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Nationalism and Security Challenges in the Western Balkans

The unresolved Albanian question

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“A nation is a society united by a delusion about its ancestry and a common fear of its neighbors”

William Ralph Inge (1860-1954)

Abstract

As the black clouds of the past are reluctantly dissipating over the region known as the Western Balkans¹ and several blue patches of sky emerge in recent years, one wonders if the century old fuse that kept on reigniting had finally burned out. The conflicts, the bloodshed and horror of the past century seem as if they are a closed chapter of an ancient Sophoclean tragedy. Is this signalling a firm path to Euro-integration and prosperity? As history has shown, this region is almost never fully stable due to the existence of many different national identities in a relatively small geographic area. Trouble still lurks within unresolved past conflicts, memories and states created and maintained by foreign intervention coupled with the prospect of future states. The firm grip of the international community appears to have a stabilizing effect on the volatile mass but will this be a sufficient future strategy?

This paper will place particular focus on the still unresolved Albanian question that can perhaps be seen as a possible future threat to the security of the region. By looking at the cases of Albanian national question, and trends among the Albanian population in Kosovo, the Preshevo Valley² and the still somewhat fragile state of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia³, this paper will make an attempt to determine whether these trends among the Albanian population have the potential to set in motion mobilizing forces that can affect the current status quo. By examining these cases and questioning a realistic possibility of a new conflict in the Balkans together with the implications of such an event will be discussed. In the past theories of nationalism have made attempts to explain similar phenomena and will no doubt be a useful asset in better understanding the topic at hand. Moreover, the recent growth of nationalism promotes or evokes 'dreams' of the 'glorious past' such as the myth of "Great Albania" or perhaps "Greater Kosovo"⁴ which could have the effect of fanning the flame if further pursued. Scattered among neighbouring states the Albanians seem to be rediscovering their nation. Just like structures in the other Balkan states the Albanian nationalists have been dreaming of their own 'Great' state. Do these 'dreams' have the potential of turning into a nightmare for all concerned? The question here is if the above mentioned is just weak nationalist rhetoric or a serious issue smouldering in the dark.

¹ Defined by the European Union as the region encompassing Albania and former Yugoslavia (minus Slovenia)

² The center of the Albanian community in Serbia with Albanians comprising 54.6% of Bujanovac and 89% of Preševo (and 26% in Medveđa)

³ Hereafter: FYROM.

⁴ An idea including the territory of Kosovo plus the areas with considerable Albanian population in former Yugoslavia (Southern Serbia, FYROM and Montenegro)

1. Introduction

This paper will be looking into the 21st century rise of pan-Albanian nationalism which does not come as a surprise in a region where such atavistic ideas were and remain fairly common. After a long period of historical weakness, discrimination within Yugoslavia, the recent democratization of Balkan societies; it appears that the Albanians have finally gotten their chance to confront their neighbors and demonstrate that they are not on the margins any longer. The early nineties and the bloody Yugoslav wars have shown that nationalist ideas can end up with catastrophic consequences. But do pan-Albanian nationalism and the ideas of ‘Great Albania’⁵ and ‘Greater Kosovo’⁶ fall in the same category and represent a potential future security threat? It could also suggest, as seen by authors such as Pettifer and Vickers⁷, a harmless pan Albanian national consciousness strengthening which would leave the security situation in the region intact. This paper is concerned with the query if these ideas realistically enjoy support from the majority of the population and political structures?

Given that a simplistic Webster’s definition proves insufficient, a section devoted exclusively to theories of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ will proceed in order to clarify if the phenomena we are witnessing today could possibly be explained through examining some of the works of renowned authors in the field. The examination of such theories comes useful in setting a basic theoretical

⁵ Unification of all alleged Albanian territories under one state

⁶ Unification of Kosovo with the western part of FYROM, The Preshevo Valley and parts of Montenegro

⁷ Pettifer/Vickers, *The Albanian Question: Reshaping the Balkans*, 2007

framework which could possibly come useful in understanding certain historical and future developments. Considered as one of the most potent weapons in the hands of politicians, nationalism with its varieties has to be taken seriously in an attempt to understand a potential threat. Unlike Serb or Croat nationalist ideas, Albanian nationalism appears to be not center driven, that is Albania itself was never (at least directly) involved in any of the conflicts or shown support for violence.

Taking into account the differences among Albanians themselves discussed further in the text, could a state like Great Albania function properly? Rather, could the populations living outside Albania be seen as the main promoters of such ideas as; and Albanian nationalism becomes dominated by peripheral forces therefore 'Greater Kosovo' seems like a much more realistic scenario than 'Great Albania'. According to Vickers it is clear that Albanians are somewhat aware of the cultural and ideological differences between their communities and thus they would rather preserve their separate political entities but the question is in what form would these separate entities function?⁸ An examination of the case of FYROM will provide insight into the causes of the 2001 conflict and examine if the intentions of the Albanians were irredentist. Given the conclusion can we talk of a genuinely multicultural FYROM? As support for EU membership is around 80% in Albania we cannot really expect expansionist ideas to come to fruition⁹ at least not at state level. The requirements set by Brussels do not allow any deviations from course and for poverty stricken, developing country like Albania this seems to be the only realistic path to progress. Kosovo's leaders seem to be practicing similar rhetoric or at the least are avoiding nationalistic speeches in order not to antagonize the international community.

⁸ Miranda Vickers "The Role of Albania in the Balkans"

⁹ Ibid,17

Nevertheless these ideas are present. The following sections will be closely examining the cases of Kosovo, FYROM, the Presehevo Valley together with the endogenous factor linking these communities and the past and current events thus providing an answer to the above posed questions. This will in turn enable the reader to draw conclusions based on academic knowledge and research conducted by some of the most prominent figures in the field.

2. A region called the “Western Balkans”

The term Western Balkans coined by the EU institutions, came to represent the area of the former Yugoslavia¹⁰, including Albania but excluding Slovenia and from this year Croatia - since the two are members of the Union. This political designation refers to the collection of weak states opting to enter the European Union. The overall situation in the region today is much different from the beginning of the century. From the wars of the early nineties to the NATO¹¹ military intervention towards the end of the century and the fall of the last regime, the situation has shown signs of considerable improvement. Countries across the region are aiming at a European membership perspective or at the least this appears to be the message emitted by the current governing structures. However, progress is still slow and in some cases questionable. There are numerous bilateral issues among neighbors such as the final status of Kosovo. Even with the security situation under control, economic issues continue to undermine the progress of these states. Moreover, organized crime and the high levels of corruption continue to deter any serious foreign investments. Unemployment rates are astounding especially in countries such as Kosovo, Bosnia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The current economic

¹⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo.

¹¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization

situation and the inability of the crisis stricken and politically divided EU to intervene may prove to be a fertile ground for local populist politicians to express frustrations and promote their own nationalist agendas thus acting as destabilizing factors. The dissatisfaction of the masses and the increase in poverty rates could turn into anger directed at minorities or at the borders of a neighboring country. After all, the region is historically prone to such events. It would be worth mentioning that from 2013 the FFP Failed State Index¹² has placed Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under the “warning” category which means that in these states the potential of political turmoil or violence is existent. With Bosnian state legitimacy still in question, rising parallel nationalisms among Slav Macedonians and Albanians in FYROM combined with the country’s identity disputes with its neighbors; the hotspots in Serbia with the Vojvodina province to the north and the Preshevo valley to the south; the Kosovar failure in the state building process can be seen as issues requiring immediate attention.

However, the year 2013 can be seen as somewhat historic for the region due to two major events. Firstly Croatia’s entry in the European Union demonstrated that the doors remain potentially open for the rest of the countries despite the growing Euro-skepticism. Secondly, the agreement reached between Serbian and Kosovar prime ministers Ivica Dačić and Hashim Tachi. This agreement was a step of extreme importance and a major regional stabilizing factor since it allows power sharing in the north of Kosovo. The Serb minority living in the North of the province will no longer be able to completely reject the government in Pristina since Serbia now recognizes its authority over the whole territory of Kosovo. In return the Pristina government agreed to allow significant autonomy to the Serbs living in the north. This in a way demonstrated

¹² See Fund For Peace “The Failed State Index” <http://ffp.statesindex.org/>; The FFP measures the indicators of risk and domestic stability.

that through dialogue even the most complicated of issues can be resolved in an amicable manner. These steps signify the still remaining potential of the region to transform into a legitimate European entity but efforts on behalf of the EU must be maximized in order to obtain a positive outcome.

3. An insight into theories of Nationalism

Present day trends could prove quite confusing to the Balkan and somewhat Eastern European citizen. On one hand, the visible illusion of globalization is pushing through and the world is becoming the “global village” utilizing modern technology and openness. On the other hand, nationalist and tribal trends were thriving in the Western Balkans only a decade ago. Even in present day politics, euro integration and globalization are used as standard rhetoric by Balkan politicians who have by now mastered the techniques of ‘window dressing’ and are firmly committed to their own “concealed” nationalist agendas. This very uneven flight path would land anyone no place else but “Confusionville”. As the era of Post nationalism in the Western Balkans is apparently light years away, an examination of nationalism its origins and consequences becomes an essential component of this paper.

