



# Conclusion



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**S**OUTHEASTERN Europe has experienced dramatic, if often unwelcome, change since the fall of communism in 1989. The period since then has been dominated by the wars in former Yugoslavia and characterized by contradictory developments. On the one hand, democracy has grown deep roots in Southeastern Europe. For all the setbacks involved, communism is today more a legacy than a reality. Governments are chosen in free, fair, and competitive elections. Transfers of power have taken place peacefully and regularly, human rights are fairly respected, the press is vibrant and critical, and civil society is pluralist and growing. The democratization of Balkan politics is a remarkable development given Stalinism's legacy in countries such as Albania and Romania, the historically weak democratic traditions of the region as a whole, and the severity of the economic decline in the 1990s. A few populist-





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nationalist politicians on the left and right have enjoyed some electoral support but not enough to topple the new democratic order. There has been no Weimar collapse in Southeastern Europe and, over the years, democratic rule has expanded rather than contracted.

Moreover, the general legal, institutional, and cultural framework of a market economy has been established: basic legislation on commercial, corporate, and bankruptcy law has been introduced, private property legalized and encouraged, prices freed, and so on and so forth. Privatization has made some inroads and the private sector, for all the dead weight of the public sector, is growing strongly.

In addition, the wars in Yugoslavia have been contained and violence has not spread outside the former federal borders. All neighboring countries, including Albania vis-à-vis Kosovo and Tetovo, have followed a cautionary and responsible foreign policy with a consistent Western orientation, making accession to the European Union and NATO a strategic priority. In Bulgaria and Greece first, Romania later, and even in Turkey today, inter-ethnic relations have markedly improved. These are achievements that have mostly gone unreported, but the people of the region should take great pride in them.

Unfortunately, for all the aforementioned successes, in certain respects Southeastern Europe has grown further away from the rest of Europe and has increasingly diverged from Central, formerly communist, Europe. The region has failed economically, politically, and socially, and today it is faced with an acute developmental crisis that requires immediate redress.

Economic reform in the Balkans has stumbled and foreign investment has been miniscule. It can be argued that there has been too much shock and not enough therapy. Much of the region is in worse shape today than in 1989, with a smaller national product in real terms. Economic decline has led to an explosion of social problems, initiating a vicious cycle of decay: public investments have dried up, and communication networks, schools, and hospitals have deteriorated beyond repair; unemployment has skyrocketed; and emigration has drained the best and brightest talent from local communities. Corruption is rampant, crime is on the rise, smuggling is the most profitable economic activity, and nepotism and clientelism form the main pattern of politics. The old communist *nomeklatura* has been replaced by a new, politically connected, media-controlling economic oligarchy.



Next to these “ordinary” problems stand the lands of the former Yugoslavia with their own additional “extraordinary” predicaments. With the exception of Slovenia, all the former Yugoslav republics have been devastated by war and ethnic conflict and are at present struggling to recover. Progress is slow and gets complicated by the continuing contestation over issues of sovereignty, institutional structures, and retribution. It will take years to reach pre-war levels of prosperity and normalcy.

However, not everything is lost. The ousting of Milošević in a popular revolution and the electoral defeat of Tudjman’s politics have allowed democracy to make new inroads in the region. For all its ethnic troubles, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has pulled itself together, Bosnia remains calm, and in recent elections Kosovars rewarded the moderates and punished the hard-liners. In the last year, Bulgaria and Romania have mustered the will to renew their efforts at reform. Turkey has managed to avoid an Argentina-like implosion and the Greek and Turkish communities have recently demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to reunite their island in Cyprus. Greece, Slovenia, and Hungary, the star performers of the region in the past decade, are drawing closer towards Europe’s core, with Greece already a member of the EU’s EMU.

## The End of Marginalization

With the resolution of the great Eastern Question that preoccupied European diplomacy for centuries, until the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, Southeastern Europe retreated to the periphery of Western and world concerns. Had it not been for Mussolini’s foolish adventurism, the Balkans would most probably have escaped the ravages of the Second World War. In the end, only Turkey managed to steer clear from the carnage. Then for a brief moment, in the immediate aftermath of the war, it seemed that Southeastern Europe would be a critical Cold War battleground. Truman proclaimed his famous doctrine in 1947 extending U.S. protection to Greece and Turkey, and Tito openly clashed with Stalin in 1948, setting in place some basic parameters of the new grand geopolitical game. By that year, however, attention was quickly shifting towards Berlin. It remained focused on the inter-German frontier, the so-called Central front, for much of the following forty years. Southeastern Europe did create some headlines during this period, though, such as during the Cyprus

crisis in the summer of 1974. But, overall, when it came to European security the primary concern remained the Central front. In regards to world security, regions such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central America commanded far greater importance than Southeastern Europe.

The Balkans regained the world's attention and imagination with the big bang provided by the violent toppling of the Ceausescu regime in Romania and the dictator's assassination in December 1989. Since then, the region has emerged at the center of Western concern for the stability of Europe, the strength of the Euro-Atlantic relationship, and the position of Russia and Turkey in the world, as it has seen major international political, military, and financial interventions.

