

Serbia's Geostrategy – From Everything To Nothing

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This study starts from two basic premises. The first is that the Yugoslavian space has its specific geostrategic value and its variation in time has strongly influenced Yugoslavia's existence. This is why we shall divide the significant periods of time when this variation has been null, insignificant or has

presented significant leaps. The second one is that in the entire aggregate of Yugoslavia's components, Serbia has had the decisive role and this is the reason why Yugoslavia's destiny has depended – to a great extent – on the attitude of the great international actors towards it. The present essay focuses on this matter.

Before the First World War

In the geography of the Balkan Peninsula, the Danube has played the role of the backbone. However, it does not separate two symmetrical spaces, but two contrastive spaces, from various points of view. While in the North of the river, there are only two peoples with a certain massiveness and compactness, the Romanians and the Hungarians, in the Southern space, on the contrary, there is an actual mosaic. Here, the peoples are smaller and more interlaced.

Serbia's territory is placed in the centre of this mosaic, which explains the fact that in the South-Danubian system it has played sometimes the role of a pivot, sometimes the role of separator between a North of western influence and a South of Byzantine influence. Therewith, as it occupied – with certain approximations – the whole space between the west bank of the Peninsula and the Danube, Serbia could turn into a potential barrier from the possible expansionistic tendencies that existed on the north-south direction. And this happened because – once more – its geography helped it in this respect. In deed, as the chain of the Dinaric Alps lines-up the western side of the Peninsula, the space between the mountains and the Danube narrows, creating a corridor that has always been **the main direction of penetration** into the peninsula. The Serbian state has functioned as an vent in this corridor.

In the Middle Ages and in modern times, two great powers have used – yet in an opposite way

– this corridor: the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. Nothing more natural, as this direction presents three defining reference points: the Constantinople in the South, Vienna in the North and Belgrade in the middle of the distance *between them*.

At first, the Ottomans have pushed from south, and they had to destroy the feudal Serbian state (the battle of Kossovo, 1389), in order to shatter the vent and to go further. But Serbia's fall under the Turkish rule was not sufficient without the dominance of Belgrade. The ruling of this spot represented at the time Hungary's security for a century (1427 – 1521), and its fall under the Turkish control preceded its fall.

Following the decline of the Ottomans, the Austrians pushed from the north, and in their turn, they encountered the Serbian state, which re-emerged in the XIXth century, as a result of the same decline. Austria's way of solving out the problem of this vent was however more complicated because of its rivalry with Russia, which, basically, was trying to accomplish the same thing: to penetrate towards the south of the peninsula. The new superpower was an outstanding opponent for Austria because of two essential reasons. Firstly, because – as a Slavic and Orthodox country –, Russia could find a natural support within the south-Danubian space, and thus, by religion and Pan-Slavism, it could ideologically smooth the way of its expansion *de facto*. Secondly, because, as it targeted the

Constantinople, Russia, in favourable situations, could create a shortcut that could bring it into Serbia's back. This is why it was interested in the existence of a Serbian state, which, from Russia's point of view, was not at all disturbing, but quite the contrary. Russia hoped to suppress the vent that Austria wanted to maintain. This is why it supported the emergence of an independent Serbia with its capital at Belgrade (1878), thus building a anti-Habsburg barrier as efficient as the one that Russia itself encountered when a Romania with access to the sea had emerged (1878).

Austria-Hungary had only two alternatives left: Serbia's friendship or its destruction. It tried both, successively. For a while, it succeeded to attract Serbia into its sphere of influence, yet afterwards a series of events (a custom tax – war, the dynasty change in 1903) have led this relationship towards hostility. Then, after having annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina – a province that Serbia considered part of its national territory – in 1908, the two states were on the verge of war. Henceforward the Habsburgs could only find the Serbian vent in effect and – just like the Ottomans in the past – had no alternative but to destroy it.

This became more obvious after the two Balkan Wars (1912-1913), which had weakened Bulgaria, the client that Austria – Hungary had managed to co-opt in Serbia's back and with the help of which it had hoped to blackmail Serbia. On the contrary, the Serbian state, enlarged and consolidated, had the possibility of a more

efficient opposition. The Balkan Wars had turned Serbia into the worst of Austria-Hungary's expectations: in the south of the Danube emerged an important national state, confident and dominant in its region. Moreover, the military victories and the elements of modernity inside the country (universal vote, freedom of the press, a moderate monarchy and the land reform for peasantry) had raised Serbia to the rank of a success model which the Southern Slavs looked up to, with more and more consideration. Serbia had been an isolated state so far, yet, after the Balkan Wars, Serbia established its objective: the access to the Adriatic Sea. Thus, Austria-Hungary's worst nightmare took shape, i. e. to see the peninsula cut in two by a state grown between the Danube and the sea. Any Mediterranean power hostile to Austria-Hungary obtained the possibility to make the junction with Belgrade and – using Serbia as a pivot – could organise a Balkan policy. The prospect that was just occurring was that of a Balkan region where the simple situation with only two great rivals turned into a more complicated one, with a growing number of players and a more and more complicated policy.

