PERMITTING CHANGES IN SERBIA – TWO-WAY STREET?

Abstract

Arguing that Serbian society is an asymmetrical, federal and non-integrated society, author of this paper assess possible institutional set-ups for such a society that could achieve the long-run equilibrium between social structures and political institutions. Institution building, overcoming nation building or multiculturalism only as a response to nation building, is of major concern for Serbia. Regional development will surely be positive for achievement of cohesion of a society, but it has to be accompanied by an overall viable integration policy, as politics of redistribution and politics of recognition are not inherently incompatible.

Key words: asymmetrical federal society, integration, national minorities, disintegration, federalism, decentralisation, regional development, politics of redistribution, politics of recognition

„Politics is almost always a matter of both identities and interest.
The question is always which identities and interest are being promoted“
Will Kymlicka (2002: 328)

1. INTRODUCTION

After eighty-eight years of being a part of the first (1918-1945), the second (1945-1991) and the third Yugoslavia (1992-2006), Serbia unwillingly regained its independence. The break up of Yugoslavia (1991-1995) and dissolution of State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2006) were not the scenarios Serbia opted for. It can be said that Serbia answered to these events with reactive but only few proactive long-reaching measures. In rare cases when leadership of Serbia tried to be proactive it did it in an extremely wrong way or in wrong time. Not even two years after final collapse of what has left of once respected leader of non-alliance movement, Yugoslavia, Serbia saw secession of its Autonomous Province Kosovo and Metohija approved by some of the most influential countries in the world. It is not so unbelievable that some groups fear that borders will continue to
migrate and shrinking of the state will not stop here – there is a petition „Nema šale“ („In all seriousness“)251 responding to or warning of secessionist incentives coming from the province of Vojvodina and Sandžak area. This goes even further – currant debate about regionalization has also been burdened with the fear that these processes will prove to be the final impulse of completion of Serbia’s disintegration.

Almost three years after adoption of new Constitution (2006) Serbia faces new challenges related to the core issue of every state - its territorial organization. Integration of national minorities is closely related to it.

In this paper I would try to show how even with significant progress in protection of national minorities achieved latterly, Serbia does not yet see cultural diversity as a valuable collective asset and, consequently, has not created an overall viable integration policy even though fear of disintegration designates many policy discourses. Instead, recent emergence of the rudiments of regionalisation might be taken as implicit substitution for it – giving precedence to politics of redistribution over politics of recognition.

In addressing these questions, I shall focus in the first part of this paper on type of society in Serbia, arguing that it is asymmetrical, federal and non-integrated, while in the second part I shall try to assess possible institutional solutions for such a society not standing away from current political debates within Serbia.

2. SOCIETY OF SERBIA

2.1. The asymmetrical federal society

The main focus of comparative federalism for a long time has only been the constitutional division of competences between the centre and the sub-state units. For K. C. Wheare, whose work is considered as the most influential within this tradition, federalism is a form of governance where the orders of government are coordinate and independent. But there is a parallel approach, though never so influential, employing a society-based perspective diametrically opposed to the dominant institutional/constitutional perspective in the study of federalism. William Livingston, the main advocate of this approach, believed that „federal society“ - a social structure with territorially based diversity - was the raison d’être for federalism (Erk, 2008: 3-4).

I believe this Livingston’s notion could be applied to Serbia by analogy. Now rather centralized state with two autonomous provinces – Vojvodina in the north and contested territory of Kosovo and Metohija in the south, Republic of Serbia is not a federation but

Serbian society pretty much qualifies as the federal society in terms of Michael Stein’s territorially based communities clearly differentiated by language and ethnicity (Erk, 2008: 4). Aiming to be precise, I shall call it the asymmetrical federal society.

