

Chapter 9: Intellectuals between radicalization and reconciliation in the Western Balkans

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Abstract:

According to cultural definitions, intellectuals can be defined as social actors who have developed public authority based on cultural achievements and/or positions. Intellectuals are key participants in the creation, specification, articulation and dissemination of any form of social ideas. Their relevance can be particularly prominent in societies dominated by nationalism, because they have the ability to sift through a particular national/ethnic tradition, selecting specific moments and elements from the collective memory and thus strengthening a given national ideology. In the Western Balkans, intellectual elites mostly positioned themselves as bearers of national programs, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. This, almost exclusively male, group was awarded disproportionately large space in the media. Smaller groups of a(anti)nationally oriented intellectuals never gained such dominance in public discourse, but continuously used their opportunities of influencing public opinion to express the necessity of repudiation of extremism and breaking with the ideology that hampers the normalization of socio-political life in the region. We analyze here the role of intellectuals to both radicalization and reconciliation in the Western Balkans, focusing especially on the former Yugoslavia. Starting with the 1987 Memorandum of the SASA, widely regarded as the ultimate intellectual fuel to the deepening the conflict, we end with the most recent case of Declaration on the Common Language (2017), which opted for the unification of the now separated Western Balkan languages into a joint one.

Key terms: Intellectuals, Belgrade Circle, Circle 99, Dialogue of Historians, Declaration on the Common Language.

Introduction: Who are intellectuals?

The term “*intellectual*” was firstly used in 1898 to describe a group of writers and professors who spoke out publicly in the case of the Dreyfus Affair,

when a French officer of Jewish origin Alfred Dreyfus got accused and sentenced for treason under suspicious circumstances. A group of prominent public figures, led by an influential writer Émile Zola, publicly accused high government and army officials in the press and, eventually, managed to revoke the sentence and free Dreyfus. Georges Clemenceau, a politician and publicist, soon called this protest a “protest of intellectuals”. Owing to this event, a paradigm was created about the authority of intellectuals in matters of public importance (Piereson, 2006: 52).

Box 9.1. *Intellectuals* are understood here as actors who have developed intellectual authority based on education and/or achievements in the cultural field and use that authority to act in public regardless of the issue at hand.

Intellectuals are irreplaceable actors in the functioning of the social system and represent a group in society that produces attitudes and beliefs, or values, which then spread to other strata of society. In that sense, intellectuals are generators of ideologies and initiators of its acceptance on the social scene. This view is shared by many theorists who have dealt with the connection between nationalism and intellectuals (Breully, Smith, Anderson, Nairn, Kedourie).

Suggested readings:

Gramsci, A. (1971). “The Intellectuals”, in Gramsci, A. *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publisher.

Collini, S. (2002). “Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer...: Intellectuals as Other People”, in Small, H. (ed), *The Public Intellectual*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

There has always been a blistering controversy about the engagement of intellectuals in social life and their attachment to certain social groups and politics. Many theorists advocate a position that intellectuals must be critical of existing society. Various determinants are attributed to them, such as: “the moral ideal of authenticity versus conformism (Sloterdijk); steering against any authority and demystifying the image of man as a consumer (C. B. Macpherson); demystifying liberal society as a society of segregation (A. Touraine); working for progress in freedom for all by overcoming purely legally defined freedom (Chronique); acting to liberate subjectivity, the struggle against totalitarianism” (Golubović, 2005).

In this sense, the independent intellectual stands against *ketman* intellectuals (Milosz 1953). Milosz described the *ketman* as an individual who is silent about his beliefs and conforms to the demands of his time, rational-

izing it by the impossibility of controlling the existing circumstances, that is, as a conformist who advocates desirable views and accepts self-censorship, rejecting value reasoning. Wright Mills (2000), on the other hand, views the independent intellectual as an actor who seeks to demystify political lies and find the truth, while the pseudo-intellectual supports the myths of the ruling ideology through falsifying historiography and abusing the mass media.

