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Ethnic Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia as a Consequence of Nation-State Building

This paper deals primarily with exploring the connection between the creation of nation states, on the one hand, and, on the other, ethnic cleansing and violence in the former Yugoslavia. It argues that the process of creation of nation states in the former Yugoslavia was an inevitable political process, whereas the ethnic strife, violence and genocide were not a "natural" part of that process. Ethnic intolerance did not increase before the war, but it did dramatically increase during the conflict and this increase provides counter-evidence to theories about ethnic hatred. It was certain political élites who provoked ethnic cleansing, primarily by the manipulation of public images, in order to win or keep power. This argument uses instrumentalism as the theory of ethnic conflicts, but other ethnicity theories are briefly introduced in the first part of the paper as well. The argumentation in the second part is based on an analysis of the creation of nation states and the appearance of nationalism in the Western Balkans. It explains the inescapability of the disintegration of socialist federations and the creation of independent states and through empirical research shows that ethnic hate was not dominant, whereas nationalism was extremely strong and finally became the main alternative to evanescent socialism.

Keywords: Former Yugoslavia, ethnicity, ethnic conflicts, nationalism, nation-states, instrumentalism

Etnični konflikti v nekdanji Jugoslaviji kot posledica oblikovanja nacionalnih držav

Članek se primarno ukvarja z raziskovanjem povezave med oblikovanjem nacionalnih držav na eni strani ter etničnim čiščenjem in nasiljem v nekdanji Jugoslaviji na drugi strani. Članek trdi, da je bil proces oblikovanja nacionalnih držav na območju nekdanje Jugoslavije neizogibno politični proces, v nasprotju z etničnimi spopadi, nasiljem in genocidom, ki niso bili »naraven« del tega procesa. Etnična nestrpnost pred vojno ni bila opazna, pač pa se je dramatično povečevala med konflikti in negativno zaznamovala teorije o etničnem sovraštvu. Avtorica dokazuje, da so etnično čiščenje izzvale določene politične elite, predvsem z manipuliranjem javnega mnenja in namenom pridobitve in ohranitve oblasti. Ta argument uporablja instrumentalizem kot teorijo etničnih konfliktov, vendar so tudi druge teorije etničnosti na kratko predstavljene v prvem delu članka. Argumentacija v drugem delu članka temelji na analizi oblikovanja nacionalnih držav in pojava nacionalizma na zahodnem Balkanu. Avtorica pojasnjuje neizogibnost dezintegracije socialističnih federacij in ustanovitve neodvisnih držav in skozi empirične raziskave dokazuje, da pred vojno etnično sovraštvo ni bilo dominantno, medtem ko je bil nacionalizem izjemno močan in je nenazadnje postal glavna alternativa propadajočemu socializmu.

Ključne besede: nekdanja Jugoslavija, etničnost, etnični konflikti, nacionalizem, nacionalne države, instrumentalizem

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1. Introduction

The judgement of the International Court of Justice of February 26, 2007 (ICJ, 2007) by which Serbia was acquitted of the charge of committing genocide in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the reactions to this decision, and ongoing cases of the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia from 1999[1] and from 2010[2]), are all but an echo of the events that will continue to encumber the former Yugoslav republics and remind the public in South Eastern Europe and throughout the EU of the tragic consequences of the disintegration of Yugoslav federation and of the weak, tardy and inadequate reactions of Europe and the world to the bloody events in the former federation that resulted in hundreds of thosands of deaths and over one million displaced persons. This region will feel these consequences for decades.

What led to this kind of disintegration of the Yugoslav federation, given that no similar bloody disintegration of a socialist federation and concomitant creation of new states took place elsewhere in Europe? Why, of all the regions, was it the Western Balkans that experienced violence in the processes of restoring old nation states and of creating new ones in the 1990s? And finally, was it the creation of nation states and the accession to independence of former federal units that triggered ethnic cleansing and mass war crimes? Those are the questions that this paper will primarily treat in exploring the connection between ethnic cleansing and violence in the former Yugoslavia and the creation of nation states. It will also treat the perception that the Balkan region and the nations living in it are "predetermined" for violence. This view of people of the Balkans as of "wild Balkan tribes" who are only capable of making war in order to realize their right to statehood is very dangerous, because it justified the inactivity of some segments of EU policy and the bloody activities of certain political élites in the region, thus making violence and disrespect of human rights seem "natural". Although there are many books and articles dealing with the dissolution of former Yugoslavia and its causes[3], this paper will focus on nationalism as one of the possible causes of that complex series of events.

