

# The ambivalent role of diaspora engagement for the homeland in the Balkans

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**Abstract:** *Diasporas have become significant role players in the democratic lives of their countries of origin. Such dynamic is particularly evident in the South East European context, a region characterised in contemporary history by massive movement, displacement and outflow of populations. This article aims at exploring the dichotomies that the diasporas' political, economic and cultural involvement in the homeland present, including the discourse over its positive and negative features, hence tackling the issue of its potential to give rise to controversy. In fact, in addition to exerting a pro-active role for the democratic and socio-economic development of their home countries, diaspora communities may also embrace antagonistic approaches, countering certain transformation processes, state-building agendas or favouring one elite rule over another. Through a set of cases from the South East European context, the research addresses the regional, therefore global, question of how diaspora groups transnationally participate in the life of their home states, what their objectives are and how they may hinder democratisation processes, acting as incubators or accelerators of – potentially violent – change.*

**Key words:** *diaspora; South East Europe; Balkans; democratisation*

## 1 Introduction

The word 'diaspora' has Greek roots: It derives from the verb *spiro* (to sow or to scatter) and the preposition *dia* (over). However, the origins of its contemporary use lie in the Jewish tradition and the idea of the 'Babylonian exile' connoted by expulsion, persecution and enslavement and implying the prospect of return. By definition, those in exile are to cultivate their native traditions and culture in preparation for a return to

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the 'promised land' (Hockenos 2003: 8). However, the Babylonian model presents the narrowest possible identity for diaspora groups. More recently a lively discourse that has arisen around the notion of global diaspora, the Babylonian 'victim typology', is deemed inadequate to make sense of today's heterogeneous transnational communities as it overlooks other kinds of migrations, such as economic emigration or voluntary expatriation. In this sense, diasporas if so strictly defined appear rather anachronistic in the age of globalisation (Hockenos 2003: 9). In this sense, a contemporary generic definition of diaspora should comprise all those members of a common ethnic-national group living outside the borders of their native home territory, hence primarily highlighting the two key criteria of 'ethnicity' and 'foreign residency'. Such a flexible definition includes immigrant families and their subsequent generations, as eventually a diaspora is made up of individuals who define themselves as such and are accepted as its members.

Global interest in the role of diasporas increased in the 1990s, when global remittances surpassed the total of the Western investments for aid cooperation. Consequently, with the increase of interest in the engagement of emigrants in the affairs of the homeland, diaspora studies became a growing field of research in Western academia in Europe, incorporating the disciplines of political science and international relations in a field that was predominantly centred on sociology and anthropology, but which suddenly became relevant for issues of securitisation and democratisation. In a somewhat domino effect, the rising relevance of diaspora as a political actor called for the rapid creation of manifold specialised institutions that were gathered for the first time by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) at the Diaspora Ministerial Conference in 2013, counting 548 high-level governmental representatives from over 140 states (Gamlen et al 2013: 4).

Today we know that diasporas' attitude towards the homeland differs greatly due to its transnational exposure: Diaspora communities can be either politically re-socialised in the host country, hence disengaging from the homeland's affairs, or conversely acquire a complementary dual loyalty, developing forms of long-distance nationalism. For those diaspora communities that wish to remain committed, political, economic and cultural participation are the main realms of their potential engagement, and can be used to pursue often contrasting and antithetical aims (Chaudhary 2016: 6).

By answering the question of how and why diasporas transnationally engage for the homeland through scholarly works on diaspora mobilisation (Hockenos 2003; Koinova 2017), post-territorial citizenship (Ragazzi & Balalovska 2011; Štiks 2010) and culture and transnationalism (Chih-Yun 2010; Kilduff & Corley 1999), but also resorting on primary data and examples from the South East European (SEE) region, the article questions the frequent attitude to glorify or deify the diaspora and its potential, shedding light on marginal aspects or even threats of diaspora engagement for or against the ongoing post-conflict normalisation and democratisation process in the Balkans.

## 2 Historical background

Due to the turbulent history of the region, migration has been a long-known phenomenon in South East Europe. The territories that formed part of Yugoslavia<sup>1</sup> have been countries of emigration, both permanent and temporary. A variety of reasons influenced people to leave their homeland, most notably political, social and economic factors. The countries of destination also varied and reflected the differences in motivation. In order to understand the behaviour of today's diasporas and current migration trends, an analysis of previous migration waves needs to be presented.

