

**Nations into States:  
National Liberations in Former Yugoslavia**

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**National Europe Centre Paper No. 5**

The Australian National University

19 October 2001

## **State building and national liberations**

The process of the creation of new states in the Balkans started in the early 19th century with the creation of the Kingdom of Greece and the Principality of Serbia out of several provinces of the Ottoman Empire. This process has continued into the early 21st century: the Albanian-controlled Kosovo province as well as the Albanian-controlled parts of western Macedonia are likely to become the first new state or states to be created in the Balkans in this century. Moreover, several independence movements in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) are striving for independence or some form of autonomy which may, in time, be transformed into independent statehood. At time of writing, several major political parties in the federal unit of Montenegro are demanding its secession, while a few major political parties of the Muslim population of Sandzak in Serbia and Montenegro also propagate secession or autonomy of that region. Whether these regions will form new states is, at the time of the writing, still unclear.

The latest round of state-building started in June 1991 with the secessions of Croatia and Slovenia from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By 1995 nine states or state-like entities of the territory of former Yugoslavia<sup>1</sup> had proclaimed their independence. In April 1992, the remaining two federal units, Serbia and Montenegro, formed a new state called the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Out of the nine newly proclaimed independent states, the European Community member states initially only recognized the independence of three - Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. After protracted negotiations concerning its name and flag, the EU subsequently recognized the independence of Macedonia. As we shall see, this process of selective recognition of independence - restricted to the federal units of former Yugoslav federation - did not stop attempts to create new states on the territory of those already recognized. These attempts continue a decade after the EU's initial recognition of the

independence of the first three new states in the region.

As with all previous rounds of state building in the region, the latest round has been justified by the need to liberate the national group or groups from the alleged oppression by foreign nations. In the new states these previously oppressed national groups were meant to find a state of their own which would prevent or pre-empt any future foreign rule or oppression. In this way, national liberation provided the ultimate justification for state-creation or state-building. Moreover, the states which the liberated national groups needed were to be nation-states oriented towards the protection or defence of the previously oppressed national group. The principal goal of this type of nation-state was assumed to be the protection of the nation which 'owns' the state from unwelcome rule by other national groups. Thus, national liberations and their ideologies provide not only the ultimate motivation for and justification of state building, but determined the nature and primary function of the states which have been created in the region.

National liberations on the territory of former Yugoslavia have a long and - not surprisingly - bloody history.<sup>2</sup> Like the process of state-building, the process of national liberations has now lasted two centuries. The first round of national liberations began in 1804 with the first Serbian uprising against Ottoman rule and continued with the second Serbian uprising in 1815, ending with the Ottoman granting of autonomy to Serbia in 1830. The most recent series of national liberations, which started in 1991 with the liberation of Slovenia and Croatia, was the fourth round of national liberations to take place in former Yugoslavia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As this fourth round appears to be still under way, it remains an open question whether this round will be the final one, after which there will be no national groups still in need of liberation from foreign rule.

The likelihood of the continuation of national liberation wars in the region became apparent in March 2001 when an Albanian guerilla force, equipped and led by Albanians from Kosovo, attacked the police and army units in western

Macedonia. This appeared to be beginning of yet another war of national liberation in former Yugoslavia. While NATO officials were able to negotiate a (temporary?) peaceful settlement which stopped short of granting independence to the Albanians in western Macedonia, liberation from the rule of the Macedonian Government is still the goal of many determined Albanian fighters both in Macedonia and in Kosovo. Only a few months earlier, the then Bosnian Croat political leaders virtually ceded the Croat-majority cantons from the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (the Croat-Muslim entity), hoping to unite them eventually with the Republic of Croatia. This suggests that the present multinational Bosnia-Herzegovina is likely to split into nation-states if and when the NATO-led forces stationed in the country are withdrawn. These are only two among several similar indications that the present number of sovereign states and their borders are largely the result of decisions reached by the EU and NATO governments. Unlike the states and borders in the rest of Europe, they are subject to change. Such a change, if it comes about, is likely to be a result of continuing wars of national liberation. This would indicate that the current round of national liberations in the region has not been ended.

The history of national liberations during the twentieth century also suggests that this may not be the final round (at least two previous rounds in that century were, erroneously, thought to be final). The first round in the twentieth century started in 1912 with the first Balkan war and led to the liberation by the Serbian and Montenegrin armies of Kosovo and the 'old Serbia' (present-day Macedonia) from Ottoman rule. In this case, no one thought of this round of liberations as final. For the Serbian political and military leaders who planned and executed the liberation in alliance with the governments of Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Rumania, there were, after 1912, other Serbs as well as Serb 'brethren' (the Croats and Slovenes) who were still awaiting liberation from Habsburg rule by the Serbian army.

The first round of liberations was bitterly contested: first by the Albanians in

Kosovo, who resisted the Serbian army alongside Ottoman troops, and then by the Bulgarian government who claimed a part of the territory of present-day Macedonia on the ground that its inhabitants were in fact Bulgarians. Thus, the first twentieth-century round set a pattern for future liberations with the liberation of one national group regarded by another national group (or, rather, by its putative or actual political leaders) as living under foreign rule, and thus deserving of liberation. This pattern ensured the further continuation and repetition of national liberations, as each successive contesting national group would, at the earliest opportunity, attempt to liberate itself from the new foreign ruler. In the case of the Kosovo Albanians, uprisings were staged against the Yugoslav authorities in 1918, 1941, 1944/45 and in 1998/99. Only in 1941 and in 1999 were they successful. In 1941, Yugoslav defeat by Axis powers, and in 1999 the NATO air bombing campaign enabled Kosovo Albanian political leaders to take over the Kosovo province from the Yugoslav government.

