

# The creation and dissolution of the multinational state: the case of Yugoslavia\*

---

DUSKO SEKULIC

*The Flinders University of South Australia*

**ABSTRACT.** The article draws on Randall Collins' interpretation of a Weberian sociology of legitimacy and the importance of geostrategy in explaining the contrasts between the creation and dissolution of Yugoslavia. The creation of Yugoslavia is interpreted as the outcome of the expansionist policy of the Serbian elite which was justified by the inclusion of all the ethnic Serbs into one state and made possible by the geostrategically weak positions of the Croatian and Slovenian elites. Different starting positions and motivations led to a struggle among elites over the definition of the newly united state, particularly over the centralisation–federalisation issue. The situation of communist Yugoslavia was a different one – the country was balancing between the 'East' and the 'West'. This balance – which, along with the memories of the 'liberation struggle', was the main source of the legitimacy of the regime – was destroyed with the cessation of the cold war. The newly created situation had two important results. First, the potential threat from the communist east had disappeared. Second, Slovenia and Croatia were attracted to the idea of integration into western Europe. This situation was substantially different than in the period of the creation of the Yugoslav state, in which western Europe was perceived as a potential threat to the existence of Croatia and Slovenia. Now, the perception of threat came from the east – from the 'unreformed' Serbia. The attraction to the west was much weaker in Serbia, where the old communist power structure stayed intact. The new situation, and the political elites' perception of it, created the tension which finally destroyed the basis of the multinational state.

## **Geostrategy and Legitimacy**

Why was Yugoslavia created and why did it disappear from the map of the world? Under the impact of its forceful and bloody dissolution many are inclined to assert that it was an artificial creation from the beginning. But what does an artificial creation mean? Clearly the concept of artificiality required qualification, unless we accept the proposition that every multinational state is an artificial creation.

\* I would like to thank the Earhard Foundation for financial support for my research on transformation of post-communist Europe on which the present paper is based.

If we try to operationalise the concept then its meaning would stem from the fact that Yugoslavia was created at Versailles by the victorious powers, against the will of the people, most internal political actors and the historical viability of the region. We would be able to claim this only if the forces in favour of the creation of a Yugoslav state did not exist. But they did exist, so we cannot argue that Yugoslavia was imposed against the will of all the people, unless we propose (as, for example, many nationalists or Marxist philosophers claim) that we know some iron law of history and that the formation of a Yugoslav state was violating some such basic law (e.g., the impossibility of the long-term survival of multinational states, or the reversal of the trends of history in the direction of socialism etc.).

Denying the artificiality does not mean that I am advocating some *a priori* historical viability of this state, or an historical necessity of south Slav people to form such a state. In my opinion this approach is fruitless and instead of engaging in such discussions I think that a much better procedure is to analyse the social forces, strategies and goals of different actors, as well as the geopolitical factors leading to the creation, and later dissolution, of Yugoslavia. Historical options are always open and only an analysis of these complex forces can give us an answer to any particular outcome.

The concrete social reality of a particular event, in this case the creation and dissolution of a state, is a complex phenomenon, which is very difficult to explain with a single theory. It is a reality where a multitude of social processes, actors and events are going on in parallel. Usually theoretical approaches have a tendency to grasp one of these processes, but not the totality of them. We can say that these approaches are possible explanations of different levels of reality, which are not mutually exclusive but interactive. Geostrategical explanations are important, but different from cultural explanations, although geostrategical and cultural processes are often linked. Where one or the other approach has the tendency to diminish the significance of the processes on the other level, this is not dealt with from the perspective of a single approach.

We will start to explore the creation and dissolution of Yugoslavia from the geostrategical perspective. The framework used will be Collins' elaboration of Weber's theory of politics (Collins 1986). The main theme is that the internal legitimacy of the regime is the result of the geostrategical success of the state. Of course, geostrategy is not only important as an independent variable producing legitimacy but is also an explanatory scheme for interpreting the strategies used by different actors involved in geostrategical games. In the following analysis I will try to explore this theme using the example of Yugoslavia.

## The creation of Yugoslavia

### *Legitimacy*

The central thesis in Collins' (1986) interpretation of Weberian political sociology is legitimacy. What is new is the emphasis on the importance of the external success of the state for its internal legitimacy.

