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Narratives in the Balkans: In the Combat Zone





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foreword

Srđan Dvornik

The conflicts, social and political turmoils we have witnessed in the last three decades were, in the minds of many leaders and participants, centred around collective identities whose differences allegedly could not be settled in a nonviolent way. The position of Kosovo Albanians within Serbia, the position of Serbs in Croatia if it were to secede from Yugoslavia, the position of all three ethnic 'communities' in Bosnia and Herzegovina – they all emerged as problematic issues, indeed issues with a high potential for conflict as the worldview that had helped keep Yugoslavia together began to fall apart. Admittedly, in the last decade of Yugoslavia hardly anybody believed in the tenets of its political ideology such as the "brotherhood and unity" of "peoples" and national minorities, but pragmatic coexistence and hope in economic prosperity seemed to keep society away from aggression and violence. However, under the surface, the nationalistic worldview had been developing since the late 1960-ies, and was even supported by the official policies of gradual decentralisation.

When the regime collapsed under the burden of growing ethno-nationalist tensions and ingovernability of the almost entirely decentralised system, the emerging new polities (to become future independent states) were formally constituted in accordance with the more or less typical arrangements of liberal democracy, with political pluralism and free markets. But at the same time, most politicians and the majority of the population understood the emerging states as confirmation of their respective ethno-national identities. This understanding was shaped by a worldview in which an ethnic category was a real community, with

a collective right to its own state, which in turn shapes the community in a way which consolidates its specificities (language, religion, customs, tradition... but not yet territory) and underlines its differences from its neighbours. Thus, the groundwork for new ethnic conflicts was already laid in the old regime.

The open conflicts in the post-Yugoslavian wars provided the advocates (and beneficiaries) of the ethno-nationalist ideologies with an abundance of experiences, or 'evidence', which 'confirmed' all the past fears and anxieties: 'they' (the other ethnic collectivities) were really out to 'get us'. Thus, both the wartime and postwar years are characterised by the proliferation of new stories which make the abstract and empty ideology of ethnic belonging ever more concrete and filled with content. The stories of war crimes and victimization (regardless of whether they are true or not) cement the ideology of belonging as that which constitutes the deepest essence of any individual member of an ethnic community, as well as their highest duty. This legacy of war works in combination with another kind of legacy, most apparent in Bosnia and Herzegovina: the institutional structure determined by the Dayton 'agreement', which preserved the very divisions that had led to the conflict. That is why today we face the continuation of the conflicting narratives, with a new purpose: to give the nationalist leaders legitimacy in the long run.

At the same time, two decades of relative peace in most of the post-Yugoslavian countries gave a new relevance to issues related to the neglected narrative of liberal democracy. It appears in various forms – from desperate

appeals to start 'living normally' to criticism of governments and their policies from the standpoint of economic efficiency, fairness in social relations, and legal security and protection. There is a growing awareness of the discrepancies between the two narratives – the narrative of ethno-national collectives, with their compulsory unity and authoritarian admiration of the nation-state, and the narrative of civic polities with pluralism and responsible governance. The latter does not have on its disposal so many stories of heroism and victimisation, but there is a growing body of information on human rights, their violation and defence, on social injustice and struggle against it, on misuse of power, complaints against corruption, etc., which indicate that this narrative might shed a new light on the facts of life and give them a new meaning. Gradually, however, it becomes clearer that the former concept of polity generates the problems in the latter: systemic corruption and state capture are enabled by the authoritarian position of the powerholders, while one of the gravest forms of human rights abuse – discrimination – is a direct consequence of the concept of polity founded on ethnic belonging.

A word should be said about the political environment too. The key players in international politics relevant to this region – notably, the US, the EU and Russia – have also played along with the dominant narratives. On one hand, they seem to have taken seriously the narrative of ethnic identification as the key factor in political divisions, social antagonisms and military conflicts. Hence, their interventions were never aimed to tackle political and social causes of conflicts, but instead took the hostilities

as deeply rooted and therefore basically immutable. Consistently, they recognised the ethnically defined segments of society as the parties to the conflict, and took the leaders of these parties as legitimate partners in negotiating peace and post-war arrangements. Thus, the impact of the divisions consolidated through the wars was perpetuated.

Whether people shape stories or is it the other way around might be an intriguing literary riddle, but when stories involve whole societies believing in them and acting upon them, they certainly acquire life and power of their own. Then it becomes very important for a society to be aware not just of fake information, but of the entirety of the great narratives that constitute the entire symbolic universe within which people trust or distrust their leaders, love or hate their neighbours, consider things important (or not) or are manipulated into obedience or aggression. Given that during this (in this part of the world) tumultuous period of thirty years a whole revolution took place in 'the world' – the revolution in digital communications, which turned the global society into a planetary network and increased the number of active communicators by several ranges of magnitude – the production, distribution, development or distortion of information and 'information', as well as public, semi-public and artificial opinions, now involves hundreds of millions of writers and distributors. Stories which elaborate the dominant narratives now pop up everywhere, which makes them omnipresent, but also vulnerable to obvious distortions of fake news. To be sure, there is no cure for that, except continuous critical public discourse. ■■■

introduction

in the combat zone

Marion Kraske

Misrepresentations and reinterpretations like this represent a typical pattern of narratives, with which political actors have been keeping the societies of the former Yugoslavia on their toes since the end of the Balkan wars: Facts are denied, in order to circulate one's own interpretations. In order to manipulate, to exert power, to cement power. In this way, the societies are kept frozen in combat mode.

"I respect those who want a civic state, but a civic state in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina means a classic centralism, in some form, in theory, which basically means an Islamic state."¹

The remark by Dragan Čović, the Croat member of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Presidency, cited by media in February 2018, is noteworthy: A rejection of the civic principle with the justification that – in BiH – it would lead to an Islamic state. A crude thesis. Why should the civic principle in a country with a majority Muslim society – and this is what Čović is hinting at – automatically lead to centralism? The civic state model, after all, constitutes the exact opposite.

To contextualize these crude claims, it must be stated that it is precisely Čović and his right-wing nationalist HDZ that are at this point doing everything to prevent the strengthening of the civic principle. Time after time, the Croat representative has turned against the secular polity, in which the dominance of ethnic groups and parties is neutralized and the citizens have a

say regardless of which religious group they belong to.

In such a state, as evidenced by the case of Croatia, the legal principle is strengthened and corrupt and criminal political stakeholders² have to count on facing legal consequences. It is evident that this is precisely what Čović fears – the loss of power and control over state institutions.

Certainly, the narrative that Islamism is gaining ground is being used extensively both by the HDZ in BiH and in the neighbouring country Croatia – it is perfectly suitable for vitalising enemy-images which can be used for one's own politics, one's own radicalisation. That the Federal Government, referring to the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)³, reacting to a minor enquiry by Die Linke⁴ in the Bundestag, established at about the same time that there was no concrete evidence of a progressing Islamisation, confirms how void of facts an atmosphere and politics can be created in the Balkans.

Likewise, the President of the Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik invokes the topic of "radical Islam" – "Teheran," as he likes to call the Bosnian-Herzegovinian capital, allegedly constitutes a threat to the Serbs. For this reason, Dodik even wanted to initiate, together with the Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, a Declaration on the "Survival of the Serb People"⁵ – a sad travesty given the fact that the RS is the product of ethnic cleansing committed during the Bosnian War: The non-Serb population was

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26533990>

³ The German Intelligence Service

⁴ See: Kleine Anfrage der Fraktion Die Linke/Auswärtiges Amt, Drucksache 19/520, 17 January 2018

⁵ <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/nacrt-deklaracije-rs-i-srbije-o-opstanku-srpskog-naroda-je-pri-kraju-ostale-finese/1jl5qc0>

¹ <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/covic-u-zagrebu-gradanska-bih-znaci-islamska-drzava>



Marion Kraske: In the vicinity of the Partisan Cemetery, Mostar, CC-BY-SA 2.0

systematically displaced, raped, killed. In Srebrenica alone, more than 8000 boys and men were killed. Dodik is denying the genocide to this day.

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Sometimes it is claimed that the formerly common language is actually composed of three different languages: Enormous amounts are being spent to "translate" the three variants (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian) between one another. A costly endeavour for the already Kafkaesquely inflated Bosnian-Herzegovinian state apparatus. When in fall 2017, an initiative of more than 200 linguists⁶ established that it is one language with different variants, politics intervened promptly to reply to the scholars not to get involved. Language politics is power politics. Thus, the three-language myth is cultivated and it is suggested to the population that, together with their language, their own identity is "in jeopardy". It is propaganda that is showing a lasting impact – in the fear of the presumed threat, support is given to those who loudly promise to save their own (ethnic) group from the "enemies" allegedly surrounding the nation.

History is being reinterpreted with calculation. For instance, a defamation cam-

paign is being orchestrated specifically against the anti-fascist movement during World War II. The partisans, who triumphed against Nazi-Germany and fascist Croatia, are being reduced solely to their criminal machinations. Streets and squares named after Tito are, like in Zagreb, renamed, cemeteries, like in Mostar, regularly devastated.

The memory of the victorious partisans is supposed to be eliminated from the public awareness – the remembrance of the resistance to fascism is too much of an obstacle to nationalist forces. Fascism as an ideology and its radical nature is too close to what happened during the Balkan wars of the 90's and has been glorified to this date: The extinction of life, because it stood in the way of one's own ethnic group.

One's own deeds, the crimes of one's own group are still hailed as heroic deeds to this day – notably the minute of silence in the Parliament in Zagreb – in an EU country! – honouring Praljak, the Croat-Bosnian military officer found guilty in the second instance. Or the award of honour for already sentenced war criminals Plavšić, Karadžić and Krajišnik in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. In Serbia, the sentenced war criminal Vladimir Lazarević is allowed to pass on his knowledge to students at the Military Academy in Belgrade. A country aiming to enter the EU has been relying on the "expertise" of a war criminal to train future military personnel.

In public discourse, in the largely politicised media, all these leitmotifs have been used in order to constantly fuel tensions. The division in the heads, the dichotomy of "us" against "them" is thus orchestrated in a continuous loop of a kind; even the most banal affairs – such as chocolate for school

6 <https://derstandard.at/2000055022385/Linguisten-Am-Westbalkan-wird-eine-gemeinsame-Sprache-gesprochen>

In such an environment of a cemented state of emergency, human and individual rights are systematically negated. The individual is only a cog in the collective power structures standing above all – above common law as well. The rule of law is systematically underdeveloped in all Western Balkan countries for a reason.

children⁷ – are politicised and tied to ethnic categories.

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Likewise, the Churches are also getting enthusiastically involved, in order to sow discord: dissolution of stereotypical roles, as diagnosed recently by Berlin-based playwright and author Ivana Sajko referring to the hysterical countermovement against the Istanbul Convention for the protection of women, initiated by the Catholic Church and its supporters in Croatia, is interpreted as an attack on cultural values and religious worldview.

In the region, patriarchal, homophobic and exclusive tendencies are dominating, shaping a climate of intolerance, of exclusion, of the radical negation of all things humane and rational. The consequences are rigid defence mechanisms against progressive and secular approaches. Instead of modernity, instead of establishing welfare for all, the citizens are kept in a perpetual combat zone, from which hundreds of thousands are fleeing – without war – in order to find their happiness in work and life elsewhere, beyond the continuing radicalisations⁸.

Everything that is abnormal, that extinguishes life, endangers or threatens it, is considered normal, even heroic – as long as it is useful to one's own group, one's own interest. By contrast, people or lifestyles not corresponding to these strictly patriarchal stereotypes are deemed to be "sick" or "abnormal", or stigmatised as traitors.

An atmosphere prevails in which a brutal devaluation of individuals and their rights is underway: In Bosnia and Herzegovina, not all citizens possess passive

electoral rights even 23 years after the war, only the three so-called constituent peoples, Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. All other citizens, for instance the Jews and Roma, are denied the right to be an equal part of the political system and to help shape it – in the Presidency for instance. The three ethnic oligarchies have power-hungrily captured the political system, as Slovenian political scientist Zlatko Hadžidedić puts it, and are defending it vehemently. That this practice is contrary to European standards was established by the European Court of Human Rights already in 2009 – but with no consequences.

What constitutes right and order is being determined by a small and corrupt class – this approach has for decades blocked the formation of functional democratic systems, in which everyone would have the opportunity to claim their rights in court. The absence of institutions of the rule of law is making it easy for nepotistic elites to maintain a vacuum, in which a few clans are in charge of distributing state funds among themselves and their favourites, to allocate jobs in a feudal manner: The phenomenon of state capture⁹ is closely connected to the narratives of manipulation and abuse of power described in this edition.

In this manner, the Southeast periphery of Europe is constantly kept in crisis mode, not least due to the poor stance of the EU¹⁰. This likewise constitutes an often used narrative to throw sand in the face of the representatives of the international community: They are, political representatives of all persuasions in the Balkans like to assure, evidently on the "European path". Shake hands, a cheering: "Keep up the good work!" And afterwards, they return to their combat zone. ■■■

translated from German by Ivana Nevesinjac

7 <https://www.rferl.org/a/croatia-serbia-chocolates-grabar-kitarovic-scandal/28167622.html>

8 See: Documentation of the Heinrich Böll Foundation: The Quiet Revolution, Sarajevo 2017

9 See: Captured states in the Balkans, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Perspectives, 2017

10 The EU's Failing Policy Initiative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, DCP Policy Paper, Bodo Weber, May 2018

life-shaping narratives

understanding "strategic narratives" on the Balkans and its borders

Nermina Mujagić

Unions, states, construct different narratives, that they tie their citizenry to special identities (of holder of citizenship, national, ethnic, religious...). Thus, between the EU and its members or the EU and membership candidate countries, or the state vs. demos, a mutual need and orientedness are created. Creating loyal citizens, that is, constant consumers of supra-state and state narratives, also means controlling 'popular opinion'. But their primary role can be functional, to make it easier for people to make sense of the world, of politics, of certain events and interactions. However, narratives can be invented so as to omit facts, especially in relation to the context, or to give facts inappropriate contexts, and should therefore equally be doubted, as their creators can mythologise them.

This article aims to point to the relative and occasional nature of borders, as well as the conflict-fostering effects of borders around which every day, narratives are built that strengthen ethno-political power and order – which can thus be categorised as strategic narratives. In the hope that state borders will lose the majority of their erstwhile attributes and that at a certain historic moment they will disappear, the author wishes to highlight the need to reduce the conflict-fostering characteristics of borders, attempting therefore to deconstruct and weaken narratives produced by ethno-political regimes whilst following the process of European integration.

A narrative or story is any imaginary or non-imaginary record (report) about certain events, presented in a series of written or spoken words or a series of moving images. Narratives can be found in all forms of human creativity and art, including speech, writing, poems, film, television, play, photography, theatre and visual arts such as painting. The word narrative comes from the Latin verb *narrare*, meaning 'to say',

which derives from the adjective *gnarus*, translated as 'knowing' or 'skillful'. Narrative can also be a statement on an event or events, regardless of their truthfulness.

An illustrative example of narratives from various fields, which is surrounded by so many controversies, are narratives tied to the Balkans. Although parts of the Balkans are accepted as parts of the geographic area, in academic circles, in various university departments, there are still discussions around *to whom* do the Balkans mean *what* and *how much*. If we add to this the theoretical potential of Orientalist theories, we will observe that such discussions suggest that the Balkans are today understood as the European *other*. Although the Balkans are not the Orient – as the ultimate opposite value category to the Western idea – as Edward Said saw it – the Balkans both are and are not European, are and are not Asian, are and are not Christian, and are and are not Islamic. The East on the Western continent, the West in societies of the East – a wavering identity, permanently indeterminate, not insignificantly other. Indeed, it is

significantly Other, as it manifests itself as the external border of West European civilisation – periphery – a space in which the European slowly fades. In Milica Bakić-Hayden's words, this periphery reproduces the Orientalism used by nationalists to culturally and politically discredit the Other, thus reaffirming the European identity. It simultaneously defines itself in the local narratives in which the vector of time assumes a new meaning. This is not a movement from the past towards the future, but a movement from backwardness to what is modern (Bakić-Hayden, 2006). "Debalkanising the Balkans" or "Europeanising the Balkans" seems to create a new world, a world where stereotypical and imaginary notions are maintained in the relationship between the EU and the periphery,¹ and where drawing borders is of more importance than living standards. These days the Socialist-Democrat Party of BH (SDP BH), which lays claim to being the leader of the left in BH, publicly requested an urgent meeting of the BH Council of Ministers in order to 'protect BH borders'.

Geographically, the Balkans are a part of Europe, but culturally still do not satisfy the criteria, and are thus defined by a new, political coinage, as the Western Balkans. The countries in question are those that did not yet become EU members, about which nuance-free narratives are maintained, and narratives of 'imputed ambiguity'.

Naturally, narratives have their introductions, protagonists, plots and turning points leading to solutions. They are simply stories told by a narrator. Narratives are composed from various motives. For a feeling of safety, to make the world more logical, to make our existence more predictable, to represent and experience the challenges we experience in a 'universalist manner'. Among other things, the construct of a narrative emerges as a means of transferring experiences and knowledge to other generations, that is, to represent something or someone as eternal. Motives can be understood as subjective, as someone's attempt to be accepted, to be loved, to profit, to experience catharsis, to show themselves that they can create an alternative world.

If we were to return just a little back in time, we would see that every solidification of borders was accompanied first by narrative, then by religious magic. In literature it

With the help of a non-Europeanised Europe, in the even more non-Europeanised BH and the Balkans, a caste was born such as history has not yet known, a caste whose means of production is political rule itself, which is strong in producing narratives of conflict, hatred, superiority of us over them, narratives of divine and historic right to set boundaries, to divisions, corruption, egotism and lies. Maybe this is why Europe needs a new Europe, but likewise the Balkans a new Balkans – a Balkans without national narratives, which could serve as a model for a different Europe.

is difficult to find any kind of procedure of marking borders that would be bereft of ritual, of ceremonies at the borders. From time to time, the rituals would change, but their function remained the same: the essence is in dividing space into ours and not-ours. Beside physical and psychological barriers, the institution of the border used to be backed up by customary law, and with time, also by public and international law. The newer metanarratives about borders also confirm this (the arbitration ruling in the case of the Croatian-Slovenian border, the Pelješac bridge, the bay of Neum, Suturina, the demarcation on the Prevlaka peninsula, determining the borders between BH and Serbia, especially the points near the Bajina Bašta and Zvornik points). As much as borders may be a topic for geographers, the moment they descend into political space, they come to serve as a means of understanding past, present and future relations within which every narrative about European identity and process of European integration is at play.

Let us remember that the first division was geographic, followed by the Roman limes – Imperium Romanum – which lasted for four centuries, after which came the division into Catholics and Orthodox Christians, then, with the Ottoman incursion, the Ottoman line close to a common Islamic influence. Industrialisation too has differentiated Europe, as has the Iron Cur-

¹ By periphery I mean the countries hoping for EU accession – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

tain, which lasted from 1945 until 1989. The most serious division resulted from changing state borders between the notorious East – and the democratic West. Therefore, starting with the limes – the very existence of Europe was conditioned by a clear drawing of borderlines due to the awareness of the existence of a boundary that demanded separation from the barbarians, non-Europeans, backwardness and similar. It may appear paradoxical, but Europeans' universalism has always had boundaries that determined, defined, encompassed and pointed to their own framework.

In antiquity, the northern part of Europe was symbolically considered a barbarian space, while the southern parts (Greece, the Mediterranean and Asia Minor) were the sites of civilisation. The Roman limes implied a different understanding of centre and periphery, and so to the North and East, the Empire bordered with the barbarian world, the barbarians being all those who did not speak Latin. The South was perceived as civilisation. During Renaissance, the conceptual division of Europe was between the North and South, as Italian cities like Florence, Rome and Venice were centres of the arts and education. Between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, these centres have moved into Paris, London and Amsterdam, since when Europe

has symbolically been divided into the West and the East (Kozminski, 2009).

In a splendid text, *Europe without Europeans*, the Slovenian culturologist Aleš Debeljak has written that "the absence of a strict border on the eastern side of the continent has determined the need for this symbolic geography" (Debeljak, 2013). Here, the East marks the symbolic mark of knowledge, not a geographical determinant. Certain zones were then defined through mutual contradiction, so it seems that Europe has traditionally been determined negatively. Its self-perception has grown from what it is not, rather than what it is.

All this reminds us that unions, states, construct different narratives, that they tie their citizenry to special identities (of holder of citizenship, national, ethnic, religious...). Thus, between the EU and its members or the EU and membership candidate countries, or the state vs. demos, a mutual need and orientedness are created. Creating loyal citizens, that is, constant consumers of supra-state and state narratives, also means controlling 'popular opinion'. Therefore, Barthes is precise when he says that "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (Barthes, 1977). But their primary role can be functional, to make it easier for people to make sense of the world, of politics,

Pristina, "Kosova Republikë!" by Marco Fieber, CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0



of certain events and interactions. However, narratives can be invented so as to omit facts, especially in relation to the context, or to give facts in inappropriate contexts, and should therefore equally be doubted, as their creators can mythologise them.

Invoking tradition, certain obligations and respect for the law is nothing but a story containing within it an internal or external perception of the state and scope of its success. In modern vernacular, we would say that this is *realpolitik* that takes off from reality, from real facts that it encounters on the ground. But let us ask ourselves who produces such reality, that is, who creates these stories, who distributes them, who controls them and, ultimately, who spreads and disseminates them. Lately, we have been witness to increasingly frequent demands by the capital of Brussels from the region, especially those concerning territorial delimitation (Slovenia-Croatia, Greece-Macedonia, BH and Croatia, Serbia-Montenegro, Montenegro-Kosovo). As time goes by, this divide expands, as the EU has been addressing the future of the region and the future of integration (enlargement policy) by means of antiquated nationalist solutions from days of yore. Thus, the processes of Europeisation and enlargement policy show how contradictory they are and how they produce new fragmentation.

Admittedly, the Union consists of stable states that struggle over control of the narratives, simultaneously limiting the processes of narrative transformation, both locally and abroad. Historical experience reminds us that this is pronounced when states are losing power (e.g. losing national control, good image...). Thus, narratives become a certain kind of strategic foreplay. They are usually the consequence of:

- external international treaties/agreements, whether formal or tacit,
- deliberate action bringing transformative drama into governance/rule
- behaviour of international parties seeking to ensure that stories envisaged by the narrators are sustained, or to imply a threat if this really does not happen.

In a word, it is sought to present narratives to various actors in the play, and they are a precondition for attaining a certain legitimacy. Such narratives are therefore most frequently called strategic. We might say that they are *divine right narratives*, *victory/conquest narratives* or *historic right narratives*. These narratives may appear firm

and everlasting, but history shows them to be delicate, fragile and ephemeral, and that they can disappear in a day. They are most frequently the product of myths (the alleged right acquired by birth, such as for instance manifest destiny), past achievements (e.g. conquests) and consensus-based international treaties.

Of course, narratives can change, and transformations usually occur due to economic pressures, ideological shifts driven from within or from without, out of own desires and state's needs for change both locally and globally, out of an increased role of other main players in accepting, shaping or declining narratives, by dissidents, all the way to incredible moments of mass conversations.

We are somehow quick to forget that within the EU, alongside the processes of inclusion, new processes of exclusion also occur, that with the erasure of some borders, new ones are also created – both vertical and horizontal – the result of reflections of nationalist logic and sentiments. "While Europe was proudly flaunting its own unification," Dubravka Ugrešić points out in *The Culture of Lies*, "on foreign [soil], it supported divisions. While on its own soil it highlighted multiculturalism, on others' it contributed to ethnic cleansing. While it swore on European norms of honour, it bargained with criminals and gave them full legitimacy" (Ugrešić, 2008).

After the fall of the Berlin wall, Eastern Europe – especially the part that has developed under the Communist ideology – embraced the western narrative about the inexistence of borders, but it also quickly unmasked its attitude towards borders. As the race towards the "world of open borders" that symbolised freedom went on, a multiplication of borders took place (with the Soviet Union an excellent example, as well as the border between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the bloody borders within the former Yugoslavia). The newly born caste, ostensibly free of ideologically-Communist orientation, has embraced narratives about borders, simultaneously strengthening two contradictions: a discourse of power – modernisation, progress, but simultaneously also a rhetoric of division. Thus, metanarratives about borders that are discussed daily in the public sphere are nothing but a means of strengthening new national antagonisms.

Although there is nothing more inconstant than state borders, public discourse is teeming with demands for the clearest

possible demarcations. Merkel congratulates the controversial Haradinaj – and asks him to make state-building, improving the economic situation and defining the border with Montenegro the "key steps towards strengthening Kosovo's European perspective." The question of the BH-Croatia border has been so politicised that it is certain to be a narrative for the upcoming elections. The House of Representatives adopted a Declaration requesting Croatia to abandon construction of the Pelješac Bridge, which was soon followed by a declaration adopted by the House of Peoples disowning this declaration. Thus, the House of Peoples has adopted a declaration saying that the other House's declaration is not their declaration.

Narratives can be regulated by means of law, force, technology, subsidies etc. Thus, every little while an appeal arrives from the EU that 'border security' is the key issue for candidate countries. Producing and controlling the diffusion of narratives is most often conducted through international 'broadcasts', interventions in social media and similar. The latest EU strategy directed towards countries beyond its borders was just an example of one such narrative, from which the future reality of this region can be gleaned: the EU Western Balkans Strategy, marked by its makers as a 'historic opportunity' for the future of the countries outside the Union.

