Commentary

Some Reflections on the South Slav Diaspora

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PROFESSOR PAUL ROBERT MAGOCSI should be commended for his article, "In Step or Out of Step with the Times? Central Europe's Diasporas and Their Homelands in 1918 and 1989." It provides an important overview of a significant but hitherto generally neglected topic, and represents an essential contribution to our discussion of diasporas. One can only hope that by framing the issue as he has done and posing the questions mentioned in the article, our attention will be drawn to this subject with renewed interest. I find myself agreeing, for the most part, with his general observations. As such, the commentary that follows is intended largely to provide accentuated remarks and, where needed, some points of constructive criticism.

What Are Diasporas and Why Study Them?

Why study diasporas, particularly central Europe's diasporas in North America and elsewhere? Is it because they have traditionally been important politically or otherwise? Is it because they represent a significant segment of the population?[1] Or is it because they tell historians, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other students of nationalism and ethnic migrations something of how

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[1]According to Canada's 2002 census, 5,448,480 Canadians were "foreign born" or "immigrant." This would mean that no less than 18.4 percent of the total population belonged at that time to a "diaspora" of one kind or another, depending on how one chooses to define the term. In the U.S., the corresponding figures are 32.5 million and 11.5 percent. Although lower, the proportion of "foreign

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groups, once divorced from their national matrices, maintain loyalties to distant homelands? To study diasporas is surely to study how groups preserve their identities and loyalties.

In order to answer these questions, we need first to define what constitutes a diaspora. After all, arguably the most contentious aspect of the subject is the one related to definition and how we choose to characterize the groups being studied, that is, as diasporas, migrants, immigrants, ethnic groups, or as some other category. Of course, this diversity in the use of concepts—and the choice of definition—will also reflect the preferences of the researcher. Diasporas have traditionally been conceived in terms of catastrophic dispersions that have been brought on by cataclysmic events, such as the two world wars. For many groups, such as Jews, African-Americans, and others, the word implied a difficult collective experience, forced exile, and all the negative effects associated with this divorce from the native land. It usually meant marginality, discrimination, and persecution. Gradually, the meaning of the term has broadened to include nontraditional diasporas based on economics, culture, or other criteria. And, generally speaking, the term has acquired a more positive connotation. Particularly for those groups that can be termed economic migrants, such as the Chinese, Indians, and Mexicans, the term *diaspora* may suggest a continued, rather than an obstructed, relationship between matrix and the new land of settlement.

State and Stateless Diasporas

The catastrophic event that gave birth to the contemporary central European diaspora and then gave it a political raison d'être is of course World War II. The earlier, pre-1918 diasporas that Professor Magocsi discusses were primarily economic rather than political in nature.[2] Here it is important—and I believe that Professor Magocsi could have said more—to stress 1945 as an ideological watershed in twentieth-century history. Indeed, World War II was arguably the most important "event" of the last century. Almost all the émigré groups under

born" as a share of the population is growing more quickly in the U.S. and appears to be a more contentious issue. For example, see the recent controversy sparked by Samuel P. Huntington with his book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York, 2004). Huntington fears that immigrants, especially Mexicans, who allegedly do not share America's cultural identity and whose loyalties lay elsewhere, threaten American identity. For the census data, see the Web sites of the U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada at http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p20-539.pdf and http://www.statcan.ca/start.html, respectively; accessed on 4 August 2004.

[2]Pre-1918 diasporas were far less political, consisting largely of peasants who emigrated primarily for socioeconomic reasons. The fact that many returned indicates their nonpolitical or apolitical nature. Generally speaking, these diasporas became political only during World War I and were politicized by recently emigrated politicians, such as Tomáš G. Masaryk in the Czech case and Ante Trumbić and Frano Supilo in the Croat (and Yugoslav) case, who fled the Habsburg monarchy in 1914–15 for political reasons.

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consideration nurtured profound grievances relating to 1945 and their wartime experiences. They believed that the "natural" course of their histories and the "organic" development of their societies had been interrupted by the imposition of "alien" communism, which came to the region with the tanks of the Soviet Red Army. Their anger and frustration were palpable and, in some cases, quite understandable. Some diaspora communities, such as Serbs, Magyars, and Poles, bemoaned the destruction—or removal from power—of their prewar political elites, while others, including Croats and Slovaks, also bemoaned the loss of "statehood." It is hardly surprising that all the diasporas were preoccupied—nay, obsessed—with the events of World War II and nurtured such deep "grudges" in 1989, either against old ideological foes and/or other national groups, which were supposedly responsible for the loss of their "statehood" in 1945.

