Viewpoints

Rising from the Ashes Democratization in the States of Former Yugoslavia

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Map from Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, (London: Macmillan, 1996).xiii

Introduction

"If there is ever another war in Europe, it will come out of some damned silly thing in the Balkans"

Otto von Bismarck

It is now over twenty years since the destruction of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia by a series of bitter wars, wars in which a considerable number of the readers of this journal were personally involved. Today, there is little coverage of the Balkans in the British media and our strategic focus has shifted elsewhere. Discussions within military circles is seemingly confined to discussions of the international operations from a historical perspective, concentrating on such areas as the coercion of Milošević or the efficacy of unsupported air power. However, the political map of the region is still far from fully stable. Although the so-called 'democratic peace theory' has been subject to a deal of discussion, international opinion is agreed that the establishment of democracy in the Balkans is likely to be the most effective means of suppressing future conflict.[1] The successor states spawned by the demise of Yugoslavia started on the road to becoming democracies, but have had varying degrees of success. Given Clausewitz's dictum of war being an extension of policy by other means, it is worth looking at the current state of the region and considering the *political* legacy of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. An understanding of many factors that aid, or hinder, progress towards stable democracy in this troubled region - formerly dominated by communism and beset by ethnic and religious divides – would be invaluable to inform ongoing, and future, international democratization projects and may shed light on the possible futures of those countries struggling with the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring' or, indeed, Afghanistan. This article will detail the history of the fracture of Yugoslavia and the road to democracy of the resulting new states. In particular, it will describe the role of external agency in the democratization process - both in agitating and mitigating the many animosities present in the region - and will suggest that the involvement of external states or international organizations, if applied intelligently and consensually, can overcome significant obstacles and prove to be a key to the success of democratization.

Let us first turn to the recent history of the region. Initially known as the "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes", the state of Yugoslavia *("Land of the Southern Slavs")* emerged from the Paris Peace process in late 1919 and was a conglomeration of smaller territories derived mainly from the defeated entities of the First World War. The new state, based around Serbia, took in Croatia and a part of the Banat from Hungary, Bosnia from Austria, and pieces of Bulgaria and Albania. The 'donor' states themselves had only acquired some of these territories during previous Balkan wars, so suspicion and intrigue beset the new state from the beginning. The population was a mixed bag of religions and cultures, with only similar languages to draw them together.[2] The task of unifying these disparate communities was far from complete when the Second World War reopened old divisions. A brutal guerrilla conflict set Yugoslavian resistance factions both against Nazi occupiers and each other with equal fervour. The Croat

leader, Pavelić, for instance, favoured fascist Italy, Mihailović led a Serbian royalist/nationalist resistance group (the Chetniks), whilst Josep Broz, better known by his *nom de guerre* "Tito", led the eventually victorious communist resistance – which had at least an aura of pan-Yugoslavian support. Himself half-Croat/half-Slovene, Tito attempted to forge a postwar unified state by granting the ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia – Hungarians, Macedonians, Albanians (mainly Kosovars) and Montenegrins – approximately equal status with the original constituent nationalities. However, the economic advantages of union barely concealed the traditional animosities and perceived inequalities, and such issues simmered under the surface as Tito's weak state survived his split with Stalin and struggled as a non-aligned island in Cold War Europe.[3]

During the reign of Tito, it was famously said that Yugoslavia had "six republics, five nations, four languages, three religions, two alphabets and one party" such was the firm grip Tito and the Communist party had on rule.[4] However, Tito made no provision for succession and, after his death in 1980, a weak rotational presidency system became gradually more ineffectual. Against the background of spiralling economic problems and high unemployment, (largely driven by the withdrawal of western aid in the absence of the cold war imperative) a number of politicians manipulated sectarian sentiment to promote extreme nationalism, emphasizing the differences between the constituent communities in Yugoslavia to strengthen their personal hold on power. In Serbia, a longstanding communist politician, Slobodan Milošević, seized the opportunity to use the six-hundredth anniversary of the Ottoman victory at Kosovo Polje to invoke Serbian nationalism in his grab for power. The break-up of Yugoslavia became increasingly inevitable as the various nationalist and ethnic groups edged for power.