This paper therefore argues that, whereas the process of the creation of nation states in the territory of the former Yugoslavia was an inevitable political process, the ethnic strife, violence and genocide were not a "natural" part of that process. Indeed, this paper will argue that ethnic strife, hatred and hostility among the nations of the former common state did not exist before the war and that it was certain political élites who provoked ethnic cleansing, primarily by manipulating

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public images. To put it more simply, the former Yugoslav nations neither hated each other nor were geographically or genetically predetermined for violence, killing and wars; instead, it was certain national politicians who exploited the mass media, manipulated public awareness and reinterpreted history in order to win or to keep power. The paper is thus about manipulation by élites and not about the creation of nation states; the latter was a historical necessity. This argument will be explained through instrumentalism as one of the theories of ethnicity; this theory propounds the manipulation of ethnicity by political élites in order to achieve political goals. Besides instrumentalism, other ethnicity theories will be briefly introduced that also apply to the examples of conflict in the area. The second part of this paper will analyze nationalism as one of the reactions to the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, by demonstrating the inescapability of the disintegration of socialist federations and the creation of independent states, and, most importantly, by using empirical research to show that there was before the war neither hatred nor any relevant hostilities between various ethnic groups of a nature that that could lead to ethnic conflicts – something that political élites in the region and individual leaders of the EU often used as an excuse during the war. Both the first and second parts of the article will be based on practical examples from the periods before and during the ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

One must of course ask also why the nations responded to manipulation and what the political goals of the élites were. However, due to lack of space, it is not possible to address the social psychology, political culture, identity, ideology, political style, system and electoral behavior that would explain the reasons behind this vulnerability to the manipulation of political élites.

1. Theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts: A case study of the former Yugoslavia

In order to understand the emergence of ethnic conflicts in the context of the creation of nation states it is necessary to place the events in a theoretical perspective; this can be found in studies on ethnic conflicts and nationalism. Three basic theories can define ethnicity and ethnic violence; the primordial perspective, instrumentalist theory and the constructive view. To these theories a fourth model of ethnic violence (Posen 1993 and Gagnon 1997) may be added which links violence to a safety dilemma as well as the "cognitive frame" theory,

an approach developed by Oberschall (2000).

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While primordial theory focuses on ancient hatreds, instrumentalist theory is directed towards rational choices, and constructive theory explores societies which create meaningful relations between the participants in a given conflict. From the perspective of each of these theories there is a tendency, before explaining the conflict, to describe the motivations, together with the interactive process between the events and the experience of the conflict, and the personal motives for expressing intolerance, hostility and hatred. These definitions will be applied to the examples of conflict in the area, pointing out some of their deficiencies in the explanation of ethnic conflict.

According to the primordial view, ethnic feelings and identities are determined by culture and belong to almost the same sort of natural inclination ("matters of the soul") as blood relationship and connectivity. Qualitatively, such ethnic belonging is extremely colored emotionally and irrational. As applied to the example of former Yugoslavia, according to Kaplan (1993), advocates of this approach are of the opinion that in spite of decades of cooperation and peaceful cohabitation, nations and nationalities basically nurtured distrust, hostility and even hatred towards the members of other groups, and these exploded in a conflict that may have been cultivated over centuries. This approach is characteristic of scholars such as Walker Connor (1994), Donald Horowitz (2001) and Anthony Smith (1995), according to whom historical hatred and deeply rooted ethnic chauvinism were the cause of the ethnic conflict. Stimulated by fierce fighting for political power during the disintegration of Yugoslavia and led by insecurity about the redrawing of borders of the existing republics and the status of ethnic minorities, these hatreds and centuries-old hostilities, supported by fear and bloody retaliations, turned into a growing spiral of aggression and conflict: neighbor against neighbor, village against village.

This theory is, consciously or unconsciously, incorporated in the popular variations of beliefs about "intrinsic" ethnic hatred that, allegedly, underline the cultural differences and historical animosities exhibited by the disintegration of Yugoslavia and its accompanying violence. This disintegration, according to this view, is seen as the combination of accumulated ethnic hatred and a "Balkan" inclination toward violence; this is due to, as Tomasić (1948, 115) says "...the characteristic of personalities of Slavic peasant robbers whose characteristics remained unchanged over centuries". People who inhabited the Balkans are often described in this kind of way and their violent nature is explained by long-lasting cultural socialization (Anzulović 1999).

