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**THE PICTURE OF CONTEMPORARY  
NATIONALISM – THE CASE OF CENTRAL  
AND EASTERN EUROPE<sup>1</sup>**

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**INTRODUCTION**

In contemporary Europe, there can be noted the overlapping and rivalry of the two significant tendencies, which are becoming stronger and stronger. On one hand, one can notice multilevel processes of integration and conditions connected with them and that are concerned with democracy, tolerance, globalization, etc. On the other hand, one can observe disintegrative factors of various kind, which refer to actions and postures connected with chauvinism, xenophobia, neo- fascism and separatism. In the second view, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), various aspects connected with nationalism seem to be of great significance. This is clearly reflected by the events which took place in, for example, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo or Macedonia.

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is outcome of others my publications on nationalism which were published in Polish as well as in English.

DEFINITIONS AND THEIR CONTEXT<sup>2</sup>

From etymological point of view, the term 'nationalism' is derived from the word 'natio' – the ethnic community, tribe, nation or national group, with which one feels more or less connected.

The above mentioned idea is discussed by Hans Kohn in his study 'The Idea of Nationalism'.<sup>3</sup> Kohn calls attention to the natural and historical tendency in which people become attached to the place where they were born and brought up as time passes by. Following to the author, this attachment is concerned both with the land and the countryside, as well as the group which uses the same language and was raised within the same history, culture and tradition.

However, the notion of nationalism is often seen and defined differently in Western Europe. In this part of Europe, nationalism is viewed mainly as a positive factor, integrating the nation and making it into an entity functioning in a harmonious way. On the contrary, in Central and Eastern Europe nationalism is mainly recognized as pejorative.<sup>4</sup>

The evidence of the above quoted distinction can be found in definitions suggested on one side, by scientists such as Louis Snyder, Hans Kohn, Anthony D. Smith or Elie Kedourie and, on the other side, by Paweł Śpiewak, Kazimierz Dziubek, Tadeusz Sokołowski, as well as many others.<sup>5</sup>

When writing about nationalism, a great number and diversity of its trends as well as of its forms has to be taken into account. One of the most significant distinctions in terminology is the difference between 'positive' and 'negative nationalism'. According to Isaiah Berlin, 'positive nationalism' is a phenomenon that goes beyond national egoism and accepts the right of all nations to their identity and independence. Apart from that, it is characterized by the fact that in case of a conflict of interests of several nations, it aims at peaceful and the quickest possible solution of the conflict.

As stated by Krzysztof Kwaśniewski, 'positive nationalism' is deprived of blindness and it declares that there are no 'better' or 'worse' nations. In this way, 'positive

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<sup>2</sup> See for example *Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (eds.) A. Motyl, San Diego 2000; *Nationalism Across the Globe* (eds.) W. Burszta, T. Kamusella, S. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2005.

<sup>3</sup> H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, New York 1944, pp. 1–24.

<sup>4</sup> K. Skubiszewski, *Nacjonalizm w dzisiejszej Europie*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe”, 1993, no 3, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of Nationalism*, Chicago 1990, p. 124; A. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, London 1971, p. 19; E. Kedourie, *Nationalism*, London 1969, p. 9; P. Śpiewak, *Ideologie i obywatele*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 168–169; about definitions of nationalism see also: *Nationalism*, J. Hutchinson, A. D. Smith (ed.), Oxford - New York 1994; U. Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism, A Critical Introduction*, Macmillan 2000; journal "Nations and Nationalism".

nationalism' on one hand respects nations' equality and, on the other hand, stresses their right to remain different.<sup>6</sup> Nationalism in the positive sense awakens and strengthens one's feeling of national identity. Often it leads to gaining or regaining independence or autonomy.

'Negative nationalism' exhibits different features. It can become a fanatic or even blind, as well as very dangerous ideology in which the common good and interest of a nation is understood in an extremely radical way. The fanatics believe that to achieve their goals any steps are allowed, or even, should be taken, irrespective of norms or limitations of any kind. In the 'negative nationalism' one's values are exaggerated and one's disadvantages are not noticed. In this ideology the other nations are discriminated and one's nation gains a special status and rights. In return, only aggression, ill-will and intolerance are offered.

In the above text the subject of analysis is 'negative nationalism' with its causes, dynamics, character as well as the possibility of prevention and counteraction.

#### **CHARACTERIZATION OF CONTEMPORARY NATIONALISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

The problem of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is very complicated and difficult to resolve. Metaphorically speaking, this problem looks like self-regulating system which is influenced by many mutually related factors: political, national, economic and historical, as well as other agents. Intensity, frequency as well as the strength of these factors can be different and depend on both the internal (e. g. social moods) and external conditions.

