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THE SPECTRES OF THE YUGOSLAV WARS: MINORITIES' RESPONSE TO STATE DISINTEGRATION¹

ABSTRACT

This article discusses minorities' responses to conflicts in post-1989 Eastern Europe that focuses on them embracing violence to cede from their original state and join their motherland or gain independence. The discussion focuses on the actions of minorities in the contested areas in the former Yugoslavia at the peak of the country's 1990s crisis, described as a drive towards ethnic self-determination. Faced with political crisis, disintegration and/or oppression, most ethnic groups opted for confrontation, secession and armed revolt/resistance with maximalist independence claims instead of cooperation, integration or compromise.

Furthermore, I discuss some possible implications of the grim Yugoslav experience. As I argue, to understand why minorities reverted to war in the former Yugoslavia and beyond, we perhaps need to recognize that post-1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe were predominantly the expressions of nationalist revolt and not democratic revolutions. In conclusion, I discuss some general conditions required for a minority to rise to arms, following Jenne's theory that stresses the role of external patrons in spurring internal conflicts. I emphasize this synergy of ethnic nationalism, external support by the kin state and/or international actors and minority's oppression as decisive for the eruption of ever-present antagonisms into a larger conflict and war.

KEYWORDS

Yugoslavia, Yugoslav wars, Minorities, Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Bosniaks

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Introduction

Why do minorities in political conflict choose to advocate independence, even at the cost of waging war? In order to provide a tentative answer(s) to this question, I will focus on the dissolution of Yugoslavia to illuminate the position of minorities during the political crisis and war. I argue that Yugoslav minorities focused their efforts on gaining independence and joining their kin republic/ (emerging) state, even at the cost of war. In particular, I will discuss in some detail all three major ethnic groups in Bosnia – Bosniaks (Muslims), Croats (Roman-Catholics) and Serbs (Eastern-Orthodox), Serbs in Croatia and Albanians in Serbia (Kosovo). Then, I will pose some more general questions about the possible implications of the Yugoslav case on the Eastern/Central Europe and former Soviet Union in general: does Yugoslav minorities' experiences perhaps make us think about the post-1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe as expressions of nationalist revolt rather than fundamentally democratic revolutions driven by the belief in the idea(l)s of the Western democracy? If so, then the today's proverbial rise of right-wing sentiments in Central and Eastern Europe is merely the continuation and rearticulation of that same sentiment, which, unless systematically prevented, will proceed until the last part of our political space receives a properly national homogenous shape, with minorities fighting to be contained within the borders of their kin state, or within a separate state-let the carved for themselves.

The caveats of Yugosplaining and Yugodenying

Yugoslavia reached the height of its crisis in the late 1980s as a federal state with 6 republics: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Serbia had 2 autonomous provinces with significant levels of autonomy: Vojvodina, where over 1/2 of the population were Serbs and the rest were Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks etc., and Kosovo with 80% Albanians and 10% Serbs. Other republics also had diverse ethnic structure: Croatia had 78% Croats and 12% Serbs, Macedonia had 65% Macedonians and 22% Albanians, and Bosnia & Herzegovina was the most diverse of all, with 43% of Muslims/Bosniaks, 34% of Serbs and 17% of Croats (Popis 1991, see: Picture 1 below).

Since the death of its charismatic, lifelong President Josip Broz Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia was ruled by a complicated collective federal presidency comprising 9 members: each republic and autonomous province provided one member, and the ninth was the president of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. After an introduction of multiparty system, elections were held in all republics and democratically elected representatives assumed their positions. After a rather formal, unsuccessful negotiations between the republics' leaders in early 1991, one by one, 4 out of 6 republics declared independence: Slovenia and Croatia on June 25, 1991, Macedonia on September 25, 1991 and Bosnia & Herzegovina on March 3, 1992. The Serbs claimed these acts were the acts of secession, maintaining the union with Montenegro and



Picture 1. Ethnic map of Yugoslavia in 1991 (source: Wikipedia commons)

