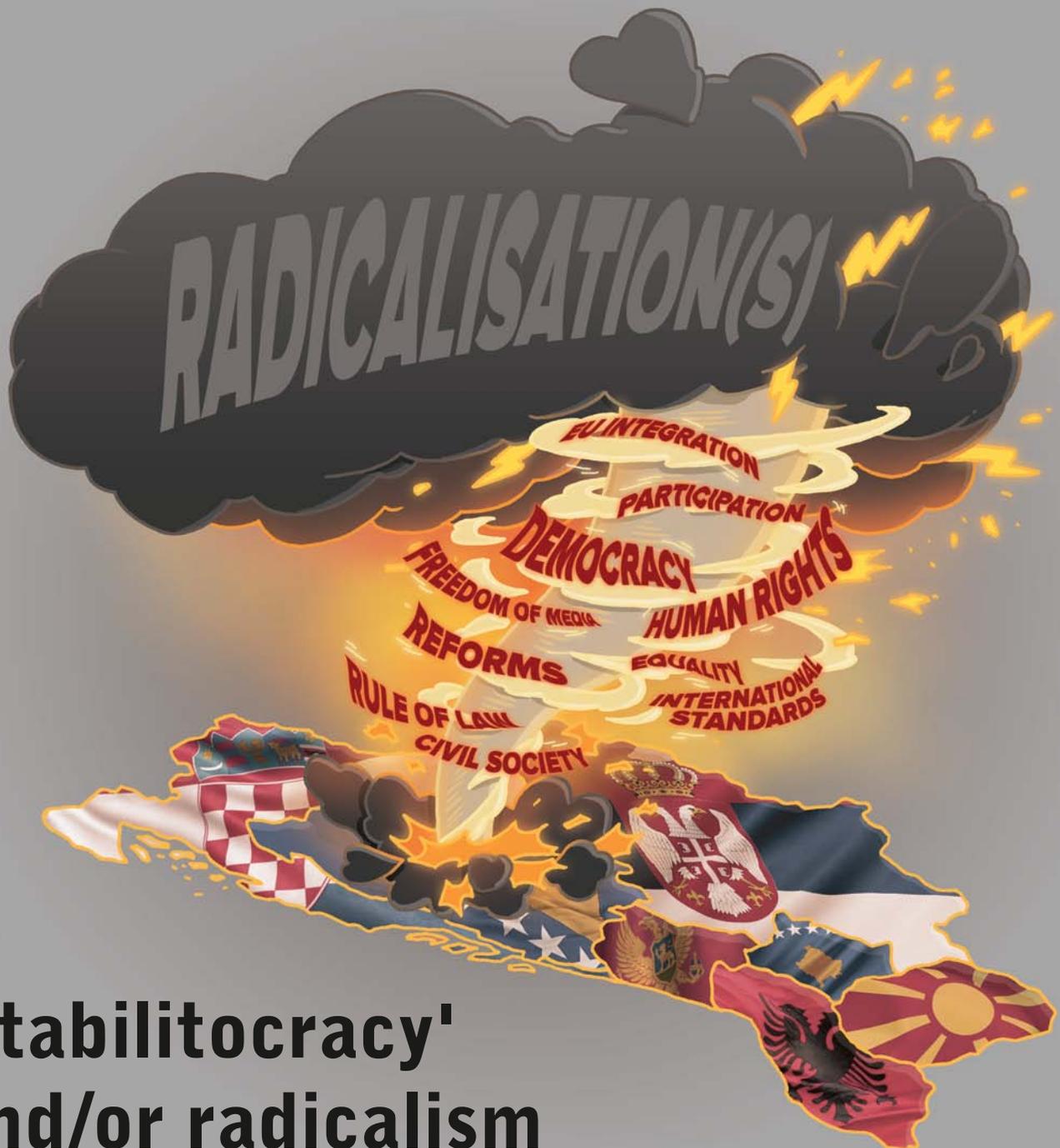


# perspectives

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POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

## SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE



'stabilitocracy'  
and/or radicalism



## Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

Fostering democracy and upholding human rights, taking action to prevent the destruction of the global ecosystem, advancing equality between women and men, securing peace through conflict prevention in crisis zones, and defending the freedom of individuals against excessive state and economic power – these are the objectives that drive the ideas and actions of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. We maintain close ties to the German Green Party (Alliance 90/The Greens) and as a think tank for green visions and projects, we are part of an international network encompassing well over 100 partner projects in approximately 60 countries.

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## introduction

# never-ending transition

Srđan Dvornik

In the wake of several recent ethnic incidents that happened in Croatia, a well known representative of the minority whose members were attacked expressed a harsh critique of the political climate in which numerous expressions of intolerance by prominent public figures sooner or later had to result in insults, physical attacks and violence. He expressed his concern that today's Croatia could end up becoming similar to its alleged predecessor. His statement was met with a new wave of intolerant responses. Most of those who reacted recognised the 'predecessor': the 'Independent State of Croatia' (NDH), the puppet state created by the Nazis in the Second World War in the territories which nowadays belong to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. In the country where extremists more or less overtly commemorate the quisling regime, and official institutions downplay its crimes while commemorating its soldiers and officials who fell as victims of the victorious partisans, and where it seems more important that the 'NDH' was a Croatian entity than that it was a fascist-style regime, all of a sudden everybody seemed hurt by the comparison between the contemporary Croatia and the regime which was defeated three quarters of a century ago. As though everybody suddenly woke up from a nightmare and realised that the 'Croat state' from WW2 was really something to be ashamed of.

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Thus, regardless of almost thirty years since the fall on undemocratic regimes, it seems that the expected transition to democracy and free market economy in 'western Balkans' has become a never-ending story. Societies are weak, pluralism develops slowly and with great difficulties, political elites still dominate, and economies are still dependent either on political authorities or on international companies. At the same time, we witness to authoritarianism, intolerance, more or less constant popular support to the same political leaders or parties who get re-elected in spite of the poor economic and social performance of their respective governments, and the widespread corruption.

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This might be a symptom of the divided national 'self' of a nation guided by a double ideology: on one hand, believing in its unique ethno-national identity which must not be mixed with anyone else's, in language, culture, economy, territory, and, of course, sovereignty; on the other, proud of being fundamentally different from the primitive 'Balkans', of having belonged to 'Europe' from times immemorial. For household purposes, we may have not entirely negative memories of the 'NDH', but if a representative of a minority, a non-Croat, especially a representative whose words are noticed by foreign media and politicians, makes such a comparison, which immediately gets interpreted as equalisation, we are offended.

But what was more surprising was that even more ferocious reactions were provoked by another statement by the same person: that, by pursuing such ethnically biased politics, Croatia turns from a factor of stability into a cause of instability in the neighbouring region. Before that, one was hardly aware that stability played such a prominent role on the list of Croatian national priorities. But on a closer look, one quickly realises that all neighbouring countries which share with Croatia the recent history of transition are highly sensitive to stability as a component of their international reputation.

At the same time, however, these are the countries where, more often than not, changes of government after elections are followed by the vehement resistance of the defeated side, be it by staged protests or by physical violence. In this region there is no loyalty or patriotism based on respect for the constitution and rule of law; instead, the polity is still equated with the ethnic commu-

nity, and ethnic minorities are viewed with suspicion; the would-be guardians of stability easily turn into investigators looking for enemies (internal and external) and destroying what little trust people might have developed in each other and in the institutions that are supposed to be concerned with the public good and equal rights for all. While praising stability and boasting as its reputed guarantors, they demonstrate how close their societies are to its opposite, and how close their own methods are to something generating instability and radicalism.

Why is that?

Three decades after the symbolic beginning of the democratisation of socialist countries in central and eastern Europe, marked by the fall of the Berlin wall, a recent study found that significant portions of these societies feel democracy is under threat. Two decades ago, various researchers were publishing papers which argued that democracy in European post-socialist countries was consolidated. That meant that, in the opinion of considerable parts of these societies, democracy was "the only game in town". In other words, two or three election cycles passed without crises or major conflicts; all the major political parties were ready to accept electoral defeat without putting into question the whole system of democratic representation. Meanwhile, most of these countries successfully completed the procedure of accession to the European Union and became members; conditions they had to meet additionally cemented democracy and the rule of law.

What happened in the meantime to make democracy seem not so consolidated as twenty years ago is beyond the scope of an introduction into this collection of arti-

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We also see waves of political mobilisation of ethnic nationalism, on the fertile soil of inter- or intra-state tensions (like those between Serbia and Kosovo, or entities and ethnic 'communities' in Bosnia and Hercegovina or Macedonia). Even the migrations of millions caused by wars, terror, climate changes or famine provide a new occasion to spread fear of 'others', foreigners, people of different cultures...

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cles focused on developments in south-eastern Europe. Suffice it to say that there is less trust in the guarantees of the rule of law, in information from public sources, and in protection of the rights to protest and criticise authorities in public. In short, people feel more distant from centres of power. Still, they believe that various forms of self-organisation and grass-roots activism (summarily called 'civil society') can help them accomplish objectives neglected by the state. The cause underlying this growing distance might lay in the fact that societies which emerged from the collapse of the old regime have never developed their own strength similar to that which had overturned absolute monarchies two centuries before. The 'revolutions' that ended the rule of communist parties were not of such kind: instead of growing industry and financial business, and capitalist classes getting stronger, societies under the communist rule suffocated under the non-democratic regimes and only experienced stagnation and decay. The new democratic orders lacked the fundamental condition of a substantial, not just formal democracy: the difference, indeed tension between state and society, which is the condition necessary for people to decide freely and for democratic checks and balances to work.

While in many post-socialist countries this defect was compensated by market liberalisation and opening to investments from developed markets, it came with a price. National governments were too weak – or unwilling – to defend national welfare systems and environment from capitalist appetites. Moreover, to a certain extent they were 'captured' by local oligarchs, a peculiar category of tycoons that emerged under political patronage. Economic growth has been paid for with the decrease in social and human security. In such circumstances, tendencies of authoritarianism and seeking collective 'shields' in nationalist policies come as an almost natural outcome.

In the part of Europe stretching from Croatia to Albania (the so-called Western Balkans) the post-socialist development was additionally burdened either by wars (the post-Yugoslavian countries) or by the legacy of the most strict totalitarianism (Albania). Apart from economic consequences – destroyed resources, slow growth, mismanagement of public assets, significantly lower (and slower) foreign direct investments, higher unemployment and poverty rates – this also entailed greater authoritarian tendencies, manifested as ethnic tensions and strong inclinations towards politics of collective (ethnic) identity.

Thus, regardless of almost thirty years since the fall of undemocratic regimes, it seems that the expected transition to democracy and free market economy in the 'western Balkans' has become a never-ending story. Societies are weak, pluralism develops slowly and with great difficulties, political elites still dominate, and economies are still dependent either on political authorities or on international companies.

At the same time, we bear witness to authoritarianism, intolerance, more or less constant popular support for the same political leaders or parties, who get re-elected in spite of their respective governments' poor economic and social records, and widespread corruption. We also see waves of political mobilisation of ethnic nationalism, on the fertile soil of inter- or intra-state tensions (like those between Serbia and Kosovo, or entities and ethnic 'communities' in Bosnia and Hercegovina or Macedonia). Even the migrations of millions caused by wars, terror, climate change or famine provide a new occasion to spread fear of 'others', foreigners, people of different cultures...

Although they try to project an image of stability, the regimes in the region constantly generate new waves of radicalisation. The authorities do not represent specific social and/or economic categories, classes, or interest groups; on the contrary,

such groups are dependent on political support and mediation, so the society is not even a junior partner in the relationship with the state; politically, it appears almost as an amorphous mass. Therefore, the ruling parties, as well as those that try to replace them, pretend to speak not for specific parts of the societies, with their specific interests, to which specific policies should correspond, but for society as a whole. In short, in a populist style, for the 'nation'. Hence their proneness to authoritarianism, populism, and nationalism.

In most cases, ideologies that dominate the societies in the region involve ideas of some kind of collective enemy, in opposition to which the national identity is typically asserted. Coming mostly from a former multi-ethnic state, the post-Yugoslavian countries have at their disposal a rich supply of candidates for the role of the enemy. The establishment of new states defined as the nation-states of their respective ethnic majority 'communities' was carried out through various policies whose function was to assert dominance of the ethnic majorities. This happened both within the former Yugoslavian federal units and beyond their borders. At the same time, and typically through the same process, the nation which 'defends' and 'affirms' its collective identity, both symbolically and in real, physical space, by drawing virtual and palpable demarcation lines which should separate it from other such nations, appears to the other nation as the same kind of enemy, against which defences must be erected.

The most remarkable case of such interferences is Bosnia and Hercegovina. The overture to the aggression of Serb nationalist forces was the political propaganda which warned against potential Muslim aggression allegedly threatening ethnic Serbs in Bosnia and Hercegovina. Eventually, such politics was successful, and the separate Serb entity was established, at the price of tens of thousands people killed, and more than a million displaced. Croat nationalist forces were not so successful, so they – continuously supported by the leading Croatian nationalist party and more or less all Croatian governments – continue to present Croats as an endangered community, which claims its own 'entity' and political representation based on ethnicity ('constitutiveness' in BH jargon). For Croatia and Serbia respectively,

this provides numberless opportunities to indirectly interfere in BH internal affairs, claiming that they are only taking care of the 'equal rights' of the members of their respective ethnic communities.

To be sure, such a political mentality is not unique to this group of countries. Some members of the EU display similar attitudes. The best example connected to this region is the case of Greece blocking Macedonia's accession to the EU. The conflict was not caused by any act of the latter somehow infringing the rights of, or deteriorating the situation in the former; it was merely a consequence of the Greek claim on the monopoly over the name of Macedonia. In other words, a mere matter of an identity symbol, which turned into a real barrier owing to the superior position of Greece as a member of the EU and NATO. And again, this act of interference was framed as defence of their own identity.

The questions which the authors in this issue of *Perspectives* have tried to answer were the following: What is the actual relation between the stability of the existing regimes of governance and the radicalisation tendencies? What are the specific phenomena that motivate participants of public debates to use exclusionary characterisations like 'traitor', or 'enemy', or terms like 'fascism'? Is it a general authoritarianism of mass attitudes and political culture? Or the dominance of a rather intolerant ethnic nationalism? Or the relatively high level of violence in society, as well as threats of violence in political disagreements? Is there something 'fascist' in the ability of nationalist leaders to mobilize masses?

Seen from an opposite angle, what is the destiny of such basic ideals like democracy and the rule of law? Have there been any developments? What is the situation like for opponents of authoritarian political ideas and practices? Are the human rights of those who defend human rights and freedom of speech effectively protected? Are there transforming movements present not only in civil society but on the political scene, acting as advocates of sustainability of living conditions, rule of law, public accountability of authorities, solidarity with refugees/migrants, openness to different cultures, and other basic tenets of a civilised society?

These questions can be answered from a variety of angles, and this issue presents some attempts to answer them. ■■■

# radicalisations

## creating wars, for now without weapons

Marion Kraske

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All things considered, it will cost the EU dearly that it has acted in detrimental partnership with the corrupt and criminal elites of the Balkans for far too long; through a crude appeasement policy an apparent stability was bet on, true democratic processes were put back. With fatal consequences: Democratic values in the Balkan states have been in free fall for some time now, the best-networked clans have put state institutions and the media largely under their control. Judicial systems are groaning under endemic corruption, (party) influences are on the daily agenda.

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It must be a unique case worldwide. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, unfortunately it is reality: a President openly and brutally contributing to the destruction of the country he is politically heading: Milorad Dodik, the Serb representative in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian State Presidency, has applied himself to that task, the separation of the Serb entity, which came into being based on systematic expulsion policies and killings between 1992-95, from the state union of the unitary state Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hardly a week goes by in which the professional provocateur does not publicly discuss the topic of *secession*.

Croat representatives likewise hold on to the old, inhuman politics: In August 2019, a high-ranking representative of the Croatian HDZ party honoured the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Herceg-Bosna, the para-state whose founders were punished by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague with 111 years of imprisonment. The HDZ in Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by Dragan Čović, in a manner just as uninhibited, promotes the murderous project as the future solution for the country, cheered by HDZ representatives in Croatia.

The weird flags with the lidded crest, similar to a jam pot, additionally ornamented with a chess pattern, are hanging around all Croat-dominated local communities in BH. The open glorification of war crimes accompanying this, of all things fired by representatives of the governing party of an EU country, is likely to endanger the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina – and thereby the whole Balkans – in the long run.



Photo by Andrew Butler,  
FilmsForAction.org,  
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And finally the Bosniak party, the SDA, maintaining close relations with Turkish ruler Recep Tayyip Erdogan and thereby pursuing a creeping turkification of Bosnia's rather European-minded Islam. War is likewise frequently mentioned by the Bosniaks as an option.

Fuelling doom and gloom scenarios works wonderfully on all sides in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as nationalist elites use it to continue defending the power they have held on to for over two decades.

24 years after the end of the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a perfect example of the dilemma of the whole region: political awakening, sustainable democratisation have yet to be realised, whereas the nationalisms and the radical extermination ideologies of the 90ies, leading to hundreds of thousands of displacements and deaths, have hardly been overcome, quite the contrary. They are once again on the rise, reinforcing each other and fostering new radicalisations.

Croatia, the newest EU member country, which will take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in January 2020, is attracting attention with an alarming revanchism. Reinterpretations of history, openly nationalist hostilities – there is no neighbouring country with which Croatia has not clashed recently.

In addition to that, there is the ingratiation with extreme right-wing and fascist traditions pursued by the right-wing nationalist HDZ (especially President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović); preferring to visit Bleiburg in Austria, the Mecca of the neo-Nazi scene, instead of sending signs of reconciliation. Those crude tendencies are being stirred up, not for the first time, by the Catholic Church.

## Vučić: misguided German foreign policy

In the meantime, Serbia under Aleksandar Vučić has increasingly developed into a disaster of German foreign policy. Apparently, it was believed for a long time that Vučić must be supported as a guarantor of the country's orientation towards the EU, in order to achieve some sort of pacifying leverage for the rest of the Western Balkans as well. However, the authoritarian tendencies of the power-seeking politician prone to manoeuvring are becoming increasingly apparent. In this, Vučić is supported more and more openly by Moscow, which is increasingly focusing on the region for its interventions.

If it hadn't been so before, the Russian support became apparent during Putin's visit in January 2019, when Belgrade cheered the Russian guest like a hero. During recent years, Vučić has repeatedly called for more stability and peace in the region, but the targeted attacks on the Bosnian state by Milorad Dodik, his partner in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Republika Srpska, he conspicuously does not comment on.

Even so, in North Macedonia the destructive policy approaches could be thwarted by Social Democrat and visionary Zoran Zaev. The settlement of the name dispute with Greece with the Prespa agreement amounted to a historical act: It hasn't occurred much in the region over the past years that a bilateral agreement signalled the readiness to compromise and put the public interest above personal or party interests.

All the more incomprehensible therefore that France prevented the opening of negotiations with North Macedonia during the EU summit in October 2019 – further evidence that individual EU member states are lacking a sense of responsibility for the region. The country has anyway barely recovered from the disintegrating narratives of a true “Macedonianism” by the former governing party VMRO-DPMNE (backed by Russia). It had deliberately promoted exclusionary and rabble-rousing political approaches, which in April 2017 even led to supporters of this nationalist orientation storming the Parliament in Skopje and severely beating MPs. Apparently, France has already forgotten that bloody scenario; the irresponsible rejection of North Macedonia, as well as the snubbing of the Zaev government and the initiated reforms, thus represent a historical mistake: Instead of now helping North Macedonia to continue on the reform path, it is accepted that the nationalist forces surrounding the VMRO will again make headway and the big roll-back will happen. In so doing, the EU is undoubtedly contributing to further radicalisation in the region.

With the ground-breaking decision in favour of NATO membership, Montenegro has at least limited the possibilities of Russia’s exertion of influence, albeit thereby, of all people, Milo Đukanović, one of the most controversial political characters in the region, has risen to become a historical figure. An elimination squad, apparently paid by Moscow, which arrived in 2016 for the *coup d’état* in order to eliminate Đukanović, has since been prosecuted and subsequently convicted.

That is a radical example of how the West is no longer alone in the Balkans in shaping the future of the fragile region enduringly and according to its own ideas. Other stakeholders like Russia, Turkey, China and the Arab states started a while ago to expand the scope of their influence – those influences unequivocally laying the foundations for further disputes and trouble spots.

All things considered, it will cost the EU dearly that it has acted in detrimental partnership with the corrupt and criminal elites of the Balkans for far too long; through a crude appeasement policy an apparent stability was bet on, true democratic processes were put back.

## the great failure of the EU – the extermination ideologies bounce back

With fatal consequences: Democratic values in the Balkan states have been in free fall for some time now, the best-networked clans have put state institutions and the media largely under their control. Judicial systems are groaning under endemic corruption, (party) influences are on the daily agenda.

There is a grotesque reversal of the paradigm of law and order. It is not laws or international standards that determine what is rightful, but criminal power cartels, which closely overlap with the dominant parties. As a consequence, personal and human rights are largely cancelled out, the individual barely stands a chance of asserting his/her rights in those structures that are outside the law. The West, above all the EU has not been able to contain those destructive forces and to emphatically campaign for its agenda – democracy, liberality, diversity.

With its trepidation, which it had already displayed during the Bosnian War, the EU now fails anew to defend European values in the Balkans. This, however, increasingly also endangers the EU in its very foundations: raging destructive ideologies, which have forged ahead during the 1990ies, are now bouncing back into the EU, endangering the cohesion of the Union.

Croatia, the newest EU member, is increasingly pushing aside its democratisation success from the EU integration process. The open revisionism, the romanticisation of the Ustasha past, thereby go side by side with the glorification of the acts of an agenda striving for a greater Croatia during the Bosnian War 1992–95 – all that has its impact on the social climate. In 2019 there were several attacks on members of the Serb minority, and in October in Zadar two black Americans were even severely beaten up; apparently the attackers thought the two military officers were homosexuals.

And yet, that relapse into the 1990ies, the hatred towards people of a different ethnic origin, in the middle of an EU country, barely gets noticed in the EU. Notwithstanding the actual problems, the new Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recently described Croatia as a “model of success“. Instead of unmasking them, such misjudgements only further encourage the relevant actors and their dangerous agendas to further pursue their anti-democratic political approaches.

## the EU – highly hazardous political approaches instead of enlargement efforts

How blind the EU sometimes acts with regard to dangerous situations in the Balkans was demonstrated most recently by the example of the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, who in the latter period of her time in office contributed to fostering crisis scenarios anew.

The discussion on the land swap between Serbia and Kosovo decisively pushed by the Italian was aimed at organising a territorial exchange between the countries according to ethnic principles – with that approach, which would in effect have fuelled new “cleansing policies“, the murderers of the Balkan wars, from Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić to Slobodan Praljak or Jadranko Prlić, would retroactively have received a clean bill for their scorched earth policies.

It can be difficult to understand why such tendencies towards radicalisation are backed by none other than the EU – was it not the EU that was once founded as the antithesis to nationalism and ethnic racial fanaticism? And it is precisely that Union, which after all was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize, that promotes ethnically clean solutions à la the land swap for the Balkans? A new proof that the European family quite obviously has lost its compass when it comes to the most fragile part of the continent.

Instead of promoting such gambling, the EU would be well advised to contribute to supporting those civic actors in the Balkan countries who, sometimes in the face of massive threats and hostilities, work on the democratisation of their countries. The EU should provide them with unwavering support; it is not unusual for those actors to risk their lives in order to fight for the basic rules of democracy. The small Davids fighting overpowering Goliaths often lack strategic support in order to successfully overcome corruption and captured state structures. Up to now, the EU has offered little to the democrats in the Balkans. Here, there is considerable need for action.

Furthermore, the EU should take the long overdue peace process seriously and give it fresh impetus. The radicalisations of the past years have led to the new circulation of ideologies of uniting greater territories based on nationalist principles. Dodik

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How blind the EU sometimes acts with regard to dangerous situations in the Balkans was demonstrated most recently by the example of the former High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who in the latter period of her time in office contributed to fostering crisis scenarios anew. The discussion on the land swap between Serbia and Kosovo decisively pushed by Federica Mogherini was aimed at organising a territorial exchange between the countries according to ethnic principles – with that approach, which would in effect have fuelled new “cleansing policies“, the murderers of the Balkan wars, from Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić to Slobodan Praljak or Jadranko Prlić, would retroactively have received a clean bill for their scorched earth policies.

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and Vučić are working on a united Greater Serbia, the Croats are breathing new life into Franjo Tudman’s dream of a Greater Croatia, and even the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama now and then plays the Greater Albania card in order to signal: If you do not want us – there is another way for us to go.

The region is at a dead end, weary of EU policies devoid of vision, and increasingly under the pressure of geostrategic power games of other actors with dubious agendas. Already there are open confrontations about Bosnia and Herzegovina’s membership in NATO – Serbs on both sides of the border are strictly against such an alliance. The big players are increasingly meddling in the already tense situation in the Balkans.

The EU is thereby in danger of losing its influence in the unstable South-east of the continent. The perils of such a “hostile takeover“ of the Balkans are obvious – with their illiberal agendas, the restless other actors are doubtlessly creating the breeding ground for further radicalisations – new hotbeds for potential security risks are emerging.

Admittedly, there is a way out of the dilemma: Deliberately moving away from the policy of cozying up to criminal elites to a reinforced legal offensive aiming at implementing basic democratic values. Corrupt state prosecutors and judges must, similarly to what has been done in Albania, resign their posts, criminal financial transfers must be prosecuted and sanctioned – a functioning judiciary is the key to the recovery of the whole region.

Moreover, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, high-profile verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) have waited for years to be implemented, verdicts with which all citizens would finally be granted equal rights. Something that really should be a matter of course, but is not in a country in which the idea of ethnic apartheid is still celebrated. And thus even 24 years after the end of the war, Jews and the Roma, as well as people who see themselves as citizens and do not wish to be ethnically pigeonholed, still cannot run as candidates for the elections for the State Presidency; this is how it was stipulated by the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 as a minimal compromise, and now the time has come to correct the wrong course that had been set.

One thing is certain: Such excesses of categorisation into first- and second-class people, which ultimately led to the devastating Balkan wars, must finally be done away with. The implementation of European law must be given highest priority; the EU has avoided those delicate issues for far too long.

What is necessary is determined advocacy by the EU and the USA for the fundamental pillars of democracy: equality before

the law, functioning institutions, unrestricted personal and human rights, and not to forget: minority rights.

For those who plunder the systems and utilise the state systems for their own self-enrichment, while the societies are sinking deeper and deeper into poverty and perspectivelessness, those who hold political responsibility and are gambling away the future of their countries and simultaneously enhancing the potential risk for the EU by endangering the fragile peace, firm deadlines must be set and boundaries drawn. Using the so-called Bonn powers of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina again should likewise be considered, whereby action against dangerous destruction may be taken.

The currently on-going mass exodus to West Europe is an alarm signal. Hundreds of thousands of people are no longer willing to endure the conditions in their home countries. The high level of demand on the Western European labour markets allows them to leave the Balkans – and take with them arguably the most valuable capital the region possesses. Above all, what leaves the Balkans are those potential agents of change who might initiate democratic and reform processes. Their departure therefore dramatically diminishes the prospects of future democratisations.

The radicalisations in the Western Balkans are real; the verbal rearmament is already afoot. All that Europe believed to have overcome is erupting anew. Europe must hurry in order to contain those tendencies. Others are already awaiting their chance to give a new twist to the region. ■■■

suffocated by stability

# populism as business as (un)usual

Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović

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In the Balkans, populism is part of the official establishment, the local political class, or, better yet, caste, because it is a closed oligarchic structure, is essentially populist, even though it is embedded in the system itself. This is its *differentia specifica*, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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As the distinguished political scientist von Beyme noted, a spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of populism. Despite this fact, testified to by the success of populist parties in elections in many countries over the past two decades, the concept is moot, despite being the most studied in contemporary political science (Stockemer, 2019: 1). Is it an ideology, a style, folklore, logic, discourse or something else? (Mudde, Kaltwasser, 2017: 3-7). Moreover, the overuse of the concept itself leads to it losing its *differentia specifica*. The concept is, therefore, in crisis, and populists themselves keep using the term crisis (whether economic, social, cultural, political). And as it happens, the overuse further compounds the crisis, producing additional confusions of ideas. Populism is thus spoken about as a form of post-politics, in terms of it being a result of the crisis of the political establishment, so-called traditional parties and the ideological spectrum itself, that is, of anti-politics, in the context of the critique of the existing, and championing different, political forms (such as the Yes to Europe, No to the European Union slogans, advocating certain forms of direct democracy and similar).

Despite these ambiguities, it is evident that populism has been penetrating, impinging, accusing..., and, paradoxically, also obliges. Thus, in Germany in 1992, the word of the year was so-called *politische Verdrossenheit*, or indifference towards politics.

Whatever the meaning of the term, populists have in fact, as is frequently asserted, re-awakened the so-called “common people’s” interest in politics. If it hadn’t been for populism, politics would have boiled down to administration by the *establishment*, the so-called “political class” (a favourite term among populists<sup>1</sup>) would still govern uninhibited, and dangerous questions would not have been posed. However, as theoreticians, and not infrequently also politicians from so-called traditional parties, have indicated, populism poses the right questions, but it does not supply the right answers. On the other hand, the *establishment* has shirked from even so much as asking the dangerous questions, giving populism free rein to make its ascent. That is to say, the key questions today are what went wrong, who is responsible, what should be done.

According to some opinions, one of the causes lies in the fact that we are living the aforementioned post-political age, wherein so-called classical parties (the left-centre-right triad) have lost their ideological reference points, became bureaucratic, not needing their membership for campaigning, while the social groups they are addressing cannot be clearly defined. This fosters discord, that is, the alienation between the people and politicians. This

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term *elite* is avoided, as it carries a certain moral connotation.

is precisely what populists use when they allegedly address the common, simple people living an honest, hardworking life. In its 1993 programme, the Italian Lega Nord has stressed that it is essential to return the dignity of the productive segment of the people, as opposed to the government and financial (global) capital (Betz, 2017: 94). With the inflow of migrants from Muslim countries, these propositions have been extended to encompass protecting one's own people not only from one's own political elite, but also from "aliens" that same elite falsely protects in the name of alleged multiculturalism and humanism, on which it has actually leached.

Also contributing to this trend are new media and popular (populist) modes of communication, as well as provocation. After president Trump quoted Mussolini in a tweet, a TV presenter asked him whether he identified with fascism, to which the USA president replied, not with fascism, but yes with the quoted sentence (McGaughey, 2018: 294).

A large number of voters have turned towards alternative options, such as the Greens and environmentalist parties, but also towards populist parties, especially right-wing ones that we focus on here. Apart from a few exceptions, they do not feature the term "party" in their names, but Alternativa, League, Front, Alliance, as they seek to represent themselves as something completely different through, among other things, markers of this kind. In addition, it is clear that the names of the parties are themselves misleading (von Beyme, 2019: 30), as many of them contain the prefixes free (in Austria, Holland), progressive (in Denmark and Norway) and similar. Style, rhetoric, image, using various metaphors rather than clearly defined views in terms of ideas, are among their key features. That is why it is said that this is a so-called thin ideology.

In the Balkans, populism is part of the official establishment, the local political class, or, better yet, caste, because it is a closed oligarchic structure, is essentially populist, even though it is embedded in the system itself. This is its *differentia specifica*, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a well-known comparative analysis on the subject of populism, when it came to parties, the names of European countries were followed by the names of their populist parties, their strength in percentages and the period when they were at their zenith.

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When it comes to the former Yugoslavia, the people happened in these regions a long time ago, and no new happening is needed, making populism business as usual. "Our" nationalists, champions of one's own kin, patriots in indefinite political employment are in power. They are "authentically" of the people, even though they are elitists of many years' standing. They have successfully remained in government by creating a subservient network of followers and clients, so what the citizens who don't belong to the network of patronage think doesn't actually concern them

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For Bosnia and Herzegovina, that column remained empty – precisely because populism here is not anti-systemic, but an integral part of the system. Politics is reduced to gossip, to hearsay, not to solving concrete problems. And while western populists criticise EU bureaucracy and their own technocracy as it is too removed from real life, politics in BH just cannot find its identity as a profession, but boils down to continuous sloganeering and countersloganeering in the aim of covering up political incompetence. There is constant talk of protecting one's own ethnic community and its cultural specificity, while less than 0.5% of GDP is allocated to culture. The media have lost their essential functions (such as education, critical, watchdog), turning into megaphones for populists, their political incorrectness and unculturedness. For this reason, the political system of BH society is in a constant crisis that never lets up. And as the aforementioned political scientist von Beyme states, populists use the term *crisis* constantly and egregiously.

## go west

To our eyes at least, the West has long seemed the best of all possible worlds, like in Ahmed Imamović's film, *Go West*. Wellbeing, functioning democracy, and a high standard of human rights, unobtrusive orderliness. But were we Plato's children, naively rejoicing in watching col-

ourful flowers, replete with sensory, shallow impressions? What remained outside this general image appeared as a random excess. The question remains whether this was really an accident, or if there are more permanent structures that are concealed beneath the top of the iceberg, which make populism possible. This question too is difficult to answer, which does not deny anyone the right to try to ponder it. Nationalism in these societies had the marks of so-called banal nationalism, as defined by Billig. It is continuously present in the context of reminders of the nation, on the occasion of national holidays and the similar, so as to evoke one's own belonging to the community, only to be mobilised and become more visible and militant in certain periods when this is needed – for instance, in Britain during the Falklands War, in the USA during its *blitzkrieg* in Iraq in 1991 (Billig, 1995: 3).

