

RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA

An overview of research and
examples of good practice
in the EU Member States, 1995-2000

on behalf of the

European Monitoring Centre
on Racism and Xenophobia, Vienna
(EUMC)

by

European Research Centre
on Migration and Ethnic Relations
(ERCOMER)

Edited by Jessika ter Wal

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PREFACE

The research interest in analysing the way mass media report on ethnic issues has increased in the Member States over the last decades. And for this reason the EUMC decided to bring together the major research reports and their findings over the last five years in this report "RACISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE MASS MEDIA - an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000".

The project has been carried out by Dr Jessika ter Wal, at Ercomer, Utrecht University, the Netherlands. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to her for her excellent work. The report underlines the importance of media research in the area of racism and diversity.

The mass media, and especially the news media, have an unequivocal position in society when it comes to establishing and disseminating common cultural references. The mass media have an influence on people's attitudes as well as our common knowledge, but not always in the expected and desired ways.

The active democratic role of the mass media in society can be influenced by a number of factors. The way the mass media represent, focus and give voice to different actors and incidents in society could have the unintentional result of strengthening a racist discourse instead of fighting against it. Mass media reporting is especially sensitive when it comes to ethnic, cultural and religious relations in our society.

The mass media organisations in the Member States take different initiatives to promote cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, such as developing codes of conduct, recruiting broadcasters from the migrant and minority communities and training the personnel from multiethnic societies.

The report has already attracted a lot of interest from researchers, from journalists as well as from media organisations. I hope that the report will be of practical use to all those interested in the fight against racism and especially those working in the media.

Beate Winkler

Director of the EUMC

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4.11 AUSTRIA (OE)

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Starting in 1989 with the dissolution of former communist regimes in Eastern Europe, a new discourse on migrants emerged in Austria. In this new discourse different migrant groups were portrayed as a threat to the social system, to security, and the economic stability of Austria. The stereotypes created in the early 1990s are still prevalent in today's newspapers and broadcasts. More recently some media have systematically connected Africans with drug trafficking in their reports. Independent radio stations and small-scale initiatives that educate young minority members on media topics are presented here as good practices.

4.11.1 INTRODUCTION

This report first introduces salient features of the Austrian media market in relation to minorities and relevant regulations on reporting. In the third section, studies on the representation of different migrants and minorities and of racism in media discourse are discussed. The studies are ordered chronologically, following the date of the articles and broadcasts that are analysed. Studies on racism and cultural diversity in the Austrian media in the last five years have focused mainly on specific turning points, for example in the discourse on migrants from Eastern Europe. In these studies, the concentration on key events and certain migrants and minorities yields some insights into forms of discriminatory reporting. What these studies cannot provide are systematic insights into the changes in reporting on migrants and minorities over the last decade. Their limited time frames allow only an assessment of the situation at selected moments. The final section examines some initiatives that try to improve the position of migrants and ethnic minorities in the media.

4.11.2 THE MEDIA MARKET AND ITS REGULATIONS ON REPORTING

4.11.2.1 THE AUSTRIAN MEDIA MARKET

Two players that have an extraordinarily large market share dominate the Austrian media market: the national broadcasting company *Österreichischer Rundfunk* (ORF) and the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* (NKZ). The ORF is by far the most important supplier of radio and television programs in Austria, holding a monopoly on terrestrial television. In the last ten years, the two ORF channels controlled more than half of the Austrian television market. This continued even after private broadcasters, cable and satellite television entered the market (ORF website, 2000)⁹⁸. Another salient feature of the Austrian media market is the overwhelming marketshare of the tabloid newspaper the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, which reaches 42.5 per cent of all Austrians from age 14 and older. Thus, any study dealing with the role of Austrian media in the portrayal of migrants has had to deal with this preponderant market player. Other important dailies are the regional *Kleine Zeitung* and the tabloid newspaper *Kurier*, with market shares of 12.7 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. The quality newspapers *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* have a range of 5.1 percent each (Mediaanalyse, 1999).

