

WESTERN POWERS AND THE BREAKUP OF YUGOSLAVIA

Book Review

VJOSA MUSLIU*

The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia. Josip Glaurdic. Yale University Press: New Haven, London. ISBN 978-0-300-16629-3. Book Review. Vjosa Musliu

The title “The Hour of Europe: Western Powers and the Breakup of Yugoslavia” by Josip Glaurdic initially invites for a reading of the European Union’s account throughout the breakup of the federation. “This is the hour of Europe...” - a sentence mentioned by the former chair of EC Foreign Affairs Council, Jacques Poos at the brink of crisis in the former Yugoslavia - has become a catchphrase to symbolize the irony of what the EU failed to deliver in Yugoslavia in terms its of supranational action. However, the main focus of the book is in general the internal dynamics within Yugoslavia, processes and developments that led to political changes, rather than a particular attention on the way the EU was handling the crisis throughout. The book confronts the transfer of Western responsibility for Yugoslavia from the United States to the EC, which, for some authors came sluggishly while for others, it is justified due to geopolitical and security patterns. The political events in the former Yugoslavia seemed to have caught by surprise many of those who had still the image of the Yugoslav heydays during Tito. Many authors, in particular those with political science background, when writing on the EU – Yugoslav relations tend to perceive the EU as a unified center of power, assuming the existence of a well-founded and established common European position. Instead of looking at the EU in unison (or looking at its non-unified stance), Josip Glaurdic focuses on the diplomatic actions and the balance of powers between France and Germany, and to a lesser extent Great Britain towards the former Yugoslavia.

The book has an excellent, in depth account of the breakup of Yugoslavia from the (substantial and/or symbolic) death of President Tito until the legal breakup in 1992. It brings to the fore the convergence of a myriad of political actors, socio-economic factors as well as the germane role of the elite, academia and media in Serbia. The coming into power of Milosevic coincided with an increase of nationalism in Serbia, followed by an increase of nationalism in the other republics. This resulted in a socio-political reality in Yugoslavia characterized by a deep distrust among its people. With Yugoslavia initially not on the EU’s agenda, and with the lack of a common EU position on how to respond to the crisis, the EU fell back on what its foreign policy is known to do best – keeping the status quo. Due to the lack of knowledge of what Glaurdic terms “Western powers” on the region, the EU strived to keep the status quo, indicating that the existence of one-single Yugoslavia should be preserved. In the meantime, fractions within the EU were clear with Germany and Austria backing the dissolution process and France and others opposing it. The ambiguous discourse from the EU, which was later translated into inaction, gave Milosevic a free hand in the war with Bosnia and Herzegovina, making this what Glaurdic justly terms to be the biggest mistake of the EU.

* Vjosa Musliu is a PhD Candidate at the Center for EU Studies of Ghent University, Belgium. Preparing a doctoral thesis on the EU’s mission in Kosovo, she is specialized in the EU’s relations with the Western Balkans. Ms. Musliu holds a BA in International Relations and Political Science from New York University, Tirana and a Master in European Politics and Policies from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

On the one hand, the book offers a very well argued analysis, based on a rich and diverse collection of data of primary and secondary sources, supplemented with declassified CIA and Foreign and Commonwealth Office documents, over 80 interviews and media monitoring. A valuable account of 200 intercepts of phone conversations within Milosevic's closest circles and "off the record quotes" at that time, gives a full account of the overall picture in an original way. To a large extent, the literature on *interventions* as such (civilian or military), remains euro-centric and the existing literature of foreign authors writing on the former Yugoslav affairs (consciously or not) tends to carry a dose of *orientalism*, creating a 'Balkanization' category in explaining the spilled over conflicts in the federation. Familiar with the context in a more intimate way, Glaurdic explains the developments contextualizing it in the literature of nation states formation and inter-state conflict. He explains how the economic problems in Yugoslavia were hijacked by the political elite (primarily in Serbia) with a raise in nationalism and xenophobia, a deep securitization in the other republics, creation and fabrication of the 'other' and 'enemies' and the instrumentalization of the minorities around the federation. In addition, the author looks at the dynamics of the conflict in the geo-political context and looks at the intermingling of processes and their results, rather than analyzing them as isolated variables. The book also offers a good report on the internal political and identity struggles within Serbia, which is often overlooked or shadowed by focusing on the ruling class.

On the other hand, the book falls short in further integrating the role of the European Union, as a supranational entity. While its role is brought to the fore throughout the fragments of the political developments, the author could have been more coherent and comprehensive in his analysis. Moreover, it does not delve into the legal changes Milosevic applied to the Constitution of 1974 (with which the increased autonomous powers for Kosovo were annulled) whose implications can explain and contextualize his later steps of changing the legal structure of the federation. To conclude, one has to point out that the time frame of the book (1987-1992) equals the 'breakup of Yugoslavia' with its legal annulation in 1992, while the tale of the breakup appears to be 'unfinished' up until today. The reader would benefit from an extended analysis to the subsequent phases of dissolution, primarily with the political crisis in Macedonia, the independence of Montenegro, and lastly the Kosovo crisis. To a large extent this would not only have 'completed' the overall analysis of the dissolution but would have given the comprehensive understanding and put things in context.

In conclusion, the book is a unique contribution to the literature in three ways. First, it offers a rich analysis of the various political, economic, social, identity and geopolitical aspects surrounding the breakup of the former Yugoslavia. By and large, historical-political accounts on the former Yugoslavia tend to examine the developments of the 90s in a vacuum, neglecting a number of social, regional and ideological dimensions that Glaurdic takes into consideration. Second, the book contributes to the literature new empirical evidence in the form of primary material such as classified information, media monitoring. Third, unlike the majority of existing works on the former Yugoslavia, the author gives prove of an in-depth knowledge of the region. Rather than explaining the derailment within the federation along the lines of 'Balkanization' phenomena, Glaurdic explains the problem by stressing the several economic problems and political frictions the region was facing, as well as the raise of nationalism and other geopolitical factors. Most of all, this book clearly shows the lack of awareness primarily of the EU and other Western powers in general of the region and the implications this had throughout the Yugoslav conflicts.

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dke@southeast-europe.org

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