A great influence on the evolution and present forms of nationalism was had by the political and economic crash of the idea of socialism in the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union. One frequently compares these events to the mythological Pandora's box opening. As many experts state, it was the direct impulse bringing nationalistic tendencies to life. Before, they were (hidden) under ideological control. After the breakdown of Communism they arose with double strength, making emotions dominate over common sense. Old antagonisms, mutual demands and accusations came into life, but on the other hand, nations, groups and individuals identified the new situation as a

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<sup>6</sup> I. Berlin, *Nacjonalizm, zlekceważona potęga*, in: *Dwie koncepcje wolności*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 199–223; K. Kwaśniewski, *O nacjonalizmie inaczej*, „Sprawy Narodowościowe”, 1996, no 1 (8), p. 63.

chance to carry into effect their hopes for political independence or compensation for former detriments.

Anyone who tries to estimate the situation on the territory of CEE properly has to be aware that its most representative factors occur in different frequency, dynamics, strength or configuration. For example, economic agents have had less importance in Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary than in Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, or the countries of former Yugoslavia or the USSR.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover one has to take into account, that these qualitatively different reasons for defining social reaction are mutually related. For example, the situation of the labor market, except its strict economic meaning, sometimes has its ethnic or social aspects. Legal or illegal immigrants (in greater number), from time to time are identified by natives as a potential (or real) threat for them. Natives are afraid because in these cases the foreigners will most likely tend to get their jobs for lower pay and without any 'special requirements'.

In this region one could distinguish three main aspects of nationalism:

- 1) Its negative influence on internal situations in CEE countries. In this aspect one has to take into account the following problems: respect for the law, social life brutality, compactness and stability of each state and its institutions, relations to other nations, development and popularity or the most radical right-wing parties.
- 2) Its negative influence on external relations between countries and people who live in the region. Nationalism nearly always has its historical roots – old (sometimes mutual) antagonisms between communities or nations. At the same time it creates new sore points. It obviously result of increase of tensions between nations which weakens the cooperation and safety.
- 3) Its negative - direct and indirect – influence on all continents, particularly on CEE countries. (E. g., the recent war in Yugoslavia.)

The other important feature of nationalism in CEE is its deep historical connotations (roots). A significant part of animosities, tensions or conflicts occurring in ECE (similarly to Western Europe) has their roots in the history, which often goes hundred years back into the past.

Nationalism discussed here can also be considered an extremely complex issue. This is because it embodies both the elements of nationalism of 'majority groups' and of 'minority groups'. It comprises both the features of state and non- state nationalism. Furthermore, it can also be qualified as, so called, nationalism created 'from the bottom' – that is resulting from people's discontent, longing for revenge, or a desire to gain or regain a thing or a benefit.

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<sup>7</sup> S. Wojciechowski, *Nacjonalizm w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Wrocław 2001.

Nationalism can also be 'created from the top' - it can be propagated by the political, religious or military leaders. Also it can be inspired 'from the outside' - in this meaning it is the result of actions of the other countries or the third parties.

Nationalism can also be classified according to the two types of nationalism presented by Michael Billig.<sup>8</sup> The first type is called by Billig 'hot nationalism'. In this type of nationalism, conscious, noisy and spectacular actions are taken from time to time by the right-wing ideologists and their formations. These actions are closely connected with the widely understood national interest and usually lead to re-functioning or escalation of the formerly existing conflict in one part of the globe or the other. In this understanding, nationalism is treated as a regrettable disease, occurring mainly in the peripheral regions, such as the former Yugoslavia, Palestine or Kurdistan.<sup>9</sup>

According to Billig there is also another type of nationalism - the 'banal nationalism'. Seemingly it is quiet and unnoticeable but, in reality, common or even universal. Its nature doesn't comprise spectacular actions. But, as it can function without great words and gestures, it can create specific ways of thinking on the mass scale, concerning both the world and a single human being. These ways of thinking usually refer to the mechanisms of subconscious actions that create the picture of one's own national country. In this process, seemingly unimportant and unrelated symbols, as well as gestures operate, for example: the flag.

The most characteristic of CEE phenomena of nationalism can be divided into two groups of features:

- 1) First is a group of prejudices, stereotypes, (mutual) ill-dispositions - historical or political antagonisms between nations and communities. Very often 'the other', a stranger - minorities, foreigners (or their investments) - becomes the subject of ill-will. These problems are present (to a certain degree) in all countries of the region.
- 2) The second thing is the whole picture of internal dependencies (e. g. social and economic situation) and external relations (e. g. 'the other' as a potential aggressor).

These factors, in certain circumstances, stimulate or suppress the features which belong to the first group and in the same way they stimulate or suppress nationalism.

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<sup>8</sup> M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London 1995.

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Ch. Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism, Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, Oxford 2001; M. Cottam, R. Cottam, *Nationalism and Politics, The Political Behavior of Nations States*, Colorado 2001; M. Saatci, *Nation - states and ethnic boundaries: modern Turkish identity and Turkish - Kurdish conflict*, „Nations and Nationalism”, 2002, vol 3, part 4, pp. 549-564; B. Denith, *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia*, University of Minnesota Press 1994.

Forms of nationalism characteristic for present-day CEE could be understood as a process of intensification or reduction of their main reasons - factors which usually are periodically active.

