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# STATE FORMATION PROCESSES IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAV SPACE

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## ABSTRACT

*The collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the formation of the new states on the former territory of the SFRY not only affected the citizens of the former Yugoslavia, but also all states on the Balkan Peninsula. Greece had serious reservations over the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia since it saw the latter's mere existence as a historical, political and national security threat. The breakup of SFRY also fundamentally affected Albanians living in the former Yugoslavia, and Albania. The collapse of the SFRY has also meant that that everywhere in the Yugoslav successor states proportion of Albanian inhabitants has become significant and their economic and political importance has grown. The Albanian settlement area—in part homogenous—now embraces a number of national border regions, especially in Macedonia and Serbia, but also in Greece. Instead of former inner administrative borders, new state borders have been raised. Some of the new state borders have turned into closed ones, and almost give the appearance of classical military borders. International borders and crossing facilities have divided special state units in the former unitary political geographical space. The most uncomfortable question within the 'separation process' was, 'Who has the right to self-determination? Within the complicated political situations (between 1991-1995, and in 2008) an ambition manifested itself that the 'peoples', the 'nations', the republics, 'the majority settlement areas' have a right to and opportunity for self-determination. Others considered that such ambitions only related to those areas which had previously also had their own constitutional mandate (at republic level).*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Historically one may distinguish a number of periods characterised by the formation of states (nation creating) both within Europe and also on the territory of the Balkan Peninsula. In the period of European modernization, starting in 1789, we can speak about different waves of state-formation processes. The 19th and especially 20th century saw this nation- and state creating process broadening further. A substantial

majority of the states formed in the Balkans came into being in multi-ethnic, multi-faith, multi-lingual regions of multiple settlement structure.

From the end of the 1980s in Southern and Eastern Europe the unfolding processes may also be considered colourful. An ethnic element appeared, stated or not. The Balkan Peninsula both at the time of Cold War Era and at the time of the later co-existence of the bipolar world represented the whole of Europe in miniature. Prior to the radical transition in 1990, the Socialist and Western state systems existed over a relatively small territory. As well as the conservatively communist Bulgaria, the presence of non-aligned Yugoslavia, and the nationally communist Albania, there were two NATO members (Greece, Turkey), one of which was a European Community member (Greece).

Within the states of the Balkan Peninsula—first and foremost in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)—an unfolding process existed, resulting partly from external and partly from internal determining factors. How the former central (federal) political power, the member republics as well as the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Voivodina would settle their own ambitions within this process was a separate question.

The collapse of SFRY and the formation of the new states not only affected the citizens of former Yugoslavia, but also all the states on the Balkan Peninsula. It is no accident that Greece had serious concerns over the establishment of the Republic of Macedonia, since it saw the latter's mere existence as a historical, political and national security threat.

The breakup of SFRY also fundamentally affected Albanians living in former Yugoslavia and Albania. It was evident that with the collapse of SFRY, everywhere in the Yugoslav successor states the significance of the proportion of Albanian inhabitants and their economic and political importance would grow. The Albanian settlement area—in part in its homogenous coverage—embraced a number of national border regions, especially in Macedonia, Serbia but in also Greece.

New state borders were erected in place of the old internal administrative borders. Some of the new state borders turned into closed ones, practically giving the appearance of classical military borders. International borders and crossing facilities divided special state units in the former unitary political geographical space.

The second question within the 'separation process' was: 'Who has the right to self-determination? Within the complicated political situations (between 1991-

1995, and in 2008) the ambition manifested itself that the 'peoples', the 'nations', the republics, 'the majority settlement areas' all had a right to and opportunity for self-determination. Others considered that such ambitions only related to those areas which had previously also had their own constitutional mandate (republic level).

## 2. THE BREAK-UP MULTINATIONAL YUGOSLAVIA, THE FORMATION OF 'NATIONAL STATES'

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1990 with her 255 804 km<sup>2</sup> territory, and with 23.5 million inhabitants was a key element in her neighbourhood. The SFRY was a real multinational state (Table 1.)

According to the political joke of the socialist period: "Yugoslavia has eight distinct peoples in six republics, and two provinces, with five languages, three religions, and two alphabets, but only one Yugoslav – Tito"

According to the Constitution of 1974 the member republics possessed the right to secede from SFRY, the state incorporating this right in a desire to emphasise the democratic nature of the state system. (Stalin in 1937 also guaranteed this right when the Soviet constitution was being worked out.) However, the Yugoslav leaders did not seriously consider the possibility of separation in Yugoslavia, and as such they did not regulate the separation procedure.

The SFRY was a federal state (with elements of confederation), but system of balances created by President Tito quickly weakened after his death. In January 1991 the question at the level of the Yugoslav Presidency was whether the objective was the strengthening of the federation or progress toward confederation.