Virtually every diaspora has its revered homeland that forms the focus of its political program. The profound nature of the political displacement that occurred in 1945 meant that central Europe's diaspora communities more often than not saw their homelands as idealized spaces and their own communities as victims beset by ideological and/or ethnic enemies. The decades that passed after World War II did not temper their memories of these idealized homelands; in fact, the more removed they were in time from the moment of immigration, the greater their tendency to see these homelands in an idealized sense. When diaspora leaders became active politically, they assigned to both themselves and their communities a belligerent—some might say "extremist"—voice in the struggle for their homelands.

Having said that, when "native" politicians courted and attempted to mobilize the diasporas, ideology normally took a backseat to pragmatic considerations. For example, let us consider the views toward the diaspora of three very different twentieth-century Croat political figures: Stjepan Radić, the leader of the Croat Peasant Party (1904–28); Ante Pavelić, the leader of the Croat Party of Right (1920–28) and the Ustaša organization (1929–45); and Franjo Tudjman, the communist general, academic, and first president of independent Croatia (1990–99). All three courted the Croat diaspora. In 1919–21, during his party's struggle with the Serbian authorities in Belgrade, Radić repeatedly told his party's deputies that the American Croat community was an important potential instrument in the party's struggle against the Serb-dominated state. It was imperative, he told his inner circle, that the Croat Peasant Party make use of the large and presumably wealthy (or, in any event, wealthier) diaspora community to buttress its political cause against Belgrade for Croatian autonomy. After 1929, Pavelić dispatched his emissaries to western Europe and the Americas to raise funds and recruit people for his nascent organization. In the late 1980s and again during the 1990s, Tudjman too recognized the need to tap the financial resources of the diaspora. That these three politicians—a democratic peasantist, a fascist demagogue, and a former communist-turned-authoritarian-nationalist—all sought the assistance of the diaspora indicates, at the very least and among other things, that they could agree on its potential usefulness in the cause of statehood. It should be added that all three politicians were more or less ideologically formed—they

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needed no help from the diaspora there—but required money and occasionally people. All three viewed the diaspora primarily in terms of its potential economic importance—and arguably overstated its importance—and the contribution it might make to the cause of independence. Similarly, the diaspora would generally support whoever stood for the cause of independence. This was equally true of the Serb diaspora, much of which, even its monarchist wing, embraced the communist Slobodan Milošević when it thought he was fighting for "the unity of all Serbs" in one state, regardless of his methods.[3] That the Serb political establishment saw far less need to resort to its diaspora in the same way is also telling and illuminates an important difference within the diaspora communities and their national matrices "at home."

This leads me to another point. I believe that Professor Magocsi misses or chooses to ignore an obvious difference within central Europe's diasporas in North America. There is, to my mind, an important distinction—one that needs further investigation—between what we might call "state" and "stateless" diasporas. That is to say, those peoples, like Poles, Czechs, Magyars, and Serbs, among others, who identified with an existing state in the region, generally behaved differently from Ukrainians, Slovaks, Croats, and Slovenes, among others, who lacked their own states or failed to identify genuinely with existing states in the region. For both groups, the defining or seminal political event of the twentieth century was the imposition of communist rule in or immediately after 1945. In other words, the political activities and opposition of the "state" diaspora was primarily if not exclusively ideological, that is, republican or royalist versus communist. In the second category, the ideological moment was of secondary import to the "loss" of statehood and the struggle to regain it, as the Croat example cited earlier indicates. Thus, when communism fell in 1989, the diasporas in the former category were largely disarmed politically. For "stateless" diasporas, however, the collapse of communism was but the first step in a larger battle for independence. The diasporas in this group were more involved in helping to forge new political policies after 1989, in part, I suspect, because their existing elites in Croatia, Ukraine, and elsewhere were still relatively weak—or at least were perceived as such—and there was a greater political "vacuum" to fill. For many émigré groups, the collapse of communism in 1989 did not yet signify the end of their raison d'être; for example, Croats achieved independence only gradually between 1991 and 1995, and Slovaks did the same in 1993. Thus, the number of émigré Croats, Slovaks,[4] and Macedonians[5] who influenced Croatian, Slovakian, and Macedonian

[3]Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars* (Ithaca, 2003), 124–27.

[4]In her study of postcommunist Slovakia and the role of émigrés, Shari Cohen appears to dispute this point, although it is a subject still in need of additional research. See Shari J. Cohen, *Politics Without a Past: The Absence of History in Post-Communist Nationalism* (Durham, 1999).

[5]See the discussion of diaspora politics in Loring Danforth's *The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World* (Princeton, 1995), which ascribes great importance to the diaspora in both North America and Australia.

