The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans

Florian Bieber

palgrave
macmillan

Florian Bieber

The Rise of Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans

2020

palgrave
macmillan

CONTENTS

Prologue: Advice for the Balkan Prince

Dear Balkan Prince,

Congratulations on your recent election.

I presume that you would like to retain power for as long as possible. While this is not as easy as it used to be, it is still possible, if you follow my ten rules outlined next.

You always have to remember that being considered a democrat and a reformer is a judgment that matters more if it comes from outside, from the EU, international observers, and organizations. They might be stricter than your domestic audience, but they are also more ignorant and likely to lose interest quickly.

1. Control the elections, not on election day, but before

While some of your predecessors might have been able to just stuff ballot boxes or raise the dead to vote for you, or even better, make sure you have no opponents running in elections, this is no longer possible. You need to win elections and be also recognized by outsiders. These outsiders might be less picky in the Caucasus or Africa, but you have to look like a good democrat in the Balkans. My dear prince, this does not mean you have to be one. There are still a few ways to do well.

First, see elections as a way to get stronger. Time elections well: many and early elections can help catch the opposition off guard and also to have votes when your popularity is at its peak. Offer voters a bit of money, or forgive them their outstanding electricity bills, there are many ways in which you can get votes for just little money. Sometimes consider offering a bit of money for people not to vote (you know that they would just cast their

ballots for your opponents). It also helps to taint the opposition as being suspicious, sexually deviant, disloyal to the state, and generally dubious.

2. Control the media, make sure you have many voices, which all say the same and have your junk-yard dog
The media is what matters to retain power domestically.

Now, you don't own them anymore, like other princes before you did. However, few of the media are economically viable, and the best way to control them is to advertise only in the ones that report well on you (and don't forget, you are the largest advertiser). Many newspapers and TV stations are probably owned either by some Western media company that value profit margins over standards or a shady local businessman about whom you can certainly dig up some unpaid tax bills.

Journalists can sometimes be a bit pesky, and the best way to make sure that they are behaving well, is to threaten them a little bit, not in public, but pressure a few. Most will be happy to censor themselves.

3. Talk about the EU and wanting to join it, but make it hot and cold
You might not really care or understand the EU and this is fine, but wanting to join the EU is a must. Without this, you probably would not have got elected considering that all voters want EU membership. Furthermore, you could be left out in the dark if you don't support the EU, as forming a government requires a stamp of approval from the EU. Thus, want the EU, but throw in a dose of ambiguity. Being too pro-European these days seems like trying too hard with a partner who doesn't really want you. Thus, throw some doubt on the project.

4. Talk about fighting corruption and reforms. Talk and talk and jail a few
Who is in favor of corruption? Nobody. Thus, there is no safer topic to campaign on and talk about all the time. It is good to position yourself as a fearless fighter against corruption and to present anybody corrupt as being against your rule, thus throwing a shadow of corruption over your opposition.

Of course, it is hard to stay in power without tolerating some corruption. Make sure that you have occasional successes, some arrests, trials. Keep in mind that arrests are more important than sentences. Also get a few of your own guys. It makes you seem more serious. Reports about modest lifestyle help, and declarations of assets can be taken with some degree of creative freedom.

5. Solve problems with your neighbors to get praise and create a few to be popular

The EU and outsiders like you to get on with your neighbors, so it is worth finding time to visit them, not only because they might have better sea town resorts: talk about regional cooperation, how we all share our European future (consult my book '100 speeches for the right occasion for Balkan princes').

Now, new or old problems with neighbors are very useful at home. They distract from other issues, give you an opportunity for some rallying around the flag. Nothing is better for boosting your popularity than some neighbor bashing. Thus, striking a balance between pleasing outsiders and feeding domestic sentiment is crucial here.

6. Pick different foreign friends, some will like you for what you are, some what you claim to be

The EU is your biggest investor, donor, and prospect, but don't focus on them only. Flirting with others will make the EU a bit jealous and pay more attention to you. Plus, you can present yourself as being your own man. It is also important to consider that other investors and donors often have fewer strings attached. Thus, you can use some resources to take care of domestic political favors. However, realize that they might also be using you, so be prepared to be dropped when they stop caring.

7. Hire your voters. Fire your opponents

The best way to stay in power is to hire your voters, there are many jobs you can offer, from advisor to cleaning lady.

If it is clear that belonging to your party is what matters, this will help in terms of support for the party and votes. Many of your civil servants will recruit dozens of voters just to keep their jobs. Your opponents can always be fired, from the state administration or private jobs (after all, you probably control the largest share of funding in the state), or their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers. There are many ways to get them to think twice about what they say about you.

8. Rule of Law, your rules, your law

The internationals will talk and talk about the rule of law. For this, dear Balkan prince, we recommend numerous action plans and strategies. However, in reality, it is important to ensure that the law is complicated enough that it cannot be universally applied, but that there is always a

shadow of illegality hanging over that can be used, when needed. Demonstrators can get fined for obstructing traffic with high fines, and other little rules can help you to remind them that your law is what rules.

9. Don't have an ideology, it can only hurt you

Don't have a clear ideology, this only commits you to certain positions that can create problems later on. Focus on broad goals, such as Europe, freedom, and prosperity and stay clear of too specific ambitions.

Now, it is in your interest to join a European or International party family, such as the Socialist International or the European People's Party as an associate member or observer. They will give you some international legitimacy and moderate some potential international criticism. However, don't confuse this with ideology—nobody will vote for you due to ideology, they will vote for you because of you and the job you got for their aunt.

10. Promise change, but make sure it stays the same

Change is what everybody wants, your voters have lived through economic crises for some 28 of the past 35 years. They want the situation to get better, so don't promise to keep things as they are, but paint a picture of how they will be. However, change is risky. So keep things the same, change is an easy promise, but a risky reality. Now, change means constant campaigning. Run your office, as if you are running for office. This will make you look energetic, have you ready to go for any early election and also make you seem like you are still in opposition, even when you are not. Thus, changing government composition, changing policy, announcing big plans are good ways to talk about change.

Dear Balkan Prince,

Ruling is like dancing on the edge of a volcano. You can only rule if you claim to be a democrat in favor of EU integration, but you can only continue your rule for a long time by not acting on these claims. Both will bring others to power and might bring you to jail. Thus, you need to walk the tight line between saying the right things to your voters and the EU, and doing something else.

Good luck, there are some who are doing well, so with some skill, you might join their club. (Bieber 2015)

When I wrote these imaginary recommendations for an unnamed Balkan autocrat for a London School of Economics blog, based on a talk

I gave there in 2015, I had no idea how popular my ironic advice would become. It was shared thousands of times, with translations into all the languages of the Balkans emerging within a few days, including a hilarious Albanian version in the style of the opening titles of a *Star Wars* movie. Over time, both victims and aides to some of the Balkan princes I thought of when I penned the lines confirmed the accuracy of this list. The list has also been used to accuse of governments of wrong doing. For example, in the Albanian parliament, Oerd Bylykbashi, an MP from the opposition Democratic Party cited from the ten rules of the Balkan prince on 7 February 2019 and called them a prediction of the behavior of the current government (Kuvendi i Shqipërisë 2019).

Of course, my advice was not a set of instructions, but rather an effort to identify how strongmen (and they are all men) rule the Balkans, pretending to be reformist, pro-European democrats, while governing informally with all the tools of an autocrat. When I wrote the *Balkan Prince*, I was frustrated how this pattern was ignored by outsiders and how Western governments and EU officials were courting the regions' autocrats, granting them legitimacy and empowering them further. Judging by the popularity of the piece and also the feedback I received, my advice hit a nerve, putting its finger on a serious problem.

Over the following years, a group of researchers from the Balkans and the EU worked on this topic the *Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group* (BiEPAG), identifying how democracy is in decline, but outsiders initially paid little attention to this trend. This led to our study on *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans: Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy* in 2017 to highlights how authoritarianism is increasing as the region formally moves closer to the EU (BiEPAG 2017). The term 'stabilitocracy' was first introduced by Srđa Pavlović to describe the situation in Montenegro in late 2016, characterized by persistent undemocratic practices and external, especially Western, support (2016).[1] Since then, the term has gained wide usage to describe this fatal dynamic of local authoritarianism and external support (Bieber 2018, *Economist* 2017).

This book is the attempt to provide an academic and systematic understanding of Balkan Princes and stabilitocracies through the framework of the global rise of competitive authoritarianism.

---

[1] Deimel and Primatarova used the term stabilocracy in 2012 to describe Albania.

Bibliography

Bieber, Florian. 2015. Ten rules by a 21st-century Machiavelli for the Balkan Prince, February 7. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsee/2015/02/07/ten-rules-by-a-21st-century-machiavelli-for-the-balkan-prince/.

Bieber, Florian. 2018. The Rise (and Fall) of Balkan Stabilitocracies, *Horizons* 10. https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-2018-issue-no-10/the-rise-and-fall-of-balkan-stabilitocracies.

BiEPAG. 2017. The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion, March. http://www.biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-an-anatomy-of-stabilitocracy-and-the-limits-of-eu-democracy-promotion/.

Deimel, Johanna, and Margarita Primatarova. 2012. *Bridge over Troubled Waters? The Role of the Internationals in Albania*. Centre for Liberal Strategies. https://www.cls-sofia.org/uploads/files/Bridge%20Over%20Troubled%20WatersThe%20Role%20of%20the%20Internationals%20in%20Albania.pdf.

Economist. 2017. The West backs Balkan autocrats to keep the peace, again, June 1. https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/07/01/the-west-backs-balkan-autocrats-to-keep-the-peace-again.

Kuvendi i Shqipërisë. 2019. Seanca, February 7. http://www.parlament.al/Home/RendDite?id=2942.

Pavlović, Srđa. 2016. Montenegro's 'stabilitocracy': The West's support of Đukanović is damaging the prospects of democratic change, *LSEE Blog*, December 23. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/12/23/montenegros-stabilitocracy-how-the-wests-support-of-dukanovic-is-damaging-the-prospects-of-democratic-change/.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and 'Post-Yugoslav Patterns of Democratization', in Sabrina P. Ramet, Christine M. Hassenstab, Ola Listhaug (eds.), *Building Democracy in the Yugoslav Successor States. Accomplishments, Setbacks, and Challenges Since 1990* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2017, 38–57).

Graz, April 2019   Florian Bieber

Introduction

Abstract This introductory chapter argues that there has been a decline and stagnation of democracy in the Western Balkans. This crisis of democracy follows larger trends but also displays regional specificities, including a history of semi-authoritarianism and complex geopolitical position outside the European Union.

Keywords Democracy • Authoritarianism • Western Balkans • European Union

The global decline of democracy has been making headlines, from challenges to liberal democracy in long-established democracies through populist candidates and parties, such as Trump's elections, Brexit, and the rise of the far-right in Western Europe, including the Lega in Italy and the Alternative for Germany. In Central Europe, conservative governments, such as in Hungary and Poland, have been eroding rule of law and democratic safeguards. Turkey and Russia have become more authoritarian, while the former has continued to hold competitive elections. In this context, the democratic decline in the Balkans is not an exception but part of a broader trend that takes on a variety of forms, depending on the regional context (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Greskovits 2015; Plattner 2015).

This book is offering an in-depth analysis of how rising authoritarianism in the Western Balkans became possible, how they are part of the larger global trend, and what explains regional specificities. Without falling into the trap Balkan particularism, this book argues that authoritarian decade of the 1990s in the region provided an important template and structural features that facilitated the increasing authoritarianism in recent years. Much scholarship on post-Yugoslav countries during the 1990s focused on the wars and the accompanying nationalism. While this is an important characteristic of the region during that decade, the wars cannot be explained by primordial nationalist hatreds, but the selfish use and abuse by political and intellectual elites to advance their own power, influence, and wealth (Gagnon 2004; Gordy 1999). The key question in understanding the conflicts was thus how authoritarian elites were able to take and retain power, rather than interpreting nationalism as a natural force.

When discussing the renewed increase of authoritarian patterns, this book does not make the argument for Balkan exceptionalism, and many of the features identified in it are recognizable to scholars working on the crisis of democracy and patterns of authoritarianism around the world. What motivated my research on the Balkans was never the region's exceptionalism, but rather as a site to observe global phenomena. Thus, this study of Balkan autocrats is based on two foundations. First, the merit of examining the patterns and dynamics of authoritarian regimes in depth in a particular region allows this book to identify regional patterns. While there is space for global comparative research, the local context is the dimension to which this book can contribute. Second, the countries of the Western Balkans share certain features that allow one to study them together. They share a socialist and mostly a Yugoslav heritage, experienced war, or the consequences of state collapse; and the countries discussed in this book have not been able to join the European Union (EU), or in the case of Croatia, joined relatively recently (2013). To policymakers, they are known as the 'Western Balkans', a term that always seemed awkward for linking the loaded term 'Balkans'[1] with the positive association of 'Western' and grouping countries reluctant to be lumped together. As joining the EU seems also to mean leaving the term behind,

---

[1] The term Balkans is problematic for its association with Balkanization and negative stereotypes that assume that the region is closely linked to violence, hatred, and being fundamentally different from Europe. See Todorova 1997.

as has been the case of Croatia, it could also be the 'Restern Balkans' (BiEPAG 2014), the countries that are not in the EU yet. Many similarities exist between the Western Balkans and the 'Eastern Balkans', that is, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as Central Europe and there is merit to a broader comparative scope (Solska et al. 2018). What unites the countries explored in this book is the process of EU integration which sets it apart from countries already part of the union and thus not restricted by conditionality and those outside a formal accession process and equally less monitored and observed by the EU, such as Eastern European countries like Ukraine or Moldova. Structurally, with accession and conditionality at least formally in place, no group of countries is at least formally under greater pressure to adopt democratic institutions and comply with the rule of law requirements of the EU than the Western Balkans.

The recent rise of interest in what has been termed 'democratic regression', 'de-democratization', or 'democratic reversals' has shattered the implicit assumption of the near teleological progression from autocracy to democracy, via the unfortunate but temporary 'purgatory' of hybrid regimes (Bermeo 2016). Not only have solid autocratic regimes not moved toward hybrid regimes, but hybrid regimes also have proven to be resilient and even regress toward authoritarianism (Turkey). The de-democratization in previously consolidated democracies (Hungary and Poland) highlights that democratization is not a one-way street, not even when they are universally considered 'consolidated' and thus the term's implicit assumption is misplaced. Like its twin concept of reform, it assumes that change will lead to more democratic and progressive governance. Instead, 'regime change' may better capture how political regimes became democratic or authoritarian and mostly move within a large gray zone.

Making sense of these global and regional trends is challenging, as critical perspectives on democratization run the risk of ending up equally uncritically assuming universal regression, without exploring regional variation and different causes. Democratic regression is not universal, and some countries have become more democratic in the past decade.

When discussing democratic backsliding or regression and authoritarian regimes, we need first to define what we mean these, as they are often widely and confusingly used. Democratic backsliding, or alternatively de-democratization of democratic decline is best understood as the movement of a regime with democratic features away from democracy toward greater authoritarianism. If political systems are conceptualized along an axis ranging from totalitarian regimes to advanced democracies or polyarchies, democratic backsliding thus denotes any movement toward higher levels of

authoritarianism but stops short of reverting to outright authoritarianism. Instead, the new regime type falls into a wide range of hybrid regimes. This is distinct from the democratic breakdown, which denotes when a regime moves toward outright authoritarianism (Tomini and Wagemann 2018). Democratic breakdowns have long the subject of research in the field of democratization (Linz 1978), while democratic backsliding has only emerged more recently, as greater attention has emerged on hybrid regimes that constitute the bulk of political systems around the world, between the fully consolidated democracies and consolidated authoritarian systems.

The other key concept to understand authoritarian patterns in the Balkans, as this book will discuss, is the regime type that emerges. If democratic backsliding describes the process and is thus dynamic, competitive authoritarianism and other terms to denote the regime type are rather static, describing how a regime is, rather than its trajectory. As this book will highlight, this dichotomy between static regime types and processes that lead to changes is possibly too rigid. Regimes fluctuate over time, in particular, if they are part of the large bracket of hybrid regimes. The shift from a liberal democracy to a hybrid regime is a stark step, and the breakdown of authoritarianism is usually caused by a large event, such as revolution, military intervention, a coup, or at least the death of a dictator. The drifts toward more or less democracy or authoritarianism in the zone between can depend on several factors and occurs gradually. However, these changes matter. Most countries are neither liberal democracies nor full authoritarian systems, and a shift entails less civil rights, citizen participation, and also restricted opportunities in changing governments.

The hybrid regimes are often labeled by the flaws in democracy, such as the concept of defective democracies (Merkel 2004) or competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010). Both terms are not fully satisfying, as they measure the regimes against the ideal type. This presupposes, implicitly or explicitly that they are a deviation from either type rather than a regime type of its own (Bogaards 2009).

As Merkel (2004) has argued, the democratic deficiencies can express themselves in different forms, including domains not under democratic control, institutions, and actors yielding undemocratic control over democratic institutions or erosion of checks and balances. These different restrictions of democracy have a significant impact on the performance of the democratic system and also might be able to co-exist with democratic institutions in the long term or compete with democratic features that force the dominance of democratic or authoritarian features of a regime.

Furthermore, one can distinguish these regimes between those of characterized by fundamentally democratic institutions and elected officials who seek to undermine these institutions and take control of them. This could be described as the 'autocrat in a democratic system' phenomena. Here, the critical question is the ability of the institutions to resist the attempts by autocrats to undermine them and change the rules of the game. These are the questions characterizing the Hungarian slide toward authoritarianism since Viktor Orbán came to power in 2010. At the other end, one can identify the undemocratic structures with a democratic elite, that is, a system that is exclusionary and marked by formal or informal institutions that make democratic decision-making difficult but are ruled by elites at least formally committed to democracy. Such systems can be found in cases of rigid and often exclusionary power-sharing, as has been the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina or when the army or international actors yield strong influence over the political system, as in Turkey before the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) consolidated power and in Kosovo during the period of formal international control. In brief, in one type, the main source of authoritarianism are elites in power, while in the other, it is institutions. While most hybrid regimes display aspects of both, if both institutions and elites are democratic, so is the system and if both are undemocratic, the regime is also authoritarian, so the discrepancy between both is an inherent feature of hybrid regimes.

Finally, a crucial factor arises from the larger social sphere that might enable authoritarianism. This includes attitudes toward authoritarianism and democracy, but more broadly encompasses the vibrancy of civil society and the media, as well as the ability to organize autonomously (Dawson 2014).

Among the cases of democratic decline or de-democratization, this book focuses on cases that had not become consolidated democracies. Thus, the de-democratization occurred against the backdrop of weak institutions and defective democracies. In some cases, the regimes have been stagnating, while in others, there has been a marked shift toward the more authoritarian end of the spectrum of hybrid regimes. Some cases, such as Montenegro, have displayed strong competitive authoritarian features throughout the past decades, even if the regime shifts its main sources of legitimacy and also engages in different policies of social and political control. Others have become more authoritarian, such as Serbia since 2012. This book is thus a study of the different regimes that all display strong competitive authoritarian features, bearing in mind that some have

remained mostly unchanged, while others have become more authoritarian in recent years. There are regional patterns, expressed with varying degrees of intensity and entrenchment.

In fact, the democratic decline and stagnation in the Western Balkans is not widely acknowledged. Given that none of the countries in the region could be considered consolidated democracies, regression within the large bracket of hybrid regimes is less noticeable. Indeed, the countries of the Western Balkans have remained hybrid regimes or unconsolidated democracies since the mid-2000s according to classification by Freedom House, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, and the Economist Democracy Index.[2] It is thus tempting to consider the trend over the past two decades to be merely a continuation of the status quo.

However, two features are striking and make a focus on the Western Balkans relevant beyond the region. First, stagnation has occurred despite all countries moving toward EU membership since the early 2000s, with Croatia joining the bloc and others in various stages of integration. Bosnia and Kosovo have also witnessed a steady decline in formal and informal external intervention, which were reasons for considering both to be tutelary regimes during the early 2000s. Thus, the expectation would not be stagnation, not to mention decline, but rather greater democratic consolidation. However, all major democracy indices suggest the opposite. The democracy scores for the countries of the region have declined on average on all indices since 2008–2010.

This decline is arguably particularly relevant as these measures are better equipped to capture formal and visible democratic decline and less the informal erosion of democracy that this book argues is taking place. Structural long-term features often hold countries back more than the autocratic practices of an incumbent. While having the advantage of capturing long-term trends, these measures are often ill-equipped to reflect sharp and rapid erosions of democracy.

When looking at the country-based trends, Serbia has been a consistent frontrunner and Kosovo and Bosnia laggards, seemingly reflecting their status in regard to EU accession. However, this is misleading. While Serbia lacks the structural restraints to democracy that characterize Bosnia (strong

---

[2] Nations in Transit 2018 characterizes Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania as transitional governments or hybrid regimes, and Serbia and Montenegro as semi-consolidated democracies. The Economist Democracy Index considers all of them hybrid regimes, except Serbia, which qualifies as a flawed democracy. Bertelsmann Transformation Index considers all of these countries as defective democracies.

international powers, complex decision-making, and ethnicity-based veto powers) or Kosovo (informal international intervention and contested pluralism), it has been dominated by Aleksandar Vučić since 2012, first as first deputy prime minister, then as prime minister and finally as president. The centralization of power and the pressure on independent institutions might lack the formal trappings of democratic restrictions visible in Kosovo or Bosnia, yet Serbia could, in fact, be less democratic than either of the two countries considered to be the furthest away from joining the EU.

In this book, I argue that the region experiences 'constrained' autocrats, as their legitimacy largely rests on external approval and democratic institutions domestically constrain them. These features set them apart from autocrat rulers in the EU and further afield, which lack either one or the other.

I use the term 'autocrats' to describe prime ministers or presidents who rule in formally democratic systems while displaying patterns of rule that either erode or bypass democratic institutions. This understanding closely follows how Levitsky and Way have defined competitive authoritarian systems as 'civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents' (2010, 5). Levitsky and Way consider many of the regimes in the Western Balkans during the 1990s to be competitive authoritarian systems, which democratized in the 2000s. However, the countries have found themselves with new competitive authoritarian systems emerging since. This is not to say the regimes are similar to their precursors in Tuđman's Croatia or Milošević's Serbia. The tools and instruments differ, and the term 'competitive authoritarians' encompasses a wide range of regimes that include those like Russia under Putin, where elections are essentially a sham, to countries like Hungary, where Viktor Orbán is tipping the scales of democracy strongly in his favor.

Rather than conceptualizing autocratic versus democratic rule as a dichotomy, this book makes a case for a more dynamic understanding. Autocratic rule has a life cycle: it changes over time, and few autocrats flip a switch between democracy and dictatorship. Thus, there is rarely a complete break when one prime minister or president takes office. Instead systems evolve over time—the question is in which direction. In fact, many of the autocrats in the Balkans (and beyond) gained office as democratic and reformist hopefuls. Unlike in consolidated democracies, the de-democratization processes took place against the backdrop of a history

of authoritarian rule, weak institutions, widespread informal practices, and moderate democratic traditions. This makes these processes often hard to detect, and as change occurs within the large gray zone between consolidated democracy and authoritarianism, gradual change is often dismissed or ignored. Thus, the cases we are discussing are not consolidated democracies (a somewhat misleading term in itself) becoming hybrid regimes with authoritarian features, but a move toward more authoritarianism within the sizeable gray zone where most countries find themselves.

Most countries of the Western Balkans and their regimes suffer from an embedded legitimacy deficit. Historically, these states were shaped by a paradox. They had weak international legitimacy and often contested borders, but internally the state dominated society in terms of economic control and dominance over the middle classes and intellectuals. Yet, they also suffered from an internal legitimacy deficit, as they were unable to deliver economic development and political stability. Their only source of divisive legitimacy was the claim to represent national aspirations, which inherently alienated a substantial share of the population that was excluded from the 'nation', defined through descent.

These deficits were in part overcome during the socialist period in the Yugoslav case at least, only to revert to some earlier patterns of statehood and regime legitimacy. The region faced two critical junctures, first in 1989–1991, when communist regimes collapsed in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and new governments emerged, redefining the political and legal system. The second turning point emerged in most countries a decade later, as the wars of Yugoslav dissolution ended and the regimes associated with the wars crumbled. This turning point is also associated with a broader trend of second democratic breakthroughs from Slovakia in 1998 to the collapse of the pyramid schemes and the autocratic rule of Sali Berisha in Albania in 1997–1998 and the push toward democratization in Romania and Bulgaria the same years. The governments of the 1990s were competitive authoritarian regimes that utilized the state resources of late socialism and in most cases nationalism to retain power. Their collapse and the second democratic breakthrough, which we will discuss in the next chapter, brought a hopeful end to authoritarianism but was not a complete break. Many patterns and structures of the previous regimes remained intact, shaping and restraining the democratization process in the 2000s. They provided the structural foundations for the democratic stagnation and backsliding that has characterized the region since the late 2000s (Dolenec 2013; Boduszyński 2010; Fisher 2006).

On these foundations, two types of autocrats have emerged. These are the autocrats, who combine autocratic mechanisms of rule with a formal commitment to EU accession and democracy, and the nationalist autocrats, who are their mirror image. Their system of rule does not differ in substance, but they substitute external legitimacy with more conventional legitimacy, based on nationalism. This strategy emerges when either a liquid strategy is not available or the benefits of the nationalist frame are greater.

Both types of autocrat came to power and built their initial careers on their reputations as reformers. What explains the success of autocrats in the Balkans today? It is tempting to draw a historical line back to the elites that established the nation states in the region. As nationalists often draw on the state tradition, critics have questioned the democratic and pluralist credentials of these earlier regimes (Stojanović 2010). Similarly, Jasmin Mujanović (2018) recently argued that elites have entrapped their citizens for most of the past two centuries with a combination of nepotism and nationalism. Although it is useful to base the analysis of current regimes on historical patterns and acknowledge path dependency in the development of regime types, there is a risk of falling into the trap of determinism, giving elites insufficient agency, ignoring choices made at critical junctures, and painting all governments with the same brush. This book argues that there are regional and temporal specificities: from lacking a credible perspective of EU membership to a historically embedded position at the European periphery, weak sovereignty, and a global context not conducive to liberal democracy.

To understand the patterns of the competitive authoritarianism, this book will first look back at the 1990s to show why and how the Central European pattern of democratic transformation was more difficult in the post-Yugoslav space and to understand the competitive authoritarian regimes that emerged. Besides, the first chapter will examine how these regimes collapsed and what they left behind. In Serbia, this is often captured with reference to 6 October, the day after the revolution that overthrew Milošević on 5 October 2000. As street sweepers cleaned up the traces of the revolution on the night of 5 and 6 October, the political clean-up was delayed and came back to haunt the second democratic transition.

The next chapter will trace the circumstances and patterns of democratic decline in the seven countries of the Western Balkans. This includes Croatia, which, despite being the sole EU member in the region, shared many char-

acteristics with its neighbors, from the authoritarian experience and virulent nationalism of the 1990s to the arduous process of dealing with the legacy of the wars and its lengthy EU integration process. This country-by-country perspective will also allow us to shed light on the variations across the region and map the path of democratic stagnation and decline.

Finally, the book will identify the key features through which the competitive authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans keep themselves in power. From the use of crises and emergencies to external support and the exertion of patrimonial control over the state, these features will highlight the characteristics of authoritarianism. These features derive from empirical observation of the regimes and based on larger comparative studies of such regime types. In conclusion, the book will assess the particular and broader features of authoritarianism in the Western Balkans.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bermeo, Nancy. 2016. On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy* 27 (1): 5–19.

BiEPAG. 2014. Completing the EU Enlargement to the Balkans: Dancing the European Kolo. A Step to the Side or a Step Forward? September, http://www.balkanfund.org/publib/biepag/BiEPAG-Policy-Brief.pdf.

Boduszyński, Mieczyslaw. 2010. *Regime Change in the Yugoslav Successor States: Divergent Paths Toward a New Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bogaards, Matthijs. 2009. How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism. *Democratization* 16 (2): 399–423.

Dawson, James. 2014. *Cultures of Democracy in Serbia and Bulgaria. How Ideas Shape Publics*. London: Routledge.

Dolenec, Danijela. 2013. *Democratic Institutions and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Europe*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Fisher, Sharon. 2006. *Political Change in post-Communist Slovakia and Croatia: From Nationalist to Europeanist*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Gagnon, V.P., Jr. 2004. *The Myth of Ethnic War. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gordy, Eric. 1999. *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Greskovits, Bela. 2015. The Hollowing and Backsliding of Democracy in East Central Europe. *Global Policy 6*: 28–37.

Kriesi, Hanspeter, and Takis S. Pappas. 2015. Populism in Europe During Crisis: An Introduction. In *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, ed. Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis S. Pappas, 1–19. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Linz, Juan J. 1978. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Merkel, Wolfgang. 2004. Embedded and Defective Democracies. *Democratization* 11 (5): 33–58.

Mujanović, Jasmin. 2018. *Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Balkans*. London: Hurst & Co.

Plattner, Marc F. 2015. Is Democracy in Decline? *Journal of Democracy* 26 (1): 5–10.

Solska, Magdalena, Florian Bieber, and Dane Taleski. 2018. In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Stojanović, Dubravka. 2010. *Ulje na vodi. Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije*. Belgrade: Peščanik.

Todorova, Maria. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tomini, Luca, and Claudius Wagemann. 2018. Varieties of Contemporary Democratic Breakdown and Regression: A Comparative Analysis. *European Journal of Political Research* 57: 687–716.

Challenges of Democratic Consolidation

Abstract This chapter outlines the causes for the semi-authoritarian regimes during the 1990s and the late democratization. It further explores why consolidated democratic structures did not emerge after the 1990s.

Keywords Democracy • Semi-authoritarian rule • Communist rule • Political liberalization • Western Balkans • European integration

When communist regimes began to fall in Central and Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989, this wave also included Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Albania, the latter two of which were outside the Soviet sphere of influence. However, strikingly, the countries of the Balkans were latecomers to the end of Communism in comparison to Central Europe, and the process there was protracted and difficult. Bulgaria and Romania overthrew long-ruling dictators in November and December 1989, just a few weeks after East Germany and Czechoslovakia. However, in Yugoslavia, there were no mass protests against communist rule, with the partial exception of Slovenia, and the ruling party fractured along federal lines, organizing multi-party elections throughout 1990. In some republics, the League of Communists lost power (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), whereas in others, it retained power for a decade or more (Serbia and Montenegro). In Albania, mass

protests began only in 1990, and it would take nearly two more years for free and fair elections that would see the defeat of the incumbent Socialist Party of Labor.

Even after the first multi-party elections in Southeastern Europe, semi-authoritarian rule persisted for most of the 1990s to a greater extent than in Central Europe. Some of these semi-authoritarian rulers were part of the communist nomenclature, which had managed to transition into the post-communist period, such as Ion Iliescu in Romania or Slobodan Milošević in Serbia. In other countries, the new 'democratic' leaders (who in most cases had also belonged to the communist nomenclature at some point) displayed authoritarian tendencies, such as Franjo Tuđman in Croatia or Sali Berisha in Albania. In the context of the Yugoslav disintegration, these authoritarian systems were closely intertwined with the wars beginning in 1991 and the instrumental use of nationalism.

It is hard to identify a single unifying explanation for the delayed collapse of communist rule in the Balkans. The defining feature of the countries under consideration in this book, whether the relatively liberal Yugoslavia (despite oppression in Kosovo) or repressive Albania, was that neither was under Soviet control, meaning the Soviet policies of Glasnost, Perestroika, and Gorbachev's renouncement of the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1989 had little direct impact on the two countries. The opposition could not mobilize against a foreign enemy, which was a crucial element of the protest movements in Central Europe. Nor could they evoke the Soviet reform efforts as a model, as both Yugoslavia and Albania saw themselves as being communist alternatives to the Soviet model.

The delay in the fall of communism in Albania and Yugoslavia thus could be explained in part by the lack of dependency on the Soviet Union. However, the communist regimes struggled with similar challenges as elsewhere, such as decreasing economic productivity, grievances among the population (as far as they could be articulated in a country such as Albania), a growing legitimacy deficit, the death of dominant long-term rulers (Tito in 1980, Hoxha in 1985), and persistent economic crisis, expressed in shortages and a decline in the citizens' quality of life. The survival of the regimes in Albania and Yugoslavia, however, did not rest on external power for military and economic support. Protests and opposition could similarly not direct their grievances toward an external actor, which had closely linked anti-communist protest and anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiment elsewhere and facilitated a powerful combination of nationalist and democratic grievances.

Indeed, late communist rulers in both Yugoslavia and Albania could brush aside the Soviet reform movement as irrelevant for their countries. However, by early 1990, Yugoslavia and Albania were the only countries of Central and Eastern Europe that had not committed themselves to multi-party elections. As such, the system of government appeared increasingly anachronistic. Yugoslavia had a fairly pluralist media, and developments in neighboring countries were widely known. From a country that saw itself more progressive than its dogmatic and Soviet-controlled eastern and northern neighbors, it suddenly seemed to lag behind. Albania was far more isolated, but the availability of Italian TV along with the coast and other sources of information made it impossible for the regime to shield the population from larger global developments.

In the case of Yugoslavia, the pressure for political liberalization came from Slovenia, which had been a more liberal republic within Yugoslavia, with a well-developed civil society and critical public by the late 1980s. Here, critical media (*Mladina*), artists (*Neue Slowenische Kunst*), and intellectuals lobbied for a political opening and a reform of the Yugoslav system (Silber and Little 1996).

Despite the different degrees of regime repression, both Albania and Yugoslavia had a relatively weak dissident movement, except for Slovenia. In Yugoslavia, the relatively liberal nature of the regime provided a 'safety valve', thus criticism of the government was possible and widespread, yet organized dissent was curtailed. However, by the late 1980s, there had been rising dissident movements in Slovenia and Serbia, although their differing priorities prevented the emergence of a unified Yugoslav dissident movement. Thus, critics of communist rule in Serbia focused on criticizing the decentralization of the country and Serbs' perceived disadvantages, whereas in Slovenia, the main rallying point of opposition was the authoritarian nature of the Yugoslav system. In Kosovo, where protests broke out in 1981, demonstrators were demanding the status of a republic and thus were not motivated by opposition to the communist system. Nor did they see themselves as a Yugoslav opposition, but as a Kosovo Albanian opposition to Yugoslavia, and their demands were strongly shaped by national considerations, like their counterparts in other parts of Yugoslavia. Thus, the protests, opponents, and critics often found themselves at odds with one another as to how they saw the country. If Slovenes and Albanians demanded more regional autonomy, Serb opponents criticized Yugoslavia's excessive decentralization. As a result, each had more in common with their respective republican or provincial elites than with dissidents in other parts of the country.

As a result, a Yugoslav dissident movement never emerged, and the groups were often antagonistic, at least once their political demands trumped the common concerns of human rights violations. This unified national and democratic critiques of the regime. While this was not fundamentally different from other anti-communist dissident groups, in those cases the nationalist demands was directed primarily against the Soviet presence, not against other nations. In Yugoslavia, there were no Soviets to blame, but Albanians and Slovenes blamed Serbs, Serbs blamed Croats and Albanians, resulting in an intra-Yugoslav blame game that could be instrumentalized by nationalist counter-elites or pragmatic late communist elites like Slobodan Milošević, who recognized the potential of these grievances.

In Albania, there was no such space for opposition. The Stalinist repression of the Albanian model of communism made all opposition extremely dangerous and offered no space for criticism. Thus, the opening was late and gradual, coming only after the Party of Labor had initiated limited reforms after communism had fallen elsewhere. Dissent emerged among the nomenclature, while citizens expressed their grievances by seeking to leave country *en masse*.

Albania and Yugoslavia could not have been more different in 1990. One had a pluralist media, and its citizens traveled to Western Europe and lived in a (limited) consumer society; the other was one of the more repressive and isolated communist regimes, comparable to North Korea. Besides, Yugoslavia was an ethnically diverse decentralized federation, whereas Albania was a largely mono-ethnic centralized state. The starting points for the post-communist transition were thus as different as they could be. Yet, they both struggled with the move toward democracy in the post-communist period. Besides the lack of the anti-Soviet dimension, both states struggled in their own way with statehood. In Yugoslavia, the common state had been a constant construction site during the socialist period, going through three constitutions and several major reforms to find a balance between the republics and central power. The main challenges to the state revolved around this issue, with power shifting over time from a centralized Yugoslavia to a more confederal one. Thus, the end of communism raised fundamental questions over the balance of power between the units and the state, not to mention the very raison d'être of the country itself. Perhaps only the Soviet Union and East Germany, both of which would also disappear, were cases where the state and the political system were similarly intertwined and co-dependent. While Albania lacked this

close link between communism and statehood, the Albanian state nevertheless had become consolidated for the first time during the Communist period. The interwar Albanian state was weak and eventually fell prey to Italian dominance and occupation. As a result, Albanian statehood was fragile after communism. There was no alternative, such as unification with the West in the case of East Germany, or disintegration in the case of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (and later Czechoslovakia). So the Albanian state hobbled along, with a severe collapse of state capacity at the end of communism, mass emigration in 1991, and the short civil war in 1997.

Another common argument to explain the difference between the trajectories of democracy in Yugoslavia and Albania on the one hand and the Central European countries on the other is the tradition of democracy. This argument, however, is highly problematic. While there is evidence that early experience with democracy facilitates its re-emergence, the record in Central and Eastern Europe far from clear cut. Of the Central European countries, only Czechoslovakia had a good democratic record in the interwar period. Poland was an authoritarian state during the period, mostly under control of the conservative and nationalist leader Józef Piłsudski, much like Admiral Miklós Horthy, who ruled Hungary for most of the interwar years. Yugoslavia and its constituent units had experimented with democracy during the interwar period and before, while Albania had limited experience during the early inter-war years. If one were to venture beyond Central and Eastern Europe, experiences with democracy in Italy, Spain, and Portugal were few before the end of the Second World War and after except for Italy. Thus, the Yugoslav and Albanian experiences of kings and dictatorships were not exceptional, and cannot easily explain the rise of semi-authoritarianism after the end of communism.