On the one hand, notwithstanding its theatricality, boosted by the new media hungry for scandal and triviality, populism is often associated with fascism. Still, a direct, unequivocal link cannot be made, even notionally. Western populists do not have paramilitary squads, do not aspire to territorial expansion etc. (Bar-On, 2017: 28). They simply appeal to the people living its true identity in its authentic simplicity threatened by the (European) elite, globalisation, multinational companies, uncontrolled immigration. Contemporary western populists frequently invoke liberal values

(their parties' and movements' names often contain the attribute "freedom" – the *Freedom Party of Austria*, the *Party for Freedom* from Holland), something the Fascists would never countenance. With an aside that these libertarian values are imperilled by aliens, especially Muslims, who, arriving in the West, carry with them their baggage of values, incompatible with European values. Due to such xenophobic attitudes, they are often thought to resemble certain forms of fascism.

And furthermore, western populists often insist on a Judeo-Christian tradition of a "true" Europe, which clearly clashes with the anti-Semitism of the National Socialists. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) views itself as a friend of Israel. Likewise, the AfD underlines that it does not hate foreigners and Muslims, and that it is therefore not fascist. This is in fact what is sometimes called multi-fascism, or fascism-lite, where certain groups (in this case cultures and nations) are not considered to be higher or lower, but essentially different. Nevertheless, when it comes to populism, there are certain similarities with fascism, in its xenophobia, its spreading of intolerance – especially towards Islam – and its black-and-white Manichean worldview. Islam itself is not infrequently viewed as a totalitarian ideology, or worldview (*die Weltanschauung*), while fascism is only ascribed to Islam. The Dutch politician Geert Wilders, leader of the *Party for Freedom*, thus compared *Mein Kampf* to the Kur'an (Bar-On,



Photo by "Dr Case",  
Populism, flickr  
CC-BY-NC 2.0

2017: 34), while members of the right-wing movement *Pegida*,<sup>2</sup> based in Dresden, compare Islam to a cancer, indeed, equate them (*Islam=Karzinom*).

Certain parties' views – for instance, that social benefits and assistance should only be extended to “our people”, which the multicultural European elite with its lavishing of cash on various minorities at the expense of the ordinary, hardworking man and the “real” people, the parasite-immigrants, the global monetary structures imposing strict rules of austerity that threaten the wellbeing of our people, the governments using money to save banks and corporations all endanger. This somewhat resembles the fascist corporate state and the Nazi employment of Germans ruined by the economic crisis, as well as the *Kauft nicht bei Juden!* (Do not buy from Jews!) slogan.

The (post)modern world is to a great extent a society of fear, one of the consequences of so-called progress. “Instead of great expectations and sweet dreams, ‘progress’ evokes an insomnia full of nightmares of ‘being left behind’, of missing the train or falling out of the window of a fast accelerating vehicle,” Zygmunt Bauman writes in his famous book, *Liquid Life*. The advertising industry fuels these fears, as symbolised, according to the author, by the huge sales of near-armoured, overexpensive SUVs, martial arts courses, prevention from the spectres of high blood pressure, cancer etc. This is further compounded by the all-encompassing fear of terrorism, crime, environmental disasters. Uncontrolled immigration creates parallel societies, or ghettos in the large cities of Europe, that are difficult to control.

## a little bit further east

A little bit further east, but still in Europe, populism attains a more fascist-like form, with the cause often, and sometimes with oversimplification, reduced to the so-called vulnerability of the “new” post-socialist democracies and the anti-Zionism that was present in real-socialist countries. However, this often ignores the arrogance of technocratic leaders of the transition, who turned the people into an apolitical mass to be modelled, not suspecting that there might come a payback, as highlighted by, among others, certain people acquainted with the (poor) situation in Hungary. In its iconogra-

phy, the Hungarian Jobbik party (Movement for a Better Hungary) uses uniforms reminiscent of Nazi uniforms, and it glorifies the period of the rule of the fascist and Hitler's collaborationist Miklós Horthy.<sup>3</sup>

Anti-Semitism is present in populism in this part of Europe, with the Roma being a frequent target of attacks (as in the cases of the Partidul Romania Unita, Slovenska narodna strana from Slovakia, the Bulgarian Ataka, the aforementioned Jobbik...), which is undoubtedly reminiscent of National Socialism (Bar-On, 2017: 34, 35). The threats to “one's own” in neighbouring states are pointed up, much like Hitler lamented over the fate of the Sudeten Germans whom he had to bring under the Reich's wing, and so irredentism too is present. As these countries do not exactly represent a promised land, unlike the more “western” ones, there is less immigration, but the enemies threatening our people are still sought and found outside, as well as inside, most often among the so-called indigenous minorities such as the Roma, and among the eternal enemies and global conspirators, the Jews. The case of the construction of a concrete wall some 2 m tall in a northern Romanian town that *de facto* ghettoised a Roma community unequivocally reminds of the Nazi period.

What they have in common with the populism described above is anti-elitism, as well as calls for government to be returned to the hands of “their own” people (for instance, the SNS slogan in the 2010 election: “We are Slovaks. Slovak government for the Slovak people”). Democracy is invoked, but it is often stressed that it need not be liberal. Thus Fidesz leader Viktor Orban, following his 2014 election victory, publicly stated that if something is not liberal, it doesn't mean it is undemocratic, thus repeating the mantras of Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt. But when populists come to power, as it happened in Hungary, what comes with them is not just an attack on the freedom of association and the media, but also a concentration of power. Something similar happened in Poland, after the victory of the Law and Justice (PiS) party in the 2015 elections, when it undertook a series of measures to take control of the judiciary (Stanley, Czesnik, 2019: 80) in order to solidify its rule. And again – in the name of the people and for the people, its original values and some kind of “real” democracy only for one's own definition of the *demos*.

2 Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Westland (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West)

3 <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/jobbik>

The culture is also cleansed of foreign influences and last traces (such as the production of forgetfulness of the fact that Hungary had ever been ruled by the Ottoman Empire, the removal of the statue of the Jewish Marxist theorist György Lukács...<sup>4</sup>).

## outside the EU in Europe

The Balkans are a symbol of underdevelopment, an otherness, or liminality, within Europe itself and its imagination, but also of its own self-reflection (Todorova, 2009). It is a great buffer for various contradictions, an eternal in-betweenness.

When it comes to the former Yugoslavia, the people happened\* in these regions a long time ago, and no new happening is needed, making populism business as usual. "Our" nationalists, champions of one's own kin, patriots in indefinite political employment are in power. They are "authentically" of the people, even though they are elitists of many years' standing. They have successfully remained in government by creating a subservient network of followers and clients, so what the citizens who don't belong to the network of patronage think doesn't actually concern them (Lasić, 2016: 157). They like to sing, to use the simplest possible language (Chomsky would say, child language), to have people's marches and processions, make amusing statements in the style of Berlusconi, who loved to "entertain" the Italian people. At the same time, they are also tragic figures fated to defend their culture and tradition and martyrology, visit "their" sites of massacres, build up their victims while downplaying or denying "others".

Although they nurture fear of the other and the different, they love "others" populists and autocrats (if they suit them, of course). Familiarity is considered one of the instruments of populism, and it also appears that there is such a thing as a populist family. Marine le Pen, the leader of the French National Front, thus stated: "If I were American, I would vote for Trump". Similarly, Dodik called on Serbs living in Austria to vote for the FPÖ's Hofer because he is a friend of the Serb people, while Bakir Izetbegović doesn't hide his sympathies for the true, pure Turk, the "Sultan" Erdoğan,

which provoked BH intellectuals and activists to protest, warning of hidden ambitions to turn BH into Erdoğan's pashalik.<sup>5</sup> But this isn't without its contradictions, as populism is often a conglomerate of opposites that (do not) rule each other out. Before the presidential election in Serbia, at a large "popular rally" Šešelj called the Ukrainian regime Nazi, while at once declaring Orban a great politician and leader, with the one difference being that Šešelj wouldn't erect walls and barbed wire along Serbia's borders, but minefields (!). As Bauman might put it, there is no fear in these regions of the train running off the tracks at full speed, while the people are more of an orphan of globalisation than the people in the west. We fell off the train a long time ago, and the ultimate subconscious desire is for a "great" leader to take us under his wing: Putin, Erdoğan, Trump; to become some kind of governorate, a pashalik, and thus create some kind of protection from the external and internal "enemy". In this, historical anachronisms and myths of the bulwark of Christendom, of the good Bosniaks (Mujkić, 2007), of the rule of the Ottoman Empire as a form of *Pax Ottomana* (Todorova, 2009: 50) are often used in order to "prettify", or camouflage such inclinations.

As Justus Bander, an expert on the AfD and award-winning journalist for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, pointed out, this is a party that considers itself a party of so-called common sense (Bander, 2017: 41). It is perfectly in line with the principles of certainty in the Cartesian sense that German workers shouldn't have to support migrants and foreigners with their own taxes. In the context of the dysfunctionality of BH institutions, it is perfectly evident that at a commonsense level, BH is an impossible state and an artificial construct, as alleged by Dodik,<sup>6</sup> that is, that it needed to be reorganised in line with ethnic principles and further divisions along the territorial principle, as stressed by Čović. Draft amendments to the electoral legislation by the BH CDU and the phrase "legitimate representatives of the Croats" also show that there are aspirations regarding the existence of "real Croats", that is, the real, authentic Croatian people,

<sup>4</sup> <http://hungarianfreepress.com/2017/02/16/hungary-is-removing-statue-of-philosopher-gyorgy-georg-lukacs-he-was-marxist-and-jewish/>

\* "Događanje naroda" [the people happening] - a turn of phrase used in the late Eighties to denote the so-called anti-bureaucratic, nationalist rallies in support of Slobodan Milošević. *tn*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/apel-grupe-intelektualaca-potvrdite-da-bih-nije-vise-pasaluk-ukome-se-besogovorno-izvrsavaju-naredbe-iz-stambola-476747>

<sup>6</sup> This play on words with BH as an artificial construct represents a kind of "revenge" on the peoples of the former SFRY, who have opted for separation while often stating that Yugoslavia was an artificial construct.

which is mainly that which lives in Hercegovina and which the attempt is to protect. Discourses coming from the neighbourhood contribute to this. As Asim Mujkić has suggested, “every little while, certain media and circles in Croatia produce an image of a Bosnian Croat as ‘true’, ‘pure’, as a ‘victim’ or a ‘hero’ standing firm in his Croatness. A true, uncompromising Serb [...] in BH: there our hero defiantly struggles for Serbianness” (Mujkić, 2007: 72). And furthermore, if the Balkans are indeed Europe’s imagination, BH is the country of the subconscious, of epic imagination and fantasy of Croatia and Serbia wherein the ideal national archetype dwells (ibid, 73).

They often seek to conceal their authoritarianism by supporting certain rights and liberties, at least as a performance, which is manifest in Vučić’s appointment of Ana Brnabić, a member of the LGBT population, to the post of Prime Minister of Serbia. This is an attempt to create a semblance of commitment to European values, similar to western populists. They often point out that Islam is undesirable in Europe, among other things, because of its rigid attitudes towards this population. The senior ranks of the party often include people from the group (as is the case with AfD’s Alice Weidel). The performance is also evident in public appearances flaunting philosemitism (especially in the case of Milorad Dodik), while among the Bosniak section, especially through portals and social networks, anti-Semitism circulates and smoulders continuously.

But when it comes to the populist leaders themselves, in comparison to those in the west, they nevertheless lag behind when it comes to using the Internet. Populist parties in Europe make copious use of the Internet to disseminate their ideas and for so-called direct contact with their supporters.<sup>7</sup> In turn, studies conducted in BH show that local populist politicians are “unskilled” in this sense – one of the reasons certainly being that populism here is of the systemic type, that is, business as usual. Of course, this does not mean that supporters and clients do not make use of so-called new media, especially web portals (both legal and unregulated), through which the “right of the stronger” from the previous war is sublimated into the “right of the louder” (Bandera’s phrase). ■■■

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<sup>7</sup> An erstwhile member of the Alternative for Germany expressed how disappointed she was when Angela Merkel stated that the Internet was for her a new world which she found hard to get used to.

# features of Competitive Authoritarian Rule in the Western Balkans\*

Florian Bieber

Over the past decade, the Western Balkans has experienced the reemergence of competitive authoritarian regimes, which rule with authoritarian means in a formally democratic environment. These regimes are part of a larger global trend and can draw on earlier practices in the region, in particular from the 1990s. There is no one-size-fits-all pattern in the region, and the authoritarian features are the most pronounced in Serbia, North Macedonia under the rule of Nikola Gruevski, in Montenegro, and Republika Srpska under Milorad Dodik's dominance. However, similar patterns can be found elsewhere. These regimes are not openly rejecting democracy, but have to balance the formal structures of democracy, not least to keep the EU integration process alive, with the will to retain power and extract resources from the state.

In my book *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans* (Palgrave 2020), I have sought to identify the emergence of these regimes, as well as their key features, which I introduce briefly below. The 8 features of competitive authoritarian regimes combine some aspects that can be found more widely among similar regime types with others based on the specific circumstance of the Western Balkans.

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The informal competitive authoritarian regimes which emerged in the Western Balkans over the past decade are based on 'strongmen.' These strongmen are by no means unique, as we can note the centrality of authoritarian male figures in other undemocratic regimes, be they Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, or Viktor Orbán in Hungary. While these might have developed a stronger ideological footing than the regimes in the Western Balkans, the authoritarianism has not emancipated itself from the leading figure of the regime.

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\* Shortened, adapted and revised version of Chapter 4, *The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans*, Palgrave Macmillan.

## 1 the constant state of crisis

Crises have served autocratic rulers in the Western Balkans to create a continued suspension of normal politics. This kind of ‘crisis management’ does not mean the conventional understanding of resolving or mitigating crises so much as their creation and subsequent resolution. A number of authors have noted the broader use of security crises by authoritarian regimes, including competitive authoritarian ones, from the Russian apartment bombings in 1999 facilitating Putin’s rise to power, to the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 that shifted Erdoğan’s rule towards a competitive authoritarian regime. However, the Western Balkan cases of such security crises are less intense than the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and the subsequent crackdown, better serving the more subtle function of highlighting (to Western actors) the importance of governments in ensuring stability and extending prolonged uncertainty among citizens. This is not to suggest that all the crises are entirely made up or even instigated by governments. Instead, they are instrumentalized, and sometimes made up, to consolidate power.

Instead of instigating large-scale violence, we can observe the production of crises. These crises come in four types. One is a crisis that includes a threat against the government and thus constitutes an opportunity to describe the opposition as traitors and/or identify foreign enemies and securitize domestic politics. The second is focused on interethnic relations and the risk of renewed violence, serving as a distraction from everyday politics and playing to ethno-national discourse. The third is a crisis over bilateral relations with a neighbour and the creation of tensions. All three of these types have both domestic and international uses. Finally, the fourth type of crisis is snap elections, called ahead of their due date. These may not be a crisis as such, but they are an opportunity to suspend everyday government and use campaigning to continue targeting the opposition and utilizing state resources for party purposes.

## 2 the dynamics of stabilitocracy

External legitimacy accorded to competitive authoritarian regimes can be termed “stabilitocracy”, as it thrives on the promise of stability, especially towards outsiders, and short-changes democracy and the rule of law for it. This does not suggest that outsiders, whether parties, EU institutions, national ministers or others, want to support autocrats or that they are always fully aware (or want to be aware) of the undemocratic practices of those they support. Instead, there is a complex set of reasons that have enhanced the external negligence of democracy and the rule of law.

The chasm between formal commitment to EU membership and authoritarianism at home undermined the assumption of the simultaneity of pro-EU positions and democracy. It is this gap that enabled the rise of stabilitocracy.

What facilitated this dynamic is the rise of geopolitical considerations in the EU and international politics. For the EU, it was the multiple shocks of the late 2000s that made the Union more inward-looking. The economic and financial crises, the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, and the migration crisis – if one accepts this nomenclature – all shifted the attention of the Union and its member states towards its survival and away from promoting democracy and enlargement, including in the Western Balkans. The EU’s more isolationist position focused its attention in the region on issues of more direct national or EU concern, such as closing the ‘Western Balkan route’. Next to migration, the threat of foreign fighters for the Islamic State from the Balkans became another key Western focus, casting the region once more as a dangerous source of radicalism, in this case Islamic extremism. The consequence is a focus on law enforcement and border controls rather than democracy and the rule of law, even if the link between radicalization and democratic inclusive governance exists.

The Western Balkan cases of security crises are less intense than the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and the subsequent crackdown, better serving the more subtle function of highlighting (to Western actors) the importance of governments in ensuring stability and extending prolonged uncertainty among citizens.

### 3 the rise of new external actors

While the EU and the US had been the prevalent actors in the Balkans since the early 1990s, other countries have become increasingly engaged. Some, like Russia or Turkey, have a long history of relations with Balkan countries, bringing with them both the advantage of intense ties to some communities and the burden of preconceptions, stereotypes, and worries about competition. Other countries, such as China or the United Arab Emirates, have few historical connections, making their relationship less burdened but also denying them easy entry points.

External actors can contribute economically to the region, but also can contribute to strengthening authoritarianism. Most directly, outsiders, such as Russia, openly support authoritarian leaders and condemn protests and the opposition as was the case during the Colourful revolution in North Macedonia. In other instances, non-transparent economic engagement favours strong men and informality, such as high-profile investments from the United Arab Emirates in Serbia. Finally, the increasing visibility of outsiders provide for greater opportunity for governments in the region to either assert their independence and balance between actors or to disguise their own democratic shortcomings by pointing to outsiders.

### 4 state capture and weak institutions

In its annual report on Macedonia in 2016, the European Commission used the term “state capture” for the first time to describe how the institutions in an accession country were being undermined and could not work for the common good, “affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society. In early 2018, the European Commission extended the concept’s reach to all countries of the Western Balkans in its new regional strategies to note that “the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration.”

This re-assertion of party control is articulated through the erosion of independent institutions, the penetration of state administration by party members and the use of informal mechanisms to secure control. In the early 2000s, a wave of new independent institutions was established, often to comply with EU and Council of Europe requirements. These included ombudspersons and other regulatory and consultative bodies, created with external support. In addition, considerable resources were invested in the reform of the judiciary and strengthening parliaments to ensure a separation of powers so that these institutions could effectively oversee the work of governments. In comparison to the 1990s, this was a significant change. During the 1990s the judiciary remained subordinated to governments and parliaments were underfunded, serving mostly to rubber-stamp executive decisions and making a mockery of democracy through polarizing debates without any discernible substance, usually broadcast live on TV. While these institutions have survived, they have been beset by institutional uncertainty and usually deprived of their independence.

In addition to weakening independent institutions, the competitive authoritarian regimes have been using informal patterns to rule, weakening rule-based institutions while keeping formal democratic mechanisms intact. The use of informality is often reflected in the exercise of power bypassing formal, legal mechanisms.



ure of the regime. The same can be said of the regimes in the Western Balkans. Neither Đukanović nor Vučić nor Gruevski offer(ed) an ideologically coherent authoritarian system that could persist without these figures. The ideological heterogeneity and the balancing act between domestic authoritarian control and external democratic legitimacy make these highly personalized and informal regimes. As noted above, the leaders emerged as ‘pragmatic reformers’, often with considerable external support. Thus, their ascent to power was not based on the promise of authoritarian rule.

## 7 nationalism as a variable resource

While the competitive authoritarian regimes of the 1990s were firmly rooted in nationalism, this ideological choice is less pertinent today. The ruling parties in Croatia and Serbia, as well as in Montenegro (until 1997) and Bosnia, were based on the use of nationalism, even if formally they identified themselves respectively as Christian democrats and socialists. In the Western Balkans today, nationalism is less central to most of the regimes’ ideological foundations. In part, EU integration and reform have become largely discursive alternatives, and the number of disputes that can be framed in ethno-nationalist terms has declined. By extension, there is no single regional pattern, but rather two types of regimes in terms of nationalism. One, exemplified by the ethno-nationalist parties in Bosnia, including Milorad Dodik, or by Macedonia under VMRO-DPMNE, is where exclusionary nationalism has become increasingly central to the government policy and trumps the rhetorical commitment to EU integration. In the other type, exemplified by Montenegro under DPS rule, nationalism has been an occasional and often pragmatic tool to reinforce regime control, but without a central function.

While nationalism has been a less central feature of more recent competitive authoritarian regimes than their precursors in the 1990s, nationalism is part of the legitimizing strategies, moderated or rather modified in the context of the centrality of external legitimacy. This results in EU accession-compatible nationalism that tests the boundaries of historical revisionism, as in Serbia. Only when EU accession becomes impossible or remote, as in

Macedonia and Bosnia, did exclusionary nationalism become more central to the regimes. Throughout, latent nationalism remains potent, as the fundamental narratives of the wars in the 1990s have not been substantially reshaped or, in some cases, returned to the dominant lines of argument that emphasize one’s own innocence (and usually victimhood) and shift blame to others. As Dejan Jović has argued for Croatia, the wars remain ever-present and are frequently evoked to generate political legitimacy. Thus, while nationalism might not be a constitutive force of most regimes, it continues to be an important resource. This does not mean that nationalism automatically generates support, but rather that it triggers different, context-specific dynamics that reinforce polarization, marginalize particular political actors, or divide opponents.

## 8 reestablishing a loyal media

One of the main pillars of democracy that emerged and thrived after 2000 was the independent media. Private media, sometimes with foreign ownership, as well as efforts to transform government-controlled media into public broadcasters, created fairly vibrant media scenes in the region. Independent media, such as *Radio B92* in Serbia or the weekly *Feral Tribune* in Croatia, had already emerged in the region during the 1990s, often with external support and despite pressure from the government.

This level of media independence has considerably decreased over the past decade. The transformation of government media into independent public broadcasters stalled across the region, as most state media continue to favour the governments. Among private media, lack of independence has been reflected in both the ownership structure, as well as the reporting. Critical and independent media during the 1990s either folded due to commercial pressures, as did the *Feral Tribune* in Croatia, or became largely uncritical through weak sales and the loss of their initial economic independence (usually precarious and donor-supported), as in the case of the Serbian media group *B92*. Foreign media engagement in the region was strong in the 2000s, but following the economic crisis and the general decline of print media, most have left the region, including, notably, the German *WAZ* group, which was once strong

in Serbia and Macedonia. The more reputable external investors have been replaced with opaque ownership structures.

Throughout the region, the high number of media outlets has resulted in low quality, great pressure on journalists to produce material, and little space for investigative reporting. This makes media susceptible to government pressure, especially when governments are important advertisers and funds are allocated in a non-transparent manner. The sometimes-opaque ownership structures also give rise to suspicions that media are kept by individuals and groups in the service of particular interest, be they political or economic, rather than for commercial motivations.

In the 1990s, influential media were still under state control or ownership, so the channel of governmental influence was more direct than today. Today, we can note that competitive authoritarian regimes rely on a combination of loyal media owned by businesses with murky and convoluted ownership structures, economic pressure on independent media, and threats and censorship of journalists and media. Thus, control of the media constitutes a central element of the competitive authoritarian regimes, albeit less heavy-handed than during the 1990s, with critical reporting in many cases available only through online platforms. ■■■

# illiberal tendencies in Croatia after Trump and Brexit

Dario Čepo

Croatia has long been (since 2000 at least) deemed a “success story” of the EU enlargement policy. The principle of conditionality, a steady dose of Europeanization, and pro-EU domestic political elites, supporters of Croatia-as-a-success-story proclaimed, are obviously enough to push a transitional country that was on the brink of falling into authoritarianism, towards the path of stable liberal democracies. Even today, some EU politicians (the latest being European Commission President-Elect U. von der Leyen, during her visit to Zagreb in the summer of 2019) treat Croatia as a success story, especially when compared to the Western Balkans countries. However, there are growing signs that Croatia is closer to the political systems bred in Budapest and Warsaw, than the one exported from Brussels.

This essay depicts, in broad strokes, the reasons, influences, and actors responsible for the obvious liberal backsliding and democratic stagnation of Croatia. This outline is intended as the starting point for a more in-depth analysis of “what happened” and “how did we get here”, where the democratic character of Croatia is concerned. I propose that it started with the 2013 accession and the loss of the stick part of the carrot-and-stick approach linked to the conditionality principle. I also propose that it has gained strength due to the populist and illiberal tendencies of two of the major political events of the 2010s – the election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America and the triumph of the YES vote on the referendum on the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union. Many impulses toward increased illiberalism and authoritarianism came from these three events. However, none of this would

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An overarching reason might be a myth which became a part of the HDZ origin story, and which has been religiously repeated throughout the last three decades – the HDZ as the creator of modern Croatia and its first leader, F. Tuđman, as the father of Croatian independence. If you see yourself as the creator and the father, then all other actors that compete with you are seen not as equal competitors and at times potential coalition partners, but as enemies and a hindrance to your natural right to rule over a system you created. And if other political parties (and, by extension, all those who support them) are seen as enemies, then no option is out of bounds in order to defend both your right to rule and the system you built and set in motion. This leads to my conclusion that the HDZ was (and still is) one of the strongest supporters and promoters of the populist turn in Croatia, especially post-2013.

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have such a profound influence on Croatia's liberal and democratic backsliding were it not for one crucial actor – the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). My last proposition, hence, is that the HDZ's behaviour both during its years in power, and especially during its opposition years, has been the major driver of the democratic backsliding of Croatia.

The HDZ is the dominant political party in Croatia. In the 29 years of multiparty democracy, it has ruled for all but seven years, for long stretches as the sole party of government, and recently through coalitions with much smaller and weaker junior partners. It is a special kind of political actor. Like almost all right-of-centre political parties, it has a radical right wing or faction whose influence waxes and wanes depending on the strength or weakness of the current president. At the same time, the HDZ is fond, again like many other mainstream right-of-centre parties, of flirting with extremist positions and groups in the society, including nationalists, populists, and outright neofascists, if that secures them more votes and hence more political power. This can be seen not only in the leading representatives of the HDZ, such as the current and (many) former presidents, giving interviews to radical right media, but also in the HDZ building national, local, and even European-level electoral coalitions with parties to the right of them, many with chequered histories of supporting illiberal and even undemocratic tendencies in Croatia.

This tactic is not something unique to the HDZ, though. It is a tried and tested means of holding on to power for many right-of-centre parties across Europe. We

can witness it in the radical right turn of former French president N. Sarkozy, for example. It is also a favourite tool of ambitious yet weak politicians, like S. Kurz of Austria or M. Rajoy of Spain. Such a strong move towards the radical right is also visible in our two previously mentioned examples. Trump won on the basis of overwhelming support from nativists, white supremacists, and religious-political social movements. Brexit succeeded because the leadership of the Conservative Party wanted to suffocate competitors to the right of them and to assuage radical right members of their own party.

However, the example of the HDZ is particularly interesting for two reasons. The first one is the dominant position of that party in the political system of Croatia, especially on the subnational level, where it rules in all but a handful of municipalities and counties. The second one is the utter hatred the HDZ shows toward losing elections and being in opposition. Political parties, of course, like winning elections more than losing them. That is, in the end, the *raison d'être* of political parties – you win an election and that gives you the opportunity to introduce preferred policies and reform the system. If you succeed in persuading the voters that you did a good job, you win the next elections too. If not, you go into opposition and readjust your programme. A strong liberal democracy needs both a strong party in power and a strong opposition to keep the ruling party in check and to convince citizens that there is an alternative. Hence, one can test a political party's dedication to democracy by how it acts during its time in opposition. If we apply such a test, we see that the HDZ does not fare particularly well.



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Croatia is neither a special case nor a poster child of European integration. If anything, its ruling political elite is using institutions, establishing structures, and adopting policies that are turning Croatia into a run-of-the-mill stabilitocracy. Will this stripping of democracy be stopped, i.e. what are the chances of progress for Croatia on its democratic path? In the short-to-medium term it seems that Croatia's democracy will continue to stagnate or even backslide. There are four major reasons that support this conclusion: the HDZ as the dominant party; weak opposition; dire demographic situation in the country; and external influences from both the EU and global powers.

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The reasons why the HDZ turns into Mr Hyde during its years in the opposition are manifold and surely have to do with a lack of intra-party democracy. However, an overarching reason might be a myth which became a part of the HDZ origin story, and which has been religiously repeated throughout the last three decades – the HDZ as the creator of modern Croatia and its first leader, F. Tudman, as the father of Croatian independence. If you see yourself as the creator and the father, then all other actors that compete with you are seen not as equal competitors and at times potential coalition partners, but as enemies and a hindrance to your natural right to rule over a system you created. And if other political parties (and, by extension, all those who support them) are seen as enemies, then no option is out of bounds in order to defend both your right to rule and the system you built and set in motion.

This leads to my conclusion that the HDZ was (and still is) one of the strongest supporters and promoters of the populist turn in Croatia, especially post-2013. In Croatia, as in many other countries, populism, more often than not, manifests itself through ultranationalism. To paraphrase Trump's leading motto, it is "Croatians First".

This was visible in the criticisms the HDZ and its leaders doled out to minority groups, ideological opponents, and critics, and has manifested itself in many different forms, through many different, usually interconnected actors, as well as in the way windows of opportunity opened by the developments within the political system were used. Here, I will focus on several actors and show the opportunities they used in the last five years. Before that, however, we need to briefly mention the groups that were often attacked by the HDZ and their allies in the political system and the society at large.

Since the mid-2010s, certain collective actors and societal groups have come under heavy criticism either by the HDZ government, the HDZ itself (when they were in opposition), HDZ proxy parties or individuals, or powerful veto actors aligned with HDZ ideology. The most heavily criticised groups include, but are not limited to, the Serb minority, the LGBTQ\* community, left and liberal civil society organizations, migrants, and some public intellectuals. The reasons for criticism and attacks directed at these groups are diverse, linked to these groups' specific interests and needs, or by ideological differences between them and the HDZ rank and file. For example, representatives of the Serb minority in Croatia came under attack by the HDZ and their allies because of their wish to enjoy their constitutionally guaranteed right to use their minority language and script in municipalities where they represent a significant percentage of the population (more than a third). The LGBTQ\* groups were criticised for their insistence on marriage equality, although no such calls came from them in the first place. Left and liberal civil society organizations have been a favourite target ever since the independence of Croatia, as the HDZ saw them as obstructors of their intention to acquire complete power in the nascent nation. Currently they are criticised for supporting a variety of progressive international treaties and agreements, like the Istanbul Convention or the Global Compact on Migration. Migrants are, of course, a perennial scapegoat for any nationalist, but the HDZ's focus on them and their allies is particularly cynical as it goes along with hiding their nationalist disdain behind the veneer of following EU rules regarding its external borders. Hence, they are not against migrants, but only against "illegal migration", at the same time making it hard for migrants to use the instruments of "legal

migration”, and securitizing migration policy, at the expense of the humanitarian approach some (mostly liberal and social democratic governments and actors) profess. In the end, some public intellectuals are always seen by the HDZ as enemies aiding the other side by criticising the HDZ and their policies. Some examples of recent criticisms directed at certain public intellectuals were linked to the HDZ’s refusal to allow critical evaluation of the rule of the HDZ’s (and country’s) first president, Tudman, or the support of many in the intellectual community for the reform of the education system, including the introduction of civic education and health education for primary and secondary school pupils.

In this activity of attacking, the most important strength of the HDZ is all the proxies, allies, and individuals they can deploy when it is not politically opportune for them to be seen as the main attackers. Some of these actors are major veto players, like the Catholic Church and the veterans’ groups. Some are conservative civil society organizations, either having sprung up as offshoots of similar organizations already existing in the West (or established by returning members of the Croatian diaspora), or established as astroturf organizations to delegitimize the existing ones. If all else fails, the HDZ can count on the myriad of small radical right political parties and individuals allowed to voice statements that are too radical for the HDZ’s European partners.

Having introduced both the criticised actors and those helping the HDZ do the criticising, it is time to see which windows of opportunity the HDZ and its allies used to optimise their attacks on the government (when they were in opposition) and on other actors (when they were in power). The first major opportunity was the economic crisis that started in 2009 in Croatia and lasted for seven years, the longest in the EU. The second opportunity the HDZ and its allies used to the greatest possible extent was that provided by the existing legal norms and institutions, used strategically and in bad faith (yet completely legally).

The first window of opportunity needs no in-depth explanation. The left-of-centre government in Croatia came to power amid

the economic crisis, yet was blamed by their rivals and much of the public for not resolving it. This allowed the HDZ to denounce every policy the government introduced as lacking legitimacy, forcing the government to either backpedal or spend energy on defending their proposals instead of implementing them. The second opportunity was much more important however, as it is structural and, hence, can be used in the future as well. The HDZ and its allies have been using (and continue to use) and misusing legal norms and institutions that form the core of the political system of Croatia, hence undermining the system using its own tools and from within. These norms and institutions include, but are not limited to, legislation on citizens’ initiatives and referenda, the Constitutional Court, the parliamentary majority, and independent executive agencies.

