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1943-2018: Seventy-five Years of ZAVNOBiH (The Anti-Fascist People's Liberation Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Unlearned Lessons

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This text intends to offer a rather brief review of the sources of modern Bosnian statehood that is celebrated, at least in one third of this country as *Statehood Day* – November 25. This Day refers actually to the First session of ZAVNOBiH (Session of Anti-Fascist People's Liberation Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina) that was held in Mrkonjic Grad on free territory on November 25, 1943. This Session is perceived as the founding revolutionary event of modern Bosnian polity, and at the same time it was, as I will argue, the final phase in realization of Leftist concept of a plural, multiethnic Republic contrary to a common pattern of monoethnically homogenized one-nation-state. Furthermore, this concept is genuine and significantly different from typical communist but also from liberal federalist solutions. In fact, Communist federalist solutions for the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia failed with the collapse of communism, exactly because they strictly followed the structural model of one-nation-one-state. The Yugoslav, the Soviet and the Czechoslovak republics of their respective federations were indeed molded on one-ethnic-nation state model. Had Bosnia been internally federalized in 1940s, had Bosnia been reconstituted as some kind of union of its one-ethnic-nation-regions or entities, it would have had collapsed overnight just as communist federations did, as the framework changed from socialism to capitalism. The same would have happened had Bosnia, as a whole, been constituted as one-nation-state.

By the end of 1930s, the two visions of BiH crystallized and conflicted in the Yugoslav Kingdom. The first one – let us call it – the rightist or nationalist. The two leading nationalist political elites: the Serb and Croat bourgeoisies conflicted and opted for the final resolution of so called 'national question' which in the essence was the plan for the establishment of the two regions on the principle of the domination of one ethnic nation. These were to be the future Yugoslav federal provinces: Banovina Croatia (Banovina Hrvatska), and Banovina Serb Lands (Banovina Srpske Zemlje). In between the two there was Bosnia,an ethnically heterogeneous region and historical province, that was viewed by these two leading nationalist elites as 'unchartered territory' awaiting to be conquered and made part of future homogenous ethnonational domains of Serbia and Croatia. This political approach had been articulated by so called 'Cvetković – Maček Agreement of 1939' that officially divided

Bosnia between the two ethnically homogenous Yugoslav Banovinas: Serbia and Croatia. Although Bosnian Muslims made up a significant portion of the Bosnian population, they were ignored and excluded from such negotiations. The second vision that sprang out of the reaction to the first, bourgeois one – let us call it leftist, communist or simply democratic vision of BiH, understood Bosnia as historically autonomous political community based on the principles of equality of its ethnic peoples and citizens who should be allowed to decide on the future of their polity by democratic means. This understanding of BiH as autonomous polity has come out of the leftists' and communists' fierce refusal of Cvetković-Maček Agreement. In hisbook *Essays on the Statehood and Political Development of Bosnia and Herzegovina* Mirko Pejanović quotes the following observations made at the 5th Country Conference of the Yugoslav Communist Party in 1940: "The position of Bosnia and Herzegovina changed because the fight of the two bourgeoisies (Serbian and Croatian) about this province is aggravating; such position of BiH affects both Serbian and Croatian working people; The leadership of Yugoslav Muslim Organization has never advocated for the interests of broad layers of Muslims; Muslim toiling masses followed that leadership only because they felt that Serbian and Croatian bourgeoisies endanger them as an ethnic group; National autonomy of bosnia and Herzegovina is the only right solution which is in common interest of Muslim, Serb and Croat masses" (Pejanović, 2016: 30).

