

DISCORD ACROSS ETHNIC AND STATE BORDERS IN THE BALKANS

Vladimir Baar

*Department of Social Geography and Regional Development, Faculty of Science,
University of Ostrava, Ostrava, Czech Republic*

Abstract: Paper focuses on relations between ethnic and state borders. While in the Western Europe we observe formation of the supranational entity - EU, in the CEE countries discord in ethnic-state borders caused tensions. The disintegration of former communist block encouraged emancipation movements. It was especially the case of Yugoslavia, where series of conflicts emerged. The outcome should be in demarcation of new state borders, that should respect new reality in the Balkan.

Key words: nationalism, ethnic borders, state borders, Balkan

Discord across state and ethnic borders caused a number of tense situations in recent years. Many of them were solved by armed conflict. At present, the situation is not different, moreover, it can be assumed that international relations will continue to be burdened by discord across both types of borders in the years to come. Tension inherent in the discord mentioned is particularly typical of the European and Asian model of a nation. Nevertheless, the same tension is beginning to surface within immature nations of the African type (for more details see Baar, 1996).

On European level, there are many places of conflict where the ethnicity of one state overlapped with a neighbouring state. Reciprocal overlapping was also quite frequent. Over the course of centuries, stronger nations occupied the territories of weaker nations and these were, more or less successfully, assimilated into a foreign culture. Thus, state borders corresponding to a large extent with ethnic borders gradually crystallised. Nowadays, in the western part of Europe, the overlapping of some state-forming nations with neighbouring countries is rather exceptional and concerns approximately tens of thousands - only exceptionally hundreds of thousands people (if dispersed populations of migrants settled in big cities are not taken into consideration).

For them, a model of cultural autonomy was gradually created (Germans in Belgium and Denmark, Swedes in Finland) and in part combined with a certain degree of territorial autonomy (Germans and French in Italy). The process is, moreover strengthened by building upon supranational structure of the European Union, in which state borders have stopped functioning as barriers. In Europe new nations of the territorial type, such as the Swiss, the Belgians and the Austrians have only exceptionally been formed out of ethnic overlaps.

A completely different situation took shape in the eastern part of Europe. The eastern part of Central Europe (Poland, Czechia) took advantage of Germany's defeat in World War II and expelled the Germans from their territories. However, Polish pre-war territories inhabited by a majority of the Ukrainians and Belorussians were annexed to their nation states at the time i.e. within the USSR. By contrast, ethnic and state borders in the south-east from the eastern part of central Europe towards the Balkans, remained in considerable discord, reflecting a variety of migrations and the formation of nations on the basis of religion rather than language. Nevertheless, the nations living in the Balkans have one more way of coming into existence - the Russian annexation of the eastern part of historic Moldova led to the formation of the Moldovan nation, and consequently, to the formation of their own state. Similarly, the Serbian annexation of the south-west part of historic Bulgaria led to the formation of the Macedonian nation and its independent state.

If we compare the differences between Croatian, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bosnian languages, the linguists will unanimously confirm that they are far smaller than those between the German spoken in the north of Germany and the one spoken in the south (and the same situation applies with French or Italian). There is no point in looking for the reasons why it was exactly linguistically identical populations in the Balkans that disintegrated and splitted into independent nations - that is simply the reality of the Balkans. An inevitable part of this reality is also a few more nations that are quite distant - in terms of language - from the Slavs mentioned previously, such as the Romance Romanians, the Moldovans and the Aromanians, the illyrian Albanians. Finally, the Greeks form a specific group of the Indo-European language family. Also it is the uralic Hungarians as well as the altaic Turks, who live in the Balkans and are quite close - in terms of language, though not in terms of religion - to the Gagauzs in the south of Moldova (in a way they, too, struggled for the declaration of independence.)

The disintegration of the communist bloc encouraged emancipation movements in those nations that had not yet formed states. (The movement was aiming at formation of their own states.) This process can be considered as legitimate, however, the reality has shown that the harmonisation of claimed state borders and existing ethnic borders will be hard to achieve. Actually, it was during the division of the states in the aftermath of World War I when two potential national conflicts were created. The state of Hungary, nearly a thousand years-old state, was reduced to a mere one third of its historic area and the divided Hungarians had to accept the fact that a percentage of them would be living outside Hungarian borders - mainly in Romania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia. It can be claimed that it is Hungary that embroiled the central-European state of Slovakia in frontier discord. The other dissatisfied nation - the Albanians - found themselves in a

different situation to the Hungarians. The Albanians were able to re-create their ephemeral medieval formations only in the Balkan war in 1912, yet they did not manage to achieve the formation of a state, in which they all could live. Thus, a percentage of Albanians remained in Greece, and a percentage in Yugoslavia. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, also Macedonia inherited an Albanian minority.