The second round of national liberations started with the Serbian government's December 1914 declaration in which the liberation of the 'enslaved brethren', the South Slavs, from Habsburg rule in Austria-Hungary was proclaimed one of the principal war aims of the small kingdom of Serbia. This round ended in December 1918 with the unification of the South Slav lands of the dissolved Austria-Hungary with the Kingdom of Serbia (with which the Kingdom of Montenegro had already been united). For the first time since the Middle Ages, the Croats and Slovenes, as well as the Serbs, appeared to have found freedom from foreign rule, in a new kingdom under the ruling Serbian dynasty. As the enthusiastic speeches of Regent Aleksandar and Croatian politicians at the time of unification attest, for them the creation of the new kingdom (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; as of 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) appeared to be the final liberation of the South Slavs from foreign rule. It is now difficult to tell to what extent their view was shared by the Regent's subjects or the politicians' electorates; at the time of unification they were not asked for their opinion.

Shortly after unification, a small group of Croat soldiers of an Austro-Hungarian regiment in Zagreb staged an uprising against the new state and its government. The superior military forces of the new government quickly crushed the uprising, killing several of the rebels. The Croat rebel soldiers not only entered martyrdom as fighters against the new occupier, the Serbs, but anticipated the view which many Croats came to share in the ensuing years; that the Serbian politicians and administrators in the new kingdom were equally as foreign and oppressive as the previous rulers.

This view was both fostered and exploited by the dominant Croat political party, the Croat Peasant Party, which advocated liberation from Serbian rule through the establishment of full sovereignty of the Croatian Diet over Croatia and a confederal union of Croatia with Serbia and other South Slav lands. The Croat Peasant Party and its fiery leader Stjepan Radic hoped to achieve this goal through a negotiated agreement with the Serbian royal house and Serbian politicians. On the eve of World War II, and several years after the deaths of both Radic and King Aleksandar, the Serb Prince Regent and the new leader of the Croat Peasant Party reached an agreement creating a semi-sovereign province of Croatia within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. But in the meantime, from 1929 onwards, a small, right-wing and racist group called the Croat Ustasha, waged a terrorist campaign against the alleged Serb occupier. They sought the complete independence of Croatia from Yugoslavia and alleged Serbian rule. That goal was achieved two years later, in 1941, though not by the Ustasha's arms, but by the Axis conquest of Yugoslavia.

The Croat Peasant Party and the Croat Ustasha were not the only movements to contest the national liberation of 1918 as the imposition of foreign rule. The Kosovo Albanians rose in rebellion against the new rulers in 1918, and another terrorist anti-Yugoslav organisation, the Bulgarian-based Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation (or VMRO in Macedonian), fought for the liberation of the Slav Macedonians from Serb rule.

The defeat of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers in 1941 led to another, third, round of national liberations. The Axis powers presented their occupation and dismemberment of Yugoslavia as the final liberation from Serb rule. Thus the Croat Ustasha were able, through Nazi military intervention, to carve out a state of their own emphatically called 'The Independent State of Croatia' - out of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to proceed to liberate through mass murder, forced expulsion and conversion to Catholicism these lands from the Serbs (as well as from Jews and Gypsies). Kosovo was liberated by Italian troops and united with Albania, also under Italian rule. Bulgarian troops liberated Macedonia, whose inhabitants they regarded as Bulgarians, while the Hungarians liberated parts of Vojvodina, in northern Serbia, with a substantial Hungarian population. Yugoslavia was thus liberated from Serbian rule by the Axis military intervention and duly fragmented into several nominally independent states and statelets.

The two resistance movements in Yugoslavia, the Chetniks, loyal to the Serbian royal house, and the communist-led Partisans, aimed, of course, at the liberation from these very 'liberators' - the Axis powers and their domestic helpers. The royalist Chetniks fought 'for the King and the fatherland, with faith in God'; their appeal was, accordingly, principally limited to the Serbs, among whom allegiance to the Serb royal house was most widespread. In contrast, the communist-led Partisans fought to liberate all the nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia from the rule of the Serbian royal house and of the Serbian bourgeoisie as well. Accordingly, their program called for the liberation of previously unrecognised national groups - the Macedonians, Albanians and Muslims - in addition to the recognised national groups, such as the Croats - all of whom were oppressed by the previous (mainly, but not exclusively, Serb) rulers. In short, they promised both what the Axis had already delivered - liberation from the previous foreign rulers, the Serbian royal house and its politicians - and liberation from the Axis and their 'domestic lackeys'. The result of this comprehensive national liberation

was to be a new state: a federal and republican Yugoslavia, finally reconstituted as the free and common homeland of all of its equal nations and nationalities.

