

West Balkan satellite states of the soft empire of the EU

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Abstract

Ulrich Beck's work, focusing on Europeanisation, presents one of the most usable – revolutionary – descriptions of the globalised world: he also shares the opinion that 'understanding' reality is, in and of itself, a revolutionary act. Reflexive modernity prompts us to reconsider the relation of the West-Balkan and Europeanisation. On the periphery of the EU, the West-Balkan states will only be able to regain their potential if the mostly economic integration also becomes a social one. All these efforts point us toward the renewal of democracy. Beck's works contain fine arguments for the foundation of self-governance: for the mutual acceptance of a bottom-up and democratic procedural order. In Europe, diversity brings about not only a multitude of problems but also opportunities for their solution. The social success of Europeanisation partly depends on the revision of elements of 'democracy', as majority-principled decision making may lead to the automatic exclusion of minority communities. This cannot be envisioned without reinterpreting the role of communities on Europe's periphery, including the relation between a nation state and its neighbours, and between a nation state and the EU as well.

We elaborate on the relationship of Beck's 'soft empire' and peripheral states, considering the EU as a non-homogeneous and non-hegemonic empire. We also work on the socio-theoretical "critique" of the so-called '*methodological nationalism*'. The starting point of a new approach is that the main problem is not any nation-building program. In our view, the reasons for the recurring, persistent problems with the issues of a nation its state and neighbours are the majority-principled decision-making and regional segmentation, and the fixed nature of borders. The emerging Balkan phenomenon of "*association with a delayed or cancelled accession process*" requires a new approach.

The West Balkan

A main factor in 21st-century Serbian political processes (just as in the post-Socialist region in general and thus in the West Balkan and Serbia) has been the attitude toward territorial retraction and toward the seceded regions. (The Albanian efforts of regional unity can be interpreted as the reverse side of this.) The South-Slavic civil wars that concluded the late 20th century had just the opposite result with regard to regionality that the Balkan wars had had in the beginning of the century. The region most commonly referred to as West-Balkan¹ is ethnically much more homogeneous than it had been in the period of 'regional unification', but it is still one of the most complex ethno-political puzzles in Europe. In the era of economic globalization and its associated supra-national institution system, however, "traditional methods" cannot handle the challenges in the West-Balkan any more.

Along with newer forms of integration and compatible with the so-called Europeanization, the centuries-old conflicts of the resident political actors (ethnic and/or territorial) need resolutions that are also acceptable for external actors. Establishing the new (: "democratic") political institutions in the region also presents this duality: there is a need to develop solutions that are still acceptable for the country's political scene and already satisfactory for the "observers" abroad. In the case

¹ Another expression, *Smanjeni Zapadni Balkan* or Rest of the West-Balkan ("Restern-Balkan") is used to collectively denote the countries in the region minus Croatia, i.e. non-EU states. (See Jović 2015, 133 p.)

of Serbia, this actually meant whether the false opposition of “*Europe or Kosovo*” can be transcended by any government coalition in a way that does not erase its own basis until the next elections. (In the meantime, the Albanian-dominated states of Albania and Kosovo have to give the impression that they are able to control their territorial aspirations, possessing the patience to wait for the right “historical moment”; without doubt, the long-term goal is the unification of Alban communities. Whether or not this happens within the EU as an empire or on the outer/inner rim, is practically of secondary concern.) As the last two Serbian nation-level elections in 2012 and in 2014 prove, this was in fact achieved. (In addition, so far the Albanian aspirations have not outgrown the frames acceptable for big political actors).² The basic situation has not changed since 2008 and is further complicated by the following: the ruling parties should³ demand *de facto* regional autonomy for the Serbs living in one block in the *de jure* unrecognised but autonomous Kosovo. What’s more, they had better support the autonomy efforts of the Serbian entity (Republika Srpska) in Bosnia-Herzegovina and should not isolate themselves from the pro-Russian communications demonstrated by certain social groups in Montenegro. These are rights and activities that the *vox populis*, taking the same minimums for granted, could not accept in the case of ethnic communities in Serbian territories. For them, Albanian, Bosnian or Hungarian regional autonomy is out of question. While the Serbian demands⁴, also prompted by international actors, face spontaneous and long-lasting disapproval from the Kosovars. At the same time, an (oppositional) party in Hungary is attacked for attempting to open an office on the Serbian parts of the Tisza region, but the Serbian governing party operates such offices with un-reflected self-evidence in the Serb-populated territories of Bosnia. Thus a characteristic West-Balkan context accompanies the enforcing role of external factors like the European Union, not only in the actual dimension of government actions, but in a similarly characteristic ideological-semantic dimension as

² Both the problem of the inviolable Serbian sovereignty and of the provisional unification of Albanian ethnicities threaten with the emergence of a less docile local elite. All major (local and global) actors are in favor of a domesticated handling of these problems.

