

UDC: 323.1(496.5)
Biblid 0543-3657, 63 (2012)
Vol. LXIII, No. 1148, pp. 5–24
Original Scientific Paper
October 2012

Aleksandar Fatić
*Srđan Korać*¹

The Albanian National Project Between Ethno-Politics and Europeanisation

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the re-emergence of ethno-politics as the determining factor for regional strategy in the Balkans, after the wars of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia 1991–1995, the subsequent NATO intervention over Kosovo in 1999, and the resulting declaration of independence of Kosovo and its gradual international consolidation. This has important strategic consequences for NATO and the EU in the region. While all Balkan countries have a future EU membership as their “number one” foreign policy priority, and all apart from Serbia have either joined, or are in the process of joining NATO, Kosovo’s independence and the related upsurge of ethnic unrest in Macedonia suggest that the very South-East of the region is drawn once again into an essentially ethno-nationalist strategy, which NATO and the EU will have little manoeuvring room to counter. The authors suggest that the way forward is to bravely meet Albanian ethnic demands half-way through territorial settlements by way of a new series of diplomatic conferences on the Balkans.

Key words: ethnic/civil nationalism, national emancipation, Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Albania, NATO.

¹ Aleksandar Fatić, PhD., Research Professor, Institute of International Politics and Economics, fatic@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs; Srđan Korać, M.A., Research Associate, Institute of International Politics and Economics, srdjan@diplomacy.bg.ac.rs.

The paper represent a part of research results within the IIPE Scientific Project no. 179029 (2011–2014), which is financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

The domain of ethno-political strategy in South-East Europe

Developments in the Balkan countries after the wars of disintegration of the former Yugoslavia 1991–1995 and the subsequent democratic transitions have included two at least seemingly contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, most countries (except Serbia) have either joined NATO or have signed the respective Membership Action Plans (MAPs). Slovenia was quickly admitted to the EU soon after declaring independence, Croatia is scheduled to formally become an EU member in 2013, while the accession negotiations with Montenegro started in June 2012. Parliamentary, judicial and executive government systems have been overhauled to varying extents in all countries of the region, generally with meagre success; however on a strictly rhetorical level, the shift from ethno-nationalism towards more citizen-based perceptions of collectivity has seemed dramatic. The move towards a “civil” rhetoric of nationality particularly in the multi-ethnic states of the Western Balkans (countries of the former Yugoslavia plus Albania), has helped lower the ethnic tensions in countries such as Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and has been an expected consequence of the stated “number one” foreign policy priority of all the Western Balkans’ countries to become EU members.

At the same time, however, while ethno-nationalism appears to have disappeared from policy rhetoric, it has become even more deeply entrenched in the region’s factual geo-strategy. The clearest example of the strategic formulation and implementation of ethno-national programmes is that advanced by the ethnic Albanian political class. This is a carefully balanced strategy of the use of conflict (and threat of conflict), combined with bilateral diplomacy with key international players, and coordinated actions by minorities in a number of Balkan countries. The strategy has already facilitated the considerable consolidation of Kosovo as the second Albanian state in the Balkans (Kosovo is 95% ethnically “pure”) and is well on the way to allowing the ethnic Albanian leaders in Macedonia to assume an even greater control of the institutional levers of power in that country. With Albania a NATO member, Kosovo a *de facto* international protectorate and Macedonia a candidate for NATO membership, this places the Albanian ethnic strategy in a key context for determining the future role of NATO in the Balkans *vis-à-vis* ethnic politics. It is possible that, contrary to its role in Bosnia, NATO will be drawn into a *de facto* pro-ethno-nationalist policy in Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and, to some extent, Serbia and Bulgaria.

Kosovo and Macedonia are especially important as “testing grounds” for Albanian ethno-political strategy, for at least two reasons. First, Kosovo is an essentially ethnic state-building project whose success serves as an important landmark for the further development of ethnic strategy in this part of Europe.

Secondly, Macedonia is “the next step”, a more complicated and politically more demanding case of gradual “state capture” by ethno-politics. Both experiments are methodologically exceptionally important: building a state out of a disarray in Kosovo, with mass violations of human rights and a lack of any clear policy vision to effectively include Kosovo in the Serbian institutional and economic system appears to be a unique project that requires not only very serious ethnic mobilisation “from the inside”, but also equally serious bilateral diplomatic successes, primarily reaching across the Atlantic. The ethnic Albanian leaders have succeeded in this project, despite an array of complicating circumstances, such as their presence on the US known terrorist groups list until 1998, when the “Kosovo Liberation Army” was removed from the list and granted increasing levels of political support.

