

Climate Change, Democracy, and Enclaves in the Balkans

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Although there are climate change deniers (and skeptics) of all sorts, the preponderance of evidence supports the consensus of climate scientists that climate change is occurring and that man is likely to be behind much of it.

The effects, which are becoming increasingly catastrophic, include rising sea levels, melting glaciers, disruption of various ecosystems, species extinction and reduction of biodiversity, and more extreme weather occurrences world-wide of drought, flooding, tornadoes, and abnormal temperatures. There are also climate induced conflicts and immigration.

Given the nature of this crisis, no country is free from climate change and its effects, and that includes countries in the Balkans. Perhaps the historic flooding that ravaged parts of Bosnia and Serbia in May of 2014, as well as the record heat wave and drought in the summer of 2017 could be harbingers of future devastation throughout the region.

Sense of Urgency

No wonder there is a growing sense of urgency to climate action. The fact that we are citizens of the world and that we share a planet in trouble has finally begun to take root in our ethos. Most encouragingly, scientists and policy-makers around the world have started to call for substantial mitigation and adaptation efforts.

It is now widely held that a reduction in greenhouse gases (GHGs) and an

By **Rory J. Conces**
University of Nebraska, Omaha
(Special to Serbia Daily)

adjustment to these effects are key features of a comprehensive strategy to combat anthropocentric climate change.

Obviously, any strategy calling for such efforts goes well beyond individuals choosing to moderate their own behavior to one that requires governments making aggressive policy changes and the International Community engaging in immediate widespread collective action and enforcing compliance of all agreements.

What should concern us today is the extent to which countries in the Balkans can be part of a comprehensive strategy. Is their participation even plausible? There are those—"the optimists"—who point to the fact that mitigation and adaptation projects are becoming more common, even in places like Bosnia and Kosovo. The donor community there, which includes the World Bank, USAID, and the UNDP, has funded projects on renewable energy, flood management, watershed development, and disaster resilience, to name only a few.

But do these projects reflect a comprehensive strategy, one that includes a buy-in by stakeholders at the state, entity, and municipality levels, and that coalesces the various ethnic communities within those countries? Is there a semblance of solidarity?

I have my doubts. If political leaders on each side of the Neretva in Mostar can-

not dismantle their parallel governments and end the duplication of services such as public transportation, policing and garbage collection and if leaders in North Mitrovica and Prishtina cannot agree on the structuring and financing of education, medical care, and municipal services, how will these same leaders work together to tackle the knotty problem of climate change? It seems to me that their strong ethnonationalist sentiments will get the better of them, making the building of coalitions very difficult.

"The optimists" may also remind us of the growing movement calling for a human right to a healthy environment. To be honest, this movement is a step in the right direction. Who wouldn't approve such a legal move given that climate change, or more aptly put, environmental breakdown, is beginning to threaten the conditions that form the basis of human well-being and ultimately survival?

Different Dimension

This infusion of human rights into the discussion is significant, for an environmentally-based human right adds a different dimension not only to addressing climate change but to supporting the body of already established human rights as well. According to "the optimists," this will lead to further collective action.

But will such a legal maneuver nudge the peoples of the Balkans to their senses, getting them to build coalitions and to agree on a comprehensive strategy? Again, I have my doubts. Although human rights discourse, or, better yet, human rights-centered ideology, has become both fashionable and politically correct among politicians, academics, and celebrities, there is often a certain ambivalence by some, especially when one's own group is singled out as perpetrator rather than as victim or as bystander.

Moreover, expanding the Universal Declaration by a single human right is likely to have little if any impact, given the notoriously weak enforcement of human rights law (and environmental agreements).

In the end, what dooms these projects and movement is that their being dis-



Floods in 2014

crete/limited and self-serving, respectively, will limit their ability to deal with what amounts to a planetary crisis, crossing every conceivable human boundary, and requiring concerted efforts by vast interconnected collectives.

Of course, these collectives are ultimately reducible to individuals for whom, as the philosopher Dale Jamieson notes, “cooperativeness would be...[an] important characteristic of agents who could successfully address the problems of climate change.” But taken to its logical conclusion, it means that agents must address the problem in coordinated and expansive ways, building from within the local and extending into the international.

