Ethnic Relations, the State and Democratic Stability

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Abstract:

   Nationalism represents a serious challenge for the countries in transition. It is a factor which immensely influences and shapes the transitional process in politics in all South-Eastern European countries. It represents a challenge for the post-communist countries especially for countries like the former republics of ex-Yugoslavia, since, as Robert Kaplan points out in his foreword chapter to the book *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History*, " in the Balkans, no wars are 'local' ". [1] Societies in Europe are experiencing remarkable changes especially in politics and economy through empowerment of their democratic political and economic systems. Nationalism and nationalist attitudes are present in political cultures in countries of transition despite efforts for implementing democracy, rapid changes and modernization of societies at institutional level and social structure and despite the newly established environment of these societies.

   Countries in transition borrowed the so-called 'copy-paste' action, and tried the implementation of such systems without considering the specifics of countries in transition which subsequently faced the variances, inadequacy and quite often the inability for the implementation of the latter.

   Therefore, this paper aims to focus on political culture of transitional countries, with a specific emphasis on Kosovo, covering nationalism and the process of democratization as a very important part of its political system and its political culture.

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[1] Robert Kaplan. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History.* St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993

Introduction

When we look at the complexity and diversity of the Balkan countries, we understand that whatever we do to designate the idea of being Balkans inhabitant is almost always incomplete and even contradictory. Different nations live in this region; different in their ethnic origin, different in their religious, economic, educational, political origin, different in their history of creation and development of their various interests, and many other issues, in a word, nations with significant differences. A complex interaction of different historical, institutional, economic, social and geographical forces constantly redefine the way of thinking of the peoples living in this region. Understanding of any politics of these countries would be incomplete without a constant effort of controlling the interaction of these forces that shape the views and attitudes of the members of these countries. In this modern era, the various strands of the political culture of the Balkan countries, especially countries in transition can be divided into categories such as economic liberalization efforts for the development of the free market, combined with a social conservatism, which supports traditional and moral values and norms of each society, by wearing the cloak of populism that values and promotes the rights of ordinary people. These trends have found a place in the dominant political culture that tends to favor lower taxes, favorable government services and policies conducive to the development of businesses, especially small and medium businesses, which in an environment such as the Balkans, cannot be accomplished as easily as planned and realized in developed European countries, more so when the "flow of shaping political and cultural identities of the peoples of the Balkans is qualified with mutual conflicts in their project

of establishing states" [2]. Moreover, in European countries part of the political culture involve faith in diplomacy and multilateral solutions to common problems, discourse, rhetoric and political rational argumentation, belief in pragmatism, the responsibility and putting the common good above the national interest benefits of the individual member States, which is not easy " to swallow" in the Balkans. What is common to all countries in the Balkans is their desire and efforts for the European Union, but this European political culture in which everyone wants to join has to do with practice and 'tasks' set by the European Union member states, for those countries which intend to come under this roof. How would the European Union support trends of non-members to join this different political culture when these countries, for example Serbia and its supporters, are not ready yet to accept the European sense of interaction with and between different states, particularly with Kosovo? Political culture is also defined as a pattern of orientation to a number of policy goals such as government policy, the government appointed politicians, government institutions and values of democracy. The difference exists in political orientation towards these goals depending on the time of onset of democracy in a given country. The idea that citizens in the newly established democratic countries, namely the states of the socialist and communist systems were more likely to express their dissatisfaction with government policy, dissatisfaction with the institutions of democracy, it is not unknown or foreign. Considering the economic performances there is not much difference between newly established democracies in terms of supporting democratic institutions. In the aspect of economic development, we may say that there is a common political culture in Europe. However, such commonality is expressed sometimes with negative attitudes towards institutions of a government and any politician in particular. In the economic terms, countries emerging from

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[2] Muhamedin Kullashi. *Përplasja e identiteteve*. Prishtinë: Dukagjini,2003

communist and socialist systems, the newly established states and countries in transition, cannot reach fast the accurate and correct economic development, fair governance and democracy without prejudices, without corruption and organized crime of various natures, as exist within the Member Countries of the European Union, and Europe and America as a whole. Unfortunately, countries in transition significantly lack the political culture in all these fields.

