

<p align="center"><b>Nationalism in the Balkans</b> <b>A reality to be challenged by our Diplomacies</b></p>		<p align="center"><b>Diplomacy</b></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Nationalism, Balkans, conflicts, cultures, ethnic differences.</p>
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**Abstract**

The Balkans and nationalism are two terms already related in some natural way, because of their history and developments during the years, decades and centuries. Our paper aims to make an analysis of the region, which has been historically related to nationalism, a reality that characterizes the relations among our people. This topic has been the object of study for many scholars of political science or international relations as part of them. It might also be of interest for a wider audience, considering that nationalism is also related to culture and our everyday life. The deeper study and understanding of this concrete phenomenon can work very well to “reconcile” the clash of cultures in our region. The issue per se is very complex and, despite the fact that it was treated fairly, again it is intriguing because, in the course of the years, there have occurred many events in our small, but difficult region. These events will be part of this work, treated chronologically, or/and intertwined with the theoretical framework, also with the concept of nationalism, its interdependence with different countries, where the context gives it different colours. This fact makes it sometimes even more aggressive and with consequences, as it has happened many times in our region. What we see as important and which has been quite influential in developments in the region, relates to the Great Yugoslavia, which has generated often conflicts, and which was a certain “apple of quarrel”, taking into account the minorities or ethnic differences. These developments came out highlighted along with its dissolution. Despite the road chosen by the Balkans, i.e., the Euro-Atlantic perspective, we think that such a topic is current again. Despite the efforts of Europe itself, as well as the efforts of “would be European” countries, to create and cultivate a European identity, where borders do not need to be anymore important, meaning less reason for conflicts or wars, still there is reason for concern on the issue, i.e., extreme nationalism in our region.

**1. Nationalism, Theory and Definition(s)**

When trying to write about nationalism, the immediate notion that relates to it, is our region, so the Balkans. It is not that these two concepts are born to and for each other. It is because our small region seems to have produced more of it than is has consumed. Many authors have been writing about this topic, relying on different points of view. “Conflicts that characterized the relations among states of the region, explains Andrew Wachtel, in most part of the modern times, are firstly understood as efforts to synchronize the borders of nation and state, trying to avoid heterogeneity in the name of strengthening of the nation.” The same author explains that none of the nations was that strong to achieve this on their own. As such, they were looking to the big powers that had their proper reasons to leave the “Balkan pot” boil, in most of the cases accompanied by aggressive wars and conflicts.<sup>49</sup> Some authors define nationalism with extreme attachment and love for one’s state and nation. Nationalism is the identity of one nation. In our common meaning, it often is mixed or confused to patriotism, although in political science they differ from each other. Patrick O’Neil arises a question: “What is the difference between being patriotic and nationalistic?” This question comes out naturally, when we look at the history of wars and conflicts that humanity has experienced in the course of centuries. The same author defines national identity as “a group of people bound together by a common set of political aspirations, especially self-government and sovereignty”.<sup>50</sup> In trying to answer the above question, he “thinks” also about patriotism, as “pride in one’s state” and brings to the reader a complex of factors to explain the difference between these two concepts. It is not easy to make such a difference, neither in theory, nor in practice. But, it is important to pay

<sup>49</sup> Wachtel, A. (2012), *Balkan in Contemporary History*, Botimet Toena

<sup>50</sup> Patrick O’Neil, *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2004), pp.46-80.

attention to such concepts, because they influence our life. Nationalism has definitely a negative connotation, whereas patriotism is something that every state and its population should strive for, even in times of a united Europe. As seen also in the history of the United States, where the citizens of each state still are proud and have their statehood symbols and still they unite under one flag and one leader. One of our favorite authors, Karen Mingst, in writing about “Europe in the nineteenth century”, considers that “nationalism, wherein the masses identify with their common past, their language, customs and practices, is a natural outgrowth of the state.”<sup>51</sup>. Nationalism leads people to participate actively in the political process. It also might lead people to the extreme actions to “defend” the proper identity. Some writers take it as positive, some others as negative. In making some “Notes about Nationalism”, George Orwell classifies it in: Negative, Transferred and Positive Nationalism. He argues this classification and arguments related based on facts and evidence.<sup>52</sup> This makes the theory very much comprehensive and if studied properly, it helps to improve our behavior. Although in different contexts occurring, it has commonality in its sense of loving and defending the proper country or the proper identity. Dimensions of nationalism and its spread are so huge that we find it far too big a question to be fully examined here. It is enough to say that, in the forms in which it appears among English intellectuals, it is a distorted reflection of the frightful battles actually happening in the external world, and that its worst follies have been made possible by the breakdown of patriotism and religious belief.