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politics after 1989 was more significant than the number of Serb or Magyar émigrés, for example, who influenced their respective politics.

South Slavic Diasporas

All this undoubtedly explains, at least in part, why some diasporan activists hoped to influence the policies of their newly independent homelands more than others. Here Professor Magocsi cites Croatia as "the best example," following her declaration of independence from Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991. There may very well be a reason why Croatia is a good example, or in any event a better example than most other central European cases. I would disagree, however, with much of Professor Magocsi's characterization of the situation in Croatia, and particularly his assertion that Tudjman was "initially beholden" to the Croatian diaspora. Nor is it true that "the vast majority of Croats abroad supported the anticommunist (and anti-Serbian) Ustaša movement" (20). This is an unfortunate conclusion, which he draws, it would seem, primarily from his reading of Paul Hockenos's book, which provides a caricature of the diasporas.[6] The vast majority of politically active Croats abroad supported the Croat Peasant Party, not the Ustaša émigrés. In part, this was due to the fact that most post-1945 Croat emigrants were themselves from the village or had been removed from it only recently. In addition, the Croat Peasant Party had a plethora of political, cultural, and fraternal organizations in western Europe and North America. The émigré Ustaša organization, on the other hand, fractured soon after 1945 into a number of small, quarrelsome, and largely irrelevant competing groups. Celebrations of 10 April as "Croatian Independence Day" notwithstanding—this was the date in 1941 when Pavelić's followers in Zagreb proclaimed the "independence" of Croatia during the Axis assault on Yugoslavia—the majority of Croats abroad objected to the radical views of the Ustaša émigrés. One might add here that Professor Magocsi ignores the many divisions within the Croat diaspora, which, like all the other diasporas under consideration here, was often torn by regional, social, political, and other divisions.

I do not wish to diverge too far from the topic at hand, but I feel compelled to address some other inaccuracies. I believe that, in general, Professor Magocsi overstates the diaspora's influence on Tudjman's nationalist views and Croatian policy in the 1990s; in both cases, the diaspora's influence was negligible. Tudjman's nationalist views had largely been formed by the mid 1960s and definitely by the time of the Croatian Spring (1966–71) and had little to do with the diaspora. According to one of his biographers, already by the mid 1960s he had adopted a Great Croatian program, that is, a program calling for a return to "historic" Croatian borders, or at least those possessed by the autonomous

[6]See Hockenos, *Homeland Calling*. See also Marina Glamočak, *Koncepcije Velike Hrvatske i Velike Srbije u političkoj emigraciji* (Concepts of Great Croatia and Great Serbia in the political emigration) (Užice, 1997).

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Croatian *banovina* (province) in 1939–41.[7] The presence of Croat-Canadians Ante Beljo, Marin Sopta, and Gojko Šušak notwithstanding—and parenthetically, only Šušak had any authority or influence on Tudjman and state policy—the authority of the diaspora is again overstated. Tudjman did meet with these men between 1987 and 1989 in Canada, but they agreed to no more than the need to create an independent Croatia within "historic" frontiers, which essentially meant a return to the *banovina* of 1939.[8] These individuals certainly possessed nationalist and occasionally "radical" views, but the diaspora's fixation on statehood was certainly not "a major factor contributing to the brutal war and ethnic cleansing that characterized much of former Yugoslavia throughout the 1990s" (21). The causes had more to do with native political elites and nationalist intelligentsias than with the diasporas. It is worth noting that, again in the Croatian case, for every Beljo and Šušak, there was an Ivo Banac and Chris Cviić ready to rail against and criticize the inadequacies and nationalist exigencies of the Tudjman regime.

This raises a more generic question about diaspora politics, namely, are they by definition extremist, aggressive, and nationalistic politics? I would argue that this is not necessarily the case, although the question certainly requires further study. I suspect that diaspora politics are generally viewed as extremist because their activists, especially in the era of the Cold War (1945–89), couched their rhetoric in vocal, occasionally idealistic, but combative ideological terms. If diasporan leaders tended to be "extremist," then it must be that their "constituencies" were (and are) equally extremist or nationalistic. This contention is, I believe, simplistic and essentially flawed. Most community members focus, as Professor Magocsi correctly notes, on their daily lives and concerns. They may occasionally donate money to a nationalist cause and attend a political rally from time to time when they perceive that their homeland needs their voice. Otherwise, they are usually part of a "silent" majority. The "leaders" of the diaspora communities, be they clergy, newspaper editors, or business people, are often self-appointed and not necessarily representative of the wider community.

