Part I

Setting the Scene

1 Situating Ethnic Minorities in Post-Socialist Southeastern Europe
An Introduction

Marko Valenta and Sabrina P. Ramet

It has been twenty years since the publication of Janusz Bugajski's landmark volume, *Ethnic Politics in Eastern Europe*,[1] but the question of the socio-political exclusion and marginalization of minorities remains one of the most burning problems in modern Europe. This issue has been especially emphasized in Southeast European post-socialist societies. In the past two decades, the countries in the region have experienced multiple structural transitions. The old socialist one-party systems were removed and new political formations, based on diverse political parties, have emerged in the region. Parallel with these changes, and after the collapse of Socialist Yugoslavia, several new countries in Southeastern Europe have been established and recognized by the international community.

In several countries in Southeastern Europe, the transformations in the 1990s marked the start of bloody conflicts between ethnic groups. People in several Yugoslav successor states went through hard times as local leaders, especially Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, stoked inter-ethnic distrust and took the peoples who had comprised a single society into a sanguinary internecine war. The 1990s were marked by wars between Croats and Serbs in Croatia and between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. In Macedonia, there were sporadic conflicts between Macedonians and Albanians (peaking in spring 2001), while in Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic conflicts developed into a long-lasting full-scale war involving Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats with shifting alliances.[2] After the pressure from the international community and NATO's military interventions against the Serbian side in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the War of Yugoslav Succession (1991–1995) came to an end and peace accords were signed in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995. In a similar fashion, the seventy-eight-day War for Kosovo (in 1999) ended with Serbian capitulation to NATO and the establishment of an international protectorate in Kosovo. These wars sowed resentments between

Serbs and non-Serbs as well as, to some extent, between Croats and Bosniaks.[3]

In most Yugoslav successor states, ethnic boundary making has been evident in most spheres of life, including in political life. In the post-socialist period, the politics in most countries in the region have been dominated by ethno-nationalist parties. In such structural frames, ethnic groups that have been in minority positions have often been in a difficult situation. In many cases, these people have become the victims of ethnic conflicts and wars, and as such have experienced violence, ethnic cleansing, and different forms of discrimination.[4] As a consequence, after the disintegration of Socialist Yugoslavia, large groups of former citizens of the Yugoslav federation who ended up as local minorities migrated to parts of the region where they would be in the majority.[5] Those who stayed were redefined as members of politically defined minority groups or as migrants. Some were even stripped of their residence rights and became stateless illegal residents.[6]

It can be safely argued that minority–majority relations have improved significantly since the 1990s, the period marked with wars, ethnic cleansing, atrocities, and large numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees in several countries in the region (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo). The absence of direct conflict and violence marks a considerable improvement.[7] Yet it may be argued that ethnic relations in many countries are still characterized by sharp ethnic boundaries and separate lives, where ethnic minority groups suffer prejudice, if not also stigmatization and intolerance. However, there are variations in how the ethnic majority treats different groups within the same country or the same region of the country.[8] While some ethnic minority groups are recognized, included, and valued by the respective ethnic majority, others, such as the Roma, are not recognized and are perceived as culturally distant, and experience socio-political exclusion and marginalization.[9] Indeed, minority–majority relations in Southeastern Europe vary greatly. Here, we can make a distinction between regions or areas within the same country that have recently been affected by ethnic conflict and those that have not. Some areas, such as eastern Slavonia in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and northern Kosovo, are characterized by a lack of inter-ethnic cooperation and clear tensions between ethnic groups that, in the not so remote past, were involved in violent ethnic conflicts. Nonetheless, recent research by Sam Whitt and Rick Wilson suggests that "a norm of fairness has survived (or rejuvenated) in Bosnia," including between members of different ethnic groups.[10] In other areas, such as Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania, and Croatian Istria, inter-ethnic cooperation is less problematic. In these contexts we

may find strong ethnic minorities who are an integrated and respected part of local communities.