Still according to Orwell and his writing about nationalism, as it occurred among the English intelligentsia, he believes that, with this category, much more than with ordinary English people, nationalism is unmixed with patriotism and therefore can be studied pure. This “purified” study and classification of nationalism in England, can be easily “transferred” into another context, such as the Balkans. It can be used to understand that battles, massacres, famines or revolutions have happened just because of this “negative nationalism”. And the history seems to repeat itself. The clashes among countries and their identities are alive, although the time passes and although certain disputes remain dormant for a certain period of time. The relations between Serbia and Bosnia, or the relations between Serbia and Slovenia are examples that show that their rivalries, hidden by the constraints of the Cold War, came out of the surface with greater force and violence, as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Although there have been calls for the establishment of war crime trials to punish those guilty of atrocities and crimes during the Bosnian-Serbian conflict and the Serbian-Kosova conflict, still there is not a real evidence of such punishment. These trials should provide an opportunity to obtain justice. But, to some writers and politicians, they might trigger more intense fighting, as nearly defeated leaders attempt to resurrect themselves. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita provides the concept of “demonizing the adversary”. He recalls considering the circumstances under which the threat of such trials might prevent atrocities in the first place and the extent to which they might provoke war criminals into committing additional atrocities to gain sufficient leverage to negotiate their way out of punishment. He raises the question “What policies strike the right balance between the desire for justice and the desire to avoid further carnage”, something which we do not find accurate. We believe that justice should provide the right result to the people. And it is this author that in certain point concludes that “war is so terrible a feature of international relations that I cannot leave the subject without emphasizing the importance to all of us improving our understanding of this deadly phenomenon”.<sup>53</sup> This is the reason why many writers and analysts try to brighten and enlighten understanding about nationalism and its negative consequences.

<sup>51</sup> As rightly written at the end of this book, Professor Mingst has expanded coverage of contemporary trends without sacrificing the effective brevity that *Essentials of International Relations* is known for. See for more Karen Mingst, *Essentials of International Relations*, Norton & Company, NY, 2004

<sup>52</sup> George Orwell: ‘Notes on Nationalism’ First published: *Polemic*. — GB, London. — May 1945. Reprinted: — ‘England Your England and Other Essays’. — 1953.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Strategic Theories of War, Principles of International Politics, People’s Power, Preferences and Perceptions*, Hoover Institution at Stanford University, CQ Press, Washington D.C. 20037), 2000 pp. 61, 480

## 2. Dissolution of Yugoslavia and its Implications on Balkan Nationalism

In trying to make a narration of what has happened during dissolution of ex-Yugoslavia, without pretending to make a detailed anatomy of this process, something that goes beyond the capacity of a short paper to do it, we would with great pleasure refer to a book written by Jasminka Udoviski, a book that she devotes to the civilian victims of the war of Yugoslavia. "To create Yugoslavia it was needed nearly a century, from the birth of the idea of a union of the South Slavs, in the early twentieth century, until the end of World War I; instead, to destroy it, it served only a few years. The ideals of national freedom and modernization were able to unite all South Slavs, except Bulgaria. After 70 years, an attitude upside down, anti-modern and mythical, came to their dissolution."<sup>54</sup> Throughout the history of creation and dissolution, the nightmare of ethnic Yugoslavia, has been and still it is very influential to create conflicts in the Balkans, generally leading to wars or to those hearths that for long periods were in state of impasse until something awakened them. Like many analysts, according also to this author, the West has a great responsibility. The criticism of these analysts is connected to the creation of a new and terrible order of mini-European states "ethnically cleansed". They want to awaken the conscience of population and politicians to stop the ultra-nationalist policies in the Western Balkans.