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The opponents of Western intervention in the Balkans were inclined to put lesser blame on Milošević than on the long-lasting cultural determinants in that area. They have seen the ethnic difference itself as a permanent source of tension in the world which [lies] at the intersection of several main religions, and have explained ethnic cleansing as the last in a whole range of slaughters and counter-massacres which, according to them, are simply part of the fabric of the Balkan history, rather than a part of the European logic of the building of nation states. And yet: for centuries, life in the Balkans was no more violent than elsewhere; moreover, the Ottoman Empire had managed, better than others, to reconcile the plethora of languages and religions. Ethnic cleansing in the Balkans was not an eruption of primordial hatred, but a deliberate use of organized violence against civilians by paramilitary groups and military units; it represented the ultimate force nationalists needed for dividing the society which was otherwise capable of neglecting the usual class and ethnic divisions (Mazower 2003, 153–154).

As Mazower (2003) puts it, gulags, death camps and terror were not invented by the Balkan nations. There have been no Balkan analogies to the racial violence seen in the lynching practiced in the USA from 1880 through 1920, or to the revolutionary violence seen in the Western Europe, which was considered bravery and not a barbarian act. The Balkan countries were not prone to violence or to imprisoning their citizens any more than other countries. It is equally hard to claim that the Balkan states are today crueler than others. Since their societies are simply of a similar nature; their crime rate is not above the European average, particularly where homicide is concerned, and racial intolerance is not widespread.

Many authors promote the thesis about centuries-old ethnic hatred to explain the terrible violence by the fact that historical processes and collective memory were "put on hold" during the 45 years of communism, thus creating a multiplicative effect of violence (Kaplan 1993, 30). The disintegration of Yugoslavia was, in this view, a trigger that freed centuries-old ethnic hatred. Some of the creators of external policy as well as many western political leaders of the 1990s, including U.S. President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) and British Prime Minister John Major (1990-1997), were guided by this explanation. U.S. Vice-President Al Gore (1993-2001) described the war in former Yugoslavia as a "tragedy that unfolded for a very long period, approximately some 500 years" (U.S. Newswire, 1995), while Major (in Ramet 2004, 740) explained the disintegration of the socialist federation as an "[…] explosion of old hatred that stirred up after the disintegration of the USSR. The conflict in Bosnia was a product of faceless and inevitable forces which were beyond any control." As Mazower (2003, 159) says, "The roots of cruelty do not lie in the 'Balkan mentality', but in the very nature of war."

According to this viewpoint, which was obviously supported by some very

influential "policy makers", it was the threat of external intervention by foreign forces – which were expected to react to even the smallest nationalistic excess that might jeopardize the balance established during the Cold War and the internal dictatorial nature of the communist system – that kept ethnic groups away from the realization of their own fate. In other words, the lack of democracy was what prevented bloodshed among the nations of the former Yugoslavia. An argument that emphasizes ethnic hate treats a political élite as an almost unimportant element, and its members' responsibility for political actions is, accordingly, considered to be almost minimal. That argument was widespread and very popular among the political élite in the former Yugoslavia as well, and was used by the first Croatian President Franjo Tuđman and by the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević as well. Their message was the same: we cannot live together, and especially not in peace, with people that hate us.

Although this approach sounds plausible and corresponds with the fact that national politicians manipulated latent nationalism and ethnic fears, some evidence contests the underlying primordial theory. Opponents to this approach are of the opinion that group norms and hostile attitudes are important, but that such an approach does not provide sufficient evidence to explain the onset of the conflict on the basis of myths and hatred. In any case ethnic cleansing is not a specific "Balkanic feature". During the 20th century, it has taken place in most of Central and Eastern Europe; for example, there were over 50 various forced migrations of population in the 1940s.

As Hardin (1995, 148–160) argues

> The major problem of the thesis according to which ethnic hatred gave rise to ethnic conflicts is in the fact that for the majority of participants in the conflict, relations before the war were generally very good / … / In fact, the war preceded today's ethnic hate. Hate may be mobilized. In the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina it took a whole year for national exclusion to develop before the mass crimes and genocide started taking place (Hardin 1995, 148–160).

According to Oberschall (2000), the ethnic cleansing of civilians was, according to research, mainly committed by members of regular militia and paramilitary troops.

In spite of the collective memory of crimes committed during WWII, for 45 years relations among the Yugoslav nations were cooperative and peaceful. Collective memory and open conflicts and clashes are not the same thing. For collective memory to activate and serve the realization of ethno-political objectives, it must be mobilized by extreme politicians or a chauvinistic élite who use their own

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position and power to manipulate the masses. A collective memory of this kind is shaped by artists or intellectuals who create myths which then may be exploited. Such myths are then retailored and propagated by national governments in order to provide legitimacy to ultranationalists' rule. In short: myths created by a re-modeling of history serve to provide legitimacy to government activities.

