

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY NETWORK

THE REBIRTH OF NATIONALISM IN THE BALKANS IN THE 1990s: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS



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In their writings and research in the field of national identity problems, most authors agree that the 1990's have witnessed an "assertive renaissance of nationalism"¹ and "increasing tensions between ethnic identities and territorial nationalism, particularly acute in the various kinds of poly-ethnic states."² However, there is no consensus among them over a theoretical approach that might explain this nationalist assertion in the late 20th century. A new wave of nationalist resurgence has been sweeping throughout the world, and yet it has led to ethnic, nationalist or religious conflicts mostly in countries that have recently embarked on the path to democracy. All countries in East Central Europe had to face some degree of ethnic problems and tensions. In Southeastern Europe these problems seemed to be even more acute. For reasons stemming from the past historical development of the region, the Balkans became a hot-bed of conflicting nationalist movements, which in the case of former Yugoslavia resulted in open warfare.

This paper aims to shed more light on the problem of nationalism in the Balkans, which is widely seen as part of the broader trend of Eastern European nationalism, but also has some specific characteristics of its own. The causes for the resurgence of nationalist feelings after the democratic revolutions of 1989 will be examined, beginning with the triumph of nationalism following WWI and the territorial settlements in East Central Europe after it. Further, the consequences of this new wave of nationalism will be discussed – i.e. the emergence of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. Finally, a number of possible solutions to the problem will be addressed as well. The different approaches to nationalism and to explaining ethnic conflicts as proposed by leading researchers in the field, will be reviewed to study Balkan nationalisms as distinct phenomena.

DEFINING NATIONALISM

This discussion begins by defining nationalism. As P. Alter argues, the term “nationalism” is “one of the most ambiguous concepts in the present day vocabulary of political and analytical thought.”³ A number of definitions exist because every author focuses on a different characteristic of the phenomenon. While delivering the Ernest Gellner Nationalism Lecture in 2004, L. Greenfeld declared, “Nationalism, in short, is the modern culture. It is the symbolic blueprint of modern reality, the way we see, and thereby construct, the world around us, the specifically modern consciousness.”⁴ Although this perspective may seem, at first glance, too broad and general and, at the same time, a somewhat simplified view, it conveys the great importance attributed to cultural identities like nationalism, ethnicity and religion, for example, in explaining the modern age. Stricter scientific definitions, however, follow one of the two major approaches to nationalism. The first, an objective approach, is based on objective factors and nationhood is defined by observable characteristics such as common language, territory, culture, traditions and religion, for example. The second approach, which is subjective, stresses psychological and attitudinal factors instead. Thus, E. Gellner asserts that “two men are of the same nation only if they share the same culture and they recognize each other as belonging to the same nation.”⁵ Alter outlines four structural components or features of nationalism, common for all definitions, which take into account both approaches to the phenomenon. These are: 1) consciousness of the uniqueness of a group of people, particularly with respect to their ethnic, linguistic or religious identity; 2) shared social and cultural values; 3) common history and a sense of common mission; and 4) disrespect or animosity towards other people. The last component is particularly important discussing the negative aspect of nationalism that leads to ethnic strife and conflicts.

Although some scholars argue that there is a crisis of conceptualization of the term nationalism, it is most often understood to embrace two connotations: 1) the authoritative claim of a nation-state to expressions of common sentiment and commitments on the part of its citizens, and 2) the assertion of a right to sovereignty by any group that defined itself by virtue of a shared history and culture.⁶ These roughly coincide with Tilly's concepts of state-led and state-seeking nationalism. Thus,

for the purposes of this essay nationalism will be understood as both an ideology, whose central values are the nation and the sovereign nation-state, and as a political movement that manages to mobilize the political will of the people and to create solidarity for the purposes of achieving a common goal.

And finally, it is important to mention yet another distinction of viewpoints. All approaches to ethnicity, nationalism and other cultural identities, however subtly differentiated from each other, can be grouped into two basic categories: ascriptive or premordialist, and situational or constructionist. The first category is based on the assumption that people who share a culture also share a common identity and sentiments that are the basis for their group interests and claims. The second category sees national or ethnic consciousness as an entirely situational matter, being a response to certain practical circumstances. This distinction is deemed important because the adoption of one or another mode of analysis will determine how one views important factors such as: the role of democracy for tempering or exacerbating ethnic conflicts, the significance of the military for shaping ethnic attachments, the process of modernization as leading to diluted ethnic divisions, the role of the military in the maintenance of state security.

ORIGINS, CAUSES AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM

Generally, nationalism is considered a product of our modern industrial age and the origins of the nation are traced back to the early stages of the evolution of the modern state in the 17th century. However, if we speak today about a rebirth of nationalism, this usually refers to the period after WWI, which many consider the apogee of nationalism and the demonstration of both its huge potential and its limitations. As P. Alter argues, during the period between 1918 and 1945 nationalism became synonymous with intolerance, inhumanity and violence. It inspired the violent expulsion of people from their homelands and justified campaigns of territorial conquest. For individuals and whole peoples alike, it signaled danger, restrictions on liberty, and even threats to their very survival. And yet at the same time, nationalism often engendered hopes for a free and just social order and for many people it is equated with liberation from political and social discrimination.

