

The Seven States of the Former Yugoslavia: An Evaluation

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The area formerly known as Yugoslavia, positioned at the crossroads of East and West, is a melting pot of ethnicities and religions. As one country, Yugoslavia's rich multiculturalism was a source of contention, culminating in a series of bloody conflicts in the early 1990s. The Dayton Accords of 1995 brought peace to the region and created separate nations organized along ethnic and religious lines. Sixteen years after the signing of the Dayton Accords, we examine the geopolitical situation in each of the seven independent states of the former Yugoslavia.



Source: Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2011.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the early 1990s, there was considerable ethnic-religious conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Dayton Peace Accords had the immediate impact of bringing the inter-ethnic strife to an end. Bosnia and Herzegovina was confirmed as a sovereign state. Today, the country is slightly smaller than West Virginia and has a population of over four and a half million.¹

¹ "Bosnia and Herzegovina," The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

However, the political solution that ended the war is complex. There are two tiers of government. The first tier is a national government, responsible for Bosnia-Herzegovina's economic, fiscal and foreign policies. The second tier of government administers the internal functions of two entities: the Bosniak Croat Federation and Republika Srpska (RS). The first entity—the Bosniak Croat Federation—is composed primarily of people of Bosniak and Croatian ethnic backgrounds. Republika Srpska—the second entity—is overwhelmingly Serb. An additional area, the Brčko District in northeastern Bosnia, was previously held by both entities. It is now a self-governing administrative unit under international supervision.

In addition to the tiered government, an Office of the High Representative (OHR) was created under the Dayton Accords with “the authority to impose legislation and remove officials.”² Created during the great rush to obtain an agreement to end the conflict, there was subsequently serious doubt about creating an external authority that could interfere in the internal matters of a sovereign state. In our opinion, Republika Srpska does not support the institution of the OHR because it feels that those aligned with the OHR are less willing to have open discussions and meaningful negotiations about matters of the state since they can always fall back on the OHR if they do not approve of the results.

The situation remains complex, but there is overwhelming support for the continuation of peace. In Republika Srpska there is a positive sense of forward movement. Although, the majority of the citizens are from the Serb Orthodox culture, Catholic and Bosniak minority communities enjoy religious freedom. The Croatian minority and the Bosniak majority are developing a better understanding of life in a pluralistic society. There is, however, a level of pessimism about the future in the Croatian community that is resulting in a number of younger Croatians leaving the country.

The bilateral relationship with the United States is now favorable. While there has been some discussion about updating the Dayton Peace Accords, there is increasing hesitation about changing a system that, for the most part, is at least working. In a recent interview, the Minister of the Interior of Republika Srpska Stanislav Cado, stated, “The more time passes and the more I read, the more impressed I am with the wording of the Accord.”³

Bosnia and Herzegovina aspires to become a European Union member state. The integration process will be one of negotiation and compromise. In the view of the authors, the goal of being a European Union member state can only be achieved by setting aside internal political strife.

² “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

³ J. Cushman Laurent, Personal Interview on 13 July 2011 with Minister of Interior (Republika Srpska) Stanislav Cado.

Croatia

Croatia, a country slightly smaller than the state of West Virginia with a population of nearly 4.5 million people, has historic ties with central Europe.⁴ It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of World War I and young Croatian men, known for their bravery, were frequently recruited to serve as soldiers in the armies of major European powers.

The country has experienced several difficult periods in its history. Following the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Croatia went through some of the same political transformations as her neighbors. During World War II, Croatia, under the control of Nazi Germany, declared its independence and allied itself with the Axis powers. Another difficult period in recent Croatian history was in the early 1990s when the Croats fought to expunge Serbs from areas they claimed were an intrinsic part of the Croatian state. These four years of struggle ended in 1995.

In 1998, Croatia was able to occupy all of eastern Slovenia. With regard to the country's foreign policy, Croatia is a candidate country for membership in the European Union. It joined NATO in 2009 and enjoys a good bilateral relationship with the United States.

Kosovo

Kosovo was a highly disputed territory constituting around 15 percent of Serbia. Slightly larger than Delaware, Kosovo became the youngest independent state of the former Yugoslavia with its declaration of independence on February 17, 2008. Landlocked and with few natural resources, the country has benefited from the aid and assistance of the West, especially the United States. While Kosovo is now a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, her neighbor, Serbia, continues to reject Kosovo's independence.

The area is rich with Serbian history. The *World Factbook* states that "during the medieval period, Kosovo became the center of a Serbian Empire and saw the construction of many important Serb religious sites."⁵ It was also here that the Serbs suffered a major defeat by the Ottoman Turks in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. The Albanian presence continued to grow and, by the end of the 19th century, Albanians had become the dominant ethnic group in Kosovo.⁶

The growth of the Albanian community led to increased demands for greater minority rights by ethnic Albanians, particularly during the 1980s. In 1990, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević authorized a brutal counterinsurgency; many Albanians were killed or wounded. The severity of the counterinsurgency led to a three month

⁴ "Croatia," The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

⁵ "Kosovo," The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

⁶ Ibid.

NATO-led military operation against Serbia, which resulted in the withdrawal of Serbian military and police forces from Kosovo. Interim arrangements designed to ease tensions failed and the Kosovo Assembly declared the country's independence in 2008.

Macedonia

Located in the southern part of the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia, an area slightly larger than Vermont, declared its independence in 1991.⁷ Greece objected to the name "Macedonia," due to its roots in classical history. For this reason, upon the country's independence, "Macedonia" was temporarily designated "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia." Although the naming issue has not been fully resolved, most countries, including the United States, refer to the country as the "Republic of Macedonia" today. While Greece maintained a trade embargo for the first several years after Macedonia's declaration of independence, diplomatic relations have since been normalized.