Both Kosovo and Macedonia are key territories for the strategic enhancement of ethnic Albanian influence in the future regional integrations, as well as in multilateral and regional negotiations, in the case that Euro-Atlantic integration may be halted in the future.²

The interplay of political and cultural factors for ethnic conflict

All of the well-known risk factors for the use of conflict in furthering ethnic policies in troubled regions apply to the Western Balkans, and especially to the position of the Albanian people in the region. There are at least three such structural factors, including (a) weak institutions, (b) unresolved internal security concerns, and (c) critical ethnic geography. The Albanian people live across the Balkan Peninsula, however as a prime political and security subject they are the most active in Kosovo, Macedonia and to some extent in Montenegro, in addition to Albania itself. These four countries are usually pointed out as the kernel of a potential regional ethnic Albanian “superstate”, or, in a weaker form, and more recently, as a potential “Balkan Benelux”. In Kosovo and in Macedonia, state institutions are notoriously weak. There is a strong legacy of in-depth criminalisation of state structures, which is exacerbated by intransparent and uncontrolled funding

² The Euro-Atlantic integration of the region may be halted for a variety of reasons, including the ongoing global financial crisis, which reverberates negatively upon the remaining “enlargement enthusiasm” within the EU, or a potential internal institutional dissipation of the current EU through the possible financial failure of Italy, and later Spain and Portugal. The strategy chosen by the Albanian leaders is universal and essentially insensitive to the outcome of EU enlargement after Croatia’s entrance in 2013. The strategy is aimed to increase the influence of “the Albanian voice” in the region whatever its institutional shape might turn out to be in the context of EU and NATO enlargement. In this context, the strategy is methodologically superb and largely self-sufficient.

sources, especially for the new Kosovo institutions. These institutions, including the Parliament and Government, do not have a clearly structured budget, and the main method of filling what there is of a budget remains the charging of import duties at the border. Tax collection — the main source of funds for the budget in any orderly state — still does not fully function in Kosovo. This gives rise to questions about the origin of the funds that supported the nascent institutions in the initial post-independence years (Kosovo has been independent since February 2008).³

Issues of minority rights, the constitutional and factual emancipation of the minorities from the oppressive state practices that characterised former Communist rule in the region, remain acute in the entire Western Balkans. This is a security issue *par excellence*. Wars in the former Yugoslavia were motivated exactly by the “overheating” of these issues by the ethnic elites, and the consequences of this process and its destructive reach have since become more than evident.⁴ This is why “the Albanian Question” is now treated by Macedonian policy makers as the prime issue of national security and is the source of greatest tensions.

Finally, the ethnic geography of the Albanian people in the region is highly conducive to ethnic conflict. The Albanian population is highly concentrated along current state frontiers, and in most cases the neighbouring state is the mother state; for Kosovo Albanians, the neighbour/mother state was Albania itself, while for Albanians in Macedonia the relevant mother state is Kosovo. Most of the Macedonian Albanian political class was educated in Prishtina and sees Kosovo as the inspirational “mother-land”, rather than Albania itself.⁵ Along with the growing international consolidation of Kosovo the tendency of radicalisation of Albanian populations in the South of Serbia also rises; this particularly applies to the militant movement called “The Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa”, which is active in the three southernmost Serbian municipalities, close to the border with Kosovo.

³ James B. Rule, *Theories of Civil violence*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988; I. William Zartman, “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse”, in: I. William Zartman (ed.) *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, 1995, pp. 1–11.

⁴ Michael E. Brown (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996.

⁵ Biljana Vankovska, “Between Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution: The Macedonian Perspective on the Kosovo Crisis”, International Studies Association 40th Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., 17–20 February 1999, <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/biljana.htm>.

The structural risk factors for a radical ethnic strategy are compounded by the fact that Kosovo is in fact the second Albanian ethnic state in the Balkans, and potentially a second ethnic Albanian voting state in a future enlarged Europe. The current struggle by Albanian ethnic leaders to take control of the Macedonian political system could increase the number of states directly controlled by Albanian ethnic strategy to three.⁶ The strategy of rounding-up the Albanian-populated geo-strategic space on the peninsula is revealed in the proposal by Gunther Fehlinger, based in Priština, and Ekrem Krasniqi, based in Brussels, for the creation of a “Balkan Benelux” consisting of Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. All four countries have very large Albanian populations, and only Montenegro has escaped ethnic unrest so far. The two authors were quick to point out at the outset that the proposal “does not suggest the creation of a Greater Albania”.⁷

In addition to the structural risk factors for ethnic conflict, at least four political factors are significant, namely: (a) the nature of the political system (how fair the system is to various ethnic communities), (b) the dominant national ideology, (c) the level of ambitions of the ethnic groups, and (d) whether or not the national elites are manipulative and prone to use conflict or threat of conflict to further their goals.⁸

From the point of view of inter-ethnic policy, the nature of political systems in the Balkans is complicated, partly because of a complex interplay of the three political risk factors for conflict enumerated above. The dominant national ideologies of individual ethnic communities differ, however they generally aspire to ethnic homogenisation and, contrary to the dominant state policy parlance about civil national identities and multiculturalism, they appeal to ethnic, rather than civil conceptualisations of political activism. The ethnic agendas are highly ambitious, and strongly leadership-driven, generally intolerant of disobedience and dissent. The ethnic Albanian political class in Kosovo and Macedonia is inclined to a militaristic model of pursuing ethnic policy. All these factors make up a potentially lethal cocktail of militarism and intolerance, along with a flammable, sweeping regional political brinkmanship. This is why governments of the region are reluctant to conduct comprehensive decentralisations of decision-making, including decisions with direct impact on

⁶ For a related discussion of principles behind ethnic homogenisation see Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War”, *International Security*, vol. 18, no. 4, Spring 1994, pp. 5–39.

⁷ Gunther Fehlinger and Ekren Krasniqi, “Balkan ‘Benelux’ would speed up EU entry”, *EU Observer*, 19 June 2012, <http://euobserver.com/7/116669>.

