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The Nation and Nationalism in Europe: An Introduction

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Alexander’s interference, in any case, Pašić eventually became Prime Minister of the Kingdom. In contrast, Trumbić—even though he was relatively young—never reached high politics again after Paris.

As the main characters of the story, Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić fade away from our attention in Section Three, as the author dramatically illustrates the introduction of dictatorship in Yugoslavia. On 20 June 1928, a Serb deputy shot five Croat deputies during a parliamentary debate. King Alexander took the opportunity to dissolve parliament and abolish the constitution. While many Croats hoped for the end of centralism in Belgrade, Alexander advanced it, which led some Croats to form the radical Ustaša—an organisation behind the 1934 assassination of the King. The author thus synthesises that the Zagreb–Belgrade rivalry included a tremendous personal touch in it, whether it was from Pašić, Trumbić or Alexander.

The author seems to reject a hypothesis that the Kingdom was the creation of the Paris Peace Conference in order to contain the ethnic conflicts in the Western Balkans. Throughout the book, the author reminds us that both Pašić and Trumbić believed in one nation, ‘Yugoslavia’—the home of all South Slavs. This review began with our memory of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, but we often forget that the same region was previously the nest of passion for unity. Perhaps, we will find more intriguing questions on unity after reading this book.

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While yet one more introduction to nationalism might be thought to be redundant, Karolewski and Suszycki adopt innovative schemes to classify and interpret perspectives on the nation and nationalism. Instead of the common division between modernism and primordialism, they distinguish between functionalist (Gellner, Greenfeld, Miller, Tamir), constructivist (Anderson, Cillia, Wodak, Billig), genealogical (Smith) and rationalist approaches (Hechter) to the nation (Chapter One). Drawing on social psychology, identity politics and rational choice, Karolewski and Suszycki focus on the constitutive element of the nation, namely national identity, and discuss its effects: cognition, self-esteem, legitimacy and dilemmas solution (Chapter Two). They also embark on an innovative systematisation of research foci on the relationship between nationalism and modernity, democracy and distributive justice (Chapter Three), while they devise a peculiar typology of nationalism based upon six specific meta-criteria that lead to six distinctions of nationalism (Chapter Four). The authors also engage in the heuristic construction of four overlapping, interacting and resilient levels that nationalism may be experienced at, emanate from or be articulated at. They rely on this analytical framework to illustrate varieties of nationalism from eight selected countries, for example the micro-level nationalism of Latvian individuals, who feel threatened by the Russian-speaking minority; the meso-level instrumental nationalist discourse of political agents, such as Vlaams Belang; the macro-level anti-immigration discourse of Italian governments; and the supranational German strategy for higher footing in the international arena (Chapters Five and Six). The last two chapters explore two suggested new varieties of nationalism, that is, regional nationalism and Euro-nationalism, and delineate the research field concerning nationalism in relation to globalisation, religion and gender.

This novel framework and, perhaps, the concise nature of the book raise a set of pivotal issues. The proclaimed ‘conceptual division between the nation and nationalism’ (p. 13) appears to be rather superficial, since the separation of the phenomenon from the ideology is controversial. Obviously, the examination of the relationship between nationalism and modernity involves, in essence, the timing of the emergence of the nation. Besides, the democratic principles of representation, participation and distributive justice implicitly presuppose a liberal democratic nation-state within which to operate,
which cannot, in turn, be dissociated from the national affiliation that nationalism forges. For the same reasons, the typology of nationalism is, of course, not exhaustive (in other words multicultural nationalism is missing despite being raised in Chapter Six), sometimes overlapping (the ontological assessment of nationalism intersects with the civic–ethnic dichotomy) and relatively controversial (the use of the very same authors to delineate contrasting nationalisms, for example pp. 98–99). Such a sharp polarising classification rather overlooks the ever-shifting nature of nationalism. Despite the many facets of nationalism, such as civic or ethnic, manifest or banal, elitist or massive, good or bad, at its very heart lie the same principles: the praise of the Self and the exclusion of the Other. Furthermore, state-seeking nationalism may swiftly transform into state-building and a marginalised nationalist political group or movement may become elitist under certain circumstances. The authors’ goal of innovation may also have caused a few inconsistencies, for example Anderson is deployed in both the second and third conception of nation (pp. 4–5) and Tamir is used as both evidence and critique of the functionalist perspective (pp. 17, 26).

This introduction to nation and nationalism undertakes to portray the conceptualisation of novel concepts, namely regional nationalism and supranational Euro-nationalism (Chapter Seven), both contradictory in terms. Karolewski and Suszycki describe thoroughly both regional identity and the phenomenon of regionalism providing factors that enforce it, while they explore the construction of a European collective identity through the deployment of bolstering symbols, mechanisms and images. Nevertheless, there is a risk of overgeneralisation and of theoretical impasse, if any collective identity and any identity technologies be represented as national. Such a perspective would eliminate any potential anticipation of a world without nations and nationalism: either ‘the nation-state represents the end of history’ or ‘there might be post-national identities’ which nonetheless construct ‘a new nation-state at a higher level’, that is the European nation (pp. 198–99). Moreover, the presentation of regional nationalism and Euro-nationalism in Chapter Seven is rather inconsistent with the determination of levels of nationalism as provided in Chapter Five, where the authors imply that nationalism cannot transcend the nation-state (p. 110). In addition, the concept of regional nationalism contradicts the distinction between national and regional identity or solidarity, namely if regional is distinct to national identity, the concept of regional nationalism is rather weak. Last, the concept of regional nationalism encompasses uneven phenomena, such as Scottish and Lega Nord separatist movements: Scottish separatism has substantially different characteristics to Lega Nord’s; notably the former has a very strong reference and affiliation to a distinct nation/ethnie, whereas the latter lacks it.

Drawing on an abundant literature, Karolewski and Suszycki offer a concise, but thoughtful, overview and a succinct, critical assessment of theoretical perspectives on and debates over the nation and nationalism. This is the quality of the book. However, perhaps due to its small scope and obsession with innovative schemes, the personal theoretical views of the authors are not sufficiently clarified and their methodological approach, at some points, encounters inconsistencies.

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