

The Balkans: Endurance and Endeavour. Resistance to Foreign Oppression

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In-depth Report: [THE BALKANS](#)

I travel frequently to the countries which once made up the now defunct Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, satisfying a passion of mine that stems back to my childhood days. For me, the Balkans' history, its people and its cultures are both enigmatic and magnetic, as they have been, too, for countless others, of many nationalities, over centuries gone by.

Accounting for the enchantment of the Balkans, its captivating allure, is a challenge to put into writing. Because no words can truly embellish what is one of the most absorbing parts of the world. To understand and feel what it is to be spellbound by the Balkans requires one to travel extensively across the region, taking in its astounding geographical landscapes and talking, intimately, with its unfathomable inhabitants, whilst indulging in reading about the history of the region – Rebecca West's classic *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* constitutes, in my mind, the Bible of the Balkans, and is unlikely to be surpassed any time soon.

But the pull of the Balkans for individuals like me has also been a pull for empires, both past and present. The problems which have, over centuries, beset the people of the Balkans are overwhelmingly attributable to outsiders who have vied for domination of the region in order to satisfy their lustful self-interests.

This article is not about the empires of the past which sowed the seeds for the pain and suffering of the Balkans and, with this, the deaths of vast numbers of the region's inhabitants. Nonetheless, it is necessary to cite those malignant empires which inflicted catastrophic damage to the Balkans, the effects, of which, continue to haunt the people of the region to this very day. So the offending empires are the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian, the German and the Nazi ones. To explain what happened between Serbs, Croats and Muslims in the twentieth-century requires a thorough understanding of what those pernicious empires did to the lands of the Balkans after they conquered and subdued them.

But for the purposes of this article, I want to focus on the destructive effects that the West's colonisation of the Balkans has had on the economies and societies in the region.

During the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbs, Croats, Muslims, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians enjoyed a level of security and stability that they had never enjoyed previously. Under the leadership of **Josip Broz Tito**, Yugoslavia had an education system and a health system that were the envy of many countries in the world, while its economy surpassed, in productivity and prosperity, many capitalist countries in the West. In Yugoslavia, everyone had a job, a decent salary, a home, a guaranteed and healthy

state pension and welfare benefits. Homelessness was non-existent in the country, and crime was as alien to Yugoslavs as the Renaissance is to **Donald Trump**; the simple truth was that most houses and apartments across Yugoslavia did not have locks on their front doors, while serious crimes such as murder and rape and organised crime were unheard of by Yugoslavs – they only encountered these crimes when they visited cities in the West, such as New York, Detroit or Los Angeles.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provided a period of respite for the long suffering South Slavs. In the words of one Macedonian in conversation with this author: “Yugoslavia was a world within a world. It was paradise.”



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However, that paradise was turned into hell when Yugoslavia imploded in 1991-1992 as a result of Germany and America having encouraged and supported armed secessionist movements in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia and then having recognised the independence of these Yugoslav republics. The actions of Berlin and Washington utterly contravened international law, severely undermining the United Nations Charter and the sanctity of internationally recognised borders. And why did the Germans and the Americans do what they did to Yugoslavia? Because with the end of communism in Eastern Europe, and with the Soviet Union at death's door, the US and the European Community, as the European Union was back then, and which Germany is the engine of, firstly, no longer required Yugoslavia (during the Cold War, Yugoslavia had played a balancing act between East and West); secondly, they did not want a socialist country in the new Europe; and thirdly, they wanted to ensure that there would be no future Russian influence in the Balkans (from 1990-1991, there was a view in the West that Yugoslavia could turn to the USSR for support in order to guarantee its survival).

The destruction of Yugoslavia by the West shattered most of what had been achieved during Tito's time. But that was just the beginning for the people in the former Yugoslavia. What followed has taken the Balkans back to being a colony.



Josip Broz Tito in cesar Haile Selassie v Kopru 1959

The colonisation by the US and the EU of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia has totally eradicated the security and stability that these countries enjoyed when they comprised Yugoslavia. The once envied health and education systems are now just memories, while the once prosperous economy lies in ruins. Homelessness is now widespread and unemployment is at shockingly high levels. The welfare state has been dismantled and state pensions are totally insufficient for people to live on. And organised crime is now a part of everyday life.

Most of the national industries of the former Yugoslav republics have been privatised and sold off to companies in the West or have simply been closed down. Many of the region's natural resources are in the hands of foreigners, and the workforce of the former Yugoslavia is used as cheap labour by American, British, German and Italian companies. Furthermore, the markets in the former Yugoslavia have been flooded with foreign goods, resulting in

domestic suppliers closing down because they simply cannot compete in prices. Coupled with pro-Western puppet governments in power from Ljubljana to Zagreb to Sarajevo to Belgrade to Podgorica and to Skopje, the Balkans is a brutal case in point of twenty-first century colonialism in practice – colonialism of the two empires which now rule the region: the US and the EU.