⁸ For broader considerations see Arendt Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1977.

minority rights. The highly accentuated risk factors for ethnic conflict cause a sort of knee-jerk reaction by the fragile systems to fend off processes that might make them additionally vulnerable. In countries with ethnic communities that are politically ambitious, led by strong and manipulative national elites and prone to conflict, it is difficult to open up the political system for a radical regionalisation and institutional decentralisation — something that ethnic communities in most Balkan countries seek. While the majority populations perceive such processes as threats to institutional stability, abortive decentralisations increase the sense of frustration in the minorities, thus also increasing their internal radicalisation and homogenisation — the familiar dynamics of a security dilemma.⁹

When the Albanian ethnic policy is concerned, a particularly potent fuelling factor for its aggressive pursuit is the dominant national ideology, which is couched in ethno-politics. This ideology is completely opposed to any civil nationalism that is favoured by most “plural” democratic societies. The difference is well described by Jack Snyder:

Civic nationalism normally appears in well institutionalized democracies. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, appears spontaneously when an institutional vacuum occurs. By its nature, nationalism based on equal and universal citizenship rights within a territory depends on a supporting framework of laws to guarantee those rights, as well as effective institutions to allow citizens to give voice to their views. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, depends not on institutions, but on culture. Therefore, ethnic nationalism is the default option: it predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions are not fulfilling people’s basic needs, and when satisfactory alternative structures are not readily available.¹⁰

Although there are serious reasons to question the plausibility of “civic nationalism” from the point of view of human rights, especially in its Republican version, which Snyder evokes (i.e. because citizenship as an administratively defined source of rights, can be a source of discrimination, and may militate against the observance of certain “natural” rights), Snyder points here to a key element for understanding the ideological efficacy of the national project in small communities. This element is culture.¹¹

⁹ Barry Buzan, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict”, in: Michael Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993, pp. 103–24.

¹⁰ Jack Snyder, “Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State”, in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, p. 86.

¹¹ For a critique of “civic nationalism” see Aleksandar Fatić, “Ethnicity as a power phenomenon: The Balkans at a crossroads of nationalisms”, *Sfera*, No. 2, October 2000, pp. 12–5.

The political culture of most Balkan nations is highly hierarchical, leadership-oriented, and intolerant of internal dissent. Consequently, in times of crisis, Balkan political movements favour strong personalities and radical political agendas. The Albanian political parties are especially hierarchic: they flourish on a mixture of traditional patriarchy and a revolutionary mentality of national emancipation that sees it as a duty of all Albanians to be good soldiers for the national cause. Albanian ethnic elites, especially those in Kosovo, do not shy away from violence to secure obedience within the national ranks: this has been manifested in the “disappearances” of potential ICTY witnesses against the former paramilitary commander Ramush Haradinaj, who was eventually acquitted of all charges by ICTY in 2012.¹² The current Prime Minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, in many ways personifies both the national struggle and the perception of an unquestioned duty of all Albanians to stand by all the main political protagonists of the 1999 war with Serbia.¹³ Thaçi was the subject of investigation, in 2012, for the trade in organs harvested from Serbian victims of the 1999 conflict, which had been triggered by reports to the Council of Europe.¹⁴

Militant political cultures additionally catalyse threatening mutual perceptions between nations potentially in conflict in the Balkans. The Albanian political class has used a particular political history narrative as a pre-text for the generation of negative perceptions of other nations in all states populated by the ethnic Albanians in the Balkans. The narrative is that the Albanians derive from an indigenous Balkan tribe, Illyrians, who have allegedly been systematically marginalised by the “immigrants” to the region. These “immigrants” then created their own nation states, quietly imposing severe structural violence on the Albanians, who were thus turned into minorities, although they are numerically the strongest ethnic group in the

¹² Marlise Simons, “Former Kosovo Leader to Be Retried”, *The New York Times* (the New York edition), 22 July 2010, p. A12; Mark Tran, “War crimes court orders retrial of Kosovo leaders”, *The Guardian*, online edition, 21 July 2010, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/21/hague-orders-ramush-haradinaj-retrial; Aaron Gray-Block, “Kosovo ex-PM back in court for war crimes retrial”, *Reuters*, online edition, 18 August 2011, www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/18/us-warcimes-haradinajidUSTRE77H56X20110818.

¹³ “Profile: Hashim Thaci”, *BBC News*, online edition, 9 January 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7133515.stm>.

¹⁴ Ian Traynor, “Former war crimes prosecutor alleges Kosovan army harvested organs from Serb prisoners”, *The Guardian*, online edition, 12 April 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/12/warcimes.kosovo; Dick Marty, “Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo”, 12 December 2010, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf; “Kosovo organ trafficking: Williamson to head EU probe”, *BBC News*, 29 August 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14706242.

region. The narrative has helped launch a movement for national emancipation and far-reaching promises of a political regeneration of Albanian political influence. The Kosovo political elite does not hide its ambition to be the leader of this emancipation drive for all ethnic Albanian communities in the Balkans.

Although political discourse has often referred to a potential Albanian political “regeneration” through the creation of a “Greater Albania”, which in addition to Albania and Kosovo would include the whole of Macedonia with parts of Greece and Montenegro, the idea of a Greater Albania would be a very far-fetched political prospect for the Albanian political elites. The reasons are many, but the most important one lies in the very different views by Kosovo politicians and those from Albania on who should lead the movement, and disagreements with regard to the acceptable methods to be used to this end. Most politicians in Albania consider the more radical Kosovo politicians to be reckless risk-takers with unpredictable political demeanour, and like to maintain a healthy distance with them when the Albanian ethnic “mission” in the region is concerned, while formally supporting their struggle to consolidate Kosovo’s independence. Such policy goes hand-in-hand with the positions by Washington and the EU, who rule out any further adjustment of frontiers in the Balkans after Kosovo independence.

