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# BALKAN NATIONALISM AFTER 1989

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Since the end of the 1980s, a growing tendency of nationalism has dominated Balkan society. Most observers of Balkan affairs have fixed their eyes on phases in which mutually antagonistic, usually violent, nationalist movements have clashed and collided with each other. By doing so, they tend to neglect more subtle, but at the same time hazardous to daily life, aspects of the phenomenon. What must be seriously reconsidered now is the "other side of the story" of the "Balkan tragedy." Concretely speaking, the question lies in how the social situation of ethnic minorities has changed in these past ten years. In this paper, firstly, the author tries to find out a common tendency of nationalist pressure that threatens the existence of the Roma community in the Balkans as a whole. Then, the examination will focus on the distinctive features of nature of the contemporary Balkan nationalism. Finally, the effect of the "humanitarian" intervention will be brought into inquiry.

## THE DETERIORATION OF THE SOCIAL SITUATION OF THE ROMA

The Roma are a European ethnic group with their own unique history and culture.<sup>1</sup> Eastern Europe, especially the Balkans, is the most densely populated area of the Roma people. The number of Roma in Europe is estimated to be some eight million.<sup>2</sup> They are more numerous than such Balkan "nations" as Albanians, Bosnians, Slovenians and Croatians. However, their ethnic rights, even their right of existence, are not properly respected and have not got proper protection.

The Roma are a diasporic people. They reside in almost every part of Eastern Europe, both in urban and rural areas. Their pattern of habitation is analogous to such peoples as Jews and Armenians. In contrast, however, the

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1 We must be careful in defining the Roma an ethnic group. As a Yugoslav researcher points out, there is a much wider gap between self-identification and identification given by others for the Roma than for other groups (Aleksandra Mitrovic, "Social Position of the Roma in Serbia," in Center for Anti-War Action, ed., *The Roma in Serbia* (Beograd, 1998), p.22). In the case of the Stolipinovo Roma, while those who confess the Orthodox faith identify themselves as Roma, the Muslims, almost without exception, claim themselves as ethnic Turks.

2 Международен комитет за правата на малицинствата, *Ромите европейско малицинство* (1996, София), С.10. Almost half of the total European Roma live in the Balkans. Their number is estimated approximately at 4 million: among them, 90,000-100,000 are in Albania, 40,000-50,000 in Bosnia & Hercegovina, 700,000-800,000 in Bulgaria, 30,000-40,000 in Croatia, 160,000-200,000 in Greece, 220,000-260,000 in Macedonia (FYROM), 1,800,000-2,500,000 in Romania, 400,000-450,000 in Yugoslavia (including Kosovo), 8,000-10,000 in Slovenia, and 300,000-500,000 in Turkey.

Roma do not have their own “national homeland,” and there is thus no authority to protect the Roma’s rights in the international political scene. The Roma people are almost defenseless both in the domestic dimension and in the international context. That is, the Roma can be called one of the most vulnerable social elements in Eastern Europe, and we can see in them most vividly how difficult the life of a minority, or a defenseless people, is. They are, in a sense, a measure to assess the degree to which respective societies realize the principles of pluralism and democracy.

There is no doubt that the Roma are one of the most oppressed victims of the political and social transitions in the Balkans, especially in the former socialist countries, in the 1990s. They are deprived of most of their original rights and are directly threatened with extinction by the surrounding ethnic majorities. Roma throughout the Balkans have been subjected to beatings and other cruelty and ill-treatment including by law-enforcement officers. Usually such treatment is racially motivated, and many human rights advocates in fact regard the ill-treatment of the Roma as one of the major human rights problems in the Balkans.<sup>3</sup>

After 1989, in most of the Balkans, the transition period was accompanied by negative side-effects such as increase in crime rates, high unemployment and the demoralization of society. In such complicated circumstances, the ones who suffered the most were the Roma. In all the Balkan countries, the Roma are the most economically oppressed ethnic group. The unemployment rate of the Roma is usually several times higher than that of other ethnic groups. In addition to the economic difficulties, strong anti-Roma propaganda damaged the social position of the Roma even further. The major role in this negativity has been played by the mass-media. A perception of the Roma as “criminals” was widely promoted by radio, television, and newspapers. The most widespread stereotypes were: the Roma are lazy and irresponsible - they are not able to engage in long term employment; the Roma are bad parents - they abuse their wives and sell their children; the Roma have low morality - they are brothel-keepers, prostitutes and drug dealers; the Roma are a criminal group -x they are murderers, burglars, rapists and thieves.<sup>4</sup> The last stereotype notion deserves special attention. Several surveys on public opinion reflect the view that Roma activities are the main reasons for crime. The Roma were described as thieves, black marketers, swindlers, and murderers.<sup>5</sup>

In a study on the image of the Roma in the Balkan media, Mariana Lenkova points out that, despite a common hostile attitude shared by the media of all the Balkan countries, Bulgaria and Romania are the worst cases.<sup>6</sup>

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3 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Annual Report 1998*, <http://www.ihf-hr.org/reports/ar98>

4 *Turks, Pomaks and Roma in Bulgaria after 1989*.

5 Mariana Lenkova, *Black & White v/s Diversity, The Image of the Roma in the Balkan Media*, [www.grocities.com/Paris/5121/blackandwhite.htm](http://www.grocities.com/Paris/5121/blackandwhite.htm)

6 *Ibid.*

There are constant references to the ethnic origin of the criminals whenever a crime has been committed by the Roma in Bulgaria. Bulgarian media has a strong tendency of presenting Roma criminals as “blood-thirsty sub-humans,” who commit crimes which no Bulgarian would ever commit. The Roma are also described as inborn thieves; the most popular profession of Roma is burglary. Thus, on the basis of such distorted information, the mass-media strengthens the traditional anti-Roma image.<sup>7</sup> The popular notion that the fall of the communist regime would remove the barrier to European standards of life in the Balkans came true only in the sense that the crime rate rose to that of European levels. The media used this to reinforce the sense of Bulgaria as a nation victimized by Roma criminals, and thus encouraged widespread hostility towards the Roma. The situation in Romania hardly differs from that of Bulgaria. The Romanian media is characterized by a profound “hate speech” against the Roma. The Roma are presented as criminals who have an innate propensity towards asocial behavior, and the public is led to believe that all Roma are criminals and dishonest people who cannot be trusted.

Although there are differences in intensity, the Balkan media in general acts to reinforce a widespread and deep prejudice in the respective societies against the Roma. After examining the situation, Lenkova poses a deep concern that the tendency of the media to adopt the prevalent anti-Roma attitudes may lead to open conflicts between the Roma and non-Roma.<sup>8</sup> This fear could hardly be considered groundless, and in fact such conflicts have already been occurring in almost all parts of Balkan society, as we will see later.

The creation of these stereotypes has not only been provoked by the media. Political figures and law-enforcement officers play their roles as well. Nationalist-oriented political parties as well as former communists have utilized the negative image of Roma as a tool to encourage a sense of victimization of the nation, and to stir up fear of a national crisis. Law enforcement officers, especially the local police, brutally persecute the Roma population. Crimes in which Roma are involved are apt to be distinguished as a “Roma case,” and are also apt to be prosecuted more severely than the crimes committed by members of other ethnic groups. They intentionally disseminate anti-Roma propaganda not only to justify the use of force, but also to discredit any allegations that its use is abusive.<sup>9</sup> The local administration authorities are also committed to discriminative policy toward the Roma. The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights describes the maltreatment of Roma in Albania as follows:

The major problems of the Albanian Roma included arbitrary police harassment in various forms such as beatings in public and in detention, and extor-

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7 Kamelia Angelova, “The Portrayal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Bulgarian Mainstream Print Media, Oct. 1997-March 1998,” in ACCESS, *Balkan Neighbours, News Letter 1998* 3, pp.34-35.

8 Lenkova, op. cit.

9 Amnesty International, AI Index EUR 15/04/94 Distr: SC/PO.

tion. While relations between the Roma and the Albanian majority population were not characterized by violent racism analogous to that in many other east or central European countries (e.g., Bulgaria and Slovakia), the Roma were often discriminated against by municipal authorities responsible for social services, the provision of municipal infrastructure and health care. Such discrimination was often justified as a way to encourage the Roma to “preserve their culture” and traditional way of life which Albanians often professed to admire. Roma men also faced discrimination in the military and Roma children in schools.<sup>10</sup>

In such a hostile atmosphere, the Roma have been easily subjected to acts of racial violence. Many Roma fell victim to racially-motivated attacks, both by the police and by extremists among the majority population. There were at least two police raids on Roma neighborhoods in Bulgaria during 1997, and in at least two other cases Roma were the victims of organized mob violence. On 4 February, masked police officers raided the Roma neighborhood in Pazardjik, beating some 60 people and breaking furniture. The raid presented an act of revenge against the Roma who were allegedly guilty of three store robberies. No officer has ever been punished for this. Darina Naidenova, a Rom, complained that she had been tortured with “falaka” (hitting the soles of feet with a hard object) in the police station in Vulchedrum on 14 April. The police had accused her of stealing hens. A similar case was reported from the same police station in June. No investigation was undertaken. On 5 April in Sredno Selo, near Veliko Turnovo, five Roma accused of stealing calves were tied to a fence in the village center and severely beaten by a mob of 100-120 villagers. The police took the victims to hospital after two hours, but did not initiate any investigations on the mass beating.<sup>11</sup>

### ATROCITIES AGAINST THE ROMA IN THE 1990s

Among the most grave incidents to occur after the fall of Socialism were cases of massive violence against the Roma population. Most such attacks were motivated by some form of nationalist sentiment. First of all, attacks by Neo-Nazi type younger age groups must be mentioned. Reports on this type of atrocities are most frequent in Bulgaria. And this type of atrocities, though to a lesser extent, are observed almost everywhere in the Balkans. For example, in Albania, where it is said that the discrimination against the Roma is least developed among the Balkan states, attacks by armed teenagers inspired by racist motives against the Roma are reported.<sup>12</sup>

There is another type of anti-Roma violence. This type of violence deserves more attention, as it is conducted by masses of ordinary people, not some

10 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Report 1998*, op. cit.