Last, but not least, countries' aspirations for EU membership and the EU's function as a promoter of minority rights must be mentioned. In the past decade, several countries in the region have achieved, or still strive to achieve, EU membership. Due to requirements imposed by the EU, countries in Southeastern Europe have intensified their efforts to establish international standards for minority protection and (re)integration of minority groups and refugees. Parallel with these changes, ethnic minority parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing the interests of minority groups have struggled to improve the implementation of the new legal frameworks, and struggled to improve the general position of their respective ethnic groups.[11] In some cases, these efforts have resulted in negative responses among the members of the ethnic majority group. Ethnic relations are clearly still strained in areas that in the past have experienced violent ethnic conflicts.[12] Nevertheless, there are many positive examples of improved social, cultural, and political positions of ethnic minorities, expressed in many educational institutions, bilingual signs, newspapers, local radio stations, and cultural clubs driven by different ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it is not unusual for ethnic minorities in certain regions to play an important role, inter alia, by being an important political force. In several countries, they have even been coalition partners in the government and it is expected that they will continue to exercise a sizeable political influence in the future.

Ethnic Diversity, Civil Peace, and Democratic Stability

Two issues which have continued to be discussed by scholars interested in inter-ethnic relations are the relationship of ethnic diversity to internal conflict and, again, the relationship of ethnic diversity to the capacity of a society to fashion and sustain democratic life. These two issues are, of course, intertwined. More than 150 years ago, British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) offered what has come to be seen as the classic statement on the subject. In his words,

Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. The influences which form opinions and decide political acts are different in the different sections of the country. An altogether different set of leaders have the confidence of one part of the country and of another. The same books, newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, do not reach them. One section does not know

what opinions, or what instigations, are circulating in another. The same incidents, the same acts, the same system of government, affect them in different ways; and each fears more injury to itself from the other nationalities than from the common arbiter, the state. Their mutual antipathies are generally much stronger than jealousy of the government.[13]

What is immediately apparent is that Mill did *not* claim that ethnic diversity *per se* was problematic. Rather, problems arose, he thought, when different segments of society had systematically different sources of information and did not participate, we could say (invoking Aristotle's terminology), in a common *polis*. While Mill's explanation is generally understood, those who trace problems with building peaceful, stable democracies to ethnic diversity differ in the emphasis they place variously on differences of race, culture, language, or religion, and this is, in part, because of differences in national contexts.

Among works of social science tracing the aforementioned problems to ethnic diversity, *Politics in Plural Societies* by Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle continues to be among the most often cited.[14] Donald Horowitz, in spite of his earlier insistence that deep ethnic divisions should not be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to consolidating stable democracy,[15] wrote, at the height of the War of Yugoslav Succession: "Democracy has progressed furthest in those East European countries that have the fewest serious ethnic cleavages (Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland) and progressed more slowly or not at all in those that are deeply divided (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and course the former Yugoslavia)."[16] Twenty-three years later, Hungary's democratic credentials do not look particularly impressive, while in Poland the government elected in 2015 quickly stamped out press freedom and tried to destroy the independence of the Constitutional Court. In contrast, Slovakia and, among the Yugoslav successor states, Slovenia and Croatia have done reasonably well in building democracy, in spite of some rocky periods (an experience shared also by Poland). To this group of scholars one may add David Miller, who has argued that neither social justice nor democracy is achievable without a common identity, adding that "this common identity must exist at the national level."[17] Again, along similar lines, Robert Putnam has argued that trust is undermined by ethnic difference,[18] while Dietland Stolle *et al*. conclude that "high levels of racial and ethnic heterogeneity are accompanied by lower levels of trust and other civic attitudes."[19] But these authors have also emphasized that "the absence of direct contact with or sustained knowledge about individuals of different racial, ethnic or class background serves to reinforce prejudices that are themselves based on inaccurate and rigidly held stereotypes"[20] – a point

confirmed by Roman Kuhar in the case of homophobia in post-socialist Slovenia.[21]