continuing to call this union Yugoslavia until 2003, when it was renamed to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The others, however, claimed that it was a dissolution and the 1991 International Arbitration Commission (known as Badinter’s commission) and the subsequent UN Security Council resolution 777 ruled in this direction (there is a whole library of books on the breakup of Yugoslavia; for a useful overview, see Silber and Little 1996; for the most concise debates, see: Ramet 2005; Bieber, Galijaš, Archer 2005). Finally, the Montenegrin independence from Serbia proclaimed in 2006, which brought an end to the short-lived State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, and 2008 Kosovo declaration of independence, presented itself as the final steps in the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Now, what – if any – implications can be drawn about other comparable cases of state dissolution in the early 1990s in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union? On the one end of the debate is the *sui generis* position, that assumes that the Yugoslav case in general and Kosovo case in particular are specific examples and thereby ultimately not applicable and essentially irrelevant to other cases in the world, be it Nagorno-Karabakh, Pridnestrovie/Transnistria, Crimea etc (for a critical analysis of the Kosovo case as *sui generis*, see: Ker-Lindsay 2013).² It seems to me that, essentially, most of the mainstream scholarship falls into this category. Namely, according to the standard explanation, advanced for decades from Fukuyama's 1992 *The End of History* to Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes' 2019 *The Light that Failed*, post-1989 revolutions in the former communist countries were fundamentally democratic revolutions, driven by the belief in the idea(l)s of Western liberal democracy such as liberty and equality, the rule of law, the freedom of speech, expression and conscience, inextricably bound with late capitalist principles of the free market. Fukuyama even argued that liberal democracy constitutes the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and famously proclaimed the end of history, describing the last man from the title of his book *The End of History and the Last Man* as the modern man who enjoys Western liberal democracy as the freest of all systems of government: "The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. Agreeing on ends, men would have no large causes for which to fight. They would satisfy their needs through economic activity, but they would no longer have to risk their lives in battle." (Fukuyama 1992: 311)

Seen from this light, it was the Yugoslav political elite, and chiefly the Serbs, that "missed the boat", failing to grasp the full consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the changing ideological and geo-political tide in Europe and the world. Simply put, they remained on the wrong side of history and ended in an ethnic war, whereas the others in mixed areas: Czechs, Slovaks, the Baltic nations were/are on the right side and peacefully entered/will enter the prosperity of the European Union as a model Western democracy.

However, in his recent critique of Fukuyama, Branko Milanović sees fundamental similarities between the events in the former Yugoslavia and in other countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s:

the revolutions of national independence and self-determination that were essentially nationalist revolts were proclaimed by Fukuyama and other *maîtres à penser* of the time to be the revolutions of democracy. This was a puzzle to me from the onset. If these were the revolutions of democracy, liberalism and multi-nationalism, why were all three communist federations broken up instead of just being democratized? Why, to use a contrast, was Spain democratized

2 "Yugosplaining", in distinction, aims to discuss the usefulness of the Yugoslav lenses for understanding world politics, that is of potentially seeing other conflicts and minority strivings elsewhere through the Yugoslav experience. A group of scholars from the former country even launched a project *Yugosplaining the World* with the objective of making sense of "our lived political experience elsewhere" (Hozić, Subotić, Vučićić 2020).

and kept as a democratic, ethnic-based federation, while all communist ethnic federations were broken-up? Clearly, there was something more than just democratization, and that more was ethnic self-determination. This was the key feature of East European revolutions; democracy was contingent.

The entire ideology of 1989 sidestepped that question. It is a fundamental question, because answering that question not only highlights the true nature of the revolutions, but answers the question of what motivated a number of wars, including the current one, that we have witnessed since 1989. There were 12 wars in the so-called transition countries. All of them were fought in the former communist federations, and 11 out of these 12 wars were the wars about borders. (The only war that was not about borders was the civil war in Tajikistan.) Thus the answer about what motivated these revolutions must be obvious to all – but to the most dogmatic minds. (Milanović 2022)

This number of wars fought in the former Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union can even be higher than 12 depending on the line that we draw between, on the one hand, a war and an armed conflict, and, on the other hand, between *one* war or *several* wars if involving the same territory and/or belligerents (for instance, we could speak of one or three wars in Chechnya between 1993 and 2009). In my understanding, a comprehensive attempt at listing the wars and conflicts fought from 1990 in the former Yugoslavia should include: The Ten-Day War in Slovenia (1991), The Croatian War (1991-1995), The Bosnian War (1992-1995), The Kosovo War (1998-1999), Insurgency in the Preshevo Valley in Serbia (1999-2001) and Insurgency in Macedonia (2001). Arguably, the list of wars and conflicts in the Former Soviet Union should include: The Transnistria (Moldova) war (1990-1992), The South Ossetia war (1991-1992), The Georgian civil war (1991-1995), The Tajikistani Civil War (1992-1997), The Abkhazian War (1992-1993, 1998), The East Prigorodny conflict (1992), The Chechen Wars (1993-2009), The Armenian-Azerbaijani War (1994-2023), The Dagestan War (1999).