### **National Liberation through Foreign Intervention: A Recurring Pattern**

While the Partisan program of national liberation of all nations and national groups had a much wider appeal than the old-fashioned royalist ideology of the Chetniks, its appeal cannot fully account for the Partisans' victory over their rivals. It was the switch of British military assistance and political recognition in 1943/44 from the royalist Chetniks to the communist Partisans that enabled the latter, as the principal British ally in Yugoslavia, to recruit and arm a significantly larger number of fighters. By the close of the war, they had wiped out the last remnants of the royalist forces. Winning the support of a major Allied power proved, in this contest among national liberation movements, a necessary prerequisite for victory.

The National Liberation Struggle - as the Yugoslav Communists called their struggle for control over Yugoslavia - thus followed the same pattern as the preceding national liberation in 1918 and the subsequent ones in the 1990s. In all of these liberations (with the exception of the first one in the Balkan Wars), it was the military intervention of a major outside power that played a crucial role in the defeat of the alleged foreign enemy and the ensuing liberation. With regard to the national liberation of 1914-18, the small and largely rural kingdom of Serbia was not capable, on its own, of liberating the Serbs and their alleged brethren from the Austro-Hungarian rule. Their liberation at the end of World War I resulted from the defeat of Austria-Hungary and its German ally by the Entente forces. The South Slavs of Austria-Hungary were not, and could not have been liberated by the Serbian army alone. Yet, after the end of war, not a few Serb politicians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia propagated the myth of the South Slav national liberation



by the Serbian army, and not a few Serbs and other inhabitants of the kingdom believed in this myth. All of them appear to have believed that the myth somehow justified the dominant position of the Serb political leaders and the Serbian royal house in the political life of the kingdom. Naturally, in the nationally divided politics of inter-war Yugoslavia, many Croat and Slovene politicians found it advantageous to ridicule this myth, which was subscribed to by very few, if any, of their supporters. The myth of the national liberation of the South Slavs by the Serbian army thus assumed a political life of its own in the contest between the Croat (and to a lesser extent, the Slovene) parties, on the one hand, and the Serb parties, on the other.

Likewise, the 1941 national liberation of the Croats and Albanians from the Serbian rulers was a myth propagated by the Axis power and their local supporters. Yugoslav administration in those areas was removed by the Axis occupying forces in 1941. The only unassisted liberation in World War II was the result of a short-lived but coordinated offensive of Chetniks and Partisans, which by September 1941 had pushed the very weak German occupying forces out of most of western Serbia. The two front-line German divisions diverted from the Soviet front quickly cleared Serbia of all resistance forces - which even in September 1941 had started to fight one another, and re-occupied the only liberated area in the Axis-controlled Europe of the time.

The Partisans returned to Serbia in 1944. Armed and equipped by the British, they joined the Soviet Red Army as well as the new Soviet allies, the Bulgarian army, to fight the rearguard of the German army which was withdrawing from the Balkans. Without British provision of arms and equipment - as well as a safe island in the Adriatic for their headquarters - the Partisans would not have been able to withstand the Axis military onslaught during 1943 and 1944 and to take over large parts of former Yugoslavia. It was only with the support of the Soviet army that the Partisans were able to liberate the northern parts of Yugoslavia held by the German army and its local supporters until early 1945. In short, without the

Soviet military intervention and British military assistance, the Partisans would have not been capable of liberating former Yugoslavia and assuming power. The myth of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia by the Partisan forces, like the previous myth of the national liberation by the Serbian army, acquired a political life of its own in post-1945 Yugoslavia. In fact, from 1945 until its dissolution in January 1990, this myth served as the major instrument of legitimation of the rule of the Yugoslav Communist party over former Yugoslavia. Since this party was, according to the myth, the liberator of the country from foreign rule, it alone could provide continuous protection from the various foreign encroachments that still threatened Yugoslavia.

## **National Equality in a Communist-Ruled Federation: An End to National Liberations?**

The first constitution of communist Yugoslavia, promulgated in January 1946, abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the first in the series of people's republics constituted in Eastern Europe on the Soviet model and under Soviet control. True to its revolutionary ideology, the victorious Communist party of Yugoslavia set out to create a new state and a new society which would bear no relation to the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia except in name. Accordingly, the new state found its origins in the rather mythical acts of self-determination of its five constituent nations - the Croats, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs and Slovenes - allegedly performed at the second meeting of the communist-dominated National Liberation Council, AVNOJ, on 29 November 1943 and at other similar meetings. According to this fictitious account, the five nations - or their members, irrespective of the federal republic in which they lived in Yugoslavia - exercised once and for all their right to national self-determination by uniting in the federation finally established in January 1946.

Following the 1936 USSR constitution, the six republics - Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia - held the honorific title of 'states', while Vojvodina was an autonomous province and Kosovo-Metohija an autonomous region (later, with a changed name, Kosovo, upgraded to a province) within the republic of Serbia. In practice, political power, once again on the Soviet model, was concentrated in the highly centralised Communist party and its highest executive organ, the Politburo, whose members were chosen by the Party's General Secretary Josip Broz Tito. Since the late 1930s, when Stalin's Communist International in Moscow put him in charge of a small and clandestine Yugoslav Communist Party, Tito had filled the top Party positions with those members who were personally loyal to him. From 1948, when he and his party were expelled from Stalin's Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), until

his death in 1980, Tito had no serious political rival in the Yugoslav Communist party or in the country at large: he was the undisputed leader of the Party, governing the country through a coterie of handpicked officials.

