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Original Research Paper

THE ETHNIC DISTANCE OF SERBIAN STUDENTS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE MILITARY BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA¹²

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Abstract :The paper is based on the results of the empirical researches on ethnic distance of students in Serbia regarding the members of the former Yugoslav nations and the most numerous nationalities (national minorities). The research was performed by multiple measuring among the students on the north of Kosovo and Metohija and twice among Belgrade students, starting from 2009, and Bogardus scale, adapted to the investigated population, was used as the instrument. Results confirms at least two theses: a) there is a connection between the increase of the ethnic distance of Serbian students towards the other former Yugoslav nations and national minorities, regarding their direct or indirect involvement in the war conflicts against Serbs; b) the consequences of the crisis during the nineties of the last century still exist even after its termination. These are manifested, among other things, through the sustained presence of conflict potential, recognizable also in the expressed ethnic distance towards certain ethnic groups. A typical example for this is the mutual distance that lasts for decades between Serbs and Croats, or between Serbs and Albanians.

Keywords: ethnic distance, students in Serbia 2009-2014, breakup of Yugoslavia, conflict potential.

1. Introductory notes

The issue of ethnic distance of the members of a social community is more than important. Following the answer to this question it is possible to establish if its members are ready to build a life together, co-exist, to lead parallel lives or they are unready to have relations with the members of another ethnic

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community⁴. In the transitional states that ceased to be former socialist federations, but remained multi-ethnic and multi-religious (e.g. Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the Baltic States, etc.), ethnic conflicts lasted for longer or shorter periods (Suvakovic 2014), but national and religious tensions remained present during the whole period. Even more so, in the environments marked by very frequent ethnic conflicts during the history, some of which from only decade and a half ago had the character of a war, the consequences are very fresh, resulting in a greater distance between members of the nations that used to participate in these conflicts. The Autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija⁵ is one of such regions that has all the characteristics of a “society of frozen conflict” and “divided society” even today, and for which it may be claimed that tensions regarding ethnic relations exist as a permanent fact (Petrovic 2010; Suvakovic 2011). Therefore, it is not only the issue regarding the knowledge of the facts from the social history (Bazic 2012), but also regarding the very vivid memory of the citizens about the great difficulties that have happened to them, even those that happen to them every day (Sotirovic 2014). Such an experience, with all the characteristics of a traumatic and war-traumatic experience, surely forms the attitudes of the complete population regarding the possibilities of cohabitation with members of other ethnic communities. Having this in mind, we considered that the continual monitoring of the ethnic distance is of great importance, primarily in order to discover the capacities of a community for integrative and development processes (Miladinovic 2007: 117), but also to observe in due time the manifest and latent social and political relations that lead in the direction of the increasing of the distance and the intensification/blazing up of conflicts (Suvakovic and Stevanovic 2012).

2. Research methodology

In regard to the measuring⁶ of the ethnic distance of students, we started from the presumption that it is: a) a good indicator of conflict potential, i.e. a good indicator of the potential for cooperation between different ethnic communities living in the same region, especially if they were in conflict until recently; b) an indicator of the *development of democratic patterns of political culture*; c) *the ethnic* identification in Serbia, including its southern Autonomous province Kosovo and Metohija, is the key element of the identity of the greatest number of individuals⁷; d) regardless of the relative durability of disposition of

⁴ Here we use the idea of “ethnic community” in the sociological and not in the international-legal sense. Therefore, under this idea we also consider the social groups with the status of nation and with the status of national minority (nationality, which was the term in the former Yugoslavia) and ethnic groups (special ethnicity without its own internationally recognized state, e.g. the Romani).

⁵ Hereinafter referred to as: Kosovo and Metohija, Kosmet or K&M.

⁶ Milić (2014: 638) indicates that measuring is a “means for increasing the exactness of social sciences”.