³ As an implicate national minimum.

⁴ See the 2015 December 17 summary of the ECMI in Flensburg. The publication also includes a chronological synopsis of the stages of the process. See: <http://us6.campaignarchive1.com/?u=0e3bc8a45806bf65531105c4b&id=5d29ca412c>
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well. Depending on the case, these roles are not only overvalued, but re-evaluated. This neighbourhood- and minority-policy and its institutions could well be reinterpreted through Beck's 'soft empire' theorem. (The essence of Beck's views is that the EU generates a unique action space with specific asymmetries and options not only for its member states, but for its potential partners as well, regardless of their distance from actual accession.)

The context of segmentation – normative democracy theory

The starting point of the Western normative democracy theory is the so-called theory of communicative action by Jürgen Habermas, but its teleology seems to have its target in the post-national constellation (Habermas 2006).

“Though sovereignty and the state’s power monopoly has remained formally intact, the increasing interdependence of the world’s societies weakens the premise that a national policy can overlap, even regionally and within the borders of the state, with the actual future of the society of the nation.”

Jürgen Habermas 2006: The post-national constellation. L’Harmattan, Budapest 66 p.

This social theory is based on leftist ideology, glorifying equality and striving to transcend (neglect) national programs, has its 'normative' suggestions; tracing them leads one to a **constitutional fetishism** intending to recycle the political tradition of contract theories. Its own consent-principled expectations are based on the notion that the constitutional directives regulate everyone in their choosing of implemented political actions (for details, see Soós-Pap 2015). However, the citation also suggests that the importance priority of the problems differ for the central states (and the minds behind their solution theories) and for the post-Socialist (member or candidate) countries on the internal and external periphery. The former would address the challenges of economic globalization by setting up an action space realised on a supranational political level, and the framework for this could be a Beck-ian empire of the cosmopolitan Europe or a global state. The latter have tried to realise their nation-building aspirations, all infeasible in the not so soft Soviet imperial conditions, through their own 'restorative revolutions' (: regime change, system transition). Internal relations are less and less homogeneous; for the former states, the task at hand is to establish a new primary majority, transcending the traditional concept of nation (willing

to live without shared past, culturally heterogeneous). But post-Socialist countries are striving to conclude a historically (before 1944) unfinished project of overlapping nation and state, in a 21st-century environment. It could be considered belated or even anachronistic from the centre, but it is not without validity.

As opposed to this, the new generation (Axel Honneth, Jan-Werner Müller) of the Habermas school prefers the procedural order manifested in the so-called Copenhagen criteria (where it lacks the necessary socio-theoretical foundations, though). This is true for theory (Honneth: *The Struggle for Recognition*; Honneth 2010)⁵ and practice as well (J-W. Müller: *Verfassungspatriotismus*; Müller 2010), but definitely true while establishing the extended political community of the EU. This is explained in the essay on Europe's constitution by Habermas (see Habermas 2012, 135). However, the constitutional process of the EU is known to be stalled. Therefore, relations between the large social groups of EU citizens (nations, ethnicities and all 'non-dominant' (minority) communities that have a commonly shared "attitude" or life-world to their environments) are regulated by member state-level constitutions and higher (but legally less enforceable and only indirectly effectual) human-right norms.

Integration and the belated nation-building

Normative social theories tend to devaluate exercises in nationalism, as not facilitating equality and consent. However, these are not a one-time excess of post-Socialist social phenomena, but today they seem to be normal society-building practice. In all cases, the most striking political program among them is **nation-building**, or as Zoltán Kántor calls it: *national re-institutionalisation*. (see Kántor 2014, 49) Without regard to ideological preconceptions, this is a realistic view on nationalism that can adequately interpret the discussed phenomena. The multi-actor process gained a characteristic context, due to the regional integration efforts (factual or intended EU-accession) from most post-Socialist countries, in spite of their former attitude of

⁵ During the process of nation building, non-dominant communities may face disadvantages; the socio-theoretical basis of their legal and moral efforts is provided in Honneth's work (Honneth 2013).

segmentation. Thus the framework of interpretation must also be extended. As Kántor summarizes it:

"The process of national re-institutionalization in the post-Communist period is to be examined with regard to state re-organization, minority self-organization, support from the home country, and EU influence. Nationalism should be analysed within the framework of the political actions of the four actors and the interactions of their policies, as a separate analysis of the actors can lead only to partial understanding."

