

Original research paper  
UDK: 355.01(497.6)“1992/1995”:328.126(73)  
327(497.6:73)“1992/1995”  
Received: 5 July 2013

---

## Balkans in Maryland's 2nd Congressional District: Helen Delich Bentley and the War in Bosnia

---

HAMZA KARČIĆ

University of Sarajevo

### *Summary*

The aim of this paper is to analyze the foreign policy activism of a Republican congresswoman of Serbian descent Helen Delich Bentley during the war in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. The paper will argue that Bentley was a congressional foreign policy entrepreneur utilizing nonlegislative avenues of foreign policy influence. Her policy aims from 1992 until the end of her term in Congress in 1994 were to establish U.S. neutrality and nonintervention in Bosnia. Though unsuccessful on both fronts, Bentley's foreign policy activism sheds light on the domestic policy debates over the formulation of U.S. policy towards Bosnia. The paper contributes to the literature on interventions in the Balkans and also to literature on congressional foreign policy entrepreneurship.

*Keywords:* Helen Delich Bentley, Bosnia War, U.S. Congress, Balkans, Yugoslavia

### **Introduction**

“Current Congressional sentiment is overwhelmingly anti-Serbian... It has reached a stage where it is becoming impossible for me to defend Serbia's actions... Now, for the sake of the Serbian people, and of Yugoslavia, I am joining the chorus to request that you step down as President of the Republic of Serbia”, wrote congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley to Slobodan Milošević in September 1992.<sup>1</sup> Thus ended an amiable working relationship that began three years earlier when Bentley attended the marking of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Though Bentley's relationship with Milošević soured, she continued to consistently advocate for the Serbian cause within the halls of Capitol Hill until the end of her term in 1994.

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank the Langsdale Library, University of Baltimore, Maryland.

During the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995, the U.S. Congress challenged the George H.W. Bush Administration and later the Clinton Administration in seeking to formulate a more forceful U.S. policy in Bosnia. Richard Holbrooke, the chief architect of the Dayton Peace Accords, was to recall that congressional efforts on Bosnia led to “some of the most emotional and contentious struggles of the Clinton Administration” (Holbrooke, 1998: 30-31). The congressional pressure was to culminate in the summer of 1995 with the passing of veto-proof legislation to unilaterally lift the UN-imposed arms embargo. Taking an active part in congressional deliberations from 1992 until 1994 was Helen Delich Bentley of Maryland's 2nd Congressional District. The Republican congresswoman was the only member of the U.S. Congress of Serb descent with a close interest in the region at the time of the Bosnian war.

The aim of this article is to analyze what policies the only Serbian-American member of Congress pursued during the Bosnian war. Analyzing the foreign policy activism of Bentley provides a clearer understanding of the internal U.S. debate on Bosnia, but also contributes to the existing literature on congressional foreign policy entrepreneurs. Though very active at the time, her foreign policy activism has been understudied.<sup>2</sup> This article, based primarily on Bentley's newly accessible archives at the University of Baltimore, will seek to trace the activism and the foreign policy influence of this congresswoman. It will also shed light on the influence of ethnic politics in the formulation of U.S. foreign policy.

The article is theoretically grounded in the work of Ralph G. Carter and James M. Scott on congressional foreign policy entrepreneurs. These are “members of Congress who seek to initiate action on the foreign policy issues about which they care rather than await action from the administration” (Carter and Scott, 2009: 21-22). Carter and Scott argued that analyzing the role of entrepreneurs through the study of formal legislation and roll-call votes accounts but for a part of policy avenues. In addition to studying direct legislative avenues such as formal legislation, Carter and Scott argued for the analysis of nonlegislative avenues of influence such as framing the issue, shaping the agenda, cultivating foreign contacts, and participating at hearings. It is by considering the diverse avenues of influence that a congressional entrepreneur's role in foreign policy can be assessed. Entrepreneurs act in a condition of policy vacuum or with a view to correcting an existing policy. According to Scott, there are four avenues of congressional foreign policy influence (Scott, 1997):

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions are Paul Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars*, Cornell University Press, 2003; Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic, *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia*, NYU Press, 1996.