The crucial point often missed in discussions of the prospect of a Greater Albania is that such a state-building project is by no means necessary, and possibly not even desirable, for the realisation of the promised “political renaissance” of the Albanian people: such a renaissance is perfectly possible if there are two, three, or even four ethnic Albanian states in the Western Balkans, including, in addition to Albania and Kosovo, the whole or part of Macedonia, and possibly a part of Montenegro — the proposed “Balkan Benelux”. Such a cluster of states (or statelets) would secure the ethnic Albanian elites’ domination over the Western Balkans in the territorial and geostrategic realms, while at the same time allowing the maintenance of good relations with both Brussels and Washington, and a continuation on the road to EU membership by all states. Although with the global economic crisis the concrete perspective of such membership has become quite distant for the remaining countries of the Process of Stabilisation and Association (the “Eastern neighbourhood” of the European Union), the integration process makes sense for the Albanian politicians. Should it be fruitful, the Albanian ethnic states would have not one, but three votes within the EU, which would allow them a disproportionate influence on matters relevant to the entire Balkan region. At the same time, within the Western Balkans, the Albanian politicians would become the decisive factor in the solving of all regional matters, and the focus of regional decision-making would consequently shift

further to the South-East of the region.¹⁵ A map with the current two ethnic Albanian states (Albania and Kosovo) shaded in dark, with two additional volatile Albanian minorities in Macedonia and Montenegro (Greece is omitted as ethnic relations there are slightly different) is given below. It shows the focus of ethnic politics that has shifted to the very South-East of the region, away from Croatia, Serbia, and even Bosnia-Herzegovina.



Albanian people in the Balkans typically do not perceive themselves as national minorities in states other than Albania and Kosovo. Part of the reason for

¹⁵ For a broader consideration see John A. Vasquez, “Factors Related to the Contagion and Diffusion of International Violence”, in: Manus I. Midlarsky (ed.), *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 149–72.

this is in the relatively high numbers of the Albanian populations in these other states. However, the main reason is in the ideological and strategic matrix of the Albanian political class, which takes a strategically aggressive approach and conceptualises “the Albanian Question” as a regional Balkan issue whose solution is yet to commence through a sort of political unification of Albanians living in the various Balkan states. The first step towards such a unification would be taking control over the political systems of the region as a dominant, rather than a minority nation. This explains why the solving of the conflicts associated with “the Albanian Question” based on the agendas of guaranteed minority rights, which has been suggested many times, has proven unsuccessful.¹⁶

The “collectivisation” of perceptions of the significant others through conflict lenses, in light of an ambitious national strategy, is sometimes described as a “pathology of ethnicity” that characterises most ethnic conflicts; it is particularly pronounced in chronic conflicts characterised by a difficult progress towards a highly ambitious ethnic goal.¹⁷ This is why conflicts waged by Albanians in the Balkans have been permeated with highly emotional and value-laden perceptions of self and the other, and characterised by a strict discipline and a hierarchic structure of decision-making, starting with political agenda-setting, and progressing all the way to the execution of specific conflict actions. However, the conflicts are highly rational on a strategic level. They are by no means “tribal wars”, which is the simplistic way in which many western politicians and researchers have perceived Balkan conflicts.¹⁸ The perception was poignantly captured by the American Admiral James W. Nance who remarked: “Let them fight it out. They have been at it for a thousand years”.¹⁹

Albanian communities in the various parts of the Balkans have proven an ability to initiate a political and armed conflict in a highly controlled way, synchronised with the movements of the other Albanian communities in other parts of the region. They were also able to cease hostilities very quickly whenever continuing the fighting would jeopardise ongoing negotiations or any other part of the coordinated ethnic strategy. While Kosovo was awaiting first recognitions, the Albanian communities in Macedonia and the South of Serbia have completely ceased their attacks on the police and security forces of the two states. In other moments, when things needed to be “moved forward”, conflicts were

¹⁶ Jonathan Eyal, “Eastern Europe: What About the Minorities?“, *World Today*, vol. 45, no. 12, December 1989, pp. 205–8.

¹⁷ Alexander J. Groth, “Pathological Dimensions of Domestic and International Ethnicity”, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 110, no. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 69–82.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, “Lift, Lift, Contain”, *New York Times*, 4 June 1995, p. E15.

¹⁹ Tom Ashbrook, “US Weighs Solo Role, Multilateral Efforts”, *Boston Globe*, 3 May 1995, p. 1.

escalated in a coordinated manner. This makes it very clear that the Albanian ethnic strategy in the Balkans is by no means an irrational “thousand years old fight” arising from ancient hatreds, but a very precise and highly rational ethno-political strategy. With the relevant cultural and strategic elements in mind, it is clear that, although minority rights and the relevant institutions need to be strengthened (as this is part of the general democratisation of the region), the solution of “the Albanian Question” is possible only through proper political negotiations aiming at a compromise.