Zoltán Kántor: *The institutionalization of the nation in Hungary after the system transition*. Budapest, Osiris, 2014, 51.

It is also worth noting that there is a duality present in the successor states of the several national communities of declaredly equal status; the newly or again independent nation states assume the two extremities of re-institutionalization. Serbia, even with a past of civil war, is not so unwilling to have minority institutions (unless they have regionalisation aspects), while Slovakia, with much better transition 'results' by having peacefully seceded from the Czech Republic, is quite reluctant to establish any minority institutions (autonomous bodies and competences). However, Slovakia has been more exposed as a home country; the meeting of the Serbian and Slovakian prime ministers also involved discussion of the situation of the Slovakian minority in Serbia. Albanian territories were historically forced to develop separately; their integration goal, the vision of a future Great-Albania does not facilitate neighbour- and minority policies. Without a definite tendency, it can be stated that those successor states that had had ethnic institutions during the Socialist era are more willing to allocate resources for minority institutions; and states in a more advance stage of nation building (and operating with more stabilized state and nation boundaries) find it easier to achieve less problematic neighbourhood policies. (Even if relations have been shifting on a weekly basis, due to the refugee crisis and to the semantic and structural actualities that the admittance/restriction issue brought in – See Ördögh 2015).⁶

⁶ In his paper Ördögh highlights that Serbia's refugee policy also has serious challenges: the legal framework is not conform to EU-expectations and the design of system itself is substandard, in terms of capacity and skill of personnel (Ördögh 2015, p 181). There is a symbolic war of interpretations ongoing among the neighboring countries, largely restricted to the filed of media. The mass appearance of refugees, the infrastructural and ideological unresolvability of the crisis opened a new chapter in self-interpretation. The international attention now makes it possible to re-position other symbolic offenses about the neighbors.

The system transitions starting in 1989 meant similar processes for countries in the former Socialist block. In Serbia, this happened in two distinct phases.⁷ A major lesson of the period is that late Socialist relations and positions (advantages and disadvantages) could disintegrate in the course of months: how a state utilized its opportunities during the transition mattered much more than the starting conditions. Granted, there were historical differences stemming from cumulative causality and involving compulsory paths. One such difference is the internal conditions for restarting the nation state program. After 1989, these defined the scene of national and minority politics, the roles of home country and of primary majority; conflicts of neighbourhood politics can be traced back to such fears (territorial demands, dismissal of self-autonomy efforts).

Therefore, though we would not have expected it a quarter of a century ago, Albanian and Serb nation-state efforts face very similar structural problems throughout the various successor states, fiercely defending their hard-earned independence and thus more sensitive to symbolic atrocities. Meanwhile, economic indicators of the involved two (or three, or five)⁸ countries converged rather to each other than to those of the aspired EU member states. The 'international judgment' on a given action (an atrocity of an act of heroism, depending on the interpretative context of the event) is also a function of how they interfere with the present interests of the big players.

Thus, acts of a functionally similar status can have differing international careers in divergent interpretative contexts, ranging from near *casus belli*⁹ to being too low-key for major news agencies. An involved neighbouring state can, however, have its

⁷ Certain elements of the normal system transitions (party formation, pluralistic media, a limited economic transformation) were present in the first phase (the Milošević-regime) as well, but the second phase began on October 5, 2000, by institutional transformation.

⁸ In addition to the Albanian-majority states of Albania and Kosovo, Macedonia also has a politically relevant Albanian minority. The Albanian communities in Serbia and Montenegro have regional/local significance. Serbs in Croatia, Montenegro and especially in Kosovo can be seen as politically relevant. They form a separate entity in Bosnia. (C.f. Reményi 2015, 13)

⁹ This is no poetic exaggeration: refer to the Serbian and Croatian daily papers from 2015 September for official and less official 'interpretations' of the measures that were taken in connection with the refugee crisis and each other.

media dominated by the same event for weeks or months: consider the drone “attack”¹⁰ occurring at a European championship qualifying round with Serbia vs Albania playing. The international media treated it as a petty scandal soon to be forgotten, while it dictated the discourse space for long in Albania and Kosovo, but in Serbia alike.