	Direct	Indirect
Legislative	Legislation Appropriations Treaties (Senate)	Nonbinding legislation Procedural legislation Appointments (Senate)
Nonlegislative	Letters, phone calls Consultations, advising Hearings Oversight Litigation	Agenda setting Framing debate Foreign contacts

This article will argue that Representative Helen Delich Bentley was a congressional foreign policy entrepreneur utilizing direct nonlegislative and indirect nonlegislative avenues of influence. In fact, during the 102nd Congress (1991-1992) and 103rd Congress (1993-1994), Bentley did not introduce any resolutions or bills regarding the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. She co-sponsored three bills regarding Yugoslavia during the 102nd Congress and was a co-sponsor of one bill on Yugoslavia during the 103rd Congress. This lends support to the thesis that Bentley's activism was focused on the nonlegislative avenues of foreign policy influence.

It will be argued that most of Bentley's efforts were directed at framing the debate on the Bosnian war and setting the agenda. The utilization of direct nonlegislative avenues such as direct correspondence and participation at hearings were geared towards framing. Her overarching aim was to secure U.S. neutrality towards the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Prior to the declaration of Bosnian independence and prior to its recognition by the U.S., Bentley made the case against recognition of independence. Subsequently, she was a fierce critic of recognition of Yugoslav break-away states. After the beginning of the war in Bosnia in April 1992 and the increasingly pro-Bosnian sentiment in the U.S. Congress, Bentley sought to provide the "other side" of the story. To this end, she took part in hearings, wrote letters to editors, sought to marshall Serbian-American community resources, and tried to influence Milošević to shed his communist and aggressor image. Furthermore, an umbrella organization SerbNet was founded of which Bentley became an honorary president. Though these were extra-congressional efforts, Bentley conducted them while serving in Congress.

### **The Bosnian War**

The beginning of the end of Yugoslavia can be traced to Serbian President Slobodan Milošević's efforts from mid-1989 to strengthen the dominance of Serbia within the Yugoslav Federation. In 1991, Yugoslav republics Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. The Yugoslav federal army failed to suppress Slovenian inde-

pendence following which Milošević and the army turned on Croatia. In Bosnia, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) of Radovan Karadžić declared areas of Bosnia with a Serb majority as “Serb Autonomous Regions” and openly called for secession (Malcolm, 1996: 213-225). The political leadership of Bosnia was rightly concerned about the spill-over into Bosnia and the repetition of the Yugoslav army’s and paramilitaries’ rampage in Croatia.

With Slovenian and Croatian independence recognized by the European Economic Community in December 1991, Bosnia faced two options: to remain part of a smaller Serbia-dominated Yugoslavia or to opt for independence. The decision was to hold the referendum on February 29, and March 1, 1992. The turnout was approximately 64%, with overwhelming support in favor of independence (Malcolm, 1996: 230-231). The recognition of Bosnia by the European Economic Community followed on April 6 and by the U.S. the next day. The Yugoslav National Army and Serb paramilitaries in Bosnia embarked on their rampage. The UN arms embargo imposed on Yugoslavia in September 1991 remained in place, in effect curtailing Bosnia’s ability to defend itself while freezing the military superiority in favor of the Yugoslav army and the paramilitaries. Efforts to lift the UN arms embargo became a key foreign-policy priority of Bosnia. In the U.S., congressional activism in formulating U.S. policy towards Bosnia centered on lifting the embargo on Bosnia.

Britain and France, with their troops on the ground in Bosnia as part of the UN force, feared that lifting of the embargo would escalate the violence and endanger their troops. The presence of UN troops with a weak and ill-defined mandate became a major stumbling block in efforts to achieve peace in Bosnia. The three-and-a-half year war in Bosnia ended with the Dayton Peace Accords reached in November and formally signed in December 1995. This followed shuttle diplomacy and marathon meetings spearheaded by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke (Holbrooke, 1998; Power, 2002).

It was during the Bosnian war that NATO became involved in the conflict. Beginning in 1993, NATO was enforcing the UN-imposed no-fly-zone over Bosnia. In early 1994, the alliance had its first-ever military engagement when it shot down Bosnian Serb aircraft violating the no-fly-zone. In August and September 1995, NATO conducted an extended air campaign against Bosnian Serb targets that paved the way to Dayton peace talks. The alliance was to play a key role in implementing the Dayton Peace Accords.