To conclude, Croatia is neither a special case nor a poster child of European integration. If anything, its ruling political elite is using institutions, establishing structures, and adopting policies that are turning Croatia into a run-of-the-mill stabilityocracy. Will this stripping of democracy be stopped, i.e. what are the chances of progress for Croatia on its democratic path? In the short-to-medium term it seems that Croatia’s democracy will continue to stagnate or even backslide. There are four major reasons that support this conclusion. These are: the HDZ as the dominant party; weak opposition; dire demographic situation in the country; and external influences from both the EU and global powers. The first and second reasons go hand in hand. The HDZ, as the dominant political party in the Croatian party system, bears the greatest responsibility for the current situation. Hence, it will be the most influential in the future democratic trajectory of Croatia. Having that in mind, it seems that Croatia will remain strongly under the sway of the supporters of the illiberal democratic turn. Due to the internal conflict between the nominally moderate and openly nationalistic wings of the HDZ, this can only become worse post-2019, depending on the success or failure of the HDZ candidate in the presidential election. At the same time, the opposition is weak, self-imploding, or unable to

cooperate with the goal of giving the citizens an alternative to HDZ rule. What is worse, the opposition is becoming populated by anti-establishment, anti-system, and radical right political forces. They are not only uninterested in safeguarding the liberal democratic political system, but are focused on revisionist policies, isolation, and aligning themselves with autocratic regimes like Russia or Hungary.

The third reason, however, is going to have the most long-term consequences for Croatia as a whole, and especially for its democratic character – demography. The demographic picture of Croatia is dire and getting worse. Ever since the war in the early 1990s, demographic trends in Croatia have been negative. Low or negative fertility rates are now exacerbated by intense emigration of the young and educated to other EU member states, as well as by restrictive immigration policies that basically exclude all except members of the Croatian diaspora. Those who are emigrating are taking their families with them, which allows us to conclude that they will not be coming back any time soon. Those who are staying have fallen into political apathy or readily support anti-systemic forces due to cynicism, fatalism or disappointment.

The final reason for pessimism lies in the character of current international arena, both on the global and regional levels. Brexit has empowered Eurosceptic forces in Croatian society to come up with an alternative to the European integration. Although their influence is still weak, Brexit proved that their positions are not impossible and hence allowed them to enter the public debate as legitimate political and societal actors. This will have repercussions on Croatia's integration stance down the line and attempts to introduce Croatia into the core of member states supporting ever closer union. As in many other countries around the world, in the USA the Trump presidency allowed the mainstreaming of the nativist, ultra-nationalist "US First" mentality, which many in Croatia nurtured for a long time but were now allowed to display publicly. These two global cases, as well as more regional ones, like the case of competitive authoritarianism in Orbán's Hungary, or the mainstreaming of the radical right in Austria and

Italy, lead us to believe that the international political climate is not favourable for safeguarding democracy in a small, open, and impoverished country.

Not to end on a completely pessimistic note, there are some structural forces that may maintain positive pressure on the political elite. This could then help safeguard Croatia's democratic development. There are three main forces; political, economic, and societal. The first is linked to the elite's interest in Croatia's further European integration. All mainstream political actors, including the HDZ, support the further integration of Croatia into the structure of the EU, mainly by entering Schengen and the Eurozone. These goals are coupled with Croatia's dependence on EU funds, which if used as carrot or stick by the European Commission may induce Croatian governments to work on at least maintaining the levels of democratic development reached so far. The second, economic, force is linked to the ever-growing dependence of the Croatian economy on tourism. The annual influx of fresh cash from the tourism industry, together with remittances sent by the emigrant community, and profits from the grey economy, are lifelines that are keeping a large percentage of the population from falling below the poverty line. Hence, the tourism industry keeps the population from engaging in anti-elite social activities (protests, boycotts, insurrections) and helps the elite maintain the status quo as any sign of societal or political trouble would frighten the tourists away, which would be detrimental for citizens living off the tourism industry. The last, societal, force is linked to those migrating to other countries, many of which are on a higher level of liberal-democratic development. The assumption is that they would adopt political ideas, behaviour, and norms, which they would internalize and transmit to their families back home. Afterwards, both they and their families would be able to promote the same norms, values, activities, and ideas in their local communities as well. This "spillover effect" might prove to be the most important element in safeguarding Croatia's democratic character for this and future generations. ■■■

# the hidden radicalism of the ruling ideologies

Nerzuk Ćurak

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The world is entering a new era, and this tracing of new political patterns undoubtedly belongs to political radicalism, because it is possible that the world we had known until today will undergo radical changes. This means that the phenomenon of radicalism should not be limited merely to the world of terrorism and the ideologies behind it. The substance of the concept of political radicalism must also include mainstream ideologies emanating a new political culture, at whose core lies the return of the old world as new.

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The world today has lost its good judgment, and so Aristotle's well-known idea of virtue as the mean between two extremes finds itself trampled under the feet of radicalism. In the "age of extremes", the middle path is no longer a virtue of human existence, but, in the interpretation afforded by various radical views on the world, is considered a defeated ideology of liberal weaklings and cowards. Indeed, after the epic opening up of the world in the Nineties and the global triumph of American liberal hegemony that westernised the world while promoting the importance of the key accomplishments of liberal democracy, especially to the citizens of post-totalitarian, oppressive single-party systems of the collapsed Soviet empire, it seemed as if radical and extremist ideologies had been brought to their natural ends, and that in the post-totalitarian era, humanity will, more or less successfully, live Fukuyama's liberal dream of a history that had reached its vertical apex, and all that remains for it is to spread out and horizontally develop at its liberal end.

This illusion was both metaphorically, symbolically and in reality knocked down on 11 September 2001, when, following the terrorist strike on the USA, the American government led by president Bush jr. opted for a violent return to history, burying liberalism as an idea of freedom, replacing it with neoliberalism, the rigid, extremist variant of political conservatism and economic predation. This murderous political-economic synthesis led to the *War on Terror* as a new political paradigm in international relations, which for over two decades already, under various guises, has significantly shaped the dominant structures of international politics that had returned to the conventional patterns of action and a well-trodden methodology of the realist school of international relations. This means that we have been exposed to the end of multilateralism and the restoration of bipolar Us-Them views of the world.

The construction of the world based on enemy figures has gained such momentum that it threatens to cancel the achieved degree of liberal construction as a construction of freedom, drowning the universal idea of free human individuals in a destructive political manifest of old conservatives who awoke in the twenty-first century in the shape of white supremacists. Donald Trump is the expression of the old world's yearning to sell itself to younger generations as a new world.

The key instrument for this civilisational restructuring lies in political radicalism, with a Hegelian cunning of reason: we must sell our radicalism to the world as pure normality, directing all decision-making energy decision-makers in the political and security spheres have towards the radicalism and extremism of those others, others who, according to our *preemptive strategy*, are radicals and extremists by their own nature.

Given that American political, security, economic and cultural power is still the only potential all-pervading, comprehensive might, and might is right, and bearing in mind, regardless of the dark clouds gathering over the American democracy, that for many humiliated and disenfranchised people, the USA is still the most intense dream of liberty, this combination of the value of power and the power of value tip the balance in decisions by most political elites in modern states to consider themselves likewise champions of the struggle against radicalism and extremism, in no way suspecting that it might be that it is precisely they, these

elites, that are the political radicals, away from the centre as a political virtue. Indeed, in the security sphere, a concept has been developed that appears as the opposite of terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism, and which has become a platitude used by national and international political and security elites. Ah, the stability and its derivative, *stabilitocracy*. Sounds promising, proper, meek, strong, dominant vis à vis the radical and extremist challenges of the world today. It sounds like something worth supporting in the confrontation against the world of unrest, violence, uncertainty produced by forces that are not integrated into our world. However, the problem is that stability is a narrative of stasis, which becomes more important than the developmental dimension, encouraging the return of archetypal images of the world; the enemy lurking behind the fence, intent on destroying our way of life.

Are the current Croatian and Serbian presidents not a true example of a prejudicial understanding of stability as the dominant form of political existence, and do they not encourage their followers in Bosnia and Herzegovina in a primitive, quasi-imperial, and essentially provincial fashion in order to fan the flames of hallucinogenic images of Bosnian Muslims, with the aim of their symbolical and real transformation into a radical anti-European Other, even though the newest public opinion surveys confirm that of all the ethnic communities in the BH, the Bosniaks are most loyal to the idea of Europe and belonging to the European Union.

The missing developmental understanding of BH, as opposed to primitive didactic patronage, is what Bosnia needs, and what is radically absent as a condition to open the gates of the West, to whose moral universe BH has the right to belong without exclusionary disqualifications of the authentic Bosnian world. It is precisely due to the long-lasting attempts to locate and recognise BH as the land of darkness, although both historic and recent events have confirmed that in relation to the BH, our neighbours are no less, if not more, sites of darkness, and due to the overall theoretical and political wandering as far as the topic of radicalism goes, in the following paragraphs, I will offer a view of radicalism from a non-consenting angle.

Radicalism today is a global social phenomenon, and as such, has predominantly occupied the international public

sphere. The main reason for the irruption of the phenomenon of radicalism both into political theory and the media, as well as into politics as a process of decision-making, is tied to the incursion of the terrorist organisation ISIS into history, using brutal violence to promote the culture of death as a way of life, challenging the political and non-political actors of our world to widen the field of struggle, not only against terrorism as organised political violence, but also against political radicalism itself as an ideology of violence.

However, the pronounced reduction of radicalism, largely to ISIS and the phenomenology generated from this horrendous culture of oppression and death, may have caused more harm than good. Observing an extremely important, yet in a historical sense nevertheless secondary phenomenon, as primary allows the primary subjects of radicalism to avoid being recognised as political radicals; indeed, it so happens that they are designated as the greatest fighters against political radicalism and violent extremism. The search for the truth, in turn, involves standardising certain political subjects belonging to the conventional sphere of politics as radical subjects, as they lead, or can lead to, the production of social relations that are true political radicalism, yet are considered as pure normality. For instance, the world is entering a new era, and this tracing of new political patterns undoubtedly belongs to political radicalism, because it is possible that the world we had known until today will undergo radical changes. This means that the phenomenon

of radicalism should not be limited merely to the world of terrorism and the ideologies behind it. The substance of the concept of political radicalism must also include mainstream ideologies emanating a new political culture, at whose core lies the return of the old world as new.

When I say return of the old world, isn't what the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán advocates political radicalism? Is the triumph of extreme right, xenophobic, anti-Semitic, islamophobic conceptions not radicalism? To me, it seems an awful kind of radicalism that, say, in the election campaign for the latest election in Hungary, a de facto anti-Semitic strategy directed against George Soros has emerged as a public policy, a public exhibit. This is horrifying political radicalism, which may not lead to violent extremism, but can and will erect razor wires against people fleeing terror and unfreedom.

In his day, Karl Marx said, "to be radical is to go to the root of the matter. For man, however, the root is man himself." It appears to me, unlike Marx, whose self-birthing definition had in mind the emancipation of the humiliated subject of history, that today's radicalism is aimed at a different direction – at the destruction of the achieved cosmopolitan values, the humanist regression of man, and the ambition to revive a hard sovereignty that leads us all towards the return of the nation-fortress and the – potential – destruction of the best of all worlds – the European Union.

We are living the paradox wherein radical ideologies that underpin the govern-

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ment in many countries around the world, are tasked with pacifying the political radicalism that transforms itself into terrorism. We have sailed into a world where a large number of citizens value the ideas of a closed society, ideas of fear of the Other and the Different, thanks to contemporary means of communication, the megavirtual and telekinetic civilisation that has trimmed space and thickened time; an ambient in which the policies and ideologies that proliferate are those that demand nothing and, as if on an assembly line, only make promises. The poisoned media and political atmosphere, where bad news triumph over good news, with the migration vector that can be read from radical political ideologies through Huntington's *clash of civilisations* (an idea that found its way to citizens of varying levels of educational attainment, including those people that are among the least well educated in our world), has produced a situation which appears to resemble a change of eras, as if we were present at an historical retreat of the world, giving up from a journey into a good society, the utopia of Europe, an European republic. Europe is breaking down as concepts I had hoped belonged to a finished history are coming back to life.

Following his, I hope, final re-election as the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán said, I paraphrase, that liberal democracy was over, and that it is time for a 21<sup>st</sup> century christian democracy, which corroborates my claim about the beginning of a European materialisation of Huntington's paradigm. And indeed, we are witnessing the imperilment of the idea of liberalism as an idea of freedom, stupidity becoming more important than knowledge, and ignorance gaining primacy over intellect. We have entered an era where facts are endangered, do not shape policy, mean nothing, and a world without facts is a world where lie is the truth of a being.

In the extraordinary new seven-part HBO series, *The Loudest Voice*, where Russel Crowe gave a first-class performance as a right-wing media visionary Roger Ailes, the man who made *Fox News* into the most watched TV network in the USA, Ailes utters the sentence that is the heart of the regressive transformation of the world, a thought that led to the triumph of populism, regressiveness, xenophobia, islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and which confirmed that, when they so desire, the media can rule the world by setting up dominant narra-

tives, transforming Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach into a winner's slogan: *Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is for the new media to change it.* And in terms of its intention and motto, *Fox News* is a new medium: not to inform, but to lie, spin, fake, hate... It was on this anti-journalistic platform that Ailes became the key player in the modelling of the American electoral basis, with this programmatic bombshell: "People don't want to be informed. *They want to feel* (underlined by N.Ć.) informed." This is the difference that this unscrupulous media schemer, sexist, bad human being, conspiracy theorist and practitioner has so brilliantly grasped, and upon which he built the conditions for a new world, with the idea of undoing the American liberal heritage. He projected Trump as someone who could possibly carry out this work, and they won. They convinced millions of viewers that truth is lie, and that their everyday lie is truth, as their viewers weren't interested in information, but the feeling that they were informed. And the feeling that they were informed meant merely that Ailes and Trump confirmed their deep-rooted fears, prejudice, conspiratorial thinking and similar. Nowadays, the most active in our region on a similar platform is the *Radio-Television of the Republic of Srpska*. This is how *Fox News* become the TV network that changed the world. For the worse – so much worse that it arrested the journey towards freedom and reaffirmed notoriety and ignorance as the criteria of political victory, and thence the victory of values. Thus, political radicalism became the mode of governing for the long run, because the citizenry identified with the political radicalism of *Fox News*, but not as radicalism, but as something that is politically correct; something that therefore isn't radicalism. I believe that a significant part of the world is now engulfed in this kind of radicalism.

In a way, President Trump has been trying to render multilateralism senseless, make it irrelevant by reducing diplomacy to bilateral relations only. This is the return of the old world. This tells us how much a personality can after all influence the production of history, especially in a country such as the USA. And now, if this stage of such political radicalism or radicalist populism, a more precise definition, were to go on, we would be heading for a world I'd define as the end of politics, as non-politics. We can see what Trump is doing. At home

and abroad, he is banalising and rendering senseless a world that had had significant support from Democrats (but also liberal Republicans), a world of multilateralism, of free media, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and civil society... He abolishes expertise, degrades political science and in effect reduces politics to his Twitter account. It is a terrible assault on political literacy, a radicalised populism. (Which is why it is extremely important to politics, especially international politics, that both George Soros and the conservative philanthropist Charles Koch together stood up against this degradation of knowledge and fundamental American values, by giving considerable financial support to the establishment of the Quincy Institute, whose opening is planned for this autumn, and whose expertise should support the idea of international peace as the dominant American foreign policy agenda.) And then, since America is the role model, this is transferred to other countries as a desirable model. Just like Clinton and Obama transmitted to the world the positive values of American democracy, making east European and Balkan countries keen to identify themselves as much as possible with America as it was then, nowadays there are many countries seeking to identify themselves with this new Trumpian America. I am not sure whether such an understanding of politics will lead to laying violent extremism and terrorism to rest, especially within unintegrated parts of the world and in regions marked by long-term instability. Here such violent extremism – even though ISIS's head has now been severed – might take other forms, allowing the culture of death to go on and continue to develop forcefully, which may have the worst consequences for those elements within the Middle East and Central Asia that wish to democratise this world and try to create model democratic societies that wouldn't be exposed to constant oppression, whether by local religious or dictatorial structures, or by power structures from further abroad. Only the Israeli Jerusalem has been reviving, and will revive the worst terrorist rituals – on the part of both state and non-state agents.

Both BH's and the region's biggest problem is not violent extremism, but ruling ideologies' political radicalism. There is no doubt that we are living in a world where security is more important than freedom, in a world where the security industry is more important than freedom and democracy. When you live in such a world, it means we have a very extended security system, which can control groups inclined towards violence, the production of death and so on. Unfortunately, we have political systems whose political radicalism cannot be controlled because the majority of this political radicalism belongs to the mainstream zone and possesses the instruments to multiply its authority, to expand it, to survive, and for citizens not to even experience it as political radicalism. On the contrary, the structures of political radicalism understood this way are part of the structure of stabilitocracy, the instrument tasked with combating radicalism and violent extremism.

Necessity demands that the ruling radical nationalist ideologies step down. These ideologies have normalised political extremism, as if this was third way politics. The long-term survival of the Chetnik and Ustasha ideologies, as well as the long-term relativisation and normalisation of the imported ideologies of evil that directly resulted in young people leaving for Daesh terrorist camps, are this country's and the Dayton triangle countries' problem, generated by certain ruling ideologies normalising the radicalist discourse, even introducing it into the sphere of politics. All of a sudden, we are living in countries where the Chetnik discourse has been normalised, where the Ustasha discourse has been normalised, where the neo-Salafist religious radical discourse has been normalised, I'd say to a lesser extent, but nevertheless, having not yet reached the level of normalcy of Chetnikism and Ustashism, as it is under much more stringent security control by the two previous radicalisms that evade easy labelling and very easily penetrate the structures of our society, our education system, the fabric of our lives, so that a huge number of citizens get used to this as if it were normality; but it is an abnormal normality, a pathology.

## is there a cure?

I believe that overall, the permanent cure lies in the emancipation of humanity. It is important to develop the idea of liberal democracy, with dedicated work on creating the conditions for social justice and equality of opportunity, while being heedful of local contexts. Many people either reduce liberal democracy merely to an ideology of an unfettered free market, which is both theoretically and historically untenable, or stuff the concept with all manner of things. It is crucially important to view liberal democracy as a request for freedom that manifests itself in the political and social spheres as freedom of association, as individual freedom, as freedom, rather than an ideology of human rights, as a freedom of opinion, freedom from some kind of overbearing force that will keep watch over you, as is unfortunately the case today in many quasi-democratic, but illiberal states... These notions of freedom need the added value of a request for increased justice and solidarity among people. I believe these values are worth fighting for, that they are, both potentially and intentionally, a part of the EU's repertory of values (with all the emancipatory objections by the European left, which are sensible and also need to become part of the repertory of values of the transforming European Union), and that we should not give up on them. That is why I think BH's accession to the EU is our most important cultural and civilisational task, unless in the meantime, under assault by the awoken nationalisms of its member-states, the European Union becomes benumbed, diminished, rendered senseless, radically incapacitated or reduced to a mere coordination mechanism – that is, to Bosnia and Herzegovina. ■■■

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Both BH's and the region's biggest problem is not violent extremism, but ruling ideologies' political radicalism. There is no doubt that we are living in a world where security is more important than freedom, in a world where the security industry is more important than freedom and democracy. We have political systems whose political radicalism cannot be controlled because the majority of this political radicalism belongs to the mainstream zone and possesses the instruments to multiply its authority, to expand it, to survive, and for citizens not to even experience it as political radicalism. On the contrary, the structures of political radicalism understood this way are part of the structure of stabilitocracy, the instrument tasked with combating radicalism and violent extremism.

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## radicalisation against external 'others'

# between the humanitarian and the securitized approach to the refugee crisis in Croatia: is there an alternative to policies grounded in populism?

Viktor Koska

Neither the humanitarian nor the 'securitising' approach were grounded in evidence-based policy approaches or on the comprehensive research and estimation of Croatian society's capacities to accept and integrate migrants. Croatia lacks clear and defined short, medium and long-term goals of migration policies and the stakeholders involved in the issue are implementing their decisions in the ad hoc manner. The legitimization of any migration-related measure in public discourse resorts to populist approaches, in which the migrants are considered fundamentally as the objects of the policy and always portrayed as a political other against whom, or by whom, the desired self-perception of Croatian society is constructed.

### introduction

In 2015, for the second time in the short history of its statehood, Croatia was faced with the challenge of massive forced migration. The country that only 20 years ago had to organize its capacities and, during wartime conditions, provide shelter and develop integration policies for several hundred thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons, who were forced to flee as a direct or indirect consequence of the war that followed the turbulent break-up of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, was once again forced to develop ad hoc measures to tackle the influx of thousands of refugees.

However, this time the forced migrants were not coming from the republics of the former Yugoslavia, with whom Croatian people shared very similar cultures, languages and habits, nor they were fleeing due to the horrible war atrocities with which almost every Croatian citizen was very familiar either through experience of direct shelling of their towns or personal losses in the ravages of war, or through regular media

broadcasts which provided daily updates on the ongoing conflict. If the events of the 1990s, through personal experiences and media broadcasts, produced what Benedict Anderson (1983) called imagined communities, where many Croatian citizens, at least in the first months of the conflict, could identify strongly with the sufferings of forced migrants seeking shelter in the Croatian territory, the events of 2015 brought a slightly different challenge to the Croatian state and society.

This time, the forced migrants were coming from conflicts and countries about which average Croatian citizens knew very little. For years before the escalation of what is now called the migration crisis, Croatian society had a general notion of the asylum crisis going on in Europe. However, asylum-related issues were perceived as distant problems affecting the countries that are the final destination of migratory routes or that are on the fence at the entry points for a large influx of forced migrants. For Croatia, these events were happening on physically distant localities and Croatia did not (and still does not) consider itself as a country of

final destination but, at best, as a transition country for migration.

In such a context Croatian governments have enacted two fundamentally different approaches to tackle the ongoing crisis over the last few years. The humanitarian approach was adopted by the left-wing government in the first months of the emergence of the crisis in 2015. However, after the Parliamentary election in 2015 and the forming of two consecutive conservative governments, Croatia shifted towards policies that were built on the securitization discourse. The rhetoric and practices involved in the latter approach could easily be interpreted as the manifestation of the migration policies developed in accordance with the rise of right-wing populist sentiments in Europe.

However, as I will argue in this essay, both approaches in Croatian society have been underpinned by a populist rationale, where various categories of forced migrants remained the distinctive Others, against whom the national image may be shaped, and mass mobilization pursued. In the long run, the sustainability and success of the development and implementation of migration policies that could both meet the needs and human rights of various categories of forced migrants and benefit the interests of the state, depends on the capacity of the society to frame the policy debates related to migration within an evidence-based approach and less in terms of populist sentiments.

## emergence of the crisis and the humanitarian approach

With the escalation of the migration crisis in 2015, on the eve of the forthcoming parliamentary election, the left-wing Croatian coalition government responded to the crisis with an approach which will in academic and public discourse be framed as the humanitarian approach (see Tatalović and Jakešević, 2016). Croatia decided to provide safe passage for thousands of forced migrants passing through its territory towards more economically developed EU countries, which were at the time willing to accept refugees and provide them with safe haven.

In contrast to the practices of Slovenian and Hungarian governments, which implemented restrictive immigration policies marked by installing fences along their

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While there is no extensive academic research on Croatian integration capacities, the existing literature reveals some data on public perception of immigrants and readiness of the society to accept different categories of immigrants. Even though Croatian society never experienced high levels of immigration, studies reveal that there is a predominantly exclusive attitude toward migrants, which frames potential migrations within the framework of economic burden and cultural threat. Foreign workers are perceived as socio-cultural threat, while asylum seekers are dominantly seen as security and economic threat. Considering that the migration policies in Croatia are developing in the vacuum of real-life experience of contemporary immigration and (un)successful outcomes of immigrant integration and its consequences to society, general public attitudes are moulded primarily through stereotypes.

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borders, and, as in case of Hungary, right wing populist inflammatory discourse that framed refugees as security threats and threats to European culture and values, the Croatian approach looked like it was based on a strong dedication to human rights protection and solidarity. Even though not all stakeholders in the Croatian public unanimously accepted such an approach to the crisis, the general notion was that the humanitarian approach that was taken had broad public support.

Media coverage provided a discourse which emphasized that these migrants are refugees and focused on the solidarity of Croatian citizens, many of whom were themselves refugees during the 1990s. This was supplemented with images of Croatian citizens and policemen providing help and moral support to refugees. While political actors from the conservative sphere of politics called for the issue to be securitised, with



Photo by  
Marion Kraske

some politicians even advocating deploying the army along the border, the Croatian Government firmly refused to adopt exclusionary policies; the public statements of Prime Minister Milanović elevated the issue to the level of taking the states' reactions to the pressing needs of migrants as the distinction between countries that are civilized and those that are not.<sup>1</sup>

In such a discourse, anti-immigrant policies were seen as a mere reflection of the rise of the right-wing populism that had been gaining momentum in many countries in Europe. With hundreds of Croatian volunteers heading to the borders and the transit camp in Slavonski Brod to aid refugees, it seemed that Croatian society was developing a distinctive approach. The advocates of restrictive approaches in Croatia seemed as if they wanted to build on the rise of right-wing populism in Europe, and benefit from introducing of a similar discourse into the Croatian political area.

## populism and the populist foundation of refugee policies in Croatia

In order to adequately understand how policies towards forced migration and related issues have developed in Croatia, neutral researchers should aim to distance themselves from personal attitudes on this topic,

and opt to analyse how in a country which never sought to develop a comprehensive migration strategy and policy, political and policy decisions on migration come to be.

It may be argued that both approaches, the humanitarian one endorsed by the left-wing government, and the later gradual move towards securitization and anti-immigrant attitudes implemented by the two right wing conservative governments formed after the parliamentary elections of 2015 and 2016, shared populist foundations.

Neither approach was grounded in evidence-based policy or on comprehensive research and estimation of the Croatian society's capacities to accept and integrate migrants. Croatia lacks clear and defined short-, medium- and long-term goals of migration policies, and the stakeholders involved in the issue implement their decisions on an ad hoc basis. The legitimization of any migration-related measure in public discourse resorts to populist approaches, in which the migrants are essentially considered as the objects of the policy and always portrayed as *a political other* against which, or by means of which, the desired self-perception of Croatian society is constructed.

In social sciences, the term populism has lately been used to describe and define various socio-political phenomena. It has been used to represent a particular type of party organization (Taggart 1995), to define specific political strategies for the mobilization of marginalized segments of societies to challenge a given social order by invoking right-wing and anti-intellectual rhetoric and celebrate the common people (Jansen 2011), a specific type of political communication adopted by the actors who claim to represent the interest of the majority of

1 To ne želimo raditi, to može svaka budala napraviti. To je ružno, to je krivo. [We don't want to do that, any idiot could do it. It is ugly and wrong.] Dnevnik.hr, 19.10.2015. <https://dnevnik.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/izbjeglicka-kriza-2015-zoran-milanovic-nemojte-toraditi-hrvatskoj-vlada-ima-apsolutno-sve-pod-kontrolom---412908.html>

citizens and frame their statements in an (over)simplified and direct manner (Kazin 1995) or a new form of political ideology which sees politics as a struggle between two clearly demarcated antagonistic groups (Mudde 2004).

The theoretical elaboration of all these approaches goes beyond the scope of this article, as my aim here is not to make a categorical claim on what populism is. Rather, I aim to focus on the features that are undisputedly populist in the framework of all these approaches in order to demonstrate that populism is not an exclusive feature only of anti-immigrant right-wing sentiments, but that it may be found in foundations of policies that, on the surface, benefit the forced migrants in the short term.

What seems to be shared by all of the approaches is that populism claims to represent the attitudes and values of the majority of ordinary people of the polity; it is marked by oversimplified representation of otherwise very complex social realities and a focus on the creation and maintenance of the image of politics as the constant struggle between antagonistic groups.

The 2015's humanitarian approach shared almost all of these populist features.

Croatia's policies at the beginning of the crisis depended on the ad hoc measures that were enacted in accordance with Germany's readiness to accept large numbers of refugees. However, they also went hand in hand with the media attitudes and public sentiments towards the refugees. In the context where it was evident that people migrating through the country in general had no intentions to stay in Croatia, the media were predominantly using the term refugees, not migrants,<sup>2</sup> in framing the news from the borders and from the transit camp in Slavonski Brod. Furthermore, the media were emphasizing the solidarity of ordinary Croatian

citizens with refugees passing through their towns.<sup>3</sup>

The inalienable rights of refugees seemed to be of secondary significance to the public, the government, as well as the media; the Government used the humanitarian and solidarity discourse to mobilize its constituency in light of the forthcoming elections, but also to position Croatia as an antagonistic other in the face of anti-migrant policies enacted by Slovenia and Hungary (which were themselves a reflection of the right-wing populism sentiments in their societies).

Additionally, in the months that followed the escalation of the crisis, human rights organizations advocated for refugees' rights and integration by focusing on developing positive images of the refugee communities – on positive individual cases of successful integration<sup>4</sup> and seeking to demystify attempts by the more right-wing segments of the public to frame refugees as a security and cultural threat.

While these combined efforts of various stakeholders (government, media and NGOs) resulted with a regime which, at least during the first few months of the crisis, provided support and protection to refugees, in practice it did not contribute to development of a stable framework for evidence-based decision-making on migration issues, which would remain in place once popular sentiment turned to the right.

While the Croatian government represented its approach as humanitarian, on the other hand it continuously emphasized that Croatia is not going to become a hotspot for migrants. Alternatively, too much focus on the uncritical construction of the positive stereotype of refugees as individuals who can easily integrate to society may be counterproductive for developing a responsible framework for public deliberation and creation of efficient migration policies in the long term; society may develop the notion that refugee rights are a privilege that can be granted to especially deserving individuals, and not as a universal right that belongs to each individual regardless of the pace and scope of the benefits and/or their (un)successful integration into society.

Dependence of the pro-refugee regime on the sustainability of the construction of

2 The distinction between the terms *refugee* and *migrant* used in public discourse has a strong implication on the political framing of the migration crisis. The term *refugee* inherently contains the message that the person who migrated was forced to leave their country due to well-founded fear of persecution and has a legitimate claim to international protection. By labelling migrants as refugees or other categories of forced migration, the media delivers a message that their pleas for acceptance and protection are legitimate, and it may even be the society's and country's duty to respond affirmatively to such pleas. On the other hand, by assigning the term *migrant* to a person in flight, one puts the person's reasons to migrate into the realm of pure individual choice. Such framing of migration contributes to construction of migrants' requests to be allowed to enter the country beyond the responsibility of the nation-state, the society's duty to respond to such requests and outside the scope of the international refugee rights regime.

3 See for example: Nevladine udruge pozvale EU da otvori granice izbjeglicama, HRT Vijesti, 12.9.2015. <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/298494/u-zagrebu-obiljezen-dan-solidarnosti-s-izbjeglicama>

4 See for example: <https://www.okus-doma.hr/hr/tekstovi/najave/premijera-dokumentarnog-filma-okus-doma-na-zagrebdox-u-22-02-2016-18h>

positive generalizations, however beneficial in the short term, can easily wither away with a similarly selective focus of the right wing media on individual cases of deviant behaviour, that in the situation of mass migration of desperate people fighting to survive, will sooner or later inevitably arise.

## from humanitarization towards securitization of migration

How fragile the humanitarian approach is in the long run, if it is not based on solid evidence-based policies but on ad hoc measures and public sentiments, became clear after the parliamentary election in late 2015 and subsequent early elections in 2016. With the two conservative coalition Governments, Croatian policies towards migrants developed more along the line of the restrictive Hungarian and Slovenian approaches.

While there is no extensive academic research on Croatian integration capacities, the existing literature reveals some data on public perception of immigrants and readiness of the society to accept different categories of immigrants. Even though Croatian society never experienced high levels of immigration, studies such as Kumpes, Gregurović and Čačić Kumpes (2012) reveal that there exists a predominantly exclusive attitude toward migrants, which frames potential migration as an economic burden and cultural threat. A similar result has been found in the research conducted by Kutli, Gregurović and Župarić-Iljić (2016), which demonstrated that in Croatian Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties, foreign workers are perceived as a socio-cultural threat, while asylum seekers are dominantly seen as a security and economic threat. Considering that migration policies in Croatia have developed in a vacuum of real-life experience of contemporary immigration and (un)successful outcomes of immigrant integration and its consequences for society, general public attitudes are moulded primarily through stereotypes. With the already existing predisposition for negative evaluation of immigration into Croatia, it is not a surprise that any policy which lacks support in empirical research may easily slip into the realm of right-wing populism. This happened in Croatia with the rise of the right-wing government.

The new governments built on the examples of the restrictive anti-immigrant policies in the neighbouring countries and unwillingness of Germany to accept the same number of refugees as during the beginning of the crises, and implemented the more restrictive policies based on the securitization of the migration issue. In such context, the actors willing to utilize right-wing anti-immigrant populist discourse could easily do so by exploiting the already present anti-immigrant sentiments.

