The politics of ethnic identity in the Balkans

in a post Communist power vacuum

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Introduction

This paper examines the politics of ethnic identity in the Balkans[1] during the 1980s and 1990s, a period of disintegration of the communist political system and increasingly nationalist policies. In particular, I focus on the manipulation of ethnicity and historiography for political purposes and the consequences for the everyday lives of people. Ethnic identity, although a recent and uncertain term, can be approached according to the analysis of Hutchinson and Smith (1996, p.4;6) as the sense of belonging to a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity. Shermerhorn (1996, p.18) combined ethnicity with the characteristics of size and power in order to define a 'minority group' as any ethnic group in a given society which forms an appreciable subsystem with limited access to roles and activities central to the economic and political institutions of the society. Although there are many minority groups in the Balkans which are very limited in size and thus do not form an appreciable subsystem within a given society, this definition can be applied to larger minority groups that this paper mainly examines such as the Vlachs or the Roma found in many Balkan countries. Like ethnicity, nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and it draws boundaries vis a vis others, who thereby become outsiders. The distinguishing mark of nationalism is its relationship to the state. As Eriksen (1996, p.30) puts it, a nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries, whereas many ethnic groups do not demand command over a state. The late twentieth century has witnessed unexpected ethnic tensions and a resurgence of nationalism in the Balkans which have been explained from a variety of stand points[2]. In this paper I focus on the ways in which a popular past has been reinterpreted by nationalist leaders at the expense of minority groups

First, I cite the policies that have been used in the Balkans to control population composition for political purposes. Then, I examine the circumstances under which ethnic boundaries were mobilised for conflict in Yugoslavia. I argue that such

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1 This paper focuses on Romania, Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For definitions about the Balkans see Todorova (1997, p.21-37), Glenny (1999, introduction) and Mazower (2000, p.25-28).

2 Most explanations fall into four categories: Primordialist, perennialist, modernist and Ethno-Symbolic. See Smith (1999), Hutchinson & Smith (1996), Smith (2003)

boundaries are reinforced by myths, memories and symbols of ethnic heritage, through which, ethnic leaders eager for economic rewards and status forged their strategies. Next, I examine how historical research, rather than being a spiritual source for humanity, has been used in the Balkans as a tool for strengthening ethnic boundaries and thus as a way of justifying the economic and social inclusion of some to the exclusion of others. I argue that it is not primordial hatred among the people that has made nationalist policies successful in the Balkans but the manipulation of ethnic boundaries by political leaders for their own ends. Finally, although Northern European countries have played their own role in creating a climate for the rise of nationalist policies, today they can be the key solution to the problem by promoting development and cooperation between Balkan countries within a wider European Union.

The power of numbers: Controlling population composition in the Balkans

The effort to control population composition in order to achieve certain political aims is not a new phenomenon but it is one that has gained importance in the Balkan area in the post-communist period. This is especially because since 1991, partition and secession has been widely practiced in the Balkans and been internationally recognised. The normative idea behind partition and secession is the right of minorities to self-determination, which at first sight seems reasonable: the people should be allowed to decide but they cannot do so until someone decides who the people are (Mc Garry & O'Leary, 1993, p.12;16). The principle of self-determination was spread through the Paris peace treaties from Western to Central and Eastern Europe, creating a net of borders and nation-states which, in the ethnic mosaic of Eastern Europe, it meant that minorities were turned to a political issue. During the 19th century, the rule of the empires was based on loyalty to the dynasty rather than ethnic identity. The first world war put an end on that world where following the Paris Peace Treaties a state derived its power from the people (Mazower, 1997). In the case of Greece for example, the ecumenical community of Balkan Orthodoxy gave its place to a linguistically based definition of the Greek Nation (Kitromilides, 1990). Following the first world war, the league of Nations[3] set up a system for the protection of minorities which proved to be inadequate, mainly because it failed to include the minorities of Yugoslavia and

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[3] The League of Nations was conceived during the first World War, and established in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles "to promote international cooperation and to achieve peace and security." The League of Nations ceased its activities after failing to prevent the Second World War.

Checoslovakia as well as the minorities of the Soviet Union (Theodoropoulos, 2000; Mazower, 1997). Later, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[4], focused on the rights of each individual, thus creating the base for a more realistic and integrated approach towards the protection of minority rights.

However, by 1991, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a series of politically binding documents, including the Moscow declaration[5], emphasised that the equal rights of peoples and their right to self-determination are to be respected in conformity with all relevant norms of international law, including those relating to territorial integrity of States, thus making it unclear what exactly their rights were. Moreover, emphasis was given on collective rather than individual rights. Given the ethnic make-up of the Balkan countries, the recognition of self-determination in the post-communist period on an ethnic basis gave impetus to the use of demographic changes of an ethnic nature as a tool to alter the structure of political relations. In Yugoslavia, for example, the arbitration commission of the European Union, finding the country in dissolution, decided in 1991 that the right of Yugoslav republics, not peoples, to self-determination deserved recognition in international law[6]. Later, in 1992, the US recognised the partition of Bosnia into two separate entities on ethnic lines. It is because of the political significance of numbers, which was reinforced by these international decisions, that Albanian populations of both Kosovo and FYROM started boycotting censuses, enabling them to claim a larger number of people than the censuses might indicate. In Bosnia all three sides were using population statistics to bolster claims that their peoples deserved more territory and political power (Bookman, 1994, p.146). Thus, in the post-communist environment, where the ethnic composition of a population became more important than in the past, the numbers of the 'other' ethnic groups were perceived as a threat, which provided certain parts of the population with the impetus to engage themselves in controlling population composition, mainly through the following measures.