The thrust of Weber's thought is . . . that politics works from the outside in, and that external, military relations of states are crucial, determinants of their internal politics . . . How is legitimacy gained and lost, and who will get it under what conditions? Weber is suggesting that it is tied to the power position of the state in the international arena. (p. 145)

The legitimacy of the Yugoslav state, and the differing prestige of the leading elites of various South Slav national groups, can be explained exactly in these terms. South Slavs were ruled by the two empires which went into decay at different periods in time. The fact that the Ottoman empire entered the period of its decline first, contributed to the earlier emancipation of the Slavs under its control. The Serbs, being the strongest group, regained in this way the role of the 'Piedmont' of the South Slavs (MacKenzie 1994). Croat and Slovenian political leaders could only envy the expansionism and gradual success of the struggle for independence of the newly created Serbian political elite. Starting with the revolt of 1804 the process of gaining autonomy within the Ottoman empire began, and from 1830s on it evolved into gradual expansion of the Serbian state. From that time on, with many set-backs, the Serbian political leadership gradually created and then expanded its autonomous state, first under the formal Turkish protectorate and later as an independent political entity. The Croat and Slovenian political leaderships, being part of the still strong Austrian (and later Austro-Hungarian) empire were not in a position to realistically aspire for independence.

During its successful expansion, Serbia gained control over Macedonia, Kosovo and Sandzak as a result of the uprisings against the Turks and the two subsequent Balkan wars. Serbia was also on the victorious side at the end of the First World War. At this time, the programme of the Serbian interior minister, Ilija Garasanin, called 'Nacertanije', which designed expansionist long-term goals for Serbian policy as outlined in the Memorandum of 1844, could finally be realised (MacKenzie 1985).

From the standpoint of legitimacy the most important element in this whole development was that the status of Serbia among other South Slav elites was tremendously enhanced. For a moment we can return to Collins:

the prime example of modern 'national autonomy' movements are those that dismantled the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in the Balkans. Yet these were precisely the states that were crumbling under the external geopolitical pressures; 'ethnic' nationalism is merely the form in which the fragmentary states surviving the breakup were organised. The ethnic purity of many of these states has

been a myth; Yugoslavia, for example, incorporated several ethnic groups, as a kind of miniature Austrian-Hungarian empire in itself. And at the same time that Austria-Hungary was breaking up, the Russian empire was incorporating even more disparate ethnic groups in central Asia and the Caucasus, having overridden the ethnic division of the Ukraine, White Russia, and the Baltic. In this case, 'ethnic nationalism' was cast in a different form, one appropriate for a consolidating empire – pan-Slavism and its extensions, which attempted to claim a greater ethnic unity appropriate to an expanding state. (Collins 1986: 153)

The essence of Collins' argument is a denial of the perception that states are simply created along ethnic lines. Depending on the geostrategical advancement, at the same time that some multinational empires were disintegrating, others (for example, the Russian empire), were expanding. The creation of Yugoslavia follows a very similar logic to the creation of the Russian empire. On the one hand, it was the result of the disintegration of the greater multinational Austro-Hungarian empire, but, on the other hand, it was a culmination of the expansion of the smaller, Serbian empire. Yugoslavia was *de facto* created as the result of a Serbian mini-expansion as a stage in the process which began in the nineteenth century. As Russia was expanding, regardless of its ethnic boundaries, even some potentially new ethnic groups were merging (Ukrainians and White Russians, for example). The same logic was guiding Serbian expansionism. Although in comparison with Russia, it should be noted that by 1900 perhaps only half of the ethnically Serbian population lived within the boundaries of a Serbian state. The other half lived within the Ottoman and Habsburg monarchies. Because of that fact the expansion of the Serbian state was justified by the incorporation of the ethnic Serbs into it. But parallel with this incorporation process a peculiar expansionism was going on. The essence of this expansionism was the denial of ethnic separateness to some groups clearly developing separate identities. The cases in point are Macedonians, Bosnian Muslims and even Montenegrins. The non-existence of clear ethnic boundaries among many Slavic and even non-Slavic groups in the Ottoman and Habsburg empires was used as a pretext for territorial expansion. If everywhere around the Serbian state Serbs are living under foreign rule, then it is a 'natural' right of the Serbian state to incorporate these territories. The roots of this type of expansion can be found in the famous Vuk Karadzic pamphlet (1849) claiming that all stokavian speaking people are *de facto* Serbs. This type of analysis was used later to justify the expansionist policy of the Serbian state. We can conclude that the expansion of the Serbian state was on the one hand based on the incorporation of the ethnic Serbs into the Serbian state. When that basis for expansion was shaky the ethnic groups inhabiting the targeted territories were simply proclaimed to be Serbs unaware of their true identity.