The influence of international actors

Options for external actors were also significantly bolstered in the new, soft imperial conditions. As long as the struggle for autonomy was top priority, other perspectives and compulsions could be suppressed. But beside the shared goal of EU accession, the new international system of relations stresses temporary compromises with the efforts of competitor countries in the region. The whole EU accession process was designed as a process of reconciliation. However, a coerced reconciliation with the accession perspective in mind does not mean the disappearance of nation-building intentions, or that these would not result in symbolic clashes between states/nations. Beside the aforementioned football conflict, many other symbolic battles are fought by the region’s nations. Nowadays these remain within the scopes of their own media, and most do not transcend the scene of interpretative “wars”.

The West-Balkan states are at different stages of the accession procedure, they have differing goals and very divergent perspectives. Their movements are further complicated by certain states competing for regional influence, compensating their recent or older losses of position and referring to cultural and religious origins and traditions. Both Russia and Turkey regard the region as a significant auxiliary stage of

¹⁰ On October 14, 2014, the Serbia-Albania EC-qualifier match in Belgrade was disrupted by a drone hovering above the field and sporting a flag of Greater Albania and Albanian national symbols. Both fans and players took offense, the flag was captured and the match was interrupted. There were allegations that the drone was controlled by Olsi Rama (the brother of Albanian president Edi Rama), who had immunity by his US passport. Along with two companions, he was apprehended and then released by Serbian police. (See <http://www.naslovi.net/2014-10-15/b92/albanci-se-utrkuju-dron-je-nas/11976498>, <http://www.naslovi.net/2014-10-15/blic/ko-je-olsi-rama-covek-koji-je-zeleo-da-izazove-nerede-i-krvoprolice/11972510>.) The incident was interpreted in Serbian publicity as a symbolic violation of the territory of the Serbian state.

global politics.¹¹ Even the otherwise apparently particular Serbian/Albanian intentions can be provided an international context, though their influence on local politics is today largely reduced to the symbolic gestures of occasional investments; both the Albanian and the Serbian parties prefer to maintain good relations with the European Union, to display an accession potential. Still, nation building is ongoing parallel to Europeanization, and the strongmen of the national elite working for European acceptance were regarded incompatible by the West a couple of decades ago; they have to seize opportunities to utilize cultural and religious connections for political gains. (This is true for Vučić and Tači as well: not only their pasts, their presents are also intertwined, just as the parallels of their paths from radicalism to consolidation are also perceptible.)

As to the neighbour and minority policy of 'those already within the empire', experiences are ambiguous. After becoming a member, the legal situation of minorities quickly left the agenda, and is occasionally revisited as neighbour policies only. Membership aspirants (and those pursuing the program of the strong nation state, perhaps while maintaining a pretence of postponed accession plans) can prepare for more and more explicit requirements on the part of the empire. (Cf. Nakamara 2009, Samardžić 2009) At the same time, the imperial context has been quite successful in domesticating the verbal and symbolic clashes that are inevitably involved in nation building. These clashes are more for internal use only, and the opponents who almost seemed mortal enemies in their twenties are now real-politicians in responsible positions, calming tempers. At the same time, the individual states do not have a well detailed, definite neighbourhood policy (Cf. Tatalović 2015, 151-158)

Concepts of space and power in the new millennium

The turn of the millennium saw several authors discussing the unipolar world order and the consequent (postmodern) state of being 'without history'. Partly to counterbalance and refine them, important works of social and spatial theory had been published by the mid-2010s. Based on these, I intend to sketch the options that define

¹¹ The Jović-article has a separate chapter on the recent developments of these relations, see Jović 2015, 139-143 p.

the political freedom of the West-Balkan countries. But first, attention must be drawn to Niklas Luhmann's work urging a sociological enlightenment, where space is *highlighted as a medium of power*. It is through space that the origin of all political phenomenon, the relation of power, becomes manifest. Power is a category of relations. It does not exist self-sufficiently. Discussing it makes sense only within the relation shaped by its existence/absence. And this relation is given shape by space (territory brought under the power): as the sand of the beach makes the track of feet visible, so is power itself made visible by territory.¹²

An important constituent part of a ruled area is its borders. For Luhmann, segmentation (definition of spatial boundaries of power, an inflexible and hard-to-change construct, like a fixed state border) is the originator of many additional questions.¹³ The external environment, the powers on the outside of segmentation (them), the area under control, the internal system (us), actors (political agents) on the two poles of the power relation, all these and their ways¹⁴ of interaction create politics itself. A major characteristic of the controlled territory is that the system of power (politics) is usually unwilling to yield a part of the territory that is under its control. Territory loss always means capitulation for them, which undermines legitimacy and therefore results in the transformation of internal power relations. Losing control over a territory also involves the de-legitimation of the reigning power. And the other way around, power that is able to transcend the current segmentation relations gains further legitimacy as a result of its own territory-gaining/maintaining policies.¹⁵ The connection between the potential for maintaining power and territory gain/loss seems undisputable.