Like its model, the USSR, Yugoslavia was a centralised one-party state displaying the trappings of a federation based on the fictitious self-determination of its nations. In such a state, the borders between the federal units were of little practical political importance. Although there has been no official explanation of how the borders between the new republics were drawn in 1946, most (but not all) of them roughly follow the pre-1914 international as well as Austro-Hungarian provincial borders, almost none of which coincided with the boundaries between the national groups. Thus the border between the communist-established federal units of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia followed the international border between the Ottoman (later, Austro-Hungarian) empire, to which Bosnia-Herzegovina belonged, and the independent kingdom of Serbia. The internal borders of Austria-Hungary between Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia followed, with only minor corrections, the border between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, which, with the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, became a provincial boundary within Austria-Hungary. In retrospect, it appears rather ironic that this revolutionary communist regime, intent on creating a new state and a new society, chose in 1946 to use the borders of the two empires which had disintegrated at the end of World War I.

Only in a few apparently arbitrarily chosen cases did the communist leaders substantially modify the old international/provincial borders to take into account the nationality of the majority populations in a given area. Perhaps only a few modifications to the historical borders were made simply because, in drawing the federal borders, the communist leaders obviously did not intend to create six nation states out of their federal units. In fact, with the exception of Slovenia, all of the federal republics of Yugoslavia were left with nationally mixed populations in various proportions.

As a consequence of keeping to the borders of the multinational Austria-Hungary, in 1946 approximately 30 per cent of Serbs and 20 per cent of Croats were left out of 'their' respective republics, Serbia and Croatia. But the new federal structure, and its new/old borders, ensured that the largest and most dispersed nation in the country, the Serbs, would not be given a republic large enough to enable Serb domination of Yugoslavia.

The principle of equality of all nations - which in a one-party state serves largely symbolic purposes - dictated that no nation, Serbian or otherwise, could dominate the rest in any way. The absence of domination was supposed to remove the need or cause for any future national liberations of national groups within the country. As the regime allowed no public dissent on any issue, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the support for the new communist federal structure and for the communist policy of national equality in 1946.

During the late 1940s, the regime faced opposition from small bands of guerrillas (which were routinely branded as either royalist Chetniks or fascist Ustashe) in the mountains of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia. In 1944 the Albanians in the Kosovo-Metohija region staged a mass uprising against that region's re-incorporation into Yugoslavia and against the new communist authorities; the uprising was suppressed, by massive military force, only in 1945. In view of the unrest among Kosovo Albanians which re-emerged in 1968 to continue throughout the 1990s, it is doubtful that the federal structure which confined the Albanian population to the status of a national minority and Kosovo-Metohija (later Kosovo) to a sub-federal unit has ever won wide acceptance among Kosovo Albanians or their educated elites. Apart from this, it is now impossible to gauge the extent of Serb *ressentiment* in the late 1940s over the separation of Macedonia from the pre-1914 territory of Serbia and the creation of two autonomous provinces within Serbia. This *ressentiment*, especially over the creation of the two provinces, displayed openly only by a few dissident intellectuals in the 1960s,

became the major driving force behind the spread of Serb nationalism in the 1980s.

But since the communist regime was successful in suppressing by force all rival national political movements until the 1980s, it is now impossible to determine whether the federal structure and the policy of national equality, without the suppression of rival national movements, would have, in time, removed the need for further national liberations. We do know, however, that the policy of national equality facilitated the revival of some of the previous national liberation ideologies, as well as the construction of new ones by the communist elites in the search for expanding constituencies and consolidation of power.

The communist policy of national equality found its most successful implementation in the Party recruitment of its members and cadres. The Communist Party recruited its members and cadres (trusted party members appointed to supervisory and managerial posts at all levels) from all constituent nations more or less proportionally. From early on, a Party cadre or budding official knew that his (or, more rarely, her) career was most likely to be tied to the cadres of their republic, even if they were to be temporarily transferred to a federal body. This policy created separate and well-defined political constituencies, consisting of Party cadres and officials from each republic with shared career and political interests. The cadre constituencies were the main beneficiaries of the communist regime and, therefore, the regime's main pillar of support; they also formed a power-base for the future national and republican communist elites which established themselves in power in each of the six republics in the early 1960s. In the late 1960s these elites dismantled the highly centralised Communist Party structure and created, in the early 1970s, a semi-confederation of republics. The third and last communist constitution of 1974 codified this political arrangement by assigning to each republic and province so wide a range of sovereign rights and powers that, in spite of the explicit attribution of some sovereign rights to the nations of Yugoslavia, the republics (and, to lesser

extent, the provinces) became both the sources of state sovereignty and centres of political power. Since the top federal bodies, the collective state presidency and the federal cabinet, were controlled by the leaders of the republics and provinces, there was no federal organ - independent of their control - which could override their authority or even arbitrate in any conflicts among them. Tito's supremacy was based in part on the personal loyalty that all communist leaders owed him and in part on his undisputed command of the armed forces. His death in 1980 left the republican and provincial communist elites in full and undisputed control of the country.

