

Sandro Knezović

## ***Consolidation in Southeast Europe - the Role of External and Internal Factors***

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The book *Consolidation in Southeast Europe – the Role of External and Internal Factors* provides an overview of historical processes of the development of Southeast Europe from the period of the Ottoman Empire until the post-Dayton period, ending with predictions about upcoming trends for the region in the last chapter of the book. The analytical entry through which the author analyses the mentioned period are the role of external and internal factors as well as the time framework within which the analysis is made. By looking at different time periods, the author not only provides a detailed historical overview but also explains the causes which led to some specific events. At the beginning of the book the author explains the meaning of the term Balkan, often used instead of Southeast Europe, which from his point of view is mostly used in a negative sense. Due to the fact that the region of Southeast Europe was faced with numerous conflicts and challenges in the past, according to the author's opinion it is seen as "a black hole of the European continent" by foreign observers. However, he points out that by doing only cursory historical analysis, one may conclude that these events are not only characteristic for Southeast Europe but also for other regions of the Old Continent.<sup>1</sup>

In the first chapter, the author touches upon the period of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy and their influence on the economic development, culture as well as on the security picture of Southeast Europe. According to Knezović, the negative impact of the Ottoman's domination in the mentioned region is unquestionable and even visible in the modern period. However, in the last subheading which is related to the Ottoman Empire, the author analyses the two historical interpretations of the Ottoman's role in the Southeast region. According to the first one, the Ottoman Empire presented a religious, social and institutional foreigner which almost destroyed Christian society and

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1 Knezović, p. 13.

during its domination had a negative impact on the security, political, economic and cultural development of the region. On the other hand, the second group of authors define the Ottoman's heritage as a symbiosis of Turkish, Islamic, Byzantine and Balkan traditions. The author does not define which of the two mentioned approaches is the most appropriate one, but he points out that it is necessary to take them both into account and to find a compromise approach. Besides the Ottoman Empire, the author also analyses the Habsburg Monarchy which had "a significant meaning and influence in the time of its existence"<sup>2</sup>. The centralistic intentions of the Viennese court on one side and the Hungarian nobility on the other greatly precluded the establishment of Croatian autonomy status with the Monarchy which additionally increased the tensions within its borders. Within this period it is important to mention the establishment of the 'military border' and decisions made at the Berlin Congress, which according to the author's opinion were crucial factors in future conflicts within this region.

In the second chapter, the author presents a detailed analysis of the period between the Berlin Congress and the First World War, which according to Knezović, can be considered as a revolutionary one with significant influence on the strategic relations within the region. Moreover, the author finds the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, national movements and the influence of world powers as three key factors which had a significant impact on the developments within Southeast Europe. Besides the mentioned factors, it is also important to highlight the significance of the mutual interweaving of external and internal factors which determined to a certain extent the creation of national states at that time as well as their side in WWI. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the importance of the Treaty of Versailles that not only determined the world's map but also had a significant impact on the world order as well. The domination of Western European countries was unquestionable and according to Knezović only Russia could have presented a potential threat to their domination. On the other hand, given the fact that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes presented everything but the state entity in which all nations were equal, one may conclude that the anticoincidence of political elites from all sides once again indicated the turbulent period for Southeast Europe.

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2 Ibid., p. 32.

The third chapter touches upon the interwar period and the Second World War as well as their influence on the security picture of Southeast Europe. According to the author, the fact that the Second World War started only two decades after the Versailles Agreement was adopted shows its failure in establishment of the new world order. However, the main focus in this chapter is on the creation of the Kingdom SHS which undoubtedly had a significant impact on the states of which it consisted. By analysing the economic and foreign policy position of the Kingdom, the author presents the interweavement of external and internal factors which had a direct influence on the security picture of the region. Moreover, in this chapter the author also analyses the period of the largest war, the Second World War, which not only had a significant impact on the region at that time but also afterwards.

