

Uncaptive Minds

SPECIAL ISSUE

**Serbian Populism
and the Fall of Yugoslavia
Different Nationalisms
Balkan Alternatives**

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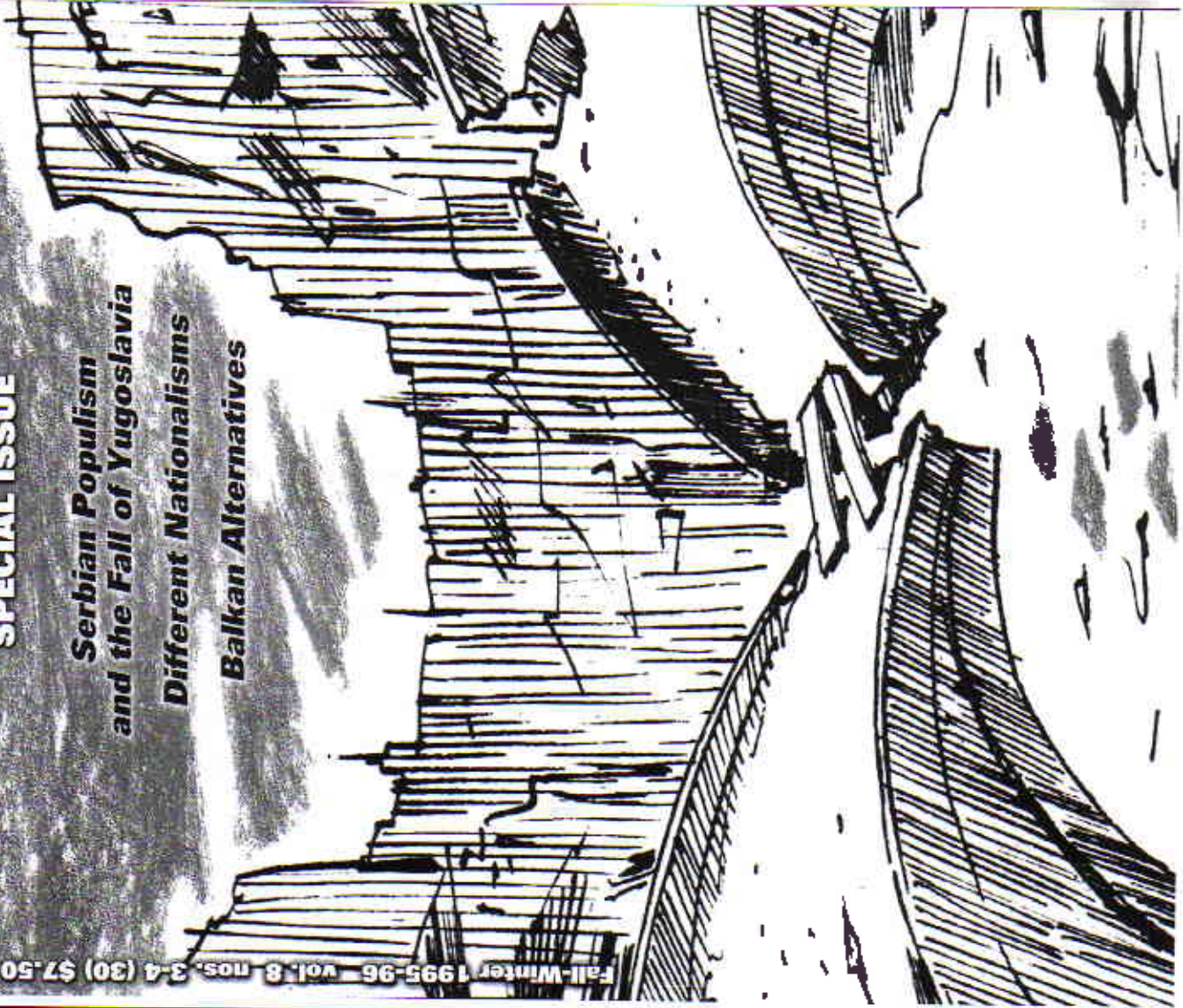
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slate with Social Democratic Action (ASH) and Dalmatian Action, also refused to support joint candidates for single districts. It was not possible for the remaining left-regionalist parties to participate as a coalition because of highly unrealistic thresholds — 8 percent for a two-party coalition and 11 percent for coalitions of three or more. It became obvious that these parties would have to run jointly under the name of only one of them.