There is nothing new in this strategy other than a reaffirmation of the EU narrative. The focus of attention is on the elite, the so-called elected representatives of the citizens and peoples in the region, and their negotiating capabilities. The Strategy states that there can only be economic progress if the markets are deregulated and freed from the constraints imposed by the state. (Do they include taxes, which ultimately finance the few social rights remaining in these states?) This strategic document produces a new narrative promoting reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, but 'reconciliation' here is merely a means of achieving a market economy unencumbered by the past, not an achievement in itself.²

The European (non-)resolving of problems in the region and creation of entirely new narratives show that the local political and academic intelligentsia is neither ready nor willing to detect substantive problems. Gramsci would call them 'experts in legitimation'. With the help of a non-Europeanised Europe, in the even more non-Europeanised BH and the Balkans, a caste was born such as history has not yet known, a caste whose means of production is political rule itself, which is strong in producing narratives of conflict, hatred, superiority of us over them, narratives of divine and historic right to set boundaries, to divisions, corruption, egotism and lies. Maybe this is why Europe needs a new Europe, but likewise the Balkans a new Balkans – a Balkans without national narratives, which could serve as a model for a different Europe. Failing that, we will sing along to a song by the Sarajevo band Konvoj: "*Change, you narratives, now we're here, now we're alive; let it be a doubt-free journey, change yourself, let people be.*" ■■■

translated by Hana Dvornik

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/eu-western-balkans-strategy-credible-enlargement-perspective_en

how is the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina perceived in 2017?

Srdan Puhalo

It has been twenty-three years since armed conflict ceased in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although some still claim that we are in a state of war. The events of war are slowly turning into myths, politicians have taken on the role of the military commanders, refugees have already become neighbours, and war criminals people's heroes. Life is trying to return to its normal flow, and we can say that in Bosnia and Herzegovina we are in a state of co-existence, but far from conciliation. Kriesberg¹ (1998) defines co-existence as a relationship between people or groups in which no side is trying to destroy the other.

Although the possibility of an outbreak of war is constantly being brought up in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is the 90s war that represents one of the greatest obstacles to this happening. A great majority of people still remember well all the grief and suffering, yet we must not forget that new generations are growing up, who are learning about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from their parents and relatives, from ethnically divided media, politicians deliberately manipulating numbers and facts, questionable web portals, social networks or Hague rulings.

Having all this in mind, a legitimate question emerges: how do inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina perceive all that took place between 1991 and 1995?

Notwithstanding which city the respondent is from, or whether Serb, Croat or Bosniak, all claim that they were caught off guard by the war, while others made intense preparations for it. They are able to list examples of such preparations by the adversaries up to several years prior to the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is interesting how a certain activity may be interpreted in different ways; for instance, spending money in the 80s could have meant that "they" knew that "something was afoot" and that dinars would become worthless, but also that "we" lived day to day, with no evil on our minds. Our unpreparedness for war shows what a naive and peace-loving a people we are, unlike the others.

the research

Hoping to find an answer to this question, we carried out a series of focus groups in Bihać, Prijedor, Tuzla, Nevesinje and Široki Brijeg. In each city we had between eight and ten adult respondents with whom we talked about certain aspects of the war. We were careful to include a similar number of men and women in our focus groups, of various ages and educational levels and with different experiences of the war. This way militants, civilians, refugees, displaced people, but also those born after the war, all featured in the focus groups.

This is what we got.

Regardless of city or ethnic group, we can isolate certain common elements characteristic of all:

■ They were preparing for war, not us
Notwithstanding which city the respondent is from, or whether Serb, Croat or Bosniak, all claim that they were caught off guard by the war, while others made intense preparations for it. They are able to list examples of such preparations by the adversaries up to several years prior to the beginning of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is interesting how a certain activity may be interpreted in different ways; for instance, spending money in the 80s could have meant that "they" knew that "something was afoot" and that dinars would become worthless, but also that "we" lived day to day, with no evil on our minds. Our unpreparedness for war shows what a naive and peace-loving a people we are, unlike the others. Indeed, our unpreparedness for war is among the most important pieces of evidence that it was they who attacked, while we merely defended ourselves.

■ We merely defended ourselves
Every defensive war is just in and of itself, and when your war is a just one, it is wholly expected that your people are the victim and that it is difficult to talk about war crimes committed by members of your people against others. This is one of the most familiar alibis justifying one's own war crimes committed against members of other ethnic groups. Of course, when certain specific instances of war crimes against members of other people is brought up, there follows an admission accompanied by the inevitable "but", justifying or relativising the crime. It is interesting that time and place

mean nothing in this justification of crimes; respondents are willing to reach far into the past, or to the other end of the country in order to find adequate justification.

Having in mind that others are to blame for the war starting, and that we led a defensive war, others' suffering in war is justified, expected and a result of their lack of judgement. Considering all of the above, it is perfectly to be expected that coming to terms with one's own crimes is a very arduous and slow process.

■ Only large trials are followed
The majority of the respondents only followed the large trials in the Hague (Milošević, Karadžić, Mladić, Plavšić, Šešelj, Krajišnik, Gotovina, Orić and similar), but even this resembled rooting for your favourites more than a rational consideration of what could be heard in the course of the trials. There isn't a great deal of interest in trials conducted in Bosnian-Herzegovinian courts. One reason for this is certainly that trials in Bosnia and Herzegovina are less attractive to the media, and thus less well represented there. Likewise, the local war crimes trials weren't in the focus of the international community's interest, and the local media stood to gain no financial or other benefit from reporting on the trials. The trials were only followed by the family, relatives, friends and acquaintances, while the local community was only interested in the verdicts, that is, the severity of punishment, rather than the trial and evidentiary processes or the testimonies of victims.

■ They do not have much trust in the Hague tribunal, but nor do they trust other courts

That Serbs and Croats mistrust both the Hague tribunal and its verdicts and the verdicts of courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not news. The Serbs consider it a political tribunal, which tallies with the official political opinion of the Republika Srpska authorities – a tribunal that only tries them and won't stop at anything to sentence them. It is safe to say that the Croats are confused and their opinions on the tribunals and war crimes verdicts divided. On the one hand, the Hague acquitted Gotovina and Markač, while on the other, sentences for six high-ranking Croat functionaries for war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina are perceived as an injustice, an assault and verdict on all Croats. Bosniaks are frustrated by the length of the proceedings being conducted

People who experienced and survived the war are in no doubt that it must be talked about and should by no means be forgotten. They are aware that all that we hear in public today concerning the war doesn't lead towards dealing with the past and reconciliation, but to sowing discord between the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and dividing them. This conversation must be different but they themselves do not know how. On the other hand, the young wish to leave the war behind and apply themselves to the present and the future. They do not discuss the war, don't know much about the war, nor is war much spoken about in their families. Nevertheless, they are aware of the existence of three irreconcilable truths about the war, and choose to strategically ignore it. Talk about the war is especially avoided in ethnically mixed groups.

in Hague against Serb politicians and army officers and believe that the whole thing is a farce and needs to be expedited. It is important to highlight that few read the rulings, and far more people trust the interpretations of politicians and the media than judicial documents.

War both should and should not be talked about

People who experienced and survived the war are in no doubt that it must be talked about and should by no means be forgotten. They are aware that all that we hear in public today concerning the war doesn't lead towards dealing with the past and reconciliation, but to sowing discord between the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and dividing them. This conversation must be different but they themselves do not know how. On the other hand, the young wish to leave the war behind and apply themselves to the present and the future. They do not discuss the war, don't know much about the war, nor is war much spoken about in their families. Nevertheless, they are aware of the existence of three irreconcilable truths about the war, and choose to strategically ignore it. Talk about the war is especially avoided in ethnically mixed groups.

They know about the war what others want them to know

The impression gained is that it is individual histories that dominate the memories of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. As expected, these memories are coloured by strong emotions and are quite enough for a personal interpretation of the war. This is characteristic of respondents who lived through and survived the war. There are events about which all respondents know a

little more, that is to say, on which they have clear opinions. These events aren't related to the local environment they live in, but are determined by the media and politicians as very important within an ethnic group (Srebrenica, Dobrovoljačka street, Bugojno and similar). If there exists a different perception and interpretation of the events of war, one that veers away from the ethnic truth, it is not uttered publicly, as the consequences for the individual concerned and his/her family members can be very serious.

We do not trust anyone, although we speak like them

Although citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina claim not to trust anyone (politicians, the media, the courts), the arguments used to describe certain wartime events, defend war crimes and with which crimes over one's own ethnic group are retold, perfectly correspond to the arguments being pushed and imposed by local politicians and their media. Not only are the arguments and language used those we hear daily from local politicians and their media allies, but any questioning of these ethnic truths is rejected. It would seem that patriotism is more important than the truth.

Each generation has its own media

Young people most frequently get their information through web portals and social networks, which on its own puts a question mark over the quality of the information about the war that reaches them through these media. On the other hand, their parents most frequently rely on the television for their information. This leaves the impression that citizens prefer video to text. Local web portals are widely read, but information that concerns dealing with the



"Survey in the RS: Mladić and Karadžić - criminals or heroes" - Al Jazeera Balkans (aired on 11.07.2018), YouTube, CC-BY 2.0

past cannot be found there. It is interesting that there is no discussion within families about the events of the war for two reasons, parents refusing to talk about it to their children because they think they shouldn't burden them with it, while, on the other hand, young people aren't very interested in learning more about the war.

in place of a conclusion

And finally, what to say? It seems that twenty three years since the war ended, not much has changed in Bosnia and Herzegovina as far as perception of the war and individual events therein is concerned. Perhaps it would be better to say it wasn't given to us for things to change. By whom? Well, primarily the local politicians. Because if we hadn't done it to them [the other 'community']* , they surely would have done it to us. They prepared for the war for ages, while we naively believed in brotherhood and unity. We merely defended ourselves, while they attacked. Our war crimes are incidents committed by sick psychopaths, while their crimes were planned and prepared in detail. Our people died heroes' deaths, while they deceitfully murdered. We had detention camps, they concentration camps. We were driven out, while they departed voluntarily. But don't be disheartened. Since everything in Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into Serb, Croat and Bosniak, why shouldn't we have three war truths about the war? Doesn't matter whether it is constructive, so long as it is constitutional. ■■■

translated by Hana Dvornik

* editor's note

how to come to terms with the concept of the Croats as the triple victim of the past?

Stevo Đurašković

One of the most common historical claims present in the Croatian public has been that the (Croatian) Serbs occupied between two-thirds and three-quarters of posts in the ranks of the civil service and the police during communism. These claims haven't been supported by any comprehensive evidence. Statistical data show how Serbs occupied up to 30% of the posts while they represented between 12-18% of population in Socialist Croatia. There are rather comprehensive arguments explaining the overrepresentation: the fact that the Croatian Serbs unanimously sided with Tito's partisans during WWII, while the Croats were divided between support for the Partisans and for the Nazi-puppet Ustaše regime.

In the seminal essay *The Miseries of East European Small States*, the famous Hungarian historian István Bibó contends that Central-East Europe suffers from underdeveloped and anti-democratic social relations characterized by small-minded and aggressive nationalisms. However, departing from the condemnation of the East European states, Bibó comprehends how the causes for the above mentioned anti-democratic trends can be found in the history of suppression of the nation-building processes by the imperial state powers, accompanied by simultaneous competition between the concurrent national movements over particular territories or/and populations. These historical trends eventually brought about "existential anxiety" for the "community" as a dominant trend in the national identity-building processes in Central and Eastern Europe. This existential anxiety in turn brought about the construction of the meaning of national history as an exclusive struggle for statehood, where a nation represented a "thousand-year" victim of others. Finally, it is not strange that martyrdom has been a dominant concept in

the East-European national identity-building processes until the present, since most of the countries of Central-Eastern Europe had been subjugated to the Nazi/Soviet imperial powers for most of the twentieth century, or eventually suffered various kinds of authoritarian regimes until 1989/1990.

Thus, the main problem with the concept of the nations as victims is not that it is completely false; on the contrary, it is grounded upon historical facts. However, the main problem is that a concept of victimhood reduces the complexity and contingency, inevitably characterizing any historical period as a kind of a fairytale Manichean struggle of heroes and villains over a metaphysical body of a nation. Eventually, the fairytale historical narration fuels a concept of others as arch-enemies, thus contributing to anti-democratic political culture.

All of the above-stated has been especially obvious in the case of Croatia, the country additionally traumatized by the legacy of the 1990s Homeland War. The war even further fostered the meaning of the national history as a centuries-long strug-

gle for national independence, as well as the concept of the nation as a centuries-long victim of, respectively, the (Austrian) German, Hungarian and eventually Serb hegemony. I will show in this article how the concept of victimhood – although not entirely false – nevertheless distorts a more comprehensive narrative on Croatian history. I will focus on a few selected examples, since a comprehensive elaboration of the subject of distortions in interpretations of history would go far beyond the scope of this article. More comprehensive exposition on the national narratives in history curricula can be found in the journal *Povijest u nastavi* [History Teaching], as well as in writings by Damir Agičić, Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Snježana Koren.

The history of Croatia in the Habsburg empire has been almost exclusively painted as a history of the (Austrian) German and Hungarian hegemony over the country and especially over its national identity-building. The Habsburg Emperors have been represented as the exclusive bearers of the processes of Germanization due to hampering the autonomy of the Croatian diet, preventing the annexation of Dalmatia to Croatia, and finally to enforcing the German language and culture. All these claims are partly true; however, they haven't been comprehended as part of a broader explanation of how the Habsburg rule was first and foremost concerned with retaining an absolute power, as shown by A.J.P. Taylor's book *The Habsburg Monarchy*. The national movements – and especially the strongest ones, the German and the Hungarian – represented a lethal danger to Habsburg absolutist rule. Thus, the Germanization came as a logical concomitant of the fact

that the German language was the means of communication of the imperial state apparatus, as well as due to the contemporaneously dominant knowledge production in German, and not as an outcome of deliberate Habsburg politics. As writings by Mirjana Gross and Josip Horvat nicely show, the Habsburgs even supported to an extent the Czech and the Croatian national movements, seeing in them a prospective means of restricting the power of the German and Hungarian national movements respectively. Moreover, the modernization of the Monarchy in the 1850s, carried out by the notorious absolutist regime, fulfilled almost all the social and economic demands previously made by the 1848 Croatian national movement.

In respect to the Hungarian-Croatian relations during the Habsburg era, the Croatian national identity-building canon portrays Hungarian politics exclusively as those of trying to subjugate Croatia under its own rule. Again, it is the truth, however, the more comprehensive picture of the Hungarian-Croatian relations that is missing. What is missing, or is not sufficiently underlined, is that Croatian politics from the late 18th century onwards regularly opted for alliances with Hungary out of fear of Habsburg absolutism. In that respect, the 1868 Croatian-Hungarian Settlement subordinated Croatia to Hungary not only due to Hungarian political pressure, but also due to the contemporaneous Croatia's institutional incapacity to fully exercise financial, infrastructural and economic policies, as Josip Horvat nicely shows in his books. Moreover, the Hungarian 1848 national leader Lajos Kossuth has been portrayed as the most extreme Hungarian nationalist and thus



"If there were freedom and democracy, there would be Herzeg-Bosnia instead of the Federation", location unknown, Facebook/radiosarajevo.ba, CC-BY 2.0

In Western Europe, the myths take on the structure of the narrative of the glory of the nation in history, where the French or the English history is conceptualized as a history of enlightenment and progress, while simultaneously neglecting the dark spots, like colonialism for example. To what extent can national history serve as a political battlefield in a similar way to what has been happening in the European East was nicely exposed in the case of the Great Britain by the book *History Teaching, Nationhood and the State* by Robert Phillips. Not even to mention how painful the process of coming to terms with the past in contemporary France has been, as is well highlighted by the book *The Vichy Syndrome* by Henry Rousso, or by Emanuel Macron's speech delivered on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Holocaust in France.

the most extreme anti-Croatian, although Ante Starčević advocated ideas that were the equivalents to Kossuth's ones. And Ante Starčević is canonized in the Croatian national identity-building process as the "Father of the Homeland".

The problem of interpreting Lajos Kossuth sheds a light on a more general problem, namely that most of Croatian historiography suffers from parochialism, most visible in the exclusion of "Zeitgeist" in interpreting history; the trend nicely outlined in the article *The Use and Misuse of History Teaching in the 1990s Croatia* by Magdalena Najbar-Agičić and Damir Agičić. Thus, neither the Croatian nor any of the concurrent national identity-building processes have been related to a contemporaneous dominant influence of the German national romanticism and historicism. Hence, the works of the most important 19th century Serb national thinker Vuk Karadžić turn out to represent an origin of the current extreme Serb nationalism, and not just one

of the concurrent ideas of "greater nations": Greater Hungary, Italia Irredenta, Megali Greece and so on.

However, all aforementioned trends of distortion become even stronger as we come to the history of the two Yugoslavias, as they have direct bearing on the contemporary national identity-building. Thus the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia has been portrayed as an overall greater-Serb hegemony, where Croatia was economically harshly exploited and national identity-building brutally suppressed. To some extent these claims are true; however, the economic exploitation is narrated without taking into consideration that the Belgrade government treated all Austro-Hungarian south Slavic territories as a kind of internal colony – as is boldly presented by Ivo Banac's *The National Question in Yugoslavia* or in writings by Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević. Thus, the fact that citizens of present-day Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and, finally, Vojvodina were subject to much higher taxes etc. in comparison to the population of Serbia has been exclusively narrowed down to the exploitation of the Croats. By the same token, the fact that the civil servants and military staff coming from the former Austro-Hungarian administration were in a much inferior position regardless of their nationality compared to their Serbian counterparts has also been omitted. Similarly, the fact that Serbian political parties were also against the 1930's Royal Dictatorship regime is suppressed, as was the meaning of the coalition of the Croatian Peasant Party with the Independent Democratic Party, a leading party of the Serbs in Croatia; a fact which was directly related to the 1928 assassination of the Croatian Peasant Party representatives including the Party's leader Stjepan Radić in the Yugoslavian Parliament.

In respect to Socialist Yugoslavia, things get even more problematic, since the victimhood narrative ultimately distorts the history of a very complex multinational polity, as socialist Yugoslavia was. Here I will show the distortions on the three most salient examples: the trend of overrepresentation of Serbs in the ranks of the civil service of the socialist Croatia; the issue of the (renewed) economic exploitation of Croatia; and finally the circumstances of the cracking down on the 1971 Croatian reformist mass movement, known as the Croatian Spring.

One of the most common historical claims present in the Croatian public has been that the (Croatian) Serbs occupied

between two-thirds and three-quarters of posts in the ranks of the civil service and the police during communism. These claims haven't been supported by any comprehensive evidence. In *Hrvatska u Jugoslaviji 1945-1991: od zajedništva do razlaza* [Croatia in Yugoslavia 1945-1991: From Unity to Dissolution], the author Zdenko Radelić exposes some statistical data showing how Serbs occupied up to 30% of the posts while they represented between 12-18% of population in Socialist Croatia. He subsequently offers rather comprehensive arguments explaining the overrepresentation: the fact that the Croatian Serbs unanimously sided with Tito's partisans during WWII, while the Croats were divided between support for the Partisans and for the Nazi-puppet Ustaše regime; the underdeveloped territories in Croatia inhabited by Serbs represented a natural basin for recruiting military officers and servants, unlike the ethnic Croat population of the underdeveloped parts of the country due to the latter's high level of support for the Ustaše. It is important here to stress that Radelić registers how Croat nationalism was suppressed more harshly than Serb nationalism; however, he explains why the Communists perceived the former to represent a greater danger to the regime than the latter.

When it comes to the issue of economic exploitation, the Croatian master-narrative emphasizes that the socialist Croatia paid much more into the federal budget than it got back via federal subsidies. This trend is true; however, the population of the underdeveloped federal republics as a recipient of the federal subsidies consumed to a great extent the consumer goods produced in Croatia. So, again, there is a question of to what extent Croatia's payments to a federal budget circled back via the market; the question rather stifled in the Croatian historical master-narrative. The same trend was exposed in the present interpretation of the crackdown on the Croatian Spring in 1971. Inter alia, the intervention against the Croatian reformist leadership was preceded by opposition by the leaderships of all other Yugoslav republics to the Croatian demands, as is comprehensively explained by Zdenko Radelić as well as by Dennison Rusinow's book *The Yugoslav Experiment*. This fact is almost completely absent from the canon, as is an emphasis on the fact that the suppression of the Croatian Spring was followed by the removal of the reformists in Serbia.

Finally, before moving on to some remarks offering a possible solution to the victimhood perspective in historical interpretation in Croatia as well as to the Manichean master-narrative, I would like to address the fact that the countries of the European West have also not been immune to the mythical structure of the national identity-building master-narrative. In Western Europe, the myths take on the structure of the narrative of the glory of the nation in history, where the French or the English history is conceptualized as a history of enlightenment and progress, while simultaneously neglecting the dark spots, like colonialism for example. To what extent can national history serve as a political battlefield in a similar way to what has been happening in the European East was nicely exposed in the case of the Great Britain by the book *History Teaching, Nationhood and the State* by Robert Phillips. Not even to mention how painful the process of coming to terms with the past in contemporary France has been, as is well highlighted by the book *The Vichy Syndrome* by Henry Rousso, or by Emanuel Macron's speech delivered on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Holocaust in France. So maybe it can be said that only the Scandinavian countries and Germany have more or less come to terms with their own past(s); the latter mostly due to the heavy burden of the Nazi past.

While we are on the subject of France and Germany, I think that the process of creating the common Franco-German history textbooks can offer concrete solutions how to replace the Manichean perspective in the Croatian historical master narrative. In my opinion, the solution does not lie in alternative textbooks, where a teacher can pick the one she finds the most appropriate. Perhaps this can present a good solution in consolidated democracies; however, in such a fractured society as the contemporaneous Croatian society – where history represents an everlasting political battlefield – alternative textbooks can present a source of further fracturing. In my opinion, the possible solution would be to assemble a committee of the most distinguished historians from the right and the left wing of the political spectrum. The envisioned committee should be in charge of two issues: first, to create a history-teaching curriculum; second, to be in charge of the production of textbooks. One could object that the envisioned curricula and textbooks would prospectively suffer from various compromises

and revisionism(s). I would say that compromises would ensure that no faction felt entirely deprived of its particular perspective, while revisionism will be avoided if all members of the committee shared a common perspective on the concepts of human rights as well on the fundamental concepts the parliamentary democracy lies upon. I think that then, and only then, history would cease to serve as a political battlefield in Croatia, and that finally the Croatian society would come to a more comprehensive public interpretation of history than the present ones have been. ■■■

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a quest for alternatives

what is the civic option in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Asim Mujkić

Indeed, what occurs in this perspective is that the criticism of one, apparently essentialist, universalist option such as liberal democracy, overshadows the fact that the challenging perspective is in itself essentialist. It resides on "the essentialist understanding of 'ethnic groups' as political agents", and therefore on the pretension to the universalization of the particular groupness in Bosnia. Or, the mobilization of ethnic politics – previously initiated in war, through illegal use of force and by means of ethnic cleansing and massive war crimes – is itself an instrument of demobilization of civic politics, which are today framed as a 'security threat'.

Summary: The author attempts to identify the so-called 'civic option' as a political, but also cultural and historical alternative to the dominant ethno-nationalist conception in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A brief overview of the development of this idea with an ideological analysis is given, as well as possible future prospects. Contrary to common perceptions in contemporary public and political discourse, this political option is the oldest political platform in 'democratic' Bosnia and Herzegovina articulated in opposition to the hegemonic Communist ideology. Paradoxical though it may sound, the author identifies another source of this option in the goals of the anti-fascist struggle set by The Anti-Fascist People's Liberation Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1943 and 1944 with its 'double-determination' of Bosnian – surprisingly, civic – Republic as a polity of 'equal peoples' and of 'equal citizens'. Further, the author identifies empirical examples of its existence – the Platform of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Tuzla Model, and Brčko District – suggesting that with a change of political circumstances and a mode of operation typical of political and civic agents affiliated to this idea, the civic option, as an option of 'value pluralism', could cease to be just an option.

introduction

Behind the fiercest discussions on the political situation and political future of Bosnia and Herzegovina involving domestic and international, especially European agents, a certain spectre seems to be haunting the political elites of this country – the spectre of a ‘civic state’. The idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a common civic state, according to the bitter statements of some ethnonationalist leaders, as well as to the profound ignorance of the European envoys, seems to be the ultimate danger to the stability of the state. Advocacy for a civic state, according to the leader of the Croat ethnonationalist party, equates to advocacy for no less than an Islamic state. Based on the ‘clear and present danger’ of a civic option, it is unacceptable for ‘Muslim judges’ to have authority over¹ Republika Srpska, according to the leader of the Bosnian Serb political elite, nominally a social-democrat. However, Bosniak ethnopolitical leaders publicly speak about the necessity of establishing a balance between the ethnic and civic principle, while at the same time, on territories under their political domination, they carry on with ‘marking’ and ‘nationalization’ of their ethno-national territory. Indeed, there is something about the civic option which causes a stir in apparently straight-forward cases: Bosnia and Herzegovina is constitutionally defined as a state of the three constituent peoples, and its political system is based on a balance of power between the three constituent groups and ethnic allocation of posts as confirmation of the equality of its peoples.

