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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Repak, D. (2013). Serbian Political Heritage and Its Influence on the Capacity Building in Environmental Policy. *European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities*, 2(2), 53-62. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-342135>

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Serbian Political Heritage and Its Influence on the Capacity Building in Environmental Policy¹

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Submitted to ECPAM'2012: June 15th, 2012
Submitted to EQPAM: February 28th, 2013

Accepted for ECPAM'2012: July 25th, 2012
Accepted for EQPAM: March 25th, 2013

Abstract

This paper analyzes the construction and capacity building of environmental policy in post-communist Serbia. It will be argued that Serbian political heritage and limited democratic experience lead to weak political-economic progress, lack of administrative, ecological knowledge and weak civil society. The first part covers Serbian historical and political heritage, breakdown of the Yugoslav state and civil war. It will also be covered the process of Europeanization as the influential tool where different mechanisms to the EU influence the democratization outcomes of the new formed states. In the second part, Serbian environmental capacity will be analyzed and it will be suggested that environmental problems require economic, political and social responses from different government institutions and that Serbia experienced considerable political instability. Closely will be covered political, economic and social conditions that brought to these unfavorable circumstances.

Keywords: environmental policy, EU enlargement, political capacity, Serbian political heritage

¹ The initial version of this paper has been submitted to the 1st Annual European Conference on Political Attitudes and Mentalities, ECPAM'2012, and published in the Proceedings of ECPAM'2012: "Political Attitudes and Mentalities. The Historical Heritage of Europe: A Challenge for the Future of Political Analysis" (Camelia F. Voinea, Ed.), University of Bucharest-Ars Docendi Press, Bucharest, Romania, 2012, pp.197-213.

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European Quarterly of Political Attitudes and Mentalities - EQPAM, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 2013, pp. 53 – 62.
ISSN 2285 – 4916
ISSN-L 2285 – 4916

1. Serbian Historical and Political Heritage

In order to examine the Serbian historicism and political background it would be properly to present Serbian historical circumstances. Situated in the Balkan Peninsula the country was between East and West, concrete it was ruled by Orthodox Byzantium, Catholic Austria and the Islamic Ottoman Empire where different cultures and religious merged.

Serbia has been object of international political competition for centuries, as the country is of commercially and military fundamental importance. Therefore, European and Eurasian powers have longstanding interests in the region.

The arrival of the Serbs to the Balkans in the 7th century established several states that formed Serbian Empire in the 14th century; however, Serbia emerged from over 400 years of Turkish colonial rule. From the emergence of the first national liberation movements among Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century the region has been chronically unstable European sub-region (Nation, 2004). After the World War I Serbia formed Yugoslavia with South Slavic people and the country existed in different forms until 2006 when the National Assembly declared the independence.

Although the area is one of the most diverse in the world with distinctive ethnic, linguistic and confessional groups, the climate of ethnic and religious intolerance that allowed conflict has been in existence for decades. Precisely since the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century conflict acquired a distinct ethnic, national and religious character. Furthermore, the Turkish novelist Ottoman Uskub states that hate between peoples condemned to coexist has become the destiny of the Balkans (Reinhardt 2001, pp. 47 – 51), the region that can be assumed as distinctive physical and cultural zone possessed of what Maria Todorova (1997) calls historical and geographic concreteness.

Yugoslavia had for many years served as a source of stability in the Balkans by providing a framework for positive cohabitation between diverse ethnic groups. The communist authorities claimed that South Slavs and other nations living in the region managed to unite upon solid foundation only because of the political guidance and had done so under the ideological premises of brotherhood and unity (Pavlovic 1992, pp. 155 – 124). Tito's Yugoslavia enjoyed advanced relations with the EC and had been based upon Western (primarily American) financial assistance. It can be suggested that communist party had ability to maintain social and political peace among constitutive countries with different nationalities.

However, when Tito died in 1980, the last trace of country's unity disappeared. The nine-man Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia replaced the president and in this period the country faced serious economic difficulties and effectiveness of decision making institutions and procedures came into the question. The rise of an intolerant and exclusionary nationalism was one of the factors that led to the destruction of multinational Yugoslavia. Simply put, people saw themselves as part of an ethnic group (Serbs, Croats, and so on).

Secessionist aspirations that had been palpable since the late sixties grew in power, particularly in two western republics (Slovenia and Croatia). These aspirations also raised the question of further democratization and re-introduction of political pluralism. The rise of Slobodan Milosevic to the position of the leader of the League of Communists of Serbia in September 1987, and his victory over a softer stream of communism signified the beginning of populist politics in Serbia. Further, electorate did not see the situation in the 1990s as politician's responsibility because of the ideological vacuum, created by rise of nationalism leading to the widespread belief that countries future was perceived as a national cause (Thompson, 1992).