Julien Benda (2014) also wrote about the role of intellectuals in society, introducing the term “betrayal of intellectuals”. This term describes the contribution of intellectuals to political and national desires, which marked the twentieth century as the century of intellectual organization of political hatred. Such a phenomenon stems from the renunciation of universal values and the acceptance of special, national commandments, which satisfy narrow, selfish interests to which justice, truth, and freedom are usually external. “And indeed never were there so many political works among those which ought to be the mirror of the disinterested intelligence” (Benda, 2014: 55). Benda strongly condemns intellectuals who act in the service of political desires and submits that they should strive for value-neutral sociology or social science. He especially emphasizes the important role of one category of intellectuals, who should refrain from bias more than anyone else – the historians. Their “derogation from the disinterested activity of the mind is far more shocking” for they are “clerks’ whose influence on the laymen is much more profound by reason of the prestige attached to their functions.” (ibid, 57). Benda reminds that intellectuals have played and undeniably still play a very important role in creating and maintaining the ideology of nationalism. He, thus, dismisses them as being not historians, but as historians at the service of the spirit of party or of national passion.

Theorists who advocate the necessity of a critical attitude of intellectuals claim that “the public is an authentic field of intellectual activity of those who understand that it is not enough to discover only the truth and articulate it theoretically, but to shed light on the existing state of society and point out possible changes” (Golubović, 2005). According to this view, intellectuals must play an emancipatory role on the social scene by engaging through the media, social protests and movements, and not be mere observers or “silentologists”. Such engagement differs significantly from party and narrowly political engagement that is related to the interests and goals of a particular party or power elite in order to gain or maintain power. In this regard, critical intellectuals clearly distance themselves from political, party engagement.

The “critical direction” qualifies the so-called pseudo-intellectuals as “immoral” and “poltronic” actors who put themselves in the service of the dominant political ideology, thus shifting the controversy to the field of ethics. By demanding that the intellectual is guided by his/her own beliefs and sense of morality, it gives a “critical point” to many extreme intellectuals, who probably perceive their views as the only correct, true and moral ones. This certainly applies to the so-called “apologetic” intellectuals and in general to all intellectuals who are directly and practically engaged. Engagement itself, by the nature of things, puts the engaged in a position that cannot be called “all-critical”, which should be the basic characteristic of an intellectual.

On the other hand, certain intellectuals can be conformists, not prone to open polemics or tolerating different ideologies on the social scene, and are inclined to occupy or be close to positions of power. It is in the nature of every ideology to strive to attract and retain as many supporters as possible, in order to survive and reproduce for as long as possible. In line with this aspiration is the appropriation of a monopoly over channels of dissemination of ideas and knowledge, which in modern times means the control of the mass media, thus trying to marginalize non-dominant ideologies.

Intellectuals in the Service of National Conflicts

Earlier, we mentioned Benda’s position on the “betrayal of intellectuals”, which directly refers to the role of intellectuals in creating and maintaining the *ideology of nationalism*. Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” ascribe to intellectuals a key role in creating nationalism: journalists, novelists, architects, philologists, folklorists and artists are actors who portray the national community and give it meaning shared by members of the nation. They create the memory cultures of groups and nations.

Box 9.2. There is a mass of evidence for the primary role of intellectuals, both in generating cultural nationalism and in providing the ideology, if not the early leadership, of political nationalism. Wherever one turns in Europe, their seminal position in generating and analyzing the concepts, myths, symbols and ideology of nationalism is apparent. (Smith, 1991: 94)

Suggested readings:

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.

Smith, A.D. (1991). *National identity*. London: Penguin books.

Anthony Smith also highlights the crucial role of intellectuals as generators of ideology and leaders of the nationalist movement in its early stages. John Breuilly (1994), who defined the notion of nationalism as a political movement that seeks or possesses state power and justifies such actions with nationalist arguments, also gave intellectuals the role of key actors in constructing the ideology of nationalism. This attitude is in the line with historical testimony that nation states, such as Germany, Italy, Serbia or Slovakia, first emerged in intellectual programs and only then in political practice. Thus, it was Croatian intellectuals such as Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905), Franjo Rački (1828-1894) and their Serbian colleagues Đuro Daničić (1825-1882) or Jovan Skerlić (1877-1914) that advanced the idea of South Slavs being merely different “tribes” of the same Yugoslav nation and opting for their unification. According to Andrew Wachtel, South Slav intellectuals played a crucial role in creating the ideology of Yugoslav nationalism at the turn of the 20th century (as well as in breaking the country at the end of it). Especially prominent ideologues of Yugoslavism were Ivo Andrić and Ivan Meštrović as reputable and award-winning intellectuals of Yugoslavia. Similarly, Croatian intellectuals promoting the breakup of Yugoslavia found their role-models among the 19th century ethno-national minded Croatian intellectuals like Ante Starčević (1823-1896) or Eugen Kvaternik (1825-1871).

