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Nationalism, Religion, and Peace in Eastern Europe with Special Reference to Yugoslavia

Paul Mojzes
Rosemont College, Rosemont, PA, pmojzes@rosemont.edu

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A. The Current Dilemma

Rarely, if ever—except during wars—did history play at such "fast forward speed" as it did in Eastern Europe since 1985. The axis year for the revolutionary transformation of the political, social, and economic system of Eastern Europe and the USSR (hereafter the term Eastern Europe will be used inclusively for the Soviet Union) is 1989 when in the fall and winter the most dramatic and decisive changes took place. Untypically for such revolutionary situations, there was initially surprisingly little violence. This is particularly noteworthy when one takes into account the mighty military forces that were primed to defend the socialist system from foreign and domestic enemies. Typically for such revolutionary situations, the various protagonists of change who suddenly formed coalitions generally agreed on what they were against but not what they were for. They agreed on their rejection of totalitarian Communist rule, which they blamed for the various misfortunes that befell their nations, which multiplied rapidly corresponding with the deteriorating economic situation. The discrepancy between Communist promises of a happy and prosperous future and the fulfillment of such promises, especially when compared to living standards of neighboring advanced industrial nations have simply become too great. New generations were no longer intimidated by persecutions that their elders had suffered nor did they inherit the notion of some of the more idealistic members of the older generations that socialism will right the wrongs of capitalism. No longer was socialism an untried system that could be offered as a utopian substitute to the shortcomings and wrongs of capitalism; as
an economic system the planned socialist economy could not keep up with the demands of a modern society; it was tried and found wanting. Modern communication prevented further hiding of empirical reality from the masses. More importantly, totalitarian dictatorship which was the common feature of all socialist countries, despite its varying intensity and attempted masking under slogans such as "people's democracy," "the rule of the people or the working class," and other propaganda devices, did not satisfy the longing for the benefits of democracy, with all of the latter's shortcomings. The hegemony or even monopoly of the Communist Party backfired because later it became obvious that no one else could share the blame no matter how cleverly the Communist Party attempted to shift blame on internal and external enemies.

One of the illusions concocted was the supposed solidarity of all socialist countries under Soviet leadership. Monolithic unity was, indeed, what many Soviet Communist leaders aspired to, but in reality such aspirations were unrealistic in face of the enormous diversity not only among the socialist countries but even within most of these countries. Artificial unity was imposed by sheer power. The ideological pretext of socialist internationalism, "proletarians of all lands unite!" was the supposed unity of all working people whose interests were in line with working people of other countries but against the exploiters from their own nation. Under the inspiration of this idea, revolutionary Communists had viciously turned against not only their domestic class enemies but had decided that all previous historical periods of their respective countries were instances of class rule from which they wanted to disassociate themselves decisively. History was therefore rewritten in such a manner that all events and persons of the past were judged according to the degree to which they could be said to anticipate Marxist insights. The dualistic criteria of "reactionary" and "progressive" were imposed with the predictable result that nearly all past national heroes were obliterated as were all those of the recent past and the contemporaries who had not embraced the "correct line" of the leaders in power. Flags were changed; country's, cities', and street's names were changed; monuments, churches and buildings were torn down; literature and history was rewritten; national heroes became unmentionable. The result was that sometimes even the knowledge or possession of certain books or objects was punishable and certain languages were neglected. Ignorance of entire segments of history or religion were quite common, or they were tendentiously interpreted in the worst possible light.

The loudest demands of the Great Transformation of 1989 seemed to have been for democracy and against dictatorship. This gave rise to the expectation that democratization will be the first order of business both in politics and in economics, leading, perhaps swiftly, to Western style parliamentary democracy and prosperity based on the free enterprise system. However, nearly at once it became evident that instead of quick prosperity the economies of the Eastern European countries would not be able to raise themselves out of devastation. To
the contrary, further disruptions in the economy followed leading to greater unemployment, inflation, lack of basic food stuffs, strikes, fear that the social services established under socialism would collapse, etc. In the political field a multi-party system was quickly established in nearly all countries, leading sometimes to an incredible proliferation of political parties. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the former German Democratic Republic, and in four of the six republics of Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Macedonia) the Communists lost at free elections. In Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, two of the Yugoslav republics (Serbia and Montenegro), and the Soviet Union reform Communists, often under altered party names, stayed in power, not on account of their socialist agenda, but rather because of their ability to represent themselves as parties of national salvation in a crisis situation. In the Soviet Union, also rather quickly, non-Communists or even anti-Communists won elections in the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and in Georgia, Armenia, and Moldavia as well as in the Ukraine.

Characteristically, many of the newly emerged political parties carried a national designation (e.g. Hungarian Forum, Croatian Democratic Union, Serbian Socialist Party, External Macedonian Revolutionary Party, etc.). Even those without such explicit national designation vied with each other as to who will more authentically advance the national interest. The national interest most clearly was revealed in demands for independence and sovereignty. In the case of former Warsaw Pact Treaty member nations who operated under Brezhnev’s doctrine of limited sovereignty of socialist countries, Gorbachev’s pledge not to interfere in the internal matters of neighboring countries was a welcome assurance that their aspiration could be reached peacefully, though many were increasingly ready to resort to arms, if necessary, to promote their independence and sovereignty. This could have been expected. What was not as expected was that in countries which are multinational federations or states with national minorities, there would come a very pronounced national intolerance leading to strident demands for the right to secession. The best known and most supported calls in the West for such secession are the Baltic states, but equally powerful demands for the establishment of sovereignty can be heard from other republics of the Soviet Union so much so that the official name of the country changed in May 1991 into the Union of Soviet Sovereign (rather than Socialist) Republics. The question in the USSR (at least until August 18, 1991, the attempted coup d’etat against Gorbachev) was whether a new federal treaty that would respect the sovereignty of the states can be negotiated or whether the great empire is destined to fall apart at the seams amid great chaos and bloodshed. No less strident are the struggles within Yugoslavia between those who are in favor of a hopefully newly negotiated Yugoslav union of states and those who say that no such concoction is possible any longer, necessitating a break-up into a number of independent or at least autonomous states and regions. Another country that is beset by great nationality problems is Romania where the
Romanian majority lives in strife with the Hungarian, German, Ukrainian, and Serbian ethnic groups. To a lesser extent the Slovaks in the Republic of Czechs and Slovaks are also pushing for a dissolution of that union.