In 1991, distracted by the war in Iraq and the continuing death throes of the Soviet Union, America and the west did not wish to get involved in Yugoslavia. Popular opinion in the west, voiced later by British Prime Minister John Major, was that the region was doomed to conflict because of 'Ancient Hatreds' that had been suppressed by the 'discipline of communism'.[5] This simplistic view should be dismissed, but it has much popular traction and is often mistakenly expressed as the driving problem in the region. As Noel Malcolm points out in his seminal history of Bosnia, the "animosities that did exist in the region were *not* absolute and unchanging. Nor were they the inevitable consequences of the mixing together of different religious communities". The resentment felt by Christian peasantry towards Muslim land owners during Ottoman rule, for instance, was largely due to economic inequality and "varied as economic circumstances changed…for most of the period after 1878, the different religious or ethnic communities in Bosnia lived peacefully together" with the major outbreaks of violence being driven from outside the country.[6] Misha Glenny expands this argument further and suggests that the *"influence of the great powers has contributed significantly to a history that is not static* – in which age-old enmities are doomed to permanent repetition – but breathtakingly dynamic" (author's emphasis).[7]

Great power influence played a role in June 1991, when an inconclusive and lacklustre visit to Belgrade by US Secretary of State James Baker convinced the parties vying for power that there

was little interest by the United States in Yugoslav affairs. European diplomacy was equally ineffectual. Four days later, Croatia and Slovenia declared independence, which resulted in the short-lived Yugoslav invasion of Slovenia and, subsequently, three increasingly brutal wars that were eventually to kill hundreds of thousands of people, displace two million and result in the break-up of the country of Yugoslavia.[8]

The differing strategies of Europe and the United States were rapidly found wanting. Europe believed it could 'solve' Yugoslavia without the United States; the Americans thought they could leave Europe to sort out its own problems now the Cold War was over. However, Europe was deeply divided, with different national interests and deep suspicions about fellow members' intent. For instance, when, effectively, the Germans forced recognition of Slovenia and Croatia at the end of 1991, France became convinced that Germany had designs on the region, described by Brendan Simms as "some form of German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*".[9] US policy in the region was encapsulated by Baker's famous statement "We don't have a dog in this fight".[10] Disinterest, half-hearted policies, and attempts at enforcement by the international powers did much to encourage the bitter conflict; it would take four years before Washington decided that it did have interests in the region and stepped in to apply its leadership and resources. The Dayton agreement of 1995 largely settled the boundaries of the emerging new republics, but it took another conflict, in 1999 between the US/NATO and Serbia over Kosovo before significant progress could be made towards true democratic transition.

Macedonia's declaration of independence passed largely peacefully in September 1991, but when Bosnia declared independence in March 1992, it triggered the most violent phase of conflict.[11] Later in 1992, the republics of Serbia and Montenegro declared themselves as a rump state to be known as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and asserted that it was the sole legal successor to Communist Yugoslavia. Other constituents of the former state opposed these claims, and the United Nations refused its request to assume the Yugoslav membership. It eventually gained UN membership in 2000 after the overthrow of Milošević and was officially renamed Serbia and Montenegro in 2003.[12] In 2006, Montenegrins voted for Independence and the States of Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia were formed. In February 2008, Kosovo split from Serbia and declared itself as an independent republic. This initial attempt at the democratization of the socialist state of Yugoslavia had clearly failed.[13] The conflict and breakup of the former Communist Republic of Yugoslavia was driven by self-interested elites invoking issues of ethnicity and race to protect their own power, undeterred by – or even encouraged by the lack of interest of - external powers.[14] These wars were not revolutions by the people, but by armed forces directed by power-seeking politicians. However, what is of more importance now is the democratization of the resulting new states post the civil wars and international military interventions. This article will, therefore, now examine the quality of democracy that has been achieved by those new states since independence.