1. What is Political Culture?

Almost all writings that speak of political culture, dedicate its significance to Alexis de Tocqueville described in his book "Democracy in America". There, Tocqueville described the 'soft despotism' which was successfully defeated by the Americans and their 'habits of the heart'. But what is soft despotism according to Tocqueville? Soft despotism is the situation in which a country can become degraded by a network of small and complicated rules. According to Tocqueville, soft despotism differs from real despotism in the way that soft despotism is not clear to people. It gives people the wrong and fake impression that they are in control of the situation, but in fact they have little or no influence on their government. Soft despotism installs fear, uncertainty and doubt to the whole population in general. And Tocqueville observed that this phenomenon was avoided in America through 'the habits of the heart' of its population in the 19th century[3]. Therefore we can say that "the political culture of a country is a set of attitudes and practices supported by a nation that shapes the behavior of their respective political culture"[4]. It is a common frame of a people with values, beliefs and habits of behavior associated with, or in relation to government and politics. These ideals and structures developed gradually in time and they influence the political life

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[3] Tocqueville, Volume II, Book 4, Chapter 6 of "*Democracy in America*"
[4] http://www.sparknotes.com/us-government-and-politics/political-science/political-culture-and-public-opinion/section1.rhtml

of the state, the region and beyond; they refer to our attitudes in terms of politics, government and society; refer to the relationship between government and people, the rights and responsibilities of people, government obligations and restrictions upon the government authority. On the other hand, governments assist in shaping public opinion and political culture through education, public events and activities, and remembrance of the past. The political culture is very different from state to state and often varies within a state itself. In general, however, the political culture remains more or less what it actually is; it remains as such for a long time, because it is ' a habit of the heart'. To say that the Serbian political culture and rhetoric have not changed at all since 1912 in relation to Albanians in particular, in relation towards Kosovo, is true. Serb radical nationalism revived in the late '80s, especially after the death of Josip Broz Tito, is still active. Serbian nationalism does not fade away or die; it changes the 'color', i.e. ways and means, but not the purpose. It uses the necessary strategies and tactics depending on the interests of Serbian politicians: flattering and responsible in front of the representatives of the European Union, while completely opposite is their appearance with their own people. In the political culture of Serbs, it is more important to express and show their inherited nationalism in centuries through their history, myths, language, and behavior rather than try to believe in universal human values. And all this, obviously has an impact on the political scene, in the Balkans as well as in the whole Europe, not to mention the impact that such political culture has in relation towards Albanians with whom it is surrounded.

2. Transition in democracy and the importance of political culture

The well-known Czech President Vaclav Havel once said: "We have removed the totalitarian system, but now we must win democracy".[5]

Throughout history there are periods of peaceful and continuous developments, but there are also periods of severe and aggressive changes when dormant forces of history explode on the surface.[6] The transition to democracy and the strengthening of democracy depends on a number of factors in a country. In addition to economic and social factors, political culture of a country is considered as a prerequisite for democracy. Fukuyama argues that "cultural factors operate at the deepest levels of society affecting in this way ideological, institutional and civil society levels"[7]. However it is an issue in itself that steps which should be undertaken to follow this development will be long and often even distressing. The Rule of law, citizens' active participation in the development of the country and democracy, civil obedience, human rights and protection of constitutionality are considered to be the basic prerequisites in the process of transition to democracy. Historical task of developing states which seek progress is to develop democracy as political culture, but this means to create something more than mere legislation or mere creation of organizations and institutions. This requires the creation of political culture. The establishment of democracy in countries in transition cannot be enforced and involuntary established, or be created by a single model, rather, it should be diversified, elected freely and build from the bottom. Different approaches

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[5] Vaclav Havel: *A Diplomat's Handbook: for Democracy Development Support*
[6] http://www.pos.direito.ufmg.br/rbep/index.php/rbep/article/viewFile/P.0034-7191.2011v103p41/134
[7] Francis Fukuyama.: *The Global Resurgence of Democracy:* The primacy of Culture. Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 1996

are propagated throughout the developed Europe, but for the countries in transition they will be successful only when everyone will be able to appreciate democracy as the historical path freely chosen. Developed countries of Europe are trying to create an effective mechanism to rules and norms of conflict prevention and crisis management based on broad national consensus and the right to participation. But, in the Western Balkans such an approach would not be immediately productive because the transformation of a society presents an even bigger problem. There is a relative consensus among citizens and policy-making elite in terms of, for example, the field of economics, and it presents the establishment of a market system but a market which provides the righteous combination of human and social rights. In order to establish such a social market economy, the key lies in the privatization process; no civil society and economic one can survive without private property interest. Pension and health insurance are a must, too. Incorporation of these European policies and principles should not be regarded as indispensable privilege, but rather, according to these principles it is required for countries in transition to create a sustainable society rooted in democracy, but in accordance with the economic, political and cultural features of the state and the region they belong to. Because all developed democratic countries be in Europe, America and elsewhere, have acted in this way by incorporating their cultural, national, religious or institutional features, using methods and ways that are native and belong to that country.

3. Political tolerance as an element of political culture

To have and to hold a tolerant attitude in society is one of the most difficult tasks faced by citizens in a society. We are not born knowledgeable or tolerant, but we learn to become such. Tolerance is the key concept in contemporary political theory and practice. Without doubt, it is associated with very difficult issues such as rights, liberty, state neutrality, tolerance limits,

and so on. However, today, the concept of tolerance also affects several important political issues: multiculturalism, pluralism, freedom of culture and intercultural dialogue, as the foundations of democracy. Political tolerance is a matter of research in many different fields such as sociology, economics, political science, international relations, and law and jurisprudence disciplines. It should be understood in different circumstances and stages.