In that process the role of the ideology of Yugoslavism was a very complex one. The fact that Yugoslavism was advocated even more by the non-Serbian political elites indicates the importance of the geostrategical

explanation. On the one hand, the idea was stronger in the 'Slavic periphery' (Slovenia, Istria, Dalmatia) constantly under pressure of Germanisation, Hungarisation and Talianisation. Support of the Slavic hinterland, unification of fragmented Slavic cultural and political 'space' was the only hope for resisting the pressures of expanding 'western' empires. On the other hand, the Serbian political elites, especially after 1830s, were much weaker supporters of the Yugoslav idea seeing it as 'calculated to stop the expansion of the Serbian national consciousness to its rightful limits' (Banac 1984: 79). The legitimacy that Serbia had achieved as the result of its long-term geostrategical success helped to enhance Serbian prestige. Stronger ties between Serbs and Croats in 1848 were significant signal of this. Under Prince Mihajlo Obrenovic, Serbia become a magnet for Serbs, Bulgars and even some Croats. One of the originators of the Yugoslav idea, Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmajer of Croatia was attracted by the Mihajlo's policies and successes of Serbia (MacKenzie 1994: 162). Yugoslavism was the form in which these political elites were able to participate in the successes of the Serbian elites (Korunic 1989). In the same way, the merging of ethnolnational identities was also going on with attempts to replace the particular identities with the Yugoslav one (Marijanovic 1913).

We can conclude that the legitimisation of the creation of Yugoslavia was the result of the Serbian geostrategical advances starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We can also regard Yugoslavism as Pan-Slavism in miniature. As Pan-Slavism was a reflection of the Russian geostrategical advances, so the strengthening of the Yugoslav idea can also be seen as a reflection of Serbian geostrategical successes. The geostrategical weakening of Austria-Hungary undermined the political forces loyal to it and gave strength to 'pro-Yugoslav' sentiments. On the other side, the earlier weakening of the Ottoman empire allowed for the earlier Serbian autonomy and then expansion without the need of the backing of the Yugoslav idea.

### *Geopolitical context*

The creation and dissolution of Yugoslavia came about as a consequence of major geopolitical changes. The creation of the first Yugoslav state was the result of the First World War, the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the 'New World Order' established at that time. I am not denying the obvious fact that the creation of the Yugoslav state was a consequence of the peace process after the First World War, and that the major power players of that time had their own interests in creating and shaping the Yugoslav state.

One important goal was the creation of viable states preventing the German *Drang nach Osten*. (Although here it must be noted that many were claiming that the preservation of the Austro-Hungarian empire in some democratised form would serve the purpose much better.) For this reason

Yugoslavia appeared to be a much more viable solution than the eventual small patchwork of states created out of the wreckage of the Austro-Hungarian empire. A special role was the impression created in France and Great Britain by the heroic actions of the Serbian army. The creation of Yugoslavia was at that moment regarded as a simple extension of the base of this Serbian army for its eventual role in some future conflict. An echo of these views can be heard even today by some Western leaders' statements about the 'Serbs as traditional allies', a statement of very dubious validity taking into account developments during and after the Second World War.

But the role of these strategic interests are in my opinion of secondary importance. The role of the political forces inside Yugoslavia, favouring the creation of such a state, were of much greater significance.

Italian and Austrian aspirations for Yugoslav territory were another important factor influencing the developments towards Yugoslav unity (Tepsic 1970). Yugoslavia, or rather the political elites of the different national groups, were in different positions regarding the neighbours' territorial aspirations. Croatian and Slovenian elites, with no armies, being part of the defeated empires and under the pressure of internal revolutionary turmoil, were in no position to resist Italy and even Austria, without Serbian military backing. On the other hand, Serbia was in a much better position to solve satisfactorily its disputes and problems with Bulgaria, Romania and Albania.