11 Ibid.

12 Artan Puto, “Balkan Neighbours in the Albanian Press, Oct.1997-March 1998,” in ACCESS, *Balkan Neighbours, News Letter 1998 3*, p.13.

limited groups of radical racist-extremists. In Romania, violent attacks against the Roma population followed the dismantling of the Ceaucescu regime. On January 1990, three houses of Roma families were burnt down in Reghin, a village in the central area in Transylvania, followed by a similar attack in Lunga in Western Transylvania, in which six Roma resident houses were burned down and four Roma were killed. In the same month, thirty-five Roma houses were destroyed in Satu Mare. In April of the same year, similar anti-Roma atrocities were witnessed in Seica Mare and Cîlnic.<sup>13</sup> These events, however, were no more than a chapter in the endless story of the Romanian Roma's catastrophic drama.

On April 1991, a mass attack by Romanian villagers on their Roma neighbors broke out in Bolintin Deal, a village about 60 kilometers north-west of Bucharest. The murder of a Romanian student by a Rom ignited furious anger among Romanian villagers. Romanians attacked Roma residences burning down eighteen houses and badly damaging twenty-six more. A "gypsy pogrom" soon spread over the neighboring villages. The next month, eleven Roma houses were destroyed in Bolintin Vale, and fourteen more were added to the list in the next village. All these atrocities were carried out in a well-organized, massive act of the Romanian villagers.<sup>14</sup>

The cruelty revealed in Roma "pogroms" is not a national trait unique to Romanians. There is no difference between nations as far as the Roma pogroms are concerned. In Transylvania, where a Hungarian element is dominant, Hungarians also organized massive attacks against Roma. One of these cases, witnessed in 1992, in Harghita prefecture of Transylvania, was a crime committed by numerous Hungarian members of a village community. On the night when the attack was carried out, Hungarian villagers gathered in the parish church, where they discussed the plot in detail. The parish priest not only offered the villagers a place for gathering, but also prayed to God for the success of their plans.<sup>15</sup>

Bulgarian residents behaved in the same manner when they massively attacked a Roma population. There are many reports of mass attacks against Roma in Bulgaria, including the one cited above. The following information concerning the mass beating of Roma illustrates how Bulgarian villagers, joined by police officers, conducted Roma persecution.

Torture and other ill-treatment of Roma in Glushnik: During the night of 3 November 1993 a group of around 40 Roma men, women and children from the village of Topolchane, in the Sliven region, went to gather grapes illegally in the vineyards of the neighboring village of Glushnik. At around midnight 20 of the Roma were apprehended by a police officer from Zhelyu Voivoda and three armed men... and the detained Roma were locked up in a pigsty in

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13 Isabal Fonseca, *Bury Me Standing, The Gypsies and Their Journey* (1995), p.141.

14 *Ibid.*, pp.148-152.

15 *Ibid.*, p.164.

Glushnik. At around 7 am on 4 November the tolling of the church bells summoned all the people of the village to the pigsty where the Roma had been detained. One of the detainees... was taken out of the pigsty, and the people started to beat him with fists and sticks... Three other Roma managed to escape from the village. The remaining 16 Roma were taken out of the pigsty one by one and tied to a metal fence with their hands held behind their backs. They were then beaten by a police sergeant and villagers. The village Mayor... reportedly also took part in the beatings of some of the Roma. Two of the Roma who were reportedly beaten were children... aged 11, and... 14. During the beatings, the Roma women... were reportedly threatened with rape... At around noon, a police patrol, contacted by the Roma who had earlier fled from the village, arrived in Glushnik and took the detained Roma to an office where they were issued with affidavits on the committed offense and were subsequently released.<sup>16</sup>

This report vividly shows how an entire community committed this atrocity, as well as how easily a minor offense ignited ethnic hatred against the Roma minority. There is no doubt that such a minor offense as the illegal gathering of grapes was not the real cause of the mass violence, but that it only disguised the real reason, which could be described as an increasing nationalistic hatred against the Roma. In the eyes of the Bulgarian villagers, the thing that deserved to be punished in the above mentioned case was not the actual theft, but the very fact that the ones who committed the theft were Roma.

The following report illustrates another case of cruelty in a Bulgarian community, and suggests that anti-Roma sentiment is deeply rooted in Bulgaria,

Racial attacks against the Roma of Dolno Belotintsi: The attacks on, and harassment of, the Roma community of Dolno Belotintsi reportedly began on 25 February 1994 after a soldier, who had deserted from his unit, robbed and murdered Piarvan Geraskov, a 70-year-old resident of the village. The soldier, who is a Rom, was caught by the villagers and handed over to the police. That evening a series of attacks against Roma homes began to force the Roma community, numbering around 20 families, to leave the village. Roma homes were broken into, the windows were smashed and furniture and other household belongings were deliberately destroyed. Many homes broken into were empty at the time with their inhabitants having fled in fear. Later in the night a group of men from the village, armed with guns, knives, axes, pitch forks and stakes, forced around 12 Roma to leave their homes and ordered them to march to Nikolovo, a village some three kilometers away, and back. Most of the Roma forced on this march were women with children who had not fled from the village. One of them... marched together with her 10-day-old baby. During the march they were insulted with racist slurs, threatened that they would be thrown off the bridge and some of the women were threatened with sexual

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16 Amnesty International, *Report*, EUR 15/04/94.

assaults. The attacks continued with the same intensity for the next two days. On 26 February, at the funeral of Piarvan Geraskov, some people among the mourners shouted: "Death to Gypsies!" and a village meeting was convened that evening at the square. Gencho Petrov Kolev, the village mayor, and other villagers spoke at the meeting about the Roma in general terms and how the village was victimized by the growing rate of crimes committed by members of the Roma community. Emil Makaveev reportedly spoke holding a knife in front of the microphone, saying: "No Gypsy will leave the village alive." Again, cries of "Death to the Gypsies!" were repeated. A letter was sent from the meeting to the President of the Republic demanding that the Gypsies of Dolno Belotintsi be expelled from the village and that the moratorium on the carrying out of death penalty be lifted... That night [eight Roma] homes... were attacked and damaged in acts of anti-Roma violence...<sup>17</sup>

This village has a population of 1,200, of which between 80 to 100 residents are Roma. The Bulgarian villagers have lived next to their Roma neighbors for a long time, however this relatively long and peaceful cohabitation did not serve as a psychological barrier to deter them from this attack. Rather, in the post-Communist era of heightened anti-Roma tensions, what might have been treated as an isolated crime of an individual instead escalated into a vigorous assault on the entire Roma community. Influenced by rapidly growing nationalistic sentiments, the violation by a Rom, particularly in this village, where the two communities had existed side by side, instigated and also invigorated a feeling of betrayal that in turn spun out of control into a mass attack on the Roma.

The case of Dolno Belotintsi is particularly distressing. No strong objections to the violence were presented at these meetings, in which almost the entire community took part. This particular case is striking, then, not only for the overwhelming participation of the villagers, but also for the fact that it was authorized by the autonomous village institution, which gave the attack an air of legitimacy. We are thus prompted to ask if the advocacy of democracy and democratic institutions have an effect on establishing a civil society in the Balkans? Or, could it be that democracy, or a democratic way of decision-making, might only have enforced the traditional soil of ethnic discrimination? The next example illustrates for us the need to examine this question even further,

During the winter the Chinguines [Roma] were a positive pecuniary advantage to the villagers; but when spring came, and their herds found fodder in the pasture-lands, they had more milk and butter to sell at Varna, realized more money, and were therefore less dependent upon the village. The Rayahs [Bulgarians] then called an assembly of the notables, in which it was decided that as the Gypsies' cattle was then feeding upon their grazing land without paying for the privilege, and as they bought but little from the village, it would

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17 Ibid.



be well to give them a hint to quit. This hint was conveyed in the most delicate manner by burning their houses over their heads one night, without any previous notice, and the poor Gypsies left...<sup>18</sup>

This observation does not date from the 1990s but from the middle of the 19th century, and we yet can notice a striking resemblance between this case and that of Dolno Belotintsi in 1994. In both cases, an institution of village autonomy (a village meeting or a meeting of notables) only served to justify and authorize the atrocities.

