

Book Reviews

Thanos Veremis, *A Modern History of the Balkans Nationalism & Identity in Southeast Europe*. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 226, ISBN 978-1-78076-846-5

It's a good thing Veremis did not publish this work when the Yugoslav Crisis was at its zenith and books on the Balkans were being produced continuously by scholars, journalists and politicians. Few survived the crisis and it was after a long pause that an important work on South Eastern Europe made its appearance. Although articles of the author on the Yugoslav Crisis were frequent in the nineties, in such prominent newspapers as *The International Herald Tribune*, *Die Zeit* and *The Financial Times*, he was wise to wait for the quiet aftermath of Yugoslavia's dissolution.

Veremis combines his professional competence in history and his familiarity with current affairs gained at the many conferences of the "Hellenic Foundation of European & Foreign Policy" (ELIAMEP) of which he was a founder. His *Modern History of the Balkans* is an exceptional achievement because it is scholarly, brief and inclusive.

It is comprised of three parts. The first summarizes the highlights of almost two centuries of Balkan history with emphasis on state-building and later the dismantling of Yugoslavia. The second part offers a comparative perspective of the region's nationalist creeds, its economies, the role of the military in politics and western misconceptions about the Balkans. The third part is about unfinished business to this day. The naming of FYROM, the independence of Kosovo and the intractable problem of Bosnia-Herzegovina with its three religious communities and their atavistic quarrels.

Two centuries of Balkan events include the process of transformation of identities, cohesion and national ideologies. From nineteenth century statecraft aiming to achieve homogeneous and unitary nation-states, to the twentieth century dismantling of federal Yugoslavia into ethnically cleansed (Croatia) or segregated (Bosnia) new states.

The author is at his best on the subject he is better prepared to analyze: Greece. His chapter “From the National State to the stateless nation,” is based on the Greek example of nationalism in the early twentieth century, but a paradigm most Balkan states emulated. “By the early 1920s the nation finally came to terms with the state and entered a relationship without routes of escape.” (p. 31)

Of all the Balkan states, Romania is the least discussed, perhaps because it was never particularly attached to a Balkan identity. Its Francophile culture and its Latin-based language set it apart of the others in the region.

The many footnotes are an indication of the toil the author has put in this endeavor. Although they contain no archival material, they are exemplary of research in secondary sources.

This book, as Aris Tziampiris predicts in its jacket, will have “a long shelf-life and will be of interest to academics, graduate students, diplomats and a more informed general public.” This is a work in the tradition of Stavrianos Jelavich and Wolff.

Theodore Couloubis Emeritus Professor
Athens University