### **Encourage and suppress: the communist use of nationalism**

In order to reduce - and eventually end - their dependence on the central Communist party apparatus operating from Belgrade, the local communist elites in each of the six republics needed to expand their constituencies and their power-bases within 'their' respective republics. For this purpose, in the mid-1960s, they broadened the recruitment drive for party membership to include the growing number of secondary and tertiary educated citizens who were not exactly representatives of the proletariat which the Communist party was supposed to represent. Once these local elites started to seek a broader constituency, they found that some of the previously discarded or suppressed national liberation ideologies still retained their mass appeal. Thus, for example, the liberation of Croatia from the rule of the Serbs in Belgrade, the battle cry of the Croat nationalist parties in the 1918-39 period, reappeared as the slogan of the Croat national movement from 1967 onwards. At that time the younger generation of communist leaders in Croatia took over these slogans of the pre-war Croat national ideologies and used the newly emerging Croat national movement to create their own constituency - of nationally-minded Croats - independent of the old communist guard and the central apparatus in Belgrade. New national ideologies - those of the Muslims and Kosovo Albanians - were constructed in the

late 1960s on the very same model of national liberation from the rule of the centralising and Belgrade-based state apparatus. They were used extensively for creating new constituencies for the Bosnian Muslim and Kosovo Albanian communist elites who came to power after 1966. As soon as these re-emerging national liberation movements appeared to threaten the rule of the established communist elites and of their leader Tito, they were suppressed. Thus, in 1971 Tito and his old guard Croat leaders used force to suppress the mass Croat national movement, and removed the younger Croat communist leaders and their supporters from power in Croatia. But even after the suppression of this and similar but smaller communist-led national movements in Slovenia and Macedonia, the non-threatening national ideologies of the emergent and smaller national groups were allowed to thrive under the guise of their cultural and national revival. Thus the Kosovo Albanian and Bosnian Muslim communist elites were left untouched by Tito's widespread purges of younger communist leaders in other parts of Yugoslavia in the early 1970s. In recognition of the loyalty of these national groups and of their elites, political leaders from the two groups were promoted, for the first time, to the highest positions in the Yugoslav federal bodies.

This appears to have been a somewhat incoherent policy of '*encourage and suppress*' aimed at containing politically undesirable or threatening nationalisms. While various national ideologies, considered to be threatening to the ruling communist elites, were suppressed and their advocates jailed or banned from employment, other, supposedly non-threatening, national ideologies were endorsed and encouraged by the local communist elites. In any case, the suppression of the Croat and Serb national ideologies, as reactionary and violent doctrines, failed to eradicate them; instead, it relegated them to the realm of political dissidence and protest. The dissident intellectuals - academics and men of letters - who continued to articulate the suppressed national ideologies, interpreted the communist policy of *encourage and suppress* as a systematic attempt to humiliate *their* national groups and to deny them their rightful share of power and



influence at the expense of other, more favoured nations. Here the communist encouragement of rival national ideologies not only heightened the sense of grievance, but also served to fuel mistrust and, later, hatred, of those national groups whose cultural and political revival was favoured by the communist rulers.

Fuelled by new grievances, the old national ideologies did not remain in the realm of dissidence for long. In an attempt to widen their appeal and thus secure their hold on power, communist political leaders, first in Serbia in 1987, and then a year later in Slovenia, expropriated the rhetoric of the dissident national ideologies and thus brought them into the mainstream political discourse. As before, these national ideologies proved to be convenient instruments for channeling popular grievances away from the local communist elites in power - the culprits for various national woes were found among other national groups, who were increasingly portrayed as foreign oppressors.

**From an ideological contest to war:  
The fourth round of national liberation**

The emergence into mainstream politics of national liberation ideologies advocating separate national liberation of various nations and nationalities indicated that the third round of national liberation, completed in 1945, was not, as had previously been thought, the last. In retrospect, one could argue that the fourth round of national liberation in fact started with the ascent to power of the political parties advocating the need for a new liberation of their national groups.

The first political campaign in the new liberation style was Slobodan Milosevic's campaign, launched in 1987, for political unification of the Serbs in Yugoslavia. Only by achieving the desired political unification, it was then argued, could the Serbs in Yugoslavia be liberated - this time finally - from the rule of non-Serbs. While the form which Serb unification was to take within Yugoslavia was left quite unclear, Milosevic's political campaign both triggered and served as a model for similar campaigns in other Yugoslav republics. For many non-Serbs, the prospect of any Serb unification raised the spectre of Serb domination over other national groups in Yugoslavia. It was in order to pre-empt any such domination - and the consequent loss of their power in Slovenia - that the Slovene communist leaders launched their own campaign in 1988 for the liberation of the Slovenes from Yugoslavia: in liberating the Slovenes and their republic from the shackles of the Yugoslav federal state, they were hoping to thwart any new movement, such as Milosevic's, which threatened to dominate. Initially their Croat counterparts did not regard the Serb unification movement with as much alarm, but in January 1990 they joined their Slovene colleagues in withdrawing from the last Yugoslav Communist party congress, thus effectively dissolving the only - and the last - major political movement which supported federal Yugoslavia. But in their enthusiasm for renewed national liberation, the Slovene and Croat Communist parties, although reformed and re-named, could not match the new nationalist political parties founded during 1989 by the former nationalist

dissidents. As a result, in April-May 1990 the new nationalist parties took power from the former communists in both republics.