There are many methods of classifying the 'quality of democracy', each of which concentrates on different criteria and has its own particular utility. However, as an illustration of general

progress in the region under discussion, *The Economist Democracy Index* provides a useful means of comparison; it assesses the quality of democracy by scoring electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. The 2012 edition ranks 167 countries. The former Yugoslavian countries occupy a wide range. Slovenia is the highest ranked state at 28th (equal with France), Croatia is 50th, Serbia 66th, Montenegro 76th and Bosnia Herzegovina 98th. (For comparative purposes, the United Kingdom ranks 16th; the United States 21st).[15] Charles Tilly suggests that a regime can be considered democratic "to the degree that relations between the state and the citizens feature broad, equal, protected and mutually-binding consultation".[16] That is: where there is the widest political inclusion of the population; there is a minimum of categorical inequality - with no group being either afforded special rights or, indeed, discriminated against; citizens are granted due process with agents of the state being unable to use power for personal gain or to punish personal enemies; and the state has a clear and binding mandate to act according to its citizens' wishes. Let us now, therefore, take each of Tilly's criteria in turn and discuss examples of progress, or otherwise, among the new states.

First then, *breadth of inclusion in the political process*. Against the background of a region deeply divided amongst a number of ethnic, national and religious groups it is perhaps surprising that elections in most of the new states are open to a large percentage of the citizenry. Parliamentary election voter turnout is typically quite high with figures in the 45%-55% range.[17] However, worryingly, these turnouts have been decreasing recently with an increasing number of voters expressing the view that elected governments are not carrying out their wishes; possible reasons for this perception will be discussed shortly. In addition, there are a number of areas where significant minority groups are excluded from the political process. These include the Albanian population in Macedonia, minority groups in the ethnically mixed regions of Serbia, such as the Sanžak and Vojvodina regions, and the Serbian population in Northern Kosovo centred on Mitrovica. There also remain significant numbers of Internally Displaced Persons, and significant migrant Roma populations across the region, who are currently still denied political rights.

Turning now to *equality amongst the citizens of the new states*. The socialist regime in the former Yugoslavia actually accommodated larger numbers of women in politics than many other communist regimes and this legacy has been carried forward to democratic politics in the new states. Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia have all committed impressively to women candidates, with women filling around 15-20% of seats in their legislatures.[18] This compares favorably to the United States, for instance, where women fill around 18%.[19] In addition, all states have made considerable progress in stamping out violence against women. However, there is still considerable hatred towards the gay community in a number of the states with little government activity, or indeed, apparently, motivation, towards building understanding. The previously mentioned Roma population suffers serious discrimination, particularly in Bosnia.[20]

Tilly's third criterion is that of protection - *how are citizens protected from the misuse of power?* The quality of the judicial process in the region has improved steadily although there is still a deal of concern in some of the countries regarding the opportunities for political interference and manipulation of the legal process. In Serbia, in particular, there is little provision for independent oversight of the appointment of judicial officers and there has been little progress in establishing civilian control of the security forces.[21] A particular manifestation of this issue was in the inability to bring high profile war criminals to justice, despite government pronouncements of support for the ICTY process; the security services of Serbia and Montenegro, for instance, has sufficient independence that they could not be forced to handover erstwhile 'heroes'. Interestingly, the latest European Commission report on Montenegro suggests that since its independence from Serbia in 2006, the accountability of the judiciary has much improved.[22] Corruption is endemic, and the ability to 'buy' political influence enables a certain immunity from the legal process.

Finally, is there a *mutually binding relationship between citizen and regime?* As mentioned previously, although results vary between countries some "70% of the people do not think that their respective countries are run by the will of the people".[23] This appears to be for two main reasons. The first is essentially the inability of governments to function effectively, with poor administration, weak legislative processes for bringing decisions into law, and a civil service that has yet to develop a professional reputation and that can attract high quality recruits. This is perhaps unsurprising after decades of centralized communist government. Furthermore, although elections enable the populace to identify a direction for the country and to determine who wields power, there is a lack of perception that democracy is an on-going participatory process. Elected politicians see themselves as 'trustees' rather than 'delegates' and, once elected, fail to consult. The concept of a civil society using activism and engagement to drive government has been slow to catch on.[24] In some areas, over-weaning international involvement has exacerbated this issue. In Bosnia and Kosovo, for instance, international commissioners have been able to veto legislation and official appointments if they obstruct agreed international guidelines.[25]

There has been a clear move in the direction of democratization but, with the exception of Slovenia and, perhaps, Croatia, many issues still impinge on the quality of democracy in the region. There are a number of main retarding factors. The first has been the problems in defining statehood for the new nations. Serbia naturally saw itself as the heir to the Yugoslav legacy and the disputes over Kosovo, Montenegro and its minority enclaves have been well documented. However, even minor disputes, such as international disagreements over something as fundamental as the name of Macedonia have been equally disruptive.* Such disputes still facilitate issues to impact on democratic politics within the region. In addition, corruption is endemic across most of the region and impacts all aspects of life. Moreover, the communist legacy bred an attitude that central government should solve all problems and provide for all needs. It has influenced society such that work, initiative and