Viewed from this ‘ethnocratic’ perspective (Howard, 2012), a non-ethnic political option undermines the very equality of the constituent collectives. In fact, there are two main, and interrelated, objections to this option. The civic option is rightly identified as an option based on the values of civil society, in fact the ‘European values’, or values embedded in the liberal-democratic moral imaginary (Taylor, 2004). Its critics find its universalist nature to be highly inapplicable to the Bosnian case, the specific three-constituent-peoples context. If applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina, if this country were organized on civic lines, it

would be transformed into a typical ‘nation state’ in which, simply according to statistic data, there would be the possibility that the most numerous constituent people – for example the Bosniaks, whose total number, according to the 2013 Census, exceeds 50% of the population – would become the ‘host-nation’ and impose its political will on to the other constituent groups, either in the entire state, or at least in one of its entities – namely, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Having in mind that an overwhelming majority of Bosniaks is of Muslim religious background, the comparison of civic state with ‘Islamic’ state by the Bosnian Croat HDZ party chief Dragan Čović certainly adds cultural, clash-of-civilizations-type of flavour to an already complex inter-ethnic problem². Indeed, what occurs in this perspective is that the criticism of one, apparently essentialist, universalist option such as liberal democracy, overshadows the fact that the challenging perspective is in itself essentialist. It resides on “the essentialist understanding of ‘ethnic groups’ as political agents” (Gagnon, 2004: xviii), and therefore on the pretension to the universalization of the particular groupness in Bosnia. Or, to paraphrase Gagnon, the mobilization of ethnic politics – previously initiated in war, through illegal use of force and by means of ethnic cleansing and massive war crimes – is itself an instrument of demobilization of civic politics, which are today framed as a ‘security threat’. Yet this contemporary systematic undermining of the legitimacy of the civic option only uncovers the highly questionable legitimacy of the violent establishment of the current ethnocratic regime. Gagnon points out:

The immediate purpose of this violence was to demobilize the wider population, to prevent a successful anti-regime mobilization from toppling the existing structures of power in the republic shifting the focus of political discourse and action away from liberalization toward purported threats to the very existence of the nation newly defined in very narrow terms. The effect of the violence was also the construction of homogeneous political space, that is,

1 Milorad Dodik said that it is “unacceptable to the Government that Republika Srpska is judged by Muslim judges” (Milorad Dodik je “poručio da je za Vladu neprihvatljivo da RS sude sudije muslimani”). (Dodik, 2018)

2 “I respect those who want a civic state, but today to say civic state in Bosnia and Herzegovina means classical Unitarism, and in some form, theoretically, it basically means an Islamic state” (“Poštujem one koji žele građansku državu, samo danas u BiH reći građanska država to znači klasičan unitarizam, u nekoj formi, teoretskom obliku, a to vam znači u osnovi islamsku državu”, rekao je Čović.), (Čović, 2018)

political space within which were imposed anti-liberal, authoritarian notions of Croatness (and Serbness), in which the views of challenger elites and the wider population, which were not in line with the HDZ right were defined as anti-Croat (or anti-Serb). (Gagnon, 2004: 122).

the birth of the civic option: 1989-1992

Indeed, what is the civic option in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to what extent is it artificial, directed against the being of particular ethnic peoples? Contrary to common perceptions in contemporary public and political discourse, according to which this political option is usually ascribed to present day non-nationalist political parties (social democrats, liberals, etc.), this political platform is the oldest, although vague, political platform in 'democratic' Bosnia and Herzegovina articulated in opposition to the hegemonic Communist ideology. It originated during 1989 and beginning of 1990 in the wake of Yugoslavian Prime Minister Ante Marković's economic liberal reforms, initially in the fields of cultural rights (various initiatives to re-open institutions of ethnic-national identity that had been previously banned by the Communist regime, forums for protection of cultural rights, etc.) and liberal, mainly student youth media such as *Valter* and *Naši dani*. UJDI (Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative), a grouping of Yugoslav civic

and political associations and intellectuals was established in Sarajevo in May 1989. It was, according to Gajo Sekulić, "the first oppositional civic-political organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina unless the rather short-lived Association for the protection of human rights in Kosovo, founded by the students of the Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo in the autumn of 1988 is counted" (Sekulić, 2006: 15).

In fact, the first political parties, including those who claimed to represent collective ethnic rights, such as SDA (for Bosniaks), SDS (for Serbs), and HDZ (for Croats), framed themselves – especially during the election campaign of 1990, as belonging to the 'civic option', or as a civic alternative to Communism. At the time, civility, civil society, civic vocabulary, seemed to be the main language of political articulation, as some kind of 'password' for entering political arena. So, in the beginning, the very loose term of 'civic option' referred to all non-Communist or anti-Communist political agents willing to compete in the first multiparty elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 1990. It was only after the elections that 'people's parties', having overwhelmingly won the elections, gradually shifted the paradigm of political articulation, revealing their ethnopolitical agenda. This rather short period of time between autumn 1988 and the outbreak of war in April 1992 could be considered the time of the beginning, and at the same time the defeat of 'civil society' and "its liberal-democratic and social-

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democratic potential" (Sekulić, 2006: 14) to the benefit of ethno-nationalist, nation-state-founding political forces. The first organized expression of 'civic option' as a reaction to the inevitable fall of the Yugoslavian Communist hegemony was UJDI (the Association for Yugoslav Democratic Initiative) which had, as indicated in their name, a rather Yugoslavian agenda. They opted for top-down democratization, advocating democratic elections on the Yugoslavian level before elections in the republics. Since the elections were held in the republics first, this option slowly faded and made way for the civic option in the republics. In that light, the first clear political articulation of the Bosnian 'civic option' has been undertaken by the Alliance of Socialist Youth – Democratic Alliance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (future Liberal Party). In a 15 March 1991 document entitled the Memorandum of Bosnia and Herzegovina of (clearly aiming to counter-act the nationalist Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts of 1986, which in the opinion of many serious analysts initiated the processes of ethnic-nationalization and ethnic 'un-mixing' in Yugoslavia that eventually led to its final dissolution), written by intellectuals and activists: Zdravko Grebo, Tarik Haverić, Đorđe Latinović and Martin Raguž, a draft of the constitution of a civic republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was offered. As Raguž explains, this civic draft "is free from all ideological markers. Conceptually, it starts with the citizen as carrier of sovereignty; Bosnia and Herzegovina is defined as the state of its citizens based on human rights, freedoms, the rule of law and social justice, with a Preamble referring to the historical circumstances of the foundation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the sovereign and indivisible state of Serbs, Croats and Muslims" (Raguž, 1991).

Raguž has continued to describe the proposed document containing the fundamental principles and ideas of a 'civic option' to this day:

The dominant place in this text is the chapter on human rights and freedoms which is in concordance with the best European democratic tradition. Furthermore, the document consequently deduces the division of powers into legislative, executive and judicial branches with a semi-presidential political system where the presidential authority is essentially restricted by the Constitution. The government is autono-

mous, answering to the parliament. The President of the Republic is directly elected for a mandate of 5 years; the Parliament is unicameral, while the special focus is on the protection of minorities, local self-government, and ethnic equality (Raguž, 1991).

It is important to note that according to this draft constitution Bosnia and Herzegovina, economywise, is a capitalist republic. Article 52 states that "economic and social organization is based on free enterprise and free flow of labour, goods and capital", guaranteeing in further provisions property rights (Article 55) and equal terms in the market (Article 53). From the very beginning it was clear to those who advocated the 'civic option' that Bosnia and Herzegovina, unlike the rest of the Yugoslavian republics, was not a monoethnic nation state, but rather a multiethnic polity, and that "with such a plural inheritance people cannot reasonably expect that political and national allegiance will express a deep culture of common values" (Gray, 2016: 147). But it was reasonably expected "that people have in common enough respect for the ruling ideas of a civil society – ideas of toleration, of responsibility and equality under the rule of law – for diversity in society to be fruitful rather than an occasion for division" (Gray, 2016: 147). This 'rational' expectation – though seriously undermined by subsequent war atrocities and Dayton realpolitik of 'contained' virulent nationalisms – is still the ultimate horizon for advocates of civic option in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The fragility of this 'expectation' was best expressed by one of the authors of the draft constitution, Professor Zdravko Grebo, who seriously doubted the feasibility of the civic option – not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but also in the other Yugoslavian republics – faced with heavily armed nationalisms. He said that not only were serious preconditions for a civic society absent, but "there are no basic conditions for the establishment of civilized political life" (Grebo, 1992).

What is further interesting is that Grebo posed the fundamental dilemma that, as it seems, still haunts the supporters of the 'civic option'. Since he highlighted the very weak chances that this option might become viable, a journalist asked him why he bothered writing and fighting for such an option and endorsing it. What is maybe surprising is the very existential tone of Grebo's answer. He said that his endeavour reflects

Only in a superficial sense could the position of Bosniak ethnonationalists be considered different from Bosnian Serb and Croat views. Although Bosniak ethnopolitics refers to elements of the 'civic option' as their political platform, in the territories with Bosniak majority, all elements of nationalization are effectively already present. However, the Bosniak political elite must be 'forced' or 'unwillingly' led to the 'three-nation-state' option due to enormous ideological discrepancy with the proclaimed imperatives of its ethnopolitics on the 'indivisibility' of Bosnia. In this subtle ethnopolitical strategy, Bosniak nationalism takes some elements of the 'civic option', distorts them to serve their nationalist agenda and thus compromises it in its entirety.

the need that despite the unfavourable circumstances, certain things that are considered as undoubtedly belonging to the legacy of civilization, things which I perceive as literally my existential interest /are worth striving for/ such as: protection of my privacy, protection of my differing opinion, protection from arbitrary police repression, creation of conditions for free political competition, for an independent judiciary, for genuine public opinion, independent media, etc. (Grebo, 1992).

Indeed, history unfolded in the way Professor Grebo had anticipated. The three leading nationalist parties accepted so-called 'Cutileiro Plan' of March 18, 1992, which redefined Bosnia and Herzegovina in ethno-territorial terms: "Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be a state consisting of the three constituent units based on the national principle and with respect to economic, geographic and other criteria". This Plan envisioned Bosnia as a confederacy, or loose union of the three ethnic republics, sovereign nation states. Even worse, now with the support of the international community, for the first time in the history of this country, the principle of ethnic territoriality has been introduced and legitimized and will remain in the background of all subsequent deliberations and negotiations on the status of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even worse, this 'League-of-nations'-type of institutional and political rearrangement of Bosnia and Herzegovina further encouraged nationalist forces, especially Serb nationalists backed by the Yugoslavian Army, to engage first in the armed 'implementation' of the plan, meaning initiating and carrying out ethnic and territorial 'redistribution' within Bosnia by use

of force in order to establish its 'national constituent unit', and afterwards, after the Dayton Peace Agreement had been signed, continuing with extreme nationalist politics of separation.

Although the civic option has lost the 1990 elections, further historical developments, especially armed nationalization and fragmentation of the republic not only kept this option alive, but meant that frightened citizens, confronted with inevitability of war, reached for its vocabulary to articulate their opposition to nationalism and further fragmentation. On two occasions – March 1 and April 5-6, 1992 – two massive civic demonstrations clearly opposed the ethnonationalist direction their republic was led into. As demonstrators managed to enter the Parliament and Government buildings on April 5, they established an open forum, a 'people's parliament' and requested that the nationalists step down. Unfortunately, shots were fired, the parliament building was shelled, and this civic initiative was drowned at birth. The exhausting, brutal nationalist war started. Nevertheless, one of the greatest achievements of the civic option and ideas was the document entitled "The Platform on the Operation of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Conditions of War", adopted by the Presidency of the republic in June 1992. The Platform reiterated the firm attachment of the Bosnian government to multiculturalism, equality of peoples and citizens, the rule of law, and other civic values. Unfortunately, due to the force of weaponry, and 'tacit consent' of the international community, the Platform was marginalized by numerous 'peace plans', each of them fully observant of the ethno-territorial claims of armed nationalist forces.

the 'communist' roots of the civic option

Another source of inspiration, besides the set of 'European values', for the Bosnian civic option is to be found not in any known universalist recipe, but in the very local, particular, contextual heritage of the modern Bosnian polity. This source is found in the goals of the anti-fascist struggle set by ZAVNOBiH: The Anti-Fascist People's Liberation Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1943. This covenant led by the Communist resistance, constituted Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign republic of all its peoples: Serbs, Croats and Muslims (Bosniaks), defining it as a republic belonging *equally* to all three, and at the same time belonging to *none* of them in particular. This formula for Bosnia and Herzegovina thus surpassed the common one-nation state solution equally endorsed by the capitalist West and socialist East. Instead of dividing Bosnia according to ethnic lines, or imposing one of its peoples as the Bosnian host-nation, the subject of sovereignty was delegated to the sphere of vivid inter-group relations, that is, to the space between them encouraging their unity, common features, multilayered interactions that have shaped Bosnian social identity for centuries.

Furthermore, the second Declaration, entitled the Declaration of Human Rights of the Citizens of Bosnia of 1944, redefined Bosnia and Herzegovina as a republic determined in two ways: as a community of equal peoples, but also as a community of equal citizens. The significance of these documents, which had established the modern Bosnian polity is that they reached far beyond strict ideological confines. Regardless of the subsequent, rather poor Communist performance, especially in the field of individual rights and freedoms, on the level of principles this 'double' determination of the Bosnian civic republic – of equal peoples and of equal citizens – remained the founding idea of the Bosnian civic option. In addition, within such a framework, Bosnia and Herzegovina recorded unprecedented development in the fields of economy, culture, but also in its political agency during its 'socialist phase'. So, though it may sound as a paradox, ideologically, the civic option clearly has two pillars – the values of the liberal-democratic imaginary that boosted anti-Communist regime sentiments prior to the 1990 election, but also anti-ethnop-

olitical sentiments from 1990 onwards. The second pillar is the ZAVNOBiH principle of equality of the peoples and citizens, a de facto Communist principle. In fact, attachment to this principle and the heritage of anti-fascist struggle has remained a strong dividing line between the civic option and ethnopolitical parties up to this day. There is also the question to what extent it is reasonable to talk about two pillars since the principle of human rights and freedoms is already included in ZAVNOBiH documents. The earliest advocates of the civic option, such as Zdravko Grebo, reintroduced the long-forgotten Second Declaration of Human Rights of the citizens of Bosnia, clearly implying that rather stricter implementation of it would suffice for the democratization of the republic. Therefore, it could be concluded that ZAVNOBiH's double determination of the republic as a polity of equal peoples and of equal citizens, reinterpreted in the light of the heritage of human rights struggles, indeed remains the fundamental principle of the civic option. And by the outbreak of war, this option was already sharply contrasted to the ethnonationalist platform for the new constitutional organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

the living civility: the 'Tuzla way' and Brčko District

Contrary to the hegemonic perspective that implies that Bosnia is viable as a country only if the principle of ethnic territoriality is met, a few empirical examples of non-national organization seem to contradict this view. In his brilliant study entitled *Politics and society in Tuzla from 1992 to 1995*, Ioannis Armakolas focuses on the case of Tuzla, the only civic polity after the first election and its struggle against nationalist pretensions throughout the war from outside and from within. Based on comprehensive empirical research, the author distils a few key characteristics of the so called 'Tuzla Way', that is, of the civic alternative option, contrasted to the nationalist and socialist-Yugoslavian options available back in the beginning of 1990s:

- Bosniannes, [political, cultural, not ethnic: A.M.];
- Bosnian tradition of living together in difference;
- Anti-fascist tradition of Tuzla [here we could add 'and Bosnia and Herzegovina': A.M.];

So, the contemporary nationalists' talk of the 'spectre' of the 'civic state' reveals itself as a handy instrument of ideological mobilization by all three ethnonationalist elites, whereby the Serb and Croat elites present themselves as victims of the hegemonic and unitary pretensions of the Bosniaks, while the Bosniak elite develops the theme of being the victim of separatist activities by the other two. This victimological stance is the 'ground zero' of ethnic mobilization on all sides, resulting in the 'win-win' context encouraging the production of separate realities, societies, and in the end, of separate territorial and political entities, 'ethnopolises', or nuclei of future monoethnic states.

- New mild communitarianism: respect for traditional institutions; less politicized; expansion or stressing the unifying elements, marginalization of those that divide;
- Flexible ethnic 'keys' [rotation of ethnic allocation to important political positions: A.M.], support for civic and liberal aspirations;
- Inter-ethnic coexistence in the context of Bosnian unity; celebration of ethnic mixing and cultural diversity;
- The pride of Tuzla, local patriotism; (Armakolas, 2016: 118).

Within the 'civic discourse' of Bosniak ethnopolitics promoted by SDA during the war and still today, the above-mentioned elements become distorted, and in Armakolas' analysis they look like this:

- Bosnianness, with overemphasis on Bosniak identity;
- Bosnian tradition of living together in difference [but with one element already overemphasized, advocating living together ceases to be persuasive – A.M.];
- Resistance to recognition of the anti-fascist tradition – powerful revisionist tendencies;
- Stronger communitarianism: traditional institutions and communities in the centre of society and politics;
- Stronger element of communitarianism in politics;
- Inter-ethnic coexistence based on communitarian lines; discouragement of mixing and opposition to cultural diversity;
- Local identity interwoven with Bosniak tradition and Islamic religion. (Armakolas, 2016: 118).

This list of comparisons by Armakolas clearly indicates the level of distortion, or difference between the 'Bosniak civic option' and the common 'civic option'. The

true – nationalist – nature of Bosniak civic option emerged, according to Armakolas, at an opportune moment during the war in Tuzla, when SDA attempted to radicalise the citizenry of Tuzla and take over political power. However, what enabled the survival of the 'Tuzla model' was the condition of war that led to the armament of the bearers of the civic option on one side, and on the other, control over resources. Yet, as Armakolas notices, this agency of the civic option has steadily weakened as a result of the general reconstruction of state organization that has become more and more nationalist (see Armakolas, 2016: 119). The ethnopolitical state structure, total control over institutions, public resources, media, and even over civil society in an atmosphere of permanent conflict and threatening 'final countdown', control and instrumentalization of repressive and ideological state apparatuses, economic and existential extortion produced the political bodies of voters that legitimate 'nationalizing' elites, at the same time marginalizing the civic option.

The civic option was not a functional reality only in Tuzla. To a significant degree it is still present in Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A civic, or non-nationalist line of reasoning, or the principle of ZAVNO-BiH's double-determination also functions within contexts other than socialist, as is visible in the Brčko Arbitration Award of 1999. By stating clearly that *the tribunal, rather than handing a trophy to one side or the other, should take affirmative steps to provide immediate relief, both in terms of human rights and in terms of economic revitalization, for the thousands of poverty-stricken individuals who live in, and want to make their home in, Brčko. (Arbitration Tribunal Award, 1999).*

The Arbitration Tribunal based its deliberation on the principles of equity stemming from the perspective of local individual inhabitants' interests, finally according the disputed area the status of condominium, echoing the ZAVNOBiH principle, which determined that Brčko District belongs equally to both entities and to neither in particular. The exclusion of the ethnic territorial principle by the Tribunal's Award has in effect set preconditions for a rather prosperous liberal-democratic, or civic community with relatively weaker communitarian elements clearly showing that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not doomed to ethnocracy. A. Moore points out in that respect that "Brčko has served as an exemplar of what multiethnic Bosnia could be – rather than the ethno-territorial division of the country otherwise established by the DPA" (Moore, 2013: 162).

conclusion: further perspectives

Contrary to the nationalist discourses' implication that the civic option intends to impose the universal abstract solutions for the specific case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with Cutileiro's and all of the subsequent plans, the only conception that has really been imposed in the domain of 'realpolitik' was in fact the universalist pattern of the construction of the nation state in the particular territorial portion of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The 'minoritarian' discourse of the ethnonationalist elites, especially of Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats, developed against the 'majoritarian' threat of Bosniaks, will obviously remain dominant until the highest possible level of nation-statehood is achieved on the territories previously conquered by force and after massive ethnic engineering. It is exactly this idea of nationalizing the claimed territories of Bosnia and Herzegovina that has introduced the ethnic animosities and never-ending circles of ethnic mobilizations on all three sides, which in a rather perverse way should end up in three separate (or loosely confederated) national 'civic' states. Once the domination of a host people is undisputed on a certain territory, all minority rights can be guaranteed, and in such a way, according to Bosnian ethnonationalist elites, liberal-democracy and organization of the state in accordance to "European values" can be achieved.

Only in a superficial sense could the position of Bosniak ethnonationalists be considered different from Bosnian Serb and Croat views. Although Bosniak ethno-politics refers to elements of the 'civic option' as their political platform, in the territories with Bosniak majority, all elements of nationalization are effectively already present. However, just as the political elite of Serbia that 'somehow' has to be forced from outside to accept the departure of Kosovo, the Bosniak political elite must be 'forced' or 'unwillingly' led to the 'three-nation-state' option due to enormous ideological discrepancy with the proclaimed imperatives of its ethno-politics on the 'indivisibility' of Bosnia. In this subtle ethno-political strategy, Bosniak nationalism takes some elements of the 'civic option', distorts them to serve their nationalist agenda and thus compromises it in its entirety. The political option claiming an affiliation to the civic option has not in reality achieved anything in the field of reintegration of the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the contrary, this political option is heavily engaged, together with the other two, in the production of three separate societies within Bosnia.

So, the contemporary nationalists' talk of the 'spectrum' of the 'civic state' reveals itself as a handy instrument of ideological mobilization by all three ethnonationalist elites, whereby the Serb and Croat elites present themselves as victims of the hegemonic and unitary pretensions of the Bosniaks, while the Bosniak elite develops the theme of being the victim of separatist activities by the other two. This victimological stance is the 'ground zero' of ethnic mobilization on all sides, resulting in the 'win-win' context encouraging the production of separate realities, societies, and in the end, of separate territorial and political entities, 'ethnopolises' (Mujkić, 2007), or nuclei of future monoethnic states. In such a context, the civic option is something like collateral damage. For one nationalist option – the Bosniak one – it is the starting point. The political vocabulary of this elite is abundant with civic metaphors and terms, yet the political practice is nationalization. For the other two nationalist options – the Serb and Croat options – the civic option is the endpoint. They say yes to liberal democracy, but only after the reorganization of the entire country, after certain conditions are met, primarily, the conditions of clear territorial hegemony of a host ethnic nation

over a particular portion of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of the three nationalist options are at the same time nationalizing options in possession of institutions, of key sources of economic power, of the entire network of the ideological state apparatuses deeply engaged in the process of production of their respective peoples and their respective societies.

What is the political future of this option, attached to the idea of society in its overwhelming complexity and free play of its plural life-forms? Contemporary political agents, which consist of political parties who vaguely claim the 'civic option' as their political agenda, such as the Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Front, the Civic Party and Our Party, seem to be rather weak. There are various reasons for that. First of all, it is their inherent ideological vagueness. Most of them use 'civic option' and 'leftist option' interchangeably. Although it is true that both social democratic and liberal parties throughout Europe face identity crises, with the tide of ultra-conservative nationalism, a certain platform of social-liberal alliance could be desirable; a more focused and articulated ideology of these parties could be helpful in their distinctive visibility for voters. That would also help them to become visible and credible in the still politically monolithic areas under the strict grip of the Serb and Croat nationalist elites. Second, the leadership issues reducing political actions and disputes to interpersonal relations are a deadly cancer of this political block. Third and most important, in my view, since the agents of the civic option must in the foreseeable future operate within a hostile ethnocratic institutional arrangement, they must come up with more effective, and subversive, ways of coping with it. Until present, their performance, even when they win an election and are effectively in power as in 2000 and in 2010, has been rather poor. Of course, part of the blame goes to the ethnically discriminatory institutional organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which forces the winner to enter coalitions with ideologically opposite partners. But an excuse is not an option. In that regard, besides the goal of strengthening the party base in the Croat

and Serb areas, some new ideas as to party organization must be discussed. As representative democracy is generally in a deep crisis of legitimacy, new forms of political organization and articulation must be considered. The election victories of Macron, Syriza, even Most in Croatia clearly indicate that one of the future shapes of political organization will be some kind of combination of political party and movement with close ties to citizens. These events showed that, contrary to the dominant views in both political theory and practice, the people, individual citizens do indeed want to be heard, consulted, asked. In fact, as H. Arendt convincingly concludes, "the right to have rights is a fundamentally political right; it is the right to belong significantly to a political space" (Birmingham, 2006: 59). The ruling ethnocracy is based on exactly the opposite – on *not* personally belonging to a political space. The political relevance of a citizen is exhausted in his or her membership in this or that group, whereby her or his voice is irretrievably silenced to the benefit of screaming and shouting ethnocratic oligarchies. The effective contact and participation of citizens within the movement and with the party's higher echelons needs to be facilitated. Political agents must concentrate on creating conditions for a significant public appearance of a citizen. Political "leadership, then, if it is still to have a role, must exercise an entrepreneurial function, not dictating to others or acting in their name or even claiming to represent them but as a simple operator of assembly within a multitude that is self-organized and cooperates in freedom and equality to produce "wealth" (Hardt, Negri, 2017: xviii). As a form of 'democratic entrepreneurship', grounded in the dynamics of everyday social life characterized by numerous interactions, new solidarity networks, ways of cooperation, grounded, if you will, in a common language spoken by all of the 'deeply divided' Bosnian peoples, the civic option has a chance, for it unflinchingly resides in the idea developed by J. Gray, that "we do not need common values in order to live together in peace. We need common institutions in which many forms of life can coexist" (Gray, 2016: 25). ■■■

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antifascism, communism and the Yugoslavian national idea in the jaws of nationalism

Srdan Milošević

Following the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the abandonment of the Marxist paradigm in understanding the national question, after many trials and tribulations, Antifascism as an ideologeme became the most important secondary thing in the process of constructing post-Yugoslavian national identities. Nevertheless, the aforementioned trials were not a matter of creative envisioning and fruitful reinterpretation of a significant subject such as the legacy of the Antifascist struggle. They were rather ramblings and roundabout paths that did not lead the societies on to the right path in understanding Antifascism, even though the term itself has regained significance. As the author of this essay sees it, the reason for the aforementioned rambling and sidepaths lies in the attitudes towards Yugoslavianness and the Yugoslavian Communists, whose negativity borders on the irrational.