The triumph of nationalism after the end of WWI was the result of two different developments. On the one hand, the collapse of the great multinational empires of Central and Eastern Europe – the Habsburg, the Russian and the Ottoman – and the emergence in their place of a number of sovereign states, which were often hostile to one another. On the other hand, it was both the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and the diminishing the power of Germany that brought the communists to power and shaped the desire of the Allied forces to contain Russian power because of the threat it represented. Extremely important in this respect was the principle of self-determination, brought before the peace conference by US President Wilson and largely used as an underlying criterion in the new reorganization of Europe. However just and lofty this principle was in itself, looking at the new map of Europe it was not difficult to see that the principle was utterly impractical as it created frontiers that coincided with the historical frontiers of nationality and language. This is why the arrangement did not work. Given the *actual* distribution of peoples in Europe, and especially the intermingled populations in the Balkans, most of the new states (that were built on the ruins of the old empires) were in fact quite multinational. The main change was that states were now on the average rather smaller and the different ethnic

groups in them were regarded as minorities and were often oppressed.

These post-war territorial settlements influenced to a great extent the future development of the region. Several major trends in the political and economic developments were preconditioned by this new ethno-territorial reorganization: the irredentist disputes among the new states, the existence of minorities and ethnic tensions in most of them, the pressures they experienced from the Great Powers, their shift to authoritarian rule and to self-contained economic development, and the failure of their efforts to create “political nations” and to achieve internal regional solidarity.

If we focus our attention on the Balkans, we see that the circumstances there followed the general patterns of East Central Europe, but there were additional factors that complicated the situation even further. The Balkan Peninsula has a geographic position such that the region was the border between the former empires and thus it was often subjected to contradictory and competing influences. The provisions of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles were not largely satisfactory for any one of the parties. Bulgaria lost territory along its western boundary but gained territory in the East from Turkey. This created a Bulgarian minority in Serbia and a Turkish minority in Bulgaria, thus laying the foundation for future strife and tensions. The greatest challenge, however, came from the artificial creation of the state of Yugoslavia. As is asserted by J. Rothschild, “by virtually every relevant criterion – history, political traditions, socioeconomic standards, legal systems, religion and culture – Yugoslavia was the most complicated of the new states of interwar East Central Europe, being composed of the largest and most varied number of pre-1918 units.”⁷

Thus, in the case of Yugoslavia, there were fewer instances of the common problems with hostile minorities and irredentist claims by neighbours. as experienced elsewhere. Here, the real challenge was to unite in a single nation all the different ethnic and religious groups; groups of divergent cultures, several languages of different language family groups, different legal systems, unmatched experience in state and political

affairs, and historical hostility to one another. For this reason, the most important factor shaping the future development of the newly-comprised state was Serbian domination in its political life, administrative and legal procedures and organization. This domination was based on four important arguments: 1) Serbia was an independent kingdom before WWI and it was the Southern Slav communities who needed protection and cover by Serbian army, dynasty and bureaucracy; 2) Serbia's government was reluctant to accept the Western-supported idea of Yugoslavia and when it finally did so, it was with the presumption that "whatever Southern Slavic state might emerge from the war would be regarded as but a chronological extension and a geographic expansion of old Serbia"⁸; 3) Serbs felt entitled to hold the leadership of the country because of their greater human losses (one-fifth of the population had perished) and the greater loss of wealth (due to expenditures) during the war; and 4) Serbia alone could contribute to the new state a political elite capable of ruling, a comprehensive government apparatus, experienced military service and a native dynasty.

However important as those Serbian arguments were, it was very difficult to reconcile the other ethnic groups to this status quo. And indeed, still in December 1918 there were street clashes in the Croatian capital Zagreb and by the end of May 1919 more than 150,000 signatures were collected and an appeal was made to the Western powers to authorize the recovery of Croatia's independence. It was the Croats who were particularly distrustful and obstructive with regards to Serbian policy and, in fact, the political history of interwar Yugoslavia was largely a "history of mutual mystification and frustration of these two peoples."⁹ Yugoslavia was an artificial creation (kept together by the ruling power of Tito) that failed to unite the people into a single "political nation." Instead, it created conditions in which each ethnic group indulged in its own nationalistic yearnings. Not surprisingly then, the ultimate evidence of this failure is seen through the fate of Yugoslavia, which was torn apart and devastated by these same manifestations of nationalistic ideology in the 1990s.