British theorist Elie Kedourie (2000) sees nationalism as a contagion that has occurred in the West and spread to other parts of the world. Western intellectuals are responsible, according to Kedouri, for generating a multitude of doctrines based on the assumption that nations are the obvious and natural division of the human race. Kedouri claims that intellectuals were marginalized in politics under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism, and the consequence of that is turning to romanticism and generating nationalism as an ideology that can give them a more significant role in society. He instrumentalizes the masses in the eyes of intellectuals as a means to achieve their own goals. The assumption that the masses are passive and disoriented explains propaganda and control over education as the only possible way to mobilize the masses for the spread of nationalism. In this way, nationalism gives intellectuals the opportunity to gain power in society and maintain an alienated position, but this time not as a

marginalized one, but as a position of parts and privileges. “The new nationalist intelligence of the middle class had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation letter had to be written in a language they understood” (Guibernau, 2003: 8).

All aforementioned theorists emphasize the power of culture, language, symbols, and ceremonies as key elements of nationalism. Intellectuals are the actors who create and use these elements drawing on cultures of memory. They act as creators of nationalist ideology and movement, providing cultural, historical, political and economic arguments for maintaining the distinctive character of the nation and thus giving legitimacy to its will to decide its political destiny.

However, Guibernau points out that intellectuals are subversive and create a discourse that undermines the legitimacy of the current order, when pursuing for special status of one’s own nation. Intellectuals do not only create a nationalist ideology, but also mobilize the national movements, often putting themselves at the forefront. Guibernau dealt with nationalism in nations without a state, and her position is interesting to study, given that nationalism in the former Yugoslavia developed in nations that did not have their own “nation state”. She also emphasizes the importance of emotional factors, which act together with the rational and cannot be eliminated from the analysis of nationalism and the role of intellectuals in its creation and expansion. Rationality is related to the objective reasons that nationalists use when defending their ideology. Emotions arise when a nation presents itself as a community that transcends the limited lives of individuals by providing them with a collective sense of identity. Belonging to a nation, which is real in the minds of its members, provides a sense of continuity based on a sense of belonging to a group that presents itself as an extended family.

The use of a common, yet specific language reinforces the sense of belonging to a community that shares a common history and a common set of values, which intellectuals emphasize in their engagement. The nation is seen as an organic community in the sense of an extended family, and membership in the nation requires a certain solidarity, in this case, with its compatriots. Invoking solidarity in the image of the family creates a sense of victimhood and a sense of attachment that becomes stronger when the group is threatened. Victimhood is a very strong factor and indicator of social integration. Through symbols and ceremonies, individuals can feel emotions of unusual intensity that stem from their identification with an entity that transcends them. Appeals to these emotions are an unavoidable item in popularizing the ideology of nationalism.

Guibernau rightly points out that the emergence of a nationalist movement in a nation without a state requires the existence of some intellectuals willing to build a nationalist discourse of a different form and often opposed to the state. Relations between national intellectual elites and state authorities in multinational states occur in a large number of ways. Crucial to the development of nationalism in stateless nations is the position held by intellectuals representing a potential national elite. The potential elite includes individuals who feel dissatisfied with the state treatment of their community, which could be seen among members of the Serb, Slovene and Croat nations in the former Yugoslavia.

In such cases, individuals are unable to work within state circles of power and influence, and must limit their activities to the region. The reaction of Albanian circles within Serbia, as well as Serbian circles within Yugoslavia, in certain periods can be observed in a similar way. Finally, potential elite includes individuals who choose to be more concerned with loyalty to a nation without a state than to strive to integrate into the state's official elite. In this way, they emphasize their commitment to advancing higher national goals versus state ones, which often means their automatic exclusion from the state's chosen elite. However, exclusion does not have to be a consequence of such aspirations, as evidenced by the example of the Slovenian and Croatian elites, who identified the progress of national goals with their progress.

Conflictual action of intellectuals in Yugoslavia

In his study of Yugoslavia, Dejan Jović testifies that there was a whole theoretical current that explains the disintegration of Yugoslavia by the influence of intellectual elites. This cultural argument gives a specific weight to intellectuals in the creation, and later in the dissolution of the Yugoslav nation, which led to the disintegration of the state (Jović, 2003: 59 – 60). Wachtel, 1998) as mentioned, also analyzes the importance of intellectual circles for the creation and disintegration of Yugoslavia.