Roma pogroms are often regarded as a tradition. And it might also seem as if Bulgarian rural society has not changed notably for hundred years. However, the coincidence of these patterns of community behavior regarding the “pogroms” rather leads us to the question: is it possible that the great transformations in the twentieth century had not affected even slightly the traditional society in the Balkans? The answer is, of course, no. The author proposes another interpretation, that is, that the changes in the post-communist period prepared the emergence of monstrous nationalistic society wearing a traditional mask. Emotional reactions to the communist regime often denied all the principles that communists advocated, including those universal values that are not exclusively communist components. Sometimes, the principle of equality was also attacked as being a component of communism.<sup>19</sup> Instead of these values, many people took up pre-communist principles, and most of these were complacent and ethno-centric, peculiar to the Balkans.

### THE BASIC SENTIMENTS BEHIND THE PERSECUTION OF ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS

The transition from a planned to a market economy brought a new complexity into everyday life. The difficulties were experienced by all the ethnic elements in the society, but the intensity of the hardships for different ethnic groups varied significantly. According to an official survey in 1992, the total unemployment rate in Bulgaria was 8.3%. While the unemployment rate of ethnic Bulgarians was 7.5%, that of ethnic Turks was 13.9%, and that of the Roma, 20.1%.<sup>20</sup> Ethnic minorities suffered more than the majority, and the Roma suffered the most among them. In 1994, 76% of working age Roma were unemployed.<sup>21</sup>

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18 S. Clair & Charles Brophy, *Twelve Year's Study of the Eastern Question in Bulgaria* (London, 1869), p.8.

19 Interestingly, for some people in Bulgaria, the term “communist” is a strong hate term.

20 Република България, Национален статистически институт, *Резултати от преброяването на населението*, том 1 (София, 1994).

21 Ilona Tomova, *The Gypsies in the Transition Period* (Sofia, 1995), p.71. The lowest proportion is in Sofia (62%), while the highest (81%) occurs in rural areas. This gap in economic opportunities between urban and rural areas may partly explain the motives that drive the mass influx to the urban Roma ghettos.

Most Roma lived in ghetto-type separate communities on the outskirts of towns throughout the Balkans. Their housing standards were generally very low. Poor sanitation and food quality resulted in illnesses among the Roma inhabitants. Despite such misery, growing numbers of Roma who resided in other parts of urban area with the majority Bulgarians have migrated to "Tzigan-ska mahalla (Roma Ghetto)."<sup>22</sup> Stolipinovo, the largest Bulgarian "Tzigan-ska mahalla," is a typical example telling us about the contemporary life of Roma.

In the early 1970s, the government intended to create a model district on the outskirts of Plovdiv, the second largest city in Bulgaria, where ethnic minorities could merge into a Bulgarian nation. Roma, Turks, Jews, and Armenians, together with Bulgarians, were forced to live in this place. The authorities destroyed many small Roma living quarters around Plovdiv and forced them to move to Stolipinovo. The expectation that dwelling together in a modern standard-of-living would gradually reduce the ethnic identity of Roma was betrayed.<sup>23</sup>

As Bulgarians and other ethnic elements moved out of this district, Stolipinovo became more and more ethnically uniform. The fall of communist rule only precipitated this process. Now, some thirty thousand Roma (or correctly speaking, "Tziganin," because two thirds of its population identify themselves as ethnic Turks, though the others, including Turks, consider and call them "Tziganin") constitute the population. The appearance of Stolipinovo is the same as the other ordinary residential complexes in Bulgarian cities. All the apartment buildings are built in an orderly fashion, having the same shape and the same height. However, a closer look allows us to notice several irregularities. Most of the living quarters are dilapidated, with garbage piles scattered here and there, and roads covered with mud mixed with horse urine (as horse carts are used here daily), and dirty water springing out from broken sewers. The unemployment rate of this district is said to be more than 90% and most of the children cannot attend schools simply because they have neither proper clothes nor shoes.

The living standard of most of the Roma population is not so different from that found in Stolipinovo.<sup>24</sup> Roma were the first to be fired when the economic situation turned bad,<sup>25</sup> and the privatization of state property least profited them. In Romania, where the properties of collective farms were divided among agrarian workers, Roma and the other ethnic minorities (with the ex-

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22 Ibid., p 68.

23 Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives, *Moving Beyond Walls, The Stolipinovo people taking charge of their community* (Sofia, 1997), pp.16-17.

24 Mitrovic, op. cit., p.30.

25 A study of the economic situation of the Bulgarian Roma shows that, while 61.0% of total income came from salaries and pensions and 31.1% from social security in 1992, the share of the first category dropped to 47.0 % and that of the latter reached 45.8% in 1994. Tomova, op. cit., pp.74-75.

ception of the Hungarians in Transylvania) tended to be excluded from the share. In Bulgaria, the principle to return properties to the former owners least profited the Roma. It is clear that the Roma, together with the other ethnic minorities, suffered most in the economic transitions. They were deprived of jobs, land, and other property.

But also, the new economic situation created new possibilities for these groups. In Yugoslavia, especially after the imposition of economic sanctions in 1992, the "gray economy" showed a significant growth, and its share of the registered social product was estimated to be approximately 40% in 1993. The spread of the "gray economy" tended to offer job opportunities for the categories of persons "not easily employable" and a part of the Roma population made use of this new chance.<sup>26</sup> Roma, along with other ethnic minorities, took an active part in such new businesses as small cafes, inn-keeping, open-market trading and also participated in the so called trade-tourism. Some of them were successful and built up small fortunes. A smaller numbers of them managed to invest this small fortune successfully in other economic enterprises, so a handful of people of ethnic minority origin entered the class of "nouveau riche." In fact, the rate of those of ethnic minority origin might even be slightly higher than that of the majority, considering that the oppressed minority was apt to undertake riskier businesses. This small success, however, aggravated further discontent in the majority, especially as the majority society overestimated the economic success of the minorities. And this discontent and envy contributed to a myth that the ethnic minorities built their fortunes by illegal means.

In the Balkans, there are many anecdotes of the greediness of ethnic minorities, especially of the Roma. For example, "Gypsy" women are said to conceal thick folds of money under their dirty skirts, gold bars are buried beneath the ground floor of "Gypsy" homes, miserable beggars have their own splendid residence somewhere in the city, and so on. Such stereotyped stories were popularly reproduced, reinforced and proliferated. Frequently, one can hear such remarks, as "the most splendid house in this village is owned by a Roma family whose occupation is robbery," "most of the persons who ride first class Mercedes are members of the Roma mafia," and so on. Several pieces of information, diffused by the mass-media, concerning an economic scandal in which people of minority origin were involved, supported and reinforced the popular belief in the minorities' greediness. During late 1996 and early 1997 the so-called "pyramid" investment schemes collapsed in Albania, resulting in thousands of people losing their life-savings and triggering off violent riots throughout Albania, during which some 2,000 people lost their lives. This event affected the Roma population. One of the first investment schemes to collapse was the Sudja scheme, which began to break down late in 1996. This was operated by a woman of Roma origin, named Maksude Kademi, or "Sudja the Gypsy." She and 18 of her collaborators were arrested on 15 January 1997. Her arrest

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26 Mitrovic, op. cit., p.38.

contributed to the persisting myth depicting the Albanian Roma as “nouveau riche.”<sup>27</sup>

The majority society could not refrain from expressing overt hostility when they heard of “success stories” of the ethnic minorities. This hostility tends to be directed against all the members of the minority group no matter what the real economic situation of the individual is. If one hears of a successful Rom, he/she becomes apt to see all the Roma as such. In the same way, if one hears of Roma criminal, he/she tends to see all the Roma as potential criminals. Sentiments of victimization fermented by the overall economic difficulties easily turns into popular discontent against the members of the minority groups whose economic condition is usually much worse than that of the majority. The open hatred towards the Roma symbolizes how majority societies in the Balkan countries treat their ethnic minorities. All the social minorities, not only ethnic, are now confronting the growing tendencies of intolerance and antipathy.

There are reports of youths who are diffusing anti-Semitism dressed in the robes of Neo-Nazism. The Balkans have for a long time prided themselves as being the least anti-Semitic region in Europe, but things have changed and the reality proves the opposite. Vandalism against Jewish institutions is widely witnessed. Also many anti-Semitic elements can be found in daily political rhetoric. Turks and Armenians are suffering as well. The media is diffusing a hostile image with regard to all foreigners, especially those who migrated from neighboring countries.

The basic sense that produces this constant xenophobia lies in the Balkan “national” tradition. Attacks against the ethnic minorities reflect the widespread and long-established idea that the rights of the ethnic minorities must be restricted on behalf of those of the majority. During the socialist regime in Bulgaria, the government introduced a policy prohibiting the use of non-Bulgarian languages in the public arena. Though this policy was strongly denounced and abolished after the fall of Todor Zhivkov, there is still a dominant psychological barrier against accepting the wider use of minority languages, such as public education in Turkish, or printing and broadcasting in the minority languages. The ideas of the people who oppose the liberalization of the minorities’ linguistic activities are based on a simple nationalistic reason, “in Bulgaria, everyone must speak Bulgarian.” This “patriotic” sentiment of the Bulgarians is often inconsistent as we see both in the growing aspiration of the Bulgarians to learn foreign “international” languages such as English, German and French and in the tendency that educated Bulgarians like to scorn those who do not know any language other than Bulgarian.