1.1 Civil War in the Balkan during 1990s

Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia had so many unsolved issues of an incomplete process of national definition and determination of its constitutive elements. In such circumstances national origins were often used to justify territorial claims that led to civil conflict. The war established the regional crisis and had significant regional dimensions in SE European region and in Europe as a whole. In this period, when the term 'Balkanism' was restored, region start to be perceived as the zone of chronic instability.

It can be argued that expansionist nationalism and calls for national homogenization were predominately reasons that led to wars in former Yugoslavia. Essentially, it was civil war for territories, identities and ideologies (Pavlovic, 1992). Disintegration of Yugoslavia should be understood as connected with trends throughout region where common ideology of equality and economic degeneration existed. Armed conflict that lasted between 1991 and 2000 claimed over 200.000 lives and war left behind terrible legacy of physical ruin and psychological devastation (Nation, 2004). Balkan War was a kind of generic phenomenon of post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole with major implication for international relations and it was kind of test for international conflict management efforts.

Even though it was only the Yugoslavians who were involved in the war, journalists called them Balkan Wars and restored the term 'Balkanization'. Balkanization can be defined as a negative category that was formed in the early years of the twentieth century, when the term became associated with violence and political unrest (it can be argued that events such as the assassination of King Alexander and Queen Draga, the Bosnian crisis, assassinations in the Balkans, the Balkan Wars influenced the term to be established). Therefore, the term 'Balkanization' is a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward and the primitive.

Finally, it can be argued that the Balkans trouble past has created objective barriers at the political, economic and personal level. Therefore, it is not surprising that the region is characterized by insecurity, volatility and, presently, some kind of a threat to Europe stability. It can be suggested that the county disintegration indicated that transition and integration in the EU would be much more costly and demanding.

1.2. Political Culture in Serbia

Political culture in Serbia can be described as complex, fragmented with significant differences in accordance to the national religious and traditional cultural forms. It can be suggested that archaic historical cultural forms based on myths of heroism and militancy hampered the development of democratic progress. It is also interesting to point out difference, noted by Vaclav Havel, between two Europe – a democratic, stable and prosperous Europe and less stable and less prosperous Europe, cited by many scholars as European periphery (Balkan).

Firstly, it must be taken into account that Serbia belong to the part of Byzantine and Oriental cultural space. During this period empires encouraged cultural conflicts in order to maintain its influence and power over the Yugoslavs. Also in Serbian history there is almost complete absence of social or democratic revolutions, simply they were suppressed under requirements of the fight against foreign powers. Therefore we can state that parochialism, archaic elements, authority distrust and alienation are perceived as the main characteristic of Serbian political culture. Dobrica Cosic (1963), a writer and former president of former Yugoslavia described Serbs as; aggressive, arrogant, with small capacity to recognize and appreciate values in others; destructive, and civically irresponsible with very low level of civilization behavior.

The Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijic (1922) singled out common ethno–psychological characteristics shaped by shared historical experience and specific modes of subsistence, ultimately derived from a particular geo – physical environment. In the similar manner Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga identified the development of the rural social institutions in South – Eastern Europe as the basis of a common regional character. On the other hand, Uvalic (Uvalic and Vaughan-Whitehead 1997) states that the prevalent view has been that people in the Balkans are primitive and uncivilized, and that by analogy, their economies are backward, underdeveloped and inward-oriented.

“By being geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as ‘the other’, Balkans has served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ has been constructed” (Todorova, 1997).

Here we find the classic Eurocentric perspective in terms of us versus them that find the Balkan as geographically part of the Europe with differences on the cultural level, specifically Balkan has been seen with primitive form of nationalism and with high degree of heterogeneity. Balkan is therefore determined as a European periphery characterized by ethno-nationally fragmentation that threat on security level.

It can be argued that nationalism still has a prominent role in Serbian politics as well as society and that is supported by other myths developed during the country’s history (such as Kosovo or myth of heavenly Serbia) and it should be suggested that Balkan integration would be more successful if there is change in the perception of Balkan people. Citizens on one hand see their future in the EU but at the same time they feel betrayed and blame the West for their ills. Although joining the EU was—and still is—the official national priority, Serbian post-Yugoslav identity has developed in profound isolation from Europe because of Serbia’s reputation as the architect of the Yugoslav breakup (Subotic 2011, pp.309 – 330). Conspiracy theory is also widespread; simply citizens have doubts about member States that favor certain states or ethnic communities at the expense of others.