When taking a closer look at the situation in Yugoslavia, it can be concluded that nationalism was covertly woven into its very foundations. The impossibility of reconciling the ethnocultural and territorial-political model led to conflicts and decentralization, which further inflamed nationalist demands. Yugoslavia began to be viewed quite early as a community of nations, and former life-long Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito accordingly pointed out that he was “a Croat first, then a Yugoslav second”. National affiliation, that is nationality, was legitimately recognized as a means of ex-

pression, which is proved by the presence of such a declaration on the census, but the ideological advantage was given to class affiliation in socialist society.

However, national demands, within the framework of the socialist ideological discourse, appeared as early as the beginning of the 1960s. An early example is the controversy between Dobrica Ćosić and Dušan Pirjevec in 1961/1962 in the literary journals *Act* [*Delo*] and *Our Modernity* [*Naša sodobnost*]. This polemic brought to light the different understandings of the nation and the role of the nation by two recognized intellectuals of the former Yugoslavia. Similar to later statements, after he withdrew from the League of Communists, Ćosić advocated the stance that the nation was only a transitional path to a higher level of integration. However, Pirjevec (2005: 190) on the other hand “considered real integration possible only if all these organisms and all these units experience such confirmation of themselves to exhaust to the end all those healthy energies which today necessarily exist as separate, as independent organisms, as special, as independent units.” According to Pirjevec, the existence of national republics should not have been questioned, which Ćosić sharply criticized.

One of the first attempts to introduce the nation into this field is the speech of Dobrica Ćosić in 1968. Already a prominent writer and intellectual, but also an official of the League of Communists, he spoke from the position of Marxist internationalism on the problems of underestimating the national question in the Republic of Serbia in the 1960s, Albanian nationalism and irredentism. Contrary to attempts to formalize national self-determination through self-government, Ćosić stands out for the second time “as we know the way of creating an internationalist community on the foundations of real socialist self-government and association of all equal and free individuals, united on the basis of common class, economic, cultural and social goals and interests, regardless of nationality and borders” (Ćosić, 2004: 21). The speech gives a very precise analysis of what was happening at the national level at that time.

It is easy to see the elements that later became so characteristic of every, even Serbian ideology of nationalism – Serbs as victims of other nations, but perhaps even more as own victims. However, the political climate of the late 1960s did not allow anyone to discuss national problems openly, especially those related to the sensitive issue of Kosovo. This speech was strongly condemned and Ćosić withdrew from the League of Communists. There was a kind of confusion since the liberalization of the market with the reform of 1965 was expected to correspond to the liberalization of other social areas. In 1967, many Croatian intellectuals signed a declaration on the Croatian literary language, to which many Serbian intellectuals

responded with their “Proposal for Thinking”. In November 1968, nationalist demonstrations broke out in Kosovo, which were suppressed by police force and the threat of military use. In the early 1970s, the Croatian leadership faced a wave of nationalism that it failed to resist, which eventually had to be removed from the centers of power at the Yugoslav level.

After that, the Constitution was adopted in 1974, transferring additional competencies to the republics of Yugoslavia. The federal state still had a charismatic leader, controlled foreign policy and the army remained under the jurisdiction of the federation. The federation lost significant power as the republics were “nationalized” so that the sovereignty within the republic belonged to the nation – more precisely, this applied to those ethnicities in the former Yugoslavia that were considered as “constituent nations” – Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims (later Bosniaks), Macedonians and Montenegrins. Other ethnic groups were considered national minorities. The largest of those were Albanians and Hungarians, and they enjoyed significant autonomy within autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, which were formally part of Serbia. In this way, all issues were linked to the national issue. The constitution also introduced the definition of a nation, nationality and ethnic group.

The Memorandum of SASA and the Slovenian Memorandum

In the 1980s, society fell into a political-economic crisis, which contributed to the strengthening of nationalisms in Yugoslavia. Investigating why Serbian intellectuals turned to nationalism, Jasna Dragović-Soso (2002) pays special attention to the crisis in society and the strengthening of differences between elites in different republics after Tito’s death, as well as the mutual relations between the Serbian and Slovenian critical intelligentsia. In her book, the author discusses the role of the Kosovo problem after the Albanian demonstrations in 1981, and its use within the national ideology. The study provides a complex overview of the development and/or change in the understanding of intellectuals from the 1960s onwards and attempts to explain the support that intellectuals gave to national ideology and ultimately to Milošević.