2.1   The Rise of Semi-Authoritarian Rule

While elections were held in all the republics of Yugoslavia in 1990, and Albania in 1991 and again in 1992, this did not decisively shift their politics toward democracy. In some cases, the incumbent communist parties, now usually renamed, retained power, whereas nationalist challengers took over in others. Irrespective of whether a change of government took place, the leadership, except for Slovenia, based their legitimacy primarily on protecting the nation from external or internal threats, not on democracy. Anti-communists, such as in Albania and North Macedonia, rejected the communist heritage but did not offer a clear democratic alternative.

Thus, there was no democratic consensus among all parties, and the multi-party system that emerged was based on strong polarization, not so much along ideological lines, but based on denying political opponents any legitimacy, considering them to be traitors.

Questions of statehood—the contested nature of the Yugoslav state and the disputes over borders and the balance of power in the successor states—and the status of minorities facilitated old and new governments alike to mobilize nationalism and retain authoritarian practices. While this pattern was particularly pertinent in the post-Yugoslav space, it was also identifiable in other cases, such as in Romania and Slovakia (Fisher 2006; Stroschein 2014).

The first period after the end of the League of Communists' monopoly on power in the post-Yugoslav space was characterized by multi-party politics without substantial democracy. The first multi-party elections in most Yugoslav republics were not held due to strong demand for democracy among citizens or strong social movements calling for such elections—with the notable exception of Slovenia. As a result, the winning parties based their rule less on democratization and more on retaining control over the state in the changed context of state disintegration, the abandonment of the socialist economic system and the altered international context. In the three southern republics—Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia—the local branches of the League of Communists, renamed shortly before or after the elections, retained their dominance, whereas, in the three northern republics, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, opposition parties took office. Here too, the pattern varied from a broad coalition of center-right parties (*Demokratična opozicija Slovenije*, DEMOS) in Slovenia to a single party in Croatia, the Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ), and a loose coalition of ethno-nationalist parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 1990 elections in the Yugoslav republics, the key issues were thus not democratization so much as the future of Yugoslavia or the independence of the republics, the threat posed by other republics or nations, and the protection of national identity. These issues continued to dominate elections everywhere except Slovenia, which, after a brief conflict in 1991, was able to leave Yugoslavia with few open issues, which enabled a shift of the political debate away from state-hood issues (Ramet and Fink Hafner 2006).

In Serbia, the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*, SPS) was able to retain power throughout the 1990s under the dominance of Slobodan Milošević. Its political dominance was not matched at the ballot

box, where the party never gained more than 46.1 percent (in 1990) and had to rely on coalition partners, including the extreme nationalist Serb Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS) or more moderate parties. Its dominance relied on the party's control over the state, including the police and secret services, as well as the publicly owned enterprises, and its ability to control and marginalize the opposition (Bieber 2005, 257). It used nationalism strategically and radicalized and moderated its position to retain control and dominance over the political system (Gagnon 2004). In Croatia, the HDZ did not have the advantage of the incumbent, and the party included both radical nationalists and moderate conservatives (at least at first). Thus, its rule was not as authoritarian as that of Milošević but was highly personalized around President Franjo Tuđman. It used similar techniques to secure its dominance during the 1990s, such as the control of state institutions, strategic privatization for the benefit of business elites close to the party, pressure on the media and civil society, and the manipulation of elections. Both regimes benefited from the wars as a legitimizing strategy. However, in Croatia, the victory in the 1995 war gave the HDZ a strong popular mandate, while, in Serbia, the SPS instead used the wars and perpetual crisis to marginalize the opposition, rather than being able to derive legitimacy from any success in warfare. Both regimes moved from nationalist–populist regimes in the first half of the 1990s to more Sultanistic regimes in the latter half of the decade, drawing on patronage and control of the state to retain power (Chehabi and Linz 1998). Marius Søberg described this period as the 'false dawn' in Croatia, as the ruling HDZ had the opportunity to reform but failed to do so to avoid threatening its own power base (Søberg 2007, 35).

This pattern must be viewed in the larger post-communist context, as similar regimes took hold in Romania and Slovakia. In the case of the former, it drew from the banned Communist Party, and in the case of the latter, it emerged from the democratic opposition, but in both cases authoritarian practices were combined with populism and nationalism.

The regimes that emerged in the Western Balkans after the 1990s were characterized by the use of late socialist state resources to limit pluralism, enforce a conservative nationalist social and political environment, and translate party control over state resources in an environment of formal party pluralism. In some cases, this resulted in outright repression of political alternatives, as in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, to a lesser degree, Croatia, Albania, and North Macedonia (Boduszyński 2010; Dolenec 2013; Fisher 2006). They were truly hybrid regimes, not

only in terms of having features of competitive authoritarianism but also in combining state control over the economy with the new wild capitalism from which an emerging class of tycoons profited, usually closely associated with, and loyal to, the regimes.

2.2   THE DEMOCRATIC BREAKTHROUGH

For the Western Balkans, the period 1997–2000 was a democratic watershed. In Croatia and Serbia, Tuđman died and Milošević and his party lost power respectively. In Bosnia, for the first time, non-nationalist parties took office, if only briefly, and in Albania and North Macedonia the conflicts in 1997 and 2001 re-established a more inclusive democratic system. In Montenegro, Đukanović's break with Serbia opened up the political space, and Kosovo could establish a multi-party system following the end of Serbian rule and repression in 1999.

Together with these democratic breakthroughs, the perspective of joining the European Union (EU) became more realistic. As the countries of Central Europe were gearing up their accession talks, the EU opened the doors to the Western Balkans through the Stabilization and Association Process in 1999, at the end of the Kosovo War. The countries now described as the 'Western Balkans' for the first time had the perspective of joining the EU. Slovenia was able to join with the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004, whereas Romania and Bulgaria joined in 2007. Of the countries offered the prospect of membership in 1999, only Croatia managed to join in 2013. The other countries of the so-called Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo) remain at varying stages of the integration process. Nevertheless, the offer of membership also made enlargement the key engine of transformation in the region, as the new governments that came to power between 1996 and 2000 pursued democratic reforms and sought closer integration with the EU.

This democratic breakthrough, of course, lasted no more than a moment. By 2002, nationalist parties had regained power in Bosnia, and in Serbia, the Serb Radical Party became the largest party after the assassination of prime minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003, even if it remained excluded from government. The expectation, which seemed to be coming true (at least for a while), was that this democratic 'shock' would shift governments to endorse reforms, democracy, and EU integration. Indeed, by the late 2000s, nearly all the parties in government and opposition appeared to endorse this

goal. A shared social consensus on EU integration seemingly facilitated this shift.

This second wave of democratization began in Romania in 1996 with the ouster of Ion Iliescu, continued with the state collapse in Albania leading to the removal of Sali Berisha, the Socialist Party's election loss in Bulgaria the following year, and the fall of Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia in 1998. While Berisha and Mečiar had risen to power through their opposition to the Communist Party and its respective successors, their governance displayed authoritarian tendencies and they sought to control state institutions while maintaining formal democratic institutions. In Bulgaria, the Socialist Party had been able to return to power in 1994 after a brief period in opposition and, displaying little willingness to reform and tackle the economic crisis, it was ousted in elections in 1997 following mass protests. Thus, the changes of government in the Yugoslav successor states took place against the backdrop of a transformation that saw the ouster of what Tom Gallagher called 'nomenclature nationalism' (2000).

In North Macedonia, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski sojuz na Makedonija*, SDSM) was ousted in 1998 by the conservative and nationalist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatreshna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija—Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo*, VMRO-DPMNE). Similarly, the dominant Albanian minority party was replaced by a more nationalist competitor. This change of government ended the predominance of the socialists in the first post-Yugoslav years, who had engaged in little transformation since 1990, much like their Bulgarian counterpart. However, the key challenge until 2001 was the Macedonian state's legitimacy deficit in the eyes of the substantial Albanian community. Although Albanian parties had been part of governing coalitions since 1991, the state remained dominated by the Macedonian majority, with few Albanians employed by the state and the constitutional and institutional self-understanding of a nation state. This only changed (partially) through the 2001 conflict and the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

The three countries that experienced a significant change of government in 2000 were Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, even if the latter's experiment was largely a failure. In Croatia, the Tuđman regime came to an end through his death in December 1999 and was ratified by the resounding defeat of his party in January 2000. In the absence of a strong successor, Tuđman's personalized regime of would

have ended even without an election, but the new government was able to break with past practices such as the president's strong powers, in part informal, and the control over the economy and media through formal and informal networks. In addition, the constitutional powers of the president were reduced, and through a coalition government led by the socialist Ivica Račan and the unpresuming Stipe Mesić as president, hailing from the small Croatian Peoples' Party (*Hrvatska narodna stranka*, HNS), the post-Tuđman transition resulted in a diffusion of power (Fisher 2006).

The end of the Milošević regime was more spectacular. He was defeated in early presidential elections in September 2000, but only a general strike and mass protests in late September and early October were able to finally oust him. In the end, it appears that core pillars of the regime, such as the army, the police (including the secret police), and the tycoons who had become rich due to their loyalty to Milošević, switched sides. The fall of the regime was also due to a unified opposition that was pushed on by social movements and offered a coherent front against the regime, despite the different positions within the opposition over what should come after Milošević and the causes and responsibilities for the wars (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Strong external support was also important, not least in clearly signaling that the Milošević regime was isolated and could not count on the tacit external support it had enjoyed in earlier times (Spoerri 2014).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, two of the three dominant ethno-nationalist parties—the Croatian Democratic Union and the Party of Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcije*, SDA)—were defeated in elections, and the more moderate Alliance for Change, led by the Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija Bosne i Hercegovine*, SDP BiH), took power. The change was incomplete as, in Republika Srpska, the Serb Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka*, SDS) returned to power after an internationally engineered moderate coalition was defeated. By the time the next regular elections were held in 2002, the Alliance had disintegrated and the ethno-nationalist parties returned to power (Manning 2004).

2.3   FRAGILE DEMOCRACY

The second democratic breakthrough was no revolution, even if images of the mass protests and the fire in the Federal Parliament in Belgrade on 5 October 2000 appear to suggest this.

The end of the Tuđman and Milošević regimes brought an end to the competitive authoritarianism, which had characterized the two countries and the larger region during the 1990s (Ramet 2011). The parties' defeat was due less to a rejection of their nationalism than opposition to their authoritarian practices and increasingly blatant corruption. After their fall, both countries moved toward more democratic government, with no single party dominating the political system, a strengthening of human and minority rights, stronger respect for the rule of law, and a reduction in media control. The first reform period ended fairly quickly.

In Serbia, the reformist Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić was assassinated in March 2003, ushering in a government led by the conservative nationalist Vojislav Koštunica. He was suspicious of any rapid transformation and formed strong alliances with groups from the Milošević era while keeping a distance from the EU and Western governments. With him, the SPS would return to a position of influence in the country, and the SRS became the main opposition party in elections in 2003.

In Croatia, the HDZ became the main opposition party, actively obstructing the reforms undertaken after 2000. The unstable ruling coalition that had taken over from HDZ in 2000 was, in turn, defeated by the former ruling party in 2003.

Thus, both SPS and HDZ were only excluded from power for four and three years, respectively. Yet, Croatia and Serbia's different paths are indicative, despite the return to power of conservative and nationalist parties. While the HDZ in Croatia continued to pursue EU integration after its return to power, EU accession and reforms slowed down in Serbia. Koštunica's government partially fulfilled Serbia's international obligations, in particular by arranging for the 'voluntary' surrender of persons indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), yet it was unwilling to pursue radical reforms that would move Serbia toward EU accession. The difference between Serbia and Croatia lies first in the differing importance of statehood issues. Croatia had no contested borders following the successful conclusion of the war in 1995 and the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in 1997. Serbia, on the other hand, had to grapple with the independence of Kosovo in 2008 (and its de-facto independence before then) and the dissolution of the state union with Montenegro in 2006. Thus, the questions of borders and statehood remained on the political agenda in Serbia, while they had become irrelevant in Croatia. Furthermore, Croatian self-identification had closely linked itself to the EU and the 'West'—as distinct from the Balkans. In

Serbia, such a Western orientation had been contested, and it was not just parties associated with the Milošević regime that promoted 'equidistance' between Russia and the EU, or close ties with Russia. Not least, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing in 1999 made a large part of the Serbian public and elite skeptical about Euro-Atlantic integration. Finally, Serbia had a large anti-system party that rendered any alternation of power more difficult. The SRS emerged as the largest single party in 2003 (until 2008) and gained support based on economic populism with nationalist undercurrents. In Croatia, on the other hand, following the transformation of HDZ during its years in opposition, no significant party opposed reforms and EU integration.

Of the three countries that engaged in a second attempt at democratization in 2000, Bosnia fared the worst. The moderate parties lost power within two years and were unable to fundamentally change political dynamics. In fact, over time, these parties would become indistinguishable from their ethno-nationalist competitors in terms of patronage-based control over state institutions, use of ethno-nationalist rhetoric and limited support for reform. Serbia fared better, yet there too reforms slowed down by 2003, whereas Croatia quickly consolidated the reforms initiated in 2000 and moved toward EU accession. As the later arrest of Ivo Sanader, the prime minister of the HDZ-led governments between 2003 and 2009, would show, these reforms did not at first preclude rampant corruption.

The breakthroughs were also only an institutional or constitutional rupture to a limited degree. The new Croatian government modified the constitution slightly, curtailing the powers of the president and abolishing the redundant upper house of parliament. The real political change occurred in the political shift away from presidential power. In Serbia, the 1990 constitution remained in force until the state union with Montenegro dissolved in 2006 and Serbia needed a new constitution as a now independent country. However, even here the overall institutional architecture hardly changed. The substantial constitutional changes occurred in Albania, which adopted a parliamentary system in 1998 following a brief and unsuccessful experiment with presidentialism. In North Macedonia, the constitutional amendments after the brief civil conflict in 2001 focused on including the Albanian minority.

By 2000/2001, the region had also seen the establishment of a postwar order with all the major conflicts resolved, at least temporarily. Bosnia had received its constitution in the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, and by 2000, the constitution began to function and a number of reforms were

on the way to strengthen the state (still at a modest level). Kosovo came under international administration in 1999, and it became clear that a return to any Serbian control was unlikely. Serbia and Montenegro remained one country if joined only loosely, and North Macedonia reformed its constitutional structure to include Albanians. Several issues remained open, such as the status of Kosovo and the future of the joint Serb-Montenegrin state, as well as how to make Bosnia a viable country, but these all appeared to be questions that could be resolved without violence. Indeed, except for the riots by radical Albanians against Serbs and the international presence in Kosovo in 2004, the period after 2001 has been marked by the end of the previous decade's violence.

In both Serbia and Croatia, as in the other cases of more timid second waves of democratization, the new governments were actively obstructed by the civil service and officials who owed their careers to the previous regimes. Besides, the new authorities took various paths of confrontation and cooperation with the vestiges of the previous regimes. Thus, Zoran Đinđić secured support for the overthrow of Milošević from Milorad Ulemek 'Legija', the commander of the notorious special police forces, but later moved against him, which would cost him his life.

In Croatia, the new president, Stipe Mesić, forcibly retired some 12 generals in 2000, after they had written an open letter accusing the new government of criminalizing the homeland war—the term used in Croatia for the war between 1991 and 1995. The generals had been closely associated with the previous government and were either under investigation for war crimes or had opposed cooperation with the ICTY. Such purges occurred only rarely and often under international pressure, particularly in the context of the ICTY and the EU and US conditionality imposed on the post-2000 governments to cooperate.

Thus, the new democratic governments that were in office in most of the Western Balkans in the late 1990s and early 2000s had inherited the institutions and legal frameworks of the semi-authoritarian regimes of the 1990s, and they struggled with the question of how to negotiate with the remnants of the previous regime. While the parties that held power during the 1990s engaged in some degree of transformation in opposition, they did not undergo a systemic reform, but often a mere cosmetic reorientation. HDZ and SPS were forced to transform themselves by the departure of their leaders and founders. Franjo Tuđman died in December 1999 on the eve of political defeat, and Slobodan Milošević was extradited to the ICTY in June 2000, leaving the political scene. While the latter sought to

dictate the fate of his party from a distance, it gradually emancipated itself from him and the more pragmatic wing, led by Ivica Dačić, took over.

The old structures not only obstructed the new governments but also presented them with opportunities. It was ironic that Zoran Đinđić evoked Article 135 of the Serbian constitution, which allowed him to disregard the authority of the nominally superior government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia 'to protect the interests of the Republic of Serbia' by extraditing Milošević to the ICTY despite objections by the Yugoslav president Koštunica. This clause was included and evoked by Milošević in the 1990 Serbian constitution to circumvent federal decisions and tolerate no more subordination to a federal system than other republics. More subtle and pernicious structures also survived, as did strong party control over state resources. The dominance of one party was replaced by that of one or more other parties, but not curtailed.

2.4   The European Consensus

What did shift after 2000 was the emerging European consensus. Anti-EU parties that openly rejected European integration and lacked a commitment to pluralism and democracy were either not represented at all or remained marginal. With the offer to join the EU, no matter how remote, citizens' hope of membership made it hard for parties to gain support without at least rhetorically supporting it. Thus, European legitimacy became central to political systems. This European legitimacy was both direct and indirect. Directly, parties and governments gain recognition from and can be rejected by interlocutors in the EU and the US. Thus, the SRS was rejected as an interlocutor by Western governments during the 2000s, forcing it into isolation. Similarly, *Vetëvendosje* (Self-determination), which emerged in 2004 as a movement against international tutelage in Kosovo, has been largely ignored by Western interlocutors for their nationalist platform and use of radical and sometimes destructive opposition tactics. At times, this can also extend to governments and other executives, such as the President of Republika Srpska and since 2018 Serb member of the state presidency, Milorad Dodik, who has been shunned by various Western governments and has even had sanctions imposed on him by the US. Before him, dozens of politicians have been removed from office by the High Representative in Bosnia, who has the mandate to dismiss officials for obstructing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Of course, isolation or sanctions were features of Western policy toward autocrats during the 1990s, but the cost was high. The flipside is reward and inclusion, which often provides recognition and, besides potential financial rewards, prestige. Most importantly, such recognition is a prerequisite for membership in the EU and NATO.

The indirect function of external legitimacy reaches governments through its citizens. If citizens want to join the EU and their government does not convincingly pursue this goal, it risks losing domestic legitimacy. Thus, to receive broad electoral support as party, it has to offer a credible prospect to join the EU, as long as a majority of citizens continue to seek membership. Thus, in Albania and North Macedonia, there have been virtually no Euroskeptic parties in parliament for the past two decades. Similarly, in Croatia, open Euroskeptic parties have had little success. In Bosnia, Montenegro, and Serbia, the anti-EU parties have combined their rejection or skepticism of the EU with nationalism and broader anti-Western positions.

Despite the European consensus, the high level of political polarization remained an obstacle to reform and change. Particularly in ethnically divided societies, supposed pro-European positions did not unify parties sufficiently to engage in building a consensus, as elites were often insufficiently committed to reform (Vachudova 2010; Bieber 2011).

This European legitimacy remains the status quo today. A few parties, such as the SRS, are hostile to the current order of peace and Euro-Atlantic integration. Some others are skeptics, such as *Vetëvendosje*, but none are in government. Yet, one can observe divergence between a declaratory commitment to democracy and EU integration and the practice.

The European consensus has papered over the differences in political actors' reasons for supporting EU integration. This might be helpful to build a social consensus for membership, but it should not be mistaken for a shared understanding of the underlying norms and values of the EU. For some, EU accession is only instrumental: a tool to secure electoral support and potentially better living standards. For others, joining the EU is a way to restore sovereignty, a potent claim in countries with a strong international presence. This seeming paradox holds for those countries which have experienced substantial external intervention over the past three decades. Consider North Macedonia, which has long been in limbo regarding EU and NATO accession due to Greek objections over the country's name. If Greece were neither a member of the EU or NATO, or if North Macedonia were both, it could have easily ignored Greece's misgivings over the name. However, the Prespa Agreement between the two coun-

tries and the willingness of North Macedonia to change its constitutional name highlights the attractiveness of the EU. Similarly, Italy sought to use its leverage against Slovenia when it joined the EU, as did Slovenia toward Croatia, and now Croatia is seeking to use its membership to pursue its interests in Bosnia and Serbia. In this way, EU membership can provide leverage against other countries which are out, while also neutralizing the pressure of others. Thus, joining the Union would reduce outsiders' possibilities to intervene—this is the hope. Others, such as Milo Đukanović, advocate for EU accession and Euro-Atlantic integration to keep their political opponents from power. In Serbia and Montenegro, where part of the electorate have misgivings about joining Western institutions due to lingering anti-Western sentiments coupled with memories of NATO intervention in 1999 and ties with Russia, advocating Euro-Atlantic integration and help polarize political competition and fragment opposition between pro-European and anti-European forces.

The competitive authoritarian systems of the 1990s left a deep imprint on the political systems of the Western Balkans. Even after Tuđman, Milošević and other strongmen left the political scene, their legacies continued to shape the post-socialist institutions. The combination of formal democracy with informal authoritarianism provided for authoritarian temptations for their successors and deeply embedded structures of nepotism and party control over state resources. As the democratic breakthroughs were incomplete revolutions, they left many of the structural features and the personnel of the previous regimes in place. The end of the wars and the changed international environment, with the promise of EU integration for the region, meant that these continuities could have gradually faded and been replaced by consolidated democratic structures. However, by the late 2000s, new authoritarian patterns had emerged that synthesized the authoritarianism of the 1990s with their democratic successors.

During the 1990s, the Western Balkans appeared to take a different post-socialist path from Central Europe. While Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic quickly established democratic regimes and moved toward EU accession, the Western Balkans were dominated by competitive authoritarian systems that led the countries into war and state collapse. The next decade offered the promise of convergence as the end of the wars and the second democratic breakthrough opened the path toward democratic consolidation. With the emergence of new authoritarianism in Poland and Hungary, but also in North Macedonia, Serbia and elsewhere, convergence appears more probable in the form of competitive authori-

tarianism than as consolidated democracies. In the next chapter, we will examine how the countries in the Western Balkans moved away from consolidating the democratic breakthroughs of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Bibliography

Bieber, Florian. 2005. *Nationalismus in Serbien vom Tode Titos bis zum Ende der Ära Milošević*. Münster: Lit Verlag.

———. 2011. Building Impossible States? State-Building Strategies and EU Membership in the Western Balkans. *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (10): 1783–1802.

Boduszyński, Mieczyslaw. 2010. *Regime Change in the Yugoslav Successor States: Divergent Paths Toward a New Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bunce, Valerie J., and Sharon L. Wolchik. 2011. *2011. Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chehabi, H.E., and Juan J. Linz. 1998. A Theory of Sultanism 1. A Type of Nondemocratic Rule. In *Sultanistic Regimes*, ed. H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, 3–25. Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dolenec, Danijela. 2013. *Democratic Institutions and Authoritarian Rule in Southeast Europe*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Fisher, Sharon. 2006. *Political Change in Post-Communist Slovakia and Croatia. From Nationalist to Europeanist*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gagnon, V.P., Jr. 2004. *The Myth of Ethnic War. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gallagher, Tom. 2000. Nationalism and Democracy in South-East Europe. In *Experimenting with Democracy. Regime Change in the Balkans*, ed. Tom Gallagher and Geoffrey Pridham, 90–100. London: Routledge.

Manning, Carrie. 2004. Elections and Political Change in Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Democratization* 11 (2): 60–86.

Ramet, Sabrina P. 2011. Croatia and Serbia Since 1991: An Assessment of Their Similarities and Differences. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 27 (2): 265–267.

Ramet, Sabrina P., and Danica Fink Hafner. 2006. Slovenia Since 1988: Building Democracy and Liberalism. In *Democratic Transition in Slovenia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Danica Fink Hafner, 30–54. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Silber, Laura, and Alan Little. 1996. *The Death of Yugoslavia*. London: Penguin & BBC.

Søberg, Marius. 2007. Croatia since 1989. The HDZ and the Politics of Transition. In *Democratic Transition in Croatia: Value Transformation, Education, and Media*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Davorka Matic, 31–62. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Spoerri, Marlene. 2014. *Engineering Revolution: The Paradox of Democracy Promotion in Serbia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stroschein, Sherrill. 2014. *Ethnic Struggle, Coexistence, and Democratization in Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vachudova, Milada Anna. 2010. Democratization in Postcommunist Europe. Illiberal Regimes and the Leverage of the European Union. In *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World*, ed. Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul, and Kathryn Stone-Weiss, 82–104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patterns of Authoritarianism

Abstract This chapter examines the countries of the region, exploring the different patterns of democratic backsliding. It traces democratic decline in the region country by country, identifying key patterns and moments over the past decade years.

As the first decade of the new millennium progressed, democracy in the Western Balkans began to stall. There was no single turning point that marked a watershed when de-democratization began trumping democratization. First, the rapid transformation that had started after 2000 began to stall and slow down. With every year, democratization appeared to stagnate further, before taking a downward turn in some countries of the region.

Internationally, the economic crisis and a cascade of follow-up crises resulted in the European Union (EU) and its member states becoming more self-absorbed and less concerned with enlargement. Being in continuous crisis, which could be traced to the failure of the EU constitutional referendums in the Netherlands and France, the Union lost its will and capacity for completing enlargement in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the economic crisis in Greece and later in Slovenia shattered the hope for the region's economic convergence with the EU, and

the democratic crisis in Hungary and later Poland the hope for demo-
cratic convergence. Consequently, the EU lost its shine as a project and its
drive as an institution. The transformative power, long a key assumption
about enlargement, has weakened, as has the ability of EU institutions to
convince citizens and states to take on new members.

It would be easy to argue that the economic crisis, which hit several of
the Western Balkan countries particularly hard, caused the rise of authori-
tarianism. However, a closer look will highlight a more nuanced picture.
In the case of Montenegro, the hegemonic position of the ruling
Democratic Party of Socialists transformed itself over time in terms of style
and external alliances, but never lost its dominance. In North Macedonia,
the turn toward authoritarianism began at full steam with the confronta-
tion with Greece over the name dispute and the failure of accession to the
North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2008. Kosovo's post-
independence elite relied on strong support from external actors, particu-
larly the US and key EU member states, in buttressing Kosovo's
independence. In exchange, external actors went to great lengths to ignore
domestic shortcomings in the rule of law and anti-corruption measures in
exchange for cooperation with Serbia. The latter saw the emergence of
authoritarianism with the rise to power of Aleksandar Vučić and the
Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS) in 2012. In
Albania, it was Berisha's rule that was first described as a stabilocracy in
2012. While Edi Rama's socialist government brought a fresh move
toward reforms, Rama's dominant personality and many of the structural
vestiges of party patronage persist. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, an oligar-
chy of ethno-nationalist parties never entirely lost control of the country.
While the dominant parties within a community have shifted and there are
now many more parties benefiting from clientelist and informal control,
their mechanisms of eroding democratic institutions are similar. This brief
overview highlights that authoritarianism was not voted into office during
the economic crisis. Some parties had uninterrupted power-bases dating
back to the 1990s (Bosnia and Montenegro), while others gained power
between 2006 and 2012. Nevertheless, their electoral success was not
based on the economic crisis so much as on disappointment with the
incumbent governments and apparently widespread corruption. They
often sought to position themselves as post-transition rulers, ending the
long, seemingly never-ending 'transition' or 'transformation' in what has
been recently described for Central Europe as the 'Delayed Transformational

Fatigue'.[1] Finally, leaders such as Vučić, Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, president of the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska and later Serb member of the state Presidency Milorad Dodik, and Montenegrin Prime Minister and President Milo Đukanović were able to capture Western imagination as young, pragmatic reformers. Their ascent to power was, therefore, met with approving comments in Western media and governments. The ability to, thus, secure domestic and external legitimacy became crucial for these new authoritarian regimes.[2]

While the democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland has received considerable attention, democratic decline (and stagnation) in the Balkans has received comparably less attention. This is mostly due to the fact that the countries are not yet EU member states and the decline has taken place within the gray zone of hybrid regimes, rather than from consolidated democracies to more competitive authoritarianism.

This chapter will examine the countries of the region, exploring the different patterns of democratic backsliding. It will trace the democratic decline in the region country by country, identifying key patterns and moments over the past decade years.

Rather than being voted into power based on an open authoritarian agenda platform, these leaders' initial electoral successes were premised on the offer of reform and EU integration. It is merely over time, especially when confronted with the lack of benefits of this process that they turned to informal, patrimonial, and authoritarian means to preserve power. By taking a country-by-country approach, this chapter argues that the region varies in terms of the extent of autocratic rule, but that the patterns that autocrats draw upon are similar. The unifying feature, as noted in the previous chapter, is the incomplete transformation that left institutions weak and susceptible to political pressure. Besides, a high level of political polarization between government and opposition meant that taking power is often a zero-sum game, matched by boycotts and a high level of distrust. We can describe the seven cases as follows:

Continuity and change from within shaped Montenegro, the only country in the region that has not experienced a democratic alternation of power since 1990. Instead, change has occurred within the ruling party. Thus, the structure of party dominance transformed, but the party and the dominant figure (Milo Đukanović) remained the same.

---

[1] Fatigue Project at School for Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/about-fatigue.

[2] Section adopted from Bieber 2018.

Return to semi-authoritarianism is the pattern in Serbia, following a 12-year break. After the fall of Milošević in 2000, the country was characterized by a period of democratization that did not lead to a consolidated democracy but rather reverted to more authoritarian rule with the coming to power of current president Aleksandar Vučić in 2012.

New semi-authoritarianism is the crucial feature of North Macedonia. The country has long been characterized by a significant national minority and an ethnically polarized political system, with a long stretch of successful transfers of power between 1990 and 2006. The full semi-authoritarian period only began in 2006 and was also the first regime to fall, in 2017.

Ethnocratic authoritarianism in Bosnia is a paradox, as we shall see. While the ethno-nationalist parties claim to have a monopoly over their ethnic constituency, they are challenged in this claim and have all lost more power than in the other countries of the region, while continuing to rule at some level in the politically complex state. No party has achieved hegemony in their constituency, but the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata*, SNSD) in the Republika Srpska (RS) has come the closest, dominating the RS since 2006 with Milorad Dodik at its helm (before he took over the Serb seat in the state presidency in 2018).

Authoritarianism under international tutelage has been characteristic for Kosovo. Due to the influential role of international actors, both during the period before independence and since, a pattern has emerged of undemocratic external intervention that has fed off an elite that has used external support to retain power.

Conservatism without authoritarianism may be the most appropriate description for Croatia. A semi-authoritarian regime governed the country during the 1990s, but no new authoritarianism has emerged over the 18 years since the end of the Tuđman era. Croatia, thus, represents a potentially successful and enduring rupture from the semi-authoritarian experience of the 1990s. However, at the same time, the political system is characterized by similar levels of polarization and a strong nationalist and conservative trend.

Structural polarization in Albania has meant that it retained a stable two-party system with each party, once in power, finding itself unwilling and unable to develop a working relationship with the opposition. This has been partly reinforced by the strongman politics of Sali Berisha and, to a lesser degree, Edi Rama. Thus, while Albania has seen less continuity and stable authoritarian rule, the winner-takes-all state control has many fea-

tures akin to those of other competitive authoritarian regimes. Once the specific features of authoritarianism in each country have been laid out, we will turn to the key patterns that can be identified in some or most cases. As this chapter will highlight, there is no single prototype for an authoritarian pattern, but there are common recurring themes, from the position of the EU to the structures of polarized societies with weak ideological differentiation.

3.1   MONTENEGRO

The long rule of the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*, DPS) in Montenegro is in many ways the prototype of the region's slide toward authoritarianism (Pavlović 2016). However, unlike other countries, Montenegro has never moved decisively away from the entrenched rule of a single party and, with it, the trappings of competitive authoritarianism. Montenegro has seen no alternation of power since 1990, or, for that matter, since 1945, when the Communist Party took over. In July 1991, the ruling League of Communists became the Democratic Party of Socialists, which still dominates Montenegro today in what could be described as a multi-party system with a dominant party. This does not mean that the rule of the party has been monolithic or unchanging. In fact, Montenegro has transformed, and despite the prevalence of competitive authoritarian patterns, state and society have become considerably more pluralist since the 1990s. The main shifts have occurred within the party, rather than through a change of government. Between 1990 and 1997, the party pursued a largely authoritarian path, supporting Serbia and Slobodan Milošević. In fact, the Montenegrin party and state leadership came to power in 1989 through a party coup. The new young guard of pro-Serbian politicians were known as 'pretty, young, and smart' and included Svetozar Marović, who became speaker of the parliament in 1994; Momir Bulatović, who took over as president; and Milo Đukanović, the youngest of the triumvirate, taking over the post of prime minister at the age of 29 in 1991, making him the youngest prime minister in Europe at the time. All three, and the party as a whole supported Milošević and the war in Croatia, including a significant contribution of Montenegrin reservists to the siege of Dubrovnik. There were moments when the party diverged from the Serbian line, and the differences became more visible as the war dragged on, as the DPS leadership became more reserved about Milošević's nationalist line. The emerging conflict was, at least at first, mostly over the

conduct of the war, the alliance with Milošević, international isolation, and more particular interests. At the same time, the government engaged in a massive smuggling operation, particularly cigarettes, circumventing the international sanctions and renting out ports and airports to organized crime (Hawksley 2010). While Đukanović and others from the regime justified this by saying it kept the country afloat in a difficult time, it also strengthened ties between party, the state, and organized crime, leading to an inconclusive investigation in Italy and the US (Traynor 2003; OCCRP 2008).

As protests in Serbia challenged Milošević after the Bosnian War in the winter of 1996–1997, Prime Minister Milo Đukanović distanced himself publicly from the Serbian and, from 1997, Yugoslav President Milošević. As the party split between a pro- and an anti-Milošević wing, Đukanović first gained control of the party and then the presidency, winning the intra-party power struggle against his erstwhile ally Momir Bulatović. As a result, the ruling party split between a reform-oriented, pro-Western wing in power under Đukanović and a pro-Milošević wing led by Bulatović who became prime minister of Yugoslavia and leader of the Montenegrin opposition party, the Socialist People's Party (*Socijalistička narodna partija Crne Gore*, SNP). While distancing the DPS from the Milošević's Serb nationalism and opening up the political space, the ruling party remained firmly in charge. This split did usher in a period of gradual opening and democratization. At the same time, with Đukanović firmly in charge, the multiple power-centers during the earlier years of DPS rule converged on him and initially transformed the system into a de-facto presidential system while he held the post. Subsequently, he was at the center of informal power, whether as president, prime minister, or party president. This pattern has persisted until today, with the party supporting an independent Montenegro and Euro-Atlantic integration. Lacking a majority, the DPS has relied on coalition partners for subsequent government formation, moderating its dominance. The DPS has relied on support from moderate, reform-oriented parties, in particular, the Social Democratic Party (*Socijaldemokratska partija*, SDP), which was an uninterrupted coalition partner between 1998 and 2016. Later, the party split and the wing cooperating with the DPS became the Social Democrats (*Socijaldemokrate*, SD). The smaller coalition partners have also been bought off with control over publicly owned enterprises, providing them with opportunities to employ party loyalists and extract resources, a widespread pattern in the Western Balkans.

Furthermore, the DPS forged a strategic alliance with parties representing national minorities. Bosniaks, Albanians, and Croats were at first marginalized under the pro-Serbian policies of the 1990s, but Đukanović drew on their support in sidelining the Serbian wing of his former party. Over time, this cooperation became increasingly strong and continued after the fall of Milošević in 2000, creating a lasting alliance. This link helped him carry a majority for independence in the 2006 referendum, putting an end to the State Union with Serbia and later moving the country toward EU and NATO integration. As the supporters for a common state made a pro-Serbian argument, emphasizing the closeness of Montenegrin to Serb identity, using Cyrillic as the dominant script and otherwise playing to Serb nationalist themes, the unionists alienated minorities, who continued to support the government, even if critical voices emerged over time.

The policy of the regime remained consistent in promoting independence and state- and nation-building, which was achieved in 2006. In addition, the government has aligned itself with the EU and the US, first in opposing Milošević (1997–2000) and later in cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), supporting Kosovo's independence and pursuing NATO membership, which Montenegro achieved in 2017, as well as harmonizing foreign policy with the EU even when it means confronting non-Western powers, Russia in particular.

The government's strategic commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, even in the face of domestic opposition, secured the government extensive external support. This external support was not merely diplomatic. Nor did it only provide European legitimacy: it was also a financial lifeline, particularly in the years when Milošević was still in power, helping to shore up the regime and build up a strong police force to counter the Yugoslav Army, still stationed in Montenegro. A total of 485 million marks were given to the Montenegrin government in 1999/2000 alone. These transfers, informal and unchecked, helped the regime, as the smuggling had done earlier, to build an informal patronage network (Marović 2018).

A high level of polarization over identity issues, such as the position toward Serb identity, has also divided the opposition. In fact, the opposition to Đukanović and the DPS has lacked unity as a whole, as parties that sought ties to Serbia rejected the government's pro-Western policies, the inclusion of minorities and the promotion of a distinct Montenegrin

national identity, including its own newly formalized language. Others focused their critique of the government on corruption and state capture by the ruling party. As a result, the opposition was fragmented and struggled to capture voters who worried that supporting the opposition would undermine Montenegrin independence and its pro-Western policies (Bieber 2003; Džankić 2014).

Thus, the entrenched rule of Milo Đukanović has not so much relied on capturing a broad majority, but rather on dominating one segment of the electorate and ensuring its control through polarization. At first, the position toward Slobodan Milošević and Serb dominance defined the main cleavage. After Milošević's fall, the divisive issue became independence and, after it was achieved, Euro-Atlantic integration and full cooperation with key Western policies. While in retrospect, this succession of policies might appear consistent, it was certainly not clear in 1998, but evolved over time. During the process, the Montenegrin government also risked temporary antagonism with its erstwhile Western allies. Particularly during the period 2000–2006, when the EU and the US pushed Montenegro to support a common state with Serbia, the Montenegrin government continued to pursue independence despite the EU's reservations and initial attempts to preserve the common state. In 2003, Serbia and Montenegro transformed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a 1992 creation of Milošević and his Montenegrin allies, into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, a loose confederal state that allowed Montenegro to call an independence referendum after three years, which it did in 2006.