Given the manifestations of nationalism after WWI, it is important to highlight one characteristic feature that clearly distinguishes East Central European and Balkan nationalism from their Western European counterparts. It is a shared opinion among nationalism theorists that in Italy and Germany, for instance, nationalism was integrative,

uniting the same peoples living in different states and principalities. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, nationalism was separatist. Dominated for centuries by big empires, the peoples hoped to overthrow their imperial rulers and establish their own nation-states. It seems, however, that nationalist and separatist characteristics have been preserved over time for if we look at the late 20th century manifestations of nationalism in East Central Europe and especially in the Balkans, the tendency is again for separation and independence rather than for unification. If we take a look now, more than 15 years later, what was once Yugoslavia has from present-day point of view disintegrated into almost as many sovereign states as pre-WWI units had existed.

RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM AFTER THE REVOLUTIONS OF 1989 IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

When considering the resurgence of nationalism after the revolutions of 1989, there are a number of factors that contribute to these developments and they originate in the demise of communism and in the process of democratization that followed.

A central argument, however, is the assertion that nationalist ideology did not disappear altogether during the communist regimes in East Central Europe, but was only suppressed by the ruling elites. The doctrine of Marx and Engels predicted that the major protagonist of future socioeconomic and political developments would be a social class, the international proletariat, rather than ethnic groups or nations. This was based on the assumption that as a result of modernization nationalism would disappear and give way to proletarian internationalism. Historical developments, however, proved this prediction to be wrong. As Z. Barany argues,¹⁰ nationalist aspirations emerged on two levels in East European communist regimes. On the one hand, following the mid-1950s, an often continuous trend aimed at more autonomy from Moscow was observed everywhere in the socialist camp. On the other hand, more important and more consequential for the future development of the region were the sparks of nationalist tensions between and within multiethnic states and among various nationalities, as well as the rise of expressed concerns about the mistreatment of co-ethnic populations living in neighbouring states.

If we look at the Balkans, we see plenty of examples of such occurrences. Although the Bulgarian Constitution of 1971 afforded equal rights to all citizens, the rights and cultural autonomy of the Turkish minority were systematically encroached, this finally culminating in the open anti-Turkish campaign of 1984-1985. Yugoslavia's history, on its part, was dominated by clashes between the prosperous Slovenes and Croats, who struggled for more autonomy within the federation, and the Serbs who were economically less advanced but greater in number and were striving towards increased centralism in the state. As Barany notes,¹⁰ ethnic problems seldom matured to full-blown crises in communist Eastern Europe due to concerted efforts by local elites to avoid intra-bloc schisms and also to Moscow's overwhelming political and military presence, which had a deterring effect.

The collapse of Communism with the revolutions of 1989, however, brought about a number of changes in the region and thus several factors appeared to have a simultaneous catalytic influence on the reemergence of nationalism. Barany enumerates a few of them, although not all of them are equally important, indisputable or tangible. Among these are: 1) most importantly, the diminishing Soviet influence and, as a consequence, its deterrent role; 2) the destabilizing political effect of mass media which has been guaranteed freedom of expression and nationwide audience due to political liberalization; 3) the search for a new ideology that ended with populist politicians employing nationalism to fill the void; 4) the economic hardships of the transition, which brought about disappointment and resentment against those who were more successful in adjusting to market conditions; 5) the broader shift to the political right; and 6) the frustration of the older generations over their "wasted lives," which was a likely impetus for seeking a new outlet. According to Barany, these factors appear to be logical consequences of Communism's demise. Other authors have observed, however, that ethnic tensions and conflicts may be the inevitable result of the disintegration of any kind of authoritarian rule. In other words, the process of democratization itself has a direct bearing on ethnic issues, and depending on the conditions present, it is likely to either mitigate or to exacerbate ethnic tensions.

Rene de Nevers developed a framework for evaluating which conditions resolve and which aggravate ethnic problems.¹² The criteria suggested by de Nevers can be applied to both the cases of Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. We can explain why in the first instance, ethnic tensions were tempered, and in the second, why ethnic tensions exploded into open conflicts. To begin with, ethnic tensions were relatively low in Bulgaria before the process of democratization started. The Turkish minority, which is about 10 percent of the population, never had secessionist claims. They required only equal rights and cultural autonomy, which were in effect provided by the democratic government. The ethnic issues were addressed early in the transition process and the Turks were permitted to create their own ethnic party, the Movement for Rights and Liberties (MRL), which represents them in the

parliament. They received cultural and religious autonomy as well – studying Turkish in the local schools, receiving Turkish TV channels, practicing Islam freely and so on. Although an external ethnic ally exists, Turkey does not have any claims on this minority and Bulgarian-Turkish relations are not influenced by this question. Even more, Turks who wanted to leave Bulgaria had the right to do so. And indeed, as many as around 100,000 people did return to Turkey in the search for work and better life, however most of them retained their property in Bulgaria. Other minority groups including the Greeks, Bulgarian Muslims, Jews and Armenians were too small and had little impact on the ethnic climate.

