Prospects for Stability in Southeastern Europe

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Since the death of former Croatian President Franjo Tudjman in December 1999 and the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, it has become commonplace to talk about Òthe Aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars of Succession,Ó as if the wars and chaos of the past decade in Southeastern Europe were mainly driven by these two men, and now that they are gone, peace and democracy will inevitably follow, and international policy in the region can now be considered successful. Richard Holbrooke, for instance, claimed that ÒYugoslaviaÕs tragedy was not foreordained. It was the product of bad, even criminal, political leaders who encouraged ethnic confrontation for personal, political, and financial gain.Ó Along similar lines, Warren Zimmerman has noted that ÒYugoslaviaÕs death and the violence that followed resulted from the conscious actions of nationalist leaders who coopted, intimidated, circumvented, or eliminated all opposition to their demagogic designs. Yugoslavia was destroyed from the top down.Ó A rather confused version of this argument is provided in a review of the Balkans by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), which claims that due to MilosevicÕs overthrow, ÒAlthough terrorist incidents and localized violence will

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1. Holbrooke, To End a War (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 23-24.
2. Warren Zimmerman, Origins of a Catastrophe (New York: Times Books, 1993), p. vii. This mode of thinking leads to some rather perverse logic; for instance, the belief that in bombing a country for 78 days you are waging a war against an individual, not against a country or a people. NATO Secretary-General Lord George Robertson, for instance, recently claimed ÒThe 19 democratic nations of the Alliance did not commit an act of aggression against the Yugoslavian (sic) people. We did not have anything against them. We acted against Milosevic.ÓSee Yuri PankovÕs interview with Robertson, ÒDialogue, Not Confrontation,Óin Krasnaya Zvezda (Moscow), 20 February 2001.

continue Ỏn the BalkansỎ the Balkan wars, which repeated themselves with terrifying monotony during the last century, are now over.Ỏ Here we have a perfect contradiction: now that Milosevic is gone, there will be no more war in the Balkans, even though these wars repeated themselves Ỏwith terrifying monotonyỎfor at least 85 years before Milosevic came to power.

In this paper I would like to argue something quite different. First, I will argue that the international community has had relatively little success in its attempt to control   developments in Southeastern Europe. Second, I will argue that that the reason why the international community has been unable to control developments in the region is because of a fundamental misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what has been driving the process of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Third, I want to argue that the crisis in Southeastern EuropeŇ if we define crisis to mean the struggle to create and sustain stable democratic statesŇ is far from over.

After more than a decade, most of the problems facing the states of the former Yugoslavia still have not been resolved. What has changed over the past ten years is that the locus of the crisis has shifted from the northeast - Slovenia and Croatia - to the southwest - Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (including Kosovo and Montenegro), and Macedonia. Even Albania has been in a state of almost chronic instability since 1997. And in this latter group, the political, constitutional, and state questions which were open at the beginning of the 1990s are far from resolved.

Looking over the events of the past decade, I would argue that the international community has had relatively little success in fostering stability, or imposing its will, on the peoples and states of the region. International diplomats were unable to prevent the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, and it took 43 months to bring the fighting in Bosnia to an end (and then largely on terms unacceptable to the local factions). Postwar experiments in nation-building, state-building, and running international protectorates in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have proven disappointing (to say the least). And despite 10 years of advance warning, international diplomacy was unable to prevent the wars in either Kosovo or Macedonia.

Moreover, despite the Ỏinternational communityỎỎ official policy and rhetoric about supporting multi-ethnicity and multiethnic states, over the past decade the international community has

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3. ỎHealing the Wounds in the Balkans,ỎStrategic Survey 2000/2001, p. 124.

presided over the formation of ever-smaller mono-ethnic entities. Thus, the former multi-ethnic Yugoslavia has been replaced by a host of states and para-states that are   now over 90 percent mono-ethnic - Slovenia, Croatia, Republika Srpska, Herceg Bosna, Bosniac-Bosnia, and Kosovo. And we have yet to see what will happen to the rest of the FRY and Macedonia.