¹² Of course, both the theoretical and practical power concepts involve non-spatial power institutions, but these (for example national councils in Serbia) are established to avoid the spatial restrictions on power. The intention is to create a power form that does not threaten the power over the nation state space through internal segmentation (regional autonomy).

¹³ See Luhmann 2002, 58.

¹⁴ Political theory has developed tools to present these issues, but Luhmann's stance is worth highlighting, as it also addresses the background of the phenomena.

¹⁵ This was well demonstrated by the internal legitimacy of Milošević's system: despite the lost wars and the military/exploitation economy, they had a serious internal basis throughout Serbia even in the final days (after the NATO bombings).

However, history is apparently unwilling to end, and the unipolar world order seems to be unsustainable for ever or long. Among the visible scenarios of shaping political space, two concepts are discussed about imperial large regions, both having West-Balkan aspirations as well. One is that the whole territory of the West-Balkan joins the European Union (regarded by many as the only alternative). The other is a concept about the imperial border of the Eurasian megaregion, bolstered through Orthodoxy.¹⁶ The basis of the two concepts have their own characteristic ideas about spatial manifestation of the relations toward modernity. But while the Russian/Eurasian concept involves a plan that externally criticizes modernity, to be realised in a controversially followed imperial framework¹⁷, the worries about joining the European megaregion are internal in nature (their basis being reflexive and self-critical modernisation). The ideas of the latter consider the conceptual basis of imperialism to be radically changeable, thus so is the relation to a ruled territory. (The EU as an empire, claims Beck and Grande's book¹⁸, is neither hegemonic nor homogeneous: hence it is 'soft'¹⁹).

We have to note here that a concept of Eurasia to be unified by the Russian state appears as a necessity (as a description of an eventually occurring process whose only alternative is annihilation²⁰). As opposed to this, joining the EU poses an outcome that is still influenced by many factors, with details blurred, and the temporal horizon of its realization is uncertain, but not unforeseeable.

The involved West-Balkan countries (the Russian narrative does not explain what roles would countries with non-Orthodox majority receive, trapped within the

¹⁶ A main ideologist is Alexandr Dugin (Kiss 2013, Szilágyi 2015), but Srđan Perišić also discusses the cultural and real-political aspects of the concept. C.f. *Osnove ruske geopolitike* (Foundations of the Russian geopolitics; PERIŠIĆ 20015, 25-61. p.).

¹⁷ See DUGIN 2004a; 2004b; 2008; 2013.

¹⁸ Beck's works often include a critical re-assessment of modernity. Here we highlight *Cosmopolitan Europe*, co-authored with Edgar Grande and explicating on the EU as a singular imperial construct. C.f. the historical analysis of sovereignty: BECK-GRANDE 2007, 99. p

¹⁹ Soft is a 'total' adjective here and a future characteristic of the empire to come, not to be confused with the soft political methods of international relations (as opposed to military actions).

²⁰ C.f. the sections on Russian interference on Ukrainian territories in DUGIN 2013, 42-44. p.; PERIŠIĆ 2015, 287. p.

natural boundaries of this civilizational megaregion)²¹ would take a peripheral status in both scenarios, with all the included disadvantages (anomalies in development level)²² and advantages (mobility due to lower degree of integration)²³.

Even for a description operating with negative (soft) attributes, imperialism establishes its structure on elements of differing status. Spatial distance is paired with cultural distance/otherness. This is completely the opposite of the currently 'official' unipolarity-based imperial doctrine, according to which the global society needs to be constituted of homogeneous (sharing the same operational principles) elements. These are composed of essentially equivalent variants of *capitalist* economy and *democratic* decision making²⁴.

West-Balkan countries trapped between commitment expectations

In the middle of the second decade of the new millennium, none of the issues that are crucial for the West-Balkan countries are concluded for good.²⁵ Neither ethnical or state boundaries, nor the possibility of categorization along influence zones could be seen as completed. Only Croatia's EU accession brought apparently irreversible changes that will enforce some self-control from the parties, when it comes to claims about Croatia.²⁶ The situation is better described as "un-solidified solutions" than as

²¹ Perišić comments that the Balkan is explicitly included in the influence zones of the new Russian geopolitical doctrine; see PERIŠIĆ 2015, 246-248.).