The economic context for conflict

Economic factors of ethnic conflict form a separate set of catalysts for the hostilities. They are typically divided into three groups: (a) problems of economic development, (b) discriminatory economic systems, and (c) challenges of economic transitions. The situation of the Albanian people in the Balkans is highly conducive to ethnic conflict in light of all three types of economic factors. All of the territories where Albanians live today are relatively poor (Greece, which until recently was an exception, is today in an exceptionally bad economic shape, with the unemployment rate of 21.9%).²⁰ All of the states populated by ethnic Albanians, except Greece, are new democracies, suffering from various degrees of transition trauma and undergoing a dramatic social restratification of the citizenry. In most of these states, economic liberalisation has gone hand-in-hand with controversial privatisations of state property and the resulting progressive concentration of ownership of resources in the hands of a few “tycoons”. In all of the Balkan countries poverty is a key issue for public policy, and in some it has been declared a threat to national security.²¹

Unemployment has been one of the most worrying consequences of the current global economic crisis, because it stifles strategies to attack the crisis by economic activity, which includes a maintenance of optimum levels of spending. In Spain, the fourth largest economy of the Eurozone, the current unemployment rate is 20%, and this is considered dramatic. On the other hand, in the Balkans, across the territories populated by the Albanian people, the unemployment rate over the years has hovered around 40–50%. In 2010, the official unemployment rate in Kosovo was 44%, and according to the Minister for Labour and Social Affairs, Nenad Rašić, the government saw no realistic options to approach the

²⁰ Louisa Peacock, “Greek unemployment hits record while French jobless rate reaches 10pc”, *The Telegraph*, 7 June 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/9316410/Greek-unemployment-hits-record-while-French-jobless-rate-reaches-10pc.html>.

²¹ Anti-poverty strategies have been declared instruments of national security in Serbia and Macedonia. See www.b92.net/info/izbori2012/vesti.php?yyyy=2012&mm=05&dd=27&nav_id=613228.

problem.²² Unemployment in Macedonia is officially at 31.8%,²³ in Albania it is between 35 and 40%, and in Serbia around 20%.²⁴ In most states of the Western Balkans the poverty rate is at or above 25%, which brings them on a par with Turkey.²⁵

When these figures are viewed in light of the enormous economic differences between members of the political class on the one hand, and the ordinary people on the other, the propensity by the Albanian ethnic elite to divert public attention towards patriotic sentiments, focused on the aim to consolidate the Kosovo independence and further the Albanian ethnic policy agenda across the region, emerges as instrumentally rational. In all of the Western Balkan states the Albanian population shares the difficult economic destiny of the majority populations. Bearing in mind the synergy of factors that trigger political and ethnic violence, all of which apply to the Albanian ethnic communities, the propensity by the Albanian ethnic elites to use conflict for the furtherance of their regional ethnic strategy is not surprising.

Ethnic Albanian-Macedonian crisis 2012

The April 2012 killing of five ethnic Macedonians near the Macedonian capital Skopje, dramatically raised the tensions between the ethnic Albanians and the majority Macedonians in this troubled country that has been a candidate for EU membership for nine years. The spree of violence, including street killings during 2011 and 2012, has marked the most critical point in Albanian-Macedonian ethnic relations since the war of rebellion the Albanians had waged on the Macedonian security forces in 2001.²⁶ The rationale for the 1991 conflict from the Albanian side was firmly imbedded in the historical narrative described earlier: the main goal was to declare Albanians the second “constitutive nation” of Macedonia, in addition to Macedonians (a status starkly different from that of a national minority). The main argument for this claim was that according to the

²² *Blic* daily, 10 August 2010, www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/202157/Rasic-Problem-nezaposlenosti-na-Kosovu-tesko-resiv.

²³ *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 15 May 2012, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/bih-sve-blize-makedoniji-po-nezaposlenosti>.

²⁴ “Unemployment rate increases to 23.7%”, *B92*, 16 January 2012, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics-article.php?yyyy=2012&mm=01&dd=16&nav_id=78314.

²⁵ *Euractiv*, 5 June 2012, www.euractiv.rs/srbija-i-eu/4190-smanjnje-nezaposlenosti-i-duga-prioritet-za-srbiju.html.

²⁶ Jeremy Druker, Joshua Boissevain, Ioana Caloianu, and Anna Shamanska, “Killings Raise Tensions in Macedonia”, *Transitions Online*, 16 April 2012, www.tol.org/client/article/23099-killings-raise-tensions-in-macedonia-corruption-sentences-in-the-czech-republic-.html.

2002 census ethnic Albanians made up 25.2% of the country's population, as opposed to 64.2% ethnic Macedonians.²⁷

Albanian demands for the political and administrative division of Macedonia date back to the initial ethnic Albanian insurgency in Kosovo, in the early 1980s. In the 1990s, during the bloody disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, these demands included the granting of the status of a constitutive nation rather than a national minority to ethnic Albanians in the newly independent Macedonia. As the demand was not met by the Macedonian government, the Albanians protested by boycotting the 1991 census and the referendum on Macedonia's independence that was held the same year. In 1992, the Macedonian Albanians held their own referendum and declared a "Republic of Illirida" in Western Macedonia. Soon afterwards that part of Macedonia was flooded by Albanian state symbols, including Albanian flags being placed on municipal office buildings. The movement for a "Republic of Illirida" culminated in 1995, with the establishment of an ethnic Albanian university in the town of Tetovo, which was outside the Macedonian state university system and posed all kinds of questions of legality and recognition of diplomas.