This type of inconsistency is a good example of post-socialist Balkan nationalism mixed with an inferiority complex. Until the end of the socialist regime (and it is true for the pre-socialist period as well), the nation-state itself

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27 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Report 1998* <http://www.ihf-hr.org/report98>

was regarded as a framework which would guarantee an extent of economic development and material well-being,<sup>28</sup> despite the fact that many had noticed the wide economic gap with the Western European countries. However, after private trips abroad became possible following the fall of the regime many people realized that the nation-state was the framework that contained them in extreme poverty. Long stagnation in economy also reinforced the sense of betrayal of development theory of the nation-state. Now, most of the people living in the former socialist Balkan countries realize that they are the poorest in Europe and that their countries are even among the poorest in the world. The nation-state has lost its role as a guarantor of economic well-being and the only meaning for its existence can be found in providing the framework that serves to protect people from ethnic discrimination and persecution. People love their state not because they are proud to be a part of it, but because they are a part of the dominant ethnicity. And the national majorities tend to regard the framework of the state exclusively as a “safe-zone” from ethnic persecution against themselves. This “safe-zone” perception of the state, therefore, automatically became a justification argument for the restriction of the ethnic minorities’ rights since, from their point of view, if there is no difference between the status of the majority and that of the minorities, it has no meaning to maintain a nation-state.

#### THE ORIGINAL CHARACTERISTIC OF BALKAN NATIONALISM

Anthony Giddens once proposed to interpret nationalism in its relation to sovereignty and citizenship. “There are a series of possible ties and tensions between nationalism, sovereignty and citizenship, depending upon the direction in which these ideas are channeled. Where nationalism is canalized primarily towards sovereignty - particularly in circumstances where there are several contenders for statehood, or where an existing state is strongly embattled - nationalist sentiments may take an exclusivist turn, emphasizing the superiority of one ‘nation’ over its contenders. Here citizenship rights are likely to be poorly developed or constricted - especially civil and political rights.”<sup>29</sup> This suggestion is especially relevant in understanding Balkan nationalism as a whole. All the Balkan countries, as far as popular belief is concerned, have

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28 Balkans Marxist historians have long claimed that national liberation was the prerequisite for economic development. Thus, independence from Ottoman rule, which was described as an Asiatic feudalism impeding capitalist development, was justified not only by the principle of “national self-determination” but also by economic reasons. Michael Palairt recently raised a strong criticism against this established view on the basis of ample information. According to him, the Balkan countries were impoverished after independence as they devastated their rudimentary “proto-industrialization.” Michael Palairt, *The Balkan Economies c.1800-1914, Evolution without Development* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.357-369.

29 Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Volume 2 of *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge, 1985), pp.217-218.

been constructed under the principle of national self-determination. In the Balkans there is no single region in which an ethnic group (more correctly, contender for a "nation") constituted a pure majority. Everywhere, there were several contenders. So, when a state claims the right of national domination in the name of the "nation," it starts automatically to assimilate other ethnic elements, dismissing their claim of cultural distinctiveness, and/or to expel non-compatriots from its territory. Thus, nationalism and chauvinism are almost synonymous in the Balkans.<sup>30</sup>

The systematic oppression of ethnic minorities in the name of nation-states is deeply imbedded in the Balkan soil. Immediately after the idea of the nation-state took root in this area, most of the Balkan people interpreted it not as the sovereignty of a nation that comprises the majority in the territory, but as an immunity from other ethnic elements. One of the earliest examples of Balkan national liberation movements, the first Serbian uprising, clearly showed this tendency. While the Serb rebels fought exclusively against the Muslim oppressors who violated the "adalet" principle of the sultan in the earliest stage,<sup>31</sup> from 1807 they began to attack other Muslim elements including those who had been in friendly relations with them until then.<sup>32</sup> What is important is that the turning point coincided with the moment when the Serbs became conscious that the aim of their action was to re-establish the state of Stefan Prvovenčanin.<sup>33</sup> The fact that a rudimentary idea of nationalism was born hand in hand with a rudimentary "ethnic cleansing" was not unique to the Serbs, but it was a kind of universal phenomenon in the Balkans in the 19th century.

The Greek liberation war was also characterized by the massacre of local Muslim civilians. As soon as the Greeks in Peloponnese took up arms for national liberation in 1821, they sacked the properties of local Muslims and expelled them from the liberated territory. Ioannes Kapodistrias, who was regarded as one of the liberal politicians at that time, not only accepted this "anti-human" act but precipitated it. When he became the first president of Greece, he attempted to colonize the vacated lands of the Muslims with Greek peasants.<sup>34</sup> By doing so, he hoped to consolidate the social base of the new state, but this was nothing but an act of "ethnic cleansing."

In the 19th century, nationalist atrocities were justified by the mere logic of nationalism and, to make things worse, both the Ottoman Empire and the "international community" generally authorized these acts. The Sultan recog-

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30 The only exception might have been Yugoslavia, but ethnic tolerance in Yugoslav society has now diminished owing to contemporary political developments.

31 Стојан Новаковић, *Устанак на Дахује 1804, оцена извора, карактер устанка, војевање 1804* (Београд, 1904), С.195-197.

32 Michael Petrovich, *A History of Modern Serbia, 1804-1918*, vol.1 (New York, 1976), pp.53-4.

33 Слободан Наумовић, "Употреба традиције," у: М. Прошић-Дворник, ред., *Култутре у традицију* (Београд, 1994), С.97.

34 Παυλος Πετριδης, *Ελληνική πολιτική και κοινωνική ιστορία, 1821-1940* (Θεσσαλονίκη, 1986), σσ.32-33.

nized that all of the Muslim population except those who belonged to the garrisons was forbidden to dwell in the territory of new Serbian Principality, when Prince Milosh acquired the right of autonomy in 1830.<sup>35</sup> The protector states of Greece (i.e., Great Britain, France and Russia) recognized the ethnically pure Greece when they guaranteed her independence.

In other words, national movements in the Balkans from the very beginning embraced in themselves the ideologies of chauvinism and “ethnic cleansing,” and the following development of nationalism has not changed this character. The famous “načertanje” drawn up by Iliya Galašanin in Serbia during the 1840s was based on the idea of unifying Bosnia, Southern Serbia and Old Serbia (Kosovo) as a principle of state-building aimed at renewal of the medieval Serbian state, but did not consider the rights of the non-Serbian population of those regions. This chauvinistic essence introduced by Galašanin was recited and advocated by his successors as the “sacred mission of Serbia” in the 1860s.<sup>36</sup> While there remains the fact that, during the 1860s, voices for the cause of solidarity and cooperation of all Balkan nationalities grew louder, there was no any significant change in their chauvinist essence. Though it is true that the Serbian government supported Bulgarian militant activists for national independence, at the same time it strongly opposed the dissemination of Bulgarian nationalist ideologies among “potential Serb compatriots” by the Exarchist Church in Southern Serbia.<sup>37</sup>

One of the characteristic traits of Balkan nationalism in the 19th century can be seen in its strong anti-Muslim orientation. It even seems that nationalists took no account of the human rights of the Muslim population. Nationalist movements in Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria put a particularly strong stress on the uniqueness of the respective languages, and therefore were ardently dedicated to the spread of education, seeing it as the strongest means for national propaganda, but at the same time, the three nationalist ideologies have a common tendency not to recognize Slavic or Hellenic Muslims as members of the nation. Serbs and Bulgarians in the 19th century usually regarded Slavic Muslims as a part of the ethnic Turks, though there were several exceptions like Vuk Karadžić. Greek nationalists were more categorical in denying the existence of Muslim Greeks. There was a significant number of Greek speaking Muslims living in the urban areas of both Macedonia and Epirus,<sup>38</sup> while on the Island of Crete, according to the 1881 statistics, there lived 73,234 Hellenic Muslims. Greek nationalist doctrine, however, did not consider them as a part of Hellenism. When Greece in 1881 acquired new territories in Thessalia and Epi-

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35 Д. Јанковић и М. Мирковић, *Државноправна историја Југославије*, 2 изд. (Београд, 1984), С.113.

36 Славенко Терзић, “Јован Ристић и заветна мисао Српска, 1868-1876,” *Историјски часопис* 34 (1987), С.271-272.

37 Владимир Стојановић, *Србија и Бугари, 1804-1878* (Београд, 1988), С.334.