Why federal society? According to census held in 2002 national minorities comprise about 17% of population of Serbia (with exclusion of population living at the territory of Kosovo and Metohija). There are about twenty odd registered national and ethnic communities in Serbia of which twelve are large enough to be considered relevant. Some of these groups are territorially concentrated in certain areas, such as the Hungarians (3.9%) living in the northern part of Vojvodina along the Hungarian border, the Bosniacs together with the Muslims (2.1%) living in Sandžak, the Albanians (0.8%) living in the South of Serbia (apart from Kosovo and Metohija), Bulgarian and Vlach-Romanian minorities living in East Serbia. Other groups are more dispersed throughout the country such as the Roma (1.4%) which are much more numerous than what census shows – estimates of the representatives of Roma people are three or four times higher. Some minorities in some areas form majority and therefore correspond to above-mentioned territorially based communities differentiated by language and ethnicity – constituents of the federal society.

Why asymmetrical federal society? Looking at the map of Serbia which differs from the map one can see at CIA Factbook or European Union web page, it can be said that almost a third of municipalities are situated in bordering areas and as a rule inhabited with national minorities. Those minorities often share a common ethnic identity with a neighbouring state, which they may view as their „kin-state“ (with some very interesting exceptions like the presence of Macedonians in Vojvodina). Border municipalities are usually underdeveloped and have been neglected by state for many years. Cross-border cooperation programmes strongly supported by EU designed Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for candidate and potential candidate countries (Serbia is among them), are very important for the development of those areas, as well as for the regional cooperation with neighbouring countries that are mainly countries of origin of national minorities.

Until the First World War just the quarter of Serbs had been living in Kingdom of Serbia (later the number increased up to the one third). The unification of Serbian people or, even more revolutionary idea, the unification of South Slavs – Yugoslavs, with the construction of Yugoslav nation, prevailed as the best solution for political and economic survival of the nation. Today, majority of Serbian people live inside of Serbia but with rather large share of ethnic Serbs living outside. Some assessments of the Ministry of Diaspora show that there is up to 3.5 million population in Diaspora and in the region - according to recently adopted Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the region (2009),

252 As probable future rarity, there is about 1,1% of people who still declare themselves as Yugoslavs. It will be interesting to see the results of the new census planned for 2011 related to decline of this non-ethnic category. There is also relatively big share of those who did not want to declare their ethnicity (1,4%).

253 Autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija is missing in these maps.
the difference has been made between Serbs in the region, as autochthonous inhabitants, and Diaspora composed of various generations of emigrants now living mainly in Europe and North America. The respect of the political rights of Serbian people in the new formed independent countries (previously republics of Yugoslav federation) as well as in the „old“ neighbour countries has a great impact in maintenance of stability of state, just as the treatment of minorities in Serbia has the great impact on relations with neighbouring countries (Antić, 2009:5-10). Once considered as potential bridges of cooperation between states in the Balkan region, minorities have more been the objects of tensions. Respect of the principle of reciprocity requires that rights guaranteed to national minorities in Serbia shall be guaranteed to Serbian minority in neighbouring countries. These are two different but inter-linked questions.

2.2 The non-integrated society

I would argue that Serbian society is the non-integrated society. The notion of non-integrated society requires some explanation. Integration can have various meanings in different contexts – integration of minorities, integration of immigrants or integration of society as a whole. For instance, immigrant integration is generating much debate across the old member states of the European Union, while new member states have historically placed emphasis on addressing minority issues. In Serbia, apart from issues similar to those of „new Europe“, there is one particular type of integration in place – integration of refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and local integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo and Metohija. This integration is socio-economic opposed to socio-cultural process which is the feature of the integration of asylum-seekers and refugees all over the Europe. The reason is obvious: refugees from former Yugoslavia and IDPs from Kosovo and Metohija are mainly persons of Serbian ethnic origin who speak Serbian language and are embedded in dominant culture. But the process of reintegration of the returnees under the readmission agreements is again shifted more to socio-cultural one, as majority of returnees are Roma whose children basically didn’t have any link to Serbia as motherland country and often speak better German then Serbian or Roma language. Finally, the society as a whole may be considered as an appropriate policy target for achieving integration seen as social cohesion, since it has become common to differentiate two Serbias in silent war with one another.