To complicate things, demands for secession are often resisted not only by the pockets of ethnic groups that belong to another of the recognized states (e.g., Russians and Ukrainians in Moldavia, Russians in the Baltic states, Serbs in Croatia, but rather small ethnic groups living in a secession-bound state fear that their situation is going to deteriorate and want out of such state (e.g., the Ossetians in Georgia, and the Muslims of Sandzhak in Serbia). All this is further complicated by the unresolved question of ethnic groups of one state living at the border of their mother states who often wish to see corrections of the existing borders so they may live in the same state with the rest of their national group.

Nationalistic euphoria is the order of the day in Eastern Europe of the early 1990s. Much of it has positive ramifications for the life of the people, as will be seen below, but much of it also contains grave threats for the stability of the region and the world and for the protection of basic human rights. While Communism led to a brutal suppression of human rights along class lines or more accurately membership in the Communist party and adherence to the official line, in post-Communist Eastern Europe the threat is the homogenization along national lines and the strident conflict of competing nationalisms resulting in national chauvinism, hatred, and killings, ultimately leading to war or to civil war.

The roots of present-day nationalism can be divided into the 1) the spirit of the past and 2) legacy of Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policies.

B. The Spirit of the Past

Ethnic strife is not a novelty in the region, though modern nationalism is a 19th and 20th century phenomenon. The great migrations of tribes in the first millennium of our era resulted in the establishment of medieval kingdoms which were often in conflict with similarly established kingdoms of other tribes. Many collapsed and disappeared from the historic scene; others prospered and became mighty empires, and still others were subjugated by the stronger groups but tenaciously hang on to their identity, resenting the overlordship of the stronger nationalities. Several great empires became dominant in Eastern Europe of the second millennium: the Hapsburg Austrian, the Muscovite Russians, and the Ottoman Turks, to which other great kingdoms, e.g., Poland-Lithuania, Hungary, Bulgaria, etc. had to yield.

At various junctures in their history most of the nationalities were independent and during periods of strength achieved borders more extensive than their present. This was
usually the result of conquest at the expense of their neighbors. They remember their 'great' state with pride, while the conquest of one’s neighbors is interpreted as the containment of their expansionism. Remembered are the alleged cultural achievements and monuments of the era of greatness, the nobility and generosity of their rule, the great progress attained at that time. Naturally, the wish is to restore such eras of success. The same is true of neighboring states whose periods of greatness took place at a different time. They, likewise, cherish and remember their own accomplishments and remember the injuries sustained during the time of their neighbors' greatness. They, likewise, wish to recreate their eras of greatness. The problem is that this is an impossibility—there is simply not enough land. It is the same territory which two or more groups consider as their own inseparable historic birthright. Each group musters arguments, often convincing not only to themselves but also to others that they and not the others should hold a specific territory. In later wars, alliances are entered with great powers often consciously opting for the side opposite of that of their neighbors in the hope that the reward of a potential victory would be return of lands "unjustly" held by neighbors. Since in war the spoils belong to the victor, national borders of the modern age were often determined by claims of war victors. In the twentieth century, Bulgaria and Hungary, for instance, twice allied themselves with Germany hoping, in vain as it turned out, that a German victory would solidify their nationalist claims.

National memory is also very selective in remembering injustice. In Eastern Europe each national group feels itself to be a victim. Among Christian nations there is a frequent recourse to identifying oneself with the suffering of Christ. One often hears that no nation on earth suffered more than it did. Often times a national saint embodies this suffering, such as St. Stanislaw among the Poles or Sts. Boris and Gleb among Russians. The Holy Virgin Mary, meek and mild, is often envisioned as the queen of the nation. All of that would suggest that each nation considers itself to be allied with the forces of goodness; hence, their adversaries would logically appear to be allied with the Great Adversary, Satan. It would seem that the various national scripts are nearly identical. One needs only to fill in the blank with the name of this or that nation and likewise fill the blank of countries that inflicted the suffering. Each group seems to have one or more nemesis. National history is not a social science but a value-laden romantic art in which virtue is inevitably attached to one’s own nation and vice to the rival nations. Members of one’s own nationality who sought to work out some *modus vivendi* with the enemy are often depicted as traitors. Unbending loyalty

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2Sunni Muslims tend to claim more victorious values such as truth, loyalty to God unto death, but the Shi'as have a similar martyrology as Christians.
and tearless sacrifice of all one's children and property for national existence is lauded as the
proper virtue. Individual survival is subordinated to national survival. Interestingly, not
only victories but even defeats (e.g. the Serbian defeat by the Turks at Kosovo) are
celebrated as sacred moments of national survival. If history created no heroes, then legend
and folklore steps in providing illustrious warrior figures worthy of emulation by later
generations. These are credited with helping a subjugated nation to survive.