On the eve of the First World War Austria-Hungary had to confront a painful dilemma: to accept the occurrence of new competitors, but in this case its expansion would have become a simple illusion, or to try to solve simultaneously and radically all the problems – destroying the Serbian vent and eliminating the rival that controlled it.

Decisive period (1914-1919). Serbia receives an Yugoslavia

However, the First World War revealed unexpected aspects.

First of all, we saw that the Serbian state was too hard a nut for the Habsburg hammer. After several blows that were energetically rejected, the empire stopped in stupefaction and asked for help (1914). Bulgaria, its client in Serbia's back, came to its assistance. Caught in the thumbscrew, the latter seemed to break down when its territory was completely occupied and divided between its adversaries (1915).

Nevertheless, it was clear afterwards that the state had not disappeared along with its territory, and that it kept its crucial political and military institutions, as well as its capacity for conducting war. It continued to fight in exile conditions, with

no interruptions, until it obtained the final victory and found again its lost territory.

This type of conduct, resistant and active, had a surprise effect at that time and determined the attitude of the great allies in the following period. The explanation consists in the fact that, in its modern genesis, the Serbian state had interlaced two types of features, the war-like features – which made it seem a kind of medieval military mark – and the features of a modern national state.¹

A document dating from the beginning of 1916 clears up the attitude and the plans of the great western superpowers regarding the Balkan Mountains in general and Serbia in particular. The famous Sir Arthur Evans and Hugh Seton-

Watson make a clear, detailed statement² concerning these matters.

(We should note only that their expressed intentions occur in a moment when the victory was still far from inclining to either of the parties involved, Serbia seemed to have been fallen, and the territory of the future Yugoslavia was totally under the control of the Central Powers. There were not even signs that Austria-Hungary would disappear, but nonetheless in London and Paris the ways of stopping Germany's future expansion to the SE and the Middle East were already being investigated. One of the main ways was the emergence of a Yugoslavia after the war).

Sir Arthur approaches these matters systematically.

First of all, the importance of Dalmatia.

From the Entente's point of view, he points out, the control of the oriental coast of the Adriatic Sea (Dalmatia) had irrefutable benefits. An agreement between Italy and the Southern Slavs³ is of equal interest for the parties and represents the "angular stone of any long-lasting peace within these territories and the *authentic guarantee* (o. u.) against Germany's possible domination, which would be equally fatal to all the interests of the Entente's great powers". History proves, he emphasises, that *controlling the coast without controlling the mountains behind is always precarious* (o. u.). This is the reason why he starts presenting the logic of creating a *Yugoslavian state*: a series of elements of the peninsula must be converged and given to someone that should not represent a danger. He clearly highlights these elements and the way they have been functioning throughout time from the geopolitical point of view. Then, after reminding how the Dalmatian pirates have functioned ever since the Roman antiquity and since the time of Queen Teuta, he concludes that "Dalmatia's control by powerful hands is a serious threat for all the Mediterranean powers, particularly for Italy and for ourselves".⁴ Dalmatia's strategic points (harbours, gulfs, archipelago) impress him to such an extent that he concludes again: "It is of great importance to us, and particularly to Italy⁵ that Dalmatia's control from the inside should be friendly. Which can be done by a *unified South-Slavic state*" (our underline) We find here a political realism that almost borders on cynicism: it is very clear that the Yugoslavian state should be born for the interest of the Entente's powers. Not at all for the

sake of putting across the principle of nationalities.

Southern-Slavs' national spirit is not forgotten, but it is considered only with a view to being instrumented. The national problem takes a very modest place in the author's attention, much more modest than the communication networks. This fact is significant for Sir Arthur's interest in his recommendations to the British politicians. "A unified Yugoslavian state could prevent the Germanic powers from controlling the Mediterranean Sea" and would place a territory "that must be considered as one of the most important in future communications with the Orient" under the protection of the allies.

