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EAST -- THE NATIONALITY DILEMMA IN KOSOVO

Manish, 13 November 1983 (RAD/Tarqa)

The nationalist-inspired demonstrations by so-called Albanian irredentist elements in Kosovo are currently almost being overshadowed by the open polemics between Serbian-Montenegrin and Albanian nationality officials in the province and elsewhere in the federation. This new occurrence is the result partly of the failure to introduce an effective program to cope with nationality problems in Kosovo and partly as a consequence of this, of the resurgence of the assertive behavior of the Serbian-Montenegrin nationality group.

It has now become official policy in Kosovo to claim that the political situation in the province, following the riots of 1981 and the subsequent disturbances, is well under control and that nationalist "excesses" have been greatly reduced. Indeed, compared with some disturbances in the past, the demonstrations today are milder and less frequent. Yet it would be completely wrong to claim that they are not ever present, as reports in the provincial press frequently suggest. As recently as November 13, the Pristina daily *Silindza* carried a report about "excesses," referring to them, however, as "hopeless, laughable, and supported only by those who commit them."¹ The article went on, however, to deal with other effects of the nationalist-inspired "excesses," which in fact are more damaging to the political stability of the province than the frequent wall-graffiti or nationalist slogans such as "Kosovo-Republic."

For the first time the daily openly criticized the role of the province's three main religious denominations (Muslims, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) for their attitude to nationalism. The daily pointed out that although the Churches were cooperating with state and political agencies, it was known that they misused religious freedom for nationalistic and anti-socialist purposes. It went on to say that the Christian and Muslim clergy identified religion with nationality and acted as representatives of nations and nationalities, thereby causing religious and national "haines." Catholic priests in some communities were accused of organizing youths in communal, cultural, and other activities. Representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church were accused of inciting anti-Albanianism by speaking in the name of the Serbian nation and "Serbian Kosovo," while Muslim ones were denounced for anti-Serbian, anti-Turkish, and anti-Montenegrin behavior. Evidence that the article particularly had in mind the behavior of representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church was the example cited of the inauguration of the renovated patriarchate of Pez (Albanian nationalists were accused of arson in Pez in 1981) in October of this year, where, in addition to the official outdoor ceremonies, "a number of nationalistic and chauvinistic" demonstrations had taken place within the monastery.

Religious and other officials should not have allowed the presence of various nationalist representations and

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oppositional elements, such as Antonađe Rankovic, Petar Rankovic, and others from Belgrade, as well as some artists and inconvertible Informburo elements from Pae.

These people, it was concluded, had nothing in common with religion and freedom of religion, which they used only to express their "Greater-Serbian hostility." Polemics of this kind are normally found in the pages of the Albanian party paper Zeri i Popullit and not in Sllindja.

The same Ksoovar daily also took issue recently with various Yugoslav publications for their allegedly hostile and tendentious reporting about the province's nationalist-related problems. The news agency Tanjug and the newspapers Politika and Borba were criticized for their distorted commentaries after the Albanian nationalist demonstrations at the football match in Belgrade between Crvena Zvezda and Pristina on October 16, when "E-No, E-No" calls (a short form for Ezeri Neoka) were heard. Yugoslav commentators and political cartoonists were accused of identifying the short "E-No" and the two-headed eagle of the Albanian flag with Albanian irredentism. The Sllindja commentary retorted that the Albanian flag was the symbol of all the Albanians and not of a few people and "it [the flag] cannot tolerate becoming the subject of tasteless cartoons."

A Pristina Radio and Television commentary, for its part, took issue with the "obstructive" writing about Ksoovar in Omladinske, the paper of the Socialist Youth of the Serbian Socialist Republic. The commentary rejected as biased and ridiculous the claims of the paper that the frequent electricity blackouts occurred deliberately "to prevent" the Serbians and the Montenegrins from watching certain Belgrade Television programs, adding decisively, "Do the Albanians watch their programs on battery operated sets?" Omladinske was also criticized for defending the Macedonian efforts to "Macedonianize" the Albanian names and localities in that republic, indicating thereby that Pristina disliked some aspects of Skopje's nationality policies. The Serbian youth publication was also accused of making common cause with other news media in the federation -- "setting out from extremist, secessionist, and centralist-unitarist positions" -- to attack the top provincial leadership, including the provincial League of Communists' Chairman. In so doing, the commentary claimed, Omladinske was attempting to discredit the work of the provincial leadership; and its aim went even farther:

It wants to sow distrust among these cadres, that is, to declare them uncredible and incapable of leading the present battle. This, through the columns of Omladinske, implies a guardianship, watching from above, from some center of force and power. This issue has been played for the past two years by the reactionary, chauvinist, Rankovic forces, which have failed once and for all because they have been condemned by all the nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia, by all the progressive forces in the country.

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What is striking about this latest spate of polemics is that they are being waged between the various news media of the country along nationality lines and not simply between the authorities and hostile "nationalist" and "irredentist" elements, which has been the case so far. This situation puts the Albanian provincial leaders and the province's news media in a serious predicament, for, in addition to their constant problem of fighting Albanian nationalism and irredentism and of warding off the steady attacks from across the border for allegedly having sold themselves to "Greater Serbian" interests, they now also have to defend themselves from other central quarters, such as the Belgrade news media.

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- 1 Ibid., 13 November 1989.
- 2 Ibid., 14 November 1989.
- 3 Ibid., 13 November 1989.

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