In the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo war in 1999 and the entrance by NATO troops into Kosovo, a part of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) moved to Macedonia and continued ethnic warfare under the name of the Liberation People's Army, claiming that they are fighting for the "unification of ethnic Albanian territories".²⁸ This led to an upsurge of conflict with the police and the Macedonian Army throughout 2000 and the first half of 2001, followed by civil unrest on the streets of the capital Skopje. With USA and EU mediation, the insurgents and the government signed the Ohrid Peace Agreement, in August 2001. The Agreement led to the cessation of hostilities followed by changes to the Macedonian Constitution, in November 2001, which gave the Albanian population the status of a second constitutive nation, reformed the local government accordingly, and created a model for the proportional representation of ethnic Albanians in central government.

At the 2002 parliamentary election, the radical Albanian Democratic Union for Reintegration received 70% of the ethnic Albanian vote — twice as many as the moderate Albanian Democratic Party. The Democratic Union for Reintegration was the political wing of the militant Liberation People's Army

²⁷ Joanne van Selm, "Macedonia: At a Quiet Crossroads", Migration Policy Institute, June 2007, www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=608.

²⁸ Nicholas Whyte, Nadia Alexandrova Arbatova, and Dana H. Allin, "The Macedonian Crisis and Balkan Security", *European Security Forum Working Paper*, No. 2, July 2001, www.ciaonet.org/wps/whn01/whn01.pdf, pp. 13–8.

(closely affiliated with the KLA, later to be renamed as the Albanian National Army) and was pushing for a federalisation of Macedonia. Already early in 2003, members of the Albanian National Army appeared in the media with a declaration that they no longer recognized the Ohrid Agreement and were set to continue a “liberation struggle”.

As a post-conflict society, Macedonia is a relatively unsuccessful example of democratisation as a strategy for maintaining the peace, because Macedonians and Albanians do not live as two parts of the same political community. Rather they are two worlds living apart.²⁹ This situation is further aggravated by the isolationism of the Albanian ethnic culture: 96% of Albanian men and women seek a spouse exclusively within their own ethnic community. This is made possible not only by the traditionalist, strongly patriarchal culture of the Albanian people, but also by the factual everyday divisions between Albanians and Macedonians: they each have their own cafés and pubs and almost never spend time together. Schools in Macedonia are organised on an ethnic principle. This means that Albanian and Macedonian children rarely meet and do not socialise together, with those encounters that do happen tending to end in fist fights. This leads to reasonable doubts about the feasibility of any future life together, within the same political system.³⁰ In Macedonian schools, even teachers have separate meeting rooms on an ethnic basis: one for the Albanians, and one for Macedonian teachers. In fact the institutional and practical arrangements of Albanian-Macedonian “life together” in the modern Macedonia can be described as a self-imposed ethnic apartheid.

The most recent Albanian political demand in Macedonia concerns the name of the Macedonian state. Initially the Albanian ethnic leaders did not pay much attention to “the name issue” in the context of the conflict between Skopje and Athens over the name “Macedonia”. Albanian politicians were of the view that Skopje’s insistence of the name “Macedonia” should not go as far as to jeopardise Macedonia’s integration into NATO.³¹ However, in 2011 and 2012 the Albanian political parties in Macedonia actively joined the debate over the state’s name with the demand that the future “final” name must reflect not just the Macedonian, but also the Albanian identity of the country.³² This demand, which

²⁹ Thorsten Gromes, “Between Impositions and Promises: Democracy in Macedonia”, *PRIF Report*, No. 91, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, pp. 25–7.

³⁰ See more Ljubica Grozdanovska, “Class Struggle”, *Transitions Online*, 1 October 2007, www.tol.org/client/article/19030-class-struggle.html.

³¹ Zhidas Daskalovski, “Macedonia”, in: *Nations in Transit 2009*, Freedom House, New York, 2008, pp. 353–4.

³² Mikhail Yambaev, “Will Macedonia become the third Albanian state in the Balkans?”, Strategic Cultural Foundation, 11 March 2011, www.strategic-culture.org/news/2011/03/11/will-macedonia-become-the-third-albanian-state.html.

has been voiced at the same time when five Macedonians angling at a lake were randomly murdered “execution style” by, as the police investigation has since shown, a group of Albanian extremists, might spur the fury of the majority population and lead to new tensions. In turn, such an angry reaction by the Macedonian public could be used by the ethnic Albanian leaders as an argument for the claim that Albanians in Macedonia can no longer realise their collective political rights without further constitutional concessions being made by the majority. This process would escalate tensions in yet another security dilemma in this state captured by ethno-political conflict.

Solving “the Albanian Question” in the Balkans

Most Balkan states that have either been directly affected by, or have indirectly felt the impact of, the Kosovo war in 1999, including Serbia and Macedonia, have debated many times the issue of whether or not to negotiate with ethnic Albanian leaders when they use conflict as a dominant means of furthering their national agendas in the respective countries. For the Balkan countries, this question has had a very similar meaning to that of whether to negotiate with terrorists in the western political discourse. Just like the “no negotiations with terrorists” policy that was formally adopted by most western democracies after 9/11, attempts not to negotiate with militant Albanians in the Balkans have proven unsuccessful.³³ Ted Honderich has explained the reasons for the failure of “no negotiations with terrorists” policy by pointing to the fact that at the base of most appalling terrorist attacks often lie collective interests which, in and of themselves are *legitimate*. According to Honderich, often the political articulation of such legitimate, and sufficiently pressing interests is blocked, either by a global marginalisation of the relevant population (the case in the Middle East), or by a practical unlikelihood that, although formally articulated, they would be effectively addressed. In such situations resorting to conflict by those marginalised has been the rule. With conflicts of the described type experience has shown that negotiations have tended to yield far better results than the “no negotiations policy”. In Northern Ireland negotiations with the IRA, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement of 10 April 1998, have stopped the bloodshed that at times had escalated to urban warfare. The negotiations have achieved what no amount of repression could. Even the British military occupation of Northern Ireland, with all the commitment of resources, had not been able to bring even