The defeated states in the First World War waited for their 'revenge' until the Second World War, and their revanchist appetites put them on the side of the Axis powers. Yugoslavia was then dismembered to satisfy these aspirations. That came more than twenty years later. At the moment of the creation of the Yugoslav state the outside threat of Italy and Austria was a crucial one. The fact that this threat was mainly oriented towards Slovenia and Croatia, the parts of the former Austro-Hungarian empire in internal disarray, with no army and a very unstable international position, significantly influenced the internal bargaining relations of the Croatian and Slovenian political elites (Jankovic 1983).

### *Internal strategies*

The internal strategies could be divided according to the main calculations about the future of this part of the world. There was almost a consensus among the political elites in the Slavic parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire, encompassing Slovenian and Croatian lands, that the goal should be increased autonomy and self-determination. The difference was in the estimation of how this should be achieved and what would be the main course of events and international changes creating a framework for action in the direction of self-determination.

The crucial division was based on the projection of the future of the Austro-Hungarian empire. If the empire survived, it should be changed

from within according to federal principles, so that the dreams of Southern Slav unification held by the South Slavs within the empire would be realised. The opposite viewpoint started from the proposition that the empire would not survive (that it would be destroyed) so that the future realisation of hopes for self-determination lay in the creation of the new state of South Slavs – which meant unification with Serbia. The first line was more popular among the politicians active within the Austro-Hungarian empire, whereas the second approach was advocated more by those who left the Austrian empire and formed the London committee (Krizman 1977, 1989).

As it became obvious that the empire could not survive, the second line of thinking prevailed and unification became predominant. But, as described earlier, the main division emerged between those who advocated unification as a more or less disguised Serbian expansion and those who saw in this unification the creation of a new entity where the three national groups (Serbs, Slovenes and Croats) would have the same rights and equal status. Politically this division was operationalised as the centralism–federalism dilemma. Centralism was advocated mostly by the Serbian political elite, which was in the strongest political position, and federalism proposed mostly by the Croat political leaders.

This controversy ended with the clear victory of the Serbian political elites and the new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was established as a centralised monarchy. The reason for this was the fact that the political and military positions of the advocates of centralism, Serbian politicians, on the one hand, and advocates of federalism, mostly Croatian political leaders, on the other, were very different. Serbia was on the victorious side with the army as the basis of its political power. On the other hand, the political leaders of Croatia (and Slovenia) were an appendage of a multinational state which was defeated in the war and was in the process of disintegration. The revolutionary ferment from inside, the international threats (the Treaty of London of 26 April 1915 promised Italy large portions of Slovenia, the whole of Istria, northern Dalmatia and most of the islands in exchange for a declaration of war on Austria-Hungary), and the lack of a reliable army, weakened the bargaining position of the non-Serbian political elites. They rushed into the creation of a common state clearly under Serbian domination.

It is often claimed that the unification and creation of the Yugoslav state was the result of the ‘will of the people’, which is a highly dubious statement. The willingness of the political elites of the Slav parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire to unite under Serbian leadership could be ascribed mainly to its politically weak position and hopes for democratic equality in the new state. It is very difficult to judge the prevailing attitudes of the ordinary people. If the results of the parliamentary elections of 1920 are interpreted as some kind of plebiscite for or against unification then support for unification in Croatia was relatively weak. In Croatia-Slavonia, the only region where it competed, the HPSS (Croat People’s Peasant Party)

won a clear majority of 52.55 per cent of votes. If we add the votes of autonomists and Frankists who were also clearly against unification (5.23 per cent and 2.48 per cent respectively), it would show over 60 per cent of voters were against unification in that region. In Dalmatia the support for unification was much stronger with votes in favour of the 'Yugoslav Club' parties of almost 28 per cent, compared to less than 3 per cent in Croatia-Slavonia (Burks 1961; Banac 1984: 387-92).

These results, combined with the history of uprisings and dissatisfaction, especially among peasants in Croatia, are a clear indicator that the rushed unification was more the result of the actions of political elites than of any kind of political movement based on popular support.

