

## Editors

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Since 2017, she is also head of the Center for European Studies, Epoka University. She has an interdisciplinary research orientation and her academic works cover topics of international mediation, foreign policy, conflict resolution and peace studies. In July 2012 Kellogg School of Management granted her Dispute Resolution Research Center Scholar Award. During her academic career, she has previously served as a member of the Project Office Board and Epoka University's Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Board. Finally, Dr. Shehi is chair of the workshop series "Peace in the Balkans, Peace in Europe: Lessons learned" and managing editor of Journal of European Social Research

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## Introduction

*Klajdi Kaziu*

Once defined by Winston Churchill, the Balkan produces far more history than they can consume: the region has simultaneously proven him wright. Being characterized by a rich set of ethnic diversity and linguistic and religious composition, the region has manifested constant patterns of inter ethnic conflicts, which have substantially undermined its democratic evolution and socio-economic development. Moreover, being bound to shifting external interventions, each promoting its distinct geopolitical interests; the Balkans has for long been referred to as the “powder keg” of Europe. Throughout the centuries, dominating world powers such as France, the Austro-Hungary, Great Britain, the, Czarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire have deeply pursued their ideological, economic interests, as well as their expansionist appetites deep within the Balkans. Consequently, the region has constantly served as a playing ground, where such powers and their proxies’ interests clashed. Therefore, a history filled by shifting power balances, unstable alliances and consecutive conflicts has characterized the overall regional realm.

In this framework, this book aims to provide for a better understanding of how these ethnic mixtures, and its complex nation compositions, have contributed to the development path of each specific country, as well as to the entire regional way forward. By utilizing a comprehensive overview of the cross-country historical conflict and cooperation patterns, it strives to deliver for few reliable assumptions on the current and prospective Balkan’s political and societal dynamics. Furthermore, building upon its descriptive and analytical pillars, this book delivers for comparative output among the particularities of each country’s context and development path. Nonetheless, despite the broad implications of such country specific circumstances, and their effect in the latter behavior, yet the common regional environment, and the broader European wide developments, have caused for similar domestic developments. Thus, being bound to arguably comparable geopolitical, economic, and societal features, the Balkan’s societies have often displayed intrinsically similar behaviors. Nonetheless, despite these commonalities, their internal social structures, religious and ethnic formations, as well as their fit/misfit to the larger geopolitical interest of the Great Powers, has substantially differed their play on the ground.

In this framework, a comparative and objective analysis on each Balkan’s country approach to these complex domestic and international trends, remains detrimental in evaluating their current constrains, advantages and potential ways forward. As such, this book provides for a review, on the historical implications of the countries' behavior, and on how the post-communist Europeanization paradigm has transformed the long-standing patterns. In this regard, bringing the all Western Balkans 6 countries, under the same reviewing framework, this book delivers a reliable comparison of their past realities, and their progress in conflict transformation and institutional building.

Pursuing a regional approach to the understanding of the past and present patterns of conflict and cooperation among the member states, this book utilizes the Bosnian and Kosovo's case studies, as its fundamentals upon which the overall analytical structure is built. As

a result, the latter case studies provide for the center of the comparative study, aiming at elaborating on the commonalities, as well as the differences they showcase. In this regard, the two countries sharing their Yugoslavia belonging past, represent the best applicable proof, capable of exemplifying the political, societal, linguistic, and religious diversity within Yugoslavia. As Kosovo technically falling under the autonomous case of that time Yugoslav Constitution, it enjoyed extensive self-governing rights yet vulnerable to the central Belgrade government overrule. Instead, Bosnia and Herzegovina, constituting one of the six Republics of the federal Yugoslav state, was subsequently vested with extensive self-ruling tights and mechanisms that allowed for strengthened "independence" from the central structure. Nonetheless, despite such systemic differences between the two parts of a common federal country, their path to secession and its consequences proved to resemble. War and conflict arose in both countries, although its time framing and on ground dynamics roughly matched. In this framework, the book draws a simultaneous comparison in between the domestic ethnic, political and religious determinants that lead the way to conflicts in both ex-Yugoslav territories, as well as on the implications that such developments have had with regard to the current state of affairs within Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the internal ethnic, socio-linguistic and religious compositions display no similarities, a comparative approach pursued in the upcoming book chapters remains detrimental in unlocking the root causes behind the during/post Yugoslav, a conflictual path in both countries.