The very essence of the term “nationalism” roughly envelopes the set of ideas and sentiments, which combined, form the framework of the national identity. Every individual is a composition of various identities (racial, religious, occupational, tribal, linguistic etc.) but from the 18th century onwards one may claim that the “national identity” comes before all the above mentioned. During this period countries like: the United States of America, France, Russia established themselves as “nations” and as world’s most influential players were followed by the

rest of the planet in the years to come. This transformation was seen as a sign of progress and modernization particular by the non-European regions and an example to follow even though science combined with advanced technology and not “nationalism” was the primary modernizing force. In order to be taken more seriously, small and unorganized regions such as the Balkans had to be transformed into nations by the emerging “nationalist” elites. Like the most potent virus, “nationalism” swept across and transformed the planet into defined areas or newly emerged ‘nations’. This in turn suggests that “national identity” has evolved to the point where nowadays is seen as the fundamental identity of an individual; by analogy ‘nationalism’ has become the paramount principle of political legitimacy in modern times. In order to better understand Nationalism this paper looks into the works of the most prominent historians within the field. For instance a common understanding would be Berghes’¹³ “Dark Gods Theory of Nationalism” which considers the concept as part of human nature and an “inevitable expression of atavistic irrational passions [...] (Hall, 41) thus cannot be taken as a basis considering the abundance of evidence suggesting otherwise. In most cases, nations are simply crated and the supposed atavism is based on mostly invented, adjusted and fabricated historical facts. We cannot think of nations as ‘natural creations’ without considering evidence pointing to the opposite. As artificial projects, ‘nations’ succeed or fail. One could not view Yugoslavia or the USSR¹⁴ as natural or as expressions of any sort of atavism. As regimes, these simply failed to manufacture nations proper. Authors like Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson provide a more realistic overview of this phenomenon. Anderson views nations as manufactured political communities in which the people hold a simple mental image of “what they are and where they belong”. Published in 1983, “Imagined Communities” sees nations and nationalism as product

¹³ P. Van Den Berghes, 1981

¹⁴ Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

common linguistic traits among members combined with the expansion of “print-as-commodity”¹⁵. Another very important point that Andersen makes in this work is the “mental image” created by members of a given community and that “members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”¹⁶ The fall of Latin as the dominant printed language after the 17th century and the emergence and wide distribution of local vernacular is viewed by Andersen as the main trait that led to the creation of nation states. Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper [...] these forms provided the technical means for representing the kind of imagined community that is a nation (Andersen,25). He called this a “battle for men’s minds” since gathering support was the key to success. Once a region had some common mental properties the groundwork was complete and a nation could emerge. Regions were put together even though they did not exactly share the same customs or traditions. This is one of the reasons that even consolidated or ‘old nations’ sometimes face opposition by sub national movements¹⁷. Gellner completely rejects the views that nationalism has anything to do with human nature considering “nations” a purely artificial creation.¹⁸ Industrialization, modernization and small but influential intelligentsias are the main contributors to the creation of nation states and thus nationalism. Both Andersen and Gellner however, agree that nationalism is a necessity of modern times and current means of industrial production. The following quotes therefore may prove useful in explaining present day Balkan nationalism:

¹⁵B. Andersen, *Imagined Communities*, 37

¹⁶ *Ibid* 37

¹⁷ An example would certainly be the Basque region in Spain.

¹⁸ E. Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 1965

[...] These new nation states will be modern, or at least they will be structured as such, even if in ideological self-deception the intelligentsia romantically believe themselves to be restoring their old nation [...]¹⁹“Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on [...]²⁰

Considering the past and current developments in the Western Balkans we could acknowledge the above mentioned as valid to this case study. Right before the collapse of communism a trend of printing “ancient ethnic maps” swept across most of the peninsula. This was used as a basis and an excuse for national movements with the goal of restoration of ‘historic borders’ and later on, ethnic cleansing. This multiplicity of “great” Serbias, Croatias and so forth was the indicator of major changes and hinted the elasticity of Balkan borders. Since most Balkan nations sought the restoration of their “ancient states”; the basis of Albanian nationalism infused in political discourse was and is no different. The idea of “Great Albania” is the very “ancient state” that could be in a sense ‘invented’ if current trends persist or spread to the core²¹. The major advantage here is that apart from the above mentioned print-as-commodity, today's actors utilize much more sophisticated tools brought upon by modern technology. This is an issue that is further discussed in the paper. Gellner also asserted that we can never be certain which states will emerge as a result of nationalism²². Moreover, when these states do emerge, traditions can easily be invented or selectively modified, dead languages restored²³. Hobswam, supports this statement by pointing to the example of the parallel and relatively new nationalisms in the

¹⁹A. Hall\O’Leary, 195

²⁰ Ibid, 195

²¹ Namely the core in Tirana

²² Hall\O’Leary 196

²³ E. Gellner, Thought and Change

Israeli\Palestinian dispute²⁴. In the Albanian case we can use a simile and that the progress of the inventing\building is in the stage of initial, weak scaffolding - in the sense that common national identity of all Albanian territories is in the initial process of creation through political discourse, open borders and media. The weakness stems from the fact that extreme nationalists opting for unification are still considered a minority and drastic changes are not expected in the immediate future. The stronger flow axis would be marked between Pristina – Tetovo – Presevo while the weaker separate link is in Tirana. Connecting the four proves a considerably complicated task. However if pursued, nationalism, could provide the necessary tools. Michael Billing examines the unconscious penetration of nationalism and nationhood through rather banal means²⁵. Even though his study is concerning established nations of the west, certain elements prove useful to gain insight into events taking place in the Balkans. A short walk through any inhabited area would prompt us with constant reminders of “who we are”. The hanging flag on a mosque in a village on the outskirts of Skopje or the occasional nationalist song played on the local radio are, according to Billing, means of daily reproductions of a nation. As humans we are constantly being reminded of where we belong and again “who we are” and thus reproduced. Politicians’ deliberate usage of deixis such as “I”, “we” and “they” is no laughing matter since this aids the clear separation between “us” and “them”. Hacking into the minds of the masses, nations are reinforced on a daily basis. The ideology promoted in the Balkans usually places “us” as the true rational patriots and “them” as the nationalist\expansionist irrational force.

²⁴ Theories of Nationalism, 76

²⁵ Michael Billing, “Banal Nationalism” 1995

4. Broader Historical Implications and the origins of Albanian National Identity

The Albanians have been considering themselves one of the oldest inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula. It is believed that they bear ancestry to the ancient Illyrian tribes that populated the region before the arrival of the Slavs. Since 1945 the goal of Albanian archeologists is to try and establish this very link which would in a way bring the discussion to an end²⁶. The truth is that there are many historical factors such as the constant change of rule, migrations, falls and rises of empires that make this issue highly controversial and almost impossible to fully prove.²⁷ "Një gjak, një gjuhë, një komb" (trans. One blood, one language, one nation) are the words commonly attributed to Georg Kastrioti Scanderbeg, a 15th century nobleman widely acknowledged in areas populated by Albanians today as a national hero. According to Prifti, he is seen as the founding father of the Albanian nation (even though nationalism and nations are historically rooted in the 18th century) and today serves as an epitome of unification (Prifti,3). Scanderbeg's 1444 League of Lezhë is seen as the first attempt to consolidate Albanian territories under one state. However, the crucial period for the formation of an Albanian national identity can be traced towards the end of the Ottoman period. For five hundred years the Ottomans ruled over the Balkans and its diverse mixture of Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim peoples. Among the Balkan peoples, the Albanians were seen as the most flexible

²⁶ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A modern History*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*,2

when it came to adaptation to new rule²⁸. Change of religion (or side to that matter) was not seen as an obstacle. According to Vickers, Scanderbeg²⁹'s father³⁰ had changed religions several times in accordance with the needs of the current situation. This very flexibility can be seen as the major factor contributing to the relatively privileged position of the Albanians during Ottoman Rule. The empire was at the time seen as a protector against the advancement of Slavs and Greeks. The Albanians of Kosovo were even more prone to accepting the Muslim faith due to the proximity of Serbs.³¹ This way they have gained considerably more rights within the empire and their existence was secured. During the Ottoman period nationality played little importance - religion was the only defining factor when it came to social position therefore by adopting Islam one was automatically considered Turk. Historically the Albanians were a tribal community placing little importance on religion or national classification³². This very reason hindered the development of national identity until the period known as "Albanian National Awakening"³³. It comes as no surprise then that researchers like Natalie Clayer points to the very complex nature of today's Albanian national identity. Divided by natural or political barriers the Albanians were one of the last peoples on the Balkan Peninsula to establish a national identity. Division occurs at the river Shkumbin in central Albania which is the dividing line between the two main dialects dividing the country linguistically and socially. Those living to the north of the river are known as *Ghegs*, in the past known for their tight tribal\clan social organization. The population to the south of Shkumbin is known as the *Tosks* and has abandoned tribal social organization with the coming of the Ottomans. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire, nationalism in the Balkans

²⁸ Ibid.,17

²⁹ George Kastrioti Sanderbeg, a 15th century Albanian lord.

³⁰ Gjon Kastrioti

³¹ Ibid.,16

³² Family, tribal relations and community being more important.