⁷ Researchers from other former Yugoslav republics represent a similar thesis, pointing out that, apart from the national element, the religious element is also the key factor for the identity of an individual (see Matevska and Matevski 2013).

social (meaning: political also) attitudes, certain oscillations exist in the distance regarding the current happenings⁸, e) the choice of student population for the measuring of ethnic distance is not random. They represent the most educated part of the society that should in the near future become the bearer of the social development, spreading the democratic cultural pattern and ideas of tolerance, so that their (un)willingness for cooperation with other nations represents the foundation of future conflict or cooperation in the examined region.

The comparative results of the inquiries performed among the students of the University in Kosovska Mitrovica (in 2009, 2012, 2013 and 2014) and the University in Belgrade (in 2010 and 2014) are presented in the paper⁹. Identical methodological procedures were repeated: same method – inquiry, same technique – field inquiry, same instrument – questionnaire (Termiz and Milosavljevic 2010: 161-192; Suvakovic 2000:113-120), and for the measuring of ethnic distance – an adapted Bogardus scale, with the same representative sample of about 400 examinees, always quota sample (Supek 1968: 2010-2012) – regarding the faculties, gender and year of studies – while in Belgrade there was also a two-stage sample, which provided representation of all faculty groups (social-humanistic, scientific, medical and technical-technological), and within it different faculties (at least two different) were part of the sample, to provide a longitudinal character to this research. All these, except for the increase of the reliability of making conclusion (Milosavljevic and Radosavljevic 2000: 61) and indicating the changes that have happened within the five-year period (2009-2014) among Serbian students, provide comparison of attitudes – and comparison of changing attitudes – at the two students' centers: Belgrade and Kosovska Mitrovica. The first is the largest and the oldest University in the two-million city, where the students come not only from the whole Serbia, but also from the former Yugoslav republics and from abroad. If Belgrade as a city can be characterized in any manner, then it would probably be its cosmopolitanism, and therefore it is important to establish if and how it reflects on the ethnic distance among students. Apart from this, if we exclude the 78-days NATO aggression on Yugoslavia in 1999, whose victim was also Belgrade and its citizens, the citizens of the capital city of Serbia have not encountered such intensive ethnic conflicts as was the case e.g. in K&M. Of course, it should be added that many war victims from the former Yugoslav region (predominantly Serbian, but not exclusively) have settled in Belgrade. However, concerning K&M (or Bosnia and Herzegovina) it may be stated that the citizens of Belgrade have lived in peace

⁸ It has been proved several times that the greatest ethnic distance lies between the nations in a present war, while it is reduced with establishment of peace, peacetime connections among people, openness for cooperation, etc.

⁹ Benchmarking and data analyses were performed within the pre-examination obligations of students at undergraduate and master studies of sociology from methodological group of courses, with the help of the assistants at these courses and under mentorship of the course teachers at the Faculty of Philosophy in Kosovska Mitrovica. This confirmed once again in practice the necessity of using the teaching process for the purpose of performing scientific, empirical researches and, on the basis of the results obtained, making suitable scientific conclusions.

since 1945. Regarding the University in Kosovska Mitrovica¹⁰, it is situated in the northern part of Kosovska Mitrovica, the divided city of the divided society of K&M. It is a region of a frozen conflict, where around 9,000 students study at 10 faculties (all of them represented in the sample). Of course, it would have been even better and more useful for our research – and we shall strive to do that – to measure the ethnic distance of Albanian students that study in Pristina as well. However, all our previous efforts in this direction have failed.

