Europe 1989-2009: Rethinking the Break-up of Yugoslavia

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1. Introduction

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) ceased to exist on 15 January 1992 but has been present in the international political discourse ever since thus opening space for discussion and analysis. The crisis of the late 1980s raised tensions and encouraged hatred among nationalist factions, resulting in brutal and humiliating wars. As Economides (1992, p. 4) states: "Violence in the Yugoslav context is an expression of discontent along a series of issues including ethnic, nationalist, religious, territorial, economic and political factors." The wars in the former Yugoslavia "shocked the civilized West" (Lucarelli, 2000, p. 1) and sparked debate over credibility and capability not only with regard to the international community as such, but also of individual states and actors who were assigned important roles in the handling of the devastating situation.

What scholarship immediately did was to point the blame at one or more subjects, most commonly at specific individuals, while at the same time sparing a number of crucial contributing factors from serious criticism. In his analysis, Robert Hayden (1999, p. 19) warns as how to approach the investigations in the field:

> Academic debates on the Former Yugoslavia are as polarized as those surrounding the creation of Israel or the partitioning of Cyprus, with criticism of a study often depending more on whether the work supports the commentator's predetermined position than on the coherence of its theory or the reliability and sufficiency of its arguments. When one side in such a conflict wins politically, it usually also wins academically, because analyses that indicate that a politics that won is, in fact, wrong tend to be discounted. Political hegemony establishes intellectual orthodoxy.

Here, I examine the existing scholarship and debate within the field of the social sciences and, in particular, the history closely related to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. I will argue that the collapse of Yugoslavia was stimulated by numerous causes, where most of them were interlinked and jointly contributed even more to the actual state disintegration. Before I present three issues that require deeper academic elaboration, I will briefly reflect upon the existing arguments which I broadly divide into two main categories: internal and external.

2. Internal factors

Internal elements are worthy of consideration for two reasons: first, due to their undeniable presence in any debate regarding the collapse and, second, because they are linked to external factors on a mutually inclusive and influential basis. Accordingly, the internal factors primarily focus on two individuals: Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman, thus Serbian and Croatian leaders at the time. The role performed by individuals requires serious consideration as their actions generated reactions in the crucial moments for the future of the Yugoslav state.

Furthermore, the internal factors focus on three republics: Slovenia, Croatia and/or Serbia. Some scholars consider individual republics and their collective decisions as a driving force in the collapse of the SFRY. For example, Slovenia is often accused of being self-centred and disrespectful towards Belgrade. I do accept the existence of self-centred behaviour within Yugoslavia. Therefore, apart from Milošević, a malefactor bent on turning Yugoslavia into a Serb-dominated country or Tuđman, who desired a Croatian state for Croatians without guaranteeing equal rights to the Serbs living in Croatia, Slovenia deserves criticism for being self-centred within the Yugoslav federation and not interested in finding an appropriate solution for all the parties concerned. Although Glenny (1993, p. 97) maintains that Slovenia is indirectly responsible for the war in Croatia, meaning that "the accumulated tensions in Croatia had to express themselves through violence," I, however, ignore the concept of cause and effect and talk rather about shared responsibility. This understanding finds its justification in Radan's (2003, p. 161) equal blame at the door of both republics: "The Slovenian and Croatian declarations of independence in late June 1991 led to war in Yugoslavia." What is relevant is that by the late 1980s, both Slovenia and Croatia started seeking ever closer relations with Western Europe, thus securing additional support for future secession. For example, within the economic field, both republics adopted an autonomous foreign policy through the Alps-Adriatic Work Community, a regional association aimed at fostering cooperation between Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Bavaria, Slovenia and Croatia.

Finally, the internal factors focus on additional three arguments: nationalism, ancient hatreds and cultural diversities. Regarding these three arguments, I argue that we should not question their contribution to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but rather understand them as back-up components in discourse used to justify certain domestic policies.