The end result of the renewed national liberations, propagated by these new nationalist parties, was no longer to be Yugoslavia, a common homeland of South Slavs, but a separate nation-state for each national group. The idea of a common homeland for the South Slavs appeared, in the late 1980s, to have finally exhausted its role as a nationally liberating ideology. Moreover, like their nineteenth century predecessors, the dissident national ideologues of the 1980s had already drawn up mutually incompatible maps of their desired nation-states. On these imagined maps, different nation-states claimed the same pieces of territory. For this ideological contest over territory to develop into war, it was necessary for the advocates of those contesting ideologies to win power in their respective republics and regions. This is what then happened in a series of multi-party elections in 1990 in all six republics of former Yugoslavia - the parties preaching national liberation of their target populations won everywhere. What started as an ideological contest over territory, could in 1991 turn into a war or series of wars over that same territory. The aim of these wars was to create several nation-states on territory often inhabited by intermixed national groups. In the nationally mixed areas, the creation of nation-states through war led, inevitably, to the forced eviction of those who did not belong to the national group making or laying claim to a given nation-state. In all such areas in which conflict took place, the members of one or more national groups became victims of forced eviction.<sup>3</sup>

The outbreak of violence and war which followed the political campaigns of the new national parties in various Yugoslav republics was easily explicable in the terms of the national liberation ideologies which those parties advocated. Anyone thought to oppose the liberation of a particular group is, within the framework of a national liberation ideology, a foreign enemy or an instrument of such an enemy. The use of force against foreign enemies is, within this framework, not only justified but at times necessary. Accordingly, the political leaders in Yugoslavia,

who came to power on various national liberation platforms in 1990, proceeded to fight against those whom they labelled as foreign enemies. In 1990 the new Croatian government and its police forces became the foreign enemy of the Serb Krajina political leaders, while the Serb Krajina leaders and their militias became, for the Croatian government, instruments of a foreign government in Belgrade. In 1991 the Yugoslav federal army (the JNA) became a foreign occupying force first for the Slovenian and Croatian, and in the following year, for the Bosnian Muslim governments as well.

The combatants in the ensuing national liberation wars differed greatly in their command of armed force. This was partly because the largest and best equipped force, the JNA, failed to fragment itself completely into national components. Its officers and high command retained, for much longer than any political movement in the country, an allegiance to Yugoslavia as a common homeland for all national groups. As such the Yugoslav federal army was considered a major obstacle to the national liberation movements which aimed at the partition of Yugoslavia into separate nation-states. The neutralisation and withdrawal of this foreign occupying force became the primary objective of the secessionist governments of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as of the national liberation movement of the Kosovo Albanians. As none of these three governments - separately or jointly - initially commanded armed forces matching the JNA, all called for an international intervention to neutralise the JNA and its successors in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

The European Community (the EC) was the first to undertake the task of neutralising the JNA. In July 1991 it sent its negotiators and white-clad peace monitors to Slovenia. While the EC successfully neutralised the JNA and negotiated for its withdrawal from Slovenia, it failed in Croatia, where the JNA supported the local Serb militias. The UN took up its task there and in 1992, under a UN-negotiated agreement, the JNA withdrew. But by 1992 the UN was no longer capable of neutralising the Bosnian Serb armed forces in Bosnia-

Hercegovina, to which the JNA had transferred its heavy weaponry and some of its officer staff. To neutralise these forces in 1995, NATO had first to launch an air bombing campaign and then to deploy ground troops to ensure disarmament and partial demobilisation of the Bosnian Serb troops. A similar but much more ferocious and long-lasting air bombing campaign had to be launched in 1999 against the Yugoslav military (the VJ), the JNA's successor in Serbia and Montenegro, to force it to withdraw from the province of Kosovo. This pattern of outside intervention and the increasing use of armed force to subdue the successors of the JNA in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo reflected the transformation of this army into an armed force of the Serb national liberation movements and of the Serbian government. As it transformed itself into a force or forces of a single, this time Serb, national movement, the JNA became increasingly resistant to international neutralisation, which was achieved without any military intervention, in Slovenia in 1991.

Thus, at the very outset of the conflict in June 1991, foreign intervention on behalf of selected national liberation movements became once again the primary instrument of national liberation. Slovenia would not have achieved independence, or at least not as quickly as it did in 1991, had it not been for the EC diplomatic and peace-monitoring intervention as well as its threats of military action against the JNA. Likewise, Croatia's independence was secured in February 1992 only by the EC and UN diplomatic intervention and the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in the Serb-controlled areas. Moreover, in 1995 the Croatian army could not have conquered - or liberated, as the Croatian government would have it - these areas (called the Republic of Serb Krajina), had it not been trained and equipped by the US or some other major power. And without the NATO military intervention, neither Bosnian Muslim nor Kosovo Albanian military forces would have been able to liberate the territories they claimed from Serb rule.