The hegemonic control of the ruling party DPS has been extensive, especially as it never ruptured the close ties with the state administration it inherited from the League of Communists. For example, for years the government rented its building from the ruling party, which had inherited not just its membership base but also the infrastructure from the League of Communists. As a result, the ruling party earned over 4 million euro from renting its building to the government it dominated between 2002 and 2007 alone (OSCE/ODIHR 2009).

The close ties between the state and the ruling party can be best described as structurally embedded state capture, as these ties have not been ruptured since 1945. It has been able to secure electoral support through providing social assistance and employment to supporters and thus binding voters to the party and its central rule in the state. Tapes of conversations inside the DPS leadership leaked in 2013 suggest that the employment agency coordinated hiring for the public administration with

DPS (Marović 2018). As Zoran Jelić, the director of the Employment Agency of Montenegro, noted in a recording: 'One person employed, that means four votes. If we succeed in employing our person, we take away their vote and increase ours [vote]. And this includes part of the family. If we help one person to get a job we get four votes for the DPS' (Janković 2017). Later, he would be replaced in the job by his wife, while he became a member of the State Audit Institution (Kosović 2013). She would later note that any party that creates one job would get ten additional votes. While this could be understood as appreciation for reducing unemployment, it also has been a central feature of buying loyalty through employment in the public sector (MANS 2017).

The central figure of DPS' dominance in Montenegro is Milo Đukanović. As elsewhere in the Western Balkans, authoritarian regimes are highly personalized, and as they rely on patronage and informal control rather than either ideology or visible and formal authoritarian mechanisms, they are hard to transfer. Đukanović has been the ultimate survivor in power. Thus, with six terms as prime minister, two as president and three breaks from public office lasting two years each, Đukanović has been dominating Montenegro since 1991, making him the great survivor of Balkan politics. No other current or former prime minister or president has been able to stay in power for so long and weather the multiple ruptures over three decades. His attempts to resign from elected office and his return in all three instances reflect the competitive authoritarian system's dependence on one person. His chosen successors lacked the popularity to ensure a win over the opposition, and furthermore, the successor did not have to merely gain popular support, but also balance between the interests of Đukanović and other key figures of the party (Bieber 2018). His return to the presidency in 2018 highlighted his continued ability to win elections; he had six terms as prime minister and one previous term as president. It also showed the difficult to rule exclusively from the sidelines as party president. Being once more in the spotlight as president made him a more visible and polarizing face of the regime and as he quickly increased the presidential powers, both formally and informally, he triggered resentment, including in his party.

On the other hand, the opposition has been highly volatile and frequently changed, increasingly fragmenting over time—as of March 2018, there are 52 political parties registered in Montenegro. As we will discuss in the next chapter, the opposition in Montenegro became a prototype of an internally fragmented and polarized opposition, which often made the

continued rule of the DPS easy. One prevailing line of division among the opposition has been the proximity to Serbia, be it under Milošević, his successor Vojislav Koštunica or, after independence, conservative and nationalist opposition figures and the Serbian Orthodox Church. For liberal critics, the conservatism and nationalism of parts of the opposition made them difficult or even impossible partners. Furthermore, the parties in the opposition diverged in their strategies against the government and the degree of opposition to the regime, in terms of using extra-institutional means. Thus, in late 2015, the Democratic Front (*Demokratski front*, DF), a coalition of radical opposition and pro-Serbian parties, used street protests to challenge the government. Drawing on social movement strategies against authoritarian regimes, the DF was seeking to compensate for the difficulties in challenging the government inside the institutions due to the DPS' level of control over the state. After the police raided the protests of the DF, a broader range of participants joined the protests to express their solidarity with the DF against police repression, transcending ethno-national and political divisions among the opposition (Baća 2018).

Later, the close ties with Russia among parts of DF appeared more sinister following an alleged coup attempt during the 2016 elections. As our discussion of the mechanisms of authoritarian rule will show in the next chapter, the government response fits into the pattern of using a crisis to undermine the opposition. By maintaining open ties to Russia, the DF also undermined their credibility as a viable alternative in the EU and the US.

The only time the opposition managed to mount a largely united challenge to the DPS was in April 2013, when Miodrag Lekić became the opposition candidate to challenge Filip Vujanović in presidential elections. Vujanović's candidacy was controversial, as he had been president since 2002, thus holding the office for two terms. The ruling party justified the third time with reference to the new constitution having reset the count of terms served. Lekić had not previously been a prominent opposition politician, but had been a Yugoslav ambassador and Montenegrin minister of foreign affairs during the 1990s and could thus stand above the political squabbles of the opposition. Vujanović defeated him by a margin of less than 3 percent, gaining 48.8 percent to 51.2 percent (Morrison 2018, 168–169).

Overall, the polarization of Montenegro's politics has served the ruling party well. This cleavage is not just political, but deeply about identity. Throughout the decades since 1991, the proportion of the population

describing themselves as Montenegrins fell from a majority of 61.86 percent in 1991 to just 44.98 percent in 2011, while the number of Serbs more than tripled, from 9.34 percent to 28.73 percent. This shift has been essentially a redefinition of what it meant to be Montenegrin: away from ambivalent proximity to Serb identity toward a fully fledged national identity that sets itself apart from Serb identity, and in fact, defines itself in opposition to Serb claims that Montenegrins are just part of the larger Serb community. Initially, this identity construction was the minority project of the small opposition Liberal Alliance (*Liberalni savez Crne Gore*, LSCG). The party briefly supported the ruling DPS in 2001, but eventually joined the opposition and dissolved itself in 2005—yet the program was taken over by the DPS, which has engaged in the extensive nation- and state-building since the late 1990s (Jenne and Bieber 2014, Džankić 2014). In returning to the presidency in 2018, and with NATO membership accomplished, Đukanović announced that he would prioritize strengthening Montenegrin identity, including a proposed anthem law that would penalize anybody who does not stand when the national anthem plays, clearly aimed at polarizing the identity divide (Vijesti 2018; Murić 2018).

Thus, pro-Serbian parties can capture a large part of the Serb population, yet the increasingly sharp distinction between Serbs and Montenegrins has also limited their appeal to the one-third or less of the population that identifies with Serbia. In fact, Serb identity follows association with support for a joint state and support for the parties that offered this option (Kubo 2007). These politics of identity by the government is not exclusive: as noted earlier, it provides space for cooperation with smaller minorities, yet it excludes Serbs, hardly a conventional minority. It is not only exclusive national identities that can serve to underpin authoritarian practices but also more inclusive and fairly liberal state and nation-building projects.

The regime had to confront a serious crisis in 2019. Duško Knežević, a tycoon close to the government fell out with the regime and revealed apparently illegal donations to the ruling party in a video he released. The revelations triggered a series of mass protests that were not dominated by a single opposition party and brought a record number of citizens to the streets in weekly protests, closely emulating similar protests in Serbia (Tomovic 2019).

Overall, the Montenegrin case is marked by structural continuity in terms of a dominant party, but a shift from nationalist legitimacy to external legitimacy through a (rhetorical) commitment to reform and pro-Western policies. Arguably, the party also lost its absolute dominance

through the 1997–1998 split and permitted considerably greater pluralism in the aftermath. In this sense, the Montenegrin regime could be seen as pioneering semi-authoritarian control with pro-reform discourse and strong external support. The polarization over identity and policy orientation have helped the regime to secure strategic support from minority and liberal voters, combined with catch-all populist rhetoric and entrenched patronage networks.

3.2   SERBIA

If Montenegro has experienced continuity of rule by one party, Serbian politics since 1989 has been shaped by several significant ruptures. The democratic pattern in Serbia can be conceptualized in three phases. Between the introduction of multi-party politics in 1990 and 2000, the Socialist Party of Serbia (*Socijalistička partija Srbije*, SPS) and its leader Slobodan Milošević were dominant. Between 2000 and 2012, Serbian politics was governed by different parties that had been part of the anti-Milošević coalition in 2000. Since 2012, the Serbian Progressive Party and its co-founder Aleksandar Vučić, a former ally of Milošević, have dominated, returning to an increasingly authoritarian path, this time without war and relying on the rhetoric of EU integration.

The SPS never gained more than 50 percent of the vote and won an outright majority of seats only in the first elections in 1990. As a result, the party ruled with coalition partners for most of the 1990s. It managed to stay in power despite the UN-imposed economic embargo, hyperinflation, and war. When Milošević and the SPS lost power in 2000, the regime was internationally isolated; it had lost the war in Kosovo and had been more and more openly resorting to authoritarian tactics, including the murder of Milošević's former mentor and later opponent, Ivan Stambolić.

The opposition was able to beat the regime through a combination of unity, mass mobilization and a well-organized and externally supported campaign (Spoerri 2014; Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 85–113). The opposition unified as the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*, DOS), an unwieldy group of 18 parties sharing little besides their rejection of Milošević, which came together under the pressure of social movements, in particular, *Otpor!* (Resistance).

In 2000, SPS and its partner and at times loyal opposition, the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska radikalna stranka*, SRS), were initially excluded from power. Competition between the Democratic Party (*Demokratska*

stranka, DS) and the more conservative and nationalist Democratic Party of Serbia (*Demokratska stranka Srbije*, DSS) characterized the period between 2000 and 2012. The largest party between 2003 and 2008, however, was the SRS, gaining 28 percent of the vote in 2003. Despite this, the SRS was blocked, as the democratic parties refused to cooperate with it and the EU and other external actors rejected it. The SRS opposed the transformation of the country after 2000 and continued to advocate a hard nationalist position. However, after the voluntary surrender of its president, Vojislav Šešelj, to ICTY in 2003, the party under the de-facto leadership of Tomislav Nikolić emphasized more bread and butter issues, gaining support among the losers of transition and those disillusioned with the ruling parties.

Meanwhile, the once-dominant SPS had become a shadow of itself after its central figure, Slobodan Milošević, was extradited to the ICTY in 2001 by the new government and a power struggle ensued. The pragmatic wing, led by Ivica Dačić, eventually prevailed and supported the conservative government led by the DSS in 2004. Although it did not join the government, it was able to appoint its members to key posts in governing structures. In 2008, the SPS was once more a kingmaker and supported the DS in an effort to become more acceptable internationally. This effort included a declaration of reconciliation between the two parties (Radisavljević 2008) that could be seen as the end of the confrontation between parties affiliated with the Milošević regime and its opponents. However, the motivation was pragmatic and had little to do with genuine reconciliation. SPS support allowed the DS to govern for another four years after a bitter split with the DSS, which had turned into an anti-European party due to Western support for Kosovo's independence. SPS was rewarded with acceptance into the Socialist International, marking an end to its international isolation. Thus, while now being a junior partner, the Socialists were out of power only for three years, between 2001 and 2004. However, SPS was a small party, gaining only 7.58 percent of the vote, together with minor coalition partners in 2008. The main obstacle for political normalization was the SRS, which, despite being beaten by DS in 2008, remained an important party with 29.46 percent of the vote. While the Socialist Party was only briefly an anti-system party, the Radicals retrained this position until 2006, when they supported the new Serbian constitution but continued to reject the goal of EU accession.

The exclusion of the SRS from power, the international blocking, and a strong domestic majority in favor of EU integration resulted in a party

split, in which the top leadership defected from the dogmatic position of Vojislav Šešelj, who oversaw the party's fortunes from The Hague as an indicted war criminal at the ICTY. Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić went on to establish the SNS, which sought to position itself as a pro-European center-right party (Konitzer 2011). While formally the SNS broke with the SRS, the SNS took with it the bulk of the party structure and leadership.

As was the practice among most parties, the SRS had requested blank resignation notices from its Members of Parliament (MPs) to be able to dismiss any disloyal members of parliament. As the parliamentary leadership left for the SNS, the SRS was unable to 'punish' disloyal members. After the split, Tomislav Nikolić, head of the new parliamentary group 'Forward Serbia', noted ironically that the blank resignation letters had been 'lost' and thus none of his allies could be forced to resign (RTV 2008). With the split, which reflected careful external support and the central figures of the party joining the SNS, the party took up most of the support previously enjoyed by the SRS. In total, 21 of the 77 Radical members joined the new parliamentary group. The establishment of the SNS shifted the party system toward an ostensible consensus on EU integration and liberal democracy. In parallel with the creation of the SNS, the Eurosceptic DSS also faced a steep decline. In his first years as president, support for Koštunica was very high. His party was still the third-largest party in 2008, with 11.62 percent of the vote: it declined to 7 percent in 2012 and would lose parliamentary representation altogether in 2014.

The 2012 elections were therefore not fought over European integration. While the opposition had moved toward accepting the post-Milošević reality, the ruling DS under Boris Tadić pandered to nationalist positions, in particular, over Kosovo, as Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić made thwarting Kosovo's independence a central focus of his tenure. As a result, the gap between the government and opposition had narrowed drastically.

The elections were shaped by widespread discontent with the government. While earlier elections had been often decisive between pro-European parties and anti-system parties that rejected the entire post-Milošević transformation, or at least did not share their support for joining the EU and the country's overall Western orientation, these appeared to be the first elections which were not a watershed. One consequence was a campaign for boycotting all candidates, the so-called white ballot initiative that civil society activists undertook to express their dissatisfaction with all parties (Obradović-Wochnik and Wochnik 2014). The

campaign highlighted the fact that many considered the election to be no longer decisive, and many perceived the candidates as not being fundamentally different. This contributed to SNS' victory, leading to a gradual emergence of authoritarian patterns. Within a few years, the SNS has become a hegemonic party, attaining an absolute or near absolute majority in elections, including in the latest presidential elections in April 2017. The level of concentration of power in one party and one person within the party exceeded any previous dominance in terms of electoral support, save for the first years of Milošević's rule in a multi-party system (1990–1992) (Günay and Dzihic 2016).

In 2012, the party only had a slight lead of less than 2 percent over the DS-led coalition, gaining less than a quarter of the votes. Yet, the SNS would ultimately prevail, for two reasons. First, its presidential candidate Tomislav Nikolić defeated the incumbent by 70,111 votes, winning the presidency with a majority of 49.54 percent over 47.31 percent in the second round. This unexpected victory—Nikolić had run unsuccessfully in every presidential election since 2000, twice losing to Tadić—shifted the political climate. Tadić had called early presidential elections in the hope of shoring up the dwindling support for his party with his popularity. In the end, his defeat signaled the end of the post-Milošević decade. The Socialist Party switched their support from the DS to SNS—it had gained international legitimacy and no longer needed the DS, and the SNS was no longer shunned—and gained the post of prime minister, despite leading only the third largest coalition with 14.51 percent. Vučić only took the post of First Deputy Prime Minister and minister of defense. While formally there was no such position as the 'First' Deputy Prime Minister, he quickly emerged as the dominant figure within the government's ruling coalition.

Vučić pursued a similar foreign policy to previous governments, with explicit support for EU integration. In this, his position was clearer than President Nikolić and Prime Minister Dačić, who had strong ties to Russia and expressed greater reservation over pursuing pro-Western policies. As a consequence, Vučić appeared as a pragmatic and dynamic politician who was ready to solve open problems where earlier liberal politicians, in particular, Tadić, had disappointed. The former president had shied away from difficult compromises, not least due to the threat of being called a traitor by the now ruling elite.

In April 2013, Prime Minister Ivica Dačić and Kosovo Prime Minister Hashim Thaçi signed the Brussels Agreement under EU auspices. The agreement set out a path for normalizing relations and was

seen as a breakthrough by the EU and observers after Serbia had vehemently opposed any acceptance of Kosovo's independence (Bieber 2015). While Vučić took a backseat in this process—not unlike in the founding of the SNS five years earlier—it was clear that he was the lynchpin of this process, resulting in strong external support for his government.

By coming to power in 2012, the SNS seemingly completed the normalization of party politics with an alternation of power among democratic, pro-EU parties (Stojiljković 2012). Thus, at first, the new government appeared to follow in the footsteps of Ivo Sanader in Croatia, who transformed the authoritarian and nationalist Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica*, HDZ) into a pro-European party (see further). Both also built and maintained their own corruption and patronage networks. When it came to democracy, the subsequent trajectory differed. While the rhetorical commitment to EU accession has been similar, there has been a systemic centralization of power around the person of Aleksandar Vučić and an erosion of independent institutions such as the ombudsperson office, control of the media through informal pressure and self-censorship, and the emergence of a strong party, which has taken control over state resources.

To consolidate its power, the SNS triggered early elections twice between 2012 and 2016, first in 2014 and again two years later. The early elections in 2014 marked the consolidation of SNS' power. The opposition DS was marred by infighting, and the SNS gained power in municipalities across Serbia as local SPS and the DSS party committees switched their support to the new dominant party. A particularly important gain was Belgrade, where the party candidate Siniša Mali replaced the DS mayor Dragan Đilas through a shift in coalitions in 2013. The early elections also allowed the party to rid itself of its position as the junior partner in government. Despite being the larger party, the first government included numerous independent ministers, as well as ministers from smaller parties, such as the United Regions of Serbia (*Ujedinjeni regioni Srbije*, URS).

In the early parliamentary elections 2014, the SNS-led coalition gained a resounding 48.35 percent of the vote and an absolute majority of seats, nearly doubling its support. Furthermore, its erstwhile coalition partner, the SPS, became the second largest bloc, whereas the DS was now fractured into two competing parties, both gaining just above the threshold with 6.03 and 5.7 percent, respectively. The poor performance of the

opposition was in part due to the fragmentation of the DS and much infighting. However, the SNS engaged in a relentless campaign against the former ruling party and their supporters, dubbed the 'yellows' (*žuti*) after the party's color. SNS speeches and campaigns, as well as the media that supported the regime, particularly the private TV stations Pink and Happy and the tabloids *Kurir* and *Informer*, relentlessly attacked the former ruling party as corrupt, criminal, and treacherous. The attacks were part of constant electoral campaigning and also reinforced political polarization. The attacks against the former elite, which persisted even years after the SNS took power, are part of the classic populism of anti-elite discourse. Of course, once in power, the old elite served as a target, obscuring the fact that by 2012 a new elite had taken control (Ristić 2018).

Since the introduction of multi-party elections in 1990, no party has gained such a large share of the vote, and never has the opposition been so insignificant and marginalized. While in 2012 the party struggled to find the expert and professional cadres to take office at the national and local level, by 2014 the SNS gained numerous members and partners. Thus, the pre-election coalition included a broad and eclectic range of small parties. These included the Social Democratic Party of Serbia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Srbije*, SDPS), led by the longest-serving member of the Serbian and Yugoslav governments and a member of the Bosniak minority, Rasim Ljajić—he has been in every government since 2000—to the Socialist Movement (*Pokret socijalista*, PS) of Aleksandar Vulin, who laid claim to the ideas (or at least the image) of Che Guevara yet pursued a nationalist line and had been a staunch supporter of Slobodan Milošević's wife in the 1990s, to the monarchist Serbian Renewal Movement (*Srpski pokret obnove*, SPO) of Vuk Drašković, the leader of the Serbian opposition in the 1990s. All these parties were minor but brought with them their loyal voters and credibility, and were, in turn, overcompensated in comparison to the dominant SNS. This strategy by dominant parties to bind minor parties to themselves that would not have a chance to cross the threshold independently is common practice. Smaller parties, often led by long-time leaders whose past or current popularity and strategic skills are their only assets, sell their electoral support for seats in parliament. The seeming pluralism is thus misleading, as these merely constitute micro-patronage networks that can link up to different dominant parties. In addition, there are smaller parties which offer themselves to the highest bidder to circumvent tedious and costly registration procedures. In 2014, former president Boris Tadić broke with his party, DS, and needed a vehicle to rekindle his political career. He was able to co-opt the small Green

Party of Serbia (*Zelena Stranka Srbije*, ZSS), later renamed it the New Democratic Party, and finally the Social Democratic Party. This is one of the confusingly large number of self-declared leftist or social democratic parties in Serbia. The Democratic Party defined itself as social democratic. In addition, there is Rasim Ljajić's Social Democratic Party of Serbia; the Social Democratic Union (*Socijaldemokratska unija*, SDU), a pro-Western small party; the Left of Serbia (*Levica Srbije*, LS), a small leftist party led by DS politician and former diplomat Borko Stefanović; the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina (*Liga socijaldemokrata Vojvodine*, LSV), led by Nenad Čanak since 1990; the Socialist Movement, led by a former close associate of Milošević's wife Mira Marković; and the SPS. These eight parties cover the entire spectrum of Serbian politics, from pro-EU reformist parties to nationalists, minority, and regionalist parties—from strong anti-Vučić opposition to close aides. This contributes to the confusing picture of Serbian party politics, where a voter would be hard pressed to select a party along ideological lines. The Greens would also later re-emerge as their own party, forming a pre-election coalition with the SPS.

Having a political party is, in short, good business. Despite controlling a majority of seats in parliament, the SNS-led coalition renewed their coalition with the SPS and its partners, the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (*Partija ujedinjenih penzionera Srbije*, PUPS) and the regional nationalist party United Serbia (*Jedinstvena Srbija*, JS), led by Dragan Marković 'Palma'. Palma is the long-time mayor of the central Serbian town of Jagodina and former supporter of the paramilitary leader-cum-failed politician-cum-criminal Željko Ražnatović 'Arkan', derided as a country hick—he once claimed to have missed hearing Beethoven perform live—who handed out cash to needy citizens and organized regular excursions to Vienna and the Greek seaside for worthy citizens. When he helped form the 2008 DS-led pro-European majority, he allegedly asked for two giraffes for his zoo as the price for joining the coalition (Robinson 2012). His populism, posing as the strongman who is for Europe, but also disdains gay rights and other 'Western values', makes him the prototype of the local 'gazda', or boss, reflecting the successful recipe of SNS rule, as described by the US embassy in an internal cable: 'Palma presided over his city's economic boom on a model of extensive public expenditure and thinly-disguised authoritarian rule' (State Department 2009).

This coalition gave the new government, now led by Aleksandar Vučić, a large majority and essentially meant that the government had no significant opposition in parliament. The inclusion of the SPS had two advantages. First, it could not gain profile as an opposition party, and second, it allowed the SNS to share responsibility and blame for failures. For SPS, which had been effectively in government or at least supporting government since 1990, with two brief interruptions (between 2001 and 2004 and for one year in 2007/2008), it allowed it to retain important posts in the public administration and state-owned enterprises, such as *Srbijagas*, a public company responsible for natural gas supply, which has been closely linked to Russia and managed by the leading SPS member Dušan Bajatović since 2008.

Another round of early elections was held in 2016, once more triggered by the ruling coalition without a credible need. Vučić justified the elections as needed for stability to engage in reforms and EU integration. Considering the large and stable majority of the ruling coalition, the early elections were more plausibly part of a continuous election campaign intended to marginalize the opposition. With early elections, the ruling party could also downplay for not having delivered on earlier campaign promises: after all, the full mandate had not been reached. The results confirmed the dominant position of the SNS, gaining 48.25 percent of the vote and more than half the seats. Once more, the second largest coalition was led by SPS, with 10.95 percent. Both parties lost seats, although not to established opposition parties, but to the SRS, which reentered parliament after its leader Vojislav Šešelj had been released from the ICTY pending a verdict in his war crimes trial. With 8.1 percent, it became the largest opposition party, followed by a new party called Enough is Enough! (*Dosta je bilo!*, DJB), formed by Vučić's former minister of economics running on an anti-corruption platform. The far-right *Dveri* movement also entered parliament with the DSS, the former stalwarts of conservative anti-EU parties. Thus, while in 2012 and 2014, a pro-European consensus appears to have been reached among Serbian parties, in 2016 two parliamentary groups were virulent nationalists and anti-European, and the pro-European opposition scored less than 18 percent. The SNS thus became the dominant force of the center, with a similar degree of support going to pro-EU moderate parties and Euroskeptics and nationalists. A renewed coalition with the SPS promised continuity since 2012.

In 2017, Vučić shifted to the presidency as the first mandate of his erstwhile ally Tomislav Nikolić expired. After months of back and forth, Nikolić did not run for a second term. While the reasons remained unclear—he had previously expressed a desire to run again—it seemed that he withdrew from the race under pressure from Vučić as relations between the two deteriorated. Vučić had become the dominant figure in the party, and Nikolić was the only other party leader with some independent clout. While Nikolić was arguably taking a stronger pro-Russian line than Vučić, these considerations appear less central than the concentration of power. Besides, Nikolić was considerably less popular than Vučić, and the opposition would have stood a better chance of regaining the office. Indeed, Vučić managed to win the first round of elections with 55.06 percent of the vote, a feat that only Slobodan Milošević had achieved in 1990 and 1992. The elections suggested a shift in the opposition, as the second, third, and fourth candidates all ran as independents and lacked their own party. Saša Janković, the runner up, with 16.35 percent of the vote, had been the ombudsperson and gained his reputation as somebody who built up the independence of the office. Luka Maksimović ran as a satirical candidate under the name Ljubiša Preletačević 'Beli' to mock conventional party politics and gained 9.42 percent, and the former foreign minister under Tadić, Vuk Jeremić, who had taken a hard line against the independence of Kosovo, became the fourth-placed candidate with 5.65 percent. Thus, the elections made Vučić the uncontested leader of party and government and highlighted an opposition in flux. With his victory, Vučić also consolidated his position in the party. By naming Ana Brnabić as prime minister, the first openly gay woman to hold the role, and one without a party base, he subordinated government to his control and acted as president of both party and state. The next chapter will examine this mechanism of authoritarian control in more detail.

A defining feature of the Vučić government has been large-scale economic projects with a strong level of state involvement and non-transparent financial conditions. These included the transformation of *JAT* into *Air Serbia* with investment by the UAE airline *Etihad* and other initiatives promoting the image of an active government, not constrained by transition or austerity, while providing ample opportunity for patronage.

The most controversial and visible of these projects has redevelopment of a large area in central Belgrade along the Sava river was hotly contested, highlighting the features of Vučić's rule. The project was launched as Belgrade Waterfront (Beograd na vodi) by Vučić soon after taking office, and in 2014, the Emirate investment group Eagle Hills underwrote the project. The group had been involved in multiple large urban projects in the UAE, Egypt, and elsewhere. The area was mostly disused and included decaying railway tracks and storage facilities. However, with a surface of 177 hectares close to the center and along the river, it was prime real estate. The project promised office space and apartments for 17,000 people, as well as more than 13,000 jobs, yet the entire planning as done in secret without a public tender or consultations. By classifying Belgrade Waterfront being of national significance, standard procedures, such as an architectural competition, could be circumvented and the urban plan for Belgrade was adjusted to the project, not vice versa. When the model of the redevelopment was first launched, it appeared to show Belgrade as being flat, without the characteristic hills and suggested that the design was made with little consideration of local topography or history and rather a generic urban development proposal that could have been built in the Emirates just as well (Shepard 2016). Furthermore, it was not clear who would be the potential buyers of luxury apartments in Belgrade, which has been suffering a long-standing housing shortage at the low end of the market. The project received further attention when during the night of 24–25 April 2016, following early parliamentary elections that day, masked men demolished several houses on Hercegovačka Street in the Savamala area, connected to the Belgrade Waterfront project. The demolition took place in the middle of the night without permits or notifications. Unidentified masked men locked up witnesses, demolished houses with unmarked vehicles and machinery and left. One witness, a security guard, later died of a heart attack in hospital. Despite the apparent illegality of the demolition and the dubious circumstances, the state and local authorities were slow and reluctant to investigate. A report by the Ombudsperson Saša Janković suggested that the police was complicit in the incident. Besides, some city services appear to have participated, yet the mayor of Belgrade Siniša Mali and others in the ruling party and government played down the matter (KRIK 2017). The incident became an important issue for the opposition and civil society to mobilize over, whereas the government and media close it sought to shut down any debate. When the European Commission

sought to mention the incident in its annual report, diplomatic intervention by the Serbian government behind the scenes led to its deletion.[3] The symbol of the protests against the development and the illegal demolition in Savamala became a giant yellow rubber duck. The movement became known as 'We don't give up Belgrade', a wordplay with we don't let Belgrade drown (*Ne da(vi)mo Beograd*). The movement organized several large protests in Belgrade between 2016 and 2017, but it later petered out. When it ran in local elections in February 2018, it only managed to gain 3.44 percent of the vote.

The project itself has been divisive, with a nearly equal number of citizens supporting and opposing the project (NSPM 2018). The shopping centers might offer little to buy for most supporters of SNS, and most have no access to buy the apartments for sale starting around 150,000 euro[4] and including flats that have the highest prices per square meter in Belgrade (*Večernje novosti* 2018). However, the project evokes the state-led development of socialism, which remains an essential benchmark for citizens in terms of a successful state. Unlike the more passive state during the extended period of transition, the Belgrade Waterfront Project, like other large-scale urban or infrastructure projects, such as Skopje 2014, offers a visible transformation and an explicit promise of change.

The SNS followed the pattern of strong patronage-based parties in the Balkans in terms of mass membership. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of members increased from 350,000 to 600,000, making its membership base larger than that of the League of Communists or its successor. With 8.3 percent of the entire population or significantly more than one in ten adult citizens, the party secured mass membership less as a reflection of political activism than as a path to employment and other privileges only open to party members (Ristić 2018).

The Serbian case is marked by some continuity between the 1990s and the more recent semi-authoritarian regime, as the ruling parties since

---

[3] Interview with anonymous EU official, 2017. The European Parliament in its resolution on the report mentioned the incident and called for 'swift resolution and for full cooperation with the judicial authorities in the investigations to bring perpetrators to justice… ; calls on the authorities to refrain from accusations, pressure and attacks directed at members of the "Let's not drown Belgrade" civil movement.' European Parliament resolution of 14 June 2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on Serbia (2016/2311(INI)), 14 June 2017. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2017-0261&language=EN.

[4] https://www.belgradewaterfront.com/sr/.

2012 are closely tied to the ruling elite of the 1990s. However, Vučić attained power by downplaying his role in the 1990s and emphasizing how he had changed, noting in 2010 that 'either you will learn and work and advance and you change for the better, or you get out of the way!' (Didanović 2010). While not abandoning nationalist rhetoric altogether, the central rhetorical goal of the SNS and Vučić became reforms and recognition by the West. The continuity with the earlier SRS is less its nationalism, but more the constant attacks against the opposition and creeping authoritarianism of the regime. It would be wrong, however, to only look at the continuities with the 1990s. The incomplete democratic transformation during the 2000s and the willingness to flout the rules made it easier for the authoritarian pattern to gain traction. From Boris Tadić's informal presidentialism to the patronage-based party system that Vesna Pešić, a prominent sociologist and former leader of the liberal Civic Alliance of Serbia (*Građanski savez Srbije*, GSS), described as state capture (Pešić 2007), the institutional roots of authoritarianism were there to be perfected and centralized after 2012.

3.3   NORTH MACEDONIA

During the 1990s, North Macedonia bucked the regional authoritarian trend. While it remained a weak democratic system, based on weak institutions and strong party patronage, it had no equivalent of the nationalist and authoritarian parties that succeeded in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia after the first elections in 1990. Throughout the decade, North Macedonia saw several alternations of power. The decade was nevertheless dominated by the post-communist Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija*, SDSM), which held office between 1992 and 1998, following a transitional all-party expert government from 1991 to 1992. Between 1998 and 2002, the national-conservative Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatreshna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija—Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo*, VMRO-DPMNE) took office, with a multi-party grand coalition in power during the 2001 conflict. In 2002, the SDSM returned to power for one term. One could consider the period between 1990 and 2006 as a phase of gradual pluralization and alternation of power, followed by a second phase between 2006 and 2017, characterized by the dominance of VMRO-DPMNE and the gradual erosion of democracy.

During the 1990s, North Macedonia was shaped by the unresolved and tense relationship between Macedonians and Albanians within the country and the multiple challenges to the country's external legitimacy. The policy toward Albanians was a messy combination of inclusion (participating in the ruling coalition since 1991) and exclusion (in higher education and language rights). This resulted in tense Macedonian-Albanian relations with recurring incidents, including clashes between police and Albanian protesters over the use of the Albanian flag in Western Macedonia in 1997, leaving several dead. At the same time, VMRO-DPMNE and its youth wing mobilized against the introduction of the Albanian language at the pedagogical faculty of the University of Skopje. Thus, the opposition was pushing for a more radical anti-Albanian line.

In addition to the tense Macedonian-Albanian relations, intra-Macedonian party dynamics were characterized by a high level of polarization between the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE, which included election and parliamentary boycotts. With the multiple conflicts with its neighbors—the dispute with Greece over the country's name, with Bulgaria over the language, and with Serbia over the Orthodox Church, the country was on the edge, with many observers anticipating conflict.

Conflict did break out in 2001 with the insurgent Albanian National Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare,* UÇK), but was quickly contained under EU and NATO pressure, leading to a constitutional and political reform process initiated by the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) that brought Albanians into the state administration and protected their position, increasing the state's legitimacy in the eyes of the sizable Albanian minority (Boduszyński 2010). The conflict and its settlement were also profoundly polarizing. Many Macedonians considered the claims of the UÇK illegitimate and the rebellion instigated by criminal networks: the conflict erupted after the border demarcation between Serbia and North Macedonia threatened to disrupt largely unchecked cross-border communication among Albanians on both sides of the border. In Serbia, a similar low-intensity insurrection began in Albanian-populated territories and was resolved by the new democratic government. The Albanian parties in North Macedonia used the demands of the UÇK to advance their demands, enshrined in the OFA, but also considered the new movement a threat to their political dominance. Indeed, after the end of the conflict, the UÇK transformed into a political party, the Democratic Union for Integration (*Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim*, BDI), led by Ali Ahmeti. It achieved majority support among Albanians and formed a coalition with the SDSM

in a coalition nicknamed 'guns and roses', referring to the roses in the logo of SDSM and BDI's militant past. The coalition supported the peace agreement, whereas the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE was divided between obstructing and accepting the peace agreement.

While North Macedonia lacked a revolutionary moment as in Serbia or a clear democratic breakthrough as in Croatia, the Ohrid Framework Agreement was a turning point. It crucially strengthened minority rights and bolstered the country's legitimacy in the eyes of the Albanian community, and it also brought about an all-party coalition to negotiate the peace. As a result, this transformative moment coincided with the democratic changes elsewhere in the region, as well as the end of the large-scale violent conflict. Beyond international mediation, North Macedonia became the regional frontrunner in the EU accession process, signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement during the conflict in 2001 and moving toward membership in parallel with Croatia. During the post-conflict years, the emphasis of external actors and the government was on implementing the OFA and improving interethnic relations. Democratization and reducing patronage, while not neglected, was undoubtedly lower on the list of international actors' priorities.

All governments since the early 1990s included Albanian parties as junior partners. This emerging tradition was stabilizing for North Macedonia, as it reduced interethnic polarization at a time when most governments in the region were exclusionary and nationalist. At the same time, the relationship was shaped by strong patronage patterns and a 'divide and rule' dynamic in which each party only catered to their respective community. This relationship extended throughout different governments and beyond the OFA. While the agreement in 2001 empowered the Albanian parties, and the BDI was in a stronger position than its predecessors, the patronage relationship and divide and rule pattern continued.

At first, VMRO-DPMNE's return to power in 2006 appeared to confirm the successful transition from the 1990s with an orderly transfer of power. The party overall accepted the peace agreement, albeit reluctantly, and formed a coalition in 2006 with a smaller Albanian party, the Democratic Party of Albanians (*Partia Demokratike Shqiptare*, PDSh). While the two had a clear majority, the BDI denounced the coalition as illegitimate for not including them, the largest Albanian party. Although the OFA did not require such a coalition, the new government at first lacked the so-called double majority in parliament introduced with the OFA, namely the requirement for critical laws to be passed not just with a simple majority but also

with majority support among minority community MPs. This was only over-come by an MP from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE joining the minority cau-cus by claiming to hail from the small Vlach minority. Despite these tensions, the first years of the VMRO-DPMNE-led government did not suggest a move toward more authoritarian patterns. The party was led by Nikola Gruevski, who had been the minister of finance during the first VMRO-DPMNE government between 1998 and 2002. During those years he had gained a reputation as a pragmatic reformer. In the intra-party power strug-gle that followed the party's fall from power in 2002, Gruevski was seen as a reformist and pro-European politician in comparison with the more radical wing of former Prime Minister Ljubčo Georgievski, who rejected the OFA and advocated partitioning North Macedonia between Macedonians and Albanians. When Gruevski took over the party in 2003, the inner circle included economists and technocrats, rather than the more ideological origi-nal party leadership. At the same time, many of them were closely tied to Gruevski by friendship or relations, such as Sašo Mijalkov, his cousin and director of the main intelligence agency during Greuvski's reign and an essential pillar of power. Besides a reformist image, the ruling party also emphasized nationalism symbols. Gruevski approved the funding for the large millennium cross above Skopje in 2001, a symbol that was seen as an exclusive claim to the city by the Macedonian community at a time of height-ened tensions. In 2004, a referendum against municipal redistricting, initi-ated by minor nationalist groups, was supported by Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE. As the municipal redesign was an integral part of the OFA, the referendum was an indirect effort to undermine the peace agree-ment. However, the referendum failed due to low turnout (27 percent instead of the threshold of 50 percent).

The year 2008 was a critical turning point. North Macedonia was widely expected to be invited to join NATO during the Bucharest summit in early April of that year, together with Croatia and Albania. However, the Greek government of Kostas Karamanlis blocked membership for North Macedonia, even under the provisional name 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia'. While it had joined the UN with this name and the agreement between the two countries foresaw the ability of North Macedonia to join international organizations under this cumber-some name, the Greek government blocked membership and thus also signaled that, without a settlement of the dispute, EU membership would also be off the table. These blockages prevented the country's member-ship in NATO and the EU, and were in breach of earlier agreements, as the International Court of Justice found in a landmark ruling two years

later, highlighting the leverage Greece had over North Macedonia. The Gruevski government, in turn, also had its share of responsibility. By renaming the main airport after Alexander the Great in December 2006, soon after taking office, it contributed to the worsening of relations between the two countries and gave the Greek government an argument for blaming the government of North Macedonia for provoking the Greek veto (Ekathimerini 2006).