At the risk of belaboring the point, I think it is worth noting that the diasporas from the former Yugoslavia represented a special if not unique case among the diasporas in question. Beginning in the 1960s, the communist Yugoslav authorities, unlike their East Bloc counterparts, opened their borders to economic migrants for both economic and political reasons. The subsequent out-migration amounted, by the early 1970s, to roughly a million workers, or one-fifth of the Yugoslav work force. In 1970, some 40,000 Yugoslavs crossed the border daily, while in 1960 the corresponding daily figure had been 500. In fact, this émigré work force became so large that William Zimmerman referred to it as Yugoslavia's "seventh republic."[9] To

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[7]Darko Hudelist, "Dr. Franjo Tudjman: Život i karijera" (Dr. Franjo Tudjman: Life and career), *Globus*, 11 December 1999, p. 41. See also the treatment of his nationalist views in Marinko Čulić, *Tudjman: Anatomija neprosvijećenog apsolutizma* (Tudjman: An anatomy of an unenlightened absolutism) (Split, 1999).

[8]Hudelist, "Dr. Franjo Tudjman," 53.

[9]William Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Non-Alignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton, 1987), 106, 139.

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be sure, Zimmerman was not interested in the diasporas in and of themselves, but his study generally lends weight to the view supporting the importance of Yugoslav diaspora groups, although he discusses only those resident in western Europe (primarily West Germany, Austria, and Sweden) and thus within relatively close proximity to the Yugoslav matrix. This migrant community, exposed as it was to various nationalist views in their "host" countries, commuted regularly to and from the former Yugoslavia. This movement had many important consequences for the political system and regime-society relations. He notes, for example, that in 1970, Croatia accounted for a disproportionately large share of the Yugoslav workers abroad: "So many people from Croatia and ethnic Croatians were abroad at the beginning of the 1970s as to constitute a central focus of discontent that fueled the resurgence of Croatian nationalism in the early 1970s."[10] Having said that, he also noted the absence of "drastic anti-regime behavior" by those who went abroad, although those who spent more time abroad had stronger anti-regime tendencies.[11] In the end, he concluded only that "the seventh republic constrains the regime's alternatives," but never influenced it directly in terms of decision making.[12]

I would additionally hypothesize that it demonstrates something about the diasporas too, and that this particular case raises some additional questions worthy of research. How did Yugoslavia's distinct status as a non-aligned communist state with relatively open borders from the 1960s onward shape her various diaspora groups? Because of this, were they different in any way from other central European diaspora groups, which may have immigrated only at particular crisis points such as 1956 or 1968? If we assume that Yugoslavia was, by the 1980s, more like Greece and Turkey than its communist neighbors in central Europe, what, if anything, does this tell us of how diasporas evolve as communities? In other words, how did the successive waves of Yugoslav migration (1945, 1960s–1980s) affect the evolution of diaspora communities, politically and otherwise?

Past or Future?

Did the diasporas look backward or to the future? While I understand Professor Magocsi's point that in 1918 the diasporas looked to the future while in 1989 they looked to the past, I would qualify this assertion. Although there is something to be said for this view, nonetheless, the diasporas very much looked backward in 1918 to legitimize claims of statehood and especially the proposed borders of the new states. One can look to the past as a guide to the future. This was true of 1989 and 1918. In 1919, diasporas looked to the past to legitimize their states and occasionally to help establish the borders of those new states. Balkan diasporas had also used the medieval frontiers of their states, while Poles looked to

[10]Ibid., 139.
[11]Ibid., 127.
[12]Ibid., 140.

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the partitioned Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Greeks had their Megali Idea, and so on. In 1989, they also looked to the past, arguably even more so than in 1919, because of the significance of 1945 and the "victory" achieved in 1989 with the collapse of communism. Professor Magocsi should not equate looking to the past with ignoring the future.

Concluding Remarks

Professor Magocsi is quite right to appeal for new studies of central Europe's diasporas in North America and elsewhere. We need studies of these diasporas for a number of reasons, many of which Professor Magocsi has already enumerated. I suspect that these diasporas were never as influential politically in North America as some might think, nor as influential as they wanted to be, although the topic needs further investigation. Studies of diasporas will, I hope, shed light on how historical memory is preserved, transmitted, shaped, and commemorated. They will hopefully tell us a good deal about how these groups, removed from their national matrices largely because of war and persecution, managed to maintain their ethnic and political loyalties to distant homelands. They will tell us something of nationalism as an ideology, in addition to many other issues. Diasporas have been with us for millennia and, in a world of globalization and a growing movement of peoples, they will assuredly remain a permanent feature of both the European and North American demographic, political, and cultural landscapes.

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