Abstract

Fan groups, or supporters’ groups, in their composition mobilize people from different social, economic, educational, and ultimately political structure. They are “interest groups” in a country which deserve attention. The scientific community in the past and today explores and analyzes fan groups from different aspect. The issue that we will primarily analyze in the paper refers to the relation between a political party and fan groups. The dilemma who, when, and for what purpose uses fan groups, as well as the questions related to the reasons for cooperation between political parties and fan groups will be presented through certain examples that are current (primarily in the Republic of Serbia). Also, through presentation of a historical digression we will try to present the continuity of "cooperation" of political parties with fan groups. The paper will also offer some considerations about fan groups as a potential "soft-power" tool that can be "used" by external factors to provoke a political and security crisis. The possibilities for institutional reaction in prevention of the influence of fan groups on certain political processes that we will present as a conclusion in the paper will offer certain solutions, ways and opportunities to eliminate or ultimately reduce the close cooperation between political parties and fans groups.

Keywords: fan groups, politics, cooperation, institutional response.

1. INTRODUCTION

All the social and political changes which took place in the past, and those happening today, have been related to a certain expression of dissatisfaction placed in the public through certain so-called interest groups. When we talk about interest groups, we should immediately emphasize that under that category of social organization we imply a certain joint action of a large number of people who connect with each other, cooperate and act together in order to realize their goals and interests. Fan groups as a social form of organization are the subject of interest of various scientific disciplines which, in their scientific field, try to answer certain questions that are primarily related to the way they are organized, the way they act, their ideological determination, as well as questions that refer to their role in the realization of certain socio-political processes.

One of the main reasons why fan groups are the subject of interest of various scientific disciplines may be contained in their structure (Lalic, 1993). In particular, it should be noted that fan groups in their ranks generally mobilize young people who basically have a different value system in relation to certain issues, but at the same time are connected and act together when it comes to the point of common interest, and that in this case it is the club
they support (Barisic, 2017). Fan groups are also interesting in terms of the process of their social control. We emphasize this moment for the simple reason that in Macedonia, as in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the process of social control is usually carried out through the way sports clubs are managed, i.e., through their ownership, which is usually in the hands of the state. In the paper we will note the historical moments in which we encounter a certain use of fan groups for political purposes as well as their role in creating certain security crises.

2. THE USE OF FAN GROUPS FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES – HISTORICAL ASPECTS

When we talk about the use of fan groups for the realization of certain political goals, we want to emphasize the fact that we do not think that the use of fans is a political goal in itself. On the contrary, their "commissioning" is only one part of the strategy for the realization of certain political goals, interests and ultimately the implementation of certain policies in the broader sense of the word. The situation of use of fan groups in order to achieve certain political goals is not a phenomenon that is characteristic of the modern times in which we live. Back in history we have examples through which we can note the role of fan groups in certain political processes. At the same time, we will not approach a deep historical digression that goes back many millennia, but we will stay on the recent past, where we encounter a process of using fan groups for certain political purposes. If the development of fan groups, especially fan groups in England as a country which is considered a source of modern way of organizing and acting, can be divided into four stages, then the role of fan groups in the implementation of certain political processes is extremely important, in the third and the fourth stage of their development.

To be more specific, the third phase of the development of fan groups and their use for certain political purposes covers the period of economic and industrial stagnation both throughout Europe and in the UK in particular, which is characterized as a moment in which the first organized fan groups were formed, which as such were primarily associated with or derived from members of the working class and were ideologically indoctrinated and advocated pro-left or pro-socialist views. Unlike the third phase, in the fourth phase of the development of the fan groups, which covers the period from the end of the 80s of the last century until today, there is a significant change in the ideological and political attitudes of the fan groups and their inclination to the right. The reason that explains why there is such an ideological change in the fan groups is probably in the role of the fans in the time period that covers the fourth phase in specific political and social processes that have happened and are happening today (Deriemaeker, & De Maere, 2016).