The blockage was even more striking as the US administration under President George W. Bush had strongly supported Macedonian NATO membership. In the end, the country lacked sufficiently committed and persistent allies to counter the strong objection by Greece.

It was this rejection by NATO and the EU that pushed the Macedonian government toward an authoritarian path. However, this transformative moment does not mean that, without it, there would have been no authoritarian backsliding, or that, with it, it became inevitable.

Following the failure to join NATO, the government called snap elections, and VMRO-DPMNE ran a nationalist campaign, winning it a significant victory (Bilefsky 2008). In the run-up to the elections, Gruevski lashed out against Greece, calling the position of the Greek government 'an attempt to unilaterally dictate, accompanied with insults and threats. There is no fight with arguments, but demonstration of power. [The] Greek negotiator, in utmost arrogant manner, points out what may be possible and not possible' (Euractiv 2008).

In addition to high levels of violence during the campaign, in particular in Albanian-majority areas, the elections were marred by what would become a key pattern of authoritarianism. The OSCE/ODIHR (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) election observation mission noted serious irregularities, particularly the use of government resources for the ruling party. These included government (rather than party) campaigns praising the success of the government right before the beginning of the election campaign, free public medical checks and other highly visible measures to promote the government (OSCE/ODIHR 2008). VMRO-DPMNE was able to achieve its highest level of support in the 2008 elections, winning 48.78 percent of the vote, giving it an outright majority of 63 (out of 120) seats in parliament. While it could have ruled on its own, it included the BDI in the new government, in keeping with the tradition of including an Albanian party but dumping its previous Albanian partner. However, as the VMRO-DPMNE had a clear majority with its electoral coalition, it could extract

better terms than in the aftermath of the 2006 elections. In 2007 the two parties had already signed the May agreement that had resolved some key disputes, including a new law on languages, paving the way for future cooperation (Ilievski and Taleski 2009).

As previously noted, including an Albanian party in government had become a tradition since the early 1990s and by turning to the BDI, the government had an 81-strong two-thirds majority, and a majority among minority MPs to secure the double majority. For the subsequent eight years, the VMRO-DPMNE and BDI coalition would endure two rounds of early elections. Until 2009, VMRO-DPMNE's power was held in check by President Branko Crvenkovski, elected in 2004, who was the *éminence grise* of the SDSM. As in Serbia and Montenegro, the president is directly elected but holds limited powers, making North Macedonia essentially a parliamentary democracy. The president can delay legislation, but cannot block it, and has a say in picking the candidate for prime minister—both limitations and possibilities of presidential intervention became visible a decade later when his successor Gjorge Ivanov used his powers to prevent a change of government.

The visual manifestation of nationalism, corruption, and authoritarianism came in the launch of the Skopje 2014 project. The project first launched in early 2010 with a video visualization of the center, launched by the mayors of Skopje and the central urban municipality *Centar*, as well as the Minister of Culture, all members of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE.[5] There are suggestions that the massive urban transformation project was prepared prior to the NATO summit in 2008, the key turning point, and certain aspects of it were already visible in 2009 when the municipal government sought to build a new Orthodox church on the city's main square. The plan led to protests and clashes between supporters of the project and mostly architectural students opposing the proposed church. Although Gruevski sided with the supporters—the government after all had backed the idea—he hesitated in building the church, and the plans were not realized (Marusic 2012). Plans to revamp the parliament building had already begun in 2006, shortly after VMRO-DPMNE came to power. The reconstruction, to echo the German Bundestag with a glass cupola, was criticized by Macedonian architects, but plans went ahead nevertheless (Blazhevski 2016). Thus, Skopje 2014 began as a gradual and piecemeal process that gathered steam in 2009/10.

---

[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iybmt-iLysU.

The plan was not subject to public consultations or a tender process. The government and municipalities concerned financed it, broke into smaller chunks, often with intentionally deflated budgets below the threshold for tenders, only to bulge during construction, circumventing large-scale planning and consultations. Crucially, the project reflected the ruling party taking over most municipal governments in the country. In Skopje, VMRO-DPMNE secured the office of mayor in 2009, while it already controlled the center of Skopje. With local, city, and national power concentrated in the hands of one party, the unchallenged reconstruction of the city became possible.

In addition to the new nationalist narrative of creating a line of continuity with ancient Macedonia, the project made both the modernist city and the Ottoman *Čaršija*, now primarily inhabited by Albanians, invisible. The new buildings, many of which were constructed along the Vardar River in flood-affected areas, covered up the earlier brutalist architecture built after the devastating earthquake of 1963, an internationally supported master plan that had dominated the skyline. In addition, numerous buildings from the socialist period, from the government headquarters to residential buildings in the center, received new facades inspired by neobaroque or neoclassical styles. Furthermore, new bridges, as well as monuments, from lions adorning the bridges to hundreds of statues, were erected in the center, gradually radiating outward. The most prominent statue would be the 'Warrior on a Horse' in the central square. Evoking Alexander the Great, the 22-meter tall monument dwarfed all the buildings and included a large fountain below that incorporated a light and water show, accompanied by musical medleys. The warrior's shield, the symbol of the ancient Macedonian dynasty, the Vergina Sun (part of the Macedonian flag from 1992 to 1995, when it was dropped due to the interim agreement with Greece) left no doubt as to who the statue was supposed to be. Just across the river, statues of Philip of Macedon and his wife Olympia (one of the few statues of women) were erected, clearly marking a claim to ancient Macedonia. The deliberate provocation was also clearly reflected in how Foreign Minister Antonio Milošoski described the project in 2010: 'This is our way of saying [up yours] to them [Greece].... This project is about asserting Macedonia's identity at a time when it is under threat because of the name issue' (Smith 2011).

A new headquarters for the ruling party, built in marble while many of the other buildings used plasterboard and other cheap materials, and a new 'Museum of the Macedonian Struggle for Statehood and Independence,

Museum of IMRO and Museum of the Victims of the Communist Regime' cemented the new nationalist narrative and the dominance of the government (Bieber 2014). The museum itself was apparently conceived by Gruevski himself during a flight from Brussels to Skopje, as he claims in the museum's official monograph (Trajanovski 2016, 1). Observers have noted the project to be an example of neoliberal nation branding (Graan 2013), but the function of the rising competitive authoritarian regime in North Macedonia went beyond this. First, the new established nationalist narrative marginalized and excluded alternative views, especially those held by the academic community that did not claim a historical line of continuity from ancient Macedonia and continued to underline the Slavic origins of today's Macedonians (Vangeli 2011). Second, the project provided extensive opportunities for graft and corruption. The independent project 'Skopje 2014 under the magnifying glass' documents the costs of the project, which reached around 684 million euros by the end of VMRO-DPMNE's rule, spent on more than 70 monuments and sculptures, 28 buildings, 4 bridges, a triumphal arch and numerous other structures and new facades (Skopje 2014 Uncovered, 2018). Recordings of conversations between Gruevski and government ministers revealed as part of the opposition's revelation of wiretaps documenting abuse of office, known as 'bombs', suggest that the project was micro-managed by Gruevski and that ministers benefited from the building spree (Marusic 2015). In the absence of public tenders, with non-transparent funding, the project epitomized the centralized and secretive nature of the regime.

At the same time, media freedom sharply declined. In 2011, a media group critical of the government was forced to shut their TV station A1 and several newspapers (Brunnwasser 2011). The same year, the German WAZ group sold three of the largest newspapers to a Macedonian investment group. Subsequently, the newspapers openly sided with the government, further reducing media pluralism.

The ruling party furthermore secured its influence through the use of state resources, for example, in employment. This was reflected by the state hiring large numbers of Albanians to fulfill requirements of the OFA for equitable representation, without actually providing those employed with posts. As a result, several thousands (the numbers vary) officially worked in the state administration, but actually had no job and thus received a salary without work. This constituted a source of nepotism, in particular for the Albanian junior partner in the coalition (Andonovski 2018). In addition, the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE has been using

employment in the public administration to pay for political support. With high unemployment, hovering around a quarter of the workforce, and a public sector workforce consisting of more than 27 percent of total employment, jobs became an important source of rewarding party supporters. In a 2010 survey of those who applied for but did not receive a job in the public administration, 75.3 percent indicated that the person ultimately hired got the job due to nepotism or a bribe (UNODC 2011). The hiring of supporters and for securing political support is widespread across the Western Balkans but has been particularly pronounced in North Macedonia. This was confirmed through the work of investigative journalists, as well as in one of the many leaked recordings of leading figures in the regime (Petkovski and Nikolovski 2018). Altogether the ruling party and its leadership around Gruevski took control of the state in what the European Commission would eventually describe state capture (Mitevski 2018).

Opposition to the regime built up only gradually. The first significant protests emerged after a 22-year-old man, Martin Neškovski, was killed by police during a victory rally for the ruling party following the success of the 2011 elections. The early elections were called after opposition protests and a boycott of parliament following the aforementioned crackdown on critical media. While VMRO lost seven seats and around 10 percent of the votes, it remained the largest party and could continue its rule with BDI. Neškovski was killed by plainclothes police officers in unclear circumstances, resulting in small-scale protests against police violence. The wiretaps, or 'bombs', revealed by the opposition in 2015 suggested that leading government figures, including the minister of the interior, sought to cover up the killing and displayed a deeply cynical approach toward the death (Truthmeter 2016). A turning point between government and opposition was 'Black Monday' on Christmas Eve 2012, when the opposition and journalists were evicted from parliament during a budget vote. The expulsion, clearly in violation of parliamentary procedure, pushed the opposition to confront the regime on the streets rather than through the institutions, and also signaled the willingness of the government to hollow out institutions (Gligoroska 2013).

Over the years, there were multiple waves of protest, some directed against the Skopje 2014 project, others against other aspects of government policy. The crises escalated after the opposition revealed the wiretaps suggesting high-level involvement in corruption, abuse of office, and other crimes. Subsequently protests increased, leading to an opposition camp in front of the government building in the summer of 2015, met with a coun-

ter camp at the parliament by supporters of the government, and the color-ful revolution the following year. In response to the crisis, Gruevski accused the opposition of organizing a coup and improved ties with Russia, which became more engaged in North Macedonia, openly criticizing the protest-ers (Stojkovski 2015). As we will explore in the epilogue, the fall of the Gruevski regime in 2017 was the culmination of a series of events over two years, beginning with the revelation of the 'bombs'[6] and ending with the storming of parliament by thugs supporting the government in April 2017.

The semi-authoritarian regime in North Macedonia began after a 16-year period of democratic alternation and the accommodation of Albanian demands. The OFA alienated many Macedonians from EU and NATO integration, accusing the West of favoring Albanians. However, this did not trigger the authoritarian turn. During the early phase of Gruevski's government, there were no clear indicators that under his rule the country would move down an increasingly authoritarian path. The trigger, though not the sole cause, was the Greek veto on NATO membership, allowing the government to move toward a strong nationalist message and enabling it to shift responsibility for the lack of movement toward NATO and the EU on Greece alone. At the same time, the government took no measures to try to reach a compromise with Greece, despite the formal continuation of talks. While originally, the European Commission recommended acces-sion talks, this recommendation weakened as years passed and the authori-tarian drift became more apparent. Yet, it would take until the peak of the crisis for the Commission to describe North Macedonia as a case of 'state capture'. Gruevski's government never formally broke with the stated goal of Euro-Atlantic integration, maintaining its association with the European People's Party (EPP). Thus, the nationalist and uncompromising stance of the government was not framed as anti-European, but rather as 'prevented' or excluded European. This allowed the regime to reconcile a rhetorical commitment to reform and increasing authoritarianism. In parallel, it sought to preserve its image as an economic reformer, even while increas-ing the size of the bloated public sector and spending millions on symbolic infrastructure, while neglecting more important investments. The govern-ment was particularly successful in ticking the boxes of the World Bank survey on the ease of doing business, catapulting North Macedonia into the top ten worldwide. These measures, however, did not result in a sig-

---

[6] Some of the first 'bombs' are available in English at https://interactive.aljazeera.com/ajb/2015/makedonija-bombe/eng/index.html.

nificant increase in foreign investments (Byrne 2017). As the European Stability Initiative argued in 2015, the ranking was creating a 'Macedonian illusion', based on a flawed methodology (ESI 2015), which was able, however, to maintain the government's aura of economic and technocratic expertise.

Thus, North Macedonia was a case of a move toward authoritarianism that rested on an established pattern of strong party patronage and high polarization between the two leading parties, leading to a parliamentary boycott by the opposition and the exclusion of political opponents. With the external trigger, the regime moved toward more authoritarian practices. Only the public disclosure of these patterns, strong opposition, civil society mobilization, and, eventually, external mediation would result in the Gruevski government losing power in 2017, a dynamic this book will return to in the end.

3.4   Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (henceforth Bosnia) has one of the most complex and unwieldy political systems of not just the Western Balkans, but Europe and beyond. This includes a highly diffused power structure, enshrined in the constitution, and a large number of political parties (Bieber 2006). There have been many changing political coalitions, and few members of the three-member state presidency, the equivalent of the president, or the chairperson of the council of ministers, the equivalent of the prime minister, have endured for longer than one term. Thus, no single party has been able to dominate the country, as has been the case elsewhere in the region.

Although this would appear to reflect a high level of pluralism, the fragmentation reflects the considerable dominance of ethno-nationalist parties. With an electorate divided along ethnic lines through territorial and electoral boundaries, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats live largely segmented by territory and are encouraged to vote for different parties in different constituencies. Where cross-ethnic voting takes place, the legitimacy of the vote is easily challenged. Thus, most electoral competition takes place not among the largest parties, but among parties competing for voters from one ethno-national community. This has not precluded pluralism within the three largely homogenous electorates. Serb voters in the Republika Srpska have been able to choose between multiple parties, most prominently the Serb Democratic Party (*Srpska demokratska stranka*, SDS), which dominated Serb political life in Bosnia from its founding in

1990 until the mid-2000s. The originally moderate challenger, dominant since 2006, has been the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, led by Milorad Dodik. Initially, it claimed to be less nationalist and corrupt, as well as willing to cooperate with the country's strong international presence, until 2006, when the party emulated the nationalist platform of the SDS. It has dominated since by copying the nationalist line of SDS, while being less susceptible to be pressured by international actors over war crimes. Among Bosniak voters, the Party for Democratic Action (*Stranka demokratske akcija*, SDA) has dominated since the 1990s, like the SDS among Serb voters. Its combination of religious conservatism and Bosniak nationalism allowed it to prevail among the Bosniak electorate, and most of the time it could draw on support from the Islamic Community. It has been challenged by secular all-Bosnian parties, in particular, the post-communist SDP, which together with other multiethnic parties sought to offer a program for all Bosnian citizens, but drew its electoral support overwhelming from majority Bosniak areas. Among the smallest ethno-nationalist community, HDZ, an offshoot of its Croatian sister party, has been dominant. While more moderate Croat parties emerged, they have not managed to fundamentally challenge the party's dominance. In 2005/2006 a smaller offshoot, HDZ 1990, emerged, which differed on some points but did not diverge on its central assumptions: to protect Croat national interests and argue for a Croat territorial unit within Bosnia.

This system of ethnic parties became entrenched through the war, when parties became warring factions and were able to establish de-facto authoritarian regimes in areas under their control—particularly in regions under SDS and HDZ control. After the Dayton Peace Agreement and the first internationally administered elections in 1996, this monopoly of power was consolidated and legitimized. However, the prevalence of the three nationalist parties was never secure. The SDS was pushed out of office first in 1998 through international intervention and support for more moderate parties, including Milorad Dodik and his SNSD. In 2000, the SDA and HDZ lost considerable support in the Federation, resulting in a more civic coalition led by the SDP.

The main characteristic of the Bosnian political system has been the prevalence of ethno-nationalism, and the contested nature of the state has been the defining feature of its politics, favoring political actors who shift attention to ethnic issues and thus legitimize their rule. Structurally, the system thus had the semblance of pluralism and diversity, while in practice, it was shaped by the hegemonic control of single parties over different

mono-ethnic electorates. This is comparable to Lebanon, which has had a similar scale of political pluralism, particularly striking considering the regional context of authoritarian regimes. However, at the level of confessional groups, the pluralism was lesser, as most candidates and parties sought to establish a dominant position, not over the polity, but over their electorate, defined by confession or ethno-national group. This pattern is institutionally enshrined in the Dayton Peace Accords. This does not mean that the dominance of ethno-nationalist parties is a result of the post-war system: after all, most current ethno-nationalist parties already emerged prior to the war in 1990, but the current constitutional system rewards ethnic parties and creates obstacles for civic parties.

As noted earlier, this does not mean that there was no competition or alternation of power. In this context, the rise and enduring dominance of Milorad Dodik and the SNSD constitute a nested form of competitive authoritarianism. The party emerged from the moderate and multiethnic reformist party at the first elections in Bosnia in 1990. As SDS left the Bosnian institutions in 1991 over disputes whether the country should become independent or align itself with a rump Yugoslavia dominated by Serbia, Milorad Dodik joined the SDS in creating the Republika Srpska. Within this entity, which soon sought secession from Bosnia, his political group was the only and small opposition. In this role, his party formally supported the RS but had no role in the war crimes committed during the war. This put him in a good position after the war. While not enjoying much popular support initially, he was more palatable to international actors, running a Serb party that accepted the peace agreement and was not tainted by the war. Together with Biljana Plavšić, who pragmatically left her old party, SDS, to run against the hardliners in the party, Dodik was catapulted into power through international intervention. While the episode lasted less than two years and the popular support for these pragmatists was limited, it brought Dodik into a privileged position. In opposition from 2000, the SNSD built up structures with external help and gained political space, as the ruling SDS was pressured to concede powers to the Bosnian state due to its deep involvement into war crimes, making the party vulnerable to external pressure, particularly during the rule of interventionist High Representative Paddy Ashdown (2002–2006). Dodik returned to power in 2006, a few months before the fifth parliamentary elections since the war. The SDS had been put under successive sanctions by the High Representative and had lost credibility. Its leader, Dragan Čavić, had sought to reform the party and move it to the center, including

recognizing the war crimes committed in Srebrenica. In this position, the SNSD was able to more effectively resist outside pressure, while external actors favored Dodik. Paradoxically, the nationalist election campaign that confirmed him in office in 2006 was the product of external democracy assistance and advice that had come from American and West European party foundations. Since winning elections in 2006, Dodik has strongly relied on nationalist themes to win subsequent elections. The campaigns relied on rolling back the internationally driven efforts to strengthen the Bosnian state at the expense of the entities, the promise of seeking a referendum on secession, and symbolically reinforcing the Republika Srpska (Toal 2013; Majstorović 2013). In Bosnia's antagonistic political system, he found sparring partners among Bosniak parties and candidates, such as Haris Silajdžić in the early phase of his rule, and in the international presence, which he continuously framed as a threat to the entity.

During his rule, he established tight control over Republika Srpska, including the media, and cultivated close ties to both Serbia and Russia as patrons to legitimize his rule. A central feature of Dodik's rule has been the ability to frame any criticism of him as a threat to the Republika Srpska, relying on conventional nationalist legitimizing strategies. The sometimes heavy-handed intervention by the international community, as well as the refusal of key Bosniak politicians to accept the existence of Republika Srpska, was used by Dodik to highlight the constant threat to the entity. This is compounded by a political system with a complex layering of competences, making it easy for political elites to shift the blame to other levels of decision-making or other actors. Thus, economic hardship; the lack of EU integration; or other social, political, and economic problems can easily be blamed on others. At the same time, the contested nature of the Bosnian state renders it easy to talk about national threats, constitutional amendments, and other large issues that marginalize more banal, yet harder to address everyday concerns. Although his party has dominated the RS government since 2006, it has not been able to govern on its own. At the peak of its popularity in 2006, the SNSD received 43.31 percent of the vote for the RS parliament, or 41 of 83 seats, not enough to govern alone. Subsequently, it has been able to form ruling coalitions with a declining share of the vote, 38 percent in 2014, 32.28 percent in 2014, and 31.87 percent in 2018. Dodik's popularity and the relative weakness of the SDS and other opposition groups and the ability of the SNSD to divide the opposition and include some of the parties in government gave SNSD a dominant position despite lacking a majority.

Of course, Dodik has not been the only political actor in Bosnia who has thrived off polarizing ethno-nationalist discourse. In fact, he was neither the first nor the last in post-war Bosnia. What has been a defining feature of his rule is the degree of authoritarian control he built up together with the ethno-nationalist rhetoric. Neither Bosniak nor Croat politicians have been able to exact a similar level of political control. Some of this is due to the institutional legacy of the RS, which was largely a one-party state during the war and in the first post-war years, dominated by the SDS. While its counterparts among the Bosniak- and Croat-controlled areas sought a similar monopolistic control, they were never as domineering. This was in part due to the more diverse structure of the Federation, which includes Croats and Bosniaks, but also more citizens who identify with Bosnian statehood. Furthermore, the media in the Federation remained more pluralist, particularly in the territories that remained under the control of the Bosnian army during the war, including the largest population centers. Media pluralism and competing parties rendered the absolute dominance of a single party more difficult. Only in some overwhelmingly Croat-populated areas has HDZ been able to keep strong control, especially in the canton of Western Herzegovina, where HDZ has regularly gained over half of the vote. Elsewhere it has been the strongest party, but not unchallenged.

The combination of rigid ethno-national power-sharing structures and authoritarian patterns has created a particularly entrenched system. While there have been multiethnic parties in Bosnia, these have suffered from fragmentation and the difficulty of formulating a coherent program that could appeal to voters across entities and ethnic communities. Social movements have emerged over the years to challenge the prevailing governments, but have often remained short-lived and ephemeral. In 2013, protests in Sarajevo focused on political bickering over the issuing of identity numbers to newborns. A year earlier, protests in Banja Luka were directed against the destruction of a park, and, in February 2014, widespread rallies and demonstrations attacked the corruption and mismanaged privatizations of enterprises, resulting in the torching of government buildings in Tuzla and Sarajevo (Kurtović 2015). In 2018, a new wave of protests in Banja Luka emerged under the banner 'Pravda za Davida', Justice for David, following the death of David Dragičević. His parents have challenged the official account of an accidental death, and the popular support for their case reflects the deep-seated distrust in the entity (and state) authorities. The issue resonated across entity lines, as the death of

Dženan Memić in Sarajevo had raised similar doubts, transforming the slogan into 'Justice for David and Dženan' (Milojević, Erjavec 2018).

The ethno-nationalist political set-up of Bosnia has thus structurally favored authoritarian control, as party pluralism is often not genuinely competitive, with ethno-nationalist parties not seeking to gain the vote of each other's electorates. In addition, the relative rigidity of the system disenfranchises voters who reject ethnic labels. As ethnicity-based representation and co-decision-making are deeply entrenched in the constitutional system, majorities are easily challenged by key veto players. Although the overrepresentation of particular ethnic groups or veto rights are neither undemocratic per se nor necessarily undermine decision-making, the elaborate power-sharing mechanism in Bosnia creates de-facto ethnic veto players who structurally undermine the democratic process. In addition, the contested nature of the state, with multiple competing and exclusive visions of how the Bosnian state ought to be structured—few parties do not have a draft constitution or idea for how the country should be organized in their drawers—facilitates high levels of polarization and contestation over the fundamental nature of the state.

3.5   Kosovo

In indices of democracy, Kosovo has consistently trailed the rest of the region. However, this assessment is largely due to the strong international presence, not democratically accountable for most of the postwar period, and less due to domestic authoritarianism. Despite this, many of the patterns found in the other countries of the Western Balkans can also be identified in Kosovo. Initially, Kosovo and Bosnia shared a strong interventionist role by external actors. While this contributed to the transition from war to peace in both countries, it also created reliance on external intervention and an international boogeyman who could easily be blamed or mobilized against by nationalist and authoritarian actors. While Bosnia is characterized by ethno-nationalist separation into three political spheres, in Kosovo, the main challenge has been the contestation of the state by Serbia and the rigid separation between the overwhelming Albanian majority and the small Serb minority in territorially defined regions, particularly in the north of the country.

The dominant party in Kosovo's politics over the past decade has been the Democratic Party of Kosovo (*Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*, PDK), competing (and sometimes cooperating) with the second largest party, the

Democratic League of *Kosovo* (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK). While the PDK emerged from the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*, UÇK) and thus represents, at least initially, a more rural electorate, the LDK was the hegemonic party during the 1990s that organized the peaceful parallel state structures in Kosovo, representing the more urban population of Kosovo. Both parties sprang from movements that better resembled broad national movements than political parties competing in a conventional political system.

The PDK replaced the LDK as the largest party in 2007, with 34.3 percent of the vote and 37 (of 120) seats in parliament. At first, it ruled with the LDK, later switching to the Alliance for a New Kosovo (*Aleanca Kosova e Re*, AKR), the party of the controversial businessmen Behgjet Pacolli. In 2014, other parties sought to exclude the PDK from power, but eventually, a coalition between the PDK and LDK took office once more. This coalition fell apart less than three years later, resulting in early elections in 2017. The new elections were contested by a coalition of two erstwhile opponents, the PDK and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (*Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës*, AAK), running together in the PAN coalition. As both parties had emerged from the Kosovo Liberation Army, their coalition was also described as the 'war faction', whereas the LDK formed a pre-election coalition with the AKR. Once more the PDK prevailed as the largest party, now governing with the AAK, the AKR, which had broken away from its coalition partners, and, as in previous governments, parties representing Serbs and other minorities. Nothing better demonstrates the difficulty of bringing the different parties together than the fact that the government could boast 22 ministers and 68 deputy ministers, a record for Kosovo and the region. Of course, the size of government is not a reflection of real need, but rather of the spoils that needed to be distributed (Elbasani 2018, 152).

Thus, the dominant party was never able to rule alone. Only during the first two elections did the LDK gain more than 40 percent of the vote, reflecting the popularity of its long-time leader Ibrahim Rugova. During the first postwar years, the LDK was the preferred partner of external actors. The peaceful resistance the party established during the 1990s was a better fit than the parties that emerged from UÇK, primarily as the UÇK had raced with the internationals in taking control of the country at the close of the war. The subsequently dominant PDK never gained more than around a third of votes, forcing it to form coalition governments. As the main party that emerged from the UÇK, it chose to align itself closely with external actors, in particular, the US. Besides the

larger goal of securing independence for Kosovo, the party also sought to prevent any investigation of possible war crimes committed by its members. This resulted in a co-dependency with external actors: the party became responsive to external pressure due to the heavy-handed international presence in Kosovo and the crimes committed during the war, not unlike the ethno-nationalist parties in Bosnia. While Serbian forces doubtlessly committed more and greater war crimes than the UÇK, the withdrawal of these forces and most of the political leaders responsible at the end of the war meant that these were not under the direct control of international administrators, unlike the political and military leaders of the UÇK.

Overall, the control exercised by political parties over the state and its institution is strong. Even if no single party has been able to dominate alone, the 'partocracy' has resulted in state capture, as party control is primarily focused on the control of resources and employment. Thus, while the PDK and its leader Hashim Thaçi display similarities with other dominant parties in the region, it is the overall party control, extending beyond a single party, that characterizes state capture in the country (Coelho 2018; Hajrullahu and Palushi 2018).

With the strong formal and informal presence of international actors, authoritarian patterns are closely intertwined with external powers. Most of the formal tools of external intervention in Kosovo's political system came to a close with the end of supervised independence and the closing of the International Civilian Office in late 2012. In mid-2018, the EU's rule of law mission in Kosovo (EULEX) also concluded its executive mandate. Today, the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), once the all-powerful administrator, maintains only a shadow existence, as the original UN Security Council Resolution establishing UNMIK has not been replaced, but it lacks any executive role. Thus, over the 20 years since the end of the war, Kosovo has become steadily less reliant on formal international organizations. However, this does not mean that international intervention has ceased altogether, and the contested nature of Kosovo's sovereignty has given external actors greater leverage. In particular, relations between Kosovo and the US have been close, reflected not only in the streets named after Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush but also in the strong role of the American ambassador.

The crisis over electing a new president in 2011 highlights the US Embassy's influence. Following inconclusive elections in December 2010, the dominant PDK required several coalition partners and thus included

the AKR, a small party established by Behgjet Pacolli, who made his fortune mostly through building projects in Russia. As part of the coalition agreement, Pacolli was supposed to be elected president. However, due to his low popularity, even among the ruling coalition, he failed at first to gain the necessary votes. Only after an apparent intervention by the US ambassador by cell phone and text messages from the visitors' stand in parliament—caught on camera by Kosovo journalists—could Pacolli narrowly achieve the necessary majority. Only a month later, the vote was annulled by the Constitutional Court over these irregularities, forcing Pacolli to resign. In response, the US ambassador gathered the coalition leaders at the embassy and reportedly presented them with an envelope containing the proposed candidate for president and asked them to agree on the candidate, yet unknown to the party leaders. Atifete Jahjaga was a completely unknown candidate to most observers and politicians alike. She was a senior police officer, having risen through the ranks after the war to become deputy director of the Kosovo Police. In this role, she had trained in the US, but she had no political background, and her views or positions were unknown when she was elected president in April 2011. The agreement also stipulated that, after her term, the president would be directly elected (Capussela 2015, 175–176). This did not happen: her successor, Hashim Thaçi, was elected by parliament in 2016. While the US ambassador might have averted a political crisis through his intervention, the manner in which he interfered in the presidential election highlighted the influence of external actors in Kosovo, even if informal, and also demonstrated how power relations are structured around maintaining close ties with the US.

These ties between the international community and the postwar elite have become more fractured in recent years. However, the fissures emerged less due to authoritarianism and corruption than over disagreements about how to deal with the past. While the EU and the US advocated the establishment of a specialist chamber to investigate war crimes, including those allegedly committed by the UÇK, the Kosovo parliament has attempted to disrupt its work, including a late-night effort in November 2017 to abolish the chamber, which was ultimately unsuccessful. Furthermore, external intervention has lost much of its earlier legitimacy. This was, in part, due to the decreased strategic engagement of the EU and the US, especially since Donald Trump took over the presidency in the latter. In addition, EULEX, the EU's rule of law mission, mostly failed, as it delivered little for such a substantial investment (Elbasani 2018, 152).

Thus, Kosovo's particular pattern of competitive authoritarianism has been based on an unconditional and uncontested Western foreign policy orientation, the lack of a clear parliamentary majority, and a low level of full institutional control. While the PDK has displayed many features shared by competitive authoritarian parties elsewhere, it has also been able to incorporate moderate and inclusive figures in government, while taking control of institutions in the post-independence period (Tadić and Elbasani 2018).

The close relationship between international actors and autocratic leadership has given rise to the most important anti-system party in the region, the Movement for Self-Determination (*Lëvizja Vetëvendosje*, LVV). This party has used populist themes to emerge as the largest opposition party in Kosovo, combining a critical position toward the international community, rejection of the dialogue with Serbia, and other nationalist policies—including unification with Albania—with an anti-corruption line (Yabanci 2015). It is this challenge to the elite, paired with the international presence and key regional policy priorities, which have reinforced their symbiotic relationship, especially that between the PDK and external actors, as they share the desire to keep *Vetëvendosje* from power. In addition, the party's use of extra-institutional tools, including mass protests and the disruption of institutions, such as the frequent use of tear gas in parliament to disrupt sessions (including the sessions to elect Hashim Thaçi as president and to ratify the border agreement with Montenegro), made the party a pariah for international actors in Kosovo.

During the nine years of UN administration and subsequently in the post-independence constitution, Kosovo's institutions offered some of the most advanced mechanisms for minority inclusion in Europe. In particular, the Serb community has been granted extensive minority rights as well as political representation far greater than that which can be found in other countries of the region, or for that matter in the rest of Europe. While the exact size of the Serb community remains an estimate—most Serbs boycotted the only postwar census in 2011, according to which only 1.5 of the population were Serbs. A more realistic estimate would be that approximately 5 percent of the population of Kosovo are Serbs.[7] Serbian is nevertheless a countrywide second language, formally equal in status to Albanian. In terms of political representation, 10 of the 120 seats in the Kosovo parliament have been set aside for Kosovo Serb MPs, and an equal number for smaller minorities. In addition, Serbs may win additional seats

[7] In 2006, an estimate put Serbs at 111,300, 5.3%. Statistical Office of Kosovo 2008.

if Serb parties gain sufficient votes as part of the 100 regularly allocated seats. While this rule has since lapsed, Serbs have generally been overrepresented in Kosovo's institutions. This was an understandable and justifiable effort to convince Kosovo Serbs of their stake in Kosovo's institutions. Furthermore, the reserved seats ensure that, in case of a boycott, Serbs would still be sitting in parliament.

Under the 2001 constitutional framework for Kosovo and the 2008 constitution, Serbs and other minorities had to be represented in government. Thus, including Serb parties in coalition governments was both a requirement and also an easy way to ensure parliamentary majorities, making the minority MPs an important factor in government formation, even if their weight in parliament and government has been limited (Beka 2018). This dynamic has also had an impact on Kosovo's democratic pattern. While in the first parliament the coalition Return (*Povratak*) was the third-largest party and a strong autonomous actor, participating in Kosovo's institutions while also entertaining close ties with Serbia, this has since changed. In 2004, following deadly anti-Serb riots, only a few thousand Serbs participated in the elections. The two Serb groups that gained all 10 seats received only 1783 votes between them. Thus, with an average of fewer than 200 votes per MP, they provided an 'easy' coalition partner that was hardly representative of the community. The boycott was less comprehensive in 2007, but even then, of the six parties and groups representing Serbs, the most popular candidate gained only 281 votes, while Albanian parties' candidates were elected with tens of thousands of votes. After independence, participation has increased, with the three Serb lists in parliament gaining over 21,000 votes in 2010.

This dynamic changed following the Brussels Agreement signed in 2013 between Serbia and Kosovo. The agreement ended Serbia's rejection of Kosovo institutions and provided for Serbs' inclusion into the structures of the Kosovo state. While this eliminated or at least reduced the parallel Serbian structures that had persisted in regions inhabited by Kosovo Serbs in 1999, it also shifted political control and leverage from Prishtina to Belgrade. The Serbian government established the Serb List (*Srpska Lista*, SL) to compete with the homegrown Kosovo parties. It trounced those parties and groups, gaining 38,199 votes and 5.22 percent in 2014, capturing nine seats. Two smaller groups gained one seat each, leaving the previously dominant Independent Liberal Party much diminished, with

just 379 votes. The Serb list subsequently became controlled and dominated by the Serbian government.

In this way, with at least ten seats in the Kosovo parliament, the Serb minority representatives have been an important pillar of Kosovo governments. Between 2004 and 2014, they provided easy majorities for the dominant Albanian parties, as they lacked strategic support from Serbia and often representativeness among the community. Since 2014, control and influence by Serbia have prevailed. This does not mean that the Serb MPs were unable to articulate their community's demands and concerns during the different periods, but it is the case that their influence has been relatively small and they have been instrumentalized by both Kosovo and Serbian governments to bolster their own rule.

How Kosovo Serbs shifted from aligning themselves with strategic partners in the Kosovo governments to aligning themselves with Serbia is best illustrated through the case of Štrpce. This small municipality in the Šar Planina Mountains along the border with North Macedonia includes a large Serb majority, around 6000, with a smaller Albanian community of 1200. Due to the ski resort of Brezovica, it has a better economic basis than most other rural Kosovo communities, and Serbs have retained a greater level of contact with Albanians. The fact that the area is not contiguous with Serbia made domination by the Serbian state less likely and also dampened the hope that the municipality might join/remain with Serbia, unlike some of the northern municipalities such as North Mitrovica. Thus, the mayor of Štrpce and the town authorities were strongly linked to the Independent Liberal Party, cooperating with the Kosovo institutions. However, after the Brussels Agreement, the mayor Bratislav 'Braca' Nikolić made a strategic shift, joining the ruling party of Serbia, SNS. The expansion of the SNS to Kosovo also meant that, for the first time since the end of the Kosovo War, parties from Serbia itself made significant inroads in the country, which they continue to regard as a region of Serbia. It was not only Nikolić who joined the SNS: more than 3000(!) inhabitants joined the party with him. Thus, more than half of the town's population collectively joined the ruling party of Serbia and switched from the SLS. In an interview for the Serbian daily, *Politika*, Nikolić justified his switch and that of his town's inhabitants by claiming that 'for us it was not decisive that the progressives are in power. We were attracted by the serious politics of the president of the Serbian government and leader of the SNS Aleksandar Vučić' (Spalović 2015). There is no doubt that 3000 small town inhabitants' collective membership in first one ruling party and then

another, each in a different country, was both a survival strategy and an effort to increase the resources available for a small peripheral town. It also highlights how power among Kosovo Serbs shifted in the aftermath of the Brussels Agreement.

The Brussels Agreement and the broader dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo have overshadowed domestic democracy in Kosovo (and Serbia). As the declaration of independence in 2008 neither settled the contested statehood with Serbia, nor resulted in full international recognition, such as UN membership, the EU has invested considerable effort in promoting a dialogue between the two countries that should lead to a normalization of relations and pave the way for Kosovo and Serbia to join the EU. The focus of facilitating the normalization of relations between the two countries has resulted in the downplaying of democratic deficits in both countries and reinforcing authoritarian tendencies (Radeljić 2019). This became particularly visible in the summer and fall of 2018, when Presidents Hashim Thaçi and Aleksandar Vučić endorsed the idea of border changes as part of a final settlement between the two countries. Such 'border corrections', as they were often euphemistically described, received endorsements from the US, the EU, and key member states (though not Germany), stating that a consensual agreement would be accepted, even if it were to include border changes. These endorsements not only neglected the top-down character of how the proposal was made: they also ignored the fact that neither president had a mandate or broad political support for such a radical step. While in Serbia, Vučić has little opposition, Thaçi has been widely unpopular, and border changes enjoy little support, including from his own coalition. The dialogue and, with it, the recent idea of border changes have reinforced autocratic structures and have been used strategically by leaders both in Kosovo and in Serbia to secure their external legitimacy (Gordy 2018; BiEPAG 2018).