These interpretations are spread in songs, school instruction, literature, art, and currently
in newspapers and the media as well as in taverns and homes. The persons spreading this
interpretation need not have had first hand contact with members of the rival nationality.
They know the others to be inherently evil. If there are personal contacts, then the
unpleasant one's are taken as typical and the pleasant one's as exceptional. In this respect
nationalism is the closest kin to racism. Many politicians, especially in times of crises, tend
to exacerbate the conflict by inflaming the national memory with examples of injustices and
inhumanities perpetrated by the rival groups and appealing to the national virtues of self-
sacrifice to obtain independence and liberty. No analysis of Polish, Czechoslovak, Romanian,
and Hungarian rejection of Communism is complete which does not contain a recognition of
the very important role of the anti-Russian character of their nationalisms. The same is true
within the borders of the Soviet Union. No account of the modifications of socialism in
Yugoslavia is complete without recognizing the elements of national aspirations and fears
of the constituent nationalities.

The spirit of nationalist legacy was not evil at the outset. Like Lucifer, it is a fallen
angel that became evil only through the misuse of freedom. It is the abuse of the healthy
national pride and aspiration that led to destructive national chauvinism. The root problem,
paradigmatically viewed in the story of the Garden of Eden, is egoism, namely thinking only
of the well-being of one's own nation and demonizing the rivals' intentions.

C. The Leninist-Stalinist Nationalities Policies

Lenin realized the problems of Russian domination over other nationalities and the
revolutionary potential which pent-up nationalism has within the confines of a teetering
empire. Nationalism of the subjugated people was a natural ally to the Bolshevik desire to
break the czarist hold on power. Hence, Lenin included in the Bolshevik platform that all
nationalities of the Russian Empire can chose whether they want to remain in union with the
Russians or secede and form their own independent nations. The promise was taken seriously
and a score of secessions took place: Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine,
Georgia, Armenia, etc. Only a few were to retain this independence. The Ukraine, Georgia,
Armenia, and others were re-incorporated into the "empire" during the civil war by the early
1920s by local Bolsheviks whose allegiance was more clearly to the Communist cause than to their nationalities. Others were forcibly re-annexed in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Stalin further contributed to a specifically Communist 'solution' of the nationalities problem by formally recognizing the right of national sovereignty and expressions, including territorial claims as republics, autonomous regions, schools, language, folk art, and so forth. The underlying reality, however, was the iron rule of an ever more limited number of people, finally resulting in the despotism of one man, who by his iron will and arm adjudicated all problems, from territorial (e.g. fixing borders, establishing a 'Jewish' state, annexing the Baltic states and Moldavia, and exiling the Crimean Tatars and Volga Germans) to linguistic (imposing Russian as the overall official language of the USSR, policies of Russification, changing the spelling of all languages into Cyrillic, Russifying of all ethnic last names, etc.). Communists believed that Stalin's nationalities policies within the framework of an internationalist Communist movement was the final solution of nationalist aspirations and the elimination of all problems. The Soviet state and legislation provided for the duplication of the Russian Federation's model in all other republics, and one gathered the impression of both unity and diversity. On paper it looked good. The virtues of this system were vigorously propagated until nearly every Communist believed that it was, indeed, so.

Even cursory conversation with many citizens of the USSR showed that the national question was not solved but was swept under the rug and left to fester. The political and economic manifestations of nationalism and its religious expression were crudely suppressed, while national prejudice and discrimination flourished even in the state bureaucracy. The disproportionate presence of members of some nationalities in the Communist apparatus (e.g. Russians and Jews) quickly gave rise to hostile feelings toward those groups, some already latently or overtly present for generations. The best proof of the lack of success of Leninist-Stalinist national policies is the speed by which nationalistic excesses came to the fore in the post-Communist period: German skinheads against all non-Germans particularly Poles, Bulgarians against Vietnamese workers, Poles against Ukrainians, Hungarians against Romanians, Slovaks against Czechs, and so forth. In the shortest of times many parts of Eastern Europe, instead of being showcases of national harmony became a cauldron of ethnic tensions, conflicts, and war.

The Leninist-Stalinist nationalities policy had a number of positive features. It condemned the excesses of national chauvinism and sought national reconciliation under the banner of proletarian internationalism. It condemned nationalism as a bourgeois excess, suggesting that it is a historical product that does not inevitably control human destiny. On the other hand it did not entirely obliterate national consciousness, allowing it to be preserved in carefully delineated domains (e.g. ethnographic museums, folk dances and songs, literature, and theaters). It fostered the ideas of unity and brotherhood between nations
suggesting an ultimate unity of all humankind, when race, nation, and language will no longer separate people. This idea spread from the USSR to other socialist nations and Communist parties in and out of power.

Communists underrated the influence of nationalism. When nationalism emerged within the Communist movement (e.g. the Soviet-Yugoslav dispute of 1948, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Sino-Soviet dispute of early 1960s, etc.) giving rise to the notion of "national communism," very few Communist leaders knew how to deal with it. Those Communist leaders to whom it was advantageous praised national loyalty; the others whose plans it foiled condemned it as a perversion. From the perspective of Soviet imperial designs national Communism was a grave danger. Within the Soviet Union the process of homogenization of all of its people had advanced to the degree that, for instance, lectures at university of Kiev were in Russian and not Ukrainian and that Georgian youth had to turn to the Georgian Orthodox Church as a sign of their adherence to their native language which was losing out to the Russian language. The leadership of the Communist Party of the USSR had an increasingly Russian stamp on it; politicians favoring a more nationalist line were easily removed. Eastern European Communist parties were purged for alleged nationalist deviationism or else from cosmopolitanism which was described as the opposite evil of not recognizing at all the reality of a nation. The truth was that the dictator of the USSR determined alone what would be allowed and what not and his will was carried out as far as his power stretched. There was also relatively little awareness of the power of nationalism of dominant nationalities (e.g. Russian, Czech, Serbian) that did not display itself in separatist manners but seemed to conform to the official unitive policies.