The manifestations of this change toward restrictive policies were manifold. Over the last few years, Croatia closed its borders to the large number of potential asylum seekers, and a number of NGO and media reports show the rise of Croatian police brutality against potential asylum seekers.<sup>5</sup> Public statements by important political actors, such as Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, are less concerned with the potential human rights abuses against the forced migrants on the borders, but focus on Croatia's task to protect its borders, maintain security and demonstrate the sovereign right of Croatia to act by police force against illegal migrants.<sup>6</sup> The media framework has predominantly changed; refugee, as a label to mark the migrant in passage through Croatia in the early months of the crisis, has been replaced by the discourse of migrants and illegal migrants on Croatia's borders.<sup>6</sup>

In such context, human rights activists and NGOs entered into an almost latent conflict with the authorities, by constantly raising awareness of the violations of immigrants' human rights and the right of thousands of forced migrants currently stranded on the Croatian borders to seek asylum. Unfortunately, in the policy framework founded more on the populist sentiments and less on solid evidence and deliberation, which has been a practice of all Croatian governments so far, any such report paradoxically maintains the status quo and objectifies the immigrant issue as part of the national order of things. While it homogenizes the sentiments of the pro-refugee segments of society, it also homog-

5 See for instance: Zeleno svjetlo za ulazak u Schengen je i zeleno svjetlo za nasilje na granicama, Dobrodošli, centralni hrvatski informativni portal za izbjeglice, 25.10.2019. <https://welcome.cms.hr/index.php/hr/2019/10/25/zeleno-svjetlo-za-ulazak-u-schengen-je-i-zeleno-svjetlo-za-nasilje-na-granicama/>

6 For example see: Hrvatska se pretvorila u zemlju koja otvoreno mrzi migrante, 22.07.2019. <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/hrvatska-se-pretvorila-u-zemlju-koja-otvoreno-mrzi-migrante/2102955.aspx>

enizes the public sentiments of those who do not recognize the human rights plights of the refugees as legitimate.

## in lieu of conclusion

The short recent history of Croatia's approach to the challenges of migration reveals that discussions and later creation and implementation of policies related to migration occur within the populist discourse, and are not grounded in empirical research and long-term discussions among various stakeholders on what future migration and integration policies should look like. While the country's recent turn towards the securitization of the issue can be seen as the reflection of the move towards exclusionary practices and sliding into populism when it comes to migration issues in the EU in general, even the humanitarian approach advocated by the left-wing Croatian government was contained within the realms of populist legitimization of public policy. Even though the latter approach entailed a reasonably high level of protection of refugees' rights, unfortunately it did not lead to developing a policy framework within which migration related decision-making will be based on research and evidence rather than on ever-changing popular sentiments towards people in flight.

The existing literature on attitudes towards migrants in Croatia reveals that there already exists a predisposition and attitudes on the part of the general public to accept the framing of the migration chal-

lenges as security, economic and cultural threats. Considering that the country does not have a long history of non-ethnic immigration, and that Croatia has a very high level of ethnic and religious homogeneity, these sentiments towards the culturally different do not stem from respondents' personal experiences.

Rather, they represent the attitudes and beliefs that respondents developed from the negative stereotypes about the cultural others that have been constructed by various actors: media sensationalism, stereotypes and negative portrayal of immigrants by the media and politicians abroad. Whatever lies at the root of these anti-immigrant attitudes, the response to the negative stereotypes and aggressive right-wing populism cannot lie in attempts to replace one stereotype with another, or one populism with another (even if the latter is more favourable towards the refugees). For Croatia to develop sustainable and efficient long-term policies towards refugees and other categories of migrants, comprehensive research on country's integration capacities will be needed, which should stimulate the public deliberation on the topic. However, such research is only the first step. It would be more challenging to have a consensus between all stakeholders (media, political elites and society) that durable solutions can only be based on solid research and guided by evidence. Without such an approach, any migration policy may be grounded in populism, with potentially devastating effects for both the society and the rights of the forced migrants. ■■

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# a Croatian story: "an extraordinary EU Member" at the price of human rights

Boris Pavelić

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After the Ombudswoman and the human rights activists reminded of what were then already regular accusations of violence and illegal conduct towards refugees that were being levelled against the police, Lora Vidović asserted "that we will remain without security as well, unless we view security from the standpoint of human rights." Because, she added: "The police that today beats up migrants, thinking that nothing needs to change, might tomorrow beat up football hooligans, and after them, trade unionists too." The rest was left hanging: and after them...

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"Let there be no doubt about this: when she speaks about refugees, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović's language, in its callous coldness, is no different from that which Heinrich Himmler and his crew used to refer to the Jews." This sentence was written by Viktor Ivančić, one of Croatia's most distinguished critical journalists, in a 8 July text criticising statements by the Croatian president.

Four days earlier, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović visited the border police station in Kordunski Ljeskovac to show her support for the policemen preventing migrants illegally entering Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina. This at a time when the Croatian police has for months been facing critiques by non-governmental organisations and the media that its treatment of these people has been violent and illegal. Having visited the forested part of the border, the President dismissed such accusations with the following sentence: "When someone crawls through such terrain, it is to be expected that they'll have scratches, bruises and bodily injuries. Have that in mind when you hear stories that our policemen are brutal. They are not, I guarantee it."

To the Croatian president, Ivančić will comment, refugees are "two-legged brutes stalking our forests, sullyng our environment, harassing our citizens, scaring our women, slaughtering our chickens and, to top it all off, running into beech branches as if into police truncheons; in short: inhuman creatures who by the natural order of things should be dealt with by hunters' associations, bodies with experience in chasing after foxes and wild boar." "Although", the journalist famed for his unrelenting critique and stringent analysis continues, "the President's rhetoric lacks the raw racial explanations, a sop to the spirit of the times, the moaning tone of the warning that the national territory needs to be protected by all means, and cleansed of those who pollute it, continuously vibrates, while each of the President's words makes it clear that "the way she views migrants is as a dehumanised image."

Kolinda Grabar Kitarović herself made sure that this judgment is not unfounded: "As an external frontier of the EU, Croatia cannot allow itself illegal crossings, but our primary goal is absolutely to protect the national interest, to protect the population on our side of the border," she said, wondering "whether it is true that in encounters with the Croatian police, they (refugees, *author's note*) sometimes form battle formations, that they have military experience, as well as that they know the maps and the terrain well."

Four days after visiting the border, the Croatian president further bolstered such militaristic discourse regarding "people on the move", as human rights activists are given to calling the strangers arriving at the Croatian border, wishing to avoid the political and value judgements implicit in the titles "refugee" or "migrant". "Of course you'll need a little force when you are pushing people back, but you need to see what kind of a terrain this is," the President of the Republic admitted in an interview she gave to a Swiss TV channel while on an official visit to Switzerland.

This statement of hers was interpreted in the public as an open admission by the highest representative of the Croatian authorities that the police have been applying force while illegally driving out refugees as part of a pushback policy, not allowing them to request asylum in Croatia, in line with European and Croatian legislation. The Croatian president's rhetoric towards "people on the move" has faithfully reflected

the rigorous anti-refugee policy Croatia has implemented for the past three years, and because of which nearly all this time it has been a focus of well-argued accusations that it has violated the rights of "people on the move" with violent and illegal acts.

It hasn't always been this way: according to information put forward by Ranko Ostojić, the former Croatian interior minister, in an 20 June 2018 interview to the Croatian *Novi list* journal, between 16 September 2015 and February 2016, 682 thousand people were allowed passage through Croatia in an organised, humane way. "The crisis began early in the morning of 16 September 2015. Already on that first day, there were more than four thousand people in Croatia. We had an average of four migrants every minute; 250 per hour; six thousand people on average daily. That lasted for five months," said Ostojić, minister of police in the Croatian Social-Democrat government of the time, which transported all these people in an organised fashion, without a single incident, from Croatia's eastern border with Serbia to its western border, with Slovenia.

But this was the time of the "Wir schaffen das" – "We can do it" – policy of German chancellor Angela Merkel, who strove to bring the Germans, and with them all Europeans as well, around to the policy of open borders and integration of refugees. As is well known, Merkel failed. Her policy soon collapsed, causing an explosive growth of the extreme right throughout Europe, and so she announced a radical turn.

The moment the developed EU members, led by Germany, closed their borders to "people on the move", it was as if Croatia had turned into what it had already once been, during the resistance to the Ottoman empire: the "Antemurale Christianitatis", the "Bulwark of Christendom", the frontier region that is to "protect" Europe from unwanted newcomers from the East.

In Croatia, the first victim of this dramatic turn was – a five-year-old Afghan girl. Madina Huseini was killed by a speeding train on the night of 21 November 2017, on the Zagreb-Belgrade railway line, just on the Serbian side of the Croatian-Serbian border, after her mother and another six children were sent by Croatian policemen to return, on foot, along the tracks from Croatia into Serbia.

It has never been precisely established who was responsible for the death of the child. The Croatian Police denied responsibility; the Croatian State Attorney's Office

dismissed the criminal complaint filed by Croatian non-governmental organisations against an unknown perpetrator, and the attempt by the Ombudswoman Lora Vidović to investigate the case was also unsuccessful: the police informed her office that the infrared camera recordings that may have registered what had happened had "disappeared".

The death of Madina Huseini marked the beginning of a tragic sequence of incidents that has gone on until today, brought about by Croatia's unremitting closed door policy, which has been supported, and financed with huge amounts of money, by the European Union.

In May 2018, near Donji Srb, in the vicinity of the BH border, the police shot at a van that had ignored two police instructions to stop. Two refugee children, a boy and a girl aged 12, were wounded along with their father. According to reports in the media, another thirteen children were in the van, but were fortunately uninjured. The police said the shooting was "justified and legal", and the Croatian non-governmental organisation "Are You Syrious" stated that "the problem lay in the institutional violence being carried out against refugees."

In July last year, at the request of the media, the Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs has reported that between the beginning of 2017 and mid-June 2018, twelve "people on the move" have perished in the Croatian territory, four of whom died in 2017, and eight a year later. At the same time, according to MIA data, fifteen people were seriously injured; four in 2017 and eleven in 2018.

However, the Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), a non-governmental human rights organisation from Croatia, presented information according to which there were two more migrants than the police had reported who had died in 2017. "We fear that the number of those who died is in fact much greater, that there are many deaths that we never even become aware of, and there are also no overall statistics for states on whose borders people die," CPS activist Julija Kranjec stated.

In the autumn of last year, suspicions as to the conduct of the Croatian police have made their way into official debate in the Croatian Parliament. In October 2018, the Parliamentary Human and National Minority Rights Committee discussed the objections raised by Croatian Ombudswoman Lora Vidović, as well as human rights NGOs,

regarding the work of the police. This was the first time at a parliamentary session that the fear that police intransparency regarding its treatment of aliens might imperil the overall state of human rights in the whole of Croatia was expressed at an official level.

After the Ombudswoman and the human rights activists reminded of what were then already regular accusations of violence and illegal conduct towards refugees that were being levelled against the police, Lora Vidović asserted "that we will remain without security as well, unless we view security from the standpoint of human rights." Because, she added: "The police that today beats up migrants, thinking that nothing needs to change, might tomorrow beat up football hooligans, and after them, trade unionists too." The rest was left hanging: and after them...

The Ombudswoman's warning had no effect. On the contrary, after a pause of sorts, caused in the movement of people towards the West by the winter cold, spring brought new mass attempts of illegal crossings, and with them accusations against the Croatian police. In mid-March, a recording was uploaded to social networks, showing a policeman forcing a group of migrants to chant the name of a Croatian football club. Following this, the police officer in question was suspended under the weight of evidence.

However, the MIA do not recognise the accusations of violence, even though a stream of accusations by refugees and migrants who have been failing to cross Croatian territory has continuously flowed from the neighbouring BH. These people make always nearly the same claims: that policemen beat them, take their mobile phones and money, and drive them on foot across the green border back into BH, not following any kind of procedure. Similar accusations have been made by Croatian and international human rights organisations.

In mid-May, the Swiss TV broadcast a recording showing Croatian policemen driving migrants over the border back into BH. Interviewed by journalists, the expelled people testified that policemen had used force against them, taken their money and destroyed their mobile phones. The Croatian police confirmed that the event took place on 24 April, but rejected accusations of illegal treatment. "This event involves no illegal actions or violent deportations. The video has showed police officers performing their duties in the aim of discouraging

a group of people from illegally entering the European Union, at a location which is not an official border crossing," the Croatian MIA reported.

However, in a statement to the Swiss TV carried by Croatian media, German migration expert Marcus Engler claimed that "it is clear that this was a violation of European and international law, as collective expulsions without due process are not permitted."

How was it then nevertheless possible for the Croatian police to dismiss all the accusations with such ease? This is explained by Marcus' following sentence, which sheds a great deal of light on the broader context of the drama that had for months already been playing out on the Croatian-Bosnian border, that eastern frontier of the European Union: of the practice recorded by Swiss TV Engler claims that "Croatia is not the only one to blame, but the entire EU." "We must criticise the Croatian government, but in this case Croatia has not acted on its own, but together with the rest of the EU. The Croatian border police is financed by European money. Other countries support such practice as it is politically profitable for them," Engler warned.

In such political circumstances, Croatian authorities are entirely free to ignore dramatic human rights violations that – by all accounts – its own police has carried out on its borders. This ignoring of the state of affairs wasn't shaken even by two dramatic testimonies by policemen themselves, who dared to testify to what non-governmental activists have been warning of for ages: that illegal and violent police conduct towards

migrants is not the result of arbitrariness, violence and unprofessionalism on the part of individual policemen, but a systematic, systemic and planned state policy carried out by the police hierarchy.

In mid-July, several days after the Croatian president admitted that "a little force is necessary when you are pushing people back" in the interview with the Swiss TV, the international human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) asked her in an open letter to "cease with the illegal practice of returning people to BH" and to initiate an investigation into such claims. A day later, on 16 July, the Croatian president "decisively dismissed" the HRW letter, calling it "an attempt to reinterpret the statements related to issues of protection of the state border."

However, as a curious coincidence would have it, that same day, 16 July, the Ombudswoman Lora Vidović made public the disturbing testimony of a group of "disgruntled policemen" from a border police station. "On the basis of an order by the police station commander and the 'head and administration', police officers were directed to return all refugees and migrants to BH territory, without documents and without processing them in order to leave no trace, and to take their money, destroy their mobile phones and throw them in a river or keep them for themselves," the Ombudswoman described these policemen's testimonies in a public statement. "Every day they return between 20 and 50 persons in this manner, and especially cruel in their behaviour are police officers on secondment from other police constabu-



Migrant  
Camp "Vučjak"  
Photo by Dirk Planert

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laries, who 'beat and seize', that is, 'do what they want, without control... and with the blessing of the leaderships of the police constabulary and directorate.'

Policemen have testified that "there are women and children among migrants, and the actions taken are 'the same against all', and that people being brought from other constabularies come exhausted, sometimes also beaten up, yet police officers still 'transfer them forcibly over night into Bosnia', sometimes even pulling their weapons". The Ombudswoman has also disclosed that she received this testimony as far back as 20 March, but did not present it to the public for four months while she was waiting for a reaction by the competent institutions – the Attorney's Office and the Croatian Parliament – to which she had delivered this testimony. There had been no reaction, just as there was none after the Ombudswoman published the testimony.

Indeed, instead of institutions requesting and initiating investigations into the claims made by the police whistleblower in line with their authorities, the President of the Republic and the State Attorney's Office attacked – the Ombudswoman's office. "I condemn the Ombudswoman's action, as such anonymous reports may be fabricated, invented," the President of the Republic declared. The Attorney's Office announced that it has "initiated inquiries" following the release of the testimony – which in terms of the criminal law still doesn't mean an investigation – but also claimed that "it is not under an obligation to inform the Ombudswoman's office about its actions on the basis of reports it sends it."

The Ombudswoman gave as good as she got. "This is no longer a question of migrants' rights, it is a question of the security of us all, including those police officers who do their job honourably, in a state that ought to guarantee the exercise of guaranteed rights to all, and adequately and efficiently investigate violations," she responded in an interview with the Croatian daily, *Novi list*. If there is no practical guarantee of an efficient investigation, there is effectively no barrier to the authorities' arbitrariness and unboundedness, no guarantee of the division of power, and this should particularly represent an extreme danger to the personal and political liberties of all the citizens of RC," Lora Vidović reminded.

One didn't need to wait too long for the unsettling testimony of the policemen who rebelled against the unlawfulness to receive a still more dramatic confirmation. On 24 July, the Croatian freelance journalist Barbara Matejčić published the first personal testimony by a police officer about the illegal expulsions that he and his colleagues were forced to carry out on orders from above. In a wide-reaching testimony by a "Zagreb policeman" published on the telegram.hr portal, the man whose identity the journalist has protected, told of how "he and his colleagues policemen carried out illegal transports of migrants from Zagreb to Croatia's border with BH and Serbia. We would bring them to the green border and tell them to cross back into Bosnia or Serbia. We didn't register them. Such were the orders we received from above in the police station, it wasn't the policemen's own idea."

The policeman told that he returned the first group of migrants "in early 2017". "I received my orders from the shift supervisor. So, I call the boss, tell him we've got a group of migrants. Citizens often report migrants when they see them, and sometimes we find them on the street ourselves. The shift supervisor then tells me he'll call back in 10 minutes. He calls my private number, where conversations aren't recorded, tells me we're taking them to the border. The migrants say: 'Asylum', and we say: 'No asylum' and put them in a police van where we disconnect the GPS emitter, so that no-one can tell where we are," the policeman declared in a comprehensive testimony.

The journalist also visited Velika Kladuša and Bihać, towns in western BH near the border with Croatia, where there are the most refugees and migrants. There, she claims, "in late June 2019 [she] heard dozens of similar refugees' testimonies: they crossed the Croatian border, the police caught them, smashed their mobile phones so they couldn't prove where they were caught, or document what the policemen had done to them, as well as to make it difficult to cross again. The majority, they claim, were also beaten up by the Croatian police. Many showed us fresh injuries, as well as healed scars inflicted by, they assert, the Croatian police."

In the same article, Milena Zajović from the non-governmental organisation Are You Syrious (AYS) stated that, according to AYS estimates, "there were as many as 10,000 expulsions from Croatia in 2018". "The Croatian police's illegal practices transcend any plausible possibility of denial. The

extent and consistency of the reports, video recordings and distressing testimonies by people who experienced bad treatment at the hands of the Croatian police point to a systematic and deliberate policy of the Croatian authorities," Zajović said.

None of this has so far swayed the Croatian authorities. Why should it, a cynic would wonder: on 30 July, Croatia became one of the first three countries visited by the newly elected president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. "Croatia is the youngest member of our Union and a true European success story!", von der Leyen tweeted ahead of her arrival to the Croatian capital. A day later, at a press conference with Croatian prime minister Andrej Plenković, she rephrased the same thought: "Croatia is the youngest EU member state, but extraordinary. The fact that you will hold the presidency early next year shows that Croatia is an exceptional success story for the European Union and that it can be a role model to other countries."

Journalists couldn't ask questions, and of their own accord, von der Leyen and Plenković said not a word about human rights violations. Or maybe they did? "I have great respect for the effort Croatia has made on its path towards the goal of accession to the Schengen Area and the Eurozone," said the European Commission president.

The path is clearly open for "the extraordinary member" and "European success story": for if the EU is willing to pay for its own illusion of cleanliness and security with a "Himmler-like merciless coldness" towards human rights, and even lives, why indeed wouldn't Croatia do the same? ■■■

## perpetuating past wars

# unrealised in the wars of the '90s, the idea of an all-Serb state is maintained by other means in peace

Latinka Perović

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The continuation of the crisis for which no end seems to be in sight, constant tensions between Serbia and the neighbouring countries – former Yugoslavian republics that have rounded themselves out as nation states; the deepened mistrust that works against reconciliation; public speech suffused with nationalism and racism; the illusiveness of political pluralism (all the political parties in Serbia offer variations on the same national programme) and a de facto party monism with the unavoidable party state; absence of reforms and the real question marks on the western European orientation of the political establishment, as well as the Serbian society; the unconvincing nature of the foreign policy; the “hollowed out” nature of institutions; academically “questionable” elite in institutions and the “unquestionable” one on the streets; in a word – the state between anarchy and autocracy – all this leads to the question, first, whether Serbia is returning to the nineties, and second, has Serbia ever left the nineties, and was the removal of Slobodan Milošević as a consensual autocrat enough for this to happen?

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If I wished to use one word to describe the state of consciousness in the Serbian body politic – in Serbia and in the states where Serb people also live – this word would certainly be – *frustration*. And after all, it is frustration upon which the defeated programme of solving the Serb question as a question of state has smouldered. Naturally there is also confusion. But, above all, it is a long-running phenomenon, an ideology whose reach is extensive and whose grasp is deep.

Throughout its history, Yugoslavia (1918-1941 and 1945-1991) has sought “a sustainable form”. Hence the dictatorships: personal and class – both in the name of ideology – and frequent changes to the Constitution. Not even the wars of the '90s were unexpected when they came. Soon after the death of Josip Broz Tito (1980), who,

although not of Serb descent, was congenial to Serb interests (the renewal of Yugoslavia, reliance on Russia, strong military, state socialism as opposed to the western European path of development with capitalism and liberalism), history, according to some historians, “blew up in our faces”. In fact, the controlled polarities of the second Yugoslavia came into view. Now without an arbiter, but also without a mechanism to resolve them.

As early as the mid-80s, a consensus was established among the intellectual, political, religious and military elite of Serbia on the solution to the Serb question. Due to scholarly authority of the institution, the key role was played by the Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of the Sciences and the Arts [SANU Memorandum] (1986).

The role of detonator in turn was played by the dissatisfaction with the 1974 Constitution, which had been adopted on the basis of balance of power (Serbia on one side, and all the other republics and both provinces on the other).

By stating that Yugoslavia was in crisis, the SANU Memorandum did not call into question the dominant political and economic system (one party and state-managed economy), but it did open the *Serb question* in Yugoslavia. A leader of the Serb people was also soon nominated (1987), which required a rift in the League of Communists of Serbia, which at the time was the sole political party. An active role in this was played by military and security circles, which had themselves remained frustrated after Aleksandar Ranković, the main rep-

resentative of Serbia in the party and state leadership of Yugoslavia, was removed from political life (1966). Representatives of the intellectual elite, themselves members of the Communist movement, welcomed the rift in the Serbian party leadership "with hope". It does not matter whether Slobodan Milošević took on the role of leader of the Serb people for pragmatic and political, or for ideological reasons; he gave the already achieved and articulated consensus on the solution of the Serb question as a question of state a new impetus.

The wars of the '90s were led "in the name" of the unity of the Serb people, its equality with other peoples, and returning a "lost" dignity. Serb interests were identified with a centralised and unitary Yugoslavia. As the majority people in Yugoslavia, but

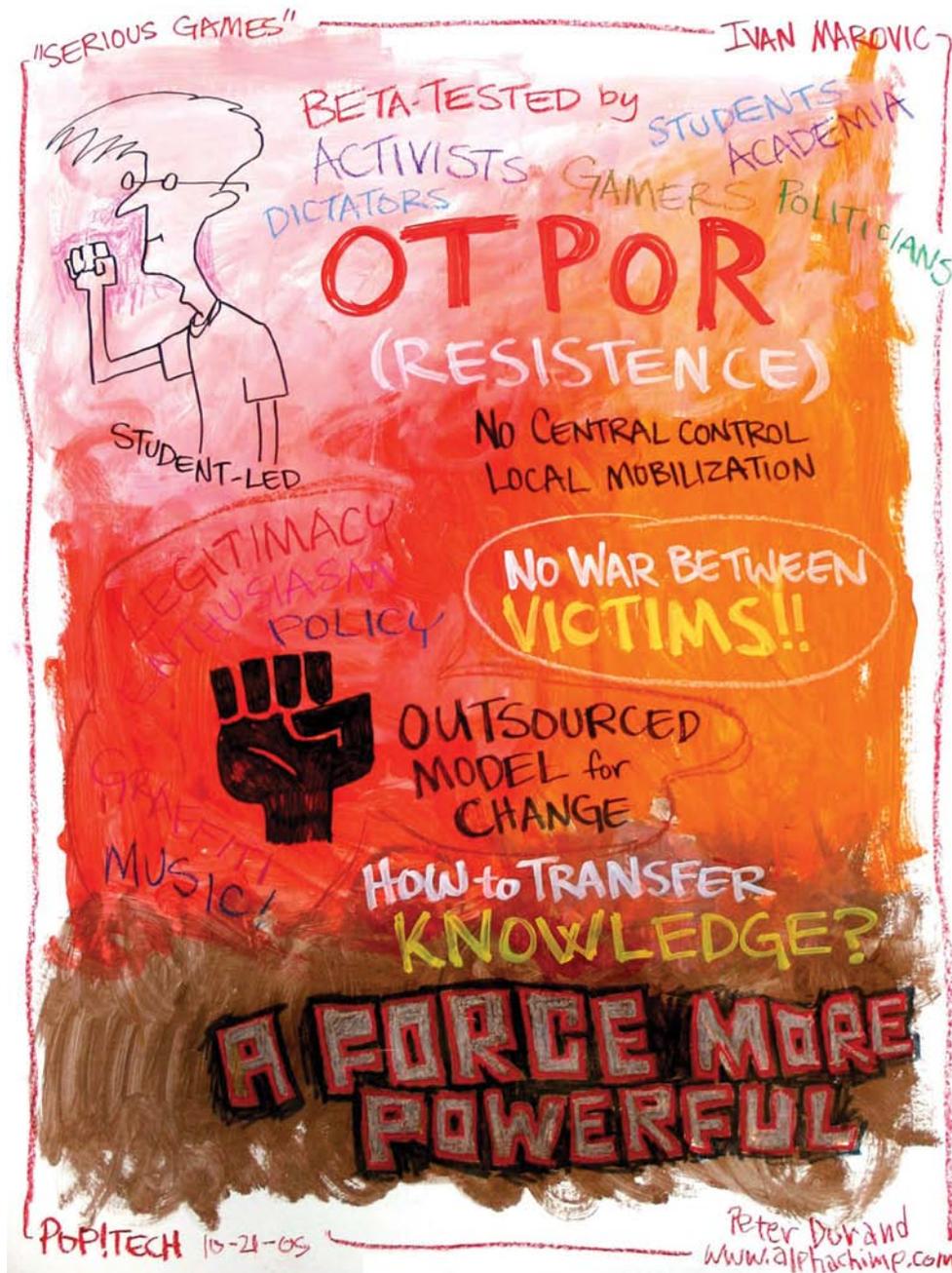


Photo by Ivan Marovic, Serious Games, flickr CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0

In the seven years it has ruled, with an opposition that does not oppose it with any substantially alternative programme, the Serbian Progressive Party has shown itself to be the inheritor of the idea of an all-Serb state. It has done so in two ways: first, by denying Serbia's responsibility for the wars of the '90s, and by ignoring the international institutions that reacted to the consequences of these wars – primarily, the Srebrenica genocide. A dramatic relativisation of war crimes is afoot in Serbia. Those convicted, once they see out their sentences, return to public life as deserving citizens. However, there are sources on everything, books have been written, films made. Serbia is therefore retreating into its own "truth". This deepens others' mistrust, and creates dangerous confusion in Serbia itself.

also on grounds of the number of victims in the creation of Yugoslavia (First World War) and its renewal (Second World War), it was as if its right to political hegemony in the state was taken as a given. The other peoples were expected to place the unity of the state above their own national interests. Much like the leader of the People's Radical Party, Nikola Pašić, placed the freedom of the Serb people as a whole above the civil liberty of Serbs in the Kingdom of Serbia. This, essentially imperialist, concept of the state, with a strategy of expansion to the south (the Balkan wars of 1912-1913) and the west (First World War 1914-1918), was defeated in the wars of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Resistance to hegemony brought to a conclusion the process of integration of other Yugoslavian nations. However, the "reserve" concept was likewise never realised. In addition to ethnic cleansing (termed the humane resettlement of population), the "Greater Serbia" also entailed changing the internal boundaries, which couldn't be done without wars.

After the wars of the '90s, there were expectations, fed also by the international public, that the new reality will be accepted, and that quick internal changes will ensue, by means of the European integration that had become the spirit of the times – especially following the fall of the Berlin wall (1989). History needed to be "jumped over": the development of the real state established as a priority, since the idea of "all the Serbs in a single state" had suffered defeat. Such expectations were quickly put paid to in Serbia with the murder of reformist prime minister Zoran Đinđić (2003).

The war did not happen because a solution to the Yugoslavian crisis couldn't be found, but because Serbia, in opposition to all other Yugoslavian republics, rejected the federal/confederal solution. Although there

had been earlier attempts, while Josip Broz Tito was still alive, to change the status of the autonomous provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina ("Blue book" 1977), since the mid-80s, no-one in the Serbian public scene championed the 1974 Constitution (an illustrative example would be the cult book *The Serbian Side of the War. Trauma and Catharsis in Historical Memory*). On the contrary, the centralisation of Serbia through revoking the autonomy of the provinces was just the first step in the imagined centralisation of Yugoslavia. When the latter came up against resistance, a second path was taken, organising the Serb population and creating Serb entities in other Yugoslavian republics with the goal of rounding out the greater Serbian state (the latest generation of authors of books on the dissolution of Yugoslavia has shown that the organisation, arms, paroles and "trailblazers" of the anti-bureaucratic revolution came from Serbia and received assistance from the Yugoslav People's Army and members of the State Security Service, that is, those institutions that were created during the 1941-1945 war to rebuild the Yugoslavian state, and after 1945 to consolidate it and defend it from internal and external enemies). All the rest belongs to the history of warfare and the break-up of the Yugoslavian state. Many details have been illuminated, but it is as if an overall explanation keeps slipping away, yet only that might help tell apart confusion, and even understandable nostalgia, from a more or less open repetition of history; ultimately, to articulate the real problems.

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The continuation of the crisis for which no end seems to be in sight, constant tensions between Serbia and the neighbouring countries – former Yugoslavian republics

that have rounded themselves out as nation states; the deepened mistrust that work against reconciliation; public speech suffused with nationalism and racism; the illusiveness of political pluralism (all the political parties in Serbia offer variations on the same national programme) and a *de facto* party monism with the unavoidable party state; absence of reforms and the real question marks on the western European orientation of the political establishment, as well as the Serbian society; the unconvincing nature of the foreign policy; the “hollowed out” nature of institutions; academically “questionable” elite in institutions and the “unquestionable” one on the streets; in a word – the state between anarchy and autocracy – all this leads to the question, first, whether Serbia is returning to the nineties, and second, has Serbia ever left the nineties, and was the removal of Slobodan Milošević as a consensual autocrat enough for this to happen?

More precise answers to these questions cannot be given without an insight into the history of the consensus created in Serbia in the latter half of the 80s. That was when the state, the society, the elites (through the institutions) and citizens (the people attending the mass rallies of the anti-bureaucratic revolution) expressed their agreement on the existence of the Serb question in the Yugoslavian state, as well as that the solution can only be attained through the *all Serbs in one state* paradigm.

The outcome is known. But has the paradigm, although defeated in the wars of the '90s, survived during peacetime, only by other means? When did Serbia embark upon this path of no return? Is the all-Serb state, in whose creation all means are permitted (“extra-institutional”, “extra-statutory”, military), merely a revolutionary improvisation, or an idea with deep historic roots? Reconstructing the historical context has proven key to understanding what had been happening in Serbia and Yugoslavia since the mid-80s, and what is happening in Serbia today. The idea of the liberation and unification of the Serb people totalised the Serbian agrarian society and established its priorities. It is no coincidence that at the Slobodan Milošević trial, the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague focused a great deal of attention precisely on the reconstruction of the historical context (beginning with Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije* of 1844, kept secret all the way until 1906, to the 1986 SANU memorandum). Or that witnesses for both

the prosecution and the defence were historians. Of course, the trial was of Slobodan Milošević as an individual, due to command responsibility, but in Serbia it was received as if it was the Serbian people that was put on trial. It was precisely the reconstruction of the historical context that showed that between 1987 and 2000 – since his appointment as the leader of the Serbian people to his defeat in the multiparty elections of 2000 – Serbia is much less explainable by the personality of Slobodan Milošević and the nature of his rule, than he by it – Serbia. The ideas of unifying the Serb people into a unitary state, much older than the phenomenon of Slobodan Milošević, and the frustrations over the large number of victims (“the victimised people”, “the celestial people”) in the First and Second World War for Yugoslavia. By all means – centralised and unitary, which the confederal constitution of 1974 rendered senseless.

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The idea of a state in which all Serbs, without exception, would live together, is essentially totalitarian. (The French foreign affairs minister told the Serbian scientist Jovan Žujović, one of the intellectuals sent by Nikola Pašić to allied countries to lobby for the creation of a Yugoslavian state: “Where did you ever see a head which can fit every last strand of its hair under a cap?”) Paradoxically, the idea of an all-Serb state reemerged as the Communist totalitarianism was being toppled. But Slobodan Milošević articulates, or more precisely, anticipates events, perhaps unconsciously. As did, besides, the SANU memorandum before him. It is not the ruling political and economic system that is being called into question, but the position of the Serb people in Yugoslavia. The latter would serve as the main motive for mobilising Serb masses. A home-made variant of Nazism looms (in his book, *Philosophy of Parochialism*, published in 1969 – at the time when the historical debate on Nazism began to take place in Germany, and the Warsaw Pact troops ended the illusion of real socialism with a human face by entering Prague – Radomir Konstantinović writes that Serbian nationalism is not an import from the German National Socialism, but the result of the parochial spirit. The spirit characterised by: collectivism, closedness, ignoring everything Other, historicity, the cult of death).