The most important negative effects of nationalism operating in CEE are as follows:

- a) Weakening of international co-operation (e. g. relations between Visegrad partners). This phenomenon is the result of rivalry and mutual reluctance or ill-dispositions of former political or economic partners, (e. g. tensions between Czechs and Slovaks or Slovaks and Romanians.)
- b) Dynamic growth of the migration process as an effect of conflicts, tensions and acts of discrimination against minorities.<sup>10</sup> A good example of this is the migration of Romany from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania and the situation in Kosovo.
- c) Deepening of the old division lines and arising new ones. Some of them have their direct nationalistic reasons, other are indirectly connected with the phenomenon. These divisions are an effect of national, cultural, linguistic and religious differences. They are also influenced by economic and social inequalities between countries or areas. (E. g. differences between countries which came into being after the political crash of former Yugoslavia - like well developed Slovenia and poor Kosovo.)
- d) The next factor (strictly connected with the problem of nationalism) is development of radical rightist parties and organizations. They act (in different scope) in each country of the region. Chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism are often their most distinctive ideas. Sometimes they prove their rights by showing force. In many cases constraint appears to be their strongest argument. The most obvious reason for the development and radicalization of CEE nationalistic parties forms of activity was the crush of The Eastern Block. Those changes, on one hand, brought individual freedom, but on the other, became a source of increasing social discontent with the economic and political situation. Those difficulties were used by leaders of the most radical rightist parties to handle their own particular aims. Often the political slogan 'to blame the others (usually minorities) for any wrong' was the simplest way to broaden one's electorate. (E. g., in the Czech Republic and Romania the scapegoat became the Roma and in Slovakia, the Hun-

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<sup>10</sup> J. Bugajski, *Nations in Turmoil Conflict and Cooperation in Eastern Europe*, Westview 1995, pp. 54-62; G. Brunner, *Nationality Problems and Minority Conflicts in Eastern Europe*, Gütersloh 1996; M. Alongi, *Ethnic Conflict and European Security*, Carlisle, Barracks 1996; A. Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict*, Cambridge 2002; *Contemporary Nationalism in East Central Europe*, P. Latawski (ed.), St. Martin's Press 1995.

garian minority.) This illustrates that intensification of old prejudices or negative experiences is a possible reason for new political problems.<sup>11</sup>

- e) Another important consequence of nationalism is the dynamic increase of antagonisms and conflicts between CEE nations and countries. As I have stated it before, the main reason here is joining old prejudices with the most present factors. One could indicate two main reasons of mutual tensions.

First, territorial quarrels. Indirectly they are a result of The Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia crash. But their direct reason are differences between the historical situations of these nations and their current artificial frontiers - their authors never paid attention to the real living territory of each of the nation. (Historical and social factors were never taken into account by them.)

Antagonisms of a second type, as one is able to estimate it, are connected with the problem of (national, cultural, religious) identity and political or legal status of minorities.

Therefore it is necessary to do everything to prevent these dangerous scenarios as well as the present signs of nationalism. Fighting nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe is not an easy matter. In my opinion it is necessary to carry out the following actions: to regulate all national and territorial problems, support processes of democratization, international co-operation, political and economic transformation of post -communist countries, to eliminate mutual prejudices and stereotypes.

However, a question arises at this point. Is that really possible to overcome mutual ill- will, animosities and stereotypes occurring in CEE , as well as in the other parts of our globe?

The sceptics hold the opinion that it is not possible. They point to the fact that a lot is being said and written about reconciliation and cooperation among the nations; such a great number of agreements and treaties are being concluded, and yet the problem of hostility and prejudice still exists. What is more, it expands and gains strength. The best possible example for these phenomena can be tensions in the former Yugoslavia, riots in Albania or cases of racist terror in Germany, as well as many other events of similar character.

The supporters of this trend, on one hand stress hopelessness of international community, and on the other hand, the persistence or even inviolability of animosities deeply rooted in the human psyche. At this point, the problem of taking revenge- retaliation arises. The holders of the above mentioned views pay attention to the fact that in some cultural circles seeking vengeance, or vendetta for one's

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<sup>11</sup> M. Minkenberg, *Between Modernity and Anti-Modernity – the Situation of Right-wing Radicalism at the Turn of the Century*, "Przegląd Politologiczny", 1999, no 3–4, pp. 37–46; N. Fraser, *The voice of modern hatred*, Woodstock, Overlook Press 2001; *Democracy and right – wing politics in Eastern Europe in the 1990s*, J. Held (ed.), Boulder 1993; *White Noise*, London 1998.

dearest or for a dishonor suffered is not only one's right but even one's duty. If this is the case, evil generates evil, and hatred generates hatred. In this way, the effect of a vicious circle is produced. This, in turn, can last for ages and cannot be stopped or prevented by anybody or anything.

And yet, is that really that bad? Isn't there any chance to change this horrifying scenario? Are we really fated to only sad memories of once experienced sufferings and to reacting according to the rule 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'? I hope not. Obviously, in every person there is some sense of right and wrong; it isn't constant aggression, fight or hostility that lies in the human nature, but rather friendship, understanding and cooperation. These, and not any other values, constitute currently functioning civilization based on rules and norms of democracy.