Antifascism acquired the status it has today in stages, although the various substances corresponding to each stage co-exist today: the difference being merely which of the existing paradigms dominates in any given moment. To wit, understood as the struggle against Fascist occupiers and their collaborators during World War II in Yugoslavia, in the post-Yugoslavian period, especially in Croatia and Serbia Antifascism was mostly judged in two ways: *rejected* as a deception, a mistaken commitment by wayward apostate renegades of national ideals; and *accepted* as an authentic (exclusive or dominant) marker of one's own body national*, while "others" are portrayed as Fascists or Fascist collaborators, or com-

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* analogous to 'body politic'; also below, 'body ethnic' – editor's note

pletely ignored at best. Both these understandings were revisionist in the deepest sense of the word.¹

In rejecting Antifascism (both historically and today), linking it to the Communists, and through them to Yugoslavia, is fundamental. It is evident in this interpretation that the Antifascist struggle was largely the work of the Yugoslavian Communist Party (CPY), which took leadership of the liberation struggle, whose goal, in addition to defeating Fascism, was to renew and reorganise Yugoslavia as a state. Both these beliefs - Antifascist and Yugoslavian - became undesirable. The criterion was national, in effect - nationalist. Communists were declared traitors to the national interests, which in turn were understood as alleged needs, invented rights and bigoted claims of specific ethnies with respect to others. Standing opposite to such demands, the Communists were perceived as the ultimate enemy within one's own body ethnic. The Communists' Yugoslavian alignment merely served to underline this arbitrary qualification, as in the dominant interpretations, Yugoslavia itself, as an idea of a state, became a symbol of national oppression. This is how it is perceived in all nationalist narratives, without exception. (It should be stressed here that not all beliefs that favoured the disappearance of this state framework *in the specific historical circumstances* are mere nationalist anti-Yugoslavianism. Quite simply, an insight that a multiethnic state framework has become unsustainable is a perfectly legitimate stance towards that idea. It is another thing to believe that the very idea of such a polity is *a priori* undesirable as it would include members of one or other nation perceived as hostile.) Since it was Communist and Yugoslavian, the People's Liberation Struggle Antifascism therefore

1 Due to frequent objections that *revisionism* is in fact a welcome phenomenon, a result of freedom of thinking about the past and interpreting events, it is important to note the following: revisionism as a concept, a technical term, denotes primarily the ideological, political imposition onto a particular historical narrative, whether historiographic or belonging to the sphere of the culture of remembering, the assumption being that the "revised" narrative is based on reliably established facts and is interpretatively credible. Naturally, this narrative itself may not be, and usually is not, value-neutral. Although different interpretations are both possible and desirable, not all are equally credible. When it is not an open falsification of history, revisionism is reliably and demonstrably its misinterpretation. Science and the culture of remembering based upon it, do not need *revision*, but improving scientific knowledge, its *evolution*. They do not need historians as *revisers*, but as responsible scholars of the past.

The Communists' Yugoslavian alignment merely served to underline this arbitrary qualification, as in the dominant interpretations, Yugoslavia itself, as an idea of a state, became a symbol of national oppression. This is how it is perceived in all nationalist narratives, without exception. Since it was Communist and Yugoslavian, the People's Liberation Struggle Antifascism therefore itself became unacceptable. In the most extreme interpretations of this tendency, even Fascist collaboration could be justified as "nationally responsible" conduct, while crimes in the name of the nation were either denied or justified.

itself became unacceptable. In the most extreme interpretations of this tendency, even Fascist collaboration could be justified as "nationally responsible" conduct, while crimes in the name of the nation were either denied or justified.

Once Antifascism was thus banished from the culture of remembering, its tradition survived at the margins of society, occasionally - though entirely lifelessly - turning up in a holiday calendar or noticed in passing, when it seemed opportune from a nationalist point of view. As the round, sixtieth anniversary of the victory over Fascism approached, and given Europe's determination to appropriately mark this date, Antifascism has suddenly become a subject recognised as a significant source of European legitimation. Of the countries that were formed after the breakup of Yugoslavia, Serbia retained a formal alignment with a presumed Antifascism, but a hysterically anti-Titoist mood created a schizophrenia that could just not be managed: to disassociate Tito from Antifascism appeared arbitrary even from the viewpoint of a nationalism inclined towards any kind of arbitrariness. To bring Tito back into the game was unacceptable, and so the false Antifascism languished in its own contradiction, as meaningless as Milošević's "defence of Yugoslavia". However, when in the context of the aforementioned celebra-

tion, Antifascism started to gain the occasional burst of prominence, corresponding reactions on other sides began to emerge: Partisans suddenly became acceptable, the slogan, "Antifascism – yes, Communism – no", was gone, the Antifascist movement was "cleared" of its leadership, while the platitude that "not all Partisans were Communists" gained frequency, all the while emphasising exclusively the contributions of members of one's own people. This formula became so powerful that it was completely neglected that organising the Antifascist struggle was still largely the work of the CPY, without which there probably wouldn't have been a People's Liberation Movement – precisely the fact that had previously been used to dismiss or ignore Antifascism. It also became unimportant that of the civic (non-Communist) actors, *only some* were militant Antifascists, while *every last one* of the Communists was. Something else that had used to serve to "compromise" Antifascism also became unimportant: the inseparability of its actors from the Yugoslavian idea, even when these actors were not Communists. It was completely overlooked that Antifascism in Yugoslavia was what it was, and achieved what it achieved thanks to the fact that it grew on the principle of fraternity and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia, that is, the cooperation between the Antifascist forces among the members of each of these peoples. A huge majority of Croat, Bosniak, Serb and other Antifascists were *Yugoslavian* Antifascists.

Stressing the significance of Antifascism, which in the post-Yugoslavian phase first intensified in Croatia, especially disturbed the spirits in Serbia, where suddenly the Partisan liberation struggle became vital to identity: the Partisans were primarily Serbs, while others only took a marginal part in the struggle. Serb PLM members were acknowledged to an extent, but Tito remained completely obscured by intentional, and therefore mendacious forgetfulness. Under the influence of the monopolising of Antifascism within the European framework that was increasingly spreading from the Kremlin, Serbian nationalists wholly appropriated the Yugo-



"Communism got colours" by Usman Malik, CC-BY-NC 2.0

slavian Antifascism, presenting themselves as its only real representatives, narrowing its base to only Serbs. The situation in Croatia was somewhat similar, but a far larger problem than an overemphasised highlighting of the importance of Croats in the PLM was the near-total erasure of the Serbs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska and its "Chetnik Partisanry" played a particularly destructive role, while the Bosniaks have a tendency to downplay the negative role the Bosniak collaborationists played in World War II. The role of the Serb factor in the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the Nineties greatly influenced the lack of sympathy for the Serb victims of 1941-1945. This was how the bizarre formula of anti-Yugoslavian, anti-Communist, anti-Titoist and ethnocentric Antifascism was reached, that is, national Antifascisms that resemble in all aspects the precise thing they ostensibly oppose.

Everyone should find it acceptable that admitting the truth of the Yugoslavian and (organisationally) dominantly Communist character of Antifascism does not imply invoking the return of either the Communists or Yugoslavia. This truth must teach us that cooperation is possible, and that common efforts directed towards an important goal are grounded in history: the experience is important, even if the common goal today may be, and is, different from the goal from several decades ago. ■■■

translated by Hana Dvornik

transcending consociationalism: in support of civic Bosnia and Herzegovina

Senada Šelo Šabić

Consociational solutions are costly, complex and rigid. They do not allow for transformations that any dynamic, progressive society naturally undergoes. They cement the division of power that had existed at the end of a conflict and petrify politics. In BiH this has resulted in the ethnicization of politics. Everything in Bosnian politics revolves around ethnicity – elections, forming governments, education, regional development, diplomacy, infrastructure, media, social policies, the judiciary and much else.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has not made significant breakthroughs in functionality and prosperity since the war ended in 1995. One crisis after another – this is what the Bosnian political reality looks like in 2018. Is there an end to this turmoil? This essay argues that the Dayton Peace Agreement, which introduced a consociational regime to end the war in BiH, can no longer be considered a credible framework for the creation of a stable, functional and prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina, a would-be EU member state.

the limits of consociationalism

Consociationalism, or a power-sharing mechanism, is used for managing conflicts in deeply divided societies. There is no unique consociational model – their details depend on the specific contexts in which they are adopted. The building blocks of a consociational model can be the proportionality principle in elections and in administrative appointments, territorial autonomy, recognition of group rights, protection of minority rights, federal or confederal arrangements and other methods.¹ The Netherlands and Belgium are two classic examples in Europe, as are Northern Ireland and Cyprus. Beyond Europe, consociational agreements in different forms were applied in Lebanon, Nigeria, Burundi, East Timor, Afghanistan, Cambodia and so on. Closer to Bosnia and Herzegovina, one can look at forms of consociationalism applied in Macedonia and Kosovo.

A trajectory of the application of the model in recent history indicates that it has become a toolbox used to end wars in different parts of the world. The international community has developed a preference for incorporating power-sharing solutions into peace agreements. In other words, "power-sharing has become the international community's preferred remedy for building peace and democracy after civil wars".²

1 Timothy Sisk (1996) *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*. Washington, D.C.: USIP.

2 Matthijs Bogaards compiling from P. G. Roeder and D. Rothchild, eds. (2005) *Sustainable Peace. Power and Democracy after Civil Wars*. Cornell UP. M. Bogaards (2006) *Democracy and Power-Sharing in Multinational States: Thematic Introduction*. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 8(2):121.

Despite an increase in the frequency of its application, its success rate in creating conditions for lasting peace is questionable.³ A power-sharing agreement may be a good basis for ending wars, but its ability to contribute to lasting peace is much slimmer. Its main drawback is that in the long run it limits democracy. Democracy should not be traded for peace, but reality in life often makes for such unpopular trade-offs. What most authors on power-sharing agreements agree on, though, is that these are best seen as short term solutions that, ideally, are to be replaced by more inclusive and pluralist policies when political conditions permit.

The risks associated with long-term power-sharing agreements are "limits on democracy, the creation of institutional weapons for ethnic entrepreneurs, a focus on inter-ethnic allocation, the problem of outbidding and extremism, governmental inefficiency, governmental rigidity, and inadequate enforcement."⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced all of the risks listed above and is experiencing a "severe stalemate".⁵ Consociational solutions are costly, complex and rigid. They do not allow for transformations that any dynamic, progressive society naturally undergoes. They cement the division of power that had existed at the end of a conflict and petrify politics. In BiH this has resulted in the ethnicization of politics. Everything in Bosnian politics revolves around ethnicity – elections, forming governments, education, regional development, diplomacy, infrastructure, media, social policies, the judiciary and much else.

Timothy Sisk summed up the precarious dynamic between the desire to deliver peace in the short term and the capacity of a power-sharing agreement to make this peace long-lasting. "While power-sharing may be desirable, and necessary as an immediate exit to deadly ethnic wars, power-sharing is not a viable long-term solution to managing uncertainty in ethnically divided societies."⁶

What is then to be done?

Every case is a universe in itself. The literature on consociationalism concedes that there are no fixed models and that even the traditional examples described in literature, like the Netherlands or Belgium, have been theoretically fuzzy to start with.⁷ Resting on the intrinsic characteristics of particular cases, the theory offers little enlightenment on how to overcome long-term challenges to the functionality and stability of a country that adopts a consociational regime. Two features can be emphasized:

- Consociational regimes tend to become rigid over time, leaving little space for adaptation to changed circumstances that are the reality of the political life of any country
- Consociational regimes are elite-driven agreements where deals are reached by elites and in which the non-involvement of citizens is a preferred, almost a required condition.⁸

Let us dwell a bit on both of these features with reference to Bosnia and Herzegovina today, taking into account the legacy created by the Dayton Peace Agreement while bearing in mind the goal of making BiH a stable, functional and prosperous state, a prospective member of the EU.

The rigidity of political life reduces the capacity of a country to react to changes that inevitably take place both on the domestic and international fronts. BiH twenty years ago and BiH today exist in two different worlds. Innovation, technological revolution, economic development, advanced education standards, security challenges, health priorities, fast transportation, new communication channels, environmental concerns, migration and demographic change irreversibly changed our world in the last two decades. Successful states are adaptable and resilient, not rigid. Weak countries, where decision-making is slow, where leaders' diverging interests pull it in different directions, where there is no commitment to the greater public good, and where fear rather than trust feeds politics, are set to fail.

The second feature of consociationalism is its elitism. However, if exclusion of

3 Bogaards, 2006: 121.

4 Ibid.

5 Donald L. Horowitz (2014) Ethnic Power Sharing: Three Big Problems. *Journal of Democracy* 25(2): 5-20.

6 Ibid.

7 Kris Deschouwer (2006) And the peace goes on? Consociational democracy and Belgian politics in the twenty-first century. *West European Politics* (29)5:896.

8 K. Deschouwer (2006), taking from Luc Huyse (1971) *Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuimdheid in de Belgische politiek*. Antwerpen: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij. See also Rudy B. Andeweg (2000) Consociational democracy. *Annual Review of Political Science* 3(1): 509-536.

citizens from decision-making was possible in the past, changes in political culture make citizens less likely to grant a few leaders the exclusive right to decide on a host of issues affecting their lives. Inclusion of citizens in politics can be messy, time-consuming, and incoherent. Actually, it almost always is. Yet, the times when kings and sultans enjoyed the privilege of determining their subjects' destinies belong to the history books. Despite the possible messiness and complexity of citizens' involvement in politics, it is a norm in advanced democracies, even when, as it frequently happens, citizens' engagement does not necessarily offer progressive ideas.

This year 27 EU member states joined an initiative to hold a dialogue with their citizens on a wide range of topics. The relevance of this initiative need not be exaggerated, nor should it be understated. A prospective member of the EU, as Bosnia and Herzegovina presents itself, should take note of the political reality of an organization it wants to join.

a civic state

Already aware of the limits to the functionality and prosperity of BiH that result from the ethnic division of power, the authors of the Dayton Peace Agreement have also included a civic principle in the system, which had been extended for a period, mostly under international pressure. During the last decade, the civic element in BiH politics had been systematically undermined by ethnic leaders. Deeper ethnic divisions contributed to political and economic deterioration. Citizens are leaving *en masse*, eager to find a better place to work and live, far from BiH.

The antithesis to ethnic politics in BiH is the civic concept. This has been vigorously criticized by the very same ethnic political entrepreneurs claiming that a civic BiH would equal a unitary state where Bosniaks would have predominance.⁹ But what is it in the concept of a civic state that is so repulsive to ethnic entrepreneurs?

A civic state is based on civic nationalism, which creates a sense of belonging to the state based on the principle of citizenship, i.e. inclusion of all members of a given

Judging by the claims of ethnic entrepreneurs, there is one counterintuitive answer. Respondents are asked to choose one out of six possible answers why they oppose the EU integration of BiH. Respondents consistently and overwhelmingly choose fear of higher taxes and increased costs of living (2015 – 62.3%; 2016 – 51.1%; 2017 – 55.4%). A considerably smaller number selected loss of cultural diversity as an answer (2015 – 12.3%; 2016 – 5.3%; 2017 – 5.2%). What this means is that a relatively small percentage of people in BiH considers identity issues as relevant in opposing EU integration. The same, by extension, could be applied to their own state – a significantly larger number of people in BiH considers economic issues as being the most important to them.

society into a political union of individuals who enjoy equal rights and are bound by state laws. Civic nationalism draws its inspiration from liberalism, a political ideology based on the principles of liberty and equality of all human beings. It gave foundation to values such as freedom of speech, religion and association, to name a few. The Oxford dictionary describes civic nationalism in the following way: "A political attitude of devotion to and vigorous support for one's country combined with a feeling of shared community with fellow citizens, especially as contrasted with a similar attitude based on ethnicity, race, or religion."¹⁰

Historically, "people of a shared ethno-linguistic group formed nations".¹¹ However, philosophers in the period of Enlightenment started to question the historical foundations of the state. Liberalism was born in the Enlightenment. The American Declaration of Independence of 1776,

9 Srna (2018) Dodik: SAD i dalje pokušavaju izgraditi BiH kao unitarnu državu. Nezavisne novine. 23 January <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Dodik-SAD-i-dalje-pokusavaju-izgraditi-BiH-kao-unitarnu-drzavu/461693>

10 See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/civic_nationalism

11 What is civic nationalism? Definition and Examples. Available at <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-civic-nationalism-definition-examples.html>



Signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, "20 years since NATO's first major peacekeeping operation" by NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization, CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0

espousing rights to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, and the French Declaration of Rights of 1789 championing *liberté, égalité, fraternité* were written with liberal values in mind.

Despite obstacles, liberal principles have permeated the world. They are encoded in constitutions across the globe and serve as a basis for developing open, progressive societies. The European Union is based on liberal democratic values.

How BiH plans to be part of the modern world, not to mention a member of the EU, if it shies away from freedom, equality, openness and inclusion, and, instead, draws inspiration from division, separation, closure and exclusivity of group rights? Citizens are not leaving BiH to live in countries that are more closed, divided and unregulated, in which one has rights only if s/he belongs to a certain group. No, they seek prosperity and happiness in countries that are open, pluralist, regulated and respect the rights of individuals.

Change in BiH cannot take place overnight or by imposition. If a significant number of its citizens seek their recognition through a group identity, this is a legitimate position that has to be respected. The question is how to design policies that ensure rights and mitigate fears while keeping focus on policies that generate development? Accepting the current reality, the answer comes by knowing where BiH wants to be ten years from now? fifty years? What is the vision that drives the country?

Mechanisms to protect group rights can be integrated into a Bosnia and Herzegovina that is becoming more liberal. Safeguarding particularisms and maintaining exclusivity absorb creative energy that could be otherwise used to improve, for example, education and health in the country, to build a new bridge or buy a new ultrasound machine.

who does ethnic division serve?

Those who insist on ethnic particularisms and stress the impossibility of cooperation claim that ensuring ethnic exclusivity in representation and applying the ethnic principle in all policy matters leads to peace and progress.

On the basis of which studies and analysis do they make such claims? Leaving aside the normative arguments discussed in the previous section, let us dwell a bit on economic arguments. How is a relatively poor country of around 3.8 million¹² inhabitants financially able to sustain five state and entity presidents, 16 parliaments and 14 governments? How rich does a country have to be to pay salaries to so many presidents, prime ministers, ministers, chiefs of cabinets, advisors, secretaries and drivers?

In terms of the overall employment rate, BiH is ranked 187th out of 218 countries in the world, immediately preceded by Malawi and followed by French Polynesia.¹³ In this ranking, BiH is closely neighbored by North Korea (194), the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, ranked 196 and 197 respectively, followed by Yemen (198), Afghanistan (209) and Syria (215), where ongoing conflicts obstruct normal economic activities.¹⁴

The already meagre GDP in 2010 (17.18 billion USD) shrank to 16.91 billion USD in 2016.¹⁵ The weak foreign direct investment in 2010 of 444 million USD could only

¹² Take into account also ft. 17.

¹³ CIA World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2129rank.html#bk>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ World Bank. Country Profile http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=B&H; <https://www.vecernji.ba/vijesti/B&H-svrstana-me-u-najsiromasnije-zemlje-u-europi-1202577>

be dreamed of in 2016, when it scored 273 million USD.¹⁶ With negative demographic trends and declining population (3.72 million in 2010 to 3.52 million in 2016), World Bank statistics do not promise a better future.¹⁷

How can anyone boast of success in a country which officially holds the world's record with a 62.3% youth unemployed rate?¹⁸ The fight against corruption in BiH never picked up, but it nonetheless managed to stagnate for six years and has since last year regressed, according to the Transparency International team in BiH in its report for 2017.¹⁹ Successive polls and research, conducted using different methodologies and different samples of respondents, come up with similar results: citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina identify unemployment, corruption and poverty among the top three problems. Politicians are, by default, perceived as among the most corrupt.²⁰

The BiH Directorate for European Integration conducts annual polls on citizens' attitudes towards the EU. The last three reports (years 2017, 2016 and 2015) confirm some already known facts – that citizens cite employment opportunities and the fight against corruption as the greatest benefits of EU membership. Citizens believe, also quite expectedly, that young people will predominantly enjoy the benefits of integration. Judging by the claims of ethnic entrepre-

neurs, there is one counterintuitive answer. Respondents are asked to choose one out of six possible answers why they oppose the EU integration of BiH. Respondents consistently and overwhelmingly choose fear of higher taxes and increased costs of living (2015 – 62.3%; 2016 – 51.1%; 2017 – 55.4%). A considerably smaller number selected loss of cultural diversity as an answer (2015 – 12.3%; 2016 – 5.3%; 2017 – 5.2%).²¹ What this means is that a relatively small percentage of people in BiH considers identity issues as relevant in opposing EU integration. The same, by extension, could be applied to their own state – a significantly larger number of people in BiH considers economic issues as being the most important to them.

civic vs islamic

As if a warning against unitarism was not enough, as of recently, the idea of creating a civic state has been branded as disguising a desire to create an Islamic state.²² Two clear antipodes – the model of a liberal state and the model of a religious-fundamentalist state – are brought into equation by a single variable: Bosniaks. It was not enough to accuse proponents of the civic concept in BiH of being Bosniak nationalists (declared or hidden), but Bosniaks need now to be exposed for what they really are – Islamic fundamentalists.

But let us ask ourselves: is it easier to create a civic Islamic rather than a liberal civic state? If Bosnian peoples are incapable of creating a functional consociational state, or Bosniak nationalists a unitary civic state, are Bosniak Islamic fundamentalists the only ones capable of such a project? Are they so well organized and financed that they will one day simply confront us with an Islamic state, presumably spanning the whole territory of BiH, as the civic concept from which it draws inspiration envisages? On that day, a few women (we can only suspect they are women) wearing burkas will walk silently through deserted streets as their men will be fighting infidels in Pale, Banja

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ CIA World Factbook <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2229rank.html#bk>

¹⁹ Transparency International BiH. Indeks percepcije korupcije: Eskalacija korupcije, posljedice razarajuće. 22 February 2018 <https://ti-B&H.org/indeks-percepcije-korupcije-eskalacija-korupcije-posljedice-razarajuce/>

²⁰ Transparency International BiH. Skoro četvrtina građana BiH bila u situaciji da im se traži mito. 15 February 2016 <https://ti-B&H.org/skoro-cetvrtina-gradana-bila-u-situaciji-da-im-se-trazi-mito/>; N.N. Istraživanje: Trećina bh. građana smatra da demokratija nije adekvatna za našu zemlju. Klix.ba. 20 May 2016. Presentation of the results of a survey of BH citizens' political opinions, conducted as part of a Balkan-wide comparative research study. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/B&H/istrazivanje-trecina-bh-gradjana-smatra-da-demokratija-nije-adekvatna-za-nasu-zemlju/160520035>; Center for the Study of Democracy. Izvješće o procjeni korupcije u 2016. godini. The report brings results of measuring corruption using the SELDI method in Southeast European countries http://integrityobservers.eu/UserDocs/Images/izvjescje_o_procjeni_korupcije_2016_HR.pdf; A 2017 poll identifies unemployment as the biggest problem (55%) perceived by citizens of BiH. More at Center for Insights in Survey Research. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Attitudes on Violent Extremism and Foreign Influence. January 4 – February 3, 2017. International Republican Institute http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_bosnia_poll_february_2017.pdf

²¹ Directorate for European Integration. All reports, dating back to 2008, are available here http://www.dei.gov.ba/dei/media_servis/istrazivanje/default.aspx?id=1905&langTag=bs-BA&template_id=120&pageIndex=1

²² Dragan Čović. 2018. Građanska BiH bila bi islamska država. Al Jazeera Balkans. 6 February <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/covic-gradanska-B&H-bila-bi-islamska-drzava>; Dženana Karabegović. 2018. Čovićeva 'islamizacija' BiH. Radio Slobodna Evropa. 7 February <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/covic-islamska-drzava-B&H/29025454.html>

Luka, Mostar, Kupres, Bijeljina, Foča and Tomislav Grad. In the name of the Islamic state, they will hunt down infidels who imitate Westerners by skiing on slopes of Jahorina and Bjelašnica. A special treat will be reserved for those Islamic state-builders who are granted the pleasure to crash windows, break chairs and tables, smash bottles and run infidels of both sexes out of cafes. To create a proper civic Islamic state, they will demolish all fitness centres as places of utter sin and drain out the few functioning swimming pools. And when they kill, hurt, frighten and expel infidels and enemies, the masterminds of the project of an Islamic Bosnia and Herzegovina will be left in peace by everybody else to enjoy their victory and live happily ever after.

If this answer was not academic enough, let us offer a few brief remarks on the flimsy argument that claims that a civic BiH would actually be an Islamic BiH.