Though I can argue that in each of this segment Serbia can be recognized as non-integrated society, for the purposes of this paper I shall focus on the integration of minorities. Such integration means giving minorities the opportunity to participate in socioeconomic life on an equal basis, without forcing them to lose their own distinct,

254 In order to facilitate the return of persons residing without authorisation in its member states, the EU decided to negotiate agreements on readmission of third-country nationals with their respective countries of origin.

255 One is modern and pro-European, the other is conservative and nationalistic.
linguistic and cultural identity while, at the same time, the minority can make distinct cultural contributions that enrich the diversity and culture of the larger society. It is not enough only that their differences are respected and recognized, but that they are accepted as equals. In other words, institutional response to diversity should be guided by either principle of cultural preservation or principle of equality of status. I prefer the latter as it „extends to minority cultures the same recognition – the same forms of acknowledgment, accommodation, and assistance – that it extends to majority“ (Patten, 2008: 101). It should be said that equal status does not guarantee cultural preservation, since group who enjoys equal public status with majority’s may still have difficulty in surviving. Institutional response can, of course, be an appropriate mixture of both mentioned principles if and when possible.

Often perceived only as extremist and xenophobic, nationalism is seen by some scholars as helpful to democratization by reviving the otherwise non-existent civil and political societies, fundamental to democratic transition and consolidation (Linz&Stepan, 1996). Tamir’s (1993) and Miller’s (1995) philosophical work provides us with another positive view of nationalism, which benefit liberal democracy by fostering and promoting an ongoing debate within the community. It seems that in a multinational country nationalism can rightly be perceived as potentially destructive to still ongoing democratization, especially having in mind Serbia’s vast experience with nationalist nightmares. Therefore, if the main institutions in Serbia are predominantly composed of citizens of Serbian ethnic origin, and if there is no significant number of students belonging to national minorities’ groups among students e.g. at the University of Belgrade, it means some groups are not included or are excluded or have excluded themselves from the ongoing democratic debate within community that is of immense importance for transformation of the society and state. In any of these cases, minorities again and again feel aggrieved and alienated. It is neither strange nor outstanding that some young Hungarians would rather study in Szeged or Budapest then in Belgrade. But since this exists as a rule within a pattern for almost all minorities, the problem of ethnic distance raise the key question: what is missing for Serbian society to become a intercultural one, able to foster a strong sense of unity and common belonging among its citizens while respecting the demands of diversity? Respect of the culture of the human beings earns their loyalty, gives them confidence and courage to interact with other cultures, and facilitates their integration into wider society. But at the same time, the greater and deeper the diversity in a society, the greater the unity and cohesion it requires to hold itself together and nurture its diversity (Parekh, 2006: 196).

The configuration of the state has to be acknowledged before assessing the role of nationalism during the process of democratization (Surzhko-Harned, 2007). Serbian state is made by a nation that claims pre-state unity based on culture, history or religion. Accordingly, cultural diversity of traditional minorities endangers the natural unity of the mono-cultural nation, as the cultural community of considered nation has priority within the territory and represents outstanding nation-building factor. Quite the opposite, diversity causes fragmentation - fragmented political identity – which is considered as a threat for the state. Non-integrated minorities can be tolerated as guests but not as
equal citizens (Fleiner et al, 2003: 199-201). Liberal constitution proclaims values that are good for all – but that means exclusion of diversity. Now, that is the history and hopefully story doesn’t end there. The question is: what can be done about it? Does this type of configuration of the nation ultimately determines state’s future?