Firstly, a pro-natalist policy among different ethnic groups has been explicit for decades in the Balkans. For example, the political leaders of the Albanians of Kosovo and

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4 Adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948

5 Document of the Moscow meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, 10 September - 4 October 1991;See also the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the Vienna Final Act (1989), the Paris Charter (1990) and the Copenhagen Documents on the Human Dimension (1990)

6 The opinions of the Badinter Arbitration committee, http://www.ejil.org/journal/Vol3/No1/art12-13.pdf

FYROM have followed pro-natalist policies during the last decades. The encouragement of large families by both religious and political leaders is partially responsible for creating the highest population growth rates in Europe. In Kosovo for example, the population grew from 773,000 in 1948 to 1,584,000 in 1981 and it has been estimated to have reached 2,1 million in 1994 (Veremis & Kofos, 1998). Furthermore, in the course of the ethnic awakening in the 1990s, religious leaders in both the Catholic and Orthodox churches called for increased populations of Croats and Serbs respectively (Bookman, 1994, p. 146). In many cases, the high birth rate functioned, as Kofos (1998, p.60) puts it, as a demographic antidote to other population control measures which aimed at diluting the ethnic composition of a population.

Push and pull factors have been used for many decades by different governments in the Balkans in order to dilute the ethnic composition of a population. For example, during the communist regime in federal Yugoslavia, Albanians from Kosovo were encouraged to migrate voluntarily towards more economically advanced regions of the country, while on the other hand incentives were offered to Serbs to settle in Kosovo (Kofos, 1998, p.59; Petrovic & Blagojevic, 1992). Since the late 1980s though, more extreme measures, such as selective migration and forced expulsions were used. For example, Croatian refugees were relocated to Istria in order to dilute the Italian-speaking population there and bolster support for the Ruling Croatian Democratic Party in an area where they had previously been defeated in elections. Similarly, some 8,000 Serbian refugees were resettled from other parts of Croatia to eastern Slavonia in 1992 (Bookman, 1994, p. 148). Bulgaria and Romania were discouraging Gypsy immigrants while at the same time Bulgaria welcomed 700,000 Bulgarians from the former Soviet Union which was perceived as both strengthening the majority and increasing economic growth (Bookman, 1994, p. 150). At the same time, ethnic minorities in the Balkans have been systematically diluted by being removed from a region and dispersed elsewhere. For instance Vlahs and Pomaks were dispersed across Bulgaria while the concentration of Greeks in Southern Albania was weakened as they were dispersed throughout the country. The extreme extension of the concept of population dilution is ethnic cleansing, which is the expulsion of an undesirable population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations. For example, Serbs have expelled Croats from Herzegovina and Eastern Slavonia while Croats expelled Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Muslims from Mostar (Bookman, 1994, p.147-148 and McGarry & O'Leary, 1993, p.9-10). Moreover, since 1984,

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Zhivkov's Bulgaria launched a campaign to ''Bulgarise'' its Muslim minorities, around 800,000 in total, mostly Turks but also Pomaks and Tsigans, by changing their names and forbidding them to speak Turkish in public. The situation aggravated by 1989 when hundreds of Turks sold off their properties and fled to Turkey, which in August 1989 closed its borders to them, declaring that it was not able to receive more refugees (Christogiannis, 1999, p.182;185). Thus, Balkan populations have been engaged in forced expulsions in an effort to readjust the regional ethnic composition.

Genocide, which is also not new to the Balkans, has been used in the Balkan area in the 1990s and reopened wounds that will take a long time to heal. Genocide[7] is defined by Fein (2002, p. 82) as a sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collective, directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim. A recent example in the Balkans is the genocide committed in Sebrenica, an eastern Bosnian town, where more than 7,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered on July 11, 1995 within weeks of the capture of the eastern Bosnian town by Bosnian Serb troops[8]. When Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence in March 1992, the Serb leaders proclaimed the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, declaring it to be part of Yugoslavia and the government of Serbia, led by President Slobodan Milosevic, vowed to fight on behalf of the Serb minority population there[9]. According to Mc Garry and O'Leary (1993, p.8), genocide in Bosnia occurred because a subordinate ethnic community of Muslim Bosnians, were left vulnerable within a disintegrating system of control.

Moreover, since the early 1990s, increasing efforts directed towards annexation, the incorporation of irredentas within the boundaries of their ethnically or historically related

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[7] In Article two of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

[8] United Nations International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia since 1991, Case No: IT-98-33-A, 19 April 2004

[9] The state of the world's refugees 2000, *UNHCR / United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) , 2000*

political unit[10], was used as another means of achieving demographic changes. In particular, the possibility of annexation, through war or negotiation, was seen in the Balkans as a means to readjust the political system of control. This occurred in situations such as that of the Albanians in Kosovo who wanted to join a greater Albania, Serbs in Croatia and Kosovo wanted to join Serbia in a Greater Serbia and Croats from Bosnia who wanted to join Croatia in a greater Croatia (Bookman, 1994, p.150-151). For example, in the late 1980s, Milosevic's Serbia proceeded by legal, political and even military means to abolish the old constitution and integrate Kosovo fully into Serbia (Kofos, 1998) whereas on July 3, 1992 the mostly Croat area of western Herzegovina proclaimed itself as an autonomous region under the name of Herzeg-Bosna, which prompted international criticism that Croatia also wanted to annex a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In all these cases, a redrawing of boundaries would increase the population of one group relative to others.