All the differences and specificities notwithstanding, it seems evident that the previous list strongly supports Milanović's claim that all the aforementioned cases, except the war in Tajikistan, were ethnic conflicts motivated by the attempt at redrawing the borders. Perceived from that vantage point, in the abovementioned cases, the behaviour of national minorities in contested areas in the time of crisis is best described as a nationalistic drive towards ethnic self-determination. Faced with the political crisis and possible disintegration and objective – real or potential – oppression, they typically opted for confrontation instead of cooperation, disintegration and secession instead of integration, armed revolt/resistance with maximalist independence claims instead of a compromise. Thus, violent response towards ceding and/or joining their national state has been almost exclusively the only perceived way by the minorities to survive, that is, to protect themselves and their vital interests. To exemplify this point further, I will provide some details about the response of various ethnic groups in Yugoslavia to the crisis and dissolution of the country, and then address briefly the issue of the general conditions and reasons that drives a minority towards a conflict and war.

Yugoslav minorities' (and majorities') quest for self-determination and independence

In facing the crisis of the state, the Yugoslavs turned to the newly introduced multiparty democracy, supporting the freshly founded nationally minded parties and elites that organized referenda about their nation's status in the country at the brink of dissolution. The first referendum on self-determination was held in Slovenia in the late 1990, with 90.83% turnout and 95.71% votes for independence. Other republics followed suit: Croatia in May 1991, with 94.17% voting "in favour" (78.69% of the total electorate), followed by Macedonia in September 1991, with 96.46% voting for independence (75.72% turnout). Croatian Serbs boycotted the referendum in Croatia, as the independence would seal their fate of losing the status of a constitutive nation and being reduced to a national minority. Namely, the Socials Federative Republic of Yugoslavia was composed of six constitutive nations (*narodi*) plus minorities (*narodnosti*). In legal terms, nations, not the republics, were constitutive political subjects. Practically, it meant that Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins and Muslims/Bosniaks had potentially the same status irrespective of the republic in which they lived/resided. However, with the rise to power of the nationalist oriented Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica in Croatia in 1989, the Serbs were swiftly reduced to the level of national minority in the new Croatian constitution, which they effectively saw as being reduced to the rank of the second-class citizens. In response, they organized their own referendum already in August 1990, proclaiming autonomy, and later went on to proclaim the independence of the Republika Srpska Krajina from Croatia. In the next step, they strove for the unification with Serbia, which Serbia, however, never ratified (see: ICTY Indictment to Milan Martić, art. 56 to 64 et passim).³

3 The timeline provided in the indictments goes as follows: "56. In advance of the 1990 elections, the nationalistic Serbian Democratic Party ('SDS') was founded in Knin, advocating the autonomy and later secession of predominantly-Serb areas from Croatia.

57. On 25 July 1990, a group of SDS leaders established the Serbian National Council ('SNC'), adopting a Declaration on Autonomy and the Position of Serbs in Croatia, and on the Sovereignty and Autonomy of the Serbian Nation.

58. On 30 July 1990, during the SNC's first constituent session, a plebiscite, which would confirm the autonomy and sovereignty of the Serb nation in Croatia, was scheduled.

59. On 17 August 1990, the Croatian government declared the referendum illegal. The Croatian police moved towards several Serb towns in the Krajina region. Serbs, organised by Milan Martić, put up barricades.

60. Between 19 August and 2 September 1990, Croatian Serbs held a referendum on the issue of Serb 'sovereignty and autonomy' in Croatia. The vote took place in predominantly Serb areas of Croatia and was limited only to Serb voters. Croats who lived in the affected region were barred from participating in the referendum. The result of the vote was overwhelmingly in support of Serb autonomy. On 30 September 1990, the SNC declared 'the autonomy of the Serbian people on ethnic and historic territories on which it lives and which are within the current boundaries of the Republic of Croatia as a federal unit of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'".

According to Serbian sources, 756,549 voted for the Serbian autonomy, against was 172, plus 60 votes being irregular. Predictably, Croatia declared that referendum to be illegal and tried preventing the referendum from being held at all with its police forces; the Serbs put the barricades to prevent the police from entering the areas populated mostly by Serbs, which was a prelude to the war that ended with the defeat of the Serbian self-proclaimed statelet and the expulsion of some 200,000 people that remained on that territory by the end of the war in 1995, most of whom came to Serbia.

The referenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro were not organized in 1991. As mentioned, Bosnia had a complex ethnic structure with three big ethnic groups, none of which had the majority, and also the Bosnian Serbs opposing the independence. In Serbia and Montenegro, Milošević's regime still hoped to retain some form of a lesser Yugoslavia, and thus a referendum made on independence made no sense at the time. Eventually, however, a referendum on the independence of Bosnia & Herzegovina was held on March 1, 1992. The total turnout of voters was 63.4%, 99.7% of whom voted for independence. In other words, out of the three main ethnic groups in Bosnia, Bosniaks and Croats overwhelmingly voted for independence. Similarly to Croatia, Serbs in Bosnia pre-empted this referendum by holding their own already on 10 November 1991 in the parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a significant Serb population. Remaining within Yugoslavia was approved by 98% of votes, and Republika Srpska was subsequently established on 9 January 1992. It was clear that Bosnia is heading towards a bloody civil war. After unsuccessful attempts of the international community to secure a peace plan that would prevent it, a full-fledged civil war broke out in Bosnia ending in a Dayton agreement in late 1995 that left it as a dysfunctional country with two largely independent parts and three constitutive nations: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. To this day, Bosnia remains divided and politically separated according to ethnic lines.

Montenegro organized their referendum on the same day as Bosnia, on March 1, 1992, but as Montenegrins at the time felt a strong bond with Serbs, they voted overwhelmingly to remain in Yugoslavia (96.82% with 66.04% turnout). However, in 2006, Montenegrins held another referendum, this time voting 55% for the dissolution of their state union with Serbia. Serbia did not dispute this referendum and Montenegro has been an independent country since 2006, though interestingly with a rather dynamic ethnic structure where people

61. On 21 December 1990, Croatian Serbs in Knin announced the creation of a "Serbian Autonomous District" ("SAO") of Krajina and declared their independence from Croatia.

64. On 1 April 1991, the Executive Council of the SAO Krajina passed the decision to incorporate the SAO Krajina into the Republic of Serbia. At the same time the SAO Krajina recognised the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the SFRY constitutional-legal system, and decided that the laws and regulations of the Republic of Serbia applied throughout the territory" (ICTY Indictment to Milan Martić, 2002).

have arguably been declaring both Montenegrin and Serbian interchangeably in the past censuses.⁴

Serbia and its Minorities in the 1990s

Throughout this period, Serbia remained the only republic – and later, state – which did not offer a referendum to its citizens, Serbs and minorities alike. If it did, its minorities would surely express dissatisfaction with the new political order. Namely, both Hungarians and Albanians, the two largest national minorities (*narodnosti*) in Serbia, enjoyed considerable autonomy in the Yugoslav times. They lived in the two autonomous provinces in Serbia – Vojvodina and Kosovo, respectively, which had almost equal rights to the republics. For instance, autonomous provinces were able to independently issue laws and voted differently from those of the Republic of Serbia. The Serbian scholars tend to be rather critical of such an arrangement that “gave to the republics and provinces prerogatives of the state, which endangered the federal state” (Pavlović 2009). The Hungarian scholars tend, however, to see these political arrangements, and the overall climate in Yugoslavia in a positive light, especially in comparison with the later authoritarian and nationalistic policy of Milošević’s regime in the 1990s (see: Varady 1997), seeing it as “a more favourable situation than their compatriots in other countries in the Carpathian basin, even including Hungary” (Arday 1996: 478).

In March 1989, Milošević made constitutional changes that effectively abolished these autonomous rights. In response to Milošević’s abolishment of Vojvodina autonomy, Hungarians in Vojvodina formed their national party – Democratic Community of Vojvodina Hungarians (*Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége*) in 1990, and adopted the *Memorandum*

4 During the Socialist Yugoslavia, Montenegrins almost exclusively declared officially as Montenegrins and the number of Serbs thus stood at around meagre 3% at population censuses from 1948 to 1981. However, since the breakup of Yugoslavia, Montenegrins apparently started declaring more as Serbs. Thus, the past pre-war census in 1991 saw 62% of Montenegrins and 9% of Serbs in the country, while 2003 census recorded 43% of the population declaring as Montenegrins and 32% as Serbs, and the last 2011 census of Montenegrins recorded 45% of Montenegrins and 27,8% of Serbs, as well as 1% of Croats, 3,3% of Muslims, 8,6% of Bosniaks, 4,9% of Albanians and 1% of Roma. Moreover, in 2003, 63% of the population said that they spoke Serbian, with only 22% describing their language as Montenegrin. In the last census of 2011, 43% said that they speak Serbian and 37% that they speak Montenegrin. Most Montenegrins belong to the historical and canonically recognized Serbian Orthodox Church, with a tiny minority adhering to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, while Croats and some Albanians are Roman Catholics and Roma, Muslims and Bosniaks are Muslims. So, instead of a fixed identity, we have a rather shady and shifting situation in Montenegro: only a portion of those declaring as Montenegrins are firmly on either pole, being consistently either *Montenegrins who speak Montenegrin and adhere to the Montenegrin Orthodox Church*, or *Serbs who speak Serbian and adhere to the Serbian Orthodox Church*. Quite often, it is a mix of people declaring as Montenegrins, but considering their language to be Serbian and being the adherents of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