2. The Europeanization Process

The Europeanization acts as an agent of change it is the policy transfer and learning process. Europeanization can be analyzed as an EU-centered process, directly dependent upon specific mechanisms. The concept of Europeanization refer to a set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics become part of the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2003). In Serbia this process shall be analyzed taking into account several factors. Firstly the process of Europeanization is not universally shared; secondly alternative identities coexist in country such as cultural affinity with Russia and previous relations with the EU were perceived negatively (Subotic 2011, pp.309 – 330).

Claudio Radaelli gives one of the most comprehensive definitions of Europeanization:

“Europeanization refers to processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003).

Europeanization affects candidate countries by imposing the internalization of communitarian norms and patterns that affect national policies (Madalina, 2010). This is the path through which policy transfer occur while setting common norms, rules, discourses and identities. Further on this way countries are in the position to obey to the rules and principles imposed. Also there are different mechanisms such as

rewards, sanctions, socialization and complex social learning, using of knowledge about policies, institutions, arrangements. It can be argued that this creates new prospects for the future regional role of the EU and allows for new considerations concerning the region's place in the New European Architecture (Radaelli, 2003).

It can be argued that the EU conditions in Balkan have been arguably more demanding. On one hand the issue of Kosovo independence and its European support was seen as a betrayal and Europe was understood to be a punisher. Also cooperation with The Hague tribunal and its trials that institutionalize a version of the recent history that paints the Serbs as the main perpetrators (Saxon 2005, pp.552 – 572) alienate Serbia from the EU path. However, it can be assumed that for the international community would be less costly to integrate Balkan than to marginalize them (Madalina, 2010).

2.1 Regional Cooperation and Re-Identification of Balkan as European

The dramatic changes in Serbia in October 2000 when reformist governments came in the power pushed forward the EU Balkan relation where the presence of the EU is shaped in two spheres: the EU serves as an enlargement factor and as a foreign policy. Therefore, joining Europe is one of the Balkan strategy objectives and one of the required processes would be to transform Balkan under the globalization trend. Simply, Balkan need region – wide strategy and broad regional cooperation. In that sense one area where some progress has been made in regional cooperation happened in February 2008, the Stability Pact (SP) for South Eastern Europe was “transferred” from Brussels to the region itself, with the creation of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), based in Sarajevo.

Regional co-operation has been promoted as an alternative that could create the broader conditions for democracy and market economy, normalize relations, bring minimum stability and facilitate trade, thus opening the way to economic prosperity. However, the Kosovo crisis and the limited success of the Bosnian state demonstrated the shortcomings of this approach and made the EU, in co-operation with other European and international actors, start considering the prospect of Balkan accession and to move towards the institutionalization of relations. Within this context and following the current practice of transformation prior to accession that characterizes the eastern enlargement; the Europeanization of the region according to the EU normative model has automatically become a necessity (Demetropoulou, 2002). In the case of the Western Balkans, structural assistance for regional development has been provided because military confrontations have proved necessary for the formulation of more coordinated (though less comprehensive) EU approaches. The Bosnian war and the Dayton Peace Agreements led to the adoption of a Regional Approach in 1996-97 and the Kosovo crisis opened the way for the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). By launching Stability Pact EU made it clear that the Stabilization and Association Process for the Western Balkans was an essentially an enlargement platform. It was platform for stabilization of region under common institutional actor.

However, it can be argued that the process of reform and integration with the EU is particularly vulnerable, impeded by extreme nationalism, organized crime and war legacy. Although downfall of Milosevic regime heralded the triumph of pro – EU politicians still there is an absence of consensus that EU membership is a political priority. People in high percentages believe that EU conditionality and pressure in matters such as cooperation with International Criminal Tribunal at Hague is too high. It is important to notice that sustainable reform process requires certain domestic conditions to prevail. Simply, reform will not be sustained without the presence of reformist parties and broad consensus among the political, economic and social elites and citizens (Anastasakis and Bechev, 2003). It can be concluded that the region is highly dependent on the EU because of uncertain economic development, political volatility and

shortage of funds (Anastasakis and Bechev, 2003) but a cooperative policy style is a prerequisite for effective policy integration.

3. Environmental Policy in Serbia

In the beginning of the '90s, environmental policy has been established in Serbia, but many of Serbia's environmental problems are in relation to historic legacy of a centrally planned economy. A focus on heavy industrialization in combination with price controls and subsidies created inefficient and wasteful natural resources use. Although the Serbian Constitution from 1990 proposed that the humans have right to healthy environment and the citizen duties in accordance with the law are to protect and improve the environment, this period is marked by a large number of uncoordinated federal, republican and municipal regulations, resulting in uncoordinated actions of different governmental bodies regulated environmental protection (Nadic, 2012).