Recently, I was in Serbia and Bosnia, where I travelled extensively and spoke candidly with locals about the effects of the Balkans being a colony of Washington and Brussels. Each and every time I am in the former Yugoslavia, my heart bleeds for its people who have suffered terribly throughout their history because of outside interference, which has involved them being played off against each other, a tactic that the West has employed in a masterful way in the Balkans since 1991. *Divide et impera* is the foundation upon which the West's subjugation of the former Yugoslavia is built.

In Serbia, today, most people do not have a contract of employment so they do not even have the most rudimentary of workers' rights. They can be dismissed by their employer for no reason whatsoever and they are not entitled to statutory sick pay or holiday pay. Bullying at the workplace is rife, while salaries are depressingly low – the average salary is approximately 400 EUR per month. A Serb friend of mine, who has a PhD, told me that:

“All of the Tito-era employment legislation, which safeguarded workers' rights, and which was subsequently protected by **Slobodan Milosevic**, is today being repealed by the West's puppet Government in Serbia. Tito and Milosevic both believed that it was the responsibility of Government to ensure employment, with full rights, for its people. And Milosevic said time and again that to be in employment is a fundamental human right and that the rights of workers must be protected by the state.”

With unemployment standing at approximately 30 per cent, together with extremely low salaries and the cost of living rising, people in Serbia are having their electricity and gas supplies cut off, even in the winter months, when they cannot afford to pay the bills. People, including babies, children, the disabled and the elderly, are, literally speaking, freezing to death in their homes. An elderly Serb commented to this author that:

“Leaving people without electricity and gas was unthinkable in Tito's time. Even if a household was unable to pay the electricity or gas bill in Yugoslavia, which were both very cheap, supplies to it were never cut off.”

The destruction of the Serbian economy, by the Serbian Government, on the orders of Washington and Brussels, is not only causing Serbs to leave the country, in the hope of finding a better future for themselves and their families elsewhere, but is also causing homelessness to explode to shocking levels. People living rough on the streets, once unheard of in Serbia, is now a common sight and especially in Belgrade. Both the Serbian Government and the Serbian Orthodox Church, both of whom are collaborating with western governments and, in turn, with each other, show little concern for the homeless in Serbia. Indeed, when I was in Belgrade last year, I saw a disabled, homeless woman crawling on her feet close to a bus stop, drinking water from a puddle, and a priest waiting for his bus there did not even bat an eyelid at this destitute woman.

Hospitals in Serbia, which during Yugoslavian times were renowned across the world like how today Cuba's hospitals are, have become symbolic of Serbian society: decaying. There is little investment by the Serbian Government in the health system, and whilst medical care is still free in Serbia (for now), many Serbs choose to travel to adjacent countries, such as Italy or Hungary, to receive treatment which they know will be to a higher standard compared to that back home. A government which does not provide an excellent level of healthcare to its people should not be in power. But then again, the government of **Alexander Vucic**, like the governments before it, serves only the interests of its masters in Washington and Brussels – the Serbian people are of no importance.

During my stay in Serbia, I travelled to Bosnia and specifically a city called Zvornik, on the Drina river. Upon entering Zvornik, one is confronted with a symbolic sight of what has befallen the former Yugoslavia. On the Serbian side of the Drina, there is a rusting hulk of a factory plant. Whereas in Yugoslav times, that factory provided local employment and contributed significantly to the local economy and, with it, the national economy, too, today it is as quiet as a cemetery – another victim of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the colonisation of the region by the West.

Zvornik is a majority Serb city but with a significant Muslim minority. Both communities there live side by side with one another in peace, as they did in Yugoslav times. But in Zvornik, the people know about the consequences of the West's rule of Bosnia. In the centre of the city, I observed just how many people – men and women – of working age were sitting in cafes for hours on end in the middle of the day. But then that is neither surprising nor an aberration in Bosnia and Herzegovina because some estimates place the national unemployment figure at more than 50 per cent in this country. Zvornik is a typical example of a Bosnian city which has not moved on for over 25 years; it is stranded in time. Neglected and left to die by its imperial masters.

Whilst I was in Zvornik, I spoke with two delightful elderly ladies, one who was a Serb and the other who was a Muslim, who both recounted to me their memories of Yugoslavia, saying how it was a country that provided to its people everything which they needed to live happy, secure and stable lives. They then contrasted Yugoslavia with Bosnia and Herzegovina, saying that the latter country is dying and its people with it. The Serbian old lady said that:

“My friend and I are not religious but if through prayer Tito would return, we would be in the church and the mosque all the time!”