D. The Role of Nationalism in the Crisis or Demise of Communism

The causes for the profound crisis or perhaps even the demise of Communism are manifold. Analysts have pointed out the economic stagnation, the overbureaucratization of the government, the problems with a one party monopoly and of the autocratic-totalitarian model after the disappearance of charismatic leaders, the increasing discrepancy between the promises and delivery, the life of lies and pretenses, etc. Insufficient attention thus far is given to the role of nationalism in this process. The leading nationality of world Communism is the Russian, yet there is a great deal of historic resentment and dislike of Russians in many parts of the USSR and Eastern Europe. Pro-Russian sentiments (among Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Czechs) are fewer than the sometimes rabid anti-Russianism of most Poles, Germans, Hungarians, Romanians, as well as Armenians, Georgians, Muslim nationalities in Asiatic USSR, the Baltic nationalities, etc. When in 1948 the Stalin-Tito
conflict took place, Stalin had miscalculated the loyalty of the Yugoslav Communists. Knowing that his personal popularity made the Yugoslav Communists obedient servants, he thought they would quickly oust Tito from leadership upon Stalin’s request. However, most Communists closed ranks around Tito feeling that they must make a choice for or against their own people, and they easily chose loyalty to their own. During the Hungarian Revolution, anti-Russian feelings were among the leading causes of the dedication of the freedom fighters to their cause. The Czechs had been rather pro-Russian until 1968, but when Russian troops entered Prague nearly all Czechs and Slovaks turned bitterly anti-Russian. The leaders of the G.D.R. kept anti-Russian sentiments of their citizens under control, but it does not take too much to have these feelings surface. The reason why Communism had very little popular appeal in Poland is that it came to Poland from Russia. The rivalry of Poles and Russians (as well as Poles and Ukrainians, Poles and Tartars) go back for centuries, but the wounds inflicted by the partitions of Poland, the Soviet-Polish war of 1919, and the partition of Poland as the result of the Molotov-Ribentrop pact leading to the occupation of the country by its two neighbors puts the average Pole into a quandary as to whom to fear and dislike more cordially: Germans or Russians. "Solidarity" appealed to Poles also by being purely Polish and promising a rule of Poland by Poles. The Romanians harbored strong anti-Russian feelings on account of the Russian annexation of Bessarabia and Moldavia. After World War II, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania all had to make territorial concessions to the USSR, which while publicly unmentionable, were resented by wide strata of the respective populations.

The more aware leaders of Eastern European nations realized that behind the claims of international Communism was frequently the rather blunt Russian imperial self-interest. Power struggles frequently developed within the leadership of Communist parties between pro-Soviet factions and nationalist factions, the latter not accepting the proposition that what was in the best interest of the Soviet Union was also in the best interest of their own country. The population of the various Eastern European and Soviet republics gladly followed the non-Communist leadership emerging since about 1988 at least partially because they promise to reduce or eliminate the Russian factor from their nation’s life.

Paradoxically, nationalism was present not only in the resistance to Soviet (Russian) dominance but also in the long ineffectiveness of that resistance. Eastern European nationalities harbor many resentments and hatreds of each other, basically following the famous chess-board theory that one has conflicts with one’s immediate neighbors and makes alliances with the neighbors of neighbors. Czechs dislike Poles and Hungarians but allied themselves with Yugoslavs and Romanians; Poles dislike Czech, Germans, and Russians but like Hungarians, etc. When one of the satellite nations rose in rebellion against the Soviet Union none of the others would join them in sympathy but instead gang-up on them.
Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania turned against Yugoslavia in 1948. Hungary was alone in 1956 except that Yugoslavia accepted its refugees and sympathized with the Hungarian revolutionaries because they shared distrust toward the Soviets. The same situation repeated itself in 1968 with Czechoslovakia where again the only passive assistance to Czechoslovakia was given by the Romanians and Yugoslavs, who feared that the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty of socialist states may also be used against them. The revolution against Nicolae Ceausescu was fueled not only by the hatred of the megalomaniac dictator but also by the Hungarian (and others') fear of his policies of Romanization, i.e. de-Hungarianization.

It is clear that the decline of Soviet influence is currently celebrated by practically all non-Russian nationalities in the USSR and Eastern Europe. Strong nationalist aspirations and parties that both feed upon and feed in turn such aspiration have emerged in every former socialist country. The Warsaw Pact and Comecon which formally held all of them except Yugoslavia and Albania has been dissolved with apparently no regrets by its former members. Replacing the "socialist camp" is simultaneously a narrower national and a broader European unity agenda,

E. Post-Communist National Aspirations and Threats

No new 'post-Communist' aspirations emerged since 1989; they are basically all resurgent aspirations and threats confirming that the Great Transformation of 1989 was largely a look backward and sideways, i.e. at their own past and Westward. It seems that Communism neither resolved nor replaced nor transcended (aufheben) nationalism. In 1980 I pointed out that nationalism may be a stronger force in Eastern Europe than either Christianity or Communism. This has now been amply confirmed. Modern nationalism may be a 19th century phenomenon, but it has not remained only a 19th Century phenomenon. Late into the 20th century and most likely well into the 21st century, nationalism continues to be a maker and shaker of world events, especially in Eastern Europe. Some contend that the events of 1991 actually took the nations of the Balkan peninsula several centuries back.