Thus, in the post communist setting in the Balkans where self-determination based on ethnicity became prominent and the ethnic composition of a population gained political significance, the above mentioned population control measures and even crimes such as genocide were put in place in order to control population composition. However, the importance of numbers in determining both political and economic power of a group relative to others is only valid in a legal system in which rights are based on groups rather than individuals. As long as the ethnic group rather than the individual is the relevant unit within society, there will be pressures to increase relative numbers of people based on their ethnic identity. In the next section I examine the circumstances under which ethnic boundaries were mobilised for conflict in Yugoslavia in for political purposes.

Mobilisation of ethnic boundaries, for conflict: The Politics of Identity in Yugoslavia

Nationalism was used in the post communist Yugoslavia as a means to mobilise a population for war, both during wars and often in preparation for war (Hardin, 1995, p. 150; 156-163). In Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s, nationalism was overtly ethnic, or ethno-nationalism, based on the subjective belief of the people of an ethnic group in their common descent (Allen, 2000, p.491). There need be nothing inherently warlike in

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[10] Oxford Dictionary, http://dictionary.oad.com/

nationalism itself. There may be instances of 'pure' nationalism in the sense that individuals merely identify with a particular nation or subgroup without having an out-group against which to direct hostility (Hardin, 1995, p.151). However, with the death of Tito and an under-performing economy, vulnerable elites in Yugoslavia used nationalist appeals to cling to power. Identity politics drew boundaries, in an attempt to exclude the influence of a particular ethnic group which was perceived as a threat to the other.

In Communist Yugoslavia, Tito had replaced the Serbian mid-war power system as well as the Karageorgevits dynasty with the multi-ethnic power of one communist party which did not necessarily achieve real unity but it managed not to let minority issues threaten the relationship between Balkan countries, the way it was happening before 1940. Tito's communist model eventually led to an economic crisis which resulted in increasing inflation and unemployment rates during the 1980s as well as in great ethnic imbalances. Enterprises in Slovenia could guarantee to its workers a standard of living 35% higher than the Yugoslav average whereas enterprises in Montenegro could guarantee to its workers an income 25% lower than the same average (Berstein, 2001, p.283-284). However, Tito succeeded in ending the violence between Croats and Serbs born of the complex conflict which developed among the ruins of monarchist Yugoslavia during second world war whereas Milosevic invoked those spirits of violence. According to Glenny (1996, p.32) until 1987, the Titoist balance was functioning with two ''political taboos'', overt nationalism and the active participation of the masses in politics. These two ''taboos'' started disappearing in 1987 when Milosevic denounced the Serbian leadership in Kosovo.

Although mobilisation of groups for collective purposes can be based on the pursuit of social progress, in the case of Yugoslavia, ethnic mobilisation brought more social degradation than emancipation and progress. When a group's members suffer discrimination as members of the group, action on behalf of the group may be necessary to remove the restraints on individuals. Ethnic mobilisation of Serbian, Croat and Kosovo Albanian peoples however, was based on power struggles between competing elites (Brown, 1997). The weakening state structure and the political transition in the former Yugoslavia led to a lack of elite legitimacy which in turn was responsible for the elite vulnerability, which embraced ethnic identities in order to legitimise their rule.

The politics of nationalism in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s and early 1990s turned territories populated by various national groups into states in which the members of the majority nation were sovereign at the expense of minority groups. In some regions of Yugoslavia, before its disintegration, people were becoming increasingly intermingled[11]. Although the low percentage (1,3%) of people who identified themselves as "Yugoslavs" throughout the country in 1971 (Hayden, 2002, p.238) favours the argument that Yugoslavia has been an imposed concept that did not reflect the reality of certain populations[12], its sharp increase to 5.4% by 1981 shows that Tito's policies did contribute towards a peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups. The free elections in 1990 in Yugoslavia marked a transition from regimes dedicated to advancing the interests of that part of the population defined as 'the working class and all working people' to regimes dedicated to advancing the interests of that part of the population defined as the ethno-national majority. Thus, there was a transition from state socialism to nation - state and socialism's class enemy was replaced by the national enemy consisting primarily of the members of the largest minority in each polity. For example, the Law of Croatian Citizenship of June 1991, the Slovenian citizenship Act of June 25, 1991 and the 1994 Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were written to favour the members of the sovereign majority in each case, have worked to discriminate against residents who were not members of this majority. Mobilisation of ethnic boundaries for conflict in Yugoslavia demanded that small ethnic communities choose sides. Bosnian citizens born of mixed marriages were among the first victims of the pressure towards homogeneity by the ruling Muslim nationalist party. In Kosovo, following the 1999 crisis, Roma were ethnically cleansed after being accused for complicity with the Serbian Regime, whereas Kosovo Turks had to renounce their separate identity and declare themselves Albanian[13].

The concepts of 'nation' and 'ethnic identity' were over simplified and then exploited by nationalist leaders. Milosevic reinforced Serbian nationalism by rekindling memories of the Croatian underground organisation, called the Ustashe, which collaborated with the Nazis in order to gain control of Croatia and carried out forced conversions, expulsions

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11 From the early 1950s throughout the 1980s 'mixed' marriages increased both in absolute numbers and in proportion to all marriages throughout most of Yugoslavia and they were particularly common between Serbs and Croats and between Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Hayden, 2002, p.238).