National feelings are by no means to be confused with feelings of hatred, intolerance and open hostilities towards other ethnic groups. By no means can national feelings and collective memory themselves create the hate that grows into a conflict. For this, they need political élites which will use them for the mobilization of masses which will then take action. The role of political élites in creating conditions for the rise of nationalism is crucial. As Jović (2003, 41) emphasized, every serious analysis of the Yugoslavia's collapse needs to begin with a study of the behavior of the political élite itself. That is exactly what primordial theory neglects, namely, the élite's actions directed at dictating motives to people that have lived with each other for centuries.

This thesis may be simply proved, namely by measuring the ethnic tolerance toward other ethnic groups before, during and after the outbreak of a conflict. If the thesis that ethnic hatred gave rise to war is correct, then one will expect that the level of ethnic hatred before, during and after the conflict will be on the same level. And if this thesis is incorrect, then the level of ethnic intolerance will be high only at the end of the war. Studies on stereotypes show that people change their perception about other ethnic groups as a consequence of conflict, and that stereotypes follow political events instead of preceding them.

An overview of the following research will confirm the claim that intolerance towards ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia is a result of conflict, and not a perception created on the basis of joint coexistence. It is hypothesized that hate increased simultaneously with the escalation of martial conflict, and then became weaker after the war than it had been during the conflict; but, as a consequence of the conflict, it was still stronger than at the beginning of the war. Proving this hypothesis would mean that conflicts in the former Yugoslavia can not be explained by centuries-old conflicts and by the existence of a collective memory about bloody conflicts in the past. Consequently, it may be argued that ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia were not inspired by the historical process of the creation of nation states, and, as a consequence, could have been prevented. This argument can be illustrated by comparative studies of Croatian citizens' perception of other ethnic groups, based on research carried out during a twenty-year period, from 1984 to 2004.

These studies conclude that the level of intolerance was the lowest just a year before the outbreak of the war (1989), in the period characterized by extreme political tensions and growing nationalist conflicts. This confirms the thesis that it was not ethnic hatred that stimulated ethnic conflicts. As Bilandžić (1996, 70–78) points out, except in Kosovo, where ethnic tensions started way back in 1981, political debates and conflicts within the political élite did not "spill over" into relationships among "ordinary" people, in spite of sporadic, isolated outbreaks of national emotions. Dynamics of attitudes (Sekulić et al. 2006, 810), particularly in the period that preceded the outbreak of the conflict, showed that general level of ethnic tolerance actually remained the same, and indeed showed a tendency to drop slightly. Macro-political disintegration did not transfer itself into an increased intolerance on the personal level, i.e., the sentiment that people can only feel safe when they live surrounded with the people of the same ethnic background was not strengthened.

A survey of ethnic relations in the mid-1990s showed that in a sample of 4,332 citizens of former Yugoslavia, only seven percent believed that the state would fall apart into its components and 62 per cent of them said that "Yugoslav attitude" was very important or rather important for them (Cohen 1993, 173). Ethnic-national relations in the work place were assessed as "good" by 37 respondents; 28 per cent of them thought they were "satisfactory" and only 6 percent said they were "bad" or "very bad". The same relations in neighborhoods were considered "good" for 57 percent of the respondents, 28 per cent found them "satisfactory" and only 12 per cent chose "bad" or "very bad". For most of Yugoslav citizens, nationalist squabbles in the public arena on the eve of wars were not perceived as hostile ethnic interpersonal relations. Cohen's research is just one of many carried out on that particular period that has similar results.

Thus, although ethnic intolerance did not grow before the war in Yugoslavia, it did dramatically increase during the conflict and provided disconfirmation of the the above-mentioned theses concerning ethnic hatred. As Jović (2003, 43) notes: "People wanted more Yugoslavia then their political leaders were ready to accept." At the beginning of the war force was used in order to diminish the sense of solidarity and cooperation between nations in the former Yugoslavia, and finally they were destroyed.

> The biggest crimes in the war were commited precisely in the areas where most people declared themselves as Yugoslavs (as an ethnic category) and where Serbians, Croatians and Muslims had lived for centuries together. [The crimes] needed to be created there, they was not the result of the communal living of local communities (Jović 2003, 43).

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With the lapse of time after the war, intolerance dropped, albeit not to the pre-war level. War as such had a enormous effect on intolerance.

