Democracy versus Nation
The Post-Communist Hypernational State
and the Position of its ‘Ethnically Different’ Citizens

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Nationalism and Pluralism
Political allegiance and voting based exclusively on ethnic lines, observable in many Eastern and Central European states and especially in former Yugoslavia, inherently contradict political pluralism and civil society. Individuals are pushed not to act primarily as citizens but as members of the ethnic group. They are not supposed to recognize any social, economic, professional and other interests and behave as if all members of the ethnic group were in the same social position. The society gradually becomes blocked as regards progress and national elites are given the opportunity to exploit their co-nationals in the name of the ‘national interest’, which, conceived as the interest of the whole ethnic nation (including the ‘diaspora’), has been an obsession in Serbian, as well as Croatian and Slovenian, politics.

Extreme nationalism also operates against ethnically identical political opponents and their associations. Under its pressure, all political organizations become gradually submitted to a ‘test’ of patriotism and ethnic conformity: when, in the opinion of the self-appointed judges, an association, no matter how politically unambitious, does not embrace a modicum of nationalism, it is subjected to damnation with a corresponding epithet, that includes the ubiquitous ‘anti-’, but varies from country to country. In Romania, it is anti-Romanianism, in Serbia anti-Serbism, in Croatia, anti-Croatism etc. Animosity against co-nationals with insufficiently developed ethnic feelings eventually becomes greater than hatred against aliens. This results in wholesale regression in political life: some of the participants cease to be perceived as political opponents and become treacherous enemies, unworthy of respect and protection.

1. The following statement of Miroslav Toholj, one of the leaders of the Serbian Democratic Party in Bosnia-Herzegovina and until recently a minister in the government of the Bosnian Serb ‘Republic Srpska’, deserves to be quoted: ‘The Serbs have been finally deprived of their Serb name, they have been made citizens, which they will not accept’, in Vreme, Belgrade, 9 March 1992, p. 54.
3. Vojislav Seselj, the leader of the ultra-right Serbian Radical Party, who had supported the incumbent President of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, against Milan Panic, who was regarded as moderate and pro-Western, made the following statement after the results of the December 1992 elections: ‘For him (i.e. Panic) voted Hungarians, Albanians, Croats, Muslims and other treacherous strata’, Borba (Belgrade), 25 December 1992, p. 4. From the results, it was obvious that many ethnic Serbs had voted for Panic. One Ostoja Sibinčić, the leader of a group of Serb refugees from Croatia, has coined the widely used syntagm of ‘higher quality’ (kvalitetniji) Serbs, as distinct from the ‘low quality’ ones. Sibinčić is a simple man, but not so Zoran Djinđić, doctor of philosophy, translator of
When the government is in the hands of nationalists, it is in a good position to choose its weapons against the non-nationalist opposition, or, for that matter, anyone who could be labelled as such. They can be vilified by state-controlled media, physically attacked by untraceable nationalist vigilantes, and, ultimately, criminally prosecuted. Moderately nationalist governments may be under strong pressure from aggressive groups and may fear violent reactions if the law enforcement agencies show more determination to prevent nationalist violence and intimidation.

Common interests are best realized and defended when they are perceived to be in jeopardy. The tribal instinct is therefore most probably the result of fear for national identity, which overshadows all other considerations. Nationalist regimes have always shown strong resilience vis-à-vis economic sanctions and this has been proven again in the case of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Sanctions are assumed to induce rational reactions, but nationalist sentiments are not rational: under their influence people are prepared to sacrifice 'vulgar' rational interests in favour of 'noble' irrational demands of national survival, dignity and sovereignty. Abstract anxiety is indeed permeating most societies in post-communist transition: 'fear of yesterday, fear of today, and fear of tomorrow'. The defence of the ethnic group has become the primary concern.

Nationalism and the Idea of Human Rights
Not only is extreme nationalism hostile to true pluralism, but it poses a serious threat to human rights. As demonstrated, authorities hesitate to offer protection of life and limb against 'patriotic' hooligans, or, even worse, use them as accessories. Freedom of association becomes restricted to a circle of nationally acceptable groups. The laws against defamation, slander and libel do not operate and the freedom of expression becomes the property of the ruling elite. On the other hand, editors of publications belonging to the opposition