³³ On the lack of success of “no negotiations with terrorists” from a principled and theoretical point of view, see Ted Honderich, *After the Terror*, Expanded and Revised Edition, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003.

a temporary halt to the conflict. To say that negotiations had no real alternative in the Northern Ireland is not, of course, to suggest that IRA terror was legitimate as a means, or that those responsible for terror acts should be relieved of moral or criminal responsibility. However, the underlying political interests behind the terror campaign were obviously legitimate, and the many years of violence have been perhaps the clearest example in Europe after World War Two of how ethnic (and/or religious) insurgency cannot be put out without the prime role being accorded to diplomacy and negotiations.

After the publication of Honderich's book (along with an avalanche of publications with similar arguments that followed it), and their own experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US government have, practically, abolished the "no negotiations with terrorists" policy, although they have not retracted the principle formally. Today negotiations are underway with the Taliban in Pakistan about the conditions for the ceasure of violence and an optimum of Islamist demands that could reasonably be met. These concern both the region's strategic situation (Taliban demands for the withdrawal of US troops) and the social order to be imposed in some of the Gulf States and parts of Pakistan itself (mainly revolving around the imposition of Islamic law).

Although ethnic Albanian leaders have been at the forefront of much ethnic insurgency in the second half of the 20th and early 21th century in the Balkans, and some of their methods were at times formally classified as terrorist, negotiations with them have never practically stopped. Part of the reason for this is that after 9/11 terrorism has tended to be perceptually connected with radical Islam, while the Albanian people had never brandished religious radicalism. However, in the Western Balkans negotiations with Albanians have not always been conducted sincerely and appreciatively of their legitimate interests and strategic ambitions that lie behind political violence committed on their behalf.

The most obvious such case have been negotiations between the Serbian Government and Kosovo Albanian leaders, in 2006 and 2007, under the mediation of former Finnish President Marti Ahtisaari. These negotiations immediately preceded Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, and were essentially characterised by a refusal of the Serbian side to either take full account of the Albanian ethnic project and strategy in the Western Balkans, or to fully appreciate the likelihood that this strategy might succeed through international support and cohesive local ethnic mobilisation. Instead of addressing these "real" issues, the Serbian negotiators myopically focused on a "legalism" that was in fact a mere positivistic normativism. The Serbian negotiation team's approach was completely unresponsive to pragmatic concerns. Serb negotiators did not talk to Albanian intellectuals, and they deliberately refused to even inform their strategy by the demographics at the

time. Instead, Belgrade's negotiators stressed multilateral diplomacy, focusing on the UN, while almost completely neglecting bilateral lobbying and, more importantly, substantive discussions with Albanian leaders. Today it is clear that the Serbian strategy was fundamentally mistaken and ultimately counterproductive.

The result of Serbia's negotiation strategy in the aftermath of massive police violence against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo under Slobodan Milošević, in the 1980s and 1990s, was loss of territory and a fast consolidation of Kosovo's independence through quick bilateral recognitions that followed already in 2008 and 2009. In a way, this illustrates the odds of engaging in a "zero-sum game" conflict with the Albanian ethnic strategy in the region.

Macedonian government's strategy is different: it appears to vacillate between waging war (as in 2001) and granting major concessions through dramatic constitutional changes. Nevertheless, Macedonia continues to exist on a proverbial sword's edge of open ethnic conflict.

Neither of the two strategies have been effective because they have failed to address what really lies behind the ethnic Albanian project in the Balkans, and that is a consolidation of political influence in all four states depicted in the map presented in this paper, while moving towards a further EU integration and a NATO membership for Kosovo. With Albania already a member of NATO and with Macedonia well underway to membership, with Serbia the only state that under a strong Russian influence as the non-NATO island in the region, such ethnic strategy must be addressed by the governments of Macedonia (and potentially of Montenegro) in a structurally different way than has been the case so far. It is likely that such a novel approach would need to go along with the *structure* of the ethnic Albanian project in the Western Balkans: it would involve not only constitutional, but also territorial concessions within broader institutional contexts, such as regional conferences resulting in territorial swaps that are guaranteed by the major powers. While a future Macedonian (and possibly Montenegrin) Dayton-like agreement with ethnic Albanian leaders may be a nightmare scenario for Macedonian and Montenegrin politicians, it is likely the only way to prevent the reoccurrence of Kosovo and the 1999 Albanian-Serbian war elsewhere in the Balkans.

The "Albanian Question" is not a matter of ethnic hatred dating back to time immemorial; it is a potent, coherent and well developed ethno-political project that dominates the entire security perspective in the Western Balkans. The only way to address conflicts that this project inevitably engenders is to draw internationally certified agreements on territorial settlements, and this involves new border adjustments in the Western Balkans.