Four waves of Yugoslav citizens' migration can be outlined until the current twenty-first century migration flow. The earliest wave preceded the formation of the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (Kingdom of SHS), which since its beginning can be traced back to the Balkan wars (1912-1913), but which has affected the territory that later became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The main characteristic of this period is that migrants were mostly unskilled and uneducated people whose destination targets were mostly overseas (Kosinski 1978: 315). The emigration continued until World War II, but due to a high return, it did not contribute much to the creation of solid diaspora communities. During the war, more than half a million people were affected by forced resettlements. Citizens of the Socialist Federal Yugoslavia moved to different republics within it, while ethnic minorities such as Jews and Germans were later on expelled from the territory (Bade et al 2011: 172). The second wave is marked by emigrations driven by political-ideological motivations after the end of World War II, when two particularly significant groups fled the newly-established Communist regime: on the one hand, the group of political opponents, including Serbian royalists and individuals who did not support the regime, and, on the other, members of the fascist Ustasha regime who by and large found a safe place in Latin America (Kosinski 1978: 318). At the same time war-torn European countries needed a labour force in order to regenerate their economies, which posed a great opportunity for Yugoslav emigration. This influenced the third period, which started in the 1960s when the borders opened for temporary workers (Kosinski 1978: 322)<sup>2</sup> and the opportunity was given to economic migrants. According to the census of 1971, just under 600 000 Yugoslav immigrants were situated in Western Europe, while estimates from 1973 exceed one million (Baučić 1973). Many of these guest workers never returned to their homelands and today constitute a significant part of the Yugoslav diaspora. The main destination was Germany, where around 1,7 million South-Eastern Europeans were registered in 1999: 737 204 from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; 213 945 Croats; 167 690 from Bosnia-Herzegovina; and 49 420 from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Bade 2011: 175). The fourth period followed the wars of the 1990s. The

1 The term 'Yugoslavia' (land of the Southern Slavs) here connotes the territories that are part of the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (1918), later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929); its successor the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1992) and the states that followed its breakup: Slovenia; Croatia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1991); the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (1992); Montenegro (2006); Serbia (2016); and Kosovo – under UNSC Resolution 1244/99 (2008).

2 The Yugoslav government took this step influenced by rising unemployment rates, caused by the 1965 economic reforms.

number of refugees in this phase was even larger than previously, as over 4 million people overall were affected. Most people migrated and were forced to move to other federated republics of Yugoslavia and temporarily even further, when the main destination countries included Germany, Austria, Switzerland, but also Italy and Greece (Bonifazi 2006: 16).

The new century brought about changes to the migration processes, especially in the early years when forces generating international migrations experienced a peak, and human mobility became an essential aspect of global integration, making this century the 'age of mobility' (Castels 2014). South East European countries continued showing high emigration levels, despite them having been low during the early years (Ljuboja 2015). These states continue to suffer from the consequences of war and the challenging post-socialist economic environment (Thrändhardt (undated)). The main 'drivers' of the emigration process in these countries are social and economic inequalities, and labour demand and demographic changes, which encourage people to leave their homes in search of a better life (Castles 2013). The case of Serbia is illustrative, as 30 000 citizens decide to leave their homes annually. Serbs, Kosovars and Bosnians are mostly based in Central Europe, specifically Switzerland, Austria and Germany, whereas Albanians are mostly concentrated in neighbouring countries, such as Italy and Greece (Thrändhardt (undated)). The socio-economic effects of migration are most visible in Albania, as one in four Albanians is a migrant. On the one hand, Albania has one of the highest demographic growths in Europe. On the other, the structure of the population is changing, as emigration is gender and age selective, leading to a reduction in the number employable young people (Krasteva 2013). Among the countries of the region, apart from Albania, citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are the most mobile, as they form the largest immigration group in Slovenia, the third largest in Austria and the fifth largest in Sweden. The number of emigrants reached a remarkable number of 1 350 000 people, which is also characterised by the tendency of a terminal decrease of returns, as 'sustainable return' in terms of the right housing, health care and employment is not guaranteed (Krasteva 2013). However, interest in migration towards the neighbouring Balkan countries escalated by more than six times. The attractiveness of the region could be seen as a symbolic reconciliation, but also as an increase in the opportunities for employment that it provides (Krasteva 2013). Nevertheless, the profile of the migrants in this region is very important, since they are young people with at least secondary education, motivated by unemployment and inadequate housing to look for better opportunities abroad. These people often are single, which grants them bigger mobility in search for better work and the possibility of a lengthier, perhaps permanent, stay in the destination country (Ljuboja 2015). The greatest loss of economic migration today is the creation of brain drain, as the countries in the region could take advantage of their own young academic cadre as their own intellectual potential, which is nowadays respected only if it creates more employment opportunities (Ljuboja 2015).