38 Васил Кънчов, *Македонија, етнографија и статистика* (Софија, 1900), С.81-82.

rus, the Muslim population of these regions numbered about 45,000 just after the annexation, while in 1911 it had diminished to 3,000.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the types of nationalism discussed above, Croatian nationalism does not seem to have had a remarkable anti-Muslim element. However, this is not due to its generosity and the real reason may lie in the fact that mainland Croatians had little experience of cohabitation with Muslim populations until the Austrian occupation of Bosnia. Croatians were not immune to chauvinist ideas. One of the most important elements of Croatian nationalism, the idea of the Party of Right, brought anti-Serbianism onto Croatian nationalist soil. The ideas of Ante Starčević and Eugen Kvaternik were tinged with militant anti-Serbian ideology. Especially, Starčević, proposing a hypertrophied notion of Croatians, regarded Serbs as morally degenerate Croatians, who betrayed their nationally innate Catholicism to become believers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which was allegedly Asian by its nature. In this idea, even the mere existence of Serbian nationalism was a threat to Croatian ethnicity. This sentiment still has a great influence on contemporary Croatian nationalism.<sup>40</sup>

Because of the strong chauvinistic character of Balkan nationalism in the 19th century, the intensification of national "liberation movements" inevitably caused deportation of ethnic minorities. During the Eastern Crises of 1876-1878 more than 50,000 refugees fled to the Ottoman Empire, and in the following 30 years the region sporadically produced a further 100,000 refugees.<sup>41</sup> During the Balkan Wars, great number of "Bulgarian" refugees fled from those parts of Macedonia occupied by Greece and Serbia.

The "national liberation" and "ethnic cleansing" movements, commonly seen from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, culminated in the agreement on population exchange, signed between Greece and Turkey on 1st January 1923. Based on this agreement, more than 1,100,000 "ethnic" Greeks from Turkey were moved to Greece, and more than 350,000 "Muslims" were moved from Greek territory to Turkey.<sup>42</sup>

Starting from this period, violent national-chauvinism began to recede from the mainstream of the development of Balkan nationalism. Due to the improvement in relations between Greece and Turkey, general cooperation in the Balkan countries became possible in the 1930s, and economic and scientific intra-regional cooperation flourished. In the meantime the protection of rights of ethnic minorities saw notable progress. The Venizelos government recog-

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39 Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les migrations des populations musulmanes balkaniques en Anatolie, 1876-1913* (Istanbul, 1995), p.32.

40 John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History, Twice there was a country* (Cambridge, 1996), p.60.

41 Toumarkine, op. cit., pp.29-30.

42 Γιαννης Μουρελος, "Απο το Σαραγιεβο στη Λοζανη, 1914-1923," *Ελλάς, η ιστορία και ο πολιτισμος του ελληνικου εθνους απο τις απαρχες μεχρι σημερα* (Αμαρουσιον Αττικής, 1998), σ.164.



nized the educational and religious autonomy of Vlahoi minorities in Greece.<sup>43</sup> Organizations for cultural and ethnic rights of the Roma were established for the first time in all the Balkan countries during this period.<sup>44</sup> There were a lot of elements and concrete ideas aimed at limiting and deterring chauvinistic nationalism in the discussions of state-crafting in Yugoslavia. The idea of Yugoslavism propagated by Aleksandar Karadjordjević, though it appeared too utopian and was authoritarian in practice, should be evaluated more positively than the traditional communist interpretation, as it dismissed chauvinistic nationalism as a “tribal” custom, and proposed the formation of a Yugoslav national identity based on surpassing ethnic differences.<sup>45</sup> The communists, to some extent, contributed to the quest for a political framework in which a multi-ethnic society could exist within the borders of the same state. However, obsessed with the “national self-determination right,” they could not distance themselves from the priority of collective rights over civil rights. Nevertheless, they conceptually separated “state” and “nation” and developed the idea of the federal political framework, within which theoretically all ethnicities could exercise their sovereignty. The classic Soviet formula, “national in form, socialist in content” could not exist without the system of authoritarian rule by a communist party.<sup>46</sup>

During WWII, under the influence of fascism, chauvinistic ultra-nationalisms came forward again, but the post-war period development saw further progress in overcoming chauvinistic nationalism as a reaction to the fascist atrocities. Having experienced the Holocaust, the “international community” began to harshly condemn the conduct of ethnically motivated massacres, persecution, and mass displacement. A new understanding that nationalism cannot serve as an excuse to justify oppressions and persecutions against particular ethnic minorities spread throughout the Balkans. This notion has served as a barrier deterring the spread of aggressive nationalism, and has given strong ground to the human rights activists advocating protection of ethnic minorities’ rights. In the sequence of transitions of the 1990s, however, such a positive trend has been completely reversed.

### BALKAN NATIONALISM IN THE POST-COMMUNIST ERA

As mentioned above, in the post-communist era the rejection of the communist past often brought about the total negation of those values which accompanied communism but did not represent its unique components at the

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43 Ελενη Γαρδικα-Κατσαδακη, “Βαλκανικοί πολέμοι,” *Ελλάς, η ιστορία και ο πολιτισμός του ελληνικού έθνους από τις απαρχές μέχρι σήμερα* (Αμαρουσίον Αττικής, 1998), σ.152.

44 Ian Hancock, “The East European Roots of Romani Nationalism,” in D. Crowe & J. Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (London, 1991), p.140.

45 Фердо Ђулиновић, *Југославија између два рата*, т.2 (Загреб, 1961), С.14.

46 Vesna Pesic, *Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis* (Beograd, 1996).

same time.<sup>47</sup> And the values which accompanied communism were apt to be replaced with “traditional” (or pre-communist) values. The League of Communists of Serbia changed the organizational principle of Marxism on behalf of “the socialist tradition of Serbia” when they changed into the Socialist Party of Serbia.<sup>48</sup> The same type of “return to tradition” can be observed in such phenomena as: the systematic change of place names to the pre-communist ones, the so-called “revival of religion,” the growing political influence of the church and so on. We can notice the same tendency in several patterns of nationalist ideas in the contemporary Balkans. Here, moderate national communism has been replaced by the Chauvinistic nationalism of the pre-WWII type.

Another conspicuous element in the revival of nationalism lies in the fact that the supporters of the idea belong mainly to the younger generation.<sup>49</sup> Even the nationalist organizations themselves tend to be controlled by young leaders. These facts suggest a notable novelty in the nationalism of the post-communist era. In this context, the Macedonian and Bulgarian Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organizations (VMROs) deserve closer examination.

Macedonian VMRO, that is, the VMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (DPMNE), is the dominant political party in the Republic of Macedonia after its victory in the 1998 general election. Though, today, it has changed into an organization preaching liberalism and civil society, at the moment of its foundation it was a party propagating strong Macedonian nationalism. In its first political platform, the party regarded itself as the solitary follower of the ideas of Goce Delčev, and claimed several expansionist policies such as issuing national passports for those “Macedonians” living in Pirin Macedonia and Egean Macedonia, thus, explicitly, reflecting the idea of Greater Macedonia. The most notable political feature of the Macedonian VMRO is its strong anti-Serbianism. The party describes the experience of Yugoslav rule as a constant oppression of Macedonian nationhood and places “the protection of Macedonian cultural spheres from foreign, first of all, Serbian influence” at the top of political agenda.<sup>50</sup> The anti-Serbianism of the VMRO is a product of the negation of the total set of values of the communist epoch. We can see this in the rhetoric of Lyubčo Georgievski in which he harshly denounced the purges under the communist rule together with the “cultural, then political assimilation by the Serbian side” and described both as evils from the same root.<sup>51</sup>

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47 We can see this in part in phenomena such as the fact that the very word “communist” is regarded as one of the strongest slanders.

48 *Све странке слободне Србије* (Београд, 1990).

49 In Bulgaria there is marked contrast between the supporters of the Socialist Party and those of anti-communist nationalist parties. While the former are predominantly old generations, the latter are characterized by a wider participation of younger generations.

50 *Istoriski beleshki*, <http://www.vmro.org>

51 Lyubcho Georgievski, “If Goce Delchev was alive in 1945 he would have finished up in Idrizovo,” <http://www.vmro.org>

Although the VMRO-DPMNE prides itself as a bearer of traditional Macedonian nationalism, it cannot conceal its general novelty when we notice the strong presence of the second and third generations of the communist era in its leadership. Beside Georgievski, who was born in 1966 and elected as leader at the age of 25, among ten leaders, five were born in the middle of the 1950s, and one in 1972. There is only one who can claim direct ties with the prewar VMRO, Boris Čarkčiev, born in 1915.<sup>52</sup> The VMRO-DPMNE is an organization founded by the second or third generation of the communist era and the truth is that it lacks any direct link to its alleged forerunners.

