

# REAL AND IMAGINED BORDERS

**Presentation delivered during the ECMI Summer School 2013 by**  
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Integrated Version, ECMI 2013



The background photo pictures the participants of the taken ECMI Summer School 2013 standing on the German-Danish Border.

Crossing the border bridge did not evoke any special feelings in the group but provoked reflections on what borders really are, whether they exist or it is just the ascribed meaning that matters...

The following discussion started with the assumption:

**Borders are constructs - mental and imagined. They become real barriers (physical, social, cultural) when recognised or disputed .**

# STATE BORDERS

## Disputed borders (Kosovo)

- Kosovo borders are disputed at both international and local levels.
- People living in the Northern part of Kosovo have specific views and attitudes towards the power-centre Pristina - not only because of the contested independence and powers, but also due to the fact that on a daily level their life is dependant on and regulated by Belgrade (e.g. education, healthcare, social security system)
- Putting up the flags of all countries that have recognized Kosovo independence symbolically reaffirms the “newborn” and its place in the international scene



# STATE BORDERS

## Recognized borders (Azerbaijan)

- Azerbaijan presents a curious case with a kin state community much smaller than the neighbouring diaspora community: In the independent Republic of Azerbaijan (the former Soviet republic of AZ) there are 10 million people, while another 30 million Azerbaijani live in Iran, across the border
- In this case a real (political) border separates physically one nation. Constituting the “few in number” as a majority (within Azerbaijan) and the “larger group” – a minority in the state of Iran. This is the case when the classic approach to the topic of the 'protection of minorities by the kin state' could not be applied.

# ETHNIC BORDERS: LANGUAGE

## Kosovo

- The Serbian-Albanian language borders in Kosovo are real and even geographical (North-South) . Before the war, in the Autonomous region of Kosovo, there were mixed areas where population was bilingual. Nowadays, monolinguals challenge even the implementation of the provision of the Law on language rights in Kosovo
- The most important factor for this language border is the system of education. Children (the new generations both in South & North) are 'poisoned' by the politics
- A positive example for overcoming the language barriers among the young generation are the courses in foreign languages, where people from different ethnic groups (Albanian & Serbian) meet and communicate. But the language of communication is usually the foreign one – e.g. English!

## Azerbaijan

- During Soviet era Azerbaijani language was held inferior to Russian. Russian was (and to some extent still is) a language of the elite
- The revolt against the Russian-speaking elite fueled in the nationalistic aspirations after independence



# ETHNIC BORDERS: RELIGION, CULTURE, IDENTITY

Borders can be established through or reflected in social and cultural practices

- In the case of Armenia there is the existing culture/religious border regulates private life since mixed Yaziti–Armenian marriages are not accepted. In the same time, these cultural practices does not challenge the public inter-ethnic communication; Yaziti can attend Armenian school and enjoy the same rights as Armenians
- Examples from Georgia illustrate the process of development of nationhood borders and their territorial projection. Inscriptions on 19<sup>th</sup> century grave-stones from the villages of Shemokhmedi and Matsevni (Guria region) reveal that only over a period of 20 years, mourning of burials “*on foreign land*” shifted to appraisals for people who “*died in the war waged for the unification of Georgia*”

# GENERATION BORDERS

- Virtual Yugoslavia-s – according to research findings (Bologna University, 2012)
  - **Retro-Yugoslavs** who “haven’t noticed” that the country has fallen apart 20 years ago. In this **Yugonostalgic** discourse war is never mentioned, as if never happened. If this is examined as a mechanisms for accommodating memory conflicts, and not only as an escape mechanism, it might lead to some tangible outcomes
  - **Post-Yugoslavs** – people in search of cyber replacement of what was once a geo-political reality. It is interesting that mostly young people tend to belong to the post-group because they do not have vivid memory from the past
- Yugosphere is currently emerging phenomenon, that could have positive impact on the region, promoting some sort of economic, social and cultural cooperation. (“Yugoslav” community occurs at almost every international event, where young people with no war memories participate )

# INSTITUTIONAL BORDER

## **Caucasus**

- Education system (Russian Schools)

## **Georgia**

- Revising history and introducing new approaches for interpreting the past can have a positive impact and eradicate borders fueled by memories or myths

## **Kosovo**

- Divided institutions can affirm the real dimensions of some mental borders. The parallel systems: municipalities, institutions, healthcare, social security system, education, managed by Pristina in the South and by Belgrade in the North, administrates the establishes division in the country

# SECURITY BORDERS

## **Moldova**

- The European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) was launched on 30 November 2005 following a request made jointly to the European Commission by the presidents of the Republic Moldova and Ukraine to fight against the range of illicit cross-border activity, including trafficking of human beings, smuggling and other illegal trade, along the 1,222km-long MD/UA border.