The issue of the communications with the Orient is crucial, too. Sir Arthur proceeds with one of those comparisons that prove his erudition. He exposes the detailed picture of the entire communication network that has unified Europe in the time of the Romans in order to demonstrate that the shortest communications between West and East passed through the north of the Adriatic Sea and through the present territory of the Southern Slavs. As compared to this configuration, the subsequent influence of Germanism has rendered the old route secondary and has moved the main communication road so that it should pass through Vienna and Budapest. By reaction, he proposed that the old Roman route should be reinforced. It would have united Great Britain, France and Northern Italy with the Levant. In addition, it would have had the advantage of being independent and shorter than the long main road through the Germanic space. But in order for this to be accomplished, it should pass through Liubliana, Zagreb and Belgrade. A new argument for establishing a Yugoslavian state. It is "essential for the British Empire" that this road should "pass through friendly hands".⁶ The most important strategic point on this entire route is Belgrade because of its position – genuinely exceptional, which Sir Arthur characterises outstandingly. Belgrade has a single weak point, he observes, its location near the border. He was certainly thinking of the bombing of the town in 1914 when Austro-Hungarians had nothing better to do than firing their artillery from the opposite bank; likewise, also in 1914, Belgrade had passed from one hand to another, proving its vulnerability without a territory that should separate it from the border. Hence, the conclusion: the future Yugoslavian state should be given sufficient territory.

Let us notice in this context that the population, whatever it might be, is not asked in any way about these territorial changes that concerned it after all. Sir Arthur was not interested in details!

His exposé was not only a geographical, historical, geostrategic study a.s.o., but also a very solid **state project**, coldly elaborated pretty much the way a contemporary manager proposes an investment project for the set-up of an enterprise.

On the same occasion, Seton-Watson⁷ asserted very decisively that the South-Slavic problem "pertains to the vital interests of the British Empire" and he was dazzled about the slowness of its realisation of this reality. Seton-Watson sees the problems in great perspectives. "... the real reason of the aggression against Serbia (of 1914, o. n.) is a reason that pertains to Europe's 2000 year-old history".⁸ Serbia had been in everybody's way, regardless of the direction of the expansion: in the way of the Crusades, in the way of the Turks, and, more recently, in reverse sense, in the way of the Germanic conquerors. "In both cases, Serbia had to be dissolved for the accomplishment of a great political plan". And further: "Today (in January 1916 – out note) we see what this plan is from our adversaries (the Germans, o.n.). Their political philosophers have been pursuing it, militarily and otherwise, for many year, in open theory or in an occult manner". The plan is a great Germanic state "from the North Sea to the Persian Gulf". Austria, Turkey and, to a certain point, Bulgaria, are only instruments for this policy. So that "it is our mission" (Great Britain's, o. n) to build a new policy. Obviously, we are allowed to say: << We are too incompetent or too lazy to build a counter-plan, which can only be that of building a barrier in the way of Prussia's domination over the Orient".

Next, we should ask ourselves, like Seton-Watson, "what does the establishment of a geographical barrier mean", i.e. a geostrategic barrier, against Germanism? The solution he proposes is clear: the entire expansion direction of the Germans must be scattered with independent national states where Germany's expansion should get stuck. Seton-Watson establishes the priority agenda, too. "The first among these states, the state that stands out more evidently (from the geostrategic point of view – o. n.) is the Southern-Slavic state, created in the manner we hope and calculate, and that, to our

own vital interest, beyond sentimental matters, we shall have to create". We should fugitively note what states were going to be founded in order for the plan to succeed: "Bohemia in the centre of the Europe, Poland a little more to the north, and as an additional condition, a Hungarian independent state and an enlarged Romania.

All this manoeuvre was going to be made "on the ground of the principle of nationalities". And he concludes like before, always on the verge of cynicism: after the victory "we have in our hands the instruments for this (the planned anti-German barrier – o. n.): the democratic Slavic nations, opened to Central Europe's progress, the Poles, the Czechs and *particularly the Yugoslavians of the Adriatic Sea...*" (o. u.).

All these reveal without any doubt that the Western powers wanted to unify the Yugoslavian peoples as much as the Central Powers wanted to divide them.

In the same year, a great part of these ideas appeared also in *Le Programme Yougoslave*,⁹ by which Dalmatians' emigration from Austria-Hungary was making a unionist propaganda in Western chanceries. Among other things, a geostrategic argumentation was put forth, which should have mutually interested France and Great Britain as far as the inclusion of Dalmatia into a Serbian state was concerned.

It was not difficult. There was only one problem: on what grounds this state should be founded. And a single answer: Serbia. At the end of the war its great allies determined it to give up its initial project – its own national state, possibly enlarged as a Great Serbia – for another South-Slavic state that was more convenient for London and Paris than for Belgrade. There was no need for great efforts, as at the end of the war a special state of mind was created. Yugoslavic ideology had been spreading and was advocating the idea that all Southern Slavs are but one people, only the names are different (Serbians, Croatians, Slovenians). The various south-Slavic provinces of the former Austria-Hungary were demanding the unification with Serbia, wishing to take some shelter from the Italian expansionism. On the other hand, the euphoria of the victory had raised the Serbs' huge ambitions and their desire of compensation for their immense sacrifices. Therefore, they sacrificed their national state in favour of a mini-empire that they exploited as such, therewith continuing to present it as a national state.