The Serbian population's environmental values were developed in the main during the communist period after the Second World War. The communist government(s) advocated a new relationship between economic activities and nature, influencing and creating an adoption of the attitude, which puts more value on humans and human activities than nature, and places them above nature in the order of importance. Mnatsakanian (1995) states this pattern of development in the way humans viewed nature is not specific to Serbia but to whole region of South Eastern Europe. It can be summarized that nature was only seen as valuable in relation to the economy and how society could progress economically. The economy and society's development was to an extent dependent on what nature and natural resources was available to be exploited. These beliefs in the highly extensive utilization of natural resources, also led to little or no care at all about the environmental implications of these activities, for example no thought was given to how to store waste in the most environmentally friendly manner. There was also very little emphasis placed on citizens taken part in public dialogue over environmental problems (Mnatsakanian, 1995).

It can be argued that civil war and other military activities did have influence on environmental degradation, but despite the low priority given to environmental impacts of economic growth; it would be false to assume there were only a small number of environmental laws turned into legislation by the government. The Serbian Constitution provides the underlying principles towards environmental politics. It is stated that every citizen has the right to live in a healthy environment, and a duty to protect and improve environment so other people's right to a healthy environment is also protected. There are about 300 pages focusing on environmental laws and the logistics of making sure they are implemented properly. The Government is in charge for enabling the protection of the environment and in 2003, it established an Agency for environment. As a result, it can be argued that Serbia, is attempting to deal with the environmental problems. However it must be stressed that the very difficult economic and political situation, plus the very high levels of pollution means that environment is a major obstacle for the government to negotiate if it is going to get the environmental conditions in Serbia up to a standard that is internationally acceptable.

This period of transition is a crucial period in Serbian history because it is bringing in a new set of principles, laws and above all a new value system. The "Serbian liberal revolution" in 2000 was organized predominantly by Western orientated political parties with the aim of creating an opportunity for Serbia, to enter the European Union, adopt European values and achieve recognition in major world institutions. Podunavac (2005) states that Serbia is still faced with an absence of a collective consensus that answers the questions who we are and why we are together. This period will not be easy due to the size of the task, as was noted in the last report of the European Commission, the adaptation and implementation of plans

and strategies in the environmental sector should have happened parallel with the creation of the new constitution.

It can be suggested that environmental problems require economic, political and social responses from different government institutions and that the Serbia has experienced considerable political and economic instability. Lack of institutional and administrative capacity, corruption, and failure to implement reforms at the local level makes hard for Serbia to manage its environment. Also it should be take into account that the Serbian revolution from 2000 was a moment of excitement, hope and idealism. However, during time of transformation, belief in emergence of new democratic and market institutions have fall. Citizens feel they have been let down, cheated by the new system that quickly replaced the old one and there is widespread public distrust in political and bureaucratic institutions. Lack of the structure of a civil society and an inappropriate model of governing in Yugoslavian states lead to a poor development of environmental politics in general and influenced widespread disappointment with political and economic developments since the collapse of the state- socialist system (Howard, 2002).

Most of the responsibilities in the area of environmental management and protection lie with Ministry. Key responsibilities include development of strategic documents, plans and programs in the field of sustainable use of natural resources and renewable energy sources; development of draft legislation for compliance with international agreements and draft laws on ratification of multilateral environmental agreements; and the implementation of legislation and policies. On the other hand, Serbia's Environmental Protection Agency is responsible under Ministry of Energy, Development and Environmental Protection for tasks related to the development, regulation, harmonization and management of the national information system for environmental protection. Further the Environmental Protection Fund is a separate legal entity set up under the Law on Environmental Protection that deals with co-finances of projects within the fields of environment protection and energy efficiency while Directorate for Water is the focal point for the Convention on the Protection and Use of trans boundary watercourses and international lakes. Although Serbia has taken important steps in formulating and adopting environmental strategies, action plans and legislation, a major challenge for improved environmental management is to move from policy formulation to implementation. Also although there are a number of institutional bodies that deal with environmental protection there is a need to sort out institutional gaps and overlaps regarding environmental responsibilities between some of the ministries as well as between the national and local level.

3.1 Serbian Environmental Protection Capacity

Environmental protection capacity can be defined as society's ability to identify and solve environmental problems, in other words, it is the country's ability to follow sustainable development path that is determined largely by the capacity of its people and its institutions. Capacity building encompasses the country's human, scientific, technological, organizational, institutional and resource capabilities. Although the level of environmental degradation in Serbia is very high, the institutional organization in charge for environmental protection in Serbia is not organized adequately; for example, there is lack of horizontal, institutional coordination and coverage of environmental monitoring activities. There is also a lack of existing monitoring systems and the lack of rigorous procedures for collection, processing and reporting on environmental issues. Law enforcement in Serbia is inefficient; there exists inadequate institutional capacity, lack of inspections, low penalties and lengthy court processes.

