

HUMANISTICKE STUDIJE



8 | 2020

UNIVERZITET
DONJA GORICA

ČASOPIS HUMANISTICKE STUDIJE

Glavni i odgovorni urednik:
Dragan K. Vukčević

Urednik broja
„Zapadni Balkan na razmeđu
lokalnih i globalnih izazova“:
Ilija Vujačić

Redakcija:
1. Đorđije Borozan (Podgorica);
2. Ilija Vujačić (Podgorica);
3. Dragica Vujadinović (Beograd);
4. Milan Podunavac (Podgorica);
5. Cirila Toplak (Ljubljana);
6. Mirjana Maleska (Skoplje);
7. Asim Mujkić (Sarajevo).

Savjet:
1. John Keane (Sidney);
2. Nenad Dimitrijević (Beograd);
3. Čedomir Čupić (Beograd);
4. Olga Breskaja (Vilnius);
5. Ana Krasteva (Sofija, Lyon);
6. Panos Ljoveras (Solun);
7. Đuro Šušnjić (Beograd);
8. Viljam Smirnov (Moskva);
9. Rudi Rizman (Ljubljana);
10. Alpar Lošonc (Novi Sad);
11. Vesna Kilibarda (Podgorica);
12. Stefano Bianchini (Bologna);
13. Hans-Georg Ziebertz (Würzburg);
14. Ratko Božović (Beograd).

Sekretar: Nikola Zečević

Dizajn: Mile Grozdanić

Priprema za štampu: Bojan R. Popović
Medeon, Podgorica

Lektura i korektura: Valentina Knežević

Lektura i korektura za priloge na engleskom
jeziku: Dragana Dubljević, Dragica Žugić

Izdavač: HS, UDG

SADRŽAJ

DRAGAN K. VUKČEVIĆ Uvodna riječ
glavnog i odgovornog urednika /5/

DIO I TEMA BROJA: Zapadni Balkan na
razmeđu lokalnih i globalnih izazova /5/

MILAN PODUNAVAC Pandemija straha: politički učinci /9/

CHRISTINA GRIESSLER Adressing the Legacies of Conflict
in the Western Balkans: Reconciliation and
Transitional Justice Approaches /19/

EDINA PALEVIQ Ethno-Nationalism in Montenegro,
Kosovo and Serbia During the Pandemic /65/

DIO II STUDIJE

ALEKSA ĐILAS Ujedinjene nacije i zaštita nacionalnih
manjina — jedno ne sasvim tužno podsećanje /83/

MYKHAYLO KOMARNYTSKYI The Role of Ethnic
Interest Groups in U. S. Foreign Policy /93/

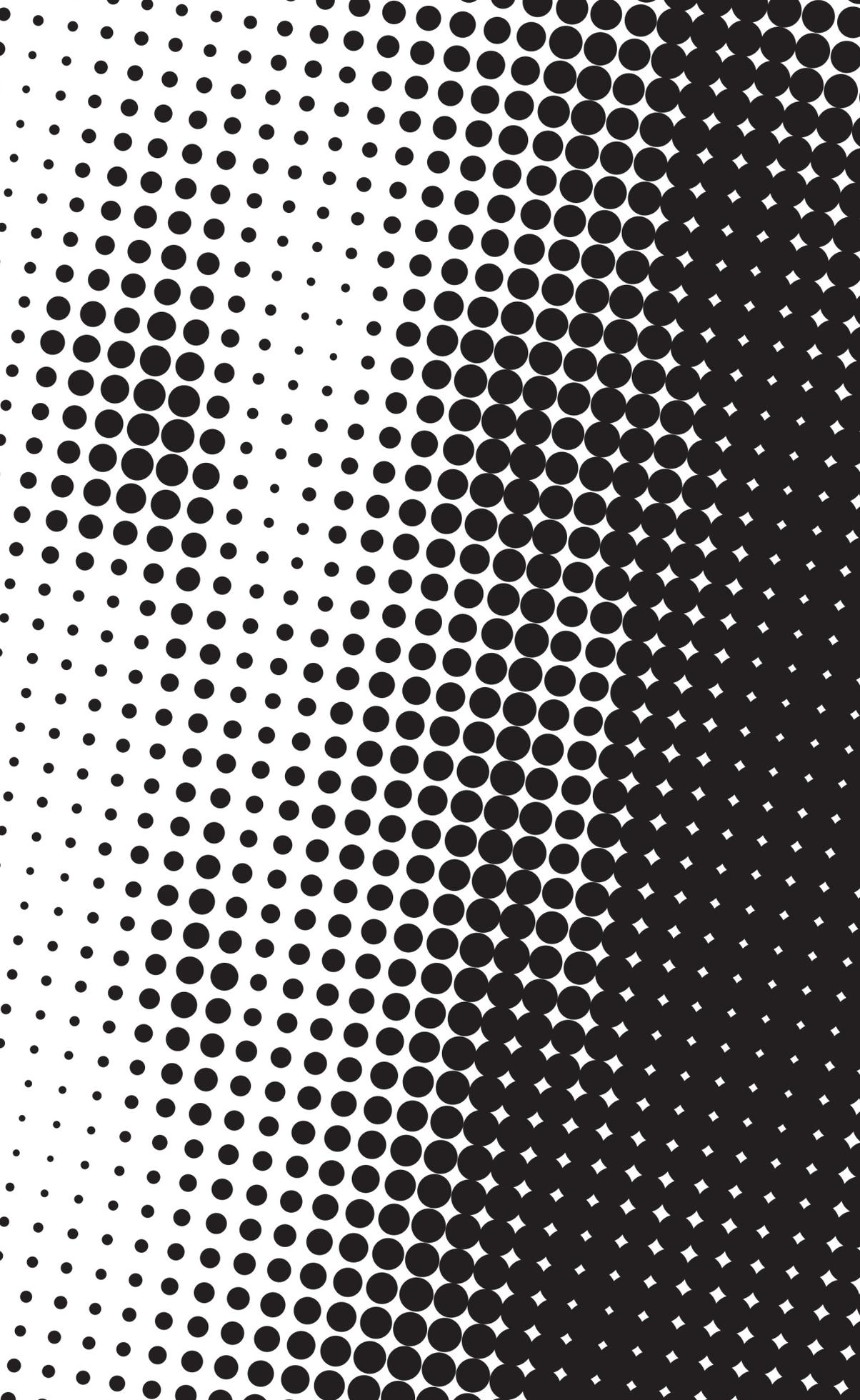
DIO III RECENZIJE

ROBERT M. HAYDEN (et al.) Antagonistic Tolerance,
Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces,
Routledge, London, 2016. (Filip Tesar) /109/

