

Laboratory Western Balkans - Vol. 1

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Can Zeyrek

Foreword

In his book *The Third Wave* Samuel P. Huntington characterized the transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic system as the main phenomenon of the global political developments of the late twentieth century.¹ He described the difficulty to explain why, how and with what immediate consequences this third wave of democratization between 1974 and 1990 was set in motion.² Huntington made the analytical attempt to explain a specific type of regime transitions, which occurred within a limited period of time between the 1970s and the 1980s in South Europe, East and South-East Asia and Latin America as well as in Central and East Europe in the end of the twentieth century. His work provides a solid basis to distinguish the third wave regime transitions from the first and second wave transitions. The major difference in contrast to the first and second wave is that an authoritarian counter-wave does not seem to come in. Here, in the meantime, well-argued doubts have been expressed in authoritarianism research. Doubts may also be raised with a view to some of Yugoslavia's successor states. Here, tendencies of authoritarian (re-) stabilization are observed. This is especially true for the Western Balkans Region. Strictly speaking, one cannot speak of an authoritarian counter-wave but rather of persistence in or a reconstitution of autocratic order, with no previous path to democratization in any area ("Lost in Transition"). This makes the region particularly relevant for transformation and authoritarianism research on the *fourth* wave of democratization since the end of the 1980s. Hence, the Western Balkans is to be understood as a 'laboratory', where four processes are linked: Transformation after state collapse, external democracy promotion, manifest ethnic-nationalist and religious-fundamentalist conflict and tendencies of authoritarian (re-)stabilization.

This first volume of 'Laboratory Western Balkans' bases on the papers presented at the International Workshop on the 'Consolidation of Democracy in the Western Balkans' at the Yaşar University in Izmir/Turkey on March 2012. It is intended as a contribution to research on political regimes in the Western Balkans and concentrates on some aspects of transformation, democratization and conflict studies. The workshop offered a great opportunity to present and discuss new perspectives and findings in the respective areas. In this context, some of the research results are presented in this present work. Two further volumes are foreseen on 'Regime Hybridity' and 'Democratic Transition versus Stabilization of Autocratic Regimes'.

¹ Cf. Huntington, Samuel P. (1991): *The Third Wave*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, xiii.

² *ibid.*

The first article introduces the new concept of embedded transformation which aims at developing an innovative approach to transformation research. It describes major interdependent areas of conflict affecting the path to democratization. It serves as an empirical tool to trace the effects of state disintegration, foreign interference and the consequences of ethnic/religious conflict. Subsequently and resorting to Wolfgang Merkel's concept of *system change* the process of transformation in former Yugoslavia and the path to democratization in the post-socialist successor states are traced with a specific focus on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this connection the political, social and economic context conditions are scrutinized in order to explain the causes of the collapse of the political system in the Yugoslav state. Siret Hürsoy analyzes the crisis management challenges and risks to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as one of the main external actors in the Western Balkans. In this context he examines NATO's Lisbon Summit Declaration of 2010 and its new strategic concept and the future role of the alliance. Nazif Mandacı focuses on the prospects of reconciliation in the Western Balkan region. Lastly, İnan Rüma's article investigates the significant role of external democracy promotion in Bosnia and Herzegovina and discusses the attempts of the 'international community' to weaken nationalist parties. Furthermore he points at the deep crisis of legitimacy in that country.

Can Zeyrek, Göttingen 2014

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Former Yugoslavia: There is no One-Way Road to Democracy – Some Conclusions of Comparative Politics and Conceptual Approaches for Transformation Research

Ursula Birsl and Can Zeyrek

Abstract

This article introduces some basic conclusions of transformation and democratization research, associated with the specific situation in the Western Balkans and its inherent complex problem constellations. It further argues that no authentic and successful process of democratization is expected any time soon. There is rather the tendency of regimes persisting in a grey zone where democratic, semi-democratic and non-democratic features co-exist at the regime level, undermining government and international governance legitimacy. Depicting major interdependent areas of conflict which affect the path to democratization, ideas to a new concept are presented.

Keywords: embedded transformation, third wave of democratization, failed state, ethno-nationalist conflict

Introduction

Up to now the situation and development of former Yugoslavia during the last twenty years have only received cursory treatment by Western research on transformation and democratization (Dzihic/Wieser 2008: 16). Only Slovenia and Croatia as new members of the European Union have become aspects of academic attention. One of the reasons is the situation in this region being interpreted as an extraordinary one. It is an exception within the late third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991). There are only few similar cases to be found in the previous waves of democratization as well.

