Professor Pål Kolstø

# *Strategies of Symbolic Nation-Building in South Eastern Europe*

The book Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe, edited by Pål Kolstø, represents an attempt to assess the success of the nation-building processes in South Eastern Europe. The states analyzed in this book are those of the Western Balkans as defined prior to Croatia's EU accession - the states created by the dissolution of Yugoslavia, including Albania. The book consists of nine chapters, seven of which analyze each of the states of the region – Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo[1], Macedonia and Albania – in that order. Each of the country-specific chapters is written by a different author, mostly from the state in question. A total of ten authors took part in writing this book, including the editor Pål Kolstø, who wrote the introduction and co-wrote the concluding chapter.

This book addresses the process of nation-building defined as "strategies of identity consolidation within states" (p. 3), distinguishing it from state-building, understood as "administrative, economic and military groundwork of functional states" (*ibid.)* and the US usage of the term nation-building, which refers to "institutional construction and reconstruction in failed states" (*ibid.)*. While much has been written about different nation-building strategies and nationalism in the region, there was no reliable data on the successes of these processes. This book aims to fill that gap in the literature.

The book can be seen from two perspectives. First, as a collection of separate papers on the topic of nation-building and its successes in each of the countries of the region, and second, as a comprehensive study on the symbolical nation-building in the region as a whole, in which identical methodological tools are used to allow for comparison between countries and the overall assessment of the nation-building process. This

......................................

1    Despite the dispute over its status, Kosovo is considered to be a state in this book.

dual nature of this book provided for both its most important strengths and weaknesses.

Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe relies on the survey data gathered by IPSOS Strategic Marketing in 2011 in each of the Western Balkan states, with some survey questions being country-specific, and others uniform in order to allow for cross-country comparison. This data was available to all of the researchers prior to the writing of the chapters, with each chapter seemingly being written independently. However, all of them used the same framework of analysis – examining religious culture, ethnic culture, historical imagination and geographical imagination.

In the chapter on Croatia, Vjeran Pavlaković touches on the importance of the Croatian Homeland War narrative and the successes of the nation-building elites of the 1990s. Ana Dević discusses the problem of low loyalty in the post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina and the possibilities of fostering a common national or supra-national Bosnian identity in this state. The chapter on Serbia, written by Vladan Jovanović, describes the attempts to reconstruct the Serbian national identity after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the regained independent statehood. Jelena Džankić describes the partially-successful nation-building process in Montenegro, where it is rivalled by a parallel Serbian nation-building process and hindered by highly complex relations between Montenegrin and Serbian identities. Vjollca Krasniqi writes about nation-building in Kosovo and the attempts to create a multicultural civic nation despite strong ethnic divisions and the fact that Albanians represent an overwhelming majority of the population. The chapter on Macedonia, written by Ljupcho S. Risteski and Armanda Kodra Hysa, describes the attempts to define the symbols of the independent Macedonian state and the obstacles to this process due to external, as well as internal inter-ethnic pressures. Finally, Cecilie Endresen addresses the nation-building in Albania as a virtually completed process, with religious and otherwise very significant north/south and left/right divides not jeopardizing the national unity of the Albanian state.

Looking at the book as a single piece of work, it represents a very interesting read on the successes of the nation-building processes in the

Western Balkans and is backed by some very intriguing and useful data. Some of the data is related to specific issues, such as the frequency of religious practice, identification with certain territorial imagined spaces or the Yugoslav nation, while the most important piece of data is the Loyalty index, according to which states are ranked by the level of loyalty of their citizens. This loyalty score is later analyzed in relation to different factors such as ethnic and religious diversity and levels of democratization and economic development in order to discover a crucial element that leads to loyalty of the citizens of the Western Balkan states.

Some of the findings in this book are rather interesting. For example, on the loyalty scale, states were rankedin the following descending order: Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The major factor found to influence the loyalty was ethnicity, with other factors such as economic or democratic development or even religious diversity being much less reliable. Another interesting finding is that while loyalty of the second-largest group in the state is most frequently the lowest, other ethnic minority groups can actually show very high loyalty to the state, in some cases even higher than the titular ethnicity. The authors very carefully examine the implications of these findings and the possible strategies states can use to pursue their nation-building goals in such circumstances.

However, the analysis of the data gathered via the IPSOS Strategic Marketing survey takes up only a small part of the book, with the majority being dedicated to examining the specifics of nation-building in each of the states of the region. While all the country-specific chapters use the same analytical framework, these chapters nevertheless differ greatly from each other. Most of them describe cleavages in the respective states and the relation of different groups to the nation-building processes. They are written in different styles and by different authors, focusing on different issues and nation-building aspects. This limits the usefulness of the book for a deeper cross-country comparison and places it somewhere between a single study and a multi-paper volume.

But while this diversity weakens the book when perceived as a single study, it contributes greatly to the quality of its individual chapters. For example, while Vjeran Pavlaković masterfully analyzes the left-right cleavage in the

Croatian society on the topic of the Second World War and the unity of the Croatian public on the issue of the Croatian War of Independence – thus proving the clear success of the Homeland War narrative, Jelena Džankić critically examines the very notions of ethnicity and nationhood on the example of Montenegro, where nation-building process has been seriously challenged. Therefore, the country-specific chapters of the book examine the most important traits and dimensions of nation-building in these states, making them very useful as individual papers.

The book Strategies of Symbolic Nation-building in South Eastern Europe undoubtedly represents an important piece of work and is strongly recommended for all those working on the topic of nationalism and nation-building in the Western Balkans or in any of the states included in this study. By both offering important statistical data for the whole region and an in-depth analysis of nation-building in each of the states, it can be very useful both for researchers and the general public.

*Nikola Burazer[2]*

2    CEU Erasmus+ Internship Mobility Program at the Institute for Development and International Relations; nikola.m.burazer@gmail.com