VOLFGANG ŠMALE Šta će biti sa Evropskom unijom? Istorija i
budućnost, Clio, Beograd, 2019. (Nikoleta Đukanović) /115/

DIO IV IN MEMORIAM

Prof. dr Tonko Maroević (1941–2020) (Luka Rakojević) /121/



Ethno–Nationalism in Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia During the Pandemic

This paper aims to investigate the ethnic nationalism during the pandemic in three specific Western Balkan countries, namely, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. It addresses the question: Is ethnic nationalism increasing due to the pandemic in these three countries? We argue that ethno-national tensions in and between the countries have intensified due to the Covid-19 crisis.

This paper is divided into six parts. After a short introduction we will try to examine the meaning the pandemic has for politics and nationalism. In the third part we will describe the ethnic issues existing before the pandemic outbreak. Next, we will take a close look at the government responses to the pandemic and its consequences for the society. At the end, we will present a brief summary.

Key words: ethnic nationalism, COVID 19, Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia

1. Introduction

The Western Balkan countries have been strongly influenced by ethnic nationalism especially since the 1990s. The fact that ethno-nationalism was and still is a tool frequently used by politicians for gaining and strengthening their power is not news in the region. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has changed and influenced many aspects of life globally. While it has fulfilled every nationalist's dream of closed borders, the opposite argument could also be considered. Due to this global affliction, the unforeseen pandemic takes precedence over the rivalry among different nations or (ethnic) groups, which could lead to a wider solidarity and collaboration beyond the national borders. In the Western Balkans, these things don't differ much from the rest of the world. Since the countries in the region are not able to deal with the pandemic within their own borders, it could create a need for cooperation, even though we are witnessing different reactions. While many scholars have examined nationalism¹ and ethnic

* Edina Paleviq, PhD Student of the Network for Political Communication (net-POL), Andr ssy University Budapest, edina.paleviq@andrassyuni.hu

¹ Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia. The Third Balkan War* (London, New York, Viktoria: Penguin Books, 1992); Pavlos Hatzopoulos, *The Balkans Beyond Nationalism and Identity: International Relations and Ideology*, 2008; Thanos Veremis, *A Modern History of the Balkans: Nationalism and Identity in Southeast Europe* (London and New York: LB. Tauris&Co. Ltd, 2017).

conflicts² in the Western Balkans in general and under other circumstances, this paper investigates the nationalism during Covid-19 outbreak in Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia. The reason for the selection of these three particular countries is the ongoing political and ethnic issues in and between them. In Montenegro, tensions regarding the long-standing issue of national affiliation and identity were heightened by the adoption of the new law on religion. As a result of the new law, the ruling party, Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), was ousted from power on August 31, for the first time in 30 years. The pro-Serb and pro-Russian coalition, For the Future of Montenegro, managed to mobilize its electorate through burning ethno-nationalist feelings.³ Kosovo-Serbia deal is also causing further tensions. All these issues can affect the peace and stability in the region.⁴ The Covid-19 pandemic is also a trigger for certain events that shaped the ethnic relations in these countries. For all the three states, however, democratic and EU-oriented reforms have been the main priorities for decades, and yet tensions between ethnic groups and nationalist rhetoric among political elites remain a feature of regional politics. Overcoming their deep rooted nationalism would be a major step towards the EU membership as well as their democracy consolidation.

As tempting as it may be, forecasting ethno-nationalism in these three countries is far from easy. Their current political behaviour as well as the environment of the crisis can lead to incorrect results instead of a decisive prediction. Nationalist behaviour during the pandemic has become more visible. It thus deserves reflection on the actions of these three governments in the state of emergency, the way of fighting the „common enemy“, as well as the consequences that their decisions cause. Therefore, this paper addresses the question: Is ethnic nationalism on the rise due to the pandemic in these three countries? We argue that ethno-national tensions in and between them have intensified due to the Covid-19 crisis.

The analysis comprises six parts. After a short introduction we will try to examine the meaning the pandemic has for politics and nationalism. In the third part we will describe the ethnic issues existing before the pandemic outbreak. Next, we will take a close look at the government responses to the pandemic and its consequences for the society. At the end we will present a brief summary.

² Cathie Carmichael, *Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans: Nationalism and the Destruction of Tradition* (Routledge, 2002); Victor Roudometof, *Nationalism, Globalisation, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans* (Greenwood Press, 2001).

³ Aleksandar Miladinovic, 'Parlamentarni Izbori u Crnoj Gori: Ko Su Ljudi u Vrhu Dosadasnje Opozicije (Parliamentary Elections in Montenegro: Who Are the People at the Top of the Previous Opposition)', 2 September 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/balkan-54002705>.

⁴ Julija Simic, 'Serbia, Kosovo Leaders Gear up for Tough US Talks', 9 January 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/serbia-kosovo-leaders-gear-up-for-tough-us-talks/>.