Further building on its comparative platform, the book provides for a comprehensive observation over the political playing ground within each WB countries, most notably centered on the domestic party politics in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and North Macedonia. While the ethnic divisions have for long played significant role in the structural formations of both public and private endeavor in these societies, the political parties' landscape has been intrinsically bound to adapt to such divisive lines. As a consequence, ethnically based parties, constantly advocating for nationalistic, or ethnically driven policies have dominated the political realm in the region. Nonetheless, as long as the societal composition in the above-mentioned countries remains heterogeneous yet differing in their structure and core/non-core group divisions; the behavior of the political actors has displayed quite differing features. Due to the fact that Kosovo and Serbia are characterized by an ethnic composition featuring an overwhelming majority group, and several minority groups- instead of being composed of two or more national-building, balanced ethnic groups as the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia; has mismarked the party politics environment among the two cases. In addition, besides the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic determinants, the political playing field, from one country to another, has largely differed as a result of the diversity of the constitutional and state structures that they have developed. While federalism according to ethnic lines in Bosnia and Herzegovina imposes a nationalistic driven, conflictual, and divisive political behavior of all the political parties, the still centralized state structure in North Macedonia induces a more cooperative behavior of the political actors. Although yet in limited terms, the existing parties, (both Macedonian and Albanian sponsored), are bound to pursue more in elusive policies, which aim at extending their electorate beyond their respective ethnic lines, thus providing for an increasingly cross-ethnic political rhetoric and endeavor. As the past parliamentary elections displayed the leftist winning party (LSDM) approach to diminish ethnic boundaries among its voter's base, yet such trends remain to be

confirmed in the upcoming campaigns. On conclusion, this book aims to deliver for a comparative understanding of how both the ethnic composition, as well as the constitutional structure of the countries has helped in shaping the political dynamic within, and in between them. Thus, analyzing the relationship among the political environment constraints and party politics behavior is essential in unfolding the causality or correlation in between ethnic division and political rhetoric, as two sides of the same coin, reinforcing one another.

Further on, the book delivers particular attention to an inclusive overlook of cross-country relations in the Western Balkans. By not limiting its analysis only to past historical trends and specific events, but in parallel elaborating on the present days economic and cultural cooperation, it strives to distinct certain patterns of relations among these countries. As such, by reviewing the already existing bilateral agreements put in place to facilitate trade and cultural, and people to people exchange between the Western Balkans states, the book seeks to evaluate their validity in strengthening cross-country relationship. Further on, considering the ultimate dominance of EU integration paradigm upon the accessing country's domestic and foreign policies- this book does emphasize the detrimental role of both the bilateral Stabilization and Association Agreements, as well as the multilateral political frameworks- in facilitating and safeguarding collective initiatives and eased cooperation in between Western Balkans countries. In this framework, through a detailed examination of the on ground implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement's trade liberalization chapters, accompanied by a thorough overlook if the actual deliverables of the IPA (Instrument of Pre-Accession), this book provides for a better understanding of the success of such processes, tools and mechanisms, in simultaneously transforming domestic and regional economic environment.

Complementing its historical and macroeconomic analysis, the book also provides for a comprehensive observation of the state building efforts of all the Western Balkans countries. Although Albania was the only actor not emerging from another sovereign structure such as Yugoslavia, during the 1990s, yet institutional building and democratization reforms needed to be undertaken have been similar among all the six Balkan states. Strongly linked to the broader Europeanization process, these efforts have particularly aimed to construct a MN of democratic, transparent, impartial, and efficient institutions that could be able to deliver appropriate services to the overall public. Yet, such undertakings, both at local and national levels, have been bound to certain democratic deficiencies, political interferences, and corruption allegations, which have undermined their trust and capability to properly deliver. As a result, despite questioning their own legitimacy, such MN countries, while deteriorating our market economies, have also challenged our trust on democratic systems.

At last, tackling the need for a shift of the societal approach to regional cooperation, this book delivers particular attention to the decisive importance of education, as a pivotal tool in our quest to sustainable peace in the Balkans. In this framework, further directing out policies and resources towards youth inclusivity, and formal / non-formal education, which remains essential in shaping a new generation able to transform the historical patterns of conflict, into new paths of cooperation and integration at both economic and societal levels. Although peace education does not insinuate forgetting the past, it particu-

larly requires common, or at least, co-existing narratives of history, that simultaneously provide a set of objective facts, as well as provide for moving ground for future change of these relationship paradigms. As such, a long-standing and resilient process of conflict resolution, that necessarily involves such a reconciliation phase, may only be sustainable if it is built upon, and constantly fueled by peace-educated generation of people. In this regard, the youth is most viable tool that the Western Balkan societies possess, in order to ensure their primary aspiration for a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic country.