In terms of future projections, despite the need for cheap labour, the demand in Western Europe is gradually decreasing mainly because of the economic crisis and its consequences, while more than 20 years after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, the SEE region continues to experience significant social, economic and political tensions (Williams 2017) that

might reasonably act as continuous drawing factors for, especially, youth emigration (Ljuboja 2015).

### 3 Economic impact

After the wars of the 1990s, the economic development of the region has relied largely on international assistance and financial remittances by the diasporas. Nowadays, the remittances come mostly from the newly-emerged diasporas, that is, from people who migrated due to better economic opportunities abroad. The remittances by individuals living abroad play a substantial role in the economic development of the region, mainly because the wages in developed economies are nearly five times larger than those in developing SEE countries (Topxhiu & Krasniqi 2017). Remittances sent to the region generally reduce the level of poverty, leading to human capital accumulation, entrepreneurship, enhanced small business investments, better access to information and technologies, and improving access to formal financial sector services. The scale of remittances sent is more than three times larger than the official development assistance. The 2016 World Bank Report states that three Western Balkan countries, Albania (12,12 per cent), Bosnia and Herzegovina (12,87 per cent) and Kosovo (16,68 per cent), are among the top ten countries receiving the largest remittances in comparison to the percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) (Topxhiu & Krasniqi 2017: 30):

**Table 1: Size of diaspora remittances to home country**

YEAR	Albania	Kosovo	Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina
2005	15,81	18,77	3,62	5,6	8,8	18,15
2006	15,12	18,9	3,88	5,9	8,7	16,7
2007	13,72	19,01	4,14	5,35	9,34	17,03
2008	14,49	18,66	4,1	6,6	7,2	14,23
2009	14,26	18,66	4,05	7,31	10,91	12,08
2010	13,34	17,27	4,12	8,1	10,43	10,62
2011	12,04	14,93	4,14	8,85	8,52	10,51
2012	11,53	14,61	4,04	9,73	8,71	10,73
2013	8,56	14,97	3,48	9,48	8,84	10,79
2014	8,64	14,87	3,23	9,4	8,36	11,38
2015	9,19	15,08	3,05	9,48	9,07	11,14
2016	8,81	14,82	2,67	9,49	8,47	11,06
COUNTRY AVERAGE (2005-2016)	12,12	16,68	3,71	7,94	8,91	12,87

Post-conflict economies often are disadvantageous and commonly characterised by weak regulations and property rights. This often hinders the economic engagement of the diasporas due to the lack of support or the frequent barriers to potential investments in their home country (Williams 2017). Therefore, a large amount of often informal remittances are directed to household consumption (Williams 2017). In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) creates and sponsors projects that seek to engage the diaspora based on support of investment, and matching grant schemes, usually funded by Western European countries (Williams 2017). This mostly occurs in light of a lack of active national policies with regard to diasporas, which are traditionally hard to achieve in highly-divided societies such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Williams 2017). Publically available data on remittances in Bosnia and Herzegovina are based on official remittance flows, whereas unofficial remittances are not recorded (Efendic, Babic & Rebmann 2014: 15). Despite all these difficulties, diaspora is an important financial anchor for this country, which in 2012 received €1,75 billion in remittances (Efendic, Babic & Rebmann 2014: 15). According to a 2007 IOM report, the rate remittance inflow to Bosnia and Herzegovina grew the most over the period 1995-2004 in comparison to all other countries, which made BIH the sixth largest receiver of remittances, as a percentage of a country's GDP, in the world (Efendic, Babic & Rebmann 2014: 16). Considering that BIH has had a continuously high current account deficit, remittances are needed for sustainability, stability and functioning of the domestic economy, both current and potential (Efendic, Babic & Rebmann 2014: 16).

Compared to BIH, approximately 22 per cent of the population of Serbia is living abroad, and as at 2010 almost 22 per cent of these people sent more than €6 000 in remittances to their families, while 40 per cent spent between €600 and €6 000 (Baird & Klekowski von Koppenfels 2010: 38). The remittances are used mainly for consumption and daily needs such as clothing, utilities, rent, food, as well as housing improvements, but not for debt payments, education or investment. More than one-quarter of the remittances is used for savings for a house in the country or in the region, or buying land or travelling (Baird & Klekowski von Koppenfels 2010: 38). In addition, Serbia is also working on brain circulation and brain gain, mainly through intermediary organisations, with cultural and educational policies that promote international cultural dialogue and academic exchange (Stopic 2013).