In this process of intervention, the outside powers - first the EC, and then the US -

pursued policies of support for selected national liberation movements, similar to the '*encourage and suppress*' policies of the Yugoslav Communist party in the past. Thus in 1992 the EC extended its recognition of independence only to the federal units - constructed by the first communist constitution of 1946. In this way the EC supported the Slovene, Croat and Bosnian Muslim national liberation movements by recognising their territorial claims, while ignoring the territorial claims of similar movements of the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and of the Albanians in Kosovo, as well as of the Muslims from Sandzak. In 1994 the US government extended military assistance to the Croatian and Bosnian Muslim national liberation movements, and finally in 1999, to the Kosovo Albanian liberation movement as well. Through military assistance and military intervention, the US and its NATO allies helped to suppress the Serb liberation movements in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and initiated the removal from power of Milosevic whom many regarded as the leader of the pan-Serb liberation movement in former Yugoslavia.

By providing military support to selected national liberation movements, the US and EU governments aided, often against their own stated objectives, these movements' policies of forced eviction of 'hostile' populations, in this case the Serbs. Thus the US and EU governments did nothing in August 1995 to prevent the eviction of almost the entire Serb population from Croatia during the Croatian army operations, for which they provided weapons, training and logistic support. In the same year these governments took no action during the eviction of hundreds of thousands of Serbs from western Bosnia in the course of the Bosnian Muslim and Croatian army offensive supported by the NATO air bombing campaign. Likewise, the NATO-led forces occupying Kosovo in 1999 failed to prevent the eviction of almost all the Serbs from that province. The military assistance of the US and its NATO allies was thus indispensable in the establishment of several new nation-states in the previously nationally mixed territories, one of which, Kosovo, is (at the time of writing) still awaiting international recognition of its independence. Continued military assistance and deployment of NATO-led forces

in the region appears also to be indispensable for the continued existence of several states in the region, in particular, of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. For example, had it not been for the NATO-brokered and supervised settlement in Macedonia, the Albanian guerilla forces would have probably succeeded in detaching the Albanian-populated areas of western Macedonia from the Republic of Macedonia and forming a semi-independent state.

### **'Encourage and suppress': will it work this time?**

The objectives of the US and EU policy of selective support and suppression of national movements in former Yugoslavia obviously differs from the Yugoslav Communist party's 'encourage and suppress' policy. Yet the US government and its European allies believe, as did the Yugoslav communist leaders, that their policy will lead to long-term political stability and peace in the region. The Yugoslav Communist party leaders, as we have seen, proved to be wrong. There are at least three reasons why the US government's belief may yet prove to be wrong as well.

First, the suppression of national liberation movements and removal of their advocates from power and influence does not eradicate the national ideologies which inspire them. On the contrary, suppression only enhances the sense of grievance which fuels national liberation ideologies. This was, as we have pointed out, the result of the Yugoslav Communist party's suppression of selected national ideologies. Hence the current US suppression of the Serb national movements is unlikely to eradicate the idea of Serb unification or of Serb liberation from foreign rule. The previous pattern of national liberations suggests that for a renewed Serb national liberation movement to have any chance of success, it would need the military and political support of a major outside power. Although at the time of writing, no such support seems to be forthcoming, it cannot be ruled out in the future.

Second, the military and diplomatic support of selected national movements raises the expectation of the liberation movements of their co-nationals. The latter also hope to receive military assistance or to benefit from a foreign diplomatic intervention in their striving for a nation-state of their own or for unification with what they consider to be their homeland. As their state-building aspirations clash with those of the already established or supported national movements, this may lead to further conflict and renewed bouts of national liberation. In former Yugoslavia, there are several such aspiring national movements. Thus, the movement of Albanians in Macedonia aims, ultimately, at unification with Albania and Kosovo, and the movement of the Muslims of the Sandzak region in Serbia and Montenegro aims at an independent state or unification with the Muslim state in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since the US and its allies supported the aspirations of their co-nationals in Kosovo and in Bosnia-Herzegovina, both movements naturally expect to receive similar support for their aspirations as well. The aspirations of the former threaten the territorial integrity and possibly the very existence of the Republic of Macedonia; and the aspirations of the latter, the territorial integrity of Serbia as well as Montenegro.

Third, arming and supporting two or more national movements which harbour mutually conflicting territorial claims and aspirations increases the likelihood of violent conflict. Clearly some Bosnian Croat political leaders as well politicians in Croatia itself have not abandoned the idea of unification of the Croat-majority cantons, presently within the Muslim-Croat entity of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with Croatia. The Bosnian Muslim leaders, who are committed to maintaining Bosnia-Herzegovina as a single state, oppose this idea. Both parties - the Bosnian Croat and the Bosnian Muslim - command substantial armed forces which have been trained and equipped by the US. At the time of writing, the principal obstacle to the separation of the Croat-majority cantons from Bosnia-Herzegovina are the NATO-commanded SFOR troops in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who possess an overwhelming military force in the country. Were the SFOR troops to leave the



country, it is highly likely that the Bosnian Muslim party would oppose the separation of the Croat cantons by force; this in turn could lead to a conflict between the two armed forces, both of which were trained and equipped by the US.

The need for indefinite and increasing deployment of foreign troops to keep the peace in the region also suggests that the present policy of supporting selected national liberation movements and suppressing others does not, without considerable military presence, lead to the desired political stability. In any case, foreign military presence alone can hardly eradicate the existing national liberation ideologies. This suggests that a policy which does not rely on the use of military force to suppress national liberation movements may in the long term be more successful in bringing peace to the region than the present 'encourage and suppress' policy.

