

# READING

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Why should the West decide what's best for the peoples of the Balkans, asks DAVE CHANDLER

## YOU WILL BE DEMOCRATISED

### UNFINISHED PEACE: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE BALKANS

Carnegie Endowment for Peace and Aspen Institute, £11.95 pbk

### AID AND ACCOUNTABILITY: DAYTON IMPLEMENTATION,

International Crisis Group, £6.37 bound

### ETHNIC NATIONALISM: THE TRAGIC DEATH OF YUGOSLAVIA (REVISED EDITION)

Bogdan Denitch, University of Minnesota Press, £13.95 pbk

### BALKAN TRAGEDY: CHAOS AND DISSOLUTION AFTER THE COLD WAR

Susan L Woodward, Brookings Institution, £33.50 hbk, £14.75 pbk

Bosnia Herzegovina today is under international occupation. Government policy agendas are written in advance by the UN's High Representative, Carl Bildt, who has the power to overrule elected representatives. Economic policy is dictated by the IMF, which has appointed a non-citizen governor of the Central Bank, and by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, responsible for privatisation and public utilities. Every annex of the Dayton Accord gives international institutions, unaccountable to the Bosnian electorate, determining powers over central aspects of how the state is governed. The international community's original civilian and military mandates have now been extended for up to two years. And this is what is called 'building genuine democracy'.

The four books under review, concerned with issues of 'democratisation' in Bosnia Herzegovina, are all written by influential figures. *Unfinished Peace: Report of the International Commission on the Balkans*, is published by policy institutes based in Washington and Berlin.



*Aid and Accountability* is a report by the influential, privately funded, International Crisis Group (ICG), based in Washington. Susan Woodward, author of *Balkan Tragedy*, is a senior fellow at the Washington Brookings Institution and in 1994 was a senior advisor to Yasushi Akashi, the top UN official in former Yugoslavia. Bogdan Denitch, author of *Ethnic Nationalism: The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia*, is a US sociology professor active in Croatian opposition politics. Despite their differences concerning past policies, all of them argue that democracy will not be possible in the region without extensive intervention by the international community.

Today there is a growing consensus that 'majoritarian democracy' in a multi-ethnic state is problematic. Western observers warn that introducing the institutions of parliamentary democracy into the ethnically diverse Balkans can only lead to xenophobic nationalist dictatorships as majority/minority group tensions are exacerbated. The assumption is that Balkan states are different to Western ones because they lack its

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'civil society'. In *Unfinished Peace*, the International Commission on the Balkans insists that liberal democracy is ill-suited to the region:

'This element of "ethnoparanoia" means that...what might well work in liberal democracies is less likely to function in the Balkans, where minorities tend to consider the civic concept of the state granting equal rights to all citizens to be a cover for supremacy by the dominant national group.' (p158)

The experts believe that a solution can only come about as a result of greater international regulation to ensure harmonious relations between ethnic groups. Western policy interventions in Bosnia over the last year are seen as a new way forward.

The reality of the Dayton dictatorship rarely impinges on these accounts of the region. For the ICG, Denitch and the International Commission, the international community has not gone far enough, because elected politicians still have too much power. Denitch suggests a 'temporary UN protectorate' (p228). The ICG and the International Commission want more powers to make the Bosnian authorities accountable to the West with stricter penalties for non-compliance with international diktat.

How has the democratic say-so of the people who live in Bosnia been overturned so easily? These authors assert that the threat to democracy comes from the nationalist politicians in the region. They add that the West has given too much credence to those nationalist leaders, entrenching their authority, and that only international regulation can safeguard democracy. In reality, what these authors call 'democratisation' means undermining the right of demos—the people—to decide their own future. Perversely, the experts even claim that democracy is under threat from the views of the Bosnian electorate.

As these authors see it, the Balkans never enjoyed the transition to democracy that Central Europe did, due to the slow emergence of a democratic opposition to communist rule. The lack of a civil society is held to have created a vacuum, since filled by the politics of ethnic nationalism. The old Communist elites were able to dress up in nationalist clothes, use the state-run media to manipulate their populations and whip up the ethnic antagonisms that fed the conflict. The general consensus is that the Serbs under Slobodan Milosevic were the first to take this path, which then stirred other nationalisms in reaction to a fear of Serbian oppression.