The attempt to solidify the unity of Yugoslavia with a new economic policy (the

economic reform of 1965) constituted a true revolution. (The Slovenian politician Boris Kraigher, an advocate of modernising the land, used to say: "Reform is war".) This was also how foreign historians of the Yugoslavian state saw the economic reform. Within the country, the economic reform met great resistance. It came from the supporters of the ideological dogma of equality, from the protected state economy, from the great differences in development that overlapped with national differences in Yugoslavia. The party and state leadership also took fright at the consequences that might have ensued from the economic reform, and so it was abandoned.

Aleksandar Ranković was removed from political life with the implausible explanation of eavesdropping; he was saddled with responsibility for "placing the security service above society," even though it was known that Aleksandar Ranković, the head of the security service, did not decide without the party leadership, and especially Josip Broz Tito. There was hope that there would be a "thawing" in the society, that there would be more freedoms. In reality, there was a strengthening of the military intelligence service, while simultaneously there were indisputable signs of liberalisation. The League of Communists underwent democratisation, a change of generations and an attempt to reorganise it and abandon the cell-based mode of organising.

The removal of Aleksandar Ranković was received in Serbia with a muffled resistance. Sympathy for him suddenly grew, seeing him as Tito's successor. That is when an informal opposition emerged in Serbia. Ideologically and politically, it was very heterogeneous. Internally, the opponent of Josip Broz Tito, it publicly took no steps against him. It prepared itself for the period that would follow him, believing that period to be near, if at least for reasons of biology.

The key figure of the Serbian informal opposition was writer Dobrica Ćosić. A popular writer, garlanded with many awards, enjoying a good reputation in the Party as well, he gradually focused public interest on the Serb question in Yugoslavia. At the May 1968 session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia, he came out with a demand to change the governing national politics. Previously, he had acquired the consent of the leading personalities of the Serbian intelligentsia. The theses he came out with represented the basis of his work in the Serbian Literary

Cooperative and the Serbian Academy of the Sciences and the Arts. He espoused the cultural unity of the Serb people, although in practice, he thought that it was already too late, and that more radical political solutions were needed. He organisationally and financially helped the creation of an all-Serb movement in Yugoslavia. He became the go-to address for Kosovo Serbs. He found people to politically engage Serbs in Croatia (psychiatrist Jovan Rašković) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (historian Milorad Ekmečić, shakespeareologist Nikola Koljević, psychiatrist Radovan Karadžić). He debated Slovenian intellectuals about the differences between the Slovenian and Serbian understanding of Yugoslavianism. He wrote and spoke about the de-Christianisation of Montenegro and the division of Macedonia. However, it was important to make an incursion into the Party that had ruled without rival for 40 years, and was historically grounded in Serbia. This happened at the Eighth session of the CCLCS (1987) – the authorship of the SANU memorandum was ascribed to him. But this was unnecessary: the memorandum was based on his well-known theses. Party leaderships were most forbearing with Dobrica Ćosić, for a simple reason: he frequently spoke what many thought, but found inopportune to say.

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After the death of Josip Broz Tito, in an atmosphere of expectation, the informal opposition became more open in its actions. Dobrica Ćosić was active in several ways. Through his literary narrative (the novel, *A Time of Death*), he emotionally captivated people, amplifying their frustration due to the position of the Serb people, the wartime winner and peacetime loser. The public's unease at the position of the Serb people was condensed by the cultural, scholarly institutions (the Serbian Literary Cooperative, the SANU). But what served as a detonator for such mood were the forums "on Kosovo – for Kosovo" held at the Association of Writers of Serbia in 1987.

It was not, therefore, Slobodan Milošević who "offered" the national programme: he merely took over the programme crystallised by the opposition intelligentsia in Serbia. For its part, this intelligentsia believed that the planetary crisis of Communism and its breakdown offer an historic chance to make an all-Serb state reality. This essentially totalitarian idea did not leave either an individual, or a social group or institution

the option of a different viewpoint, without marking them as “treacherous”.

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The explosion of the national programme formulated by the opposition intelligentsia and accepted by the ruling elite after the Eighth session of the CCLC of Serbia was not the result of “brilliant” coordination and “good” organisation. It stemmed from the established idea of an all-Serb state. The toppling of “bureaucratic”, “opportunist” leaderships, “cut off from the people”, in the provinces and other republics (Kosovo, Vojvodina, Montenegro) was only halted on the border of the Republic of Slovenia. The Yugoslavian party and state leadership was unsure. Thinking that Serbia’s campaign against Yugoslavia would be halted by the centralisation of Serbia, it not only gave the go-ahead to abolish the autonomies of the provinces, but – as shown by the most recent research – actually created pressure for this to happen. Other republics also gave their consent for the same reason. They treated the position of the provinces as an internal Serbian question, even though the 1974 Constitution had granted them the status of constitutive units in the Federation.

Although carried out with ease, the centralisation of Serbia was not however the only goal of the national policy followed by Slobodan Milošević since 1987. It turned out that it was a precondition for the centralisation of Yugoslavia. The 1990 change to the Constitution of SR Serbia, the right to reject provisions in the Federal Constitution that are not in line with provisions in the Constitution of SR Serbia; the incursion into the monetary fund – all this was an expression of Serbia’s new position, a position established regardless of the interests and rights of other republics. This position was laden with conflict. In his Gazimestan speech (1989) on the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Kosovo battle, Milošević indicated the possibility of war, but even before that speech, relations between Albanians and Serbs had been discussed at Writers’ Association of Serbia forums as if this had been a matter of war.

For political parties, which were, after all, also established in Serbia - the priority lay in solving the Serb question as a question of state. The Serbian Renewal Movement and the Democratic Party rejected the confederal solution, anachronous and fraught with civil war. For both these parties, the survival of Yugoslavia implied changing

the internal borders. The Serbian Radical Party rejected any Yugoslavia and saw the solution to the Serb question in the creation of a Greater Serbia. From 1987 to 1989, the opposition parties operated in synchrony with Slobodan Milošević. After the fall of Communism, a competition developed; the question arose: who will get whom? The opposition has sought to “put the knife under the throat” of Slobodan Milošević once he had done the “dirty” work. However, he holds the power, the military and security structures, propaganda and masses crying “Slobo, freedom!”\* The March 1991 demonstrations in Belgrade, when tanks came out onto the streets, showed the real balance of power.

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After the Dayton agreement (1995), the international community also began to see Slobodan Milošević as a peacemaker. However, he intensified the repression in his country (legislation on universities, the media; selective killings) and prepared for the war in Kosovo. The country was isolated and under sanctions. It was then that the opposition united in the intention of removing Slobodan Milošević. Not even the October 2000 changes went further than that. The notion that it was an error that “the 6<sup>th</sup> of October was absent” was one of the legends: there had been no programme to reconsider the recent past, nor was there time for a real turnabout. The western European integration served as another pseudo-metamorphosis to preserve the programme of an all-Serb state. Zoran Đinđić’s government was an exception – he himself more than anything perhaps. Using the historical opportunity brought by the breakdown of Communism in eastern Europe, he sought to make internal reforms a priority (above all, systemic reforms), while, he reckoned, the ideological changes would take time. Aware that this was impossible without international help, especially after wars, he showed willingness on the part of his government to fulfill the conditions it had been set in this aim. Above all, the cooperation with the International Criminal Court in the Hague and the extradition of Slobodan Milošević to the Court.

Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was murdered on 12 March 2003. The Belgrade press considered his murder an imperative: “If

\* Play on words, as the Serbo-Croatian word for freedom is *sloboda*. *tn*

Zoran Đinđić survives, Serbia won't". But which Serbia, what kind of Serbia? It was again Zoran Đinđić himself who understood. Just before his murder, he wrote about the different experiences of east European countries following 1989. Communism, or state socialism and the monopoly of the Communist party, wasn't the same thing in the case of Serbia and in the case of those east European countries (for instance, Czechoslovakia) which prior to 1945 had been industrially developed, had parliamentary democracy and a civil society. In fact, each east European country returned to what it had prior to Communism. For some countries, it was imposed and represented an aberration, a discontinuity. For others, in turn, the agrarian ones, that lacked a civil society, Communism, along with a pattern in property relations and law, came "from within", relying on the institutions of a patriarchal society ("finding the newest in the oldest").

After the Slovenian and Croatian declarations of independence, the process of fragmentation continued in the rest of Yugoslavia (the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the sovereignist movement in Montenegro; the Montenegrin independence referendum; the Kosovo declaration of independence).

All the presidents of the "truncated" Yugoslavia and the independent Serbia obstructed the cooperation with the Hague tribunal, which meant also with European integration. But the Serbian society did not desire much more, and, with its calls for an electoral boycott with "empty ballots" in order to remove the then-Prime Minister so that development could be unfrozen, the Serbian intelligentsia paved the way for the domination of a single party. The international circles also found that the change of the name of the Serbian Radical Party to Serbian Progressive Party allowed change by simulation.

In the seven years it has ruled, with an opposition that does not oppose it with any substantially alternative programme, the Serbian Progressive Party has shown itself to be the inheritor of the idea of an all-Serb state. It has done so in two ways: first, by denying Serbia's responsibility for the wars of the '90s, and by ignoring the international institutions that reacted to the consequences of these wars – primarily, the Srebrenica genocide. A dramatic relativisation of war crimes is afoot in Serbia. Those convicted, once they see out their sentences, return to public life as reputable citizens. However, there are sources on everything, books have been written, films made. Serbia is therefore retreating into its own "truth". This deepens others' mistrust, and creates dangerous confusion in Serbia itself.

At the same time, the Serbian Progressive Party maintains the idea of the state of Serbia as the central point of the Serb people. Ideas that had been used to prepare the war of the '90s are seeing a renewal among the intelligentsia. There had not been so much as an attempt at self-reflection when certain important occasions have been marked, such as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SANU memorandum.

There is a strong tendency for the societies in the countries in the region to identify with extreme nationalist tendencies. For this reason, the western European orientation of Serbia is questionable, in the sense of values. Remaining prisoner to the dogmatic idea of an all-Serb state, Serbia cannot liberate itself from the frustration with the, truly enormous, sacrifice it has underwent for a cause that cannot be accomplished. ■■■

# revisionism in Croatia 1989-2019

Ivo Goldstein

Croatian revisionists keep comparing the Partisans' and Communists' mass killings and crimes of 1945 with Ustasha crimes. The Croatian public is persistently and aggressively being served the insupportable proposition that "all totalitarianisms are the same", a logic from which then follows that Ustasha crimes and Partisan-Communist crimes are in fact equivalent. Advocates of the thesis of the "equivalence of all totalitarianisms" often invoke the 2 April 2009 resolution of the European Parliament on European conscience and totalitarianism, but its point G clearly states that "whereas millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe", but that "the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged".

Since the late eighties, an endeavour to deny, or at least downplay and cover up some incontrovertible facts about the Ustasha Independent State of Croatia (ISC) and the period of World War Two has been present in Croatian politics, historiography, opinion journalism, media, school textbooks and public life in general. It is a specifically Croatian kind of revisionism.

In 1989-90, revisionism emerged in Croatia as a historiographic retardation and a socio-political anomaly. Unlike the Western countries, in Croatia since 1990, the new political authorities tolerated and encouraged it, and partly included it in their policies. Its general feature and basic starting point – the fetishism of the state and fetishising the Croatian nation-building idea. Anything throughout history that had worked towards Croatian national independence is valued most positively and is uncritically overemphasised, while weaknesses or guilts are forgiven or at least minimised. Opposite historic tendencies are generally negatively valued, and their

weaknesses or guilts uncritically overblown. Such revisionist inclinations, going in both directions, do not stop at suppressing and obfuscating facts, which sometimes goes so far as to spill over into direct falsifications and lies. In this context, the Ustasha ISC suddenly emerges in a relatively positive light, regardless of its Nazi-Fascist essence, its total political and military siding with the historical Evil, of the genocidal and other crimes it had committed. Conversely, the weaknesses and guilts of both the Yugoslavian states (both the monarchy of 1918-1941 and the Socialist state of 1945-1991), and especially the crimes committed in their names, are absolutised and generalised to the extent that they become arguments in a rigid nationalist politics, and, where possible, justification for Ustasha crimes, or at least for their relativisation.

The causes of Croatian revisionism are manifold, but can be reduced to three basic ones. First, during the 45 years of Socialist Yugoslavia, the phenomenon of Ustashaism and the ISC was rarely approached in

Efforts to downplay and deny ISC crimes produced the opposite effect in the nineties. They drew the attention of the global scientific community to the genocide in the ISC, which had previously attracted relatively limited attention from Western historiography. By around 2010, a new generation of historians came of age abroad, beginning to address Ustashism and the ISC. They are more or less unanimous in their assessment of the nature of the Ustasha regime as criminal.

a sober, analytical way, but rather, most often, with blanket a priori evaluations, often also exaggerations, underpinned by boring propagandist phraseology. At the same time, discussing Partisan and Communist war and postwar crimes was most strictly prohibited. When democratisation in the late eighties made this possible, an explosion ensued on the other extreme. Discoveries of Partisan and Communist crimes became media sensations, and were used as propaganda material for xenophobic and political agitation, while Ustasha crimes were covered over with the artificial fog of relativisation, justification and disavowal.

Second, the authors in Croatia dealing with historical revisionism are most often not motivated by the scientific study of the recent past, but by certain political aims. At the very least, it can be said that they approach the work with political prejudice. These are right-wing, or extreme right political orientations one of whose fundamental characteristics is an unwillingness to appropriately confront the crimes committed by the Ustasha authorities during the ISC. Also active was the influence of the extremist segment of Croatian political emigration that never broke with Ustashism. The Croatian Democratic Union (CDU), the party that came into power in 1990, announced a “reconciliation between the Ustashe and the Partisans”, with the aim of overcoming the divisions in the Croatian body politic as one of the basic tenets of its political programme. In order to do so, it was essential to remove from Ustashism the ignominy of having been a faithful Nazi-Fascist ally and perpetrator of the most brutal genocidal

crimes and crimes against the civilian population during World War Two. This would earn Ustashism at least a modicum of legitimacy to participate in building the Croatian society surrounded as it is with the dominant European democracy. This has proven to be impossible without radical historical revisionism, accompanied by an unavoidable denial or falsification of facts.

And third, Croatian historical revisionism was partly a reaction to the swelling of Serb nationalism and historical revisionism. The first shoots of such tendencies in Serbia could be seen as far back as the late 60s, in literary texts, and later also in texts by politician Dobrica Ćosić (1921-2014), reaching their climax in the latter half of the 80s, with the overexaggeration of the number of victims of the Ustasha camp Jasenovac (a number of 700,000 or more victims was thrown around, while in reality those killed numbered between 80 and 100,000). This also led to accusations of “genocidality” of the entire Croatian people. This was a psychological and media preparation for the 1991 war and aggression against Croatia. At the time, some prominent Serbian politicians stated that the 1991 war was not truly a war, but a “revenge” for Ustasha crimes committed between 1941-1945.

The key person in the development of Croatian historical revisionism was Franjo Tuđman (1922-1999), especially as the author of a book, *The Wastelands of Historical Reality* (1989). In the better part of *Wastelands*, Tuđman successfully refutes the tall tale about the 700,000 victims of Jasenovac and the genocidality of the Croats, but from time to time he falls for the other extreme. Using a one-sided selection of data, he inappropriately minimises the total number of victims, especially Serbs, claiming that “between 30 and 40,000 prisoners really died in the Jasenovac camp, mostly Gypsies, followed by Jews and Serbs, as well as Croats”. Moreover, he indirectly downplays the responsibility of the Ustasha by means of an odd “distribution of guilt”. Thus Jews, in addition to being the victims of Jasenovac, suddenly also become complicit in it.

Tuđman’s responsibility as a promoter of Croatian historical revisionism is all the greater for the fact that he was its main patron in politics and public life. Tuđman opened these paths with a declaration made at the First General Congress of the CSU in February 1990, that “the ISC was not only a Fascist creation, but also an expression of the Croatian people’s centuries-old desire



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for an independent state". This statement set in motion a furious public debate about the character of the ISC. Having grasped the dangers that stemmed from the ambiguity of his statement, in later denials, Tudman disavowed any connections to Nazism and Ustashism, but he never publicly distanced himself from the broad ambition to design the identity of the Croatian state precisely in the spirit of his declaration.

President Tudman, motivated by the Spanish example of Caudillo Franco, also advanced the idea of the "reconciliation of all the Croats", that is, a reconciliation between the Ustashe and the Partisans, or their sons and grandsons. The idea of reconciliation, as attractive as it may have appeared in principle, actually boosted the revisionist historiography, allowing extreme nationalism and pro-Ustasha excesses to be tolerated in public.

Thus, in the nineties, Josip Jurčević, Josip Pečarić, Ljubica Štefan, Mladen Ivezić, Rikard Gumzej and others burst through into the public arena as revisionist authors.

The death of Franjo Tuđman in 1999 and the moderate left and centre coalition taking office after the 2000 election marked the beginning of the deconstruction of the authoritarian political system established in Croatia during the nineties. Consequently, a new stage in the activities of Croatian revisionists also arrived. They lost a great deal of their room for manoeuvre in the wider public. In those years, the Croatian state leadership (President Stjepan Mesić and Prime

Ministers Ivica Račan and Ivo Sanader) gave out clear statements about the unacceptability of promoting the tradition of the ISC and the Ustasha movement.

However, the radical-nationalist public's interest in revisionist views remained.

One of the theses of revisionism in Croatia and its earlier roots is the myth of the supposed rebellion of the Serb people as the cause of Ustasha crimes. After the downfall of the ISC in 1945, this remained a rare argument that the Ustasha emigration could use to try to justify their acts when faced with the clear evidence of the criminal nature of the Ustasha regime.

In addition, it was sought to shift part of the responsibility to "wild Ustashe" and "nastaše"\*, over whom Pavelić and the Ustasha movement allegedly had no control, and who "on occasion responded to Chetnik excesses in kind, what's more, who did so in their own country as the defenders of their nation state". Naturally, that too is a lie – there were individual Ustasha crimes that took place without the regime's knowledge, but displacements of people into Serbia, deportations into camps and mass crimes against Serbs, which included the killing of women and children, were carried out by Ustasha units under direct control of the Ustasha leadership, headed by the *Poglavnik* Ante Pavelić.

Instead of impartial analysis of the Ustasha ideology, Croatian revisionists unconditionally accepted the Ustasha regime's value system, denying its Nazi-Fascist character. Conversely, they used the crimes committed by the Chetniks to justify Ustasha terror against the Serbs. Such views became commonplace in texts by Croatian revisionists, even though many of them were careful to distance themselves from a full justification of the Ustasha regime, satisfying themselves "merely" with equating the culpability of the Ustasha movement and that of its victims for the terror carried out in the ISC from 1941 on.

As far as the genocide against Jews in the ISC goes, the revisionists accept the responsibility of the Ustashe to various degrees, but seek to mitigate it by pointing out examples of many Croats who had saved Jews, falsely claiming that Pavelić's wife was a Jew, and by pointing out that senior regime officials had Jewish relatives or had them-

\* Those accused by Ustasha sympathisers of being dishonest recent converts, etymologically, "nastati" means "to come into existence", "to become".

Translator's Note

selves been Jews (which is only true to a very small degree). Finally, they shifted responsibilities for the genocide on to the Nazis, who were said to have exerted pressure on the Ustashe to carry out anti-Jewish measures and kill Jews en masse. All this of course is a lie, since by summer 1942, the Ustashe perfectly autonomously dispatched more than 70% of the Jewish community in ISC territory into camps.

In order to create some sort of balance in the public debate, the revisionists highlight the Partisan and Communist killings in 1945, equating them with Ustasha killings. The worst recent example of this is Josip Jurčević's book, *Bleiburg – Yugoslavian Postwar Crimes against the Croats*, published in 2005. On top of the numerous terminological and factual errors, the book remains silent on the criminal nature of the Ustasha government, only recognising the repressive nature of ISC authorities in a single sentence in a book over 400 pages long, seeking at once to blunt this assessment by categorising this repressiveness under a denominator common also to other totalitarian regimes, primarily the Yugoslavian Socialist government established in 1945. Jurčević cites numerous examples of wartime and postwar eliminations and death sentences carried out by the Partisans, the Yugoslavian Army and Yugoslavian secret services, but fails to mention anywhere that a significant portion of those Croats and Muslim Bosniaks killed or sentenced to death at the time were also responsible for, and guilty of, a series of Ustasha crimes (as well as Serbs for Chetnik crimes). On the contrary, Jurčević portrays Ustasha crimes as a construct of Communist propaganda aimed at smearing the Ustasha movement and fostering hatred against its members. By selectively quoting sources, he seeks on several occasions to construct a claim that the Yugoslavian Communist government hated the Croatian state so much that even in postwar lists of victims of war, it denied such status to those killed on the ISC side, even though documents contained in his own book refute this.

Efforts to downplay and deny ISC crimes produced the opposite effect in the nineties. They drew the attention of the global scientific community to the genocide in the ISC, which had previously attracted relatively limited attention from Western historiography. By around 2010, a new generation of historians came of age abroad, beginning to address Ustashism and the ISC. They are

more or less unanimous in their assessment of the nature of the Ustasha regime as criminal. Among others, they include Andrej Angrick, Nevenko Bartulin, Max Bergholz, Carl Bethke, Mark Biondich, Martina Bitunjac, Tomislav Dulić, Alexander Korb, Rob McCormick, Goran Miljan, Tea Sindbæk, Rory Yeomans.

In the years following the publication of Jurčević's book, Croatian revisionists' interest turned to the Jasenovac camp – seeking on the one hand to relativise the horrors that took place in the camp during the ISC, while, on the other, promoting the absurd thesis that the camp continued to exist after 1945, even until as late as 1951. The modestly-sized volume by Vladimir Mrkoci and Vladimir Horvat, *The Bare Lie of the Jasenovac Camp*, issued in 2008, lies at the beginning of this new wave. The only documents the two authors used from a huge amount of source material were those that portrayed the camp solely as a punitive and labour camp, while consistently passing over documents (including Ustasha and German documents) that clearly testified to the mass genocidal killing and a death camp as the dominant character of the camp.

The thesis that the Ustasha camp Jasenovac continued to operate after 1945 began to be advanced since the late eighties. Until then, the alleged Communist camp Jasenovac had never been so much as mentioned by any of the revisionist authors. In his *Wastelands*, Franjo Tuđman was the first to propose the thesis that there existed witnesses and archival material on the existence of the Jasenovac camp after 1945, but failed to mention any details. Here he – intentionally or unintentionally – confuses Jasenovac with the Stara Gradiška prison (which had existed since Austro-Hungarian times and was in operation up until the eighties). After Tuđman, other authors appeared, expanding on this thesis of his, but without any real arguments.

In 2014, the Society for Research of the Threefold Jasenovac Camp was established. Its founders claimed that the first Jasenovac, until May 1945, was an Ustasha camp, the second, from 1945-1948, Communist, and the third, from 1948-1951, used against the Cominformists.

The assumed postwar Communist camp in Jasenovac was invented in order to create a kind of "balance of memory" in relation to the horrors of the Ustasha camp. In point of fact, during the prisoner breakout and the subsequent retreat of the Ustashe

on 22 April 1945, the Jasenovac camp was torn down. After liberation, inmates of the Viktorovac-Sisak Forced Labour Institution were brought to the area to clear the ruins. Despite a great deal of effort in recent years, advocates of the thesis of the continued existence of the Jasenovac camp after 1945 have so far not found a single living witness who might speak about the horrors of the camp, do not have a single written account, nor a single name of a person to have perished in this imaginary camp.

In 2015, the Society published a book by Vladimir Horvat, Igor Vukić, Stipe Pilić and Blanka Matković called *The Jasenovac Camp – Investigations*, in which the authors have claimed that between 1941-1945, Jasenovac wasn't a death camp in which the Ustashe committed genocidal mass murder of the Roma, Jews and Serbs, and political mass murder of Croats. It was supposedly merely an ordinary detention, penal and labour camp, where the odd individual killing would occur.

In 2015, the president of the Society for Research of the Threefold Jasenovac Camp, Stjepan Razum, who is also head of the Archdiocesan Archive in Zagreb, went even further than the four authors in his public statements, claiming that the Jasenovac camp was a “myth” planted on the Croats, that “an incommensurably larger number of people perished in the postwar Jasenovac camp than did in the wartime camp”. Moreover, that the wartime Jasenovac camp was a “labour and transit camp”, that “killings were not carried out there”, that “the list of victims of Jasenovac was entirely fake and fabricated”, that “the ISC did not kill Serbs” in Jasenovac, “but that after the war, Partisans and Communists killed Croat patriots”. Razum claims that in his public statements in recent years, the prominent opinion journalist and publisher Slavko Goldstein (1928-2017) sought “to ascribe the darkest features to the ISC”, calling it the “Goldsteinisation of the ISC”.

At the same time, these same authors will highlight that the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, saved Jews and others who were persecuted. As they are denying the Ustasha genocide, the question logically arises: who was it from that Stepinac was saving the Jews and others who were prosecuted?

In recent years, Igor Vukić has been gaining prominence among the revisionists. By around 2000, Vukić was a very good journalist and editor for liberal and left newspa-

pers, but changed his views entirely over the past ten years or so. After his first revisionist texts about Jasenovac, which he published as a feuilleton in the Catholic weekly, *Glas koncila*, he co-authored the aforementioned book, *The Jasenovac Camp – Investigations*. Finally, in 2018, he published a book, *The Jasenovac Labour Camp*, which can only be described as disgraceful. For example, Vukić selectively quotes sources from Jasenovac inmate Milko Riffer's book about theatrical performances in Jasenovac and similar, while “forgetting” to mention that Riffer also describes the most savage extermination of thousands upon thousands people. Vukić accepts Jasenovac doctors' reports on inmate deaths (e.g. heart failure), and takes them at face value. However, he passes over witness statements asserting that such diagnoses were fabricated, that the doctors used to write them after the fact, under pressure to keep up appearances. For instance, camp survivor dr. Nikola Nikolić has described how some adults were registered as having died of childhood diseases or conjunctivitis, one man as having died of ovarian tumour. Furthermore, Vukić describes an international commission entering the camp in February 1942, quoting only those reports that describe the camp as a tidy and well-managed place, where all necessary care was taken of the inmates, but entirely omits the report by German captain Arthur Haefner, who saw through the Ustasha attempt to disguise the true state of affairs, calling Jasenovac “a camp of the worst kind, comparable to Dante's hell.”

Finally, Vukić didn't ask himself the most banal of questions – why were men, women and children in the camps at all, why were they taken away and imprisoned (were they all sentenced as offenders? Why imprison people in a labour camp at all?).

Slavko Goldstein's book, *Jasenovac – Tragedy, Mythomania, Truth*, published in 2016, is a polemical and argued response to this, as well as any, attempt to minimise or deny the criminal and genocidal character of the Jasenovac camp, as well as to seek to establish in scientific and scholarly circles a new historical truth of the postwar Communist camp in Jasenovac. Over the past three years, Đorđe Mihovilović, Nataša Mataušić, Goran Hutinac, Mirjana Kasapović, Ivo Goldstein and others have joined Goldstein with their writings.

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ings and crimes of 1945 with Ustasha crimes. The Croatian public is persistently and aggressively being served the insupportable proposition that “all totalitarianisms are the same”, a logic from which then follows that Ustasha crimes and Partisan-Communist crimes are in fact equivalent. Advocates of the thesis of the “equivalence of all totalitarianisms” often invoke the 2 April 2009 resolution of the European Parliament on European conscience and totalitarianism, but its point G clearly states that “whereas millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe”, but that “the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged”. By setting the text of the resolution into the context of Croatian history, we unambiguously reach the conclusion that Partisan and Communist crimes cannot be equated with Ustasha crimes, as these are “unique”.

However, Croatian revisionists have strong support in right-wing circles, the Catholic church, even some segments of the authorities, especially at regional and local level. And so, there is no end on the horizon to the debate on the criminal character of the Ustasha regime. Croatia’s dealing with its own past is still nowhere near its conclusion.

From many aspects, this problem is absurd, especially since after the summer/autumn of 1943, certainly the majority of the Croatian people supported the Antifascist Partisan movement, led by a Croat, marshal Josip Broz Tito. ■■■

# the different faces of fascism

Erich Rathfelder

It was the late 1960ies. The student movement in West Germany had abated. But the social problems it had confronted were not overcome. There were still old Nazis in the institutions, in the legal system, among the doctors, in schools and universities, in the big parties of the so-called “bourgeois” camp.

Although the Nazi ideology was concealed by liberal democratic institutions, the ideology of the nationalist “community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) lived on in the background, especially in the bourgeoisie, but also in the sub-proletariat, and it manifested itself in the aggressions of the “perfectly normal” people towards all those who were “different”, who loved both the Rolling Stones and jazz (“Negro music”), who broke out of the excruciatingly heavy conversations at the coffee table and asked questions. “What did you in fact do during the Nazi era?” These questions and the emotions they triggered broke entire families.

The unspoken, but then still existing ideology of the “*Volksgemeinschaft*” was like a stronghold. But at least it was broken in 1969 by the election of the resistance fighter and social democrat Willy Brandt as Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. Brandt was elected to power both by the social democrat trade unions, which had regained their strength, and by the enlightened sections of the middle class, which were on the verge of change.

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Adorno’s sentence that nationalism leads to fascism is still key for the discussion about right-wing extremist terror systems, because it highlights the danger of social movements that are mobilised by nationalism. The social discussions in the democratic societies established after the Second World War had at least one thing in common throughout the West: the fascist, National Socialist and other forms of right-wing totalitarian rule were analysed by liberal and left-wing minds as social phenomena, as phenomena that continue to exist in the societies and continue to pose a danger to the democratic-liberal order, even though at times their mass basis had collapsed. How quickly this can change can be seen today with the emergence of nationalist right-wing populism and even neo-Nazism.

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## burden of history

The atmosphere changed and there was scope for public discussion about the burden of history. Not only did information about Auschwitz and the crimes of the Nazis become available, but in this discussion, the question of guilt was tackled, as well as the questions of the complicity of broad strata of “little people”, of racism and anti-Semitism, but also the role of “us”, the next generation, “our” responsibility towards this German history and society. How could it happen that a society once regarded as a cultured nation had allowed itself to be drawn into such unfathomable crimes?

A parallel critical society emerged, but one that was contradictory in itself. There were also many on the left who wanted to flee from this differentiated discussion and who characterised the German society of the time generally as “fascist”. Those who adopted the communists’ definition of anti-fascism ignored the problem of totalitarianism, which also applied to the rule of Stalin or Mao Zedong. Some leftists no longer thought it possible to change society by the long route of discussion and through the institutions, but adopted the general accusation of fascism against society to fight the old Nazis and the representatives of the “pig system” with terror. For Red Army Faction militants, ultimately all those who would not join their group were “fascists”. Their struggle was therefore hopeless and their social analysis wrong.

The discussion at the Frankfurt School, among the philosophers Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and later Jürgen Habermas, to name but a few, took us further. This discussion revolved around the manipulation of people in totalitarianism – but also democratic-capitalist forms of rule. The terminology adopted from Sigmund Freud, the relationship between the “ego” and the “id”, ultimately led to the realisation that the ego-strengthened individual could best resist manipulation. This means that in a society of free and self-confident people, a “discourse free of domination” can be produced in which totalitarian ideologies no longer have a chance to dominate society.

In the course of the following decades, West German society developed with its contradictions into an open and liberal society capable of admitting the crimes committed by the Nazis and the associated guilt. The memorial to the victims of the Shoah directly next to the Reichstag in Berlin is perceived with astonishment by visitors from all over the world. The open discussion about National Socialism is also the key to understanding why right-wing radical and nationalist authoritarian positions in (West) Germany have so far remained politically irrelevant – in contrast to East Germany or other parts of Europe.

With such a nationalist, inhuman ideology, with its claims to world domination, its racism and anti-Semitism, with its organized will to destroy, National Socialism is a unique. Hitler was therefore not a “fascist” in the usual sense, he was a National Social-



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ist. Benito Mussolini was a fascist. Fascism, like National Socialism, had imperialist aspirations, wanted to renew the Roman Empire and conquer all countries around the Mediterranean. Mussolini developed around himself a leader cult as “Duce” and built a totalitarian state. But he did not build extermination camps, he was not an anti-Semite. Other than Mussolini and Hitler, “Caudillo” Franco in Spain did rely on the state party “Falange Española Tradicionalista” after the devastating Civil War 1936-39, which emulated the Italian fascists, but his true power base remained the Army and the Catholic Church.

