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The double agenda of the EU for the Western Balkans has become a veritable cottage industry in academia, variously phrased as stabilisation versus integration, transformation, empire versus enlargement, or intervention versus integration. In seven contributions Radeljić’s volume analyses the shift from largely stabilisation-driven policies to accession strategies for each individual post-Yugoslav state, including Kosovo. The articles are complemented by a substantial introduction and an epilogue written by the editor. The authors are young scholars, each from the country of his or her expertise, with Western academic training; in the case of the Kosovar Leandrit Mehmeti from as far away as Adelaide, Australia. The focus of each “national” chapter – which is a rather uninspired division of labour – was selected by its author. Hence, the topics range from Euroscepticism (Serbia), to democratisation (Kosovo), to the return of refugees (Croatia). However, this volume is not a disparate conference volume, but a well-designed project, even though it is not easy to make the case for a book priced at £ 60 in a market flooded by publications on the same general theme. The editor promises a critical assessment of the achievements and failures of both parties – the European Union and the national governments of the post-Yugoslav republics.

Unfortunately, the editor’s introduction falls short of his claim to provide a critical assessment. It offers a competent and condensed overview of the EU trajectories of the seven post-Yugoslav states with their ups and downs, but many such overviews are already available. Its conclusion that these trajectories have been asymmetrical and that the search for a more effective EU strategy towards the Western Balkans is still outstanding, comes as no surprise either. By contrast, the concluding chapter keeps its distance from the abundant literature that reifies EU integration and Europeanization into the sole and unquestionable solution to the old and new problems of the region. “[T]he impression is that the EU […] is more interested in providing the Western Balkans with a European perspective than the respective states themselves” (216).

Fortunately, some of the chapters have much more to offer in terms of insights and critical perspectives. Damjan Mandelc analyses Slovenia’s combination of successful Europeanization and unrelenting nationalising policies to the detriment of democracy. Europe’s readiness to be fooled by Slovenia’s efforts to keep up appearances and by solemn promises from Ljubljana, as well as by the need in Brussels for a post-Yugoslav prodigy are presented clearly. In addition to the well-known story of the so-called “erased people”, the author outlines the little-known phenomenon of right-wing extremism in Slovenia. On a similarly bleak note, Antonija Petričušić and Ljubomir Mičić study the EU’s much...
more critical assessment of Croatia’s policies vis-à-vis its Serb minority and Eastern Slavonia. They argue that ultimately the success of Brussels’ insistence on refugee and internally displaced persons’ return may have been limited, but without European initiative the ethnic homogenization of Croatia would have been a fait accompli.

Two chapters deal with the derailed or at least stagnant processes of EU-driven reforms and Europeanization in Macedonia (Simonida Kačarska) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Emir Vajzović). Whereas most other chapters are based on academic literature and close scrutiny of official EU policy documents, the chapter on Macedonia relies heavily on first-hand interviews with key political actors and observers in Brussels and Skopje. Oddly enough, this chapter has been written from the perspective of the institutional logic of the EU, resulting in statements like: “[…] the Commission intends to further intertwine the roles of the EU as an active player and a framework in the region” (103). In the Bosnian case the EU is blamed for being soft on the conditionality of police reform as a precondition for any further steps in the integration process. Hence, whereas the lesson from the Croatian case for the EU is to accept the best possible outcome under the given circumstances, the lesson from Bosnia seems to emphasize the importance of credibility and a quid-pro-quo. Much of this chapter explicitly follows the well-known recommendations made in recent publications by the senior expert on Bosnia, Florian Bieber.

At the core of the book is the triptych on Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo as the last remaining parts of former Yugoslavia. In accordance with the chapter on Slovenia, Jelena Džankić focuses on the EU’s faible for positive examples and its selective cognition. In 1997 the Democratic Party of Montenegrin Socialists (DPS) and Milo Đukanović were welcomed as “anti-Milošević” and their flaws, ranging from blatant corruption and black marketing to political opportunism, were ignored. Conversely, the EU postponed Montenegrin independence as a favour to the post-Milošević regime in Belgrade. Hence it is an understatement to conclude that “[t]he history of Montenegro’s relationship with the EU since the disintegration of Yugoslavia was not a linear one” (126). Yet, the author’s firm belief that “Montenegro is in the process of acquiring and internalizing norms and values exported by the EU during its accession process” sounds somewhat hollow (128). Like the contribution on Macedonia, Marko Stojić’s study on Serbia is based on original research. Serbian Euroscepticism is analyzed using the well-known theoretical frameworks developed by Paul Taggart and Cas Mudde. Stojić’s classification of most Serbian parties as so-called “soft” Eurosceptics or Euroenthusiasts reads like a premonition of the recent volte-face of the nationalist Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Conversely, Leandrit Mehmeti’s chapter on Kosovo fails to move beyond the findings of the particularly extensive literature on Kosovo’s political development in the past two decades. His final sentence clearly predates the EU-brokered agreement between Belgrade and Pristina of April 2013: “Without clear signals for the prospect of integration into the EU, these political elites will hardly make progress into further stages of cooperation, mutual agreement and reconciliation” (207).

On the whole, this volume proves that every new study adds a little to our understanding of the multifaceted relations between the European Union and the post-
Yugoslav space, even more so as both parts of the equation are currently undergoing rapid change, for better or worse. The downside is that volumes like this restate and rework at length numerous well-known facts and events – from Dayton to Ahtisaari and from Rambouillet to Ohrid.

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The last two decades have been an intense period in the Western Balkans. The states of the region have emerged from a series of conflicts towards the pathway to EU accession (already completed by Slovenia and Croatia), while they have also been impacted by the world economic crisis. The heterogeneity of the countries – in ethnic composition, in the degree of economic development etc., and the relative scarcity of policy-relevant data – makes an analysis of their economies an extremely complex exercise. “Chronic conditions” such as the low economic activity of the population, the proliferation of informal employment, endemic poverty and budget pressures have been aggravated by the crisis, while some positive tendencies have been disrupted. Problematic issues are deeply rooted in the taxation system, social benefits design, features of the labor market and educational sphere. Reforms in economic, political and social spheres are necessary, and this book contributes to the creation of a methodological base from which to make local policy measures coherent with the EU-2020 agenda. It is also topical in the context of the EU-enlargement.

The present collection of papers by a team of acknowledged experts provides an in-depth overview of the state-of-the-art in the analysis of poverty and social exclusion, and of the enhancement of welfare systems in Western Balkan countries. Apart from the regional analyses, this volume outlines the methodological challenges of creating comparable databases (across countries and time). Given the general uncertainty of conditions, not only in the Western Balkan countries, but also globally, the validity of a number of policy-relevant definitions (e.g. of relative poverty lines) is questioned and redefined in accordance with the current context. In addition, the volume offers a policy-relevant analysis with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies from different disciplines - economics, sociology, and anthropology.

Concerning regional specifics, the book definitely provides an excellent introduction to the up-to-date complex reality of the Western Balkan countries and the heterogeneity of problems that they share. In the case of Albania the book covers noteworthy aspects such as the creation of regional poverty maps of in-between-census years (Ch. 5), gender wage gap development and reasons for gender discrimination (Ch. 10), internal migration and its impact on the maintenance of social ties and intra-network transfers (Ch. 11), precision in targeting of vulnerable groups by social assistance programs (Ch. 16, or, in particular, the Roma population in Ch. 4). The first ever set of estimates of social exclusion indicators for Bosnia and Herzegovina, BIH, (Ch. 6) is certainly a breakthrough. Multiethnicity (which is closely tied to the