3. Economics: factor of connectivity

The economic argument can be approached both from internal and external perspectives. If analysed within the Yugoslav state borders, the economic crisis in the late 1970s is what most academic writings concentrate on as it became evident that Yugoslavia's future would depend on its economic performance. Susan Woodward in her book *Socialist Unemployment*

(1995, p. 364) correctly points out that the economic crisis caused constitutional conflict and thus the crisis of the Yugoslav state as such. In order to understand the specific situation at that time, she concludes that growing unemployment pushed the political elite to carry out certain policies, thus challenging "the system's capacity to adapt to … new economic and social conditions" and "the country's ability to continue to manage unemployment itself" further eroding the "balance in constitutional jurisdictions of the federal system."

However, the validity of economic argument can be understood better if relations between Yugoslavia and the West are examined. Without going into detail over the ties between the two entities, Lane (2003, pp. 121-122) explains how their connectedness was cultivated: "At the heart of Tito's foreign policy was the notion of sustaining a balance in Yugoslavia's relations with both East and West, achieving ideological sustenance from a relationship with the communist movement as a whole, while benefiting from Western economic aid and (if need be) military support." The response from the West was its "policy of 'keeping Tito afloat,' a phrase … which led the West to underwrite Yugoslav economic development until the end of the 1980s" (Ibid., p. 109). The price of this regime of economic dependence was paid by the SFRY in a number of different ways: it affected its reputation in the West, undermined its non-allegiance, deepened domestic frustration.

The economic changes the Yugoslav state was required to implement came from external sources, mostly international organizations, rather than domestic bodies. When the International Monetary Fund imposed policies on Yugoslavia in the 1980s, bringing unemployment and double-digit inflation with them, central state polices shifted from protecting the people and the standard of living in general to attacking them (Mastnak, 1991). Such a situation, in Reuter's (1991, p. 115) terms "turned Yugoslavia into the West's worrisome child [and] Washington and Brussels started to fear that Yugoslavia's economic breakdown might have unforeseeable political consequences." Thus, at a certain point it became "fashionable in the West to be pessimistic about Yugoslavia's future after Tito," an approach justified by the re-emergence of the national issue that was always going to be difficult to solve peacefully (Johnson, 1974, p. 55). Later, the death of Tito and the collapse of the Yugoslav debt-ridden economy put the hegemony of Yugoslav ideology to the test (Bowman, 2005).

4. External factors

The main focus of this paper regards the role played by the external actors, in particular by the European Community. Accordingly, here, I examine major debates regarding Community's involvement and contribution to the disintegration of the SFRY. I question whether lack of interest existed and if it did, how important it was for Yugoslavia's future, then more significantly, why some Member States had greater power than the Community itself and what were the driving forces behind the decision-making processes that obviously influenced some leaders to adopt particular policies.

4.1. Lack of whose interest?

In the late 1980s when collapse of the SFRY turned from being a possibility into probability, the European Community decided to leave the initiative to the local actors. Scholarship discussing this period points out that both the United States and the EC opted for preventive diplomacy—an approach that "revealed one of the weaknesses that subsequently hindered the mediations—the inability of the intervening states and the international organizations to speak in a single voice and convey a clear message to the disputing parties" (Touval, 2002, p. 15). In short, in regard to the American position, I argue that the US had no clear standpoint in regard to the Yugoslav crisis; it did not even need one. The US rhetoric of supporting Yugoslav unity changed as soon as in the late 1980s doing business with the Serbs no longer seemed possible: on 28 November 1990, the *New York Times* reported the opinion of US intelligence that the Yugoslav experiment had failed and "that federated Yugoslavia will break apart, most probably in the next 18 months, and that civil war in that multinational Balkan country is highly likely."

In regard to the European position, be that as it may, what is interesting about the EC is its apparent unawareness of the circumstances. It was the US who informed the EC about the deteriorating situation in the SFRY. As Zimmermann (1996, p. 65) puts it:

> the Europeans simply couldn't believe that Yugoslavia was in serious trouble. There had been too many cries of wolf in the decade after Tito's death in 1980, when practically everybody had predicted that the country would fall apart. When it didn't, Europeans blinded themselves to the cataclysm that was now imminent … their approach to Yugoslavia was without any of the urgency with which they acted fourteen months later, when the breakup they said couldn't happen was upon them.