on the Self-Governance of Hungarians Living in the Republic of Serbia. The Hungarians focused on minority rights, demanding personal autonomy with the rights in the areas of education, culture, media and the use of language, territorial autonomy for the majority of Hungarian municipalities, and special local autonomy for municipalities with a Hungarian majority. However, the Milošević regime showed no intention of granting collective rights to Hungarians, despite their arguably more cooperative approach to his rule (Beretka 2019; see Pavlović 2021) After the fall of Milošević in 2000, Serbia adopted several key laws on minority protection in cooperation with the Hungarian minority representatives in particular. This resulted in a lasting positive trend in Serbian-Hungarian relations and minority rights, which, according to the recent scholarship, ‘could potentially offer a template for addressing ethnic tensions in other Central and East European countries’ (Smith, Semenyshyn, 2016).

Kosovo Albanians, being much larger in numbers and constituting an absolute majority in Kosovo, openly opted for independence from Serbia. Responding to their autonomy abolishment which Kosovo Albanians considered to be unconstitutional, Kosovo Parliament declared Kosovo to be a Republic, equal to other Yugoslav republics, on July 2 1990. Serbia responded by abolishing the Kosovo Parliament and removing editors of all main Albanian media in Kosovo, and stopped financing Kosovo institutions. Kosovo Albanians responded by building parallel institutions. In September 1990, MPs met in secret to adopt the Kosovo Constitution and held an informal referendum on independence and went on to proclaim Kosovo independence from Yugoslavia, which Serbia deemed illegal and rejected its validity and results. This proclamation did not get international support as Kosovo was recognized only by the neighbouring, kin country of Albania. In reality, until 1999 Kosovo functioned as a parallel system with official Serbian institutions of the autonomous province Kosovo and Metohija and Albanian institutions of the “Republic of Kosovo” which Serbian authorities considered illegal and tried to prevent by police force. After years of fragile peace and essentially non-violent resistance, some Albanians embraced a violent struggle and founded the UÇK (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës* or Kosovo Liberation Army). In 1998, conflicts between the Albanian insurgents and Serbian police intensified, leading to NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the withdrawal of Serbian establishment from Kosovo. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared independence (again), this time gaining considerable international recognition (for a short overview, see Pavlović et al. 2021: 364–367).

What is more, even Albanians that constituted majority in regions outside of Kosovo, from the Preshevo valley and Western Macedonia (see Picture 1) rose to arms. After the NATO bombing, the Albanians from the Preshevo valley in Southern Serbia replicated the Kosovo Albanian armed units and demanded unification with Kosovo – their political representatives still occasionally make this claim – but were eventually demilitarized with the assistance of NATO forces in June 2001 (for a detailed overview on Kosovo, see Mehmeti, Radeljić 2016; Bieber, Daskalovski 2003; for a discussion focusing on minorities, see:

Ćeriman and Pavlović 2020). Moreover, essentially the same military formation (UÇK – *Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare* or National Liberation Army) waged a warlike campaign with the Macedonian state forces throughout 2001, which ended with the Ohrid Agreement that significantly increased rights of Albanians in Macedonia and a disarmament brokered by the NATO.

Ultimately, even Muslims/Bosnians from Sandžak, a region in south-western Serbia bordering Bosnia, at the time opted for independence and organized their referendum in late October 1991. They constituted a majority in 3 municipalities and significant minority in the other 3, comprising in total cc. 280 000 people of close to then 10 million people in Serbia overall (inclusive of Kosovo Albanians). However, despite numerous complaints, cases of persecution during the Bosnian war and arrests of their representatives, and attempts at internationalizing their position, they never declared independence, likely due to their relatively low numbers and a lack of infrastructure and support to see it through (see *Chronology for Sandzak Muslims in Yugoslavia*, 2004).

