Marko Nikezić: A Struggle for Anti-Nationalism in Socialist Yugoslavia

Cemre Aydoğan

Introduction

The dissolution wars of socialist Yugoslavia caused mass atrocities due to the nationalist polarizations among distinct ethnic groups. The war years (1991-1995) are generally known for several disasters. The wars "generated massacres and ethnic cleansing, culminating in Srebrenica in 1995, the mass destruction of cities such as Vukovar (a Croatian city), Mostar, and Sarajevo, the latter of which was under siege for almost four years" (Boskovic 2013: 54). The rise of Serbian nationalism in the 1990s mobilized nationalist groups[1] especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina where multi-ethnic demographic structure was clearly and historically traceable. Serbian nationalism and its influence brought about the end of socialist Yugoslavia.

During the collapse of the Iron Curtain, many states also owned their independence in Eastern Europe through internalization of liberal market economy and a rupture from the Soviet Union. Their re-turn to Europe (Neumann 1993) process did not cause violent conflicts although they face economic problems that continue even today due to the extension of capitalism in those states. On the other hand, socialist Yugoslavia and its folks faced economic disasters in the 1990s, however the political actors focused the issue of artificial nationalism to maximize their interests by skipping the issue of economic deprivations (Ramet 2006). Hence, those actors used the card of "nationalism" to gain the self-esteem

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[1] Serbs started to stockpile arms across the regions where Serbs populated, but especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and this was a material part of the planned Bosniak genocide (Ramet 2006: 9).

they lost during the periods of economic "recess" (Ozkirimli 2017: 51-54).

Although many studies centralize nationalism to understand and to discuss the dissolution of former Yugoslavia (Denitch 1996; Sells 1996; Bieber 2002), the distinctions among communists are generally less focused aspect of the dissolution process (Jović 2009). The distinction process started in 1960s, especially in Serbia and among Serbian politicians and thinkers. Despite the fact that Tito and other founding elites certainly aimed to decentralize the state as their primary goal, the "liberal" communists also insisted on discussing the economic depression of Yugoslavia and local solutions on that through reforms (Guzina 2003).

Serbian nationalism was seen harmful even in Serbia in the 1960s, but it found a grassroot movement due to the polarization between the arguments of the "liberal" communists and the conservatives[2] who supported pro-statist policies. The conservative wing consisted of both nationalists and anti-nationalists, however the reformists are generally categorized as anti-nationalist voices of Serbia. Hence, suppression of the reformists (the "liberal" communists), such as Koća Popović, Mijalko Todorović, Latinka Perović, Marko Nikezić, and Petar Stambolić, and their dismissal from their office paved the way for the consolidation of nationalist conservatives in the next decades. In this article, I will analyse the role of Marko Nikezić, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia and the 6th Chairman of the League of Communists of Serbia between 1968-1972, to discuss how anti-nationalist maneuvers were visible in the Serbian politics of the 1970s, and also how they were ignored. I will analyze Marko Nikezić's speeches, policies, and targets for the sake of anti-nationalist future of Yugoslavia through primary and secondary sources, then I will display the impossibility of anti-nationalist politics in the context of the rise of Serbian nationalism and the Yugoslav politics.

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[2] They were either nationalist or anti-nationalist.

Brief history of Serbian nationalism

Scholars who specialize on Serbian nationalism in the Balkans mainly refer to the Battle of Kosovo of 1389[3] as the first important incident while they try to trace the roots of nationalistic sentiments among Serbs (Sells 1996; Bieber 2002; Subotić 2016). On the other hand, many studies that underline the modern and constructed essence of nationalism open a window of opportunity to understand how nations (re) narrate their history through retrospective interpretations (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1983; Üngör 2014). In other words, national histories and quest for national independence were tried to be justified through historical, generally ancient, cases in the 19th, especially among distinct nations of imperial states and by their nationally heroic figures or state elites (Brass 1979; Greenawalt 2001: 57-59). Therefore, construction of national incidents and myths might be generally classified as artificial efforts in the modern era. Although this claim is contractionary with Orientalist school since the members of this school centralize the ancient and embedded hate of the folks through their explanations of the wars when they focus on nationalism, especially in the Balkans (Kaplan 1991/1992).

