

THE BALKANS BETWEEN THE EU AND NATO: FOCUSING ON THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

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Abstract. *The fragmentation of Yugoslavia has wrought extensive political and social changes in the Balkans and Europe more generally. After the collapse of communism and the breakup of Yugoslavia, many Balkan countries have transformed their political system and have begun to forge new foreign and security policy. Some of them have already joined the EU and NATO, and some are about to access these organizations. But the Western Balkan states seem to be farther in the future. In regard to the former Yugoslavia, the United States, European states and international organizations, such as the EU, NATO and UN, have attempted to engage and manage this breakup on an individual and collective basis. They have greatly influenced the process of the post-conflict nation building of this region. From this viewpoint, the paper discusses the political and social transformation of the Balkans after the breakup of the Yugoslav conflict, and the role of the EU and NATO in the process of the democratization and nation building in the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, attention is paid to the features of the involvement of the EU and NATO in the former Yugoslav conflict. In the process of Yugoslav fragmentation one can see the 'Eastern Question' revisited and the 'Powder keg of Europe' once again rising to its brim.*

1. THE END OF COLD WAR AND THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE BALKANS

Following the end of the Cold War, the meaning of 'Balkan' changed considerably in Eastern Europe. 'Eastern Europe' as a political term disappeared and a new dichotomy came to emerge – a dichotomy of cultural and historical differences between Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) and the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Romania, and Bulgaria). This dichotomy implied past experiences of parliamentary democracy and economic development in these former socialist countries. Historically, the division line between Central Europe and the Balkans overlaps with that of the Habsburg and Ottoman

Empires. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, this line cut the country into two halves, with Slovenia and Croatia belonging to Central Europe and the other republics to the Balkans. *The Chicago Tribune* made the following statement: "A new curtain is falling across eastern Europe, dividing north from south, west from east, rich from poor and the future from the past. As Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic sprint into the future of democracy and market economics, Romania and Bulgaria slide into Balkan backwardness and second-class citizenship in the new Europe.¹ This distinction between Central Europe and the Balkans was evident in the way in which democratic transitions in Central Europe have been supported, and in which conflict in the former Yugoslavia

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¹ Cited in M. Todorova, *Imaging the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1997, p.157. *Chicago Tribune*, 10 October 1994.

has been managed.² While Central Europe unquestionably featured prominently in the strategic plans of European and transatlantic institutions, the place of the Balkans in these plans was not so clear throughout the 90s. The US directed its efforts at preparing Central European states for membership of Euro-Atlantic structures. On the other hand, the EU took partial and in some cases contradictory action, due to changing policy preferences and internal problems.

“Balkanness” was frequently quoted as both a cause and characteristics of the conflict. Such words as ‘genocide’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and ‘Vandalism’ (destruction of cultures) were bandied about to express the ‘barbarity’ of the Balkan conflict, foreign to ‘civilized’ Europe. Here it is obvious that the word ‘Balkan’ is used not in the geographic sense, but in the sense of creating an ‘other’ within the borders of Europe and the Western civilization. In the West, the dichotomy between Central Europe and the Balkans is frequently interpreted as the East-West opposition.³

On this point, M. Todorova notes as follows.⁴ East is a relational category, depending on the point of observation. The same applies to the Balkans with their propensity to construct their internal orientalism, aptly called the process of “nesting orientalism”. A Serb is an “easterner” to a Slovene, but a Bosnian would be an “easterner” to the Serb although geographically situated to the west; the same applies to the Albanian who,

situated in the western Balkans, are perceived as easternmost by the rest of the Balkan nations. Greece, because of its unique status within the European Union, is not considered “eastern” by its neighbors in the Balkans although it occupies the role of the “easterner” within the European institutional framework. For all Balkan people, the common “easterner” is the Turk, although the Turk perceives himself as Western compared to real “easterners”, such as Arab. This practice of internal orientalism within the Balkans corresponds to what Erving Goffman has defined as the tendency of the stigmatized individual “to stratify his ‘own’ according to the degree to which their stigma is apparent and obtrusive.