Between the World Wars

Although the Yugoslavian unification seems to be an extensive and spectacular event, in fact nothing was basically changed: Serbia is still conceived as a barrier. Yet, as this time it has to stop the formidable Germany, we can see that in order to correspond to the situation Serbia had been consolidated proportionally, receiving an entire Yugoslavia as a dowry, with a protection territory for Belgrade and Dalmatia with its ports that represented the access to the sea.

Moreover, western powers had found their harmony after having managed to push into the Serbian bulldog's backyard all the "suitcases" of the Balkan Mountains they were interested in. Once their plans accomplished, the old ideas continue to appear only as anxieties, related, of course, to a resumption of the Germanic expansion in the Balkan Mountains.¹⁰ There was nothing left for them but to support Belgrade even if whimpers were heard from the inside. Croats submitted complaints after complaints (to the Society of Nations and to the great capitals) denouncing Serbian centralism and hegemony, and their political parties, Slovenians' and Bosnians', suggested Yugoslavia's reorganisation in a federative form. However, as at that time the superpowers considered that a federative state is weaker than a centralist one, they preferred to cover their ears to their discontents and claims. Serbia received a mandate in blank under the transparent excuse that, undoubtedly, "the flexible and intelligent Serbian genius will know how to find the happy modalities susceptible of conciliating the desires and all the legitimate claims".¹¹ This meant that

Serbia should solve the national problems of Yugoslavia in its own manner.

However, during the first inter-war decade, the enemies of the western powers soon discovered that it was profitable to see the matters exactly in the opposite manner and began to erode the Serbian barrier, digging-up into the national problem. They avoided direct blows either from lack of power – as Hungary and Bulgaria did – or out of fear of international risks and implications, as Italy did. They preferred to act at the basis of the barrier with a strategy that more involved the peripheries of the Yugoslavian system rather than Serbia itself. Italy was just about to reach a compromise with the latter if Belgrade would have accepted Dalmatia's separation. Nevertheless, the intransigence encountered here determined Mussolini to look for cracks to slip his dynamite in Macedonia and Croatia. Through a hegemonic and plundering policy that revolted the provinces, Belgrade was helping him to find them.

During the first inter-war decade, due to the Italian pressure upon its Yugoslavian empire, Serbia renounced its tradition, being confronted for the first time with an attempt of lateral coercion. Yet it returned to matters that were familiar during the second decade of the period, when, after the completion of the Anschluss (1938), an aggressive Germany showed up at its northern border. This almost completed its encirclement.

Those were the days of its great geostrategic importance. Obviously, its insecurity had been continuously growing until it equalled the importance of the positions it held.

The Second World War Period

As important as it may seem, the Second World War has brought nothing new in principle. Serbia and the entire Yugoslavia around it have had the same role of vent on the north-south direction. In a changed conjuncture, Germany has resumed its expansion to the south of the peninsula, yet, like Austria-Hungary in the past, it first looked for a way of opening the vent without having to force its way militarily. During his negotiations with Prince Paul, Hitler was

tempted to guarantee Yugoslavia's territorial integrity in exchange for a permissive vent (March 1941). Hitler made his way by military force only when Serbia's ego outburst abruptly annulled the agreed arrangements, which jeopardised his plans.

The Yugoslavian barrier fell with a rapidity which proved that the multinational Yugoslavian state was actually much more fragile than the Serbian national state would have been. Attacked

in circle, forced to disperse its forces almost along all its borders and with no possibility of gathering its forces to the shelter of Bosnia-Herzegovina's central massif, the Yugoslavian state was easily defeated and soon disappeared. Dismayed by national problems, Yugoslavian armies had nothing of the strength of the Serbian ones two decades before.

Nevertheless, when everybody thought that the Serbian barrier had been crushed, much like in the previous war it found its own, costly way of resisting on the map of the war. Yugoslavia's annihilation, its division between the winners and

the founding of puppet-states, the Croatian and the Serbian states, had entangled the Gordian Knot to such an extent, that an extremely bloody civil war broke out, combining all possible contradictions: ethnical, religious, ideological. Out of this stir, a liberation movement was born, fighting against occupation troops ("Tito's partisans"), with a combative efficiency that kept on growing. The partisans rapidly exploited Bosnia's massif, which Yugoslavian armies had neglected, and started the country's liberation. The number of German troops that they managed to block during the war was significant.¹²

The Communist Approach

After the war, something fundamental happens: the relation between Yugoslavia and Serbia is overturned.