*Table 1: National Composition of Yugoslavia, 1961–1991. Percent (except total)*

National group	1961	1971	1981	1991
Total	18,549,291	20,522,972	22,427,585	23,528,230
Serbs	42.0	39.7	36.3	36.2
Croats	23.1	22.1	19.8	19.7
Muslims	5.2	8.4	8.9	10.0
Albanians	5.0	6.4	7.7	9.3
Slovenes	8.5	8.2	7.8	7.5
Macedonians	5.6	5.8	6.0	5.8
Montenegrins	2.8	2.5	2.6	2.3
Yugoslavs	1.7	1.3	5.4	3.0
Other	6.1	5.6	5.5	6.2

*Sources: Woodward, S. L. 1995.*

The collapse of SFRY (Figure 1) in the Yugoslav Wars (1991-1995), the formation of new states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia) and a special formation of Federal Republics of Yugoslavis FRY) (after 2003 the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro) not only affected the Southern Slavic peoples, but also every state on the Balkan Peninsula and all over Europe.

The concrete disintegration process of the federal state began in January of 1991 with the crises and later by the collapse of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. It continued at constitutional level (the disfunctioning of the Yugoslav Presidency Council), and later at the level of the member republics. But gradually ambitions towards an independent statehood also emerged for the Autonomous Region of Kosovo, and areas settled by Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In this political situation the role and importance of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) increased considerably. The JNA nearly became the sole 'legitimate Yugoslav structure'. (Members of the JNA took on oath on SFRY, and on Socialism.)

This short paper will not describe the process of separation but rather how the essence of the territorial content of the new system appeared within the territorial rearrangements and experiments, what kind of secession ambitions developed below the level of republics within the particular new states and how those problems pertaining to the settlements areas might be handled.

### **2.1 First state formations on the basis of federal republics**

Slovenia was the westernmost, the most developed in economic terms, and most nearly homogeneous republic in terms of ethnicity, language and faith. The referendum (held on 23rd December, 1990) supported the proclamation of independence, comprising 88,2% of the total citizens eligible to vote. The ten-day war against the JNA did not throw Slovenia into disorder, and the losses both in human and in collateral terms were small.

Slovenia declared its independence on 25th June, 1991, the country's new democratic constitution coming into existence at the end of December 1991. In Slovenia, only a small number of Italian and Hungarian inhabitants were registered as native minorities. No secession movements appeared within either of these Hungarian and Italian settlement areas.

In Croatia, after a referendum of independence (19th May 1991), the Croatian Parliament announced the country's independence on 25th June. Parallel to it, the

Parliament accepted a document with the title “Charter on Rights of Serbs and other Nationalities in the Republic of Croatia”. After two bloody civil wars (1991-1992, 1995)—which on the one hand were struggles between the JNA and the Croatian Police, and on the other between Croatian central power and “non legal” Serbian regional autonomies—Croatian territory was reintegrated in January 1998. After the Victory, and in building a new nation state, Croatia did not wish to see any kind of formation that might possess meaningful national territorial autonomy over its territory. The problems and resettlements of Serbian refugees (about 150,000) are one of the most serious questions in the EU accession process.

Macedonia—as opposed to the other former republics—split with Yugoslavia entirely peacefully, and celebrates 8th September 1991 as its Independence Day. The country is ethnically divided; besides the majority of Macedonians, Albanians constitute a significant minority and have settled in a territorially homogeneous fashion. In 1995, Greece announced an embargo against its new northern neighbour. The ‘name discussion’ between the two countries is not just about the name of the new state, but first of all about its whole national and regional history, about heritage, about identity etc.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was the most multiethnic, multi-faithed republic in the former SFRY. Moreover, the ethnic groups lived side by side, partly in settlement area majority and partly in a mixed, mosaic configuration.

In October 1991 BiH declared its sovereignty, and at the same time Bosnian Serbs established the Bosnian Serb Assembly to represent their own settlement area and national interests. The Bosnian Croats also aspired to the announcement of the Herzegbosnian Croat Community, afterwards Republic.

The bloodiest and most complicated civil wars (Serb-Bosnian, Croat-Serb, Croat-Bosnian, Bosnian-Bosnian) took place in BiH (1992-1995), and the international community (and the NATO air force) intervened in the war to defend the Bosnian population.

The independent state of BiH was formed (Dayton Peace Agreement, 1995) partly by the international community, and partly by the independent states of BiH, Croatia and Serbia, with the leadership of the three communities in the background.

Fifteen years after Dayton we can say that BiH is “floating” as an international dominium, with inner political structures. Besides Kosovo, BiH is a real risk from the aspect of the security of the Western Balkans.

## **2.2 The interim remains as the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (after the 2003 Union of Serbia-Montenegro) and a peaceful chapter of the new Balkanization process**

In April 1992 it became clear to the former Yugoslav and Serb political and military elite that the Yugoslavia created by Tito would soon come to an end. First of all they wanted to save the name of 'Yugoslavia', and to form claims for a Yugoslav heritage.