³³ From 1870 - until the Albanian Declaration of Independence in 1912.

was growing. Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks had their respective religions and alphabets which served as identity. The Albanians however, were still divided into Catholics, Muslims and Eastern Orthodox thus, according to Vickers; it was these divisions that deprived them from establishing unity. In support of Gellner, language was indeed the only connection between the communities and probably the only reason that lead to an Albanian state. The ‘Albanian National Awakening’ started in 1870 and was a response to the threat of newly emerging states and pushing towards establishment of Albanian national awareness. The fear of losing their lands to the Slavs or Greeks prompted the people who considered themselves ‘Albanian’ to think of a unified state of their own having in mind the present day territory of Albania and Kosovo. The San Stefano treaty of 1878 gave Albanian populated areas to Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro which was seen as a trigger to the strengthening of Albanian nationalism. The League of Prizren was formed; lead by Abdyl Frashëri it protested the San Stefano decisions at the Congress of Berlin. The League also opted for further unification between the North and South towards a common goal – the unification of territories (Vickers, 32). However the League did not enjoy the support of the wealthy landowners who did not wish to pursue autonomy from the Ottomans nor opt for independence as the empire guaranteed the safety of their assets. On the other hand the Ottomans themselves found it unreasonable to support a formation of a new national identity in the Balkans since this would be a challenge to their authority (Babuna, 1). After all, they have maintained control for almost 500 years by skillfully extinguishing nationalism.

The Albanian Revolt and the start of the First Balkan War in 1912 gave way to the independent state of Albania created at a meeting of Muslim and Christian leaders in Vlore. In 1913 at the Treaty of Bucharest, Albania was recognized by the Great Powers but had left large portions of land (Kosovo and parts of Macedonia) populated by Albanians – outside the newly created state.

The Bucharest Treaty had its impact all the way to present day, failing to solve the regions nationality and minority problems. In the eyes of nationalist Albanians who proudly wave maps of “Greater Albania” it is seen as a major injustice in need of correction.

So far we have seen that here is no doubt that the Albanian question is not a recent phenomenon. The Albanians have felt that injustice has been done towards them since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to Clayer, during the 20th century we witness a further division among the Albanians in the Western Balkans which brings common identity into question. The two communist regimes were different in every possible way so while the population in Albania was in iron curtain type lockdown under the Enver Hoxha³⁴ regime (1944-1989), the Kosovars were much better off under Tito’s³⁵ version of socialism. After the fall of communism in the Balkans there is a definite reconstruction of identity. Old elements of Albanian life resurfaced to some extent. Religion started affecting national identity and north vs south rivalries (since the elite ‘*nomenklatura*’ usually came from the south Tosk region) came to light. However, it also meant that with open borders those from Albania and Kosovo were free to come together, however disparities left by the past like religion, social status and geography still remain firmly embedded. Moreover “this has not lead to greater national cohesion but on the contrary political interests have consolidated on the existing *status quo*, and three Albanian capitals have emerged: Tirana, Prishtina, Tetovo in lively competition with each other” (Batt,6). Clayer points out to the still prevalent differences among Christians and Muslims in present day society. In Albania’s metropolitan areas, Christianity is connected with progress and Europe thus intellectuals view Islam as a thing of the past. It is also worth mentioning that in Albania the 30% Christian

³⁴ Communist leader of Albania from 1944 until his death in 1985, as the First Secretary of the Albanian Labor Party..

³⁵ Marshal Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslav revolutionary, statesman serving various roles from 1945 to 1980

minority enjoys a higher social status. Islam in Albania significantly diminished after the communists came to power and the *nomenklatura* was usually consisted of southerners with a Christian background. The Muslim identity is deliberately concealed or better yet never mentioned. However, in Kosovo, Montenegro, Southern Serbia and the west of FYROM, Islam seems to be the dominant factor in national identification³⁶ and to be Albanian is seen as being Muslim. Over the past years concerns have risen over the presence of radical Islamic structures (Salafi³⁷ and Wahhabi) in these areas financed by outsiders³⁸ as well as in Bosnia. According to Babuna, this penetration of hardcore Islamists may lead to even further divisions among Albanians predominantly in Kosovo and small parts of FYROM. The alleged rise of Islam in Kosovo and FYROM will no doubt create a gap with Albania where the secular character of the state in a way survived the post-communist years and the penetration of numerous religious organizations.

5. The Rise of Regional Pan-Albanianism

In the previous section on nationalism it became clear that the phenomenon³⁹ can be a major force contributing to the stability of any given region on the planet. The issue here is to identify the type of nationalism prevalent among Albanians and determine if this can potentially have a destabilizing effect on the region in the scenario that the current nearly status quo dynamics. This paper divides Albanian and Balkan nationalism into; *idealistic patriotism* and *belligerent*

³⁶ Nathalie Clayer 125

³⁷ Not to be confused with Wahhabis – a comparison considered derogatory by Salafists.

³⁸ Organisations originating from the middle east, specifically, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

³⁹ modernist perspective that describes nationalism as a recent phenomenon that requires the structural conditions of modern society in order to exist

nationalism. The first has to do with personal feelings of belonging to a 'nation' due to common traits such as language tradition etc. and can be seen as positive in the sense that encourages cooperation. In the Albanian case, idealistic patriotism would mean that ideas like "Great\Ethnic or sometimes called Natural Albania" would only serve as a reminder of common traits among neighbors and would not be pursued at a pragmatic level. The second type however holds irredentist attitudes and encourages separatist practices such as division and unification with another state and has no place in today's modern European society. This section will present some of the existent groups and political parties that may be associated with the implications of the term 'belligerent patriotism' but it will also make an inquiry if these formations are able to change the current or future trends

In order to look at the modern day pan Albanian nationalism one has to pose the question; Is there an unresolved Albanian Question in the Balkans and are there viable dynamics among the Albanians in the region that may lead to destabilization of the region? This is not a simple yes or no question as it requires extensive elaboration. An even better inquiry would be to seek the possible repercussions, if any of this potentially unresolved issue. Some would claim that the final status of Kosovo in 2008 had placed a lid on the Albanian boiling pot, however this ethnicity is scattered further than the physical boundaries of Kosovo and Albania. Furthermore, one could raise a question concerning the local 'Kosovar' identity versus the ethnic or national. That is to say if the population in Kosovo sees itself as Kosovar or Albanian and are there enough historical and traditional differences to allow for this. This goes for the rest of the Albanian populated areas. As the population of Albania is nearing a figure of 3 million according

to a 2011 census⁴⁰, the problem lies in the fact that a similar figure is scattered among neighboring countries. Kosovo's total population is around 1.8 million (excluding North Kosovo). The Western part of FYROM is the area with the Albanian absolute majority in the country especially the towns of Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar, Struga and even though the exact figure is a subject of dispute a number of 500 000 is plausible. The south of Serbia or the Preshevo Valley (50.000) and the Montenegrin municipalities of Ulcinj, Bar and Plav are also areas with Albanian majority populations nearing 30.000. Due to the uncontrolled migration in the early nineties an accurate number of Albanians currently residing in Greece cannot be produced but official data from 2008 point to a figure of nearly half a million legal Albanian passport holders⁴¹. Researchers like Clayer are very clear when it comes to the local versus national identity. In Clayers view, these separate communities especially the Kosovar have already formed their unique identity thus unification with Albania is highly unlikely. However can we say the same about FYROM, Montenegro or South Serbia? It would be wrong to assume that an Albanian living in Preshevo feels 'Serbian' for instance, or at least distinct from a Kosovar.

According to Balkan Insight, a poll conducted by Gallup in 2010 revealed that "62 per cent of respondents in Albania, 81 per cent in Kosovo and 51.9 per cent of respondents in FYROM supported the formation of a Greater Albania". Over 95 per cent of the respondents reported that they wish to see Albania, the West of FYROM and Kosovo united as opposed to the Kosovo-Albania option. Yenigun⁴² however comments on the fact that only 25 per cent believe that this will happen in the next decade. As a contrast 68 per cent of Albanians consider the relations with the EU as paramount and 92 per cent support Albania's membership aspirations. These figures

⁴⁰ Source: CIA World Factbook

⁴¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian_immigrants_in_Greece

⁴² Cuneyt Yenigun, SDU Faculty of Arts and Sciences Journal of Social Sciences: Special Issue on the Balkans.

demonstrate that despite the popularity of the ‘Great Albania’ idea, the population is fully aware of the reality of the situation. The ruling elites on all three sides are extremely careful when presenting ideas concerning the above mentioned and attempt at staying as far as possible of any nationalist allegations. However there are existent structures that make attempts at turning the situation around and influencing the public with irredentist scenarios.