Yugoslav Communists insisted in one of the Conference conclusions to continue „fight against the attempts of Serbian and Croatian bourgeoisies to divide BiH without even asking the people of these regions", and that „peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina should themselves freely choose and find the solution for regulation in these regions through autonomy and the like", and that „Serb, Croat and Muslim toiling masses can achieve national autonomy only in joint fight" (Pejanović, 2016: 30). Pejanović follows the development of this idea, leftist vision which opposed the ethnonationalist vision of the right and fully dismissing the bourgeois hegemonic frameworks of one-(ethnic-) nation-one-state. This leftist vision insisted on necessary preservation of the territorial unity of BiH while the rightist ethnonationalist vision insisted on ethno-territorial division. So the leftist solution, although still only in the sphere of principles, presupposed a political entity without exclusive ethnonational ownership over either the entire province or over some of its portions, and without a core nation that unavoidably results from a process of so called ethnic un-mixing (Brubaker, 1995) like in so many areas in Europe of that period: Greece, Turkey, Poland, etc. From where we stand today, we can observe that the leftist perspective for BiH was centered around the equality of ethnic-nations living in a ethnically mixed way and distributed almost equally throughout the province, while pre-communist (1939), and unfortunately the post-communist rightist, nationalist perspective for BiH (1990), was centered around ethnic and nationalist mobilizations for the purpose of creating the ethnically unmixed territories later to be included in wider one-nation-one-state of its respective neighboring states. That is why the more recent Agreement, the Agreement of 1991 between Milošević and Tuđman wears so much resemblance with the 1939 Agreement. Both agreements spring out from the same heritage of ethnic nationalism and the idea of 'final solution of national question' provided that this solution is one-ethnic nation-one state.

Only the inevitable historical course prevented the implementation of the 1939

Agreement. After the aggression and vast invasion of Axis forces and their allies (Hungary and Bulgaria) on Yugoslav Kingdom in April 1941 the Serb and Croat political elites mainly sided with the aggressors. Yugoslavia was dismantled as new pro Axis satellite regimes were established: 'Independent State of Croatia' led by Croat Fascist Ante Pavelic, and Serbia of pro-Fascist Milan Nedic. The entire Bosnia and Herzegovina became a province of 'Herzeg-Bosnia' of Pavelić's Fascist puppet state. Only the Yugoslav Communist Party showed a necessary level of determination to organize the resistance and confront the aggressor and its puppet local forces – Croat *Ustaša*, and Serbian *Chetnik* units. As anti-fascist liberation movement grew stronger during 1941 and 1942, BiH has gradually become revolutionary political force capable of liberating the two thirds of its territory and now in need for its political articulation as an answer to the pressing question of its future status. Mirko Pejanović points that „in the initial phases of discussions (about BiH by leaders of resistance) an option was fashioned according to which BiH would have a status of province in the Yugoslav community of equal nations. In the status of province BiH could exist as a province within Serbia, as a province within Croatia, or as a province linked directly to the institutions of the Yugoslav Federation. All three possibilities were the topic of discussions and search for the solution for BiH"(Pejanović, 2016: 33). In fact, communists firmly held the idea that Bosnia was an autonomous province, an entity of its own, but what exact shape this autonomy would take, was far from clear. Mirko Pejanović singles out the key figure to participate in this exciting and unpredictive political thriller. Rodoljub Čolaković of the Bosnian Committee of Communist Party opposed all of these open options and to the generally misguided idea that federal construction of Yugoslavia should be based on the principle that number of nations should equal the number of the units of the future federation. He considered this principle to be too narrow and too mechanical. Furthermore, it was reasonably feared by Bosnian communists that such an approach could revive and re-initiate the nationalization processes in a federation where all of its units were modeled on a nation-state principle. The question of belonging of a unit without a clearly dominant ethnic referent could once again call-forth ethnonationalist attempts of appropriation of that province.

Rodoljub Čolaković then suggested the following:

> To add Bosnia to any of these two Yugoslav republics would mean to provoke numerous suspicions among Serbs and Croats respectively, and particularly among Muslims. Such solution would be both incorrect and politically harmful response to the unfortunate question: Whose is Bosnia, Serb or Croat as already posed by Serb and Croat chauvinists. BiH is already a historically formed geographical – economic entity with its specific political problems as multiethnic and multiconfessional community. The solution for this multiethnic specificity will certainly be faster and easier if BiH is a federal unit equal with other Yugoslav lands. That will be the right answer to Serb, Croat and Muslim reactionaries and chauvinists, meaning that BiH is neither Serb nor Croat nor Muslim, but it is equally Serb, Croat and Muslim (Pejanović, 2016: 34).