In Kosovo, local political elites have developed a symbiotic relationship with external actors, which has facilitated authoritarian patterns and closely tied them to the leverage of the US and the EU. The origins of the party system, based on limited ideological differentiation but a high level of polarization over the origins (and legitimacy) of catch-all 'national liberation movements', has also contributed to authoritarian patterns. Since Kosovo's independence, the PDK has been the dominant party, becoming an entrenched party with authoritarian features. Yet, as it has lacked a substantial majority, state capture has been tempered by weak coalition governments.

3.6   ALBANIA

In the Western Balkans, Albania has always been an odd fit. It was not affected by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars, nor by a high level of conflict over identity and statehood, and it has been quite distinct from the post-Yugoslav space. More by accident than by design, the country was caught up in the Western Balkans due to challenges of democratic transformation in the 1990s. In this regard, it shared in the experience of semi-authoritarian regimes, as explored in the previous chapter. The government of Sali Berisha, which had turned increasingly authoritarian by 1996, broke down in the wake of the collapse of pyramid schemes in 1997. This brought about not only a breakdown of the regime but also a state failure, with most state institutions crumbling (including the army) and international intervention being required to restore order and enable new elections.

The period after 1997/1998 was characterized by both a second democratization and a state reconstruction that only gradually resulted in an uncontested political system. Unlike most other countries of the Western Balkans, Albania experienced a surprisingly stable two-party system, with power regularly alternating between the two dominant parties, the Democratic Party of Albania (*Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë*, PDSh) and the Socialist Party of Albania (*Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë*, PSSh). Power first switched in 1992 to the PDSh, back to the PSSh in 1997, returning to the PDSh in 2005 and back once more to the PSSh in 2013. While regular alternations of power between two established parties might suggest a stable, consolidated democratic system, the reality has been characterized by a high level of polarization and low levels of the legitimacy of these changes of power—or by these not taking place. The legitimacy of election results is frequently contested by the losers, ushering in protracted periods of boycotts. Such a polarized political system, based on a limited political consensus, has favored periods of episodic authoritarianism. Despite this polarization, the parties have cooperated in asserting their duopoly over the state, both in freezing other parties out of the system and in ensuring strong party control over the state. Thus, Deimel and Primatarova noted that, after constitutional amendments in 2008, '[b]linded by the alleged consensual spirit, the international community helped consolidate stabilocracy in Albania, which provides stability externally but domestically oscillates between democracy and autocratic tendencies' (Deimel and Primatarova 2012, 19).

When the PDSh returned to power in 2005 under the leadership of Sali Berisha, who had become increasingly autocratic in the 1990s, many observers worried about a renewed period of authoritarianism. These fears were initially disproved, as he appeared to have undergone a democratic transformation, as Ion Iliescu had done in Romania between his earlier presidential mandates in the 1990s and his return to power in 2000. In both cases, the country's transformation and pragmatic considerations explain the different natures of their rule. However, the high level of polarization remained characteristic of Albanian politics and, following hotly contested elections in 2009, the PSSh-led opposition questioned the legitimacy of the government. The tensions were reinforced following protests that turned violent in January 2011. As the opposition demonstrators attacked the government building with stones and Molotov cocktails, the Republican Guard shot into the crowd, killing 3 and wounding 60. A further hundred protesters were arrested (Deimel and Primatarova 2012, 23). As the demonstrations had been triggered by revelations about bribe-taking by Berisha's junior coalition partner, Ilir Meta, the incident revealed both the extent of state capture by ruling parties and the willingness to use force to confront challengers. As a kingmaker between the two parties, Meta and his small party, the Socialist Movement for Integration (*Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim*, LSI), used his position to maximize access to power and resources. He later switched sides to support Rama and would be elected president in 2017, turning against him in 2019 following a renewed episode of confrontation between the dominant parties and mass protests led by the opposition.

The violent suppression of the 2011 protests resulted in the intervention of the EU and the US in an effort to mitigate the conflict between government and opposition, an established pattern of external engagement that focused on stability rather than democratic process. The fact that a peaceful and mostly uncontested transfer of power could occur in 2013 suggests that, despite the violence and high level of polarization, the alternation of power remained possible. Sali Berisha was replaced by Edi Rama, who had not been part of the power struggle during the 1990s and marked a generational change. Nevertheless, despite his unconventional style—he is an artist who had impressed many with his innovative approach to reviving and transforming Tirana—Albanian politics remained shaped by strongmen and high levels of polarization. The US ambassador noted in 2009 that Rama shared a 'distinct authoritarian streak' with Berisha (Abrahams 2015, 294). With a highly personal and domineering style, Rama has often undermined the emergence of an independent public

administration. At the same time, he has been able to incorporate civil society activists and independent personalities in his government.

The paradox of Albanian polarization is its weak ideological foundation (Kajsiu 2016). While ostensibly the PDSh is a center-right party and the PSSh social democratic, the policy differences are hardly detectable. Instead, polarization is based on two interlocking features: first, the Democratic Party's anti-communist legacy and the Socialist Party's role as the successor to the Communist Party of Labor, and second, a North-South divide, with the PDSh faring stronger in the North and the PSSh with more support in the South. However, these patterns do not translate into clear lines of fragmentation. Neither does either party dominate conclusively in the different regions, nor is family history during communism a clear predictor of preference. As each party claimed control over state resources in power, party, and party loyalty, as in the other countries of the Western Balkans, parties secure loyalty and support mostly through patronage, the provision of jobs, and other benefits. Thus, the alternation of power is less a reflection of the competition of alternative political visions and rather that of competing claimants for resources and state control.

3.7   CROATIA

Similarly to Serbia, Croatia experienced a decade of semi-authoritarian rule during the 1990s. The government of HDZ curtailed the freedom of the media, refused to recognize election results, and used its control of state resources to retain power. It promoted a nationalist atmosphere in which the opposition was systematically accused of disloyalty. The regime went through two phases: until the end of the war in 1995, it built its legitimacy on nationalism and the war. Once the defense of the homeland could no longer command electoral support, it moved toward a more sultanistic form of rule, based on a highly personalized rule, with Tuđman relying on a small coterie of loyal supporters. Increasingly visible corruption undermined the government's legitimacy. As the HDZ government was a highly personalized regime, Tuđman's death in 1999, together with the elections that followed, allowed for a relatively smooth transition (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 53–84) to a democratic coalition dominated by the SDP.

HDZ's victory in early elections in 2003 was a crucial test of whether its exclusion from power had been transformative. While in opposition, HDZ had undermined the post-Tuđman coalition through mass rallies

against cooperation with the ICTY, and its transformation into a pro-European mainstream conservative party was by no means apparent at the time. After his electoral victory, the pragmatic HDZ leader Ivo Sanader built his government on the basis of support from a Serb minority party rather than relying on the support of a far-right nationalist party. He also pursued EU integration, allowing him to obtain external support. Thus, at the critical juncture, the party opted for EU integration and reform. However, this decision was not necessarily based on a full commitment to the norms this process embodied.

In 2009, Sanader suddenly resigned as prime minister. The only explanation he gave for his resignation was that '[t]here is always a time in life for a new beginning…. Such a moment has come and now it's time for others to take over' (Ilic 2009). At the time, his decision was perplexing, considering the party's electoral success in 2007 and the progress the country had made toward EU membership. Just six months later, he made a surprise attempt to return to political life, after which he was excluded from the party. Later that year, in December 2010, the mystery of the sudden resignation was resolved: Sanader had fled the country for Austria—he had spent many years in Innsbruck—due to the threat of arrest over corruption allegations. The Austrian police arrested him and swiftly extradited to Croatia. His successor Jadranka Kosor continued his policy of EU integration, but at the same time sought to clean up corruption allegations that increasingly centered on Sanader.

In court, the prosecution revealed that Sanader had amassed a collection of expensive watches, worth more than 150,000 euros, a luxury villa, and a costly art collection. None of these would have been possible to acquire legally considering the modest salaries in public service: he had held posts in Tuđman's cabinets for most of the 1990s and had later taken over the party before becoming prime minister. In November 2012, on the eve of Croatia's accession to the EU, for which he held key responsibility, Sanader was sentenced to ten years in jail. The verdict was later reduced to eight and a half years, and finally overturned for procedural flaws in 2015. While awaiting retrial, he was sentenced to four and a half years in a different case.

In the end, the reforms that Sanader had initiated and his commitment to EU integration created the very institutions that would later help investigate, indict, and sentence him, not least the anti-corruption agency USKOK, named after sixteenth-century corsairs, which gained teeth under the Sanader government (Kuris 2015). Observers have called this the

'Sanader effect': being caught by one's own reforms (Serwer 2017). The message was clearly a warning to other authoritarian rulers in the Western Balkans: engaging in even superficial or managed reforms can increase the risk of being caught later. To a certain degree, the ruling party's ability to investigate a former prime minister and party president revealed the transformative power of joining the EU and demonstrated that prime ministers and presidents had to be careful to avoid the same fate. The paradox was that despite the corruption scandals under Sanader, the period of Prime Ministers Sanader and Kosor was the most liberal period of HDZ rule, and the time when the party came closest to being a traditional European conservative party.

One key reason for Croatia managing the transition toward a more consolidated democracy was the rhetorically pro-European orientation of autocratic HDZ rule during the 1990s (Razsa and Lindstrom 2004). While it made little effort to actually take the country into the EU, it claimed to be bringing Croatia to 'Europe', and thus the party's subsequent shift upon its return to power was more plausible. However, this does not explain why it did not later revert to more authoritarian practices. EU membership, as the cases of Hungary and Poland highlight, is no safeguard to democratic backsliding.

Following parliamentary elections in 2011, Jadranka Kosor lost power to the SDP, led by Zoran Milanović. HDZ would return to power in 2016, after the more conservative Tomislav Karamarko took over the party in 2012. When the party returned to office, EU accession had passed, and with it the restraining effect of conditionality. Furthermore, with Viktor Orbán in Hungary and the Law and Justice led government under the informal control of Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, the dynamics within the EU had begun shifting. It had become possible to challenge the liberal democratic consensus from within the Union, and there was little open resistance among other members. Thus, the return of a conservative illiberal HDZ would have better fit the new pattern of illiberal rule within the EU than the autocratic pattern in the rest of the Western Balkans. As Croatia no longer needed to negotiate EU accession, it was not restricted by the tight jacket of conditionality.

The first brief HDZ-*Most* government in 2016 had some revisionist and authoritarian features, including nationalist revisionist cultural policies promoted by its Minister of Culture, Zlatko Hasanbegović. However, the government ultimately failed, as it was based on a coalition with the more pragmatic coalition *Most*, which did not support the more nationalist policies of HDZ. What is more, within HDZ itself there was no clear leader who could command the support of the different wings to promote a turn

toward semi-authoritarian rule. In the 2015 elections, HDZ gained only 1 percent more than the SDP and had only around a third of its electoral support. Thus, it was not the landslide it needed to either implement nationalist policies or move toward a more illiberal path. The short-lived government was led by the hapless Tihomir Orešković, a technocrat with a business background in Canada and a limited grasp of Croatian politics (and language). As the coalition broke up, Karamarko resigned and the party chose the less conservative Andrej Plenković, a Member of the European Parliament, as their new president. While new elections in 2016 led to a renewal of the same coalition, the more nationalist and conservative members of the previous government, including Hasanbegović and Karamarko, did not join.

Thus, although the road toward a more illiberal democracy was open, it lacked the clear electoral support it enjoyed in some EU member states, such as Hungary or Poland, or elsewhere in the Western Balkans (Raos 2016). Nevertheless, a shift to more illiberal policies did occur in Croatia in the years after 2015. This included a constant campaign by a well-organized veteran group against the Serb minority and liberal critics of the war, as well as a conservative clerical group against same-sex partnerships (Petričušić et al. 2017). In particular, the war of the 1990s has remained a central feature of political debates, used to marginalize and undermine critics of the official narrative (Jović 2017).

This move toward illiberalism was not so much part of government policy but rather emerged from multiple groups and individuals close to HDZ. The party facilitated the success of illiberalism, yet did not benefit electorally from it. Thus, Croatia displays the rise of illiberalism, as in Poland and Hungary, but without a strong party to either push the agenda or build an illiberal democracy. At the same time, it avoided the informal authoritarianism prior to EU membership. That Croatia avoided the informal authoritarianism of its southeastern neighbors and the illiberal authoritarianism of Poland and Hungary is mostly the result of fortuitous timing. During the accession process, the EU's credibility had been mostly intact, and the process did not appear to be never-ending, as with some other Western Balkan countries. Whereas in post-accession Poland and Hungary the party system and particularly the center-left collapsed, paving the way for illiberal hegemony, the Croatian party system remained resilient (although the SDP entered a severe crisis after losing office in 2018/2019). As the HDZ oversaw large parts of the accession process, and the period following the global economic crisis, the party was not an outsider that could harness a popular

backlash, but was deeply embedded in the political system. Thus, it would be simplistic to attribute Croatia's avoidance of an authoritarian or illiberal turn to EU accession, considering the track record within the EU: rather, it is due to a combination of factors. The rise of conservative and illiberal public discourse in recent years highlights that illiberalism and authoritarianism are not automatically linked but occur separately.

3.8   Conclusions

As the aforementioned survey of the individual countries of the Western Balkans highlights, there is no one-size-fits-all description to capture the region's authoritarian trends. This book also does not argue that all countries are equally affected by the authoritarian temptation. There are considerable common factors across the region that have facilitated the return or persistence of authoritarian patterns. First, weak democratic institutions: as institutions only gradually and often marginally gained independence and professionalized in the early 2000s; they remain easy prey for political parties and predatory elites. Second, state weaknesses: most countries, including Albania, experienced weak and often contested state structures, which has facilitated the persistence of authoritarian patterns. Third, external legitimacy has been key to authoritarian tendencies, and as the rigid scrutiny of EU accession is often remote or less effective than during early enlargement rounds, international actors often have facilitated rather than undermined authoritarian tendencies. Fourth, high levels of polarization: most countries are experiencing high levels of political polarization, often without clear ideological differences (or only minimal ones). The lines of polarization are mostly centered on nationalism, ethnicity, and the different party legacies, such as their anti-communism or their role in the 1990s. Authoritarian regimes often strategically use this polarization, transforming political contestation into a zero-sum game. Finally, weak party systems prevail, sometimes with large parties, but without a consolidated and stable membership base or a clear programmatic profile. Parties mostly act as interest groups for narrow elites.

In order to understand the mechanisms of how authoritarian patterns persist and reinforce themselves, in the next chapter, we will more closely explore the mechanisms through which autocratic rule sustains itself in the region, picking up on some of the themes highlighted in the case studies, including the role of external actors, nationalism, and crises.

Bibliography

Abrahams, Fred C. 2015. *Modern Albania. From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*. New York: NYU Press.

Andonovski, Stefan. 2018. The Effects of Post-conflict Constitutional Designs: The 'Ohrid Framework Agreement' and the Macedonian Constitution. *Croatian International Relations Review* 26 (81): 23–50.

Baća, Bojan. 2018. Forging Civic Bonds 'From Below': Montenegrin Activist Youth Between Ethnonational Disidentification and Political Subjectivation. In *Changing Youth Values in Southeast Europe Beyond Ethnicity*, ed. Tamara P. Trošt and Danilo Mandić, 127–147. Abingdon: Routledge.

Beka, Rinor. 2018. Representation and Meaningful Participation of Ethnic Minorities in Parliament. The Case of Serbs in Kosovo after 1989. Unpublished PhD, University of Graz.

Bieber, Florian. 2003. Montenegrin Politics Since the Disintegration of Yugoslavia. In *Montenegro in Transition. Problems of Identity and Statehood*, ed. Florian Bieber, 11–43. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

———. 2006. *Post-war Bosnia: Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

———. 2014. The Museum with the Longest Name, Notes from Syldavia Blog, January 18. https://florianbieber.org/2014/01/18/the-museum-with-the-longest-name/.

———. 2015. The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An EU Success Story? *Review of Central and East European Law* 40 (3/4): 285–319.

———. 2018. Self-Entrapment of the Eternal Leader: Milo Djukanovićs Imminent Return as Montenegrin President, Notes from Syldavia Blog, April 1. https://florianbieber.org/2018/04/01/self-entrapment-of-the-eternal-leader-milo-djukanovic-to-be-return-as-montenegrin-president/.

BiEPAG. 2018. A Fresh Start for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue.

Bilefsky, Dan. 2008. Violence Erupts in Macedonian Elections. New York Times, June 2. https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/02/world/europe/02macedonia.html.

Blazhevski, Bojan. 2016. The Birth of Skopje 2014: Reconstruction of the Parliament Building, Eastblog, April 11. https://eastblog.univie.ac.at/2016/04/11/the-birth-of-skopje-2014-reconstruction-of-the-parliament-building/.

Boduszyński, Mieczyslaw. 2010. *Regime Change in the Yugoslav Successor States: Divergent Paths Toward a New Europe*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Brunnwasser, Matthew. 2011. Concerns Grow About Authoritarianism in Macedonia, New York Times, October 13. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/world/europe/concerns-grow-about-authoritarianism-in-macedonia.html.

Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byrne, Andrew. 2017. What Put Macedonia in World Bank's Top 10 Ranking for Investors, Financial Times, June 6. https://www.ft.com/content/4f786fa0-3b18-11e7-ac89-b01cc67cfeec.

Capussela, Andrea Lorenzo. 2015. *State-Building in Kosovo: Democracy, Corruption and the EU in the Balkans*. London; New York: I.B. Tauris.

Coelho, Joseph. 2018. Seizing the State Under International Administration. The Case Study of State Capture and Corruption in Kosovo. *Southeastern Europe* 42 (1): 107–130.

Deimel, Johanna, and Margarita Primatarova. 2012. Bridge Over Troubled Waters? The Role of the Internationals in Albania. Centre for Liberal Strategies. https://www.cls-sofia.org/uploads/files/Bridge%20Over%20Troubled%20WatersThe%20Role%20of%20the%20Internationals%20in%20Albania.pdf.

Didanović, Vera. 2010. Monstruozni miš i ostale aveti iz sopstvene prošlosti, Vreme, July 15. http://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=940757.

Džankić, Jelena. 2014. Reconstructing the Meaning of Being 'Montenegrin'. *Slavic Review* 73 (2): 347–371.

Ekathimerini. 2006. A Stir Over Name of Skopje's Airport, December 29. http://www.ekathimerini.com/45802/article/ekathimerini/news/a-stir-over-name-of-skopjes-airport.

Elbasani, Arolda. 2018. State-building or State-capture? Institutional Exports, Local Reception and Hybridity of Reforms in Post-war Kosovo. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18 (2): 149–164.

ESI. 2015. Rankings That Fail Bosnia, Macedonia and Doing Business, November 9. https://www.esiweb.org/pdf/DB%20illusion%20Bosnia%20Macedonia%202015%20-%209%20Nov%202015.pdf.

Euractiv. 2008. Macedonia PM in Greek Outburst After EU Summit, June 23. https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/macedonia-pm-in-greek-outburst-after-eu-summit/.

Final Report, Warsaw, 20 August. https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/fyrom/33153?download=true.

Gligoroska, Violeta, ed. 2013. *Black Monday*. Skopje: Foundation Open Society—Macedonia.

Gordy, Eric. 2018. Why Borders Are Not the Problem—or the Solution—for Serbia and Kosovo, Foreign Affairs, Snapshot, October 10. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/kosovo/2018-10-10/why-borders-are-not-problem-or-solution-serbia-and-kosovo.

Graan, Andrew. 2013. Counterfeiting the Nation? Skopje 2014 and the Politics of Nation Branding in Macedonia. *Cultural Anthropology* 28 (1): 161–179.

Günay, Cengiz, and Vedran Dzihic. 2016. Decoding the Authoritarian Code: Exercising 'Legitimate' Power Politics Through the Ruling Parties in Turkey,

Macedonia and Serbia. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 529–549.

Hajrullahu, Arben, and Lirije Palushi. 2018. Illiberal Tendencies and the Aspirations for Euro-Atlantic Integration in Kosovo. In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Hawksley, Humphrey. 2010. Can Montenegro Shake Off Crime Hub Image? BBC News, August 31. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11133635.

Ilic, Igor. 2009. Croatia's PM Sanader Resigns, Quits Politics, Reuters, July 1. https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-40733720090701.

Ilievski, Zoran, and Dane Taleski. 2009. Was the EU's Role in Conflict Management in Macedonia a Success? *Ethnopolitics* 8 (3–4): 355–367.

Janković, Srđan. 2017. Afere nisu prepreka za napredak u državnoj službi, Radio Slobodna Evropa, March 7. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-zoran-jelic-snimak-dri/28355897.html.

Jenne, Erin K., and Florian Bieber. 2014. Situational Nationalism: Nation-building in the Balkans, Subversive Institutions and the Montenegrin Paradox. *Ethnopolitics* 13 (5): 431–460.

Jović, Dejan. 2017. *Rat i mit Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj.* Zagreb: Fraktura.

Kajsiu, Blendi. 2016. Polarization Without Radicalization: Political Radicalism in Albania in a Comparative Perspective. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24 (2): 280–299.

Konitzer, Andrew. 2011. Speaking European: Conditionality, Public Attitudes and Pro-European Party Rhetoric in the Western Balkans. *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (10): 1853–1888.

Kosović, Srđan. 2013. Audio snimak: DPS izborna strategija—jedan zaposlen, četiri glasa, Vijesti, February 15. http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/audio-snimak-dps-izborna-strategija-jedan-zaposlen-cetiri-glasa-114052.

KRIK. 2017. Izveštaj o Savamali: policija nije otkrila ko je rušio, October 2. https://www.krik.rs/izvestaj-o-savamali-policija-nije-otkrila-ko-je-rusio/.

Kubo, Keiichi. 2007. The Issue of Independence and Ethnic Identity in Montenegro. *Southeastern Europe* 31–32: 163–180.

Kuris, Gabriel. 2015. The Little Anti-Corruption Agency That Could. Foreign Policy, August 7. https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/07/the-little-anti-corruption-agency-that-could/.

Kurtović, Larisa. 2015. 'Who Sows Hunger, Reaps Rage': On Protest, Indignation and Redistributive Justice in Post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 15 (4): 639–659.

Majstorović, Danijela. 2013. Comments on Gerard Toal's "'Republika Srpska Will Have a Referendum': The Rhetorical Politics of Milorad Dodik". *Nationalities Papers 41* (1): 209–213.

MANS. 2017. Case Study. New Reasoning, One Employee, Ten Votes. http://www.mans.co.me/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SSNovalogikaZZZCGENG.pdf.

Marović, Jovana. 2018. Montenegro Between Democracy and Authoritarianism. In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Marusic, Sinisa Jakov. 2012. Construction of Controversial Skopje Church Begins, Balkan Insight, May 14. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/construction-of-controversial-skopje-church-begins.

———. 2015. *New Tapes Show Macedonian PM 'Designed' Skopje 2014*, Balkan Insight, June 1. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonian-opposition-exposes-skopje-revamp-project.

Milojević, Milorad, and Dragana Erjavec. 2018. Građani ponovili: Pravda za Davida i Dženana, Radio Slobodna Evrope, October 5. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/banjaluka-sarajevo-david-dzenan/29528063.html.

Mitevski, Mancho. 2018. *Captured State. Understanding the Macedonian Case.* Skopje: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Morrison, Kenneth. 2018. Change, Continuity and Crisis. Montenegro's Political Trajectory (1988–2016). *Südosteuropa* 66 (2): 153–181.

Murić, Darvin. 2018. Podržavaju kažnjavanje, ali bi BS da mijenja zastavu, Vijesti, October 14. http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/podrzavaju-kaznjavanje-ali-bi-bs-da-mijenja-zastavu-1008368.

NSPM. 2018. Istraživanja javnog mnjenja, Beograd – Zima 2017/2018, January 22. http://www.nspm.rs/istrazivanja-javnog-mnjenja/beograd-zima-2017/2018.html?alphabet=l.

Obradović-Wochnik, Jelena, and Alexander Wochnik. 2014. Invalid Ballots and the 'Crisis of Representative Democracy'. Re-inventing Protest at the 2012 Serbian Elections. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 28 (4): 808–835.

OCCRP. 2008. Djukanovic Indicted; Avoids Trial, October 9. https://www.occrp.org/en/daily/153-djukanovic-indicted-avoids-trial.

OSCE/ODIHR. 2008. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Early Parliamentary Elections, 1 June 2008 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

———. 2009. Montenegro. Early Parliamentary Elections, 29 March 2009, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, June 10. https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/montenegro/37521?download=true.

Pavlović, Srđa. 2016. Montenegro's 'Stabilitocracy': The West's Support of Đukanović Is Damaging the Prospects of Democratic Change, LSEE Blog, December 23. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/12/23/montenegros-stabilitocracy-how-the-wests-support-of-dukanovic-is-damaging-the-prospects-of-democratic-change/.

Pešić, Vesna. 2007. State Capture and Widespread Corruption in Serbia, CEPS, Working Document 26. http://aei.pitt.edu/11664/1/1478.pdf.

Petkovski, Ljupcho, and Dimitar Nikolovski. 2018. *Macedonia: Illiberal Democracy or Outright Authoritarianism?* In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Petričušić, Antonija, Mateja Čehulić, and Dario Čepo. 2017. Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures: An Analysis of the Conservative Religious-Political Movement in Croatia. *Politička Misao* 54 (4): 61–84.

Radeljić, Branislav. 2019. Tolerating Semi-authoritarianism? Contextualising the EU's Relationship with Serbia and Kosovo. In *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans*, ed. Jelena Džankić, Soeren Keil, and Marko Kmezić. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Radisavljević, I. 2008. Pomirenje DS i SPS, Blic, October 19. https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/pomirenje-ds-i-sps/g5j0jhs.

Raos, Višeslav. 2016. Transformation of the Croatian Party System in the Process of EU Accession. In *Croatia and the European Union: Changes and Development*, ed. Pero Maldini and Davor Pauković, 159–176. London and New York: Routledge.

Razsa, Maple, and Nicole Lindstrom. 2004. Balkan Is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tudman's Croatia. *East European Politics and Societies* 18 (4): 628–650.

Ristić, Irena. 2018. Serbia—A Regime That Only Seemed Gone. In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Robinson, Matt. 2012. Small-town Don Makes Awkward Ally for Serb Liberals, Reuters, May 18. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-election-palma-idUSBRE84H0KI20120518.

RTV. 2008. Poslanici 'Napred Srbijo' i Nikolić 'izgubili' blanko ostavke na mandat u parlamentu, September 8. http://www.rtv.rs/srlat/politika/poslanici-napred-srbijo-i-nikolic-izgubili-blanko-ostavke-na-mandat-u-parlamentu80267.html.

Serwer, Daniel. 2017. Two Chairs. In Focus, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, October 24. http://www.helsinki.org.rs/indexarchivat152.html.

Shepard, Wade. 2016. A Look at Abu Dhabi's 'Bad Joke': The Belgrade Waterfront Project, Forbes, December 8. https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2016/12/08/inside-abu-dhabis-bad-joke-the-belgrade-waterfront-project/#222599006c12.

Skopje 2014 uncovered. 2018. The Official Database of Buildings, New Facades, Sculptures, Monuments, Fountains and Other Structures Which Are Components of Skopje's Makeover Financed by Public Funds, January 5. http://off.net.mk/links/nabrzinka/34611.

Smith, Helena. 2011. Macedonia Statue: Alexander the Great or a Warrior on a Horse? The Guardian, August 14. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/14/alexander-great-macedonia-warrior-horse.

Spalović, D. 2015. Kako sam učlanio Štrpce u SNS, Politika, September 17. http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/338439/Kako-sam-uclanio-Strpce-u-SNS.

Spoerri, Marlene. 2014. *Engineering Revolution. The Paradox of Democracy Promotion in Serbia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

State Department. 2009. Serbia: Jagodina Mayor Palma Raises Profile on National Stage, US Embassy Belgrade, July 22. Available through WikiLeaks: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BELGRADE719a.html.

Stojiljković, Zoran. 2012. Izborna obećanja i postizborna realnost: javne politike u izbornoj ponudi u Srbiji. *Političke Perspektive* 2 (2): 81–99.

Stojkovski, Ljupcho. 2015. Authoritarian Closeness: Gruevski, Putin and the Macedonian Political Crisis, E-International Relations, July 15. https://www.e-ir.info/2015/07/15/authoritarian-closeness-gruevski-putin-and-the-macedonian-political-crisis/.

Tadić, Katarina, and Arolda Elbasani. 2018. State-building and Patronage Networks: How Political Parties Embezzled the Bureaucracy in Post-war Kosovo. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 18 (2): 185–202.

Toal, Gerard. 2013. 'Republika Srpska Will Have a Referendum': The Rhetorical Politics of Milorad Dodik. *Nationalities Papers* 41 (1): 166–204.

Tomovic, Dusica. 2019. Montenegro Opposition Parties Unite Behind Civic Protest, Balkan Insight, March 30. https://balkaninsight.com/2019/03/30/montenegro-opposition-parties-unite-behind-civic-protests/.

Trajanovski, Naum. 2016. Displaying a Contested Past: The Museum of the Macedonian Struggle and the Shifting Post-Socialist Historical Discourses in Macedonia, Unpublished M.A. thesis, CEU, Budapest.

Traynor, Ian. 2003. Mafia Chief Links Balkan Leader to Tobacco Scam, The Guardian, September 27. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/27/smoking.italy.

Truthmeter. 2016. Wiretapping Scandal Set 29: The Murder of Martin, June 1. http://truthmeter.mk/wiretapping-scandal-set-29-the-murder-of-martin/.

UNODC. 2011. Corruption in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Bribery as Experienced by the Population. https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeasterneurope/corruption/CorruptionreportfYRMacedoniaFINALweb.pdf.

Vangeli, Anastas. 2011. Nation-building Ancient Macedonian Style: The Origins and the Effects of the So-called Antiquization in Macedonia. *Nationalities Papers* 39 (1): 13–32.

Večernje novosti. 2018. U Beogradu na vodi stan za 700.000 €, March 1. http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/ekonomija/aktuelno.239.html:714445-U-Beogradu-na-vodi-stan-za-700000-.

Vijesti. 2018. Đukanović: Briga o državnom identitetu prioritet u predsjedničkom mandatu, April 13. http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/dukanovic-briga-o-drzavnom-identitetu-prioritet-u-predsjednickom-mandatu-984269.

Yabanci, Bilge. 2015. Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics in Kosovo: A Case Study of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje. Contemporary Southeastern Europe *3*(2): 17–43. http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/yabanci.

Mechanisms of Authoritarianism

Abstract This chapter explores the different mechanisms of competitive authoritarianism in the region, including the use of political crisis, nationalism, control over the media, a weak opposition, and civil society and state capture. The chapter further examines the role of external actors in sustaining competitive authoritarian regimes.

Keywords Competitive authoritarianism • Formal democracy • Informal authoritarianism • Politics of uncertainty • Constant state of crisis • Stabilitocracies • Institutions • Civil society

While the previous chapter underscored the varying paths taken by the countries of the Western Balkans, this chapter will explore the different mechanisms of competitive authoritarianism in the region.[1] Autocrats in formally democratic systems are confronted with the challenge of retaining power while maintaining formal democratic structures. Theoretically, they could dispose of democratic rules and establish an outright authoritarian system. However, this would be a high-risk strategy. European integration, and with it, democracy, has been part of a broad social consensus for two decades, and these countries are small and tightly integrated with the European Union (EU). Thus, outright authoritarianism, as some

---

[1] This chapter draws on mechanisms first developed in Bieber 2018.

89

post-Soviet countries opted for, would entail higher risks than would maintaining most formal features of democracy. As a result, the regimes are particularly confronted with managing the politics of uncertainty, as Andreas Schedler described one of the critical challenges for authoritarian regimes (2013). Rather than conceiving authoritarianism and democracy as distinct and mutually exclusive, this book understands the competitive authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans as cases of rulers using authoritarian tools, mostly informally, to subvert formal democratic rules (Levitsky and Way 2010, 27). In this relationship between formal democracy and informal authoritarianism, it would be a false choice to describe the countries as either authoritarian or democratic; instead, one needs to consider the simultaneity of both and the ambiguity the combination creates. This book seeks to focus on the mechanism and ruling strategies of these regimes that have learned to work in such a political environment of ambiguity.

The mechanisms of rule, as outlined in the advice to the Balkan Prince in this book's epilogue, are thus an essential feature in understanding this balancing act. Some of these features are easily recognizable in other authoritarian regimes, such as the politics of crisis and a constant state of exception, the use of informal institutions and state capture, and the role of leadership. Others, including the reliance on external legitimacy through the EU integration process and the use of geopolitical competition, are not unique to the Western Balkans but reflect the specific context that constrains and structures authoritarian patterns. Not all mechanisms identified here can be found across the whole region. As the previous chapter highlights, authoritarian patterns have been most pronounced in Serbia since 2012, North Macedonia during the ten years of the premiership of Nikola Gruevski, Montenegro under the rule of Milo Đukanović for nearly three decades, and in Bosnia in the Republika Srpska under the dominance of Milorad Dodik since 2006. Thus, most examples and illustrations will stem from these cases, while acknowledging that similar patterns can also be found elsewhere, including in Kosovo, Croatia, and Albania.

4.1   THE CONSTANT STATE OF CRISIS

On 9 May 2015, war seemed to return to the Balkans. In the northern Macedonian town of Kumanovo, shooting erupted between security forces, who stormed several houses in the town, and heavily armed Albanian fighters. At the end of the gun battle, eight police officers and

ten gunmen were dead, dozens were injured, and the area affected by the fighting was devastated. There had not been such a serious incident in the country since the end of the short civil war in 2001; in fact, there had been few cases of interethnic violence across the region for a decade. That evening, Prime Minister Gruevski called the police response a 'highly professional, heroic and patriotic action', saving some 8000 lives—the number of victims the fighters were allegedly planning to kill in a series of terrorist attacks (Deutsche Welle 2015).

However, the incident appeared very odd. There had not previously been any Albanian groups seriously challenging the status quo or demanding greater rights. The gunmen were unknown in Kumanovo and were clearly outsiders. Some of the gunmen appear to have been shot at close range after the fighting was over, raising the question of whether they had been executed (Arifi 2018). In a subsequent trial in November 2017, 37 defendants were found guilty by a court in Skopje, which sentenced them to 12–40 years in jail; only four were acquitted (Marusic 2017). Despite the trial, doubts remained about the background to what had really happened. In one of the wiretaps released by the opposition a few days after the incident, the minister of the interior Gordana Jankuloska and the head of Prime Minister Gruevski's cabinet, Martin Protugjer, are supposedly heard contemplating a conflict with Albanians, presumably recorded well ahead of the actual incident in Kumanovo. In it, Protugjer asked, 'Should we have a war?'; to which the minister responds, 'Oh, if it is for us to show who is stronger, we will crush them in one hour… But the job is not to show our muscles now' (MKD 2015).

Just a month before the violence erupted, a former special police commander and opposition politician, Stojanche Angelov, alleged at an opposition rally that the government had paid off criminals and mercenaries to incite interethnic violence in Kumanovo (Stanković 2015). The opposition, the Albanian community, and observers all noted their doubts about the official version of the incident at the time. These doubts are also reflected in statements by intelligence agents (Arifi 2018) and international monitors. A detailed investigation into the events of 9 May shed some serious doubt on the idea that the shoot-out was what the government claimed it to be: a police action against a terrorist group. At the very least, it suggested that there was some murky background.

What is more, the shoot-out coincided with the height of the wiretap crisis. After months of revealing tapes implicating high-ranked government officials in serious abuses, the opposition had called for a massive rally against

the government to be held on 17 May. On the evening of the violence, Prime Minister Gruevski stated that 'in such moments there is no opposition or government, nor everyday confrontation to interrupt their activities. At least for the duration of such operations, as in such moments, the unity of the state is needed' (Gruevski 2015).

While the full story of the Kumanovo incident might never come to light, the timing, the confrontation itself, and its background have raised serious doubts about the veracity of the government version of events. If the goal was to distract from the government crisis and the opposition's accusations, the incident failed. There was no backlash in interethnic relations, and if anything, it contributed to forging an increasingly cross-ethnic protest movement. When the opposition established a protest camp in front of parliament a few weeks after the violence in Kumanovo, Albanian and Macedonian flags were prominently on display, often tied together.

However, independently of the success or failure of the incident, crises have served autocratic rulers in the Western Balkans to create a continued suspension of normal politics. This kind of 'crisis management' does not mean the conventional understanding of resolving or mitigating crises so much as their creation and subsequent resolution. A number of authors have noted the broader use of security crises by authoritarian regimes, including competitive authoritarian ones (Snyder 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, 191–192), from the Russian apartment bombings in 1999 facilitating Putin's rise to power (Treisman 2011) to the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016 that shifted Erdoğan's rule to a competitive authoritarian regime (Öktem and Akkoyunlu 2016). However, the Western Balkan cases of such security crises are less intense than the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and the subsequent crackdown, better serving the more subtle function of highlighting (to Western actors) the importance of governments in ensuring stability and extending prolonged uncertainty among citizens. This is not to suggest that all the crises are entirely made up or even instigated by governments. Instead, they are instrumentalized, and sometimes made up, to consolidate power.

In the Western Balkans today, wars are no longer a resource readily available to autocrats. As V.P. Gagnon (2004) and Eric Gordy (1999) have convincingly argued, the regimes in Croatia and Serbia used violence during the 1990s as a strategy to both legitimize themselves and to delegitimize and demobilize the opposition. Such strategic use of mass violence was no longer as easily possible in the 2000s. First, the memory of the

1990s is still very fresh and has acted as an important break on support for violence. Second, the use of violence would foreclose options and cost both external legitimacy and domestic support. Third, unlike in the 1990s when the arsenals of the Yugoslav army provided the resources to fight multiple wars, armies in the region today are small in size and partially integrated into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and large stockpiles of weapons have been destroyed in the past two decades.

