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Yugoslavia, our dangerous backyard

The endless research and experimental effort towards an original and independent "path to socialism" have, since the end of World War II, given popularity to Belgrade's regime. And at a time when the USSR itself is engaged in the difficult attempt to introduce market elements and some form of decisional decentralization into its solidly bureaucratic system, "self-managed socialism" would almost seem to be a model for the whole of so-called "real socialism".

F. Fejtő, *The Yugoslavist idea*

At the same time, however, the economic failure of this experiment is to be seen by all, and has led Yugoslavia to a crisis affecting all aspects of social co-existence: it is an economic-structural crisis (in a wider sense than this adjective usually has with regard to Western economies); a crisis of representativity, credibility and acceptance of the single party (the LCY); and an institutional crisis. The latter is leading not only to further revision of the Constitution, but also to a decline of the Yugoslavist idea with respect to ethnic rivalries. That is, it is undermining the faith of the various Yugoslavian nationalities in the advantages of living together in one single state.

If, embittered by the rapid worsening of economic conditions, these rivalries were to prevail, as is beginning to seem possible at the present moment, it would not only mean the defeat of the main historical conquest made by the Southern Slavs over the last century, but also the reappearance of explosive instability in the heart of Europe: an instability whose effects would be much more serious than those which the USA accuses Nicaragua of provoking in America's own backyard.

S.K. Pavlowitch,
*From
authoritarian
magic to humble
politics*

These hypotheses are no mere exercise in the prophecy of doom, but conclusions based on the recent past. Over the last ten years (though the roots of the phenomenon go back to Tito's times), most of the central government's powers have been transferred to local bureaucratic feudalities. In the economy, this has led to a fragmentation of the Yugoslav market into an incoherent collection of eight small autarchical Republics or Autonomous Regions, with results that are shown by savage inflation (up to 200%) and unrepayable foreign debt: over 1000 \$US per capita.

K. Christitch,
The Kosovo crisis

But in politics the consequences have been even worse. Not only has the devolution of power to local nomenklatura groups made the Kosovo tragedy possible, but it has also shown that the equilibrium between a partitioned Serbia and the smaller national groups no longer holds. And since the very existence of post-World War II Yugoslavia is based on this equilibrium, what is jeopardized by the resurfacing of the "Serbian question" is nothing less than national unity.

J. Krulic, *The
army, mirror of
society*

Thus, both inside and outside Yugoslavia there have been hypotheses as to army intervention to save the country's unity. The possibility of "Bonapartism" is frequently mentioned, a new variety - after the Jaruzelski regime - of military communism. It is thus legitimate to worry about the possible loss of just that degree of toleration with respect to dissent which constitutes the real superiority of the Belgrade regime over the other Eastern European countries.

V. Meier,
*De-balkanizing
the Balkans*

Paradoxically, this falling back of the country into typically "Balkan" characteristics (fragmentation, ethnic strife, poverty, militarism) is taking place just at a moment when this area, for a long time immobile due to the division between the blocs, would seem to be entering into a phase of détente that has offered Yugoslavia the opportunity for regional initiatives, less ambitious, but more realistic and useful, than its previous world-scale diplomacy. Yugoslavia and the Balkans, whose very names recall dramatic memories, thus seem to be entering a critical phase, where gigantic problems will have to be faced, but that also gives room, for the moment at least, for certain prudent hopes.