The degree to which this will occur is dependent on the forms of governance or “ways in which societies organize themselves...[to manage] conflict and achieve their goals,” notes the political scientist Daniel J. Fiorino in *Can Democracy Handle Climate Change?*

As Fiorino argues, some forms are more effective than others in dealing with a problem like climate change, with full democracies (e.g., Norway and Sweden) being better than both flawed democracies (e.g., Serbia and Croatia) and hybrid regimes (e.g., Bosnia and Macedonia). (Kosovo escapes classification in the Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU] Democracy Index, though I am inclined to think it is not a full democracy.)

Core Characteristics

On the one hand, full democracies possess core characteristics like free and fair elections, limits on governmental power, and an independent and diverse media, as well as score high marks for political participation and culture.

On the other hand, flawed democracies meet only some core criteria and are deficient in political participation and culture, whereas hybrid regimes fall short in many areas.

These differences are important, for it is the “bundle” of characteristics possessed by strong democracies that provides quality governance, which promotes the building of coalitions crucial to effective climate action.

And herein lies the major problem for a less than full democracy: it has difficulty building coalitions. Not only to form the necessary political and economic transformations in-country, but also to build coalitions internationally.

Specifically, if countries like Bosnia and Kosovo are to become strong coalition partners against climate change, they need to work through their “post-conflictedness” to create a fuller democracy and a sustainable peace.



Northern Mitrovica

But to do that will require taking on the ethno-nationalisms that are endemic to the Balkans. This is no easy task given that nationalism is a tribalism that includes/privileges one's own people and excludes/disqualifies all others.

It foments an attitude of us-against-them that is hostile to coalitions between those who differ, denying a certain moral gracefulness in their dealings with one another.

The American journalist David Wallace-Wells acknowledges the connection between these isms and climate change in his recent *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming*, when he writes that “just as the need for...[international] cooperation is paramount, indeed necessary for anything like the world we know to survive, we are only unbuilding those alliances—recoiling into nationalistic corners and retreating from collective responsibility and from each other.” Wallace-Wells may be right about such “unbuilding” occurring within the United States, but parts of the Balkans have far fewer alliances to “unbuild.” In fact, ethno-nationalist identities are so dominant among individuals in Bosnia and Kosovo that they reverberate within entire ethnic groups leading to “in-group” hypersolidarity and “out-group” distrust, and the formation of ethnic enclaves.

But there are differences: we find a failing “democratic” multiethnic society (diverse and weakly interactive/integrative) in Bosnia and a stagnating “democratic” plural monoethnic society (diverse non-interactive/non-integrative) in Kosovo. No matter, ethnic enclaves are the physical impediments, the bulwarks against strong multiethnic societies that promote democracy and peace building, as well as a robust collaboration towards dealing with global problems like climate change.

But if these lived-in ethnic enclaves have a physical geography to them, their materiality will be created and maintained in part by evocative objects.

These objects can mean many things to

many people. Here I take them to be physical objects, which by evoking memories and precipitating ideas, resonate cognitively, affectively, and conatively along ethno-nationalist lines for a person. Building on Sherry Turkle's insightful *Evocative Object: Things We Think With*, evocative objects stress “the inseparability of thought and feeling [and striving] in our relationship to things...[and] bring[s] together intellect and emotion [and volition].”

They “color” a person's world, making it meaningful for them in a much lived sense.

Positive and Negative

In Kosovo, however, the same object will resonate very differently depending on who is viewing (or thinking, recalling, imagining) it—they are, in effect, “observer-sensitive.” The flag of Albania and photos of Adem Jashari, for instance, are likely to resonate positively with Kosovo Albanians, but negatively for Kosovo Serbs.

The reverse effects are likely to be had with the state flag of Serbia and photos of Slobodan Milošević.

Also, evocative objects have both centripetal and centrifugal effects on people. Objects that resonate positively with a person will pull them in and make that person feel welcome, whereas those that resonate negatively will push them away and make that person feel unwelcomed.

Given that evocative objects have these effects, serving as boundary markers that welcome some and unwelcome others, and that ethno-nationalist identities tend to be dominant for many, it is no wonder that ethnic enclaves exist in Kosovo.

And they do so not only as physical geographies, but also as geographies of ideas, emotions, and strivings—“lived-in” social and psychic geographies—of “niche cultures.”