12 See for example Batakovic (1997)

13 Amnesty International online documentation archive, AI Index: EUR 70/010/2003, Amnesty International's concerns for the human rights of minorities in Kosovo/Kosova 29 April 2003; Dırens Jean-Arnault, Winners and losers among the minority groups in former Yugoslavia, Le Monde Diplomatique, August 2003

and massacres of Serbs during World War II [14]. In Croatia on the other hand, once Tudjiman was in power, Serbs were defined as second-class citizens and they were fired from positions in the police and military. He also placed the red-and-white "checkerboard" of the Nazi-era Ustashe flag in the new Croatian banner (Bowen, 2002, p.335;339). In Ljubljana, during the campaigns for the Slovene elections there were pictures of caves filled with the bones of people killed during the massacres which had taken place at the end of the Second World War. Although the dead came from various national groupings and political movements, the captions on the photographs said simply "This is what *They* did to *US*' (Bowman, 2001, p.41). Modernists argue that, these new communities, even when they took old names, were not a result of identity formations brought back into being by the collapse of communism but new inventions of community, which had been imagined and then carved out of multi-ethnic communities in response to fantasies of the violence the others would carry out on 'us' if 'we' did not mobilise first for violent conflict (Bowman, 2001, p.41; Hosbawm, 1990). Such manipulation creates 'myths' or imagined communities (Cohen, 1985, p.108-118; Barthes, 1993, 113;123;129;151) carrying great risks because these identities are used to define institutions and principles that govern the territory of a state. The supporters of ethno – symbolism have pointed out the limitations of modernism in terms of "failing to distinguish genuine constructs from long term processes and structures in which successive generations have been socialised and neglecting the powerful effective dimensions of nations and nationalism" (Smith, 1999, p.9; Armstrong, 1983). What can be said with certainty in the case of Yugoslavia is that popular past events have been reinterpreted by nationalist leaders as a means to retain political leadership in grim times. In the disintegrated post-communist Yugoslavia, it was not the past that dictated to the present but the present that manipulated the past (Hardin, 1995, p.161).

The mass media, through the transmission of symbols, has also played a key role in the process of reinterpreting ethnic identity for political ends. Intellectuals, politicians and nationalists saw themselves as victims of communism and sought to restore their sense of national pride and dignity by creating a new national identity, built on new symbols

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[14] Milosevic Interview in Sky Television / Belgrade, BBC summary of World Broadcasts, Part 2 Eastern Europe: B Internal Affairs, Yugoslavia, EE/1146/B/1: ''I think that people around the world are not aware that we are facing a restoration of fascism in this country. This is the first example after World War that that someone armed his own party. It was in Croatia that someone started organizing paramilitary formations and demonstrating his sovereignty by attacking all Serbial villages and towns in the Republic. This is something that happened in this country 50 years ago as well, for you know that in the so called independent State of Croatia genocide was committed against the Serbs. In one concentration camp alone in Jasenovac, more than 700,000 Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and others were killed. We are now facing a very similar situation".

such as flags, traditions and new constitutions often borrowed from the past (Williams and Sfikas,1999 p.65). As Allen has noted, the mass media seem to have *been* an important factor in spreading state nationalism during the twentieth century (Allen, 2000, p.488) and this was definitely the case in post-communist Yugoslavia. For example, the memory of the humiliating defeat of the Serbs by the Ottomans in the 14th century, which was reinforced by the popular Serb film "The Battle of Kosovo", was used by Milosevic to remind the Serbian people that they were wronged by history[15]. Similarly, in 1996 the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was using Albanian newspapers to call for Albanians to support the group's attacks on Serbian targets in Kosovo. Furthermore, some of the KLA members were justifying the importance of these attacks as well as the killing of Albanians who continued to trade or had friendly relations with the Serbian citizens of Kosovo, in terms of ethnicised group definition of loyalty and treachery derived from an exclusionary traditional system of rule originally reinvented by radical Diaspora nationalists (Sievers, 2001, p.115). The mass media has played a key role in transmitting these new meanings and symbols of an imagined community from the new post-communist elite to the masses.

It is well worth noting that, as I also mentioned in the previous section, the partition of Yugoslavia and the politics of nationalism were also assisted by political decisions at an international level. For example, despite much publicised protestations that the international community would never accept the ethnic partition of Bosnia, the Dayton-Paris peace treaty does precisely this by recognising that Bosnia is composed of two 'entities', the Croat Muslim federation and the Republika Srpska each under its own constitution. These constitutions define the respective states in ethnic terms and thus this agreement under international sponsorship legitimates the ethnic partition of Bosnia. Furthermore, Croatia's expulsion of its Serbs was viewed by the American ambassador to Croatia as a positive step in resolving the Yugoslav conflicts (Hayden, 2002, p.248). Thus, the partition of Yugoslavia on an ethnic basis was a phenomenon that has proven successful both in recreating social reality and in gaining international political acceptance.