As for Albania, remittances and remittance services are among the most important financial aspects of the diaspora. Financial incomes have had relevant political and economic effects in Albania. Because of the growing emigration, the 1997 remittance inflow induced a rapid recovery of the economy. Remittances usually enter through means other than banks, with diasporas directly bringing in money or sending it through relatives and friends. This is considered to stem from psychological, practical and historical reasons (Minister of State on Diaspora). The common behaviour of using remittances for personal consumption has a positive effect of reducing poverty and enhancing economic growth (Topxhiu & Krasniqi 2017: 32). World Bank research has revealed that financial remittances have an impact in reducing 3,5 per cent of the overall number of poor people in the SEE region (Topxhiu & Krasniqi 2017: 33).

Nevertheless, the phenomenon also has a negative impact. Tempestuous post-conflict and transitional dynamics present in South East Europe have led to a rapid increase in organised crime. Smuggling routes that were initially used as escape routes for migrants and to supply of arms to militant groups became the main avenues for trafficking illegal goods (Natarajan 2011) as the emergence of drug trafficking through Western Europe (Arsovska & Basha 2012). Alongside drug smuggling, financial remittances from diasporas were used for illegal migrations, the smuggling of alcohol and cigarettes, as well as to encourage activities such as plundering and looting and 'taxation of humanitarian assistance' (Siani-Davis 2003). In 2008 the US State Department estimated that drug-related crimes in BiH accounted for almost 2 per cent of the country's economy, accounting for more than 500 million BAM a year in earnings (CIN 2008). Furthermore, reports on drug smuggling reveal that not only do the diasporas provide financial support for this type of crime, but it also creates a safe haven for criminals, by allowing them to pursue business through their companies: Some cases illustrate Balkan-based transport companies being involved in drug trafficking from the region to Western Europe, especially Scandinavian countries (CIN 2008). In 2002 the OSCE estimated that around 200 000 women in the Balkans were victims of a smuggling network that extends to the EU (Institute for War and Peace Reporting). Trafficking in women was conducted mostly through Bulgaria and Romania, where many were sold to people from Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro and subsequently transported to Italy and other EU countries.

Despite the negative aspects and the creation of a culture of dependency (Topxhiu & Krasniqi 2017: 34), remittance inflow has a great potential to improve the overall livelihood of recipients and create opportunities for investment. Nevertheless, the question of other positive aspects such as creditworthiness of recipients, economic stability, and designing policies that could adequately facilitate a productive use of remittances, still remains a challenge.

#### 4 Political impact

Over the last decades, diaspora communities have shown an increasing interest in the origin countries' affairs and their growing influence in the political arena has been evident. Reasons for this could be found in the globalisation process which has provided cheaper air travel and communication, while the internet has also allowed people to easily stay in touch, becoming a prime instrument for mobilisation. A product of these processes is a 'digital diaspora' that supports common national interests and identity.<sup>3</sup> Ragazzi argues that the re-configuration of the nation as global, combined with the inclusion of diasporas by the origin country, marks the emergence of post-territorial citizenship (Ragazzi & Balalovska 2011: 5-7). A conception of national belonging transcends the territory of the nation state, and citizenship is distributed within the diaspora, while governmental agencies and ministries make it possible for diasporas to be included in the voting system. In this way the diasporas can constitute a

3 All countries of the former Yugoslavia have official and semi-official websites for bringing together diasporas and providing them with relevant information.

vital political asset and the state's regulation of voting from abroad can tell a lot about how possible diaspora engagement is perceived.

A number of former Yugoslav countries have accepted an ethnically exclusive citizenship policy and then secured seats in parliament for diaspora representatives. By doing so, these countries displayed their belief in the positive impact of diasporas on their origin country. Prime examples are Macedonia and Croatia, which demonstrate that motives for including diasporas can also be found in the fact that diaspora members are staunch supporters of the ruling parties. In Croatia all diaspora seats used to go to the Croatian Democratic Union (CDU),<sup>4</sup> with major political consequences, as in 2000, when it prevented the opposition party from achieving an absolute majority<sup>5</sup> in parliament, or in 2007, when it provided the CDU with the necessary seats to form a government.

Contrary to these citizenship policies aimed at attracting all members of certain ethnic groups, Montenegro has since early 2008 forbidden dual citizenship. Given the size of the Serb minority (28 per cent according to the 2011 census), as well as many Montenegrins living in Serbia (Stiks 2010: 31), such a move of the Montenegrin government indicates the fear of Serbian influence on its politics, and hence diasporas' kinship is regarded as negative.<sup>6</sup> Another example of imposing boundaries on diasporas' engagement is evident in the regulation established by Serbia. Despite the fact that Serbia has facilitated a citizenship policy enabling ethnic Serbs and those considering Serbia as their nation to acquire citizenship, it has not facilitated the voting process to its diasporas, or secured seats for diasporas in parliament. This practice has been striking considering the size of the Serbian diaspora, but is explainable if diaspora preferences are analysed: While their engagement in the 1990s supported Milošević's illiberal and ultranationalist agenda,<sup>7</sup> in the last presidential elections the majority of diaspora votes went to the main opposition candidate with a more liberal political programme (Prelec 2017).