Integration is a two-sided process. Beside development and implementation of overall integration strategy by the state, the perception and attitudes of minorities’ population are very important and can be also considered as restraints for the achievement of equilibrium between social structures and political institutions. Some groups reject the very idea of integrating into the common national society that with their integration could become distinct but common multicultural or inter-cultural society, as they think of themselves as forming distinct nations and see integration only as assimilation. Some of them e.g. Roma, often see their integration into majority social systems as an asymmetric process - participation in social interactions for which the rules were established by other groups. Others, like Albanians do not really show an interest to be part of larger polity or even reject majority society whenever possible - by not voting in elections for the President of Serbia and being very active only at local elections instead, by refusing to draft into the state army etc.

2.3. Everlasting problem: fostering unity and diversity

Serbia has almost fulfilled the legal conditions for integration, as previously defined. The basic principles in advocacy for the rights of national minorities are based on the new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006) and Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities (2002) and the newly adopted Law on National Minorities Councils (2009). Constitutional provision establishes a foundation for cultural autonomy of minorities. With the law that allows the establishment of minority based self-government, members of national minorities are encouraged to elect their own national councils in order to practice their right to self-government in the areas of culture, education, information and the official use of their language and script. However, there is a gap between legal provisions and exercised practices. The second opinion on Serbia of the Advisory Committee on the CoE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities states: „Serbian authorities are still largely considered to lack a comprehensive and strategic approach towards the integration of its minorities into the society. In addition, measures taken in this field of minority protection are often perceived by Serbian society as a result of the pressure exercised by external actors (italicized by B.D.).“ Indeed, complying with the CoE or OSCE standards is required for post-communist European countries to be accepted in the West, as western democracies decided to „internationalize“ the treatment of national minorities in post-communist Europe (Kymlicka, 2004). It only proves the necessity of internal incentives for one adequate integration policy.

The same opinion of the Advisory Committee recommends the following: „The Serbian authorities should devote particular attention to measures aimed at developing contacts and interactions between the various communities living in Serbia. This would require taking nation-wide awareness-raising measures to promote Serbia’s
ethnic diversity. The Serbian authorities should also take measures to enhance mutual respect and understanding for each other’s culture in the school context, including by promoting the teaching of minority languages to the majority. “Indeed, the language is today the main feature of people’s culture, and it greatly determines scope of the public space and channels of communication. To that effect, teaching of minority languages to the majority, rather neglected in Serbia, could be one of the most important step forward nurturing diversity.

From the point of view of the state, it is easier to govern a society when its citizens share a common national language, culture and identity. With negative remembrance regarding disintegration and mistrust among communities it is not easy to create appropriate functional and sustainable integration policy and institutional set-up for is implementation. Serbia should be proactive and evaluate carefully some of the options for adequate policies. In their paper “Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict Management in Multicultural Societies“ Fleiner, Kälin, Linder and Saunders propose four options that allow multicultural states to meet the challenges that they face:

1) policy of tolerance: diversity must be respected but it is not a political value - the guarantee of human rights as individual rights;

2) policy of reconciliation: assisting with conflict management, contributing to better understanding, fostering inter-communities cooperation;

3) equalizing minorities and majorities: establishment and insurance of the equality of all peoples - peace among communities as a goal of the state, in addition to individual liberty;

4) enhancing diversity: the federal option - promotion of diversity as a value per se (Fleiner et al, 2003: 203-207).

Each of these options is a building brick for the next one, and Serbia has only rudimentary practices of the first three but has not come to the adoption and implementation of the forth policy option yet – which would correspond to its, though asymmetrical federal society. Only proper promotion of diversity is proper diversity management and can really enhance integration.

3. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP FOR THE SERBIAN SOCIETY - IS THE GOOD DESCRIPTION ENOUGH FOR THE GOOD PRESCRIPTION?

3.1. Federalism

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in his Du principe federatif saw social and economic diversity as the reason for adopting federal political institutions, rather than seeing these institutions as the cause of diversity (Erk, 2008: 4). What kind of institutional set-up does the existing diversity in Serbia imply?