Croatia		Bosnia and Herzegovina		Serbia		Montenegro	
Referendum on independence	May 19, 1991	Referendum on independence	March 1, 1992	Not held		Referendum to remain	March 1, 1992
Proclamation of independence	June 25, 1991	Proclamation of independence	March 3, 1992	Proclamation of "lesser" Yugoslavia	April 27, 1992	Proclamation of "lesser" Yugoslavia	April 27, 1992
Croatian Serbs referendum on autonomy	August 17, 1990	Bosnian Serbs referendum on remaining	November 10, 1991	Hungarians from Vojvodina referendum	Not held	New referendum to leave	May 21, 2006
Croatian Serbs declaration of independence	December 21, 1990	Bosnian Serbs declaration of independence	January 9, 1992	Kosovo Albanians referendum on independence	September 26-30, 1991	Proclamation of independence	June 3, 2006
				Kosovo Albanians declaration of independence	September 22, 1991		
				Muslims/Bosniaks from Sandzak referendum	October 25-27, 1991		

Chart 1. Referenda and declaration of independence by Yugoslav nations and nationalities

What can be derived from this survey? Effectively, at the first democratic, multiparty elections held in 1990, practically all Yugoslav nations and nationalities voted overwhelmingly for their national parties, and later went on to even more overwhelmingly vote for their independence on the referenda. Moreover, minorities had a proactive approach and most of them pre-empted the moves of the majority by forming their own national parties, organizing separate referenda and declaring autonomy or full-fledged independence before their more numerous compatriots or “com-republicans” did. All differences notwithstanding, it is plausible to say that – faced with state dissolution – practically all Yugoslav communities that were (or were to become) minorities clearly wanted independence, and most of them actually went on to declare it, even at the cost of war.

To be sure, diving deep into particularities of the Yugoslav case in the early 1990s would provide a detailed insight into the fabric of these ethnic conflicts, actions and roles of internal and international players, and thereby certainly offer a more nuanced picture of each minority in question as well as possible alternatives. However, that the Yugoslav nations and minorities (*narodi* and *narodnosti*), led by the nationalist rhetoric of the leaders they elected, strove towards their national independence based on ethnic principle rather than the principles of liberal democracy, seems difficult to dispute.

Implications (?): Minorities and War

I provided here a relatively brief survey of actions undertaken by practically all nations and nationalities in the former Yugoslavia, and argued that, faced with political crisis and (possible/likely/emerging) conflict, both the majorities and the minorities swiftly proclaimed independence as the sole and ultimate response to their situation and as the exclusive solution to their problems. Arguably, even those minorities that did not officially proclaim and pursue it, such as Hungarians in Vojvodina and Muslims/Bosniaks in Sandžak, did desire/prefer such an option, but refrained from it due to their relatively low numbers and the lack of means and support.

Ultimately, are there any broader implications and explanatory potential of the Yugoslav case to the question of minorities’ responses to the crisis and conflicts in general? One possible line of reasoning follows from the claim that, indeed, the conflicts in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were essentially revolutions in the name of national independence rather than ideological revolutions in the name of liberal democracy. Hence, it recognizes that the nationalism and right-wing sentiments in Eastern Europe are not being on the rise only recently, but that nationalism was already there in 1989 and held its unimpeded presence ever since. Thereby, it appears that both majorities and minorities in the former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union behaved somewhat similarly in the times of crisis: inasmuch as the latter was pulling towards a unified, homogenous, mono-national state, the

former was pushing away from it, especially if it has a kin state nearby providing logistics and support.

Arguably, this is still not sufficient to cause a clash between the minority and the majority. According to Erin K. Jenne's theory that stresses the role of external international factors in spurring internal conflicts, only "when the minority's external patron credibly signals interventionist intent, minority leaders are likely to radicalise their demands against the centre, even when the government has committed itself to moderation" (Jenne 2007: 2). In the Yugoslav case, military support of Milošević's regime in Serbia – or, rather, his early rhetorically professed readiness to provide it, was such external agent for Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, while unilateral support of international powers, Germany and Austria in the first place, and international willingness to arm Croatian government, was such external agent in the Croatian case. Kosovo Albanians in the early 1990s had neither arms nor the resources from the weak and poor Albania, nor did they have full support for independence from the international powers. However, the international situation changed in their favour after 1995, with the US government openly supporting Kosovo Albanian armed resistance. Last but not least, the central governments in each of these cases immediately assumed a hard line towards the minorities; Serbs in Croatia were reduced from a constitutive nation to a national minority, Bosnian Muslim-ruled government proclaimed independence despite the Bosnian Serbs' protests and inevitable ensuing conflict, and Milošević's regime ruled over Kosovo through a perpetual state of exception and apartheid.

To be clear, I believe that the previous discussion shows that a violent conflict and wars were all but inevitable. The Yugoslav example, as well as other wars in the former communist countries, could also be instructive in the sense that even when the crisis occurs, there is still a huge space between the two radical positions of assimilation and independence to comfortably accommodate both centrifugal and centripetal forces. Unfortunately, the grim reality is that it is rarely pursued and that the actions – or lack thereof – of the political elite in the former communist countries and international factors consisted in pushing it until it breaks.