Separatist politics in Yugoslavia formed borders which enclosed a '"We" and excluded, often violently, others (Bowen, 2002, p.335). Nationalistic politics, aided by the international community and the mass media, contributed to creating negative

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[15] BBC video archive, Justin Rowlatt on how Milosevic exploited history, www.bbc.co.uk

stereotyping and fear of another group. This means that the violent conflicts in Yugoslavia were the makings of political leaders who reinterpreted the popular past of the second world war to manipulate ethnic tensions for the purpose of ensuring their political boundaries at the expense of minority groups. According to Hinton (2002) believing otherwise means assuming that such conflicts are primordial, the natural consequences of human depravity in some parts of the world. In turn, assuming that ethnic groups in Yugoslavia would naturally follow their leaders' call to kill, distracts us from the central and difficult question of how and why people sometimes mobilise for conflict (Bowen, 2002, p.335). I pursue this point further in the last section. Next, I examine how the rise of nationalism in the post communist disintegrating system of power in the Balkans turned historical research into a tool for political power.

Low value Politics instead of high value historical research: The Macedonian Question

The close connection between historiography and politics is evident in the Balkans and especially in the geographical region of Macedonia where national identities are fluid and unexpectedly changeable. Hobsbawm[16] has stated the following: "I used to think that the profession of history, unlike that of say, nuclear physics, could at least do no harm. Now I know it can. Our studies can turn into bomb factories like the workshops in which the IRA has learned to transform chemical fertiliser into an explosive". This is especially true in the case of Macedonian historiography. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs battled for and won their independence from the Ottoman rule. Almost immediately, they began to struggle against each other for control over the geographical region of Macedonia. Research into Macedonian history and identity became a field of battle for the competing political interests of the Balkan countries. In the following paragraphs I examine the politics behind the major claims of Macedonian identity. In the geographical region of Macedonia, historical research has been used for nationalistic purposes, strengthening the links between ancient and current inhabitants, and violating the rights of minorities.

By projecting today's reality wholesale into the past, the FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece all have a different approach to the Macedonian question. The official dogma of the FYR Macedonia is that there has been an uninterrupted existence

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[16] Eric J. Hobsbswm quoted in Pettifer (2001, p.60)

of a self-conscious 'Slav Macedonian' entity since the settlement of the Slavs in the 6-7C AD to the present day. This dogma has been passed on to the majority population of the FYR Macedonia, who are firmly convinced that they form a Macedonian nation and speak a Macedonian language with implicit and explicit claims about the continuity of 'Macedonian' civilisation since Alexander the Great (Drezov, 2001, p.55). Such claims have little historical but significant political value since they were accompanied by territorial claims over the rest of geographical area of Macedonia, which currently belongs to Bulgaria and Greece[17].

Serbia on the other hand, although having completed the process of diplomatic recognition of the Macedonian name at a political level, has different claims at the academic level. The accepted view of many Serbian academics[18] does not deviate significantly from the early twentieth century theory of the ethnographer Jovan Cvijic that "throughout the ages, the Macedonian Slavs were devoid of any particular ethnic characteristics and always represented a part of an amorphous mass that could be easily made either Serb or Bulgarian depending on the strength of the relevant propaganda". He believed that these people were Slavs who identified themselves as Bulgarians based not on linguistic criteria but on the basis of the erroneously understood Bulgarian name (Drezov, 2001, p.53).

This view was heavily criticised by Bulgarian nationalist associations such as the BMPO - CMD[19] which claimed that Yugoslav historians created the term Slav Macedonian to conceal the existence of Bulgarians in Macedonia. They also ascribed the contemporary reality of a Macedonian nation and language to Titoist propaganda (Kentrotis, 1994, p.334). Their claims are based on the fact that the Bulgarian part of the identity of Macedonians was forcibly suppressed through firm communist control while at the same time, during the nation building process, they acquired Serbian characteristics in alphabet and language. In more popular propaganda, Bulgarian politicians have claimed that ancient Macedonians were directly related to present day Bulgarian Macedonians (Barker, 2001, p.5).

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[17] Territorial claims over Bulgaria and Greece based on the Macedonian identity were made by the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) in 1944 (Poulton, 1995) but also by the VMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity in 1990 (VMRO, Translation by ELIAMEP) as well as by the president of FYR Macedonia, Kiro Gligorof in 1994 (Tziabiris, 2003, p. 87)

[18] See **Terzić Slavenko (**1995)

[19] A poplular nationalist association in Bulgaria promoting the country's national interests whose president is the historian Dimiter **Gochev**

Nonetheless, the Greeks claim that the ancient Macedonians were nothing more than one of the many Greek tribes. In particular, they argue that whatever the ethnic origins of Ancient Macedonians, they were active in spreading Hellenic culture throughout the world and that they were completely Hellenised many centuries before the Slavs started to settle in the Balkans (Dreszov, 2001, p.49). By popularising the catchphrase "Macedonia - 4000 years of Greek civilisation", the Greek government covered up the fact that the ethnic Greek predominance in at least half of the territory of present-day Aegean Macedonia goes back to only 75 years ago, following the resettlement there of refugees mostly from Asia Minor[20] (Drezov, 2001, p.49).