In the case of Yugoslavia, two extremely important factors are the existence of historical grievances and the presence of strong ethnic stereotypes. Internal nationalism was certainly the most important political factor throughout the existence of Yugoslavia. The previous regime's identification with the Serb people and its attempts to manipulate the ethnic mix in parts of the country had also contributed to the exacerbation of ethnic grievances. As Reno Lukic argues,¹³ it was the Serbian drive to rule the other South Slavic nations under the label of a "federal" Yugoslavia that was the major cause of the country's breakup. Another set of factors that also proved to be decisive, were the ethnic ties across state borders and the support that the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia received from Milosevic's government. The extreme positions of the leaders of all the ethnic groups, which were sometimes used as tools in intra-ethnic political competition, and the unwillingness of those leaders to agree on compromises were certainly a major reason for the conflicts to escalate and become so devastating. And last, the fact that the federal troops proved to be loyal to Serbian leadership in the decisive moment when Slovenia and Croatia opted for independence also had a great impact. However, it can be argued that the first and foremost reason for the Yugoslav crisis was the fact that ethnic grievances were not addressed at all. Instead of accepting the proposal of Slovenia and Croatia to restructure Yugoslavia as confederation, which would have provided more autonomy for them, Milosevic resorted to direct military intervention using the federal army to keep control of both republics by force.

THE MAJOR CONSEQUENCE OF THE RESURGENCE OF NATIONALISM: THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Having identified the causes for the resurgence of nationalism, let us turn now to its major consequence – the emergence of ethnic conflicts. We can start the discussion with Smith's assertion that the deep-seated conflicts between ethnic communities emerge primarily from rival (and sometimes incompatible) myths, symbols and memories that define the tradition and value-systems of those communities, when they are brought – usually by external actors – into close proximity and often unequal relations.¹⁴ Both factors in this correlation have equal importance: unequal relationships will not lead to an ethnic conflict unless there is a sense of ethnic difference, and similarly, rival myths will not bring two communities into a conflict if the two communities have not entered into competitive relationship. Thus, this unequal footing of the republics in the Yugoslav Federation and Serbian pretensions for domination were the driving forces behind the rise of ethnic conflicts. (This is only one of many examples, however drastic it may be. For according to statistical data from the UN, after the bipolar balance of power of the Cold War came to an end, some 30 conflicts and regional wars emerged, precisely because new and destabilizing relationships were brought into these multi-ethnic communities.

In close connection with the emergence of ethnic conflicts and the participation of the state military in them is the relationship between ethnicities and militaries. The analysis of this relationship can cast more light on such problems as the self-identification of soldiers, the recruitment and mobilization policies of state elites, the role of the military in state-building and in providing state security, and the role they may play in the event of an ethnic conflict. As far as the possible effects of state military on ethnicity are concerned, there are three theoretical alternatives according to S. Enloe: 1) militaries can have no independent effect but simply reflect sub-military, sub-political trends in social relations; 2) the military may have an independent effect in the direction of hastening the disappearance of ethnicity as a basis for inter-group relations; and 3) the military may have an independent effect in the opposite direction, so that it sustains or revitalizes ethnic identifications.¹⁵ However, the final possibility

turns out to be the most common both in the past and the present, as evidenced by military commanders and civilian state elites choose to make ethnic criteria instrumental in their policy decisions. This demonstrated why the federal troops in Yugoslavia, comprised mostly of Serbians and led by Serbian command personnel, remained loyal to the ruling elite in Belgrade in the crucial moment and fought the Slovenian and Croatian separatist forces. This is yet another example that lends credence to the argument that when a state feels secure the military will be preoccupied with professional training and upgrading weapons technology; but, in a multiethnic state, when state security is jeopardized ethnic identity and reliability become as crucial as professionalism. But it is also proof of the fact that the ethnic composition and deployment of troops in multiethnic or ethnically fragmented societies reflect the desire of state elites to maintain a cooperative domestic class and ethnic patterns of order that will secure the authority of the state. Enloe argues that such elites have in their minds what might be called "ethnic state security maps" that trace the expectations that elites have regarding the political dependability and the reliability of various ethnic groups.¹⁶ These "maps" take in account the ethnic groups that are significant to state and military policies. An illustration of such a strategic outlook is the fact that the troops that are deployed in the southeastern part of Bulgaria (where the Turkish minority lives) and along the Bulgarian-Turkish border consist exclusively of ethnic Bulgarians, while soldiers of Turkish ethnicity usually serve in secondary units, most often in civil engineering and construction units, in the interior or the north of the country.