### **U.S. Congress and the War in Bosnia**

As Yugoslavia’s process of dissolution proceeded, congressional foreign policy entrepreneurs increasingly voiced their support of the right of Yugoslav republics to seek independence. Foremost among the activists was Republican senator Bob Dole

who had been drawing attention to the repression of Kosovar Albanians. Following the beginning of the war in Bosnia, Congress passed legislation in 1992 to deny Serbia and Montenegro Most Favored Nation status. This was directly linked to Serbia and Montenegro's support for the Bosnian Serbs in the war.<sup>3</sup> However, the major bone of contention between the Clinton Administration and congressional entrepreneurs was over whether and how to end the U.S. participation in a UN-imposed arms embargo. The embargo, originally introduced in 1991 on the whole of Yugoslavia, applied to Bosnia and thereby cemented the military superiority of the Bosnian Serb side. Congressional efforts throughout the 1992-1995 period were to be directed at lifting the embargo. In 1994, Nunn-Mitchell Amendment was passed which ended the financing of the U.S. enforcement of the arms embargo in the Adriatic Sea. This decision led to contention within the NATO alliance as the British and French governments considered any effort at easing the embargo as a factor that would lead to more violence. The Administration heeded to the allies' concerns leading to friction between the executive and legislative branches on this issue. During 1994, the Congress itself was torn apart between advocates of multilateral lifting of the embargo such as Democratic majority leader George Mitchell and advocates of unilateral U.S. lifting of the embargo which included Senators Dole and Joseph Lieberman and Representative Frank McCloskey. With the Republican victory in November elections of 1994, one of the key Bosnia activists Bob Dole became majority leader. In January 1995, Dole introduced legislation to lift the embargo<sup>4</sup> and his legislation, with minor changes, was overwhelmingly supported in both houses of Congress in the summer of 1995 (Sciolino, 1995). In early August 1995, President Clinton vetoed the legislation and the Administration commenced its most serious effort at finding a peaceful solution for Bosnia. This effort was to culminate in the Dayton Peace Accords.

While the sentiment of most congressional entrepreneurs was in favor of lifting the embargo and conducting air strikes on Bosnian Serb targets, at the other side of the debate on the U.S. policy towards Bosnia was the frequently lonely voice of Maryland's Representative Helen Delich Bentley. The Republican congresswoman was to spend much of the 1992-1994 period providing the Serb version of events in Bosnia. Her overall aim was to achieve U.S. neutrality and nonintervention in Bosnia.

<sup>3</sup> H.R.5258 – To provide for the withdrawal of most favored nation status from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and to provide for the restoration of such status if certain conditions are fulfilled, May 21, 1992, 102nd Congress, 2nd Session.

<sup>4</sup> S.21 – Bosnia and Herzegovina Self-Defense Act of 1995, January 4, 1995, 104th Congress, 1st Session.

## From Maryland to the Balkans

Helen Delich Bentley, first elected to Congress in the 1984 elections, had been active in the Serbian-American community before the Yugoslav crisis. Bentley's activism on Yugoslavia can be traced to her visit on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1989. Bentley's office issued a press statement in June 1989 announcing that she accepted His Holiness Patriarch German's – the Prelate of the Serbian Orthodox Church – invitation to be his special guest for the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle. Her press release stated that she would be joined on this trip by her husband and that this is their personal trip to Yugoslavia.<sup>5</sup> Bentley met Milošević and Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, as well as members of the opposition in Serbia.<sup>6</sup> Following her trip, Bentley sent a letter to Milošević thanking him for his hospitality while she was in Serbia. "I can think of no more thrilling site than seeing the multitude of people gathered at Gazimestan on Vidovdan from your helicopter as we left for Belgrade. I left your country convinced that many good things will come of your presidency..."<sup>7</sup> wrote Bentley following her trip to Serbia.<sup>7</sup> The following year, in July 1990, she was a key participant in the Serbian American Days in Washington further cementing her role as the Serbian-American voice in the capital.<sup>8</sup>

Amid Yugoslavia's dissolution, Bentley became more vocal in calling for U.S. neutrality. In February 1991, the Subcommittee on Europe of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing on Yugoslavia. Bentley asserted that the best policy was to preserve Yugoslavia. Pointing to history, Bentley reminded that Serbs were the only allies of the U.S. during previous conflicts. She also noted the importance of the battle of Kosovo in 1389 which stopped the advance of the Ottomans and provided for the prospering of Christianity in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Congresswoman Bentley to be Guest of Serbian Patriarch German for the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 23, Press Release, b-4-23, 1; University of Baltimore Archives (Henceforth, UBA).

<sup>6</sup> Congresswoman Bentley to be Guest of Serbian Patriarch German for the 600th Anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 23, Press Release, b-4-23, 1; UBA; Schemo, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Kosovo Trip of HDB for 600th Anniversary of Battle of Kosovo, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 23, b-5-23; UBA.

<sup>8</sup> Serbian American Days in Washington – July 22-24 '90, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 22, Report Resolution, b-88-22; UBA.