Diasporas can engage in politics in diverse manners, not only through voting and representation in parliament, but also by lobbying in host countries, giving financial support to political parties and civil society organisations, but also by sponsoring actors involved in violent conflicts in the homeland. Examples such as that of Kosovo demonstrate how different diaspora groups can lobby and act either in favour of nation building, considering their engagement for the creation of an independent successor state of Yugoslavia, but also be actively involved in fostering nation-wrecking processes.

There were two instances when diaspora engagement was the strongest, namely, during the Kosovo war (1998-1999) and during the period preceding the 2008 Declaration of Independence. Before the 1999 North

4 The party established by the country's first President and promoter of this policy, Franjo Tuđman.

5 The SDP-HSLS coalition obtained 47%, while it would have won 50,7% of the votes without diaspora seats; see Ragazzi & Balalovska 2011: 11.

6 It is seen as negative since diasporas would include a large number of Serbs.

7 Liberal civil society groups gained little or no support from the diasporas, and not even the Otpor (Resistance) movement, that later brought democratic change in Serbia, succeeded in changing this. Chicago-based diasporas, for example, supported both radical Milošević opponents – Vuk Drašković and Vojislav Šešelj; see Koinova 2009: 55-56.

Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervention, diaspora activism was very strong outside the Kosovo territory, and even included informal taxation for the support of parallel institutions. Support for the radical Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) forces also escalated from 1997 to 1999 and was shown through financing and fund-raising activities (Koinova 2017a: 9), part of which was used for arms collection, aided by arms smuggling, thus violating the international arms embargo on Yugoslavia. Some countries, such as Switzerland, even froze certain bank accounts connected to individuals linked to the supply of arms to the KLA (Transnational Communities Programme). In addition, KLA was recruiting Kosovo Albanians from the diasporas to fight for their homeland (Naegele 1999).

For a long time the Albanian diasporas lobbied for Kosovo independence, investing the greatest efforts in the area of lobbying. Accordingly, two inter-related circumstances should be taken into consideration: the geographic position or location of diaspora entrepreneurs, and the strategic importance of the issue for global powers. If diaspora entrepreneurs are physically located in Europe, close to Brussels, it could be expected that they would be well positioned to lobby European institutions. However, this is not necessarily the case. Albanian diasporas in European countries – even if more geographically contiguous – remained embedded in contexts less empowering for the pursuit of statehood (Koinova 2017b). Furthermore, Albanian diasporas based in Europe invested more efforts and resources in lobbying outside the borders of Europe, particularly in the USA. An example was Swiss billionaire Behgjet Pacolli who contributed to Kosovo's independence by lobbying in Washington, where he established a group of professional lobbyists. By contrast, minimal lobbying activities followed in the UK (Koinova 2017b). One possible reason could be that EU states at the time were more conservative regarding Kosovo independence due to the lack of unanimous consensus on the issue of official recognition of the country. Even in the UK, highly supportive of NATO's intervention, interest in the Kosovo issue waned (Koinova 2017b). By contrast, the USA-based Albanian diaspora remained relatively strong and consistent in the pursuit of independence for Kosovo. The New York-based Albanian American Civil League (AACL) and Washington-based National Albanian American Council (NAAC) (Koinova 2017b) are among the important organisations that played a significant role in lobbying for Kosovo's independence throughout the 2000s.

Today the Kosovo-Albanian diaspora remains connected to the political parties that have a strong, non-negotiable standpoint on the status of Kosovo, among them *Lëvizja për Bashkim* (Movement for the Unification) which favours the unification of all Albanians into one state in its political programme. Although it has not gained significant popular support, its leader was appointed the Minister for Diaspora, interpreting the feelings of a large part of the expatriates (Yabanici 2015: 26).

On the one hand, it can be argued that Kosovo Albanian diasporas' actions played a constructive role in interpreting and supporting the claims for self-determination of Kosovo Albanians in the homeland. On the other hand, it bears mention that they dangerously partook in and enhanced controversial extra-territorial claims and plans for the creation of a 'great Albania' that with their implications hinder the ongoing internal

state democratisation, as well as regional stabilisation, with great threats to the peace and security of the whole region.

