

Eldar Sarajlić and Davor Marko (eds.), *State or Nation? The Challenges of Political Transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo, 2011)

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This edited volume brings together “the coming generation of Balkan social scientists” in an effort to open up discussion and shed light in various elements of Bosnia-Herzegovina’s troubled post-conflict transition processes. The book, like others focusing on the same subject, illustrates why Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) remains the most intriguing piece in the puzzle of Yugoslavia’s disintegration. In the most ethnically diverse republic of Yugoslavia, the particularly bloody conflict shocked the world that was watching in disbelief as international community scrambled to respond to the escalating crisis. The Dayton Peace Agreement put an end to the war but put into place a dysfunctional political system fashioned with consociational characteristics that resulted in ethnicization of politics, education and just about every other aspect of life in the country. Finally, the unprecedented international intervention that culminated in the institution of ‘international administration’, as embodied by the Office of the High Representative (OHR), made BiH the ‘perfect’ social experiment in the making. As an extreme or crucial case study, it attracted hordes of social scientists analyzing peace building, intervention, state building, nation-building and post-conflict reconstruction. With the international administration now in its sixteenth year of presence on the ground and with the political situation spiraling out of control to the point of talk among (nationalist) political elites of renewed conflict, it is not difficult to understand why the country is a mess that continues to fascinate.

Most scholarly accounts of the country, for reasons just presented, tend to get bogged down in the ‘diagnosing the problem’ stage, rarely offering policy recommendations or suggestions on how to break out of the stalemated status quo. However, these quests to assign the blame or pinpoint the ultimate cause of the troubled situation in the country or the reason behind international community’s inability to ‘administer’ the BiH’s post-conflict democratization processes often fall prey to circular reasoning. How does the volume by Sarajlić and Marko fare in this respect? Does the “new generation of Balkan social scientists” offer new information or fresh perspective on BiH’s troubled political transition? The introductory chapter by Sarajlić offers an excellent overview of cognitive, epistemic and methodological challenges in studying the BiH transition and correctly points out that conceptual boundaries (an example of which can be found in the civic versus ethnic nationalism dichotomy) stand in the way of political reform of the country. Sarajlić goes on to inflate readers’ expectations by pointing out that what is needed are “conceptual tools and political means to envisage Bosnia and Herzegovina beyond the mold of the nation-state” (p.18), as well as “a shift in

political thinking.” (p.19) However, he finishes the introductory chapter by setting a far more modest goal for the volume: “to open up certain questions, indicate certain problems” and offer opportunity to engage in discussion with the coming generation of Balkan social scientists. (p.20)

The book offers investigations in the spheres of state, society and culture. Sead Turčalo’s chapter summarizes some of the main literature in the field of statebuilding and its conclusion echoes Roland Paris’ that promoting empty forms does not lead to liberal democratic substance or norms within those institutions. As a review, this chapter offers a useful starting point to the discussion of external actor role in BiH post-conflict transition. Mateja Peter goes on to provide the analysis of international conceptions of state building by comparing different High Representatives’ priorities during their time in power. This chapter provides a useful narrative of different High Representatives’ goals and behavior while leading the OHR and illustrates well the shifting of the state building visions as well as the support and lack thereof from the side of the Peace Implementation Council. She concludes that, “Priorities and visions of the international community...greatly circumscribed the opportunities for the local subjects to translate their visions of state and nation into practice.” (p.60) However, some may disagree and point out that local political elites have fashioned the country into precisely the kind of state/nation they envisioned, despite the presence and interventions of the international administration.

Adnan Huskić is equally if not more pessimistic than Peter as he sets out to explain “the failure of state-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Pointing to the paradox of parallel state building and democratization processes, this chapter returns to the analysis of faults in the Dayton Peace Agreement and the mistake of premature post-conflict elections that legitimized and entrenched war-mongering nationalist parties in powerful positions. Even though well written, this chapter is a good example of an analysis bogged down in assigning blame and in critiquing Dayton and the 1996 elections – which few authors defend – it fails to offer new insights on the matter. Ivana Howard’s analysis of mistakes in supporting civil society development summarizes the main critiques of this endeavor, also offering local or recipients’ perspective on the flaws in this process. Her conclusion goes a step further and offers a set of recommendations. However, these recommendations (“donors must learn and be willing to change,” “they must learn to communicate,” “donors should learn how to respect their local partners,” p.118-119) lack operationalization. The final two chapters which focus on culture analyze the subjects that have not received as much attention as political elites, international administration and civil society in BiH: public holidays and the role of religious communities. Nataša Bošković’s chapter is well argued and demonstrates how through regulation of public holidays, political elites in BiH have institutionalized the precedence of ethnic identity instead of promoting individual citizens’ rights

and acknowledging the multiethnic composition of the country. The chapter by Tatjana Ljubić and Davor Marko provides an excellent illustration of religious communities' interference in both educational and electoral processes and how the 'synergy' between political and religious elites has hampered the democratization of the country. This final contribution is especially relevant taking into account the recent toxic backlash of religious figures against the government efforts to exclude religious teaching grade from students' overall GPA. (April-May 2011)

The overall impression of the book is that it reaches the goal that Sarajlić set initially: relevant issues were discussed, and some of the chapters provided original insights and added dimensions to existing analyses. However, as Sarajlić himself pointed out in the beginning, what is needed to further the discussion on BiH in an effort to break out of the political stalemate is a change of paradigm or a shift in our thinking about the local and international actors and their roles in the challenging BiH transition processes. As long as this conceptual shift is lacking, accounts of BiH and its problems will continue to leave readers frustrated, dissatisfied and wanting more.

Rajah Rasiah and Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt (eds.), *The New Political Economy of Southeast Asia*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010)

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Southeast Asia has recently been dubbed as one of the world's fastest rising economic hubs. Although it has some countries that offer exemplary stories from the East Asian economic miracle, the region also has its share of middle-income and low-income countries beset with grave problems in their respective political economies such as endemic poverty, environmental challenges and economic governance issues. Notwithstanding that the region is indeed a fascinating focal point for the analysis of emerging political economies, there appears to be a vacuum in Asian studies scholarship on a comprehensively-written volume examining political-economic change of the countries from a distinctive regionalist perspective which justifiably abandons the country-by-country analytic approach. More particularly, this means that it considers the entirety of Southeast Asia as a focal unit of analytic-scholarly endeavor, rather than examining each country in the region – with the latter task usually ending up in a mere stockpiling of case studies.

Filling successfully such a gap, *The New Political Economy of Southeast Asia* aims to provide a compelling scholarly examination of the most crucial contemporary issues in region's political economy. By exhaustively and eloquently highlighting the weaknesses and limitations of previous analytical approaches (neo-classical; state-