References

1. *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 15 May 2012, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/makale/bih-sve-blize-makedoniji-po-nezaposlenosti>.
2. Ashbrook, Tom (1995), "US Weighs Solo Role, Multilateral Efforts", *Boston Globe*, 3 May, p. 1.
3. *B92*, "Unemployment rate increases to 23.7%", 16 January 2012, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politicsarticle.php?yyyy=2012&mm=01&dd=16&nav_id=78314.
4. *BBC News*, "Profile: Hashim Thaci" (2008), online edition, 9 January, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7133515.stm>.
5. *BBC News*, "Kosovo organ trafficking: Williamson to head EU probe", 29 August 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14706242.
6. *Blic daily*, 10 August 2010, www.blic.rs/Vesti/Drustvo/202157/Rasic-Problem-nezaposlenosti-na-Kosovu-tesko-resiv.
7. Brown, E. Michael (1996), (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
8. Buzan, Barry (1993), "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict", in: Michael Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, pp. 103–24.
9. Daskalovski, Zhidas (2008), "Macedonia", in: *Nations in Transit 2009*, Freedom House, New York, pp. 353–4.
10. Druker, J., Boissevain, J., Caloianu, I., and Shamanska, A. (2012), "Killings Raise Tensions in Macedonia", *Transitions Online*, 16 April, www.tol.org/client/article/23099-killings-raise-tensions-in-macedonia-corruption-sentences-in-the-czech-republic-.html.
11. *Euractiv*, 5 June 2012, www.euractiv.rs/srbija-i-eu/4190-smanjenje-nezaposlenosti-i-duga-prioritet-za-srbiju.html.
12. Eastern Europe: What About the Minorities?“, *World Today* 45(12): 205–8.
13. Fatić, Aleksandar (2000), "Ethnicity as a power phenomenon: The Balkans at a crossroads of nationalisms", *Sfera* 2: 12–5.
14. Fehlinger, Gunther and Krasniqi, Ekrem (2012), "Balkan 'Benelux' would speed up EU entry", *EU Observer*, 19 June, <http://euobserver.com/7/116669>.
15. Friedman, L. Thomas (1995), "Lift, Lift, Contain", *New York Times*, 4 June, p. E15.
16. Gray-Block, Aaron (2011), "Kosovo ex-PM back in court for war crimes retrial", *Reuters*, online edition, 18 August, www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/18/us-warcrimes-haradinaj-idUSTRE77H56X20110818.
17. Gromes, Thorsten (2009), "Between Impositions and Promises: Democracy in Macedonia", *PRIF Report*, No. 91, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 25–7.
18. Groth, J. Alexander (1995), "Pathological Dimensions of Domestic and International Ethnicity", *Political Science Quarterly* 110(1): 69–82.

19. Grozdanovska, Ljubica (2007), "Class Struggle", *Transitions Online*, 1 October, www.tol.org/client/article/19030-class-struggle.html.
20. Honderich, Ted, *After the Terror*, Expanded and Revised Edition, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003.
21. Lijphart, Arendt *Democracy in Plural Societies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1977.
22. Marty, Dick (2010), "Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo", 12 December, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, http://assembly.coe.int/CommitteeDocs/2010/20101218_ajdoc462010provamended.pdf;
23. Peacock, Louisa (2012), "Greek unemployment hits record while French jobless rate reaches 10pc", *The Telegraph*, 7 June, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/9316410/Greek-unemployment-hits-record-while-French-jobless-rate-reaches-10pc.html>.
24. Rule, B. James (1988), *Theories of Civil violence*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
25. Selm, Joanne (2007), "Macedonia: At a Quiet Crossroads", Migration Policy Institute, June, www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=608.
26. Simons, Marlise (2010), "Former Kosovo Leader to Be Retried", *The New York Times* (the New York edition), 22 July, p. A12;
27. Snyder, Jack (1993), "Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State", in Michael E. Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
28. Tran, Mark (2010), "War crimes court orders retrial of Kosovo leaders", *The Guardian*, online edition, 21 July, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/21/hague-orders-ramush-haradinaj-retrial.
29. Traynor, Ian (2008), "Former war crimes prosecutor alleges Kosovan army harvested organs from Serb prisoners", *The Guardian*, online edition, 12 April, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/12/warcrimes.kosovo.
30. Van Evera, Stephen (1994), "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War", *International Security* 18(4): 5–39.
31. Vankovska, Biljana (1999), "Between Preventive Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution: The Macedonian Perspective on the Kosovo Crisis", International Studies Association 40th Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., 17–20 February, <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/biljana.htm>.
32. Vasquez, A. John (1992), "Factors Related to the Contagion and Diffusion of International Violence", in: Manus I. Midlarsky (ed.), *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, Routledge, London, pp. 149–72.
33. Whyte, Nicholas, Arbatova A. Nadia, and Allin, H. Dana (2001), "The Macedonian Crisis and Balkan Security", *European Security Forum Working Paper 2*, July, www.ciaonet.org/wps/whn01/whn01.pdf, pp. 13–8.

34. Yambaev, Mikhail (2011), “Will Macedonia become the third Albanian state in the Balkans?”, Strategic Cultural Foundation, 11 March, www.strategic-culture.org/news/2011/03/11/will-macedonia-become-the-third-albanian-state.html.
35. Zartman, I. William (1995), “Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse”, in: I. William Zartman (ed.) *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colorado, pp. 1–11.