In the following chapter the author's focus is on the period of the Cold War and on the rivalry of the two main actors, the USA and the USSR. Their differences in policies and incompatibilities did not have only a direct influence on them but also on other countries in the world and therefore on the region of Southeast Europe as well. The fact that the world at that time was divided between two pacts, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, leads to the conclusion that the security picture during the Cold War was formed according to the affiliation of countries to one of the mentioned pacts. Although, at the beginning, Yugoslavia was under the direct influence of the Soviet bloc, with the strengthening of the local communist movement it became more independent in its foreign policy which decreased the influence of external factors in favour of internal ones. The fact that Yugoslavia never became part of the Warsaw Pact leads to the conclusion that its leadership was oriented towards independent foreign policy, making it a unique case. The Non-Aligned Movement can be perceived as a confirmation of the abovementioned conclusion and even though it was not able to counteract the two blocs it "significantly contributed to Yugoslavian credibility at the international level"<sup>3</sup>.

The fifth chapter deals with the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the system for which "it was believed that it hides elements of stability and continuity"<sup>4</sup>. However, under the new circumstances, the

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3 Ibid., p. 119.

4 Ibid., p. 129.

goal of new democratic countries was to become NATO members in order to ensure their security, as well as to become EU member states given the fact that the Union at that time had a significant economic role. The fall of communism had immensely influenced the situation in former Yugoslavia. Even though it is difficult to identify key factors that led to the dissolution of the mentioned country, the consequences of presidential elections in Serbia can be perceived as one that undoubtedly influenced the pace of the disintegration process at that time. The overall political situation at the end resulted with the conflict toward which external actors at the beginning were indifferent and qualified it as a "local" one. In this chapter, the author also provides an overview of the mutual relations of Europe and the USA through a comparative analysis of their approach to the conflict in Southeast Europe. The American involvement into the resolution of the conflict once again showed its international dominance, while on the other hand Europe was faced with the deficiency of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) mechanisms. Taking all abovementioned facts into account, one may conclude that this period of time is the best example of the influence of both internal and external factors, the first one whose influence had daunting consequences and the second one which at the end lead to the stabilization of the region.

In the last chapter, the author focuses on the post-Dayton period that cannot be perceived as a period of intensification of cooperation between the countries which were affected with the conflict, but according to Knezović represented a precondition for the redefinition of relations within it. Taking into account the existence of political confrontation at that time, one may conclude that the foundation for the intensification of relations between the countries were not achievable until the political elites changed. The period of political changes during the 2000s is what the author points out as precisely the period during which some improvements were made. However, the level of normalization of relations between the countries from the region was far from satisfactory. Europe, which was not able to stop the conflict, took over responsibility for the post-conflict stabilization of this part of Europe. Therefore, the European Commission has introduced the Stabilization and Accession Process with the aim to ensure the stabilization of the region which would afterwards bring countries closer to membership in the EU. The importance of this process was the fact that it defined regional cooperation as a *conditio sine qua non* in the post-conflict period

and according to the author it represented a stimulating framework for changes. Taking all abovementioned facts into account, as the author claims the post-Dayton period can be undoubtedly perceived as a period in which the region transferred from a security consumer to being the region in the Euroatlantic accession process.

In the conclusion, the author points out that external actors had a decisive role in defining major parameters and trends of development of the region, but with a mostly negative impact on regional security. With the end of the Cold War, the interweaving of external and internal factors continued, but the internal ones got the opportunity to take over more responsibility. This is mainly visible during the process of regional consolidation and with democratisation of the countries during the last decade when internal actors got the important role in stabilization and further development of the region.

The book *Consolidation in Southeast Europe – the Role of External and Internal Factors* provides a very useful and interesting overview of the historical changes which had a direct impact on the security picture of Southeast Europe. The fact that this book systematically consolidates all important elements of the author's multidimensional research, leads to the conclusion that it can be considered as very substantial material for understanding the security of Southeast Europe. Throughout the book the author not only analyses the issues from the past but also deals with current trends, providing thorough insight into possible future scenarios. Therefore, this book does not only represent a useful read for researchers from the mentioned field but also for everyone who wants to learn more about Southeast Europe and its security.

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