<sup>9</sup> Civil war in Yugoslavia: The U.S. Response – Statement by Congresswoman Helen Delich Bentley before the European Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 21, 1991; Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 22, Remarks, b-60-22, 1; UBA.

The Baltimore Sun reported in April 1991 on another visit by Bentley to Yugoslavia during which she conceded that Milošević had become “a little too authoritarian”. According to the article, Bentley was walking a fine line between maintaining her contact with Milošević but also trying to induce change in Serbia (Schemo, 1991). Following her trip, Bentley co-signed a letter to her congressional colleagues in July 1991 calling for the U.S. to stay neutral with respect to Yugoslavia until the situation was resolved.<sup>10</sup>

With Slovenian and Croatian independence increasingly internationally recognized, Bentley became a strong critic of recognition. In early April 1992, Bentley attended an event with the Serbian-American community in Milwaukee and opined that the U.S. would not recognize Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia or Macedonia until they were internationally recognized as independent republics (Cuprisin, 1992). At the end of April 1992, she sent a letter to Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger calling for the U.S. to be a neutral arbiter and not to favor any side in the Yugoslav disputes.<sup>11</sup> Following the U.S. recognition of Yugoslav republics, Bentley sent a letter to President George H.W. Bush in April 1992 stating her “shock and dismay” that the U.S. recognized the former Yugoslav republics. She claimed that the recognition resulted in more violence and had the potential to cause a “civil war” in the Balkans.<sup>12</sup> During a visit to Serbia the following month, Bentley reasserted that recognition of Bosnia was premature (Bowman, 1992a).

As the war in Bosnia escalated, Bentley’s focus shifted from criticizing the Administration’s recognition of breakaway republics to seeking U.S. neutrality. By July 1992, Bentley was claiming that all sides in the Bosnian conflict were to blame. In her view, an intervention in Yugoslavia would lead to a new Vietnam. She emphasized that she was working to defend the Serbian people, and not the regime in Serbia (Bowman, 1992b). As part of her nonlegislative activism, Bentley worked on defending Serbia’s interests. On April 28, 1992, Bentley wrote a letter to a producer at CNN Roger Bahre. She contacted him regarding an inaccurate map shown on CNN the previous day which did not show the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina as parts of Serbia. She asked the producer to make the necessary correction and offered to have him contact persons who were recently in Yugoslavia and who could talk about the issue.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Dear Colleague Letter re: Republican Study Committee Promotion of Lantos Resolution, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 29, Letter, b-55-29; UBA.

<sup>11</sup> “HDB Correspondence to Eagleburger”, HDB; Series VII. Balkans, Box 5, Yugoslavia, Catalog no. 4157-1.

<sup>12</sup> Letter Sent to Pres. Bush from Mrs. Bentley re: U.S. recognition of Croatia, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 30, Letter, b-16-30; UBA.

<sup>13</sup> HDB, Box 26, Correspondence: HDB to CNN re: Maps on their Newscasts, Letter, b-110-26.

That Bentley was the voice of the Serbian-American community in the capital is seen from the following letter. On May 21, 1992, Information Secretary of the Chicago committee of Srpska Demokratska Stranka (Serbian Democratic Party) sent a letter to Bentley with an attachment of a report by a Northeastern Illinois University professor's trip to Dubrovnik in Croatia. The trip, according to the letter, was sponsored by Serbian Democratic Party of Chicago. At the end of the letter, the Information Secretary writes: "Please keep in mind that Professor .... is extremely familiar with the Serbian problems in Yugoslavia. He is an excellent candidate for testifying at the hearings in Congress for the Serbian Cause."<sup>14</sup>

When news of the Serb-run notorious camps for Bosnian Muslims and Croats were confirmed in summer of 1992, Bentley sent a letter to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić informing him of reports of Serb-run "concentration camps" for Muslims. She said she hoped it was not true and asked that he allow neutral observers access to the locations to show it is not true. She wrote that the sooner this was accomplished, the better it would be for the Serbian people. She also stated that with so much disinformation tarnishing the Serbian image, this incident would be "absolutely devastating".<sup>15</sup> A few days later, Bentley again sent a letter to Karadžić asking him to inform her of what is going on at the Omarska detention camp in Bosnia and who the detainees were. She expected him to fulfill his offer that the Red Cross take charge of the camps. "This is of key importance if the Serbian name is ever to be cleared in the Western press", wrote Bentley.<sup>16</sup> In November 1992 she sent a letter to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali stating that "it is imperative that the opening up and inspection of ALL detention camps on ALL territories of the former Yugoslavia begin immediately", and emphasized the need for "all three sides" to open up their camps.<sup>17</sup>