Perhaps inevitably, a reaction set in as various scholars have challenged the "diversity = trouble" hypothesis. M. Steven Fish and Robin S. Brooks, for example, have drawn attention to a long-standing consensus that level of economic development can have a major impact on inter-group tensions and, thus, on the potential for inter-group conflict and democratic stability. That there is a global correlation between peace and stable democracy is, of course, well known. In their words, "[g]reater wealth is associated with more open government."[22] There are completely self-evident reasons for this. First, the more well-off people are, the less frustrated they are likely to be, the more they have to lose in the event of destabilization, and thus the more risk-averse they will be, while people living on the edge of poverty or below the poverty line may feel that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by insurgency or provoking internal conflict. Second, economic development translates into jobs, while poor societies are apt to have large numbers of unemployed people with time on their hands. Third, in advanced industrialized societies, educational attainment is higher, and larger numbers of people have saleable skills. The phenomenon of the "brain drain" reflects the fact that, when people with saleable skills find that local conditions are deteriorating, they may have the option of emigrating to a country they consider more attractive.

James Fearon and David Laitin joined the debate in 2003 with an article in which they reported that, on the basis of an analysis of 127 conflicts, they had found "little evidence that one can predict where a civil war will break out by looking for where ethnic or other broad political cleavages are strongest."[23] On the contrary, they argued:

> *For any level of ethnic diversity, as one moves up the income scale…, the odds of civil war decrease, by substantial factors in all cases and dramatically among the most homogeneous countries. The richest fifth is practically immune regardless of ethnic composition.*[24]

They concluded thus:

> *The conditions that favour insurgency – in particular, state weakness marked by poverty, a large population, and instability – are better predictors of which countries are at risk for civil war than are indicators of ethnic and religious diversity or measures of grievances such as economic inequality, lack of democracy or civil liberties, or state discrimination against minority religions or languages.*[25]

While their list of factors favoring insurgency – and thus, potentially, the breakup of a state – includes most of the operative factors in Socialist Yugoslavia on the eve of the outbreak of war in 1991, it omits two vital

factors: the legitimacy factor and, thus, the fact that the socialists in Yugoslavia were never able to establish that a one-party system with controlled media and limited space for private enterprise and religious activity alike could be considered legitimate by most of its citizens; and second, the presence of regional leaders, above all in Serbia but also elsewhere, who were prepared to manipulate public opinion and convince their respective constituencies that, for example, economic inequality *did* matter and not merely for its own sake but also and primarily because they were (allegedly) the victims of discrimination and exploitation *by members of other groups.*[26] In this way, economic issues were *ethnicized* by ambitious leaders, which is to say presented as ethnic in nature.

According to Arash Abizadeh, "at the societal level, shared culture is neither necessary nor sufficient for mutual understanding." At most, "greater cultural and especially linguistic distance between society's members may in some contexts necessitate greater efforts and resources to achieve the same levels of communicational transparency, all other things [being] equal."[27] It follows, as Abizadeh has it, that:

> *Integration in liberal democracies is not contingent upon cultural nationalist assimilation policies. To the contrary, faced with cultural heterogeneity, state-sponsored nationalist projects of cultural assimilation, speciously justified by reference to some supposed need for homogeneity, have increasingly proven to be not just ineffective, but positively counterproductive to the goal of integration.*[28]

The Size of Minority Populations in Southeastern Europe

Indeed, there are large differences between countries in Southeastern Europe, and within different regions within countries, in terms of how each respective ethnic majority has treated local ethnic minorities in the post-socialist period. In some regions, multiculturalist rhetoric has dominated and continues to dominate public debates and political programs of leading political parties, while in others, efforts to achieve national homogeneity and the assimilation of ethnic minorities have been prevalent.