B. Posen has offered an interesting and different theoretical viewpoint on the emergence of ethnic conflicts that draws on international relations theory.¹⁷ He employs the basic concept of the security dilemma and applies it to the special conditions that arise after the disintegration of multinational states like former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. Thus, to the unequal relationships between proximate groups proposed by Smith, Posen adds the idea that these "groups of people suddenly find themselves newly responsible for their own security."¹⁸ In such a situation they

have to assess the nature and the direction of the threats to their security and to undertake adequate actions in order to guarantee their sovereignty. Thus, the security dilemma affects relations among these groups, just as it affects relations among states, and so it becomes the driving force behind their conflicts. The essence of the security dilemma is that "what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that, in the end, can make one less secure."¹⁹

This theory can be successfully adopted to explain the military conflicts between Serbs and Slovenes and between Serbs and Croats in former Yugoslavia during the period 1991 to 1993. In both cases the slower progress in the formation of state structures and the lesser power of the new republics, created opportunities for the Serbs to use force against the Slovenes and the Croats. While the strength of their offensive over defensive capacities encouraged a preemptive first-strike, while they still enjoyed their superiority. Another important factor was the fact that Serbia saw the reemerging identities of both republics as security threats, since these identities undermine the existence of the federation and consequently Serbia's domination within it. The use of force against Slovenia was hastily authorized by the federal premier Markovic in June 1991, right after Slovenia's declaration of independence. For this reason, Lukic argues, the Federal army's intervention was "poorly planned and badly executed" and the short war ended with "the stunning defeat of the side that, on paper, had military superiority."²⁰ In the case of Croatia, the offensive started a month later and was preceded by a number of hostile activities on both parts signaling their intention to fight, the most important of which were Serbia's withdrawal of all heavy weapons stored in Croatia for the use of the territorial defence forces and the Croats' acceleration of their own military preparations. The signs of mutual distrust began to emerge a year earlier, when the Croats began encroaching on the rights of Serbs living in the region of Dalmatia, and the latter declared cultural autonomy in response. The actual war of aggression of Serbia against Croatia, however, was based on the calculation that the ill-equipped Croatian defence forces would quickly collapse when faced with the superior firepower of the federal army and Serbian "irregulars" and on the belief in the seemingly wide window of opportunity for Serbian success.

In recent years, social scientists have also sought to explain ethnic conflict and ethnic violence. For instance, Roger D. Petersen uses a social

psychological approach to examine whether fear, rage, hatred or resentment have played a key role in outbursts of ethnic violence that have occurred throughout the 20th century in East European countries.²¹ The author's central finding is that resentment (as opposed to fear or hatred) has been a pivotal factor in such outbursts. Although such an approach may seem disputable to some, it certainly can offer additional insights, especially in cases like former Yugoslavia where deep-seated ethnic stereotypes exist. Given that nationalism has been defined as a fundamentally humanistic phenomenon, human emotions are thus bound to have a bearing on decisions made and actions undertaken.

ALLEVIATING ETHNIC TENSIONS AND RESOLVING UNDERLYING DIFFERENCES

Finally, we have come to the inevitable question what solutions can be found and what actually can be done to contain ethnic conflicts and to resolve their underlying contradictions. Theoretically, a number of possible solutions for alleviating ethnic tensions and resolving the underlying differences exist and a few of them will be enumerated here: cultural autonomy, creating new identities or “civic nationalism,” federalism, the secession or partition of the state, use of force, outside intervention, economic integration and political solutions. However, all those solutions have greater or lesser importance and effectiveness, as well as different degrees of applicability under certain conditions and in the specific cases and regions of the world. For indeed, the leverage that governments and political elites have on hand, and the possibilities for outside intervention by neighboring countries or the international community are to a great extent dependent on the specific conditions and the ethnic stereotypes that exist in the different parts of the world that are and have been torn by ethnic wars.

In a recent study of the alternative policy responses to ethnic conflict problems – based primarily on the historic development of the Middle East, a region with a “rich” record of ethnic strife – Daniel L. Byman assesses five contending approaches: control policies or coercion, cooptation, manipulating ethnic identities, political participation and partition.²² C. Kaufmann examines a number of ethnic conflicts around the world (Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya, Bosnia, Kashmir and others) and offers a theory of how ethnic wars end.²³ He also proposes an intervention strategy based on this research that includes ethnic separation, designing new settlements, external military intervention and partition. We will focus our attention on those solutions that have been best-suited or largely employed in the effort to resolve the ethnic problems in the Balkans.

Cultural Legitimation

One of the simplest alternatives is the cultural legitimation of the historic heritages and outlooks of the different ethnic communities, so that a situation of dialogue and mutual respect could be brought about. It can be illustrated with the cultural and religious autonomy given to the Turkish ethnic

minority in Bulgaria – studying Turkish in the local schools, receiving Turkish TV channels, practicing Islam freely and so on. As already mentioned with regard to de Nevers’ theory, however, this autonomy should be provided for early enough in the democratization process. Even then, it could be deemed insufficient on the part of the minority group, should deeper grievances and rivalries between the different ethnicities exist. In the case of Bulgaria, however, one could argue this initial cultural autonomy has proved to be successful and with time has led to political rights as well. The political party Movement for Rights and Liberties (MRL), initially created as Turkish ethnic party, has come to enjoy great support and hence to play an important role in the Bulgarian parliament and in Bulgarian political life. Occupying the centre/centre-right political space, it has been for two-to-three successive mandates the “balancer” between the Left and the Right in Bulgaria, while for the last six-to-seven years it has been part of the governing coalition. We can judge its success also by the fact that today a number of Bulgarian nationals are not only among the party’s members but also in the party’s highest political leadership and quite a few are elected in governmental and other state positions on behalf of MRL.