Diminished fear from police, a greater sense of freedom (especially of speech, assembly, and religion), and the proliferation of political movements and parties made it possible for a great variety of views to emerge. The dominant Communist ideology which provided both

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a voluntary or involuntary bonding of diverse peoples as well as an interpretation of reality collapsed. People knew that one system was giving way, but they did not and still do not know what will replace it. Communism was dreaded by many, but at least it was familiar for one or more generations who did not know any other socio-economic system. Anxiety was mixed with exhilaration. On the whole, there were no known and tested leaders to replace the aging dogmatic Communists. Both the reform Communists and the alternative political leaders tended to be young and well educated. Some of the new leaders maintained extensive contacts with the West and were technologically sophisticated, but their message was not necessarily understood by the masses. It is fair to say that the masses prefer simple messages. Such a simple message could be that the Communists are responsible for all ills of society and that they need to be replaced. Also, the command economy was unable to deliver the goods and therefore ought to be changed. A free enterprise system was offered as an answer together with the preservation of comprehensive social services a la Scandinavia and Western Europe. But such expectations for immediate improvement in the economy clashed with reality. The transition from one system to another would bring a worsening economic situation for the time being rather than an improved one. The value of the local currency collapsed, great inflation, unemployment, ecological catastrophe, questions of land and enterprise ownership, the role of foreign companies, the source of funding old age pensions and other social services all became issues with no easy answers.

With feeling threatened, one needed to find simple answers. The simplest answer available is that there is indeed a culprit—it is other rival ethnic units who presumably prospered under the old system, having exploited our group. The answer is national sovereignty and liberation of our ethnic unit from the dominance of the rival nations. Such simple answers are half-truths, but half-truths are very effective in times of crisis. The truth is that some members of dominant ethnic groups did benefit from the old system, and the truth is that some ethnic groups were threatened in their very survival on account of the disproportion in the size of population or in natality rates. Thus, for instance Latvians rightly fear that Russians will quickly outnumber them in Latvia itself and that they are threatened in their very survival as a people. Serbians, likewise, fear the phenomenal disproportion in natality as compared with Albanians; the average size of a Serbian family is two children while the Albanian families in Kosovo still have about ten children, thus quickly changing the proportion of the population in a given area.

Most areas of Eastern Europe still have a very strong collectivist sense. This is a mixture of traditionalism and Communism. Traditional societies strongly emphasize the value of family, clan, tribe, neighborhood, village or town, religion, and state. Leadership in traditional societies tends to be hierarchically arranged and automatically bestowed. Communism further nurtured a collectivist sense since Marxism was a reaction to the
overindividualization of modern industrial societies and its message fell on susceptible ears in traditional societies which likewise had a distrust of individualism.

In tense and anxious times, individuals fear to confront alone the threatening adversity. They look for allies who can help them cope. The family, village, and town are too small as units to be of effective help. The larger grouping of tribe, religion, and nation offer a more assuring protection from outside threat. Thus, many if not most individuals in Eastern Europe quickly placed their trust in the nationalist solution. It gave an explanation of both the culprit and the savior. The appeal of the nationalist solution is that much more understandable when one realizes that it is permeated with great mythic and legendary themes of the nation. The enemy is known because it is an old enemy; the victims have been victimized for centuries, and salvation is found in national unity, rallying around as common cause which, since it worked in the past crises, is bound to work in the present. Here religion also plays an enormous role, and it is not at all accidental that the new freedom of religion resurrected the dormant alliance of religion and nation which the Communists unsuccessfully tried to bury. Patriarchs, archbishops, priests, mullahs, and hodzhas emerged as public figures with political connotation. They at least never gave up on a clear identification of the national interest, unlike the Communist leaders whose loyalty was questionable since they tended to follow Moscow's line even when they rebelled against Moscow. Churches and mosques were reopened, newly built; public religious processions took place; religious leader got access to media, and people found them to be credible interpreters of the past and the present and offering hope for the future. After all, many of these religious leaders have gone through the crucible of persecution, and therefore they could be seen as authentic spokespersons for a suffering people. Religious leaders are steeped in the past. They carried with them the memory of the defeats and victories of the people and assured them that faithfulness to God and the nation pays off. Generally, religious scholars suppose that loyalty to God should outstrip loyalty to nation, but at least in Eastern Europe this is often not the case. Difference in religion aggravates the national conflicts, e.g. Orthodox Serbs vs. Catholic Croatians, Hungarian Reformed vs. Romanian Orthodox, Armenian Christians vs. Azeri Muslims, Serbian Orthodox vs. Albanian Muslims. Sometimes the distrust cuts along confessional lines when for instance Albanian Orthodox distrust Albanian Muslims or Catholics. But when the chips are down, national belonging seems to be more crucial than religious adherence. When confronted by outside hostility,

\footnote{Notice that most of the Christian churches have a national designation, e.g. Russian or Bulgarian or Serbian or Romanian or Albanian Orthodox Church, Slovak Lutheran Church, and Hungarian Reformed Church. Even Roman Catholic Churches that do not in themselves carry a national designation in their formal name are very strictly nationally de-alienated, and there is practically no cooperation or even concern of the other's well-being between say Roman Catholics of Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia.}
Albanians of all three religions find a common cause; Hungarians of all denominational membership will unite against Romanians or Slovaks, and that includes for instance Hungarian Roman Catholics against Slovak Roman Catholics or Czech Catholics against Slovak Catholics. One could make a case that the ultimate concern for the nationalists is the nation—not God.