First, it is not made in good faith as it attempts to qualify Bosniaks as Islamic fundamentalists.

Second, it implies that Bosniaks are a coherent, religiously politicized group with no pluralism of opinion.

Third, it implies that the Bosniaks possess the potential for strategic planning, execution and ability to reach their ultimate goal while successfully withstanding and resisting external pressure, and simultaneously maintaining strong internal cohesion.

None of the above assumptions are correct.

Data shows that all Bosnians overwhelmingly reject the idea of an Islamic state (89%).²³ When disaggregated by ethnicity, Bosniaks come out as the group with the highest percentage of people with an absolute preference for a secular state (58%), in comparison to 56% of Croats and 49% of Serbs.²⁴

conclusion

The international community's interventionist policy cannot go on indefinitely if BiH wants to mature into a stable, functional and prosperous state. Bosnian leaders and citizens need to find a formula for peace and progress. Drawing on the values of liberal democracy carries the most potential to design a successful model.

Ethnic entrepreneurs quite rationally want to continue forever to abuse the ethnic division of power, as that allows them almost unchecked reign in their zones of influence. They have been quite successful, to give them credit, in achieving their goals. The question is what are those who are dissatisfied with the situation in BiH ready to do?

Political projects that aspire to carve out ethnically-dominated territories as a way to manage conflicts in multiethnic states are civilizationally retrograde, morally apprehensive, politically expensive and economically self-defeating.²⁵ If we disregard modern political thinkers and those who regard things exclusively from a moral standpoint, and just decide to think pragmatically, we again confront the problem of territorial division as a solution for managing conflicts in multiethnic societies. Such projects are extremely hard to operationalize and implement. They often fail even when resorting to extreme tools - the use of arms. The costs of such violent attempts are far greater to a society in terms of human and material loss than it is to invest resources in searching for progressive viable solutions.

What is thus 'wrong' with the civic concept in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Why is it impossible to imagine a country of around 3.8 million people in Southeast Europe as a functional democratic state with accountable leadership, based on the rule of law, in which all its citizens, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, class or gender, political affiliation or geographical background, or any other identity trait, are equal and prosperous?

One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors. (Plato) ■■■

23 Center for Insights in Survey Research. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Attitudes on Violent Extremism and Foreign Influence. January 4 – February 3, 2017. International Republican Institute http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_bosnia_poll_february_2017.pdf
24 Ibid.

25 On economic effects of ethnic diversity see Adnan Efendić and Geoff Pugh (2018) The effect of ethnic diversity on income – an empirical investigation using survey data from a post-conflict environment. *Economics e-journal*. 2018-17. 28 March <http://www.economics-ejournal.org/economics/journalarticles/2018-17>

majority, minority and political strategies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mate Subašić

Nationalist projects continue to be maintained, backed by an even stronger argument now that an absolute majority exists within the society. One could argue that veto power guarantees that there is no need for fear. However, for nationalists, formal institutions are not perceived only through their instrumental value. For them, formal institutions may also be the symbols that embody narratives about group identity, possessing varying degrees of emotional salience. Therefore, the policies being advocated by particular ethnic groups seem reasonable from this perspective.

Within nationalism studies, scholars either deal with majority nationalism or minority nationalism. Both approaches have developed throughout time. New insights from the former led to new investigations within the latter and the other way around. What brings the two approaches together, beside nationalism, is the fact that in the late 20th century nationalism seems to have become ethnicised.

Ethnic identity is considered to bound people through an objective relationship, which stems from a common culture and ancestry. National identity, however, reflects the question of social organisation and in particular loyalty to the institutions of society – states.

Every state, once it is created aims to develop a sense of commonness and loyalty to its structure among its citizens regardless of their ethnic identity. Following this, nationalism being ethnicised means that an ethnic group tends to create social institutions which reflect only its own interests. It aims at creating a state congruent with itself.

Once such a state is created, the nationalising policies will reflect only the identity of the respective group. Identity though seems to be a blurred concept having a dif-

ferent meaning for different people. However, in practical terms, the question reflects the right and the power to make a decision on the future of the respective group.

Further on, as the state is a legal concept which presumes a certain territory, it is highly unlikely that the territory would be congruent with the ethnic group's territorial dispersion. The fact that most war and post-war policies initiated by the three constitutive ethnic groups within Bosnia and Herzegovina were aiming at territorialisation brings us to the conclusion that the goal was to establish a state congruent with an ethnic group. As in other similar cases, there are always members of other groups in a territory, particularly in communities such as Bosnian and Herzegovinian.

The minority will be perceived by the majority as a threat to its security. The majority will portray them as disloyal. This is the consequence of the fact that the state seeks loyalty based on ethnicity. The minority will, therefore, feel endangered by the nationalising policies of such a state. They will request a certain level of autonomy ranging from cultural institutions all the way to the introduction of some form of federative mechanisms or even separation

from the state. Those institutions will allow the minority to protect their identity or to decide on their own about their future.

It becomes clear that if one belongs to the majority within a given state one won't be concerned about the ethnic majoritarian policies that state seeks to pursue. Those policies will certainly reflect their identity. On the other hand, if one belongs to a minority one will demand that the state acknowledge their autonomy with regard to the nationalising policies being pursued. One will seek protection and guarantees.

*The fear of becoming a minority*¹ is a therefore a strong determinant of the political strategies that an ethnic group might choose. Therefore it is better to be the majority in a smaller state than to become a minority within a larger state. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Peace Agreement was aiming to prevent such fears by introducing the right of veto for all three constituent ethnic groups. However, within the nationalist environment that has developed during the war and that was institutionalised with the implementation of the Agreement, the fear did not disappear. On the contrary, it led two ethnic groups, the relative minorities, Serbs and Croats, blocking all attempts by the state to introduce policies aiming at creating the sense of commonness and loyalty to the state. The fact that their neighbouring kin-states introduced similar national projects, creating states for the majority ethnic groups has just amplified the fears.

The recently published census makes the argument of the fear of becoming a minority ever more present. Even with such protection as veto powers, both groups have become not only relative but absolute minorities within Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas the Bosniak share of the population has grown to over 50%. The idea to establish a separate territorial community for its group reflects exactly this development.

The international community did expect that with time, an overarching identity and therefore state policies might be developed due to the right of veto. However, instead of an overarching identity, what has happened in last decades was that three nationalising policies were being pursued at the same time, creating minorities and majorities all



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around the country. In such circumstances, one would have felt safer where one is the majority. The institutions have had completely the opposite effect compared to the intention of the Agreement itself.

Nationalist projects continue to be maintained, backed by an even stronger argument now that an absolute majority exists within the society. One could argue that veto power guarantees that there is no need for fear. However, for nationalists, formal institutions are not perceived only through their instrumental value. For them, formal institutions may also be the symbols that embody narratives about group identity, possessing varying degrees of emotional salience². Therefore, the policies being advocated by particular ethnic groups seem reasonable from this perspective.

Bosniaks have always supported a state which would maintain overarching identity. Due to the asymmetrical organisation of the state their position might have been understood as they were in the majority. Within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bosniaks are in the majority. At the state level the Federation is the territorially larger part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, members of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina coming from the Federation occupy two-thirds of the seats. If the agreement would be reached at the Federation level between Bosniaks and Croats, Bosniaks would certainly be on the majority side at the state level. Further on, overarching identity would allow for Bosniaks to become overall the majority within the state. This would be particularly beneficial for Bosniaks living in Republika Srpska where they currently form a minority. The population census results make Bosniak's claims even stronger as there is no fear of becoming a minority.

1 Dejan Jović introduced the term; he argues that this fear has been one of the main motivators for the dissolution of Yugoslavia. I argue that within Bosnian and Herzegovinian society this fear still has a strong symbolic value embedded in the nationalist narrative.

2 Basta, Karlo (2016) Imagined institutions: The Symbolic Power of Formal Rules in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 75, No. 4, pp. 944-969.

The paradox in this situation is that the whole structure is based on the idea that no group should find themselves in the minority when it comes to the decision-making process. However, the census results make nationalist claims ever more appealing to voters due to the symbolic meaning assigned through the narrative. This in turn makes elections rather plebiscitary. As the fear of becoming a minority has grown stronger, the ethnic group's narrative will only sound more appealing to voters, at least to the voters of minority groups.

To a certain degree, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina started due to the fact that the Serb population wanted to decide for themselves on their future. They didn't want to be a minority in any circumstances and allow others to decide for them. Therefore they created a para-state which later became part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their only goal seems to be to preserve the smaller entity where they would be in the majority. Within nationalist discourse and studies, this seems like a reasonable act. The fact that the veto vote would prevent them being outvoted does not figure so strongly anymore as it is obvious that the system which was supposed not to produce a majority had produced it.

Croats within Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina have really been outvoted in the elections for the member of Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their fear is even stronger because, they argue, even the laws introduced with the Agreement have prevented them from choosing their own representatives. They follow the same minority nationalist line of argument. They argue in favour of the smaller ethnically defined unit rather than risking their interests being an even minor minority within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bosnia and Herzegovina overall.

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making process. However, the census results make nationalist claims ever more appealing to voters due to the symbolic meaning assigned through the narrative. This in turn makes elections rather plebiscitary. As the fear of becoming a minority has grown stronger, the ethnic group's narrative will only sound more appealing to voters, at least to the voters of minority groups.

Within the framework of nationalist studies, the behaviour of political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina seems reasonable and rational. It is hard to imagine an agreement which would accommodate all the interests. However, the existing situation does not reflect the situation on the ground. Even the assumption that the Dayton Peace Agreement secures a status quo does not work anymore. This again brings us back to more nationalism rather than less.

Future policy proposals, particularly those referring to institutional change, should acknowledge the situation as described and seek a solution within the nationalist framework. Any other attempt will cause only more fears and lead further to even broader requests for autonomy. Only once all three groups feel safe within Bosnia and Herzegovina will other forms of political strategies become realistic. Only when the symbolic value they assigned to the institutions reflects their narrative, will it become possible to expect a different kind of politics. ■■■

(in)surmountable past

the taste of nationalism

Ildiko Erdei

Who could remember what it was about at all? And even if someone were able to recall the "Serbian chocolates" affair, it might seem as irrelevant compared to the emergence of this current conflict. Nevertheless, I still think that it is worth reminding readers of the now almost forgotten political dispute over the chocolates produced in Serbia that found their way to consumers in Croatia and the public reactions that this provoked. Mostly because it can legitimately be supposed that this episode is not an "episode" at all, that it goes well beyond its possible surface meanings.

It's hard to stick to the previously made plan and write on practices of "banal", mundane, "cold" nationalism in today's, post-war Serbia and Croatia, when the exchange of political statements and accusations between politicians in Serbia and Croatia is getting more and more inflammatory as I am writing these lines. Flags were being prepared to be waved again, threatening and insulting words that we remember from the Nineties have started to circulate along the known roads, painful memories were revisited and revived, old wounds reopened, and the Croatian PM even quoted the familiar line from a popular Yugoslav TV series, stressing that, "as Đuza Stojiljković says, yes, we do like theatre*, but not in our home".

True, considering it from this point of view, the episode I was planning to write about, which was meant to illustrate the workings of everyday, mundane, banal nationalism in the context of "settled national states", seems of secondary importance. Who could remember what it was about at all? And even if someone were able to recall the "Serbian chocolates"

affair, it might seem as irrelevant compared to the emergence of this current conflict. Nevertheless, I still think that it is worth reminding readers of the now almost forgotten political dispute over the chocolates produced in Serbia that found their way to consumers in Croatia and the public reactions that this provoked. Mostly because it can legitimately be supposed that this episode is not an "episode" at all, that it goes well beyond its possible surface meanings (as of a bizarre incident or historical bit of trivia) and that it could be symptomatic of, generally speaking, new ways of maintaining a certain political and social order, or, simply put, "playing politics".

Firstly, this episode belongs to the thread in political and economic history known as "economic nationalism" or "economic patriotism". It had also been documented during the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia. From the example of the consumer boycott in the late eighties (a state-inspired boycott of products from Slovenia by consumers in Serbia), through the thoroughly ethno-nationalized economies of former Yugoslav republics during the Nineties, to the subsequent boycott "Buy domestic" campaigns, a close relationship was established between

* he used the word "pozorište", a Serbian word for "theatre", referring to the erstwhile famous sitcom "Pozorište u kući" (Theatre at Home)

Although the story was put aside after only a few days, it still conveyed those "nearly subliminal signals" that banal nationalism consists of, and it did attempt to reinforce the idea that (some) Serbian and Croatian citizens "are in the end nationals of a wonderful nationality". Economic patriotism as the semantic twin of economic nationalism thus appears as just another way to describe how national animosities, which in many cases find expression in ethnic wars, continue to exist.

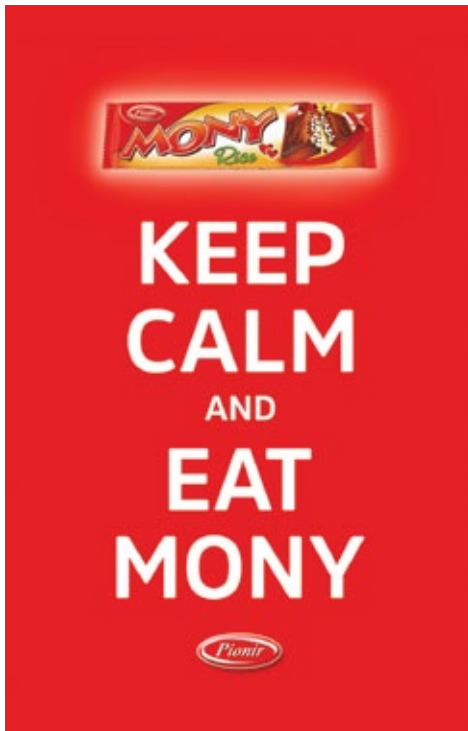
economic – mainly consumer – practices and political identifications on one side, and collective and personal identities on the other. Secondly, it reveals how consumption today is enthroned as the main technique for producing new subjectivities, both collective and individual, and hence became a perfect idiom for the workings of banal nationalism. This kind (or rather register) of nationalism, argues social psychologist Michael Billig, presents itself as an "incessant stream of repetitive, every-day-every-hour, nearly subliminal signals sent to the citizen-consumer reinforcing the idea that she or he is in the end a national, and should be very glad and proud of this wonderful nationality". This happens on a daily basis, through seemingly trivial activities that function as interpolations of ideology. Ultimately, the case of "Serbian chocolates" (not "chocolates from Serbia", as if goods themselves have *nationalities* or *ethnic identities*) shows us how food is connected with culturally defined senses and tastes, and how deeply is it incorporated in our bodies, our souls and our minds as a building block for identification.

But let's remind readers of what happened in December 2016. During an official visit to Dubrovnik, the Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović met with a group of children and gave them packages of presents. In the packages, among other things, were chocolates of, it would appear, suspicious origin, for they were produced in Serbia. Soon after the visit, one of the parents had alarmed the public, outraged by the fact, as he noted, that his child had received

a chocolate from Serbia "from the hands of the President". "I had to post this on social networks so that you could see what kind of country we live in. My child's kindergarten went to see the President, and the children received from her hands a chocolate from Serbia. That is really sad – and it all happened on the Day of the Defenders of Dubrovnik. Bravo!".

Still, it was not his reaction that stirred up the debate, but the answer to it, given by the President herself, that actually confirmed this kind of "reasoning" and legitimised it. She decided that she should apologize for the "mistake" and offered an "explanation" that the packages were in fact bought by a "Croatian" company (as if, again, companies are *national subjects*, or have some *ethnic essence* and therefore a clear *national* or *ethnic identity*). "Serbian" chocolates, announced the Office of the President, constituted a minor part of the packages, that were otherwise full of "Croatian products", and "it happened by accident that among three hundred products there were several of the questionable products". Grabar Kitarović offered an apology to anyone whose "feelings were hurt", and expressed disappointment with the case, for, as she said, she personally supports the Let's Buy Croatian campaign: "The Croatian President must promote Croatian products, and this will not happen again. We will apologize to the parents who have received these chocolates and we will send them Croatian products".

On the Serbian side, officials were taken by surprise, but not for long. As soon as they managed to find their punchline, they responded with remarks questioning the political maturity of Croatian officials. The Minister of Trade and Tourism Rasim Ljajić said: "The statement by the Croatian President is un-democratic and un-European". He also used this opportunity to point to the fact that the number of Croatian companies operating in Serbia was much higher than the number of Serbian companies selling their products in Croatia, implying that the *Serbian market* (as if markets have *personalities*, and as if these *personalities* correspond with *national characters*) is more open than the *Croatian market*, and hence leaning more toward reconciliation and establishment of good relations. Ljajić used this opportunity to admonish the politicians in Croatia, asking: "what kind of normalization of relations in the region



"Keep calm and eat Mony" factory Pionir from Serbia tweets an ironic response to the "Chocogate affair"
Copyright by Pionir

can we talk about if such a level of ethnic intolerance can be caused by a single chocolate? Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić also voiced his opinion that the Croatian president's apology was "a clear sign that Croatia does not want good relations with Serbia" and that talk about reconciliation has "crumbled." Some humorous remarks and ironic comments on social networks put things into more sober, reasonable perspective, as did public actions on the streets of Zagreb, which ridiculed the seriousness with which the issue of *ethnically marked* chocolates was taken on both sides of the political/national divide. And although the story was put aside after only a few days, it still conveyed those "nearly subliminal

signals" that banal nationalism consists of, and it did attempt to reinforce the idea that (some) Serbian and Croatian citizens "are in the end nationals of a wonderful nationality". Economic patriotism as the semantic twin of economic nationalism thus appears as just another way to describe how national animosities, which in many cases find expression in ethnic wars, continue to exist. It is a weapon of choice and a means of division, that is still active long after the war is officially over.

Interestingly enough, however, apart from being rooted in the everyday realities and activities of the social actors, stories of this kind function on a less evident level, keeping alive fantasies about "hostile others" who claim the right to "our pleasures". The phantasm of the "stolen pleasure", according to Žižek, is built on the idea that something that is dear to us could be taken from us, and that it could become a source of someone else's pleasure instead of exclusively ours (be it natural resources, cultural goods or "a way of life"). Žižek argues that in many cases national identity and also ethnic tensions are organized around the idea that the "other" wants to steal our enjoyment and deprive "us" of our pleasures. These pleasures are materialized, among other things, in the bitter and sweet chocolate bar, that seems to have a *nationality*, and which should be either kept at a safe distance from our children ("Serbian" chocolates in this case) or handed down to children whose feelings were allegedly hurt ("Croatian" chocolates together with the picture of Grabar Kitarović, sent as an "apology"). And there it was - a clear demonstration of how the boundaries of our tastes became boundaries of our national identities. And vice versa. Simple and banal as that. ■■■

women – active participants in a passive role

Đurđa Knežević

In this article I will discuss the attitudes of women's groups in Croatia who were/are openly advocating a nationalist ideology and the narratives supporting nationalist-state project(s). The phrase "national project" implies a range of collective strategies oriented towards the perceived needs of a nation, nationalism being one of the fundamental strategies.¹ Of particular interest is the way in which women with nationalist orientations perceive themselves while forming their identities through identification with the nation.

Whenever deep social changes take place, when a society seems threatened, and furthermore, when there is a critical period of nation-state formation, women are "invited" to participate actively in public life. When traditional structures of domination are shaken, a need for the mobilization of the whole population arises. At the same time, a crisis of existing social norms enables women to overcome the traditional boundaries of their place within society. A period of crisis can appear as a new opportunity. However, if that only represents a transition to the collectivist 'solution', as is nationalism and the nation state, then the involvement of women in public life does not include active participation. The woman is welcomed as a mother-symbol, a symbol of the community to which an individual owes his or her existence/birth. In short, mothers appear as an ideal symbol of an authoritarian community in which the duties of the individual towards the community prevail over his/her rights. This attitude is nothing new, it spans a long period of time

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and, together with the nationalist political parties, it is also fundamentally supported by most of religions. Very recently we have witnessed it in the rough form during the politically heated debate about the Istanbul Convention, as well as the simultaneous debate about a new abortion law in Croatia, which almost threw the country into political crisis.

Basically, the roles women can play in public are limited to the displaying of suffering as the basis for the condemnation of the "enemy" (every nationalist community legitimizes itself through its own victimization), and to the role of caretakers.

¹ Sylvia Walby, *Woman and Nation*, in: *Journal of Comparative Sociology*, London, September 1990.

As long as women's power helps in maintaining the nation state, that is, (re)establishing male domination in society, women as a social group will receive political recognition and a certain access to the public. In the case of Croatia, the turmoil that happened, primarily caused by the war, initiated various developments. The form and dynamics of gender relations changed. The support of women, a large social group, was, in fact, crucial. Still, the scope and form of women's political presence and activity was created and controlled by male power and limited to a mere supporting role.

That means that the "enemy" always exists, sometimes more visible and threatening, sometimes less, depending on whether the political relations between nations are in a state of crisis or not. Fulfilling these roles, however, allows women to reach a high level of public visibility and political recognition, bound by the stereotype that they never take active part in high politics. The invitation to political participation is limited in two ways. The first limitation consists of the framework within which women are allowed to use in their political/public activity, while the second one is related to the content of their political claims.

As long as women's power helps in maintaining the nation state, that is, (re) establishing male domination in society, women as a social group will receive political recognition and a certain access to the public. In the case of Croatia, the turmoil that happened, primarily caused by the war, initiated various developments. The form and dynamics of gender relations changed. The support of women, a large social group, was, in fact, crucial. Still, the scope and form of women's political presence and activity was created and controlled by male power and limited to a mere supporting role. The obvious fact is, however, that the majority of women, due to the patriarchal history of

humanity, perceive "their proper place" in the same way as their male dominated environment does. That is to say, they acknowledge their role as subordinated, passive; as a matter of fact, second-rate citizens.

It is clear that throughout the period of the establishment of new states following the fall of FY until today, nationalism has basically exploited the notions of gender. Its narratives changed only on the surface, according to the socio-political conditions. In wartime, there was a wide range of support women could give, first and foremost in the form of mass voting for parties that pursued nationalist projects. Furthermore, we could notice a sudden increase in activism oriented towards organizing social and humanitarian help for "our cause" and "our boys". Simultaneously, groups appeared exerting political pressure with programs based on patriarchal values in combination with strong emotional and often religious sentiments.

All of this lasted until the structure of the state was consolidated. This form of activities was then no longer needed for the development of a national project; the public/political work of the groups which carried it out was either terminated, or their activism took on a different form. Their status was put in hibernation so that they could



thousands of people at a protest march in Split by citizen's initiative 'Croatia against Istanbul Convention' photo provided courtesy of Hina/Fenix-magazin

be (mis)used again on the next political occasion, as it happened through the above-mentioned debate on the Istanbul Convention a few months ago. Namely, more or less, the same organizations (meaning, the same group of people), which were active at the time of, and briefly after, the war in Croatia, have reappeared now with slightly different political claims. While during the war nationalist women's organisations fought for the nation state and focused their activities on helping Croatian soldiers, now their political focus has shifted to defending "traditional Croatian values", meaning, opposing the concept of sex and gender binary while advocating the traditional division of male-female roles, fighting against the rights of the LGBT population, and similar. It has to be noted that then, as now, the names of organizations were rooted in the language of war. The Croatian Background Front was the most active and publicly present among these organizations, while at present, the Croatian Soldiers' Widows stands out. However, the only way women can get political recognition (and public space) is when acting congruent to common stereotypes of women and their role in society. Since our society (or societies) is/are male dominated, women can only play a subordinate role. In short, women can be supporters but not agents.

During wartime in Croatia, according to their own understanding of, and agreement with their given role, women's organizations gave a number of statements like the following:

"Dear Croatian soldiers in the battlefields, in hospitals, wherever you are... we give you our tribute and express our gratitude for your selfless love for 'Our Beautiful' [Lijepa naša, the initial words of the Croatian national anthem, used when expressing tender feelings for the homeland – DK] and for your heroism in the Patriotic (Homeland) War. We are a miniature part of the Croatian nation that loves you and respects all that you gave up and sacrificed in defending Croatia, our beloved homeland",² or this one: "We started to help our boys who went to the front in blue-jeans and sneakers. We said, 'let the state take care of the weapons, we, the women, will take care of underwear, pants, socks, gloves.' Women are a miniature part, subordinate, carers..., the domain reserved for women is spiritual, an emotional dispo-

sition, religious sentiments, and motherhood.

The role of the media in creating and supporting such narratives should not be overlooked. As an example, in hundreds of photographs taken of demonstrations in front of the headquarters of international organizations like UNPROFOR, one image stands out: women dressed in black, with candles and flowers and small children around them. In a word, everything is focused on the creation of a religious image, an icon of 'Mater Dolorosa'. It has to be said that the media are/were playing a fundamental role in supporting and maintaining such narratives. There are usually two levels of understanding such media messages as photos and statements. First of all, there are, without a doubt, understandable and legitimate claims for the women's dead or disappeared husbands and/or relatives. There are, however, always overt or discrete elements that advocate, follow and support the state's nationalist politics. This hypothesis becomes clear in the following quotes:

"this horrible war took thousands of young people's lives, physically and mentally wounded countless people, but it did not kill goodness and our will to defend our homeland"³.

or:

"...they went to the front-line, many of them in jeans and sneakers, but with a heart for Croatia... For thirty-four young Croatian fighters the war was their last duty in their lives. Bodies become ashes, the goal they died for is achieved. Croatia is free."⁴

In fact, most of the latter statement quoted in the *Vjesnik* article (many more similar statements appeared in the Croatian media) supports the above-mentioned hypothesis. Almost as a rule, in images in both printed and broadcast media, supporting politicians stand discreetly in the background. Instead of information about the event, the same – emotion-mobilizing, abstract, (quasi-religious) image is constantly repeated. At the end of the day, abstract, religious images mobilize emotions.