According to the third, instrumentalist theory, ethnic feelings and affiliation were manipulated by political leaders and the intellectual élite in order to achieve certain political goals, as Rosens (1989) argues. Ethnic groups can also behave in an instrumentalist way by confiscating land, dismissing rivals of other ethnic background at work, abolishing education or universities in minority languages – policies adopted in order to increase benefits to themselves.

Using the example of the former Yugoslavia, this approach can in fact explain the methods whose goal was the realization of the Greater-Serbian project, or, to an extent, the realization of Croatian ultra-nationalist goals of annexation of a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The example of the Greater-Serbian project demonstrates that ethnic cleansing resulted from the long-time Serbian tendency to expand its existing borders to include the imagined ethnic territories of the Serbian nation, stimulating at the same time deeply rooted cultural values. The Greater-Serbian project required "cleansing" of non-Serbian population from the territories with a Serbian majority and uniting them with their Serbian motherland. The instrumentalist theory argues that, by relying on historical events, an ethnic group anticipates future developments and opportunistically adjusts past ones. The fear of becoming a victim again may lead to the decision to take part in violence, although such a decision does not have to be connected with material gains.

Although there is clear evidence that ethnic cleansing was the state policy of Slobodan Milošević, supported by Serbian political élite and Bosnian Serbian leaders, this explanation ignores the fact that many Bosnian Serbians did not want to take part in conflicts with their neighbors, that many Serbians felt like political Croatians and citizens of Croatia and that, after all, even a certain percentage of the Serbian population did not embrace the idea of an aggression on their former neighbors (Milošević 1997, 109). The instrumentalist theory presupposes an ethnic consensus over ethnic cleansing – something that initially did not exist. Of course, a natural question arises: if many Serbians did not desire war or the ethnic cleansing of their former neighbors, why did it take place? This paper embraces instrumentalist theory as the belief, as Joireman (2003) would put it, that ethnic identities develop and nationalism ensues in the pursuit of particular political goals. Ethnicity is never neutral from an instrumentalist point of view, it is used in the political struggle for power. "Leaders use ethnic identities and sentiment to control a whole group in the attempt to meet their own personal goals. Typically, this happens through the use of symbols that are held to be important to a

particular group", as Joireman (2003, 38) puts it. As the Serbian president and leader of Serbian right-wing ultra nationalism (1987-2000), Milošević tried to manipulate these deeply rooted cultural values of the Serbian people in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The use of symbols to mobilize people and draw them together for a cause is "an attempt to reach them emotionally in order to pull them on board a political agenda /.../ Ethnicity must be stirred up by leaders and directed towards a particular goal. It is a tool." (ibid.)

> It is form of instrumentalism because nationalism is used for the political end of supporting the actions of the particular government in power in response to the needs that they face in times of great crises. Not only does nationalist rhetoric inspire people to make great sacrifices for their country, it is also used by governments to justify their actions in conflicts (Joireman 2003, 48).

As Pavković (2000) argued, in the late 1980s nationalism itself became a powerful tool for political mobilization. In other words, self interest motivates ethnic identification and ultimately the nationalism that will be further explored in the second part of the paper.

The third, constructionist theory created by Kuper (1977) complements the two theories just mentioned. According to him, religion and ethnic sentiments are extremely strong social agents but in „ordinary" times they belong to only one of the many identities and roles which people have in ordinary lives. According to Linz and Stepan (1996, 366), "/ … / political identities are less fixed, they are instable and variable, prone to the forming or destruction by political institutions and political choices". This theory is grounded in symbolic communication, and links manipulation by élites to a situation in the field which leads to political action, which includes ethnic conflicts. The constructionist approach is often incomplete as it does not provide an answer to the question of how nationalism and ethnic feelings are formed, i.e., are born under the influence of political mobilization and propaganda by mass media.

Along with the three basic theories there is also the fourth model of ethnic violence (Posen 1993, Gagnon 1997), which focuses on the disintegration of the state, anarchy and jeopardization of safety which create conditions in which ethnic groups react defensively towards the members of other ethnic groups; this in turn leads to their arming, thus increasing the spiral of conflict. It is evident how safety at all levels is closely linked with human psychology. When in danger, people react and undertake defensive actions. The choice of type and intensity of defensive action at the personal level does not necessarily correspond to the objective danger, since the feeling of being endangered is very individual, in