Countries in Southeastern Europe also differ as regards the level of economic development, cultural homogeny, and religious diversity. In several countries in the region, socioeconomic inequalities and differences in religion and language correspond with boundaries between the ethnic groups, while in others the boundaries between ethnic groups are blurred. Furthermore, there are large differences between countries in Southeastern Europe regarding the size and composition of their minority populations.[29] We can roughly distinguish between three categories of countries with respect to the ethnic composition of their populations.

Within the first category, we find countries such as Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia, which have ethnically very heterogeneous populations. In Montenegro, the Montenegrins (the largest group in that republic) make up less than half of the country's total population; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, local Bosniaks have recently claimed that they constitute 54 percent of the population of the country as a whole.[30] However, although the Montenegrins are, thus, in the minority in arithmetic terms, they dominate their society. In Macedonia, the largest ethnic group (Macedonians) is in a clear majority position as it comprises more than 60 percent of the population.[31]

In the second category, we find countries with a moderately ethnically heterogeneous population. In this category are Albania, Slovenia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. In these countries, the largest ethnic group makes up between 83 percent and 85 percent of the population. We may also find large ethnic minority communities in these countries. However, these ethnic minorities make up only a fraction of the country's total population. For example, among the aforementioned countries, Bulgaria has the largest ethnic minority group. There are more than half a million Turks in Bulgaria, constituting the second largest ethnic group. Yet they make up less than 9 percent of the population in the country, while ethnic Bulgarians make up 85 percent (see Figure 1.1).

The third category includes countries with even smaller ethnic minority populations. In these countries, we may find relatively small ethnic minority groups, such as Hungarians in Romania, Serbs in Croatia, and Serbs in Kosovo. In these countries, the ethnic majority makes up roughly 90 percent or more of the country's total population. Figure 1.1

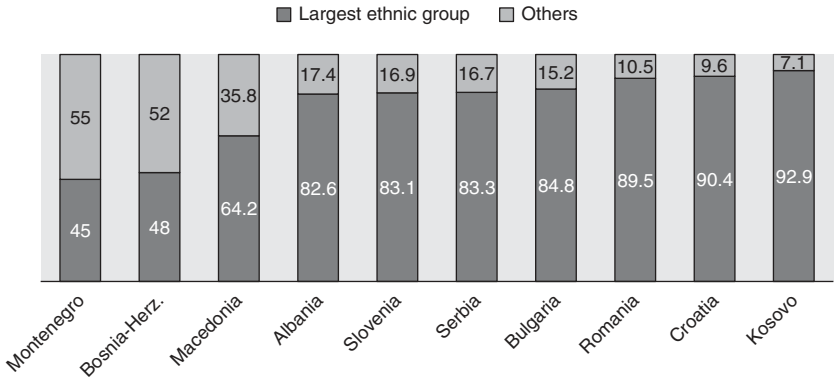

Figure 1.1 The relative size of the ethnic majority population in Southeastern Europe

illustrates the relative size of the ethnic majority population in different countries in Southeastern Europe.

The figure shows the proportion of countries' total populations that have declared themselves as belonging to the largest ethnic group in the country. It should be noted that a sizeable proportion of the population in several of the countries listed did not provide information on their ethnicity in the population census. For example, in Slovenia, Slovenes comprise 83 percent of the country's population, while 10 percent of the population did not declare their ethnicity. Seven percent declared themselves as members of groups other than Slovenes. Similarly, in Albania, Albanians comprise 83 percent of the country's population, while 16 percent of the population preferred not to respond concerning their ethnicity.

It is often claimed that the numbers of people who identify with different ethnic minority groups in many countries are underestimated for various reasons. This topic will be addressed by several authors in this volume.