³ Statement of the We - For Our Guard association, article entitled "Let the People Enjoy Peace and Freedom", *Vjesnik*, 1994, April 1

⁴ "Mothers, Thanks a Lot", article in *Vjesnik*, 1993, November 24th

² Mi za našu gardu (women's association), *Vjesnik*, 1994, April 1

All this draws a clear distinction between the roles of women and men. Women are just helping "our boys" who belong to modernity, while simultaneously and almost automatically taking the lesser position, the traditional position of a person in the background. The state, represented by the strong, dominating male figure, should take adequate responsibility to supply "our boys" with the weapons that are of fundamental importance. Women will take care of things which are ephemeral, less essential, and yet the whole sentence expresses female tenderness in harmonious balance with male toughness. It also shows the complexity and ambiguity of male-female relations at the symbolic level. Here we have, therefore, the state playing the symbolic role of the tough father and, in contrast, women who are tender, caring, mothers of "our boys". Finally we have "our boys" themselves who are in a poorly defined position. As fighters they have a greater responsibility and therefore hold a higher position in the social hierarchy than women. Women, however, being mothers, treat them (the young boys) as small, effeminate sons who need their care and protection. All this sheds a slightly tragic light on the young boys, for both sides, both mothers and fathers, sacrifice them *pro patria*, for the Father(land).

As mentioned before, the same pattern is still valid today. Mothers before, today widows. Then, during wartime, the lives of sons and husbands had to be protected and needed motherly care. Now foetuses have to be protected through anti-abortion measures, as well as the traditional family as the place which protects traditional male-female roles and the similar. As long as women are constrained by this narrative, they can be recognized as active participants in social life – but only as a group that is limited in both the social and political sense. That creates a political and psychological balance with women's own self-understanding of subordination, low self-esteem, orientation towards the spiritual, emotional and merely supporting role. ■■

manipulating war crimes as a narrative used in everyday politics in BiH

Lejla Turčilo

introduction: media narratives as "tools" for shaping public opinion and public discourse

It is well known that the media have significant influence on shaping public opinion, especially on sensitive issues. The media shape public opinion by putting certain issues on the agenda (in the spotlight), channelling public debate on them, shaping the context of certain events, giving legitimacy to certain actors (or depriving some of it) and provoking certain reaction in the audience (which can significantly influence the functioning of the society). In that context, we say that media are not neutral channels of distribution of news and information, but rather important actors in the public scene, which, by providing dominant narratives, produce specific societal situations. The term "media culture" is being used to describe how "images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities. (...) Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today." (Kellner, 2004: 5 / 1) These stories and pictures in the media are, in fact, the constituents of media narratives.

In this context, we follow Gillespie's definition of a narrative as a media text "which

Boosting national identity might be the most accurate description of the dominant media narratives in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, this national identity does not serve itself, it mainly serves political purposes. Nationalist rhetoric serves, first of all, the purpose of mobilizing the public to support certain decisions and actions by political elites. Media culture in BiH is mainly a culture of monologue, not dialogue, a culture of spectacle and stereotypes, and a culture of non-tolerance and discrimination.

establishes certain order and creates patterns of meaning" with regard to the topic, that is, "helps media to shape our knowledge about the world" (Gillespie, 2006:83). In the interpretation of narratives it is also important to observe the respective positions of the source of information, media and the public and to be aware that "things that are omitted in text are as important as those selected to be part of the text" (Gillespie, 2006:82). Media narratives create a general public discourse on reality and society, that is, "the way that we talk about issues in public, which both reflects and determines what solutions are considered desirable or plausible in the commonplace logics that shape the politics of a particular moment. Close attention to public discourse not only allows us to keep up with politics as it happens, but also reveals important truths

about the meaning, linkages, and effects of the non-discursive activities we traditionally consider political." (Woodly, 2015:7).

It is more than clear that media narratives are influenced by and used for political purposes. The main goal is to win the attention of the audience for certain issues and win the acceptance of the public on certain political solutions to these issues. That is why we say that media do have power to shape public opinion, but those who manage to influence the media have power to create general public discourse by using media narratives.

dominant media narratives in Bosnia-Herzegovina on war crimes and Hague trials

"Bosnia-Herzegovina is a young country with many problems. As such, instead of dealing with solving specific problems of its citizens, it often tries to construct and empower national identities in a space defined by variables of fear and national pride. The inclination towards these variables in media representation leads, of course, to the general patriotization of the media instead of creating more intelligent content that would stimulate readers to think beyond the narrow patriotic framework." (Pejković, 2016) Indeed, boosting national identity might be the most accurate description of the dominant media narratives in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, this national identity does not serve itself, it mainly serves political purposes. Nationalist rhetoric serves, first of all, the purpose of mobilizing the public to support certain decisions and actions by political elites. "Media culture in BiH is mainly a culture of monologue, not dialogue, a culture of spectacle and stereotypes, and a culture of non-tolerance and discrimination." (Turčilo, 2017:82). The media are under strong political pressures and influences, their agenda predominantly conforms to the agenda of political actors, they present the views of certain ethnic groups instead of the entire population, thus channelling public debate only within certain ethnic "circles"; they mostly deprive those who do not agree with the mainstream from a chance to speak in the media and they provoke public reactions that conform to the interests of those who dominate political life. Having in mind the fact that the public is divided along

The key question is usually: "is the verdict fair?" And it is exactly this question that provokes different interpretations and produces different narratives. Those media that find sentences lower than deserved then use the voices of victims to explain the scale of the crimes, while those who find them higher than deserved speak about those accused as heroes, those "who only defended their people" etc. "This is a verdict against all ... people" (Croat people, Serb people) is also a quite often used trope, as well is "our sacrifice and our victims were for nothing", which is a strategy to provoke strong public mobilization.

entity and ethnic lines, such approach by the media additionally deepens these divisions and makes society more divided.

Since the war of 1992-1995 was the most recent event with such devastating consequences for the BiH state, society and people, wartime events are heavily interpreted and manipulated in and by the media, each of them providing their version of the "truth" on what was happening during wartime. Dominant media narratives about the war are using the "us" and "them" paradigm, in which "us" always means "victims" and "them" means "perpetrators" of crimes. In this context, the matrix of "our heroes and their criminals" is easily recognized in media reporting, especially with regard to war crimes and Hague Tribunal cases.

When it comes to media reporting on war crimes, Džihana and Hodžić (2011) say that "nationalist news coverage represents the dominant paradigm when reporting about events on which there is a consensus at the level of ethno-national elites, but there are also great differences between the Bosniak, Serbian and Croatian political elites (...) and reporting strategies coincide with ethno-national lines" (p. 14).

If we use the 5W matrix to try to explain the dominant media narratives on war crimes and their manipulation for political purposes, we may say the following:

*Bullet taken from the
Luka detention facility
near Brcko, Bosnia and
Herzegovina. - photo
provided courtesy of the
ICTY,
CC-BY 2.0*



WHO speaks about war crimes and the Hague trials? – We could divide the key speakers into three groups: a.) victims (mainly well-established individuals representing victims' organizations and associations; their statements are used mainly for the purpose of provoking emotional reactions in the public); b.) publicly recognized people (legal experts for example, but also other people who may attract attention, such as political analysts, who are often asked "how will this verdict influence inter-ethnic relations", or former Hague convicts, who may be asked questions like "how was life in the Hague") and c.) representatives of international organizations (who are used to delivering the message that, to a certain extent, the international community is a guarantee that events in the Hague will not jeopardize peace in the county). This shows how fragile is the consensus on Hague itself, as well as how superficial the media are in reporting on it, mainly focusing on the consequences of Hague verdicts.

WHAT is the key message? Depending on which media, key messages are different. However, we may say that the key question is usually: "is the verdict fair?" And it is exactly this question that provokes different interpretations and produces different narratives. Those media that find sentences lower than deserved then use the voices of victims to explain the scale of the crimes, while those who find them higher than deserved speak about those accused as heroes, those "who only defended their people" etc. "This is a verdict against all ... people" (Croat people, Serb people) is also a quite often used trope, as well is "our sacrifice and our victims were for nothing", which is a strategy to provoke strong public mobilization.

WHEN is it published in media? It is not rare that verdicts are commented on even before they are announced, which mainly serves the purpose of raising tensions in the public and provoking strong reactions among people. The frequency of discussions about the Hague trials is the highest immediately after verdicts are made, but it also grows when elections approach, as a mechanism for mobilizing people to support "our party as the defender of our nation from others and from international actors". Also, stories on war crimes become more frequent on some specific dates (July 11, the Srebrenica genocide memorial day or others).

WHERE is it published? Stories on war crimes and Hague trials are published in almost all media, but with different approaches and in different contexts. It is very rare that certain media, oriented towards certain ethnic groups, report on crimes in which it is not the victims, but the perpetrators that are members of the ethnic group in question (with the exception of the reporting by some Sarajevo media on the "Kazani" case even during wartime). This lack of readiness to report on all crimes regardless of the ethnic backgrounds of the victims and perpetrators shows that dominant media narratives follow ethnic lines.

WHY is it published? Unfortunately, we cannot say that the media report on war crimes and Hague trials for the purpose of finding the truth on what really happened in the period 1992-1995. It is more often that they use these tragic events for the purpose of political manipulation, provoking emotional reactions among the public when elections approach (some politicians, for example, wear "The Flower of Srebren-

ica" brooch during campaigning as a way to identify themselves as "those who care about victims", which is an obvious case of political manipulation with the victims of Srebrenica) and mobilizing people to support certain ideas as a way to defend their ethnic group and ethnic identity, so that "the crimes never again happen to us".

If we wanted to give a brief answer to the question of HOW the media report on war crimes and the Hague trials we could say that they report in a sensationalistic manner (which was more than obvious in the most recent case of the suicide of the Hague convict Slobodan Praljak), manipulating emotions (which is more than obvious in many media when reporting on Srebrenica), using "big words" ("Heroes, not Criminals", "Criminals Should be Convicted, but our Heroes in the Hague are Certainly not Criminals" are some of the headlines that appeared in the media) and selectively reporting on crimes (often ignoring crimes done by "us").

In many media, thus, we can find examples of narratives on war crimes that "establish certain order and create patterns of meaning" and "help media to shape our knowledge about the world" as said by Gillespie (2006:83). These meanings shape the society in BiH as a divided one and do not contribute to reconciliation and finding the full truth about the war. Of course, there are exceptions – professional, honest and truthful media and journalists, but they are exactly that – exceptions, not the mainstream.

conclusion: what could be done differently?

If we agree that the media manipulate wartime events, war crimes and trials for perpetrators for the purpose of political manipulation and emotional mobilization of the public, then a logical answer to the question: "what could be done differently" would be: "more professional reporting". However, in order to achieve that goal, we would need at least several pre-conditions to be met. First of all, a society more open to accepting the truth and facts about the events of 1992-1995 and more ready to deal with the past for the purpose of peace-building and reconciliation. Secondly, such society would need a more truth-oriented media, which would provide the tool for citizens to learn about the past, live in the present and learn lessons for the future. And thirdly, such media would need a public that is resistant to manipulation, open to accepting facts and ready to see beyond their ethnic lines. So, the difficult task of finding the truth on war crimes is not only a task for the media and journalists. It is a task of all of the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina. As we usually say, the media is the mirror of society. And the picture that we see in that mirror at the moment is not a nice one. If we, who are reflected in it, do not change, it won't change either. ■■

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the dominance of ethnic parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue

Damir Kapidžić

Ethnic parties have dominated politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) for over 25 years. While some narratives look towards multi-ethnic parties as vehicles for political change, I argue that this is not supported by empirical evidence. Ethnic party politics are inherent to consociational democracy in BiH and it is possible to distinguish four separate party subsystems defined by ethnicity. Electoral support is constant over time for parties of the same ethnic category with negligible cross-ethnic voting. The narratives of (ethnic) party leaders reflect and reinforce this system. It is not feasible to expect change from multi-ethnic politics in a country whose institutions are built on the notion of ethnic representation.

BiH democracy: a competitive struggle for the ethnic vote

Political parties are central to representative democracy. They have a key role to coordinate between elected leaders and citizens as the link between citizens' interests and the political system of a country. Through elections the party system is bound to reflect social cleavages and divisions within society and this is no different in BiH. Since the first elections in 1990, parties representing the three main ethnic groups have dominated BiH politics, while multiethnic and non-ethnic parties have not managed to take hold across the whole country. The narratives of party leaders also reflect this divide, in contrast to narratives by (mostly) international actors that see multiethnic parties as vehicles of change. Essentially it is possible

The main goal of consociational democracy is to govern social cleavages in non-violent ways through electoral and communicative practices. Party elites cultivate narratives that reinforce social cleavages while competing to win the most votes among their ethnic group. The consociational political system of BiH emphasizes competition between parties of the same ethnic affiliation, while inter-ethnic electoral competition is minimized. However, this was realized at the cost of reinforcing societal divisions and splitting the electorate along ethnic lines.

to speak of a divided party system in BiH, or more precisely of a party system with several distinct party subsystems. This setup favors ethnic parties and makes multiethnic politics especially difficult.

Political parties form around politically relevant social cleavages. In much of Western Europe these include relations between center and periphery, religious and secular, urban and rural, economic cleavages between capital and labor, as well as materialist and post-materialist values.¹ Party interactions and competition along such cleavages are what constitutes a party sys-

¹ Lipset, S.M. & Rokkan, S. (eds.). 1967. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: The Free Press.

tem.² For a long time in BiH confessional affiliation was the only politically relevant factor. In the absence of a unifying nation-building process, social movements based on faith led to the emergence of three main ethno-political groups, along the religious divide of the population. Thus, Croat parties developed that were affiliated with the Catholic church, just like Serb parties close to Orthodox Christian institutions, and Bosniak parties with ties to the Islamic Community in BiH. As a rejection of politicized religion, secular parties emerged with strong links to organized labor. All this happened in the late 19th and early 20th century.

During the first democratic elections in 1990, this initial form of party system was re-established after decades of one-party rule. The dominance of the secular Communist Party of Yugoslavia was challenged by three ethnic parties that brought together Croatian, Serb or Bosniak members but with a great diversity of interests within each party. At this moment we could rather speak of three national movements of the particular ethnic groups, which also incorporated the narratives and political heritage of national and cultural organizations and parties from the early 20th century. The decisive victory of the Party of Democratic Action (Stranka demokratske akcije, SDA), the Serbian Democratic Party (Srpska demokratska stranka, SDS), and the Croatian Democratic Union BiH (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica BiH, HDZBiH) in these elections shaped a multi-party system predominantly based on ethnicity. The three parties, in addition to the former Communist Party, now called the Social Democratic Party (Socijaldemokratska partija, SDP) form the four main segments within the contemporary BiH party system. All new parties today were primarily established through splits within these four core parties, and only occasionally through the transformation of previously existing societal organizations.

While the first elections brought ethnic interests to the forefront, wartime events and the post-war political system further reinforced their dominance. The political system established through the Dayton Peace Agreement placed an emphasis on the institutionalization of ethnicity through a consociational model of democracy. The main goal of consociational democracy is to

govern social cleavages in non-violent ways through electoral and communicative practices. Party elites cultivate narratives that reinforce social cleavages while competing to win the most votes among their ethnic group.³ The consociational political system of BiH emphasizes competition between parties of the same ethnic affiliation, while inter-ethnic electoral competition is minimized. However, this was realized at the cost of reinforcing societal divisions and splitting the electorate along ethnic lines.

Today, political contest in BiH takes place within ethnically defined segments of the population, creating three ethnically bound party subsystems with a high degree of independence, in addition to one less well defined non-ethnic party subsystem. This can be empirically verified by looking at voting patterns for ethnically defined party groups across time for the BiH Parliament. Using Sartori's terminology, in BiH we can identify a complex party system with a dominant role for the three ethnically defined party sub-systems and one non-ethnic party subsystem.

the four party subsystems of BiH

The elections for the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament are the only contest in which all relevant political parties in the country compete against each other. Between 1996 and 2014, seven elections were held with 114 political organizations filing candidates, out of which 93 were political parties and 21 pre-electoral coalitions.⁴ Both the coalitions and the parties running in elections regularly changed and only two parties ran independently in all seven elections. The vast majority of parties and coalitions, more precisely 58%, won seats only in a single election, while only one quarter won seats in more than two elections.

While this hints at significant and persistent shifts in voter support, a more detailed analysis is needed. In order to do so, the measure of electoral volatility is used, which looks at the total change of electoral

2 Sartori, G. 2005. *Parties and Party Systems*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

3 Deschouwer, K. 2001. Freezing pillars and frozen cleavages: party systems and voter alignments in the consociational democracies. In: Karvonen, L. & Kuhnle, S. (eds.) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments Revisited*. London & New York: Routledge.

4 Author's calculations based on data from: BiH Central Election Commission (Središnje izborno povjerenstvo). 2018. Statistike i rezultat izbora. <http://www.izbori.ba/>, accessed 16 03 2018.

Derelict buildings in Sarajevo city center plastered with 2016 election campaign posters, klix.ba, Photo by Nedim Grabovica



support for parties from one election to the next.⁵ General volatility for the BiH Parliament elections is very high, tentatively suggesting an extremely unstable party system. There is also significant change over time where voter support shifted by 30% to 74% between two elections. Even if we take into account changing pre-electoral coalitions, the values still range between 18% and 29%. This, however, does not mean that voters in BiH are willing to support any political alternative.

In order to test shifts in voter support between ethnic and multiethnic parties, the 114 political organizations are divided into four general categories based on the criterion of ethnic representation.⁶ Accordingly, any party can be identified as Croat, Bosniak, Serb or multi-ethnic and any coalition can equally be grouped into one of these four categories. Electoral volatility between the four categories is very low, with an average of 5.8%. This means that there is almost no shift of votes between parties that belong to different ethnic categories. For example, voters will always choose to vote for a Bosniak party, even though their choice of particular Bosniak party can change. Especially voters that voted for Serb or Croat parties almost never vote outside of their ethnic category (on average 1.6%), which limits the ability of multi-ethnic parties to attract such voters.

Using electoral volatility, it is empirically possible to identify four distinct party subsystems in BiH based on ethno-political social cleavages. In such a segmented multi-party system, electoral competition is focused on winning votes from one's own ethnic group and there is virtually no cross-ethnic voting. Among the parties within the

same subsystems there is negligible political distance. Instead of aiming to generate broad political support, political narratives focus on how to best represent the interests of one's own ethnic group. The resulting narratives employed by leaders of ethnic parties often lead to ethnic outbidding and neglect cooperative discourses.

uncooperative elites in a consociational democracy

Elections and electoral campaigns are a regular feature of politics in BiH. Alternating between the local and national levels, elections are held every two years.⁷ This creates an atmosphere of continuous electoral contest framed in the terms of the ethnic party subsystems within which competition occurs. Narratives employed by political parties and their leaders are thus largely directed towards their ethnic electorates and serve to mobilize and coalesce voters.

Take for example three common narratives, those of ethnic federalism, referendums, and centralization, that are differently perceived within each ethnic party category.

Ethnic federalism, strongly ingrained within the narrative of a third Croat-dominated subnational entity, is supported by almost all Croat political parties. HDZBiH especially uses the narrative in an attempt to push for more group autonomy. At the same time this narrative is vilified by Bosniak and multi-ethnic parties as it runs against their narrative for more centralized and effective policy-making. What could be framed as a debate on decentralization becomes distorted into an ethnic competition. Both narratives serve not to shift voters between party subsystems, but rather to boost political support for parties that best represent group interests within their own ethnic categories.

Another example is the use of the referendum narrative amongst Serb parties. In this case an enacted consultative referendum on judicial authority and a proposed referendum on secession were strategically employed by the Serb-dominated Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata, SNSD) in the runup to several recent elections. By creating a common and undisputable cause within their ethnic party subsystem, the

⁵ As the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliament has only 42 members, the measure of electoral volatility is based on the volatility of votes instead of seats as this is more precise.

⁶ Chandra, K. 2011. What is an ethnic party, *Party Politics* 17(2): 151-169.

⁷ Elections at the entity and cantonal levels are held simultaneously with national elections.

Using electoral volatility, it is empirically possible to identify four distinct party subsystems in BiH based on ethno-political social cleavages. In such a segmented multi-party system, electoral competition is focused on winning votes from one's own ethnic group and there is virtually no cross-ethnic voting. Among the parties within the same subsystems there is negligible political distance. Instead of aiming to generate broad political support, political narratives focus on how to best represent the interests of one's own ethnic group. The resulting narratives employed by leaders of ethnic parties often lead to ethnic outbidding and neglect cooperative discourses.

ruling party of Republika Srpska was effectively able to sideline all opposition as passive bystanders during the pre-electoral campaign. Simultaneously, the referendum narrative provoked a strong reaction from Bosniak parties, which coalesced voters of both ethnic party subsystems.

Such political narratives are self-serving and further the divisions within the BiH party system. On the one hand, they solidify the ethnic party subsystems and prevent the loss of cross-ethnic voters by creating a strong difference between us and them. On the other hand, they allow for a more radical expression of ethnic interests and competition among parties of the same ethnic category at who best represents the group.

As such, all ethnic political narratives have to be seen through the lens of electoral politics, as their main purpose is generating voter support.

High stakes policies, such as the recent reform of the electoral law, are viewed along these conflicting narratives. In all its iterations the proposal for electoral law reform exclusively deals with notions of descriptive representation by linking the electoral choice of voters to the dominant ethnicity of electoral units. As a result, parties in BiH ensure that they are not just an expression of voters' choice but the main guarantor of ethnic self-governance, replacing state institutions as the primary mechanism to ensure group representation. ■■■

the Hague tribunal – reconciliation on hold

Nemanja Stjepanović

The facts of the genocide in Srebrenica, the siege of Sarajevo, concentration camps in Prijedor, rape in Foča, Serb and later Croat ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks in BH, Serb crimes against the Croats and Croat crimes against the Serbs in Croatia, mass murders and the ethnic cleansing of some 800,000 Albanians from Kosovo are today denied only by the stupid and the malevolent. Unsuccessfully from the viewpoint of opposing facts, successfully in terms of acceptance of their theories in the region. That more or less depicts the 25 years of operation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in the Hague (the Hague Tribunal) – it unearthed, while others followed it reburying; it shed light, others obfuscated, it clarified, others blurred.

Who are these others? Regional official political circles, mainly governing, and those on their payroll, loyalists and fellow travellers. All those in whose interest it was for the truth about the wars in the former Yugoslavia not to be uncovered. These were political, military and police institutions and individuals involved in the wars and war crimes or who made fortunes in the wars, and are now seeking by any means possible to preserve their positions, to conceal their roles and bar any thought of court proceedings that might be pursued against them.

When the UN Security Council founded the Hague Tribunal in 1993, one of the aims of the tribunal's work was to contribute to reconciliation in the region. Along with all the mistakes and oversights, during its

Today, the region is in a situation the like of which it has not encountered in its history following a traumatic period of war, of which there were many. This is the first time that a historic narrative can be entirely built upon facts, rather than myth. For the first time, it is possible to have a clear factual insight into the illusions of the past, and an opportunity to contemplate the perniciousness of dreams of territorial enlargement and national delimitation in the Balkans. However, this has not occurred. Partly, this was due to "our people believing in phantoms more than facts", but partly also because these phantoms are presented by the political leadership as the truth, and facts as unnecessary prattle by the courts.



Ligature used to bind victims' hands in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, unearthed during an exhumation. Photo provided courtesy of the ICTY, CC-BY 2.0

25-year existence¹, the Hague tribunal has done a lot – for a start, it has convicted 90 persons out of the 161 that were charged. Among them were senior politicians of the region's states and entities, military and police officers, as well as some of the most brutal murderers from the bottom of the formal structures. More importantly, the Tribunal has collected extensive material on the wars of the nineties, on the basis of which it reached factual conclusions about the wartime events of the nineties.

All this could have contributed to reconciliation. But it takes two for reconciliation. The other, that is, the states that emerged in the bloody dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, did not want the reconciliation, at least not one grounded in a fact-based understanding of history.

From the very founding of the Hague Tribunal, the region's states' political authorities, above all in Serbia and Croatia, have made various attempts to stymie its work – by refusing to extradite the accused and furnish documentation from their archives, instructing witnesses not to speak the truth in the state's interest and all manner of throwing spanners in its works.

In spite of everything, the Hague Tribunal has managed to overcome the obstructions and deliver the region the results that no one had expected at the outset of its work. First, it managed to bring all the fugitives to justice – all those who were

charged were also tried. Second, it removed a number of regional warlords and leaders of wide-reaching criminal campaigns from government structures or made it impossible for them to return there – for instance, the former president of SR Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, the leaders of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, or the leader of the Bosnian Croats, Jadranko Prlić. The Hague Tribunal has persuaded the states of the region to deliver it archival material, conducted comprehensive investigations on the ground, and thus obtained several tens of thousands of military and police documents, intercepted conversations, video recordings, photographs, minutes of meetings of high-level state bodies. It managed to find and interview 4,650 witnesses – survivors, relatives of those murdered, but also insiders from various political and military structures – and record their statements in around two and a half million pages of transcripts.