Instead of instigating large-scale violence, we can instead observe the production of crises. These crises come in four types. One is a crisis that includes a threat against the government and thus constitutes an opportunity to describe the opposition as traitors or identify foreign enemies and securitize domestic politics. The second is focused on interethnic relations and the risk of renewed violence, serving as a distraction from everyday politics and playing to ethno-national discourse. The third is a crisis over bilateral relations with a neighbor and the creation of tensions. All three of these types have both domestic and international uses. Finally, the fourth type of crisis is snap elections, called ahead of their due date. These may not be a crisis as such, but they are an opportunity to suspend everyday government and use campaigning to continue targeting the opposition and utilizing state resources for party purposes.

In the first category, the threats against the government can come as both completely fictional plots, as the rumors of a coup in Serbia in November 2015 (Radovanović 2015), and as a more real yet murky threat, such as the alleged coup attempt in Montenegro in October 2016 (Hopkins 2017; Bechev 2018). The phony Serbian coup began on breakfast television. Dragan J. Vučićević, the editor in chief of the tabloid *Informer*—popular, sensationalist and always ready to attack real and imaginary enemies of the government to which it is close—pleaded to Prime Minister Vučić not to travel to the 16+1 Chinese-Central European summit in Beijing: 'I warn Prime Minister Vučić that he should not go to Beijing, that he doesn't go to China! If he goes to China, there will be a coup in Serbia. People, this is not a joke!' Vučićević continued to warn of an organized crime network and a media mafia that would seek to take over. Of course, neither happened, and Vučić went to China and returned. Nevertheless, talk of a coup was picked up and disseminated by the most popular TV station Pink, which also interviewed government ministers who confirmed the threat of a coup. In this context, the tabloid *Kurir*, which had previously been pro-Vučić but turned against him, alleged that he and his associates pressured a former director to discredit the owner of

Kurir. In response, Vučić voluntarily submitted himself to a lie detector to clear himself of these allegations (Gligorijević 2015). The results were announced at a press conference called by the Minister of the Interior Nebojša Stefanović, with masked special police units in the background, stating, 'It is obvious that these lies about the prime minister are aimed at the destabilization of our country' (Dragojlo 2015). With this performance, the coup was over. Although the whole episode had a farcical side it, it also highlights the importance the regime attributes to the tabloid press, how the coup rumors turned into a demonstration of force by the government, and how they promoted the image of a government under threat.

The Montenegro 'coup attempt' less than a year later was considerably more serious and complex, being one of the murkiest events in recent Balkan politics, involving Russia, nationalist thugs from Serbia, an autocratic regime, and Western intelligence agencies.

Montenegro had been in a political crisis since 2015. At the end of that year, the Democratic Front, which included the most radical opponents of the Đukanović government, including pro-Serbian parties, organized protests against the government, criticizing it for seeking NATO membership and for its corruption. Clashes between protesters and police escalated the confrontation, highlighting the polarization between government and opposition. However, by focusing on NATO membership, using anti-Western rhetoric and forging close ties with Russia, the Democratic Front (*Demokratski front*, DF) lost support among more moderate and reformist critics of the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*, DPS). At the same time, the long-standing coalition between the DPS and its junior partner the Social Democratic Party (SDP) broke down in early 2016.

On election day, 16 October 2016, it become known that the Montenegrin authorities had arrested 20 people, both Serbian and Montenegrin citizens, for planning a coup. During the day, the government partially blocked social media, arguing that these were abused to put pressure on voters and news remained unclear about the plot.

The government and the prosecution accused the plotters of seeking to assassinate Prime Minister Milo Đukanović and helping the opposition to come to power in what amounted to a planned coup. Among those arrested was the former head of the Serbian special police unit, Bratislav Dikić. He was dismissed from the unit in 2016 and formed a minor nation-

alist political party. In 2017, Dikić and 13 other defendants were put on trial, including two leading politicians of the Democratic Front and two Russian officers of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), as it was alleged that the Russian officers had provided funds for the plotters. The case was built mostly on the statements of two witnesses for the prosecution, Aleksandar Sinđelić, who claims to have acted as liaison with the GRU, and Mirko Velimirović, who was apparently tasked with transferring the weapons. While there are serious doubts about the credibility of these witnesses—one with a history of mental illness, the other revoking and restating his claims—a Russian connection appears likely (Bechev 2018; Hopkins 2017). In the aftermath of the alleged plot, the British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* published several articles on the coup that appear to have been informed by British intelligence sources, strongly suggesting Russian involvement (Framer 2017). American sources have similarly pointed to Russian involvement. In addition, the Serbian Prime Minister Vučić, after initially dismissing the coup story, appears to have accepted the accusations, and Serbia deported the two GRU officers after intercepting them with Montenegrin special police uniforms and 20,000 euros in cash (Bechev 2018, 10). The full extent of the case remains unclear, and the information emerging has been contradictory. With dubious witnesses and tenuous connections between the plotters and the opposition, it appears unlikely that the plot involved a coup d'état as the government has alleged. At the same time, clearly, some sort of incident involving Russian intelligence structure was in the planning. Thus, a complete picture of what happened is likely to remain unknown for the foreseeable future.

There had been an earlier case when the Montenegro government had played up a similar incident: on 9 September 2006, the night before the first post-independence elections, Montenegrin police arrested 13 Albanians accused of plotting terrorist attacks in an operation named 'Eagle's Flight' (*orlov let*). Three years later, the 17 accused were sentenced to a total of 51 years (later reduced to 49) for terrorism, but doubts were widespread about the seriousness of the plot, with the president of an Albanian party in coalition with the DPS evoking a popular saying that 'the mountain shook and a mouse was born' (Canka 2008).

Against this background, considering numerous inconsistencies and the fact that the Montenegrin authorities knew of the plot, whatever it was, before the elections as the first suspects were arrested earlier, it seems likely that the alleged coup was at least used by the Montenegrin govern-

ment (Bechev 2018). As an aspiring NATO member, the alleged Russian engagement helped to push through NATO membership in a period of uncertainty, particularly after the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency later that year. Domestically, it discredited the radical anti-Đukanović opposition. Not only did two of its leaders, Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević, face trial, but the opposition could be portrayed as a security threat.

Operation Eagle's Flight in Montenegro and the incident in Kumanovo discussed in the introduction to this section are clear examples of using the alleged threat posed by minorities to create a sense of crisis.

The third type of crisis, involving bilateral issues, includes the 'train incident' in January 2017 and the escalation of tensions between Serbia and Croatia during the peak of the refugee flow in September 2015. Not least the name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia has been used by the Gruevski government to distract from domestic authoritarianism and justify the Skopje 2014 project.

In January 2017, Serbia inaugurated the newly resumed train service from Belgrade to Mitrovica with a train decorated with stickers of icons and Orthodox churches on the inside and, on the outside, the slogan 'Kosovo is Serbia' in 21 different languages, including Serbian and Albanian. Serbia had not sought consent from Kosovo authorities in reinstating the train service, and the decorations served to enhance the provocative gesture. As the train approached Kosovo—the journey time from Belgrade to Kosovo is well over six hours—Kosovo politicians expressed their dismay and opposition to the train entering Kosovo. Vučić eventually stopped the train in the small town of Raška, just a few stops before the border with Kosovo. He accused Kosovo special police forces of seeking to stop the train and blow up the line, whereas Kosovo authorities claimed to have positioned their forces to secure the line to prevent any incidents (BIRN 2017).

In the end, the passengers were taken by bus to Mitrovica, and the train was relegated to a commuter train in Serbia, where it is still circulating with the proud inscriptions slowly peeling off. Instead, the regular train line from Kraljevo in Serbia to Zvečan in Kosovo, which had existed before the incident, continued without controversy. This 'crisis' appealed to the confrontational and nationalist side of the electorate but also allowed Vučić to de-escalate a crisis of his own making. Thus, both creating and solving crises help to reinforce the domestic position by taking a confrontational line with neighboring countries or renegade provinces, while his

ability to de-escalate could highlight to the outside a willingness to ensure stability.

Finally, the fourth type is less a type of crisis than a suspension of normal politics: the use of early elections. During the 12-year rule of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatreshna makedonska revolucionerna organizacija—Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo,* VMRO-DPMNE), not a single parliamentary election was held as originally planned. Instead, citizens were called to vote early in 2008, again in 2011 and 2014, and finally once more in 2016. Only the last elections could be considered legitimate early elections, as those were the result of the Pržino Agreement brokered by the EU between government and opposition in July 2015. Similarly, Serbia held early parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2016, neither of which were necessitated by the ruling coalition losing its majority or any serious dispute within government. In fact, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) and the Socialist Party have been the two largest parties of the ruling coalition since 2012 and have continued to cooperate after each election. Instead, the early elections boosted support for the ruling SNS and gave it a strategic boost, such as when national elections were called together with local elections in 2016. This pattern preceded the current autocratic regimes and was widely used during the 1990s by both Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman to shore up support when their popularity was high.

All these incidents involve multiple and complex layers of events, with different actors opting for escalation. It is often impossible to determine to what degree these incidents are fabricated or merely used opportunistically. They take place amid a media environment that regularly accuses foreign powers, minorities, and opposition parties of seeking the violent overthrow of the status quo, and many media loyal to the governments talk of war on a daily basis.

'Crisis management'—both allowing (or causing) these crises and subsequently de-escalating them—serves the function of supporting the regime's legitimacy domestically and internationally. Domestically, they underline the danger of international and external threats and provide 'extraordinary' circumstances that overshadow more mundane problems. They also serve the classic nationalist purpose of maintaining the threat of the other, be it from foreign powers (a state or other actor) or a minority or opposition party within. Externally, they serve an important role as they highlight an external threat to a government and can thus shore up sup-

port. The alleged coup in Montenegro certainly helped to propel the ratification of NATO accession, as Western media could present the government and the country as an important bulwark against Russian intervention in the Balkans. In addition, conflict resolution can serve to demonstrate state and government capacity for resolving conflicts.

Crisis management thus fulfills an essential function in the nature of competitive authoritarian regimes. Their shadowy circumstances make a clear understanding of what happened in each of these incidents difficult, but one can plainly observe the strategic use of crises by governments. The use of emergencies in this way is not limited to non-democratic governments but is part of a larger pattern of 'emergency politics' (White 2015).

4.2   External Legitimacy and the Dynamics of Stabilitocracies

After more than a year of crisis in North Macedonia following the revelation of the 'bombs'—the wiretaps documenting government abuse—the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party was struggling as it entered early elections in late 2016. The elections were part of a plan agreed under EU auspices to take the country out of its protracted political crisis. As the 'bombs' revealed, the ruling party and its leadership, in particular, had put pressure on judges and media, falsified election results, and did not shy away from illegal means to stay in power. During the campaign, the party had a hard time credibly claiming itself to be a pro-European conservative party. Yet on 27 November 2016, just a few days before election day, Austria's young foreign minister Sebastian Kurz (at the time just 30 years old) stepped on the stage of a VMRO-DPMNE election rally, after being introduced as a supporter of the party program: 'We are happy that Macedonia is on a good path to the European Union, we are happy that for us in Austria, Macedonia is an important partner in many questions… You probably know that the refugee crisis and migration are a special challenge for Austria… without your government, the closing of the Western Balkan Route would not have been possible and we remain grateful… As a representative of the EPP I wish the team all the best, and lots of energy for the electoral campaign.'[2]

Later, he defended his support by saying he attended not as a foreign minister, but as a member of the European People's Party, to which both his conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the VMRO-DPMNE

---

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-vsk6JP-I.

belong (*Salzburger Nachrichten* 2016). While such assistance to sister parties across Europe is not uncommon, it was unusual to provide such vocal and public support for a party that had become so deeply embroiled in severe abuse of office, which was widely acknowledged, including by the European Commission. The line between Kurz as a party official and a foreign minister was also blurred, as he had earlier the same day met Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki to discuss the 'Western Balkan Route' (Wölfl 2016).

Both the meeting and the speech itself offer an insight into the primary motivation for this example of external electoral support. The willingness of the Macedonian government to close the 'Western Balkan Route' was also offered as a justification by Kurz himself when he came under fire back home for the campaign stop: 'It is decisive for us that the Balkan Route remains closed and the current government is a guarantee for this' (*Tiroler Tageszeitung* 2016). At that moment, his support was an important boost for the ruling party (Marusic 2016). The daily *Vest*, which supported the government, came out with the headline 'Leader of the largest European political party gives strong support for VMRO-DPMNE' (Vest 2016).

The campaign boost by the Austrian foreign minister is no exception when it comes to the external support autocratic rule in the Western Balkans has been enjoying. This type of external legitimacy accorded to competitive authoritarian regimes can be termed 'stabilitocracy' (Bieber 2018), as it thrives on the promise of stability, especially toward outsiders, and short-changes democracy and the rule of law for it. This does not suggest that outsiders, whether parties, EU institutions, national ministers or others, want to support autocrats or that they are always fully aware (or want to be aware) of the undemocratic practices of those they support. Instead, there is a complex set of reasons that have enhanced the external negligence of democracy and the rule of law.

Thus, highly visible bilateral ties, represented by state visits, highlight external legitimacy and are important features in election campaigns. For example, Aleksander Vučić visited German Chancellor Angela Merkel shortly prior to the election in April 2017 (Ernst 2017). The visit was given considerable attention in Serbian media, and after his first-round victory, he publicly thanked Merkel for meeting him so close to the elections ('Vučić' 2017). To match these high-profile ties to EU leaders, Vučić (and some other regional leaders) also cultivated their visits to Putin to placate the more pro-Russian electorate.

Of course, this dynamic is by no means specific to the Western Balkans. International diplomacy is generally not particularly sensitive to issues of democracy, and many democratic governments have struck good, pragmatic, or cynical ties with autocrats in the name of *realpolitik*. What makes the external support for autocratic patterns so striking in the Western Balkans is the prospect of EU accession. The region is supposed to be incorporated into the EU, including the presupposed normative transformation and emphasis on the rule of law in the accession process, not relations based on stability at the price of democracy (Vachudova 2014). Considering the Copenhagen Criteria and the EU treaties, which require a member state to be a democracy and have a functioning system of the rule of law, any country seeking to join needs to uphold those institutions and standards, and EU institutions regularly, at least in theory, measure and demand these. What thus merits understanding here is how it became possible for high-ranking officials from the EU and its member states to endorse leaders who blatantly and publicly disregard those norms.

Even during the 1990s, a key feature of competitive authoritarian regimes was their limited international legitimacy. The government of Serbia (and Montenegro) was under UN sanctions between 1992 and 1995 and remained subject to an outer wall of sanctions afterward, strengthened in the context of the Kosovo War in 1998–1999. Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were not subject to sanctions, except for the Yugoslav-wide weapons embargo of 1991–1995. Croatia could build ties with EU members, and the Tuđman government was able to make a more credible case for integration with international organizations than Serbia or the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. However, EU accession was not an option for Croatia, even after the end of the wars in 1995 and the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in 1997. While Tuđman contrasted his own country with the rest of the Balkans, Croatia, unlike Slovenia, was grouped with the other post-Yugoslav countries as not being ready for accession and, accordingly, lacking democratic credentials. During the first post-communist wave of enlargement, Slovakia, under the Mečiar regime, which shared several features with that of Tuđman, was delayed in its EU accession due to its undemocratic rule (Fisher 2006).

In Serbia (and Montenegro), the prospect of European integration was even more remote. Briefly, Milošević came to be accepted as a 'peacemaker' in the Bosnian peace talks and was given preference over the more radical Bosnian Serb leaders by US mediators. Yet, that acceptance was always tentative, and he was seen purely as a provider of stability, not as a

partner in Euro-Atlantic integration. With the indictment of Milošević by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) during the Kosovo War in 1999, he became internationally shunned and isolated. His international isolation was a key factor contributing to his fall in 2000.

Thus during the 1990s, the regimes of the Western Balkans could at best hope for strategic support in promoting stability, but Euro-Atlantic integration was neither on offer nor actively sought by most governments. After 2000, nationalist and autocratic parties were excluded from power and could only return if they reformed or the country risked its integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions. During the 2000s, conditionality focused less on democracy and more on cooperation with ICTY and, in places under international tutelage (Bosnia and Kosovo), cooperation with the international administrators.

Some political parties, such as the Radical Party in Serbia, were kept out in the cold, sidelined by international officials, again less for their lack of commitment to democracy than for their rejection of the postwar order and their virulent nationalism. The underlying assumption of external actors was that democratic, pro-European, and anti-nationalist politics would go hand in hand. Thus, a political party committed to EU integration would automatically be democratic. If this were the case, the second half of the 2000s would have been a breakthrough. By the end of the decade, hardly a single relevant party in the Western Balkans opposed EU integration. The most formidable opponent, the SRS, split, and most of its MPs joined the new pro-European Serbian Progressive Party (Konitzer 2011). In North Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo, all parties aspired to join the EU. Even the radical Self-Determination Movement *Lëvizja Vetëvendosje* in Kosovo sought the country to join the EU, while rejecting the heavy-handed international presence. In Montenegro, some of the smaller Serb nationalist groups were indeed not fully committed to the EU, but their influence was small and their opposition to the EU not central.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the chasm between formal commitment to EU membership and authoritarianism at home undermined the assumption of the simultaneity of pro-EU positions and democracy. It is this gap that enabled the rise of stabilitocracy.

A second factor that facilitated this dynamic is the rise of geopolitical considerations in EU and international politics. One might return to 2001 and the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September as the beginning of an era in which questions of global terrorism and strate-

gic alliances to fight it began to dominate US foreign policy instead of the more humanitarian and democracy-driven previous decade. For the EU, it was the multiple shocks of the late 2000s that made the Union more inward-looking. The economic and financial crises, the Eurozone crisis, Brexit, and the migration crisis—if one accepts this nomenclature—all shifted the attention of the Union and its member states toward its survival and away from promoting democracy and enlargement, including in the Western Balkans. The EU's more isolationist position focused its attention in the region on issues of more direct national or EU concern, such as closing the 'Western Balkan Route' so emphasized by Austrian foreign minister Sebastian Kurz during his campaign plug in 2016. Next to migration, the threat of foreign fighters for the Islamic State from the Balkans became another key Western focus, casting the region once more as a dangerous source of radicalism, in this case Islamic extremism (Shtuni 2016; Bećirević 2018). The consequence is a focus on law enforcement and border controls rather than democracy and the rule of law, even if the link between radicalization and democratic inclusive governance exists (Robinson and Kelly 2017).

A pro-Western foreign policy, including sanctions against Russia and the early recognition of Kosovo (together with North Macedonia), a strategy chosen by the Montenegrin government, has helped to encourage Western governments to turn a blind eye to severe shortcomings in the rule of law in the country. Similarly, in Serbia, president Vučić has been successful in suggesting that he is continuously torn between Russia and the West and that any too sudden or strong pro-Western line would create a backlash. This has helped him create more wriggle room to clamp down on the media and independent institutions. Thus, the 'return of geopolitics' (Bieber et al. 2017) has undermined a critical eye on democracy and the rule of law.

Finally, what Christophe Hillion has described the 'creeping nationalization of EU enlargement policy' (2010) has contributed to the dynamics of stabilitocracy. While individual member states can be concerned with the EU's overall norms and values in the enlargement process, their motivations for interfering in the process are usually more selfish. The obvious case is those of neighbors that seek to enforce their own agenda on the candidates. Here, the name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia comes to mind, with Greece misusing its leverage against its northern neighbor and holding up the country's EU accession, even once it has fulfilled the formal criteria to begin accession talks. Greece is no exception,

as Italy has used this leverage against Slovenia, Slovenia against Croatia, and Croatia might against Bosnia and Serbia. Further afield, countries such as France and the Netherlands have put the brakes on the EU enlargement process, formally over concerns about whether the countries are ready to join the EU. In practice, the positions are mostly driven by domestic skepticism toward enlargement (Balfour and Stratulat 2015). Thus, in June 2018, when the European Commission strongly supported the beginning of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia—especially crucial in light of the latter's agreement with Greece—most member states, including Greece, strongly supported giving the countries the green light. However, at an informal summit of foreign ministers in Luxembourg France and the Netherlands blocked an agreement for hours, resulting in a compromise that postponed accession talks by a year (Emmott 2018). In June 2019 once more, France (and the German parliament) triggered a delay in accession talks. As EU member states have weighed in more strongly on enlargement, often reflecting broader citizens' concerns over the EU, enlargement has become driven less by clear standards and norms, and more by fleeting national concerns that can once more serve to legitimize authoritarian practices in the Western Balkans.

A critical connection between external actors and domestic politics is the role of European party families. The two most significant, the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES), began building their networks, partners, and associate partners in the Balkans in the 1990s and 2000s. Although the SNS positions itself as a center-right party and the DPS as a center-left party, their programs and policies provide little insight into their position. VMRO-DPMNE in North Macedonia positioned itself as a pro-European center-right party.[3] Over time, however, as a consequence of external blockages in progressing toward EU accession, it has moved away from mainstream positions to endorse ideologies and policies on the far-right (Petkovski 2015). However, all parties aspired to membership in European party families, including VMRO-DPMNE and SNS, as associate members of the EPP, and DSP, as an associate member of the PES. Only Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (*Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata*, SNSD) was expelled from the Socialist International in 2012 for its nationalist policies and built ties with far-right parties.

This inclusion prepared both future partners and allies in the European Parliament. Besides, these networks were long assumed to be tools of socializing Central, East, and Southeast European parties to the West

---

[3] It remains an associate member of the European People's Party (EPP).

European experience of mass parties (Hloušek and Kopecek 2010, 215–226). Within the EU, the case of the Viktor Orbán's Fidesz in Hungary, which maintains membership in the European People's Party, highlights the limits of this norm socialization. The EPP's reliance on votes and the solidarity among kindred spirits trumped the willingness to criticize or even expel the party for its democratic abuses. Similarly, the Western Balkan parties became the tail that wagged the dog of the European party families. Just as Sebastian Kurz supported the Macedonian ruling party in 2016 in the name of the EPP, political parties have sought the protective shelter of European party families.

Montenegro best exemplifies the role of external legitimacy in shoring up competitive authoritarianism. Unlike in Croatia and Serbia, where there was a rupture in the rule of the party that had been dominant in the 1990s, the DPS transitioned from full autocratic rule in the 1990s to pro-Western competitive authoritarian rule. Through the government's support for Western policies, from toppling Milošević to Kosovo independence and NATO membership, and a clear commitment to EU membership, it gained significant external support over the years. First, this meant direct financial assistance and also recognition as a partner, and later a position as frontrunner in the EU accession process. After Croatian EU accession in 2013, Montenegro was the only country with which the EU was in accession talks, followed by Serbia in January 2014. Thus, the country became important in keeping the accession process alive, so shortcomings were easily overlooked for the sake of expediency (Džankić 2014). Furthermore, quick legislative changes promised reforms, whereas implementation has been slow.

Above all, external legitimacy has been expressed in terms of formal advancement in the EU accession process. The technical steps along the way—candidate status, the opening of negotiations, the opening and closing of chapters—bestows legitimacy on governments, as they (appear) to confirm EU approval. Besides the EU, NATO is the most important international organization serving this purpose. With an enlargement process for both NATO and the EU that often focus on the technicalities and less on the larger picture, such as the state of democracy, both organizations have become unwilling accomplices of authoritarian decline.

Importantly, all parties and their leaders began their rise to power as self-proclaimed 'reformers', a position widely accepted and supported externally. Nikola Gruevski, Milo Đukanović, Aleksandar Vučić, and Milorad Dodik: all these men presented themselves as pragmatic politi-

cians who offered a break with the past. They attained power not as radical candidates from the political margins, but with mainstream parties, connected to European party families. All could thus rely on external support, at least initially, which, in turn, reaffirmed their domestic position as reformers.

Finally, external legitimacy not only serves to confirm popular support for EU integration and ties to EU member states. It also enables competitive authoritarian regimes to undermine the opposition. If the government has received formal or de-facto recognition from the EU or its member states, this relativizes criticism of autocratic rule.

4.3   THE RISE OF NEW EXTERNAL ACTORS

While the EU and the US had been the prevalent actors in the Balkans since the early 1990s, other countries have become increasingly engaged. Some, like Russia or Turkey, have a long history of relations with Balkan countries, bringing with them both the advantage of intense ties to some communities and the burden of preconceptions, stereotypes, and worries about competition. Other countries, such as China or the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have few historical connections, making their relationship less burdened but also denying them easy entry points.

The most controversial external actor is Russia. Russia has become another cause for concern for the EU and the US in the Balkans: as the new confrontation has escalated, particularly in the aftermath of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its military intervention and support for warlords in Eastern Ukraine, the US and European policymakers have shifted their attention to reigning in Russian influence across Europe. As Russia has been supporting far-right and populist groups and politicians in Europe and the US, it is not wrong to consider it a revisionist power that supports mostly undemocratic forces. In addition, Russia has been fomenting instability and tensions elsewhere with the goal of disrupting the EU and the US. Thus, pushing back Russian influence could be interpreted as also holding democratic backsliding in check. However, in the Western Balkans, the dynamic has not been as straightforward. The Russian threat can also be used strategically by governments to secure Western support and distract from their own democratic deficits. In this manner, Russian engagement is both a real and a dramatized challenge to democracy, both part of the securitization of international relations (Bechev 2017).

Not only do Russia and other non-Western actors act as supporters for authoritarian governments but also the fear of Russia has helped distract from shortcomings in terms of the rule of law and democracy. The best example here is Montenegro. Russian investors have been crucial to the country's economic development since independence. For example, in 2004, the aluminum smelter in Montenegro KAP was bought by the Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska. The smelter was not just the single largest employer, but also a crucial contributor to the Montenegrin economy, accounting for more than half of all Montenegrin exports and contributing around 15 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) (Bechev 2018). In 2013, however, the company went bankrupt, and the Montenegrin government took it over after it could not pay its electricity bills (it used 44 percent of the total gross electric supply in the country in 2007), leading to a souring of relations between Deripaska and the government he had earlier supported. The importance of Russian investors in tourism development along the coast continued, and Russian tourists made up a total of 25 percent of all tourists in 2016 (CSD 2018). In 2016, 32 percent of all foreign-owned firms in Montenegro had Russian owners, reflecting the benefit of foreign investors easily obtaining residence permits (Tomovic 2016). Overall, there has been a marked decline, however, in Russian investments since the worsening of relations. These ties had some historical resonance but were mostly built on easy access for Russian investors and the ability to bypass rules. They were not based on strong political allegiance with Russia and following the increase in tensions between the West and Russia over the latter's illegal annexation of Crimea and support for the war in Eastern Ukraine, the Montenegrin government unconditionally joined Western sanctions. This coincided with improving prospects for Montenegro to join NATO. NATO membership was highly controversial in Montenegro, with the pro-Serbian opposition rejecting membership in the alliance, both due to a broad anti-Western position and drawing on NATO intervention in 1999 that had also included the bombing of military installations in Montenegro. Amidst the domestic controversy over NATO membership, Russia became visibly engaged with those in opposition to NATO membership. As discussed in the previous section, Russia forged close ties with parts of the opposition and appears to have had some involvement in the alleged plot against the government in 2016 (Bechev 2018). The plot was the breaking point of increasingly strained Montenegrin-Russian relations. While Russian investments had been an important part of the Montenegrin government's economic basis in the

2000s, the country's Euro-Atlantic integration and souring relations between Russia and the West led to this deterioration, which was also used strategically by the government in terms of emphasizing the strategic alliance of the country with the EU (Đukanović 2018).

In Serbia, the Vučić government has taken a more ambiguous approach toward Russia. Russian opposition to Kosovo's independence and its veto power in the UN Security Council has given it particular leverage. In 2011, shortly before entering government, the SNS signed a cooperation agreement with Russia's ruling party United Russia, and Tomislav Nikolić maintained close ties with the country. Furthermore, the government has strong pro-Russian actors, including the Socialist Party, which has strong political and economic links to Russia. For example, its leading member Dušan Bajatović has been director of Srbijagas since 2008 and in this function has forged close ties with Gazprom. On the pre-election list of the SNS, two minor strongly pro-Russian parties also managed to enter government: Nenad Popović's Serb People's Party (*Srpska narodna partija*, SNP) has never run on its own and has limited popular support, but Popović was named minister without portfolio in charge of innovations and technological development in 2017. He has strong business interests with Russia and advocates close ties. The other pro-Russian partner is Aleksandar Vulin, who began his political career in the 1990s as a close associate of Mira Marković, Slobodan Milošević's wife, who had her own pseudo-Marxist party, JUL. He later created the marginal Socialist Movement (*Pokret socijalista*, PS), an anti-globalization group that combines nationalism and pro-Russian views with Che Guevara iconography. Vulin has served in multiple positions in the government, often sporting fantasy black uniforms and representing a strong anti-Western line.

Aleksandar Vučić has also cultivated ties to Vladimir Putin and Russia, including several high-profile visits and nearly comical deference to Putin, including standing in the rain without an umbrella during a military parade in his honor in 2014 and insisting on speaking Russian with him. Yet his relationship is more complicated. Rather than just securing Russian support, he has instead sought to balance close Russian contacts with ties to the West, and Germany in particular. Ironically, Vučić is emulating Tito's policy in socialist Yugoslavia, which sought to position the country between the West and the Soviet Union and thus maximize the benefits.

While Russia has been cooperating with anti-Western forces in the Western Balkans, no 'authoritarian international' has emerged under Russian leadership. Russian intervention in the region has been too eclec-

tic and tactical to build up an alliance, as some parties and groups might use the Russian media coverage on particular issues, such as VMRO-DPMNE, which drew on Russian support to try to stay in power and undermine the referendum on the name change, but did not align themselves fully with Russia. Others, like SNS, might have signed a cooperation agreement with Putin's party, but that has not meant unconditional alignment, an association with the European People's Party or a different European party family offers a far greater prize: protection and legitimacy in the EU.

While Russia has taken sides in terms of political parties and critical issues, often in conflict with the prevailing Western view, China has been more subdued. Chinese investment, like that from the UAE, has long-term and strategic considerations at its core rather than the more short-term tactical gains sought by Russia. As a result, neither supports autocrats in particular. However, the nature of the engagement favors strongmen over transparent processes, such as the purchase of the steel mill in Smederevo by the Chinese Hesteel Group, following the withdrawal of the previous American owners (Surk 2017).

Another high-profile case has been Chinese investments in Montenegro. Here, China has provided a loan to build a highway in Montenegro from the coast to the less developed north. Early feasibility studies found the project not viable, yet once China became involved a new study found the project to be financially workable. The highway was not just funded by a Chinese loan but also constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation, employing Chinese labor. The project was controversial not just for the economic risks and public debt rising to around 70 percent of the GDP in 2018 largely a result of the project, but also the non-transparent choice of investor and unclear process (Barkin and Vasovic 2018; Grgić 2017). In addition to creating a debt trap for countries, such external engagement due to non-transparent funding and support for prestige projects with unclear economic benefits is mutually reinforcing with authoritarian patterns. At the same time, Chinese engagement has a more strategic and long-term dimension than Russian involvement (Vangeli 2020).

Another actor is the UAE, which has become particularly engaged in Serbia, where Aleksandar Vučić cultivated a close economic relationship. First in 2013, Etihad, the national carrier of the UAE, bought 49 percent of JAT, the national airline of Serbia, and integrated it under the name Air Serbia into its expanding (and soon failing) European network with Alitalia and Air Berlin. The investment brought about a long-hoped-for boost to

the airline, but the agreement remained a state secret, thus obscuring the Serbian government's investments and the full terms of the deal. Subsequently, the UAE invested in agricultural land and, most controversially, in the large-scale urban redevelopment project 'Belgrade Waterfront' (Surk 2018), discussed earlier. Here, non-transparent state-driven investments, negotiated between strongmen or the 'sultanism' of the UAE and the authoritarianism in the Western Balkans, are mutually reinforcing (Bartlett and Prelec 2020).

Foreign-funded large-scale projects, from the 'highway to nowhere' in Montenegro to the Belgrade Waterfront, signal a departure from the more modest transition period that was characterized by limited state projects and little large-scale construction. In some cases, as in North Macedonia, these initiatives were funded by the governments themselves (or indirectly through loans), but external actors such as China or the UAE have been important enablers of such initiatives in recent years.

In other ways, external actors have been a model and interlocutor reinforcing authoritarian tendencies, from the burgeoning Serbian-Turkish relationship to Russian support for Milorad Dodik in the Republic Srpska. Autocrats from greater powers offer an attractive model for the small country autocrats of the Balkans to aspire to.

As the case of Montenegro highlights, the engagement of external actors, such as Russia, can also serve to receive uncritical support from the West. Thus, non-Western actors are not just supporters for autocratic tendencies; they are also a convenient scapegoat.

4.4   State Capture and Weak Institutions

Something strange happened in the Serbian Parliament in December 2017. The parliament was about to discuss the government budget. In total, 2300 amendments to the law on the budget and all the other accompanying bills were up for debate. However, many of these did not come from the opposition: at least 300 were submitted by MPs from the ruling coalition (Čekerevac 2017; Latković 2017). These amendments in no way challenged the government proposal, but rather just suggested a few decorative additions. For example, the SNS MP Jelena Žarić Kovačević 17 times proposed to add the following sentence to each of the 17 articles of the budget law: 'Planning, preparing, passing and executing the budget of the Republic of Serbia is conducted by advancing the financial basis of the judicial system in the Republic of Serbia to the maximum degree possible.'

Dozens of other MPs submitted similar amendments in large numbers and then went on to present their amendments in the plenary debate. What seemed like a nonsensical show served a clear purpose. By flooding the debate, limited to a total of ten hours of discussion, with hundreds of meaningless amendments, the opposition had no chance to present their own, substantial amendments and thus publicly criticize the government's budget. Parliament in Serbia, as well as most the other countries in the Western Balkans, has been weak to begin with, with limited resources and no tradition of independence from the executive. However, this example shows how the Serbian parliament has been marginalized as a place of decision-making and debate. Between 2016 and 2018, 70 percent of laws and amendments were passed by urgent procedure without public debate. In parallel most other features of parliamentary oversight have declined to negligible levels (Tepavac 2019). As a consequence, most opposition parties began a boycott of parliament in early 2019.

In its annual report on North Macedonia in 2016, the European Commission used the term 'state capture' for the first time to describe how the institutions in an accession country were being undermined and could not work for the common good, 'affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society' (EC 2016). In early 2018, the European Commission extended the concept's reach to all countries of the Western Balkans in its new regional strategy to note that 'the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration' (EC 2018, 3). This concept describes the control of state resources for illicit purposes by a small elite in control of the state (Fazekas and Tóth 2016), in the case of the countries under discussion in this book, that small elite is the leadership of the ruling parties.

This re-assertion of party control is articulated through the erosion of independent institutions, the penetration of state administration by party members and the use of informal mechanisms to secure control. In the early 2000s, a number of new independent institutions was established, often to comply with EU and Council of Europe requirements. These included ombudspersons and other regulatory and consultative bodies, created with external support. In addition, considerable resources were invested in the reform of the judiciary and strengthening parliaments to ensure a separation of powers so that these institutions could effectively oversee the work of governments. In comparison to the 1990s, this was a significant change. During the 1990s, the judiciary remained subordinated to gov-

ernments and parliaments were underfunded, serving mostly to rubber-stamp executive decisions and making a mockery of democracy through polarizing debates without any discernible substance, usually broadcast live on TV. While these institutions have survived, they have been beset by institutional uncertainty and usually deprived of their independence (Flessenkemper and Kmezić 2017).

In addition to weakening independent institutions, the competitive authoritarian regimes have been using informal patterns to rule, weakening rule-based institutions while keeping formal democratic mechanisms intact. The use of informality is often reflected in the exercise of power bypassing formal, legal mechanisms (Pavlović 2016). Thus, unlike more ideologically based competitive authoritarian regimes in Poland, Hungary, or Turkey, the governments of the Western Balkans have not promoted constitutional change to institutionalize the new power relations. With EU accession as an important legitimizing criterion, the weakness of ideology and an ability to bypass formal decision-making structures, informal power trumps constitutional changes (Djolai and Stratulat 2017). Informality also serves to subvert democratic processes. Elections in the region are tainted by a variety of schemes to influence the outcome through vote-buying and putting pressure on vulnerable voters, especially those employed by the state or receiving state benefits, such as pensioners and citizens on welfare programs (Marović and Cvijić 2017). These dynamics came to light through wiretapping scandals in Montenegro and North Macedonia, which revealed not only the direct pressure being put on the media but also the manipulation of election results and the hiring of party members. Similar dynamics have been documented across the Western Balkans (Cvejić 2016).

An essential tool of control is employment. In countries with high levels of unemployment and often considerable uncertainty in the job sector, the most secure and prestigious employment is in the public sector. Across the Western Balkans, survey data from the Balkan Barometer suggest that citizens want to work for the state. A total of 43 percent of citizens preferred to work in public administration, 33 percent in publicly owned enterprises, and only 15 percent in the private sector. Considering the overwhelming popularity of working in a state-controlled job, the leverage for parties and those who control the state is great. For jobs, most citizens in the Western Balkans consider contacts to be the most important criteria, ahead of a good education or working hard (RCC 2017, 69–71). The appeal of the state as an employer is the stability, relatively good salary

and, often, social prestige it offers. However, it also puts citizens into a relationship of dependency, making them vulnerable to pressure, incentives, and outright blackmail by those who hold power. Mostly these mechanisms are hidden, informal, and hard to quantify. In a rare admission, Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska, threatened his political opponents on the 2018 election campaign trail. In the town of Gacko, he said, 'Whoever is employed in Gacko, don't accidentally vote for Govedarica and the SDS [the opposition]. We will fire you! And I ask you, if you see somebody that votes [for them], call me. I will fire them' (Blic 2018). Party membership is often a condition for employment in the public sector, not just at the level of management, but even down to cleaners and manual labor. Anthropological research in Bosnia suggests that party membership alone is often insufficient, but additional connections, often known as 'veze', are required (Brković 2017; Kurtović 2016). The extent of the hiring of party members is widely known and accepted. Shortly before becoming Serbian prime minister, Ana Brnabić, then minister in charge of public administration, acknowledged the prevalence of employment based on party membership (Blic 2017).