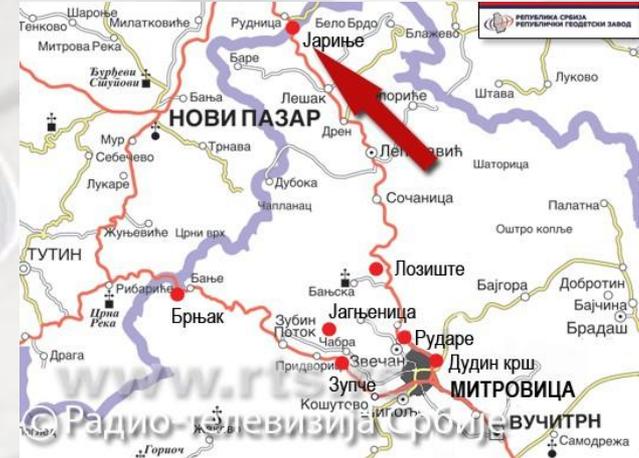
## **Kosovo**

- Borders are still dependent on the international management. Their administration remains a hot /disputed issue. As a result of the framework agreement on how to administrate these borders, EU soldiers were deployed at the borders (e.g. in Brnjak )

# SECURITY BORDERS

## Kosovo

In the summer of 2012 serious tensions occurred at the crossing points between Kosovo & Serbia and quite a few barricades were installed. Some barricades still exist in Mitrovica.



# URBAN / RURAL BORDERS

- Rural and urban differences can enhance the divides in society and hence contribute to development of social and political conflicts
- Attempts to modernise rural areas in Yugoslav times were not accepted well due to the undergoing collectivisation of land. Communist party was supported by people from rural areas, who felt betrayed due to the land policy of the government. Tito decided to stop the collectivisation attempts but in the same time urban population perceived peasants as "capitalists" because they were not following the socialist norms and rules with regard the land (economic factors)
- Divide based on level of literacy and education – significant differences between rural and urban areas. People from rural areas in ex-Yugoslavia were easily indoctrinated by nationalistic speeches before the outbreak of war. This divide still exist.

# POLITICAL & PRAGMATIC BORDERS

- Pro-Western / Pro- European borders
- A new EU-Balkan border emerge with Croatia joining the EU. This political border could easily transform into identity border (there are already jokes about the “EU neighbour Croatia”)
- EU accession could promote reconciliation in the region if countries are brought in together
- Pragmatism of borders. Many Serbs who fought against Croatia during the war now or who claimed that they would not communicate with Croats, would not marry them, are now applying for Croatian passport s

# NEW/OLD BORDERS & NEW/OLD FOES

- In Azerbaijan the frontiers appeared as uniting as well as dividing factor. The idea of unification with the Southern Azerbaijan (North of Iran inhabited mostly by Azerbaijanis) has become a first mental “violation” of the traditional borders set by Russian empire and later by Soviet regime.
- In 1989 some people crossed the border between Soviet Azerbaijan and Iran. Those people also destroyed border posts and claimed new era in unification of Azerbaijan. This provoked major discontent of the Iranian government and Iranian state has put strong efforts to undermine the independence of the newly emerging Azerbaijani state. Hence, Iran’s unanticipated support to Armenia, and not to the ‘fellow Muslim nation’
- After the fall of communism some borders disappeared but others emerged – visible & invisible, mental & real. The Nagorno Karabakh conflict created a mental border between the states and the people of Azerbaijan & Armenia, that in Soviet times used to live peacefully together, to travel in the neighbouring country, and to have inter-marriages

A top-down, slightly blurred photograph of several people's feet and lower legs standing on a light-colored wooden floor. The people are wearing various styles of shoes, including sneakers, loafers, and sandals. The text "THANK YOU!" is overlaid in the center in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**THANK YOU!**