In related to this critical issue, S. Zizek puts an interesting question. “Where do the Balkans begin? The Balkans are always somewhere else, a little bit more towards the southeast.... For the Serbs, they begin down there, in Kosovo or in Bosnia, and they defend the Christian civilization against this Europe’s Other; for the Croats, they begin in orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values; for Slovenes they begin in Croatia, and we are the last bulwark of the peaceful *Mittereuropa*; for many Italians and Austrians they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes; for many Germans, Austria itself, because of its historical links, is already tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency.”⁵

² M. Sadakata, “Regional Governance: Lessons from European Involvement in Yugoslav Conflicts”, *Japanese Journal of Political Sciences*, 4(2), 2003, p.316.

³ M. Sadakata, “Changes in Intervention Theory and the Fragmentation of Yugoslavia”, V. Franicevic and H. Kimura eds, *Globalization, Democratization and Development*, MASMEDIA, Zagreb, 2003, p.232.

⁴ M. Todorova, op. cit., p.58.

⁵ S. Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, Verso, London and New York, 2000, pp.3-4.

2. THE EU AND THE STABILITY PACT FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

As the Eastern bloc collapsed, considerable differences surfaced between those countries which had been a part of it. However, the vast majority of them shared the common aspiration of joining the EU. The EU functions as a reference point for the modernization of aspiring transitional candidate members. Europeanization has become a series of operations leading to systemic convergence through the process of democratization, marketization, stabilization and institutional inclusion.⁶

The EU had seized on the former Yugoslav conflicts in an attempt to demonstrate its ability to prosecute a European foreign and military policy, but it had failed twice. In Bosnia in 1995, as in Kosovo in 1999, initial European efforts resulted in the United States eventually taking control of negotiations and leading its NATO allies into conflict. According to Holbrooke, Dayton shook the leadership elite of post-Cold War Europe. Some European officials were embarrassed that US involvement had been necessary.⁷

The EU intervention and assistance policies in the Balkans have mainly been shaped in response to emerging crisis, most frequently on a purely ad hoc basis. Although in 1996, the EU developed its Regional Approach inviting the Balkan countries to implement regional cooperation, the approach lacked in substance and concrete measure of support. However, a turnaround in EU policies came

immediately after the NATO bombardments of FR Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999.

In view of its failure to stabilize the Balkans throughout the 1990s, the international community, and in particular the EU, decided to elaborate a new, more comprehensive, and longer-term strategy for the Balkans. This led to the adoption of the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" in Cologne in June 1999, which was designed to assist the reconstruction efforts of the seven Southeastern European countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Yugoslavia) which had been affected by the Kosovo conflict.⁸

The Stability Pact was put forward by countries from the Balkan region, and by major donor countries and international organizations such as the EU, World Bank, EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), and the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). The Stability Pact represented a political commitment by all the countries and international organizations concerned to a comprehensive, coordinated and strategic approach to the region. Crisis management would be replaced by preventive diplomacy, and there would be a focus on democratization, human rights, economic development and reconstruction, and internal and external security.

For European countries, this Pact was interpreted as a means to link all Balkan states to mainstream European political processes, and in particular to EU integration and the EU enlargement

⁶ L. Demetropoulou, "Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe", *Southeast European Politics*, 3(2-3) 2002, p.89.

⁷ R. Holbrooke, *To End a War*, (New York, Random House, 1998), p.318.

⁸ M. Uvalic, "Integrating Southeast European Countries into European Union: Problems and Prospects", Paper at the Conference "The South-East European Countries in Transition"; Zagreb, 12-14 September 2002, p. 4.

process. Briefly stated, it was an attempt to 'Europeanize' and 'de-Balkanize' the Balkans.⁹ The Stability Pact is the first creative response to a historic challenge to create a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region in an area where such attributes have been rare.