With the centralisation of Yugoslavia and the dissatisfaction of Croatian, but also other non-Serbian, anti-centralist political elites, the stage was set for the constant conflicts and instability which characterised the Yugoslav political scene between the two world wars. Because of these deep divisions Yugoslavia was unable to maintain parliamentary democracy and in 1929 (after the leader of the Croat Peasant Party, Stjepan Radic, was assassinated in parliament) King Alexander introduced a dictatorship in the hope that with it the warring national divisions could be overcome. That proved to be a false hope and in 1934 the king was assassinated by Croat and Macedonian extremists during his visit to Marseilles.

On the eve of the Second World War, in 1939, the regent Pavle negotiated the autonomy of Croatia, although this autonomy was never accepted by a majority of the political elite in Serbia. Banovina Croatia, created as a possible first step toward the federalisation of Yugoslavia, was short lived because Yugoslavia was occupied and divided by Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria.

Some major conclusions from this brief analysis of the political and historical forces operating in the period of the creation of Yugoslavia are the following.

First, the international environment, hostile and with territorial aspirations towards the South Slav part of the dissolving Austro-Hungarian empire, pushed the Croat and Slovenian political elites into Yugoslavia as a second-best solution. These elites rushed into Yugoslavia, even under centralist conditions unacceptable to them, because they perceived it as a lesser evil than the loss of territory and division between Italy, Serbia and eventually Hungary and Austria. This rush into Yugoslavia was also stimulated by the pre-revolutionary ferment and civil disorder, which threatened to slip control out of the hands of the new government.

Second, popular support for unification was never tested, and according to the results of the elections in 1920, together with unrest, specially among Croat peasantry, it did not enjoy widespread popularity.

Third, the concepts and ideological bases of unification differed significantly between the Serbian and the non-Serbian (Croat-led) political elites. Serbian elites viewed centralisation and the destruction of the cultural and



political traditions of the autonomous regions as a prerequisite for building a strong and unified state. In practice that meant Serbian domination in the newly formed state, and for all practical purposes the expansion of the Serbian political institutions to the rest of the state. In contrast, the political leaders of the Austro-Hungarian South Slav regions were advocating the creation of a federal state, and not the simple expansion of the pre-existing Serbian state.

These ideologies of the Serbian and non-Serbian political elites were the basis of the permanent conflict in the Yugoslav state. One view was based on expansion (liberation from the Ottoman empire, the Balkan wars and now victory in the First World War), which was linked to the territorial enlargement of the Serbian state, and viewed the creation of the new state as a simple extension of the process which started with the anti-Ottoman uprisings and the creation of a free Serbian state in the second half of the nineteenth century. The other elite view hoped to create a completely new political structure as the culmination of long-existing hopes for South Slav unification but on a democratic and egalitarian basis.

This division underpinned all the conflicts of the 'old' Yugoslavia. At first it was limited only to the upper strata of the respective societies. Although anti-monarchist (anti-Austrian, -Hungarian and -Italian) feelings were strongly present among the wider Croat, Slovenian and Bosnian population, the Yugoslav idea did not have much popular support. Unification, except of course among Serbs living in Austria-Hungary, was not deeply rooted either. Animosity against Serbs was not based on traditional hostility and Croat peasants lived peacefully together or alongside Serbian settlers in Croatia. There is no history of their mutual conflicts, but, on the contrary, there is a history of mutual cooperation. It was only when the Yugoslav state was created that anti-Serbian feeling started and spread to the non-elite strata of society over persecution and resentment concerning the denial of some basic rights (e.g. discrimination against practising the Catholic faith). The lack of interest in Yugoslavism among the wider population of non-Serbs evolved on the basis of negative experience. It moved in the direction of anti-Serbianism and anti-Yugoslavism, because the Yugoslav idea, although historically mostly advocated by Croatian elites, became equated with Serbian domination.

## **The dissolution of Yugoslavia**

### *Legitimacy*

In accordance with the Weber–Collins approach to legitimacy based on geostrategical success, we will try to interpret the decline of the legitimacy of Yugoslavia. Many have attributed the dissolution of Yugoslavia to the death of the great leader, but the disintegration started six to seven years after Tito's death and culminated only ten years later. The main reasons for

this slow dissolution lay in the fact that basic legitimacy was preserved because the fundamental geopolitical position stayed unchanged. This static geostrategical situation is the true explanation of Yugoslavia's survival. It did not disintegrate because of Tito's death, although there was an undeniable weakening of central power after that event. However, its demise occurred because of change in the wider political environment and the total decline of internal legitimacy which resulted from it.