Developing political tolerance is important because it strengthens a democratic society. In short, political tolerance implies the willingness of a society to provide, ensure and guarantee the fundamental rights and civil liberties of individuals and groups, a country or state, whose views differ from those of the others. And this is one of the fundamental human rights. Individual rights and freedoms that citizens of democratic countries respect, promote a wide range of different ideas and beliefs that may not be accepted, liked and often even challenged and rejected by the strict majority of the members of a population. In a democratic society such divergent values are considered protective tools against the establishment and enforcement of tyranny within a society. However, human society, despite efforts to free itself from the 'chains' of humiliation and violation of human rights and freedoms, particularly the minorities, seem to acknowledge such a change with difficulty, or better to say seem not to acknowledge it at all. Consider as an example the relations between Slavic and Albanian people: both sides declare a strong belief in democratic principles such as freedom of speech and proper participation in the Assemblies or Parliaments of the countries concerned. But if you analyze such an issue, in the sense of whether they are willing to offer their rights to the groups, whose ideas are different from their ideas, the answer probably will not be what is expected. The gap of intolerance may fade over time, but at present, it is unchanged in this regard, especially in the attitudes of Serbs towards non-Serbs, in the attitudes of the position towards the opposition, and so on.

4. The impact of nationalism in political culture: Serbia and Kosovo

Nationalism as the term, is widespread, although its precise meaning is always diverse, different and never the same. Therefore, in some definitions, nationalism is: a) a political consciousness of ethnicity and ethnic cohesion, political identity and shared national interests, b) political ideology that considers the nation as the main determinant, the most important and fundamental to society. In this sense, nationalism is the basis of political movements for national liberation, national equality and the establishment and protection of the nation-state, c) a preference to protect the interests of members of a nation as opposed to the interests of members of one nation or another ethnicity, d) can include overestimating the features and characteristics of one nation or ethnic country while on the other hand underestimating the characteristics of another nation or ethnicity, which might cause the rise of intolerance between members of different nations and in some cases the rise of ethnic conflicts. [8]

Because of all these definitions, nationalism has a strong value, carrying the socio-political and psychological character, both at individual and societal level. Therefore, nationalism is considered both, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, by various political actors as well as by citizens in different social environments and different ideologies and political theories.

Nationalism as an expression of the aspirations of many people in their struggle for national independence, freedom and sovereignty has emerged since the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, then in anti-colonial movements until the fall of communism and the fall of many multinational federations. Realization of a sovereign nation-state was their main goal regardless of the circumstances, historical period and/or socio-

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[8] Ernest Gellner.: *Nationalism.* Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson,1997.

political contexts. [9]This is clearly seen in the examples of post-communist societies that have emerged from multi-national states like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia, whose authoritarian regime has limited political freedom of the people respectively, of a nation, in an effort to integrate them into a political unified community established upon ideological basis and from the higher authorities. It is also evident in the examples of small nations and / or ethnic minorities in the developed Western countries that the civic consensus and democratic political system are not sufficient factors of integration and, therefore, they are not sufficient factors of political stability of those communities, as is the case with Spain, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy or France. It should also be noted that despite the processes of globalization and the trend to create a global democracy, which among other things, significantly reduces the sovereignty of a state, political identity, which is still dominant in the level of nation states, has still remained an open question. Thus, nationalism is neither an aberration of democracy nor a non-progressive or reactionary phenomenon.

In the case of Kosovo and Serbia, we should go back at the times of the communist regime in Tito's Yugoslavia. Although equality between peoples and organization of the federal Yugoslav state was one of the foundations on which the legitimacy of the communist government stood, authoritarian communist regime was the one which generated nationalism and, mostly through repression and suppression of freedom of expression and speech, as often as it was considered to have crossed some limits. These limits were set by the authoritarian government, primarily through the postulates of communist ideology in power and enforced through the imposition of maintaining multi-national federation and monopoly power

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[9] Berch Berberoglu.:*Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict:* Class, State, and Nation in the Age of Globalization.USA : Rowman &Littlefield Publishers, Inc.,2004

through the Communist Party, which held the exclusive right to perform national interests. The Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, which was to guarantee a significant level of autonomy and formal citizenship towards its republics and provinces, and despite the declaration of national equality and solidarity as fundamental value (the so-called 'unity and brotherhood'), significantly limited the freedom of national declarations and political free speech. The communist regime could not effectively articulate those rights guaranteed by the Constitution without democratization, which in turn would put into question the monopoly of the Communist party and consequently would endanger the survival of its power. After the death of Josip Broz Tito, there was no such an authority who would be the arbiter between federal party leaders and the leaders of the republican parties and who would guarantee the preservation of the unity of the state; as result, the political processes of decentralization of Yugoslavia increased and strengthened[10]. But, this decentralization did not happen in a democratic way and Yugoslavia disintegrated with violent, bloody wars and victims, with enormous destruction and damages in almost all the republics, including Kosovo. But has the political culture of Serbia changed after all those events? Has it become more democratic, more tolerant and more reasonable?