Because enclaves impede the formation of a multiethnic society that sup-

ports the building of democracy, or, more importantly, of deliberative democracy, which emphasizes deliberative engagement by neighbors and parliamentarians alike, the obvious approach is to attack enclaves at their core—the objects that support them. Legislating away these objects is next to impossible, and while change through mass education and attrition of recalcitrants may occur, it will be far too slow to rely on. It can be supplemented, however, by using civic design (whose goal is to create persons who work toward civic improvement) to change neighborhood demographics and dynamics by physically removing objects that are ethno-nationally antagonistic and by replacing them with “shared objects of positive evocativity” (e.g., the neighborhood market as a place for all to congregate) or “shared objects of negative evocativity” (e.g., the bridges and roads washed out by climate change-induced flooding).

Outward Expression

Admittedly, there is some erasing of the outward expression of culture and thus, some homogenization, but it is more than offset by establishing spaces of interaction and integration, spaces that promote both agreement and disagreement (commonality and difference), and the preservation of plurality. Enclave insularity and polarization are deterred by proximal or face-to-face conversations that endure over time, perhaps a long time. One can only hope that the environment will be a topic of those conversations.

It is through the death of the enclave that a multiethnic society begins to take shape, offering space for the sort of democratic society that is conducive for making coalitions within and between the full range of collectives—neighborhoods, cities, municipalities, entities, the state, the region, the International Community.

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The physicalist approach to enclave demise proposed here is just one step in that process. Wanting to save the planet and, thus, ourselves, is a no-brainer, but sometimes our lives (and enclaves) just get in the way. We are, so to speak, not up to the task.

By physically changing the places in which we live and work, it is hoped that ethnic enclaves can be a thing of the past and thoughtful experimentation and productive coalition building on urgent matters like climate change can become a thing of the future.

‘No Evidence’ for Arrest for US Albanians’ Deaths



President Aleksandar Vucic insisted that there is no evidence to detain a former senior policeman for the killings of the three Albanian-American Bytyqi brothers in Serbia in 1999

Aleksandar Vucic told the Serbian parliament on Monday evening that “there is no evidence of who committed the murder” of Ylli, Agron, and Mehmet Bytyqi – US citizens of Albanian origin who were killed in Serbia in 1999.

Vucic said that without evidence, no one be arrested based “only on media reports and lawyers’ claims”, because “Serbia is a serious state”.

The Bytyqi brothers’ family have repeatedly accused Vucic of failing to fulfil his promises to make progress towards clearing up the case.

They believe that Goran Radosavljevic, alias Guri, who was the commander of a police training centre where the brothers’ bodies were eventually found, is the main suspect in the case.

Radosavljevic, who is now a senior official of Vucic’s ruling Progressive Party, was briefly investigated over the crime by the Serbian prosecution, but never indicted. He denies any involvement.

Vucic said on Monday that Radosavljevic could not be arrested without evidence.

“People have been killed, the crime has been committed, but when looking for evidence from someone, they say ‘why you do not arrest Guri?’, and then we say ‘give us the evidence’, and then there is no evidence,” he said.

On Monday, the Bytyqi family appealed to Vucic to put pressure on Vlastimir Djordjevic, a former high-ranking Serbian interior ministry official who was jailed by the Hague Tribunal for war crimes in Kosovo, to reveal more information about the case and about other hidden graves from the Kosovo war.

They suspect that Djordjevic, who could be due for early release soon, was also implicated in the brothers’ deaths.

The three Bytyqi brothers went to fight for the Kosovo Liberation Army against Belgrade’s forces and were arrested by Serbian police after the war ended when they strayed over an unmarked boundary line between Serbia and Kosovo.

After serving their sentences for illegal border crossing, they were re-arrested as they were leaving the district prison in the town of Prokuplje in southern Serbia, taken to the police training centre in Petrovo Selo, and detained in a warehouse there.

They were then tied up with wire by unknown persons and driven to a garbage disposal pit, where they were executed with shots to the back of the neck on July 9, 1999.

During the trial of two Serbian police officers who were ultimately acquitted of transporting the brothers to the police training centre, witnesses claimed that Djordjevic gave them the order to drive the Albanian-Americans to Petrovo Selo. Radosavljevic has insisted he was on vacation when the brothers were killed. In December 2018, the US government banned him from entering the country because of his alleged involvement in human rights violations in the Kosovo war. He said at the time that he did not want to comment on the US State Department decision.

“I gave statements to the investigative authorities, I spoke about that a hundred times, so it doesn’t make sense that I speak about that,” Radosavljevic told Radio Free Europe.