The legitimacy of the Yugoslav regime was not based on support for communism, which was an ideology accepted by only a small minority of the population. It was based much more on memories of the liberation war against Nazi occupation where the resistance was led by the communists. Nationalism, Weber insists, is a specially political sentiment. It is 'linked to memories of a common political destiny' (Weber 1922/68: 923). 'It was the history of having fought together, as part of a common state, against common enemies, for common political ideals, that constitutes the bond of political solidarity' (Collins 1986: 152). In that sense, a particular nationalism, different from 'ethnic nationalism', was created in Yugoslavia. The fact that Yugoslavia was defended against a common enemy, that through this struggle it became a part of the victorious coalition (as Serbia was in the First World War) helped to create a special sense of belonging to the state. This was also enforced by the new political elite emphasising the dangers of an internal enemy, those political forces defeated in the civil war which was going on in parallel with the liberation struggle:

The ruling class need not base its claims to domination entirely on some ideology proclaiming the justice of its rule; a challenge from some other class can be even more effective in stirring up the emotions buttressing or establishing its legitimacy. It then becomes the defender of order against the party of disorder, where 'disorder' means explicitly violence in the streets, threats to persons and property. (Collins 1986: 160-1)

This 'internal enemy', in the form of political exiles, was constantly elevated in political importance regardless of its actual fragmentation and political insignificance, and depicted as a part of the fascist world (which was partially true). The fear of civil disorder was constantly evoked by reminding the people of the atrocities of the civil war and by creating the perception that the existing regime was the only guarantor of peace and stability. The source of this power to maintain peace and stability was based on the fact that the communist regime was part of the victorious coalition and that the nationalist forces were allied with the fascist powers. The post Second World War order was based on anti-fascism which gave an important element of legitimacy to the communist regime.

The most important single source of legitimacy was the threat from the 'East'. The Yugoslavs lived in a relatively open and liberal society compared to other Eastern bloc countries. The fact that in spite of being a communist country, they enjoyed greater freedoms and a higher standard of living than

their communist neighbours created a specific 'negative legitimacy' and pride in being a liberal communist society. This negative comparison was more important than the positive comparison with the Western European countries. On several occasions, particularly in 1948 and 1968, the Yugoslavs expected an invasion from the East and according to many the important element in Tito's decision to crush the Croatian Spring was the threat from Brezhnev. (Of course it is an open question whether he used this threat as an excuse to create a consensus within the elite circles or whether it was a real threat.) With the geostrategical retreat of the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe the reasons for this negative legitimacy disappeared, attention was focused on positive legitimacy towards the West, and ethnic nationalist mobilisation prevailed.

### *Geopolitical context*

The geopolitical context also played a crucial role in the dissolution of Yugoslavia. But this time the forces operating on the political leaders, especially on the leaders of the 'western' part of Yugoslavia, were pushing them in the opposite direction from that which had prevailed at the time of the creation of Yugoslavia.

In the case of the creation of Yugoslavia, the West, particularly Italy, was the 'danger' pushing the leaders into the arms of Serbia. But in the eighties the West was not perceived as a danger any more. It was the other way around; the process of European integration, economic prosperity and the disappearance of any revanchist aspirations made Europe attractive for the reform-minded, communist leaders of Slovenia and Croatia. Their main preoccupation became how to join Europe and not how to escape it. The last congress of the Communist Party of Slovenia, still in communist-ruled Yugoslavia, was held under the slogan *Evropa zdaj* (Europe now). This evolution toward liberal communism, first in Slovenia and later in Croatia, was accompanied by the opposite process in Serbia. There the evolution went in the reverse direction culminating in the replacement of the moderate leadership of Ivan Stambolic with the radical Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic's leadership was much more reluctant regarding the opening towards Europe as reflected in a stronger alliance with the Soviet Union, particularly when Gorbachev slowed down the reform process. This pro-European strategy, characterising the western part of the still communist Yugoslavia, and the pro-Eastern stance, characterising Milosevic's leadership in Serbia, were important elements in the division of Yugoslavia. The split became final when, after the first free elections, the western part (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also Macedonia) elected anti-communist and nationalistic governments, while Serbia and Montenegro kept their communist regimes (in Serbia under a new socialist label, while in Montenegro the name was not even changed).