2.1. The role of the fan groups in the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia

As to the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, analyzed from today's distance, we can rightly say that it was a complex process that absorbed a large number of activities which led to the military conflict as their final result. The emergence and development of nationalism among the people who lived in the then common state for some political actors at the time was a process of surprise. But, unlike this group of surprised political activists, at that time there were politicians who, on the contrary, with their activities contributed to accelerating the disintegration of Yugoslavia. At the same time, we do not want and we will not go deep into the political reasons that were the main generator of the beginning of the break-up of Yugoslavia, such as the Constitution of 1974 or the speech of Josip Broz Tito
ten years earlier in 1964 at the Eighth Congress of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, but we will try to analyze the process at the time of its final operationalization, which is the period of the early 90s of the last century (Markovic, 1994).

On the contrary, we base our approach and limit it to the role of the fan groups in the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia and their significance i.e., their contribution to its realization. If we previously emphasized that the development of fan groups, as well as their ideological (political) indoctrination in the so-called fourth stage of development which was, and till today is predominantly right, then it would be logical to conclude that the development and transmission of nationalism, certain forms of extremism and chauvinism, in the period of the beginning of the break-up of Yugoslavia were manifested through fan groups. Basically, there was not (and still does not exist) a better opportunity for a certain policy to be transmitted, and the effect of transmission to be maximized by the general public, from the use of sports matches, through the direct use of fan groups. Although Yugoslavia, as a political creation and as a socio-political organization, for a long time managed to amortize the phenomena that spread very quickly from Western Europe and through the countries of the Eastern Bloc, still the end of the 80s is a period in which Yugoslavia, i.e., its authorities failed to find a suitable mechanism to prevent and stifle growing nationalism.

The war in Yugoslavia seems to have been inevitable, but what remains unanswered till today is the impact of the football match between the teams of Dinamo Zagreb and the Red Star of Belgrade, as a kind of initial trigger in the process of escalating hostilities. In the years after the break-up of Yugoslavia, when the six independent states were formed, there were again examples of the use of fan groups to raise the level of nationalism, promoting policies which, at that time, the state leadership of a certain country considered right and necessary, etc. In addition, in terms of the use of fan groups to carry out certain processes related to hostilities in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, there are examples of the use of fan groups as a base for recruiting volunteers needed to fill paramilitary units on the ground (Петревски, 2020, стр. 53).

2.2. The control of the fan groups

When we talk about the system of control over the fan groups, we want to emphasize that in this section we do not refer to the control of fan groups through the legislative framework which undoubtedly exists in our country and in the countries of former Yugoslavia and Europe, where in fact, we have used certain experiences when it comes to making appropriate legal decisions. Also, we do not discuss the question of whether the legal solutions or specifically the Law on prevention of violence and misbehavior at sports competitions is effective, whether it is applicable and whether it faces certain objective obstacles in its application. On the contrary, our intention is to try to present some other forms of control to the fan groups.

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1 Opinions are divided in the scientific and professional public when it comes to the meaning and role of the match played at the Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb on 13.05.1990. There are certain indicative moments that are related to the sports match itself and the clash of the two fan groups, their iconography during the match itself, as well as the role of the direct participants in it. Part of the scientific community comes out with the opinion that the sports match itself "justified" the role of a generator of the occurrence of military conflicts between Serbia and Croatia, i.e. JNA with the forces of territorial defense of Croatia, which meant an official entry into the war. See more: Петревски, Благојч. Казнено-правни, криминолошки и криминалистички карактеристики на казненото дело насилство и недостојно однесување на спортските натпревари за периодот од 2004 до 2015 година на територијата на Република Македонија, стр. 45
First of all, we want to think in the direction of whether there is a certain political control over the fan groups in these Balkan areas, or, to be more specific, whether in the countries of the former Yugoslavia there is an informal system of control by political entities and specific politicians over the fan groups. If we analyze the events that have been prevalent in the recent period, especially in the neighboring Serbia and the processes related to the arrest of members of the group "Principi", which is an integral part of the fan group "Grobari jug", then the only logical conclusion that is imposed as justified, real and objective is that the degree of political cooperation (politicians) is active and that it really existed. By keeping the fans close to them, politicians at any time have the opportunity to easily mobilize a larger number of people and use them for the realization or in certain situations also for the immediate implementation of certain solutions.