During this pre-war period, a document appeared in Serbia which was later used as the crucial evidence of the connection between nationalism and intellectuals. Since its appearance then, and until today, the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA Memorandum) does not cease to provoke controversy about its character and intentions. Mostly, this unfinished product of intellectuals within the SASA is assessed

as a moment when Yugoslavia clearly noticed nationalistic tendencies among Serbian intellectuals. Although the Memorandum was an official document of SASA, the academics did not deny their authorship, nor did they distance themselves from its content.

According to the authors of the Memorandum, the economic crisis, which worsened during the 1980s, was the result of poor economic planning. This crisis subsequently contributed to the strengthening of the republican and provincial bureaucracy, and was reflected in the suppression of any opinion that seemed against their interests. They considered Serbia a victim of Yugoslav policy, which they understood as the policy of other republics, primarily Croatia and Slovenia, which deprived Serbia of parts of its territory – Kosovo and Vojvodina. This idea of Serbs as victims, which appeared in Čosić's speech 18 years earlier, became a cornerstone of the demands of both nationalists and communists in the late 1980s. In the Memorandum, Albanians were negatively characterized as an anti-democratic force, aimed at achieving the goals proclaimed in the programs and actions of the *Prizren League* 1878-81. Albanians were perceived as a serious threat to the state and the Serbian nation due to the lack of timely action by the authorities. In order for Serbia to become an integral component of socialist Yugoslavia, they believed that the country needed democratization, constitutional reform and the elimination of national discrimination, in order for the Serbian people to enjoy the same rights. The authors point out that shortly after the end of the WWII "nationalism began its rise, so that every constitutional change complements the institutional preconditions for its flourishing", and that "the basic cause of the multidimensional crisis lies in the ideological defeat inflicted on socialism by nationalism" (SASA Memorandum, p. 31). On the other hand, despite certain contradictions, the basic vision for the organization of Yugoslav society in the SASA Memorandum is related to the period before 1966.

A few weeks after the SASA Memorandum, the Contributions to the Slovenian National Program – also called the Slovenian Memorandum – were published in the *New Review* [*Nova Revija*] in Ljubljana. This document had a similar tone of resentment towards a common state in which its own nation is threatened with extinction. Serbian and Slovenian intellectuals had an understanding for each other so much so that the Belgrade *Literary Newspaper* [*Književne novine*] published the Slovenian memorandum, giving full support to efforts to articulate the national question. This document clearly positioned the Slovenian nation as exploited and subordinated in Yugoslavia, especially in terms of language. However, it did not try to offer any solutions for a common state, unlike the Serbian version,

but limited itself to issues of exclusive importance for the Slovenian nation (see Dragović Soso, 2002).

After this first widespread appearance of intellectuals within the national discourse, Slovenian and Serbian intellectual elite as well as elites from other republics, largely supported the dominant political ideology of the political leadership in their respective republics/autonomous province, which introduced nationalism as its inseparable element. Subsequent developments further weakened the support of intellectuals to the dominant communist ideology. The general socio-economic crisis has contributed to the engagement of many intellectuals in politics. However, during the 1990s, intellectuals who were thought to not belong to the “mainstream” did not find their way to the general public.

Following the October 5th, 2000 overthrow of Slobodan Milošević’s and subsequent democratic changes in Serbia, the elimination of the former dominant discourse in which nationalism found its place did not go as smoothly as had been assumed. The value structure of this discourse has survived the changes and found its place on the social scene, regardless of the calls for liberation from the ballast of the past. That there is a deep division among intellectuals over the ideology of nationalism is evidenced by the results of research among intellectuals after 2000 (Pudar Draško, 2016).

Anti-Nationalist Action of Intellectuals

Bearing in mind the series of studies that thematized the views and efforts of intellectuals in the direction of supporting national conflicts, it is important to point out continuous attempts to end such nationalistic program in Yugoslavia. Former *Praksis* members such as Nebojša Popov and Miladin Životić strongly opposed the ideology of nationalism. They started several initiatives, such as the one opting for a peaceful solution in late 1991, before the full outbreak of the war in former Yugoslavia, signed by 18 academics. In it, the signatories requested the resignation of Milošević, which SASA did not adopt at its regular session on June 4th, 1992, but the document was nevertheless signed by 65 academics.