4.11.2.2 REGULATIONS FOR REPORTING ON FOREIGNERS AND MINORITIES

The most important self-regulatory institution of Austrian media is the *Presserat* (Austrian Press Council). It has published a 'code of honour for good journalism' that has been signed by a large number of daily newspapers and magazines (*Ehrenkodex für die österreichische Presse*, 2000). This code explicitly prohibits discrimination based on 'race', ethnicity, religion, nationality, and gender. In recent years, several newspapers have been convicted for having violated these self-imposed regulations (Österreichischer *Presserat*, 1997; 1998; 1999). Unfortunately, a negative judgement by the *Presserat*

98 <http://mediaresearch.orf.at/ferna16e.htm>

is a mere recommendation and imposes no serious consequences other than prohibiting the newspaper from carrying the logotype of the *Presserat*. This might explain why none of the relevant studies since 1995 made any reference to the Presserat or its regulations. Even though some anti-racist groups have been appealing to the Presserat successfully (*Rassismusbericht* 1998/99, 1999), there are no indications of the code of honour having a significant impact on reporting on foreigners' issues.

The state broadcasting company ORF is the only institution that is subject to close scrutiny. The reporting of the ORF is regulated by the Broadcasting Act (*Rundfunkgesetz*, 1984). This Act requires the ORF to take extra care that it reports 'objectively'. Regulations explicitly forbid discrimination on the basis of 'race', ethnicity, sex, nationality, religion, or political affiliation. The only empirical study dealing with the portrayal of foreigners in the ORF was a quantitative analysis by Dänemark (1997), but its results have been obtained with unreliable methods.⁹⁹

The Broadcasting Act (*Rundfunkgesetz*) does not prescribe any specific regulations for minority groups (Cogoj, 1999a). The Austrian state radio broadcasts only 5 hours per week in minority languages and state television dedicates only 30 minutes per week to programmes in minority languages (de Cillia, 1998). On the other hand, media specifically targeting minorities in Austria have a limited reach. Newspapers in the Slovenian and Croatian language are found to limit reporting to topics connected directly with ethnic identity, whereas media in the majority language are the main providers of general information and entertainment for minorities (Busch, 1998). The result of this format is that minority media remain more dependent on state funding.

99 The study used a quantitative approach that is imprecise in its categorisations and draws its conclusions from the comparison of incommensurable data. No other recent information on the impact of these regulations is available.

4.11.3 ETHNIC AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

Studies on the media portrayal of different migrants and minorities and of racism published between 1995 and 2000 have concentrated on three different time frames:

- i) the turning point caused by the arrival of refugees from Eastern Europe after 1989;
- ii) the Bosnian war and the Freedom Party anti-immigrant petition; and
- iii) more recent discourses.

4.11.3.1 *THE DISCOURSE ON ROMANIAN REFUGEES AFTER 1989-90: A NEW RACISM IN THE MEDIA?*

After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of former communist regimes, a new discourse emerged, with more overtly racist attitudes towards Eastern European migrants. Several phases can be identified in the development of this discourse. The earlier discourses on migration and migrants from Eastern Europe were built on the dichotomy between persons living in freedom and persons living under authoritarian communist rule (Matouschek, Wodak, and Januschek, 1995; Zierer, 1998). Starting in 1989, the discourse was much more strongly dominated by economic arguments and categories (*ibid*; also Zuser, 1996). The term "*Wirtschaftsflüchtling*" (economic refugee) that became prevalent in this discourse, illustrates how the topic of migration was connected with questions of employment, social stability, and economic power. Economic arguments were also used to legitimise more overt xenophobic statements. Apart from the new racism noted by some studies, older discriminatory reporting practices could also be found in the media. The anti-Semitic language used in the discourse of the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* was found to be commonplace in more recent debates on Austrian identity as it had been in the coverage on the 1986 Waldheim Affair (Gruber and Wodak, 1995).