2. Nationalism and the Pandemic

Following Florian Bieber we understand nationalism as „a malleable and narrow ideology that values membership in a nation more highly than belonging to other groups. i. e. based on gender, political ideology, socio-economic group, region, seeks distinction from other nations, strives to preserve the nation, and gives preference to political representation by the nation for the nation.“⁵ Ethno-nationalism, however, is a form of nationalism, brought as a term in political science for the first time by Walker Connor. Ethno-nationalism defines the nation by shared heritage, namely a common ancestry including common language and faith. As Connor noted, „it is not what is, but what people believe is that has behavioural consequences“⁶. And ethno-nationalists believe that nations have common biological and genetic origins, thus they are united by ties of blood, and therefore each country should be homogenous.⁷ This paper also follows banal nationalism as described by Michael Billing. Banal nationalism refers to the daily representation of a nation through national symbols such as flags (in buildings), maps, and stamps as well as through rhetorical words presented in the media such as „us“ and „them“.⁸

In the past years nationalism has been on the rise not only in some authoritarian and hybrid-authoritarian regimes, but also in many democracies.⁹ The outbreak of the pandemic appears to have further sparked nationalist sentiments globally. The countries' reactions to the pandemic has led to the further rise of nationalism. While the number of the Covid-19 infections is constantly increasing, countries are dealing with the situation in peculiar ways: holding each-other responsible for the disease, arguing over medical supplies, closing borders, struggling against fake news for political censorship and other restrictive domestic decisions.¹⁰

To explain how the pandemic and the government responses to it have shaped nationalism, a few previous researchers have interlinked nationalism with natural disasters and diseases¹¹. According to Goode et. al. disasters generate „unsettled times, or ontologically insecure

⁵ Florian Bieber, 'Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends.', *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (2018): 10.

⁶ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, n. d.), 75.

⁷ The broad literature on nationalism and ethnicity has countless other dimensions that are not covered in this paper. For more see e Smith's (1973, 1981), Carter (1981), Deutsch (1970), Haas (1986), Noiriel (1991b)

⁸ Michael Billing, *Banal Nationalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 1995).

⁹ Bieber, 'Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends.', 10.

¹⁰ Florian Bieber, 'Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 1, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.35>.

¹¹ John Wagner Givens and Evan Mistur, 'The Sincerest Form of Flattery: Nationalist Emulation during the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09702-7>; Bieber, 'Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

moments when social and political institutions are in flux¹². Natural disasters are generally regional, but when a disaster is so widespread that it is perceived as a national scale, it is likely to strengthen feelings of nationalism. They can intensify pre-existing divisions of a society such as social, political, religious, ethnic etc. up to an armed aggression¹³. Mistur et. al., point out that countries are more likely to emulate Covid-19 policies of their neighbours instead of responding to their domestic conditions¹⁴, and those who advocated a nationalistic ideology before the pandemic are more affected by nationalism during the pandemic.¹⁵

Nationalism is also strongly interlinked with authoritarianism. Autocratic elites use nationalism to secure their political positions and to mobilize against challengers. The emergence of the virus gave them an opportunity to justify their policies. Bieber names four aspects that can be shaped by the pandemic, particularly for far-right nationalist governments: Recent developments in nationalism and its pre-pandemic social relevance, the spread of authoritarianism as a result of the suspension or reduction of democratic freedoms and civil liberties by governments, promoting biases against certain groups, rising borders, deglobalisation and the politics of fear.¹⁶

3. Pre-Pandemic Ethno-nationalism

Not only have these countries (Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia) experienced stagnation in democracy for decades, but in recent years they have even tended to turn into authoritarian systems and hybrid regimes.¹⁷ This was confirmed also by Freedom House — Nation in Transit report in early 2020, where Montenegro and Serbia lost their democratic status for the first time since 2003, and are considered hybrid regimes once again. Even though Kosovo's democratic status has slightly improved, according to the Nation in Transit report, it is still considered transitional or hybrid regime.¹⁸

¹² J. Paul Goode, Davis R. Stroup, and Elizaveta Gaufman, 'Everyday Nationalism in Unsettled Times: In Search of Normality during Pandemic', *Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.40>.

¹³ Rune T. Slettebak, 'Don't Blame the Weather! Climate-Related Natural Disasters and Civil Conflict.', *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (2012): 163–73.

¹⁴ Evan Mistur, John Wagner Givens, and Daniel Matisoff, 'Policy Contagion During A Pandemic', *Social Science Research Network*, 2020.

¹⁵ Ruolin Su and Wensong Shen, 'Is Nationalism Rising in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic? Individual-Level Evidence from the United States', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09696-2>.

¹⁶ Bieber, 'Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic'.

¹⁷ Florian Bieber, *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

¹⁸ Freedomhouse, 'Nations in Transit 2020. Countries and Territories', accessed 14 November 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores>.

Considering one of the most important features of democratic consolidation — the peaceful replacement of the main party in government, we see that in Montenegro it was not the case for the last thirty years. The political elites of these countries are perceived as increasingly authoritarian because of the policies they are practicing. They continue to use nationalistic rhetoric and promote nationalistic policies as a pretext for uniting their ethnic groups and protecting the interests of the nation in order to obtain electoral support. And as Jasmin Mujovic argues, for the past two decades they have entrapped their citizens with the combination of nationalism and nepotism¹⁹. The main argument that is found in literature is that in the Balkans, a political elite constructed ethnic identity „in order to create a domestic political context“²⁰.

The prospect of Serb intellectuals and political elites to unite „all Serbs in one state“²¹ which ended up in armed conflict and ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, left deep roots in society today. As Bieber et. al. argue, even though the nationalist polarization from the past has never disappeared from the region, a tense increase has been observed since 2015, especially between Kosovo and Serbia but also lately between Serbia and Montenegro.²²

One of the main factors causing tensions between them is religion. The Serbian Orthodox Church plays an important role in maintaining Serbian mythology.²³ The status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, as well Serbian religious and cultural heritage is a matter of status and sovereignty for Serbia and Kosovo. Since this topic is highly sensitive and is related to identity, so far it has not been on the table for discussions in the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo. The cultural heritage is seen by the Serbian people in Kosovo as the „cradle of national identity“²⁴, and by Kosovo-Albanians as part of the „overall historical and cultural heritage“²⁵ of the newly-established republic. Orthodox religious buildings with a special status are symbols of delegitimation of Kosovo’s sovereign government. However, Serbia sees churches and monasteries as evidence of

¹⁹ Jasmin Mujanovic, *Hunger and Fury. The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans* (London: Hurst and Co., 2018).