Three anti-nationalist initiatives that were of a more permanent character in the former Yugoslavia are *The Belgrade Circle and the Circle 99*, *The Dialogue of Historians* and *The Languages and Nationalisms* initiative which gave rise to the Declaration on a Common Language.

The Belgrade Circle and the Circle 99

The Belgrade Circle arose from a spontaneous gathering of Serbian intellectuals united against the war that was just beginning. It brought together about 400 independent intellectuals who, in the midst of nationalist euphoria, gathered to promote the knowledge of a democratic, civil, pluralistic society. This “loose community of anti-regime intellectuals” (Cvejić et al, 2019: 39), which grew into an organization, is the originator of the idea of the *Second Serbia* as an anti-war, anti-nationalist and civil Serbia. The first presidents of the Belgrade Circle were Miladin Životić and Radomir Konstatinović. The sessions of the Belgrade Circle, which gathered the critical intellectuals of the time, were held in the Student Cultural Center, and then in the Youth Center. The group was eventually expelled from both places due to political intolerance and pressure. Through these sessions, the Belgrade Circle produced two important works - the book volumes “Second Serbia” and “Intellectuals and War”, which were subsequently translated into several languages.

Box 9.3. *The Belgrade Circle* gathered a number of prominent intellectuals with which the Second Serbia – i.e. anti-war and anti-Milošević activists – was identified. One of the founders, Borka Pavićević, described it as follows: “one book, one association, was formed as an opposition to the policy of memorandum Serbia, as a rebellion, as a creative rebellion against nationalism, evil, crime, destruction and self-destruction. In oral, written, propaganda and executive form. I am of the opinion that the Belgrade Circle with which the Second Serbia was identified, and between which there is not always a sign of equality, was basically Yugoslav and therefore necessarily anti-nationalist” (Borka Pavićević, 2017).

Suggested readings:

Cvejić, I. Nikolić, O. Sladeček, M. (2019). *Gradenje jedne kontra-institucije: istorija Instituta za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju*. Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju.

Russel Omaljev, A. (2016). *Divided We Stand: Discourses on Identity in “First” and “Other” Serbia*, Hannover: Ibidem-Verlag.

In the early months of the Bosnian war in late 1992, in ethnically mixed and diverse Sarajevo, an informal network of intellectuals began to operate around the independent and popular local radio station Studio 99. *The Circle 99* [*Krug 99*], as this association was later named, gathered a group of intellectuals who inherited the values of the Bosnian way of life. In the fol-

lowing period, this group appeared publicly with the aim of offering a different future and openly resisting aggression and nationalism. The Circle 99 launched the *Declaration on a Free and United Sarajevo* in early 1994, which was signed by 185,000 citizens of besieged Sarajevo and almost a million citizens from around the world. The Circle 99 cooperated closely with the Belgrade Circle and together they organized a meeting in Sarajevo during the siege, calling once again for an end to the conflict and coexistence of all citizens. Unlike the Belgrade Circle, this association still exists and operates today.

Box 9.4. The multinational composition of the *Circle 99* [Krug 99] and the free expression of national, religious and political feelings of its members practically proves the possibility of living together, tolerance and mutual respect... All members are united and bound by the vision of a free, democratic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, complete freedom and equality of its citizens and peace as their highest ideal. Nationalism, chauvinism, political and religious fanaticism, social injustice, any form of discrimination against individuals and groups, as well as any, especially cultural isolationism, are incompatible with the principles of human rights and freedoms, and that means they are incompatible with the principles of the Circle 99. Mutual personal respect, regardless of differences of opinion on certain topics, is the highest value of Circle 99, and openness to different political or ideological orientations is the principle of action with a call for dialogue.

The Dialogue of Historians

The Dialogue of Historians is an initiative that created an important output of ten books, collections of plenary presentations and statements submitted at these gatherings. The German Liberal Foundation organized nine meetings from 1998 to 2004, insisting to have present at the meetings pro-nationalistic intellectuals as well. The Dialogue of Historians formally began in 1998 in the Hungarian city of Pécs without the presence of the public, in order to secure neutral ground without pressure. Three more gatherings on this topic were held in Pécs. Only after the fourth gathering, were such activities organized on the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Herceg Novi, Zagreb, Belgrade, Zadar, Vršac and Osijek).