„Should the description of a multicultural or ethnic reality result in the prescription that state has to duplicate or even to further this reality in its laws and policies?....one could argue exactly the opposite, that a centrifugal society requires a centripetal state policies to keep it together“ (Joppke, 2004: 239). Having had had bad experience with both centrifugal (within former Yugoslavia) and centripetal state policies (Serbia after
1991), Serbia needs to adopt moderate approach opposed to extreme ones practiced in the past, and follow it and stick to it in a true spirit.

As Serbia is in transition period moving toward higher phase of development, for effective results of a general development strategy, integration of Serbian society as a whole would be necessary, with special emphasis on integration of minorities. Arguing that Serbia is a federal society and opting for the federal option as institutional answer for the integration policy does Serbia necessarily need to become a federal state?

Federalism provides a particular solution to the organization of power in order to secure good governance. It also offers an answer to the question what can be done to bring or to hold multicultural societies together (Fleiner et al., 2003:197-198). However, federalization means a fundamental change of a constitutional system with considerable risks – there must be sufficient confidence on both sides. It is not an appropriate option for Serbia at the moment. Firstly, territorial federalism as a means of division and diffusion of power is more appropriate for large and diverse territory which the territory of Serbia is not; goals of approximating of the decision-making to the citizens can be attained through process of decentralization as less complex and more suitable for transition country with already overloaded administration. Secondly, multinational federalism is impractical in the case of minor or very small ethnic communities; also, territorial self-rule cannot accommodate diasporic or highly mobile ethnic communities (Duhachek, 1977:19) e.g. Roma. The minorities-within-minorities phenomenon complicates any federalist solution since a federating polity that organizes a sub-unit around a particular mode of ethnic representation and patronage may actually exacerbate existing intra-ethnic conflicts in that sub-unit, thus encouraging new and more ardent minority claims for political recognition, greater autonomy, or even full independence (Schuck, 200: 203). Finally, none of the political actors in Serbia is currently pleading for this option.

3.2 Regionalization: what is in the regional development?

Instead of federalism, there has been a huge debate about regionalization – does Serbia need it and if yes, what type of it? Serbian main foreign policy goal is integration with EU. For the pro-European political actors it is possible to legitimize almost everything if it can be proven it is European, whatever that might mean. Thus, when it comes to issue of decentralization or regionalization, it is hard to admit that there are no clearly articulated and generally applicable European standards of decentralization and regionalization of nation states. Every country should resolve this issue for itself according to its own peculiarities and not trying to match some non-existing European model.

According to the principle of subsidiarity, main feature of European federalism, aiming to transmit part of its authority (competency) to lower level and to bring decision-making closer to the citizens, the state has two options: a) to transmit them to the level of today’s cities and municipalities (local self-government) or b) to transmit them to the some sort of mezo level – lower then state, higher then municipality. Reversely, local self-government can hand over realization of its plans to intermediary level, if there is any, instead transferring everything to state level. This principle has
been enumerated among principles of regional development in a newly adopted *Law on Regional Development* (2009). One may say that establishment of statistical regions provisioned by this law is the first step toward formation of a regional state as an overall answer or even prevention of Serbia becoming asymmetrical state in its organization.\(^{256}\) It has all been revived with the discussion about draft of Vojvodina’s new Statute\(^ {257}\) stipulating stronger autonomy within Serbia, in the process of re-constellation of responsibilities between national and provincial level.