Unifying Symbolism and Ideology

Another solution is the creation and dissemination of an overarching unifying symbolism and ideology – a common political culture or a “civic nationalism.” Although theoretically possible, this proves to be extremely difficult to achieve in practice. It could be argued that this is what the former state of Yugoslavia had tried to produce, but the total failure to create an ideology unifying all ethnic groups is demonstrated through the fact that once authoritarian rule – which kept the country together by means of the state machine and the army – ended, the country began to disintegrate.

Federalism

A possible solution is also federalism, that is dividing the realm of “culture” from that of politics. However, governments are particularly reluctant to allow this, as many believe (with some justification) that federalism could be a first step to future secessionism. This is best exemplified by the development of relations between Serbia and

Montenegro. When all other former republics of Federal Yugoslavia have succeeded in one way or another, many analysts predicted that the loose confederation and the uneasy state-union of Serbia and Montenegro will not survive for too long, despite being partially fostered by and advocated by the EU and other international organizations. Indeed, acquiring more rights for self-determination, including: the acceptance of the Euro as an official currency, and the introduction of some internal tariffs in the economic realm, the establishment of provisions for regional government and parliament meant that Montenegro is embarking on a separate path of state and economic development. Although a federal president, parliament, one army and a number of common offices and services have kept the federative formation together for some 13 years, it was no surprise when the authorities in Montenegro declared they wanted full independence and conducted a referendum to that end. Despite the existence of pro-Serbian forces as well, the people of Montenegro voted, though with a small margin, in favour of the country's full independence, which was officially declared on 3 June 2006. Although this development was much to the dislike of the Serbian authorities, it was the only logical outcome and was clear they could no longer hold a country that has been an independent kingdom since the late Middle Ages, an internationally recognized country from 1878 until 1918, and whose people have chosen again their independence in a legal and democratic way.

We should also give attention to the idea of creating an all-Balkan federation, which has been put forward through the years. Proposals for federative projects on the Balkans have been made quite a few times in the last two centuries, but they all have suffered from hegemonic tendencies. A recent interesting proposal – put forth by a Bulgarian researcher from Sofia University in the early 1990's when ethnic conflicts in the Balkans were in their prime – is for a Balkan federation. The rationale behind this idea reiterates the basic argument of this work, namely that historical and geographic factors have shaped the development of the Balkans such that the population has intermingled to a great degree, and a specific “culture” has developed. However, both factors have bred nationalisms of their own. These are resurgent and more militant than before and thus have earned the region the much-used label “dynamite warehouse”. One idea espoused by B. Gagova is that a Balkan community, “Balkania”, should be built on a voluntary basis, that is through referenda in the core Balkan countries – Greece,

Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The proposal is based on “realizing the fact that history, slowly and methodically, albeit inconspicuously, has already created a real community of the peoples and ethnicities in the geographically essential part of the Balkan peninsula.”²⁴ Gagova argues that the most powerful factor to bring about the semi-spontaneous integration that she anticipates in the near future, is actually negative in nature – that is, the common threat for the survival of the population, which is engaged in ethnic and class conflicts insoluble in any other way, and the threats to the historical continuation of the typical Balkan culture. She believes that accepting the term “Balkanian” as denomination for regional affiliation will resolve many of the insoluble Balkan problems.

As noble and fair as this idea might have been, the historical development in the last 15 years has proven that Balkan countries invariably seek the right for self-determination and independence in the political realm. The integration processes are confined to the economic and cultural realms only.

Economic Integration

On the subject of economic integration in the Balkans, we have to take into account two major prerequisites. First, one should differentiate between the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, Montenegro and Serbia/Kosovo (which are still characterized by a general low level of economic and social development), and the EU member states: Greece and the newest members Bulgaria and Romania, who have achieved a stable macroeconomic growth in the last six-to-seven years and experienced significant progress due to consistent pre-accession efforts, financing programs and foreign direct investment. The economies of the countries in the West Balkan region are burdened by two severe legacies: the arrangements of the old socialist semi-planned economy and the damages inflicted during the wars of the 1990's. That is why most countries are still struggling to achieve their pre-1989 level of real GDP.²⁵ Secondly, the economic development and integration efforts in the Balkans are achieved to a great extent under the aegis and with the advice of the monitoring and financial assistance programs of the EU. After Milosevic's regime in Serbia was brought down in 2000, the European governments decided that the Western Balkans needed a comprehensive new policy approach. The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) had already begun and was complemented

by the conclusion of comprehensive treaties with each of the countries and the deployment of new policy instruments, particularly in the areas of trade and assistance. But as S. Lehne, the Director of the Directorate-General for External and Politico-Military Affairs in the Council of the EU argues,²⁶ most importantly the new approach has also encompassed the promotion of regional cooperation among the countries, achieved under the auspices of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe.

