



# KOSOVO

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## Homogenizers in Retreat

By George F. Will, Newsweek  
<http://www.newsweek.com/id/150469>

When Alexander the Great's weary soldiers trudged into northern Pakistan around 327 B.C., they were not too tuckered out to fraternize with the local ladies. Or so 'tis said, although ethnographers and DNA cast doubts on asserted close connections between Macedonians and today's Hunza people of the Himalayan foothills. But a myth's power does not depend on its plausibility, and the Financial Times enchantingly reports that on July 11 Prince Ghazanfar Ali Khan, representing the dignity of the "fair-skinned, blue-eyed Hunza people," arrived at Alexander the Great airport in Skopje—capital of the Republic of Macedonia, a shard of the former Yugoslavia—to assert kinship across 23 centuries.

So let us now praise a splendid reversal. Durable differences are flourishing, to the exasperation of would-be homogenizers of the world.

Macedonia demands recognition of a Macedonian minority in Greece, which wants Macedonia to change its name, which is the same as the name of Greece's northern province. Greece funds cultural institutions in Pakistan and Afghanistan among the Kalash people, who also claim descent from the soldiers of Alexander. He had no known children.

From the Mediterranean to the North Sea—Scotland is in another fever of nationalist regret about 1707, when its Parliament became subservient to Westminster—Europe is experiencing interesting ferments. In 1500, there were approximately 500 European political units. By 1800, there were a few dozen, and that was before the unifications of Germany and Italy. The 19th century of consolidation has, however, been followed by fissuring. In 1920, after the First World War shattered the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires, Europe had 23 states. By 1994, there were 50. The disintegration of two entities born out of the 1914–18 war, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the divorce of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, exemplify the politics of reasserted particularities.

Disaggregation is in the air even as the implacable consolidators of the European Union try to break ancient nations to the saddle of sameness. The EU has a flag that no one salutes, an anthem no one sings (it has no words), 27 different national memories and more than that number of durable ethnicities. Hence the EU is increasingly an *opéra bouffe* attempt to turn "Europe" from a geographical into a political denotation.



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In 2005 referendums, the French and Dutch rejected what was preposterously called a European "constitution." It was a mare's nest of obscurantism (what was verbiage about the Sami people's reindeer husbandry doing in a *constitution*?) and lunacy (the right of children to "express their views fully"). Undeterred by democracy, and determined to continue the centralizing project, the EU ginned up the gaseous Lisbon Treaty, a sample of which is: "The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on ..." Good grief.

Ireland recently rejected this wordy device for leeching away even more of the national sovereignty that is a prerequisite for self-government. France's excitable President Nicolas Sarkozy, who currently occupies the EU's rotating six-month presidency, seems to think, as EU leaders generally do, that balky nations must keep voting until they vote correctly, at which point the ratchet of consolidation is irreversible. Britain's Conservative Party, which is favored to win the next election (sometime before summer 2010), says that if Ireland has not by then ratified the treaty, a Conservative government will urge rejection of it by referendum.

At their worst—their best is bad enough—EU enthusiasts clumsily invoke the pale specter of a synthetic terror, a recrudescence of bloody nationalism, to panic the EU's 27 member nations into "pooling" their sovereignties and "harmonizing" their social policies, for the greater glory of the EU bureaucracy in Brussels, which is in Belgium, which is in crisis. It was cobbled together in 1830 from French-speaking Wallonia and Dutch-speaking Flanders, and after 178 years these regions find each other increasingly irritating. Perhaps they would seek a divorce if they could decide who gets custody of Brussels—and of Belgium's huge national debt. The Belgians, with their seven parliaments, should consult with the restive Bosnian Serbs of Republika Srpska, and with Moldova's secessionist Transdnistria region. Such would-be statelets might not make economic sense, but it is not obviously irrational for other considerations to matter, too.

Of course, not all European affirmations of ancient differences are wholesome. In Spain, Basque separatists recently detonated four bombs, the first near the city of Bilbao, which in 1936 and 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, was briefly the seat of an autonomous Basque government. But it is, on balance, nice that Marx and his epigones, who were reliably wrong, were never more so than when insisting, as other slow learners still do, that religion, myth and ethnicity were preindustrial forces that would lose their history-shaping saliency in the modern, market-driven world of economic motives. A core tenet of conservatism was put perfectly by William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." If it were, the present would be thin gruel indeed.