Serbia is a country of deep economic, social and geographic differences. Stratification during last decades is a consequence of transition from centrally planned economy to market economy, followed up with bloody wars, immense criminalization and international sanctions, and wild privatization. But this is only an addendum to regional disparities, characteristic of underdeveloped countries due to their large territorial discrepancies and their deep historical roots (e.g. typical centre line: developed North – undeveloped South, or difference between territories ones under the Turkish and Austro-Hungarian rule). Every attempt to eradicate these differences in a sustainable way can be considered as quite a challenge, to say the least. The new law represents just one step in dealing with this challenge defining regional development as a long-term and comprehensive process of advancement, promotion, forwarding of sustainable economic and social development of a region, area or unit of a local self-government, with respect and consideration for their peculiarities. The region is a statistical functional territorial unity, composed of one or more areas, established for the purposes of planning and implementation of the policy of regional development, in compliance with NUTS (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics – NUTS\(^ {258}\)), of level 2. It is not an administrative territorial unit (for now there are still dispensable districts as elements of de-concentration) and has no legal subjectivity. There will be seven regions (Vojvodina region, Belgrade region, West region, East region, Central region, South region, and region of Kosovo and Metohija) but their specification is now responsibility of Statistic Office of Serbia. This legislation does not bring political nor administrative regionalization but it stipulates classification of regions and areas according to their level of development, anticipation of various developmental documents (strategies, plans, programmes) and establishment of National Council and National Agency for Regional Development as well as regional developmental councils and agencies. Although the exact boundaries of regions are still unknown it is expected that the regions will be as much as possible symmetrical thus not completely in correspondence

\(^{256}\) In April the Serbian president Boris Tadić said it is not natural that only province of Vojvodina has defined special rights and that other areas or regions wants the same rights. If Vojvodina would be the only such a region, Serbia would have been an asymmetrical state – and that would cause permanent instability.

\(^{257}\) The Statute is the highest ranking legal act of Autonomous province of Vojvodina that determines constellation of responsibilities between national and provincial level.

\(^{258}\) NUTS derives from French expression «Nomenclature commune des unités territoriales statistiques.»
to economic, ethnic and religious diversities – and asymmetrical federal society. Ethnic Albanian officials from Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac municipalities in Southern Serbia have already launched a new initiative for the formation of a separate region in the so-called Preševo Valley\(^{259}\) with its own institutions and organs. This proposal envisages the creation of an ethnic Albanian-led governance structure for the area. This initiative shows how even light elements of regional policy are already being pervaded with ethno-political practices. Authority and power have territorial dimension and opponents of regionalization suspect regions could become new focuses of separatism. „These fears are given some credence by the fragility of the territorial political map of the Balkans, the uncertainty of political borders in Albanian populated areas in the region and the recent problematic declaration of independence of Kosovo“ (Petruševska, 2009: 66) – this sentence is actually written for Macedonia but it could be applied to Serbia with even more justification.

The question is: what makes certain institutional set-up stable and secures unity while at the same time promotes diversity? Needless to say, Serbia is very much interested in achieving the long-run equilibrium between social structures and political institutions. Should Serbia adopt British model where some „regions“ are more „regional“ then others, to paraphrase George Orwell? Will this influence of ethno-political practices be considered just as democratic even though „A spectre is haunting the globe – the spectre of ethnic fragmentation“? Even in 1977 Duchacek believed that if he was still alive, Marx would rewrite the first sentence of his Manifesto to read like that (Duchacek, 1977:100).

For Nancy Fraser, in every Western democracy there are two powerful hierarchies - economic and status hierarchies, while struggles against inequalities inherent and corresponding to these hierarchies are *politics of redistribution* (remedy: economic restructuring, such as income redistribution, reorganizing the division of labour or regulating investment decisions) and *politics of recognition* (remedy: cultural or symbolic change do upwardly revalue disrespected identities and cultural products of maligned groups or positively value cultural diversity). In the real world, these two politics are often combined. Marxists have supposed that the second hierarchy is purely secondary and epiphenomenal and it is pointless attempting to tackle cultural stigmatization without challenging the underlying economic situation (Kymlicka, 2002: 331-333). Whether this has been the legacy of the previous period of communism, this belief is strongly present nowadays – e.g. development of South of Serbia or Sandžak region would relax the existing majority-minorities tensions. There are concerns with both of these