52 terms of both cause and intensity. In addition to this, in the domain of regional, interstate relations, safety is the system with a built-in "positive feedback"; an increased feeling of safety on the one side reduces the quantity and intensity of defensive actions and thus creates an increased feeling of security on the other; and, of course, the reverse is true: the more insecure one side feels, the more actively will the other side defend its interests. The latter kind of behavior on the part of opponents will create the feeling of insecurity and the same reaction. This kind of safety paradox was an integral part of the Cold War and it can also be discerned in the conflicts which occurred in the area of the former Yugoslavia. The phenomenon of manipulation is closely tied to this paradox since the political élite of one country may create a feeling of its own insecurity, resulting in the same state of insecurity in the neighboring country, more aggressive defense of its own interests and defensive activities; and this, in turn, leads to a reaction to danger in the country which has caused the insecurity in the first place, all of which creates a vicious circle of increased insecurity.

Applied to the case of former Yugoslavia, this approach was translated into simple answers to questions such as: if I am a Serbian, will the Croatian policeman protect me from the violence of Croatian citizens? will I keep my job if my boss is a Muslim? etc. Because all the systems of the former state had disintegrated and the protection of basic human rights was not yet (fully) in place in the new states, it was logical to expect fear, and consequently a defensive reaction on the part of ethnic minorities.

Oberschall (2000) introduces yet another theory for explaining ethnic conflicts through a cognitive framework. A *cognitive framework* is a mental structure which places and links events, people and groups in a meaningful context in which the social world in which one lives has a meaning, and may be deliberated and shared with others (Snow 1986). The population of the SFRY experienced ethnic relations in two contexts: normality and crisis. Both contexts exist in the perception of the population: in times of peace, the crisis context was "dormant", and in times of crisis and war, the normal context was suppressed. Both contexts were "anchored" in private and family experiences, in culture and in public life. In the normal context which prevailed in Yugoslavia under Tito, ethnic relations in the perception of the majority of population were those of cooperation and good neighborliness. Colleagues and co-workers, school and team colleagues acted routinely in their roles regardless of their ethnic background. Some did not even know, or did not bother to find out, the nationality of the others. Mixed marriages were accepted, holidays of other republics were celebrated, etc. In the 1980s the normal context prevailed in the majority of the republics, with the exception of Kosovo.

The crisis context was based on the memories of the Balkan wars, WWI and

WWII – and other wars before that. In these crises civilians were treated no differently than soldiers. Conflicts, massacres, torture, ethnic cleansing and "scorched earth policies" were the rule. People as a group would be considered collectively responsible for their ethnic background and denomination and would become targets of revenge and retaliatory acts.

In spite of some deficiencies, one cannot ignore the existence and justification of events in the area of the former Yugoslavia by recourse to elements of the theories described above, since in the ethnic conflicts in the area of the SFRY elements of each of these theories may be found. There is no doubt that conflicts were inspired by suppressed nationalism, and that that same nationalism was manipulated by political élites, that the manipulation of propaganda by the media obviously took place, and it is also true that fear and insecurity contributed to the arming of members of ethnic minorities and that all this resulted in an ethnic violence of an extent not seen in Europe since WWII.

2. Nationalism and realization of nation states in former Yugoslavia

Most of the scholars who have studied the concept of nationalism agree that this phenomenon has emerged in the past 200-500 years, although the history of nations goes back many hundreds of years. As nationalism is an ideology that supports the development of political movements, an increase of subjective national identification is considered to be a result of various social processes – economic, political and ideological. A succinct understanding of the concepts of "nation" and "national identity" is often problematic and the conceptual bases range from matters that concern the "nationality" (ethnic background) of the population to the process of forming a "nation" as a category that offers an emotional and political identification for a certain population.

National identity is considered to be a result of concepts generated through more or less selective interpretations of and references to written and oral traditions – a process that establishes a collective belief in the legitimacy of claiming a territorial "fatherland". The assumption that this type of identification is a recent one does not imply that identity is exclusively a modern phenomenon. National identity is observed as a modern manifestation of human awareness of belonging to a certain group. In this process, historical facts have either been deleted from oral and written tradition or are presented selectively and/or in a distorted manner, which is a good basis for the manipulation of history.