²⁰ V. P. Gagnon, ‘Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia’, *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 132.

²¹ Dejan Guzina, ‘Socialist Serbia’s Narratives: From Yugoslavia to a Greater Serbia’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 104.

²² Florian Bieber et al., ‘The Western Balkans in Times of the Global Pandemic’ (BiEPAG Policy Brief, 2020), 16.

²³ Vedran Dzihic, ‘Zwischen Ethnonationalismus Und Europäischer Zukunft. Skizzen Aus Dem Heutigen. Serbien’, *Europäische Rundschau* 3 (2008): 69.

²⁴ Stefan Surlic and Igor Novakovic, *Serbian Cultural and Religious Heritage in Kosovo from Ahtisaari’s Special Zones to the Final Status* (Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER), 2020), 1.

²⁵ Surlic and Novakovic, *Serbian Cultural and Religious Heritage in Kosovo from Ahtisaari’s Special Zones to the Final Status*.

the right to the territory they consider their holy land.²⁶ Aleksandar Vucic and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) are manipulating the Kosovo issue for political support. The SNS is presenting itself as the guardian of the territory of the province of Serbia, by promising not to recognize Kosovo as long as they are in power. Furthermore, they have established the Serb-List, a political franchise party of Kosovo-Serb minority in Kosovo. It is promoted as the only party in Kosovo that could represent and protect the Serb minority in the country.²⁷

In Montenegro, however, the conflict between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church over ‘autocephaly’ (a term used to describe a church’s autonomy) shifted on to the political ground and became a symbolically important strand of the myriad conflicts over identity, nationhood and statehood²⁸. In December 2019 the Montenegrin Parliament adopted a new Law on Religious Freedom, which directly affects the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church. This law highlighted the tensions even further.²⁹

Albanian nationalism in Kosovo was present long before the declaration of its independence in February 2008. According to Shaqiri, the state of Kosovo today can be seen from two points of view: the one is the viewpoint of Albanian nationalists, who see the independence as a political finalization of the nation-building project and a success of the nationalist movement which arose in Kosovo since 1912. This group considers Kosovo as the second Albanian state in the Balkans. And the second point of view is that of the international community, which considers Kosovo as a multi-ethnic and multicultural state, but not as an Albanian state. These two perspectives have created a political contradiction, namely the formal-legal multi-ethnicity of the state, underpinned by the international community and the informal ethno-nationalist symbolism, which is developed by Albanian nationalism and is being practiced daily.³⁰

4. Government Responses to Covid-19

The pandemic has particularly uncovered the weaknesses of the political systems in all three countries. As Tzifakis argues, most executive branches of these governments sought to take on extraordinary

²⁶ Surlic and Novakovic, 1–2.

²⁷ Giorgio Fruscione, ‘After the Nineties: A Never-Ending Political Transition’, in *The Balkans: Old, New Instabilities. A European Region Looking for Its Place in the World*, ed. Giorgio Fruscione (Milan: ISPI, 2020), 18.

²⁸ Kenneth Morrison, *Nationalism, Identity and Statehood in Post-Yugoslav Montenegro* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 83.

²⁹ Sandra Maksimović, ‘Montenegrin Law on Religious Freedom: Polarization That Benefits the Government(s)?’, *European Western Balkans* (blog), 13 January 2020, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/01/13/montenegrin-law-on-religious-freedom-polarization-that-benefits-the-governments/>.

³⁰ Mexhit Shaqiri, ‘Albanian Nationalism and the State of Kosovo’, *European Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2018): 70.

powers at the expense of the legislatures. The introduction of the state of emergency challenged the balance of power between state institutions and, in Kosovo, even led to the overthrow of the government.³¹

Although Montenegro did not formally declare a state of emergency, the rules practiced were very strict. Mostly they were in line with the Law on Protection of Population from Infectious Diseases and the Criminal Code, as well as with the Constitution.³² The ruling party, however, used the pandemic as an opportunity to further pursue undemocratic practices which did also not contribute to the unification of the population. One of the violent acts from the government was the publication of the names of people in self-isolation on government's website. Another violation of religious rights occurred when the bishop and clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church was arrested on May 12 for public gathering, protesting against the new religious law. However, the same rules didn't apply to the mass celebration of the Independence Day on May 21, and this indicated a selective application of measures. Freedom of expression, which has been one of the main issues for decades pointed out every year in European Commissions country report, took another level when citizens and editors of online-portals were taken in custody for spreading fake news.³³

The parliament did not hold a plenary session from March 4 to April 22. During this period several decisions were taken by the government without parliamentary approval, despite the opposition calls to bring the legislature into session.³⁴

In March 2020 one of the NGOs proposed that the budget and funds allocated for NGO activities should be used to fight the pandemic. The Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dusko Markovic welcomed this proposal. He also tried to justify the disputable state aid that the Montenegrin government granted to Montenegrin Airlines at the end of 2019 by emphasizing the contribution of the airline to bringing the Montenegrin citizens home.³⁵ Furthermore, the opposition party was constantly accusing the Montenegrin Government for actions such as illegally spending the aid funds for the political campaign purposes, as well as for refusing to accept the aid from

³¹ Nikolaos Tzifakis, 'The Western Balkans during the Pandemic: Democracy and Rule of Law in Quarantine?', *European View*, 2020, 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820963333>.

³² Daliborka Uljarevic, Tamara Milas, and Damir Nikocevic, 'Montenegro and the Coronavirus: The State of the Nation in the First Six Weeks.' (Podgorica: Centre for Civic Education, 2020), 8–9.

³³ Samir Kajosevic, 'Concern for the Rights in Montenegro amid COVID-19 Fight', *Balkan Insight*, 26 March 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/26/concern-for-rights-in-montenegro-amid-covid-19-fight/>.

³⁴ Uljarevic, Milas, and Nikocevic, 'Montenegro and the Coronavirus: The State of the Nation in the First Six Weeks.', 12.

³⁵ Uljarevic, Milas, and Nikocevic, 11.