The survival of such an unlikely alliance of communist and anti-

communist parts of the country was possible only in two ways. First, by creating an even looser federation-confederation, in order to allow the western part to go its own way toward further integration into the Western world and the east to stay on as the bulwark of communism. Second, by the use of force to crush one or the other option. Taking into account the imbalance of military power, and the inclinations of the Yugoslav army, the chances of the western part using force against the eastern part were minimal, but the chances of the east achieving military victory over the west were substantial.

The western republics (Slovenia and Croatia) offered a new confederal treaty (Cohen 1993: 178–81). The idea of an asymmetric federation was for a long time in use, especially in Slovenia (59–65). Milosevic, encouraged by European pressure to keep Yugoslavia intact, flatly rejected the proposals directed toward further confederalisation and instead offered the solution of centralisation. When that was unacceptable to the western part of the country, he started the war to restructure Yugoslavia.

Another element should also be taken into account, and that is the dissolution of world communism and the lack of pressure from the USSR. From the moment when communist Yugoslavia became an independent actor on the international scene, and that means after the Tito–Stalin split in 1948, its autonomy was dependent to a very extensive degree on the balance of power between two antagonistic world blocs. Yugoslavia was probably saved from a Soviet invasion mainly because of the fear of Western counter-intervention in 1948 (Bilandzic 1985: 158–63). The position of Yugoslavia from that time on can be described as a free floating entity kept alive by contradictory pressures from the West and East. With the disappearance of the one supportive pressure, the Warsaw Pact–USSR, the balance was lost and Yugoslavia fell.

This balance was important not only from a geostrategic standpoint but also because it enabled Yugoslavia to enjoy significant economic help from the West, as the show case communist state breaking its ties with the USSR, and at same time not being forced to fully join, in the sense of internal changes, the Western camp. That also increased the internal legitimacy of Tito's communist regime creating the image of liberating Yugoslavia from Soviet domination, in spite of the fact that it had brought it under the Soviet sphere of influence in the first place.

The interest and involvement of the West in Yugoslav affairs faded with the disappearance of Yugoslavia as an example of a communist dissident, while the capability and willingness of the USSR to intervene also diminished. Yugoslavia, without outside pressures to hold it together, no charismatic leadership, and with no possibility of creating and sustaining internal legitimacy, because of the crisis of communism and the deteriorating economic situation, simply exploded. The internal forces keeping it together were too weak or too clumsy, but the forces acting in the direction of dissolution were not capable of managing the transition in a peaceful

way. A bipolar world held Yugoslavia together as the result of pressures from both sides; the disappearance of bipolarity meant the collapse of the outside forces keeping Yugoslavia intact.

### Conclusions

The geostrategical explanation is important in understanding the dynamics of the creation and dissolution of Yugoslavia. Geostrategy operates on three different levels. First, on the level of international actors and their perception of the importance of the creation or the dissolution of an entity like Yugoslavia; Second, on the level of the interaction of geostrategical considerations and internal elite strategies; Third, on the production of legitimacy as the result of geostrategical success or failure.

The important element in the short-term explanation of the creation of Yugoslavia was the willingness of the non-Serbian elite to accept the Yugoslav state as a better solution than its disintegration and domination by the hostile surrounding powers. In that perspective Serbian domination looked to be a lesser evil than domination by Italy or Hungary. This consideration was also strengthened by the high esteem the Serbian elite was held in, resulting from its successes in creating and maintaining independence over the longer run.