## 5 Cultural impact

One of the main ingredients that influence diaspora communities is culture. Culture itself is a complex combination of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and 'any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society' (Gsir & Mescoli 2015: 8). The meaning of culture, *cultura animi* (the cultivation of the soul), as authored by German philosophers and linguists, connected the concept to both the individual and the collective (the nation) (Gsir & Mescoli 2015: 8). Cultural identity was further defined as a shared culture, but not a fixed one, rather changeable under the influence of continuous transformations (Gsir & Mescoli 2015: 9).

Diaspora communities are a good example of culture transformation. Once they leave their country of origin, they on the one hand take with them an image of their own culture and embody it while, on the other hand, they are influenced by a host culture, resulting in a 'transnational flow of cultural capital'<sup>8</sup> (Chih-Yun 2010: 34), which then leads to the creation of a hybrid culture.<sup>9</sup> In this way, due to the struggle of living between different cultures, diaspora members might tend to be more self-conscious of their culture of origin (Kilduff & Corley 1999: 2). This type of behaviour may have positive and negative, progressive or reactionary outcomes in terms of engagement with their home countries. In this part we focus on language and education resorting to examples from the post-Yugoslav space.

### 5.1 Language and diaspora

Language is used as a means of attaining nationhood in post-Yugoslav countries. Since the nineteenth century the predominant language of the region was the so-called 'Serbo-Croatian', which entailed several dialects and the use of two alphabets, namely, Latin and Cyrillic. The other official languages of Socialist Yugoslavia were Slovenian and Macedonian. Following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the need to assert language as a national identifier became ever more pronounced. Thus, today one can speak of Bosniak, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian languages; despite the fact that Bosniaks, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs understand each other quite well.

The recognition of the new official languages was used to achieve political independence. Languages remain the source of conflict in disputed areas where different ethnic communities live together, such as the case of Croatian Krajina where there is an ongoing dispute over the

8 The cultural capital of diasporas is related to the globalisation of ideas, knowledge and, to some extent, social models. While establishing themselves in a country, transnational societies bring with them a rich cultural background which, while representing the visible features of their identity, also provides them with the means for their integration and acceptance into their new society (International Organization for Migration 2013: 3).

9 These hybrid cultures are not necessarily superior cultures, but simply differ from the existing cultures from which they borrow (Kilduff & Corley 1999: 6).

usage of both scripts, Cyrillic and Latin. Another example is Bosnia and Herzegovina, where all administrative and legislative matters have to be 'translated' into three official languages: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian.<sup>10</sup> Despite evidence by many linguists that the differences between these languages are actually dialect differences,<sup>11</sup> the leadership of post-Yugoslav states disregards these facts and promotes the specificities of their national language. These varieties transcend to diaspora members, who are defined on the basis of their new nation states and ethnicity, rather than on the basis of the country they or their families left. Even before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, diaspora communities have often differentiated themselves and attempted to counter loss of identity, hybridisation and even forms of cultural repression. For instance, starting in the 1980s, Croat communities in Germany established national cultural communities and schools with their own language and curriculum (Milardović 1992: 172). These Schools of Supplementary Learning in Diaspora are still active against cultural assimilation of diaspora communities, due to the influence of both host countries and successor states. They are supported by central governments that give financial aid to schools to co-finance the projects that politically aim at hardening ethno-national cultural divisions.

Some diaspora groups reject these manipulations. The Declaration on Common Language<sup>12</sup> constitutes a bright outcome of the engagement of people with such credentials who embraced the idea to problematise the existence of four 'political' languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia.<sup>13</sup> Those that signed the Declaration declared:

Polycentric standardisation<sup>14</sup> is the democratic form of standardisation closest to the actual use of language;

Does not bring into question the individual right to express affiliation to different peoples, regions or states;

Each state, nation, ethno-national or regional community can freely and independently codify its variant of common language;

The fact that this is a common polycentric standard language leaves the user the ability to name it as s/he wishes.<sup>15</sup>

- 10 All cigarette packets destined for the Bosnian market must contain anti-smoking warnings written in all three languages, which leads to a situation where the message 'Smoking kills' is written the same in all languages, the only difference being that the Serbian warning is written in the Cyrillic script (Milekić 2017).
- 11 Their main argument is the understanding of all new languages by speakers of other language groups, including Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin. See The Economist 'Is Serbo-Croatian a language?' (The Economist 2017).
- 12 Croatian academic and linguist Snježana Kordić's seminal work *Language and nationalism* (Durieux 2010) was the foundation for the text of the Declaration. The Declaration was drafted after four regional conferences, held in Podgorica, Split, Sarajevo and Belgrade during 2016.
- 13 Jezici i Nacionalizmi, <http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/o-projektu/>.
- 14 Polycentric language is a language with several interacting codified standard versions (as German, English, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish, etc are defined).
- 15 *Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku, Jezici i nacionalizmi*, <http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/>.