Susan Woodward stands out against this interpretation of the conflict in Yugoslavia. In her convincing study, she locates the dynamic for separation in Slovenia and Croatia's drive to enhance their chances of joining Europe by ditching the rest of the Yugoslav Federation.

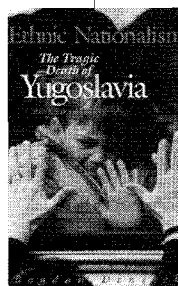
Yugoslavia had been a beneficiary of the Cold War, playing off the West and the Soviets for subsidies and aid. This allowed the richer republics of Croatia and Slovenia closer links with the West. From the late eighties, the elites within these republics gave their growing economic independence a nationalist political voice. With the backing of Austria and Germany they called for Western recognition. For Woodward, it was European recognition of these republics that fatally undermined the legitimacy of the Yugoslav federal government—supported by 79 per cent of the population in the spring of 1990 (p129)—and created the drive to establish separate 'national' territories that reached its apogee in Bosnia. The promise of Western recognition did not only destroy the possibility of new federal arrangements between the republics in the Yugoslav federation. It also gave the Croatian government of Franjo Tudjman freedom to take tough action against Serbs in the Croatian territory of Krajina, so setting in motion the process that led to civil war.

From the first, international intervention actually undermined the democratic process in Yugoslavia, by shifting the locus of decision-making away from central institutions which were potentially accountable to the people of the region, and giving Western institutions the power to shape the political agenda.

The collapse of the Yugoslav state left Bosnia itself open to division, given that Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats made up around 35 per cent and 15 per cent respectively of the population. There was little 'Bosnian' identity outside of the major urban areas. In the elections of November 1990 nationalist parties representing the Muslim, Croatian and Serbian communities polled over 70 per cent of the votes. In December 1991 Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic warned of the dangers of war if Croatia were recognised, and requested international peacekeepers.

At the end of 1991 the Bosnian parliament, with tactical Croatian support, proclaimed its sovereignty. Despite Serbian opposition, Bosnian independence was recognised by the international community, under US pressure, in April 1992. Where international intervention had contributed to the break-up of the multi-ethnic state of Yugoslavia, it now sought to shore up the even less viable multi-ethnic republic of Bosnia, against the wishes of the majority of the population.

Woodward pushes her excellent analysis of the break up of Yugoslavia too far when she suggests that there was strong support for the preservation of a unitary Bosnia. The people of Bosnia's support for maintaining a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia is used by Woodward to argue that there must also have been support for a unitary Bosnian state. In fact the election results demonstrated that the vast majority of Bosnian voters supported separate Muslim, Serbian or Croatian parties.



## THE AWKWARD TRUTH WAS THAT WITHOUT YUGOSLAVIA, THE CANTONISATION OF BOSNIA WAS INEVITABLE. THAT WAS RECOGNISED BY THE BOSNIAN LEADERSHIP AND MANY INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATORS

But Woodward dismisses this as a result of media manipulation of the voters. She says that the nationalist politicians were not 'legitimate interlocutors' (p280) and not representative of broader Bosnian opinion.

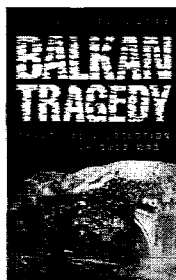
Denitch, too, argues that Balkan election results cannot be taken too seriously because voting was about 'expressive politics and had nothing to do with political responsibility and legitimacy' (p153). So much for democratic choice.

Once the nationalist politicians have been branded illegitimate, then it becomes legitimate for international institutions to intervene and override them. For Denitch, the elected politicians were so unrepresentative that 'the meddling Western "outsiders"...are far better representatives of the genuine interests of the Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian peoples and states than their patriotic leaders' (p210). Similar justifications were once used for white rule in South Africa and the British Raj.