Serbia, not seeking support from Russia, but accepting the assistance from Turkey.³⁶

In terms of media presence, the President Milo Djukanovic and the Prime Minister Dusko Markovic have been more absent during the pandemic than their colleagues in the other two countries.³⁷

In June the country declared itself a Corona-free state and the authorities decided to partially open the borders, but Serbian citizens were not on that list.³⁸

In Kosovo the discourse of state of emergency and the pandemic have particularly influenced the power struggles, namely the internal conflict in the government. In February 2020 a new government was formed, a coalition between the long-time opposition Vetevendosje (Self-Determination) and Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves (LDK). This was the first time since the independence that parties in power didn't emerge from Kosovo Liberation Army.³⁹ When the virus started to spread in March 2020 the President Hashim Thaci proposed the Assembly to declare a state of emergency in accordance with the Constitution. The Prime Minister Albin Kurti (also leader of Vetevendosje) opposed this move and so did the Serbian List, a party that represents the Kosovo Serbs in the Assembly, out of concern that there may be an occupation of Serb municipalities.⁴⁰ The government collapsed on March 25 creating a political void until June 3 when a leader of LDK received a vote of confidence.⁴¹ The overthrow of Kurti's government was perceived as a result of the US pressure to unconditionally lift tariffs against Serbia, which Kurti disagreed with,⁴² and as a plan of President Thaci to move forward with an agreement with Serbia, through the so-called „land swap“. This land swap between Serbia and Kosovo would include territories with Serbian and Albanian Minorities. However,

³⁶ Filip Milacic, 'Montenegro', in *Democracy and the State of Emergency. Responses to the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia*, ed. Max Brändle and Filip Milacic (Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 2020), 22.

³⁷ Uljarevic, Milas, and Nikocecic, 'Montenegro and the Coronavirus: The State of the Nation in the First Six Weeks.', 11.

³⁸ Euractiv, 'Crna Gora Otvara Granice (Montenegro Opens Borders)', 26 May 2020, <https://euractiv.rs/7-cu-i-zapadni-balkan/36-vesti/14978-crna-gora-otvara-granice-ne-i-za-graane-srbije>.

³⁹ Werner Distler, 'Political Crisis and the Corona—„State of Emergency“ in Kosovo', *Z Friedens Und Konfliktforschung*, 2020, 3, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42597-020-00046-w>.

⁴⁰ Prishtina Insight, 'Government and President Divided over State of Emergency Proposal', *Prishtina Insight*, 18 March 2020, <https://prishtinainsight.com/government-and-president-divided-over-state-of-emergency-proposal/>.

⁴¹ Exit News, 'Kosovo President Admits He Secured Crucial MP Vote for New Government.', 6 April 2020, <https://exit.al/en/2020/06/04/kosovo-president-admits-he-secured-crucial-mp-vote-for-new-government/>.

⁴² Sarah E. Garding, *Kosovo: Background and U. S. Policy* (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

this problematic proposal is not very popular in Kosovo and is not supported by Kurti.⁴³

From the outset of the pandemic, measures such as restrictions on freedom of movement, religion and association were taken. While media freedom seems to be in place, media has been very polarized and acted one-sidedly regarding program broadcasts and political debates, while putting one or the other party into spotlight.⁴⁴

Serbia declared state of emergency in March with the signature of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament, while the Assembly would not ratify the declaration until late April. Although this statement has been viewed by some legal experts as a violation of the Serbian Constitution, the Constitutional Court has, however, decided that the declaration is legal. During this period the Parliament lost its role of decision making process and the power was concentrated in the hands of one man — the President of the Republic — without checks and balances by other institution.⁴⁵

Freedom of expression deteriorated significantly. With a view to combating disinformation, a ban on dissemination of information related to Covid-19 has been introduced. The journalists were also detained for 48 hours if they „spread fear among the population“.⁴⁶

In contrary to Montenegrin President, the Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic was very present in the media. During the peak of the pandemic, he started a pro-Chinese propaganda. The fact that before the European Union China has sent medical equipment to Serbia to prevent spread of the virus, was used by Vucic for his and his parties interest in many different ways, mainly to provoke the European Union. In the media he was shown kissing the Chinese flag⁴⁷ and criticizing the European Union. He often underlined that the „European solidarity does not exist“ and „that was a fairy-tale on paper“⁴⁸. Moreover, he placed a billboard in the centre of Belgrade between the

⁴³ Tzifakis, ‘The Western Balkans during the Pandemic: Democracy and Rule of Law in Quarantine?’, 6.

⁴⁴ Besa Kabashi-Ramaj, ‘Republic of Kosovo’, in *Democracy and the State of Emergency. Responses to the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia*, ed. Max Brändle and Filip Milacic (Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 2020), 18–19.

⁴⁵ Alexa Ilic, ‘Serbia’, in *Southeast Europe — COVID-19 Bulletin No 4 Pandemic Politics*, ed. Steven Blockmans and Erwan Fouéré, 2020, 19.

⁴⁶ European Federation of Journalists, ‘COVID-19: Serbian Government Urged to Guarantee Free Flow of Information’, 4 March 2020, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/04/03/covid-19-serbian-government-urged-to-guarantee-free-flow-of-information/>.

⁴⁷ Euractiv, ‘Serbia Sets the Stage for Beijing’s Mask Diplomacy’, *Www.Euractiv.Com* (blog), 2 April 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/china/news/serbia-sets-the-stage-for-beijings-mask-diplomacy/>.

⁴⁸ Atlantic Council, ‘COVID-19 in the Western Balkans’, *Atlantic Council* (blog), 3 April 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/covid-19-in-the-western-balkans/>.

presidential palace and the Parliament, replacing another called „The Wall of Tears“, which presented anti-NATO messages along with images of Serb victims of the Kosovo war. In that billboard he thanked „Brother Xi“ for the assistance Beijing sent for Serbian people and stated that the Chinese and Serbs will be brothers forever⁴⁹.