Zierer (1998) compares how refugees were portrayed in leading newspapers in the context of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and

the dissolution of the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989. For 1989, the study analysed leading articles that dealt with Romanian refugees in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, the *Kurier* and the Social Democratic party newspaper, the *Arbeiter Zeitung*. Zierer found that already in December 1989, the reports of the *Kronen Zeitung* differed from the other newspapers. Whereas in the beginning of the Romanian revolution, many newspapers were only reporting on the political situation in Romania, the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, in contrast, was already writing about refugees who might come to Austria. Generally, the articles of all newspapers analysed were reporting about Romanians in a compassionate way in December 1989. Only from March 1990 onwards did the editorials of the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* start to depict Romanian migrants as a serious threat to the social order in Austria. People fleeing from Romania were described as 'economic refugees' and a security risk for Austria. They were also portrayed as criminals and welfare scroungers, i.e. people taking advantage of the social system. At the same time, various newspapers used a metaphorical language that represented migration as a natural catastrophe or as a highly alarming phenomenon. Phrases such as 'migration of Eastern European nations', a 'state of siege', or a 'tidal wave of emigrants to Austria' were used not only by the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, but also by the other newspapers.

When the first restrictions against Romanian migrants were enacted by the Austrian Government, the *Kronen Zeitung* used to prove a "racist discourse" to legitimise these calls for increasingly harsh regulations. The Austrians were portrayed as the victims of migration. Rational arguments as well as the emphasis on 'understandable' popular fears were used to justify the introduction of measures such as a visa-regime for Romanian citizens. Claiming that they were unwilling to learn German and to adapt to Austrian culture also defended popular xenophobia toward Romanian immigrants. The newspaper *Kurier* partly used the same problematic language to describe the migration of Romanians, but gave representatives of NGOs and the Church some space to plead for their humanitarian positions. In both the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*, accusations of racism were denied by referring to the help Austria gave the peoples of Eastern Europe in the past and by comparing the increas-

ingly restrictive policies towards refugees with those of other European countries. In other quotations, derogative comments that presented Romanians as lazy or criminally inclined were often made explicit, whereas humanistic views were often kept implicit and only expressed in indirect quotations, if made at all.

The media discourse on Romanian refugees during 1989-90 has also been analysed as a paradigmatic form of discriminatory reporting (Matouschek, Wodak, and Januschek, 1995). In a study of the development in press reporting from the outbreak of violence in Romania in December 1989 until May 1990, the authors found similar forms of biased representations of Romanians as Zierer (1998) did, especially in the choice of metaphors and arguments. The early reports on the revolutionary events in Romania were kept in a compassionate tone. When the violence there ceased, the reports were often patronising, following a discourse of tutelage by which the Romanians were depicted as helpless victims. In the state television reports before March 1990, one could not find an elaborated xenophobic discourse or implicit sentiments of contempt behind the apparent sympathy expressed towards Romanians (ibid). However, the overall negative portrayal of Romanians as victims of a system that left them desperate enough to do anything to come to the West, paved the way for an openly xenophobic discourse in the print media after March 1990, especially in the *NKZ*.

The turning point in reporting came with demonstrations against the housing of refugees in the village of Kaisersteinbruch in March 1990. Following this event, the *NKZ* in particular was regularly supporting racist sentiments and policies in its articles. Romanians were suddenly transformed into a heatedly discussed problem of internal politics. It was especially the *NKZ* that fuelled racist discourse in the debate by attributing negative characteristics and stereotypes to the Romanian refugees. The newspaper implied that the male asylum seekers who were to be housed in Kaisersteinbruch were potential rapists or presumed assassins of the Romanian secret service *Securitate*. The newspaper depicted xenophobic protests as a just and normal reaction to refugees, who were depicted as a threat. At the same time, *NKZ* editorialists of reinforcing xenophobic sentiments in the population accused

organisations and individuals defending a humanitarian, less xenophobic or less restrictive approach to the reception of Romanians. Table 1 illustrates the development of the news discourse on the Romanian refugees.