### **Plebiscite: a possible alternative to national liberation?**

The pattern of national liberation sketched out here suggests that outside military and diplomatic intervention is a crucial element for the success of any national liberation movement in the Balkans. From this one can conclude that to end the national liberation wars it would be necessary - although hardly sufficient - to change the model and purpose of outside intervention in this region. Military intervention in the last three rounds of national liberation has invariably been aimed at supporting one set of movements at the expense of others: hence the favoured '*encourage and suppress*' model in place at the time of writing. While at this stage it is entirely speculative to suggest alternatives to this approach, it is perhaps important to note that there are ways of approaching national liberation movements and the grievances on which they thrive alternative to the '*encourage and suppress*' approach favoured so far.

The main grievance which the national liberation movements address is personal humiliation and physical insecurity brought about by foreign rule. To remove that grievance, it is necessary to escape from foreign rule. But national liberation through armed struggle is surely not the only way to do so. Each national group could be given an opportunity to choose, through a suitably conducted referendum or plebiscite, a state within which it wants to live, even if this leads to a proliferation of small states.<sup>4</sup>

The EC decision in 1992 to extend recognition only to the federal units within Yugoslavia denied this opportunity to the Muslims of the Sandzak region and the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, as well as to the Serbs in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It left the field open to the national liberation movements which promised to achieve liberation through armed struggle.

An alternative approach to the issue of national self-determination would have been to organise, prior to the outbreak of war in 1991, internationally supervised plebiscites in all contested regions of former Yugoslavia which would allow each national group to choose a state in which it wants to live. At the time this approach may have appeared unfeasible, both because of its apparent technical complexity (for example, in determining the boundaries of each contested area) and because it appeared to breach the sovereignty of several emerging states in the region. But in retrospect, the task of identifying the contested regions and designing appropriate plebiscite procedures is no more complex than the many military and refugee relief operations carried out since in former Yugoslavia at a huge cost in human life, displacement and destruction. In retrospect, the repeated breaches of sovereignty of various states of the region, including repeated UN and NATO military interventions and the imposition of international protectorates that took place since 1991, appear to be much more serious and costly than plebiscites of this kind would have been.

In the course of the huge displacement of population resulting from the successive

wars, a large number of people in former Yugoslavia have been further denied the choice of the state in which they wanted to live while still living in their original homelands. This wrong - the denial of choice of a state - could still be redressed by organising such plebiscites both among the present inhabitants of the contested regions and those who have been expelled from them. By attempting to redress the wrongs committed in the name of national liberation, this kind of plebiscite could initiate a wider process of reconciliation among the peoples of former Yugoslavia. The plebiscites and a sustained effort at reconciliation would address, I believe, the grievances on which the national liberation movements thrive and thus pre-empt the need for further national liberation. Freedom from foreign rule would be achieved in a peaceful way and the neighbouring national groups would no longer be regarded as foreign enemies.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, a reconciliation of this kind would be a new beginning for the peoples of former Yugoslavia which would, hopefully, signal the end of the repeated cycles of national liberations.<sup>6</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These are, in order of their proclamation of independence: the Republics of Slovenia and Croatia, the Republic of Serb Krajina (in Croatia), the Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serb Republic (in Bosnia), the Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna, the Republic of Western Bosnia (both in Bosnia-Herzegovina) and the Republic of Kosovo. For an account of their secessions see Aleksandar Pavkovic, 'Recursive Secessions in Former Yugoslavia: Too Hard a Case for Theories of Secession?', Political Studies, vol. 48 (2000), pp.485-502 and Peter Radan, The Break-up of Yugoslavia in International Law, (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> For a short history of national liberations in this century see Aleksandar Pavkovic, The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism and War in the Balkans, 2nd edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Thus in mid-1991 most Croats were expelled from the Serb-controlled areas in Croatia, while at the same time many Serbs living in Croatia were forced to leave their homes and to flee to Serbia. Bosnian Muslims were evicted *en masse* from eastern Bosnia-Herzegovina by Bosnian Serb forces at the very start of the conflict in 1992. Likewise, during their offensive in 1995 Bosnian Muslim and Croat forces forced most Serb inhabitants to leave western Bosnia. In 1992 Bosnian Croat forces evicted first almost all Serb inhabitants from western Herzegovina, and then, later in the conflict, the Bosnian Muslims as well. During the fighting between Bosnian Muslim and Bosnian Croat forces in 1993-94 many Croats in central Bosnia were also forced from their homes.

<sup>4</sup> For a proposal of this kind see H. Beran, 'A Democratic Theory of Political Self-Determination: For a New Political Order', in P. B. Leaning, ed., Theories of Secession (London, Routledge, 1998), pp.32-60, and Aleksandar Pavkovic 'Recursive Secessions in Former Yugoslavia: Too Hard a Case for Theories of Secession?', Political Studies, vol. 48 (2000), pp.485-502.

<sup>5</sup> For a further discussion of the possible reconciliation see Aleksandar Pavkovic 'A Reconciliation Model for the former Yugoslavia,' Peace Review, vol. 12, no. 1 (March 2000), pp. 103-10.

<sup>6</sup> An earlier version of this paper is due to appear in the Eastern European Quarterly in 2002.