Due to the partisans that had progressively become communists, Yugoslavia put herself together once more. Communists' internationalism, accepting all ethnic groups, was very well received by the population, following the years of bloody nationalism. Moreover, their political program aiming to reorganising the state into a federation (Jajice, 1943), thus complying with non-Serbian peoples' main request in the time of the first Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia could consider itself to be on the side of victory also due to the partisans. Much like the end of the first war, after numerous sacrifices, the end brought a great prestige in the international arena. However – also because of the partisans – unlike other situations, this prestige was now more a Yugoslavian than a Serbian one, even though the

Serbs claimed that they were the ones who had bestowed most sacrifices and the most numerous heroes.

As compared to 1918, in 1945 the system is radically changed: what used to be the Yugoslavian periphery becomes the strong point, in detriment of the Serbian force nucleus. The second Yugoslavia represents the emancipation of the empire and the beginning of Serbia's decline. Taking over the Yugoslavic idea in their own manner, the communists have emphasised the systemic principle in detriment of the parts, which on federation level translated into the principle: "a weak Serbia, a strong Yugoslavia". The constitutional organisation and the inner borders of the republics were established on this principle. Consequently, while after the First World War Serbia had taken over a Yugoslavia, after the Second World War, Yugoslavia takes over and tames a Serbia

The Cold War. Geostrategic oscillation: Serbian decline, Yugoslavian Peak

Serbia's geostrategic decline was considered a minor fact and did not disturb anyone at the end of the war. The old vent of the north-south direction had become useless and went out of history.

Now a crevasse had been created on the east-west axis, which subordinated all other problems. Nevertheless, the inter-war decades had allowed the outlining of the idea that the side pressures (then Italy) increase Yugoslavia's geostrategic importance rather than Serbia's. This geostrategic modification suddenly became very obvious when the East-West confrontation placed Yugoslavia right on the great border.

As a country pampered by Stalin, it initially placed itself zealously on the eastern side of the border and provided Stalin with various services. Among other things, it accepted to be the dispatcher of assistance to the Greek communists, in a way that seemed to remind the old north-south direction. However, the Belgrade-Moscow relationship deteriorated quite rapidly when Stalin had to observe that Tito had his own projects regarding the foreign policy and he was ready to accomplish them even against Moscow if necessary.

Just like after the first war, victory created an euphoric effect and a surplus of confidence in the

country's own forces, which reflected into an ambitious foreign policy. Tito's partisans occupied the north of the Adriatic Sea, pursuing Slovenia's growth, and Trieste was kept for Italy only after U.S.A. sent an ultimatum to Belgrade. In fact, by diminishing Serbia's domestic policy, Tito was taking over the latter's nationalism in the foreign policy. An older and more ambitious Yugoslavic project dating from the inter-war period was taken over by Tito in a new form. It was about a grand Yugoslavia, which would have spread from the Adriatic to the Black Sea, thus including Bulgaria. Tito thought that Bulgaria – once again weakened by defeat –, would consent, particularly that this time a federative state was suggested. Macedonia would not have been a problem between Serbia and Bulgaria any more, since it would have become a domestic affair of the state. The problem of Albania – although it was a non-Slavic country – was to be solved much the same way, by including it in the Yugoslavian federation. Only Greece was going to be omitted in the territory south of the Danube, but he hoped to annex Aegean Macedonia from the latter, and this is the reason why he kept on helping the Greek communists on his behalf, although Stalin had abandoned them.

This way Tito's federative Yugoslavia was preparing to assume geostrategic functions, which royal Serbia – mainly concerned to preserve its hegemony – preferred to abandon.

Stalin was completely against these projects, preferring to have several controllable states in the Balkan Mountains, rather than one ambitious, uncontrollable state. Consequently, Soviet-Yugoslavian relationships reached the maximum tension. Yet, it was proven that, regardless of the means, none of the parties had resources to persuade or force the other. In exchange, each of them had resources to cause a loss to the adversary. Gathering the communist states against Yugoslavia, Stalin isolated it and destroyed the project of a Balkan federation. On the other hand, Tito forced him to accept the first doctrinal heresy in the communist camp and the first breach in the geostrategic mechanism. Considering the disproportion between the parties and the international stake of the game, we can assert that the final outcome was a fine victory of Belgrade.

But it was not only a victory of Serbia, but one of Yugoslavia, too. Its geostrategic importance was making for the peak.