Table 1. Phases of reporting on Romanians, December 1989 to March 1990

Date	Event	Discourse
December 1989	Uprising in Romania	Tutelage
December 1989-February 1990	Situation after the uprising, first arrivals	Sympathy or pity
March 1990	Demonstrations against settlement of Romanians in Kaisersteinbruch	Justification of xenophobia

Source: Matouschek, Wodak, and Januschek (1995: 59-61).

Reports in the national newspapers *Kurier* and *Der Standard* differed considerably from those of the NKZ. The *Kurier* was ambivalent in its position, using xenophobic arguments in some articles but arguing for a humanitarian approach in others, and giving some space to persons writing against growing xenophobic sentiments and policies. Only the quality paper *Der Standard* was found to consistently criticise the anti-foreigner discourse, keeping an ironic distance to the xenophobic comments by demonstrators in Kaisersteinbruch and condemning racist political statements and policy proposals. In the *NKZ* and *Kurier*, hostility towards Romanians was often rationalised and legitimised with economic arguments and the use of the term 'economic refugee'.

In an analysis of articles from January to September 1990 in the *NKZ*, *Kurier* and *Standard*, Zuser (1996) identified the change in reporting about the Romanians as coinciding with the introduction of arguments that described migration as a problem for the Austrian security and economy.

The new discourse was found mainly in the *NKZ* that presented itself as the advocate of the 'Austrians' against the 'foreigners', while excusing and legitimising popular 'reactions'. The newspaper usual-

ly portrayed anti-racist initiatives in a highly distorted way, so that they could be dismissed as trifling or damaging.

All studies thus stated that the changes that occurred around 1989/90 produced a new discourse, in that the media voiced anti-immigrant fears with a frequency and a language unheard of in the Austrian media until that time. The issue of the Romanian refugees signalled the introduction of economic arguments into the debates and their prevalence in the news discourse. In addition, more overtly negative representations of the refugees and the denial of racism were found in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*. These different devices were used to sanction the hostile attitudes towards Romanian refugees and the restrictive measures enacted against them.

4.11.3.2 THE WAR IN BOSNIA AND THE 'ANTI-FOREIGNER-PETITION' OF THE FREEDOM PARTY

The most extensive study dealing with reports during the war in Bosnia and the campaign for the anti-foreigner petition of the Freedom Party in 1993 is Rohrauer's (1997). In her study, she surveyed 2,800 articles on foreigners appearing between May 1992 and February 1993 in daily and weekly newspapers published in Styria, the region around Graz. Major differences could be seen in the way the newspapers dealt with the influx of refugees from Bosnia. Whereas some regional dailies tried to show the migration of Bosnians in the context of the global movement of refugees and other historical events, the Styrian edition of the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* emphasised the singularity, danger, and the sudden 'burden' that Austria faced because of the refugees. Rohrauer found that the tabloid systematically described the influx of Bosnian refugees as a dramatic development, instead of putting the numbers into perspective. When the newspapers reported on the situation of the refugees in Austria, the latter were hardly ever presented as individuals. The *Neue Kronen Zeitung* had a special position here; it wrote primarily about the discussion about refugees in Austrian politics and the impact that the refugees would have on the economy, and did not consider the perspective of refugees at all.

The portrayal of the situation of migrants in schools was completely dominated by the discourse concerning the Austrian Freedom Party's petition to introduce tougher political measures against 'foreigners'. Migrants as workers were portrayed in different ways. Three out of six newspapers surveyed described the problems from the perspective of the employed 'foreigners' only. Two newspapers showed that the workers' undocumented status was a problem for them, without mentioning the role played by the employers. Only the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* portrayed foreign workers mostly as illegal employees and described them as a general threat to Austrian workers.