Instead of simply criticizing international efforts in Southeastern Europe or placing the blame for events over the past ten years on one or two individuals, what I would argue is that the events of the past decade are part of an historical and social process that cannot be controlled by the international community, given the limited resources it is willing to devote to the region. As Gale Stokes, a prominent historian of Eastern Europe, has described this process,

> Remapping state boundaries onto ethnic lines is one of the major threads of postFrench Revolutionary European history. The process began with the unifications of Italy and Germany, ran through the creation of new states at the end of World War I, and had its most catastrophic outcomes at the end of World War II with the Holocaust and the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe . . . the wars of Yugoslav succession are not some aberrant Balkan phenomenon; they are the last stages of a process of European redefinition that has been going on since the French revolution.[4]

Indeed, as Istvan Deak adds, Òthe creation of nation-states has been so much a part of modern European history as to allow us to call it inevitable.Ó If this school of thought is a correct interpretation of modern European history, and I believe it is, then the possibilities for   creating stable multiethnic societies in Southeastern Europe are dim. But, unfortunately, I believe that the effort to create even stable mono-ethnic democracies in Southeastern Europe is going to be extremely difficult for the foreseeable future.

4. Gale Stokes, ÒThe Unpalatable Paradox,ÓNationalities Papers 27 (June 1999), pp. 327-329.
5. Istvan Deak, ÒA Somewhat Pessimistic View of Charles IngraoÕsUnderstanding Ethnic Conflict in Central EuropeÓÓNationalities Papers 27 (June 1999), p. 320.

What are the factors or realities on the ground that are inhibiting or preventing the emergence of stable democracies in Southeastern Europe? I would argue that they fall into three categories. The first is the overall level of poverty among the population of the region, and the weak state of the local economies. The second is the existence of weak governments using weak and/or ineffective political mechanisms. The third category of problems is that most of the existing states/governments lack popular legitimacy. We are unlikely to see major improvements in any of these categories in the immediate future. Let me now examine each of these categories in turn.

The first category of problems facing states in the region is the depressed state of their economies. To emphasize the importance of a strong economy for the maintenance of a stable democracy, let me cite the words of a recent study on the Balkans:

> Few concepts in political science have been as widely accepted (particularly in the Western world) as the idea that socioeconomic well-being is the crucial foundation of a sound democracy. The formation and growth of a middle class through robust economic development is considered to be the bulwark of democratic stability.[6]

Unfortunately, the reality of Southeastern Europe at this point in time suggests that the economies of the region are far from being able to support or sustain a robust middle class, as income disparities and the gap between rich and poor have both widened over the past ten   years. Regional unemployment (according to official statistics) is approximately 30 percentcountry by country, it ranges anywhere from 20 percent in Croatia to 60 percent in Kosovo. Living standards in most of the former Yugoslavia have declined by 30-50 percent over the past decade. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo have suffered significant damage to their economic infrastructures due to war. Most of these countries suffer from a   high degree of dependence on foreign aid. In Albania, 9 percent of GDP comes from foreign aid. In Montenegro, the state budget for the current fiscal year is approximately $90 million.   Coincidentally (or perhaps not) Montenegro is also receiving approximately $90 million in aid from the EU and the US this year. And, of course, the provision of public services in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo is almost completely dependent upon the international community.

6. Stefano Bianchini and Marko Dogo, "Foreword," in The Balkans: National Identities in a Historical Perspective. Stefano Bianchini and Marco Dogo, eds. (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1998), p. 16.

Most of these countries are also suffering from a serious outflow of educated, talented young people, the so-called 'brain drain.' In Albania, 40 percent of the teachers have left the country since 1992. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a recent poll reported that 62 percent of the country's young people would leave if they had a way out. It bears stressing here that if these countries are going to have a successful democratic transition, they are losing that part of the population most likely to carry it out. Refugees and displaced persons continue to cause severe economic and social problems throughout the region. The devastated FRY economy is currently supporting the largest refugee population in Europe. The Bosnian economy is currently supporting over 500,000 internally-displaced persons, and the number of refugees and displaced persons from the fighting in Macedonia is growing every week.