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The nationalism of South Eastern Europe mostly emphasizes the cultural heritage of the population and its ethnic continuity (Stavrianos 1958; Jelavich and Jelavich 1977; Jelavich 1983). This development is a result of the historical process of the building of nations in the region in the past 150 years. Early Balkan nationalists like Rigas Velestinlis and Balkan federalists from the late 19th century offered an alternative to the model of nation state. Their goal was to separate the organization of the state from ethnic groups, in order to enable a federation or a state in which various ethnic groups could coexist in peace. However, these Balkan attampts failed; indeed, with Macedonias separation from Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, the ideology of a homogenous nation state prevailed over the idea of federalism. As a result of these historical developments and the policy of homogenization of the Balkan states after 1913, the building of nations in Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia put a stress on ethnicity and religion, not citizenship, as the main criterion for belonging to the national "imagined community". The making of the First Yugoslavia (1918) was a departure from these trends. However, the new state had to deal with many problems that concerned the coexistence of different ethnicities (Serbians, Croatians, Slovenes and other smaller groups) within the borders of a single entity (Banac 1984; Ramet 1992).

With the exception of Great Britain and France, today major European nations established their nation states in the 19th century. According to Caratan (1993), in four of five wars waged in Europe in that century in the period between 1850 and 1871 the creation of national myths was the main topic. The national unification of Italy took place between 1859 and 1871; the unification of Germany and its consolidation into a nation state took place in the context of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–1871, which means that the German and Italian nation states are not older than 120 years. Transformation of France into a modern nation state can be observed as the result of the great revolution of 1789.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Russian Federation and the USA which were created, respectively, 200 and approx. 150 years ago. The Austro–Hungarian Empire was constituted as a combined state in 1867, determining the national development of its constituent nations.[4] The creation of a nation state is therefore a relatively modern historical process. According to Caratan (1993), the nations of Eastern Europe in the post-communist period did no more than continue a development which was delayed in the 19th- and 20th- century multination states in which they participated. More or less voluntarily or under coercion, and the creation of which was influenced equally by the international constellation of political powers in Europe and the world.

The rise of perestroika and the fall of the Berlin wall on November 9, 1989

marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War and the former classical interest divisions existing in the world disappeared. The dismantling of communist society allowed the continuation of processes which had earlier been interrupted by the coming to power of communist parties and their program of radical changes, which were designed to erase all the social relations developed earlier by civil society. The creation of independent states in the area of the former Yugoslavia represents an inevitable process of the realization of national interests by the creation of nation states. "It is entirely normal that the nations which lived in a political constellation which prevented them from the finalization of the process of their national constitution may continue with the finalization of that process only when circumstances so allow" (Caratan 1993, 123). The content of the nation state, i.e., its political orientation, is not relevant for the forces of nationalism (movement, organizations, and communities). The only importance is to create the nation state, although its orientation succeeds as nondemocratic or even criminal, compared to international conventions. But, although nationalism presumes homogenization and emphasizes national above all other interests, it does not necessarily include violent actions of the political élites against other nations. As Jović (2003, 45) argues, in the relationship towards other nations, nationalism can be divided into isolationism and expansionism. Unless it is violent, it is a quite democratic legitimate political doctrine that unites different political doctrines (liberalism, socialism, conservatism, etc.) for the purpose of creating and protecting the nation state. But in times of crises nationalism very often becomes an alternative to other doctrines.

The mobilization of masses and acceptance of conflicts can be explained as follows: according to surveys, national/ethnic hate was not dominant, but nationalism was extremely strong. "Separatist nationalism insisted on creating a new (or renewing an old) nation state, but the other unitarianist nationalism dedicated itself to strengthening Yugoslavia as united nation state. It was the clash presented during the whole history of Yugoslavia: how to organize the state and how to define Yugoslavia and its nations" (Jović 2003, 46).

As in the physical development of humans, individual phases in the development of states – thus, the phase of the creation of a nation state – can not be by-passed. Any forcible prevention of the processes triggered by the fall of communism is not possible. Such processes create exactly the opposite effect: the prevention of "growth" leads to conflicts which, if they are suppressed, may, so to speak, "explode" with a much stronger effect. The control of the processes is possible if the new state is respected and if its compliance with civilized standards established in democratic developed societies is ensured. This is exactly the policy that Western Europe, institutionalized in the European Community, failed

to apply after the disintegration of communism and the creation of nation states in the area of the former Yugoslavia until 1995. The political élites in the EU failed to accept as historical legitimacy the fact that, in practice, a nation state is not a state of national discrimination.

The realization of nation states in the area of former Yugoslavia was not therefore a journey into the past, but a historical necessity: the enabling of the finalization of the process of the building of nations and the realization of nations' right to self-determination. During the communist era, nationalism was treated as an anti-socialist doctrine and excluded from the public sphere. "Nationalism did not undermine socialism, but it emerged as the main alternative of evanescent socialism. After that, the battle for the definition of nation and state was waged between two types of nationalism (separatism and unitarianism)", Jović (2003, 47) claimed.