²² Or the fact that that Russia is relatively far away. The lack of territorial continuity is a vulnerable point in the theorems intending to bond Slavic-Orthodox West-Balkan states to Russia, unlike the commitment policies of adjacent authoriter leaders (see CIS, Lukashenko and Belorussia). A West-Balkan state can only achieve a status of 'observer' regarding the institutionalization of the Eurasia-concept.

²³ At the West-Balkan research workshop in Graz, this is referred to as the so-called Turkish scenario, 'advancement without accession'.

²⁴ Luhmann uses the neutral term 'majority-principled'.

²⁵ In other words, they seem re-openable, when the situation demands.

²⁶ Croatia's territorial aspirations are not settled and there is no consistent neighborhood policy to speak of, either. C.f. Hrvatska politika prema državama Zapadnog Balkana nakon članstva u

“frozen conflicts”. No party has it in its interest today to spark a conflict of similar intensity to the civil wars of the late 20th century. Nevertheless, the following West-Balkan issues are still open present day:

- state situation of Kosovo
- formal/institutional unity of Serbian districts in Kosovo
- interrelations of Bosnian entities
- relation of the entities with their origin countries
- Macedonia’s official name usage
- the level of autonomy (/secession) of the Albanian-majority parts of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro
- the issue of the Sanjak, located in two distinct countries today
- the state situation of Montenegro and the divergent ethnic identities

These topics need to be treated as provisionally accessible problems by the current elite, because the declared and supposedly conclusive acceptance of the status quo would erode the legitimacy of their own rule. This gesture would abandon control over these now international, politically addressable issues, whose re-emergence could shift power relations within the new states, even on the short run. Suggesting a future re-settlement of the issues, they also let their own options and mobilisation potential untapped. If consolidation processes progress slower than hoped, they will have the means for the re-legitimization of their rule, even considering their gradually eroding action potential.²⁷

There is an obvious and powerful pressure from the international entities active in the region. However, the governing parties in 2000-2008, origination from the Democratic Opposition in Serbia (DOS), cannot forfeit the Southern province of Kosovo. (not for their own ideological/value basis, but such a symbolic act would soon render them a dwarf party²⁸) The various party formations organized by veterans of the

Evropskoj Uniji - Attitude of Croatian politics to West-Balkan countries after the EU accession. TATALOVIĆ 2015, 151-155.).

²⁷ The whole region has to face challenges of political and social transformation and the resulting crises. The relative un-consolidatedness of the newly or again autonomous states is manifest in the frequency of early elections.

²⁸ In 2012, president Tadić also experimented with early elections, which fits in the tendency. (However, the Democratic party had made a strategic mistake earlier, when they formed a

Kosovar liberation battles are also unable to allow for the institutional separation (regional autonomy/'un-secession) attempts of the formally taken, but never really ruled northern, Serbian territories.²⁹ Global players also acknowledged the complexity of the situation. This is why *Realpolitik* can have an advantage in the West-Balkan, during the implementation of the expectations from the centre.

New opportunists

The present situation is thus an intriguing ground for regional powers (ex-empire) redefining themselves today, such as Russia or Turkey. Cultural bonds (Orthodoxy, 'Slavic psyche') and century-old imperial presence, and the Islamic regional mosaic left behind by the receding empire has never actually lost sight of this periphery. In a period of newer uncertainties, the time came³⁰ when much influence could be gained from a small investment. The aforementioned internal controversies of the issue also enabled Russia to find partners among the Orthodox Yugoslavian successor states. This is partly instead of Romania, committed to both the USA and the EU, and instead of Bulgaria, now a geo-economic partner coerced by certain actions and values expected by the new centres. Compared with the mobilised capital, all this seems to be carried out with a fairly good return rate.

The efforts defining Russian-Serb relations in the new millennium are in many aspects different from those in the past. Russia inherited key positions in international organizations from the USSR, and in the last fifteen years Serbia has expected Russia to take a favourable stance for them (e.g. a veto in the UN Security Council) in the emerging unresolved/unresolvable issues. Russia, as part of its 'geopolitics of resources' strategy³¹, strove to shape its economic footholds in the Balkan. In other words, the Russian party just had to not counter the Serbian expectations, for relatively cheap

coalition with the Serbian Socialist party of Slobodan Milošević – again, for the sake of remaining in power.)