A final problem regarding these economies is the phenomenon and extent of organized crime in these societies. Milosevic's Serbia, Djukanovic's Montenegro, and NATO's Kosovo are the worst examples of this problem, but Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, and Macedonia have significant and serious problems here as well. The extent and strength of organized crime syndicates in the region is so severe that some observers claim they are the main impediment to a successful democratic transition in the region. As the former chief of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ambassador Robert Barry, recently noted:

> Organized crime and corruption are a more serious threat to security and stability than military forces. The growing nexus between extremist politicians, organized crime, and the former communist intelligence services is becoming ever stronger, and this is the single greatest threat to democratic reform, economic investment, and membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. Rolling back the mafia must be a central goal of the Stability Pact, NATO, the EU, and the OSCE.[7]

Now, the second category of problems: weak governments handicapped by inefficient political institutions and mechanisms. One obvious problem is the fractured party systems throughout the region, and the politically polarized populations. In Croatia, the government is made up of 5 (until last week, 6) competing parties. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the Federation, the government is composed of 10 different parties. In Serbia, the DOS coalition is made up of 18 different parties, and I've lost track of how many parties are formally a part of Macedonia's current national unity government. Obviously, unwieldy coalitions made up of competing parties will not be able to govern effectively, or

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7. See the commentary by the OSCE Chief of Mission in BiH, Ambassador Robert Barry, in the Frankfurter Allegemiene Zeitung, 20 July 1999.

to agree upon the difficult decisions needed to implement political and economic reform.

The second problem in this category lies in the fact that most of the governments in the region (with the exceptions of Albania and Croatia) are using failed political mechanisms inherited from the former Yugoslavia. Here I mean giving sub-state entities high degrees of ethnic or territorial autonomy; the use of ethnic vetoes, parity ethnic representation in executive, legislative, and judicial bodies; decision-making by consensus; and collectively rotating leaderships. All of these are political mechanisms that failed to address effectively the problems of the former Yugoslavia, and they have not proven successful in post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina or in the FRY. Nevertheless, they are still political ÒsolutionsÓ that the international community will probably try to force Macedonia to accept in order to settle the crisis there.

Finally, the third category of problems inhibiting or preventing the emergence of stable democracies is the fact that many of the existing states in the region lack popular legitimacy or support. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, a recent poll found that 72 percent of the people surveyed thought the RS should either become an independent state or unite with the FRY.[8] Similarly, the results of the referendum of Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina organized in October 2000 suggest that a large percentage of the Croat population in Bosnia is extremely unhappy with the current constitutional arrangements there.[9] Obviously, the Albanians in Kosovo have no desire to remain a part of the FRY, and if anyone is surprised by developments in Macedonia, it is worth remembering that Albanians boycotted the countryÕs 1991 referendum on independence. Montenegro is reassessing its relationship with Serbia, and even if Montenegro does become independent (which is beginning to seem more and more unlikely) it will be against the will of roughly half of its population. Albania also faces considerable problems as its attempts to create a viable state within its current borders face challenges from those who would like to see closer ties between Tirana, Pristina, and Tetovo. And even though Croatia is now overwhelmingly a mono-ethnic country, the political system there is extremely polarized between members of the current government, which would like to wash their hands of the Croats in Bosnia, and those who favor a more active and interventionist approach in supporting them.

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8. ÒPotmulo Negodovanje,Ó Reporter (Banja Luka), Number 114, 28 June 2001.

9. For an examination of the issues the Croat referendum dealt with, see Hrvatska Rijec (Sarajevo), Number 326, 4 November 2000.

What I have argued in this paper is that there are two ways of understanding the problems in Southeastern Europe. Much of current international policy has been based on the belief that the problems in the region have been caused by one or two bad politicians. Now that those politicians are gone, peace and harmony should characterize the region.

Clearly, however, this is not happening, as the continuing problems in Macedonia, Kosovo, the Presevo Valley, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina show that these crises have different roots and different catalysts. What I have instead proposed in this paper is that the wars in Southeastern Europe over the past decade, are, unfortunately, a part of the often bloody European model of state and nation-building. This is a process of enormous historical and social force, and it is naive to think that a donor's conference that raises $5 billion, or a barrage of cruise missiles, can solve these problems in the 3-4 years between American presidential campaigns. As Timothy Garton Ash said in a recent article, "What we are proposing to do in our Balkan quasi-protectorates is not just to freeze war. It is to freeze history."[10] As we all know, however, time waits for no one, not even for the international bureaucrats trying to redesign and transform Southeastern Europe. Consequently, since the so-called "national-questions" of many of the ethnic groups of Southeastern Europe remain unresolved, I fear instability will characterize the region for the foreseeable future.

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10. See Ash, "Cry, the Dismembered Country," The New York Review of Books,