According to Roberto Arbitrio, the occurrence of three particular events has led the country into chaos and caused the explosion of nationalism and ethnic conflict.<sup>55</sup> The first of these developments is the economic crisis, namely the abandonment of market socialism, in favor of bankruptcy agreed economy. The second development was the death of Tito, who had made possible the coexistence of different ethnic groups, hitherto considered impossible. The marshal was the main figure of the unity of the country, and represented the guarantee of political and economic stability of it. The third development that tore the country and gave rein to ethnic hatred repression until then, was the fall of the bipolar system with the Berlin Wall. The end of economic support from the West brought down every pact of non-aggression among nationalisms. So Yugoslavia, after the end of the Cold War, had to handle nationalism without the support of the West and without the threat of Soviet intervention. In this chaos emerged the role played by the Serbian army, one of the few institutions which boasted of a strong internal competence. The army was opposed to the secessionist aspirations of the republics of the federation and wanted to concentrate power in the Serbian state. The first alarm was the revolt of the Albanians of Kosovo, which was rejected by the Serbian government, invoking nationalism to the people and with the aim of creating a greater Serbia. The spokesmen of this nationalism and the main figure was Slobodan Milosevic, who rocked the dream of Great Serbia and who became president in November 1987. In the Great Serbia there had to be all territories that the Serbs considered an integral part of their state.<sup>56</sup> Slovenia had an easy secession because in Milosevic's attention there were the projects for the independence of Croats and Muslims. In 1990, the elections in Croatia were won by nationalists of Franjo Tudman. On 25 June 1991, there was the proclamation of Croatian independence after the referendum. The Serbian response was immediate through the military intervention in Croatia. The areas most at risk were the Krajina, where the Croats and Serbs had lived together and had an important value for both parties. The uprising of the Knin Krajina was bloodless for the unpreparedness of the local Croatian police and the Serbian majority living in that area.

The situation of Slavonia was different. There, there was great heterogeneity, where paramilitary groups formed in Belgrade were led by adventurers and nationalist fanatics. They, with the support of the Army, imposed in all major cities of Slavonia, Osijek, Vukovar their project of terror by putting fire to Vukovar in a terror never seen before. After a siege that lasted three months, out of the 45,000 inhabitants, there remained

<sup>54</sup> Jasminka Udoviki, James Ridgeway, *Yugoslavia's ethnic Nightmare* (L'incubo etnico del Jugoslavia, Lauren hill books, 1995)

<sup>55</sup> Roberto Arbitrio, *(Il conflitto etnico) The ethnic conflict*, FrancoAgneli Milano 1998.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 146

only 10,000. The war was widening with bombings on earth and in the ports of Dalmatia to Zagreb with the intent to bend the legitimate authorities. On September 7, 1991 it begins at The Hague one of the many and lengthy peace conferences, internationalizing the conflict and formalizing the death of Yugoslavia. In those six months of the war, the data speak of 15,000 dead and 200,000 displaced. For the final conquest by the Belgrade army, it had to wait for the summer of 1995, when Yugoslavia was dead and the Croatian troops had the support of the Americans before moving to the light of peace in Bosnia.<sup>57</sup> Extreme nationalism fueled by Milosevic and the idea of hostility that he wanted reigned among the Serbs who lived in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosova, have made that among the peoples there was great hatred. But Milosevic, did not stop there, removing the two regions of Vojvodina and Kosovo the autonomy that Tito had granted them by the constitution of 1974.<sup>58</sup> During the Cold War, Yugoslavia had remained an independent and neutral country. Before the 90s, both Europe and the US had not foreseen any danger of a conflict turning into a war in the Balkans. The break-up of Yugoslavia had generated wars. After the dismemberment of Croatia and Slovenia, it would be conducted an even more destroying war, the one with Bosnia-Herzegovina. For a more complete understanding of the situation, would be of interest to quote Prof. Bajrektarevic "It was not by chance that nearly all of the main European military campaigns outside the Russian front conducted by the Nazi occupator during the WWII –from Kozara to Drvar– were taking place exclusively in Bosnia – a core of the Yugoslav antifascistic front. Simply, who controls center– Bosnia, controls pretty much the rest of the Balkans, and from there the access to Black Sea, Caucasus–Caspian as well as further to the Afroasian proper, too. It was also not accidental that Austrian arrogant imperial occupation of Bosnia and its subsequent brutal and illegal annexation was one of the key diplomatic challenges from the Berlin Congress until the WWI outbreak. This careless Austro-Habsburg colonial expropriation of Bosnia has only accelerated, escalated and magified the forthcoming WWI slaughterhouse, in which southern and western Slavs were forced or decived to kill each others and other eastern Slavs. Southern Slavs will readily butcher themselves – as useful idiots – for the benefit of Central Europe soon again, in 1940s and 1990s."<sup>59</sup>

This composition led to great tension that sometimes turned into bitter wars that took away thousands human lives, refugees, irreparable damage, ethnic cleansing, considering it as the most atrocity conflict since the Second World War in Europe. <sup>60</sup>Although the Serbian Parliament of Bosnia-Herzegovina had been voting against the independence of the later from the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia was recognized as an independent state April 6, 1992, leading to the prolongation of the war until 1995. The two main forces were armed, the army of the Serb Republic of Bosnia and the Muslim army or "the Alijas army". During the war in Bosnia there were killed thousands of innocent people, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Without a doubt, the most horrible massacre was considered the Srebrenica in 1995, where there were killed and buried 8,000 Bosnian men and boys and where ethnic cleansing of 30,000 people was carried out in the area by the army of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia under the leadership of Ratko Mlladic.<sup>61</sup>