Dalmatian Action decided to support the ASH and run candidates on its slate, thus giving up the DA name for the elections. Unfortunately, ASH was not well profiled or well known to the general public, especially in Dalmatia. Due to lack of time, finances, and resources, as well as a national media blockade, Dalmatian Action failed to communicate to voters what slate they should vote for. This explains our failure. The only ASH candidate to win a seat was in Zagreb, in a single electoral district, running on the Serb minority list. Clearly, voters feared wasting their vote on small parties.

The Future of Croatia's Regionalist Left

The absence of regionalist left representatives and other well known critics of the régime in the Croatian parliament will jeopardize the survival of other democratic oases in Croatia, including the pockets of free media that now exist.

As for Dalmatian Action, the regional election returns have encouraged it to begin preparations for the local elections. Based on the low 1995 results, DA estimates that it would get at least one or two town council members in each local government. But it remains to be seen whether the party can build and maintain a party infrastructure. It lacks sufficient finances to hire even a single staff person and it has not been able to replace its headquarters since the September 1993 bombing. The election defeat may increase the emigration of demoralized volunteers. Unprotected by parliamentary immunity, DA leaders can expect to see an increase in attacks by various militant groups.

In the long run, Croatia's social and political conditions offer good reason to build a regionalist left. For the sake of democracy in Croatia, it is essential to preserve political parties, free media, organizations protecting human rights, and similar non-nationalistic organizations that support European democratic traditions. Whether such parties and organizations survive will depend on how much assistance, both moral and material, democratic Europe provides. □

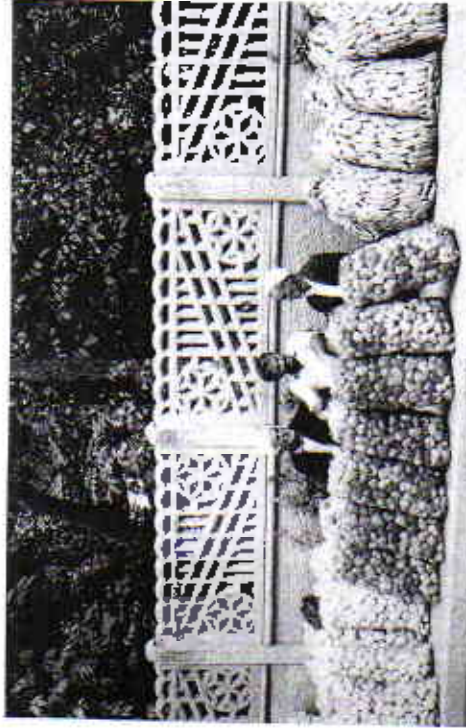
REMEMBER KOSOVO?

by Julie Mertus

Julie Mertus is a former counsel to Helsinki Watch and Human Rights Watch/Helsinki and has written frequently on Kosovo and other human rights issues. She is currently a Fulbright Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Law in Bucharest, Romania.

Remember Kosovo? Few people do, especially policymakers. For them, this troubled sliver of ex-Yugoslavia is a bothersome thorn they would prefer to go away. But today's Balkan war started in Kosovo and it may end there as well. A steady stream of police violence, torture in detention, and mass arrests serves as a constant reminder to both Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority (90 percent of the population) and its Serbian minority (10 percent) of the region's strategic importance.