* Greece refuses to recognise the name *Macedonia*, the current compromise is the *former Yugoslav Republic of Yugoslavia* (fYROM)… although, within NATO, Turkey refuses to recognise *fYROM* and insists on *Macedonia*!

motivation are negative qualities, attitudes that will inevitably retard the development of modern liberal democracy and prevent the development of a healthy, competitive economy.[26]

The adverse effects of International indifference on the early attempts to democratize the former Yugoslavia are clear. External initiatives have continued, on occasion, to produce adverse effects and ill-informed diplomacy, described by Farkas as "external meddling that presumes to understand [the region]"[27] has often undone progress. That said, it is clear that the single most important external factor in facilitating democratization has been the involvement of the European Union (EU). Whilst membership of the EU is seen as a gateway to wealth via access to EU markets, subsidies and development funding, the conditional approach that the EU has imposed for accession has directly addressed many of the retarding factors described above. The EU has determined that the best hope for enduring peace and stability in the Balkans is democratization. It has insisted on a condition of liberal democracy for membership, which aspiring member states must accept to receive the eventual benefits.[28] The Stabilization and Association Process, based on careful two-way negotiation, has not only made development funding available for the reform of justice, governance and public administration, private sector development, transport, environmental issues and agriculture, but has also seen the EU adopting a mentorship role in building democratic processes and institutions and setting standards for 'good behaviour'. Essentially, to aid accession, the EU has forced an overhaul of old communist mindsets and is teaching nations 'how democracies work'. The EU has also provided much aid, both material and intellectual, to fight corruption. Tilly identifies 'state capacity' as an essential factor in the democratization process.[29] This is the ability of the state to supervise democratic decision-making, put its results into practice and to fulfill the responsibilities of a state, such as protecting the population. Essentially, the EU has provided the nascent democracies a large portion of the state capacity that they themselves were missing - or where the structures they possessed were obsolete. In addition, and most importantly, the desire to be part of the community is forcing entities to agree on outstanding nationalist and ethnic disputes.† Slovenia led the way joining the EU in 2004, Croatia acceded in July 2013; the other countries in the region are at varying stages of progress.[30]

It would be remiss of us, however, to not be cautious about future progress in the light of the financial crisis both internationally and, more specifically, within the Eurozone. The crisis has had at least three negative effects on the Balkans. First, the EU itself has become preoccupied with the economic troubles and has largely put the enlargement agenda to the back seat. Second, fighting the financial crisis itself is draining individual government resources and diverting attention from the necessary accession reforms and advocacy efforts. It was quite evident from the very onset of the crisis that countries immediately became introspective and a trend emerged of re-nationalization of policies in the EU. Third, as the EU is devising a new regime of economic governance for the future, it will undoubtedly put more emphasis on the candidate states' economic and financial policies. The EU will inevitably seek to prevent

† At the moment of writing (20 Apr 13) Kosovo and Serbia appear to have signed an historic agreement that promises significant progress (*The Times*, on-line edition, 20 Apr 13)

the future accession of countries which are economically weak and perceived as potentially disruptive and unable to conform to its newly established, stricter rules.[31] That said, there appears to have been little dimming of appetite in the Balkan countries for EU accession. Serge Brammertz, prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, expressed the view that "It is clear that what is attracting countries to the European Union is, of course, the European Market and European solidarity, and it was quite clear during all of the discussions we've had that the economic advantages of EU membership are one of the main, if not the main reason, for Serbia and other countries to implement difficult political and economic reforms. The financial crisis has only accentuated this." More widely, Thomas Mirow, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, has argued that there was a deeper reason why the countries of former Yugoslavia hoped to gain entry to the EU. "My sense is that the way the Western Balkan states look at the European Union is quite independent from cyclical economic development. They look at Europe as being the anchor, being the only long-term perspective that would also secure that no new conflicts will arise within the Balkans."[32]