Regarding the measuring instrument – the Bogardus scale, the original instrument has been modified according to the specificities of the student population, which were offered social relations for which real experience of examinees existed. Seven social relations with members of other nations were predicted in the instrument: living permanently in my country, living in my city, living in my neighborhood, studying at the same faculty, to be my professor/assistant at the faculty, to be my friend and to go steady with/be married to him/her. The relation to 21 nations has been researched. Each of the proposed relations was possible to accept or to reject and the total score of the distance for the examined population was calculated as the average value of scores for each examinee, gained by the sum of rejected relations offered in the instrument. In this paper we present the results of the research of the ethnic distance of students regarding the 11 ex-Yugoslav nations: all six that used to be constitutive in the joint Yugoslav state (Serbians, Croats, Slovenians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Muslims i.e. Bosnians), as well as five nations – ethnic communities in the former Yugoslavia that used to be important regarding the number of their members (Albanians, Hungarians, Turks, Bulgarians and Romani). It is important to note that the inquiry in 2013 was ended on 15th April, several days before the conclusion of the so-called Brussels Agreement. Therefore, the effects of the agreement and its implementation may be observed on basis of the results from 2014.

3. The results of the research of the ethnic distance among the students of the University in Kosovska Mitrovica and discussion in this regard

As it can be seen in the Table 1, the greatest distance of students is towards the members of the Albanian minority. It reached its peak in 2012, after the events in 2011, when the situation was destabilized on the north of Kosovo and Metohija by the attempt for violence over the local Serbians by the special units of the temporary self-government in Pristina, which resulted in Serbian barricades on all roads. The situation calmed in 2013, which is shown by the decrease of ethnic distance score, while it rose again in 2014. Since the main political event that might reflect this increase was the signing of the so-called Brussels Agreement, the dissatisfaction with its content was expressed primarily

¹⁰ The official name is the University in Pristina with temporary head-office in Kosovska Mitrovica, but here we constantly use the shorter name, which is linguistically less crabbled and geographically more precise. It is the University established by the Republic of Serbia in 1970 that was displaced from Pristina after June 1999.

among the Serbs from K&M living north of the Ibar (where this University is situated), as well as the obstruction of its implementation by the institutions of the temporary self-government in Pristina, it may be concluded that it is the main intervening factor that contributed to the repeated raise of the ethnic distance. Otherwise, the ethnic distance regarding the Albanians is usually high among students of this University, which is visible from Table 1. They reject even 6 out of 7 offered social contacts, accepting only living in the same country. In general, significant ethnic distance between these nations, regarding the presented findings in all four surges, “is possible to interpret by the fact that the researches were performed during the extremely delicate period of opening and solving the status issue of Kosovo and Metohija, the difficult issues of free movements of people, the managing of the crossings of the administrative lines, etc.” (Suvakovic and Petrovic 2014).

In all four research periods Albanians were among the three nations towards which the greatest ethnic distance was displayed, towards which the distance was the highest every time and where they were primarily qualified as unwanted for every kind of social contacts.

Table 1: Comparative presentation of the average value of the ethnic distance score regarding ethnic groups in 2009, 2012, 2013 and 2014 researches performed on student population of University in Pristina with contemporary head-office in Kosovska Mitrovica.

2009 Nation/ Ethnic commu- nity	Average value of ethnic distance	2012 Nation/ Ethnic commu- nity	Average value of ethnic distance	2012 Nation/ Ethnic commu- nity	Average value of ethnic distance	2012 Nation/ Ethnic commu- nity	Average value of ethnic distance
Albanians	5.85	Albanians	6.09	Albanians	5.53	Albanians	5.74
Turks	4.91	Turks	5.48	Turks	5.07	Turks	4.83
Croats	4.55	Croats	4.52	Croats	4.94	Croats	4.76
Bosnians/ Muslims	4.04	Bosni-ans / Muslims	5.16	Bosnians / Muslims	4.70	Bosnians / Muslims	4.10
Romani	4.04	Romani	4.86	Romani	4.53	Romani	4.02
Hungarians	3.77	Hungarians	4.78	Hungarians	4.27	Hungarians	3.88
Bulgarians	3.69	Bulgarians	4.28	Bulgarians	4.24	Bulgarians	3.71
Slovenians	3.16	Slovenians	3.95	Slovenians	3.92	Slovenians	2.93
Macedo- nians	2.32	Macedo- nians	2.76	Macedo- nians	3.03	Macedo- nians	1.94
Monte- negrins	2.00	Monte- negrins	1.92	Monte- negrins	1.94	Monte- negrins	1.85
Serbians	0.16	Serbians	0.27	Serbians	0.31	Serbians	0.59