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¹ The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia has concluded its work on 31 December 2017. Jurisdiction over unconcluded cases (those of Stanišić and Simatović before the Trial Chamber, and of Vojislav Šešelj, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić before the Appeals Chamber) was transferred to the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, also based in the Hague.

However, if we start with Serbia and the Serbian side in the war, the Hague files will show us that the wars of 1991-1995 were conducted out of Belgrade, with the clear goal of occupying and ethnically cleansing parts of Croatia and BH, if possible annexing them to Serbia; that all was planned in advance, and that in the course of realisation of this plan tens of thousands of civilians were killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. It is also clear that the military and police structures of Serbia and Serbian political formations in BH and Croatia took part in realisation of this concept. Some might say that Serbia's role in the war in BH, for instance, is not mentioned in Hague verdicts such as those against Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić. True, it is not explicitly stated that Serbia conducted the war in BH, but the Hague evidentiary database and facts established in court give us a clear picture of the political support the Belgrade authorities gave the Bosnian Serb authorities, of military assistance to units that committed crimes and presence of Serbian police and military units in BH throughout the war. Finally, Ratko Mladić and the officers in his army who planned and put through the Srebrenica genocide, terrorised Sarajevo for 44 war months and developed a system of concentration camps all over BH, were paid from Belgrade all through the war, from the budget of the Yugoslavian Army. A huge number of these officers, lead by Ratko Mladić, today receive their pensions from the Republic of Serbia.

The evidence likewise clearly shows that the murders of several thousands and displacement of at least 800,000 Kosovar Albanians during the NATO intervention against SR Yugoslavia in 1999 were committed by Serbian army and police units, as well as that on orders from the state leadership, the police transported around 1000 bodies of Albanian civilians from Kosovo to mass graves in Serbia.

Let us go on. The example of Croatia in BH. Here, the Hague files clearly show that the idea of the Croatian state leadership was to capture, ethnically cleanse part of BH and annex it to Croatia, with the aid of the Bosnian Croat military-political authorities. With that goal in mind, Bosniaks in the imagined Croatian territory were killed, imprisoned, tortured and driven out. Although a shameful appeal verdict freed Croatian generals from responsibility for crimes against Serbs in Krajina committed during and after the Oluja military opera-

The generation born after World War II waged the wars of the nineties in the former Yugoslavia. These are people who had no experience of war, but listened to romantic stories about it and whose education was grounded in myth-based narratives. If history teaches us anything, it is that this scenario must not be repeated. The generation born after the wars of the nineties is growing up alongside us, and we are once again raising it on a narrative based on myth and romantic stories of war heroes. Only this time, unlike World War II, the declared war heroes are actually common criminals.

tion in the summer of 1995, the evidence nevertheless clearly shows that crimes have been committed against the Serbs, and anyone who can read can be in no doubt that they were planned and carried out by the state of Croatia.

With a little effort, even matters that were not the subject of trials, such as the agreement between Serbia and Croatia to divide Bosnia and Herzegovina, can today be found in verdicts and evidence gathered by the Hague Tribunal.

This is only a portion of the conclusions that arise from the work of the Hague Tribunal, that can help us to properly consider the past, to take stand on the illusions we were once inclined towards and once and for all relinquish the concepts that led to wars and mass crimes against civilians. But no, we do precisely the opposite – we sweep facts under the carpet and turn our heads away from them. Because it is easier that way. Not only is it easier, but that way, there is no talk about criminal, moral, or any responsibility of various current civil servants and politicians in government who took part in wars, gave their support to their nations' war goals and not infrequently took part in planning and committing war crimes. To give an example, the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, who was a member of the radical pro-war political faction during the war, has for years denied the achievements of the Hague Tribunal and had nothing to

say about it but to criticise it, whilst at the same time repeating day in day out that we should not dwell on what happened in the past, but look into the future. "If I had a past like that, I'd also only look at the future," a Belgrade journalist replied to him.

Therefore, this is the reason why reconciliation in the region is having hiccups. Those who most resent the Hague Tribunal for not contributing to reconciliation, that is, politicians in Serbia above all, followed by those in Croatia and elsewhere in the region, have also done the most to keep the facts that this court has found invisible to most citizens. Politicians are those who in the face of evidence of planned crimes speak of their people's defence, who sneak in stories of renegade extremists as perpetrators in place of evidence on the state's complicity in crimes, who, rather than remove convicted war criminals from public life, celebrate them and cooperate with them.

While we're at it, let us ask how exactly could the Hague Tribunal reconcile us if we return the war criminals it had convicted into state institutions and elevate them into societies' moral authorities. For instance, having completed the sentence handed down to him by the Tribunal, Vladimir Lazarević, the Serbian general convicted of war crimes against Albanian civilians in Kosovo, was returned to Serbia on a government plane, at the airport, he was given a hero's welcome attended by government ministers, the Chief of the General Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces, church dignitaries. The same general soon became a lecturer at the state Military Academy. Before him, another convict, Milošević's 'Kosovo man' Nikola Šainović, was promptly coopted on serving his sentence into the general committee of the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia (the erstwhile party of Slobodan Milošević). The other ruling party – Aleksandar Vučić's Serbian Progressive Party – has brought Veselin Šljivančanin, convicted in the Hague of crimes against Croats in Vukovar, to public discussions. Tomislav Nikolić, former president of Serbia and also a member of the Serbian Progressive Party, received Momčilo Krajišnik, likewise a Hague convict, the wartime right hand of Radovan Karadžić, to the Presidency of Serbia for consultations. What could they have been consulting about?

There is resentment against the Hague Tribunal for merely contributing to divisions among peoples in the Balkans that are already divided. That is true, but how did it exactly come to this? Because its work was

viewed as a sports competition, counting how many of ours and how many of theirs were convicted, each verdict met with tears by one side and songs of joy by the other, although no-one who sang or wept has ever read a single verdict. Thanks to politicians' and media lies, people believe that the accused were convicted in the Hague merely owing to their being Serbs or Croats, that judges spend sleepless nights thinking how to do us wrong, how to turn us all into criminals and saddle us with collective guilt.

Maybe that is the catch – fleeing from collective guilt, we managed to flee from responsibility. Because, if we are not all guilty of crimes, we nevertheless have a certain responsibility for what happened in the past. Whether as followers of the political paths that led to the crimes or as indifferent citizens who never stood up to such politics.

However, today we bear the greatest responsibility – to learn as much as possible about past events and pass our knowledge on to new generations, all with the aim that these crimes are never repeated. The generation born after World War II waged the wars of the nineties in the former Yugoslavia. These are people who had no experience of war, but listened to romantic stories about it and whose education was grounded in myth-based narratives. If history teaches us anything, it is that this scenario must not be repeated. The generation born after the wars of the nineties is growing up alongside us, and we are once again raising it on a narrative based on myth and romantic stories of war heroes. Only this time, unlike World War II, the declared war heroes are actually common criminals. Failure to acquaint this new generation with the facts of the wars may lead to these young people, once they come of age and become decision-makers, embarking on new wars with the old, unrealised dreams.

The Hague Tribunal can certainly be of help here. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to take it as the end of the story of the past. On the contrary, it should be the beginning of an honest regional conversation about what we did in the nineties and why we did it, a solid foundation upon which to build the house of long-lasting peace in the Balkans. ■■■

translated by Hana Dvornik

changing narratives, changing histories

dormant yet radiant history: memories of the First World War in the Republic of Macedonia

Petar Todorov

History is seen mainly as political history, whose role is to serve the goals of the nation. In such context, WWI is mostly regarded as military history, which explains why historians studying WWI are focusing on a topic related to the national idea and completely ignore the social aspects of the war.

This essay addresses the image(s) of the First World War in the Macedonian society. The history of the war has been dominantly defined as the most tragic event in the Macedonian national history. This interpretation has had a strong impact on the Macedonian national historical and political narrative and on the development of the present historical and political myths in the Republic of Macedonia. Taking this into consideration, the essay focuses on three important points. The first is the historiographic production in both the socialist/Yugoslavian and post-socialist/post-Yugoslavian context and the creation of ethno-nationalist discourse. The second point is the partnership between politics and history, or how political thought influenced historiographic production during the recent years, and the role played by historians who presented themselves as political and national preachers, ignoring the critical approach in studying history. The last point is public discourse, the politics of memory and commemorations i.e. the way the present day Macedonian society reacts to the history of the First World War.

No other event in the Macedonian historical ethno-national narrative can be defined as dormant yet radiant; dormant because it has a great potential for academic research due to the fact that what is perceived to be one of "the most tragic events in Macedonian history" is not subject to continuous academic research, and

radiant, because it has a huge impact on the development of the present historical and political myths in the Republic of Macedonia and has had a strong impact on the everyday life of the local population for decades after the war. One of the best-known novels of the Macedonian literature, *Pirej* (1980), represents a solid example of the importance of the history of the First World War (WWI) in Macedonia and the place it holds. The novel, as well as the historical narrative, underlines the sufferings and the victimhood of the Macedonian people in the wars from 1912 to 1918. Moreover, the history of WWI represents only one piece of a long series of events that shape the myth of victimhood in the Macedonian historiography, one of the most important and strongest myths. However, the historical narratives also shape other myths such as the myth of eternal enemies or a siege mentality.

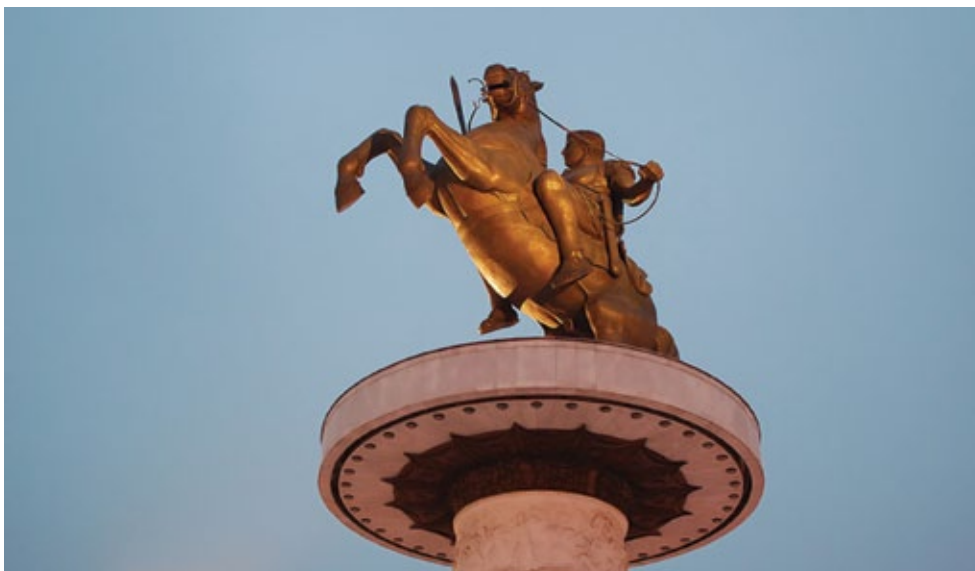
Beside the novel, a discovery of a grenade or artillery shell from WWI in someone's backyard or a field is the most common way citizens of Macedonia are reminded of WWI history and its devastating consequences. Although many regions in the Republic of Macedonia, especially those near the front line, still keep memories of WWI and its consequences, today in Macedonia there is no national monument or memorial commemorating its history. However, there are many other memorials and monuments such as military cemeter-

ies. Until the 1990s, many of these cemeteries were neglected. After independence, many of them were reconstructed, like the Bulgarian military cemeteries in the south-eastern part of Macedonia. The renovation of these cemeteries showed an increase in nationalist reactions on the part of many historians and media, blaming the government for allowing the reconstruction of the cemeteries of an "occupying force". Such reactions represent a good example of the abuse of history and the influence of the historical narrative in the Macedonian society. Namely, we do not witness such reactions in the case of other cemeteries (French, German, British), whose armies helped the other "occupiers" to re-establish their rule in the present Republic of Macedonia.

It is at the cemeteries that commemorations take place every 11 November. Ambassadors from the European Union (EU) countries and government officials pay visits to the WWI military cemeteries and give speeches about the importance of peace and reconciliation in the region. However, in many other cases, messages of peace and reconciliation from Macedonian representatives are absent, yet political élites abuse the past with an aim to mobilize the public to support them and legitimize them and their policies. This political discourse is strongly influenced by the work of historians on the other side, who present themselves as victims of the interests of the politicians and their interference in the historians' affairs. On the other hand, many historians see themselves as state historians and statesmen/stateswomen and make political statements not only in public speeches and interviews, but also in their works.

Regarding the history of WWI and Macedonian historiography from its foundation in the 1950s until the present day, there are no more than 10 books and articles dedicated only to the history of WWI in both the socialist/Yugoslavian and post-socialist/post-Yugoslavian context. Moreover, some of these academic works are taking WWI into account only as part of a long series of wars from 1912 until 1918. However, the history of WWI and questions considered to be of importance to national history are examined in studies dealing with broader questions. For example, we frequently read about the history of WWI in Macedonia in studies dealing with the question of the "Macedonian national movement", the politics of the Balkan countries and the Great Powers or the activities of certain groups fighting for autonomous Macedonia – in short, topics dealing only with issues of political and national history. No study has attempted to examine WWI from the viewpoint of social history.

The reasons behind this are many, but two of them are important to underline. The first explains the nature of the Macedonian historiography and the understanding of the history of Macedonia. Namely, history is seen mainly as political history, whose role is to serve the goals of the nation. In such context, WWI is mostly regarded as military history, which explains why historians studying WWI are focusing on a topic related to the national idea and completely ignore the social aspects of the war. The second reason is the role of some Macedonian activists during WWI. Their controversial role and allegiance to Bulgaria, considered to be the enemy of the Macedonian people



Statue of Alexander the Great, part of the controversial Skopje 2014 project by kristofarndt, CC-BY-ND 2.0

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the socio-economic and political changes, we witness changes in the interpretations of WWI, but more importantly we also witness an increase in the nationalist rhetoric in historical studies. However, this has not led to increased interest in researching WWI. Since the 1990s we have seen less than 5 books and/or articles on the topic. Moreover, like in the previous context, the history of WWI is part of the studies dealing with questions considered to be important to the national history.

and the Macedonian national idea, has put the historians in a difficult position. However, the neglect of the history of WWI and the selectivity in studying this event has not prevented the historians from using it in shaping the myth of victimhood and the siege mentality. Moreover, the wars from 1912 to 1918 are defined as a turning point in the historic development of the Macedonian people.

The first study on WWI in Macedonia written in Macedonian was published back in 1969. Its author was a member of the first generation of the Macedonian national historians. He authored a monograph that paved the path for studying the history of WWI in Macedonia in terms of chronology and topics. Namely, in terms of chronology, WWI is only a segment of the wars fought from 1912 until 1918. This chronological concept was followed by scholars in the following decades. As an illustration of this point, in 1988, a conference on the Balkan Wars and the First World War was organized by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Regarding the topics discussed in this conference, questions like the recruitment of Macedonians in the Balkan armies, Macedonia under the occupation, the Macedonian question in the politics of the Central Powers and their allies, military history, i.e. the battlefield and different forms of the Macedonian people's resistance against the

occupying forces were questions elaborated in almost all presentations that dealt with the WWI. Until the present day, this approach has not significantly changed, except in terms of ideology and some modifications in the interpretation of the roles played by some personalities and political groups. The history of WWI remains political and military history.

Regarding the narrative in the socialist/Yugoslavian context, studies dealing with WWI represent a good example of the Marxist and nationalist historiography, accompanied by an intense rhetoric of national victimization. Namely, we often read about Macedonian victimhood and the division and occupation of Macedonia (often represented as an economic and political subject, not as an imagined geographical region) ignoring other ethno-religious communities and the complexity of the Ottoman and post-Ottoman geography, economy and politics. Regarding the Marxist narrative, WWI is defined as an imperialist war. Moreover, some events are defined through the paradigm of class, as well as the paradigm of events of 1917, i.e. the October revolution. Regardless of the question whether or not the October revolution had significant influence, or other regional socio-economic factors, the problem with these interpretations is the selective approach in studying these topics. It is exactly the selectivity, the frequency of the writings of crimes committed against the Macedonians and their framing that are central to the creation of the myth of victimhood, but also to the myth of continuous resistance of the Macedonians against their enemies (Bulgarians, Serbians and Greeks, supported by the Great Powers).

The selectivity in the interpretation and the way in which some Macedonian political and national activists are viewed and portrayed is also worth mentioning. Namely, while left-wing oriented political activists are viewed as being on the positive side of the history, those who are right wing are usually portrayed as collaborators and traitors to the Macedonian national cause. It is exactly the exploitation of this term that makes historical interpretation and the role of historians very controversial in the development of the narrative of patriots vs. traitors in the Macedonian political discourse. Another point worth mentioning is the con-

tinuous insistence on a separate Macedonian ethno-national identity. This reveals the main concern of Macedonian historiography, i.e. to prove the existence of a distinct Macedonian ethno-national identity.

With the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the socio-economic and political changes, we witness changes in the interpretations of WWI, but more importantly we also witness an increase in the nationalist rhetoric in historical studies. However, this has not led to increased interest in researching WWI. Since the 1990s we have seen less than 5 books and/or articles on the topic. Moreover, like in the previous context, the history of WWI is part of the studies dealing with questions considered to be important to the national history. In many ways, the topics and the interpretation offered in all these studies repeat the previously established views on the character and consequences of WWI for Macedonia and the Macedonian people. It is only the Marxist rhetoric that has been removed, but is not completely absent. Terms such as "imperialist conflict" are still used and some events still defined through the paradigm of class. However, 1917 and the October revolution and its impact are much less exploited in the interpretation of some events and in some studies they are completely absent.

We see more important changes in the portrayal of some political activists and groups, previously defined as collaborators with the enemies and traitors to the Macedonian national cause. Namely, their role has been reexamined, and now they are represented in either neutral or positive light. However, some historians still continue to underline their collaboration with Bulgaria. Today, these interpretations represent one of the most important debates between historians, a debate strongly influenced by the now former ruling party, the right-wing VMRO-DPMNE. Another change worth mentioning which also serves as testimony to the increasingly nationalist rhetoric and development of the myth of victimhood is the change in how the main battlefield in the Balkans, i.e. the *Macedonian front* or *Salonika front* or *Front d'Orient*, is referred to. Namely, while in the Yugoslavian period the front was exclusively named the *Salonika front*, today Macedonian historians insist on naming it the *Macedonian front*. Other interpretations related to WWI

remain unchanged. The war and its consequences are defined as catastrophic for the Macedonian people as we read interpretations like: "great obstruction of the historical development" of the Macedonian people. Moreover, the neighbouring countries, helped by the Great Powers, who "took part in the partition of Macedonia" are responsible for the catastrophe. In addition to the question of the dominant narrative, terms like traitors or people betraying the national cause are still used in shaping the national narrative of the struggle of the Macedonian people for independence.

To summarize, Macedonian historiography defines the history of WWI in Macedonia through an ethnic prism, ignoring its complexity. Moreover, the history of WWI is politically charged, i.e. in specific periods this history serves more the needs of the official policies of the government than the purpose of better understanding the past. The recent political developments are strong proof of the (ab)use of history, or more precisely, the narratives of the past. Namely, the rhetoric of victimhood and the role of the Great Powers in the Macedonian question are frequently exploited in political speeches. Thus, in the context of the last political crisis in Macedonia, President Gjorgji Ivanov and the former prime minister and president of the VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, claimed in their later speeches that foreign actors (the international community or the Great Powers) supported by local politicians and political parties are attempting to destabilize Macedonia with the ultimate aim of redefining the country. These are examples of statements in which the Great Powers and "traitors to the nation" are defined as the enemy of Macedonia and the Macedonians. Moreover, the recent examples of increasing abuse of history and intense nationalist rhetoric led to the worsening of the neighbourly relations between Bulgaria and Macedonia. Namely, last November, a Bulgarian delegation placed a plaque commemorating the Bulgarian soldiers fallen during WWI on the summit of the Kaimakchalan mountain, i.e. the borderline between Macedonia and Greece. A few days later the plaque was destroyed by a nationalist group led by a person who was an ardent supporter and advocate of the VMRO-DPMNE policies. ■■■

historical revisionism

Erich Rathfelder

In the village Slatine, located on the Dalmatian island Čiovo, the memorial to those killed in action is held in esteem. Almost all the names of the families that have lived here for generations are listed here. The majority of the men died in 1943, in the famous battles of the Neretva and Sutjeska rivers, which brought about the turning point of the Second World War in the Balkans. At the time, several tens of thousands of Partisans defeated 120 000 German and Italian troops and their allies, the Croat Ustasha and the Serb Chetniks. These victories represented the beginning of the complete liberation of Yugoslavia from German occupation and – as Partisan leader Tito himself believed – from Fascism.

Apparently, the latter was not completely successful. The memorial in the village to honour those fighters was erected after the Second World War. But honouring the Partisans today does not suit the prevalent ideology in Croatia. Although people still wish to keep the memory of their forefathers alive, they are no longer allowed to be Partisans. This is a compromise. A new inscription can be read on the memorial: "They fought against Croatia's enemies."

Thereby, the traces of their connection to the Partisans have been blurred. Following the Independence War of Croatia against Yugoslavia from 1991 – 1995, the Partisans of Slatine were incorporated without much ado into the current Croat nationalism. However, as this nationalism relates to the state made by the grace of Hitler and Mussolini, to the Ustasha regime from 1941-45, the current inscription on the memorial even turns the real history upside down.

reinterpreting history

After the wars of the 1990s, a comprehensive reinterpretation of history began in the region of former Yugoslavia. Not only were Partisan monuments changed, desecrated or destroyed, the names of schools, public buildings and especially streets were also adapted to the new-old ideologies. Thus, many Partisans' names were replaced by those of Ustasha and Chetnik leaders. Even in Sarajevo, ethno-national religious Muslim circles are trying to rename Marshall Tito Street to Alija Izetbegović Boulevard.

In the Croatian public, the process of coming to terms with the Second World War is reduced to the massacres committed by the Communist Partisans against members of the Croatian Home Guard and supporters of the Ustasha regime after their surrender at Bleiburg in 1945. By contrast, the crimes of the Ustasha dictatorship are downplayed or denied by the conservative-nationalist and Catholic side. The annual drama surrounding the days of commemorations at the Jasenovac concentration camp, in which alone over 80 000 Serbs, Jews, Roma and oppositionists were murdered, testifies to this. The cynical Ustasha slogan "Za dom spremni" (for the home – ready!) set recently by right-wing extremists near the location of the concentration camp and the merely half-hearted dissociation of the government in Zagreb indicate that the historical revisionism process in Croatia has not yet been completed. This also includes the Catholic Church's denial up to the present day of its partially active role in the persecution of dissidents and the Serb, Roma and Jewish minorities up to 1945.

On the whole, the role of the multi-national Partisans and the Socialist Tito regime is considered in both states to be an obstacle to "national liberation." The Chetnik crimes are denied by nationalists in Serbia just like those of the Ustasha are by Croatian nationalists. Moreover, the revision of history aims to cover up the crimes committed during the last war. Bosnian-Croat war criminals, such as Jadranko Prlić, tried in The Hague are glorified as national heroes. It is no different on the Serb side in the case of war criminals Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić. A comprehensive discussion between the societies in the successor states to former Yugoslavia only continues to exist in civil society circles.

propaganda in Serbia

By contrast, the crimes committed by the Ustasha regime and their concentration camps – Jasenovac, Gradiška and others – still remain in the centre of the Serbian public debate on the bloody past of the region. Although the remembrance of the manifold persecutions by the Ustasha regime was also the subject of public discussions during the Tito period, dealing with the past was too centred by the Partisans on their own glorification and not on an objective presentation of history covering the whole context.

The memory of the events within the families and local communities did not necessarily correspond to the official versions. Because of this, the ground was ready for the substantial rehabilitation in Croatia and Serbia of the nationalist positions, which had been promoted already prior to the 1990s war by the Serb nationalist side. The propagandist instrumentalisation of the memory of the persecution of Serbs in Croatia and Western Bosnia – with altogether greatly exaggerated casualty figures (it has even been claimed that there were 1.5 million victims) – was indeed essential

to the radicalisation of the Serb population prior to the wars of the 1990s.

Within such a worldview, the manifold collaborations of Serb nationalists with the German occupation force need to be denied. But directly after the occupation of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941, a Quisling regime was established in Belgrade with the approval of Hitler – the Nedić regime, which for all intents and purposes had the sympathy of the populace. On the other hand, the Chetniks loyal to the king turn at first were opposed to the occupation forces, but veered already in fall 1942 and saw their greatest enemy in the multinational Partisans and in Tito. Afterwards, the Chetnik troops led by Draža Mihailović collaborated with the occupation forces.