The myth of national greatness from the 1990s came back in a different form. The so called „new Serbian world“, where the Serbian President should be the President of all Serbs is emphasised constantly in the media. This statement is accepted by the Serb minority population in the region.⁵⁰

5. *The Causes in Society*

Tensions between Kosovo and Serbia were very high before the pandemic, especially with respect to the nationalist symbols used in Kosovo. When Albin Kurti and his Self-Determination came to power in October 2019, the display of Albanian national symbols became more distinct. Even though Kurti never avoided Kosovo state symbols in the Parliament or during the trips he made abroad in his capacity of a lawmaker, he did criticize the Kosovo flag and especially the lawmakers who backed the independence declaration in 2008 for choosing the flag without a public vote. The same day after the election victory, in a meeting with the British Ambassador, Kurti was shown on social media of Self-Determination with an Albanian flag as the only state symbol visible in the background.⁵¹ This triggered a stormy social media debate. The Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic clearly saw this action as a provocation to his nation. After the Abbott-meeting he posted in his social media account (handle: avucic) a photograph of Kurti with the British Ambassador next to the Albanian flag. The photograph was accompanied by the questions addressed to the British Ambassador in Pristina, asking him which elections Kurti won, and which country the flag belonged to. Vucic received many responses to this tweet. In its statement Self-Determination rejected the „imposition of one’s identity or symbols“ and „censorship of the political will of a subject“⁵². The editor in chief of

⁴⁹ Euractiv, ‘Serbia Sets the Stage for Beijing’s Mask Diplomacy’.

⁵⁰ Filip Milacic, ‘Montenegrin Democracy in Times of Coronavirus’, *European Western Balkans*, 27 April 2020, <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/27/montenegrin-democracy-in-times-of-coronavirus/>.

⁵¹ Bekim Baliqi, *Zur Frage Der Nationalen Identität Am Beispiel Des Kosovos*, Dipl. Arbeit (Wien: Universität Wien, 2005), 12–13, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bekim_Baliqi/publication/330842911_ZUR_FRAGE_DER_NATIONALEN_IDENTITAT_AM_BEISPIEL_DES_KOSOVO/links/5c577df9a6fdccd6b5e0f7fa/ZUR-FRAGE-DER-NATIONALEN-IDENTITAEt-AM-BEISPIEL-DES-KOSOVO.pdf.

⁵² Andy Heil, ‘First Flag: Kosovo’s Would-Be PM Takes Serbian Heat For Favoring Albanian Banner’, RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 17 October 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-kurti-serbia-vucic-albanian-flag/30222104.html>.

the daily *Koha Ditore* questioned „if he’s annoyed by an Albanian flag, does that mean that he’d like to see a Kosovo flag there, which he doesn’t recognize?“⁵³ The exchange within the public debate over the Albanian flag in Kosovo underlines the fact that the emotional reconciliation between Serbia and Kosovo still needs to be achieved. Otherwise the dialogue between them will remain rocky.

In Montenegro, with the Law on Freedom of Religion, Djukanovic plays the card of nationalist conflicts to mobilize his constituency and strengthen his position in the upcoming parliamentary elections. According to Drago Pilsel, „this act of manipulating religious sentiments has tremendous destabilizing potential, especially in ethnically mixed environments“ and this „threatens to become a permanent source of tension and conflict by threatening the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo“.⁵⁴ The division of the Montenegrin political scene was intensified by this law and it triggered massive protests in and outside the country. Citizens of Montenegro who claim to belong to Serbian nationality strongly opposed this law⁵⁵. In support to Serb citizens of Montenegro, demonstrations also erupted in Serbia and Serbian citizens were calling for its abolition. The tensions between Serbia and Montenegro reached their peak when the Montenegrin flag in front of the Embassy in Belgrade, became a target of fireworks, as a result of protests against the new law⁵⁶.

A couple of weeks after the first infection case of Covid-19 was confirmed, Montenegro accused Serbia of confiscating their respirators, that they ordered from a Swedish producer headquartered in Serbia⁵⁷.

The opening of the Montenegrin borders to many countries, except for Serbia, sparked further tensions between the two countries. In response to that action, Serbian officials banned Montenegro Airlines from operating flights to Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport and gave them to understand that Montenegro is igniting conflict with its decision to keep the borders closed.⁵⁸

In Kosovo, the creation of conditions of political certainty during the pandemic has sparked the anger of many people. Banging pots

⁵³ Heil.

⁵⁴ Independent Balkan News Agency, ‘Montenegro: Đukanović Plays the Card of Nationalist Conflicts with the Religious Freedom Law’, *Independent Balkan News Agency* (blog), 20 January 2020, <https://balkan.eu.com/montenegro-djukanovic-plays-the-card-of-nationalist-conflicts-with-the-religious-freedom-law/>.

⁵⁵ Maksimović, ‘Montenegrin Law on Religious Freedom’.

⁵⁶ Voice of America, ‘Montenegro Denounces Protest Attack on Embassy in Serbia | Voice of America — English’, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/montenegro-denounces-protest-attack-embassy-serbia>.

⁵⁷ Mladen Dragojlovic, ‘Montenegro Accuses Serbia of Confiscating Their Respirators’, *Independent Balkan News Agency* (blog), 26 March 2020, <https://balkan.eu.com/montenegro-accuses-serbia-of-confiscating-their-respirators/>.

⁵⁸ Vijesti, ‘MA: Industrija u Kojjoj Poslujemo Ne Bi Trebalo Da Zavisi Od Političkih Odluka (The Industry in Which We Operate Should Not Depend on Political Decisions)’, 26 May 2020, <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/436963/blic-zabranjeno-slijetanje-aviona-montenegro-erlajnsa-na-beogradski-aerodrom>.

and pans every night from their balconies was another way the citizens used to display their dissatisfaction with the situation.⁵⁹

In Serbia, the citizens also adopted the pots and pans method on April 26, to express their disagreement with the harsh measures taken by the government, especially the large-scale authoritarian shift with the alarming concentration of powers in the executive. On April 29, regime supporters responded with a counter-protest, with torches burning on several roofs of buildings. Although large flames in residential buildings were dangerous and contravened the curfew, the police did not intervene.⁶⁰

6. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the political scene in Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia as it affected all other countries in the world. While these states had a marked increase in ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism before the pandemic, the arrival of the pandemic further weakened the political system and increased pre-existing national ethnic tensions.