However, it should be noted that the high level of ethnic distance regarding Albanians has also been established in earlier researches that had been performed both on young people and the general population in Serbia as well, the

former Yugoslavia and the independent former Yugoslav republics, especially starting from the '80 (e.g. Bacevic 1990; Pantic 1991; Kuzmanovic 1994; Georgijevski 2006; Miladinovic, 2008; Ivanov 2008; Kandido-Jaksic 2008; Popadic 2010; Petrovic and Miladinovic 2014). "At the same time, it is the greatest level of mutual separation between members of these national groups since ethnic distance has been measured in Serbia and wider in the region." (Suvakovic and Petrovic 2014) Regarding the values of the ethnic distance score, the Turks (the second largest distance in 2009 and 2012, the third in 2013 and 2014) and the Croats (the third largest distance in 2009 and 2012, the second in 2013 and 2014) interchange at the second and the third place. Regarding the Turks, the ethnic distance score has varied, but the one recorded in 2014 was the lowest; regarding the Croats, the score has varied as well, but in 2014, it was somewhat lower than the maximum in 2013, but it was higher than the scores from 2009 and 2012. Although keeping different annual places concerning the sequence, the ethnic distance score concerning the Muslims/Bosnians has considerably decreased in 2014 and was the lowest for the complete period of observation, staying within the boundaries of moderate distance. The situation is the same concerning the Romani, with the lowest ethnic distance in the observed period recorded in 2014, even 0.99 lower than in 2013. Actually, the characteristic of the research in 2014 is that the ethnic distance among the students in Kosovska Mitrovica has been decreased regarding all nations, with the exception of the two where it has been increased: in regard to the Albanians and in regard to – the Serbs! We have already explained the relation concerning the Albanians and when the distance concerning the Serbs is the issue, although it is within the identification, it has been increased for a certain value (from 0.16 in 2009 to 0.59 in 2014). However, due to the irrelevance of the increase, we will not enter into analysis of its occurrence¹¹. Therefore, the oscillation of ethnic distance concerning the previous research from 2013 is +0.21 (concerning the Albanians) / -1.09 concerning the Macedonians. Speaking of the latter, it represents the return within the frame of a normal, small ethnic distance.

4. The results of the research of ethnic distance among students of the University in Belgrade and discussion in this regard

As it is clearly visible from Table 2, the highest ethnic distance among students of the University in Belgrade, in both research years, was also towards the Albanians and then the Turks. However, it should be noted that a high ethnic distance score has not been recorded anywhere among the students of the University in Belgrade, it was modest even in regard to the Albanians, while it was small in regard to other nations, even identification (Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians).

¹¹ Concerning the nationality, 91.3% of students nationally define themselves as Serbs. Regarding the other nations, the participation of the Muslims/Bosnians is 3.0%, the Gorani 2.7%, the Montenegrins 1.6% and the Romani 0.6% in 2014.

However, unlike the students from Kosovska Mitrovica, where the ethnic distance was reduced in 2014 in regard to practically all ethnic communities (except towards the Albanians and the Serbs), this was not the case with Belgrade students: it was reduced in regard to the Albanians, the Turks (minimal, 0.01 so that we may say that it remained unchanged), the Romani and the Montenegrins, but it was increased in regard to the Bosnians/Muslims, the Croats (minimal, 0.01 so that we may say that it remained unchanged), the Bulgarians, the Hungarians, the Slovenians and the Macedonians.