Greater freedoms thus contributed to increased conflicts. Dušan Janjić assessed the situation thusly,

Naturally, it is a sad irony, as Mihajlo Mihajlov wrote, that democratization pushed these peoples, people from these areas into a merciless civil war. But this is not the result of democratization. Democracy—as a procedure, institution and a culture of living—in these areas did not exist, and now it is just being laboriously established. And this is why among us "demos" is actually "ethnos," and "ethnos" is a war cry. In any case, in societies which for full 45 and even 70 years did not know democracy it was an illusion to expect that they will avoid a totalitarian dynamic. In the struggle against totalitarianism (communist) develops the totalitarianism of nationalistic regimes. What Adam Michnik so convincingly wrote happened—Communist elites in the effort to stay in power resort to a symbiosis with the "new" nationalistic elites and, with certain necessary modifications and ideological reformulations they defend their essential foothold, state ownership and the complete state-party and police control over society, over the public domain. But these elites, without an exception, passed the multiparty elections and received, with an impressive majority, the support of the voters. Therefore one must take them into account for a longer period.6

An analysis of many, though not all, nationalistic political leaders in Eastern Europe shows that, indeed, many had illustrious careers in the Communist Party or Army of their respective state and seemingly their loyalty changed but not their methods of dealing with people who think differently. Nationalistic leaders tend to use propaganda to destroy the enemy's reputation and to create an atmosphere of intolerance that would seem to justify an antagonistic and violent posture toward the rivals. Increasingly, those within one's own ethnops are declared traitors and being the fifth column who advocate more conciliatory measures. Two types of ethnic leadership emerge: one which at least gives lip service to negotiations and dialogue and the other which feels that the time for words have passed and the time for military action has come. Many people feel that war is better than protracted uncertainty, and the ideology of "blood and land" calls for sacrifices which too many willingly respond to. Even the mothers are infected with the nationalistic blindness, for while many demonstrate against bloodshed and death of young men, soon the concern for the lives of young men becomes primarily the concern for the lives of young men of their own ethnic group.

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F. The Case of Yugoslavia and/or the Balkans

Whether or not Yugoslavia as a federation of states will continue to exist is unclear. There are so many conflicts within Yugoslavia alone that it is hard adequately to describe them. But it is even more important to set them into the context of Balkan problems because many of Yugoslavia's problems involve nationalities of other Balkan states, and even if Yugoslavia is not to survive, the nationalities problems on the Balkans will continue. Concisely, the problem of the Balkan Peninsula is a great diversity of peoples living intertwined with one another and everyone hating all the others, more or less. Alliances tend to be short lived as they are based on defending themselves from common enemies.

Some of the enmities are truly of mythic proportions and long lasting, e.g. nearly all Balkan people hate the Turks with the possible exception of non-Turkish Muslims who converted to Islam under Turkish influence and assumed a Turkish culture. So there is an overarching Christian-Muslim enmity. Even older and quite as nasty is the dividing line between eastern and western Christendom which rends the Balkan Peninsula in two creating religious animosities between Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. No one should be deceived to think that the ecumenical era brought any kind of fundamental change in the distrust and animosity between these two great branches of Christendom which is, like the Muslim-Christian animosity, superimposed over the ethnic conflicts.

When one looks currently at Yugoslavia, the largest ethnic group, the Serbians, find themselves in conflict with nearly everyone else. There is the explosive conflict between Serbians (Orthodox Christians) and Albanians (mostly Muslims with a Roman Catholic minority) over who controls Kosovo which brought outrages of human rights violations by both sides, though the Serbians have the upper hand in controlling the Serbian state machinery and thus inflicting heavier casualties upon the Albanians, though both sides have perpetrated atrocities over the other. In its genesis the Serbian-Albania conflict is mostly a 20th century conflict; so is the second most explosive conflict, the Serb-Croat conflict. Here two there were vague rivalries along religious lines (Orthodox-Catholic), but Serbs and Croats fought each other for the first time in World War II when Croatian units fought as part of the Austrian Army in Serbia. Contrary to wide-spread belief, Croats joined Serbia voluntarily in the aftermath of World War I. It was the developments after the creation of the common country that its was realized that the expectations differed radically as to what the common house is to be. Naturally the description of what transpired and who is responsible differ sharply. During World War II in the midst of Nazi occupation, the rivalry between Serbs and Croats broke out in an open warfare, particularly on the territory of the

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7Nearly as many Albanians live in Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro as in Albania.
Nazi puppet state, Independent State of Croatia where a genocide of Serbs took place. Right after the War, also horrifying revenge took place over captured Croatian forces. It is the memory of these unspeakable atrocities that fuels present fears on both sides. Thus, the present war between Serbs and Croats in a sense is the third in this century. Since the fall of 1990, several hundred Serbs and Croats were killed and many others wounded and migrated, with great material damage. The horrors are real and often photographically documented, but unverified and probably exaggerated ghastly stories frighten both groups and heighten the crisis and the bloodshed. The ambiguous role of the Yugoslav Army confuses the situation still further for it is supposed to be impartial, yet Croatians and Slovenes accuse it of openly siding with the Serbians.