Another salient feature of the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* was the frequency with which 'foreigners' appeared as criminals. The newspaper mentioned them considerably more often as perpetrators than was the case in rival newspapers, yet when the victim was a 'foreigner' the ethnic origin was not included more often. Generally, when a crime report referred to the status of a person as an asylum seeker or refugee, the portrayal was more dramatic or sensational. On the other hand, crimes between 'foreigners' were mostly played down and even ridiculed (Rohrauer, 1997: 141). Most striking was that racist and right extremist violence against 'foreigners' in Austria was often described as 'normal' criminality in the newspapers surveyed (Rohrauer, 1997: 163).

Only the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* was speaking of illegal aliens during the whole period surveyed. This topic became central especially after the FPÖ chairman, Jörg Haider, announced his 'anti-foreigner petition' calling for restrictions against 'foreigners' in Austria. Whereas the regional dailies left humanitarian and church organisations some space to argue against the FPÖ initiative, the NKZ supported the campaign for the petition most of the time and heavily attacked its critics (Rohrauer, 1997: 169-72). Overall, Rohrauer concluded that 'foreigners' were usually only present in a highly stereotypical form, and were very often introduced as exotic or primitive persons. 'Foreigners' hardly ever appeared as individuals in the newspapers analysed; reports about their everyday life were exceptional.

Rohrauer's findings were consistent with Hochstätter-Wittmann's (1995), who argued that the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* was generally writing in favour of the FPÖ 'anti-foreigner petition', although some less significant editorialists argued against it. Generally speaking, anti-racist organisations, especially *SOS-Mitmensch*, were depicted in a disparaging way. In January 1993, a massive demonstration was held in Vienna against the FPÖ's anti-foreigner campaign. The *Neue Kronen Zeitung* almost completely ignored this important event, which was the largest demonstration in Austria until that time and is commonly referred to as the 'Sea of Lights' demonstration (*Lichtermeer*).

In the most recent study of the discourses surrounding the 'Austria First' petition, Reisigl and Wodak (forthcoming) distinguished between the reaction of the quality newspapers, (that were arguing against the petition), and the pro-petition coverage of the tabloids, especially the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*. This study found that all newspapers were relying on the reproduction and commentaries of political speeches. Only a few newspaper articles dealt with the social problems of migrants, the discrimination of non-Austrian citizens, or the immigration policies that have already been introduced by the government earlier.

4.11.3.3 RECENT DISCOURSES ON FOREIGNERS, REFUGEES AND RACISM

Studies dealing with more recent discourses have focused on the connection made by some media between Africans and drug trafficking and the prevalence of a discourse directed against Eastern Europeans (Rausch, 1998). Rausch analysed the representation of foreign citizens in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* and the *Kleine Zeitung*, a Styrian and Carinthian regional newspaper, in March and April 1998. The representation of 'foreigners' differed greatly depending on the origin of the person featured in the story. Table 2 shows the distribution of positive and negative comments on several national groups in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*.

Whereas eight out of eleven times Germans were described positively in the reports, in all sixteen cases that Romanians were men-

tioned, they were portrayed in a negative way. There was also a connection between the national origin, on the one hand, and the status of a 'foreigner' and the reporting style, on the other. Nationalities that were regularly portrayed negatively were mostly identified as refugees or foreign workers. Reports on these people were almost always placed in the context of crime. Eastern Europeans were mentioned in a negative context significantly more often in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* than in the *Kleine Zeitung*. In contrast, Western Europeans and Americans were depicted more positively, usually as guests or artists, in the culture and sport section of the newspapers.

Table 2: The distribution of positive and negative comments on national groups in the national tabloid *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, March-April 1998

Nationality	Distribution positive:negative
German	8:3
Romanian	0:16
Italian	4:1
Czech	3:4

Source: Rausch (1998: 93).

In crime reporting, the appearance of an alleged perpetrator was often used to describe the character traits of a person. Stereotypical references to physical appearance were found mostly in reports about crimes allegedly committed by individuals of Eastern European countries and Turkey. If a person with a 'positive' nationality was involved in a crime, another attribute was sometimes added to identify the perpetrator, for example when it was mentioned that a criminal was not simply Dutch, but had 'dark skin colour'. Rausch also pointed out that the signal words used in headlines often refer to ethnicity.