Still, while Yugoslavia, Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia all broke down between mid-1991 to the end of 1992, not everywhere did that involve violence and conflicts between ethnic groups and between majority and minority. Thus, while the dissolution of Yugoslavia resulted in some 2 000 000 refugees and over 130 000 dead, the breakup of Czechoslovakia had 0 casualties. In comparative analyses, authors emphasized that, actually, both countries had many similarities, but blame poor leadership and "centralist attitude of Serbian leaders, unwilling to compromise and play by the rules of a consociational regime" for the violence occurring in the former Yugoslavia (Kennedy 2020: 5). Thus, while Vaclav Havel mediated between the two sides and contributed to calming tensions and coming to a bureaucratic accord for peaceful dissolution, Milošević in Serbia as well as Tuđman in Croatia both spurred national sentiments of their electorate and discussed the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other

factors contribution to war were “the particularly unhelpful international community’s response to the problem” in Yugoslavia, and more democratic strands in elite circles and the general population in Czechoslovakia (Kennedy 2020: 9). Bookman adds that Yugoslavia had a greater economic crisis in the 1980s, longer legacy of inter-ethnic conflicts, and that the Great Powers contributed to war by premature recognition of the secessionist claims. Most importantly, Czechoslovakia had a far more homogenous ethnic structure, with Czechs and Slovaks constituting 94% and 86% of population in their parts, and with only 1-3 of Czechs living in Slovakia and vice versa before the breakup (Bookman 1994: 184). Thus, the question where to draw the border was a pacifying issue in the Czechoslovakian scenario, but a tantalizingly antagonizing issue in the Yugoslav case. In summarizing the arguments supposed to offer distinctions between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia vs Yugoslavia that would provide the explanation for the violence, Bunce thus claims: “All of this leads to one conclusion: Yugoslavia, at least with respect to these considerations, does not emerge as distinctive” (Bunce 1999: 219).⁵

Thus, rather than admitting that warlike outcome is inevitable, I emphasize this synergy of ethnic nationalism, external support by the kin state and/or international actors and the irresponsible behaviour of the central government as decisive for a minority reverting to war. What is more, even when violence occurs, as long as this rift between minority and majority does not completely crack, full-blown conflicts can be avoided, and wounds can be somewhat patched and healed – as was arguably the case in Macedonia. But if this is let to escalate to a point of no return, then it is likely that the conflict will persist until ethnic homogeneity is achieved, either by successful independence claim, or defeat and ethnic cleansing, or subjugation (unless, as it usually happens, foreign/international intervention disrupts such “natural” development).

5 According to Bunce herself, “Yugoslavia ended violently because the federation had been for so long decentralized; because Serbs were less powerful than their numbers (and their history) would indicate, yet empowered at the same time by the institutions of the Serbian republic; and because the Yugoslav military had long been a domestic political actor and was opposed, by mission and interest, to the dismantling of the state” (Bunce 1999: 233). As plausible as it may seem, the problem is that the army first intervened in Slovenia, only to withdraw after ten days. Again, we are forced to go back to the question of drawing the borders – homogenous Slovene population left little room for the army or any other party to maintain the conflict. But in the ethnically mixed Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia minorities refused to accept the previous republican borderlines as state borders even at the cost of a war. Without attempting to overgeneralize this case, the borders between ethnicities in the former Soviet Union were drawn by some consideration, which contributed to velvet dissolution. But it suffices to look at the case of Ossetians, who were divided between Russia and Georgia, and also contained Ingush lands in their territory; or of Armenia and Azerbaijan, with Nagorno-Karabakh being an enclave of Armenians in Azerbaijan, and Armenia cutting Azerbaijan proper from its enclave Nakhichevan. In such cases, it is much more difficult to maintain a peaceful political breakup and prevent conflicts.

Conclusion

This article offered a perspective on minorities' responses to conflict in cases when they embrace violence to cede from their original state and join their motherland or gain independence. The discussion focused on the minorities in the former Yugoslavia from the early 1990s onwards, i.e. at the peak of the country's crisis. As I argued, the behaviour of national minorities in the contested areas in the time of crisis is best described as a drive towards ethnic self-determination. Faced with political crisis and possible disintegration and objective – real or potential – oppression, most ethnic groups opted for confrontation instead of cooperation, disintegration and secession instead of integration, armed revolt/resistance with maximalist independency claims instead of a compromise. Thus, violent response towards ceding and proclaiming independence and/or joining their national state has been almost exclusively the only perceived way by the minorities to survive, that is, to protect themselves and their vital interests. I exemplified this point by illustrating how most Yugoslav minorities reverted to war to achieve national unification/independence: all three major ethnic groups in Bosnia – Bosniaks (Muslims), Croats (Roman-Catholics) and Serbs (Eastern-Orthodox), Serbs in Croatia and Albanians in Serbia (Kosovo).