The intervention of the West became indispensable, bringing the Dayton Agreement in November 1995, which marked the end of the war to the end of that year.<sup>62</sup>But, as Bajrektarevic claims, "The rest of the Western Balkans is still finishing the dissolution of Yugoslavia, by forming the ever smaller, incapacitated un-greened

<sup>57</sup> La nascita e la dissoluzione della Jugoslavia, Guido Tassinari , Alphatest, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Udovicki, J. & Ridgeway, J. Yugoslavia's ethnic Nightmare (L'incubo etnico del Jugoslavia ,Lauren hill books, 1995.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted by "Berlin Congress of 1878 still in force in the Balkans", Prof. Anis H. Bajrektarević, Vienna, 26 APR 2015.

<sup>60</sup> The Srebrenica massacre, the Bihac airport, as the most important, Which broke out in May 1992, causing irreparable damage. Describes in detail the situation of war and destruction that has brought this war, Udovicki, J. & Ridgeway, J. Yugoslavia's ethnic Nightmare (The nightmare of ethnic Yugoslavia, Lauren hill books, 1995.

<sup>61</sup> These figures were reported by the theme "Security in the Balkans" (1990-2010), Dezertante Elkida Sinani, University of Tirana, The Department of Political Sciences, DND Political Theory, Tirana, January 2011

<sup>62</sup> Demi, L. *European Enlargement and the Integration of the Western Balkans*, Botimet Dudaj, Tirane, 2009.

and depopulated mini nation-states.” And, Bosnia is the best example of such an external intrusion, and of the outer powers that purposely set nonfunctional governance there.

### 3. Kosova<sup>63</sup>

After the war in Bosnia, which was considered as one of the most horrific wars the world has ever seen, it follows another one, that of Kosovo. Kosovo has been the country that has always demanded detachment, first from Yugoslavia, and then from Serbia. Kosovo has always been seen together with Albania, considering the composition of its population, as well as the physical location of the region. Here we recall the protests in Belgrade in 1968, which were successful and led to the opening of the University of Pristina in 1970 and Tito's Constitution in 1974 which granted Kosovo autonomy. But the aforementioned autonomy was threatened with arrival of Milosevic. In the early 90, Kosovo demanded full independence. This demand for independence Kosovars have shown in the various referendums organized, choosing independently their president. These initiatives organized and legitimized by the people of Kosova, were never recognized by Belgrade, which also nowadays does not recognize Kosova's independence, proclaimed in 2008.

Mr. Elez Biberaj, a notable journalist in the VOA, when trying to make the “anatomy” of Kosova conflict, puts a lot of arguments as the origin of it. “Revival of nationalism and deepening ethnic hostilities in Kosovo in recent years are a result of direct grievances that are asked Albanians in Yugoslavia in the past, their economic exploitation, oppression and cultural discrimination, and the deepening inequalities of economic development between the territories inhabited by Albanians and the rest of the country.”<sup>64</sup> In his thorough analysis of the origin of conflict, he logically connects it with nationalism, “Albanian nationalism could be well developed in other ways and directions if only in 1945 Albanians would be given equality with other ethnic groups, would be involved in one territorial unit and would be given the status of Republic.”

### 4. Concluding Remarks

Nation-building per se is a historic feat and many European nations have taken centuries to develop their national identity, political cultures and institutional structures. When referring history, in most of the cases it takes a negative connotation. In fact, nationalism is a worldwide phenomenon related to a one global state. It has deep roots and deep implications and consequences in people lives. This effect is more sensitive in our small region, because politics in the region reflects immediately Balkan nationalism. Being a small region, it has an extreme impact in our past, present and in our perspective. But, despite the history, the origin and the past, all countries in the region have determined their future to European Union. The Balkan is facing challenges of all types, without forgetting that all these issues should not be taken closed or isolated. Obviously, more work needs to be done to separate from the heritage of the past, which in many cases impedes the road toward Europe. The structure of the countries per se is part of problem of legitimacy. Our countries have deficiencies that make reconciliation more difficult. However, Balkan countries seem to be at the right track. Although the Euro-Atlantic community is providing a lot of support, a process so complex and diverse, just can not be imposed from above or beyond. It is our homework to woe for it.

<sup>63</sup> We prefer to call it Kosova, as it is used in Albanian language, communication and writing.

<sup>64</sup> Elez Biberaj is Director of Euro-Asia Department in the Voice of America. He is the author of many books and articles.

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