At the very center of the Balkan problem has been the violent disintegration of multi-ethnic Yugoslavia and its replacement with small, homogenizing, impoverished, dysfunctional, and antagonistic nation-states. Yugoslavia has dominated the contemporary debate on the Balkans and has given new impetus to the negative stereotyping of the whole region. After a decade of wars, ethnic cleansing, and the massive NATO military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, the Yugoslav problem is far from resolved and points of contention remain in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, to a lesser extent, Montenegro, while the final status of Bosnia and Kosovo remains unresolved.

Although the rest of the peninsula escaped the gruesome violence that engulfed Yugoslavia, it did not remain free of trouble. On the contrary, Albania collapsed into near civil war in 1997 and itself became the ground for an Italian-led international peacekeeping operation. Bulgaria went bust in 1997 and renounced its monetary independence in favor of an IMF-backed currency board. In Romania and Moldova economic depression led to the return of old-new communists to power. Finally, Turkey, after having enjoyed twenty years of growth and increased international assertiveness, experienced a severe financial crisis characterized by a currency devaluation, capital flight, bank failures, increased inflation, massive unemployment, and an almost 10 percent decline in output. Bankruptcy was avoided thanks only to massive IMF emergency lending. Only the Greek-speaking parts of the region, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, together with Slovenia and Hungary have enjoyed robust growth and a general if slow convergence of living standards with those of Western Europe.

Emerging from this account is a region that has moved from the periphery to the center of Western security concerns. The Balkans have been where a new



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post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic relationship has been negotiated and NATO has been put to the test. According to the new understanding, the United States remains the major European power whose leadership is required for any major military intervention to take place even on Europe's nearby periphery. The support of the European Union and its leading members is essential, especially in post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, despite its lack of hard power, the EU's abundance of soft power is recasting interstate relations in Eastern Europe to the extent that cooperation and interdependence have become conditions for membership.

The Balkans have been the place where Christian Europe's relations with Islam and the millions of Muslims on its southern periphery are, to a great extent, defined. By supporting Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians against Serbian aggression, the West sent a clear signal to the Islamic world that religious differences should not dominate the post-Cold War world. In addition, the decision to accept Turkey as a candidate for EU accession at the Helsinki Summit of 1999 could open the way for a more multicultural Europe.

Finally, it is in the Balkans that much of Russia's position in the new Europe has been determined. By abandoning its fellow Serbs and cooperating with NATO in stabilizing Bosnia and Kosovo, Russia not only realistically assessed the new geopolitical balances of power, but provided a powerful Western orientation to its foreign policy that can only be coupled with a renewed reformist drive at home.

This end to Southeast Europe's marginalization and isolation is the product of not just violence, instability, and Western intervention. It is part of the general rubric of globalization that provides for the opening of national economies to world markets and connects peoples, societies, and cultures across borders to an unprecedented degree. Simply compare Albania before and after 1991, and the ferocity of change in this previously hermetic communist kingdom becomes apparent. More broadly, it is Southeastern Europe that is going to be the conduit for much of the new energy and network infrastructure connecting the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea with the world market.

Benevolent and malevolent forces have combined to force Southeastern Europe out of its historical irrelevance. Attention will remain focused on post-war former Yugoslavia and on Turkey. Grand questions of democratic representation and accountability, inter-ethnic relations, and secularization, coupled with economic stability, reform, and growth will continue to dominate the

agenda of these nations. In countries such as Romania and Bulgaria democracy seems secured but the economy lags behind. Greece in the south and Hungary and Slovenia in the north are in a league of their own with centrist, managerial, and consensus-oriented politics in place of old existential polarizations. These are the region's anchors of stability and main partners with the world-at-large.

## The Challenge for Balkan Studies

The study of the Balkans as a region is a fairly recent arrival to the field of area studies. During the Cold War, research on Southeastern Europe was fragmented among competing Slavic, Middle Eastern, and West European studies. Following the fall of the iron curtain, the peninsula recovered some of its lost unity and Balkan studies became gradually "meaningful" again. True, much of what is "Balkan" remains contested. The region has no clearly defined northern border and it is very diverse in historical, ethnic, religious, and cultural background. Nevertheless, few contest that there is such a region called Southeastern Europe. Geographically it encompasses the lands to the south of Hungary, including present-day Turkey and Cyprus. Historically it has been more or less part of the Ottoman Empire.

Students of the Balkans are confronted with several predicaments. Despite recent upheavals, funding remains limited, research centers are few, and linguistic barriers are hard to overcome. However, this collection of essays, in its diversity of subjects, comparative thinking, and interdisciplinary nature, is a proof of the vitality of the field and its progress during the last years. The volume is far from an exhaustive account of the field but it does provide promising glimpses into the future potential of Balkan studies.

Clearly, doctoral dissertations and related research are increasingly shedding light on new subjects of Balkan history, society, politics, economy, and culture, away from conventional wisdom. These efforts aim at providing an analytical framework for making sense of a region where many dominant Western concepts do not apply. They discover underlying threads that have tied Balkan developments together and moved them forward. They search the past to understand the present in order to make the future better. Rather the aloofness of a judgmental outsider, they offer the sensitivity and empathy of an insider who is trying to explain .



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Ultimately, these papers are a salute to serious, post-national scholarship and to cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. They can provide a firm launching pad for future research. Through the Kokkalis Program on South-eastern and East-Central Europe, Harvard University will continue to support this scholarship and cooperation that our troubled world needs so much.

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