In the second step, I discussed some possible implications of the grim Yugoslav experience. I argued that in order to understand why minorities reverted to war in the former Yugoslavia – and why they revert to war beyond this specific space – we perhaps need to recognize that post-1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe were predominantly the expressions of nationalist revolt and not primarily democratic revolutions. Namely, a popular view, advanced from Fukuyama's 1992 *The End of History* to Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes' 2019 *The Light that Failed*, saw post-1989 revolutions essentially as democratic revolutions, driven by the belief in the idea(l)s of Western democracy. In line with this argument, the current rise of right-wing sentiment in Eastern Europe should be understood as the consequence of the failing belief in democracy. In opposition to this view, Branko Milanović (2022) recently asked a simple question: „If these were the revolutions of democracy, liberalism and multi-nationalism, why were all three communist federations broken up instead of just being democratized?“, pointing out that 11 out of 12 wars fought in the former communist federations were about borders.

Furthermore, I discussed some general conditions required for a minority to rise to arms as the only and ultimate solution to its status, in particular Erin K. Jenne's theory that stresses the role of external international factors in spurring internal conflicts. I emphasize this synergy of ethnic nationalism, external support by the kin state and/or international actors and oppression of a minority as decisive for the eruption into a larger conflict and war. Still, the main concern of this article is not to offer a theoretically solid and universally applicable answer to the question when will a minority revert to war. Rather, I wanted to emphasize the responsibility of all actors involved in a conflict

to act in the way to prevent and avoid armed conflict and war. For centuries, Serbs and Albanians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Ukrainians and Russians lived together, intertwined, in the same states and empires. Bringing them back together under one banner and country name they would give allegiance to, seems impossible today, but it is easy to imagine them fighting quite literally to the last, with that last man being precisely the opposite of Fukuyama's one – the ultimate survivor of an ethnic conflict. Their national sentiments could have remained benign, were it not for external and internal agents determined to ruthlessly exploit them. Sadly, while war crimes are punishable by international law, war-mongering is not, even though it is no less soaked in blood.

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Aleksandar Pavlović

Bauci jugoslovenskih ratova: Kako manjine reaguju na raspad zemlje?

Apstrakt

Ovaj članak razmatra pitanje – kako manjine u Evropi posle 1989. godine reaguju kada su zahvaćene konfliktom i/ili raspadom zemlje? Diskusija se usredsređuje na manjine u bivšoj Jugoslaviji od početka 1990-ih, dakle na vrhuncu državne krize. Kao što tvrdim, ponašanje nacionalnih manjina u spornim područjima u vreme krize može se najbolje opisati kao težnja ka etničkom samoopredeljenju. Suočene sa političkom krizom i mogućim raspadom i *objektivnom* - stvarnom ili potencijalnom - represijom, većina etničkih grupa se odlučila za konfrontaciju umesto za saradnju, raspad i ocepljenje umesto integracije, oružanu pobunu/otpor s maksimalističkim zahtevima za nezavisnost umesto kompromisa.

U radu se takođe razmatraju i neke moguće posledice sumornog jugoslovenskog iskustva. Kako se tvrdi, da bismo razumeli zašto su se manjine u bivšoj Jugoslaviji okrenule ratu ili ga prihvatile, možda je najpre potrebno prepoznati da istočnoevropske revolucije posle 1989. godine nisu bile prevashodno demokratske revolucije, već pretežno izrazi nacionalnog bunta.

U zaključku se osvrćem i na neke opšte uslove potrebne da bi manjina posegla za oružjem kao jedinim i krajnjim rešenjem za svoj status, posebno teoriji Erin Dženi (2007) koja ističe ulogu spoljnih međunarodnih faktora u podsticanju unutrašnjih konflikata. Naglašavam ovu sinergiju etničkog nacionalizma, spoljnje podrške od strane matične države i/ili međunarodnih aktera i represije prema manjini kao odlučujućima za erupciju (inače uvek prisutnih) antagonizama u širi konflikt i rat.

Ključne reči: Jugoslavija, Jugoslovenski ratovi, manjine, Srbi, Hrvati, Albanci, Bošnjaci