In September 1992, Bentley organized a hearing in Congress for the Bishop of Herzegovina Atanasije Jevtić. In a Dear Colleague letter, Bentley presented the Bishop as a "fierce opponent of Communism and the Milošević regime" who would provide a "first-hand account of events in Herzegovina". In Bentley's press release following the hearing, she stated that Jevtić shared his view on the Croat occupation of Herzegovina and the atrocities committed by all three sides as well as Croatian

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence to HDB re: Yugoslavia: Part 1, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 5, Letters, Memos, Faxes, 4115-1; UBA.

<sup>15</sup> Milosevic Folder, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 7, Letters, 4173-1; UBA.

<sup>16</sup> Milosevic Folder, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 7, Letters, 4173-1; UBA.

<sup>17</sup> Cong Bentley, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 5, Letters, Statement, Report, Congressional Record, 4145-1; UBA.



and Muslim destruction of Orthodox churches. The press release stated that Jevtić and Bentley agreed that the three leaders – Slobodan Milošević, Franjo Tuđman and Alija Izetbegović – were to blame for the situation in Yugoslavia.<sup>18</sup>

Outside the Congress, Bentley kept in frequent touch in 1992 with John Kennedy of John Kennedy Associates, a public relations outfit in London working for the Serbian cause.<sup>19</sup> Her correspondence papers also suggest close contacts with the Crown Prince Alexander of the Karadjordjevic dynasty. Correspondence with both was mainly focused on trying to tone down U.S. and western Europe media coverage highly critical of Serbia.

Amid increasing coverage of Bosnian Serb brutality and increasingly critical media coverage, the Serbian-American activists under the umbrella organization SerbNet struck back. In early August 1992, *The New York Times* ran an ad paid for by SerbNet Inc. entitled “President Bush, Governor Clinton: Why Take Sides in A Civil War? Instead, Be the Peacemaker in Bosnia”. The ad stated that all sides were to blame for the conflict, accused Bosnian Muslims of refusing to negotiate and asked why there were no sanctions against Croatia when Croatian troops were in Bosnia.<sup>20</sup>

Bentley’s activism on behalf of Serbia led to resentment in her congressional constituency. Bentley’s reelection rival in 1992 Michael C. Hickey Jr. criticized her for devoting more time to Serbia than to her constituency. He called on her to resign as president of a Serbian-American advocacy group SerbNet Inc., a post that Bentley said was honorary. According to *The Sun*, Hickey’s criticism was based on an article in a Serbian-American newspaper supportive of Bentley which said: “Serbs have only one voice in Congress – Helen Delich Bentley. She has sacrificed her career to promote and fight for Serbia and Serbs... Mrs. Bentley has only two Serbs in her congressional district, yet she spends a majority of her time helping Serbs.” Bentley said that the article omitted a key phrase – that of the time she spent on foreign policy issues, most was devoted to Serbia. The article also mentioned that her reelection campaign in 1992 received around \$80,000 from the Serbian-Americans (Carson, 1992).

Criticism of her activism extended to constituents. A Maryland constituent wrote her in June 1992 criticizing her “misguided support of the Communist Serb-

<sup>18</sup> Hearing of Bishop Jevtic, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 27, News Articles, Press Release, Testimony, Remarks, b-129-27; UBA.

<sup>19</sup> Correspondence to HDB re: Yugoslavia: Part 1, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 5, Letters, Memos, Faxes, 4115-1; UBA.

<sup>20</sup> SerbNet Ad: President Bush, Governor Clinton: Why Take Sides in A Civil War? Instead, Be the Peacemaker in Bosnia, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 27, News Ad, b-94-27; UBA.

led Yugoslavian army through your Serb-Net Inc.”. The same constituent wrote her again in early August 1992 writing that it was incomprehensible how she or anyone could support “Serbian Nationalists” amid worldwide condemnation of their actions in Bosnia. The constituent asked her to condemn the atrocities in Bosnia and distance herself from Serbian nationalists.<sup>21</sup>

The congressional elections in 1992 echoed the conflict in the Balkans. In October 1992, *The Sun* ran a story of how Bentley’s reelection effort pitted Serb and Croat supporters and that the reelection campaign in 2nd Congressional District of Maryland was, in a way, an extension of the Yugoslav conflict. Her rival Hickey focused his criticism of her work for the Serbian advocacy group SerbNet, Inc. He charged that Bentley was using her office to promote support for SerbNet, Inc. Hickey meanwhile had picked up support for the most part from Americans of Croatian descent (Bowman, 1992).

