

EES SPECIAL REPORT

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DECADE OF WESTERN
PEACE-KEEPING AND NATION-BUILDING
IN THE BALKANS**

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Since the end of the “wars of Yugoslav succession” in the mid-1990s, the region has made considerable progress toward stability, democratic transition, and future association with the European Union. Slovenia has become a Central European democracy. Croatia is well along on that path. Serbia seemed to mark time between the ouster of Milosevic in October 2000 and the assassination of Djindjic in spring 2003, but has now begun to overcome political paralysis and corruption. Montenegro is ahead of Serbia in this regard. Macedonia has achieved an uneasy internal compromise between its dominant Slav majority and its large Albanian minority populations. Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH, as it is abbreviated in Bosnian) are peaceful under international supervision.

Where do we go from here? My purpose today is to review critically six assumptions commonly made about the Western Balkans. As I review these assumptions, I find myself questioning whether continuation of present trends – more of the same – will result in regional stability, democracy, and inclusion in Europe. Let us examine the assumptions before continuing to accept them as the basis for the “Road Map” of the future.

Shared History?

A first assumption is that consensus is emerging in the region about the causes and consequences of the tragic developments of the past decade. This is simply not the case, notwithstanding a number of notable projects by NGOs and governments that aim to foster such understanding. While no side was without fault, principal blame for the violence that engulfed former Yugoslavia falls on individuals and groups acting in the name of Serbs and Serbdom – Milosevic, Seselj, Cosic, various paramilitary forces, the Yugoslav Army, and many others. Yet much of Serbian society still regards itself as the principal victim of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia. It follows that much more effort

is needed to confront the past and find common truth as a basis for regional reconciliation. These efforts should focus primarily but not exclusively on Serbia and the Serbs in BiH.

Contribution of the Hague Tribunal?

A second assumption is that the search for a shared understanding of recent history is

resources have gone to the two areas that are international protectorates – Kosovo and BiH – and constitute efforts at nation-

The counterargument is that no state can survive in the absence of terror without a modicum of internal legitimacy. Titoist Yugoslavia once had that modicum of internal legitimacy but lost it in the 1980s, yet Western policy tried to salvage Yugoslavia instead of helping to manage its devolution without violence. This history repeated itself with rump Yugoslavia – Serbia/Montenegro – and today we have something mediated by the EU called Serbia and Montenegro that is formally one country but is widely viewed as a very temporary transition to two countries.

In the post-Communist world, it is remarkable how uncritically the international community has come to accept administrative lines drawn by tyrants as the “natural” borders of sovereign states. Moldova is one case in point. Kosovo is another such case; its borders as an administrative subunit of Serbia were fixed by Tito’s secret police chief Rankovic after World War II. BiH is a third case; it was established as a subunit of Yugoslavia by Tito to end Serb-Croat squabbling over its territory in borders that did not correspond to any of the historical configurations of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The practical consequence of this assumption in former Yugoslavia is to leave in limbo issues of status that should be addressed sooner rather than later. Kosovo will not be re-incorporated in Serbia, and it would be a plus for all sides – including the causes of democracy and self-government in both Serbia and Kosovo – if this were clarified now. The UN protectorate will be followed by an independent Kosovo, a state of its ninety-percent plus dominant Kosovo Albanian population, with minority rights for those Serbs (down from 25 percent of the population in the 1960s to less than five percent today)

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