The International Commission report argues that the central error of intervention in Bosnia was giving too much respect to the Balkan politicians. They stress the need to use the threat of force to achieve a settlement, and the dangers of Western neutrality. Woodward and Denitch agree, but balk at the one-sided anti-Serbian bias of US intervention in 1994 and 1995 with its arming of the Muslim-Croat Federation, backing for the cleansing of the Serb Krajina, and Nato air-strikes against Serbian positions. However, their support for international action as the solution gives credence to the International Commission's whitewashing of the West's involvement in the conflict. For the International Commission the only problem was that armed Western intervention came too late to prevent the ethnic carve up of the state.

The awkward truth was that without Yugoslavia, the cantonisation of Bosnia was inevitable. That was recognised by the Bosnian leadership and many international negotiators such as Lord Carrington and Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, at the time when Germany was forcing through international recognition of Croatia. Tragically, the division of Bosnia became more prolonged and barbaric as the US and European governments fought over how it should be organised.

European attempts at mediation, starting with the Lisbon talks in early 1992, were undermined by US opposition and encouragement for the Muslim government. The conflict between the USA and Europe was only resolved when Washington gained the upper hand by forging a Muslim-Croat alliance, in exchange for giving Croatia diplomatic and military support. The European powers and the UN were pushed into the background as NATO bombed the Bosnian Serbs into submission and US negotiators, with Croatia and the Bosnian government already on-side, offered Milosevic's Yugoslavia relief from sanctions if he negotiated for the Bosnian Serbs at Dayton.



The Dayton Agreement was a product of US military and diplomatic control over the region. It established Bosnia Herzegovina as an independent state made up of two distinct entities, the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Serbian dominated Republika Srpska. Blaming Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian politicians for the war and the failure of peace negotiations misses the point that, in truth, they had little ability to influence events. At the same time, blaming the nationalist politicians helps to cover up the destructive influence of the USA and the international community.

The fact that most of the nationalist politicians are still nominally in power today reinforces the illusion that they are really in charge. But for these authors it is not enough that the West dictates the terms behind the scenes. They want to see the nationalist leaders publicly humbled by the West:

'A really happy ending to the Dayton talks would have required sending all three signatories, or at the very least Franjo Tudjman and Slobodan Milosevic, on a one-way flight to The Hague Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity.' (*Ethnic Nationalism*, p215)

The Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian politicians are accused not just of waging war, but also, particularly in the Serbian case, of reviving the worst horrors of the Nazi experience in the Second World War: 'ethnic cleansing', concentration camps, rape camps and attempted genocide. The implication is clear. It is not just the politicians that stand condemned, it is also the people who elected and, in most cases, continue to elect them. Denitch suggests the need for 'something resembling the de-Nazification processes in Germany and Italy after the Second World War' (p8) and the ICG feel that 'The respect shown Karadzic [the former Bosnian Serb leader] by the people and leaders of Republika Srpska...is the tangible expression of their complete denial of responsibility for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes'. By this assessment, the Bosnian Serbs do not deserve a democratic choice because they are living in denial of their own guilt.

Once Balkan people and their political representatives are seen as the problem, democracy and elected governments come under question. The less legitimacy the elected Balkan politicians are allowed, the more it seems that only the international community can be truly representative of Balkan interests. The International Commission clearly feels emboldened by the new possibilities for the region opened up by the Dayton settlement.

They argue that Europe and America, using the threat of force and economic sanctions, should act now to carry out the 57 far-reaching policy recommendations contained in their report. These include submitting the status of Kosovo to legally binding arbitration; ♦

maintaining a UN presence in Macedonia and encouraging a high degree of decentralisation; and, in the region as a whole, the reform of election systems to guarantee the political representation of minorities and encourage regional and municipal autonomy, a recipe for the politicisation of ethnic divisions.

Fifteen months after Dayton the Bosnian state is more divided than ever, less because of nationalist politicians than because of the differential treatment of the communities by the international overseers, who have granted less than three per cent of Bosnian reconstruction aid to the Serbian entity. In the elections proposed for Bosnia over the next two years it seems probable that any questioning of Dayton will be illegal. Apart from demanding restrictions on who can stand as candidates, the ICG insist that 'the media should not be allowed to broadcast statements...which are contrary to the Dayton Peace Agreement'. Stalin himself would have been envious of such election rules. ●

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