Rodoljub Čolaković, according to Mirko Pejanović, set the tone for the first gathering of Bosnian revolutionary convention – ZAVNOBIH – the Anti-fascist People's Liberation Council of BiH on November 25, 1943. This revolutionary assembly has become the „highest political body of the peopleof BiH" (Pejanović, 2016: 36) which initiated the construction of the republican state structure of BiH. This act of a sovereign will was – in terminology of political philosophy, the first part of a genuine social contract between the Bosnian peoples and citizens. This convent constituted BiH as a sovereign republic of all its peoples: Serbs, Croats and Muslims. This act is of historical importance – not only for the Bosnian people, not only for Yugoslavia, but generally, the example of the constitution of BiH undermined hegemonic uniform pattern of the process of ethnic nationalization of Central and South-East European region that was initiated together with the introduction of capitalist mode of production in the second half of the 19th century. It also undermined the dominant pattern of national solution present throughout the communist world. One should remember – all Soviet and Yugoslav republics except BiH were one-nation states with their dominant ethnic homogenous core ethnic peoples. The solution for BiH was in domain of precedence. Instead of an uniform nation-state model, Bosnian republic was flexible and equally codetermined in two ways: as a community of 'equal peoples', but also as a community of 'equal citizens', pursuant to the Declaration on human rights of Bosnian citizens brought by the second session of ZAVNOBIH in July 1944. This declaration guaranted the freedom of religion, of choice and association, and press, of personal property and security of citizens, freedom of private initiative in economy and equality of women with men, some three years before the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This particular vision of a 'multiethnicrepublic', or the republic of the 'plural-Many', and not of the 'hegemonic One' (a Nation, a People), a historical community that seemed not only to have worked out for decades bringing the yet unseen material, cultural and political prosperity to its citizens, but also it seems that it will gain much more importantce for the future, not only of BiH, but also of Europe which itself faces the process of either exceeding the one-nation-one-state model, or with the process of retraction, re-homogenization that could lead us to the renewal of populist autoritarianism. From where we stand today, we can observe that this particular Leftist perspective for BiH, was centered around the real equality of ethnic-nations, while Bosnian perspective of politics of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia personalized in Cvetković, leader of Serb nationalists and Maček, leader of Croat nationalists centered around partition of Bosnia, that is around ethnic and nationalist mobilizations for the purpose of creating the ethnically unmixed territories in Bosnia, the two ethnically homogenous 'banovinas'.

Almost 50 years after, in the wake of democratic transition, one of the first goals of the emerging Serb, Croatand Muslim (Bosniac) nationalist anti-communist coalition that won the first multiparty election in 1990 was not only to overthrow a communist regime, but to disregard all fundamental principles that BiH had been constructed upon. Being dismissed as mere communist propaganda ZAVNOBIH principles were replaced – acording to new nationalist leaders – with 'new-old social contract' euphemistically titled as the 'new agreement of Bosnian-Herzegovinian peoples'. This agreement, however, resulted in specific form of ethnopolitics that re-generated processes of ethnic-nationalization including 'nation-state-building' on areas under the

ethnonationalist control, processes that had been interrupted by the communist victory in the World War II. These old-new processes occurred now first in its armed form of 'national revolution', and then in its pseudodemocratic form of ethnocracy which only further deepened the ethnic divisions and maintained territorial distribution produced by war.

Immediately upon its establishment in 1990, the ethnic party pluralism displayed collosal incapability in building consensus, in state builiding, yet it displayed deplorable imagination in generation of conflicts and production of permanent crisis whichseems to have been its fundamental feature up to the present day. Instead of democracy, Bosnian polity ended in thoroughethnocracy. Under the ownership of ethnonationalist forces political processes in BiH have been re-directed towards the establishment of ethnic polities under the sovereign authority of one particular ethnonationalist elite whose domination is fortified by their full ownership of public resources and ideological hegemony through educational system, media and most of the religious institutions. Citizens are mercilessly subjected to disciplining measures of political homogenizations constantly re-initiated by radicalized yet unsanctioned political speeches. This system is based on full political, economic and cultural dispossession of ordinary citizens regardless of their ethnic background.