By declaring this, they appealed for

[a]bolishing all forms of language segregation and language discrimination in educational and public institutions;

[a]voiding unnecessary, meaningless and expensive ‘translation’ in courts and administrative practices as well as public information media;

[t]he freedom of ‘mixing’, mutual openness, and the permeation of different forms and expressions of common language to the universal benefit of all its speakers.<sup>16</sup>

Since 2016 there have been more than 9 000 signatories. Diasporas/émigrés lent their strong support: 1 339 out of 9 093 signatories (14,7 per cent) are expatriate intellectuals who joined the cause from all over the world, boosting its legitimacy and outreach.<sup>17</sup> The future of the Declaration remains uncertain. However, the constant increase in the number of diaspora signatories is perceived as a positive outcome of the Declaration.

## 5.2 Education: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Snežana Kordić: In such a system the purpose of the education is purely political – to subjugate the will of the young people to the will of the nation. The schools are the tools of the state political agenda, just like the army, police or the budget (Ilic 2011).

Politics of language are closely connected to education politics and policies. The region’s notorious example of this interrelation is Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has a deeply-divided educational system along ethnic lines, on the basis of the claim that there are three different languages in the country (Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian). Divisions persist in spite of the common standpoint of prominent linguists that the language essentially is one and the same. Today, there are three different curricula in use where the main subjects of distinction are the ‘national group of subjects’, namely, language, history, geography and religious education (Trkulja 2017: 7) as they are regarded as essential for preserving the national identities of the three constituent peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The consequence of this are essentially mono-ethnic schools around the country and there are the so-called ‘two schools under one roof’ where pupils of different ethnic backgrounds are physically separated with different school entrances and are very often prohibited to mix (Trkulja 2017: 7). These schools were established in 1999 with the initial aim of assisting refugees’ return by showing them that their rights and liberties will be fully protected, providing the education for children based on their national identities. One of the main obstacles in resolving this problem is the political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where policy powers are delegated to different levels and where each level has its own policies and ways of implementing educational curricula, and the ethno-nationalist politics using education as a tool for nation building. These schools assisted in the development of segregation and division; where education serves as a separation instead of a uniting tool (Karabegović 2017: 6).

<sup>16</sup> As above.

<sup>17</sup> For the list of signatories, see <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/1XVGV5Z306SeDFzpdpUHhfeK-voAFdaakS48LqXfGozA/pubhtml>.

With these discriminatory and segregationist policies, what is the role of the diaspora? With its capacities and experiences, the diaspora sees education as a field where it can contribute, be it through organisations that bring children from different ethnic groups together or by reinforcing ongoing divisions. The case of the city of Mostar is a good example of the diaspora's transnational influence to bring Bosniak and Croatian children together under one roof. A few diaspora organisations are operating in that direction.

One organisation is Our Kids,<sup>18</sup> a non-profit diaspora organisation with a focus on orphans and youths with disabilities, regardless of their ethnic background. The board of directors consists of individuals declaring themselves citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, rather than placing themselves in one of the national groups (Karabegović 2017: 8). Another example is *Våra Bar* (our kids), a sister organisation of Our Kids, which is based in Stockholm, Sweden. Their focus group are young adults with special needs, who are provided with necessary services and employment opportunities, as well as a space in Mostar where they can meet (Karabegović 2017: 9). The third example is the Association of Bosnians in France,<sup>19</sup> which is in direct communication with particular schools, trying to mitigate the divided education system and to bring children together. One of their contributions was to furnish a computer laboratory, meant to be used by all students, without any divisions (Karabegović 2017: 10). With this they managed to bring all students together in one place, and schools into dialogue on how should they operate in these circumstances.

These kind of actions by diasporas are aimed against the ethnic subdivision of communities. However, along with examples of diasporas encouraging reconciliation, some diaspora groups reinforce ongoing divisions. An example is the case of Konjevic Polje.<sup>20</sup> Due to assimilation policies established in the Republika Srpska, the Bosniak minority group of Konjevic Polje did not have an opportunity to study their national group of subjects (Trkulja 2017: 10). Parents of those children decided to speak out and ask for education reforms. This battle was strongly supported by the diasporas. Diasporas from Switzerland and France raised awareness of the situation by taking diverse initiatives.