In October 1992, *The Baltimore Sun* ran advertisements paid for by the Maryland Coalition to Stop Ethnic Cleansing sharply critical of Bentley. The ads stated: “Helen Delich Bentley ostensibly was elected to the US House of Representatives to represent the 2nd Congressional District here in Maryland. But careful examination of her Congressional work record... [shows] her primary efforts are focused less on her Maryland constituency than on her role as a mouthpiece for Serbia... She used her influence in Congress to help Serbia’s criminal government to avoid diplomatic and military consequences for their military aggression, violation of human rights, and ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina... she was one of two members of Congress who spoke against a Congressional resolution condemning the Serbs for these camps.” The ad notes that she was the president of SerbNet and called on voters in the 2nd Congressional District to “put your ‘X’ or pull the lever to end the career of Helen Delich Bentley. The outgunned victims of Sarajevo... will appreciate your action on behalf of universal human rights that we take for granted here in Maryland.” This ad ran on October 11, 1992. Another ad critical of Bentley that ran in *The Baltimore Sun* quotes her along with the picture of Bosnian Muslims detained at a notorious camp. The ad asks: “Does Helen Delich Bentley represent Maryland or Serbia?... On November 3rd, vote against Helen Delich Bentley.”<sup>22</sup>

In November 1992, *The Baltimore Sun* ran a story how Bentley’s rival in the elections was increasingly using her advocacy for Serbia as a focus of criticism. According to this story, Bentley’s press spokesperson Blaine Taylor resigned and called for the congresswoman to change her policy towards Serbia. The article quoted Dr.

<sup>21</sup> Loose papers Part 3, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 4, News Articles, Letters, Reports, 4088-1; UBA.

<sup>22</sup> Correspondence to HDB from Milan Panic, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 5, Yugoslavia, Letters, Faxes, Memos – Part 2, 4176-1; UBA.

Philip Cohen who was active in the Maryland Coalition to Stop Ethnic Cleansing, an advocacy group which sponsored ads critical of Bentley. The congresswoman defended her position claiming that only part of the story in Yugoslavia was heard and that her efforts were aimed towards balancing and providing Serbs' view of the conflict. Her opponent Hickey criticized Bentley for having two staffers in her office work on Serbian issues. She conceded as a mistake that official stationery was used but denied that staff were assigned to work on Serbian issues. According to the article, Bentley also received a \$1000 campaign contribution from Milan Panić, a Serbian-American and the prime minister of Yugoslavia. The article said that of the \$842 000 in campaign contribution, Bentley received approximately \$100 000 from Serbian-Americans (Hill, 1992).

The sharp tone of the congressional elections in 1992 notwithstanding, Bentley secured another term in the House of Representatives. That year she had also been closely following elections in Serbia where her fellow Serbian-American Milan Panić challenged Slobodan Milošević. Bentley's archives indicate frequent contacts with Panić since his name first came up for consideration for the position of Yugoslav prime minister in 1992. However, Milošević outwitted the newcomer to Serbian domestic politics and Bentley in effect lost a crucial political ally in Serbia.

Following her own congressional reelection, Bentley remained closely involved with the Balkans. In January 1993, she advised Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić to accept the Vance-Owen peace proposal which would have recognized most of the Bosnian Serb military conquests. Bentley wrote to urge Bosnian Serb Republic Parliament "to vote in favor of the Peace Plan which, I understand, could lead to a final settlement as well as be conducive to stabilizing the region".<sup>23</sup>

Within the Congress, Bentley sought to provide the Serbian version of events in what she deemed to be heavily anti-Serbian media coverage. Writing to her congressional colleague Representative Bill Paxton in March 1993, Bentley voiced her concern about "... the western media's one-sided portrayal of Yugoslavia's civil war as a case of Serbian aggression against Muslim neighbors... To ignore the Serbian side betrays a people who have been America's most loyal allies in the Balkans throughout this century." She also attached documents for Paxton providing the view from the Serbian side. She dismissed the notion of an aggression stating that Bosnian Serbs lived in Bosnia for ages. Furthermore, she wrote that "Bosnia as a political entity dates only to post 1945, when communist dictator Tito arbitrarily created it as an internal administrative border within Yugoslavia".<sup>24</sup> A few months

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Radovan Karadzic. Pres. of Serbs in Bosnia, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 35, Letter, b-70-35; UBA.