The situation is characterized by a combination of a wide range of occurrences and phenomena. This includes that the post-Yugoslav states and nations are the result of a failed state, whose collapse was caused by military conflicts or better: by civil wars. Ethno-nationalist lines of conflict and territorial claims were expressed during these wars. Furthermore, the escalating violence traumatized whole sections of society. External actors like the NATO and the European Union (EU) intervened in the civil wars.

The United Nations (UN) provided humanitarian aid and the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) economic assistance. The EU as well as external non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been active in being supporters of state building and as so called “democracy promoters” in the region up to the present. But, nevertheless, the process of building nation states does not really make progress. Even a stable blueprint for lasting peace cannot be found yet because the potential for ethno-nationalist conflict seemingly remains and is kept awake by so called “political entrepreneurs” again and again. Against this backdrop it does not astonish that a process of democratization does not make any progress. The political regimes persist in modern neo-patrimonialism (Timm 2010: 103). It remains unclear if the region is “only” stuck in the transitional phase or if the systems of political rule are established in a grey area or “twilight zone”, which leads to the assumption that democratization may not be expected to take place in the foreseeable future. The building of stable states and statehood may last just as long although – or even because – external actors are trying to prevent stagnation.

Indeed, the former Yugoslavia, or more correctly: the region of the Western Balkans – without Croatia – is a special case because of its various complex problem constellations. But the Western Balkans is some kind of laboratory, too. It is a laboratory because we can find all obstacles to democratization which have been identified by transformation research so far. Furthermore, research on transformation processes and democratization is requested to identify available approaches and to ask critically, if it is really helpful to open EU accession negotiations with states like Serbia or if there is the possibility that such a step could be counterproductive.

In the following some central findings of research on transformation processes and democratization will be presented, which are connected to the briefly touched constellation of problems. A conclusion of these findings shows a rather pessimistic scenario. It seems that important conditions for a sustainable pacification of conflicts as well as for state building and a process of democratization are missing – there is no one-way road to democracy in the Western Balkans. The central argument of this article is that the process of democratization will not make any progress in the foreseeable future and that the Western Balkans will – in Aurel Croissant’s words (2003) – persist in a “dilemma of persistence” of hybrid, non-democratic regimes.

In order to test the validity of this argument, the following four questions have to be discussed:

What is the extent of knowledge generated by research on transformation processes and democratization on

1. the prospects of establishing democratic rule and state order if a nation state and statehood have collapsed after (civil) wars?

2. the prospects of establishing a democratic system if conflicts along ethnic lines are still manifest?
3. the prospects of democratization through democracy promotion in external relations?
4. the prospects for survival of modern neo-patrimonial regimes?

Out of this analysis we will develop at last some conceptual approaches for reconstructing the complex nature of transitional processes and unclear forms and structures of political rule in the dilemma of persistence like in the Western Balkans. Leaning on the concept of “embedded democracy” developed by Wolfgang Merkel, Hans-Jürgen Puhle and Aurel Croissant (2003; Puhle 2013) we will present a first approach to a new concept: “embedded transformation”.

1. What are the prospects of establishing democratic rule and state order if a nation state and statehood have collapsed after (civil) wars?

Philippe C. Schmitter asserts in an article published in the *Journal of Democracy* in 2010, in which he reviews 25 years of research on transformation:

“All regimes in the contemporary world – democratic or autocratic, legitimate or illegitimate – require some degree of ‘stateness’ in order to survive (and autocratic or illegitimate ones require considerable more of it)” (2010: 26).

According to historical experiences the development of national identity, state integrity and state sovereignty (concerning the nation’s people) are linked to democracy. During the different waves of democratization, democracy “met” nation states or multinational states that are supposed to be national territorial units, population/citizens and some degree of statehood. Otherwise democracy could not have been developed. Although territorial integrity, population and public authority is – in Ulrich Beck’s words (1998: 50f.) – a bureaucratic description of reality and therefore a construction of nation states as container that does not stand up to an empirical verification, but it is potent nevertheless.

Historically, the nation state did not materialize because of democratic processes, but because of the opposite: “because of the facticity of war, conquest, civil war and assimilation, which [were] also” – as Claus Offe (1994: 63) states – “tamed by the fragile rules of international law and transnational organisations.” According to Wolfgang Merkel it becomes clear, inter alia, in former Yugoslavia that these rules were still valid at the end of the 20th century (2010: 325). This would mean that no process of democratization can be initiated in the Western Balkans as long as state building is not finished.

It is a paradoxical situation: once a state and stateness have collapsed and there is no possibility of reaching a consensus concerning new border establishment, it remains in