Following Milošević's political downfall in October 2000 the pressure and opportunity to restart and reorganise manifested themselves. Serb society accepted neither the new confederation defined in the 2003 constitution easily, despite the political rearrangements, nor the right for Montenegro to decide on its separation by referendum after three years had elapsed.

The referendum took place on 21st May 2006, and with the peculiar validity threshold of 55% defined by the EU the Montenegrins expressed their lack of any real interest in a quick split.

## **2.3 Kosovo: last or just next new state in the Balkanization process?**

After the aerial war against Serbia (1999) and the political changes of 2000, talks began on the future fate of Kosovo at the international level. It was clear to everyone that the Kosovo question was fascinating not just within the context of the Balkans, but also from the point of view that the final solution to this question, its method and results would be an example for all regions of a similar nature and in a similar situation, not to mention the fact that it may set processes in motion for the creation of new states all over the World.

In spite of UN Resolution 1244, Kosovo declared her independence on 17th February 2008. After Kosovo's declaration of independence the "hottest question" of the Western Balkans (and in a wider sense) turned out to be the diplomatic recognition of Kosovo. For Serbia, and for different reasons for Bosnia and Herzegovina, this question is a basic political, strategical problem. In part, the question is partly dividing the European Union itself, because some member states have special fears emanating from the 'non precedent' situation.

## **3. SUMMARY**

The external environment of the systemic changes taking place in the Balkan Peninsula and of the transformation of the national-territorial structures was the transition of

different value systems: global, inter-systemic (socialist-capitalism), superpower (American-Soviet) and Western value systems (NATO), Warsaw Pact, European Union). Parallel to the collapse of the socialist world system and the elimination of the bipolar system of the world, fundamental transitions began to get under way in the state systems of all ex-socialist countries. The integration of the GDR into the FRG, the state structural crisis of the Soviet Union and then its disintegration at Christmas 1991, as well as the peaceful partition of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993, all demonstrated these fundamental rearrangements.

The initial positions were of course very much different for the further development processes in the respective countries. The earlier created and experienced internal structures, and the manner of the transition, had a considerable impact on the progress of the processes later on. The internal process of the transition determined to a great extent how the respective countries were able to integrate into the new international and European order. The inner structures of the individual states were significantly influenced by the system of relations built into the European Union (the preparation and then accession of some countries in 2004). The need for the harmonisation of different structures naturally emerged.

The systemic changes of the socialist states of the Balkan Peninsula actually fit into the principal tendencies. Rearrangements in 1989-1991 took place in at least three different ways (negotiations; smaller or greater opposition, social conflicts; and finally in the framework of tragic civil war).

The countries of the Balkan Peninsula (the “decent” socialist countries, the non-aligned socialist Yugoslavia, the socialist Albania with its own way and the two capitalist countries) experienced historical development processes that were similar in several respects but also very complicated and very much different and in some other ways. By the end of the cold war period it was rather heterogeneity than homogeneity that became a typical development characteristic and result in the countries of the Balkans. The respective countries of the region arrived at the starting line of the “new world order” with a variety of historical heritages and specific economic, social and political experience.

The large-scale rearrangement of the national territories taking place in the region was thus not a “Balkan feature”, not a peculiar and unique phenomenon in this period, but in civil war circumstances it did possess had individual and unique characteristics.

The social, economic and political systemic changes occurring in the Balkan Peninsula necessarily and fundamentally concerned the issue of Yugoslavia, and related to Yugoslavia and almost all neighbouring countries in some way. The crisis of Yugoslavia, a country with large territory and population, a country that was actually a regional power with a leading role among the non-aligned countries, generated spillover effects.

There were also considerable differences across the respective states as regards whether radical transformation took place within the “old national frameworks” (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania), or whether new states were born. In the newly created states (which make up the majority in the region in question) the issues coming from the disintegration of the old state structures and the problems of the new arrangements of the state had to be handled simultaneously. During the state foundations, new nation and state concepts were made, new capital cities were designated and the relation of the new elites to the territory of the state also changed.

The historical, political and other specialist literature on the transition of the respective countries is huge and diverse. Research carried out within national frameworks have explored almost all aspects of the processes of the given states. In addition to national surveys, transition processes were also analysed comparatively. The issues of the development of the macro-region have been monitored by a large number of internal and external institutions and networks. The correlations of state-building and administrative systemic changes, democratisation, decentralisation and regionalisation, among other things, have continuously appeared in analyses.

In the Yugoslav area, systemic change coincided with the strengthening of nationalism, as both the old and the new political elite expected to find their “real” roots in this nationalism, which became a political “calling” for a while. The handling of the issue of multi-ethnicity appeared during the working out of the new constitutional arrangement, and also with the creation of the administrative systems and spatial divisions. The new state majorities were usually unwilling to offer territorial autonomy to ethnic minority areas. The approach to the ethnic minority areas has become a significant and peculiar issue of decentralisation and regionalisation.



*Figure 1: Forming seven states out of one*



1 State border of former Yugoslavia in 1990

2 State borders in 2010

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