Ethnic Minority Populations in Southeastern Europe

Most of the ethnic groups in Southeastern Europe are scattered across several countries in the region. Albanians are the ethnic majority in Albania and Kosovo, while they are the largest ethnic minority in Macedonia and one of the five largest ethnic minority groups in Montenegro. Another group that is scattered across several countries in Southeastern Europe is Hungarians. The largest Hungarian communities are in Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia, but we also find sizeable Hungarian communities in Croatia and Slovenia, as well as in neighboring Austria. We may also find significant Turkish communities in several countries in Southeastern Europe. The largest Turkish community is in Bulgaria, where there are also about half a million Pomaks (Bulgarian-speaking Muslims).[32] In addition, we find Turkish communities in Macedonia, Romania, and Kosovo. Croats are also scattered across several countries. Outside Croatia, the largest proportion lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but there are also Croatian communities in Serbia and Slovenia. Yet, among the large ethnic groups inhabiting the Yugoslav successor states, Serbs are probably the most scattered group. There are approximately 9 million Serbs in the area, but almost 1.8 million Serbs live outside Serbia; most of them are in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbs are also the principal minority group in Croatia, Montenegro, and, with 2 percent of the population, also in Slovenia (just ahead of second-place Croats, who account for 1.8 percent of the population of Slovenia); Serbs are also the second largest ethnic minority group in Kosovo and the fourth largest group in Macedonia

Table 1.1 *Minority population according to declared ethnic affiliation*[35]

Total population	Largest ethnic minorities in the country				
Romania 20,121,641	Hungarian 6.5% N 1,227,623	Roma 3.3% N 631,573	Ukrainian 0.3% N 50,920	German 0.2% N 36,042	Turkish 0.1% N 27,698
Bulgaria 7,364,570	Turkish 8,8% N 588,318	Roma 4.9% N 325,343	Russian 0.1% N 9,978	Armenian 0.1% N 6,552	Vlach 0.1% N 3,684
Serbia 7,186,862	Hungarian 3.5% N 253,899	Roma 2.1% N 147,604	Bosniak 2.0% N 145,278	Croatian 0.8% N 57,900	Slovakian 0.7% N 52,750
Bosnia-Herz 3,791,662	Bosniak 54% No. N/A	Serbian N/A	Croatian N/A	Yugoslavs N/A	Monte-negrins N/A
Croatia 4,284,889	Serbian 4.4% N 186 633	Bosniak 0.7% N 31 479	Italian 0.4% N 17 807	Roma 0.4% N 16 975	Hungarian 0.3% N 14 048
Albania 2,831,741	Greek 0.9% N 24,243	Roma 0.3% N 8,301	Aromanian 0.3%	Macedonian 0.2% N 5,512	Egyptian 0.1% N 3,368
Macedonia 2,022,547	Albanian 25.2% N 509 083	Turkish 3.9% N 77 959	Roma 2.7% N 53 879	Serbian 1.8% N 35 939	Bosniak 0.8% N 17 018
Slovenia 1,964,036	Serbian 2% N 38,964	Croatian 1.8% N 35,642	Bosniak 1.1% N 21,542	Muslim 0.53% N 10,467	Hungarian 0.3% N 6,243
Kosovo 1,739,825	Bosniak 1.6% N 27,533	Serbian 1.5% N 25,532	Turks 1.1% N 18,738	Ashkali 0.9% N 15,436	Egyptian 0, 0.6% N 11,524
Montenegro 620,029	Serbian 28.7% N 178,110	Bosniak 8.6% N 53,605	Albanian 4.9% N 30,439	Muslim 3.3% N 20,537	Croats 0.9% N 6,021

(see Table 1.1). We should note that in most countries that belonged to the Yugoslav federation, growing numbers of Muslims of Slavic origin have in the last two decades declared themselves as Bosniaks. Today, Bosniaks make up the largest ethnic group in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, there are almost 300,000 Bosniaks scattered in other parts of the post-Yugoslav region, with the largest communities in Serbia and Montenegro. Bosniaks are also the principal minority group in Kosovo