These different perceptions, determined by different, long-term, historical positions, planted the seeds for the conflict which would constantly undermine the stability of Yugoslavia between the wars. This was a conflict between centralisation, rooted in the perceptions of the Serbian elite that Yugoslavia was just an extension of the long-term expansion of Serbia, and federalism, where Yugoslavia was perceived by the non-Serbian elites as the framework for an equal development of all national entities included in the new state. It was only from this period that we have, for example, the widespread Serbo-Croatian conflict at the popular level. Before the creation of Yugoslavia, the popular nationalisms of the two nations were not directed against each other. At the elite level, we have anti-Croatianism and anti-Serbianism, which is the logical consequence of nation formation and consolidation in the nineteenth century. At the popular level, before the peasant masses in Croatia began to feel that Serbian domination in Yugoslavia was directed against their interests, there was no popular anti-Serbianism. This internal divisiveness contributed to the fast dissolution of Yugoslavia as a consequence of Nazi aggression.

In explaining the events of post Second World War communist Yugoslavia, geostrategical factors were again of immense importance. Yugoslavia was between two existing blocs, balancing between the two. Internal stability was maintained exactly on the basis of this balance. The pro-Western forces were kept at a distance because of the 'reality' of Soviet influence. Any move directly outside the 'socialist camp', could bring the

danger of internal dissolution and 'brotherly help' from the Eastern neighbour. On the other side more dogmatic, communist forces were kept at bay because the whole internal legitimacy of the system was built on the fact of successful struggle against Nazi occupation and Soviet pressure. This perception of the successful maintenance of independence created some deep inroads into the popular legitimacy of the communist regime. We can say, paradoxically, that the regime was popular not because it was communist, but because it successfully resisted the Soviet communist pressure and created stability where nobody expected that it could be achieved.

With the dissolution of world communism the situation dramatically changed. The fact that the west, particularly Italy, Austria and Germany, was not perceived by elites and the population at large to be any kind of danger, but, on the contrary, pillars of the European integrative processes, removed the motivation so important in the creation of the first Yugoslavia. The goal of the political leaders in Slovenia and Croatia was not to escape but to join Europe. They were prevented in their moves by the Serbian integrationalist strategy of unifying Yugoslavia on a more pro-Russian and anti-European basis. The disappearance of the Soviet threat removed the sources of internal legitimacy of the regime and allowed the explosion of pro-Western sentiments. Consequently the shifts in external pressures, the attractiveness of the West and the disappearance of the threat from the East, totally destroyed the internal consensus and Yugoslavia exploded under cross-pressures and the attractions provided by the changes in the geopolitical environment.

## References

- Banac, Ivan. 1984. *The National Question in Yugoslavia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Bilandzic, Dusan. 1985. *Historija Socijalisticke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije*. Skolska Knjiga: Zagreb.
- Burks, R. B. 1961. *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cohen, Leonard, J. 1993. *Broken Bonds. The Dissintegration of Yugoslavia*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Collins, Randal. 1986. *Weberian Sociological Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jankovic, Dragoslav. 1983. 'Oko unitarnog ili federativnog uredjenja prve zajednicke Jugoslavenske drzave', in Nikola Popovic (ed.), *Stvaranje Jugoslavenske drzave 1918*. Belgrade: Institut za savremenu Istoriju.
- Karadzic, Vuk. 1849. 'Srbi Svi i Svuda. Kovcezi za istoriju, jezik i obicaje Srba sva tri zakona. Bec, Jermenski manastir', quoted in M. Grmek, M. Gjidara and N. Simac, *Etnicko Ciscenje. Povijesni dokumanti o jednoj srpskoj ideologiji*. Zagreb: Globus, 1993. pp. 29-35.
- Korunic, Petar. 1989. *Jugoslavizam i Federalizam u Hrvatskom nacionalnom preporodu. 1835-1875*. Zagreb: Globus.
- Krizman, Bogdan. 1989. *Hrvatska u prvom svjetskom ratu*. Zagreb: Globus.
- Krizman, Bogdan. 1977. *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslavenske drzave*. Zagreb: Skolska knjiga.
- MacKenzie, David. 1985. *Ilija Garasanin: Balkan Bismarck*. Boulder, CO.

MacKenzie, David. 1994. 'Serbia as Piedmont and the Yugoslav Idea 1804–1914', *East European Quarterly* 28, 2: 153–82.

Marjanovic, Milan. 1913. *Narod koji nastaje. Zasto nastaje i kako se formira jedinstveni srpsko-hrvatski narod*. Rijeka: Knjizara G. Trbojevic.

Tepsic, Dragan. 1970. *Italija, Saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje*. Zagreb: Skolska knjiga.