The immediate consequence was that Tito made Yugoslavia slide one step to the West, then

he stopped it right on the zipper between the two sides. Once this was done, it became increasingly obvious that the second Yugoslavia was becoming an vent on the east-west direction, just as Serbia had been before, on the north-south axis.

The gained position had to be exploited, too. Very soon Yugoslavia established relationships with an Occident exhausted by defeats from the Soviets and glad to obtain a victory that it had spent nothing to get. This is why the West preferred to do it now. The result was that the West opened a door to Yugoslavia, through which capital never ceased to roll in various forms. At the same time, as it occurred in a time when it was inconceivable, the Titoist dissidence brought Yugoslavia a prestige and an international support that it benefited by in its foreign policy.

Forced by Stalin to lead an extra-Balkan foreign policy, Tito has led an original policy on the global arena. After turning Yugoslavia into an oasis of neutrality on the frontier between East and West, he began to theorise its example, turning it into a model of export. In a world burdened by the pressure of polarisation, he managed to find partners willing to escape the vice – as he did – without paying the price of the isolation. The Conference of Bandung created the movement of the non-aligned and turned him into a leader of global prestige.

Those were Yugoslavia's golden days. Under the pressure of Yugoslavia's international success, Serbia seemed to be melted into the former's melting pot and its individual role had lost its past importance.

Even before Bandung, the West had understood that it could no longer wait; Yugoslavia was not a push-through the enemy front. But the West began to be interested in maintaining this dissidence in its enemy's flank, much the same way that the soviet enemy would become interested to maintain a communist Cuba in the USA's back. As far as both superpowers were concerned, this was of no big use. Forced into a defensive position, both superpowers managed to put the heresy at their door into quarantine and get used to its existence. In offensive position, each of them quickly understood it could not develop anything starting from the bridgehead they believed for a moment they had created. Yet, in the same time, they could not afford to abandon it, so that they continued to support it. Consequently, during the Cold War, the West left the channels that allowed

the subsistence of the Yugoslavian economy open, as the Soviets were watching the subsistence of the Cuban economy.

Very soon, after Stalin's death, the Soviets accepted the situation in Yugoslavia, which wanted to show the world that it had emancipated from the aggressive dogmatism from the past. As Tito turned to be a non-oscillating communist in the end, Yugoslavia's position in principle made them a favour, too: tolerating the Titoist experiment proved their liberal position at no

costs. However, from the military point of view, the loss was significant, as Yugoslavia's non-alignment took away their possibility of locating military bases at the Adriatic Sea, and therefore their chance of piercing like a wedge between Italy and Greece. The Mediterranean NATO disposition was able to remain dominant all the time.

Thus, during several decades, Yugoslavia calmly collected the usufruct of its new geostrategic value.

The Final Stage: Pandora's Box

1989 was a crossroad. The end of an old and the beginning of a new chapter in history. The balance of the problem this time showed that the Southern-Slavic territory had been taken advantage of by two sets of geostrategic criteria. The first, old and traditional, had derived from the north-south axis and had forged the history of Serbia and of the first Yugoslavia. The second one had derived from the east-west axis and had forged the faith of the second Yugoslavia. Up until 1989, some kind of a relay had functioned between Serbia and the two Yugoslavias, and, when one of them missed the wind in its sails, in fact it deviated it to the other's direction.

Still, at the end of the Cold War, for the first time in the XXth century, Yugoslavia was not on an expansion direction or on a border between two enemies. It could no longer feed from power balances or equivocal force relations. For the first time in its history, Yugoslavia was not threatened anymore by Byzantines, Turks, Austrians, Germans or Russians. Finally secured, we could expect it to flourish. Nevertheless, it collapsed right in that moment. It was precisely the confrontation that Yugoslavia was prepared for, and the pressures and the outside support of this and that scarcely did it good, holding up its walls.

In the new world after the Cold War, it had to discover a new set of criteria which could render it a value for the West or for the world in general. And this set of criteria existed. It has been proven that the USA and other superpowers wanted to maintain Yugoslavia out of fear that its disappearance might destabilise a traditionally vulnerable area. Still standing up, Yugoslavia containerised old Evils that the West wanted to get rid off and that – just like an appendix – isolated them from Europe. Once the container broken, there was fear that it would pour out

xenophobic nationalism, religious intolerance, ethnic aggressions, etc.