Despite the bitter conflict and schisms that resulted after the death of Tito and, essentially, the failure of the unified socialist state of Yugoslavia to move from communist dictatorship to a more democratic form, the resulting new republics have had varying degrees of success in moving towards democracy. Whilst Slovenia and Croatia have made the most progress, and are sufficiently democratic to be accepted into the EU, there is still evidence of exclusion of minorities, weak civil society, and lack of regime accountability in the region. Issues over statehood, a centralized, self-serving, government mindset derived from communist times, and endemic corruption have stalled progress. However, external intervention in the form of EU mentorship with the prize of eventual membership has been most successful in fulfilling a leadership role to minimize and, hopefully, eventually overcome these issues. The EU's role in the solution of conflict has been based on agreements that are accepted by all sides to ensure sustainability. Not the least, all parties have to agree that democracy is a desirable end state. The set of problems facing the nascent democracies of the fractured Yugoslavia were as daunting as can be imagined – the ideological, ethnic, religious and national divides were as pronounced and bitterly fought as anywhere in the world; if these states succeed in the path to democracy, facilitated by international leadership in effect substituting for, and nurturing the reconstruction of, the machinery and philosophies of state, the clear lessons are likely to have applicability in other areas of conflict and emerging democracy.

Notes

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[4] Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War*, (New York: Random House, 1998).26.
[5] Statement by the Prime Minister, *Hansard*, 23 Jun 93, col.423.
[6] Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, (London: Macmillan, 1996).xxi.
[7] Misha Glenny, *The Balkans 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*, (London: Granta, 2000).xxv.
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[9] Brendan Simms, *Europe: The Struggle for Supremacy 1453 to the Present*, (London: Allen Lane, 2013).494.
[10] Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*, (London: Penguin/BBC Books, 1996). 201.
[11] Glenny, *The Balkans 1804-1999*. 634-652.
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[18] Richard P. Farkas, *Democratization in the Balkans: Prescription for the Scarred Body Politic*, (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2007).62
[19] Jennifer E Manning, *Membership of the 113th Congress: A Profile*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress number R42964, 28 Feb 13.7. Via **http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42964.pdf**. Last accessed 20 Apr 13.
[20] Human Rights Watch 2013 World Report. Via **http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/bosnia-and-herzegovina** . Last accessed 20 Apr 13.
[21] European Commission Staff Working Document, *Serbia – 2012 Progress Report, SWD(2012) 333*. 10 Oct 12. Via EC Website, **http://ec.europa.eu**. Last accessed 21 Apr 13.
[22] European Commission Staff Working Document, Montenegro – *2012 Progress Report, SWD(2012) 331*. 10 Oct 12. Via EC Website, **http://ec.europa.eu**. Last accessed 21 Apr 13.
[23] Farkas, *Democratization in the Balkans*.116.
[24] Balfour and Stratulat, *The Democratic Transformation of the Balkans*, 32.
[25] Soeren Keil, "Explaining Democratic Stagnation in the Western Balkans" in *Med. 2012: The European Institute of the Mediterranean Yearbook*, Barcelona, 2012. 5. Via **http://www.iemed.**

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[26] Farkas, *Democratization in the Balkans*.113.

[27] *Ibid 116*.

[28] Geoffrey Pridham, "Securing Fragile Democracy in the Balkans: The European Dimension", in Romanian Journal of European Affairs, Vol.8, No.2,2008. 55-57. http://www.ier.ro/documente/rjea_vol8_no2/RJEA_Vol8_No2_Securing_Fragile_Democracies__in_the_Balkans_the_European_Dimension.pdf. Last Accessed 12 Apr 13.

[29] Tilly, *Democracy*, 15, 16.

[30] Reports on each country (most recent tranche Oct 2012) available on http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/. Reports for CR, MA,MN,SR accessed 13 Apr 13.

[31] Ogyan Minchev, "The Western Balkans: Between The Economic Crisis And The European Perspective", Institute for Regional and International Studies, Sofia 2011. 3. Available on http://iris-bg.org/files/TheWesternBalkans.pdf accessed 2 Oct 13.

[32] Both views reported in "How will the Eurozone Crisis affect Europe's neighbours" in the blog *Debating Europe* started 31 Oct 11. http://www.debatingeurope.eu/2011/10/31/how-will-the-crisis-affect-europes-neighbours/ last accessed 2 Oct 13.