During the brief conflict in FYROM in 2001 an organization that called itself The Albanian National Army (ANA or Armata Kombëtare Shqiptare, AKSh) became more widely known to the public, (although its origins date back to the Kosovo conflict of 1999) and was committed to assist the NLA⁴³ fighting the government forces. ANA holds deeply irredentist and separatist values and made attempts at destabilizing the situation in the Western Balkans on multiple occasions. The organization holds close ties with its political wing - the United National Albanian Front (FBKSh Fronti i Bashkuar Kombetar Shqiptar) whose main goal is the creation of “United Albania” which would include all Albanian populated territories. Resembling a cormorant bird the group keeps on resurfacing since 2001. Leader Gafur Adili claims a strength of 12 000 men even though this is a highly unlikely figure. The organization re appeared in 2003 in Kosovo and has since been threatening violence through video appearances on various media. Blacklisted as a terrorist organization by the United States and the United Nations, ANA has made its latest appearance in June 2013 announcing its re mobilization and threatening to enter into war with Serbia over the removal of a monument in Preshevo dedicated to Albanian fighters in the Valley⁴⁴. The organization views the Preshevo Valley as a part of Kosovo. ANA’s attempts at destabilization have so far been unsuccessful however its repeated resurfacing and

⁴³ See section on FYROM for more details.

⁴⁴ Source: Balkan Insight

the very existence of such roaming militias is seen as alarming by the Slavic governments. Moreover, concerns over the Pan Albanian issue do not exclusively revolve around regionally scattered guerilla groups. Some political actors (including high profile politicians) in Albania and Kosovo have also expressed their support for the formation of a state resembling “Greater Albania”. Kreshnik Spahiu, a Tirana lawyer emerged as a public figure in 2012 registering his Red and Black Alliance (Aleanca Kuq e Zi) organization as an official political party in Albania. According to Novinite, in January 2013 the party asked the Central Election Commission of Albania to conduct a referendum for the unification of Albania and Kosovo considering that the time was right for such a move. Spahiu’s party is labeled irredentist, xenophobic and ultra nationalist, holding the idea of uniting the Albanian lands primary. These labels are denied by Spahiu who in turn claims that Great Albania is not on its agenda but that the right Albanians to remove borders “between themselves” should be respected⁴⁵. In an interview for the Reuters news agency, the leader expressed his dissatisfaction with the current borders in the western Balkans and has labeled the divisions made at the century old London conference as not valid. In a hard economic climate, following the rise of nationalist parties on the Balkan Peninsula, Spahiu’s nationalist rhetoric quickly managed to receive the necessary support from Albania’s lowest income layers and placed him 3rd on the party popularity list for the June, 2013 elections. Koleka points out how the party’s short-lived “success” had a magnet effect and drew moderate leaders towards the right. Albania’s moderate Prime Minister (at the time) Sali Berisha clumsily attempting to play the nationalist card in order to gain votes, made some rather disturbing statements during the 2013 celebrations of Albania’s 100 years of independence. A statement made by Berisha in the Albanian town of Vlore calling for [...] the independence of all the

⁴⁵ Source: Reuters

Albanian regions from Preveza to Presevo, from Skopje to Podgorica,"⁴⁶ echoed loudly in Greece, FYROM, Serbia and Montenegro and placed Albania in a diplomatic hotspot. An appealing explanation followed from Berisha's cabinet stating that "referred to the historical context of 100 years ago and did not express any territorial pretext against our neighbors in the south, north or east."⁴⁷ Despite its predicted popularity the Red and Black Alliance turned out to be a major disappointment at the June 2013 elections and won no seats. According to Balkan Insight the alliance "won little more than 10,000 votes during the general election, less than 0.3 per cent of the electorate". This demonstrated the overall maturity of the Albanian electorate and hinted that the formation of a new nation state is not a dominant opinion. However, this short-lived but prompt change of climate and the effect it had on Albanian politics might be suggestive of the ease with which Balkan politics can shift.

The celebrations of Albania's 100 years of statehood seem to have awakened certain nationalist voices mostly dormant in the past decade. Koco Danaj, an adviser to several Albanian PM's (including Sali Berisha) has been spreading the idea of what he calls "Natural Albania" as opposed to "Great Albania" which according to him is reminiscent of the Nazi era. Danaj claims that his idea is the only way to fully stabilize the Balkans⁴⁸. To that end, Danaj intends to collect a million signatures from the Albanian expats in Europe and seek support for assistance in the realization of "Natural Albania" from EU governments. In July 2013 a Serbian independent news network⁴⁹ reported that Danaj has asked the government of Montenegro to abandon its eastern Albanian populated areas as these should be a part of "Natural Albania". Danaj sees injustice in

⁴⁶ Source: setimes.com at

http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/11/30/feature-02

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Source: Balkan Insight

⁴⁹ InSerbia at: <http://inserbia.info/news/>

the London conference of 2013 and seeks a peaceful transformation of Albanian populated areas into one nation state.

The Kosovar political scene is no exception when it comes to hardline nationalist voices. With its headquarters in Pristina, “Vetëvendosje!” (trans: Self-Determination), a radical, nationalist movement which categorically criticizes foreign involvement with the Kosovar state and has in the past expressed expansionist views is on the rise in terms of popularity. Starting as the Kosovo Action Network in 1997, the movement protested the actions of the UN, the Ahtisaari Plan and advocated a union with Albania. Pioneered and led by former Milošević era student activist Alibin Kurti, the movement emerged as a political party in the 2010 elections, ending up as the third party in line after Thaci’s PDK. Even though Vetëvendosje currently holds 14 out of 120⁵⁰ seats in the Kosovar assembly and is considered of moderate influence, concerns exist about the increase in popularity and future elections. There is no doubt that this movement possesses a pan Albanian agenda thus holds the potential to radicalize Kosovar politics. More importantly, the movement has formed ties with similar groups (especially youth organizations) in neighboring countries and poses a threat concerning the indoctrination of the younger unemployed population with irredentist ideas. The extent to which ideas like this can penetrate the minds of the youth is closely related to the deteriorating economic situation in the region. As unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunities rise, radical ideas become more attractive. Kurti is accustomed to occasionally attending rallies in neighboring countries and was on one occasion detained by FYROM authorities in 2009 and prevented to enter the country due to fears that his ‘awareness raising’ campaign may have a separatist background that could have an effect on the already tense interethnic relations. In essence the organizations main goals could be summarized into

⁵⁰ Source: Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assembly_of_Kosovo

three main points: the departure of all international organizations from Kosovo; the removal of the current (according to them) corrupt government and finally, the unification with neighboring Albania. As an example the “The manifesto principles and priorities of “Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!” in article 7 clearly states that:

Instead of expressing the will of the Albanian people for national unification, the Constitution of Kosova denies that will. Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE! considers that articles 1.1 and 1.3⁵¹ of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosova are contradictory. We commit to removing Article 1.3 which denies Kosova the right to unite with **another state**, and in particular Albania⁵²

In FYROM’s case, there are no hardline political parties that can pose a potential threat to moderate politics at present time. The only party with a somewhat pan Albanian unification agenda is the nationalist Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA), de facto biggest Albanian opposition party led by Menduh Tachi. There are occasional instances where Tachi has threatened destabilization of the country and even war. In 2013 in an interview for the Pristina newspaper “Zeri” he issued a statement saying that the “war between the Albanians and Macedonians is not over but in a time out stage at the moment”⁵³ and that “the country will dissipate soon” if the problems between the two ethnic communities are not resolved. Tachi has harshly criticized the moderate politics of ruling coalition member BDI’s leader Ali Ahmeti for not properly representing the interests of the Albanian minority. DPA has sunk in popularity over

⁵¹ The Republic of Kosovo shall have no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State. (Source: Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo)

⁵² Source: Official website of Vetevendosje, <http://www.vetevendosje.org/>

⁵³ Source: Time.mk at: <http://www.time.mk/c/012422944f/menduh-taci-vojnata-megju-makedoncite-i-albancite-ne-e-zavrse-na.html>

the years and has won 5.90 per cent of the electorate or 66,315 votes of the 1,124,064 strong electorate in the 2011 parliamentary elections, which makes the fourth party⁵⁴.

6. The Case of Kosovo⁵⁵

From the Serbian Medieval Kingdom, the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenes and even for a short period of time a part of Greater Albania⁵⁶ all the way to Tito's Yugoslavia; the small area of barely eleven thousand square kilometers viewed by Serbs as the 'Holy Land' and 'home' by the Albanians seemed like a never ending story until hope arose with the 2008 proclamation of independence and recognition by Western States. Historically, ethnic tensions were a common occurrence but were never organized till the late nineties.