The basic issue here is also simple and irreconcilable. The Slovenes and Croatians claim that their seventy years of experience in Yugoslavia are unsatisfactory and that as sovereign states that voluntarily joined Yugoslavia, they can now just as freely live with their present borders intact and exist alone or in a very lose confederation with those that might wish to form one. Serbians, on the other hand, insist on the continuation of the federation because it best protects the interests of nations that are hopelessly mixed. Arguing that they have the inherent right to live in a single country for which they have shed so much of their blood, they say that if the other states insist on secession, particularly Croatia and Bosnia in which millions of Serbs live, then they insist, militarily if necessary, on re-drawn borders that would include in Serbia all of the Serb population. The elected presidents of the two republics: Franjo Tudjman of Croatia and Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia both indicate little flexibility and seem to place the seat of sovereignty not in the citizens of their respective republics but in the Croatian and Serbian nationality respectively, thus threatening the non-Croatian and non-Serbian population. The regions of Croatia where Serbs make the majority of the population have declared that they will never live in a secessionist Croatia and in turn declared secession from Croatia indicating their interest in being annexed by Serbia. That is the crux of the current Serbo-Croat crisis.

The most intractable problem could turn out to Bosnia and Herzegovina where about fifty per cent of the population is Muslim (who also see themselves as a separate Muslim or Bosnian nation) and the rest nearly evenly divided Serbs and Croats. Bosnia is a microcosm of Yugoslavia and is located in the middle of the country. Its population, like the population of the adjoining areas, has a reputation of bloody settling of disputes and the conflict can burst into the open any moment.

8 Roland Prinz, "True or not, gruesome tales stoke Yugoslav ethnic fight." Philadelphia Inquirer. The author regretfully omitted to date the cut out from the paper.
Another issue is the identity of the Montenegrins. Some contend that Montenegrins are just that—a separate Montenegrin nation; others contend they are Serbs and that the Communists invented a separate nation of them and the Muslims only to weaken Serbs.

Still another potentially unsolvable problem is Macedonia. Bulgarians contend that Macedonians are western Bulgarians, Greeks that they are northern Greeks, Serbs that they are southern Serbs, while many Macedonians now wish to create an independent "greater Macedonia" out of portions of Bulgaria, Greece, and Macedonia.

Albanians have aspirations to unify all Albanians in a single "Great Albanian" state. Hungarians would love to see Hungarians or Romania and Yugoslavia be part of a greater Hungary. Some Italian political parties have requested a revision of their borders with Yugoslavia so that Istria and parts of Dalmatia would be annexed to Italy. Gypsies are unhappy with their status anywhere in the Balkans. Bulgarians have troubles with their Turkish Muslims; Romania is potentially a civil war arena what with restive Hungarian and German population and Romania’s claim to Moldavia. And so it goes.

The war in Yugoslavia has started, and it is no longer the low intensity war that has lasted since the onset of the Kosovo crisis in 1980. As of the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia on June 25, 1991, it has become a civil-war in which the protagonists are still negotiating but in which the local hatred is already so strong that the fighting goes on regardless of the negotiations. It is estimated that about 500 people were killed in combat since the declaration of independence. Fortunately, it is not yet an all-out war because the scope of such a conflict, as the experience of World War II indicates, will bring hundreds of thousands if not millions of casualties.

G. The Role of Churches/Religions in Peace-making

a. The Ambivalent Role of the Domestic Churches

Peace-making under the above described conditions is badly needed. People of the area, for all their historic inclination to fight, were sometimes victimized by outside manipulations. But in this case they are the victims of their own doing. It is not a question of right or wrong, for all sides have claims that can be evaluated as right, and all have acted wrongly. It is as if the peoples of the Balkan have again been seized by an insanity that drives them once again into the abyss with little or no regard to the ability to get along with one another on a tolerable level that they have shown after World War II. Have the experiences of cooperation completely faded or will they be a reminder that life together in peace is possible?
One of the natural peace-makers, one would think, would be the churches or religious leaders. Indeed, religions have spoken of peace, of the need to use religiously acceptable means to deal with the adversary. During the Kosovo crisis, an Orthodox priest and a Muslim hodja proposed that each time a Serb injures an Albanian the local priest should apologize and ask forgiveness of the Albanian population and vice versa. This was not popularly accepted. Rather, Serbian Orthodox leaders made a world-wide appeal asking for protection of the human rights of the Serbian people and church property, while the Albanian leaders likewise appealed for world public opinion to protect them against the Serbs.

From time to time, one could observe a Croatian Catholic priest walk hand in hand with a Serbian Orthodox priests as they tried to mediate a local dispute between Serbs and Croats. In May 1991, Patriarch Paul of the Serbian Orthodox Church with a group of bishops met in Sremski Karlovci Franjo Cardinal Kuharic and a group of bishops, and they issued a joint Christian appeal to their constituencies. They did so again in late August in Slavonski Brod. It received considerable media attention. They spoke beautiful words of evangelic peace and love but made no marked impression on the course of events by which they themselves are consumed.

However, on the whole, the hierarchies and priests of the two churches are stalwart supporters of the national cause of their people and many of their statements and their presence at nationalistic gatherings seems to contribute to the tension rather than create links. Questions regarding the scope of the genocide of Serbs particularly in the concentration camp Jasenovac, and the role that Alojzije Cardinal Stepinac, now a Croatian hero on account of his persecution by the Communists, played in the forceful conversion of some Serbs to Catholicism during World War II create much agitation.

Dr. Peter Kuzmic, perhaps the most prominent Protestant theologian and leader issued an interview to the prestigious weekly, Danas, in which he strongly urged restraint to nationalistic claims and excesses and urged cooperation.

The press and the media give a good deal of attention to the practically free religious communities, particularly to their leaders but rarely does one see an explicit call to reconciliation.

b. Difficult but Necessary Intervention from Abroad

The Yugoslav press, especially the Slovene and Croatian, seem to place much of their hope for a resolution to the conflict on foreign intervention, particularly that coming from

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European political leaders. Indeed, the European Community and the Council on European Security and Cooperation (better known as the Helsinki process) promise to be of considerable help, perhaps including the placing of troops from other country as a buffer zone between the belligerents, though one can hardly imagine the latter to be effective knowing that there are hundreds of villages and towns in which Serbs and Croats live in poisoned proximity. There simply is no front in a war of nations which are intermingled to such a great degree.

Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky reported of a peace-making mission organized by Foundation of Conscience and its leader Rabbi Arthur Schneier, which included a Catholic bishop and a Muslim leader. That visit seems to have evoked considerable positive press coverage in Yugoslavia. The Conference of European Churches sent a letter to Yugoslav churches signed by the Council of European Churches General Secretary Jean Fischer on July 3, 1991 and by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church stating, "We strongly affirm the importance of non-violent, political means as the appropriate way to bring about change in Europe. . . There are no situations in our countries or on our continent in which violence is required or justified." Additional letters were sent in September by the Council of European Churches, the World Council of Churches, while the American Bishops Conference issued a statement urging peace upon the area.

These may not be the only instances of a foreign religious intervention, but the overwhelming impression of this writer is that the international religious community has not reacted adequately. In most instances it has not reacted at all.

Would such intervention be of help? The answer is yes, as it would be in the Soviet Union, Romania, and all other countries in which the nationalistic conflicts boil over. There is a need to appeal for moderation, to counsel restraint and patience, to teach dialogue as a method of resolving conflicts. Eastern Europe is not the only place of religious and ethnic conflict. This is why a more organized strategy for religious intervention in religious and ethnic conflict is ever more necessary. If nations could create a United Nation to deal with problems then the World, European, National, and other councils of churches owe it to their own constituencies and the belligerents to intervene and make an impact at least upon the religious population of those countries.

It may be too late. An intervention prior to 1991 would have been more effective because with each passing day the number of victims, refugees, and the embitteredness grows, while the crisis becomes more complex. Nevertheless churches and religious leaders should not simply stand by. I recommend the following course of action:

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1. A letter or statement by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.,
Europe/USSR Committee, perhaps under the signature of the President of NCC to all major
churches should be mailed in the shortest possible time. It should express concern over the
crisis, regret over the deaths and other suffering, and urge that the churches undertake a
more active reconciling role. It should also announce the intention to send an ecumenical
team as described in #2.

2. Send an Ecumenical Team of 6-10 prestigious church leaders. Since the Yugoslav
religious communities are mostly hierarchical at least some members of the team should hold
high ecclesiastical rank. It is very important that the team contain Eastern Orthodox and
Roman Catholic as well as Muslim delegates. The team should be well briefed and have at
least two experts who speak the languages and could serve as translators and advisors. The
Ecumenical Team should not take sides in the issue but be both an expression of concern on
part of the American Churches as well as urge activism in reconciliation. They should be
willing to share their experience in the dialogical approach.

The ecumenical team should seek a very high profile with the media in Yugoslavia
(including foreign correspondents) so that its mission reaches a maximum of people. People
in Yugoslavia are very concerned about not appearing 'barbarian' and less civilized and
therefore the members of the ecumenical team should thoughtfully point out that resorting
to violence is likely to turn the clock of history backward rather than forward for the people
of the Balkans. It is important that the ecumenical team not be a "fact finding team" because
the problem, as previous fact finding groups have discovered is that each group has solidified
its interpretation of facts. The team should bill itself as protagonists of reconciliation no
matter how the facts are perceived by the various participants.

The team should seek contacts with the heads of the Roman Catholic Churches in
Ljubljana and Zagreb, the heads of the Orthodox Churches in Belgrade and Skopje, and visit
Sarajevo and Pristina, where the Muslim element is particularly strong. It might consider
an ecumenical meeting with local and or national clergy in one of the conflict-ridden areas
but only if safety concerns allow. Two weeks should be earmarked for such a visit. The
team may write a report that is to be sent to the church leaders and media in Yugoslavia as
well as to other groups (such as CEC, WCC, and the UN).

3. Follow ups should take place with perhaps another ecumenical team of team of
scholars or experts in ecumenical negotiations, whose basic task is the same as the previous
mission.

4. Visit by some of the team members with the U.S. State Department and United
Nations Secretariat staff to communicate impressions and recommendations. Urge United
State and United Nations involvement in conflict-resolution in Yugoslavia.
5. Create similar ecumenical teams (but not identical) to Romania, Czechoslovakia, and USSR with similar objectives as the team to Yugoslavia. The major objective of all visits is the message that while religions caused and continue to cause tensions and conflict, the peace-making task of religion is more fundamental than its national protector role. One can be a peace-maker without abandoning concern for the well-being of the nation. War in the Balkans or any other nation simply cannot be in any nation's long-range interest.

5. Participate and financially support a proposed bi-annual interreligious dialogue (Eastern-Orthodox-Roman Catholic-Muslim-Protestant-Jewish) in Sarajevo.

6. Urge the implementation of a "Universal Declaration of Global Ethos" (see pp. 45-46).

7. Send relief funds and workers to assist the over 500,000 refugees. The aid must be distributed without regard to nationality and ideology.

The above recommendations were made when the author originally wrote this article in June 1991. By the middle of November 1991 the civil war reached such enormous proportions and the relationships between the warring nationalities became so embittered that a number of these recommendations would no longer work. The Yugoslav example should be a warning that help from outside is needed in order to prevent the rapid deterioration in national relationships in other countries, especially the USSR and Romania. The USSR is also rapidly approaching a point of no return. Neither the international community nor the religious communities have found ways to respond to the crisis adequately. At this point the combination of nationalism and religion in most of Eastern Europe is not leading to peace but to war and it is not leading to democratic evolution but to nationalistic explosion.