The Bulgarian VMRO reveals the same nature. The VMRO-SMD (League of Macedonian Society) is one of the most powerful sub-units of the Bulgarian governing political organization SDS (Union of Democratic Power). The original core of the VMRO-SMD was a circle composed of regular customers of the cafe "Goce Delčev" in Sofia during the middle of the 1980s. At first, the circle was a mixture of individuals with various political orientations, including veterans of the prewar VMRO, but the majority was composed of university students from Sofia and Velikoturnovo. At the end of the 1980s, there appeared a sharp confrontation between those who supported the line of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) and the rest who took a critical position towards it. The latter faction, in which the presence of the younger generation was predominant, liked to support the ideas of Todor Aleksandrov and Ivan Mihailov,<sup>53</sup> who had been condemned by the BCP.<sup>54</sup> After the fall of the regime of Todor Živkov, the youth faction played a leading role in founding the Macedonian Cultural Enlightening Society on January 1990. The purpose of the society was to "promote the fair settlement of the Macedonian question on the basis of historical truth and by means of diplomatic negotiations to protect human rights,"<sup>55</sup> or in other words, the unification of the three parts of Macedonia through cultural activities. The first congress held in December changed the name of the organization to VMRO-SMD and stressed the necessity for political activities. On 24 March 1995, the VMRO decided to abolish the post of the party head, and newly founded a three-person council. By this time, the younger generation, most of whom were in their thirties, had fully controlled the party. This process makes it obvious that the Bulgarian VMRO is a novel organization with weak ties with the pre-communist nationalist forerunners. It was founded by and mainly composed of the younger generation who spent their adolescence during the last phase of the communist rule. It prefers to support the ideas that had been banned by the communist regime. Reading and study played the most important role in the formation of their ideas. They, therefore, like to emphasize the importance of activities with educational inclinations. The his-

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52 "Rakovostvoto na VMRO-DPMNE," <http://www.vmro.org>

53 Pro-Bulgarian Vrhovist leaders, allegedly supporters of the Fascist Movement.

54 Крашмир Каракачанов, *ВМРО, 100 години борба за Македонија* (Софија, 1996), С.183-184.

toric claims proposed by Krašimir Karakačanov, the leading ideologue of the party, are also tinged with an “imagined” interpretation of history.<sup>56</sup>

These new nationalists, as mentioned above, seek their political identity mainly in “the truth of history” molded on the basis of “imagined” reality. They tend to accept the old ideas of their grandfathers’ generation. We can see in this a kind of atavism. This atavistic nationalism is nourished and consolidated by a visibly biased post-communist printing media. Publishers of the post-communist era actively reprinted pre-communist works, many of which had been banned or coldly treated by the regime.<sup>57</sup>

In short, recent developments in Balkan nationalism are generally marked with, in some way or other, an atavistic tendency. Because of its “imagined” elements, atavistic nationalism is apt to be more monstrous than its alleged forerunners. After independence, Croatian nationalism has often expressed the most chauvinistic features compared to its predecessors. The elements of south-Slav cooperation, or Yugoslavism, are elaborately removed and strong anti-Serbianism, which had been banned during communist rule, is placed at the core of the idea.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Ljudevit Gaj and Josip Strossmayer have been placed at somewhat inferior positions in the mainstream of the development of Croatian nationalism, and ideologues of “the Party of the Right,” Eugen Kvaternik and Ante Starčević,<sup>59</sup> have been restored with their honor. Anti-Serbianism is also visible in the following examples. The grass-roots movement for the purification of the Croatian language is eager to replace “Serbian” words with neologisms, but generous to other borrowed words of German, Italian, or Hungarian origin. People who had un-Croatian sounding names massively changed their names to typical Croatian ones.<sup>60</sup> Though the government refrains from expressing an overtly affirmative attitude to the Ustashe past, the notorious fascist-type Croatian nationalist tradition, Tudjman’s regime revived some of the symbols and ideology of WW II Croatia.

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55 Ibid., p.188.

56 Ibid., passim.

57 Diana Johnstone reported a similar tendency in Croatia. “When I visited Croatia three years ago, the book most prominently displayed in the leading book stores of the capital city Zagreb was a new edition of the notorious anti-Semitic classic, ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.’ Next came the memories of the World War II Croatian fascist Ustashe dictator Ante Pavelic, responsible for the organized genocide of Serbs, Jews and Romany (gypsies) that began in 1941, that is, even before the German Nazi ‘final solution’... So it should be no surprise that this year’s best seller in Croatia is none other than a new edition of ‘Mein Kampf.’ This is not a critical edition, mind you, but a reverently faithful reproduction of the original text by that great European leader, benefactor of Croatian nationalism and leader of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler.” Diana Johnstone, *Nazi nostalgia in Croatia, Emperors-clothes*, [http://www.suc.org/kosovo\\_crisis/Sep\\_08/6.html](http://www.suc.org/kosovo_crisis/Sep_08/6.html)

58 Lampe, op. cit., p.60.

59 Leaders of the Croatian Party of the Right. They first introduced anti-Serbianism into Croatian Nationalism. Ivo Perić’s new interpretation of Croatian history is a very good example of this argument; Ivo Perić, *A History of the Croats* (Zagreb, 1998).

60 Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babel, The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic*

**“HUMANITARIAN” INTERVENTION, AND ITS EFFECT  
ON THE BALKAN NATIONALISM**

The so-called “international community” seems to be unconscious of the new tendency in the development of nationalism in the post-communist Balkans. In contrast to the ostensible “humanitarian” discourse, most examples of foreign intervention in the Balkan affairs in the 1990s only served to escalate the “Balkan tragedy,” mainly because the “international community” supported the cause of nationalists. It pushed an ethnically intolerant social tide into an overt national hatred. The US pretext to protect the multi-ethnic entity of Bosnia resulted in three separate Bosnias, each section ethnically pure.<sup>61</sup> In the same way, US policy helped Croats to create an ethnically pure Croatia.

The nationalist HDZ-led Croatian government pursued a policy of making the territory ethnically pure. After international recognition of its independence, Croatian authorities continued to escalate the persecution of non-Croatian citizens and Croat critics of the government. The authorities most frequently targeted them in a range of human rights violations. In 1995, the Croatian government crushed the Serb paramilitary forces that had controlled Krajina and Eastern Slavonia. Immediately, a massive exodus of the Serb population occurred in both areas. The Serbs who remained were threatened and attacked by both civilians and soldiers, in some cases with explosives, rocket-propelled grenades or incendiary materials. Frequently occurring murders, arson, and violent aggression, together with improper treatment by law-enforcement officers, clearly had the aim of intimidating the remaining Serbs into leaving the region. Local and national authorities did not act to prevent the violence from intensifying. Despite agreements to facilitate their return, Croatian Serbs in the FRY or Bosnia-Herzegovina who had announced their wish to return to Croatia could not do so. The great majority of Croatian Serbs remained exiled.<sup>62</sup>

In January 1996, the UN set up the Transitional Authority in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Sirmium (UNTAES), which was to oversee the peaceful reintegration of the territory. But UNTAES could not effectively deter the nationalist aggression of the Croats, in part due to sabotage by the local and national authorities. International monitors continued to report ethnically motivated incidents of violence. Following the withdrawal of UNTAES in January 1999, the region returned to the full control of the Croatian authorities, and reports of ethnic violence have increased in Eastern Slavonia.

The Croatian aim of purifying their territory is also elucidated in the following figures. According to government statistics, by the end of 1999, 2,000 Croatian Serbs had returned to the country under a repatriation plan, in addition to several thousand Croatian Serbs who reportedly returned unofficially

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*War*, 2 ed. (Boulder, 1996), p.212.

61 For the contemporary situation of Bosnia and the belated process of national reconciliation, see David Chandler, *Bosnia, Faking Democracy after Dayton* (London, 1999).

and whose number was impossible to confirm independently. However, the government's failure to guarantee their safety aggravated the Serb mistrust of the Croatian authorities and at least 7,000 Croatian Serbs left Croatia as a result. According to the same statistics, some 20,000 Bosnian Croats remained as refugees in Croatia and many of them occupied the prewar homes of Croatian Serbs.<sup>63</sup>

The aftermath of independence in Croatia shows clearly how devastating the international recognition of separatism in the Balkans has been. The "international community" has learned the bitter lesson that the recognition of "national rights" and independence only encouraged nationalists to escalate ethnic atrocities and to intensify "ethnic cleansing." After having analyzed the laws and regulations for protecting ethnic minorities' rights in the successor states of former Yugoslavia, Dragan Simeunović wrote as follows: "Contemporary nation-states support an idea whose principal value lies in the consolidation of state and nation on the base of nationalism, and in the total subjugation of individuals and minorities to a supremacy of a ruling nation. The organic principle of new nationalist states is to give priority to collective rights over individual [ones], and to subjugate ethnic minorities to the majority."<sup>64</sup> His argument accurately describes the nature of contemporary Balkan nationalism.

#### NATO INTERVENTION IN THE KOSOVO CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH

As mentioned above, nationalism in the contemporary Balkans stands at the farthest point from pluralism and civil equality. It is thus a contradiction to support nationalist causes while preaching humanitarian principles.<sup>65</sup> In order to conceal this fatal contradiction, the "international community," especially the US government, intentionally emphasizes the difference between "good" nationalisms and "bad" ones. During the Balkan crisis in the 1990s, Serbs and Serbian nationalism gained a well-established evaluation as a genuine evil. Helped by this popular image, the US government succeeded in justifying its diplomatic and military intervention. The same tactics were applied in the case of Kosovo.

It is probable that at the end of the 1990s, approximately 90 percent of the Kosovar population were ethnic Albanians. However, there were also some 200,000 ethnic Serbs and a variety of other minorities, including Jews, Roma, and Muslim Slavs (or Bosnians).<sup>66</sup> For people other than Serbian and Albanian national extremists, neither Serb nor Albanian nationalism was favorable.

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62 "Croatia's Dangerous Extremism," *The New York Times*, 28 April 1997.