The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 and Serbian *Chetniks*' role[4] (Todorova 1994) in the World War II influenced the mindset and manuscripts of the scholars who analysed the Serbs (or the Balkans in a broader perspective), and their claims centralised Orientalist arguments: barbarous East, violent Slavs, and their constantly conflictual behaviours (Kaplan 1991/1992: 65). On the other hand, after the WWII, the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia with its six republics and two

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[3] The war was between the Ottoman State and the forces of the Serbian prince Lazar in 1389. The Battle of Kosovo ended with Turkish victory and the collapse of medieval Serbia. Although Serbs were defeated, the war is still important for them because it is believed that the war initiated a new era in their history. Therefore, romantic and retrospective remembrance of the war constitute one of the important milestones of Serbian national history.

[4] It was a Serbian guerrilla force in the occupied Yugoslav regions (by Germans and Italians) during the WWII. *Chetniks* collaborated with fascist units, even with Croatian *Ustashe* who systematically killed Serbs in the WWII.

autonomous regions[5] started a new epoch because of the formulation
of supra-national identity and its internalization among the folks of
Yugoslavia. Its establishment highlighted that the violent conflict or
centrifugal politics is not inevitable in the region[6].

Although national questions were also visible within the borders of
multi-ethnic socialist Yugoslavia, especially because of the introduction
of the market socialism[7] (Ramet 2016), Yugoslavia might be generally
remembered with its anti-nationalist, Marxist utopian, and decentrali-
zed structure (Budding 1997; Lindstrom 2005; Maksimović 2017). The
rise of nationalism, or at least nationalist ideas, found room in the 1960s
and 1970s in Yugoslavia, especially in its Serbian republic among se-
veral thinkers and politicians[8], however this does not demonstrate that
there were no communist and anti-nationalist bloc in Serbia.

The 1960s-1970s: Can we detect Serbian nationalism?

Budding's article on Serbian national identity crisis in the late 1960s
and 1970s starts with an intriguing example from today's perspective[9]:

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[5] Republics: Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, and
Macedonia; autonomous regions: Kosovo and Vojvodina.

[6] National liberation front in the WWII had a diversified social and political
structure with members from several political and religious backgrounds and with
the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. Then, the state was founded by the Anti-Fascist
Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) in 1943 with the name of
Democratic Federal Yugoslavia (named as "socialist" Yugoslavia/SFRY in 1963).

[7] National questions were also traceable in Yugoslavia since national conflicts
emerged among political leaders of federal republics even in the 1960s due to the
introduction market socialism that bifurcated the Yugoslav society: reformists vs.
conservatives. Under the general umbrella of the conservatism, there were not just
anti-nationalist communists. National front also found a room under etatist-conser-
vatism to criticize the reformists' policies by referring to unequal nature of the re-
forms and their unequal effects among republics.

[8] Serbia was economically one of the less developed parts of Yugoslavia, therefo-
re suspicion on reforms and ideological distinctions were much more visible in com-
parison with other republics of socialist Yugoslavia.

[9] The dissolution wars of Yugoslavia flamed nationalism within the region, and
today there are still nationalist polarizations in the lands of former Yugoslavia where
multi-ethnic structure exists.

how Serbian poet Pavle Stefanović's ranked his identities, first a Yugo-slav, then a Serb (1997: 407). Guzina discussed the 1960s' Serbia from the point of nationalism, and he claims that "civic nationalism" and "Yugoslavism"[10] were the most concrete ideologies that aimed to include all "communist" citizens without an exclusionary policy (2003: 92). Another example that displays the legal hegemony of the Yugoslav identity over Serbness in 1960s is the case of the Brioni Plenum of 1966. Vice-President of Yugoslavia and the highest-ranking Serbian commu-nist, Aleksandar Ranković was accused in this plenum due to his secret efforts to create "a-state-within-the-state" (Budding 1997: 410) and his smuggling activities in Kosovo and Metohija where Ranković consciou-sly supported Serbian migration waves (Cvetković 2017: 130). Prpic un-derlines that Ranković's "closer ties with Moscow" even after Tito-Sta-lin split in 1948 and his "Serbian chauvinist" acts caused the end of his political career (1969: 41). Furthermore, he was stamped as "nationa-list" or "chauvinist" which carries negative connotations in the 1960s' Serbia and of course in Yugoslavia (Budding 1997: 410).