The three examples show that each country has its own character, including when it comes to right-wing nationalist dictatorships. National Socialism, fascism and Francoism have in common the leader principle and totalitarian structures that were directed against all liberal organisations and social movements. They differed in other areas of politics. Germany, organized by the Nazis, broke any broader resistance with brutal force by the Gestapo and an unprecedented security system, leaving only individual attacks on Hitler and attempts such as Count Stauffenberg’s 1944 plot as acts of resistance. In Italy, despite 20 years of Mussolini’s rule, popular resistance was never completely extinguished and immediately became manifest in 1943 when the dictator was overthrown. Despite the developing mass movement against his rule, Franco died peacefully in his bed in 1975 and even appointed King Juan Carlos as his successor. Despite all differences, what those “fascisms” have in common is that the antidemocratic, totalitarian rule established by them was able to win over broad social classes (national community). Large parts of the petty bourgeoisie, the middle classes, and especially the wealthy class, formed the mass foundation of these systems of rule.

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the democratic-liberal order, even though at times their mass basis had collapsed. How quickly this can change can be seen today with the emergence of nationalist right-wing populism and even neo-Nazism in Germany, the strengthening of the fascists and right-wing populism in Italy and nationalism in Spain.

## the partisans

It was only in the countries of the east of the continent occupied by German troops that there was significant armed resistance during the Second World War. After the occupation by German troops, a resistance formed in France as well, but the intensity of the resistance in the West could not be compared to that of the East. In Russia, Ukraine and likewise Poland, armed partisan troops were formed which sabotaged the occupying forces. But none of these movements reached the importance of the partisans in Yugoslavia.

Of course, the partisan victories can also be attributed to the organisational skills and military genius of Josip Broz, nicknamed Tito. But more importantly, the partisan movement succeeded in mobilising millions of people for cosmopolitan human values in the face of the crimes of the occupying powers and their allies, especially the Croatian Ustasha, with the slogan “bratstvo and jedinstvo” (“brotherhood and unity”). They fought not only against the occupying forces and their allies, but essentially also for a peaceful perspective bringing together the nations of the Balkans within the framework of a socialist society. More importantly, they won, and re-founded Yugoslavia.

In contrast to the developments in the West, however, in the East in general and more importantly still in Yugoslavia, the term fascism was used as a battle cry especially against the occupying powers. The German Wehrmacht, the SS, and the Italian troops, were considered fascists. But were Chetniks and Ustashe understood as fascists? Were the Serbian Nedić or Croatian Pavelić regimes merely pro-fascist collaborators? How are the Serbian Ljotić troops and the Chetniks to be classified? The *Mitläufer* (fellow travellers) in the NDH state, the Domobrani in Croatia and Slovenia, the Handzhar troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

If one takes the Western discussion about fascism as a yardstick, the ideologies of the “pro-fascist” nationalist extremists

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Only in limited intellectual and urban circles of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and the other republics has there been a deeper discussion about the guilt of their own national societies for the crimes of the Second World War. A “domination-free” dialogue of responsible citizens with lasting effects on the individual societies did not take place either under socialism or after the devastating wars of the 1990s and the establishment of new “democratic” regimes.

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like those of the Ustashe, who even set up extermination camps on their own initiative, should have resulted in strict criticism in Croatia itself. Because a large portion of the society supported the NDH state of the “*Poglavnik*” Ante Pavelić. The varieties of fascism and right-wing nationalist extremism should also have been covered by a controversial debate among the population itself – especially in Serbia.

After 1945, Tito was concerned with once again bringing the societies of the Yugoslav nations together after the catastrophe and the civil war that took place under the occupation regime. Nationalist positions were suppressed; the trenches were supposed to be filled up “from above”. “Family traditions” were juxtaposed with “state ideology” (Žarko Puhovski). However, the old ideologies continued to live in large portions of the society through oral history. Given the limitations of freedom of speech, the Tito regime was unable to allow a critical processing of history in the greater part of the population, with its celebration of the heroism of the Partisans in the fight against “fascism”. Thus, does the definition of pro-fascist collaboration used by the Yugoslav

state not already implicitly contain an exoneration?

Only in limited intellectual and urban circles of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and the other republics has there been a deeper discussion about the guilt of their own national societies for the crimes of the Second World War. A “domination-free” dialogue of responsible citizens with lasting effects on the individual societies did not take place either under socialism or after the devastating wars of the 1990s and the establishment of new “democratic” regimes. The current establishment of the victim myth in Serbia and the aggressive historical revisionism in all societies of former Yugoslavia, the fundamentals of anti-anti-fascism, were described by Todor Kuljić in his book *Disputed Pasts*. The glorification of the NDH present nowadays in Croatia and the rehabilitation of the Chetniks in Serbia, as well as the simultaneous silence on the existence of the pro-Hitler Nedić regime and Ljotić’s troops are an expression of that process.

In any case, it is certain that the processing of “fascism” in its social dimensions has not yet succeeded in any of Yugoslavia’s successor states. ■■■

## radicalisation and maintenance of power

# the 'stability' of Albanian democracy without rule of law: political polarization, captured institutions and periodical crisis

Arolda Elbasani

To the external observer, Albanian political developments in the last two years may suggest an exceptional, almost dramatic, political crisis. The February 2019 decision of the opposition to relinquish *en bloc* its parliamentary seats is probably the culmination of this ongoing crisis.<sup>1</sup> The radical act followed the opposition's systematic boycotts of the parliament after the 2017 general election. This time around, however, the boycott came with an ultimatum – resignation of the elected government and holding fresh elections under a transitional government chosen by the opposition – as the only way to negotiate the crisis.<sup>2</sup> The rationale for the ultimatum to the elected government appears to draw on a similar radical political discourse where the current PM and members of the executive are daily branded as 'gangs', 'bandits' and 'criminals' allegedly involved, among other things, in voter fraud, organized crime, smuggling and cannabization of the country.

Few or none of those accusations have been proven by the courts or other institutions in charge. International indices of democratization, moreover, don't corroborate any theory about the radical deterioration of democracy, nor are there any state of the rule of law (RoL) indicators that would justify the need for government to resign. The state of democracy has remained pretty similar over time and has slightly improved when comparing the current government's

The dilemmas about the immediate 'dramatic' crisis then, are more of a question of a 'stable' and persistent problem of democracy without RoL, which is apt to radicalization and disruptions. The explanatory factors, therefore, should be sought in what shapes and maintains this vicious circle of hybrid democracy that suffers from poor RoL and periodic disruptions. We argue that this kind of democracy without RoL builds on two interrelated phenomena – 1) polarization cum radicalization of the political spectrum; 2) weak and captured institutions unable to serve as trusted mechanisms of peaceful resolution of conflict.

scores (2013-18) with those of the previous one, that was led by the parties that are now in opposition (2009-13) (Table 1). As for the state of RoL, in general, RoL indicators show some improvement during the period 2004-2008 and then decline again during the subsequent 2009-13 government as much as the current one (Table 2)<sup>3</sup>.

1 Euroactiv. *Albania's opposition MPs to resign in protest*. February 19, 2019. Available at: <https://www.euroactiv.com/section/enlargement/news/albanias-opposition-mps-to-resign-in-protest/>

2 Semini, L Lazar. *EU, US urge non-violence as Albanian opposition protests*. Daily Herald, May 25, 2019. Available at: <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20190525/news/305259948>

3 We have used data from Nations in Transit and BTI in order to trace the trends of different indicators, but also to triangulate data from different sources.

Yet, having relinquished its parliamentary seats, the opposition also took its revolutionary battle onto the streets by leading a series of protests marked by violence, attacks on state institutions and outright threats of escalation of conflict.<sup>4</sup> The crisis took a new turn with the approach of the local elections of June 30<sup>th</sup>, which the opposition not only boycotted, but also tried to prevent by vandalizing polling stations and threatening voters and officials in charge. Only a nominal warning by the US to opposition leaders that “if there are acts of violence in future protests, we will consider them responsible” put a hold on acts of violence. However, it didn't stop the political tensions or institutional strife, which escalated after a June 8<sup>th</sup> decree by the Albanian president cancelling the upcoming elections.<sup>5</sup> The decree was another controversial act of intra-institutional strife to the extent that it came after the start of the campaign and without consultation with any parties, or setting a new date for the elections.

Since then, the protests have abated, violent protests were abandoned, international actors backed holding the elections on the set date, elections were peacefully held and supervised by the ODIHR, the

presidential decree was overturned by the Venice commission for overstepping the president's constitutional rights, and the president himself became the subject of a parliamentary investigation into abuse of power. The country has, thus, resumed its eventful path to democracy, punctuated by a radical political discourse, revolutionary political behaviour including threats and acts of violence, periodic boycotts of elected institutions as well as quasi-regular moments of institutional crisis. The international indices of democratization, on the other hand, confirm a general stagnation of democracy scores, which places the country squarely and persistently in the category of hybrid democratic regimes (Table 1). They also indicate how sticky the problem of RoL is in all its dimensions – corruption, independence of the judiciary and separation of powers (Table 2).

The dilemmas about the immediate 'dramatic' crisis then, are more of a question of a 'stable' and persistent problem of democracy without RoL, which is prone to radicalization and disruptions. The explanatory factors, therefore, should be sought in what shapes and maintains this vicious circle of hybrid democracy that suffers from poor RoL and periodic disruptions. We argue that this kind of democracy without RoL builds on two interrelated phenomena – 1) polarization cum radicalization of the political spectrum; 2) weak and captured institutions unable to serve as trusted mechanisms of peaceful resolution of con-

4 Reuters. *Albanian protesters hurl petrol bombs, seek snap poll*. May 11, 2019. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-protests-protests/albanian-protesters-hurl-petrol-bombs-seek-snap-polls-idUSKCN1SH0MN>

5 Perry, Maja. *Albanian Party Accused of Graft Calls for President's Removal*. OCCRP, June 10, 2019. <https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/9906-albanian-party-accused-of-graft-calls-for-president-s-removal>

Table 1: Democratic Governance Scores, Albania 2005-2018

	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Democratic Governance	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50

Source: *Nations in Transit*, compiled by the author. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress.

Table 2: Dimensions of Rule of Law Scores, Albania 2006-18

	06	08	10	12	14	16	18
Separation of powers	5	7	7	6	4	4	4
Independent Justice	5	5	5	5	4	4	5
Prosecution of corruption	4	5	5	5	4	4	4

Source: *Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)*, compiled by the author. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest value. Note that BTI reports evaluate a period spanning the 2 years leading up to the year of the report. Example, the evaluation of 2018 refers to the period 2015-2016 and so on.



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flict. Both those factors reinforce a vicious cycle where the polarized political class sees unruly conflict as a means to take over institutions, while evolving institutions are incapable of withstanding such pressure and commonly become a political weapon in the evolving political struggles. Periodic but somehow regular crises and disruptions are an expected outcome of this type of democracy.

## polarization and winner-take-all style of governance

The Albanian mode of chaotic and at times violent transition from the communist regime has shaped a ferocious long-term conflict between two antagonistic political-ideological camps, the former communists and the anti-communists, which has come to haunt post-communist democratization. This type of polarization,<sup>6</sup> often empowered by political groups' efforts to distinguish and maintain their power bases, has brought the country to the verge of collapse more than once.<sup>7</sup> It has also facilitated a system of winner takes all forms of governance, which thrives on dominant leaders, hierarchical parties and patronage-tainted institutions.<sup>8</sup>

This type of polarization, when coupled with politically controlled institutions, tends to degrade into periods of bitter crisis, even institutional disruption and violence. As a recent study on polarization notes, potential consequences of polarization for democracy include 'gridlock and paralysis, careening and instability, democratic erosion, and democratic collapse.'<sup>9</sup> In the case of Albania, the corollary phenomena of weak institutions and the extensive patronage networks they build on, have deprived the system from peaceful institutional mechanism of conflict resolution. Instead, this type of institutions captured by political patronage networks enable and reinforce the pattern of a polarised democracy apt to crisis and collapse.

6 Here defined as mutually antagonistic "us" vs. "them" camps, which collapse normal cross-cutting interests and identities into two mutually exclusive identities. Somer, Murat and McCoy, Jennifer. 2018. *Transformations through Polarization and Global threats to Democracy*. Annals x.

7 BTI. 2016. Albania Country Report. Available at: [https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI\\_2016\\_Albania.pdf](https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Albania.pdf)

8 BTI. 2018. Albania Country Report. Available at: <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/ALB/>

Specifically, since the fall of communism, Albania has consolidated a bipolar party system dominated by the Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Party (SP). The two parties have positioned themselves at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, which has shaped an aggressive, even unruly competition between the two blocks.<sup>9</sup> The DP, the umbrella party that brought together different anti-communist sections of society after the introduction of pluralism in 1990, represents and has in a way monopolized the idea of the center-right – a fierce anti-communist, free market and non-interventionist democratic state allied with the West. The SP, also created in 1991, is the descendant of the former communist party and has inherited some of its structures, its leadership and voter base, although it has reformed itself in the line with the European central-left and reorganised its central organs with leaders hailing from the anticommunist movement. To some extent, this major political cleavage overlaps with regional divisions. The DP's anti-communist ideology appeals to Northern parts of the country, which have particularly suffered during the communist repression and tend to vote en masse for the DP, despite its record in government. That key DP leaders hail from the Northern areas helps to enshrine their ideological message into a system of patronage/regional relationships. Similarly, the SP typically appeals to southern areas of the country, which have traditionally been the power base of communist party and tend to feed the SP's rank and file, including major SP leaders. Moreover, the parties' leaderships have persistently used existing divisions as an effective strategy to define and strengthen their basis of supporters, a strategy that works particularly well in the context of winner take all style of governance and patronage networks that characterize the system.<sup>10</sup>

Due to this type of polarization embedded in regional patronage networks, both parties have alternated in power and maintained effective control over the government for prolonged periods – the DP as the ruling majority in the period 1992-7 and again in 2005-13; the SP in 1997-2005 and 2013 until the present. The main “third” party, the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), has split off from the SP, arguably following bickering over the party leadership after 2001 elections. Since then, the SMI's “pragmatic” shifts to ally with any governing majority despite its ideological orientation – the PD in 2009 and the SP in 2013 – shows that fierce ideological polarization serves to mobilize voters and build up a party's voter base, but it does not mean much when it comes to holding on to and exercising power. Ideological divisions aside, the major political parties have proven similar in their tactics of packing state institutions with militants and loyalists once in power.<sup>11</sup> Such a system serves as a means for the parties to feed the loyalist base, but also hierarchically control the spoils of widespread corruption. This “winner-takes-all” model of governance rooted in the patronage networks thrived especially when governing parties enjoyed ample parliamentary majority and little political competition.

The closed list proportional electoral system adopted in 2008 has reinforced the traits of a bipolar system and strengthened the role of party leaders in personally controlling who enters, survives and thrives in the system, and thus also the network of a system of loyalty and service to the leader.<sup>12</sup> All parties are similarly marked by centralized hierarchical structures that evolve around a single leader as the linchpin of the party and its style of governance. In this context, reshuffling of party leadership usually means a cleansing of party ranks in favour of those close to the leader, a process which has turned party organs but also its lower ranks into close-knit networks of personal loyalty and obedience to the leader.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Elbasani. Arolda. 2011. 'EU administrative conditionality and domestic downloading: the limits of Europeanization in challenging contexts.' KFG Working Paper Series, No. 2. Available at: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~kfgeu/kfgwp/wpseries/WorkingPaperKFG\\_2.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~kfgeu/kfgwp/wpseries/WorkingPaperKFG_2.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> BTI. 2014. Albania Country Report. Available at: [https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2014/pdf/BTI\\_2014\\_Albania.pdf](https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2014/pdf/BTI_2014_Albania.pdf); BTI. 2016. Albania country Report.

After the 1997 crisis, which required international intervention to bring the patched system together, the country had to start anew, this time amidst acrimonious political conflict, vacuum of state institutions, and a deeply distrustful society. Consecutive majorities, led by DP or SP, continued to prey on the traits of polarization and control of state institutions for personal and political interest. Despite heavy international presence and investment in institution-building, the governance system continued to suffer from antagonistic politics, centralization of power, politically controlled institutions and periodic moments of crisis and disruption.

## dysfunctional institutions and periodical crisis

This type of polarization, when coupled with politically controlled institutions, tends to degrade into periods of bitter crisis, even institutional disruption and violence. As a recent study on polarization notes, potential consequences of polarization for democracy include, gridlock and paralysis, careening and instability, democratic erosion, and democratic collapse.<sup>13</sup> In the case of Albania, the corollary phenomena of weak institutions and extensive patronage networks they build on, have deprived the system of a peaceful institutional mechanism of conflict resolution. Instead, this type of institution captured by political patronage networks enables and reinforces the pattern of a polarised democracy prone to crisis and collapse.

The notorious crisis of 1997, which degenerated into an armed movement against state institutions, is perhaps the most vivid example of the potential disruption of the radical polarization and weak institutions siding with specific political groups. Harsh polarization between major political parties during the first stages of transition facilitated the building of a one-man rule capitalizing on security forces, an extensive patronage system and single party control over state institutions, much reminiscent of the previous communist-party rule.<sup>14</sup> The economy, too, degraded into a fraudulent transition and mushrooming of pyramid schemes, which destroyed the savings of 3/4 of the Albanian population. Massive protests by people unhappy with the direction of change, including

the oppressed opposition, developed into an armed movement once the governing majority choose to mobilize their own supporters, thus leading the country to a dangerous civil conflict along the North-South division. After the 1997 crisis, which required international intervention to bring the patched-up system together, the country had to start anew, this time amidst acrimonious political conflict, vacuum of state institutions, and a deeply distrustful society.

Consecutive majorities, led by the DP and the SP, continued to prey on the facts of polarization and control of state institutions for personal and political interest. Despite heavy international presence and investment in institution-building, the governance system continued to suffer from antagonistic politics, centralization of power, politically controlled institutions and periodic moments of crisis and disruption. In 2012, for example, an international report concluded: "Albania has experienced a shift to almost complete control by the ruling elite and extensive use of non-democratic proceduralism where laws [and institutions] are used for exerting control by elites in power."<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, the opposition challenged the evolving 'undemocratic proceduralism' in the streets as much as inside the unresponsive institutions, thus creating another moment of crisis and disruption.

Once in power, the reshuffled SP majority (2013 to the present) pledged to go beyond the usual political game – polarization and politically captured institutions – that hollowed out the legitimacy of democracy.<sup>16</sup> A range of long delayed reforms – from the judiciary to illegal construction – were positively assessed by international reporting.<sup>17</sup> Most notably, the 2017 elections

13 Somer and McCoy. 2018. 'Transformations through Polarization'.

14 Elbasani, Arolda. 2004. 'Albania in transition: Manipulation or appropriation of international norms?' *Southeast European Politics* 5 (1), 24-44

15 Primatarova, A., and Deimel, J. (2012) 'Bridge over troubled waters? The role of the internationals in Albania', Centre for Liberal Strategies.

16 BTI. 2016. *Albania Country Report*.

17 Ibid.

were held under an exceptional political agreement which gave the opposition control over key institutions in charge of elections – the Chairman of Central Electoral Commission, the position of deputy prime minister, and 6 related ministers including the Minister of the Interior. For the first time during those elections, the government also established a task force chaired by a deputy prime minister from the opposition, in order to monitor and coordinate the public administration's conduct during elections. The agreement resulted in a comparatively smooth, less politicized and closely monitored electoral process. Yet, the arrangement didn't quell the usual radicalization or the bitter political conflict between the parties, including contestation of results, boycott of the elected institutions, and revolutionary calls to bring down the elected government. Even the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations to improve the electoral process ahead of the next elections were stalled because of the boycott of the Parliamentary Commission on Electoral Reform.

Subsequently, opposition's boycott and later resignation of its parliamentary seats deprived the country of the necessary parliamentary scrutiny over an increasingly overpowered executive. It also obstructed the functioning of the democratic institutions instead of capitalizing on those institutions – parliamentary investigations, parliamentary committees, judicial proceedings etc. – to keep those in power in check. Political and institutional obstruction took various forms: public denigration of elected officials, boycott of legislative reforms, including ongoing reform of the judiciary, and frequent popular mobilization to bring down the government. The Albanian public, unsurprisingly, tends to distrust their own institutions. The results of a 2016 IDRA survey on judicial reform, for example, show that 92% of the interviewees support it. However, 66% believe that there will be blockages in Parliament, only 17% trust judges and 30-42% the main parties to conduct the reform, as compared to the 76% that trust the EU and 78% the American embassy. Additionally, 60% believe that reforms will not be efficient because people within the system will work against them.<sup>18</sup> ■■■

18 IDRA. 2016. *Judicial Reform in Albania: General Public Survey*. Available at: <https://www.idrainstitute.org/en/projects/reforma-n-drejt-si-sondazhi-i-opinionit-publik>

# 'fool's gold': the Macedonian journey from stabilitocracy to radicalization and back

Biljana Vankovska

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The investigation is ongoing and the final outcome will be known in a few months, but the Macedonian public has a *déjà vu* feeling: going back to square one, where one regime is only replaced by another, and apart from the switch between Gruevski and Zaev (and their respective parties) literally nothing has changed. In sum, it is how stabilitocracy has survived despite the democratic 'radicalization'. Many less informed or biased observers wonder: How was it possible for the protest movement (dubbed the *Colourful revolution*), including the then-opposition and now ruling SDSM, to fail so miserably in almost all aspects of democratic consolidation?

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It looks like bizarre destiny for a country to be doomed to repeatedly be central to various 'success stories' made up by the international community – and yet to remain as weak and poor as ever. Few remember that once, in the early 90s, the Republic of Macedonia was a so-called 'oasis of peace'. The myth ended ten years later during the short-lived 2001 internal conflict, but it became a miracle of the EU post-conflict management soon after. Here we go again: reborn as North Macedonia, it figures in another amazing fairy-tale of dispute/conflict resolution in the troublesome Balkans. In a Jesus-like manner, 'vinegar turned into wine' under the touch of two (potential) Nobel peace prize holders (prime ministers Zaev and Tsipras), discretely led by the divine hand of the 'international community'. The so-called Prespa process (i.e. the route from signing the Prespa Agreement between Athens and Skopje in June 2018 to the amending of the Macedonian Constitution in January 2019) was supposed to open the heavens' gate of NATO and the EU to the small state whose path to accession had been blocked for years due to the 'absurd problem' with its name. At least, this was

the version presented to the Macedonian citizens not only by the new 'pro-European' government led by Zaev, but also by a range of high-ranking foreign officials and statesmen, including the NATO Secretary General and the German Chancellor Merkel, who took the pain of visiting the European superperiphery on the eve of the September referendum to secure the outcome. Lobbying and taking (albeit a disguised) part in an internal process of direct democracy by foreign dignitaries would have been seen as highly inappropriate in any other case – but this is the Balkans, after all. The Empire in denial (to quote David Chandler) takes good care of the incompetent locals and helps them in the process of state-building. The Macedonian society had already witnessed a similar tour and dosage of propaganda on the eve of yet another referendum (in 2004), but much more instructive was the case of the 2015 (bailout) referendum in Greece, when the European powers openly displayed their resoluteness in disciplining the government and people in the Balkan periphery. Zaev's government badly needed an immediate boost as early as June 2018: anything to ingratiate itself with the discon-

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tented and shocked public. A government assisted production of fake news, spread by the mainstream media (and not opposed by the European power centres), delivered the happy announcement that Macedonia had got a date for the start of the EU negotiation process along with the invitation to join NATO. Celebrations (both ill-attended and half-hearted) took place in 14 cities in mid-July 2018. However, a lie has no legs, so the bitter truth became fully obvious in June 2019: the name change has not been enough to gain the opening of the so desired negotiation process! The anti-climax has again been managed by PR services and diplomatic phrases by numerous European politicians (mostly by putting the blame on the lack of progress in neighbouring Albania and emphasizing the transition in EU institutions after the parliamentary elections). Despite all the previous tantalizing pains, the Macedonian citizens are being asked to be more patient and wait until October, November or December - the only unknown variable is: of which year!

Many European analysts find this outcome unfair and damaging both for the EU and the country that (allegedly) delivered so much and unjustifiably remained out in the cold. The basic premise of this position is twofold: first, Macedonian citizens displayed amazing will and determination

to get rid of Gruevski's stabilitocracy, shook it up through the process of radicalization through a popular protest movement, and second, the pro-European government of Zaev quickly resolved all bilateral disputes with the neighbours. With regard to the first premise, a state that was generally (and rightly) defined as a 'captured state' and an illiberal/hybrid regime (under the rule of Gruevski and the conservative VMRO-DPMNE along with the Albanian partner DUI) has transformed into a "shining example", not only for the other regional actors (apparently, Serbia and Kosovo), but has the potential to serve as a model on a global scale. The most interesting, and least noticed 'detail' of this miraculous transformation is the following fact: a classical regime change through a colour revolution (2015/2016) materialised only partially! Namely, Gruevski had always been presented as an archetypal dictator and the main culprit for the antidemocratic developments. His twin-brother in the governing coalition, Ali Ahmeti, the leader of the DUI (the Albanian partner), has so far remained untarnished and innocent as a child. During the so-called Colourful Revolution (indeed, even prior to it, since the 2015 Protest movement) it looked as if Macedonia had gone through an inspiring and all so necessary process of radicalization: the citizenry, regardless of ethnic, religious or other origin, got fed up with the corrupt and inept government, so the stabilitocracy was supposed to come to a glorious end, through a bottom-up democratic upheaval and radical political transformation. The European partners mediated the political crisis through the so-called Pržino agreement, which not only provided the way to the next elections but also, more importantly, introduced the office of the Special Prosecutor (apparently unconstitutional, it was seen as a ray of hope in reaching the 'revolution's goal' that read "No justice, no peace").

Seen through the EU association prism, one should not disregard a few significant facts about the stabilitocracy-radicalization nexus. First of all, under Gruevski's rule the country progress reports were satisfactory enough to get (nine) unanimous positive recommendations for starting the negotiation process, both from the EU Parliament and the European Commission (the failure to obtain the recommendation at Council level was always due to the Greek veto – at least the Macedonian public was led to believe so). Gruevski (as well as the

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Up until recently, the government's excuse for all scandals involving cronyism, conflict of interest at the highest government level, nepotism, filling the public administration with party members, control of the media, etc. has been that "within the last two years we had external priorities, we achieved the unimaginable, we resolved all bilateral disputes, we opened the path to NATO and the EU. Soon we will start with the internal reforms." The gross disappointment with the Zaev government was due to a fundamental 'misunderstanding' over the priorities: while the majority of citizens expected internal reforms (especially in the economic sphere, particularly as regards unemployment, and in the judiciary and health care), the entire government (including ministries not responsible for foreign policy and EU integration) put all their efforts into its 'external achievements', as well as basing its propaganda around them.

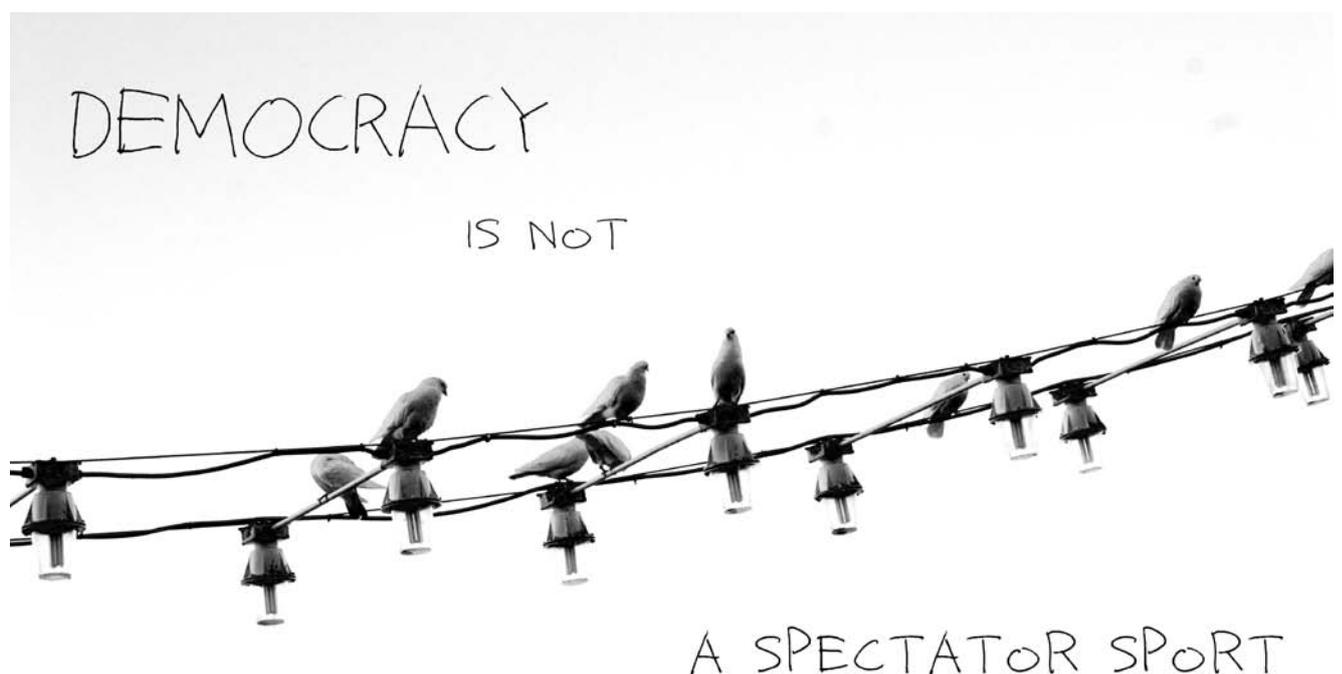
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president, Ivanov) may have been seen as a 'son of a bitch' behind the scenes – yet he was 'our son of a bitch' (to use Franklin D. Roosevelt's famous expression) as long as he compliantly followed all the demands from Brussels (and Washington). This especially proved to be true during the 2015 migrant crisis, when the Macedonian security forces were expected to do the dirty job of protecting the core EU countries on the border. (One could surely discuss the lack of professionalism and coordination of, and among, the security services of a generally weak and inept state, but that is another story). Furthermore, as Zaev's 'bombshells' showed, Gruevski had also been negotiating a name change with his Greek counterparts and was not such a staunch 'nationalist' and defender of Macedonia's name as he wanted everyone to believe. In spite of the widespread (media) accusations of his alleged anti-NATO and pro-Russian orientation, the facts show that during his rule, the Lilliputian state had no foreign policy of its own whatsoever, which is a constant of Macedonian state-building. The government followed all the instructions from Brussels (and especially Berlin), even when the demands were going against national interests (for instance, Macedonia gave up on possible cooperation with Russia in the energy sector, i.e. the South Stream project, at the same time that Germany was working on the North Stream deal). In the spirit of stabilitocracy, until the very end (i.e. when Ahmeti was told not to enter a coalition

with the victorious VMRO-DPMNE after the 2016 parliamentary elections), Gruevski was able to deliver on the internal front as well: the inter-ethnic (so-called tender or deal-oriented) coalition worked perfectly well, at least on a political and security level (honestly, ever since 2001 nobody really cared about the societal level and genuine peace-building, so the artificial and negative peace had always had priority over the more difficult aspects of transformation of ethnic conflict). He ran a particularly friendly policy towards the neoliberal business centers. Finally, having ruled a very weak, and politically and economically dependent state, Gruevski had always been a paper tiger (which was obvious during the 2015/2016 political crisis, when not a single opposition figure, not even Zaev himself, was arrested or seriously intimidated). At the end of the day, the gross irony of fate is the fact that Gruevski was allowed to go scot-free (presumably by Zaev's government), and currently enjoys the status of asylee in Hungary. The country he led may have a long road ahead to the EU, but he personally has joined the Union despite everything.

Zaev's rise to power was not an easy one: the Colourful Revolution (vastly assisted by foreign funds and agencies) greatly helped the foot-dragging and impotent Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) to regain some political legitimacy and popularity. Yet it was not enough to earn him a clear electoral victory. Actually, despite the fact that a significant number of Albanian

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in a country which is almost a protectorate, it would be legitimate to look beyond the local incapacities and traditional Balkan backwardness. The rare analysts who have dared criticize the 'medicine' given to the sick patient have been repeatedly vilified as anti-Western (and therefore pro-Russian) elements who are against the country's membership in NATO and the EU. Zaev's government thus got a carte blanche to do whatever it wanted, as long as it followed the all-important Prespa path. The key misunderstanding between the European (or better, the Euro-Atlantic) partners and the local public lay in the *raison d'être* of the Prespa agreement: it had less to do with EU enlargement (and Macron was the only European politician honest enough to put it bluntly prior to the 2018 September referendum) but rather with joining NATO as soon as possible. In other words, the removal of the Greek blockade was inspired by geopolitical reasons and not by the idea of European enlargement.

voters placed their confidence in a Macedonian party in the hope that it would provide a real alternative to the corrupt DUI and DPA (a unique achievement in an otherwise deeply divided country), Zaev effectively owes his premiership to Ahmeti, i.e. the powerful pillar of the previous 'regime' that had allegedly been overthrown. In reality, it took three smaller Albanian parties to make a workable governing coalition (albeit one with feet of clay). The horrifying events and scenes of 27 April opened the way for the government to be formed; as a side-effect, it gave Zaev an image of a martyr, on top of that of a hero.