The West has opted almost unanimously for a strategy synthesised by two ideas. Firstly, maintaining the Yugoslavian container (yet without mixing within it the acceptance of a passive and permissive policy in the relationship with Belgrade, the capital of the federation). It was the third time, after 1918 and 1945, when the West (and now first of all the USA), considered that Yugoslavia's existence was necessary. Secondly, this policy had to be doubled by a more active one, which should make a preventive prophylaxis in the area. Yet, once the strategy was chosen, we should not draw the conclusion that the West had made great efforts to implement it. First of all because at the beginning of the '90-s, USA in particular was drawn by other horizons and problems (particularly in the Gulf), secondly because the prestige accumulated from winning the Cold War made it believe that the simple statement of its desire will be sufficient resource for determining the regional actors. And it was not at all wrong.

As far as maintaining the container is concerned, this has been noticed especially on the occasion of James Baker's visit to Belgrade (the 21st of June, 1991). It was only a one-day detour from the route of the American state secretary, who did nothing more than to express in principle USA's support for Yugoslavia's existence. Yet, that was enough for Slobodan Miloshevitch, who, understanding that he could not expect an outside intervention, he launched the military actions against Slovenia, the prelude of the long inter-Yugoslavian wars. As far as the second idea – the regional prophylaxis – is concerned, it was obvious on the occasion of the embargo against Yugoslavia, which the regional states respected, despite their losses.

This strategy was abandoned and replaced when the succeeding states – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, then FYROM (Macedonia) – began to receive international recognition. For the first time after the First World War, the world had to consider a Southeastern Europe without Yugoslavia.¹³

Therefore, the Yugoslavians consciously failed to meet the last set of criteria that guaranteed their existence – establishing the South-Danubian mosaic. Serbia had the decisive role in this drawback, as it preferred to reject the only project (put forth by Slovenia and Croatia) that could maintain Yugoslavia.

Actually, in its last years of existence (after 1989), the second Yugoslavia gradually began to resemble the first. Just like then, the external environment supported Belgrade (although only until June 1991).¹⁴ The differences of perspective between Serbia and other inner nations have increased. These were exerting a pressure from the inside for a looser form (confederation) which Serbia rejected as it was interested only in consolidating the centralisation.¹⁵ In all cases it was an effect of the nationalist policies. To a great extent, Yugoslavia represented – for Slovenia and Croatia – just a convenient shelter at the end of every great war. But at the end of the Cold War,

the atmosphere of security determined them to seek their interest outside Yugoslavia.

This was the case of Serbia, too. Belgrade proved that the last geopolitical role it had received – regional stability and Evils containerisation – was not fit for it. History had educated Serbia for combative roles, and it was impossible for Serbia to assume a managerial role. Engaging, together with the other republics, in a race of founding national states, it could only accomplish the opposite effect and destabilised the area. The wars that broke out broke also Pandora's box and all the intolerance – which Europe wanted to get rid off – spread out.

The principle of the national state attains a late and last triumph which extends over that of the European integration. For a moment, the occurrence of the new states reminded of the Europe of Versailles, dominated by suspicions, rivalries and national hatred; they also emerged from Pandora's box. For the West, the problem consists in managing to avoid that the disappearance of the "Europe of Yalta" should create spaces for the revival of the "Europe of Versailles".¹⁶ The answer consists in the same integration therapy that proved successful for over half a century and that has to go down in the Balkan Mountains¹⁷ *without avoiding Serbia*.

NOTES:

¹ Its existence in the South-Danubian corridor made it resemble those medieval bellicose states (initially military marks or knight-orders) founded in vulnerable regions with a view to managing valleys, mountains, passes and key positions at the boarder with an enemy. The warlike character was the more inevitable as the state had reorganised itself following anti-Ottoman insurrections of the people that had succeeded in waves for several decades. The starting point was zero (1804) – if we do not consider the myths. Serbian society was lacking elites, as the Turkish rule had prevented the emergence of the bourgeoisie. Elites had been formed through liberation fights and had a war-character. Barely delineated, institutions and elites had found themselves in the situation of having to administer the South-Danubian corridor from the military and political point of view, which maintained the resemblance with a mark for a long time.

On the other hand, the entire process pertained to the realities of the modern world, so that the final outcome was a national state where the above-mentioned features were inserted in order to offer it a special personality.

² Sir Arthur Evans' exposition and the debates that accompanied it took place on the 10th of February 1916, at the Royal Geographical Society in London (see Sir Arthur Evans, *Les Slaves de l'Adriatique et la route continentale de Constantinople*, London, 1916).

³ At that moment the only independent Southern Slavs were the Serbians, the Montenegrins and the Bulgarians. Montenegro was the only one with an access to the Adriatic Sea, but it was not taken into account. Therefore Sir Arthur Evans refers to something that was merely about to become reality.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁵ On that date, the danger is perceived only in Germany. Italy is on the same military side, including Serbia too. That was a way of approaching the matters.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Seton-Watson's dissertation* takes place following Sir Arthur Evans' expose and it is put forth with a view to consolidating and completing the latter's ideas (see Sir Arthur Evans, *Les Slaves de l'Adriatique et la route continentale de Constantinople*, London, 1916).