²⁹ See Opportunity?/UDRUŽENJE/ZAJEDNICA VEĆINSKI SRPSKIH OPŠTINA: OBAVEZA ILI PRILIKA? ECMI: Kosovo Communities Issues Monitor, Flensburg, 2015, 4. p.

³⁰ In his article, Dejan Jović commits a separate chapter for the phenomenon, subtitled '*The effects of Russia's and Turkey's growing power*'; see: JOVIĆ 2015, 139-143. p.).

³¹ PERISIĆ 2015, 165-169. p.

economic advantages. However, neither party has been able to accomplish the maximum of their intentions. Serbia was disappointed by Russia not really inhibiting the international process of Kosovo's recognition. (Whether Russia was unable or unwilling is a matter of interpretations.³²) Each ruling Serbian government actively anticipated and counterbalanced this intention: national gas company NIS went into Russian majority ownership well under its price, which the Serbian media³³ and opposition keeps thematising. This Russian move was to be an organic part of the planned South Stream gas pipeline, later abandoned due to Western pressure. Thus the Serbian expectations of the collectable transit fees and 2000 new jobs failed, never settling the balance against the Russian benefits.³⁴

The contrary strategy of opposing Russian efforts does not seem to be surely profitable, either, as the case of Montenegro shows. Having Orthodox and Russophile traditions itself, the republic gained independence in 2006 and was committed toward Western orientation on the 2016 national elections.³⁵ Russia- and Serbia-friendlies remained in opposition, but NATO membership and the emphasised siding with the EU/USA will not solve the country's everyday problems. One-third of its domestic product comes from tourism, with just Serbia and Russia being the two major source states in terms of number of guest nights.³⁶ Most of Montenegro's foreign trade and its foreign-originated capital investment are from these two countries as well.³⁷ The new Montenegrin cabinet will have much to do to reconcile economic interests and symbolic allegiance.

³² Ibid, 136-141. p

³³ See <https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/bezograncija/2400/and>
<https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/bezograncija/2468/Rusko-srpski-posao-veka-drugi-deo.htm> ,
downloaded: 2017.01.09.

³⁴ PERIŠIĆ 2015, 172-175. p

³⁵ Prime minister Đukanović's party had the relative majority, but he himself was removed from power. C.f. the election results at :
<http://www.dik.co.me/izbori%202016/Konacni%20rezultati.pdf>, downloaded: 2016.11.20.

³⁶ 27.8% from Serbia and 26.5% from Russia in 2015, see the Montenegrin office of statistics:
<http://www.monstat.org/cg/>. Downloaded on 2016.11.20.

³⁷ According to 2013 data, 27% of the investments come from Serbia and another 10% from Russia. see the Montenegrin office of statistics: <http://www.monstat.org/cg/>. Downloaded on 2016.11.20.

The third West-Balkan country involved in Orthodoxy is Macedonia, whose Eurasian allegiance is rather hindered by the fact that they could only minimally get Russian support to their now international problems. They also continue an unresolvable debate on name usage with the Orthodox, but not Slavic, Greece. (In this regard, the EU-member Greece is also in the mentioned Balkanic dilemma: they can't forfeit rights to the name without risking internal hazards.) Macedonia has become infamous for being a European mediator of the Russian propaganda machinery: most of the Russian-controlled fake news sites are based here. However, the Macedonian political elite is well aware that Western orientation is perceived as exaggerated by the Slavic-Orthodox majority, and this can be counter-productive. It proved true in the recent Bulgarian elections; like a pendulum that tends to swing to the other extreme and facilitate Russophile powers.

The geopolitical framework of regional initiatives

Bottom-up regionalism in the West Balkan invariably faces suspicions of ethnic secessionism. The independence of Kosovo is a warning example for power elites. Similar situations are avoided whenever possible, but they need to support any parallel efforts on their own brethren's part within the borders of another country. They just cannot afford not to help their fights for recognition. Politics does not necessarily require consistency. This is why such constellations seem often un-modellable for the external viewer.