The Swiss Bosnian Solidarité Bosnie organisation made pressure on the Office of the High Representative in BiH throughout this period, as well as publicising their cause in a variety of media outlets. A letter and petition

- 18 The Our Kids Foundation was founded in London in 2008 and incorporated as a charity in 2009 by individuals living in the UK. Their goal was initially localised towards an orphanage in Mostar, Egiptasko Selo. Over the years, they have raised enough funds to rebuild the orphanage, employ a qualified team of professionals to create a safe environment for the children, ensure a quality level of care, and help orphans and children with special needs develop career readiness skills in trades such as hairdressing and IT (Karabegović 2017: 9).
- 19 Established in 1991, the Association has approximately 500 members, most of whom arrived as guest workers in France before the war of 1992-1995. Others arrived as refugees towards the beginning of the war. Nearly all have since become French citizens. Since the war their mission has shifted from humanitarian work to education (Karabegović 2017: 12).
- 20 Konjević Polje, a village near Srebrenica, is located in the Republika Srpska entity. The RS curriculum is skewed towards a view of history favouring Serb historical narratives about the war, negating genocide in Srebrenica, and with politicised language instruction, leaving minorities in these schools with little possibility to engage in meaningful ways.

were written with recommendations echoing the Konjević Polje parents' request to the Office of the High Representative, Ministry of Education, and other prominent governmental bodies (Karabegović 2017: 11).

Diaspora members also showed their support by coming to Sarajevo and taking part in organised protests. Apart from similar actions, diasporas from France organised a public discussion about the issue on the outskirts of Paris (Karabegović 2017: 11). After a long struggle the new, private school for Bosniak children teaching the Bosniak national curriculum was built (Karabegović 2017: 12). Konjevic Polje is an example of reinforcing the division: It is true that these people needed help and protection of their rights, but the diasporas could have advocated (as in other circumstances) community rights while considering the need for reconciliation and avoiding the outcome of dividing children without granting them an opportunity to interact.

These examples drive one to the conclusion that the diaspora has its potentials and limitations, a will to help the reconciliation process and a will to support segregation. It is willing to work and help local communities although it cannot change the political narratives present in the region. This brings us back to the Declaration on the Common Language because, as Snježana Kordić states, common language could be used as a tool for abolition of the system of 'two schools under one roof', since these schools are based on different national curricula (Milekić 2017).

## 6 Conclusion

The engagement of diasporas is an increasingly important issue at the global level that will inevitably acquire more and more relevance, as international migrations already constitute a pillar of contemporary politics and societies. Diaspora communities realise various socio-economic and political programmes through lobbying, remittances or personal participation, all of which have the potential of consistently impacting countries' decision-making processes.

In economic terms we discussed how the diasporas can have a significant impact on the relative wealth because of their remittances, topping 16,68 per cent of the GDP in the case of Kosovo. However, this practice, often informal, can be abused, fostering a system of social dependency, but also facilitating criminal enterprises and networks such as florid drugs trafficking in the region. Politically speaking, emigrants abroad play an increasingly active role, to the extent that many states have begun to recognise them as legitimate constituencies, granting them active and passive political rights. In this way the diaspora can activate itself to support parties or civil society organisations both financially and by lobbying for their causes. At the same time, we saw how it can successfully engage in antagonistic actions, for instance by contesting sovereignty, especially in weak states such as Kosovo. At the cultural level, the diaspora often disposes of tools for creating an impact on local communities back home and, in the case of highly-divided societies as in the Balkan region, where they can act to counter dynamics of discrimination and divisions, as seen in the example of the 1339 expatriated scholars and intellectuals who advocate the end of language segregation in the educational sector by supporting the Declaration of Common Language, while at the same time

it can also engage toward weakening ongoing reconciliation efforts, as in the case of Konjevic Polje.

The article shed light on the ambivalent role of diasporas, warning about the inherent controversy in the ongoing discussion in the policy area of the diasporas' engagement. The authors aimed at highlighting the potential threats coming from the diaspora's mobilisation for the homeland and the need for avoiding unnecessary reifications of this increasingly crucial social actor, while inviting a critical analysis of its dual impact. In fact, with its complex fluidity, diasporas' positionality is continuously exposed to historical developments, to shifts in narratives, to dynamics of boundary maintenance or erosion, with the result that its legitimacy and accountability might constantly vary. This is certainly not a claim for any form of diasporophobia: The purpose is rather to stress that, even with regard to its great potential for enhancing democracy, the diasporas' engagement always has to be carefully scrutinised, especially by the emerging non-state actors dealing with it.

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# The ambivalent role of diaspora engagement for the homeland in the Balkans

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