Yet, the legitimate question is how politics, i.e., politicians manage to control fan groups. Is there a system of formal control or is it still a situation in which informal control over fan groups is successfully implemented? When we try to answer the previous dilemma, the opinion we want to present is that politicians control the fan groups by directly controlling sports (primarily football clubs) to which the fan groups gravitate. The forms through which the control system is implemented are basically reduced to installing their own "verified" staff in management positions in the boards of directors of sports clubs. In general, the major sports clubs from former Yugoslavia have not changed the way they function to date, and at the same time to date no serious attempt has been made to approach the process of changing the ownership structure. Namely, in most cases it is dominant in the "hands of the state", and through this position the state is directly responsible for the way of functioning of sports clubs, as well as in the organization, i.e., communication with fan groups that are an inevitable part of the governing bodies of sports clubs. Getting certain leadership positions, the ability to "control" their own tribune and participate in the distribution of season tickets for a certain sector of the stadium, as well as their "presence" on certain payrolls, are part of the forms and ways in which politicians control fan groups. The situation in Macedonia fully responds to the aforementioned situation. In our country, most of the sports clubs (football, handball, and basketball) are predominantly owned by the state or local self-government units. Thus, through the control of the management package and through direct dependence on the financial means that the state or the local self-government units allocate for the smooth functioning of the sports clubs, the cooperation between the politicians and the fan groups is defined.

3. (AB)USE OF FAN GROUPS IN THE POLITICAL LIFE IN MACEDONIA

The history of independent Macedonia is filled with political events and processes that have attracted the attention of the public. Some of those political processes were related to the mobilization of a large number of citizens and their direct participation in them. For example, in the days before and immediately after the declaration of independence, on the territory of Macedonia certain activities were noticed by some of the fan groups that were aimed at encouraging the feeling of the need for an independent state. Specifically, when we talk about a certain fan activism in the days before the referendum on independence, as well as immediately after the declaration of independence of our country and the manifestation of belonging to the new Macedonian state, we should note the importance and role of the fan group "Komiti" (Петревски, 2020, стр. 201). Basically, the activity of the fan group was aimed at mobilizing a critical mass that will accept and "revive" the idea of an independent and sovereign state. Sports matches, in this case football matches of the football club
“Vardar” from that period were the place used by the fan group to convey certain messages, to display certain slogans, flags and banners that generally referred to promotion of the idea of an independent and sovereign state of Macedonia.

Fan groups in Macedonia were also used in order to polarize and further encourage interethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians in our country. The first activities in this direction were noticed immediately before, during and after the end of the military conflict in 2001. Most often, in the role of direct executors of the directions received from certain centers of political power in our country, when it comes to the process of inciting and inflaming national, ethnic, ultimately religious intolerance between Macedonians and Albanians, have been the fan groups "Komiti" and "Shverceri". The very fact that their "human potential" is composed of a structure that is generally pure in terms of nationality and ethnicity, then their use in the processes of causing incidents on a national basis, is not accidental. A relevant example in which the previously mentioned fan groups participated, and which to this day seems to be present in the collective consciousness of the citizens in our country, is the incident at the Skopje Fortress “Kale” in 2011. The incident in Skopje is interesting from another aspect, i.e., during the incident was noticed direct participation of a senior political official of a political party from the so-called Albanian bloc was noticed. In addition, the incident was a good example to confirm the thesis that fan groups are directly controlled by political parties, but at the same time the incident served to note the powerlessness of the state, in this case seen through the direct activity of the then deputy Interior Minister who embarked on a process of releasing persons who had previously been deprived of their liberty by remanded police officers. The testimony of some of the participants in the incident from both fan groups confirms the impression and the conclusion that there was some political manipulation (Митевска, 2014).