Although every country has a different view on the Macedonian question, a common characteristic is that none recognise the importance of historical change. In current historiographic research in the Balkans the main focus is on linking the majority population of the current nation-states with their alleged ancient ancestors, who were the first to inhabit the area. In fact, the ethnic groups inhabiting the former territories of the ancient Macedonians and the adjacent lands hardly ever called the territory 'Macedonia' for a period of almost a thousand years until the early nineteenth century. In the Byzantine period the name 'Macedonia' applied to part of what is now Thrace, and the territory of the present-day FYR Macedonia was the core of the Byzantine province of Bulgaria. The term 'Macedonia" was regularly applied to the territories of the ancient Macedonians only by western travellers, cartographers and politicians after the renaissance and was widely re-adopted for local use by the Greeks after independence in the early nineteenth century (Barker, 2001; Mazower, 2000). Thus, claims of uninterrupted existence of "Greek Macedonian" or "Slav Macedonian" ethnic identity in the area, undermine the impact of historical change on ethnic identity and transform historical research into low value politics. The real victims of this process are the minority populations whose rights are being violated for political purposes.

Islam for instance, which has been a more powerful unifying factor than ethnicity in the Balkans, has been used to manipulate minorities in the FYR Macedonia for political

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[20] According to the 1923 treaty of Lausanne, muslim residents in Greece had to leave their homes to return to Turkey, while Orthodox Christians from Asia Minor were moved in the opposite direction and settled in and around Thessaloniki, thus helping to "Hellenize" Greek Macedonia (Mazower, 1997).

purposes. In particular, the communist authorities, concerned at the rise of Albanian nationalism in the 1980s, asserted that many Turks in Macedonia had been 'Albanised' under pressure. The Albanians apparently claimed that 'these were not Turks' but 'Illirians turned into Turks who were now 'returning to the Albanian mother nation. In a similar manner the leader of the main Albanian political grouping in Yugoslav Macedonia called, in 1987, on the Torbesi and Roma minorities to declare themselves Albanian. The Torbesi on the other hand, a people with a Macedonian Muslim Slav identity, accused the Albanian party in Macedonia of the 'Kosovoisation and Albanisation" of western Macedonia through the quiet assimilation of the Slav Muslims with Albanians. The Roma on the other hand, although having gained substantial recognition after 1981, continued to be unwilling to identify themselves as such due to the persistent stigma attached to this, encapsulated in the use of the pejorative term 'cigane' by which they continue to be widely known. Many Roma have declared themselves to be 'Muslim Macedonians' or Turks in order to be drawn towards larger Muslim groups with a better established 'national identity. This manipulation on an Islamic basis was opposed by the Communist and later the FYR Macedonian authorities which made efforts to prevent such assimilation, viewing it as a means of strengthening the most 'problematic' Muslim minority, namely the Albanians. The crux of the matter lies in the question of to whom, in national terms, these relatively small groups of Slav Muslims belong. For example, some Muslim Vlahs in FYR Macedonia have adopted Albanian identity whereas during the 1997 contestations between FYR Macedonia and Albania over each country's treatment of the other's respective minority, one Albanian ploy to avoid responsibility for its Macedonian minority was the claim that "all the so-called Macedonians are really Vlahs" (Friedman, 2001). When examining identity choices in the Balkans, the research for a people's history of language and religion goes hand in hand with considerations of nation-state boundaries and resource management strategies for cultural capital.

Another example of minority manipulation in the Balkans for political purposes are the Vlachs, who are also found in Greece, FYR Macedonia, and in Albania. Fine (1987, p.12-13) has demonstrated that from the point of view of the medieval historian, it is difficult to determine exactly what is meant by the term Vlah when it begins to appear in existing sources, and the current debate is more a projection of twentieth-century concepts of nation and ethnicity back to the eleventh. For example, the special

connection between Albanian and Romanian[21] is deployed by Vlahs in Albania to argue that they, too, are descendants of Illyrians. Vlahs in Albania were not enumerated as an ethnic category in the 1989 census, and the 2001 Albanian census eliminated both ethnicity and religion as categories of enumeration. Preservation of minority cultures and languages is not a high priority for Albanian Government which is facing serious economic problems. Greek identity has also been deployed by Vlahs in Albania in order to ally with the most powerful minority in terms of both history, as the defining factor for the Orthodox Christian millet of Ottoman times and modern politics and economics, as the only Balkan member of the EU (Friedman, 2001). In Greece, there has been an attempt to describe the Vlahs as "Romanised Greeks" (Kazazis, 1992). Greece has not recorded the Vlahs as a separate census category since 1951, when the official figure was 22,736 (Winnifrith, 1987, p.3). The president of the Greek Federation of Cultural Associations of Vlachs stated that the Vlach-speaking Greeks never asked to be recognized as a minority by the Greek state as both historically and culturally they were, and still are, an integral part of Hellenism and he issued a strong protest on the occasion of the direct or indirect characterization of the Vlach-speaking Greeks by the non-profit organisation Freedom House as an ethnic, linguistic or other type of minority[22]. In FYR Macedonia, this same discourse of autochthony has occasionally surfaced in claims that the Vlahs are descendants of Romanized Ancient Macedonians. Recent history is painful, difficult to disentangle and written records are lost or scattered or written in a variety of foreign tongues thus requiring a great deal of time to make an objective study of these records. Unsurprisingly, the average Macedonian Vlach tends to shy away from the recent past and to concentrate on remoter eras in which it is easy to build theories showing that the Vlachs were the original inhabitants of Macedonia. This assertion is a variation on the old Balkan game of "we got there first" played in Transylvania between Romanians and Hungarians, in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians and in Macedonia between almost everybody (Winnifrith, 2001, p. 126). However, in the Balkans there have been so many invasions that it would be quite impossible for any indigenous group to retain its identity. Nonetheless, historical research in the Balkans has been directed to producing reasonable historical and linguistic scholarship, in order to prove that a particular group of people belongs to either one nationality or the other. The need for such policies in

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[21] The existence of small number of basic words that appear to come from a common Indo-European but pre-Greco-Roman source

[22] Macedonian Press Agency, Thessaloniki, 18 August 2003 (17:51 UTC+2)

the Balkans was reinforced by the rise of nationalism, which made it difficult for minority groups to preserve their culture.