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\(^{259}\) Non-existing as geographical area, the term Preševo Valley was constructed after an armed conflict between UÇPMB (the Albanian acronym for *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Preshevës, Medvegjes dhe Bujanovcit* – in English: Liberation Army of Presevo, Medveda and Bujanovac) and Serbian security forces in 2001, and has been used ever since to identify whole area with town of Preševo as its inhabitants are predominantly ethnic Albanians. Bujanovac, on the other hand, has a more mixture population structure while Medveda is predominantly inhabited by ethnic Serbs. There is even a movement in Kosovo calling this part of Serbian territory „Eastern Kosovo“. The matter is more complicated by the fact that, although Serbia doesn’t recognize independence of Kosovo, Albanians from the Southern Serbia demand its recognition.
politics. But two much emphasis on the „politics of recognition“ could undermine our capacity as a society to achieve a „politics of redistribution“. The more we emphasize our cultural differences, the less likely we are to work together to fight economic inequality and express solidarity with each other.

I believe regional development planning, although the law does not clearly shows final intentions of the authorities, opens the door for a future regionalization, that will be entrenched around statistical regions soon to be proposed. This would represent a giant leap for centralized Serbia. Regional development policy as foreshadowed by the government is actually an element of politics of redistribution260 and, paradoxically, moderate centripetal state policy aspiring avoidance of the asymmetrical regionalism. The fear of preoccupation with identity and recognition can lead to fragmentation stands behind this politics. Instead of devolution for some regions aiming to avert ethnic separatism, it promotes symmetrical regionalization for the asymmetrical federal society. What are the chances for success?

It is important to note that asymmetric regionalization can be avoided in constitutional arrangement but can appear as a result from the way in which administrative, political and fiscal systems are implemented in a regionalized state. De facto asymmetry exist in every state and even with the politics of fiscal equalization – redistribution, it will not lead to symmetrical development. Moreover, it is often forgotten that politics of development cannot rely only on redistribution, but rather regions have to discover their own, no matter how scarce, resources and employ their potential for development. Even though the privileging issues of identity and recognition can undermine solidarity and undermine creation of cross-cultural ethic, ignoring them can be just as harmful. On the other hand, economic, social and political equality is a basis of cultural diversity – very often we see how „identities are valued, recognised, respected, and cherished when they meet the society’s criteria of success, and in ours these are economic and political“ (Parekh, 2004:208). Redistribution and recognition both address complementary though different aspects of equality.

3.3. Decentralization – an imperative

State is in no position to resolve by itself the problems of the citizens and therefore has to transmit authority and resources to the levels where real life is taking place – to regions and local communities. Decision should be made closer to location of their implementation and no real proponents of democracy can be against decentralization. Advocates of decentralization says it can be seen not only as a democratic mechanism guaranteeing greater citizen participation and accountability and transparency on the part of administrators and politicians, but also as a convenient instrument to buffer ethnic tensions. Other, not necessarily opponents of decentralization, warn us that the democratic potential of decentralization could be hampered by ethnic politics (Petrusevska, 2009: 74).

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260 The Law initiator was Ministry for Economy and Regional Development.
Serbia has little experience with decentralization others than provinces - counts or today's districts were examples of administrative and not political decentralization. The country was highly centralized until 2000 with restricted autonomy for local governments. Belgrade has been paternally doing almost everything leaving local leaders with no possibility in „training“ for the real governance. That is why often term decentralization in a public discourse has a meaning of demetropolisation or debelgradisation.

After the transition reforms, the position of local government units has significantly improved and a higher decentralization level was achieved. With the adoption of the Constitution in 2006, further strengthening of the local government was affirmed as the highest legal act in Serbia provided the basis for restitution of the municipal property that was taken out from municipalities in 1991. One of the problems of the regulation of this area is, apart from precondition of adoption of necessary laws and by-laws, creating well-defined institutional framework that will also enable connection between municipalities and districts in the process of defining development initiatives, flow of information and harmonization of national, regional and local development objectives and priorities.

