

Review

Mieczysław P. Boduszyński  
**Regime Change in the Yugoslav  
Successor States: Divergent Paths  
Toward a New Europe**

The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore,  
2010, 333 pp.

Although much has been written on the topic of post-Yugoslav states in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the war that followed, the issue of transition and democratisation of these states remains under-researched. This is largely due to the prevalence of a liberal orientation in the literature on post-socialist states, and in particular to liberal dogma that “liberal states do not fight war with each other”. It was hard to explain that the war in the post-Yugoslav space in fact occurred at the same time when all of Yugoslavia’s successor states accepted the democratisation of their political institutions. And then, when the war started, the transition did not pause but rather continued, being much shaped by the war itself. In these circumstances, the war was thus also used as a good excuse for the non-transparent practice of privatisation, corruption and clientelism, all of which had deep consequences for the social and economic situation in the years to come. However, the dominant approach to studying these events was based on the assumption that transition and war could not go together: transition is a peaceful and gradual transformation of the political,

social and economic spheres as well as of the concept of statehood, and war is the sign of a failure of such transition. Thus, when discussing transition, social scientists and analysts focused on East-Central Europe and (in some cases) Slovenia. The “Western Balkans” was left aside, as if it is a different story altogether.

In this respect, Mieczysław Boduszyński’s book on regime change in the Yugoslav successor states makes a clear break with this “tradition”. The book is confined to the 1990s, and thus it offers an insight in political processes of the “early”, or “first” transition (from socialism to nationalism). Not much is said in the book on the later (post-2000) liberalisation of these new nationalist regimes, which in some cases coincides with EU accession.

The author argues that the war and conflicts were “dependent variables”, used and produced by political elites who wanted above all “to legitimise their undemocratic policies”. In this way, Boduszyński interprets the war as result of a political game played by those who opposed liberalisation. He calls the newly established post-Yugoslav regimes “illiberal nationalisms”. By classifying them as “illiberal”, Boduszyński in fact challenges a simplistic view of some transitologists – that the whole former Eastern Europe went through a process of liberalisation after 1989. In fact, his argument is that only some countries became “full democracies” (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovenia), others were “nearly full democracies” (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia), some were “formal democracies” (Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Macedonia), some “regimes between formal democracies

and authoritarianism” (Albania, Armenia, Croatia), or “semi-authoritarian regimes” (Azerbaijan, Kyrgistan, Kazakhstan and Bosnia-Herzegovina) and “authoritarian regimes” (Belorus, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Although this classification can be challenged in view of recent popular discontent in some of the countries classified as “full democracies” (for example, in Slovenia and possibly also in Hungary), as well as in view of changes that took place after 2000 (in Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia), the point is that successful democratisation was more of an exception than a rule in the former communist countries.

The other interesting and methodologically useful innovation that this book offers is in showing the high level of variability in the outputs of the process of transition. Although all post-Yugoslav states shared the Yugoslav historical and institutional context, they became rather different at the end of the 1990s. Slovenia is the only “substantive democracy”, with a high level of liberal content. The then FR Yugoslavia had a low liberal content, and towards the end of the 1990s it in fact sunk deeper into authoritarianism. Macedonia is a case of an “illegitimate democracy” with a much lower level of liberal contents than Slovenia and Croatia, while Croatia was a case of a “simulated democracy”, in which elites did not like democratisation but “faked it” in order to achieve their main objectives and to pacify external critics.

Whereas Slovenian politics was, in the 1990s, inspired by the process of Europeanisation, democratisation and economic growth, Croatian politics was characterised by the notion of nationalism, defence,

territorial integrity and a low level of liberalism. “The Tadjman regime used ethnic nationalism, authoritarian populism, and economic clientelism to consolidate and legitimize its hold on power. Early in Croatia’s post-communist transition, liberal reform and integration into Western structures were deemphasized in favor of national issues” (p. 74). To this effect, the Croatian elite politically exploited the so-called “Homeland War”, which was used “to justify anti-democratic politics and clientelistic practices by the ruling party” (p. 75). The conservative segments of the Croatian political space in fact keep the memory of the war permanently alive, in order to continue opposing significant reforms. Interestingly, Boduszyński argues that opposition to Europe has become a substitute for its earlier anti-Serb rhetoric. HDZ, the ruling party of the 1990s did not openly reject membership in the EU, but it nevertheless moved Croatia ever further away from Europe by its various policies and its ideology. In short, Boduszyński argues, the first ten years of Croatian post-communist transition was characterised by the domination of non-liberal political forces. Since he does not say much about the post-2000 situation, it would be interesting to see to what extent has this type of politics then changed in the last decade. Is contemporary Croatia still a case of illiberal (or: semi-liberal) nationalism? Is there a realistic chance that antiliberal and nationalist policies return sometime in the future?

When trying to explain the variety of systems in post-Yugoslav states, Boduszyński relies on two major variables that influenced the process of regime change in the 1990s. One is found in the starting conditions in which transition

happened, primarily in the different economic positions that the post-Yugoslav countries found themselves in. The other is the way domestic elites responded to pressure by external (ie. Western) actors: both those who offered EU integration and those who insisted on transitional justice (ICTY). The book argues that the different position of the post-Yugoslav states at the end of the 1990s can be largely explained by using these two variables. The external incentive for liberalisation cannot produce liberal regimes, but it might play a decisive role in shaping transition.

The other major point that this book makes is in challenging the view that the resistance to liberalisation and transformation is led and organised primarily by those social forces who are to become the losers in transition. Boduszyński argues that it was the political, economic and social elite in general who opposed changes in order to secure its power. Thus, the winners, not the losers have opposed liberalisation. The system worked for them, and they tried to keep the benefits of the controlled regime change exclusively for themselves.

Mieczysław Boduszyński's book is to be recommended to all those who analyse political changes in the 1990s. It offers interesting and rather useful methodological tools for comparative analysis of transition in war-torn countries. In addition, it helps us to understand the motives and actions by political elites in the post-Yugoslav states during the first decade since their independence. This book will also be useful to researchers of further transformation of these societies.

*Dejan Jović*  
*University of Zagreb*

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Darko Karačić, Tamara Banjeglav  
and Nataša Govedarica

**Re:vizija prošlosti: Politike  
sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini,  
Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine**

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Sarajevo, 2012, 240 pp.

*Re:vizija prošlosti: Politike sjećanja u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji od 1990. godine (Re:vision of the Past: The Politics of Memory in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia since 1990)* is a welcome sign that a new generation of scholars in the region is applying theories from memory studies to analyze the interactions between history and politics in the Yugoslav successor states. Although numerous studies have been produced about nationalism, transitional justice, and post-conflict reconstruction in the former Yugoslavia, research into the politics of memory, especially by local academics, is a relatively new field. This book is particularly useful because it presents overviews of how three former Yugoslav republics – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia – have dealt with not only World War Two but also the conflicts of the 1990s. As the authors show in their detailed texts, political actors have often blurred the past and the present; they revised World War Two narratives to fit the new ethno-nationalist discourses predominant after the wars from 1991-1995, and incorporated selective elements of Partisan, Ustaša, or Četnik narratives into the commemorative practices