From "Balkanism" to Balkan Co-operation

As we already saw, the rise of nationalism in the Balkans in a post-communist disintegrating system of control has not been free from 'Western' politics. Said's definition of Orientalism, a western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient can be applied not only to the Middle East but also within Europe itself, that is between 'Western' and 'Ottoman' and hence Oriental-Europe (Said, 1994, p. 133). What constitutes the link between the Orient and the Balkans is that both regions have served *as* a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive image of the 'European[1] and the 'West' has been constructed (Todorova, 1997, p.188). One such characteristic has been the human depravity perceived *as* being a Balkan feature which makes people naturally follow their leader's call to turn against each other (Bowen, 2002, p,342; Todorova, 1997; Glenny, 2001). In fact, western politics have always been present in the Balkans, contributing to the creation of the circumstances for ethnic tension. According to Kitromilides (1990, p.24), the explosiveness of the politics in the Balkans in the eve of World War I was ''due to the interplay of great power imperialisms with the conflicting claims and aspirations of the region's nationalities.'' Throughout the 19th century to the aftermath of second World War, Balkan affairs had a significant impact on the diplomacy of Europe's great powers, namely Russia, Great Britain, France, Austria – Hungary, and Germany.

For example, Britain intervened against the Turks in the Greek revolution in the 1820s because of Philhellenism and in order to block Russian influence (Christodoulidis, 1997), but went to war against Russia in 1853 on Turkey's behalf, again to block Russian power. Churchill went to Moscow in October 1944 and agreed with Stalin on military influence over Romania, Greece, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia[23]. 'Austria tried to control the two new states of Serbia and Romania through political alliances and economic treaties. Serbia denied to create close political and economic ties with Austria, especially during the Karageorgevic dynasty which became a rallying point for anti – Austrian forces. After 1878, and especially after 1903, Serbia and Austria found on a collision course

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[23] ''In Romania, the USSR was to have 90 percent influence, the United Kingtom and the United States 10%, In Greece the situation was to be reverse, 10 percent and 90 percent. In Bulgaria it was to be 75 percent Soviet, 25 percent Western. In Yugoslavia and Hungary in was to be 50-50 ''(DePorte A.W., 1979, p.49).

that ended in the war of 1914 (Kissinger, 1994). Russian policy in the Balkans included compassion towards Orthodox Christians and retention and expansion of rights of navigation from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean (Christodoulidis, 1997). By the end of the 19ht century, pan slavism, the duty of emancipating the slavs in the Balkans from the Ottoman empire and from Western Europe and in creating a Slavic federation under Russian control had a marked influence on Russian's foreign policy (Stern, 1975). Kennan (1967) in his efforts to estimate the real power potential of Moscow he included in the Sovied Union population amenable to Russian Authority such as ''the Balkans''. Kaizer's Germany was aiming at economic penetration in the Balkans. During the 1st world war Germany supported Bulgaria in its attempts to annex the Macedonian regions of her neighbours, Greece and Serbia (Katapodis, 1996). During the second word war Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania became Germany's satellite allies whereas Greece and Yugoslavia were conquered (DePorte A.W.,1979). By the end of the 19th century, the ''Eastern Question'' revolved around one issue, what should happen to the Balkans if and when the Ottoman Empire disappeared as a fundamental political fact in the Southeastern Europe. The vested interests of the great powers persisted in the newly independent from Ottoman rule nation – states.

Nonetheless, one could argue that today this is not the case any more, since the single power of the European Union has replaced the competing northern European powers of the late nineteenth century. However, there are serious shortcomings that continue to exist within the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) whose assessment by most political analysts was not encouraging. The experience of the first few years of the CFSP provided confirmation of the existence of a gap between expectations and capabilities. Its limitations became obvious by the premature recognition of Croatia and Slovenia under German pressure but also during the war in Kosovo and the bombing in Yugoslavia where a European policy or a common position with some weight was not evident (Tsoukalis, 1997; 2003). Also later, the Americans brought the three warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the round table and persuaded them to sign the Dayton/Paris Agreements in 1995 and to assemble a NATO military contingent (IFOR) under the auspices of the UN for ensuring their implementation (Athanasiou, 2001, p.89), thus enabling partition on the basis of ethnicity. The Dayton/Paris agreements have been critisised for not fully resolving the causes of ethnic cleansing in the area. Although the military presence of SFOR and KFOR forces has ended the conflicts in Bosnia – Herzegovina and in Kosovo, the relevant international agreements were either

not implemented or misconstrued. Clashes between ethnic communities continued to persist whereas the protection of refugees was delayed and the protection of minorities was lacking (Roumeliotis, 2001). Furthermore, when inter-ethnic relations in the FYR of Macedonia continued to deteriorate in the period from 1992 to 1993, the EU powers involved in advancing the Gligorov government did not address the serious human rights problems suffered by the Albanians and other minorities (Pettifer, 2001, p.141). Under these circumstances, foreign intervention has enabled partition on the basis of ethnicity, and thus created doubts in its ability to promote stability in the Balkans.