63 Amnesty International, *Report on Croatia*, AI Index EUR64/004/99.

64 Драган Симуновић, "Етничке мањине и нова национална држава," у: *Положај мањина у Свезној Републици Југославије* (Београд, 1996), С.352.

65 This contradiction is the central theme of the "double standard" discussion.

66 According to statistics from 1981, about 22.5 % of the total population of Kosovo were non-Albanians.

Throughout the entire Kosovo crisis, however, the US administration contrived to make the story simpler, and they succeeded in describing Kosovo as a place where only Serb ultra-nationalists and peaceful Albanians lived. In the first stage, they used Dr. Ibrahim Rugova and his Democratic Union of Kosovo to make the story plausible. They intentionally exploited the image of Dr. Rugova as a propagator of a peaceful solution, then gradually shifted to the militant national liberation element of the Kosovar Albanians, and finally dropped Rugova and his party, partly because Rugova showed a reconciliatory attitude to the Yugoslav government and also because the peaceful stance of Rugova was not convenient to military aggression. Then came the Kosovo Liberation Army.<sup>67</sup>

The KLA first appeared in the international scene as a “terrorist” organization.<sup>68</sup> The US administration, as early as the middle of 1998, began to support this organization, gradually treating it as a kind of representation of the Kosovar Albanian masses, and finally, invited it as the main body of the legitimate Kosovar delegation at the Rambouillet conference. In this sequence of developments, the US administration precariously concealed the chauvinist image of the Kosovar Albanian movements from the public, and depicted it as a symbol of the Kosovar Albanians’ aspiration for liberation.

In the crisis, the most important problems were connected to creating a framework within which all the ethnic elements could live together, but the US administration pursued a policy exactly reverse to what was required. They supported the nationalist cause, instead of the civil principle. It is clear that the US intervention in Kosovo was only intended to support Albanian nationalism against Serb nationalism, but the US administration pretended to be in a neutral position.

That is why the US administration had to put the conflict into the form of a simple story: “an evil dictator, using national antagonism as a political tool,

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67 There was hot discussion concerning the origins of the KLA. Ibrahim Rugova had regarded it as an intrigue of the intelligence service of Yugoslavia, and others described it as a Maoist or Islam fundamentalist organization. What is evident is the fact that the political purpose of the KLA is both an independent Kosovo and eventual unification of Albania proper. And many leaders of the KLA explained its final aim as the unification of three Albanian territories including the western part of Macedonia, which coincide with the territory of Great Albania, a fascist puppet state during the WWII. We can see in this the common tendency of new Balkan nationalism discussed above. According to John Sigler III, the core of the KLA is composed of participants of the student rioting in 1981. If so, the KLA serves as another model of an atavistic nationalist organization; John Sigler III, *A Look at Albanian Nationalism and the KLA*, <http://www.suc.org/politics/kosovo/papers/Sigler.html>

68 On February 1998, the Clinton Administration’s special envoy for Kosovo, Robert Gelbard, strongly condemned the KLA as terrorists; “We condemn very strongly terrorist actions in Kosovo. The KLA is, without any questions, a terrorist group.” Republican Policy Committee, *The Kosovo Liberation Army: Does Clinton Policy Support Group with Terror, Drug Ties? From ‘Terrorists’ to ‘Partners’*, <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/fr033199.htm>

started the genocide of an innocent people who had lived peacefully, so we must stop him.”<sup>69</sup> Ironically enough, this over-simplification of the story placed them in a bottleneck.

By early 1999, the US Administration had fixed its Kosovo policy on either the acceptance by both sides of a pre-drafted peace agreement that would entail a NATO ground occupation of Kosovo, or, if the Albanians signed the agreement while Belgrade refused, bombing of the Serbs. However, the rupture of this plan came from the Kosovar-Albanian side. The KLA, the dominant element of the Kosovar-Albanian delegation, refused to sign the document fearing that signing it would mean abandonment of their claim for independence. The neutralist gesture of the US administration made the KLA too skeptical to understand their real aim. Before and even after the Rambouillet meeting, US authorities repeatedly ruled out the possibility of an independent Kosovo. “The KLA offers a deceptively simple answer to the tragedy of Kosovo - independence from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. But there is no guarantee that independence would lead to peace in Kosovo, and ample reason to fear that it could undermine stability elsewhere in the region.”<sup>70</sup> But the tone gradually became softer. Deputy State Department spokesman Foley stressed that the KLA would have the chance to move forward in their quest for self-government under a “different context.”<sup>71</sup>

The most disastrous element for the Kosovo crisis lies in this “context.” The ostensible refusal of an independent Kosovo by the US administration, coupled with de facto backing for the Albanian nationalist cause, caused the leaders of the Kosovar-Albanians to believe that the only way to independence lay in the basis of a *fait accompli*. Thus, the US-NATO intervention in Kosovo opened up a new phase of “ethnic cleansing.”

### KOSOVO LESSONS: THE RESULT OF NATIONALIZATION

Despite the “humanitarian” gesture of the US administration, most of the Balkan Jews were quite critical of its policy. They justly assessed the dangers of nationalism, recognizing that the backing of the Albanian nationalist cause

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69 There is another explanation of the intentions of the US administration. Panayotis Charitos emphasizes the coincidence of NATO air strikes and the new doctrine of NATO announced on April 1999. He suggests that the NATO attack against Yugoslavia was “an act for inducing compliance by all those who are a hindrance to the creation of the new international political reality, as well as an example to serve as a warning to all those who might contemplate resisting future deployments for the imposition of this new international reality.” See Panayotis Charitos, “The Crime Against Yugoslavia: 100 Violations of International Law,” in *Europe at the Crossroad, New Walls or a United Europe* (Belgrade, 1999), p.101.

70 Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright Remarks and Q&A Session at the U.S. Institute of Peace Washington, D.C., February 4, 1999, as released by the Office of the Spokesman U.S. Department of State.

71 Republican Policy Committee, *The Kosovo Liberation Army*, op. cit.



would jeopardize a multi-ethnic entity in Kosovo, and would lead to a total destruction of the Jewish community there. It was thus natural that a group of Jewish Holocaust survivors from Yugoslavia led a protest of Jews who opposed the recent bombing in Kosovo by NATO forces. The protest action was held in New York, on Thursday May 13, 1999. The protesters opposed the bloodshed in Kosovo, saying that the Serbs in Kosovo were staunch allies of the Jews against the Nazis in WWII.<sup>72</sup> The apprehensions of Jews was proved true soon after the end of the NATO air strikes.

Hardly had the NATO bombing ended and the displaced Albanians returned to Kosovo, when nationalist-Albanians began their attacks on Serbs in retaliation for atrocities carried out by Serb troops and paramilitary groups. Many Jews thought they would be spared, because Israel was among the first countries to dispatch mobile hospital units to help the sick when ethnic-Albanian refugees were persecuted by Serb attackers in April 1999. However, as atrocities conducted by the Albanian nationalists escalated, non-Serb minorities were also persecuted. Early in July 1999, an American Jewish relief organization working among the various ethnic groups in the Balkans asked the Kosovar leaders to ensure that the Kosovo Liberation Army would protect the lives and property of the tiny Jewish community in the war-ravaged province. The envoy feared that Kosovar Albanians tended to identify Jews as pro-Serbs. At the request of the envoy, Hashim Thaci signed a letter instructing KLA troops to protect Jews, as well as property belonging to Jewish residents, whether currently in the province or not.<sup>73</sup> But the promises of Thaci did nothing to check the intimidation of Jews by paramilitary vigilantes. Jews were made targets of nationalist aggression and systematically driven from their homes.

Jews were persecuted not because they were identified as pro-Serbs, but because they were not Albanians. The following information proves this point. At the end of June, an Albanian paramilitary group armed with sub-machine guns came to the door of the Priština apartment where Čedomir Prlinčević, the 61-year-old director of the Priština regional archive, and his family lived,

“He told us to get out,” Cedomir Prlincevic said “We asked him why. He said, ‘My house was burned’.” I said, “But I’m not the one who did it.” He said, “I’m not interested. Get out or I’ll slaughter you.” Because Mr. Prlincevic and his family had good relations with the Albanians and had protected Albanian neighbors during the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo by the Serb forces, they believed they had no reason to flee when the Serb forces withdrew. They also believed in the guarantees of the international community and the promises of KFOR, the peacekeeping force in Kosovo led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to protect Serbs and other minorities. But, when heavily armed Albanian paramilitaries arrived, the Jews of Pristina found themselves target-

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72 Israel Wire-5/13/1999.