Reports across the region suggest that such practices are widespread. Those working for the state administration are often given quotas of how many votes for the ruling parties they must secure to keep their jobs. These commitments are then checked through different tools that undermine the secrecy of the ballot. One common option is the so-called Bulgarian train, where a party activist gives a filled-out ballot to the voter, who replaces it with the blank ballot in the voting booth and returns the blank one to the party activist. The latter then fills it out and thus continues the 'train'. Otherwise, voters are asked to take pictures of their ballot and send it to party officials or to vote for candidates using a specific symbol that election monitors from the respective party will recognize (Bencun 2016; MANS 2016; Marović and Cvijić 2017).

The coercive link between supporters and ruling parties comes to light, especially during political crises. During the political crisis in North Macedonia, civil servants and employees in publicly owned were forced to take part in in the many counter-protests. During the elections, there was huge mobilization on the part of the local bosses who were calling and checking people if they gave their vote. The 'bombs' later revealed how extensive and well organized these networks were (Al Jazeera 2017, bomb 7).

In addition to the pressuring voters, parties may use money to incentivize people to vote for them. Better-connected party supporters may also

secure job offers in exchange for their support (Marović and Cvijić 2017, 22–27). Finally, as employment is based on party loyalty, not qualification, many state officials are loyal to the ruling party not for their ideological affinity or even direct pressure, but out of concern that a shift of power would jeopardize their job. The dependency of many working for the public administration thus provides for a safe reservoir of support for ruling parties that secure employment for their members or supporters.

By 2015, the SNS claimed to have around half a million members, a dramatic rise in membership since taking over government three years earlier (Blic 2015). These numbers are greater than the number of members in the large German 'peoples' parties', the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats, which in the same year had just below 450,000 members each (Niedermayer 2017). In total, Serbian parties claim a membership of 1.5 million citizens or more than 20 percent of the entire population. These claims may be frivolous, as party membership is based on declarations rather than payment of membership fees, and many citizens never leave parties they joined decades ago. In fact, many hold memberships in multiple parties. High levels of party membership and multiple party membership are both the result of this legacy effect and could also be seen as an insurance policy. When party membership does not indicate ideological orientation, but merely support for jobs, being a member of multiple parties would appear to be a logical choice. In North Macedonia, similar trends have emerged, with VMRO-DPMNE having a membership base of 170,000, or 8.1 percent of the entire population. As the authors of one study point out, this is a number slightly greater than the Communist Party in Macedonian during Yugoslav times (Jovanovska and Božinovska 2017). In Montenegro as well, nearly 10 percent of the population are members of the ruling DPS, dwarfing membership in other parties (Popović 2017). Similarly, the ruling party of the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska SNSD claimed in early 2019 to have 192,707 members, amounting to 15.2 percent of eligible voters in the entity (Puhalo 2019). The link between party membership and employment is also clear to citizens. For example, a 2018 survey of young people in Serbia showed that 92 percent believe that it is easier to get a job through membership in the ruling party. None of those surveyed disagreed (Demostat 2018).

The primary challenge is to determine the dividing line between the clientelism and large-scale corruption that is a feature of many societies, and state capture, which fundamentally distorts the democratic process. The illicit nature of such practices makes such an assessment difficult,

except in cases where their scale emerges through investigations, court cases, and public disclosure. Concerning state capture, the mechanisms of rule are similar to those of the 1990s. The main difference has been the active rollback in recent years from the (modest) advances toward the rule of law made in the early 2000s. Thus, unlike before, the countries continue to have independent institutions, but their ability to act as checks and balances is severely curtailed. At the same time, informal power structures and ruling parties have been able to take control over state institutions.

4.5   Weak Opposition and Civil Society

In October 2016, when the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists in Montenegro was heading for its tenth election victory in a row, it was challenged by no less 16 election lists, many of which included multiple parties. No less than 35 parties competed for votes in a country of less than 650,000 inhabitants: roughly one party per 20,000 inhabitants.

The two main opposition lists were both coalitions. The radical *Democratic Front* includes an array of parties from the *Serb Radical Party*—not to be confused with the *Party of Serb Radicals*—to the *Yugoslav Communist Party* and the *Democratic People's Party*. The more moderate coalition *Key* (*Koalicija ključ*) only included three parties. In addition, there were eight (!) Albanian parties competing (on three lists composed of one, three and four parties, respectively) and eight other parties, plus three appealing to Bosniak and Croat voters.

While arguably many of these are ephemeral parties, no less than nine lists made it into parliament, bringing with them even more parties. The dominance of the ruling DPS has been the key reason for the emergence of dozens of parties which are indistinguishable copies of one another. After every failed effort to break the dominance of Đukanović and his DPS, the opposition parties multiply. The extreme fragmentation helps the ruling party to stay in power, as it not only undermines the credibility of the alternatives but also creates a large pool of potential partners that can be co-opted in a future government.

This phenomenon is not unique to Montenegro, but rather a broader pattern when the main function of parties is less about program and more about access to power. The leadership of a party is central to power, and exclusion from power denies parties their central raison d'être. The best example is the *Democratic Party* in Serbia, which has fragmented or rather

duplicated, into multiple offshoots. Of the 17 parliamentary groups in the Serbian Parliament elected in 2016, 4 are offshoots of the original Democratic Party, which is also still represented: the Democratic Party of Serbia, the Liberal Democratic Party, the New Party, and the Social Democratic Party, not to mention some extra-parliamentary offshoots (Left of Serbia), as well as the People's Party established after the elections by former Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić, and the opposition movement Alliance for Serbia, led by the former Democratic Party mayor of Belgrade, Dragan Đilas.

The fragmentation of the opposition already contributed to its weakness during the Milošević period, when endless coalitions and alliances of the parties failed against the Serbian (later Yugoslav) president. The Democratic Opposition of Serbia (*Demokratska opozicija Srbije*, DOS), which eventually defeated him in 2000, included 18 parties. Of course, many of these parties, just like today, were so-called minivan parties (*kombi stranke*), as observers noted sarcastically that all their members could fit into one.

Today, the party fragmentation is strong among the opposition in Serbia and Montenegro, as discussed earlier. In the other countries of the region, this is less prevalent. In North Macedonia, for example, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija*, SDSM) retained its position as the dominant opposition party. As the successor to the League of Communists, and in power for 12 of the 16 years between 1990 and 2006, it possessed the resources to retain a dominant position. In Albania, the dominance of the two-party system that alternates between the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party is even more pronounced, as smaller parties can only gain a few seats on the list of the large parties and only the 'centrist' Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) has been a kingmaker. The party system in Kosovo lies in between a stable two-party system and a fragmented opposition facing a hegemonic ruling party. Political power has alternated between the Democratic League of Kosovo (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës* LDK) and Democratic Party of Kosovo (*Partia Demokratike e Kosovës*, PDK), and both parties have drawn their legitimacy from the 1990s—the former as the leaders of the parallel state and the peaceful resistance, the latter as the heirs to the armed struggle. Around them, smaller parties have emerged that were able to become indispensable coalition partners. Most importantly, the system has been challenged by *Vetëvendosje*, an unusual party, as discussed in the earlier chapter on Kosovo, for its combination of nationalism, leftist

ideas and a critical view of the international presence in the country. Thus, the opposition has been stronger in Kosovo, yet its main obstacle has been *Vetëvendosje*'s radicalism, resulting in its exclusion by influential international actors, basically blocking it, in ways similar to the Radical Party in Serbia during the 2000s and the pro-Serb opposition in Montenegro. In addition, the nationalism key opposition parties in Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo did not only undermine their potential external support but also pushed centrist and reformist electorate into the arms of the government.

Beyond opposition parties, civil society has struggled to mobilize against the regimes. This is at first surprising, considering that *Otpor!* in Serbia has been a role model for civil movements aiming to oust dictators from Georgia to Egypt, and its activists have become successful consultants for non-violent protests around the world. Others, such as GONG in Croatia and CeSID in Serbia, have been critical monitors, preventing autocrats from fudging the vote. After the second democratic breakthrough around 2000, there have been plenty of social movements seeking to push their countries toward more democracy, against corruption and many of the structural causes of autocratic tendencies this book has discussed. These include protests against the privatization of public spaces and services, such as Pidgin park in Banja Luka, in Belgrade by *Ne (da) vimo Beograd* against the Belgrade Waterfront project, and, in Zagreb, against the construction of a shopping center in the town center. These protests echoed similar protests around the world and in the wider Balkans, from Maribor to Istanbul, in defense of the commons (Brentin and Bieber 2018). Organized movements and protests, such as those in Albania organized by *Mjaft* and *MANS* in Montenegro, had graft and corruption at the center of their complaints. Similarly, the spontaneous mass protests in Bosnia in February 2014 targeted elites and the abuse of office, best exemplified by the so-called *beli hleb*, or white bread, the generous payments for elected officials after the end of their mandate.

These movements scored short-term successes, such as the resignation of many local and cantonal officials in Bosnia in 2014 and a stop to some projects, but they have overall been unable to shift the larger political dynamics, with the exception of the *Šarena revolucija* (colorful revolution) in North Macedonia, to which we will return in the epilogue. Many of the protests explicitly rejected party politics and eschewed more conventional political engagement. This stance, particularly pronounced in Bosnia in 2014, is best understood with reference to the bad reputation of parties and wide-

spread disillusionment with party politics in general. Yet, this has also stymied the transformative power of the protests that were not part of a broad social movement. Conventional civil society, organized and institutionalized, has been important but is widely viewed not as reflecting citizens' concerns, but rather as service providers and employers, with priorities often driven by outsiders who fund them.

Opposition parties have at times co-opted social movements or utilized social movement strategies, as the Democratic Front in Montenegro during its protests in 2015, but this has often alienated parties from social movements. This gap is not new, as parties and *Otpor!* in Serbia viewed each other with considerable suspicion in 2000. With autocratic patterns being more subtle and less brutal than the Milošević era, and with the considerable Western support or at least acquiescence the regimes have been able to secure, the space for social movements has grown more difficult. In addition to opposition party cooptation, regimes have also sought to undermine civil society. This included branding them as enemies, for example, in North Macedonia, the opposition and civil society were labeled by the government and media close to it as *sorosoidi*, as pawns of George Soros, including media images of supposed Soros sponsored individuals during protests circled in red to show the alleged influence of Soros. Gruevski claimed that 'Soros turns Macedonian NGOs into a modern army…. They crush you. They make you a criminal, a thief, traitor, idiot, a monster, whatever they want' (Dunai 2017). This claim is widespread among nationalist and authoritarian governments and parties accords Europe (and beyond). In addition, regimes have co-opted civil society and their leaders into government structures, thus reducing their ability to criticize the regime. Finally, governments have established their own 'civil society' which in North Macedonia, for example, has emerged during the political crisis and played an important role in mobilizing on the streets in counter-protests and giving the semblance of the regime's popular support.

Fragmented opposition and weak civil society are both structurally embedded and encouraged by the competitive authoritarian regimes. This fragmentation has been particularly intense in Montenegro, Bosnia, or Serbia, where the lines of fragmentation and polarization do not follow the line of division between government and opposition, but also fragment the opposition on issues of national identity, be it along ethnic lines as in Bosnia, the political orientation of the state in Montenegro, or the position toward the past and the national interest as in Serbia.

4.6   Strongmen in Charge

In Serbia, and indeed in all countries of the region, the prime minister formally is the most important office in the country. The directly elected president holds few constitutional powers and relies on his (so far only men have held the office in Serbia) symbolic power. On occasions when the president did not hail from the ruling coalition, that is, during cohabitation, as was the case with Milan Milutinović until 2002, as a holdover of the Milošević era, or Boris Tadić during most of his first term in office from 2004 until 2007, the presidents have been weak. Thus, if one were to only look at the constitution, the decision of Aleksandar Vučić to run for the presidency in 2016 would be surprising. He replaced Tomislav Nikolić, his close associate in establishing the SNS in 2009, with whom he had increasingly fallen out since both took office in 2012. There are two reasons that the switch nevertheless made sense. First, the SNS had become highly personalized, and much of the party's support was tied to the popularity of Vučić himself. A survey in 2014 suggests that 80 percent of SNS voters would not support the party if it were not led by Vučić (N1 2014). Even during local elections, Vučić featured prominently in the campaign, even though he was clearly not a candidate for the mayor of Belgrade. It was thus by no means clear that, in a presidential election, the party's strong showing in other elections could be easily transferred to another candidate. Running for president thus avoided a possible defeat and cohabitation that would have weakened the party's grip on power. Second, the president could informally control government, and there was a precedent. After Tadić won his re-election in 2008 and his party formed a coalition government with the SPS, he controlled government as head of the party and named Mirko Cvetković as prime minister, an economic expert without a party base or political ambition. Merging control over the ruling party and the presidency, and with the power to name the prime minister, Tadić had shown a way to informal presidentialism. This path was emulated by Vučić, who perfected and advanced informal presidential control. His choice of prime minister was more ingenious than Tadić's decision to nominate Cvetković. Ana Brnabić had joined the government less than a year earlier as Minister of Public Administration and local self-government. Before being a minister, she had worked as a consultant and as director of a wind park but had no political affiliation or background. She was part of several experts the SNS had included in government since 2012. The inclusion of experts helped overcome the lack of professional cadres in the

party, and also promoted the image of a technocratic government. These included Saša Radulović, who would later break with Vučić and create the short-lived opposition party *Dosta je bilo!* (Enough is Enough!), as well as Kori Udovički, a former minister in a DS-led government and governance expert. While resembling Cvetković's technocratic profile, Brnabić became not only the first female prime minister of Serbia but one of the first openly gay prime minister. Her nomination was thus mostly viewed externally through the lens of her sexual orientation and taken as evidence of the government's progressive nature. Domestically, however, the main image associated with her was that of a small potted plant—the ficus. As a ubiquitous and completely irrelevant feature of many offices, the ficus reference suggested that Brnabić's function would be primarily decorative, but without any real function. Numerous cartoons featured the tree, and the satirical portal *njuz.net* quipped that the new prime minister had ordered army barracks to be decorated with ficus trees to promote her personality cult (njuz.net 2017), a joke Ana Brnabić shared herself on social media. Jokes aside, the nomination of Brnabić signaled to the West a commitment to technocratic reforms and an endorsement of LGBT rights. However, the nomination could also be considered a case of 'pinkwashing', or using gay and lesbian rights to obscure other illiberal or authoritarian patterns. It could be seen as a similar pattern to earlier 'minority washing' in Central and Southeastern Europe, where the inclusion of national minorities in governments signaled a commitment to liberalism and multiethnic policies that were often less than sincere—a pattern continued by the competitive authoritarian regimes discussed in this book. The Vučić-led governments continued to include the longest-serving minister of post-socialist Serbia, Rasim Ljajić, who as a member of the Bosniak minority has been a member of every Yugoslav and later Serbian government since 2000.

As an expert without roots in the party, as a woman in a political environment that is still very patriarchal, and as a lesbian, Brnabić's authority rests on being named and supported by Vučić. This leaves her with little autonomy, and even if she has claimed to be her own woman, the political dependence has shifted authority from the prime minister's office to the presidency. By no means is she the only 'ficus', but autocratic patterns in the Western Balkans—as elsewhere—are based on strong leaders, the importance of loyal and pliant office holders matters more than professional competence or political weight. In North Macedonia, President Gjorge Ivanov, in office from 2009 to 2019, was a loyal and unconditional supporter of the

Gruesvki government. In Montenegro, Milo Đukanović has three times chosen a successor for his job as Prime Minister. Between 2006 and 2008, Željko Šturanović held the office, later, between 2010 and 2012, it was Igor Lukšić, and, since 2016, Duško Marković. While Šturanović represented a loyal and easy-going party official, Lukšić seemed to be part of a more pragmatic and younger generation that might become a successor to Đukanović. Finally, Marković, being older than Đukanović and due to his long-time role in overseeing the intelligence agency, has been rather a loyal and reliable aide than a successor. With all three, power remained with Đukanović, who determined if and when he would return to office. Whether as prime minister, president or 'just' as president of the ruling party, power has always followed him.

The role of strong leaders finds support among citizens, where surveys suggest that support for democracy has declined in the past decade, while the number of those supporting a strong leader has increased. Furthermore, by 2017, a majority across the region believes that strong leaders are compatible with democracy, suggesting that many who support democracy would also support a strong leader within a democratic system (Lavrič and Bieber 2019).

The informal competitive authoritarian regimes that emerged in the Western Balkans over the past decade are based on 'strongmen'. These strongmen are by no means unique, as we can note the centrality of authoritarian male figures in other undemocratic regimes, be they Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, or Viktor Orbán in Hungary. While these might have developed a stronger ideological footing than the regimes in the Western Balkans, the authoritarianism has not emancipated itself from the leading figure of the regime. The same can be said of the regimes in the Western Balkans. Neither Đukanović nor Vučić nor Gruevski offer an ideologically coherent authoritarian system that could persist without these figures. The ideological heterogeneity and the balancing act between domestic authoritarian control and external democratic legitimacy make these highly personalized and informal regimes. As noted earlier, the leaders emerged as 'pragmatic reformers', often with considerable external support. Thus, their ascent to power was not based on the promise of authoritarian rule. It might be tempting to personalize and pathologize 'bad leadership', engaging in an analysis of the personality of the leaders and their background (Hayoz and Džihić 2018). Besides the obvious limitations in such an analysis, it also downplays the structural

features, discussed earlier, that enable the weakening of institutions and the rule of law, as well as generating external and domestic support.

4.7   Nationalism as a Variable Resource

On 9 January 2019, a large parade on the occasion of the Day of Republika Srpska was held in downtown Banja Luka. Special police units, the notorious motorbike gang Night Wolves, closely connected to the Russian leadership, as well a local karate club and the Republika Srpska Automobile Club marched proudly past a tribune with high-ranking officials of the RS, as well as guests from Serbia, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Aleksandar Vulin. The ceremony that included a short speech by the entity's president and the display of a helicopter was an odd mixture of nationalist threat and banality. The streets were lined by a small crowd of onlookers, considerably fewer than the thousands of citizens that had protested just a few days earlier in the long-lasting 'Justice for David' (*Pravda za Davida*) demonstrations, discussed in the previous chapter. The parade was held in defiance of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the international community. In November 2015, the Court had ruled the holiday unconstitutional as it was established in 1992 to coincide with a Serb Orthodox holiday, thus reinforcing the mono-national nature of the entity. In response, the RS organized a referendum on 25 September 2016 with the question 'Do you support that the 9th January is marked and celebrated as the day of Republika Srpska?' With turnout at 55.7 percent, 99.81 of voters answering yes, the government of the RS insisted on keeping the day, irrespective of the ruling. It was also the first referendum held in the country since the war and evoked the earlier threats on a referendum over independence that Dodik had toyed with publically. Dodik interpreted the referendum in the context of the larger nationalist narrative: 'Today we have written one more page of our glorious history, and we said that we are people who fight for freedom… for the rights of the Republic' (Rose 2016). With the referendum, Milorad Dodik openly defied the court decision, and the parades became as displays of defiant nationalism and symbols of rejecting the authority of Bosnian state institutions and the international community.

Dodik took over the RS in 2006, winning the elections by copying the nationalist discourse of the previously dominant Serb Democratic Party (SDS) while evoking his stronger position toward the West, arguing that his party had no debt to any foreign power (Dodik 2006). Over the years,

he has consistently played up the threat to the RS by internationals and Bosniaks and called for a referendum on independence. For example, he argued in a campaign speech in 2016 that 'Bosnia and Herzegovina is the biggest threat for the Republika Srpska' (Dodik 2016, 51). Similarly, Dodik has long been downplaying the war crimes committed by Bosnian Serb forces during the 1992–1995 war: in 2018, he described the genocide of more than 8000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995 as an 'arranged tragedy' and the 'realization of the plans of some Western countries to put collective guilt on the Serbian people' (Deutsche Welle 2018). His nationalist rhetoric, which is ramped up in electoral campaigns, is reminiscent of the discourse of the 1990s in Bosnia, Serbia, or Croatia.

During the 1990s, a close symbiotic relationship emerged between semi-authoritarian regimes and exclusionary ethnic nationalism. Nationalism was a readily available ideology that could deflect from the lack of democratic rule. It was essential in marginalizing political and social alternatives and justified a strong role for the executive and political repression.

While the competitive authoritarian regimes of the 1990s were firmly rooted in nationalism, this ideological choice is less pertinent today. The ruling parties in Croatia and Serbia, as well as in Montenegro (until 1997) and Bosnia, were based on the use of nationalism, even if formally they identified themselves respectively as Christian democrats and socialists. In the Western Balkans today, nationalism is less central to most of the regimes' ideological foundations. In part, EU integration and reform have become largely discursive alternatives, and the number of disputes that can be framed in ethno-nationalist terms has declined. By extension, there is no single regional pattern, but rather two types of regimes in terms of nationalism. One, exemplified by the ethno-nationalist parties in Bosnia, including Milorad Dodik, or by North Macedonia under VMRO-DPMNE, where exclusionary nationalism has become increasingly central to the government policy and trumps the rhetorical commitment to EU integration. In the other type, exemplified by Montenegro under DPS rule and the SNS in Serbia, where nationalism has been an occasional and often pragmatic tool to reinforce regime control, but without a central function.

Conservative and nationalist policies characterized the decade of VMRO-DPMNE rule in North Macedonia. The use of nationalism became particularly pronounced following North Macedonia's failure to join NATO in 2008 when the government embarked on the megalomaniac building project Skopje 2014 (Vangeli 2011). The dispute with Greece and the nationalist

project served the Gruevski government well, as the conflict kept nationalist tensions high, from which the ruling party could benefit. In addition, the 'antiquization campaign' was polarizing and by no means widely accepted, including by the Macedonian population. The narrative of antiquity and Alexander the Great as the central figure in the national history had been marginal in North Macedonia until the 2000s and was promoted by nationalist diaspora groups and pseudo-historians. Through the government campaign, it entered the mainstream and made some inroads. However, a clear majority continued to consider more recent historical events to be more relevant (ISSH 2013). Yet, the emphasis on antiquity gradually found entry into academia and history textbooks. Had the government not lost power in 2017, that shift would have probably continued. If we consider the government effort as an attempt to polarize the population on the issue, the project succeeded.

The case of Montenegro appears different at first. The DPS regime adopted a catch-all platform of such broad scope that it is nearly impossible to pin down ideologically (Džankić and Keil 2017). The ruling party promoted Montenegrin state-building and a distinct Montenegrin national identity. As the party has relied on minority support among its electorate and from minority parties, this nationalism has not been exclusive and focused less on national myth-making than in North Macedonia. At the same time, it had a similar polarizing dimension. The Montenegrin nation-building under Đukanović has sought to emphasize the separateness from the Serb nation, including through the introduction of the Montenegrin language with its own letters. While earlier Montenegrin identity remained ambivalent toward Serb identity, the new Montenegrin nation defined itself in opposition to the Serbian nation (Džankić 2013). This gradually transformed the political split in the ruling party in the late 1990s into a conflict over identity, with the Serb parties excluded from power and the nation-building project. Paradoxically, the Montenegrin nation-building was inclusive toward minorities, yet polarizing toward Montenegrins who (also) identified as Serbs. This dynamic is not surprising, considering the dominance of exclusionary Serb nationalism, particularly prevalent in Montenegro, represented by the Serbian Orthodox Church and bishop Amfilohije, who has dominated the church in Montenegro since 1991.

In Serbia, the SNS has downplayed its roots in the extreme nationalist SRS, as the pragmatic wing that created the SNS in 2008 realized that it could only establish a party that could gain external and internal legitimacy by putting distance between itself and the war-mongering positions

of the Radical Party, instead making a rhetorical commitment to EU integration and (ill-defined) economic and political reform (Stanković, Ćuković and Vuksanović 2016). At the same time, the repositioning of the party has been ambivalent. Aleksandar Vučić made several high-profile gestures to correct his nationalist image, such as a visit to the Srebrenica commemorations in 2015. At the same time, Vučić and the party have never confronted their past. In addition, the party has given space to convicted war criminals, such as the former Yugoslav Army officer Veselin Šljivančanin, responsible for war crimes in Vukovar (YIHR 2017). Similarly, the tabloids and TV channels that have been a loyal backbone of the regime promote a revisionist nationalist narrative that emphasizes Serbian victimhood and shifts the prime responsibility for the wars of the 1990s to others.

Thus, while nationalism has been a less central feature of more recent competitive authoritarian regimes than their precursors in the 1990s, nationalism is part of the legitimizing strategies, moderated or rather modified in the context of the centrality of external legitimacy. This results in EU accession-compatible nationalism that tests the boundaries of historical revisionism, as in Serbia. Only when EU accession becomes impossible or remote, as in North Macedonia and Bosnia, did exclusionary nationalism become more central to the regimes. Throughout, latent nationalism remains potent, as the fundamental narratives of the wars in the 1990s have not been substantially reshaped or, in some cases, returned to the dominant lines of argument that emphasize one's own innocence (and usually victimhood) and shift blame to others. As Dejan Jović (2017) has argued for Croatia, the wars remain ever-present and are frequently evoked to generate political legitimacy. Thus, while nationalism might not be a constitutive force of most regimes, it continues to be an important resource. This does not mean that nationalism automatically generates support, but rather that it triggers different, context-specific dynamics that reinforce polarization, marginalize particular political actors, or divide opponents.

4.8   Re-establishing a Loyal Media

An unusual show opened in July 2016 in Belgrade. In the downtown gallery *Progres*, the information service of the ruling SNS organized an exhibition entitled 'Uncensored lies'. Visitors could see some 2500 articles, title pages, and cartoons from independent media criticizing the government. The message was the title. The content of the articles were lies, the name

suggests, yet the fact that they could be published was evidence that no censorship exists (Djurić 2016). Opening the exhibition in the central Serbian city of Kruševac, Prime Minister Vučić described the content as a reflection of the 'democratic spirit of Serbian society… showing how senseless their accusations of censorship are. Here, I have not seen one serious argument nor one question, I have seen nothing that would criticize what we have done or the economic results, that we reduced the deficit below the Maastricht level, that we have the highest growth and that we prevented state bankruptcy' (B92 2016a). As the well-known journalist Filip Švarm noted, the message was two-fold: 'One was directed towards the European public, to counter how the government is accused of censorship by showing what can be written here…. And the other is directed towards his bots and supporters: don't worry about anything, we are keeping an eye on this' (Petrović 2017). After Belgrade, the exhibition went on tour throughout Serbia.

One of the main pillars of democracy that emerged and thrived after 2000 was the independent media. Private media, sometimes with foreign ownership, as well as efforts to transform government-controlled media into public broadcasters, created fairly vibrant media scenes in the region (Irion and Jušić 2014). Independent media, such as Radio B92 in Serbia or the weekly *Feral Tribune* in Croatia, had already emerged in the region during the 1990s, often with external support and despite pressure from the government.

This level of media independence has considerably decreased over the past decade (Kmezić and Bieber 2015; Vračić and Bino 2017). The transformation of government media into independent public broadcasters stalled across the region, as most state media continue to favor the governments (Marko 2016). Among private media, lack of independence has been reflected in both the ownership structure, as well as the reporting. Critical and independent media during the 1990s either folded due to commercial pressures, as did the *Feral Tribune* in Croatia or became largely uncritical through weak sales and the loss of their initial economic independence (usually precarious and donor-supported), as in the case of the Serbian media group B92. Foreign media engagement in the region was strong in the 2000s, but following the economic crisis and the general decline of print media, most have left the region, including, notably, the German WAZ group, which was once strong in Serbia and North Macedonia. The more reputable external investors have been replaced with opaque ownership structures.

Furthermore, the economic crisis resulted in a reduction in advertising revenues, after which space was often filled by state advertising or advertising by companies under the direct influence or pressure of the state, such as energy and telecom providers. In North Macedonia, three of the largest newspapers, *Utrinski vesnik*, *Dnevnik*, and *Vest,* were owned by a company closely connected to the inner circle of former Prime Minister Gruevski (Cvetkovska, Jordanovska and Apostolov 2014). These papers have been supportive of the VMRO-DPMNE government and hostile to the opposition.

The pattern is not unified across the region. While North Macedonia has suffered from a high level of media concentration and a lack of pluralism, Serbian media are more diverse by virtue of the country's size, and critical media have existed since the 1990s. However, pluralism has declined, especially in media that matter, that is, those with a broad and wide reach, such as tabloids, radio, and television. Serbia has an ample supply of critical weeklies, such as *Vreme*, *NIN*, and *Novi Magazin*, but their reach is limited and, together with the long-established daily *Danas,* they provide evidence of the country's media pluralism without the ability to shape popular opinion or keep an effective check on the government.

Despite being the smallest country and thus having the smallest number of potential media consumers, Montenegro has a very diverse and also critical media scene, with strong opposition to the government. However, just as the chasm between government and opposition is deep, the media landscape too is highly polarized. This reflects the political polarization explored above and contributes to a diminished role for the media in putting an effective check on government, as media are partisan and only accepted within their respective constituency.

Throughout the region, the high number of media outlets has resulted in low quality, great pressure on journalists to produce material, and little space for investigative reporting. This makes media susceptible to government pressure, especially when governments are important advertisers and funds are allocated in a non-transparent manner. The sometimes-opaque ownership structures also give rise to suspicions that media are kept by individuals and groups in the service of particular interest, be they political or economic, rather than for commercial motivations.

Governments benefit from being overrepresented in loyal media, both in terms of coverage and content. Research during the Serbian presidential elections in March 2017 found that Aleksandar Vučić received more attention than all other candidates combined across all the main TV sta-

tions. In the popular private television network Pink, Vučić received more than 88 percent of the coverage for candidates, most of it overwhelmingly positive ('BIRODI' 2017). Between 1 and 20 September 2017, for example, Vučić received nearly four times as much coverage than the next government figure—Ana Brnabić, his prime minister—and more than all government ministers put together. With nearly 90 percent of the coverage being positive, he dominates not just in the public broadcasters RTS but also key allies among the private stations, Pink and Happy (BIRODI 2017).

None of the Balkan autocrats could emulate the media presence of Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez, who had his own talk show *Aló Presidente*, which lasted for hours every Sunday and was used for him to highlight his achievements, to dress down his ministers, and attack the opposition. In the Balkans, the visibility of leaders varies. While some, like Montenegrin President/Prime Minister Đukanović, dominate from behind the scenes, others are omnipresent. Vučić, in particular, has been ever-present in Serbian media since taking office. In particular, he has been a frequent feature in a talk show called *Ćirilica* on the private TV channel Happy TV, a children's channel transformed into a reality TV station with pro-government programming, owned by the controversial tycoon Predrag Ranković Peconi (Anastasijević 2017). Besides ministers and commentators, mostly from the nationalist spectrum, Vučić appeared 13 times between 2014 and early 2018, including a one-on-one interview that lasted for more than three hours.

In North Macedonia, the government closed down an important independent TV station A1 in 2010 and subsequently, both private and public TV broadcasters became increasingly uncritical, eroding an earlier rather vibrant media scene, making the closure of the station a critical turning point (Fokus 2018). The wiretaps later revealed how the government sought to make an example of the owner of A1 and also how leading government figures gave instructions to editors and reporters what and how to broadcast and report (Al Jazeera 2017, bomb 5).

In Montenegro, ahead of the 2016 election, due to EU conditionality, the ruling DPS 'approved' the change of the editorial team at the public broadcaster to ensure greater independence. However, after the party's electoral victory, it re-established control, and the public broadcaster has been, like Serbia been reporting uncritically of the government (SEENPM 2018).

Tabloid media close to the regimes also serve to attack the opposition, NGOs and other media. The most prominent example is the Serbian tabloid *Informer*, which has regularly engaged in hate speech at a level not seen in the region since the 1990s. It regularly attacks other nations, uses ethnically denigrating terminology (i.e. Balija for Bosniaks, Šiptari for Albanians), and accuses the opposition of attacking and undermining the government. The paper regularly warns of imminent war or a coup. In a random week of headlines, *Informer* tells its readers that 'ISIS is preparing the slaughter of Serbs in Kosovo' (11.10.2018), 'Dodik: Republika Srpska is now the strongest', 'NATO promises: We will defend Serbs from the Šiptars [derogotary for Albanians]!' (9.10.2018), 'Janissaries continue to expel Serbs. Milo's blacklist' (8.10.2018), 'Trump will divide Kosovo' (6.10.2018), 'They blackmail Serbia to attack Dodik' (5.10.2018), 'Russians and Chinese send the army to Kosovo' (4.10.2018), 'Putin promises: I will defend Serbia' (3.10.2018). The constant barrage of hate speech and tales of imminent war are not random but have clear targets: minorities and the opposition, as well as neighboring countries. The overall line is openly anti-Western, whereas it portrays Putin and Russia consistently positively. In Serbia, *Informer* is just one of the tabloids and its message is reinforced by *Srpski Telegraf*, *Alo*, and intermittently also *Kurir*, as well as the weekly *Ilustrovana Politika*, which covered the 18th anniversary of the overthrow of Milošević in October 2018 with the headline 'the day the Parliament was robbed' and later produced a cover titled 'The dogs have been let loose', featuring a threatening Rottweiler against the background of independent media covers, arguing that these are just out to attack the government, instigated by foreign powers (Nasković 2018). In 2018 alone, the two leading tabloids *Informer* and *Srpski Telegraf* announced a total of 265 impending wars and conflicts, to be waged against mostly 'Ustaše', denoting fascist Croats, and 'Šiptars' (Živanović 2019).

In addition to attacks against political opponents, the West, and neighbors, the tabloid media in Serbia also contributed to the emergence of a personality cult surrounding Aleksandar Vučić, portraying him as a constant victim of the aforementioned enemies while also displaying superhuman features in overcoming these challenges (Jovanović 2018).

In the 1990s, influential media were still under state control or ownership, so the channel of governmental influence was more direct than today. Today, we can note that competitive authoritarian regimes rely on a com-

bination of loyal media owned by businesses with murky and convoluted ownership structures, economic pressure on independent media, and threats and censorship of journalists and media.[4] Thus, control of the media constitutes a central element of the competitive authoritarian regimes, albeit less heavy-handed than during the 1990s, with critical reporting in many cases available only through online platforms.

4.9   Conclusion

While autocrats may steal each other's ideas or discover specific tactics at the same time, there are no patterns of systematic regional authoritarian cooperation. Connections with Russia have been too weak and diverse to identify a clear pattern. Furthermore, ideological and policy orientations have been too diverse to allow for smooth cooperation. If Montenegro under the DPS has sought NATO and EU membership, Serbia or North Macedonia under Gruevski have been less unconditional in their foreign policy orientation. Similarly, during the refugee crisis, the Serbian government explicitly positioned itself against Hungary's restrictive policies (B92 2016b), while Gruevski has sought close ties with Hungary. Clearly, the autocrats of the Western Balkans have often been more at ease in cooperating with authoritarian regimes elsewhere, even if they seek a rule-based and less personality-driven relationship with the EU. Yet, there is no autocratic international. When it comes to threats to regime stability, one can observe a certain solidarity. Thus, the Serbian government has been distinctly nervous about the Macedonian protests and the new government that emerged after the fall of the VMRO-DPMNE government. Similarly, Russia became engaged in North Macedonia after the protests and criticized the anti-government movements.

There appears to be also some solidarity among autocrats: In November 2018, former Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski escaped prison sentence for abuse of office in his home country by fleeing to Hungary with the assistance of the Hungarian government and its embassy staff. Once in Budapest, he applied for and swiftly received asylum in the country known for its restrictive and repressive policy toward more 'ordinary' asylum seekers (Marusic 2018).

---

[4] These are well documented in Human Rights Watch 2015; Lilyana 2017.

Bibliography

Al Jazeera. 2017. Interactive Overview of Macedonia's Largest Wire-tapping Scandal. https://interactive.aljazeera.com/ajb/2015/makedonija-bombe/eng/index.html.

Anastasijević, Dejan. 2017. Tri grozda protiv dva bela goluba, *Vreme*, March 30. https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1486598.

Arifi, Benjamin. 2018. Smoke and Mirrors: A Macedonian Spy Mystery, *Balkan Insight*, May 9. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/smoke-and-mirrors-a-macedonian-spy-mystery-05-08-2018.

B92. 2016a. Kako izgleda kruševačka izložba 'Necenzurisane laži', September 6. https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=09&dd=06&navcategory=11&navid=1173420.

———. 2016b. Vucic on Migrant Crisis: Egoism Reigns Among EU Countries, March 30. https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2016&mm=03&dd=30&navid=97526.

Balfour, Rosa, and Corina Stratulat, eds. 2015. EU Member States and Enlargement Towards the Balkans, EPC Issue Paper 79, July. http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub5832eubalkans-issuepaper.pdf?docid=1654.

Barkin, Noah, and Aleksandar Vasovic. 2018. Chinese 'Highway to Nowhere' Haunts Montenegro, *Reuters*, July 16. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-europe-montenegro-insi/chinese-highway-to-nowhere-haunts-montenegro-idUSKBN1K60QX.

Bartlett, Will, and Tena Prelec. 2020. UAE: Sultanism Meets Illiberal Democracy. In *The Western Balkans in the World Linkages and Relations with Non-Western Countries*, ed. Florian Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis. London and New York: Routledge.

Bechev, Dimitar. 2017. *Rival Power: Russia in Southeast Europe*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 2018. The 2016 Coup Attempt in Montenegro: Is Russia's Balkans Footprint Expanding? *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, April. https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BechevFinal2018.pdf.

Bećirević, Edina. 2018. Bosnia and Herzegovina Report. *Extremism Research Forum*, British Council, April. http://wb-iisg.com/wp-content/uploads/bp-attachments/5595/erfbihreportBritish-Council.pdf.

Bencun, Siniša. 2016. Manipulacije u izbornom procesu: neutemeljene optužbe ili značajan uticaj na izborni rezultat. In *Izbori u Bosni i Hercegovini: karakteristike i moguća unaprjedjenja*, ed. Siniša Becun, 23–34. Sarajevo: Pod Lupom.

Bieber, Florian. 2018. Patterns of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans. *East European Politics* 34 (3): 337–354.

Bieber, Florian, Dane Taleski, and Nikola Dimitrov. 2017. The Avoidable Return of Geopolitics in the Balkans, *Atlantic Council*, May 10. http://www.atlantic-

council.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-avoidable-return-of-geopolitics-in-the-balkans.