<sup>24</sup> Dr. Radovan Karadzic. Pres. of Serbs in Bosnia, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 35, Letter, b-70-35; UBA.

later, Bentley took part in the U.S. Helsinki Commission hearings on Bosnia held on October 21, 1993, in which she asserted that the sanctions against Serbia were hurting the poor people the most.<sup>25</sup>

Outside of Congress, Bentley reached out to editors. She addressed a letter in April 1993 to Steve Weisman of The New York Times and attached documents with the Serbian side of the conflict. She made the point that Serbs had been America's "most loyal allies" in the 20th century. Bentley wrote of "Yugoslavia's civil war" and asked Weisman to consider that Bosnian Serbs are "not grabbing Muslim lands, but rather defending their own homes". She further claimed that many of the atrocities attributed to Serbs "were perpetrated by Muslims against their own people to gain western sympathy".<sup>26</sup>

### **Correspondence with Milošević**

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the Bentley congressional papers is her intensive correspondence with Slobodan Milošević in 1991 and 1992. These will be quoted at length for they represent as yet unpublished correspondence. To get a sense of how their relationship evolved, it is useful to provide an overview of their correspondence throughout the period.

In January 1991, Bentley urged Milošević "to remove all red star insignia in use by the military and the Republic of Serbia, not just by statute, but also physically. The continual appearance of the red star... has also been seized on by the international media, who use it to justify their claims of communist Serbian leadership." In a late July 1991 letter, Bentley lamented the growing anti-Serbian public opinion in the U.S. She informed Milošević of Representative Tom Lantos' recently-introduced resolution calling for direct aid to Yugoslav separatist republics. She further wrote that the Serbian image in the U.S. would be bolstered if progressive reforms were undertaken in Serbia and that this could be facilitated by bringing into the government prominent public figures. In December 1991, Bentley urged Milošević that Serbia continue taking part in the Hague conference so as not to isolate itself. She also urged caution "in any official recognition of either Serbs in Croatia or Bosnia. This is a two-edged sword, and would force international recognition of the province of Kosovo as an independent republic."

In late February 1992, Bentley wrote that after consultations with "Washington power circles", she came to the conclusion that Milošević's visit would not be

<sup>25</sup> Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, "The Fate of the People of Bosnia-Herzegovina", October 21, 1993, 103rd Congress, 1st Session, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Correspondence from HDB to Steve Weisman of The New York Times re: Fair Representation in Press, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 30, Letter, b-110-30; UBA.

welcomed. "... Serbia is unfortunately still perceived in the west as a 'Bolshevik' or 'Communist' state." To improve Serbia's image, she urged that Milošević publicly renounce communism, remove the red star from official insignia and lift restrictions on the press. She also conceded that she was "coming under increasing fire from Congress and from the American public, as are some of my other colleagues, for supporting a country that is considered the last bastion of communism in Europe".

In late April 1992, the congresswoman wrote in a sharper tone that Milošević "must" undertake efforts to "salvage Serbia's reputation". She urged him to publicly call for an end to violence, call on the U.S., the UN, and the EC to take part in negotiations, support Bosnia's international borders, and declare that the new Yugoslav army exists only within the new federal state and renounce those units that remained in Bosnia, and declare that Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia have a right to self-determination. She urged that these measures be undertaken.<sup>27</sup> On April 7, 1992, Bentley wrote to Milošević urging him to lift economic sanctions that Serbia imposed on Bosnia and Macedonia. She drew his attention to President Bush's statement that the U.S. would drop its economic sanctions on Serbia once Serbia lifted its sanctions on Bosnia and Macedonia. "... It will be impossible to block the passage of any anti-Serbian legislation in Congress without such an action on your part", she wrote. On April 30, 1992, she wrote that Serbia was perceived as the "guilty" side in the violence and stated that the priority of leadership of the new Yugoslavia should be to establish peace in Bosnia. She warned that failure of the peace process would result in greater isolation of Yugoslavia.

In June 1992, Bentley wrote Milošević urging him that the Sarajevo airport be open so that relief supplies can be delivered to the city. "I would impress upon you to use your influence with Mr. Karadžić and other Serbian leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina not to hinder any of these future convoys... The feeling of ill will towards Serbia due to the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina... continues to grow... It is vital that the humanitarian situation in Sarajevo improve. This rests on your shoulders alone."<sup>28</sup>

On September 22, 1992, Bentley informed Milošević that the House of Representatives passed legislation withdrawing Most Favored Nation status from Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. "... Current Congressional sentiment is overwhelmingly anti-Serbian, and there was no real chance of defeating this bill... It has reached a stage where it is becoming impossible for me to defend Serbia's actions... Now, for

<sup>27</sup> Correspondences from Helen Bentley to Slobodan Milosevic, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 26, b-107-26; UBA.