Within Yugoslavia⁵⁷ the Kosovo issue was largely marginalized despite the unrest and pleas for 'state' status among the population from the early eighties. The state had an autonomous province status within Yugoslavia which was at the time deemed 'good enough' for the Albanian side. More serious events started surfacing after Slobodan Milošević firmly established his dictatorship in the late 80ties and in 1990 removed the legal basis for Kosovo's autonomous status and suspended the Pristina parliament. During the period a fictional "Republic of Kosovo"⁵⁸ was established and a referendum for independence was sought for. Ibrahim Rugova⁵⁹

⁵⁴ State Election Commission of Macedonia at: www.sec.mk

⁵⁵ (See Appendix for complete overview of population according to ethnic group)

⁵⁶ During the Second World War

⁵⁷ Refers to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)

⁵⁸ With headquarters in Zagreb, Croatia

emerged at this time as a leader of the Kosovar Democratic League (LDK⁶⁰). After the referendum that took place in 1991, Albania was the first (and only) state to recognize the ‘independent state’ of Kosovo. Despite these efforts the destabilized situation in former Yugoslavia was a priority in the eyes of the international community thus the Albanian issue ended up on the margins once again. As Vickers points out, unrealistic visions of military support from Albania and unification started emerging at the time but these hopes were quickly sacked by Sali Berisha⁶¹ who in an interview in 1993 described ideas as “Great Albania” superficial and something that is not taken seriously in Albanian political circles (Pettifer\Vickers, 160). The Kosovars were forced to accept Balkan reality and wait for their moment despite the oppression. After the mostly passive attitude of Albanians during the Yugoslav period and the conflicts in the early nineties, frustration mounted up and many young Albanians, feeling oppressed did not wish to abide by Ibrahim Rugova’s non-violent, negotiation oriented politics any longer. The Kosovar Democratic League lost grip over the situation and (then) militant figures like Ramush Haradinaj and Hashim Tachi started gaining popularity. It was evident that the issue was marginalized by the international community and the younger generation saw taking to arms as the only solution. The status quo was no longer acceptable and a final solution was sought for. Smaller incidents began in 1996⁶² with the formation of underground structures such as the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo (*Levizja Kornbetare per Ciirimin e Kosoves, LKCK*) which ultimately morphed into the Kosovo Liberation Army⁶³ (*Ushtria Clirimtare e Kosoves, UCK*). In 1997 the situation exploded in

⁵⁹ The first President of Kosovo, serving from 1991 to 2000 and again from 2002 to 2006

⁶⁰ Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës

⁶¹ President of Albania 1992-97

⁶² After the recognition of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia by the international community.

⁶³ Hereafter UCK

Albania over failed investment schemes and thousands left without their life savings (Vickers, 309). The country quickly sank into anarchy due to the so called ‘pyramid crisis’ which took nearly 2000 lives. This also meant that tons of weapons from broken Albanian storage facilities found their way into Kosovo. According to Vickers, the Kosovars lost the psychological support from their “mother country” but gained what they needed to fight the Serbs. The endeavor of these groups, fully understanding Serb military superiority, was to finally attract international attention to the province and ultimately separate from Serbian rule. Incidents between the UCK and Serbian security forces became common escalating in the 1999 NATO led military intervention on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia sought my many as illegal due to the fact that it was not fully approved by the UN Security Council⁶⁴. As the foreign intervention ended, Kosovo became an international protectorate under UNMIK (administration)⁶⁵ and a NATO led mission KFOR (security) remained to maintain peace. In 2004 after major violence broke out and the situation became more volatile the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (CSP)⁶⁶ was drawn to prepare Kosovo for potential independence (even though the word *independence* was not mentioned). Goals⁶⁷ were set to create a more tolerant multiethnic society and greatly improve public institutions. Painful negotiations continued up to 2008 when the Assembly of Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. Even though Serbia sought international support, the International Court of Justice ruled the proclamation legal⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legitimacy_of_NATO_bombing_of_Yugoslavia

⁶⁵ UNMIK: United Nations Mission in Kosovo, which represents provisional international self-government.

⁶⁶ Also known as the Ahtisaari Plan (After former Finnish President Marrti Ahtisaari)

⁶⁷ Functioning institutions, rule of law, freedom of movement, rights of communities, property rights, dialogue with Belgrade, and the, Kosovo Protection Corps.

⁶⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Kosovo_declaration_of_independence

Presently, the Republic of Kosovo has been officially recognized by 101 states⁶⁹ including most EU member states and the United States of America. The situation has improved but the problem with the Serbian minority still remains. With 92%⁷⁰ of the total population being Albanian the remaining Serb population lives around the north Mitrovitsa region with many refugees refusing to return due to fears of Albanian retaliation. Serbs hold close ties with Belgrade, use the dinar as currency and receive pensions from Serbia. Undermining UNMIK's authority they organize their own defense structures and conflicts around the Mitrovitsa Bridge are not a rare occurrence. The fear of discrimination leaves no room for trust in the Kosovar government. Like in other parts of the western Balkans reconciliation presents a major challenge. In 2012 a referendum among northern Serb controlled areas was organized and with 99.74%⁷¹ voting in rejection of Kosovar institutions and authority. Thus the previously mentioned 2013 Dačić-Tachi agreement is seen as an act of treason by the Kosovo Serbs and does not in fact guarantee full stability. Since conjoining to Serbia is rather unlikely, an option of forming Bosnian-like cantons⁷² seems like a viable solution. Cantonization would allow separate communities to exist in their own spheres and yet avoid territorial changes. A multinational Kosovo is at present an unattainable goal and solutions like the above mentioned need to be discussed and considered if peace is to be established. Propositions like exchange of territories could have a destabilizing effect on the region since this would involve migrations and should not be considered. Moreover, destabilization may occur taking into account Kosovo's current protectorate status, economic hardship, staggering unemployment rates and restriction to membership in international organizations may lead to frustration and distrust in the international system. Criticism and

⁶⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_recognition_of_the_Republic_of_Kosovo

⁷⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html>

⁷¹ North Kosovo Referendum 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Kosovo_referendum,_2012

⁷² Serving as the second-level units of local autonomy

protests against Tachi's government are not a rare occurrence due to the high levels of corruption and counterproductive actions. This in turn could produce a new generation of politicians and parties (such as the radical Vetëvendosje) which would quickly forget the help received from the international community in the past and pursue a purely nationalist and pan-Albanian agenda. Parties of type undermine the role of international actors such as UNMIK and EULEX. Views like this can be problematic given the undeniably remarkable achievements of UNMIK in the country. International organizations were solely responsible for the proper building of institutions (assembly and government), issuing of travel documents as well as the formation of the Kosovo Police Service. Radicalization of politics in Kosovo could easily have a spillover effect in Albania and the west of FYROM where politicians of that caliber are recently gaining popularity. Territorial pretensions are not the official policy of Kosovo however open talks about 'national unification' and redrawing Balkan borders are a very sensitive subject.

Another open issue is the Presevo, Medvedja, Bujanovac region in southern Serbia, adjacent to Kosovo, also known as the Preshevo Valley⁷³. From 1999 to 2001 the area was shaken by conflicts between Albanian militant groups and Serb security forces. The violence was due to Albanian claims of discrimination and under representation in public institutions within an area where they are in fact the majority. Even though the so-called Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac (UCPMB⁷⁴) agreed to disarm in 2001 tensions could still escalate in the future with Albanians encouraged by the Kosovo independence. For them the only logical outcome due to geographic proximity is to join these territories to Kosovo itself. This kind of solution would most likely result in total refusal from Serbian authorities and an Ohrid

⁷³ with Albanians comprising 54.6% of Bujanovac and 89% of Preševo (and 26% in Medveđa) (Source: Wikipedia)

⁷⁴ Ushtria Çlirimtare e Preshevës, Medvegjës dhe Bujanocit, UÇPMB

Agreement-like solution must be implemented in order to avoid future peace disturbances. Undeniably, Albanian politicians from the valley tend to connect their future with that of Kosovo. Interchange is something that will be sought for depending on Serbian actions. This means that if the Kosovo Serbs opt for autonomy in northern Kosovo the same could be expected in the Valley from the Albanian side. This means that Belgrade needs to be careful with giving false hopes to the Serbs in Mitrovitsa. The politics is dominated by the ruling coalition of Presevo major, Ragmi Mustafa. As a nationalist politician Mustafa does not hide his aspirations for unity with Kosovo. In a statement for Tanjug in early 2013 he stated that: “If Serbia is not ready to provide the (valley) Albanians with the necessary conditions to feel as equal citizens, than they have the right to go to a place where better living conditions will be provided”.

According to a 2007 CEPS⁷⁵⁷⁶ report, Albanians were majorly underrepresented in public institutions which are under central (Belgrade) control. An example is given concerning the municipal court in Bujanovac where only 4 out of 44 employees are of Albanian ethnicity. The only integration success so far is the multiethnic police force. Given the current conditions Serbia must look at strengthening its decentralization policies (at municipal level), minority rights including multinational local governance, cooperate with the international community and tackle unemployment through revitalization of neglected local economy, as these can be igniting factors. According to CEPS decentralization started in 2002 but has since then been moving with slow pace. Unemployment is still a serious issue prompting black economy and crime. Albanians are so far largely excluded from the public sector thus, something reminiscent of pre Ohrid Agreement FYROM and are forced into opening private businesses and not willing to pay taxes.

⁷⁵ www.blic.rs “Ragmi Mustafa: Nije novina da želimo pripajanje Kosovu”.

⁷⁶ Centre for European Policy Studies

Given the history lessons from the region there is no doubt that the situation at present is problematic and must be addressed as fast as possible.