The Dayton Peace Accords failed to address the issue of Kosovo. Indeed, due to his new role as "peacemaker," Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic may apparently act with impunity against domestic opposition. Already, he has cracked down on the independent media (for example, taking over the main independent television station, Studio B, in February 1996), deregistered the independent Soros Foundation Yugoslavia, and stepped up surveillance and harassment of all outsiders, including foreigners, Albanians, political opponents, and human rights activists. In return, Milosevic was rewarded by the international community with the lifting of sanctions.



Kosovo Life

Photos by: Lisa Kubane

The ending of the embargo boosted Milosevic's popularity at home, but it did nothing to improve conditions in Yugoslavia; the winter has brought little except increased depression. For Albanians, the picture is particularly dismal.

In this situation, billions of aid dollars are pouring into Bosnia and Herzegovina and, to a lesser extent, Croatia, while Kosovo has moved off the radar screen. As a token of support, the U.S. Information Service (USIS) announced that it would open an office in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, which the regime is allowing only after intense diplomatic pressure. USAID dollars to the region might increase as well. Still, Kosovo is a poor cousin to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. Why? Speaking out about Kosovo would only stir up problems, one Washington analyst cautioned, dismayed at any attempts to bring Albanian Kosovo issues to the bargaining table.

Stir up problems? The problems with Kosovo started long ago. Policy makers need to understand quickly the history of the Kosovo conflict, its role in the destruction of Yugoslavia, and the vastness of the split between Albanians and Serbs today if they are ever to fashion an appropriate response.

Yesterday and Today: On the Edge

Life in Kosovo has many of the attributes of a war zone. Machine-gun wielding police wearing bullet-proof vests and dark army fatigues search old men in marketplaces. Serbian and Albanian kids eye the scene and then pass each other in stony silence, unable to forget for a moment that they live on the edge of war.

Parents fear sending their children out to play. Daily, Serbian police raid marketplaces, homes, and villages, often under the pretext of searching for arms. Courts are merely political bodies and the police is merely an arm of Belgrade. Rule of law is thus nonexistent. Albanians have no legal recourse when being held without charge, beaten into signing confessions, and imprisoned on that basis for endangering the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia. Albanians, not a nation of martyrs, have chosen a path of peaceful resistance to survive.

But the iron fist of police terror cannot solve the Albanian question.

Ever since the creation of the second Yugoslavia at the end of World War II, the question of whether the Albanian-populated land of Kosovo should be part of a South Slav state has dominated political discourse among Albanians and, to a lesser extent, Serbs. The 1974 Constitution of Yugoslavia attempted to solve the matter by granting Kosovo (along with Vojvodina, a northern region with a considerable Hungarian minority) the status of autonomous republic. This gave Kosovars their own popularly elected government, with control of schools, hospitals, courts, and other local institutions. Tito's regime also tried to preempt Albanian resentments through an influx of capital and industrial development. But these plans were poorly managed and marked by overwhelming corruption, doing little to improve the everyday life of Kosovars. While the standard of living of Albanians rose, it still was (and is) one of the lowest in Europe.

Tito's refrain of brotherhood and unity failed to take root among most Albanians; they were always the population of ex-Yugoslavia least likely to identify themselves as Yugoslavs. Even in the economic heyday of the mid-to-late '70s, Albanians still continued to dream of joining Albania or having their own state. Tito's regime cracked down against Albanians who tested the right to freedom of speech and advocated greater autonomy, independence, or even just the promotion of Albanian culture. They were always disproportionately represented among political prisoners of the time.

After Tito's death in 1981, Albanian students demonstrated for Kosovo to become a republic (like Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina). Fearing that this move was one step away from secession, the regime responded harshly. The police and military arrested, tortured, and imprisoned activists. The demonstrations became a defining moment for an entire generation of young Albanians. The police crackdown, and the failure of Serbian students to act in solidarity (in part because of Serbian-controlled media propaganda), only solidified the Albanian movement. The media hate campaign further demarcated the lines between "us and them," forcing people into opposing camps.

As Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic unwittingly helped the separatist faction of the Albanian movement along when he suspended the constitutionally established status of Kosovo and Vojvodina as autonomous republics in 1991. From now on, he declared, these lands are just another part of Serbia, subject to rule from Belgrade. Before Milosevic unilaterally changed the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, many Albanians saw republican status within the existing Yugoslavia as a solution to their problems. Afterwards, Albanians saw no other choice. In independently held elections in 1991, deemed illegal by the Serbian regime, Albanians voted to separate from Yugoslavia and to create their own state of Kosova, electing Ibrahim Rugova, the head of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK), as their president.*

For five years, Albanian Kosovars have stood united in their face-off with the Belgrade regime. But the situation is far from being quiet or settled. To the extent that the Dayton Accord has had any impact on Kosovo, it has only served to increase feelings of desperation and despair among Albanian Kosovars. Ibrahim Rugova's hold on power has grown tenuous, tested by those who demand more assertive leadership and quicker solutions, as well as by those who fear and distrust the LDK's growing authoritarian style and octopus-like bureaucracy. These include former political prisoners, a minority of human rights activists, disillusioned university students, and many parents whose children are receiving substandard education under the current underground Albanian school system.

* Kosova is the Albanian spelling for the region, or independent state; Kosovo is the recognized Yugoslav spelling for the territory. — Editor's Note.

Despite the great solidarity among Albanian Kosovars, several serious differences of opinion have arisen. The Albanian press is more diverse than ever, and many of the independent publications are critical of the LDK's leadership, management, and sense of priorities (for example, the reported extravagance of LDK leaders' travel). In their homes, people whisper disagreements over whether the LDK boycott of the 1990 Yugoslav elections promoting Milosevic to power denied the opposition a crucial source of votes; whether Albanians should compromise with Serbs on Kosovo's status; or whether Rugova is indeed the right leader who can bring change for Albanians. Some Albanians discuss taking more concrete actions to draw in the support of the international community, while others argue that even "active" resistance through demonstrations will not be enough to bring freedom.

Yet, so far, no Albanian opposition leader has emerged who could take the place of a popular leader like Rugova, and no opposition party could begin to challenge the reach and organization of the ruling LDK, whose highly disciplined branches are present in nearly all cities of Kosovo.

Kosovo and the Destruction of Yugoslavia

Against this backdrop of life in Kosovo today lies the central role Kosovo played in the destruction of Yugoslavia. Slobodan Milosevic used the Kosovo issue to rekindle Serbian nationalism and propel himself to power. It was in Kosovo that Milosevic could first pose as the defender of Serbs everywhere, giving him his first opportunity to strike against Tito's Yugoslavia. Without Kosovo, Milosevic would not have built the power base he needed to plunge into Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Yugoslavia was thrown into a state of chaos by Tito's death and the hodgepodge rotating presidency that followed. For the first time, the people of Yugoslavia saw what lay behind the screen of Tito's economic miracles: unpaid debt. Depression, the inevitable result for all over-mortgaged countries, hit Yugoslavia hard. The fall of the Berlin Wall brought not comfort but only greater uncertainty. The good life of Yugoslavia — each family enjoying two weeks' vacation on the beach, two in the mountains — began to unravel and people grew afraid. With Tito gone, Yugoslavia's economic miracle dissolved and the country's favored status as a nonaligned country was in jeopardy. Even one's own identity was uncertain.

For Serbs, the crisis had an added dimension. Even where in the minority, Serbs in Tito's Yugoslavia enjoyed certain privileges, including higher representation among the leadership of the military and police, government offices, and state-run businesses. With Tito gone, their status as a privileged or at least equal ethno-national group was in danger. As was later seen in Croatia, this fear was not unfounded. The first constitution of independent Croatia reduced the status of Serbs from a nation equal with Croats to a recognized minority.