<sup>28</sup> HDB Letters to Milosevic, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 11, 4256-1; UBA.

the sake of the Serbian people, and of Yugoslavia, I am joining the chorus to request that you step down as President of the Republic of Serbia. The destruction of Serbia must stop, and this is the only way that is acceptable to the international community”, wrote congresswoman Bentley.<sup>29</sup>

Her relationship with Milošević damaged, Bentley continued to closely follow the events in the Balkans throughout the remainder of her term. The end of her congressional career came as a result of her decision to run for governor of Maryland. In November 1993, Bentley began her gubernatorial campaign. The *Baltimore Sun* noted that she was “the lone congressional voice supporting Serbia as Yugoslavia fell apart and the world learned of Serbian atrocities”.<sup>30</sup> Bentley was defeated in her run for governor and thus ended the congressional career of the five-term representative from Maryland.

## Conclusion

Bentley’s legacy in foreign policy includes efforts to preserve Yugoslavia in 1991 and to advise the Bush Administration not to recognize the breakaway republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia in 1992. As the war in Bosnia escalated and, amid increasingly negative media coverage of Serbia and Serb actions in Bosnia, Bentley sought to present the Serbian version of events. To this end, Bentley utilized both the direct nonlegislative and the indirect nonlegislative avenues of influence. She participated in hearings, wrote to editors, and sought to marshal the resources of the Serbian-American community towards a common aim – presenting the Serbian side of the story. Her policy aim was to neutralize the increasingly pro-Bosnian congressional sentiment and to maintain U.S. nonintervention. Her lack of success on both fronts notwithstanding, Bentley’s activism is a prime example of congressional foreign policy entrepreneurship. An analysis of Bentley’s activism in the U.S. domestic debate on the policy towards Bosnia contributes both to the literature on intervention in the Balkans and to literature on congressional foreign policy entrepreneurs.

<sup>29</sup> Correspondences from Helen Bentley to Slobodan Milosevic, Helen Delich Bentley Collection; Series VII. Balkans, Box 26, b-107-26; UBA.

<sup>30</sup> John B. O’Donnell, “Bentley kickoff is uncharacteristically nervous”, *The Baltimore Sun*, November 11, 1993.

## REFERENCES

- Bowman, Tom. 1992. Serb, Croat sympathizers clash in 2nd District, The Baltimore Sun, October 21.
- Bowman, Tom. 1992a. Bentley visits troubled Yugoslavia, pledges aid for mother seeking young, The Sun, May 27.
- Bowman, Tom. 1992b. Bentley lobbies for a more favorable view of Serbia, The Baltimore Sun, July 2.
- Carson, Larry. 1992. Bentley criticized by foe for work on behalf of Serbs, The Sun, October 3.
- Carter, Ralph G. and James M. Scott. 2009. *Choosing to Lead: Understanding Congressional Foreign Policy Entrepreneurs*, Duke University Press.
- Cuprisin, Tilhel. 1992. US lawmaker says recognition will take time, The Milwaukee Journal, April 4.
- Cushman, Thomas and Stjepan Mestrovic. 1996. *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia*, NYU Press.
- Hill, Michael. 1992. Bentley's dogged defense of Serbia comes under fire, The Baltimore Sun, November 1.
- Hockenos, Paul. 2003. *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars*, Cornell University Press.
- Holbrooke, Richard. 1998. *To End a War*, The Modern Library.
- Malcolm, Noel. 1996. *Bosnia: A Short History* (New, Updated Edition), New York University Press, New York.
- Power, Samantha. 2002. *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, New York: Harper Perennial.
- Schemo, Diana Jean. 1991. Bentley finds uncertainty, turmoil in Yugoslavia, land of her ancestors, The Baltimore Sun, April 3.
- Sciolino, Elaine. 1995. Conflict in the Balkans: In Washington; Defiant Senators Vote to Override Bosnia Arms Ban, The New York Times, July 27.
- Scott, James M., 1997. In the Loop: Congressional Influence in American Foreign Policy, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 25 (summer): 47-76.

*Mailing Address:* **Hamza Karčić**, Faculty of Political Science, Skenderija 72, 71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. *E-mail:* karcich@fpn.unsa.ba