7. The Case of FYROM⁷⁷

The Albanian issue in FYROM, even though existent, was generally overshadowed by events in Kosovo and Bosnia during the late eighties and early nineties. It was during the independence referendum of 1991, when the tiny Yugoslav republic voted to part from the federation that the Albanian issue slowly surfaced. Human rights violations were present during the Yugoslav era but not in any way close in intensity to those in Kosovo per se. Minorities were completely excluded from the constitution (of SR Macedonia) and the newly created, nationalist VMRO-DPMNE⁷⁸ (with origin claims to the IMRO rebel movement of 1893) was gaining popularity. Leading politicians at the time were mainly transformed communist elites who chose to ignore the minority problem and to some extent employed resolution tactics reminiscent to those of Milošević. Additionally, the positions in the public sector were almost exclusively held by the Slav-Macedonian majority. The Albanian political parties organized a parallel referendum requesting an autonomous status of the west of the country. This brought upon a serious disturbance in relations with the Slav-Macedonian majority. Protests by the Albanian minority were violently dealt with by the newly established government and the almost homogenous security forces. As a reaction figures like Arben Xhaferi and Menduh Tachi parted from the moderate Abdurahman Aliti' PDP⁷⁹ and formed the more radical DPA⁸⁰ in 1994. The DPA,

⁷⁷ (See Appendix for complete overview of population according to ethnic group)

⁷⁸ (IMRO-DPMNE; trans. Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity), officially the party was founded on June 17, 1990 (Source: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/>)

⁷⁹ Party for Democratic Prosperity

situated in Tetovo had formed stronger ties to Kosovar parties and developed much stronger opposition rhetoric. The newly created state was clearly sinking in the economic and political abyss. Neighboring Greece has closed borders and imposed a trade embargo due to a dispute over the country's name⁸¹ which had a crippling effect on already troubled trade and industry. Serbia, as the main trading partner was heavily involved in the Bosnian massacres thus future seemed unclear. It would be safe to say that an overlapping of the 'Macedonian' and 'Albanian' question occurred within the country. As a state FYROM was seeking recognition of its identity and statehood on the international scene while on the other side the largest minority was opting for acknowledgment on the domestic. Indeed, ethnic problems existed before but independence was supposed to create a state for all citizens. Smaller scale violence erupted in 1997 after the national flag of Albania was removed by police from public buildings in the western town of Gostivar. Riots followed with outcome of 25 injured and two dead⁸². The event signaled the fragility of the security situation and should have been a clear indicator to the politicians that major steps towards the minority issue had to be taken. The reality was that a state with more than 24% of the population comprised of an ethnic minority could not adopt tactics used by states with mere 5 or 10 %. FYROM needed to develop its own unique strategy which no one at the time was seriously considering. Furthermore, using imported blueprints from Serbia or Bulgaria only had a negative impact. It was obvious that the Albanians were patiently waiting for their chance to be heard. The Kosovo conflict in 1999 served as reminder that the time had finally come.

⁸⁰ Democratic Party of Albanians\ *Partia Demokratike Shqiptare*

⁸¹ Same as that of the Greek northern province.

⁸² OSCE Mission, Official Press Statement, 13.07.1997: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/52686>

The Balkan ‘oasis of peace’ shattered its image at the beginning of the 21st century. The only republic that managed to completely avoid the nightmare of the Yugoslav wars in the early nineties finally succumbed to the overall Balkan atmosphere and its durability was this time put to the real test. The 2001 armed conflict was both internally and externally motivated. The Slavic majority of a bit less than 65% and the predominantly Slav-Macedonian government during the nineties’ have clearly failed to address the rights of the country’s vast 25%⁸³ Albanian minority within the nearly decade of independence. Additionally the previously discussed turmoil in Kosovo in the late nineties brought a refugee influx⁸⁴. It was this very blend of Kosovars and locals that gave way to ideas of armed conflict. Considering the weak government⁸⁵ and its discriminatory politics towards minorities combined with the arrival of aggressive ‘guests’ the situation sprang out of control for a few months. Ali Ahmeti (one of the founders of the UCK) organized the ‘National Liberation Army’⁸⁶, a paramilitary force consisting of UCK, UCPMB and local radical fighters. The NLA however, stated their demands do not revolve around the idea of fragmentation of FYROM and do not wish to threaten the territorial integrity of the state⁸⁷. Their goal was a constitutional change which would make the country a state of two peoples, equally represented. Additionally, the group showed maximum support for international mediation. The view among the Slavic population, however, was quite different; the rebels were seen as those who wish to divide or federalize the country thus anti-Albanian sentiments sky rocketed. The insurgency started in February 2001 and lasted till mid- August. Even though small compared to the Bosnian or Kosovo example it was an issue the state could barely handle.

⁸³ Official CIA Data

⁸⁴ Data on the number of refugees that left FYROM after the Kosovo conflict ended is still disputed. According to UNHCR more than 860.000 refugees left Kosovo during the crisis, 40% were accommodated in Albania only. According to official government figures 183,800 were stationed in FYROM.

⁸⁵ VMRO-DPMNE with Ljubco Georgievski serving as Prime Minister.

⁸⁶ Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare – UÇK, Hereafter: NLA

⁸⁷ Ohrid and Beyond, p.21, Rusi, Iso a letter written by Ali Ahmeti

Poorly armed, the 10 000 strong FYROM army quickly acquired military hardware from Ukraine and Bulgaria. Civil war was avoided but negative sentiments expanded together with ethnic hatred. With efforts made by NATO and the EU the conflict ended with the signing of the ‘Ohrid Framework Agreement’ on August 13, 2001 foreseeing changes to the constitution, decentralization, use of the Albanian language as second official and retaining the unitary character of the state. It was signed by both Slav-Macedonian and Albanian political leaders as well as a number of international mediators. Ahmeti transformed his group into a political party called The Democratic Union for Integration (BDI)⁸⁸. At present, Ahmeti’s party⁸⁹ is a part of the ruling coalition together with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski’s VMRO-DPMNE⁹⁰. Ahmeti holds a moderate stance focusing on dialogue, modifications to the Ohrid Agreement and sees NATO and EU integration of paramount importance for the future of FYROM. Destabilizing rhetoric however, comes from the opposition. The second largest Albanian political party DPA (The Democratic Party of Albanians) led by Menduh Tachi who considers Ahmeti a ‘sellout’⁹¹, has been known to make statements that call for an armed conflict, seeks federalization of the state and even expressed support for unification of Albanian territories. Unlike in Kosovo the Albanians in FYROM are strictly divided in these two blocks similarly to their Slav-Macedonian counterparts⁹². Presently the moderate BDI retains most of the support from the domestic electorate not posing any serious destabilization risks. This in turn shows that the majority of the Albanian population is not in support of irredentist ideas and is in fact striving for further integration within the state. However, the mere presence of radical structures may be a matter of

⁸⁸ Bashkimi Demokratik per Integrim

⁸⁹ BDI is the largest Albanian party in the county

⁹⁰ VMRO DPMNE enjoys support from 63% of the Slav-Macedonian voting electorate and is the largest party in the country.

⁹¹ http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2012/11/19/feature-02

⁹² VMRO-DPMNE under Nikola Gruevski and The Social democratic Union of Macedonia under Branko Tsrvenkovski

concern for the future of FYROM. For the moment one cannot claim that a serious threat to statehood is evident. Federalization is an idea strongly opposed by Slav-Macedonian authorities from fears that the Albanians might separate and conjoin Kosovo. Ethnic tensions have greatly improved since 2001 but establishing a genuine multicultural society will be a serious challenge in the future. A positive example should be taken from Montenegro where the Albanian minority was almost fully accommodated. There is no doubt that the same skillful strategy can be implemented in FYROM, given that there is political will to do so. Again a very serious challenge is posed by the fact that FYROM is still out of NATO and the EU. The situation may stray in the negative direction if efforts both on behalf of the EU and the domestic actors are not doubled. In 2011 VMRO-DPMNE was re-elected forming a coalition with Ahmeti's BDI. Even though the Albanian counterparts have constantly reminded that the name issue with Greece needs special attention, the Gruevski lead government has shown little realistic interest in resolving the issue. Alarming a process of "Antiquization" or "Macedonization" has commenced since 2010. The notorious, government financed "Skopje 2014" project has brought upon the erection of numerous statues and renaissance type buildings - mainly in the capital city which may have negative impact on the country's relations with its neighbors who view the move as a provocation. The 22 meter colossal statue of Alexander the Great⁹³ together with Philip of Macedon on the opposite side will only worsen relations with Greece – seen as the main obstacle on the way to NATO and the EU. Neighboring Bulgaria has also raised concerns about 'Macedonization' of its history. What began as an project to revitalize the looks of Skopje's dreary center after the 1963 earthquake, has turned into something that will in fact promote a new wave of state building in FYROM thus again highlighting the ethnic

⁹³ Named "Warrior on a horse".