4. THE CAPACITY OF FAN GROUPS TO PROVOKE SECURITY CRISIS

Fan groups, as a kind of social group in the past and today attract the attention of both the scientific and professional public. Additionally, we are witnesses that there have been certain activities of state bodies, here we primarily refer to the Ministries of Interior, trying to come to certain knowledge and information that would be useful in the prevention of certain security conditions, but also in the direction of continuous monitoring of the group as part of the system of the so-called interest groups.

To the question of whether fan groups have the capacity to cause a particular security problem or crisis, the answers can be reduced to two different positions and approaches. Namely, part of the public (scientific and professional) advocates the view that fan groups are a potential security problem and they have the capacity to cause a serious security situation. The other position that is also legitimate is that the fan groups are not in a position to cause a security problem or a serious security situation, if of course, the system works properly and it does not face certain shortcomings or pressures of a different nature. In the recent past, i.e., in the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia, state bodies acted from a position that perceived and treated fan groups as a serious security problem and as a group that can and has the potential to cause serious security disturbances in a country. A typical example of a serious and studious approach to fan groups, an approach that meant daily monitoring of their activities and daily analysis of their capacity to cause security crises, is the approach of the State Security Service of Croatia - Republic Secretariat of the Interior of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (Previsic, 2019).
In the first years of Yugoslavia's existence, football was used as a means of integration and confirmation of "brotherhood and unity", but in the process of the break-up of Yugoslavia, football, and thus the fan groups, took on a new role and were major players in the process of manifestation of nationalist policies and messages. In particular, fan groups were used in the process of promoting the so-called stadium nationalism, which the political establishment from the period of the break-up of Yugoslavia needed in order to influence the broad masses and convey the message of the necessity for the break-up of Yugoslavia.

Even after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the formation of independent and sovereign states, stadiums and fan groups continued to be an issue of interest to state authorities. The reason why the continuity of interest in the groups is maintained is contained in the emergence of the "ideology of the stadiums". This phenomenon is not exclusive to the countries of the former Yugoslavia. On the contrary, the appearance of "stadium ideology" is previously encountered in stadiums in England, Germany, Italy, etc. The ideological indoctrination of fan groups was especially present in Germany in the mid-80s of the last century when the process of resurrection of National Socialism was observed in the stadiums in this country, and ultimately Nazism (Петревски, 2020, стр. 38).

The phenomenon of "stadium ideology" is also present in Italy as a country. There are a number of fan groups in Italy that advertise themselves as right-wing (primarily Lazio, some Roma fans, Bologna, Verona, etc.). Italy may be the only example in Europe where at the same time we meet strong left-wing indoctrinated fan groups. The main point that unites these fan groups is the pronounced anti-Nazi rhetoric, the liberal views on certain issues (migration, the LGBT community) and the alliance for joint action against right-wing groups2. In addition to the "ideology of the stadiums" in Italy in the past period there have been a number of incidents, of serious security breaches related to the organization of a sports match. Some of those incidents ended in several deaths, both among fans and members of the police, which in itself confirms the capacity and possibility for fan groups to be the cause of more serious security incidents. (Петревски, 2020, стр. 116).

England is a special example of the occurrence of serious security incidents related to fan groups. The major incidents at Heysel in 1985, and Hillsborough in 1989, are perhaps the best examples of the ability of fan groups to cause serious security problems and situations. In both examples, a large number of human casualties were reported, but at the same time, the inability of the official authorities to prevent the problems was noted.

Fan groups from former Yugoslavia, specifically the larger fan groups from the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Croatia, when it comes to their ability to be the cause of security incidents that would cause concern to the official authorities referring to the general security situation, does not lag behind the examples we have given earlier. Primarily, the larger fan groups (Delije, Grobari, Bed Blue Boys and Torcida) in the period after the break-up of Yugoslavia participated in a number of security incidents, and some of them ended with serious consequences i.e., followed by human casualties. The killings of Brice Taton, Ivan Perovic, Aca Radovic and several other cases related to fan fights, are a sufficient example that should be the basis for thinking that fan groups should be perceived as entities which are "ready" to cause serious incidents and that their power should not be underestimated or ultimately marginalized.