3. TERMINOLOGICAL PROBLEM BETWEEN THE BALKANS AND THE SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

The most important aspect of the Stability Pact is the fact that the Balkans are finally perceived as a part of Europe. This is expressed in the Pact's consistent use of the term 'South Eastern Europe' instead of 'the Balkans'; the drafters of the Pact explicitly decided to shun the term 'the Balkans'. This was an attempt to transform perceptions that the region is 'backyard', 'peripheral', or that it is a 'border' or 'transition zone' and promote the notion that the region is part of Europe.¹⁰

So, the substitution of 'Balkans' with 'Southeastern Europe' is significant. Moreover, the principle of inclusiveness is further underlined by the use of the term 'countries of the region and their neighbors'. References to Europe and to European integration make it clear that the Stability Pact is intended to be something of a springboard towards the ultimate goal of European integration for

the region.¹¹ The term 'Southeastern Europe' is positive, compared with the popular negative connotations possessed by the term 'Balkans' and reflected in terms such as 'Balkanization'. But the term also contains the promise of a brighter future. EU strategies to establish peace and promote regional democratization entail redefinitions of what the region is. The term 'Southeastern Europe' has been introduced to convey the idea of an integrated European region.¹²

On this terminological problem, N. Svob-Dokic clearly compares these two terminologies. Regional self-identification, expressed as either acceptance or rejection of the notion of Southeast Europe or Balkans, reflects today the spiritual background of the positioning of the Southeast European countries and societies in Europe and the different value systems that such positioning may stand for. The Balkans appears to be the term that is primarily associated with the historical close links and historical similarities between this part of Europe and the Near East that were established and maintained within the Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, Southeast Europe is associated with modernization of the area and its cultural and conceptual closeness to Western Europe, developed mainly under the German and Austrian influences.¹³

⁹ Vucetic, "The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe as a Security Community-Building Institution", *Southeast European Politics*, No.2, October 2001, p.115.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹¹ D. Bechev, "Building Southeastern Europe: The Politics of International Countries in Transition", Paper at the Conference "The South-East European Countries in Transition", Zagreb, 12-14 September 2002, p.14.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹³ N. Svob-Dokic, "The Transitional Changes in the Scientific Systems of Southeast European Countries", V. Franicevic and H. Kimura eds, *op. cit.*, p.456. The Balkans is burdened with very negative connotations. Stereotypes of cruelty, irrational, emotional and uncivilized behavior are ascribed to the Balkan heritage. The attempt to re-integrate the areas economically, politically, and perhaps, culturally has been strongly resented by the nationalist movements and rejected through the processes of building up separate national states. The EU strategies to establish peace and support democratization in the area are bringing forward an attempt to redefine it conceptually. Following such ideas, Southeastern Europe has been re-introduced to express the main idea of turning the whole area into an integrated European region. N. Svob-Dokic "Balkan versus Southeastern Europe". N. Svob-Dokic ed., *Redefining Cultural Identities?* (Culturelink Joint Publication Series No.4) Zagreb, Institute for International Relations, 2001, p.40.

4. DISCORD BETWEEN THE EU AND NATO IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As it is clear that the countries of the region lack power and strength to solve the problems on their own, and there is certainly no alternative, only the American and the European policy remain as relevant actors that will in part compete, and in part undertake joint activities in order to accomplish set goals.¹⁴

The international community, in particular the West, was urged to manage the conflict that followed and to stabilize the region. However, the engagement and intervention by the West reflected the competition for hegemony within the West itself and their dichotomous view of the cultures between Central Europe and the Balkans.

Economic benefits are certainly very important to the European Union. By defining the regional cooperation as an alternative to instability and possible new war, the EU has clearly announced its goal: advancement of cooperation between the neighboring states and the creation of conditions for preventing possible confrontation.