For Serbian historian Dubravka Stojanović, a historical legend is being worked on in Serbia, in which the crimes of the Serbian Nedić regime, which collaborated with the German National Socialists, are downplayed, and the crimes of the royalist Chetniks and their collaboration with the German occupation forces is relativized. The image of a nationalist anti-fascist movement is supposed to be designed for the Chetniks. In Serbia, the Chetnik leader



"Herceg-Bosna, your time will come" - Photo taken in Mostar by Štefica Galić CC-BY-NC 2.0

Draža Mihailović, sentenced to death in front of a court in Sarajevo in 1946, is already being rehabilitated, with the filming of a glorifying feature film.

the case Mladen Stojanović

Serbian historical revisionism becomes especially apparent – and relevant for our film – with regard to the former Partisan commander still popular in Serbia today, Mladen Stojanović from Prijedor in Western Bosnia. After Hitler's invasion of the USSR in June 1941, the doctor and Communist Mladen Stojanović was urging the workers in the ore mines of the region – Omarska, Tomašica, Ljubija – to strike and then to begin armed resistance. However, the German occupier considered ore mines essential to the war effort. Therefore, the resistance had to be broken with all military force. The Partisans did succeed in continuing to offer resistance, however, with their military forces far too weak, they could no longer protect the over 40 000 civilians who had fled to the Kozara mountain – primarily Serbs, but also Jews and Roma – from deportation to Jasenovac.

Ustasha and Chetnik troops fought together with the Germans against the Partisans. Various evidence exists thereof. The Serb Stojanović became the Partisan commander for the whole region of Western Bosnia. He was wounded in late March 1942 and murdered ten days later by a group of Serbian Chetniks.

In the endeavour of Serbian historical revisionists to depict the Chetniks as resistance fighters against the Germans and as anti-fascist, the historic image of the still popular war hero Stojanović had to be changed. The major media have been maintaining the "new line" for several years. Stojanović was murdered by Partisans, it is now claimed, Partisans who wore Chetnik uniforms, in order to belittle the Chetniks in the eyes of the populace.

This adventurous historical theory is being vigorously pushed by the authorities of the Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even a former Serb Partisan who is over 90 years old, who had accused the Chetniks of Stojanović's murder in a private conversation, backpedalled when he was supposed to repeat this in front of a camera. He was afraid that his pension might be reduced and that his son might lose his job. The new interpretation of Stojanović's death has become the official account of history

The commemorative culture remains pre-political. It became political in the youth and workers' movement in 2014 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which challenged the political structures and the power of the ethno-nationalist parties, initially in Tuzla. The party offices of the Croat and the Bosniak nationalist parties HDZ and SDA in Mostar were attacked by an angry crowd. With its plenary assembly culture, direct democratic participation created in the cantons, and its fight against corruption, the movement drew on the self-government structure of the Partisans. However, it was literally washed away by the rain and the major floods during the spring of 2014.

by the Serb side in Prijedor. The rehabilitation of Serb nationalist extremists as anti-fascist resistance fighters is being pushed on in the whole Serb public.

the historical revisionism of the nationalists

Partisan monuments have largely been destroyed in the former Yugoslavia. In Croatia, streets are being named after well-known supporters of the Ustasha regime in the Second World War. On the whole, the role of the multi-national Partisans and the Socialist Tito regime is considered in both states to be an obstacle to "national liberation." The Chetnik crimes are denied by nationalists in Serbia just like those of the Ustasha are by Croatian nationalists. Moreover, the revision of history aims to cover up the crimes committed during the last war. Bosnian-Croat war criminals, such as Jadranko Prlić, tried in The Hague are glorified as national heroes. It is no different on the Serb side in the case of war criminals Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić. A comprehensive discussion between the societies in the successor states to former Yugoslavia only continues to exist in civil society circles. The generation of critical and productive intellectuals raised under Tito is slowly dying out, while

the majority of the generation already raised in the successor states no longer wishes to deal with the overall context. The civil society groups that had blossomed during and after the wars of the 1990s have thinned out, funds from the EU and other Western countries have dried up.

Additionally, the national elites have succeeded in isolating these civil society groups by portraying them as being controlled from abroad or as traitors to their country, such as Sonja Biserko and Nataša Kandić in Belgrade. Long before Hungary, the elites in former Yugoslavia have been trying to prevent the activities of the billionaire George Soros's foundations, which have co-financed many civil-society and cultural projects. At least several independent and self-sustaining projects have developed, offering independent information and discussions primarily on the internet.

nevertheless, resistance is growing

The memory of the Tito regime has not completely faded among the population. Those who experienced the 1980s remember a relatively well-functioning state with pensions and medical insurance, with higher wages, with a passport enabling one to travel anywhere, open discussion in the media, the shared music, film and theatre culture.

The nostalgia manifests itself not only in the renewed popularity of the culture of those times, also in the crowded Tito

cafes that exist in some cities. Many people are frequenting the Partisan veteran's meetings again. But this commemorative culture remains pre-political. It became political in the youth and workers' movement in 2014 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which challenged the political structures and the power of the ethno-nationalist parties, initially in Tuzla. The party offices of the Croat and the Bosniak nationalist parties HDZ and SDA in Mostar were attacked by an angry crowd. With its plenary assembly culture, direct democratic participation created in the cantons, and its fight against corruption, the movement drew on the self-government structure of the Partisans. However, it was literally washed away by the rain and the major floods during the spring of 2014. Unfortunately, after the collapse of this movement, only splinter groups remain active.

But at least other groups are being founded though, suddenly anti-fascist film festivals are emerging, suddenly hundreds of young people are demanding the solving of the murder of a young fellow citizen, as happened in May 2018 in Banja Luka. Independent positions have not been completely forced out of public life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, or Serbia. Inter-linked in internet forums across national borders, these people are taking not inconsiderable risks however, in order to fight back against the ruling nationalist parties and ideas. We wish to illustrate their by no means easy confrontation with nationalists from all sides. ■■■

translated from German by Ivana Nevesinjac

collective glorification of individual guilt

it is *their* fault, not *ours*

Zarije Seizović

in place of an introduction

The paper describes, analyses and explains the unbearable Bosnian (and Balkan) 'tradition', custom, habit and practice of glorifying sentenced war criminals. Despite the fact that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has rendered a number of verdicts sentencing individuals for war crimes, these individuals are objects of worship within their respective ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH). It appears that perception of *collective guilt*, a seemingly unavoidable destiny of the irrationalism of the Balkans will remain in place for at least decades to come. Why is that so? Are there any institutional or any other mechanism/s that should be put in place to heal the wounds and treat that contagious and dangerous 'collective mental disease'? Let us explore a few recent examples that match the title of this paper.

factual and legal background

On 24 October 2017, the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska (NARS) gave plaques of recognition to former politicians that were credited with the creation of the Republic of Srpska. And there would be nothing to wonder about but for the fact that those persons have been sentenced for war crimes by the ICTY. Momčilo Krajišnik (27 years) and Biljana Plavšić (11 years) had served their sentences, while Radovan Karadžić has so far been sentenced in the first instance (40 years) *inter alia* for the most severe war crime: genocide. The Delegation of the European Union in Bosnia and

It appears that perception of collective guilt, a seemingly unavoidable destiny of the irrationalism of the Balkans will remain in place for at least decades to come. Why is that so? Are there any institutional or any other mechanism/s that should be put in place to heal the wounds and treat that contagious and dangerous 'collective mental disease'?

Herzegovina, the Office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR) as well as the US Embassy condemned the glorification of the sentenced war criminals in the NARS and expressed their disapproval.

On 22 June 2014, Dario Kordić, a Bosnian Croat, arrived in his home town of Busovača, Central Bosnia. Prior to coming to Busovača, he landed at the Zagreb Airport where he was greeted by a lively crowd of his friends and others believing him innocent of the crimes for which he was sentenced and served two thirds of a 25 year prison sentence. He had been found guilty for war crimes committed by the military force of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), including crimes in the village of Ahmići, near the Central-Bosnian town of Vitez. The welcome itself was not forbidden whatsoever, and therefore it was legal. There were a few hundred people welcoming Kordić, while in Sveti Anto Church in Busovača a prayer was held. Later on, Kordić addressed a group of friends and supporters on a local football pitch and his speech was shot through with religious content. The

welcome party was attended by Mr. Dragan Čović, at the time the speaker of the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (currently a member of the BH Presidency). There was also Ms. Borjana Krišto, at the time an MP in the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mr. Marinko Čavara, at the time an MP in the House of Representatives of the Federation Parliament, as well as other VIPs of the Croatian Democratic Union of BH (HDZ BiH).

On 22 April 2008, the Appeals Chamber of the ICTY pronounced the retired Bosnian Army (Armija RBiH) general Enver Hadžihasanović guilty and sentenced him to 3.5 years of imprisonment for crimes committed in Central Bosnia against Croats and Serbs during 1993. A highly ranked officer of the Bosnian Army, Ibrahim Kubura, was sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment. As to reactions caused by the verdicts, it is worth singling out the statement by Mirsad Ćeman, at the time highly positioned member of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), now holding the role of Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who said that the acquittal was expected.

In light of the cases described above, it is crystal clear that the main narrative in all cases was: *our people* are innocent; *we* did

not commit the crime/s, *they* did. Let us also shed some light on the arrest of the former high-ranking military officers of the HVO in Orašje that provoked vehement reactions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially in the neighbouring Republic of Croatia. On 31 October 2016, on the order of the State Prosecutor's Office, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) arrested 9 persons in the area of Orašje, a town situated in Northern Bosnia. They were charged with war crimes committed against Serb victims in the town of Orašje and its surrounding area between April 1992 and July 1993. Namely, they were accused of having committed war crimes in their capacity as wardens in prison and detention facilities there. A specific curiosity was that one of the arrested officers was an ex-deputy director of the SIPA. Following the arrest, the highest political figures of the Republic of Croatia – the Prime Minister, the President and some of the Ministers – rather openly challenged the work of the highest judicial institutions of BH, claiming even that some of the arrested were innocent. Despite the justified fear caused by the fact, confirmed later, that the military forces of the Republic of Croatia were involved in the war in the territory of BH and that its officers were in command of the Croatian Defence Council (HVO), the Croatian officials' reactions constituted a

NATIONALISM



Teaches you to take pride in
shit you haven't done & hate
people you've never met

A crime is an individual act. A particular verdict pronouncing guilt and sending to jail a member of a certain ethno-religious community should under no circumstances be taken as verdict that holds guilty the entire ethnic or religious community the perpetrator belongs to. Peoples and/or communities cannot be perpetrators and cannot be held collectively responsible for a specific crime or crimes committed by its individual members.

sharp departure from diplomatic language and the conduct commonly used between State officials. On the other side, BH – a state that is still considered a legal, political and military arena for crossing of swords of the key players in the international community – gave an unconvincingly mild response, which was consistent with the major feature of Bosnian politics – the reaction of a country that has been politically and/or militarily usurped by its neighbouring countries for centuries.

is there a common future?

All things considered – these deviant events produced no substantial consequences and nothing is going to change either in Bosnian or the Balkans states' politics. It seems that there will always be an astonishing lack of responsibility, accountability, morality and honesty. Yet, there is an adequate way to tackle this unbearable malformation. Ordinary people and above all politicians at all government levels should be aware that a crime is an individual act *contra legem*. They should also be aware that a particular verdict pronouncing guilt and sending to jail a member of a certain ethno-religious community should under no circumstances be taken as verdict that holds guilty the entire ethnic or religious community the perpetrator belongs to. Peoples and/or communities cannot be perpetrators and cannot be held collectively responsible for a specific crime or crimes committed by its individual members. There is no collective guilt – therefore identification of an ordinary citizen with the war criminal based on the *mere fact* that they both belong to the same ethno-religious community is wrong, terribly wrong. Additionally, it is wrong, terribly wrong to consider the sentenced criminal innocent *solely* because of a shared ethnic and/or religious affiliation. If and when each individual becomes sincere and mature to a level that makes him able to differentiate between *good* and *bad*,

a spark of hope will arise on the horizon witnessing that it could be possible to live together, have a decent life, free from burden made out of tears, blood and savagery from the past.

What is the pressing need in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Balkans region and what can ordinary people achieve? What would be the international community's role? It is *Transitional justice* – a new scientific discipline being taught and implemented as a specific method and process of dealing with the past within the societies encumbered by the heritage of heavy crimes and mass and systematic atrocities and human rights violations as well as violations of international humanitarian law. It offers a variety of mechanisms and comparative international experiences and achievements to heal the wounds and make life bearable for all those interested and involved. It is beyond question that war crime trials before the ICTY and national courts in the region, fact finding and truth telling processes, as well as restitutions, compensations and rehabilitations can guarantee the efficiency of this method.

It is also beyond any doubt that ethno-religious elites holding power do not want to see transitional justice in full swing. Memorialisation, commemorations and culture of remembrance (as opposed to the *culture of denial*), peace and state-building and 'enforcing democracy', legal reform, vetting processes, NGO activities, a comprehensive Transitional Justice Strategy in BiH will be an additional tool and safeguard for fulfilling tasks of transitional justice that can be labelled as 'society recovery'. International community, *i.e.* its key players in BH and the region should raise funds and resources to back up said mechanisms, enabling them to develop through different phases. The mechanisms should focus on the society and state and their relation to victims, justice, fact finding, apology, reconciliation and, eventually, if the conditions are ever met – mercy and forgiveness. ■■■

fear and hate – the two edges of the same sword

Xhabir Memedi Deralla

Asked by a journalist if he found it right that the government organizes such a welcome for a person convicted of war crimes, the then Prime Minister Gruevski answered briefly and ironically: "It is alright". Jankulovska and Gruevski are now standing trials for corruption and many other serious criminal acts, on charges brought by the Special Public Prosecutor. No one has yet raised criminal charges against Ivanov, who is serving a second term as the country's president after heavy vote rigging in 2014 (also a case with the Special Prosecutor), but his abuse of office is certainly publicly condemned as one of the causes of the Colourful Revolution in 2016. Gruevski's regime may have lost in elections in 2016, but what truly brought it down was certainly the Colourful Revolution.

The image of unspeakable horrors of ethnic cleansing and war is still vivid in the memories the Balkan people. Hundreds of thousands have scattered around the world after the Balkan wars of the 90s, mostly as migrants. Few of them have easily applied as "professionals" who offer their knowledge and experience in torture and mass killings to structures that may have "big and patriotic" plans for their countries... Graves are still fresh, wounds are still open, and rage and grief are still pounding the minds of people, making them easy prey for those who want more blood and even more money, manipulating those who were struck by tragedies to seek justice where justice is nonexistent. Behind the impeccable and flashy TV studios stands a bloodthirsty propaganda machinery of the murderous criminals who neatly sowed the seeds of fear and hate in the fabric of their programming. Mass murder, pogroms, executions, ethnic cleansing, concentration camps... are now covered by the thin refined silk of the new vocabulary of rule of law, democracy, freedom of speech... Balkans at the end of the 2010s...

no fair future for the Balkan people

Coldblooded murderers and criminal maniacs likewise led hordes of outlaws, rapists and slaughterers to an unprecedented agony in the 90s. Their media servants helped them praise themselves as national heroes and liberators from the "others". Now, many of them are respected members of the communities that they divided with fire. Many of them are filthy rich and show off as benefactors who build places of worship or occasionally provide money for kids who need an urgent operation abroad, for the health systems in the Balkan countries have been robbed and ruined. Many of them are part of the political landscape and hold societies hostage to fear and hate – the two edges of the same sword.

The Balkans were covered with blood for too long (one victim is too many) before the peace accords were signed and immediately shirked by those who signed them. The international community was mainly "very

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worried" and "concerned" in the beginning, after which they brought everyone to the green table – to negotiate. And a few of them got indicted by the ICTY. A nice story. Then donors came and poured millions in foreign currencies into the booming NGO and media sectors, to reshape society and promote the values of the developed democracies. Even nicer story. Success? Not such a nice story.

More than a decade in, we have the Balkans divided, but at peace. We have authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes (Macedonia became liberated a year ago), who don't look (too much) over the national borders, but enjoy exploiting every possibility to make more money and grow their power within national borders. And Bosnia (BiH), the saddest example of how local thugs, politicians and diplomats can blow things up on account of people who got stuck between the alchemy of earning their daily bread and avoiding the sword of fear and hate. Of course, Bosnia is the saddest, not the only example. All in all, the Balkans or, more precisely, those who "did their best" to stay out of the EU, remain a powder keg.

And all this is so well-known, extensively elaborated and discussed at international, national (internationally sponsored), and political, cultural, scholar and coffee-house levels that it is sickening. It is sickening for it seems to be endless, fruitless, hopeless, and several other words ending with -less. And it is boring, nevertheless.

Why is there (still) no fair future for the Balkan people? At times openly or through subtle propaganda, corrupt politicians and run-of-the-mill intellectuals from the Balkans tend to explain that the Balkan tragedy is caused by some foreign conspiracy and viciously envious forces of the West. Those are the same characters who enable the penetration of organized crime and politics from Kremlin, Ankara and few other centres (no less destructive if not mentioned here). The Western bureaucracies, on the other hand, only managed to turn the Balkans into the Achilles heel of Europe. Slow and disunited, national administrations within the EU have neither time nor will, to help this troubled peninsula. Some would say – no one can help the Balkans, and probably will be at least partly right. The humble author of these lines would say, well, if we don't help ourselves, no one can.

However... Their (politicians') mouths are full of Euro-Atlantic integrations, but they strike deals with criminals and former

war dogs from entirely different parts of the world. They speak of peace, democracy and rule of law, but they use force, wiretapping and electoral fraud to remain in power. And, most of all, they use fear and hate to divide and rule, or gain power. And more power. And more money.

praising the war criminals

They sign peace accords and various international treaties, come under pressure of the international criminal courts, but praise war criminals as heroes at home. Let's look at the Macedonian example, though it is far from being the only one.

The Hague Justice Portal¹ brings a profile of a war criminal sentenced to 12 years in prison: "Johan Tarčulovski ordered, planned and organised the crimes during the attack on the Albanian village of Ljuboten on 12 August 2001 and personally took part in the attack himself. [...] Tarčulovski was charged with three counts of murder, wanton destruction of cities, towns or villages, and cruel treatment as violations of the laws or customs of war. According to the indictment, Tarčulovski, or members of the police unit which he led, participated in the murder of seven Albanian men, the destruction of at least 14 Albanian houses, and the beating, humiliation, harassment and psychological abuse of over 100 villagers in Ljuboten."

This should be enough to make this person and his commanders ashamed for the rest of their lives. Yet, thousands of euro (Macedonian tax-payers' money) were spent every month on legal protection for his wife and the rest of his family and to allow them a luxurious life, for the entire duration of this war criminal's prison sentence. And this was not the end. On returning home in April 2013, the war criminal Tarčulovski was welcomed as a hero by the highest institutions in the country.

Back then, President Gjorge Ivanov couldn't be more cynical and arrogant when he said that Tarčulovski's return to the country will help the process of reconciliation. The Interior Minister Jankulovska said she's "proud to welcome a person who did everything he could in the interest of the Republic of Macedonia. He was welcomed as a national hero..." Asked by a journalist if he found it right that the government

1 <http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=6045> (accessed august 2018)

Victimization campaigns always preceded the wars. It was always "the other side" that was preparing for a horrid aggression. And, always, the aggressor was found behind "their own lines of defence" first – the treacherous dark forces who spoil the holiness of the blood and values. Those who thought and spoke of peace and dialogue were enemies... Those who were in ethnically mixed marriages or had "mixed blood" were enemies... At the same time, we saw the unspeakable crimes of all sorts of armies, paramilitaries and armed gangs bearing the names of their leaders, some animal or other, or the colour of their berets. Carefully and sometimes not so carefully observed by blue helmets and other international missions that are as expensive as they are inefficient.

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Back to Johan Tarčulovski... He was sentenced by the ICTY to 12 years in prison for his chief role in the Ljuboten massacre²... This war criminal was given a lift from the prison in Germany in the government's air-

plane. The media were racing to run stories about the atmosphere of relief and happiness upon Tarčulovski's release. The then pro-government private TV broadcasters Sitel, Kanal 5, the radio and television public broadcasting service and so many others featured disgusting and pathetic features in their programs about the welcoming party that Gruevski's government had organized. Macedonian ambassadors to Germany and the Netherlands rushed to welcome him at the gates of the German prison, where this murderer of civilians had served his prison sentence. The main square of the country's capital, already defaced by the infamous Skopje 2014 project, hosted a pompous and kitschy celebration, welcoming the war criminal through the so-called Porta Macedonia (grotesquely pretending to be a Triumphal Arch), where singers and actors tried to create a heroic and patriotic ambience with their trembling voices on the square filled with thousands of people. This is still a vivid memory, depicting the regime,

² <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/macedonia/>



"Special Prosecution Office", logo designed as a sign of support by Nebojša Gelevski-Bane, CC-BY 2.0

but also the political culture that has been nurtured through the years of the Balkan-style political and moral decay.

Meanwhile, the fate of the 12 ethnic Macedonians and 6 ethnic Albanians who went missing during the conflict in 2001 remains unknown. The case of the construction workers tortured by UCK militants remains unsolved. Those and other cases were closed by the parliament's vote for total amnesty of all cases of alleged war crimes committed by Ali Ahmeti's "freedom fighters" in 2001. One will rightfully ask: Does that great word, Reconciliation, also not mean serving justice? However, Ahmeti has been a part of Gruevski's corrupt and autocratic government for almost a decade, and has bought himself a first row ticket for the current one. Yes, he was a part of the government that has spent an unknown amount of money and resources to please war criminals and to organize welcome celebrations for them.

Tarčulovski's history as a war criminal was entirely forgotten in a political and social sense, and he was VMRO-DPMNE's candidate for mayor in one of Skopje's municipalities at the local elections in 2017. He didn't win the elections, but the message was clear – the rightwing nationalist VMRO-DPMNE carries on with its extreme nationalism and is comfortable with war criminals in its ranks.

We see other Balkan countries sinking in the vicious spiral of fear and hate, while these criminal structures enjoy the wicked fruits of their inhuman and immoral ways, contaminating entire societies. Long is the shadow of the Balkan butchers...

People living in the Balkans witnessed how after the era of butchers like Milošević, politicians, regardless of how democratic their declared post-war concepts were, have flirted with the ideas that had led to bloodshed. Their networks had hidden war criminals as long as they could, making international justice slow and inefficient. Meanwhile, despite their statements in favour of the international authorities, they worked hard on modelling societies in which thugs and criminals became virtuous and respected members who believe in god and nurture "family values"; they've been carefully and systematically developing anti-Western sentiments during their unofficial field campaigns, describing the Hague Tribunal as an institution of evil enemies and conspirators who work for the "other side". By doing so, they managed to build their own little delinquent sultanates, and

suffocated societies with the stench of their wicked fantasies and uncontrolled criminal appetites.

Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia... They all cried when their "heroic sons" got indicted by the Hague Tribunal (ICTY)³ and gave them majestic welcomes upon their arrivals back home. That is not the way these societies can prosper. And, the treatment of war criminals is only one detail of the whole story.

when radicals pretend to be the victims...

Contradicting voices resonate from different corners of Balkan societies...

High time for telling the truth... But how? Don't all people and groups in society have the right to express their own truth, no matter how wrong it is? ...Forget about manners, we need to call things their real names... No, do not let hard talk spoil the process, do not aggravate the opponents and chase them away from the table... If democratic and progressive leaders, intellectuals, and institutions were more decisive, and if people were less silent, the evil deeds would have not taken place...

The centuries-long dilemma of every progressive group in any society: are decency and moderate talk ever going to prevail over the poisonous language of those who call to arms against "the others"?

"Poor, unarmed people" claimed they were victims and called for protection in the beginning of the 1990s. All Balkan peoples were "victims", being driven away from their "eternal homes" by the bloodthirsty enemies. Those who were fellow citizens in the former federation, became arch-enemies overnight. They had to be exterminated in a "sacred war". Talking to them was impossible, on the contrary, it was treated as high treason. "Sacred" were the night raids in which villages and towns were looted, and civilians robbed, raped and killed across the embattled zones, where "proud" nations emerged after years of insane destruction and killing. After sweeping some village clean of civilians, trucks were loaded with TV sets, refrigerators, stoves and sound equipment. All that was holy prey for the "heroes" who protected some "other, poor, unarmed people" who were quite "heavenly" at the same time.

³ <http://www.icty.org/>

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I spoke to my father on the phone at the beginning of 1992. I asked him to come over, to Macedonia, since it was quite clear what was going to happen to BiH. "No, my son, don't you worry about me. Everybody loves me here" – he said. That was the last time we spoke. He was one of the first civilian victims in the town where he lived as a high school arts teacher. Killed in broad daylight by armed "victims" who "defended" themselves from someone who threatened the "holiness" of their bloody rampage...

The propaganda always claimed that those who started and conducted atrocities were the actual victims. This kind of victimization was the wicked tool for mobilization. To spread fear and hate, fill their ranks with soldiers before they start with the slaughter. Just as the Nazis or the Soviets and other totalitarian regimes and religious fanatics tried to justify their hate and calls for murderous marches against political opponents, Jews, Roma, other ethnic minorities, homosexuals, prostitutes, persons with disabilities...

Wars were interrupted, but never ended. And now, we see them, "heroes and defenders of good old God and the blood and the holy land and the ancient nation", abusing weak democracies and taking cover within corrupt power structures and institutions, continuing with their dirty work. Integration, equality and peace are false brands concealing the true nature of the "Western demons". Their sponsors, whether they are domestic, from across the border, or come from Kremlin, Ankara or Qatar, use the legal frameworks of the countries to "democratically" support the "victims". So, while politicians calculate, and the media, intellectuals, and NGOs continue being snobbishly nice and polite, radicals are growing, while playing poor "victims".

It was 1999, when I told a Western journalist: "See you next war". It wasn't the first time I said that to a foreign journalist. Unfortunately, I think it wasn't the last time either.



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