Table 2: Comparative presentation of average value of ethnic distance score regarding ethnic groups in 2010 and 2014 research performed on student population of the University in Belgrade

2010 Nation/Ethnic community	Average value of ethnic distance	2014 Nation/Ethnic community	Average value of ethnic distance
Albanians	3.80	Albanians	3.43
Turks	2.32	Turks	2.31
Romani	2.30	Romani	2.25
Croats	2.15	Croats	2.22
Bulgarians	1.74	Bulgarians	2.16
Bosnians/Muslims	1.68	Bosnians/Muslims	1.83
Hungarians	1.56	Hungarians	1.67
Montenegrins	1.39	Montenegrins	1.39
Slovenians	1.36	Slovenians	1.11
Macedonians	0.90	Macedonians	0.88
Serbs	0.18	Serbs	0.31

With reference to the decrease regarding the Albanians, as in the case of the students in Kosovska Mitrovica, the intervening factor was the Brussels Agreement, where propaganda in favor of its affirmation as the “solution of the Kosovo issue” by the authorities in Belgrade, but without a real critical insight of examinees into the “situation on the field,” influenced the decrease of this score. The increased ethnic distance score was the most expressive concerning the Muslims/Bosnians, where the increase was 0.55 concerning the 2010, while the ethnic distance score decreased the most for 0.51 in regard to the Montenegrins. The increase of the distance score in regard to the Bosnians/Muslims can be explained by the extreme statements and constant provocations from some of their religious-political leaders from Novi Pazar, partly with the general atmosphere created by the world and also by the Serbian media regarding the aggressiveness of the Islam, while the decrease of the score in regard to the Montenegrins can be explained just as the return to normal limits. Oscillations of the ethnic distance score of maximal +/- 0.5 are in favor of the thesis about the relative constancy of the attitudes of the investigated population, when social conditions allow stability. In the case of Belgrade students, there was also an increase of the distance towards Serbs, within the limits of identification, from

0.18 in 2010 to 0.31 in 2014¹². Numerous factors have probably influenced this increase, including some of methodological nature, but since the difference in the distance score is little, we shall not burden this paper with such an analysis.

5. Toward conclusion

In analyzing and comparing the data obtained, one might make several conclusions regarding the totality of the student population researched:

- 1) Ethnic distance scores that we obtained by the longitudinal research performed on a population of students in Kosovska Mitrovica and in Belgrade in the period 2009-2014 show that there is a clear ethnic distance of Serbian students towards the members of other ethnic communities that used to live in the region of the former Yugoslavia;
- 2) The researches performed in six rounds have shown that the greatest ethnic distance, both among students in Kosovska Mitrovica and students in Belgrade, is in regard to the Albanians, then to the Turks, the Croats, the Romani, the Muslims/Bosnians (though not in that order), which confirms our hypothesis on the existence of connection between the increase of ethnic distance of Serbian students in regard to the other former Yugoslav nations and national minorities depending on their direct or indirect involvement in war conflicts against the Serbs, which had been shown at the beginning of this research (Шуваковић 2010). With the normalization of relations, with the elapse of time from war operations, the stabilization of situation, the ethnic distance was also decreasing; on the other hand, in conditions of a “frozen conflict” on Kosovo, it is maintained at an extremely high level in regard to the nation perceived as the main opponent – the Albanians, while it is reduced in regard to those that used to be perceived as opponents, now slowly losing that “status”;
- 3) The consequences of the crisis during the ‘90s of the 20th century persist even though it has ended (though it is the question if it has actually ended or its intensity has been temporarily reduced). These are manifested, among other things, through the more permanent presence of conflict potential, also recognizable in the more distinct ethnic distance concerning certain ethnic groups. This distinctness is greater in the regions where the conflict continually lasts for decades, acquiring the characteristics of a war conflict in one moment (1999), then ethnic cleansing and pogrom over the Serbs (2004), so that even among the current youngest generations of students, many of whom have lost some

¹² The greatest number of students at the University in Belgrade are identified as the Serbs, 91.5%, the Montenegrins follow with 2.1%, the Bosnians/Muslims and the Romani 0.8% each, the Hungarians and the Macedonians 0.5% each, the Croats and the Albanians 0.3% each, while others do not want to declare themselves according to nationality, or they declare themselves as members of some other nation.