The main problems in Serbia also include lack of reform consensus, limited democratic experience and weak institutions impeded politico-economic progress; delayed and unimplemented reform programs leading to inferior economic performance, declining living standards, rising unemployment and increased

poverty. More specifically, there is present the lack of administrative, technological, ecological knowledge and the weakness of environmental organizations. It can be suggested that environmentalism is of low political significance, not only for politicians but also for public.

We could closely analyze political, economic and social conditions that brought to this situation. Absence of political culture, of participatory democratic tradition, weak civil society inexperience of pluralism, lack of political experience and skill governance would be political conditions that brought to these circumstances. On economic level it is present insufficient means of production, stagnation, annual inflation, the system of economic instruments is still not developed and does not provide sufficient incentives that will encourage pollution reduction. Financing of environmental protection at the local level is a problem due to lack of funds and at the local level there are few established eco funds for protection of environment. On social level there are anti-modern mentalities, lack of new social structures, deepening social crisis, appearance of crime and growing gap between elites and public. Serbia lacks the institutional as well as the financial resources needed to create and adopt solutions that would successfully tackle these problems. Ferguson (2008, pp.629 – 652) who made research about the environment and civil society in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina noticed the lack of fund-raising knowledge, advocacy skills and policy-orientated expertise among the scientists and geographers who were involved in conservation during the socialist period and who are today positioned in the green movements. It can be argued that a similar problem exists in Serbia with a poor development of environmental politics in general.

Government institution for environmental protection, Non-governmental proponents (environmental organizations, media and ecologically innovative companies) are responsible for dealing with environmental protection. It can be argued that it is a kind of a challenge to build capacity in the administrations at the local level for implementation of new commitments in the field of environmental protection. Training programmers with an aim to build up local human capacity should be imperative in Serbia. NGOs steadily increasing in numbers since the collapse of communism, but many have been created by Western organization and are dependent upon Western funds. The green NGO sector still does not have the potential required to influence the political establishment and society as whole to adopt the stronger European environmental principles required if Serbia is going to improve its environment up to international standards. In particular, environmental movement across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Balkans have been the recipients of tutelage, training and the transfer of know-how to the extent that many such organizations depend entirely on foreign-sourced project grants for their existence (Fagan, 2008, pp.629 – 652). It is evident that foreign investments will dictate the future of environmental politics in Serbia.

In the future, we can expect increasing importance of quality relations between citizens and government, the degree of citizen participation in political decision-making process on environmental issues should rise. More work has to be done on building partnerships between governmental and non-governmental institutions. It is also possible to argue that improvements should be made in the area of participative political culture and civic awareness about environmental issues. Although there is an obligation, that public authority of the autonomous provinces or local governments fully and regularly informs the public objectively about the state of the environment. However, environmental issues are not prominent in media; simply environment and sustainable development are not of high media importance.

We can state that lack of developed political, economic and social institutions, the obsolete and insufficient infrastructures and means of production, the economic stagnation, the lack of civil society and privatization caused problems in environmental sector. It was pointed out that law enforcement in Serbia is ineffective and is limited due to the lack of human capacity.

Therefore it would be necessary to work on the construction of an adequate educational system that would enable more functional training of personnel in environmental field. However, Central European and Eastern States share similar recent history of rapid social, economic and environmental transitions and it would be reasonable to hope that change in this sector won't be encouraged by political legacy, rather it will be the process of adapting to the European Union policy that will accelerate the transition to the benefit of citizens and entire society.

4. Conclusion

Although communist regime sought to repress non-state activity and force citizens to join and participate in state controlled organizations, participatory political culture should be developed because environmental policy is impossible without good environmental management that built on democracy and participation. Also a key challenge is to move from pursuing an isolated environmental agenda to discussing the implications of environmental degradation to key development issues such as EU-accession and economic growth. The EU should generate more contacts with Balkan domestic groups, allow their participation in a variety of programs and create the networks that will facilitate the required learning and adaptation process. The Europeanization of environmental rules will require leadership capacity and involvement from municipalities. In that sense we will need training in environmental management, which can increase the capacity to address environmental issues. Harmonizations with the EU legislation on the environment issues will also allow benefit and allow better functioning of the European market and this will also lead to improvement of citizens' lives. Now it is the question of political elites to take up the opportunity.

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