

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

“CAN VOLAILLE SOCIETIES SUPPORT STABLE STATES – CASES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, KOSOVO AND NORTH MACEDONIA”

PUBLISHED BY THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIOLOGICAL, POLITICAL AND JURIDICAL RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY “SS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS” – SKOPJE, 2023.

Comparative studies analyzing the socio-political context and developments of the countries in Southeast Europe present a rather crowded academic terrain mostly occupied by people that have limited experience with the region or come from completely different political, economic, and academic environments. There is no pejorative sound to this statement since the objectivity of academics that come from abroad and analyze the region has a big added value in the face of lack of emotional involvement, bias, or predetermined experiences. However, occasionally, and for the sake of presenting the internal perspective from the countries belonging to the so-called Western Balkans (Southeast Europe seems to largely become a euphemism for WB), one comes across a manuscript that is authored entirely by local academia. Such an example is the book “Can volatile societies support stable states – cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo and North Macedonia” which presents a rare occasion to expand one’s knowledge in the realm of a phenomenon lately known in political science as “unfinished states”. The biggest advantage of the authors is that all five of them come exactly from one such state and that is North Macedonia, obviously being well connected and acquainted with the political history and current developments in the region of the WB as well.

Petar Atanasov, Slavejko Sasajkovski, Pande Lazarevski, Driton Maliqi and Dragor Zarevski have set a very simple political plain for unit analysis – four states that could be classified as transitional, unfinished, divided, and challenged in various aspects. North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are being explored from assorted angles in the four chapters present in the book with an obvious intent. In the first place, all authors, regardless of their specific approach, have tried to make connections between societal developments, the public political discourse, and the end political result in all four cases exposing the essence of the challenges that each of the countries is faced with. Secondly, the political circumstances of the four analyzed states, no matter how

harsh, in all texts are put in a regional and European perspective (or the lack thereof) while the authors make an effort to contextualize the current political standings of the countries within the broader political, sociological, economic and security landscape. Thirdly, all authors try to draw parallels between all four countries trying to extract common lessons on exactly the phenomenon that binds them all – their political imperfections and societal defectiveness, the latter causing the former as all authors indicate, thus earning them the epithet “unfinished”.

One of the biggest contributions of this manuscript is that it tries to “dig deep” in the origin and the background of the societal conflicts in the analyzed states trying to explain the connection between societal occurrences and political manifestation of deeply rooted conflicts in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Another common thread of the four societies is also the historical pathology of the lines of division of all four societies, notwithstanding that the level of conflict in intensity, duration and harmfulness varies quite obviously in individually analyzed cases. The authors brilliantly grasp the gradation of the least intensive division, which is the case of North Macedonia, then explaining the ethno-genetic rift of the Montenegrin society, as well as the rather complicated power-sharing arrangement and interethnic conundrum of Bosnia and Herzegovina finishing with the complete separation of the two formative communities in the youngest of all analyzed states and that is Kosovo. There is an unintentional grouping of states made while the four analyses unravel in the book and that is between one group of countries with troubled yet relatively optimistic political odds (North Macedonia and Montenegro) and the second group of countries apropos which all four chapters predict a rather uncertain and blurry future if major societal conflicts are not pacified and adequately accommodated – Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. However not even the political standings of North Macedonia and Montenegro are being presented unobjectively and without a fair amount of political and interethnic burden, however the manuscript gives out the impression that the authors are a bit more optimistic in these two cases. And rightfully so.

In the first chapter named “Social conflicts preventing political integration – Comparison between Bosnia and Hercegovina and North Macedonia” the author Petar Atanasov compares the efforts of both countries to politically stabilize and integrate their societies, starting off with what seems rather relevant in both cases – the historical background of the development of both political environments. From this historical landscape via an obvious attempt to draw certain path-dependency, the author then moves on to analyzing the current context in which societal and political divisions take place noting all respective differences and pathologies of both societies. Precisely dissecting the last three decades of political rifts and conflicts in both the case of North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, prof. Atanasov clearly pinpoints the ideological carriers of the divisions and the inability to further integrate the societies – ethno-predatorial political elites that hinder all societal efforts to move away from the interethnic zero-sum game and ethnic outbidding.