While the bad fortune and missed opportunity to start negotiations were

still being lamented, the 'shining example' had already started to fall apart. The latest scandal over the misuse of the 'telephone bombshells' for racketeering and obstruction of justice involves the Special Prosecutor, Katica Janeva, and TV channel owner Bojan Jovanovski. The investigation is ongoing and the final outcome will be known in a few months, but the Macedonian public has a *déjà vu* feeling: going back to square one, where one regime is only replaced by another, and apart from the switch between Gruevski and Zaev (and their respective parties) literally nothing has changed. In sum, it is how stabilitocracy has survived despite the democratic 'radicalization'. Many less informed or biased observers wonder: How was it possible for the protest movement (dubbed the Colourful revolution), including the then-opposition and now ruling SDSM, to fail so miserably in almost all aspects of democratic consolidation? Up until recently, the government's excuse for all scandals involving cronyism, conflict of interest at the highest government level, nepotism, filling the public administration with party members, control of the media, etc. has been that "within the last two years we had external priorities, we achieved the unimaginable, we resolved all bilateral disputes, we opened the path to NATO and the EU. Soon we will start with the internal reforms." The gross disappointment with the Zaev government was due to a fundamental 'misunderstanding' over the priorities: while the majority of citizens expected internal reforms (especially in the economic sphere, particularly as regards unemployment, and in the judiciary and health care), the entire government (including ministries not responsible for foreign policy and EU integration) put all their efforts into its 'external achievements', as well as basing its propaganda around them.

It seems that for most of the Western partners and foreign observers, what Zaev achieved abroad is practically the only matter where the state showed (alleged) progress and should be rewarded. On the contrary, a public opinion survey (conducted in mid-July 2019) shows a different picture of the 'progress': more than half of citizens think that the country is moving in the wrong direction, and the spheres that are the worst off are the health sector and the judiciary. The same percentage of respondents are not only disillusioned by the Special Prosecutor's work, but also believe that the institution should be abolished (interest-

ingly, despite the huge scandal, the official EU view is that the SP deserves full support and should carry on). If the elections were held tomorrow, the winner would be VMRO-DPMNE (again).

Why did the international community's effort fail despite the huge amount of money invested and the direct and indirect support for the reform government? This is not to say that the 'locals' should not take any blame, but in a country which is almost a protectorate, it would be legitimate to look beyond the local incapacities and traditional Balkan backwardness. The rare analysts who have dared criticize the 'medicine' given to the sick patient have been repeatedly vilified as anti-Western (and therefore pro-Russian) elements who are against the country's membership in NATO and the EU. Zaev's government thus got a *carte blanche* to do whatever it wanted, as long as it followed the all-important Prespa path. The key misunderstanding between the European (or better, the Euro-Atlantic) partners and the local public lay in the *raison d'être* of the Prespa agreement: it had less to do with EU enlargement (and Macron was the only European politician honest enough to put it bluntly prior to the 2018 September referendum) but rather with joining NATO as soon as possible. In other words, the removal of the Greek blockade was inspired by geopolitical reasons and not by the idea of European enlargement.

The entire process of resolving the political crisis through European involvement was led by the heavy hand of power and politics, rather than by respect for international and internal (particularly, constitutional) law. That was the case with the gentle removal of Gruevski from office, the Pržino 1 and 2 agreements that envisaged unusual and unconstitutional institutional arrangements (such as the Special Prosecutor's office and the so-called Pržino government, inter-party deals in the appointment of officials, such as members of the State Electoral Commission or the Anti-Corruption Commission, etc.). In a statement for the media in 2013, Žarko Puhovski said that Macedonia is not quite a state - and he was/is right: this is a protectorate *sui generis* (as practically any protectorate is). For the external state-builders, the goal is more important than the means. No wonder that, in a statement to the Austrian *Kurier* (10 October 2018), EU Commissioner Hahn encouraged the Macedonian Prime Minister to go on with the Prespa deal regardless of the failure of the

referendum, suggesting a "combination of the Balkan and rational approach" in securing the 2/3 majority necessary to change the Constitution and ratify the Prespa agreement. Apart from turning a blind eye to the scandalous breaches of all the norms of the Venice Code of Good Practice on Referendums and the national constitution, the European partners did not see or hear the biased propaganda, not even Zaev's calls for bribery and racketeering during the campaign. The process was completed in such a way that the whole idea of the rule of law was burnt on the altar of (geo)political efficiency: by means of intimidation and 'reconciliation' with eight opposition MPs who had been charged by the Special Prosecutor's office or by the regular state prosecutor (over the events of 27 April), including a quick change of the Criminal Code to provide them guarantees that they won't be charged in the future. Zaev has obviously started to believe that he was untouchable and above the law, due to the unreserved support he received from Brussels and Berlin. It remains to be seen for how long he will be tolerated by his external mentors.

There is a popular saying that "The candidate countries pretend they want to reform and we pretend we want them to join the EU". Unlike the other Balkan leaders, during the last couple of years Zaev did not even need to pretend to make reforms. He was chosen to deliver 'peace and stability in the region' - and maybe get a Nobel Peace Prize (as he surely believes he deserves). On the eve of the June EU summit he even offered to exchange two Nobel Prizes for a green light for opening the negotiation process. As soon as the government became aware that no prize was forthcoming, they turned to the old and well-practiced tactics: using stability as a bargaining chip! The message spelled out mostly by the Prime Minister and the minister of foreign affairs was interesting *per se*: if you do not open the process, the country will relapse back into instability and nationalism! Not so long ago, foreign minister Dimitrov believed in miracles (i.e. the Prespa agreement), but now warns that the region is a "theatre of geopolitical competition", including the involvement of Moscow and Beijing, and that the lack of an appropriate response from Brussels "will boost the 'shallow nationalists' opposed to EU". Zaev and Rama sent a similar message, referring to anti-EU forces, populism and other bogeymen from the same repertoire. This kind of self-presenta-

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tion as the best and the one and only "right" political option opens the dilemma about the essence of political pluralism, political competition, and the role of the opposition. The other aspect refers to getting away with one's political responsibility for a complete lack of reforms because 'the alternative to us is much worse for you'. Zoran Zaev sent another interesting message from the London meeting: "We don't need a new radicalism, nationalism and populism in our country". He has obviously forgotten that he owes his position to a 'new form of radicalism', a grass-roots movement that ousted his predecessor. As things stand right now, he should not feel threatened by any 'new radicalism' because the main part of the leadership of the 'coloured revolutionaries' is well-situated in the establishment, while the general public is drowning in apathy and has lost hope that anything will change for the better.

One of Macedonia's most respected public intellectuals, Arsim Zekolli, recently drew attention to a very important issue. In his words, if the EU and Germany are unreliable, then what about Zaev's pledges: "Has Zaev ever kept his word about anything he promised to his own citizens? Threats with cataclysmic scenarios, and generally speaking emphasizing Gruevski and Berisha as negative examples vis-à-vis his current successes as a substitute for reforms, serve as an excuse for not meeting EU criteria." Zekolli reminds that he once compared Macedonia's path to the EU to the fish from Hemingway's novel. I have used another metaphor for the same issue in an earlier article for *Perspectives*: the curious case of Benjamin Button.

Stabilitocracy, as the author of this term Srđa Pavlović rightly points out, is a two way street: "The parties involved in this bargaining nightmare bear responsibility for the final outcome." Furthermore, the concept of stabilitocracy is deeply problematic because it contains certain colonial and emancipatory impulses on the part of the West towards the "not-quite-Western Other". Hakan Wiberg used to remind of the iatrogenic effects of 'external medicines', but Chandler has deconstructed the game in which the external state-builders manage to rid themselves of any responsibility for their deeds and put the blame on the incompetent locals. The 'radicalization process' once glorified during the Colourful revolution is now discarded as a dangerous development that may lead the country away from the path to the EU. Stability is 'the only game in the town', and that's what Zaev offers. In the eyes of the Macedonian citizens it means "more of the same", a devastating *status quo* in a rebranded state with a new label on the old container. ■■■

# Europe's longest-standing leader survives with Western support, while oppressively ruling the country

Milka Tadić

Montenegro is the only country in Europe (not counting Russia) in which there has never been a change of government in an election. Since 1945, it has been governed invariably by one and the same party - the Communist Party, which in 1990 changed its name to the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS). Although the multiparty system was introduced at the time, the Berlin Wall has not been demolished here, because the entire system is tightly controlled by the DPS, more precisely by its leader, the longterm president Milo Đukanović and his family and friends, who seized power with support from Slobodan Milošević and have not released it since. On two occasions, he briefly withdrew from government functions, but remained in full control as DPS Chairman.

Thus, real democratic elections in which the free will of the citizens would prevail have never been conducted in this country. The shortcomings of the electoral process are detailed in several international documents, including the OSCE / ODIHR report from the last presidential elections, which emphasizes the so-called institutional advantage enjoyed by the ruling party candidate. If one has an institutional advantage in elections, how can the opponents challenge him or her?

Despite the monopolies, the Podgorica government is persistently supported in the West. On several occasions, when Europe's longest-serving leader Đukanović was on the cliff-edge, his friends from Europe and the United States reached out to him to stop him falling. They usually justified this support for an essentially deeply authoritarian politician by pointing to a weak, disunited anti-Western alternative that would divert the country from its European path and to the threats coming from Russia.

The judiciary did not prosecute even overt abuses and electoral manipulations. After the "Recordings" and "Envelope" affairs, which clearly demonstrated that the ruling party was buying votes and offering state jobs ahead of elections, no high-ranking officials were held accountable, despite convincing evidence and appeals by the EU, which regularly demands in its reports that these affairs be resolved. Crimes and violence against investigative reporters in recent years have also gone unpunished. One reporter was murdered, another journalist was shot in the leg, explosive devices have been planted in their yards and several were brutally beaten, while a bomb shook the offices of the daily Vijesti, several of whose cars were set on fire.

Russia has been introduced into this narrative in recent years, especially since the 2016 elections, as allegedly trying to destabilize Montenegro, the youngest NATO member. This has been claimed even by some politicians from influential Western countries. The fact that Đukanović developed close relations with Moscow in the recent past and gave Putin's oligarchs some strategic companies and the most beautiful real estate by the sea has been forgotten.

The opposition in Montenegro has weaknesses. It is not well organized and is bitterly divided, but most opposition parties cannot be defined as predominantly pro-Russian and anti-Western. On the contrary, none of the parliamentary opposition parties calls into question the country's accession to the European Union, and only parts of the Democratic Front are openly pro-Russian.

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Photo by NATO,  
The Prime Minister  
of Montenegro visits  
NATO, flickr  
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While the country is suffocating in corruption and crime, many offences remain unpunished, especially those whose perpetrators hold the highest positions. Two decades ago, the President himself was charged in Italy as a member of a criminal group that smuggled cigarettes between the two coasts of the Adriatic but his case was archived due to his sovereign immunity and thus never prosecuted. Narco-bosses, such as the infamous Šarić brothers, who have been tried in the neighbouring and several EU countries for smuggling huge amounts of hard drugs, are protected here and are freely doing business with the state and state officials, including the family of Milo Đukanović and the family's bank in which they hold millions.

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Not only were the perpetrators of these crimes never held accountable, but the dirty campaign against the free media which dared to report on the links between business, crime and politics, has become a constant

in pro-government media outlets. Critical media have been accused of various crimes and their representatives of betraying the country and national interests, as during the peak years of Communism. This campaign against the media was often led personally by Đukanović, who depicted investigative journalists as "mice to be exterminated" and openly called for the arrest of the owners of the daily *Vijesti* and weekly *Monitor*. Because of all this, over the last decade Montenegro has fallen by more than 50 places on the Reporters Without Borders' Media Freedom Index. In 2018, it was ranked a disastrous 104<sup>th</sup>, among the lowest in Europe.

In the last 30 years, the middle class in Montenegro has been almost completely wiped out. According to UNDP research in Southeast Europe, the biggest gap between the rich and poor is to be found in Montenegro. About 30 percent of the country's citizens are on or below the poverty line. At the same time, a small group associated with the authorities is enormously wealthy, and has taken over the wealth of the country in an untransparent privatization: factories, land, banks, hotels, real estate and so on.

In this process, Đukanović and his family and closest friends turned out to be the most successful 'entrepreneurs'. A few years ago, the distinguished British daily the *Independent* ranked him among the twenty richest politicians in the world, while Forbes estimated the wealth of the Đukanović family at over \$ 160 million, marking the Montenegrin president as one of the richest persons in the country. This could be just part of his visible fortune, as some estimated that it could be worth more than \$ 1 billion.

The average monthly salary in Montenegro is only 500 euros. According to unof-

ficial estimates, from 1991 to 2015, some 140,000 people left the country of only 620,000 inhabitants, fleeing unemployment, poverty and unequal chances. Most of them emigrated to Germany. When that country further liberalizes its labour market next January, it is feared that emigration from Montenegro will further intensify.

Montenegro's economy is quite devastated by corruption and shady privatization. External debt has grown from about 28 percent of GDP in 2006 to an enormous 70 percent of GDP in 2018. According to independent economists, the loans were used mainly to stimulate consumption and for unreasonable projects. An example is the construction of a 40km motorway section from Podgorica to Kolašin financed by China that will cost more than one billion euros. According to international experts, this loan could make Montenegro dependent on Beijing because it is unclear how the weak Montenegrin economy can service the increasing debt.

When he came to power at the age of 27, Đukanović possessed nothing but a bachelor's degree in economics, with rather poor average grades, but an excellent CV of a party soldier. He had been a member of the League of Communists since high school, climbing the power ladder with incredible speed. His brother Alexander (Aco) owns hundreds of thousands of square meters in the country's best locations, along with office buildings, apartments and one of the largest banks in the country. Milo Đukanović's government has extensively supported this bank, not only by depositing state funds in it, but also by bailing it out with tens of millions of euros during the financial crisis. His sister Ana, a lawyer, has become the exclusive attorney for foreign investors doing deals with the state. Đukanović's family and its cronies and closest friends have taken over the state's most valuable resources.

The rest of the DPS party nomenklatura also enjoys the benefits. This summer, it was reported that millions of euros were spent exclusively on high-level officials' apartments, many of whom have obtained grant funding for their purchase or renovation, which is in collision with the law.

This retrograde system is maintained by appointing to key positions 'reliable' individuals, who frequently do not meet either legal or professional requirements. Only recently, Vesna Medenica was elected as President of the Supreme Court of Montenegro for the third time, despite the constitu-

tional limit of two terms for performing this important judicial function. The same thing happened earlier with former Montenegrin President Filip Vujanović, who was elected as president three times in a row, despite a restriction in the Constitution that clearly stipulates a maximum of two terms. Both Vujanović and Medenica are considered loyal party cadres close to Đukanović.

Montenegro has been in the negotiation process with the European Union for seven years, but its prospects for membership are still hazy due to disrespect for the rule of law, although 2025 has been floated informally by some Brussels officials as the year of possible entry. If indeed this smallest of all former Yugoslav countries were then to be accepted in the Union, it would mean that the negotiation process took longer than it did for any new EU member to date.

Clearly, the main barrier to joining the Union is the whole range of internal factors, many of which we have mentioned here. Therefore, it is hard to believe that negotiations on Chapters 23 and 24 on the rule of law could be closed in the near future. Or, say, Chapter 27, on the issue of sustainable development and ecology, since nature and biodiversity, including in areas protected by UNESCO, such as the Tara Canyon, have been aggressively assaulted, while waste, toxic emissions and pollution have still not been addressed.

It is well known that the EU is tired of enlargement, that it is uncertain about its own future and that Brexit is making it look increasingly like Yugoslavia before the breakup. It is thus quite normal that in such a situation there is no particular enthusiasm for negotiations with Montenegro, as well as with other candidate and potential candidate countries.

But despite all this, under the Association and Accession Agreement, Brussels should at this stage play a more proactive role in transforming Montenegro into a functioning democracy, especially when it comes to the rule of law, economic reforms and nature protection. Instead, Brussels treats with considerable tolerance the brutal violations of law by official Podgorica, including its gross infringements of the country's constitutional order, as in the case of the unlawful election of the Supreme Court president.

There was no adequate response from Brussels to a number of other breaches of the law. Last year, the management of Radio Television of Montenegro (RTCG), which

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sought to reform the broadcaster and make it a truly public service rather than a mere service of the DPS – was unlawfully dismissed. In that case too, the EU voiced only moderate criticism of this act in its regular report, and Montenegro continued to drop down the charts of media freedoms.

There was no decisive reaction from Brussels even when an insider, the businessman Duško Knežević, posted a video in January of this year, showing him handing over an envelope of about 100,000 to the former Mayor of Podgorica and present member of DPS presidency Slavoljub Stijepović for the ruling party's 2016 parliamentary election campaign – which would have constituted illegal campaign financing. Knežević, one of richest Montenegrins, has launched an entire campaign to release large amounts of compromising evidence against local authorities from London, where he took refuge from the Montenegrin public prosecution service, which has meanwhile

raised financial misconduct charges against him. He has directly accused Đukanović of numerous illegal acts and has handed out to the media documents on Đukanović's secret offshore and financial dealings.

In the European Union governments would resign and fall for much less. In Montenegro, European officials have continued to cooperate with Đukanović, and many to openly support him, even though Đukanović in person and his nomenklatura are the main obstacles, not only to joining the EU, but to establishing a basic rule of law in the smallest of the post-Yugoslav states.

Why does the West support such a regime, more specifically why do the EU countries do it?

Đukanović immediately recognized Kosovo, when requested by Brussels and Washington. He quickly implemented the necessary reforms in the military, and in 2017 Montenegro joined the NATO alliance. In addition, he established good relations with neighbours, primarily with Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, against whom he had fought in the 1990s. He apologized to Zagreb and Sarajevo for his acts during the breakup of Yugoslavia and the love affair with Milošević, but at the same time, no war crimes committed by Montenegrins have been fully prosecuted.

Đukanović has also established good ties with Serbia, whose rulers he had opposed when Montenegro was heading towards independence in 2006. Today the Montenegrin president, despite his confrontation with the local pro-Serbian parties and the Serbian Orthodox Church, maintains an exceptional relationship with Serbian President Vučić, with whom he shares many similarities in the way they govern their respective countries. Đukanović also imposed himself on the regional scene, with some experts even suggesting him as a mediator in the Prishtinë-Belgrade talks. He also has an intense and friendly communication with the Kosovo leadership.

At the same time, the Montenegrin ruler imposed sanctions on Russia when the European Union did and began accusing Moscow of interfering in the country's domestic affairs.

Thus, all that Đukanović did was to align the country's foreign policy priorities with the interests of Brussels and Washington. In return, he got a free hand to do whatever he wants at home, to oppress and consolidate his own power, instead of reforming Montenegro and preparing it for EU accession. ■■

# stabilitocracy and political stability – a view from Serbia

Vladimir Veljković

In recent years, when politicians talked, and journalists and analysts wrote about the stability of the western Balkans region, it wasn't a stable democracy they had in mind, but, above all, security conditions on the ground and control over international and interstate disputes so that they would not escalate towards mutual conflict. The displacement of stability into the sphere of security pushed the question of democracy into the background, thus setting off processes that in some of the countries of the region led to the phenomenon of captured states.

Stabilitocracy is a new concept, created in order to denote certain western Balkan countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia) that are roughly and formally at different stages of the European path – expressing in principle the desire to become members of the European Union or the NATO alliance – but where there is a deficit of democratic liberties. Stabilitocratic regimes are in effect a product – it would seem – of real-political assessments on the part of European political elites that would – perfectly legitimately – prefer to keep the region within the sphere of EU states' political and economic influence during a period of enlargement fatigue and accumulated internal and external problems. Keeping the Western Balkans in the sphere of EU influence may be considered the first aspect of stability, considering that the countries of the region have officially continued the policy pursued previously by those European states that aspired to join the EU, and by the end of this journey fulfilled the conditions and attained full membership in the organisation: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia etc.

Another aspect of stabilitocratic regimes presupposes that regional political stability and security are on the side of stabilitocracy, while radicalisation is seen as its opposite, that is, as a potential worsening of regional disputes and their uncontrolled escalation into possible regional conflicts. Such a political view was expressed precisely in 2017 by the former director of the European External Action Service for Russia, the Eastern neighbourhood and the Western Balkans Miroslav Lajčák, who said: "Relations in the Balkans are tense. But I hope that political leaders won't allow new conflicts to arise."<sup>1</sup> The inner stability of the region is hence one of the key components when we speak about the stabilitocracies in the Western Balkans.

Stabilitocracy is also a term derived from the previously defined EU policy on expansion and accession of new members, but with a modification that substantially changes the implications of the entire process of European integration. With the European Council's 1993 Copenhagen criteria, the political, economic and legal conditions that future full member states had to fulfill

1 <https://www.vecernji.hr/premium/odnosi-su-na-balkanu-napeti-ali-nadam-se-da-politicki-vo-e-nece-dopustiti-nove-sukobe-1171453>

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As opposed to democratic rule, which implies the legitimacy of the existence of political pluralism and accepts the activities of the opposition as a constituent part of a democratic political system, in stabilitocracies, the ruling majority declares the minority in opposition a security problem, inciter of civic conflict and a destructive element. The Serbian stabilitocracy neither recognises nor acknowledges political opposition; it sees oppositional activity as a hostile act directed against the state and society. We might therefore call the current Serbian stabilitocracy an authoritarian regime of electoral autocracy.

through the "stabilisation and association" process and agreement were adopted. At the time, for east European, and later also Balkan countries (excepting Greece and Turkey), former socialist states with single-party systems, stabilisation implied the internal stabilisation of liberal democracy (establishing the rule of law and separation of powers, political pluralism and the possibility of removing citizens' political representatives and appointing others in free elections). In recent years, when politicians talked, and journalists and analysts wrote about the stability of the western Balkans region, it wasn't a stable democracy they had in mind, but, above all, security conditions on the ground and control over international and interstate disputes so that they would not escalate towards mutual conflict. The displacement of stability into the sphere of security pushed the question of democracy into the background, thus setting off processes that in some of the countries of the region led to the phenomenon of captured states. The policy of stabilitocracy thus technically achieved its basic goals – keeping the region within the EU's sphere of influence – but, especially in the Republic of Serbia, indirectly created a tense internal political situation whose denouement is as yet uncertain.

Stabilitocracy may perhaps achieve some minimal goals that are in the interest of the Western Balkans region, in the sense of freezing and controlling interstate and international disputes, but internal political processes in individual countries have shown in practice that without democratisation of political circumstances, such disputes cannot be successfully resolved and brought to a peaceful end. In other words, the paradox of the project of stabilitocratic regimes (sta-

bility and security without democracy) lies in that they, despite working on regional stability and security in principle, are not in fact able to provide a successful model for stabilising the security situation in the region through clearing up the unresolved interstate issues and disputes.

The example of North Macedonia (hereinafter: Macedonia) during Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (2006-2016) and the VMRO-DPMNE party's (which he headed) rule in coalition with the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration eloquently supports this thesis. As the Macedonian prime minister, Gruevski enjoyed international support in the aim of reforming his country and remaking his party as a "modern, right-wing, conservative party". However, Gruevski's rule did not contribute to the democratisation of the political situation in Macedonia, but was characterised by right-wing populism, settling of accounts with political opponents, megalomaniac construction projects and high levels of corruption. By the end, Gruevski's policies had undermined international relations, as well as relations with western partners. After the VMRO-DPMNE's fall from power, the Special Prosecutor's Office in Skopje has had its hands full with proceedings initiated against erstwhile party and state officials. Gruevski did not wait to be imprisoned in Macedonia, but fled in 2018 to Viktor Orban's Hungary, tracing a trail through the neighbouring stabilitocracies – Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. In terms of regional security and stability, Gruevski did nothing to achieve a compromise solution with the neighbouring Greece about the new constitutional name of Macedonia.<sup>2</sup>

During Nikola Gruevski's decade-long rule, the contentious issue between Macedonia and Greece, significant to the regional stability and security of the Western Balkans, has not been resolved. This was only achieved after political changes in Macedonia – the parliamentary elections of 2016 and the formation of Zoran Zaev's government in May 2017 – with the June 2018 signing of the international and interstate Prespa treaty between Macedonia and Greece, mediated by the UN. Later on, Gruevski would remind the public that before PM Alexis Tsipras took office, he led discussions with PM Papandreu, but that "we couldn't arrive at a solution due to the well-known Greek positions, or red lines."

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1643382&fbclid=IwAR0AbKfUe5RxXawceBZ2VDmJZuMmyJ-LYMaMkcVV\\_00B35AhcotUf8IvoFc](https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1643382&fbclid=IwAR0AbKfUe5RxXawceBZ2VDmJZuMmyJ-LYMaMkcVV_00B35AhcotUf8IvoFc)

When Tsipras took office in 2015, Greece was in an economic crisis, but that same year a political crisis broke out in Macedonia too, so Tsipras "judged that if he were to wait, he'd get a much better interlocutor, willing to make much larger concessions over national issues such as the name, identity, history," Gruevski said.<sup>3</sup> The incumbent president of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, mainly accuses the former government of making concessions to the Kosovar side, as it did not "so much as issue a communication when Kosovo declared independence," while during his rule, "13 states withdrew their recognition of Kosovo."<sup>4</sup>

Serbia is today in a similar situation as neighbouring Macedonia during Gruevski's rule. Parallel to the unresolved regional issue between Serbia and Kosovo, there are also ongoing political tensions within the country, caused by the undemocratic conduct of the ruling clique. The opinion that Aleksandar Vučić, the current Serbian president, and the Serbian Progressive Party (SPP) received the support of western countries in 2012 in order to solve the issue of Kosovo has become commonplace in the critical segment of the Serbian public: "He is ideal for the western political structures, as he has been blackmailed with his warmongering past and criminogenic present. (...) Vučić did not come into power, he was brought there. And he was brought because he gave certain promises regarding Kosovo. The West expects him to deliver on these promises."<sup>5</sup> However, seven years of SPP government have passed, and a successful solution to the contentious issues between Serbia and Kosovo is still not in sight – nor have the citizens of Serbia been acquainted with president Vučić's plan to resolve the dispute.

While official Belgrade has professionally worked on a peaceful solution to the regional dispute with Kosovo, research by Stefan Janjić and Stefani Šovanec from the Philosophy Faculty in Novi Sad has shown that portents of war with the neighbouring Croatia, Kosovo, Albania or Bosnia and Herzegovina could be found every day in (pro)regime tabloids.<sup>6</sup> Wartime rhetoric in

the context of regional relations can also be found in assertions by certain ministers from the Serbian Government. "Every military exercise is always also a message both to friends and enemies," Aleksandar Vulin stated recently, adding that relations between Serbia and Croatia have "tensed" exclusively because "it is an extension of Croatian policy, where everything is blamed on Serbia."<sup>7</sup> In the tabloids, writing about western countries also often takes the form of conspiracy theory, describing their intelligence services as working tirelessly to depose Vučić.

But to the Serbian president, enemies are also to be found inside the country.

At a rally during the presidential election campaign in March 2017, Aleksandar Vučić, then-Prime Minister and a candidate in the election, said this to his supporters, referring to the opposition: "I am concerned by their desire to provoke disorder and unrest in Serbia. *They remain intent on provoking the Macedonian scenario in Serbia.* [italics by V.V.] This is not a success for Serbia, a success would be peace and stability, to think about successes and victories, not about our conflicts. Whatever they do, I will not allow them to endanger your children's peace and quiet."<sup>8</sup> To then-candidate, and current Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić, the "Macedonian scenario" did not indicate a peaceful change of government in Macedonia, which would ultimately lead to the resolution of a decades-long dispute with the neighbour-

7 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/vulin-vojna-vezba-je-uvek-poruka-prijateljima-i-neprijateljima/>

8 <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/politika/opozicija-zeli-makedonski-scenario/98777/vest>



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3 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/gruevski-o-izjavi-grckog-premijera-nikada-nisam-odbio-susret-sa-ciprasom-na-protiv/fz85mkl>

4 [http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a535594/Vucic-Trovanje-izmislijeno-je-kosovski-politicari-ne-znaju-stace-sa-sobom.html?fbclid=IwAR2HdEBG8Ph5Kq\\_T9I23kbGs6lizrAEMk-M0rJJdPAwZGE-dhPuWrRsVSgU](http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a535594/Vucic-Trovanje-izmislijeno-je-kosovski-politicari-ne-znaju-stace-sa-sobom.html?fbclid=IwAR2HdEBG8Ph5Kq_T9I23kbGs6lizrAEMk-M0rJJdPAwZGE-dhPuWrRsVSgU)

5 <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1713224>

6 <https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs/data/pdf/2466-541X/2018/2466-541X1843049J.pdf>

The additional involvement of the EU on putting the internal political situation in Serbia in order, on top of constant mediation in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, has shown that the seven-year-long trust the western partners have shown in the Serbian stabilitocracy comes at a political price. Instead of a single regional problem, with its authoritarian style of government, official Belgrade has created another one, this time inside Serbia itself, thus indirectly threatening the process of resolving the relations between Belgrade and Prishtina. Because an electoral boycott by the strongest opposition grouping may put into question the political legitimacy of the parliament that would be elected in 2020 – thus creating a potential situation where another assembly might revoke its decisions related to Kosovo, declaring them undemocratic and illegitimate.

ing Greece. In this kind of political process, which could play out in Serbia as well, he saw conflict, disorder and unrest, and a threat to the peace and quiet of citizens and their children. Contrary to the chaos the opposition was allegedly planning to cause, in his electoral campaign, Vučić offered the citizens of Serbia peace and stability. We can find similar statements by Aleksandar Vučić before and after 2017, since when he has been in office as president of Serbia, but this statement itself is enough to give an insight into political life within the framework of stabilitocracy. As opposed to democratic rule, which implies the legitimacy of the existence of political pluralism and accepts the activities of the opposition as a constituent part of a democratic political system, in stabilitocracies, the ruling majority declares the minority in opposition a security problem, inciter of civic conflict and a destructive element. The Serbian stabilitocracy neither recognises nor acknowledges politi-

cal opposition; it sees oppositional activity as a hostile act directed against the state and society. We might therefore call the current Serbian stabilitocracy an authoritarian regime of electoral autocracy.

The main trump card of stabilitocracy is the supposed internal political stability, but is stabilitocracy truly a stable political system? In a text he wrote for the Serbian Sunday magazine *Vreme* (no. 1445, 13 September 2018) the president of the opposition Democratic Party, dr. Zoran Lutovac, marked stabilitocracy with the phrase *labilocracy*. "In fact, it would be more accurate to term such a system a labilocracy: a system of undeveloped freedoms and rule of laws, with a façade of democracy devoid of true substance. This system has unstable foundations, as it depends on ratings and the authoritarian's good will and the support he receives from the great powers, rather than on independent institutions and a balance of liberal and democratic principles and practice. This is a system that rests on the phenomenon of a captured state (a term used by the World Bank), where laws are tailored to the needs of powerful individuals, counter to the interest of the citizens and the state. The state is captured with the assistance of the political and business elite that is well networked with powerful individuals."<sup>9</sup> Can a political system that does not take into account all social interests and political differences in a society, and does not resolve them within the framework of the representative body and independent state institutions, be stable? Or does it in fact represent an unstable (labile) system within which citizens will air their dissatisfaction exclusively on the street?

In the autumn of 2018, mass but peaceful antiregime citizens' protests under the name "Stop the bloody shirts" began throughout Serbia, provoked by the beating up of opposition politician Borko Stefanović, increasing political violence and overall negative trends in the country. The citizens cited unfree media, corrupt government, unemployment, poverty and a large number of youth leaving the country as the main motives for participating in the protests. Their expectations centred on restoring democracy and media liberties, and a change of government.<sup>10</sup> The protests were to last until 13 April 2019, when they ended with a large citizens' gathering outside the

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1624817>

<sup>10</sup> <http://rs.n1.info.com/Vesti/a468449/Istrazivanje-o-protestima-1-od-5-miliona.html>

National Assembly in Belgrade. (The protest walks have continued to take place in a reduced form, and are held every Saturday in Belgrade.) These were the third anti-regime protests in Serbia since the Serbian Progressive Party came into power in 2012 – after the "Protest against Dictatorship" (2017) and the protest organised by the Let's Not Drown Belgrade citizens' initiative (NDM BGD) against the illegal demolition of buildings in Belgrade's Hercegovačka street in order to clear the ground for the construction of the "Belgrade Waterfront", a luxury residential and commercial complex (2016). This was one of the central construction projects of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which is carried out jointly with a United Arab Emirates company. (Construction began in 2015 and is still ongoing.)

The 2018-2019 protests would later become known for the slogan, "1 out of 5 Million". The Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić himself deserves the most credit for it, as in December 2018, he said the following concerning the citizens' protest: "Walk to your hearts' desires, I will never fulfill a single one of your demands. *Not if five million of you were to gather.* [italics by V.V.] You can only win an election, and when you win an election, go ahead and fulfill what was promised to the people, I will not bow under pressure and that's what makes me different from all the rest."<sup>11</sup> According to the 2006 Constitution, now in force, the President of the Republic is elected in direct elections and represents all the citizens of Serbia. However, president Aleksandar Vučić has informed the disgruntled citizens that he is not the president of all the citizens. That he will not consider their requests and that – if they are dissatisfied with him, the behaviour of the current government and the overall atmosphere in the society – they may try to beat him in an election. Otherwise, they may walk "to their hearts' desires". In February 2019, in response to the protests, Vučić began a personal promotional campaign in Serbian cities, called "The Future of Serbia", gathering his supporters at rallies. The campaign ended on 19 April, with a large gathering outside the National Assembly in Belgrade. While the months-long "1 out of 5 Million" protests were going on, national TV broadcasters and government-controlled print media – a large majority of the media in the country – negatively

reported on the protests, trying to diminish their political significance and the number of citizens gathered, when they did not simply ignore them.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of this year, political life in Serbia has completely abandoned the framework of representative institutions, even though regular parliamentary and local elections are set to be held in 2020.