The negation of the right to a nation state is as equally non-democratic as the negation of civil rights and the rights of ethnic minorities. History has also shown, as Caratan (1993) claims, that the nations which were completing their nation-building process were at the same time creating their nation states by establishing the equality of citizens regardless of their ethnic affiliation. The liberal theory of the time implied the equality of citizens as the basic principle of nation states. Therefore, the dilemma is not whether the nation state should be formed but whether and to what extent it will be democratic. In the beginning of the creation of nation states after the disintegration of the SFRY, liberal Europe forgot that the creation of nation states was at the core of civil society and that the processes in South Eastern Europe were not taking place simultaneously with the integration processes in the EU. The wrong assessment of political élites in the EU and their inability to find a solution for the conflicts in former Yugoslavia contributed in part to the stirring up of the war there.

4. Conclusion

This paper tries to answer the question whether the ethnic strife in the territory of the former Yugoslavia took place as a result of the creation of nation states, and whether the violence and genocide were an inevitable, "natural" part of that process. It argues that the ethnic strife, hatred and hostility among the nations of the former common state did not exist before the outbreak of the conflict, but that they were produced by certain political élites, primarily using media manipulation. Due to lack of space, this paper does not venture into a deeper

analysis of the context of this conflict or of the creation of the political climate; and it does not attempt to analyze the local and international protagonists who influenced the development of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and the failure to stop them, or to analyze the institutions responsible for prevention of conflicts.

The main argument is explained through an analysis of the creation of nation states and the rise of nationalisms in Europe and specifically in the area of South Eastern Europe, and the effects of the disintegration of socialist federations and the creation of sovereign and independent states; through theories on ethnic conflicts, and, what is particularly important, through empirical research showing that, before the war, there was no feeling of hatred or hostility among members of the various ethnic groups that would lead to ethnic wars; this was the regional political élites' common excuse for stirring up hatred and ethnic strife, as well as the common excuse of some European officials during the conflicts for not preventing them. Research carried out before and during the war in Croatia, as well as in other republics of former Yugoslavia has helped us understand how a war contributes to the emergence of ethnic intolerance among the population.

The influence of war substantially exceeds individual experience or even individual change of attitudes. According to Blumer, ethnic attitudes are a "fundamentally collective process" (Blumer 1988, 197). "This process mainly works by means of public media in which individuals that have been accepted as loud-speakers of an ethnic group publicly characterize other ethnic groups" (Blumer 1988, 197–198). Nationalists' régimes prefer "upward falsification" and exert permanent pressure on people – liberal and moderately tolerant individuals – to think and act in ethnically intolerant ways. According to Blumer, the modification of public definitions takes place in times of crises, such as war.

Created by political élite and led by masses, political mobilization (Brown 2001) becomes an interactive process taking place among political leaders, intellectuals, journalists and other makers of public opinion on the one hand and the public on the other; it is a process that defines the one-way characterization of the mobilization, including the strengthening of ethnic hostilities. Political tensions grew between 1985 and 1989, but the tensions among the public were not transferred to the level of individual antagonisms. War enables a change in perception of "the other" and a redefinition of relations with "the other" as dangerous and distrustful.

The growth of intolerance is not the only result of the mass manipulation of public media by political élites, but the manipulation by the élite is nevertheless

the basic contribution to this process (Županov, Sekulić, Šporer 1996, 411–415).

Ethnic intolerance and ethnic strife are a complex collective process of interaction, encouraged in the case under discussion by politicians who "packed" the media with depictions of war and of that blend with incidents of ethnic conflict, expanding more and more through the population of the former Yugoslavia. This changed the situation as people knew it, including their understanding of other ethnic groups. As a result, ethnic intolerance began to look natural and reasonable, as did the process of the disintegration of SFRY and the coming to independence if its republics – something that happened elsewhere in Europe.

Notes

[1] The final decision of the court in ICJ (2008).

[2] More information in ICJ (2010).

[3] Dejan Jović (2003), for example classified eight different causes for Yugoslavia's dissolution that are mentioned in the relevant literature: economic crises, primordial hate, nationalism, cultural differences amongst the peoples of the SFRY, the influence of the international political environment after 1989, the personality influences of certain political figures in the creation and destruction of Yugoslavia, the pre-modern character of Yugoslav state vs. nation state, as well as several structural institutional causes.

[4] Thus, the Croatian National Renaissance occurred between 1835 and 1848; the Croatian – Hungarian Compromise of 1868 provided Croatia with some rights that other non-Hungarian ethnic groups did not have.

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