As indicated by the above mentioned arguments, the international community appeared bewildered. I argue that scholarship had not paid enough attention to the nature of the relations that developed between the West, and in particular the European Community, and Yugoslavia prior to 1991. In his brief account *Yugoslavia: Why Did It Collapse?*, Pavlowitch (2007, p. 151) insists that while the West was enthusiastic about the first Yugoslavia "as the new state seemed to fit a new European order," it therefore supported Tito from the beginning "as he was deemed the best chance for a united Yugoslavia, before it turned his regime into a bastion against Soviet advance in the Cold War and a hoped-for model for the development of the rest of Eastern Europe." However, the author concludes that "the West's understanding of Yugoslavia was illusory. It went on supporting Yugoslavia's communist leadership to the very end, thus enabling Tito's heirs to avoid real reforms."

4.2. "*The hour for Europe has come*"

I argue that the Yugoslav crisis was a European problem from the early beginning although for the Europeans the SFRY became a matter of interest only when the conflict seemed easy to deal with, thus, according to Buzan and Wæver (2003, p. 387), "boosting the EU foreign policy profile – as expressed in the infamous statement by Jacques Poos that 'the hour for Europe has come'." The paradox of this statement was twofold: first, it advocated how powerful the Europeans were by claiming that "if one problem can be solved by the Europeans, it is the Yugoslav problem. [Yugoslavia] is a European country and it is not up to the Americans" (cited in Almond, 1994, p. 32), and second, it was pronounced in a moment of complete ignorance and lack of serious strategy as to how to approach the Yugoslav problem. Obviously, the EC policy did not manage to resolve the crisis in the Balkans or prevent the spread of violence.

The initial period—"the period without decisive external action" (Buzan and Wæver, 2003, p. 383) – meant that each of the local actors hoped for the support of their influential friends abroad. The Slovenes and Croats sought support in Austria and Germany while the Serbs had a degree of consensus from the Russians. Once the conflict attracted global attention, the European players decided to step in; indeed, an opt-out strategy was no longer possible. Zimmermann (1996, p. 147) is critical of the approach: "The European Community leapt into the accelerating maelstrom with a pedagogical rather than a political approach. Without much understanding of the nationalist forces at play, the Europeans lectured the Yugoslavs as if they were all unruly schoolchildren whose naughtiness would deprive them of the sweets only Europe could provide."

Although not voluminous, the scholarship discussing the EC's involvement fits into two groups: one, which concentrates on the Community's recognition policy and its legal significance within broader international context, and other, which examines particular Member States and their undisputable power to influence decision-making at the EC level and therefore challenge some of the previously established norms. The recognition policy was a turning point during the Yugoslav crisis. Again here, arguments somehow take both US and Europe into consideration. According to Thomas (2003, p. 3), the Yugoslav state was not destroyed "because of domestic struggles and militant Milošević-led Serbian nationalism," but due to a Western *ad hoc* recognition policy which violated the 1975 Helsinki Accords Final Act guaranteeing territorial integrity of European state frontiers.

Equally important is the argument that questions the EC's relation vis-à-vis its Member States. Initially, the Community spoke in the name of its twelve member states. But, considering that "the EC was almost willy nilly sucked into the crisis" (Lak, 1992, p. 175) the voices of the Member States carried more weight. By mid 1991 the EC faced a split over the Yugoslav problem. In his analysis, Cohen (1995, p. 46) puts it:

German, Austrian and Italian political leaders, for example, were generally more sympathetic to the views advanced by the governments of Slovenia and Croatia for a confederation of sovereign states, whereas Serbian advocacy of a remodeled federation – though not necessarily according to the highly centralized perspectives of Milošević – were received more sympathetically in London and Paris.

Therefore, the emergence of different points of view demanded a switch from a supranational to an inter-governmental approach in order to tackle the crisis. In her *Balkan Tragedy*, Woodward (1995, p. 183) criticizes the EC states for all becoming "increasingly vulnerable to German assertiveness" and the "German maneuver" that pressured other EC members to recognize Slovenia and Croatia: "The precedent set by the German maneuver was that the principle of self-determination could legitimately break up multinational states, that EC application of this principle was arbitrary, and that the surest way for politicians bent on independence to succeed was to instigate a defensive war and win international sympathy and recognition."