The newly-achieved EU-membership by Bulgaria and Romania should give further impetus and new stimuli for economic integration in the Balkans: the two countries have been seen as the drivers of this process. Indeed, the last six-to-seven years have witnessed a number of important achievements in this respect, for instance, meetings between the Balkan ministers of economy, trade, finance, energy and construction have become a regular occurrence, where many important or conflicting issues are discussed. In addition, trade cooperation and the decrease of certain export/import tariffs have been successfully negotiated; more checkpoints have been opened along the common borders to facilitate trade and other relations; and several joint infrastructural development projects have been embarked upon, such as the building of the pan-European corridors across the region, the Bourgas–Alexandroupolis oil pipeline, the consolidation of electric power networks into a common energy system, the increased export and import of electric energy, and the finalization of the railway connection between Bulgaria and Macedonia. The joint economic progress of the region, leading to better social conditions as well, is seen by both politicians and researchers as the best means for both taming the existing remnants of nationalistic grievances and for bringing the region further along on the way to EU integration. While the EU-Balkans summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003 clearly stated that the future of the Balkans would be in the EU, it still remains to be seen how effective the EU strategy will prove to be and whether the success stories of the countries of East Central Europe can be replicated in the much more complex conditions of the West Balkans.

Political Solutions

In examining political solutions to ethnic problems, we should focus our attention on the “special case” of Kosovo, where 90 percent of the population is comprised of ethnic Albanians. After Milosevic became president in 1987, he deprived the province

of its autonomy and overthrew its political leadership. After that, political unrest and ethnic tensions in the region were so great that in Lukic's words “the conflict had turned into a low-intensity war.”²⁷

In mid-1999, the province acquired the status of an international protectorate under the auspices of the UN / UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo), with border and police control by 18,000 NATO troops via its KFOR (NATO Kosovo Force) mission. This temporary political solution was implemented to stabilize the province and to support the provisional government and other local authorities until a final decision on Kosovo's status is reached and a compromise between the two sides is negotiated with the active support of the international community. The fragile nature of the apparent peace and the successes of UNMIK achieved in the province were, was clearly demonstrated by the events of March 2004, when the complex political and social tensions erupted in ethnic hostility and mob violence, directed both at certain elements of the Serbian minority and at some of the representatives of the international community residing in the province.

The divisions between Serbians and Kosovar Albanians have been so profound and the rivalries so intense, that inevitably all researchers and political commentators use strong language to describe the situation. M. Glenny, for instance, compares the Kosovo problem to the “Sword of Damocles,”²⁸ hanging over the Western Balkans and asserts that it would be hard to overstate the crucial significance of Kosovo for the stability of the wider Balkan region.²⁹ But why do the negative effects of Kosovo's unresolved status go far beyond its borders? First, it is generally believed that a failure and a return to violence in Kosovo would inevitably have a negative influence on Macedonia (due to the great Albanian minority there), possibly on Montenegro (due to the Serbian and the Albanian minorities in the south), and on Bosnia (given Serbian claims on *Republika Srpska*), and thus would jeopardize the security situation and threaten the very stability and existence of the whole region. Second, for many years fears and warnings have been voiced about the danger of a pan-Albanian movement in all the three countries where ethnic Albanian population lives (in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia), based on the assumption that the constituent parts of an ethnic group dispersed across different states will inevitably at some point in time seek to join with each other.

Why are the standpoints of Serbs and Kosovars so irreconcilable, that even the UN and the international community have been so far unable to negotiate the right compromise? S. Lehne argues, that from the very beginning, right after the end of the war in 1991, the international community has wrestled with a dilemma: "There is no prospect for genuinely sustainable stability in the region as long as the status of Kosovo has not been resolved. At the same time addressing this issue in itself presents considerable risks to stability."³⁰ In an attempt to overcome this, the "Standards Before Status" policy was implemented, which provided for progress in building democratic institutions, in ensuring the rule of law, and in protecting the rights of minorities, before the status issue could be finally resolved. The initial target date for the review of these standards was mid-2005, after that the actual status negotiation process could start. In the beginning of 2006, the UN special envoy, the former President of Finland Marti Ahtisaari was entrusted with the mission to broker this final solution. After 14 months, 25 missions in Belgrade and Pristina and 17 sessions of direct negotiations between Serb and Kosovars on different levels, the badly needed compromise was not achieved. In February 2007, Ahtisaari officially presented his report in the two capitals and in the end of March 2007 it was submitted to the UN Security Council for review. His proposal is considered by most commentators as balanced and honest, as it provides for "a multi-ethnic society with a democratic government and with full respect for the rule of law, human rights and basic freedoms."³¹ Ahtisaari is careful not to use the word "independence", but rather "sovereignty under international supervision," which in his opinion is the only viable option and the best solution for the whole region. The new state will be initially placed under the supervision of international civilian teams from the EU and the NATO military presence will continue to ensure the defense of the Serbian and other minorities, the freedom of movement and the preservation of Serbian monasteries and other cultural monuments. Although the five countries from the international contact group (US, Russia, UK, France and Germany) have supported in general Ahtisaari's plan, Belgrade and Pristina remain intransigent. The final decision now belongs to the UN Security Council. Although Russia has claimed it will not support any decision that is not accepted by Serbia, the UK (through the Foreign Office spokesperson) and the US (through their UN ambassadors and other administration officials) have already declared their full support for the final adoption of the proposed plan.