Isak's (1999) study dealt with the most overt racist discourse that has been expressed in recent years in which Africans were stereotypically portrayed as drug traffickers. Isak analysed the newspaper accounts of the Marcus Omofuma case that were published in May and June 1999. After being tied up and gagged with adhesive tape by the police, Mr. Omofuma died in an airplane during his deportation from Austria. In the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, his name was always

abbreviated as 'Marcus O.' - a form that is used for alleged perpetrators suggesting that he was a criminal. Already earlier, Africans had been systematically depicted as drug traffickers in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung*. Other studies also observed the systematic association in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* of Nigerian asylum seekers, in particular, with drug trafficking (Ottomeyer, Isak, Orlitsch, Lassenberger and Sellner, 2000). Another report on the 1999 parliamentary election campaign confirms the criminalisation of Africans and Eastern Europeans in the media interventions of the Austrian Freedom Party (ter Wal, 2000). The tabloid *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, in particular, supported such generalisations about African drug dealers, claims which were also propagated through the electoral advertising campaigns of the Freedom Party (Wodak, 2000).

Within the period investigated, only one study dealt with racism in a quality newspaper. Gräf (1999) analysed the discussion around the book *The Bell Curve* in the daily *Der Standard*. She showed that the discourse that was introduced mainly by one renowned editorialist presented the controversial study uncritically and even used stereotypes describing Jews and Africans not present in the earlier debate on the study.

4.11.4 MEDIA INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMBAT RACISM

The studies on the portrayal of migrants and minorities point not only to the problem of stereotyping, but also establish that members of many migrant groups and minorities are not presented in the media as individuals. This is due partly to the problems arising from the absence of employees from these groups in mainstream media as well as the lack of strong minority media in Austria.

The most interesting initiatives in the media give members of ethnic minorities the opportunity to broadcast programmes in their own languages. Especially notable are the radio stations that emerged after a law allowing the broadcasting of private radios was passed in 1994 (Cogoj, 1998). Only then was the state monopoly on radio transmission broken. After the Supreme Court repealed the law, it had to be amended, however, and the start of private radios

had to be postponed. Private radios eventually started their broadcasts in April 1998. That autumn, private radio stations, with programmes in Slovenian (*Radio AGORA* and *Radio Korotan*) and in Croatian (*Radio MORA*), went on the air. Unfortunately, in July 2000 a cut in subsidies by the Austrian government forced Radio MORA to seriously curtail its multilingual talk shows (Alfter, 2000).

The independent radio stations *Radio Orange* (www.orange.or.at) in Vienna, *Radio FRO* (www.fro.at) in Linz, and *Radiofabrik* (www.radiofabrik.at) in Salzburg are also broadcasting programmes in different languages (Cogoj, 1999a). These channels give migrants with only a little experience in broadcasting the opportunity to produce programmes for other migrants. The free radio stations supply not only the infrastructure for broadcasting, but also offer seminars and host conferences on ethnic minorities in the media (Radio FRO, 1999).

Other initiatives try to help members of minorities enter mainstream media. In July 1999, the NGO *Initiative Minderheiten* conducted a summer academy for members of ethnic minorities on the topic of minorities and media. In lectures, discussions and workshops, 34 young people from 6 European countries examined racism, the situation of minority media, and strategies for minorities to become more visible and to gain access to mainstream media (Cogoj, 1999b). *Initiative Minderheiten* announced that the successful summer courses will be repeated in the coming years.

In the last year and a half, a great number of new Internet sites where racism and anti-racism strategies are discussed have been founded. New highly active spaces for public discussion have arisen on the homepages of (recently founded) NGOs.

In general, initiatives to help migrants and minorities on the media market are situated outside the mainstream media. However, many of these initiatives face an uncertain future; their dependence on statefunding makes them vulnerable to severe cutbacks. Significant initiatives by mainstream media or the state to improve the access of migrants and minorities to the media have not been introduced so far.

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