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21,000 Kosovo Serbs and counting seek Russian citizenship

an Anarchist perspective

Alan Jakšić

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Last week, we heard news that over 20,000 Serbs in Kosovo are seeking Russian citizenship. This news has come about not long after recent clashes had occurred at the border posts between Serbia and Kosovo, which occurred after local Serbs in the mainly-Serb north of Kosovo had placed barricades in response to Priština's imposition of Kosovan state customs officers. However, most of those Serbs applying to become Russian citizens live in various enclaves further south from the major clashes in the north. Also, away from the border crossings, a shooting incident occurred between ethnic Serbs and Albanians in the divided city of **Kosovska Mitrovica** (or simply **Mitrovica**), in which two Serbs got injured and a third got killed.

As far as Serb nationalists are concerned, this is a painful reminder of how the Serbian people are losing their country bit by bit. And what adds fuel to their anger is how the government in Bel-

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grade seems to be doing nothing about it. For me as an Anarchist Serb, however, I view this as a failure on the part of both states: a failure on the Serbian state, that its own citizens have lost faith in the country they recognise as their own to the extent that they're seeking another country's citizenship; and a failure on the Kosovan state, for not being able — or perhaps willing — to integrate these people, who still don't consider that region to be outside of Serbia, let alone recognise it as a separate country! And generally speaking, I see this as another failure of the whole concept of the **nation state**, another in a *long* list of failures and *disasters* stretching back to the 19th century as far as the Balkans are concerned, and especially over the course of the last 20 years in the former Yugoslavia.

Nation states are supposed to be states for one specific ethnic group, whose leaders and army will protect them within defined borders, even though many people within those borders do not belong to the ethnic group that that state is named after, and thus represents foremost. These people are considered **ethnic minorities** in relation to the **majority population** in such a state. And as it happens, all Balkan states have *numerous* ethnic minorities living within their borders.

However, wars have occurred when, in one country, one ethnic minority, led by hardline nationalists, seeks to unite their home region, in which they constitute the majority, with the neighbouring state that bears their ethnic name, which they see as their **mother country**. By uniting their homeland with their mother country, they would be increasing its borders, landmass and population, while “liberating” themselves from the state their homeland is already a part of, which they usually accuse of having treated them really badly in the past on the basis of their ethnicity! What I've just described to you is often regarded as “irredentism”, of which there are many examples in Balkan history, and Kosovo is one of them.

But — and this is a BIG but — even in such regions, in which one ethnic minority actually constitutes the majority, there will also be ethnic minorities, who live there among the majority population of that particularly region in that country. And quite often the case will be that one of those ethnic minorities in such regions may actually constitute the *majority population* in that country *as a whole*! And it's precisely *that* ethnic minority that will demonstrate strong allegiance to the country their home region belongs to, even though they don't constitute the majority population in the region they live in!

In Kosovo, there have been ethnic tensions between the majority Albanians and minority Serbs for decades, tensions that not even the former Communist régime at the time could properly resolve, yet caused many Serbs to leave their homes in the autonomous province for central Serbia. Following **Tito**'s death, Kosovo Albanian students lead huge protests calling for Kosovo's status to be raised to that of a republic within the Yugoslav federation. Then came **Milošević**, who practically revoked the province's autonomy and made life very hard for the majority population in that province, to say the least. And in time, came a war which caused two waves of ethnic cleansing: the first wave was experienced by Albanians, and the second by Serbs and other non-Albanians; each wave being traumatic for either group(s). And let's not forget the smaller wave of ethnic cleansing that occurred during the **2004 pogrom** against Kosovo Serbs in the full view of the then **KFOR**, which should've protected them. And finally, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008, and has since been recognised as an independent and sovereign state by well over 80 states around the world. Needless to say, Serbia has refused to recognise Kosovo's independence since its proclamation.

So have relations between Serbs and Albanians improved since independence? Well, I can't really answer that question, since I neither live there nor have I ever been there. Though from what I've heard, Serb and Albanian gangsters seem to be getting on really well there and have done so for years, despite Kosovo's political instability!

In the sporting world, Kosovo Albanian sportspeople wish to showcase their sporting talents in international competitions while representing Kosovo, though failing that, they may choose to represent Albania or another country — so long as it's *not* Serbia!

Recently, we've had clashes at the border in the north, and now, there are 21,000 plus Kosovo Serbs, who wish to become citizens of Russia! This, in my Anarchist opinion, demonstrates a failure on the part of both the Serbian and Kosovan state, as explained above, but also as another example of the *numerous* failures that have come about due to the whole concept of the nation state, fuelled by ethnic nationalism. Nevertheless, nationalists under various banners will continue to justify the existence of their own native — or chosen — nation states, while dismissing others they bear a grudge against!