Public expectations in Kosovo are best exemplified by a recent interview of the well-established Kosovo political analyst and publicist Baton Hadzhiu, who said in an interview with the weekly, *Europa*: "I know what is not possible, but I do not know what is possible. It is not possible for Kosovo to be part of Serbia, but everything else is possible. Serbia lost the moral right over Kosovo; the people do not believe Serbia anymore. And this is not a problem of either Russia or Spain, this is a matter of war and peace."³² While for the Serbian leadership the only acceptable alternative is greater autonomy for the province but under the country's jurisdiction and within its borders. This firm standpoint has also been incorporated in a law adopted by the Serbian parliament. A recent public opinion poll in Serbia showed that 90 percent of the population is against the independence of Kosovo, but at the same time 70 percent of those interviewed believe that the present situation cannot be prolonged anymore.³³

The political process as such develops over a considerable period of time and the mastering of a political compromise is never easy, but there is some hope that before the end of 2007 the UN Security Council will adopt and enforce the proposed political solution. For Kosovo, it would provide the necessary political framework to develop further the democratic institutions and to address the difficult economic and social problems (80 percent of the population is unemployed). For Serbia, it would accelerate its integration into the Euro-Atlantic region and turn the country into a much more reliable partner. For the whole region, it would provide the long sought stability and reliability, that will allow for further democratization, economic development and cooperation and attract more foreign direct investment. For Europe, it would mean solving a long-standing problem in its own backyard, and greater prospects of integrating the Western Balkans at sometime in the foreseeable future.

**In discussing the ethnic problems in the Balkans we have touched upon all the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The situation in Bosnia has been excluded because its greater complexity goes beyond the scope of this case study.*

CONCLUSION

The resurgence of nationalism in the Balkans in the 1990's has been to a great extent pre-conditioned by the past historic development of the region and most specifically by the post-WWI territorial settlements. Its manifestations have been exacerbated by the process of transition to democracy, which as a result and in most cases has given rise to ethnic tensions and grievances, and in some cases, resulted in open hostility and war. The militant and separatist character of Balkan nationalism has led to the full disintegration of the former Republic of Yugoslavia into all its constituent ethnic/religious elements, with the province of Kosovo awaiting its sovereign status in the coming months.

A number of possible solutions for resolving ethnic problems exist, but they have different applicability and in each case the best decision or a combination of approaches must be sought. In general, to achieve any of the solutions is not easy, since nationalism and war can be regarded (on some grounds) as mutually justifying. But the "lessons of history" should be learned, so that the mistakes once made will not be repeated and the compromise decisions and formula that have worked successfully for one region might be applied in other parts of the world as well.

Due to the continuous strife and fighting that lasted, with few intermissions, for more than 10 years, the processes of democratic transition, economic and social development, industrialization and privatization in most of the West Balkan countries have been greatly retarded and their European prospects have largely receded. In the last few years, many political analysts and scholars have repeatedly appealed to European leaders and EU institutions to find some solution for a more rapid integration of the West Balkans into the EU, for example by giving them some "special membership" or "European trusteeship" status.³⁴ The prospect of waiting an additional 15 years for the countries to fulfill all accession criteria is rather unrealistic. But, while providing the overarching political framework of the EU would greatly help the countries to complete their nation-state building, to channel their efforts and further their development, and, at the same time, to resolve all residual issues inherited from the former-Yugoslavia. As J. Rupnik asserts, if this happens the political elites in the region will have to forget the

19th century stereotypes of national sovereignty, but will instead "share sovereignty in a 21st century European Balkans."³⁵

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- ³ Ibid, p. 4.
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- ⁵ Ibid, p. 7.
- ⁶ Comaroff and Stern, p.37.
- ⁷ Ibid, p. 201.
- ⁸ Rothschild, p.205.
- ⁹ Rothschild, p.209.
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- ¹¹ Ibid, p. 123.
- ¹² De Nevers, R., "Democratization and Ethnic Conflict" in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, edited by M. E. Brown, Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1993.
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- ¹⁵ Ibid, p. 11.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, p. 15.
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- ²⁷ Ibid, p. 49.
- ²⁸ M. Glenny, "The Kosovo question and regional stability", in *The Western Balkans: Moving On*, edited By Judy Batt, *Chaillot Paper*, No. 70, October 2004, p. 89.
- ²⁹ Ibid, p. 87.
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- ³¹ *Agence France Press Bulletin*, 11 March 2007.
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