The political elites, however, were trying to repress the danger of the pandemic and politicising it for their political gain. The abuse of power can be observed in all the three countries. Government responses to the pandemic have created further divisions in their societies, for instance, the accusations over medical supplies, the arguments over the opening of the border, media censorship, the new religion law, the publication of names on governments website and the double standards of regulations. The idea of land swap between Kosovo and Serbia and the so-called „new Serbian world“ could further provoke conflicts in the region.

This could reinforce the existing idea of homogenous ethnic countries throughout the Western Balkan region and could once again end in bloody conflicts.

⁵⁹ Eve-anne Travers, 'Prishtina Protests from Its Balconies', 2020, <https://prishtinainsight.com/prishtina-protests-from-its-balconies/>.

⁶⁰ Sasa Dragojlo and Milica Stojanovic, 'Serbian Police „Allow pro-Govt Protesters to Breach Curfew“', *Balkan Insight*, 5 May 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/05/serbian-police-allow-pro-govt-protesters-to-breach-curfew/>.

References

- Atlantic Council. 'COVID-19 in the Western Balkans'. *Atlantic Council* (blog), 3 April 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/covid-19-in-the-western-balkans/>.
- Baliqi, Bekim. *Zur Frage Der Nationalen Identität Am Beispiel Des Kosovos*. Dipl. Arbeit. Wien: Universität Wien, 2005. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bekim_Baliqi/publication/330842911_ZUR_FRAGE_DER_NATIONALEN_IDENTITAT_AM_BEISPIEL_DES_KOSOVO/links/5c577df9a6fdccd6b5e0f7fa/ZUR-FRAGE-DER-NATIONALEN-IDENTITAE-T-AM-BEISPIEL-DES-KOSOVO.pdf.
- Bieber, Florian. 'Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic'. *Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.35>.
- . '„Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends.“' *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (2018): 519–40.
- . *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- Bieber, Florian, Tena Prelec, Marika Djolai, Donika Emini, Jovana Marovic, Srdjan Majstorovic, Vedran Dzihic, Alida Vracic, and Nikolaos Tzifakis. 'The Western Balkans in Times of the Global Pandemic'. BiEPAG Policy Brief, 2020.
- Billing, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: SAGE Publications, 1995.
- Carmichael, Cathie. *Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans: Nationalism and the Destruction of Tradition*. Routledge, 2002.
- Connor, Walker. *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, n. d.
- Distler, Werner. 'Political Crisis and the Corona—„State of Emergency“ in Kosovo'. *Z Friedens Und Konfliktforschung*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42597-020-00046-w>.
- Dragojlo, Sasa, and Milica Stojanovic. 'Serbian Police „Allow pro-Govt Protesters to Breach Curfew“'. *Balkan Insight*, 5 May 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/05/serbian-police-allow-pro-govt-protesters-to-breach-curfew/>.
- Dragojlovic, Mladen. 'Montenegro Accuses Serbia of Confiscating Their Respirators'. *Independent Balkan News Agency* (blog), 26 March 2020. <https://balkaneu.com/montenegro-accuses-serbia-of-confiscating-their-respirators/>.
- Dzihic, Vedran. 'Zwischen Ethnonationalismus Und Europäischer Zukunft. Skizzen Aus Dem Heutigen. Serbien'. *Europäische Rundschau* 3 (2008): 67–74.
- Euractiv. 'Crna Gora Otvara Granice (Montenegro Opens Borders)', 26 May 2020. <https://euractiv.rs/7-eu-i-zapadni-balkan/36-vesti/14978-crna-gora-otvara-granice-ne-i-za-graane-srbije>.
- . 'Serbia Sets the Stage for Beijing's Mask Diplomacy'. *Www. Euractiv.Com* (blog), 2 April 2020. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/china/news/serbia-sets-the-stage-for-beijings-mask-diplomacy/>.
- European Federation of Journalists. 'COVID-19: Serbian Government Urged to Guarantee Free Flow of Information', 4 March 2020. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/04/03/covid-19-serbian-government-urged-to-guarantee-free-flow-of-information/>.
- Exit News. 'Kosovo President Admits He Secured Crucial MP Vote for New Government.', 6 April 2020. <https://exit.al/en/2020/06/04/kosovo-president-admits-he-secured-crucial-mp-vote-for-new-government/>.
- Freedomhouse. 'Nations in Transit 2020. Countries and Territories'. Accessed 14 November 2020. <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores>.