On the other hand, Ranković was not alone in his illegal and chau-vinist acts, and his supporters were also accused in the Plenum (Prpic 1969: 41). Although Ranković "was openly against the notion of Mu-slim particularly and denied the existence of, or the possibility of, a Muslim nation" (Ramet 2006: 286) which was clearly against socialist and de-centralized spirit of Yugoslavia, his coterie was also against the idea of "ethnic particularities" (*Ibid.*). Therefore, a Serbian grassroot for nationalist ideas started to be mobilized silently around Ranković's mindset. After the reign of Ranković, "mainly Serbs and Montene-grins moved to other parts of Yugoslavia" because of "the discrimina-tory policies of Kosovo Albanians" (Mertus 1999: 27). Hence, Serbian state elites who applied to the tool of nationalism in 1990s would start to refer to those incidents too in their polarizing narratives.

On the other hand, "Serbian opposition to Yugoslav decentraliza-tion" organized a public discussion in March 1971[11] that also centra-

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[10] Yugoslavism is generally argued as a civic religion in the socialist regime, and it aims to glorify communism in a Marxist utopian way.

[11] "Serbian opposition to Yugoslav decentralisation gained its fullest explicit-ly political expression during the period of officially-mandated "public discussion"

lized the issue of national benefit maximization of Serbs which was contrasting with the essence of socialist utopian Yugoslavia[12] (Budding 1997: 416). Cyrillic colour of nationalism started to be spoken loudly although one of the most important scholars who also joined this public discussion, Mihailo Đurić was sentenced to nine months prison due to his critique of Yugoslav decentralization and his positive attitudes towards the rise of Serbian nationalism (*Ibid.*). However, there were also "other communists" who supported anti-nationalism in Serbia.

The 1960s-1970s: Marko Nikezić

Even though Serbian nationalism was started to be spoken loudly in Serbia, there were also some "liberal"[13] communists who believed and supported "internationalism" across Yugoslavia through the maximization of the citizens' economic interests without any nationalist argument (Budding 1997: 409). "The Serbian 'liberal' communists were party reformists (headed by Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović[14]) who gained prominence in Serbia after the fall of Ranković and were in control of the Serbian Communist Party from 1968 until 1972"

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that preceded the passage of the constitutional amendments of 1971. In March 1971, the Law Faculty of the University of Belgrade hosted a particularly dramatic session. It was fraught with claims that Yugoslavia was "at its final cross-roads" and that "after the adoption of these amendments Yugoslavia will no longer exist as a state". In this charged atmosphere, a few speakers put forward a political analogue to the Proposal for Consideration's linguistic platform. That is, they insisted that if others could do without Yugoslavia so could the Serbs on certain terms. Philosopher Mihailo Đurić, asserting that Serbs had "magnanimously" chosen to create Yugoslavia instead of Greater Serbia in 1918, called on the Serbian people to renounce 'the mistakes of the past'" (Budding 1997: 416).

[12] The essence of socialist utopian Yugoslavia was anti-nationalism and pro-decentralization-oriented policies across its borders.

[13] Liberal communist of Serbia refer to a bunch of state elites and their supporters who aimed to eradicate economic inequalities through reforms and through adaptation of social democratic principles.

[14] Koća Popović, Mijalko Todorović, Latinka Perović, Marko Nikezić, and Petar Stambolić were the leading names of the liberal communists of Serbia in the 1960s-70s.