The European approach is based on well-established and already tested methods of regional integration, which have yielded so far positive results and which are regarded by the EU as a prerequisite for potential integration of a certain region into the European one. The American SECI (Southeast European Cooperative Initiative), on the other hand, is designed with prospects to assemble a larger number of countries, to diminish animosities between former enemies, by the means

of which it would accomplish some higher strategic objectives: securing peace and stability and eliminating the Russian influence and presence in the area.¹⁵

Discord between the EC (EU) and the United States over leadership regarding European security was a major problem. The United States tried to play a leading role in the framework of NATO, while the EU began working to have its own defence organization not reliant on the United States. For Europe, the Yugoslav conflict was a European affair and, therefore, an unavoidable problem. However, for the United States, it was a case study for the construction of the new world order.¹⁶

America made it quite clear already at the time of NATO-led military operation that the Europeans would have to deal with the reconstruction issue in wider terms. Having given immediately thumbs up to the idea of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the American policy supported the Pact as a joint Euro-American Project. During the preparations, as well as during the NATO action itself, the USA didn't actually suffer great material losses and after the intervention they have been trying to pass the bill for reconstruction works over to the EU. The American strategy was displayed again which only highlighted the American primacy and at the same time it showed clearly that Europe could only represent a second-rate ally of the unipolar global power. If the burden of the reconstruction on the Balkans falls to the maximum extent on Europe, then

¹⁴ R. Vukadinovic, *Security in South-Eastern Europe*, Politicka Kultura, Zagreb, 2002, p.61.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.61.

¹⁶ M. Sadakata, "Changes in Intervention Theory and the Fragmentation of Yugoslavia", *op. cit.*, p.230.

it is to be expected that euro won't get to a real rival to dollar.¹⁷

There is an additional nuance that separates the West Europeans from their American counterparts. In the non-Yugoslav Balkans, the war in the former Yugoslavia is referred to exclusively as the "Yugowar" or the war in Bosnia. In Western Europe, it is usually defined as the war in ex-Yugoslavia or in Bosnia, although there is occasional mention of a Balkan war. In the United States, the war is usually generalized as "Balkan war", although there is occasional mention of the war in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁸

5. NATION BUILDING AFTER DAYTON AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In the post-Cold War era, international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, the EC (EU) and CSCE found themselves in a situation where they needed to find new ways of legitimating their cohesive international roles without the framework of the Cold War. The language of democratization, marketization and global ethics has provided a new set of 'mission statements' that are particularly suited to the needs of the new era.¹⁹ The period of post-Cold War era is also seen as the age of globalization. In response to these drastic political and economic changes, international organizations have been guided or influenced by the notions of 'liberal internationalism' and 'democratic peace', whether they liked it or not.

International organizations have adopted democratization as a pillar for nation-building projects in post-conflict countries. Theoretically, their involvement in democratization is based on the assumption of the so called 'democratic peace theory', which states that democracies rarely go to war with each other, and therefore assumes that an increase in the number of democratic states would imply, and indeed encourage, a more secure and peaceful world.

However, in practice, we can say that democratization possesses some unique characteristics. What first needs to be emphasized is that democratization is a process, a coherent cooperative project with no fixed definitions and time limits, a coherent mechanism that can last as long as its practitioners require. This is due to the circular nature of the democratization approach itself, which tends towards the problematization of recipients of democratization assistance, making self-government increasingly less likely.²⁰ Based on this assumption, the democratization process has provided an ideal opportunity through which international organizations have been able to reconstitute their legitimacy and given them the capacity to adjust themselves to post-Cold War international relations.

In the light of the role of international organizations in nation-building, the Bosnian case was of great importance in that it enabled the organizations to redefine their legitimacies and reshape themselves in the post-Cold War World. According to Chandler, the

¹⁷ R. Vukadinovic, *op. cit.*, p.139.

¹⁸ M. Todorova, *op. cit.*, p.185.

¹⁹ D. Chandler, *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton*, Pluto Press, London, 1999, p.18.

²⁰ M. Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, Zed Books, London, 2001, pp.188-189.

democratization process, through linking democratization to international institutional mechanisms, has ensured that the international administration overseeing the post-conflict reconstruction of Bosnia will be prolonged for as long as it is in the interests of the major international powers to use the country as a focus for international cooperation. There are always new problems and new institutional involvements.²¹ As a result, democratization in Bosnia, far from realizing democratic and multi-ethnic civil society, has maintained societal divisions and reinforced the nationalist power bases that control Bosnian society.