The answer depends on how much weight we give to this issue. Political culture in its broad sense of sentiment defined by attitudes, which are never homogeneous, and by symbolic model, not necessarily coherent, connected with determination and policy making, seems to be changing. However, it cannot stand on its own without the support of a political structure of a society that is changing. Evolving political culture should be based on a set of stable institutions which serve as a framework for policy-making in different way than in the past, and in

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[10] Dusan Bilandzic.: *Yugoslavia after Tito :1980-1985.* Zagreb: Globus, 1986.

accordance with the new post-authoritarian rules. As a political community, citizens of Serbia have learned their lesson from the bitter experience of the 90s, and for a while they would state that these learnt lessons are being put (an emergent political culture) in practice. These changes in attitudes and political views could serve to prevent possible return to the past. Nobody wants the '90s to be back. The Serbian people should develop strong doubts and a kind of opposition towards demagogic and populist nationalistic calls of their politicians and of the Serb Orthodox Church. They should have realized how high the price they paid was. But ordinary Serb people are left on their own to democratize their political habiliment as best as they can and know. This applies especially to people who encourage democracy. But what is happening now in Serbia shows that their political culture has not changed almost at all. The attractiveness of the population and greater support to the Serbian Radical Party on the one hand, and the election of a president like Tomislav Nikolic, on the other hand, shows that the political culture and dominant nationalist and ethnocentric rhetoric has not changed. This nationalism, cleverly used by the ruling political party based on a real Serb nationalist identity, despite the purposes and reasons for which it is being nourished, exists; it is very strong within the Serb people, and as such affects the political scene of the Balkan region and Europe as a whole. Whereas, when we talk about the political culture in Kosovo, it is clear that the Yugoslav federation, as a country with internationalism and communism as an ideology had failed to provide the same degree of national equality and freedom. Although this regime rested on foundations built to overcome or better said, to prevent ethnic conflicts, it failed because of authoritarianism and ideology implemented in society. On the other hand, the suppression of nationalist sentiments stirred collective frustration. In addition, authoritarianism as the dominant socio-psychological characteristic has contributed to the permanent existence of ethnic tensions during the communist regime. All these factors

have led to the explosion of nationalism in this area, immediately after the fall of the regime. Due to the limitations of political freedom, especially freedom of speech and expression of national interests, that regime was perceived as 'imprisonment and handcuffing' to the Albanian people. Therefore, nationalism was manifested as revenge against the communist regime. Economic reasons may be added to the political ones. Uncertainty, increased economic problems, political disputes and increased political instability led to the creation of a state of apathy and pessimism, it increased frustration, anger and ethnic intolerance. Undoubtedly the biggest generator of this entire situation was great Serb nationalism which became even stronger during the Yugoslav crisis. And this same great Serb nationalism influenced the strengthening of nationalism of the rest non-Serb ethnicities living in Yugoslavia. But nationalism played a key role in the collapse of the communist system and in the process of creating and building independent states.

What are the situation and the political culture in Kosovo today? Kosovo society is trying to do what it can do and knows how to act, in order to maintain and develop its nation. The government is relying on 'leadership and guidance' of the European Union and its member states and the U.S.; it is trying to present Kosovo with an image of a 'European' country, which should be accepted internationally. This represents one side of the political culture in Kosovo. Other efforts include the improvement of the social and economic life of its citizens, the efforts to win the trust of citizens through commitments and accomplished duties and obligations towards the country and its people who they lead and represent. Kosovo is likely to progress. With the consolidation of the new social and political system, by alleviating external pressures, and with serious development goals, Kosovo has a chance to develop. The period of normalization of social and political life and the period of post-war recovery as well as the democratization processes during the transition period, have contributed significantly to

the decline of ethnocentrism and strengthening of liberal nationalism. Nationalism now has another form and as such should be nurtured and protected with high dignity and high level of culture.

Conclusion

Interaction of historical, institutional, economic, social and geographical forces redefines the way of thinking of the peoples. Nationalism challenges countries in transition and shapes all the processes in politics. Therefore, democratic and economic systems should be empowered. But the establishment of democracy in countries in transition should be diversified and elected freely. In the Western Balkans such an approach would not be immediately productive because the transformation of the society presents a problem. A consolidation of the new social and political systems gives a chance to the countries in transition to develop. As such nationalism will find another form and will be protected with dignity and high level of culture.

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