Áron Léphaft counts with several options of ethnically-based regional autonomy in his discussion of the emerging anomalies.³⁸ As the new states and those with a distinct (pre-Yugoslavian) past are small in area, and as their historical developments took place within the same megaregion, bottom-up regional initiatives can only involve ethno-regional efforts. One exception is the northern Serbian province of Vojvodina. The region was not always part of the Serbian state, and was populated by South Slavs as a consequence (refugee waves and relocation projects) of the 17th century military endeavours in the collision zone of the declining Ottoman Sultanate and the expanding Habsburg empire. Vienna had its interest in the formation of a sort

³⁸ Léphaft 2014.

of border buffer region, and in a partial and delayed restoration of the Hungarian Crown's jurisdiction; this was achieved between 1690 and 1867. However, the resulting territory developed a demographic and economic structure different from both the Balkans and the Habsburg realms, when at the Paris peace treaties in 1918 it was decided that Vojvodina went to the Serb-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom and then to Yugoslavia. One-third of the population was South Slavic at that time. Slavic majority was brought on by the modernization/colonization processes in the Yugoslavian period and the relocations that followed WW2. During the era of the second Yugoslavia (1945-1989), the multi-ethnic character of the region was emphasised, in accordance with Socialist ideology. The population movements accompanying the civil wars around the turn of the millennium increased the homogeneity of the province that has a strong (two-third) Serbian majority today³⁹, with once state-founder ethnicities like Croats and Montenegrins in minority. During a period of three centuries (from 1690 to 2000 – two centuries of which did not see any West-Balkan concepts of state or nations shaping the development of the region), an ethos emerged here that is in many aspects different from those in central and southern Serbia, one that is suitable for bottom-up initiatives. However, this does not mean an ethnically based regional autonomy (attainable in theory only for the Hungarian local majority in northern Bácska and along the Tisza river), but a regionalism founded on economic and cultural “separate development”.

The issue of Vojvodina is secondary to other problems in the West Balkan. Though the ethnical emancipation of minorities and the regional emancipation of the majority has been ignored in favour of efforts to reinforce central state power⁴⁰, the solution is not hopeless. The key factor to bring change is found outside the Balkan.

In the process toward the EU, Serbia had to formally enable the formation/consolidation of the institutions that regained attention, due to the accession criteria. The explicit thematization of regional development and minority

³⁹ In the last census in 2011, 66.67% was the proportion of Serbs. Source: Republički zavod za statistiku, <http://webzrzs.stat.gov.rs/WebSite/Public/ReportResultView.aspx?rptId=1210>; downloaded on 2017.01.11.

⁴⁰ The de facto autonomy of the province was supported rather from the opposition, even by the Western-oriented parties. Trapped within false parallels like Kosovo-Vojvodina, they did not do much for its realization. The influence and support of regional parties is too small to change the historically established situation.

rights (in the so-called Chapter 23) will eventually prevail over the Orthodox/Unitarian legal notion that only the central government can have jurisdiction throughout Serbia.⁴¹ These issues can actually be solved through institutional solutions that are acceptable for the European Union and also maintain Serbian regional unity (as a fundamental and indispensable tenet), so they are not impossible to settle. The solution to both seem to be within reach.⁴²

However, the question whether Serbia can be called a consolidated democracy is still open. It is certain that the question is hard to answer regarding the whole West Balkan, actually. The 2017 paper by Tibor Ördögh, *Serbia as a Consolidated Democracy* addresses this issue. The institutional checkpoints he examines (including constitution, cabinet, party system and political culture) present that the process is not fully concluded, but it is neither much different from what can be expected in the region: the required institutions exist, though they do not operate with truly good efficiency. The author highlights a deficit, the media' disproportionate power in influencing political will, that has also become suspicious in allegedly consolidated Western democracies. A slow increase of the democracy index (from the 66. to the 65. rank, see Ördögh 2017, 36.) can be perceived as an achievement. But there is a most recent trend of closing in on the Western model; this emerged due to the fact that more and more consolidated democracies question the legitimacy of the political elites, with the media as a primary factor in the legitimacy deficit. It can be seen as disturbing news for everyone, but the West Balkan region can hardly be blamed for its emergence.

⁴¹ C.f.: PAP-BOZSÓ 2014; SARNYAI-PAP 2015

⁴² Regarding minority rights, there are forms invented in the early 2000s that are not accompanied by territorial consequences. This is how the system of personal autonomy and of national councils could be established. Jurisdiction debates are ongoing, but they must be solved and consitutionalized to continue the EU-accession negotiations. (see Pap 2014, 95-99). Vovvodina has always been a politico-technical question. Now that national parties also managed to set up their bases, it is no longer unsolvable. (Until recently, the 'democratic opposition' was able to use the province as a fall-back area.) The emergent solutions of ethnical autonomy without regionality and regionalism based on formal rights do pose problems within the state, but these are not in the scope of international relations.

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