It is fair to say that achievements of decentralization process up to now have been some-what weak and a strong reason for that is insufficient capacity of municipalities to carry out reform measures. As The Regional Development Strategy of Republic of Serbia correctly recognizes „decentralization is an entirely new concept of planning – it is not just transferring new functions from the state level to the local government, but different management of old functions. Almost all resources are missing for the correct implementation of this concept: human, financial, and organizational. It will take some time for local administration to supersede a passive role in defining and the implementation of the local development goals with an active role.“

It all looks like that famous question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? If almost all resources are missing – human, financial and organizational, for the correct implementation of the concept of decentralization, how will this concept ever going to work and stimulate local and regional development? If we say, the egg is older, we just chose to believe in some sort of evolution of local self-government, or in this case maturation of local communities and their daily learning. If we say, the chicken is older, we chose to believe in creationism, or by analogy, in one great regional plan that has no chance of failing regardless of resources. There is no such a plan. One idea suggests the future role of the region as a territorial unit exactly there – it will allow articulation of common issues, interests and projects of local communities or greater territorial unities, as region possess bigger institutional, financial and professional capacities for defining and realization of bigger development projects.

Mikhail A. Alexseev in his article Decentralization Versus State Collapse: Explaining Russia's Endurance argues that the non-collapse of post-Soviet Russia suggests that state disintegration is not a function of the degree of central control or the balance of power between the centre and the periphery, but of the existence and effectiveness of institutions that mediate centre-periphery grievances. Problem-solving through multilateral compromises and bargaining are state-preserving factors opposed to ethnocentric consolidation of central government. When it comes to Serbia, institution building,
overcoming nation building or multiculturalism only as a response to nation building, enters the scene. Institutional cohesion can not emerge on its own but is a result of deliberate state policies – and all the actors should be involved in their creation. Wishing the best for themselves, all the ethno-cultural minorities should seek to participate and the state should enhance diversity and effective participation policy.

4. CONCLUSION

Someone wisely said that one can take away from people everything forcefully, but cannot give to people anything forcefully. Serbia had to learn that in a harder way. Afraid that the pattern of disintegration will repeat again, it hesitated to make brave changes so many times, assuming a passive instead of an active role. Today, Serbia is at crossroads again while having divided and non-integrated society as a social basis for its immense plans of transition, democratization, development and European integration. Assessing what gets to the heart of each ethnic conflict within Serbia is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that Serbia cannot rely only on regional development policies to relax tensions with minorities. Although impact of the regional development will surely be positive to cohesion of a society, these policies have to be accompanied by an overall integration policy. Politics of recognition addresses important issues neglected by the politics of redistribution but these politics are not inherently incompatible – on the contrary, each can give the depth and energy to the other, and as equally important, both need to be integrated into a coherent theory of politics (Parekh, 2004: 202-205).

Albeit Serbia has become independent state opposing to that option, it can now use the opportunity and proactively rebuilt its society and institutions anew, permitting important and inevitable changes of its society, state and national identity. However, it should be borne in mind that the role of the state in institutionalizing and protecting the equal dignity of its citizens is the most important one, but that this is not enough – Parekh (2004:211) reminds us of our centuries long habit to take a statist view of justice, but that society as a whole, culture(s) and each of us individually is also responsible for permitting and promoting these much-needed changes.

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Sažetak:

Tvrdeći da je srpsko društvo asimetrično, federalno i neintegrisano, autorka ovog rada procenjuje moguća institucionalna rešenja za jedno takvo društvo koja bi mogla da postignu dugoročni ekvilibrijum između društvenih struktura i političkih institucija. Izgradnja institucija, prevazilazeći izgradnju nacije ili multikulturalizma samo kao odgovora na izgradnju nacije, je od prevashodne važnosti za Srbiju. Regionalni razvoj će svakako biti pozitivan za dostizanje društvene kohezije, ali mora biti praćen sveukupnom održivom integracionom politikom, jer politika redistribucije i politika priznanja nisu inherentno nekompatibilne.

Ključne reči: asimetrično federalno društvo, integracija, nacionalne manjine, dezintegracija, federalizam, decentralizacija, regionalni razvoj, politika redistribucije, politika priznanja