It was primarily the disintegration of Yugoslavia that brought the Serbs into the ranks of dissatisfied nations. For them, the original Yugoslavia meant that their dream about "great" Serbia had come true. The Serbs discontented with the efforts of the Croats, the Slovenes, the Bosnians, and the Macedonians to form their own states reacted in a well-known way. At first, they struggled against the disintegration, and then their efforts resulted at least in the separation of the part of Croatia and Bosnia where the Serbs represented significant minorities. By this, they aimed at joining all the Serbs even in "rump" Yugoslavia. Their intention was to achieve this aim with the help of a strong Yugoslavian Army, as well as that of a quickly forming military attachment recruiting the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs. However, the quite understandable efforts of the largest minority living within Serbia - the Albanians, who had been concentrated in the autonomous province of Kosovo since the post-war period (the autonomy was annulled by the Serbs in 1981) - to join their nation, were paradoxically rejected by the Serbs. And it must be said here that the emancipatory efforts of the Kosovo Albanians did not aim at integration with their compatriots in Albania at the time but endeavoured only to be granted a constitutional guarantee of equal rights within the "rump" Yugoslavia. In its first phase, Serbian military and numerical superiority was successful. The Serbs drove approximately a quarter of a million Croats to leave their homes and declared the republic of Serbian Kraina on the occupied territory.

In Bosnia over 2 million people were forced to leave their homes (tens of thousands were murdered) and the Serbs gained control over approximately 75% of Bosnian territory and formed another republic there, the so called Serbian Republic (in contrast with the Republic of Serbia - a part of Yugoslavia). The main Serbian goals were reshaped - the new aim was to form a new structure with the help of ethnic purges, in which ethnic and state borders would demarcate the new Yugoslavia, this time leaving out the "treacherous" Croats and Bosnians. The governments of the new Serbian republics submitted an official request to join the Serbian - Montenegrin Yugoslavia. However, the request met with a determined opposition among the international community. As a consequence, the government of the new Yugoslavia succumbed to this pressure and decided rather to reject the appeal submitted by the two republics. Nevertheless, what must be mentioned, it is the fact that the international opposition was by no means a consequence of a hostile attitude towards the Serbians, but rather expressed disapproval of the methods the Serbs had used. Whilst the separation of Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia did not displace anybody. The ethnic cleansing committed by the Serbs was simply not acceptable.

While the Croats were not capable of effective national defence, a different situation was prevalent in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Forming a coalition with the Bosnians made the attempt to stop the Serbian offensive successful, as well as the Croats' attempt to hold over or even conquer some of the territories. Thus, a civil war

started, of which the Serbs, despite several local defeats, became winners. Nevertheless, the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina created a formation of their own - the Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia. Their intention was to join the new republic to Croatia. However, in 1995 the situation changed. The Croatian army took the offensive that consequently led towards the defeat of the Serbs in Serbian Kraina and enabled the Croats to prepare also an offensive in the Serbian Republic situated in the territory of Bosnia. It is worth noting that the conquest of Serbian Kraina caused an exodus of approximately 400 thousand Serbs. The fact is, however, that they fled from the country mainly because they were afraid of potential Croatian revenge. It is true that the Croatian government encouraged the Serbs to stay in their homes, yet warned them that all who had been involved in expelling of the Croats from their homes and in confiscation of their property in 1991 would be prosecuted. Thus, the ethnic border between Croatia and Serbia (resp. Yugoslavia) became more identical to the state border. Nevertheless, a percentage of the Serbs remained in eastern Slavonia, which was not returned to Croatia, on the basis of agreement, until 1997. In addition, experience shows that the Croatian state did not start up a political hunt for the Serbs (the reason may have been the fact that the main leaders of the Serbian revolt rather decided to flee from the country).

The offensive in Bosnia and Herzegovina (further only BAH) caused the change of the situation. The Serbs got only 30% of the original territory and this fact made them to start off negotiations. Having signed the Dayton Peace Treaty, (apart from the three political representations of the Bosnian nations, the treaty was also signed by the presidents of Croatia and Yugoslavia) the Serbs gained 49% of the Bosnian territory (however, their share in the population was only 33%). Moreover, the territory was in a quality agricultural area in Sava region and Drina region. The border between the Serbian Republic and a newly established Bosnian - Croatian Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (both parts i.e. SR and FBAH form together the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina - a certain terminological paradox is obvious here) respects the new ethnic situation. A new political border (not a state border yet, only a regional one for the time being) is essentially an ethnic border between the Serbs and the Bosnians. At the same time also the territories inhabited by the Bosnians and the Serbs within FBAH concentrated and ethnically homogenised.