Shortly before I returned to the UK from Serbia, I made a visit to Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina. On the outskirts of this city, I saw factories and construction plants closed down, left to rust at the hands of Mother Nature, on the instructions of Washington and Brussels. Accompanying me to and from Novi Sad was, amongst others, a Kosovan Serb, in her early sixties, who was born and brought up in Kosovo and Metohija. Nothing more demonstrates the antagonism and hatred exhibited by the West towards Serbs than the tearing away from Serbia of the cradle of Serbian civilisation – Kosovo and Metohija – by the US, EU and NATO and then declaring it as “independent”. Never, ever, will Serbs forgive or forget what the West did – and rightly so.

Today in Kosovo and Metohija, Serbs have been reduced to a very small presence and who are overwhelmingly located in the northern city of Mitrovica. Since NATO took control of the

Serbian province, Serbs have fled in terror as a result of Albanian pogroms, while the Albanian authorities are complicit in the cultural destruction of Serbian sites, with between 120 and 150 churches and monasteries destroyed, vandalised or turned into toilets by rampaging Albanian mobs.

Whilst the plight of Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is miserable, the plight of Albanians there is equally as bad. The province is a NATO colony run by organised crime groups with extensive links to its so-called President, **Hashim Thaci**, a well-known boss of the drug, gun and sex trafficking trades and a notoriously brutal killer. Indeed, he once headed the infamous Drenica organised crime syndicate, the most powerful mafia in the Balkans. Since NATO's arrival in the province, in 1999, organised crime has become the de facto economy there, so much so that British narcotics police refer to Kosovo as the "Republic of Heroin".



Kosovo

With no job prospects, Kosovan Albanians have left the province in huge numbers, taking up jobs in countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The overall economic situation in the Serbian province is even worse than in the rest of Serbia, with unemployment standing at approximately 40 per cent and with salaries at a dire level – it is believed that 10 per cent of the population are living on less than one dollar per day. On top of that is a, literally speaking, deadly reality facing Kosovo and Metohija's population: the consequences of NATO aircraft, in 1999, having dropped vast amounts of depleted uranium shells across the entire province, causing a massive increase in cancer rates there (the rest of Serbia is also suffering from this most vile of actions by NATO). So all in all, it is believed that Kosovo and Metohija has incurred a population exodus of approximately 400,000 since the province became a NATO colony.

During my visit to Novi Sad, I asked the Kosovan Serb, whom I was travelling with, about what life was like growing up in Kosovo and Metohija when it was a part of Yugoslavia. She commented that:

"Life was great in Kosovo under Tito, as it was throughout the rest of Yugoslavia. We had super times. The problems for Serbs in Kosovo began after Tito's death, when the collective presidency in Yugoslavia proved to be ineffective and the Albanian authorities in Kosovo took advantage of this and started to target us. That was when life became difficult for Serbs in Kosovo."

When I took my seat on the flight back to London, I had expected to spend the two hour journey reflecting, on my own, about my visit to the Balkans. But what I had not expected was to spend the flight actually talking to my neighbour, in what turned out to be one of the most enjoyable and informative discussions I have had in a long time.

The gentleman seated to my right was a Serb in his early sixties who originally was from Novi Sad but who had emigrated, with his wife and children, to Canada in the late 1990s to build a better life there. We spoke about the appalling and sickening state that not just Serbia is in but that the whole of the former Yugoslavia is in today. And we lamented on how Serbs and everyone else in the Balkans are, once again, under colonial control. My friend, as he now is, spoke fondly and nostalgically of life in Yugoslavia under Tito. He recalled what a wonderfully exciting time it was to be a young Serb in the 1960s and 1970s, with so many

opportunities available. Towards the end of our discussion, we pondered whether Serbia and the rest of the Balkans can be saved. We both concurred that the world goes through phases and that history demonstrates anything is possible. Whilst the situation that Serbia, for instance, is in today is absolutely abysmal and getting worse, it will not necessarily always be like this, we said. My new-found friend and I rejoiced in how the Serbian people have, throughout their history, resisted and overcome foreign oppression, from the Ottomans to the Austrians to the Germans and to the Nazis. We agreed that the occupation of Serbia today by the American and EU empires differs from previous empires in the tactics being employed but that the objectives are the same. By the time we touched down in London, I suspect that both of us felt refreshed not just in having spent two hours engaged in a memorable conversation but also in our conviction that the Serbs will, one day, prevail in the face of foreign oppression and, as a result, regain their freedom and independence. Thank you, Milan, for helping to raise my spirits.

So I end this article on an optimistic note: Serbia and the rest of the former Yugoslavia can free themselves from the shackles of Western oppression. The people of this most intriguing and cultured of regions have so much in common and have endured so much together. Today, their lives are extremely painful but by them resisting the policy of divide and rule by the Americans and the Europeans, a better future can lie ahead for them.

I am under no illusions as to how formidable the task is of the Balkans freeing itself from the yoke of Western tyranny. But history has shown that the unthinkable is possible. We must remember that and we must have hope because the alternative for the former Yugoslavia is too horrific to think about.

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