of the closest relatives in those conflicts, and some of them have been victims themselves. Therefore, the ethnic distance score for almost every nation among the students of the University in Kosovska Mitrovica is almost doubled in comparison to the ethnic distance score concerning the same nation among the students of the University in Belgrade. This clearly shows that the conflict potential among the students on the north of Kosovo and Metohija is extremely high, furthermore, with the highest ethnic distance being recorded in regard to the numerically dominant ethnic community in the region of K&M;

- 4) Although among both student populations, in Belgrade and in Kosovska Mitrovica, the ethnic distance score is unreasonably high in regard to the Romani people, in both cases it was reduced in 2014 to the level of low (Belgrade), i.e. modest distance (Kosovska Mitrovica), which surely represents a progressive achievement. Not only that the majority of the Romani were on the side of the Serbian people in the wars, but also they were sharing (and still share) its faith: in 1999 they were deported from Kosovo and Metohija together with the Serbs and other non-Albanians. However, the distance towards them existed even before and that “constant in the decisive distance is one of the most stable results in the research of interethnic distance, not only in Serbia but also broader, in the region of the Balkans.” (Suvakovic and Petrovic 2010; see also Georgijevski 2006; Ivanov 2008) If the social position is considered, more precisely the social disqualification and marginalization of the Romani people on the basis of their misery and poverty, all of which force them towards unacceptable forms of behavior for the contemporary society (pilferage, mendicity, living in insanitary dwellings, rejecting inclusion into the educational system, etc.), then this fact might be considered as the decisive for such a distance;
- 5) Finally, it should be indicated that the obtained ethnic distance scores are also good indicator of the religious and denominational distance. Both in the case of students from Kosovska Mitrovica and in the case of students from Belgrade, it is the smallest in regard to the Orthodox people: the Serbs, the Montenegrins and the Macedonians, while it is the highest in regard to the members of Islam¹³ and the Catholics. Of course, exceptions from this rule exist and they indicate that religious and denominational dissimilarity, at least regarding the students of these two Universities, is not of primary importance for the determined ethnic distance.

¹³ The majority of Albanians in K&M are Muslims according to their denomination, although it cannot be considered that the faith is the decisive factor for identity of this people that has three religions even in Albania: Albanians-Muslims, Albanians-Orthodox and Albanians-Catholics. We determine that even Albanians in Macedonia are Muslims according to their denomination.

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ЕТНИЧКАТА ДИСТАНЦА КАЈ СРПСКИТЕ СТУДЕНТИ КАКО ПОСЛЕДИЦА НА ВОЕНИОТ РАСПАД НА ЈУГОСЛАВИЈА

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Апстракт: Трудот е базиран на резултатите од емпириските истражувања за етничката дистанца кај студентите во Србија во поглед на припадниците на другите народи и народности (национални малцинства) од поранешна Југославија. Истражувањето беше спроведено со користење на повеќе мерки меѓу студентите од Северно Косово и Метохија и во два наврати помеѓу студентите во Белград, почнувајќи од 2009 година, а како инструмент за истражување на примерокот беше користена прилагодена Богардусова скала. Истражувањата потврдува најмалку две тези: а) постои врска помеѓу зголемувањето на етничката дистанца на српските студенти кон другите нации и национални малцинства од поранешната Југославија и нивната директна или индиректна вмешаност во воените конфликти против Србите; б) последиците од кризата во периодот на 1990-тите постојат и по нејзиното завршување. Тие се манифестирани, покрај другото, преку постојаното присуство на потенцијалот за конфликт, препознатлив исто така и во ираzenата етничка дистанца кон одредени етнички групи. Типичен пример за ова е взаемната дистанца која постои со децении помеѓу Србите и Хрватите, или помеѓу Србите и Албанците. Ова се потврдува преку резултатите презентирани во овој труд.

Клучни зборови: етничка дистанца, студенти во Србија 2009-2014, распад на Југославија, потенцијал за конфликт.