However, the argument about German tactics had its supporters as well. For example, Daniele Conversi (1998, p. 64), justifies the German reaction, and thus recognition of the two republics. He says:

[t]he idea that the German attitude expressed a deliberate will to 'dismember Yugoslavia' was easily invalidated… First, the German government acted in response to public pressure. Second, this pressure was shared by other European countries. Third, Germany acted only after initial hesitancy and considerable distress. These three factors alone can dispel the idea of a 'deliberate plan to dismember Yugoslavia'.

This opinion is supported by some other authors who contribute by saying that any discourse aimed at blaming Germany for its premature behaviour with regard to the recognition of Slovenia and Croatia is misplaced; according to them, it was not Germany that supported armed Serbs, but France and the United Kingdom, both "in effect prepared to see Croatia, and later Bosnia-Herzegovina be defeated by Serbia" (Lukić and Lynch, 1996, p. 271). It is worth recalling that the EC had agreed in July 1991 to postpone recognition of Croatia and Slovenia until October, until the three-month moratorium on independence relating to the secessionist republics had expired. Thus it was France and the United Kingdom who, through their opposition to recognition, affected the EC consensus, not Germany.

5. Gaps in academic scholarship

All of the arguments mentioned above have significantly contributed to the understanding of the collapse of Yugoslavia. Although some of them are quite exclusive in their

nature, I argue that it is more appropriate to examine the Yugoslav crisis if looking through the conglomerate of various factors and their interconnectedness. Having said this, it is this missing link between internal and external factors that is worthy of examination. The Yugoslav example illustrates the relevance of the interaction between internal and external factors where non-state actors of undisputable power challenged and shaped decision-making processes. Thus, while having in mind the complicity of the relations between the Community and Yugoslavia prior to the crisis, my concern is focused on the role perpetrated by non-state actors such as media, diasporas and churches. Decisions are often made, under unclear circumstances. In their analysis about decision making, Kroeber-Riel and Hauschildt (1987, p. 47) distinguish between collective and individual decisions and warn that while "[t]he participants in the decision making process may have specialized functions, which enhance productivity, but since the co-ordination of these specialists requires planning and adjustment, collective decision making may be a long drawn-out process." I support this model as it can be used to examine decision-making processes during the Yugoslav crisis where the Community represents 'collective' and a Member State is an 'individual.'

The non-state actors should be examined separately. This way, we can understand what each actor's contribution was and offer clear account of the policies adopted. Although the literature on non-state actors has been very limited, I argue that they can be of rather strategic significance. Apart from contributing to "the fragmentation of political responsibility," Sabl (2006, p. 250) concludes: "The more successful non-state actors are in affecting political outcomes, the more responsibility they should be asked to take for those outcomes." Accordingly, I argue that media, diasporas and churches were the most powerful non-state actors in the process of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Firstly, when the media stepped in, wider perception of the crisis depended rather on what exactly the media had to say than what the factual situation was. In judging the coverage of the Yugoslav crisis, some scholars view Western propaganda as being directed against Serbs, while Conversi (1998, p. 47) is of the idea that the Belgrade political elite manipulated Western perception of the Yugoslav crisis and at the same time controlled the information reaching Western embassies in Belgrade, thus raising the question of lobbying. However, the literature briefly questions the role that Slovenian and Croatian media played and how they linked themselves to the media in the countries bearing a decisive function to facilitate their path towards independence. For example, Crawford (1996, p. 502) notes that media coverage of the war and the large Croatian community living in Germany might have influenced politicians to support recognition of the Croatian republic.