73 Patrick Goodenough CNS Jerusalem Bureau Chief: 07 July 1999.

ed and terrorized. Almost all Pristina's Jews left the city during a 10-day period in late June.<sup>74</sup>

The Kosovar Jews have a long history, having migrated to the Balkans in ancient times. Since then, they have survived many political turmoils and setbacks until the modern period. Their community flourished especially during the Ottoman period. Most of the Kosovar Jews were Sephardic Jews, who had migrated from Iberia in the 15th century. They were successful merchants in trans-Balkan trade. Even after Ottoman rule, Jews continued to live in Kosovo peacefully until April 1944, when Albanian fascists, acting on Gestapo orders, interned and plundered the belongings of 1,500 of Pristina's Jews, most of whom were sent to Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Less than half of Kosovo's pre-World War II Jewish population of 1,700 survived the Holocaust. While many those of who survived the Holocaust emigrated to Israel from 1948 to 1952, the Jewish community in Kosovo continued to exist.<sup>75</sup> The continuation of more than 500 years of Jewish presence in Kosovo, however, is now coming to an end as there are reportedly only four Jews currently living in the environs of Priština.

The Jewish tragedy after the NATO bombing is a truly grave matter for the future of the Balkans. Some Jewish communities in the US showed great sympathy for the Kosovar-Albanians during the war and Israel sent much humanitarian aid to the Albanian refugees; it therefore seemed natural that the Albanians should appreciate the Jewish friendship. However, reality shows that no amiable attitude can bar the spreading nationalist desire to seek an ethnically-pure Kosovo. The Turkish case supports this assertion.

Ethnic Turks in Kosovo were probably the most pro-Albanian ethnic group. Because of their religious similarity, it was widely said that Kosovar Turks were fully assimilated into the Albanian community. Ethnic Turks also suffered as much as Kosovar-Albanians during the NATO bombing. According to the Turkish media, Serb nationalists expelled both Albanians and Turks without distinction. During the NATO bombing, the Turkish government made a great contribution to helping Albanian refugees. They accepted tens of thousands of refugees.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the contributions of the Turkish government during the war and the traditional amiable relations with Albanians, Kosovar-Turks also became the target of nationalist atrocities. Before NATO's air strikes on Yugoslavia, the ethnic Turkish community in Kosovo had numbered more than 50,000 mem-

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74 The Globe and Mail, Tuesday, 31 August 1999.

75 Павле Иванов, *Јевреј Косова и Метохије* (Београд, 1998), С.70-74.

76 When I visited a refugee camp in Eastern Trakia in April 1999, I was surprised to find that every half an hour, large trucks full of relief supplies arrived from all parts of Turkey. The camp was opened in order to accommodate Turks expelled from Bulgaria in the 1980s, and continued to serve as an accommodation institution for the refugees of the Bosnian war. The facilities were quite pleasant.

bers. When the air strikes started, more than 10,000 Turks fled Kosovo-Metohija. Those who were displaced did not return, and ironically enough, another 30,000 have left since the end of the war. Now, the Kosovar Turkish community is on the brink of total extinction. According to the ethnic Turkish community leader in Kosovo-Metohija, Zejnelabadin Kureis, nobody has guaranteed the remaining ethnic Turks' safety of person or property, and a large number of them are living at subsistence level.<sup>77</sup>

Similarly to the ethnic Turks, Bosnians and Slavic Muslims also suffered from the nationalist pressure, as we can see it in the following report of the OSCE:

"Gora, where a large Slavic Muslim community lives, has experienced general harassment and sporadic acts of violence. Coupled with the activity in neighboring areas, this has raised tension and put pressure on the Slavic Muslim community. In September, the schooling issue exposed some splits both between Slavic Muslims and Albanians, and within the Slavic Muslim community itself, the main disputes being access to education and linguistic rights. Those Slavic Muslims who identified themselves as Albanian were largely slotted in the Albanian school system; those who wished to retain their distinct identity and to be educated in the Serbian language were left out."<sup>78</sup>

From the above information, we may conclude that Albanian nationalists are pursuing a full scale "ethnic cleansing" in the region. This is exactly the same thing that happened in Croatia and Bosnia after Dayton. Again, US backing of the nationalist cause resulted in the destruction of a multi-ethnic society. In such a cruel phase of nationalist agitation, every ethnic minority can become a target. And, in most of the cases, those who suffered the most were Roma. Roma were harshly persecuted in Bosnia and now Kosovar Roma are facing the same fate as their Bosnian counterparts.

Media (both Western and Balkan) and human rights watchers are constantly reporting on atrocities and "Gypsy pogroms" in Kosovo:

- "Albanian extremists and terrorists have thus far expelled 90,000 out of the total of 150,000 Romany living in Kosmet before the arrival of KFOR, reported the Society for the Protection of Endangered Nations Today in Getingen."<sup>79</sup>
- "The ethnic cleansing of Kosovo's estimated 100,000 Gypsies began only after the Serbs withdrew and the Kosovo Liberation Army moved in, and it has continued right under the noses of Western peacekeepers."
- "In Urosevac, the Roma/Ashkalija communities continue to be subjected to harassment, intimidation, and house burning."<sup>80</sup>
- "Roma are being subjected *en masse* to revenge attacks by ethnic Albanians.

77 Tanjug: 3 November 1999.

78 UNHCR /OSCE/ Overview of the Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Kosovo, 3 November 1999.

79 [www.serbia-info.com/news](http://www.serbia-info.com/news)

80 UNHCR, op. cit.

- Thousands have their homes burned, and have fled their villages."<sup>81</sup>
- "The Roma, or Gypsy, population has left en masse, monitors say, and daily human rights reports in June, July and August were dominated by accounts of killings, house burning, missing persons and abductions."<sup>82</sup>

Kosovar Roma have deeply tied themselves to Kosovar society, despite the fact that they are subjected to severe ethnic discrimination from both Albanians and Serbs. In particular, Ashkalija Roma have Albanian names and speak Albanian as their first language. Before the NATO air strikes, Roma were persecuted by Serb nationalists with the same intensity as were the Albanians. Politically, most of the Roma supported the party of Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, the Democratic League of Kosovo. However, these indicators that seem to point to an amiable relation between Roma and Albanians proved to be nothing during and after the war. Roma are attacked from both sides, Serbs and Albanians. They are caught in the middle and have nowhere to go. Roma are systematically expelled from their home villages. Serbian border officers refuse to accept them as refugees. They are now forced to flee to refugee camps or "Gypsy Ghettos" in some of the major Kosovo towns. "There is only a scattering of Roma still left in the outskirts of Priština town, and movements beyond their enclave are restricted. Even those gypsy populations who use the Albanian language (Ashkalija) face intimidation and harassment in public places, which have effectively denied them access to markets, public transport and health facilities. Roma/Ashkalija children in the urban centers currently have no access to education."<sup>83</sup>

The Western media tends to support the Albanian nationalist cause, and likes to explain Albanian attacks against non-Albanians as an explosion of frustrations caused by long-time ethnic submission to Serb rule. They frequently use the term "revenge" in describing the Albanian ethnic atrocities, and optimistically see it as an inevitable side effect in the switch-over to a new system. In spite of their expectations, the atrocities did not cease, and instead became more and more intensive during the later half of 1999. Even an OSCE report admitted:

"While the crime statistics released by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in mid-October indicate a decline in the overall number of violent incidents as far as minorities are concerned, this may be due in part to the fact that there has been a significant decrease in the overall non-Albanian population over the past four months. Informed observers agree that there is a climate of violence and impunity, as well as widespread discrimination, harassment and intimidation directed against non-Albanians."<sup>84</sup>

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81 BBC News, Monday, 5 July 1999, 21:36 GMT.

82 BBC News, Monday, 6 December 1999, 11:19 GMT.

83 UNHCR, op. cit.

84 UNHCR, op. cit.

By late December 1999, as many as twenty people were killed every week. It is clear that the optimistic view of the Western media toward Albanian "revenge" is groundless. Rather, it seems that the atrocities are neither personal nor accidental "revenge," but the expression of an Albanian will for an ethnically purified Kosovo. The following UNHCR report expresses nothing but a process which deserves to be called "ethnic cleansing": "the situation of minorities within the wider Pristina area during the last two months has been characterized by: a steady decline in the numbers of ethnic minorities (mainly Serbs and Roma); an increasing tendency towards concentration in mono-ethnic enclaves; continued isolation and restricted freedom of movement; and lack of access to public services - especially education, medical/health care - resulting in efforts to create 'parallel' systems or activities in some areas."<sup>85</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Balkan nationalism in the post-communist era is marked by a strong Chauvinistic nature. In its form and content we can see a revival of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century type of nationalism. Contemporary Balkan nationalism, however, is not the direct reincarnation of these, but a new type, whose connection with these predecessors is, in many cases, no more than a product of imagination. Since it is rooted in peoples' imagination, it tends to throw up genuine elements of its alleged forerunners, usually the most bloodthirsty ones. The aggressive nature of the new Balkan nationalisms can be observed in many aspects of social life. Harsh discrimination and persecution of the Roma is one of the clearest examples to prove this point.

Newly established nationalist parties widely revived the worst elements of nationalism. As exclusionism played an integrative role in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century nationalism in this region, the revival of nationalism wearing a "traditional mask" inevitably brought with it Chauvinist ideologies, which were the driving force of "ethnic cleansing." The "international community," or Western diplomacy, has deeply committed itself in the escalation of nationalist atrocities by supporting the principle of "national self-determination," which means nothing but a go-sign for the nationalist policies in this region. Both the Croatian and Bosnian cases alerted us to the dangers, and now we have faced the same result in Kosovo.

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85 UNHCR, op. cit.