‘Macedonian’ and not multiethnic character. Not taking into account the cost which amounts up to staggering 500 million euros⁹⁴ which will no doubt damage the state budget; on the domestic scene the minorities have been mainly excluded from this ‘new image of the state’. On the other hand, the Slav majority (or a portion of it) has been given their national pride back after the 2001 Ohrid Agreement – seen by most as a victory of the ‘others’. This could lead to the dissolution of the VMRO\BDI coalition which has served as a pillar of stability to this day. The state remains (according to opposition critics) under the firm grip of the current VMRO government which has captured strategic public sectors and imposed party membership as paramount to public positions. A decline in freedom of media .Bad investments (such as Skopje 2014) could further hinder the already poor economic progress and lead to frustration among the Albanian population. The name issue is also stalled due to the fact that Athens’ perception of the current situation within FYROM leads to a conclusion that destabilization is quite possible thus ‘wait and see’ politics seems to be the best strategy at the moment. For the time being, the current government has not shown serious incentive to resolve the name dispute with Athens. Under the cover of placing the blame on the other side for lack of “constructiveness” and flexibility the issue remains submerged. This may lead to what critics⁹⁵ of current PM Nikola Gruevski would describe as isolation of the country from the region and rest of Europe. Nation building seems to be an issue of greater importance (at the moment) than integration into the EU and NATO. Internal stability, however, is an issue in need of immediate attention. If left unresolved the state will not stand a chance at addressing the problems with its neighbors and improving its economy. What needs to be crystal clear is that FYROM as a ‘project’ or the early nineties (self-given and

⁹⁴ According to Balkan Insight “critics dispute that figure and estimate the real costs of Skopje 2014 to be much higher, in the region of 500 million or even a billion euros”

⁹⁵ Manly on behalf of opposing SDSM and independent researchers.

domestically popular) nickname “Switzerland of the Balkans” is nowhere near complete and a lot has to be done in order to achieve the ultimate balance with Europe. The repetitive negative progress reports that are coming in from the European Commission in Brussels are presented to the public as the result of “Greek’ aggressive foreign policy” and EU integration blockade from the southern neighbor. While there is some truth in this statement the public is manipulated into thinking that this is the only problem the country has at the moment.

8. Is there a realistic threat to the security of the region?

This paper has made an attempt at presenting the historical and current trends concerning the Albanian issue in the Western Balkans region. The utilization of academic articles, written by some of the most renowned names in the field as well as rigorous fact checks, enabled this study to present the reality of the situation and provide evidence for any plausible scenarios where the region would be destabilized by internal factors. What becomes clear is that there is an Albanian question in the region, however there is no evidence that there are structures large enough to pose a serious threat to security or that there is a Greater Albania in the making – at least not in the way its described by nationalist thought. The possible destabilization may occur if other factors combined with the existing structures are taken into consideration.

It would be unreasonable to characterize the region as a ticking time bomb or attribute scenarios of a full scale war at this point in time. However, one cannot completely disregard the potential for minor escalations of violence. After all, only a decade has passed since the Western Balkans was on the breaking news of the world’s top media corporations. Generations of people affected by the past wars, hatred and unnecessary bloodshed have brought a new generation in some areas

indoctrinated in the 'old way of thinking'. This very new generation grew up in poverty, witnessing the slow and painful post conflict revival of their newly created societies. The very same generation is now in their twenties with very little to do due to the still harsh economic conditions, lack of industrial development and their "countries" isolation from exclusive clubs (namely the EU and NATO). Krastev (2004) describes these developing countries (or Balkan Democracies) as political regimes where even though voters are free to change governments, very little can be done about changing policies since these are already prescribed by external factors such as the EU or the IMF. Kosovo serves as the prime example of this; the elected elites have very little control over the political process and so even after the proclamation of independence the country is still not a member of major international organizations. This very fact cleanses predatory elites from social responsibility thus suggesting the overall weakness of individual states⁹⁶. Triantaphyllou (2002), comments on the distance created in situations like this between the elites and the citizens thus making it impossible for the state to cater to the citizen's basic needs. In FYROM the majority population reacts negatively to Albanian demands upon realizing that the struggling government has little chance of tackling high unemployment rates and collapsing economy, let alone cater to the needs of minority groups. A situation of this kind creates an impasse where citizens feel stranded and added the bad economy and unemployment rates, can lead to frustration. The danger of escalation is thus not essentially rooted in ethnic hatred between Albanians and Slavs in the region but stems from the very weak institutional setting these populations live in. Ideas like "Great Albania, Serbia etc. enter nationalist discourse in situations like the present one. Krastev sees bureaucracy building and the

⁹⁶ Krastev, Ivan, "Weak States as a Security Threat".

aim at creating responsive governments as a part of the solution to the region's problems⁹⁷. Such responsive and moderate governments could set aside irrational internal conflicts and devote their attention to improving the economic and political climate. Improvements in these sectors would thus leave minimal maneuvering space for nationalist or extremist organizations which mainly thrive exclusively in areas with high crime and unemployment rates.

The European Union has been attempting to become a part of the solution for the Western Balkan region since the Yugoslav wars of the early nineties. It has signed Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) with Serbia, FYROM, Albania and Montenegro while Bosnia and Herzegovina is still under the "potential candidate" category bound by the Interim Agreement which regulates matters concerning trade and bilateral relations. Kosovo's independence is still a matter of dispute between EU member states thus SAA negotiations are authorized by the European Council but will hardly be implemented. Even though the European Parliament in 2010 called upon all EU member states to recognize Kosovo, the process has not progressed. This demonstrates that the Union's interests still succumb to the interests of individual states. Croatia remains the only Western Balkan country to join the European Union with the rest still on the "waiting list". This slow integration process brought upon internal confusion and lack of central leadership in Brussels combined the global economic crisis will have negative effects both on the EU and the Western Balkans. A growing army of unemployed people migrating within the EU boundaries leaves little space for dealing with 'external issues'. The problem here lies in the fact that since the Yugoslav wars, Europe has treated Balkan problems as "external" instead of European issues. This leaves the Balkans in a type of limbo between Europe on one hand and Russia\Turkey on the other. As the EU weakens and

⁹⁷ Ibid

enlargement fatigue increases the troubled region may turn to Turkey or Russia for “assistance”. Euro-skepticism is on the rise among Balkan politicians as any closer ties would diminish their full monopoly over the small states. Even though a politician like Nikola Gruevski or Iвица Dačić may seem as pro-European, their actions suggest quite the opposite. According to a Gallup⁹⁸ report for 2011 the Albanian population of the region (regardless of country) scores highest in supporting EU integrations while euro-skepticism has steadily risen among the Slav population. For the time being the EU remains powerless to encourage progressive reforms thus there seems to be a process of stagnation. The EU mediated Pristina-Belgrade agreement of 2013 is seemingly a positive step but the denial of self-determination to Serbs may have negative implications on stability. The consolidation of the Union into one voice and the development of a single strategy towards the integration of the troubled region is the only viable solution to the full stabilization. Integration within EU structures would bring about the obsolescence of nationalist ideas concerning the redrawing of borders thus reinforcing European over national identity. Even though the idea seems distant at the present moment it is nevertheless possible. Greater Albania or Greater Kosovo would be possible in this European setting without triggering a conflict as borders would be open and the need to secure or acquire territories would be obsolete. Democratization of individual Albanian populated territories is seen as a much better solution than the forming of a new ethnic state. On the other hand there is no doubt that every ethnicity has the fundamental right to choose their own government and by that the country they live in through democratic means. In the case that the euro integration trends in the region stall for another decade and Kosovo’s status is not promoted to full independence we may expect turmoil in the area. The Preshevo Albanians feel stranded within Serbia and there is no doubt that further

⁹⁸ Gallup: Balkan Monitor at <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/>

seclusion from their Kosovar peers may lead to conflicts. Close attention is required by European authorities in order to keep peace.

For Kosovo the period of 1999-2008 was considered as the 'peace building' period whereas from then on improvement of institutions is a priority. Corruption and organized crime remain a serious challenge and act as a deterrent for foreign investors thus hindering economic development. Topping this is the highest unemployment rate in Europe and blossoming of black economy. EULEX is present with 1400 police officers, 50 judges and customs officers constantly monitoring and assisting the building of democracy however unless the economy improves we cannot expect a fully stable Kosovo. The November elections of 2013 proved difficult and were perhaps held too soon as radical groups among the Serb minority made attempts at boycotting. However despite the low turnout they were held for the first time without the involvement from Belgrade. It was the first time as well for Serb authorities to call on the local population and ask them to participate⁹⁹. Future elections will demonstrate if progress has been made and if Kosovo could indeed become a home for both Albanians and Serbs

The nationalist voices coming from Albania proper have proven to be of no influence on state politics and involvement on Albania's behalf in any future regional disturbances is not expected. The polls in Albania have shown that the majority of the population sees the progress towards the EU primary thus would not allow any changes in trajectory. In Kosovo and FYROM irredentist ideas are more widespread; however the groups propagating such ideologies are small in numbers. The fact that armed guerillas exist in the region remains but these are not capable of undertaking any serious actions and are fully aware of the obstacles that would be in the way of

⁹⁹ Source: Euronews at www.euronews.com

such a move. The political voices that are in control of Albanian public opinion in these states are also strongly opposed to militant actions thus

In FYROM's case the Ohrid Agreement is the crucial deal made between the two main ethnicities in the state and its full implementation must be accelerated as soon as possible. Federalization of the state is not recommended at the moment since fears still exist among the Slav population that Albanians will use the opportunity and part from the state. The gradual upgrade of the minority status seems to be the best strategy at the moment even if this does ultimately lead to complete decentralization and subsequently to federalization. The country must focus all its energy on resolving its diplomatic feuds with neighboring states and bring itself on Europe's doorsteps. If this process does not accelerate drastically in the coming years dissatisfaction among Albanians may increase thus the fragile peace may be shaken. From the research conducted and the facts presented this paper has demonstrated that the current irredentist trends among the Albanian population in FYROM are extremely low. Further conflicts are expected but only in the form of rough demonstrations that is to say in no way of militant nature. Progress has been made towards the use of the Albanian language and the equal distribution of the minority in the public sector and it is paramount that it continues with rapid pace.