The situation has changed considerably since the last NATO bomb fell on Yugoslavia. Milosevic is gone and political leaders in the successor republics of Yugoslavia now negotiate different forms of cooperation. The Americans are loosing interest and the Europeans try to bring peace and stability to the region. The Union, and its member countries, are the biggest providers of aid and it offers the perspective of integration into the European political system. This is a powerful weapon since as Brown (1997, p.22) puts it, the fact that the Balkan states have a good chance of joining the European Union at some point in the not-too-distant future gives people powerful incentives to ignore nationalistic appeals. The Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki enriched the Stabilisation and Association Process[24] (SAP) with elements of the enlargement process[25]. In particular, by the end of the Kosovo conflict in June 1999, agreement was reached among EU member states to offer all SEE countries the ''European perspective''. The Feira council in 2000, recognized the Western Balkan countries as potential candidates for EU membership and the Zagreb Summit of November 2000 SAP as the heart of the Union's policy towards the five countries concerned[26]. In February 2003, Croatia was the first to lodge an application for membership. The EU – Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003, confirmed that ''the Balkans will be an integral part of a unified Europe'' and that enhanced SAP will provide the overall

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[24] The Stabilisation and Associastion Process (SAP) was set up in the spring of 1999 as a comprehensive long term approach towards countries – entities of South Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). It was based on the Regional Approach to the countries of South East Europe (SEE), adopted by the EU in 1996 and 1997, which set out political and economic conditions for enhancing relations with the EU. For more details see: 1) Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on the Stabilisation and Asociation process for countries of South-East Europe [COM(99)235 of 26.5.99] and 2) Council conclusions on the principle of conditionality governing the development of the EU's relations with certain countriesof south – east Europe, 29 April 1997

[25] The Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans: Moving towards European integration, 16 June 2003, **http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/gacthess.htm**

[26] Zagreb Summit, Final Deglaration, 24 November 2000

framework for the EUs policy twards the region[27] . However, these EU initiatives have been critisised by independent evaluators in terms of lack of a strategy for an integrated approach, weak attention to human rights and cross – border implications and problems in addressing the issue of the return and minority protection through longer term local development and integration policies and programmes[28]. Moreover, regional, including cross-border, cooperation in the Balkans is limited and this can be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, there is a suspicion among regional political leaders that any form of regional co-operation in the Balkans can lead these countries away from European Integration. This in turn can be attributed to a weak understanding in these countries about the importance of regional cooperation as a step towards a more sustainable European integration. Secondly, the different EC guidelines that Balkan countries need to follow in order to implement European funded programmes is another reason why cross border cooperation in the Balkans for planning and implementing development programmes remains limited [29]

Nonetheless, there should be no doubt that the EU can provide the lead in external involvement for stabilisation of democracy and economic development in the Balkans. All other potential candidates for this role are either, as Tsoukalis (2003, p.188) puts it, too weak or too uninterested. The EU could have an important role in eliminating ethno-territorial nationalism in the Balkans by discouraging the pursuit of self-determination based on ethnicity and providing economic incentives for the development of new trade routes amongst Balkan countries, as these constitute their most logical markets under the competitive circumstances of the beginning of the 21st century. On the ethnic front, tolerance and co-existence are cheaper and more viable than the creation of ethnically pure regions, whether by war or organised migrations. Foreign aid might be linked to a view of the region that is multiethnic, rather than indulging ethnic groups in their efforts to break up.

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[27] General Affairs and External Relations, 2518th Council meeting, Luxemburg 16 June 2003

[28] Evaluation of the Assistance to Balkan Countries under CARDS Regulation 2666/2000, Synthesis Report Volume 1: Findings of the Evaluation, June 2004

[29] See CARDS regulation for Western Balkans, PHARE guidelines for Bulgaria, ERDF guidelines for Greece, TACIS for Romania etc.

Conclusion

The post-communist power vacuum of the last two decades in the Balkans combined with the support from the international community for self-determination based on ethnicity has given impetus to nationalist leaders to maintain their power by creating 'ethnically pure' communities to the detriment of minority groups. The policies that have been used to achieve this goal include even crimes such as ethnic cleansing and genocide. Although nationalism need not necessarily be warlike, in the post communist Yugoslavia it has been used as a tool to draw boundaries vis a vis others based on ethnic identity for political purposes with the support of the mass media and the international community. Furthermore, in the Balkans, in a period where ethnic identity became an important political tool, high value historical research has been replaced by low value politics. The efforts of Serbia, Bulgaria FYROM and Greece to prove which nation is closer to the ancient Macedonians, fail to recognise the importance of historical change and by mythologizing the history of their alleged ancient ancestors, they are turning against the minority populations who are seen as a threat to the persistence of the ethnic integrity of the majority of these states. Thus the Vlach, Turkish, Greek, Albanian, Roma gypsy, Torbesi and other smaller minorities, are mere pawns in the 'we got there first' game often played in the Balkans. Moreover, although some 'western politicians' have often attributed political instabilities in the Balkans to deep-rooted historical hatred, the role of European and American diplomacy to regional politics cannot be denied. Finally, while in the past, the international community facilitated nationalist policies in the Balkans, today, the European Union has the opportunity and ability to promote stability in the area by giving economic incentives for the promotion of development and cooperation among Balkan countries and their closer association with the European Union.

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