BIRN. 2017. Serbia Accused of Provoking Kosovo Over Train, January 16. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-accused-of-provoking-kosovo-over-train-01-16-2017.

BIRODI. 2017. Nalazi monitoringa o predstavljanju Vlade Srbije u centralnim informativnimemisijama,October18.http://www.birodi.rs/nalazi-monitoringa-o-predstavljanju-vlade-srbije-u-centralnim-informativnim-emisijama.

Blic. 2015. U Srbiji milion i po članova partija, neki imaju i po pet članskih knjižica, January 29. https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/u-srbiji-milion-i-po-clanova-partija-neki-imaju-i-po-pet-clanskih-knjizica/9vwnf1c.

———. 2017. Ministarka Brnabić: Partijsko zapošljavanje i dalje postoji, javnoj upravi potreban ZDRAV RAZUM, February 20. https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/ministarka-brnabic-partijsko-zaposljavanje-i-dalje-postoji-javnoj-upravi-potreban/xb87v6n.

———. 2018. Dodik pretio biračima 'Ko glasa za opoziciju, izbacićemo ga s posla', September 28. https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/dodik-pretio-birac-ima-ko-glasa-za-opoziciju-izbacicemo-ga-s-posla/bpy715b.

Brentin, Dario, and Florian Bieber. 2018. Social Movements and Protests in Southeastern Europe. A New Tragedy of the Commons? In *Social Movements in the Balkans Rebellion and Protest from Maribor to Taksim*, ed. Florian Bieber and Dario Brentin. London: Routledge.

Brković, Čarna. 2017. *Managing Ambiguity*. In *How Clientelism, Citizenship, and Power Shape Personhood in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Book.

Canka, Mustafa. 2008. Presuda za 'Orlov let', *Deutsche Welle*, August 6. https://p.dw.com/p/ErOi.

Čekerevac, M. 2017. Svađa o krađi vremena i rasprava o 2.300 amandmana, Politika, December 11. http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/394282/Svada-o-kradi-vremena-i-rasprava-o-2-300-amandmana.

CSD. 2018. Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Montenegro, Policy Brief 73, January. http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=18126.

Cvejić, Slobodan. 2016. *Informal Power Networks, Political Patronage and Clientelism in Serbia and Kosovo*. Belgrade: SeConS.

Cvetkovska, Saska, Meri Jordanovska, and Vlado Apostolov. 2014. Web Portals in the Off-Shore Clawsof the Macedonian Government-Oriented Tycoons, Southeast European Media Observatory, April 24, http://mediaobservatory.net/radar/web-portals-shore-claws-macedonian-government-oriented-tycoons.

Demostat. 2018. Poverenje mladih u institucije. http://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Poverenje-mladih-u-institucije.pdf.

Deutsche Welle. 2015. Macedonian Police Wipe Out Albanian 'Terrorists', May 10. https://p.dw.com/p/1FNnQ.

———. 2018. Bosnian Serb Leader Milorad Dodik Disputes 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, August 14. https://p.dw.com/p/33AeD.

Djolai, Marika, and Stratulat, Corina. 2017. Clientalism. In *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans: An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion*, eds. Marko Kmezić and Florian Biebe, 73–90. Belgrade: Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group. https://biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-an-anatomy-of-stabilitocracy-and-the-limits-of-eu-democracypromotion/.

Djurić, M. 2016. Necenzurisane laži—izložba SNS o medijskoj sceni, *Al Jazeera*, July 18. http://rs.n1info.com/a178134/Vesti/Vesti/Necenzurisane-lazi-izlozba-SNS.html.

Dodik, Milorad. 2006. Govori Milorada Dodika u kampanji 2006. Banja Luka: SNSD. Retrieved from http://www.snsd.org/images/dokumenti/Publikacije/milorad%20dodik_%20naprijed%20srpska%202006%20govori.pdf.

———. 2016. *Pobjeda Srpska*. Banja Luka: Nezavisne Novine.

Dragojlo, S. 2015. Serbian PM Denies Blackmail, Takes Polygraph Test, *Balkan Insight*, November 30. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/news-11-30-2015.

Đukanović, Milo. 2018. The EU will always have a stable partner in Montenegro, says President Đukanović, Speech at European Parliament, 2 October http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180926IPR14404/the-eu-will-always-have-a-stable-partner-in-montenegro-says-president-dukanovic

Dunai, Marton. 2017. Soros-funded Charities Targeted by Trump-inspired Crackdown in East Europe, *Reuters*, March 23. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-easteurope-soros-idUSKBN16U17Y.

Džankić, Jelena. 2013. Cutting the Mists of the Black Mountain: Cleavages in Montenegro's Divide Over Statehood and Identity. *Nationalities Papers* 41 (3): 412–430.

———. 2014. From Creeping to Sprinting: The Foreign Policy of Montenegro. In *The Foreign Policies of Post-Yugoslav States from Yugoslavia to Europe*, ed. Soeren Keil and Berhard Stahl, 173–198. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Džankić, Jelena, and Soeren Keil. 2017. State-sponsored Populism and the Rise of Populist Governance: The Case of Montenegro. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 19 (4): 403–418.

EC (European Commission). 2016. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report. Brussels. November 9. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf.

———. 2018. A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EUEngagement with the Western Balkans. Strasbourg, February 6. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/betapolitical/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf.

Emmott, Robin. 2018. EU Divided Over Balkan Accession as NATO Says Macedonia Welcome, *Reuters*, June 25. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/eu-divided-over-balkan-accession-as-nato-says-macedonia-welcome-idUSKBN1JL0OL.

Ernst, Andreas. 2017. Vucic, der Machiavellist, [Vučić: the Machiavellian]. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. April 3. https://www.nzz.ch/international/wahl-in-serbien-durchmarsch-von-vucic-ins-praesidentenamt-ld.155050.

Fazekas, Mihály, and István János Tóth. 2016. From Corruption to State Capture. *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (2): 320–334.

Femić, Ratko. 2015. Srbija, država partijskih knjižica, *Al Jazeera Balkan*, January 31. http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/srbija-drzava-partijskih-knjizica.

Fisher, Sharon. 2006. *Political Change in Post-Communist Slovakia and Croatia: From Nationalist to Europeanist.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Flessenkemper, Tobias, and Marko Kmezić. 2017. Checks and Balances. In: *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion*, edited by Marko Kmezić and Florian Bieber.BiEPAG.http://www.biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-an-anatomy-of-stabilitocracy-and-the-limits-of-eu-democracy-promotion/.

Fokus. 2018. Peševski: Koga se zatvori A1, sistemot na VMRO-DPMNE izbega od normal, November 15. https://fokus.mk/peshevski-koga-se-zatvori-a1-sistemot-na-vmro-dpmne-izbega-od-normala/.

Framer, Ben. 2017. Russia Plotted to Overthrow Montenegro's Government by Assassinating Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic Last Year, According to Senior Whitehall Sources, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 19. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/18/russias-deadly-plot-overthrow-montenegros-government-assassinating/.

Gagnon, V.P., Jr. 2004. *The Myth of Ethnic War. Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gligorijević, Jovana. 2015. Moždani udar, *Vreme*, December 3. https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1347160.

Gordy, Eric. 1999. *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Grgić, Mladen. 2017. Chinese Infrastructural Investments in the Balkans: Political Implications of the Highway Project in Montenegro. *Territory, Politics, Governance.* https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2017.1359106.

Gruevski, Nikola. 2015. Izjava, May 10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpcKMEEvQe0.

Hayoz, Nicolas, and Vedran Džihić. 2018. Between Stalled Reforms and Authoritarian Temptations: Revisiting Debates on Democratization, Grey-Zone Regimes and 'Bad Leadership' in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. In *Illiberal and Authoritarian Tendencies in Central, Southeast and Eastern Europe*, ed. Florian Bieber, Magdalena Solska, and Dane Taleski. Bern: Peter Lang.

Hopkins, Valery. 2017. Indictment Tells Murky Montenegrin Coup Tale. *Politico*. May 23. http://www.politico.eu/article/montenegro-nato-milo-dukanovicmurky-coup-plot/.

Hillion, Christophe. 2010. The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy, *Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies* 6, November. http://www.sieps.se/en/publications/2010/the-creeping-nationalisation-of-the-eu-enlargement-policy-20106/.

Hloušek, Vít, and Lubomír Kopecek. 2010. *Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties*. London: Routledge.

Irion, Kristina, and Tarik Jušić. 2014. International Assistance and Media Democratization in the Western Balkans: A Cross-National Comparison, Analitika. Working Papers. April. http://www.analitika.ba/en/publications/international-assistance-and-media-democratization-western-balkans-cross-national.

ISSH. 2013. Skopje 2014 Project and Its Effects on the Perception of Macedonian Identity Among the Citizens of Skopje. http://www.isshs.edu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/1.-sk2014-eng.pdf.

Jovanović, Srdjan M. 2018. "You're Simply the Best": Communicating Power and Victimhood in Support of President Aleksandar Vučić in the Serbian Dailies Alo! and Informer. *Journal of Media Research* 11 (2): 22–42.

Jovanovska, Slobodanka, and Žana P. Božinovska. 2017. Komparativna studija za izbornite nedostatoci vo Makedonija i iskustvata vo regionot. *Centar za građanski monitoring*, November. https://www.mkd.mk/files/article/2017/11/17/studija.pdf.

Jović, Dejan. 2017. *Rat i mit Politika identiteta u suvremenoj Hrvatskoj.* Zagreb: Fraktura.

Kmezić, Marko, and Florian Bieber. 2015. Media Freedom in the Western Balkans. Background Papers, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group. http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/BIEPAG-Media-Freedom-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf.

Konitzer, Andrew. 2011. Speaking European: Conditionality, Public Attitudes and Pro-European Party Rhetoric in the Western Balkans. *Europe-Asia Studies* 63 (10): 1853–1888.

Kurtović, Larisa. 2016. Future Conditional: Precarious Lives, Strange Loyalties, and Ambivalent Subjects of Dayton BiH. In *Negotiating Social Relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, ed. Stef Jansen, Čarna Brković, and Vanja Čelebičić. London: Routledge.

Latković, Nataša. 2017. 'ČAROBNA' REČENICA Poslanici vladajuće koalicije podneli čak 300 amandmana neobične sadržine, EVO U ČEMU JE TRIK, *Blic*, December 12. https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/carobna-recenica-poslanici-vladajuce-koalicije-podneli-cak-300-amandmana-neobicne/rq4xkgz.

Lavrič, Miran, and Florian Bieber. 2019. The Rise of Grassroots Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans: Causes and Consequences. Under review.

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.

Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism. Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lilyana, Velina. 2017. Western Balkans: Media Freedom Trends 2017. European Parliament Think Tank. April 27. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2017/603888/EPRS_ATA(2017)603888_EN.pdf.

MANS. 2016. Izvještaj o parlamentarnim izborima 2016. Finansiranje izbora, birački spisak i nadzor nad sprovođenjem izbornih zakona, December. http://www.mans.co.me/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ParlamentarniIzbori2016mn.pdf.

Marko, Davor. 2016. The Future of Public Service Broadcasting in the Western Balkans: The Need for a New paradigm, Sarajevo: Centre for Social Research Analitika. http://www.analitika.ba/en/publications/buducnostjavnih-servisa-na-zapadnom-balkanu-u-potrazi-za-novom-paradigmom.

Marović, Jovana, and Srdjan Cvijić. 2017. Elections. In *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion*, ed. Marko Kmezić, and Florian Bieber. Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group. http://www.biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-an-anatomy-of-stabilitocracy-and-the-limits-of-eu-democracy-promotion/.

Marusic, Sinisa Jakov. 2016. Austrian FM Defends Decision to Back Macedonia Ruling Party. *Balkan Insight*. November 28. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/critics-slam-kurz-s-support-for-macedonia-s-rulingparty-11-28-2016.

———. 2017. Macedonia Gives Kumanovo Gunmen Heavy Jail Terms, *Balkan Insight*, November 2. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-kumanovo-shootout-trial-verdict-11-02-2017.

———. 2018. Map: Gruevski's 'Great Escape' Through the Balkans, Balkan Insight, November 16. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/map-gruevski-s-escape-route-leads-trough-three-balkan-countries-11-16-2018.

MKD. 2015. Ќе заврши работа Цаци ако го направи ептен патетично. Транскриптите од 32. бомба (АУДИО), May 15. https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/politika/transkriptite-od-deneshnata-32-bomba-audio.

N1. 2014. Istraživanje: SNS bez Vučića bi imao 80 odsto manje glasova, December 20. http://rs.n1info.com/a21521/Vesti/Istrazivanje-SNS-bez-Vucica-bi-imao-80-odsto-manje-glasova.html.

Nasković, Đorđe. 2018. "Psi su pušteni": Hajka i crtanje mete nezavisnim novinarima, *N1*, November 1. http://rs.n1info.com/a432576/Vesti/Psi-su-pusteni-Hajka-i-crtanje-mete-nezavisnim-novinarima.html.

Niedermayer, Oskar. 2017. Mitgliederentwicklung der Parteien, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 7 October. https://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/138672/mitgliederentwicklung-cdu-und-spd.

Njuz.net. 2017. Ana Brnabić predlaže da se kasarne ukrase fikusima kako bi se ojačao kult premijera, August 23. http://www.njuz.net/ana-brnabic-predlaze-da-se-kasarne-ukrase-fikusima-kako-bi-se-ojacao-kult-premijera/.

Öktem, Kerem, and Karabekir Akkoyunlu. 2016. Exit from Democracy: Illiberal Governance in Turkey and Beyond. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 469–480.

Pavlović, Dušan. 2016. *Mašina za rasipanje para. Pet meseci u ministarstvu privrede [The MoneyWasting Machine: Five Months in the Ministry of Economics]*. Belgrade: Dan Graf.

Petkovski, Ljupcho. 2015. Authoritarian Populism and Hegemony: Constructing 'the People' in Macedonia's Illiberal Discourse. *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 3 (2): 44–66. http://www.suedosteuropa.unigraz.at/cse/en/petkovski.

Petrović, Ivica. 2017. Necenzurisane laži, *Deutsche Welle*, July 20. https://www.dw.com/sr/necenzurisane-la%C5%BEi/a-19413592.

Popović, Tina. 2017. Svaki sedmi građanin CG ima člansku kartu jedne od šest partija koje postoje najmanje 10 godina, *Vijesti*, October 23. http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/svaki-sedmi-gradanin-cg-ima-clansku-kartu-jedne-od-sest-partija-koje-postoje-najmanje-10-godina-959885.

Puhalo, Srđan. 2019. Zašto SNSD ima toliko članstvo? *Frontal.ba*, March 5. http://www.frontal.ba/blogovi/blog/61369/zasto-snsd-ima-toliko-clanstvo.

Radovanović, Rade. 2015. Premijera najavljenog državnog udara u Srbiji [Premiere of an Announced Coup in Serbia]. *Al Jazeera*. November 30. http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/premijera-najavljenog-drzavnog-udara-usrbiji.

Regional Cooperation Council [RSS]. 2017. Balkan Barometer 2017, SEE 2020 Series, Sarajevo. https://www.rcc.int/seeds/files/RCCBalkanBarometerPublicOpinion2017.pdf.

Robinson, Nicholas, and Catherine Lena Kelly. 2017. Rule of Law Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism. *ABA ROLI Rule of Law Issue Paper*, May. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/directories/roli/misc/rule-of-law-approaches-to-countering-violent-extremism-2017.pdf.

Rose, Eleanor. 2016. Bosnian Serbs Defy State with Referendum Landslide, *Balkan Transitional Justice*, September 25. https://balkaninsight.com/2016/09/25/republika-srpska-referendum-early-results-09-25-2016/.

Salzburger Nachrichten. 2016. Kurz dankte Mazedonien für Schließung der Balkanroute, November 28. https://www.sn.at/politik/weltpolitik/kurz-dankte-mazedonien-fuer-schliessung-der-balkanroute-846910.

Schedler, Andreas. 2013. *The Politics of Uncertainty Sustaining and Subverting Electoral Authoritarianism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SEENPM. 2018. CoE Analysis: Local Public Broadcasters in Montenegro Politicized and Loyal to the Ruling Party, June 4. http://seenpm.org/coe-analysis-scans-media-scene-montenegro/.

Shtuni, Adrian. 2016. Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo, *USIP Special Report*, December 19. https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/12/dynamics-radicalization-and-violent-extremism-kosovo.

Snyder, Timothy. 2017. The Reichstag Warning, The New York Review of Books, 26 February, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2017/02/26/reichstag-fire-manipulating-terror-to-end-democracy/.

Stanković, Ana, Katarina Ćuković, and Tijana Vuksanović. 2016. Programska plat-forma liste Aleksandar Vučić–Srbija pobeđuje na parlamentarnim izborima 2016. Godine [The Programmatic Platform of the List Aleksandar Vučić—Serbia Wins in the Parliamentary Elections 2016]. In *Stranke i javne politika. Izbori u Srbiji 2016. Godine [Parties and Public Policy.Elections in Serbia 2016]*, ed. Gordana Pilipović and Zoran Stojiljković, 101–123. Belgrade: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Stanković, Siniša. 2015. Obračun u Divljem naselju, *Vreme*, May 14. https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1297267.

Surk, Barbara. 2017. As China Moves In, Serbia Reaps Benefits, With Strings Attached, *New York Times*, September 9. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/09/world/europe/china-serbia-european-union.html.

———. 2018. To Build Dubai of the Balkans, Serbia Deploys Bulldozers and Baseball Bats, *New York Times*, April 29. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/29/world/europe/serbia-belgrade-waterfront-uae-aleksandar-vucic.html?partner=IFTTT.

Tepavac, Tara. 2019. National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia: Temple or Façade of Democracy? *CRTA Working Paper*, January.

Tiroler Tageszeitung. 2016. Mazedonien: Nach Kurz auch Ungarns Außenminister bei Wahlkundgebung, December 2. https://www.tt.com/ticker/12335440/mazedonien-nach-kurz-auch-ungarns-aussenminister-bei-wahlkundgebung.

Tomovic, Dusica. 2016. Russians Dominate Foreign Ownership of Montenegrin Companies, *Balkan Insight*, August 18. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/russians-own-every-third-company-in-montenegro-report-08-17-2016.

Treisman, Daniel. 2011. Presidential Popularity in a Hybrid Regime: Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin. *American Journal of Political Science* 55 (3): 590–609.

Vachudova, Milada Ana. 2014. EU Leverage and National Interests in the Balkans: The Puzzles of Enlargement Ten Years On. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52 (1): 122–138.

Vangeli, Anastas. 2011. Nation-building Ancient Macedonian Style: The Origins and the Effects of the So-called Antiquization in Macedonia. *Nationalities Papers* 39 (1): 13–32.

———. 2020. China: A New Geoeconomic Approach to the Balkans. In *The Western Balkans in the World Linkages and Relations with Non-Western Countries*, ed. Florian Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis. London and New York: Routledge.

Vest. 2016. Liderot na najgolemata politička partija vo Evroupa so silna poddrška za VMRO-DPMNE, 1 December 1. http://www.vest.mk/default.asp?ItemID=3D7817B2FF57B142AE19CCDD0A552DF8.

Vračić, Alida, and Bleriana Bino. 2017. Media. Marko Kmezić, and Florian Bieber (eds), *The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion,* Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG). http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/final.pdf.

Vučić. 2017. "Vučić: Pobedačista kao suza, nije mala razlika,"[Vučić: Victory is clean as tears, not a small differ-ence]. *N1*. April 2. http://rs.n1info.com/a239510/Vesti/Vesti/Obracanje-Vucica-nakon-izbora.html.

White, Jonathan. 2015. Emergency Europe. *Political Studies* 63 (2): 300–318.

Wölfl, Adelheid. 2016. Kurz macht in Mazedonien Werbung für umstrittene Regierungspartei, *Der Standard*, November 28. derstandard.at/2000048381453/Kurz-macht-in-Mazedonien-Werbung-fuer-Umstrittene-Regierungspartei

YIHR. 2017. Ratni zločinci u političkom životu: Uzajamna podrška osuđenih ratnih zločinaca i političkih elita u Srbiji, http://www.yihr.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Ratni-zlocinci-WEB-radna-verzija.pdf.

Živanović, Katarina. 2019. Koje su sve ratove najavljivali tabloidi u 2018. godini? *Danas*, January 1. https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/koje-su-sve-ratove-najavljivali-tabloidi-u-2018-godini/.

Conclusion

Abstract This concluding chapter takes the crisis and fall of the Gruevski government in Macedonia between 2015 and 2017 to understand the conditions under which the competitive regimes in the Western Balkans can be challenged.

Most governments in the countries of the Western Balkans have moved toward more authoritarianism over the past decade, despite the formal progress toward European Union (EU) accession. This apparent tension is less surprising than it might appear at first glance. As enlargement has dropped from the EU agenda, the transformative power of the EU accession process has weakened. Besides, regimes that consolidated themselves combine a formal commitment to democracy and European integration with informal authoritarian practices. The pattern of competitive authoritarianism in the Western Balkans is not exceptional in a global context.

The competitive authoritarian regimes of the Western Balkans, part of a broader pattern across the European continent and beyond, are not necessarily unpopular and they do not necessarily need to manipulate elections to stay in power. This ambiguity makes them more difficult to identify and challenge. The regimes are not inherently unpopular. A

139

combination of patronage, the promise of reforms or change, and the constant state of exceptionalism jointly provide these governments with considerable support. In fact, they thrive off the polarization that is a defining feature of many Western Balkan societies. The cleavage need not be ethnic as in Bosnia but can also be based on deep-seated political antagonism, as in Croatia, Albania, or Macedonia, or center on the identity of the majority, as in Montenegro. In each case, high levels of polarization often disguise the absence of substantial ideological differences and the mutual benefits of the antagonisms. In some cases, this has led the alternation between different parties in power, each trying their own hand at taking control of the state. In others, the government used the cleavage to become entrenched and chain its voters to the fate of the regime. Of course, a patronage network that becomes part of the system risks alienating those who feel excluded and can lead to a sultanistic system, where loyalty is exclusively bought and support is mostly transactional. While such a regime centers on jobs and other favors provided by the government and the ruling party in exchange for votes, it is disguised by nationalism, and the threats and uncertainties the regimes produce, as well as their instrumentalization of the international environment.

Balkan autocrats are part of a wider breed of largely informal authoritarian politics that coexists with formal democratic institutions. Not all regimes in the Western Balkans are equal. As this book has shown, there are considerable variations. In Serbia or Montenegro, the regime is highly centralized around one party and person, as had been the case in Macedonia until 2017. In Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the structure is polycentric with different elites competing for power and none being able to dominate outright.

The underlying weakness of institutions and lack of effective checks and balances results in regimes dominated by strong executives and weak legislatures and judiciaries. The extent to which the pattern tilts the regimes toward full competitive authoritarianism depends on the capacity of the regime in terms of electoral support, and the weakness and fragmentation of the opposition, as well the larger international framework. Eight features outlined in the last chapter have facilitated the shift toward more authoritarian regimes. Some are firmly under control of the governments, such as the use of emergencies, while others as the international framework can be harnessed by the regimes, but are mostly external. Their confluence has enabled them to flourish. As this book has shown, they rely less on the outright coercive instruments of more open autocrats and they lack the

ideological vision to challenge liberal democracy as such. Instead, they formally accept democratic rules and institutions, while informally taking control of these institutions through party patronage networks, control of the public sphere, and by securing external support. This means they are constantly juggling between the formal and the informal, the external promise of democracy and autocratic reign at home. Walking this tight-rope is the art these regimes have mastered, and in this way, they fit into the larger world of undemocratic rulers who have contributed to the global erosion of liberal democracy.

The regimes rest on hybridity, not just in terms of their juxtaposition of democratic rules and authoritarian practices, but also on the combination of formality and informality and nominal pro-Western orientation and the implicit rejection of Western liberal democratic norms. Although the combination is typical for hybrid regimes, including competitive authoritarian regimes, the need to combine and calibrate these different features makes regime consolidation more difficult, but not impossible. Taking the ability of the Montenegrin regime to survive both domestic and international shifts over 30 years and remain in power suggests that the competitive authoritarian regimes in the Western Balkans can persist and be stabile.

Epilogue

Dear Balkan Prince,

You read my previous notes (see Introduction), then you engaged some foreign advisers (Bieber 2015) to make yourself look good internationally, and then you hired some domestic advisers (Vasić 2014) to show you how to play dirty. However, you never called and offered me the possibility to provide you with more assistance.

I have thus decided to provide some advice for those who might be seeking to replace you. As I wrote back then, your job is dancing on the edge of a volcano. Good luck to those who seek to replace you and hopefully will not become just another prince:

1. It is difficult. It is harder than challenging classic authoritarian rule. Srđa Popović provides some good and humorous advice on toppling today's dictators, but much of it does not work in removing the Balkan prince (2015).
2. Getting them caught. The 'eleventh' rule for the Balkan prince is 'Don't get caught', a key lesson for those seeking to remove them. Much of the mechanisms of staying in power rely on everybody knowing them, suspecting them, but lacking hard evidence beyond personal anecdotes. Hearing your Prince and his aids talking about citizens like cattle, manipulating elections, courts, media, and threatening the opposition is potentially destabilizing (Macedonia Watch 2015).

3. The Balkan prince is often quite popular and thrives on mobilizing a supposed 'silent majority'. The prince will often use populism to make sure that he has strong backing and he will campaign continuously. To challenge him, you need to show the citizens that he does not have the 'silent' majority behind him. Just basing opposition on one group (i.e., students and city dwellers) will not be sufficient to build a strong movement.

4. Reclaiming the public. The Balkan prince will control the media, not through direct censorship, but subtle pressure (controlling media through advertisement, targeted pressure). To challenge the prince, you need to create a public sphere, and the Internet won't do, as its reach does not get to the citizens who are the most loyal voters.

5. Challenge external support for the Balkan prince. The power of the Balkan prince rests on external legitimacy. As long as external actors, such as the EU, remain silent or lack a clear language, the power of the prince to claim of external legitimacy will help him. In fact, he might use this to discredit the opposition and present himself as the only guarantor of stability and Euro-Atlantic integration. To challenge the Balkan prince, make sure to secure external backing, but careful too much backing might make you vulnerable to accusations that you are a foreign agent.

6. Offer an alternative. The Balkan prince will be happy with the message that everybody is the same, equally corrupt, power-hungry. As long as citizens believe that there is no fundamental difference, why chose new leaders, they will steal even more than those who already have stolen enough.

7. Don't accept his terms of the debate. He will seek to convince the public that he is more patriotic than you and more reformist and more European than you. Don't try to be more patriotic (i.e., nationalist) than him. Change the framework to one you can win (unemployment, poverty).

8. Pick winnable and popular battles. As Srđa Popović notes, it is important to pick a battle with the prince you can win and that can energize the public.

9. Win elections. The only credible place to defeat the Balkan prince is elections. As their rule claims to be democratic, it is difficult to challenge them in social protests alone. Without an electoral challenge, they can wait out protests and win elections. While the prince has made it harder to defeat him, he still has to win them and has limited leeway in manipulating them.

10. Block the ethnic card. Balkan princes will want to play the ethnic card, antagonize and polarize to shift attention away from the real issues. You need to challenge the ethnic card, not trump it. This means building cross-ethnic coalitions and recognizing that most citizens don't care much about ethnicity, given a chance.

To the challengers of the Balkan prince, good luck, and don't forget to not use the powers you might inherit for your own advantage, they are tempting. If you do, you will become just another Balkan prince.

(Bieber 2015)

So far, of autocratic rulers discussed in this book the only 'Balkan Prince' to lose power has been Nikola Gruevski and his ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) in Macedonia. The end of his regime was a long and protracted process that highlighted the entrenched nature of these regimes. It ended with the fall of the government in 2017 and the conviction of Gruevski himself for ordering a 600,000 euro Mercedes he used for private purposes—hardly the most serious abuse of office, but one that could be proven. Following the confirmation of his verdict, Gruevski fled to safety with another autocrat, Viktor Orbán in Hungary (Marusic 2018).

The 'Macedonian moment' (Bieber 2017) occurred in 2017, when a new government led by the social democrat Zoran Zaev replaced the 12-year rule of VMRO-DPMNE. Besides ending the political crisis that had resulted from the massive abuse of office, the new government seized the opportunity to improve neighborly relations by signing a friendship agreement with Bulgaria and settling the name dispute with Greece, as well as re-energizing reforms and Euro-Atlantic integration. This shift only became possible through a complex set of circumstances—and is by no means secure.

It began in the year 2014, which was a low point. It was the supposed endpoint of the gigantic urban redesign project Skopje 2014, which had been launched out of the blue five years earlier and had transformed the city center with fountains, bridges, new facades, and buildings squeezed along the Vardar River to hide the old Ottoman bazaar from view. Still, the revamp continued, as the ruling party's control seemed absolute. In early elections in April that year, its candidate for the presidency, Gjorge Ivanov, won a controversial second term after most Albanian parties,

including the junior government partner DUI, called for a boycott, arguing that VMRO-DPMNE had not offered a consensual candidate. Early parliamentary elections were held simultaneously with the second round of presidential elections. The elections were a resounding success for the ruling party. VMRO-DPMNE gathered 44.47 percent of the vote and 61 of 123 seats in parliament. While it lacked only one seat for an outright majority, it continued its marriage of convenience with the Albanian junior partner, the Democratic Union for Integration (BDI), despite their boycott of the presidential elections.

The opposition was dispirited, as the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) had gathered only 26.22 percent of the vote, giving it 34 seats, losing out in comparison with the previous election when it began to close the gap with the ruling party. The new head of the party, Zoran Zaev, seemed to be unable to mount an effective challenge the government.

At the same time, the elections were marked by serious irregularities. The OSCE report noted vote-buying and pressure on civil servants and citizens to vote for the ruling coalition and not to attend opposition rallies (OSCE/ODIHR 2014, 14). Besides, the media coverage strongly favored the incumbent through a combination of pressure, self-censorship, and bias (OSCE/ODIHR 3), leading to the results that fall in line with the authoritarian patterns discussed in this book. In response to the irregularities, the MPs from the coalition led by the social democrats (except for three) decided to resign their seats.

A boycott has become a common strategy in the region, particularly in Macedonia, but also in neighboring Albanian and Montenegro. While it can serve as a dramatic tool to underline the democratic shortcomings of parliament, if overused it can be self-defeating. Consequently, international observers have seen boycotts as the reflection of a political dispute between governing and opposition parties, not focusing so much on the deep institutional flaws that triggered it in Macedonia, not to mention a crisis of democracy.

In 2014, the resignations were unable to limit the power of the Gruevski government, as 89 of 123 MPs remained in parliament—more than two-thirds—reducing the opposition resignations to a purely symbolic step. Internationally, it also failed to draw enough attention to change power dynamics.

Had there not been the 'bombs', the thousands of recordings by the intelligence agency made at the behest of the Gruevski government and

leaked to the opposition by Gjorgi Lazarevski, a former intelligence officer, not much would have changed (Jovanovski 2017). As Zaev released the recordings at regular intervals in much-awaited press conferences, Macedonian citizens could hear Prime Minister Gruevski, his cousin Sašo Mijalkov, head of the intelligence agency, and various ministers discussing election fraud, pressuring the media and judges, mocking opponents, and showing disdain for democracy and institutions. The revelations led to a series of protests: first a tent city in front of government in 2015, and then the 'colorful revolution' that literally colored many of the institutions of the government, especially those (re-)built as part of the Skopje 2014 project, by throwing paint at them. The protests were multiethnic and did not only include supporters of the opposition. This social movement worked closely with the opposition but also included checks to ensure that the struggle for democracy would not be short-circuited.

However, neither the revelations nor the protests would have led to change of government on their own. The protests were ignored in the loyal press or described as a rabble. The EU only gradually understood the dispute as not merely a conflict between government and opposition, but over democracy. A crucial turning point was the dispatch of an expert group led by Reinhard Priebe. The former European Commission director and a number of legal experts visited Macedonia and issued a report in June 2015 that clearly identified all the shortcomings in terms of the rule of law and democracy that the government needed to remedy (Senior Experts' Group 2015). The report was released in parallel with the EU-mediated Pržino Agreement, which outlined a way out of the crisis for the opposition and the government, including the resignation of Gruevski, the establishment of a caretaker government, and early elections, as well as the establishment of a special prosecutor's office to investigate the allegations. Despite delays, the special prosecutor's office, led by three women soon known as 'Charlie's Angels', took on the difficult cases and indicted, among others, Gruevski himself. The interim government, led by Emil Dimitriev, took over from Gruevski in January 2016. Early elections were held after some delays in December 2016. The results were inconclusive. While VMRO-DPMNE remained the larger party, with 39.39 percent of the vote, the opposition SDSM gained nearly the same level of support, with 37.87 percent, and the government formation hinged on the Albanian parties. Government formation was difficult, as the main Albanian party DUI had lost considerable support and was tainted by its association with the VMRO-DPMNE. In this situation, President Ivanov sought to influ-

ence the government formation in his party's favor by rejecting a coalition composed by other parties. When the SDSM, the DUI, and smaller Albanian parties agreed to form a ruling coalition, the first step was the election of the speaker of parliament. When Talat Xhaferi was elected speaker of parliament—he had served as minister of defense under Gruevski—some 200 thugs were let into parliament by MPs of the formerly ruling party. These nationalist protesters attacked MPs and injured several members of the newly established government majority.

The violence in parliament was a turning point that prompted stronger international pressure, including by the US, which helped secure the election of the new government that took over just over a month later in late May 2017. With the change of government, the crisis that began in 2014/2015 came to a conclusion, the building of Skopje 2014 came to a halt, and the investigation of past abuses accelerated. However, while this ended the autocratic rule of the Gruevski government, its legacy lingers on. The new government swiftly sought to improve relations with its neighbors, which had soured over the previous decade. Following a friendship agreement with Bulgaria, it concluded the Prespa Agreement in June 2018 with Greece, resolving the 27-year-old name dispute. The agreement was a precondition for joining NATO and the EU and thus a priority for the government. Implementing the agreement posed a serious challenge, as VMRO-DPMNE, now in opposition, sought to obstruct a settlement. This resulted in the failure of a consultative referendum in September 2018 and a tight vote for constitutional amendments in October 2018 and January 2019. Securing support in parliament required the vote of MPs who had been tainted by their past involvement in autocratic practices. The Prespa Agreement came into force in early 2019 after both the Greek and the Macedonian parliaments successfully ratified the agreement. This ended the name dispute and created the potential for potting the dispute not just to rest, but also reducing the opportunities for it to become a convenient excuse for authoritarian leaders. The change of government and the efforts made by the new leadership to break with the previous government are only the beginning in tackling the challenges of weak democracies. A competitive authoritarian regime lost power, but institutions remain weak and patterns of patronage and nepotism are too entrenched to be uprooted overnight.

As this book has argued, the rise of autocrats in the Western Balkans is strongly predicted by structural features that do not simply disappear when a particular president or prime minister loses office. The informal

authoritarian patterns have become strongly embedded, with officials—judges, civil servants, and journalists—looking to those in power for signs of what is acceptable and desired. Breaking this pattern requires more than a change of government. In addition, the polarized nature of the political sphere can easily replace those who held all power in their hands, with those excluded from power now taking their revenge and thus replicating the pattern. Overcoming the different legacies of autocratic rule might also be contradictory: for the new Macedonian government, moving beyond the polarization with Greece over the name incited by the previous government might result in a compromise on the rule of law. The legacies of autocratic rule are not easily undone.

Looking back, the opposition in Macedonia managed to challenge the 'Balkan Prince' on all of the ten points I identified earlier. It took massive revelations on the abuse of office, strong social movements, international mediation, an election, and then a serious level of violence, threatening the lives of opposition leaders, to bring about change.

While mass rallies against the Macedonian government helped the opposition to mobilize and eventually gain power, they were not sufficient. The regimes are able to mobilize their own supporters, and they are not just the scared, coerced, and confused masses that Slobodan Milošević bussed to Belgrade in 1996/1997 to counter the mass rallies against his vote theft. Of course, this is not the only path to end this type of government, but competitive authoritarian systems are firmly entrenched. Some of the weaker examples may eventually collapse due to an unexpected electoral defeat, an unusually independent prosecutor or judge, or a strong social movement. However, considering the regimes' reliance on formal electoral majorities, control of institutions and media, and external support, these foundations are not easily shaken. Protests movements have emerged in several countries discussed in this book in late 2018 and 2019, including Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Kosovo and Albanian. Their specific gestation varies, but they all reflect a strong sense of dissatisfaction of citizens with the state of democracy and rule of law. They shared some features with the protests in Macedonia. This does not mean that the Macedonian experience easily matches on the other countries. In Serbia and Montenegro, the opposition is fragmented and ideologically heterogenous, ranging from liberals to the far-right. Citizens appear to protest not because of the opposition, but rather despite it. With the competitive authoritarian regimes entrenched and relying on considerable resources to hold voters captive, democratic transformation is difficult.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bieber, Florian. 2015. New Notes for the Balkan Prince and His Opponents, Notes from Syldavia, April 23. https://florianbieber.org/2015/04/23/new-notes-for-the-balkan-prince-and-his-opponents/.

———. 2017. Seizing the Macedonian Moment, BiEPAG Policy Brief, December. http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/BiEPAG-Seizing-the-Macedonian-Moment.pdf.

Jovanovski, Borjan. 2017. The Spy Who Overthrew Macedonia's Government, *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project*, October 16. https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/7134-the-spy-who-overthrew-macedonia-s-government.

Macedonia Watch https://macedoniawatch.wordpress.com/.

Marusic, Sinisa Jakov. 2018. Map: Gruevski's 'Great Escape' Through the Balkans, *Balkan Insight*, November 16. http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/map-gruevski-s-escape-route-leads-trough-three-balkan-countries-11-16-2018.

OSCE/ODIHR. 2014. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, 13 and 27 April 2014, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Warsaw, 15 July.

Popović, Srdja. 2015. *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Senior Experts' Group. 2015. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues Relating to the Communications Interception Revealed in Spring 2015, Brussels, June 8. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf.

Vasić, Miloš. 2014. Čovek koga nije sramota, *Vreme*, 3.7. https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1209854.