Nevertheless, in the international community, there is little challenge to the democratization approach and little consideration given to the impact of the international administration on the Bosnian political sphere. As to the assessment of democratization, the liberal critics view the only limitation to internationally imposed democratization as being the lack of will of international community itself. On the other hand, the conservative critics argue that the problem with international policy is that Bosnian cultural and ethnic divisions make it an idealistic proposal which could entail international embroilment in Balkan affairs with little possibility of a solution to the complex questions of ethnic division.²²

In the drive towards extended international intervention, it was clear that the 'division of labor' of international organizations in nation-

building in Bosnia, had less to do with the problems of Bosnia itself and more to do with the search for legitimacy and policy-coherence on the part of international organizations. According to M. Cousens, senior officials at most major implementing agencies persistently described a chaotic blend of different mandates, incompatible timetables, and divided leadership among their respective executive bodies.²³

Moreover, what should be pointed out is that 'market share' competition or a turf battle was clearly revealed in the division of labor among international organizations. We can easily detect here disagreement between the US and the UN, and also between the US and the EU. The US-brokered Dayton accords confirmed the unquestionable predominance of the United States even within the European continent, vis-à-vis its own Western European and EU allies and the successor to its former rival, Russia.

The allocation of mandates under the Dayton Accord is as follows: The Europeans, in the restrictive EU sense of the term, were granted the High Representative, but the United State, through NATO, obtained the first role in the military field. The pan-European (and North American) body, the OSCE, was given the elections, arms control, and regional stability, and part of human rights and democratization, significantly with an American at the helm of the Bosnia and Herzegovina mission.²⁴

²¹ D. Chandler, *op. cit.*, p.189.

²² *Ibid.*, p.179.

²³ E. M. Cousens and C. Kumar, *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies*, Lynne Rienner, London, 2001, p.141.

²⁴ G. Kostakos, "Division of Labor among International Organizations: The Bosnian Experience", *Global Governance*, 4(4), Oct.-Dec. 1998, p.474.

6. BALKAN GOVERNANCE AND THE INDIGENOUS APPROACH

Confronted with difficulties inherent in Balkan governance, we have to pursue a more indigenous approach. As Bugajski suggests, the indigenous approach should be introduced into the stability project. According to Bugajski, without more emphasis on “indigenization”, democratization, the marginalization of extremists, and structural economic reform, long-term security could be seriously undermined.²⁵ The indigenous approach need not entail isolation or segregation which would surely entail a re-Balkanization of the region. On the contrary, the indigenous approach seeks an appropriate balance, in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, between international engagement and indigenous self-dependence. The EU and other international organizations should re-examine the meaning and relevance of European concepts such as democratization and civil society, in the context of the history and social development of this region.

It is important to understand that the Stability Pact is not product of a dialogue; instead, it is an institution imposed onto the Balkan states by the international community. It sprang from repeated failures on the part of the EU to deal with the mounting crisis in

Kosovo and in the earlier wars in Croatia and Bosnia.²⁶

Moreover, international organizations have to cultivate civic actors to participate in the decision-making process, and implement stability projects for the democratization and reconstruction of civil society. For their part, Balkan peoples have to boldly tackle the social inertia inherited from communist regimes, and consciously and willingly participate in the democratization processes of their own societies.

Viewed in this light, the indigenous approach can be regarded as the only means by which to put the governance of the Balkans on a sound footing. As Carothers claims, transitional countries will not necessarily move steadily along the assumed path from opening and breakthrough to consolidation. Above all, Balkan countries have not made a straightforward transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Almost all the Balkan countries belong in Carothers’ gray zone, characterized either by feckless pluralism or dominant-power politics.²⁷ To consolidate a genuinely transition to democracy, Balkan countries and international institutions should recognize that the indigenous approach provides effective and appropriate means for democratization and the cultivation of indigenous Balkan governance.

²⁵ J. Bugajski, “Balkan in Dependence?” *The Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2000, pp.189.

²⁶ S. Vucetic, op. cit., p.115.

²⁷ T. Carothers, “The End of Transition Paradigm”, *Journal of Democracy*, 13(1) 2002, pp. 10–12.