- Fruscione, Giorgio. 'After the Nineties: A Never-Ending Political Transition'. In *The Balkans: Old, New Instabilities. A European Region Looking for Its Place in the World*, edited by Giorgio Fruscione. Milan: ISPI, 2020.
- Gagnon, V. P. 'Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict: The Case of Serbia'. *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 130–66.
- Garding, Sarah E. *Kosovo: Background and U. S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service, 2020.
- Givens, John Wagner, and Evan Mistur. 'The Sincerest Form of Flattery: Nationalist Emulation during the COVID-19 Pandemic'. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09702-7>.
- Glenny, Misha. *The Fall of Yugoslavia. The Third Balkan War*. London, New York, Viktoria: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Goode, J. Paul, Davis R. Stroup, and Elizaveta Gaufman. 'Everyday Nationalism in Unsettled Times: In Search of Normality during Pandemic'. *Nationalities Papers*, 2020, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.40>.
- Guzina, Dejan. 'Socialist Serbia's Narratives: From Yugoslavia to a Greater Serbia'. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 91–111.
- Hatzopoulos, Pavlos. *The Balkans Beyond Nationalism and Identity: International Relations and Ideology*, 2008.
- Heil, Andy. 'First Flag: Kosovo's Would-Be PM Takes Serbian Heat For Favoring Albanian Banner'. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, 17 October 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kosovo-kurti-serbia-vucic-albanian-flag/30222104.html>.
- Ilic, Alexa. 'Serbia'. In *Southeast Europe — COVID-19 Bulletin No 4 Pandemic Politics*, edited by Steven Blockmans and Erwan Fouéré, 2020.
- Independent Balkan News Agency. 'Montenegro: Đukanović Plays the Card of Nationalist Conflicts with the Religious Freedom Law'. *Independent Balkan News Agency* (blog), 20 January 2020. <https://balkan.eu.com/montenegro-jukanovic-plays-the-card-of-nationalist-conflicts-with-the-religious-freedom-law/>.
- Kabashi-Ramaj, Besa. 'Republic of Kosovo'. In *Democracy and the State of Emergency. Responses to the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia*, edited by Max Brändle and Filip Milacic, 16–19. Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 2020.
- Kajosevic, Samir. 'Concern for the Rights in Montenegro amid COVID-19 Fight'. *Balkan Insight*, 26 March 2020. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/26/concern-for-rights-in-montenegro-amid-covid-19-fight/>.
- Maksimović, Sandra. 'Montenegrin Law on Religious Freedom: Polarization That Benefits the Government(s)?' *European Western Balkans* (blog), 13 January 2020. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/01/13/montenegrin-law-on-religious-freedom-polarization-that-benefits-the-governments/>.
- Milacic, Filip. 'Montenegrin Democracy in Times of Coronavirus'. *European Western Balkans*, 27 April 2020. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/04/27/montenegrin-democracy-in-times-of-coronavirus/>.
- . 'Montenegro'. In *Democracy and the State of Emergency. Responses to the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia*, edited by Max Brändle and Filip Milacic, 20–23. Friedrich Erbert Stiftung, 2020.
- Miladinovic, Aleksandar. 'Parlamentarni Izbori u Crnoj Gori: Ko Su Ljudi u Vrhu Dosadasnje Opozicije (Parliamentary Elections in Montenegro: Who Are the People at the Top of the Previous Opposition)'. 2 September 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/balkan-54002705>.

- Mistur, Evan, John Wagner Givens, and Daniel Matisoff. 'Policy Contagion During A Pandemic'. *Social Science Research Network*, 2020.
- Morrison, Kenneth. *Nationalism, Identity and Statehood in Post-Yugoslav Montenegro*. London; New Yourk: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Mujanovic, Jasmin. *Hunger and Fury. The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*. London: Hurst and Co., 2018.
- Prishtina Insight. 'Government and President Divided over State of Emergency Proposal'. *Prishtina Insight*, 18 March 2020. <https://prishtinainsight.com/government-and-president-divided-over-state-of-emergency-proposal/>.
- Roudometof, Victor. *Nationalism, Globalisation, and Orthodoxy: The Social Origins of Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans*. Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Shaqiri, Mexhit. 'Albanian Nationalism and the State of Kosovo'. *European Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2018): 66–76.
- Simic, Julija. 'Serbia, Kosovo Leaders Gear up for Tough US Talks'. 9 January 2020. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/serbia-kosovo-leaders-gear-up-for-tough-us-talks/>.
- Slettebak, Rune T. 'Don't Blame the Weather! Climate-Related Natural Disasters and Civil Conflict.' *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 1 (2012): 163–73.
- Su, Ruolin, and Wensong Shen. 'Is Nationalism Rising in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic? Individual-Level Evidence from the United States'. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-020-09696-2>.
- Surlic, Stefan, and Igor Novakovic. *Serbian Cultural and Religious Heritage in Kosovo from Abtisaari's Special Zones to the Final Status*. Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER), 2020.
- Travers, Eve-anne. 'Prishtina Protests from Its Balconies'. 2020. <https://prishtinainsight.com/prishtina-protests-from-its-balconies/>.
- Tzifakis, Nikolaos. 'The Western Balkans during the Pandemic: Democracy and Rule of Law in Quarantine?' *European View*, 2020, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685820963333>.
- Uljarevic, Daliborka, Tamara Milas, and Damir Nikocevic. 'Montenegro and the Coronavirus: The State of the Nation in the First Six Weeks.' Podgorica: Centre for Civic Education, 2020.
- Veremis, Thanos. *A Modern History of the Balkans: Nationalism and Identity in Southeast Europe*. London and New York: LB. Tauris&Co. Ltd, 2017.
- Vijesti. 'MA: Industrija u Kojoj Poslujemo Ne Bi Trebalo Da Zavisi Od Političkih Odluka (The Industry in Which We Operate Should Not Depend on Political Decisions)', 26 May 2020. <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/ekonomija/436963/blic-zabranjeno-slijetanje-aviona-montenegro-erlajnsa-na-beogradski-aerodrom>.
- Voice of America. 'Montenegro Denounces Protest Attack on Embassy in Serbia | Voice of America — English', 2020. <https://www.voanews.com/europe/montenegro-denounces-protest-attack-embassy-serbia>.

Edina Paleviq

ETNO-NACIONALIZAM U CRNOJ GORI,
KOSOVU I SRBIJI TOKOM PANDEMIJE

Cilj ovog rada je da istraži etnički nacionalizam tokom pandemije u tri posebne države Zapadnog Balkana: Crnoj Gori, Kosovu i Srbiji. Rad se bavi pitanjem: da li je etnički nacionalizam, usljed pandemije, ojačao u ove tri zemlje? Takođe polazi od stava da su etno-nacionalne tenzije u navedenim zemljama, ali i između njih, intezivirane usljed COVID-19 krize. Ovaj rad je podijeljen na šest djelova. Nakon kratkog uvoda, probaće da istraži značenje koje pandemija ima za politiku i nacionalizam. U trećem dijelu su opisana otvorena pitanja koja su postojala prije izbijanja pandemije. Dakle, rad pažljivo sagledava vladine odgovore na pandemiju i njene posljedice po društvo. Na kraju je predstavljen kratak sažetak.

Ključne riječi: etnički nacionalizam, COVID-19, Crna Gora, Kosovo, Srbija