So, during the past 100 years BiH have existed in the two forms of statehood. One, the Leftist form was based on the two interconnected principles of full equality of Bosnian peoples without ethnic particular territorialization and full equality of Bosnian citizens. Of course, this period of its existence recorded periods of autoritarianism and bad human rights record. The second, nationalist form characteristic of the first three decades of 20th century and of the past three decades based on ethnic territorialization of Bosnian peoples, and full inequality of Bosnian citizens. This period also records authoritarian tendencies along with flagrant ignorance of human rights (including stil present Anti-Semite and Anti-Roma Article 5 of the Constitution). The first vision is based on the historical facts of common experience of life in ethnically diverse surrounding; the second vision is based on, let us say in contermporary vocabulary, 'alternative facts' of ancient tribal hatreds and necessity of separation and segregation very often 'justified' in vocabulary of human rights. The first vision implies dialectical collective identities, under which an ethnic identity is in a substantially existential way co-determined by the others.

In the Republic of Many, envisioned by ZAVNOBiH, the ethnic – national question of one group is impossible to be dealt with without simultaneously dealing with the ethnic – national identities of the other two groups. A perspective of one group is always given in the contextual horizon of the other two – in the economy, history, culture, arts, and therefore in politics as well. Under the first vision, despite the limitations of socialist regime, Bosnia experienced overwhelming progress in cultural and economic sectors. Under the second vision, Bosnia experienced war, destruction, genocide, misery, tremendous decay in the fields of economy and culture. The Leftist perspective for BiH centered on the equality of Bosnian peoples; the Rightist, Nationalist, Bourgeois perspectives centered on existential threat or endangered essence of a particular people. Which would you chose? Of course, the question is rhetorical, since the return to socialist self-management system is no longer an option, but on the other hand, nationalism is not a cosmic necessity either. The case of Brčko

Districtof BiH, [1] or City of Tuzla during the 1992-95 War, [2]for example, shows that Bosnia can be solid multiethnic liberal democracy only if the principle of ethnic teritoriality is cancelled. In addition, recent flooding in Bosnia (2014) displayed, contrary to the expectations of nationalist elites, enormous potential of ordinary citizens to involve in the development of networks of solidarity reaching far beyond the ethnic confines. Countless daily interactions among citizens themselves in the fields of trade, economy, culture, science, media, civic activism, education, you name it, surpass way beyond the ethnic confines imposed on them by the ethnocratic elites, new ruling class, thus producing the enormous symbolic capital and opening the sphere of the political awaiting out there to be appropriated and articulated in a discourse of a new collective political subjectivity. Indeed for authors such as Laclau and Mouffe «a collective subjectivity is the result of an articulatory practice and is related and sustained through a particular discourse» (Harrison, 2014: 46).

Although under the present ethnopolitical institutional arrangement *demos* cannot be properly articulated, it has been constantly silenced by the *ethnos*, it surely does not mean that there is no demos in this country, as it is usually concluded. Therefore, we do not have to change nor blame the citizens, only the discriminatory and humiliating institutional arrangement should be blamed and therefore changed, as once, for example, the institutional arrangement of slavery in USA had been changed. For twice in the last hundred years ethnic nationalism showed itself as degrading, destructive, deadly criminal force responsible for the worse attrocities in the 1940's and again in the 1990's. It had its chance twice to display its potentials, characteristics and limits, and its records have twice been disastrous for the citizens of BiH. Nikola Babić identified what he calls the permanent characteristic of Bourgeois-Nationalist politics in BiH:

Bourgeois political forces in BiH which by their politics have continuously weakened the ties between its peoples – Muslims, Serbs and Croats – have during this period /1938-1940: A.M./ been introducing only the new elements of mischief and distrust among them by slogans of Serb Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Croat Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Muslim autonomy of BiH. In conditions of present danger of fascist aggression and pro-fascist orientation of Yugoslav bourgeois regime, this kind of politics of bourgeois forces enabled ever more drastic social and national oppression of the peoples and the working class (Babić, 1980: 7).

Our experience with domination of ethnic nationalism teaches us that any stabilization and consolidation on nationalist basis is simply impossible. It continues to lead to new forms of oppression and the dispossession of the Many. There will be always new circles of radicalizations and ethnic mobilizations. Ethnic nationalism in the Balkans just as chauvinist far right nationalisms of present day Europe cannot be tamed, civilized, and we are reaching the point when all of us on this small continent of ours will have to take a stand.

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Notes

1. See Adam Moore, *Peacebuilding in Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013). ↩
2. See Ioannis Armakolas, *Politika i društvo u Tuzli od 1992. do 1995. godine* (Sarajevo: University Press, 2016). ↩

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