Secondly, debate over diaspora groups has been overlooked as well. Both politically and economically they play a significant role in contemporary social mechanisms. Some authors discuss their role during the Yugoslav crisis, but without dedicating much attention to the actions adopted in the eve of the disintegration of the state and more importantly what impact they exercised on the EC policies. For example, Gow and Carmichael (2000, p. 181) point out that the 1990 Slovene World Congress brought Slovenian émigrés around the world together

with a common goal: independence. As they put it:

> While it was important to spread the word everywhere and anywhere, it was quickly realised that an independent Slovenia would be in no position to establish links with all the eighty-four states with which the Yugoslav federation had diplomatic relations, let alone the eighty or so with which it had no link. Efforts were therefore concentrated on the shaping of foreign policy. This meant, among other things, secretly contacting as many of the small number of Slovenes in the Yugoslav diplomatic service as could be trusted, forging links with the larger Slovene émigré communities, and building links with neighbouring countries and especially with those capitals judged to be the most 'interesting' for Slovenia in its current situation – most notably Washington, Bonn and Prague.

The discourse about Croatian diaspora has got more space in the literature. Apart from focusing on the financial assistance invested and the target countries, some authors concentrate on the evolution of both formal and informal contacts. In his discussion about the exile patriotism, Hockenos (2003) examines Croatian diaspora in Canada and the United States and clearly shows its greater involvement after 1987, first to back President Tudjman's electoral campaign and consequently to support country's fight for independence. However, he remains rather silent about diaspora activism in Europe – an argument worth consideration as the Croatian diaspora in Germany remarkably contributed to the overall development of the crisis and thus influenced the decision making processes.

Finally, discourse over religious organizations and their policies should be addressed properly. In former Yugoslavia and especially once the conflict had commenced denomination played a critical role and belonging to one religious organization rather than another was a matter of importance. Moreover, in war torn territories, multiple identities disappear making way for the identity most closely related to the conflict: this identity is often outlined by religion (Huntington, 2002). However, the scholarship discussing religion often focuses on its internal dimension and disagreements arising from ethnic heterogeneity within the state. Based on this, Ramet (2002, p. 95) argues that "[a]s Serb-Croat polemics heated up in the course of the period 1989-1990, the Catholic Church was ineluctably drawn into the fire," and therefore conclude that "religion was a social component of the forces that helped dismember the Yugoslav 'experiment'."

I argue that more complete understanding of the Yugoslav 'experiment' is possible if external dimension of religion is taken into consideration as well. The cross-border power of Slovenian and Croatian Catholic churches to link themselves to the respective Catholic organizations within the European Community meant securing a back-up factor in their fight for independence. While the Serbian side enjoyed support for its expansionism from the Greek Orthodox Church, the two Catholic republics communicated with the Vatican City which openly lobbied for them. Since this permitted stronger incentive in regard to their position,

the literature has not demonstrated yet how the communication between them was handled, what strategy the informal contacts adopted and to what degree their activism influenced decision-making processes.

6. Conclusion

Lack of academic research concerning specific elements might affect the complete understanding of any important issue, and this is true also in the case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In her analysis, Dragović-Soso (2007, p. 28) warns that "scholarship does not exist in a vacuum but tends to be influenced by the dominant cognitive frameworks of its time and often seeks to respond to prevailing public perceptions and political debates." However, the extensive literature on the collapse of Yugoslavia and EC involvement, very often lead to the conclusion that the conflict was inevitable, but I have not found any 'good' reason as to why it was so devastating and long-lasting. Hopefully, substantial explanations are yet to come.

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ヨーロッパ 1989-2009：旧ユーゴスラビア連邦解体の再検討

ブラニスラヴ・ラデリッチ

旧ユーゴスラビア連邦の解体は、今日でも広く議論されている。学界においても、解体をもたらした要因について（再）検討し、様々な理論を構築する試みが続けられている。本稿では、まず、旧ユーゴスラビアで生じた現象について、学界ですでに多くの検討が進められてきた側面について、国内要因、国内と国外をつなぐ経済要因、国際要因の三つに分けて検討する。次に、これまでの研究ではあまり注目を浴びず、今後、より研究が進められるべき側面について言及する。特に、メディア、ディアスポラ・グループ、そして、教会といった、その活動が政策決定者や連邦の将来に影響を与えてきたアクターが、危機の間に果たした役割について検討する。