Box 9.5. *The Dialogue of Croatian and Serbian Historians* is a collective name for international scientific gatherings of historians, primarily from Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), later Serbia and Montenegro. It soon proved, despite the previous unscientific approach, and even gloating expectations, that the democratic and pluralistic dialogue did not present a set-back, but an opportunity for mutual enrichment and opening of new prospects and insights. It showed that an intellectual and liberal discussion in a society and among societies, which strive for democracy, pluralism and tolerance, cannot be part of the problem itself, but only part of its solution (Fleck, 2005: 37, in Graovac, 2005).

Suggested readings:

Graovac, I. (2005). *Čemu dijalog povjesničara - istoričara?* Brussels: Fridrich Naumann Stiftung, Dijalog.

Declaration on the Common Language

With the support of German foundations, the project “Languages and Nationalisms” was launched in 2016, the intention of which was to problematize the issue of “political” languages in the four countries that emerged from the disintegration of Yugoslavia through an open dialogue between linguists and other experts. It was taken as a starting point that the languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia have a common basis in the Štokavian dialect, and it was pointed out that linguistics has been intersecting with identity politics for years. As part of the project, four regional conferences were held in Podgorica, Split, Belgrade and Sarajevo. The core of the working group consisted of prominent experts in the field of language: Snježana Kordić from Croatia, Hanka Vajzović from BiH, Ranko Bugarski from Serbia and Božena Jelušić from Montenegro. In 2017, these linguists jointly issued a *Declaration on the Common Language* [Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku] which was subsequently signed by a number of prominent intellectuals and public figures throughout the region.

Box 9.6. *The Declaration on the Common Language* contains a number of postulates that emphasize the common features of the politically separated languages that originated after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, such as:

The answer to the question whether a common language is used in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia is affirmative.

This is a common standard language of the polycentric type – one spoken by several nations in several states, with recognizable variants, such as German, English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese and many others. This fact is corroborated by Štokavian as the common dialectal basis of the standard language, the ratio of same versus different in the language, and the consequent mutual comprehensibility.

The use of four names for the standard variants – Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian – does not imply that these are four different languages.

Insisting on the small number of existing differences and on the forceful separation of the four standard variants causes numerous negative social, cultural and political phenomena. These include using language as an argument justifying the segregation of schoolchildren in some multiethnic environments, unnecessary “translation” in administration or the media, inventing differences where they do not exist, bureaucratic coercion, as well as censorship (and necessarily also self-censorship), where linguistic expression is imposed as a criterion of ethnolinguistic affiliation and a means of affirming political loyalty.

Suggested readings:

Text of the *Declaration on the Common Language*, available at: <http://www.krokodil.rs/eng/text-of-the-declaration-on-common-language-in-english/> (page accessed on 1.7.2020)

Conclusion

Modern history testifies that intellectuals have engaged massively in creating the contextual terrain for conflicts based on the ethnic and national grounds. Nations are collective communities, and are peculiar and elusive concepts prone to be interpreted as “being both ‘banal’ and infinitely complex; primordial and modern; imagined and real; they also have a great role in the politics of enmity” (Pavlović et al, 2018: 7). The Yugoslav and the generally Balkan context has shown that intellectuals were not only ideologues but also implementors of the ideology of nationalism. For such reasons, it was important to show that they also wholeheartedly engaged in anti-conflictual thinking and contributed to anti-conflictual actions. State building in Balkans has to move a step away from nation building. Finding a consensual peace is the only sustainable perspective for the region which suffered tremendously from ‘othering’ and attempts to expel those ‘others’ from one’s own communities.

Questions for students:

Should intellectuals be defined *formally* – as a strata with the highest education within a society, or *functionally* – as those who voice their views publicly and influence public opinion?

Do intellectuals have *ethical and/or legal* responsibility for their public statements and engagement?

What are the specific characteristics of intellectuals and their public role in the Western Balkans, especially during and after the 1990s?

What were and/or are the main challenges and activities of the Western Balkan intellectuals during and after the 1990s, and how did the violent conflict in the region affected their work?

What are your views of the most important recent reconciliation efforts and initiatives instigated by the Western Balkan intellectuals?

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