Slavejko Sasajkovski offers a completely different approach to the analysis of all four countries in the chapter named “Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia - political-legal determinants of their state and their social disintegration”. The author inspects the more normative terrain of international documents, constitutions

and other legal documents that shape and define all four societies. The normative analysis does not present a goal for itself but rather a starting point for the depiction of one obvious argument – the normative legitimacy, may be domestic or international, in all four cases, is rather deeply “divorced” from the notion of substantive legitimacy on domestic terrain creating numerous challenges in internalizing the political order envisaged in the very normative framework. Be it the Ahtisaari plan, the Dayton Peace Accord, the Ohrid Framework Agreement or the Montenegrin Law on religious freedoms it seems that normative reality creates more problems than it solves in the societies that are put under scrutiny. However, a challenge for a possible continuation of this chapter is seeking the answer to a very simple question – would the unfinished societies without such normative framing become impossible societies? Could they even survive without such flawed and on occasions deeply troubling normative structuring? Notwithstanding the imperfections of the now present legal and political reasoning behind solutions predominantly imposed by the international community, is internalization of the political rules of the game possible at all in these societies, given all divisions and conflict potential that exactly prof. Sasajkovski refers to in this chapter?

The penultimate, third chapter presents a rather deep and insightful analysis of Kosovar society and its current socio-political pathology. The author, Driton Maliqi, explains present political occurrences through the lens of the historically troubled relations between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbs, choosing a very challenging terrain and that is political myth formation in both communities apropos their claims on Kosovo. In the chapter named “Comparative Analyses of Social Integration in Kosovo and Montenegro”, prof. Maliqi does not end the chapter with analyzing the Kosovar example alone. He turns to Montenegro and its social integration seemingly in an effort to make a small juxtaposition vis-à-vis Kosovo as well as to indicate the obvious differences between the two countries that have a common denominator – an ethnic Serbian community opposed to two different groups (Albanians and Montenegrins) in two rather different political environments. With two possibly completely different political outcomes, *pro futuro*.

In the last chapter the authors Pande Lazarevski and Dragor Zarevski put sovereignty in the central place of analysis. By explaining the concept of sovereignty, they then make an attempt to connect exactly the problems of sovereignty of all four analyzed states with the current political pathologies and anomalies on societal level in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo. By pinpointing the causality between societal developments and the imperfections in sovereignty exercising by all four states, the authors move to the terrain of regional initiatives and their respective promises of success given the troublesome context in which they try to work their way to relevance. Hence the name of the last chapter – “Divided Societies and Sovereignty Deficit – The Challenges in Building Sustainable States in the “Western Balkans”.

As a separate annex to the book, the authors offer the reading audience a transcript from the online conference “Can Unstable Societies Support Stable States - Cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia”. The transcript is annexed to the main chapters as a reminder of a rather fruitful exchange of opinions between intellectuals in the region. Aside from the authors, respectable names from the region and the aforementioned countries in focus appear with their original contributions

serving as an intellectual base for what later became a rather perceptive analysis of states whose democratic transition and especially social integration is nowhere near finished.

The value of this book is twofold. On one hand, after a long period of time, a group of local authors is trying to present a comparative analysis of the region, country by country, linking the political destinies of all four analyzed countries with each other as well as the region as a whole. This perspective makes the book rather valuable since the authors, regardless of their ethnic origin and possible bias, have remained cold-headed and objective in their effort to understand the differences in social cohesion in all units of analysis and contribute to theorizing unfinished states. Furthermore, within their capacity, the authors are also trying to make future predictions and warn on possible political bottlenecks and neuralgic spots that societies in the region need to prioritize in their efforts to politically stabilize not just the states but societies as well. The second task being obviously much harder than the first one.

in Skopje,
09.06.2023

Prof. Nenad Markovikj