(Guzina 2003: 94). In this article, I specifically discuss the role and importance of Marko Nikezić to understand anti-nationalist maneuvers in 1960s-70s' Serbia. Nikezić was a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia and the 6th Chairman of the League of Communists of Serbia between 1968-1972. Before that he was one of the partisans, and he was also a member of founding bureaucratic class of Yugoslavia with Josip Broz Tito and Edvard Kardelj.

Flere and Klanjšek state that "Nikezić explicitly considered that republics, not nationhoods, were constituents of Yugoslavia" (2019: 136). This is important to understand the general mindset of the "liberal" communists on nations and nationalism in Serbia: it was never one of the central ideologies of the state. Nikezić's ideas for the future of Kosovo signified its homeland situation for both Albanians and Serbs (*Ibid.* 143), hence Serbian nationalists were uncomfortable with Nikezić's discourse. Végel underlines that "Nikezić incessantly emphasized that the primary goal of Serbian communists must be resolutely fight the resurgent Serb nationalism" (2005: 172). This quote also displays how he was against hegemonic and historical narratives of Serbian nationalism.

Furthermore, he was a pro-European figure because of his belief in inclusive overarching identities. In 1966 Nikezić argued that "the series of initiatives by the socialist East European countries and by West Europe to actively change the state of affairs and to remove the obstacles accumulated through the Cold War" (1966: NN2). Therefore, the idea of pan-Europeanness was also important for him like the idea of *South Slavness*. According to Nikezić, Europeanization was also a vital goal for each citizen of socialist Yugoslavia, and Europeanization equated with more reform to improve economy within all republics and regions. Nikezić aimed to eradicate extreme underdevelopment and backwardness in former Yugoslavia, and he thought that state intervention should have been stopped in certain reforms (Đorgović 2014). Nikezić also argued that more qualified working class would have ended the economic problems, and new decisions should be formulated independently, independent from the state (*Ibid.*).

While Nikezić insisted on reformist policies for the sake of citizens of socialist Yugoslavia, he also believe that problems of ethnic minorities, such as the problems of Croatian Serbs, should have been sol-

ved in their regions, in Zagreb not in Belgrade (Jović 2009: 133). This is also significant to trace his position vis-à-vis Serbian nationalism to prevent any pan-Serbian movement across Yugoslavia. Moreover, he was also skeptical of decentralization policy of socialist Yugoslavia since it might have found a room for the goals of nationalists actors (*Ibid.* 124). His ideas against the rise of Serbian nationalism and for economic prosperity of citizens of socialist Yugoslavia went hand-in-hand, and he started to be more critical for the regime's agenda.

Although the "liberal" communists of Serbia aimed to save the state, their ideas were seen unacceptable for Tito and the ruling class (*Ibid.*). Therefore, anti-nationalist bloc of Serbia was dismissed from the office. Nationalist wing of Serbian politics also agreed Tito's exclusionary attitudes towards the "liberal" communists. Hence, reformist ideas of Nikezić and others, were cleaned from the state's agenda, especially through their dismissal from their offices in 1972. This maneuver of Tito would cause the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia through nationalist conflicts especially in the regions where Serbs populated. Therefore, ideological warfare of the late 1960s-70s led to the emergence of artificial reasons for the war, nationalism, and the lack of the "liberal" communists' bloc would bring about the rise of violent politics.

Conclusion

Scholars on the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia and the rise of Serbian nationalism mainly focus on centrifugal politics in the 1990s among distinct ethnic groups to understand polarizations and their reasons. On the other hand, the ideological differentiations in Yugoslavia on certain issues were less discussed since those distinctions were the stories of the 1960s-70s. In this article, I aimed to demonstrate why we need to know different voices in the Yugoslav politics, especially in Serbia, in order to understand the roots of the dissolutions. I specifically focused on Marko Nikezić, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia and the 6th Chairman of the League of Communists of Serbia between 1968-1972. As a "liberal" communist, Nikezić and his fellows supported the idea of anti-nationalism in their policies. They were dismissed from their offices in 1972 due to their

reformist policies that were contrasting with Titoist state-centered politics. From the point of fictional history, the existence of the "liberal" communist bloc would have mattered, and might have prevented violent conflicts in the dissolution process.

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