A new Serbian attempt to shift their ethnic borders into an ethnically Albanian territory in Kosovo met with a determined opposition among the UNO and NATO member states. Their late intervention in BAH had been under severe censure for a long time, but at the same time, the member states were criticised by the very same politicians for the timely (although not really typical) intervention in the case of Kosovo. It is not the objective of this contribution to evaluate events that are just in the process of being solved. What should be done instead is to consider the possible ways out of the whole Balkan crisis. A high price (hundreds of thousands victims) was paid for a long-time intolerance among the Balkan nations thus showing that at present the chances of the model of ethnically mixed states are in this part of Europe faint. It is really a paradox - whilst the people in western Europe are trying to shape a multiethnic supranational formation, the nations in the Balkans are fragmenting, striving to establish small nation states even at the cost of expelling people of other nations. The creation of the new

border across Bosnia started off a process that can in the near future continue to form ethnically as homogeneous states as possible. As the Kosovo Albanians are coming back home, it seems to be likely that the Serbs will lose Kosovo (or at least its crucial part). As compensation, they can annex the Bosnian - Serbian Republic, in which there is enough space also for the Serbs from Croatia and Kosovo. This will reduce Bosnia to its half, nevertheless, it was the Dayton Agreement that had actually already given it the name of Bosnia and Herzegovina i.e. the name of the existing state. There is a high probability that also Kosovo could in the course of time join Albania thus solving the problem of the largest contemporary minorities consisting of millions of people. However, Kosovo and Albania need not unify in the future - lets just recall the Moldovan euphoria concerning the unification with Romania that was quickly gone (and Moldova, similarly to Kosovo, has not got an extremely advantageous inland geographical location).

Nevertheless, even if the discord across the ethnic and state borders mentioned before were achieved, it would be far from solving all the existing discords across ethnic and state borders. Approximately as many as 500 - 800 thousand Albanians in Macedonia will be concerned (the Macedonian authorities give smaller numbers, whilst the Albanian sources speak of higher ones), mutual Albanian - Greek overlaps are considerably smaller (approximately 50 -70 thousand people). As for the overlaps of Macedonians in Greece and Bulgaria, these are estimated at 200 - 300 thousand people in both the countries. Also, there is one million of Turks in Bulgaria, over 100 thousand Muslims (they do not call themselves Bosnians but the Sanjaklis or simply Muslims) in Yugoslavia and approximately 700 thousand Montenegrins, out of which an increasing number does not wish to be considered as a mere ethnographic group of the Serbs. Many a man are puzzled about what would the Hungarians do in the new situation in Yugoslavia (approx. 300 thousand people), in Slovakia (approx. 600 thousand people), in Romania (approx. 2 million people). Although, it is only Slovakia where they have a wide frontier contact with their own state (Hungary). In Romania, they form an enclave without a wider contact with Hungarian frontiers and in Yugoslavian Voivodina, the Hungarians form territorially splitted area mixed with the territories belonging to other minorities. Moreover, Hungary, as an UNO and newly as a NATO member made a pledge to respect existing state borders.

In conclusion, it can be said that the achieving of discord across ethnic and state borders among the Serbs, the Bosnians, the Croats and the Albanians could contribute towards the stability in the Balkans, however, it could not puzzle out all the existing problems.

References

- Baar, V. (1996): Modelový přístup ke vztahu mezi národem a státem. Sborník Geografie-Geologie PřF Ostravské univerzity, č. 4, s. 99-118.
- Baar, V. (1998): Národy na konci 20. století - emancipace nebo nacionalismus? (Habilitationní spis). FPVMV Univerzity M. Bela, Banská Bystrica.

- Barša, P.** (1997): Krvavý zrod národů: případ Jugoslávie. *Politologická revue* 1 : 88-107.
- Ilić, J. - Spasowski, M.** (1994): Geopolityczna specyfika Balkanów i etniczne terytorium Serbów. *Sprawy narodowościowe* 3 (2) : 135-158.
- Koter, M.** (1993): Geographical Classification of Ethnic Minorities. *Geographica Slovenica* 24 : 123-138.
- Yuval-Davis, N.** (1992): *Radicalized Boundaries : Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle*. London.

Resume

Disharmonie etnických a státních hranic na Balkáně

Nesoulad státních a etnických hranic vyvolával v minulosti řadu konfliktních situací. V Evropě bylo takových lokalit velké množství, ale v západní části se podařilo jejich počet výrazně omezit v průběhu dlouhého vývoje. Rozsáhlá zóna disharmonie obou typů hranic však zůstala na Balkáně. Zde se navíc vzájemně prolínají hranice tří civilizačních sfér: katolické, pravoslavné a islámské. Navíc zde dlouhou dobu působila komunistická ideologie. Ve druhé polovině 20. století jsme svědky vlny nacionalizace, při níž se i národy jazykově téměř nebo úplně identické formují do podoby specifických nových národů (Bosňáci, Makedonci, Pomáci). Kromě toho zde žijí 3 národy (Maďaři, Srbové, Albánci), jejichž národní státy nezahrnují ani zdaleka všechny národní příslušníky. Několik miliónů jich žije v hranicích jiných států. To přináší rozsáhlé etnické konflikty, snahy o etnické čistky a asimilaci, rozsáhlé migrace apod. Nové politické hranice se vytvořily uvnitř Bosny a Hercegoviny, další změny se očekávají v Kosovu a možná i v Černé Hoře. Násilné migrace vedly k tomu, že etnicky smíšené oblasti se stále silněji homogenizují a vyvolávají potřeby nového vymezení státních hranic.