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁹ *Le Programme Yougoslave*, Edition du Foyer, Plon-Nourrit et C, Paris, 1916.

¹⁰ See René Martel, *La Slovénie et les problèmes politiques contemporaines*, Paris, Librairie Felix Alcan. According to these fears, Germany could insert itself as a wedge between the Northern Slavs (Czechs) and the Southern Slavs (Yugoslavians and first of all Slovenians). The old Berlin-Bagdad line could reappear under a new form: Munchen, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Constanța, Constantinople. Slovenians block two roads for the Germans: towards the Adriatic Sea and towards the Orient. The lethal danger for Slovenia comes from Trieste, perceived as the "German national bridge" to the Adriatic. Germany could be interested in resuming the idea of an expansion in the Balkan Mountains if it settles in Carinthia, which might be of interest for Germany, as Carinthia aggregates an important railroad node, connected to the German railroad network. The operation of this node was so good during the war, that it explains the disaster endured by the Italians at Caporetto. Fallen into the hands of the Germans, this strategic position would be so important, that it would offer them an offensive attitude. This is why the *Anschluss*-ul with Austria must not be accomplished. Yet Germany continues to have a powerful influence in Slovenia through an old and solid propaganda which Yugoslavia has not the means nor the time to prevent. Its basis is wide: All clerks (5000 in 1912) are Germans, there are many Pan-Germanic associations that possess capital and ramifications a.s.o.

As far as the internal situation is concerned, and particularly as regards to the political parties, they reveal disturbing aspects, such as the demand for organising the Serbian state following the model of Switzerland or U.S.A. Or worst, the demand of sharing only the foreign policy, the army and the navy. All the rest should remain independent. This is the demand of many Slovenians that remonstrate that they pay the greatest taxes in the state and they want these sacrifices to be beneficial to their own country. There is also a national justification that Slovenians resort to in order to support a substantial separation: they are afraid for their own language, different from the Serbo-Croatian, but minuscular and therefore threatened.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² We prefer not to present numbers, as the figures have been disputed. It was believed that the Yugoslavian historiography exaggerated them in order to increase Yugoslavia's contribution to Germany's defeat. Yet, small figures are questionable, too.

¹³ This is not literally correct. A Yugoslavian state continued to exist, reduced at Serbia and Montenegro. But from the geostrategic point of view, it is a different state.

¹⁴ The USA and the European Community believed for a while that a unitary Yugoslavian state was the best arrangement in the Balkan Mountains, and, since Slobodan Miloshevitch seemed to follow this direction, he received international support.

In May 1991, a delegation of the European Community led by its president, Jacques Delors, visited Belgrade and proposed to the Prime-Minister Ante Markovitch a financial help to maintain Yugoslavia. On June 20, 1991, for the European Security and Co-operation Conference (ESCE) ruled out the maintenance of Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. The next day, June the 21st, James Baker visited Belgrade, where he asserted his approval for the same proposal and asked Slovenia and Croatia to renounce their declaration of independence. On the 23rd of June, the foreign secretaries of the European Community rejected unanimously the international recognition of Slovenia's and Croatia's independence in case they separated unilaterally.

¹⁵ Serbia's centralist tendencies came from the revival of the nationalist policy.

Yugoslavia's constitutional arrangements had created two autonomous provinces within the republic of Serbia, Kossovo and Voyevodina. Serbia considers them as inalienable parts of the national Serbian state and invokes historical rights. Yet, there are national problems in both provinces. Voyevodina is multi-ethnic (Serbs, Hungarians, Romanians, Germans), while in Kossovo there are two ethnic groups. The Albanian one has overwhelmingly grown after the war (approximately 90%) versus the Serbian group. The evolution of the constitutional state of these two provinces within the federation had evolved, in the sense of giving satisfaction to the minorities, i. e. from the status of autonomous province within the republic of Serbia to the status of republic, which should put them in line with the other republics. Serbia denounced this evolution as being a way through which its national territory is taken away, even if this is made in a democratic manner. Consequently, it revoked the last regulation, bringing back the provinces to their previous status. The ethnical tensions reached alarming quotas in Kossovo.

Besides, Serbia was dissatisfied as regards the borders of the republics that did not correspond to those of the Great Serbia, which it considered its national borders.

¹⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea tablă de șah. Supremația americană și imperativele sale geostrategice*, Univers enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1999, p. 101.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 99.