In solidarity with the demands of the "1 out of 5 Million" protest, delegates and councillors from parties gathered under the umbrella of the Alliance for Serbia (AfS) – the strongest opposition grouping – have since January embarked on a boycott of both the Republic-level and local parliaments. The investigative site Istinomer (a project of the CRTA NGO from Belgrade) has characterised the previous situation in the Parliament thus: "Circumstances in the parliament have significantly deteriorated over the past few years. The ruling majority has monopolised the legislative process... However, even more ruinous for relations with the opposition delegates is the fact that abuse of procedure has squeezed the room for control over the work of the government and for debate on bills. Preventing the opposition to critique the work of the government and draft legislation from the parliamentary benches is part of a wider process of tearing down all the mechanisms of control over the executive. The Assembly used to represent one of the last remaining institutions where criticism of the government could still be heard. With the gradual closing of this space, a boycott of the work of the Assembly was becoming more and more likely."<sup>13</sup> In early August, several roundtables with representatives of the government and the opposition, organised by the Open Society Fund on the subject of electoral conditions were held at the Philosophy Faculty in Belgrade with no visible results. Consequently, by mid-September, all the parties gathered under the AfS declared a boycott of the 2020 election. The citizens' initiative NDM BGD also decided to boycott the forthcoming election, calling on all public personalities to support their "Declaration to boycott the election" and form a broad front in the struggle for a democratic and free Serbia.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.raskrikavanje.rs/page.php?id=355>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.istinomer.rs/analize/bojkot-parlamenta-ista-posle/>

<sup>14</sup> [https://nedavimobeograd.rs/javni-poziv-za-podrsku-deklaraciji-o-bojkotu-izbora-borba-za-slobodnu-srbiju/?fbclid=IwAR1ztcJohfZXvZFwOJAQJxIOmiyOF2Y4mvj\\_LcptytmQjip5U7c9GBv4Qsw](https://nedavimobeograd.rs/javni-poziv-za-podrsku-deklaraciji-o-bojkotu-izbora-borba-za-slobodnu-srbiju/?fbclid=IwAR1ztcJohfZXvZFwOJAQJxIOmiyOF2Y4mvj_LcptytmQjip5U7c9GBv4Qsw)

<sup>11</sup> <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a442570/Vucic-o-protestu-u-Beogradu.html>

As of the time of writing this text, the media have announced a meeting between the representatives of majority and opposition parliament factions on 9 and 10 October to discuss the electoral conditions, to be mediated by a representative of the European Parliament. Statements have come from the opposition parties that had declared the boycott that their possible involvement in the meeting will not mean abandoning the boycott of the 2020 election. The additional involvement of the EU on putting the internal political situation in Serbia in order, on top of constant mediation in negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo, has shown that the seven-year-long trust the western partners have shown in the Serbian stabilitocracy comes at a political price. Instead of a single regional problem, with its authoritarian style of government, official Belgrade has created another one, this time inside Serbia itself, thus indirectly threatening the process of resolving the relations between Belgrade

and Prishtina. Because an electoral boycott by the strongest opposition grouping may put into question the political legitimacy of the parliament that would be elected in 2020 – thus creating a potential situation where another assembly might revoke its decisions related to Kosovo, declaring them undemocratic and illegitimate.

Only a politics that does not feed on inventing enemies can lead to peace and resolution of regional issues. It is therefore naive to believe that a political phenomenon such as stabilitocracy, with its mechanism of producing internal and external enemies, can lead to permanent peace and reconciliation in the Western Balkans region. The North Macedonian example shows that a long-term solution for the stability of this region does not lie in authoritarian politicians ruling over unstable stabilitocracies, but in democratic changes. Stabilitocracies are not a part of the solution; they survive on promises, keeping the problems ever open. ■■■

# non-implementation of ECtHR and BH Constitutional Court decisions in the rule of law and policy context

Dženana Karup Druško

There are as many as four decisions by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) concerning the BH Elections Act, and their implementation requires not only changes to certain provisions of the BH Elections Act, but also amending the BH Constitution, which is a component of the Dayton Peace Agreement. What these decisions have in common is that citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are discriminated against. In the Sejdīć and Finci case it is because members of the Roma and Jewish minorities cannot run for office as members of the BH Presidency, nor can they be elected members of the House of Peoples of the BH Parliamentary Assembly; in the Pilav case, it is because citizens living in the Republika Srpska entity cannot run for BH Praesidium unless they are Serbs; in the Zornić and Šlaku cases because citizens who do not wish to identify as members of one of the constitutional peoples – Serbs, Bosniaks, Croats – cannot run either for Praesidium or for the House of Peoples of the BH Parliamentary Assembly.

There is no doubt that implementing these decisions would help Bosnia and Herzegovina to make a step forward beyond the Dayton agreement, which above all stopped the armed conflict in BH, but which also, apart from the rights of the constitutional peoples, foresaw strengthening the state, state institutions, and the position of citizens; Bosnia and Herzegovina consented to that, among other things by subsequently accepting international commitments, including those stemming from joining the Council of Europe. For that matter, equal rights of all citizens, not only the constitutional peoples, are guaranteed in the preamble of the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, those who

obstruct the implementation of the decisions of the European Court in Strasbourg, which shall be further discussed later, and who hide behind the Dayton agreement when refusing any changes to the BH Constitution (although they never answered for not implementing some of its articles, including the annex 7 – return of refugees and displaced persons, which further affects the electoral process, as well as some other substantial issues), are doing all they can to keep the country in the 1990ies, with clear ethno-national divisions.

Under the BH Criminal Code, non-implementation of decisions of the European Court of Human Rights is a criminal offence which carries a penalty of between six months and five years of imprisonment. The Council of Ministers of BH entrusted the implementation of these decisions to the BH Ministry of Justice, which initiated certain activities, but in actual fact, the decisions have not been implemented nor has anybody been punished for that failure. Not implementing BH Constitutional Court decisions is likewise a criminal offence, yet no-one has ever been penalized for it.

It is important to say that in both cases, and when discussing the non-implementation of European Court of Human Rights and BH Constitutional Court decisions, the decisions in question are mostly such that affect constitutional issues of significance to the state, as well as to citizens and their rights, which means that, in addition to constituting a blow to the country's constitutional order, also creates legal insecurity for the citizens, and seriously undermines the rule of law. And the greatest responsibility for such a state of affairs is borne, along with politicians' irresponsibility, by the BH

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Apart from the rights of the constitutional peoples, Dayton agreement also foresaw strengthening the state, state institutions, and the position of citizens; Bosnia and Herzegovina consented to that, among other things by subsequently accepting international commitments, including those stemming from joining the Council of Europe. However, those who obstruct the implementation of the decisions of the European Court in Strasbourg, and who hide behind the Dayton agreement when refusing any changes to the BH Constitution, are doing all they can to keep the country in the 1990ies, with clear ethno-national divisions.

judiciary, whose non-prosecuting of those who violate the Constitution is itself a violation of BH laws. And no-one has ever been sanctioned for this. Citizens can punish politicians in elections, but the judiciary is untouchable and protects itself, as no judge or prosecutor was ever held responsible for never having penalised anyone for not implementing decisions by the BH Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights. And thus, the circle closes when it comes to those responsible for protecting the Constitution and laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the same time, the failure to respect the decisions by these two courts engenders a political crisis and seriously undermines security, as, for instance, in the case of declaring and celebrating 9 January as the Republika Srpska Day, on which the BH Constitutional Court gave as many as three rulings, declaring it an unconstitutional holiday, while in the meantime, the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Republika Srpska entity continues to celebrate it, invoking the decision (law) by the National Assembly of Republika Srpska and a referendum on the issue conducted at entity level – in Republika Srpska. The most recent celebration was also attended by senior officials of the CDU (Croatian Democratic Union), a party that is

in both the federation- and state-level governments, but also by the Croatian ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is precisely the CDU representatives who tried to instrumentalise the BH Constitutional Court in order to introduce changes to the BH Election Act pertaining to the election of members of the BH Praesidium and the House of Peoples of the BH Parliamentary Assembly. Such changes would seek to increase the constitutiveness, in this case, of the Croats, in the areas where they comprise the majority of the population and where the CDU is most in control, which would in turn reduce the rights of the Croats living in areas where they are in the minority. The CDU-BH, with great support from the Croatian CDU, has for more than a year been on a serious diplomatic offensive in Brussels, the seat of the European Union, as well as in other countries – France, the USA, Germany... even though its demands are entirely contrary to the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In addition, the Venice Commission's recommendation is clear: if the BH Election Act is amended, it should be in line with the guidelines and standards of the European Union.

It should be noted here that Bosnia and Herzegovina is among those countries that have unreservedly accepted all the commitments embedded in the European Convention on Human Rights, which the BH Constitution makes directly applicable, and that European Court of Human Rights decisions take precedence over BH Constitutional Court decisions, so that implementing the rulings of the Strasbourg court would automatically dismiss all of the CDU's demands that it has sought to realise through the BH Constitutional Court. The CDU's demands enjoy the support of Republika Srpska officials, led by Milorad Dodig, leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (AISD) and current member of the BH Presidency for the Serb



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people. In addition, Dodik has supported implementing the Sejdić-Finci ruling, but in his interpretation, the ruling only pertains to the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Federation of BH entity, and should under no circumstances apply to the Republika Srpska, something he stated a number of times, including in meetings with Brussels officials. This has no grounds, as the decision pertains to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as confirmed by the European Court decisions in the Zornić and Pilav cases. Nevertheless, it is precisely all this that has led to a serious political crisis in the country, one which has lasted years, and which further complicated the situation following the latest general election of October 2018.

The situation being that it will soon be two years since the General election in Bosnia and Herzegovina without a possibility in sight of a government being formed at state level and in the Federation of BH. At state level, the so-called coalition parties, the AISD, the DAP (Democratic Action Party) and the CDU cannot agree on continuing the country's NATO path (even though in recent years their leaders have adopted decisions to put the country on the path of Atlantic integration in parallel to European integration, embedding them in the Law on the Armed Forces of BH), that is, on consenting to submit Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Annual National Programme to NATO after receiving from NATO its Membership Action Plan, which, after all, BH has itself requested.

The reason the Federation of BH government hasn't yet been formed lies in the changes to the BH Elections Act that the CDU insists on, as mentioned above. The CDU enjoys the support of Milorad Dodik for its demands, while CDU leader Dragan Čović, although professedly in favour of Atlantic integration, supports Milorad Dodik in the process of forming the state-level government as he believes that BH's NATO path should not be an obstacle to appointing Milorad Dodik's candidate for the Chair of the Council of Ministers of BH. For his part, Milorad Dodik does not hide that he only seeks to strengthen the Republika Srpska, which he publicly calls a Serbian state, while doing everything to undermine the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its institutions, all the while the CDU's desired electoral changes give new wind to the idea of Herzeg-Bosnia, that is, a third entity.

Naturally, the aforementioned conditions are challenges directly related to the future of BH, but one needs to remember

that in other spheres too there are insurmountable differences between the largest (national) political parties, that have direct repercussions on BH's constitutional position, and even on its future.

Answers to the European Commission's Questionnaire submitted by Bosnia and Herzegovina late last year, as well as answers to the additional questions provided to Brussels early this year, contain a series of important facts and give the most illustrative representation of the state of relations and institutions in BH, especially when it comes to rule of law, the BH's path towards the European Union and NATO, but also regarding respect for the decisions of the BH Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

In its answers, BH has established that it has not carried out 13 BH Constitutional Court decisions. Asked why, BH responded that it had no answers. But when asked how many criminal proceedings were instituted as a result, the answer stated that the BH Prosecutor's Office did not manage to prosecute all those who wittingly or unwittingly blocked or obstructed Constitutional Court decisions, as it was "democratic procedures" what led to the failure to implement, which is absolutely unacceptable, even ridiculous. Non-implementation of Constitutional Court decisions, even just a single one, is an attack on the legal system and legal security of a state. Amendments to the BH Election Act pursuant to the ruling of the BH Constitutional Court on the appeal of Božo Ljubić (submitted on behalf of the CDU), but also to the ruling on the city of Mostar, may be (politically) the most sensitive, but alongside European Court of Human Rights decisions, they are crucial to resolving the country's electoral system, and as such represent a system of communicating vessels, for which reason they need to be resolved en bloc and together.

When the answers to the European Commission Questionnaire are analysed, especially those parts that concern security, defence and the related issue of rule of law, and compared to the information in the Annual National Report for NATO, it is unclear whence such resistance on the part of Milorad Dodik and other Republika Srpska politicians, as the answers to the Questionnaire and the ANP information barely differ. However, Republika Srpska acceded, supplied its answers and gave its consent for them to be sent to the European Commission even though certain parts of

the answers to the European Commission Questionnaire are more detailed and substantive than the “debatable” ANP.

Why does the ruling establishment of RS not wish to give their consent to the ANP, when they gave it for the answers to the European Commission is clear for all to see. What is unclear is how will the sudden change of the Republika Srpska authorities’ and Serb politicians’ decision, that they do not want to join NATO, be resolved. It is well known that for nearly a decade, RS authorities have supported the overall legislation related to BH’s accession to NATO. When Serbia decided to take a firmer position and declare so-called military neutrality (which no-one ever recognised in international relations), Republika Srpska too adopted a declaration on neutrality, of which even the RS Constitutional Court wrote that it is a “non-binding act” (in order to protect the authors and instigators of the declaration from possible criminal prosecution).

Of course, after a series of communiqués by the Russian Federation and its foreign affairs minister Sergei Lavrov that they “supported” the military neutrality of Serbia and BH, preceded by that of Macedonia and Montenegro, it is clear that it is precisely the Russian Federation that is behind this “neutrality” plan, having even, in order to accomplish the plan, attempted to stage a coup in Montenegro through members of its military intelligence service GRU, as well as to cause problems in North Macedonia – which both these countries managed to resist. On the other hand, it is evident that it is the Republika Srpska politicians that are now at a loss how to exit the vicious circle they drew themselves into. All the NATO-related legal procedures in BH have gone through Parliament with the support of Republika Srpska, and it would appear that they have “no time” in the RS to try to change or redefine the BH security policy when it comes to NATO within the framework of democratic procedures. Why are they in such a “hurry” and why do they one-sidedly reject and fail to respect the adopted legislation on defence are questions for the relevant prosecutors’ offices, not only and exclusively political questions.

In all the reports the RS authorities have been submitting for years on their own initiative to the UN General Secretary, as well as in other reports and appearances by RS officials, nearly all state institutions are disputed, from the issue of defence (the BH Armed Forces), through intelligence (the

Intelligence-Security Agency) and security affairs (the State Investigation and Protection Agency), to the judiciary (the Court and Prosecutor’s Office of BH) etc., claiming that most of the institutions that had been established at state level were illegal and illegitimate, going as far as claiming that the Office of the High Representative needs to be abolished.

The view of the RS representative as seen in the report on the structural dialogue is that the OHR has imposed the Law on the Court and the Prosecutor’s Office of BH, while according to them, judicial institutions “are under the jurisdiction of the entities, with the exception of the BH Constitutional Court,” stating that “in view of the fact that the justice system in RS is a rounded whole, in addition to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council or two discrete councils at state level, a High Judicial Council of RS and a RS body to appoint prosecutors also need to be established.”<sup>1</sup>

Before, after this and in the meantime, there has been such a “flood” of various declarations, views, announcements and ideas by political parties that someone whose focus of interest doesn’t lie on BH would legitimately ask themselves whether there were a way out of this situation? Because unfortunately, everything points to the rule of law being undermined in a way that is planned, witting and organised, beginning with European Court of Human Rights decisions, through BH Constitutional Court decisions, to the violations and non-compliance with the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and what is behind this are various political concepts, various political coalitions, disrespect or abuse of BH laws, obstructions of the work of legislative and other levels of government.

And finally, a question: what do the creators of the Dayton and Washington agreements think of all this? Decades of assistance extended and work of the international community have slowly but surely unravelled. What is the solution? It seems that there are only two possible solutions in the BH: either to continue the support of the international community, but with a strong policy of conditionality, or the further cav-

1 Incidentally, in its report “BH – SPP STRUCTURAL DIALOGUE ON THE JUDICIARY, which has been delivered to the EU Commission, the RS has clearly emphasised that foreign judges need to be cast out of the Constitutional Court, the existing rules abolished and a law on the constitutional court adopted, defining – of course – the election of local judges (under the mantle of politics)

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And finally, a question: what do the creators of the Dayton and Washington agreements think of all this? Decades of assistance extended and work of the international community have slowly but surely unravelled. What is the solution? It seems that there are only two possible solutions in the BH: either to continue the support of the international community, but with a strong policy of conditionality, or the further caving in of BH will be allowed while messaging about internal agreements, all the way to catastrophic consequences including a three-way division of BH, as well as notions of creating several states.

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ing in of BH will be allowed while messaging about internal agreements, all the way to catastrophic consequences including a three-way division of BH, as well as notions of creating several states. There is no doubt that it is clear to those in The Hague (but whether also to the majority in the international community and in Bosnia and Herzegovina?) that such a partition would entail new joint criminal enterprises, new crimes, new genocide. Can the European Union face a new conflict in the Balkans and a possible escalation of wars on European territory?

The European Union's latest messages, refusing to grant North Macedonia and Albania status as candidates, have created additional political pressure in the BH and further opened real geopolitical and geostrategic challenges in the BH as well. The responsibility of local political actors

towards politics in BH has long extended beyond the state borders of BH, and in recent years the borders of Europe as well, especially towards the east. For this reason, political relations in BH never were, and are especially not today, local political moves, and this should be clear to all. Bosnia and Herzegovina's path is clear: European and Atlantic integration, both underpinned by the rule of law. With the aid of the creators of the international agreements, both Dayton and Washington, this path has also become a legal obligation, and there is still a chance that it may be continued along this path regardless of changes in international politics globally and the strengthening of the Russian Federation. The European Union and NATO represent security for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but for the European Union as well. ■■■

## civil society vs establishment

# another view – in the eye of the political storm

## stabilo-radical rhapsody in Montenegro

Damir Nikočević  
Daliborka Uljarević

What do Montenegro, Benin, Fiji, Mali, Uganda and Honduras have in common? Not the number of sunny days in a year, the number of visitors, or GDP growth but, unfortunately, a flawed electoral process, attacks on the media, pressure on civil society, endemic corruption and weak rule of law, with a judiciary subservient to politics. This is not the authors' private opinion but the result of a global study by the *Economist Intelligence Unit* on the state of democracy in 2018, which listed countries with these characteristics among "hybrid" regimes.<sup>1</sup>

Since the 1990s, Montenegro has been in a state of permanent political tension, more or less intense, but with visible long-term consequences. From being closely tied up with Milošević's catastrophic policies, to inflation, wars, bombing, the split with Milošević, the forced state union with Serbia, to again becoming an independent state which, since 2006, has continued to fail the expectations of a considerable number of its citizens.

Seven years of accession negotiations for EU membership, and Montenegro as the best pupil in this process among the laggards and the unruly, have still not led to a strengthening of dialogue and tolerance in its internal affairs. Montenegrin political elites have little patience for those of a different mind and character and are quick to reach for scathing words (and sometimes violence).

Critical thinking or readiness for dialogue is viewed in this atmosphere as a form of derangement on the part of those calling for it. Excommunicating such individuals and pinning targets onto the backs

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When one has been in power for almost thirty years and does not understand the concept of change of government, it is hard to remain responsive to the needs of the citizens. Hence, the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists' (DPS) connection to the citizens has become perfunctory, enough to maintain the system but not to imbue it with necessary vitality. Such a system rests on the paternalism of its leader and clientelism of those around him, but during the elections it continues to pose as the anchor of the country's independence. The false equivalence between the authorities and the state is a crime against the public.

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of those who protest the irrationalities and failures of governance in Montenegro is also a way to pre-emptively shut up everyone else who sees trouble on the home front but may still be gathering the courage to speak up. Those who dared to air the dirty laundry were denounced by the authorities as the enemies and traitors of the state – even if they were among those who had built the state. The verbal lashing of the critics, brought to a fever pitch during the electoral race, cools down after victory is secured, to mollify the international public and score points in Brussels. But the consequence of these periodic witch hunts and suppression

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

of freedom of speech is reflected in the general decline of the still undeveloped civic and political culture.

When one has been in power for almost thirty years and does not understand the concept of change of government, it is hard to remain responsive to the needs of the citizens. Hence, the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists' (DPS) connection to the citizens has become perfunctory, enough to maintain the system but not to imbue it with necessary vitality. Such a system rests on the paternalism of its leader and clientelism of those around him, but during the elections it continues to pose as the anchor of the country's independence. The false equivalence between the authorities and the state is a crime against the public. The state ought to be above any party, above any leader, any part of the society and not be misused as part of the mechanisms for maintaining the power of one party.

It would be wrong to say that the ruling party is the only one to suffer from intolerance. The opposition, or at least some of it, is not immune either. Namely, close ties to the Serbian Orthodox Church turned a part of the opposition (Democratic Front) into prophets of backwardness. They too see the non-governmental sector as a necessary evil, and a lack of tolerance towards difference is visible, regardless of whether those who are different are national minorities, the LGBTIQ community, or even the majority ethnic group – the Montenegrins.

Between the deep trenches of these two sides of the public scene, the civic and progressive part of the society remain

in the worst position, buffeted by the two extremes. Division into “us” and “them” leaves no space to question individual and collective responsibility vis-à-vis the state. Everyday problems, social issues, economic hardship, environmental degradation are all relegated to the margins of public discourse. And instead of citizens becoming part of the solution and being the focus of the system, they are treated as décor or mere executors of party objectives within election cycles. In parallel, we are witnessing the regressing of the reforms that were launched and a decline of key political institutions and of representative democracy as such, with the rise of informal centres of power.

High profile political clashes are also taking over public opinion at large. A CCE study from March 2019 indicates a growing degree of radicalization, with a third of the respondents saying that violence in pursuit of political, social or religious objectives could be justified, which represents a potential for further radicalization. Moreover, the study also showed that Montenegrin citizens are most likely to discriminate against others on grounds of political belief and income, and that over two fifths assess that discrimination on grounds of ethnic and religious affiliation is rather or very widespread.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the media in Montenegro are in a crisis of their own. Except for a handful of private outlets fighting for survival in a crumbling media market, most of the media

<sup>2</sup> [http://media.cgo-cce.org/2019/03/CGO\\_Stavovi-prema-nasilnom-ekstremizmu-i-radikalizmu.pdf](http://media.cgo-cce.org/2019/03/CGO_Stavovi-prema-nasilnom-ekstremizmu-i-radikalizmu.pdf) (MNE)



Photo by Centre for Civic Education

accept to be in the service of the ruling party and linked para-political power and economic centres, often leading smear campaigns against critics of the government. The CCE was also a frequent target of these proxy campaigns, one of the most intense of which was conducted during spring 2018, with hundreds of mostly negative pieces. By way of illustration, in May 2018, journalist Olivera Lakić was brutally attacked and shot in the leg in front of her building. The daily “Pobjeda” found this event worthy of just two front-page headlines, while dedicating seven front pages to negative reporting about the CCE in the same period. The lack of dialogue is especially prominent in Radio-Television Montenegro (RTCG), a public service broadcaster, which despite being funded by taxpayers, marginalises public interest and pluralism of opinions, opting for mercenary reporting.

Treading through these minefields of complex political and social relations are the human rights defenders who in their everyday work fight for freedom of expression, de-radicalization of public discourse, and opening of society to necessary democratisation. They bravely resist the stabliradicalism that is dragging us back into the discourse of the dark 1990s. It remains to be seen if that will be enough of a base for the strength needed to truly Europeanise Montenegrin society. ■■■

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# on the margins of political discourse

Gresa Hasa

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What this is about is the attempt to shift the focus, from those responsible for the economic, natural, human and social crisis in the society, to those who criticize and fight against these dark forces in power – thus dividing the massive majority that would otherwise stick together against the only culprit: a state not working for the 99%. In this way, “the enemy” can no longer be identified with corrupt politicians or lawmakers creating and passing discriminatory or anti-human-rights laws and policies, but with those fighting this obscenity.

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“She’s a communist!”, he shouted right at my face, with the content air of someone who had just delivered a knockout punch to a debating opponent.

He, a man in his sixties, introduced with some pomp by the show host as an “intellectual” and a celebrity, and I, a student activist, were invited as commentators in a live TV broadcast dedicated that evening to the massive student protests that had brought the country’s public universities to a standstill.

“She’s a communist!”, he said, in response to the points I was trying to make, while I was just thinking that his sole contribution to the debate of that evening was to confuse and distract the audience from understanding the issues surrounding a very impactful piece of legislation: the Law on Higher Education, and the corollary issues such as high tuition fees, the factors that foster corrupt practices in academia, such as selling of grades, lack of adequate public funding, rampant sexism, and so on.

Why did he call me a “communist”? Why not a “leftist”, a “radical”, or just plain “crazy” for that matter?

The reason could be that “crazy”, “leftist” or “radical” do not go far enough in dismissiveness and defamation. None of those terms denotes extremism, nor does it provide the immediate strategic amplification that the term “communist” does. None of those terms can trigger outrage more quickly and effectively in the wider population; none can engender the bias necessary to drown an opposing voice. None can burn more quickly any bridge that had been painstakingly built between opposing sides, and none can more irreversibly kill the hope for future bridges.

The term “communist” remains toxic in Albania, and poisonous to any public discourse, as it shifts the debate from arguments to personal attacks. The term remains charged and derogatory, and it is used, mostly in the absence of arguments, to smear and discredit an opponent, or as a way to spin facts and manipulate a situation in the service of other political interests.

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What is really extreme at the end of the day? A government taking money from students, forcing them nevertheless to pay more while public universities in Albania lack basic conditions like libraries, books, computers, heating systems, while big businesses never pay their fair share of taxes? Who is extremist – a government working for big corporations and businesses, making deals with them and partially selling public universities to “big guys with money and power” and intimidating activists, citizens and students; or a grassroots attempt to stop such policies and laws, to hold such a government accountable and demand from it transparency, proper investment, better conditions, books, pencils, computers and the most important: the possibility to access university regardless of one’s class, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief or ethnicity?

A “communist” in such matters means a person who should not be trusted, somebody trying to manipulate people and cause harm. The “harm” involved is never specified because that would be unnecessary. Those who label others as “communists” in public today count on the collective memory of a people who lived through the horrors of Enver Hoxha’s dictatorship to almost instantly produce outrage, fear, and resentment. For a “communist” is a “*persona non grata*”. Those who engage in such name-calling have weaponized the term so that it can devalue someone completely; it reduces all their critical, independent, ideological and political thinking into some perversion no one should listen to; and finally, it aims to elicit immediate hatred on the part of the audience.

On rare occasions, especially amongst academics or intellectuals, the term “communist” or “communism” is used to denote exactly what the terms meant when they first came into existence: i.e., communism as a modern political and economic doctrine the theoretical foundation of which was developed by German sociologist, economist and philosopher Karl Marx, the father of a political idea that has yet to be entirely comprehended as it was never fully explained. Marx’s idea was, however, highly misused during the 20<sup>th</sup> century by political profiteers and later criminal dictators such as Joseph Stalin, Enver Hoxha, Ceausescu and the like, who gained power and sowed

the seeds of terror in their respective countries all across Eastern Europe.

Any intellectually mature person, with no more than a modicum of knowledge of political theory, would be aware of the correct meaning and use of the term(s). They would also be aware of how that meaning has been perverted, modified and transformed into a powerful discursive weapon, most notably in post-socialist societies.

The term “communist” as a label of humiliation will stick better, however, to exponents of the left side of the political spectrum. Grassroot activists, for example, are routinely subjected to such name-calling whenever they challenge those in power, or when they question the status quo, or demand responsibility from the decision-makers. The latter will use their privileged status (i.e., possession of financial means, control over public institutions, and – to a great degree – the media), to fully shut down such opposing voices.

And this is not just an Albanian phenomenon but a worldwide political tactic. In the United States of America, presumably (still) under some McCarthyist influence in the contemporary public discourse, especially lately, after the 2016 elections, such weaponized terms are frequently used against certain politicians, activists or public figures. Bernie Sanders is constantly attacked by opponents on both sides, Democrats and Republicans alike, as “a socialist” (which over there means more or less the same as “communist” does on this continent) for his ideas, especially the ones concerning education and healthcare.

In Europe, young activist Greta Thunberg is occasionally attacked as working for a “communist agenda” for her activism and ideas of a Green New Deal; for being so vocal and critical of those in power while at the same time mobilizing people worldwide in a common struggle for our future and that of the planet. In such cases as well, “communism” is not meant as some naive and idealistic idea of society but as the worst system people are placed under through the mechanics of dogma.

What this is about is the attempt to shift the focus, from those responsible for the economic, natural, human and social crisis in the society, to those who criticize and fight against these dark forces in power – thus dividing the massive majority that would otherwise stick together against the only culprit: a state not working for the 99%. In this way, “the enemy” can no longer be

identified with corrupt politicians or lawmakers creating and passing discriminatory or anti-human-rights laws and policies, but with those fighting this obscenity.

A Machiavellian tactic.

When the undeserved wealth of the privileged 1% and all their other interests are put into question or placed under threat, they will not remain silent. They will fight back, at the cost of destroying the entire educational or healthcare system or even our common house: planet Earth; while loading public discourse in such a way that people, activists or not, feel intimidated, their ability to act stifled. During the broadcast that evening, that man, my opponent, did not simply call me a communist: he interrupted and shouted at me while using that specific term. What could the audience possibly have felt in those moments? Anxiety? Intimidation? Stress? An infantile desire for the spectacle to go on because that is what this man's aim was: to turn a rigorous political debate or any attempt at such a debate, into an entertaining show. That is typically what can be expected from such "intellectuals". The elites – clowns – working closely with the government and fed by it, using solely emotions in the public sphere, to produce fear instead of arguments; to provide a banal show instead of understanding and clarification of certain topics of public interest.

The ultimate resistance is to not fall for such vocabulary and into political traps but to fight back by holding on to logic. The fight is necessary and vital, not just to social causes but to democracy itself, because a government that works to exclude the majority of the people from basic rights, such as education in this case, is not a government of the people. This is exactly what the Albanian government has been doing by violently passing a discriminating law that makes it harder for young people, and any other citizens who live below the median wage, to access higher education. And this law specifically harms girls and women in Albania, for whom university is a means of liberation. For a young woman on the outskirts of Tirana who can't access education will be forced to either work in some shoe factory for only 100 Euros per month, or married off by her family, to a man usually older than her.

What is really *extreme* at the end of the day? A government taking money from students, forcing them nevertheless to pay more while public universities in Albania lack basic conditions like libraries, books,

computers, heating systems, while big businesses never pay their fair share of taxes? Who is extremist – a government working for big corporations and businesses, making deals with them and partially selling public universities to "big guys with money and power" and intimidating activists, citizens and students; or a grassroots attempt to stop such policies and laws, to hold such a government accountable and demand from it transparency, proper investment, better conditions, books, pencils, computers and the most important: the possibility to access university regardless of one's class, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief or ethnicity?

Extremism is not to be found in an attempt to make a society equal, just and inclusive for all by using the most powerful weapon there is: critical thinking. Extremism however can be found at the margins of public discourse, where privileged men patronize, interrupt and shout at your face every time you try to fight back against a discriminating system that concentrates the money in the hands of the few, usually the same powerful men thriving in such patriarchal and capitalist structures.

Demanding free public education, free healthcare, a complete dismantling of patriarchy and immediate action on the climate crisis and policies that make life better for all is an effort happening on the international scale that will sooner rather than later bring about the change we all need. Such an effort does not need labels, especially derogatory extremist ones. ■■■

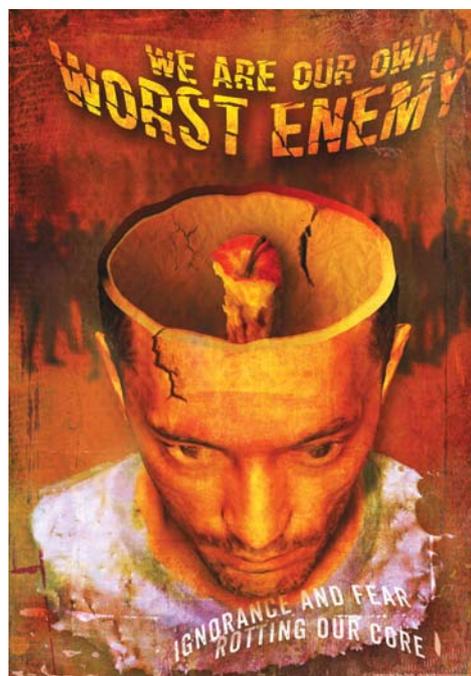


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