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2 *How is football a political sport – 9 left-wing clubs to whose fans you don't want to ask this questions*, available at: https://www.newindianexpress.com/galleries/sport/2020/aug/21/how-is-football-a-political-sport-9-left-wing-clubs-to-whose-fans-you-dont-want-to-ask-this-questi-102932--2.html
4.1. The situation in Macedonia

Fan groups in Macedonia since the independence have not been associated with the occurrence and participation in serious incidents. When we talk about serious incidents, we first think of situations from which human casualties have arisen. It is not that in Macedonia in these past 30 years of independence there were no situations in which fan groups had the main role in a sports match. A positive circumstance is that there are no human casualties during those incidents and physical clashes. In this regard, we would like to note the example with the death of the member of the fan group "Komiti" - Nikola Sazdovski, whose murder is correlated with previous fan fights and expressed fan impatience, caused by different ethnic, national and religious affiliation of the victim and the perpetrators. Other examples where we have the presence of human victims as a final consequence of fan incidents in Macedonia do not exist. However, what should be noted about the Macedonian fan scene, i.e., the Macedonian fan groups (especially for the larger fan groups) is the fact that they are divided on the basis of different ethnic and national affiliation of their members. This situation is the reason for the frequent occurrence of hate speech at sports competitions in our country. Of course, we must not ignore this situation and we must not marginalize it, because very easily verbal violence can be transformed into serious physical fights whose consequences can be fatal.

Perhaps in the explanation i.e., in an attempt to answer the question why in Macedonia until today there have not been a large number of incidents such as the cases in Serbia and Croatia, first of all, we should look for it in the frequency of sports matches in our country, as well as the average number of spectators (fans) who watch sports matches. In Macedonia there is not a continuity of quality sports matches that would be a reason for greater attendance of audience at the matches and greater mobilization of their fans. Also, the organization of sports clubs lags far behind the organizational capacities of the clubs of the former big four in Yugoslavia. In this context, we should mention the fact that fan groups in Macedonia today, unlike the years after the independence at the beginning of the new millennium, are in a phase of reorganization and generational change, which as processes further affect the capacity of fans groups and in the mobilization of new members in them.

The conclusion from the above is that in Macedonia there are no serious chances and prospects for the fan groups to appear as perpetrators of incidents of more serious proportions and incidents that would ultimately be accompanied by material and mortal casualties. Analogous to what has been said before, in Macedonia fan groups can be part of an incident only if they are instructed and encouraged by certain political processes and by the direct influence of political parties or leaders of fan groups.

5. CONCLUSION

The arguments presented earlier in the content of this paper give us the right to draw certain conclusions regarding the role of fan groups in the implementation of certain political processes, as well as their capacity to cause serious security crises. A fan group in an organized society and in an organized country should always be treated as an interesting social group that has its own ways and methods of functioning that can be used to implement or promote certain policies. The examples mentioned earlier in the paper, which speak of the direct role of fan groups in the realization of certain political scenarios only confirm our position that they can be used and (ab)used for certain political purposes in the future. In addition to achieving political goals, fan groups have the potential to provoke security incidents that can cause serious consequences.
For that purpose, the state i.e., the state apparatus should base its approach to the fan groups on the principle of continuity. When we say this, first of all we imply that continuity should be achieved in a way that will carefully monitor the activities of the fan groups and on the basis of that vigilance to analyze their capacities and their capabilities in certain situations.

In this regard, we should emphasize the importance of inter-institutional cooperation, which primarily implies or should imply the exchange of information in order to timely prevent certain situations.

In addition, access to fan groups should not and must not be stigmatized. The generalization of all members of a fan group as hooligans or as people who easily decide to use violence in a certain situation, means nothing but a reflection of the inability of the state apparatus to face the problem in a real and objective way.

6. REFERENCES

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