

It's time to end Serb-bashing

Пише: Neil Clark

понедељак, 14 јануар 2008 15:22

The Serbs have been demonised because they have consistently got in the way of the west's hegemonic ambitions in the region

Guardian, January 14, 2008

On Cif last week Anna di Lellio, who was a political adviser to the former Kosovan prime minister and one-time Kosovan Liberation Army chief of staff, Agim Çeku, claimed that "Serbian nationalism briefly subdued after the fall of Milosevic" is back in full force with its "old tactics". Di Lellio offers very little evidence to back up her assertion, except a declaration from the Serbian parliament that - horror of horrors - the country is determined to defend its territorial integrity in compliance with international law.

What *is* undoubtedly "back in force" with all its "old tactics" is Serb-bashing, of which Di Lellio is only one of many culprits in the western media (including, it must sadly be said, Cif). The Serbs have been demonised not because they were the party most responsible for the wars of secession in the 1990s - they were not - but because they have consistently got in the way of the west's hegemonic ambitions in the region.

The west wanted Yugoslavia destroyed, with one militarily strong, independent state replaced by several weak and divided Nato/IMF/EU protectorates. "In post-cold war Europe no place remained for a large, independent-minded socialist state that resisted globalisation," admitted George Kenney, former Yugoslavia desk officer of the US state department.

The Serbs' great "crime" was not reading the script. Out of all the groups in the former Yugoslavia, the Serbs, whose population was spread across the country, had most to lose from the country's disintegration. At a meeting at The Hague in October 1991, the leaders of the six constituent republics were presented with a paper entitled "The End of Yugoslavia from the International Scene" by European Community "arbitrators". Only one of them - the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic - refused to sign his country's death certificate. "Yugoslavia was not created by the consensus of six men and cannot be dissolved by the consensus of six men," he declared.

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For his pro-Yugoslav stance, Milosevic was rewarded with over a decade of demonisation in the west's media. Despite his regular election victories in a country where 21 political parties freely operated, Milosevic was (and is) routinely labelled a "dictator", a description which even his consistently hostile biographer Adam LeBor concedes is "incorrect". Some of the attempts to incriminate Milosevic for events he played no part in have been ludicrous: in a Guardian article in 2006 Timothy Garton Ash, a professor of European studies, wrote of Slovenes "trying to break away from Slobodan Milosevic's Yugoslavia in 1991", even though the leader of Yugoslavia at the time was the Croat Ante Markovic (a correction to the claim was published).

In the standard western rewrite of history, Slobo and the Serbs were also to blame for the break-out of war in Bosnia . Yet the man who lit the blue touch paper for that brutal conflict war was not Milosevic, nor the Bosnian-Serb leaders, but the US ambassador Warren Zimmerman, who persuaded Bosnian separatist Alija Izetbegovic to renege on his signing of the 1992 Lisbon agreement, which had provided for the peaceful division of the republic.

Even after the 1995 Dayton agreement brought an end to a totally unnecessary conflict, there was to be no let up in the west's Serbophobia. In Kosovo, the west's strategic objectives meant them siding with the hardliners of the Kosovo Liberation Army, a group, officially classified as a terrorist organisation by the US state department.

No one, certainly no Serb of my acquaintance, denies that Serb forces committed atrocities in the Balkan wars and that those responsible should be held accountable in a court of law (though not one financed by the powers who illegally bombed their country less than 10 years ago). But what makes Serbs so incensed is that whereas Serbian atrocities have received the full glare of the western media spotlight, atrocities committed by other parties in the conflict are all but ignored.

While massive media attention focused on the relatively low-scale tit-for-tat hostilities between Yugoslav forces and the KLA in 1998/9, Operation Storm - where an estimated 200,000 Serbs were driven out of Croatia in an operation which received logistical and technical support from the US - is hardly mentioned. No publicity, either, for massacres such as the slaughter, on Orthodox Christmas Day 1993, of 49 Serbs in the village of Kravice , near Srebrenica. The town recently held a commemorative service to mark the 15th anniversary of the atrocity: no members of "the international community" were present.

Now, with Kosovo again in the headlines, the Serb-bashers are once more out in force. Once

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again, the dispute is being portrayed in Manichean terms. While much is made of the treatment of Kosovan Albanians by Yugoslav forces in 1998/9, little is said about the KLA's campaign of intimidation which led to an exodus of an estimated 200,000 Serbs, Roma, Bosnians, Jews and other minorities from the province after "the international community" moved in.

"Nowhere in Europe is there such segregation as Kosovo ... Nowhere else are there so many 'ethnically pure' towns and villages scattered across such a small province. Nowhere is there such a level of fear for so many minorities that they will be harassed simply for who they are. For the Serbs and 'other minorities', who suffer from expulsion from their homes, discrimination and restrictions on speaking their own language, the pattern of violence they have endured for so long may be about to be entrenched as law in the new Kosovo, as the future status talks continue."

So concludes the Minority Rights Group report on "liberated" Kosovo - but hey, let's brush that one under the carpet because it doesn't blame Serbs.

The double standards imposed where Serbs are concerned are breathtaking. Independence for Kosovo is a simple issue of self-determination, we are repeatedly told. Yet the same principle does not apply to Bosnian Serbs who wish to join up with Serbia .

Instead of championing Kosovan secessionism in contravention of international law, Britain and the west should, in fact, be reconsidering its policy towards Serbia . It's too late to undo past crimes - such as the barbarous 1999 Nato bombing campaign - but changing its policy on Kosovo would at least be a start on redressing the injustices of the last 20 years. It's high time we gave the Serbs a break.

Adresa:

http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/neil_clark/2008/01/its_time_to_end_serbbashing.html

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