There are two primary ethnic groups in the Republic: Macedonians (64.2 percent of the population) and Albanians (25.2 percent of the population).⁸ In 2001, ethnic Albanians protested various inequities which resulted in the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001). Brokered by the international community, Ohrid transformed Macedonia into a bi-cultural community in which the majority ethnic group determines the official language of that community. The rights of minorities were advanced. While the United States remains concerned about some issues of corruption and human trafficking in Macedonia, the bilateral relationship is strong.

Montenegro

The co-authors recently visited Montenegro, a country slightly smaller than Connecticut, with a population of almost 662,000, located on the shores of the Adriatic Sea.⁹ The outlook, articulated by some Balkan specialists on the future of Montenegro was pessimistic, but in the few years since independence, Montenegro's stability has erased this pessimism and the country is now an example of a small but stable state in the West Balkans.

Following the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's dissolution in 1992, Montenegro entered into a federation with Serbia. It began transitioning to full independence despite a loose state union in 2003 known as "Serbia and Montenegro." The 14 years of transition passed peacefully and in June 2006, following a decade of negotiations, Montenegro became the 192nd member state of the United Nations. The United States played a significant role in the negotiations that led to Montenegrin independence in 2006, and the bilateral relationship remains favorable today.

⁷ "Macedonia," *The CIA World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

⁸ Percentages from the 2002 census as reported in "Macedonia," *The CIA World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

⁹ "Montenegro," *The CIA World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

Serbia

Among the countries of the former Yugoslavia, Serbia, which is slightly smaller than South Carolina, is well-known for its involvement in international affairs for over 200 years.¹⁰ Appearing first as a sovereign state in 1878¹¹ when its independence from the Ottoman Empire was recognized by European powers, the region was known as the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes upon its formation in 1918. Following World War I, the region emerged as a central power, changing its name to “Yugoslavia” in 1929.

Josip “Tito” Broz, the leader of the Partisans in the struggle against Nazi Germany during World War II, emerged as the leader of Yugoslavia in 1945. Although regarded as a communist, he guided Yugoslavia via the Non-Aligned Movement. He led Yugoslavia until his death in 1980.

After almost a decade of weak internal leadership, Slobodan Milošević became President of Serbia in 1989. An ultra-nationalist, Milošević advocated Serb domination which led to the violent breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991. The result was a more intense ethnic division with Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia in 1991 and Bosnia in 1992 declaring their independence as sovereign states.

In April 1992, Milošević became the leader of the Federal Yugoslav Republic, encompassing Serbia and Montenegro. He remained a strong promoter of “Greater Serbia,” and the use of military force to unite Serbians of the neighboring republics. Ethnic-religious tensions became more serious in 1998 when Milošević undertook a counter-insurgency campaign in response to civil disturbances by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo; many died. The Milošević government also expelled large numbers of Albanians living in Kosovo. Milošević was adamant in his refusal to discuss a solution to the problem in Kosovo; this led to the NATO bombing of Serbia. In 1999, both Serbian military and police forces were withdrawn from Kosovo and NATO forces entered the country to protect ethnic minorities. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, thereby ending the targeting of ethnic Serbs.

The situation in Serbia has resulted in a residual atmosphere of national disappointment and aspirations for a “Greater Serbia” have faded. The hope that Montenegro would remain in a political union with Serbia did not materialize and Kosovo, home of so many members of the Serb Orthodox faith, is now an independent state. Serbia has experienced a few difficult years. Fortunately, President Boris Tadić, who has led the country since 2004, is an internationally-respected leader.

¹⁰ “Serbia,” The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

¹¹ This date, 1878, is largely accepted by the international community as the date when sovereignty was recognized.

Slovenia

With a population of slightly more than two million and an area slightly smaller than New Jersey, the country now called Slovenia was strongly influenced by its historic and cultural ties to Western Europe.¹² It was a contingent of the Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Hapsburg Dynasty before becoming part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Following the dissolution of the Empire in 1919, the Slovenes joined their Croatian and Serb neighbors in 1929 in forming a multinational state named “Yugoslavia.” Following World War II, Slovenia became a republic within the communist Yugoslavia. In 1991, driven by the goal of full freedom from the Serb majority, Slovenia declared its independence after a ten-day struggle.

Slovenia is the most flourishing of the former member states of Yugoslavia, enjoying strong economic benefits from a stable political system. The country is a member of NATO and the European Union. With its strong alliances, Slovenia will most likely continue to grow in influence during the 21st century.

Currently, there is some debate concerning the land and maritime boundary agreement between Croatia and Slovenia. The agreement, “which would have ceded most of Piran Bay and maritime access to Slovenia and several villages to Croatia, remains ungratified and in dispute.”¹³ There is also strife regarding a 2003 Croatian claim to an exclusive economic zone in the Adriatic Sea. Slovenia is also trying to improve cross-border cooperation with Croatia concerning the southern border.

Summary Observations

The birth of Yugoslavia is in some ways attributable to US President Woodrow Wilson who, at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919, actively supported the formation of the Kingdom of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs—the predecessor of Yugoslavia. During the Bosnian War of 1992-1995, the United States, under President Clinton, gave decisive leadership to ending that conflict in 1995 with the Dayton Peace Accords. The United States continues to have a special attachment to the seven states that were formerly part of Yugoslavia and enjoys close relations with these seven states. Today, like the United States, the area of Yugoslavia is multiculturally diverse and widely engaged with the international and regional communities in order to improve the lives of its citizens.

In the opinion of the co-authors, the international community should refrain from imposing any new solutions on these states. Their sovereignty should be respected and they are at peace with one another. Their futures are in their hands.

¹² “Slovenia,” The CIA *World Factbook*, 16 August 2011.

¹³ Ibid.