9. Concluding Remarks

A crucial point to understand when looking at the security in Western Balkans and the "Albanian Question" is the interdependence of the small states. Historically conflicts in the region have almost always had a spillover effect so the stability of one country is crucial to that of another.

Destabilized Kosovo may easily have implications on FYROM or the Preshevo Valley or even Montenegro and vice versa. One cannot claim that the region is stable in the full meaning of the word. A term like ‘under control’ would be more appropriate. The role of international organizations in the region was and remains of crucial importance for security. The constant efforts of the United Nations, NATO and the EU have brought the region to a point where building democracy is not such an unattainable goal. The promise of EU membership has also played a vital role. Even though in recent years we have seen ‘enlargement fatigue’ coming from the EU, the European Commission has clearly stated that ‘the future of the Western Balkans lies in Europe’¹⁰⁰, this is a motivating factor that plays a major role in the stability of the region. Further involvement through structural funds on behalf of the EU should be pursued in order to avoid distrust and future negative scenarios. The EU enlargement strategy could potentially have a beneficial effect on the rising nationalism and ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans. Joining a larger family would promote European identity instead which would come as supplementary for the existing national identities. Improvements in the bad economic situation would naturally follow. The foreign embassies in the region have been the ‘guard dogs of democracy’ with ambassadors acting as advisors to governments. There is no doubt that without international involvement today’s picture of the region would have been much different. Keeping the countries firmly devoted to the European future is the only road to follow if future conflicts are to be avoided.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/content/20110408STO17340/html/Future-of-the-Western-Balkans-lies-in-Europe>

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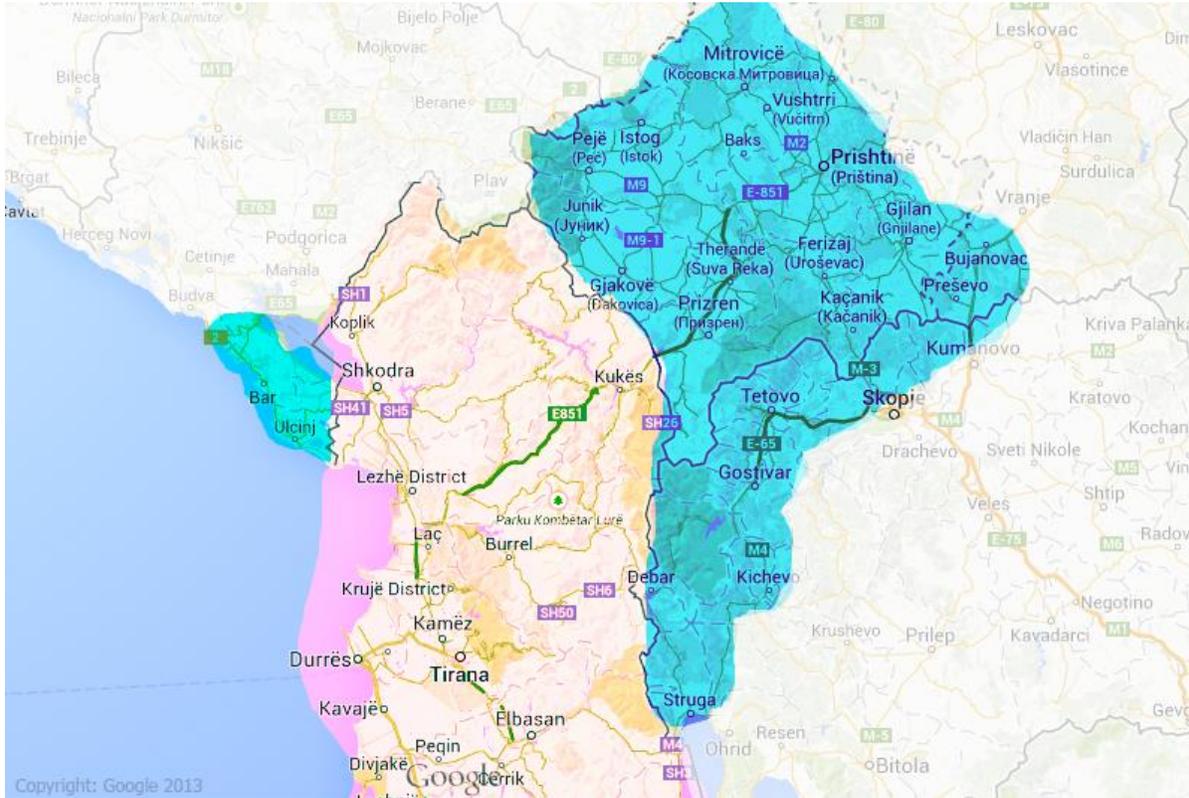
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11. Appendices:



Map of political influence in Albanian populated territories



Appendix Source: www.wikipedia.org

Population of Kosovo according to ethnic group 1948-2011	census 1948		census 1953		census 1961		census 1971		census 1981		census 1991		census 2011	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<u>Albanians</u>	498,244	68.5	524,559	64.9	646,605	67.1	916,168	73.7	1,226,736	77.4	1,596,072	81.6	1,616,869	92.9
<u>Serbs</u>	171,911	23.6	189,869	23.5	227,016	23.5	228,264	18.4	209,498	13.2	194,190	9.9	25,532	1.5
<u>Muslims</u>														
<u>Bosniaks</u>	9,679	1.3	6,241	0.8	8,026	0.8	26,357	2.1	58,562	3.7	66,189	3.4	27,533	1.6
<u>Gorani</u>													10,265	0.6
<u>Montenegrins</u>	28,050	3.9	31,343	3.9	37,588	3.9	31,555	2.5	27,028	1.7	20,365	1.1		
<u>Croats</u>	5,290	0.7	6,201	0.8	7,251	0.8	8,264	0.7	8,718	0.6	8,062	0.4		
<u>Yugoslavs</u>					5,206	0.5	920	0.1	2,676	0.2	3,457	0.2		
<u>Romani</u>													8,824	0.5
<u>Ashkali</u>	11,230	1.5	11,904	1.5	3,202	0.3	14,593	1.2	34,126	2.2	45,760	2.3	15,436	0.9
<u>Egyptians</u>													11,524	0.6
<u>Turks</u>	1,315	0.2	34,583	4.3	25,764	2.7	12,244	1.0	12,513	0.8	10,445	0.5	18,738	1.1
<u>Macedonians</u>	526	0.1	972	0.1	1,142	0.1	1,048	0.1	1,056	0.1				
Others or unspecified	1,577	0.2	2,469	0.3	2,188	0.2	4,280	0.3	3,454	0.2	11,656	0.6	3,264	0.6
Total	727,820		808,141		963,988		1,243,693		1,584,441		1,956,196		1,739,825	

Population of Macedonia according to ethnic group 1948-2002^[5]

Ethnic group	census 1948		census 1953		census 1961		census 1971		census 1981		census 1991		census 1994 ¹		census 2002	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%										
Macedonians	789,648	68.5	860,699	66.0	1,000,854	71.2	1,142,375	69.3	1,281,195	67.0	1,328,187	65.3	1,295,964	66.6	1,297,981	64.2
Albanians	197,389	17.1	162,524	12.5	183,108	13.0	279,871	17.0	377,726	19.8	441,987	21.7	441,104	22.7	509,083	25.2
Turks	95,940	8.3	203,938	15.6	131,481	9.4	108,552	6.6	86,691	4.5	77,080	3.8	78,019	4.0	77,959	3.9
Romani	19,500	1.7	20,462	1.6	20,606	1.5	24,505	1.5	43,223	2.3	52,103	2.6	43,707	2.2	53,879	2.7
Serbs	29,721	2.6	35,112	2.7	42,728	3.0	46,465	2.8	44,613	2.3	42,775	2.1	40,228	2.1	35,939	1.8
Muslims													15,418	0.8	2,553	0.1
Bosniaks	1,560	0.1	1,591	0.1	3,002	0.2	1,248	0.1	39,555	2.1	31,356	1.5	6,829	0.3	17,018	0.8

Appendix Source: www.wikipedia.org

Montenegriens	2,348	0.2	2,526	0.2	3,414	0.2	3,246	0.2	3,940	0.2	3,225	0.1	2,318	0.1	2,003	0.1
Croats	2,090	0.2	2,770	0.2	3,801	0.3	3,882	0.2	3,349	0.2	2,878	0.1	2,248	0.1	2,686	0.1
Yugoslavs					1,260	0.1	3,652	0.2	14,240	0.7						
Vlachs	9,511	0.8	8,668	0.7	8,046	0.6	7,190	0.4	6,392	0.3	7,764	0.4	8,601	0.4	9,695	0.5
Bulgarians	889	0.1	920	0.1	3,087	0.2	3,334	0.2	1,984	0.1	1,370	0.1	1,682	0.1	1,417	0.1
Others or unspecified	4,390	0.4	5,304	0.4	4,616	0.3	22,988	1.4	6,228	0.3	45,239	2.2	9,814	0.5	14,887 ²	0.7
Total	1,152,986		1,304,514		1,406,003		1,647,308		1,909,136		2,033,964		1,945,932		2,022,547	

Appendix Source: www.wikipedia.org