

**Stojarová, Věra; Emerson, Peter (eds):  
Party Politics in the Western Balkans. Oxon: Routledge,  
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Since 1990 the Balkans have undergone a complicated evolution that still enjoys major attention from scholars as well as the general public. This attention should not be surprising. On the one hand, the development in the Balkans is one of the crucial questions that underlie stabilization and security in the whole of Europe. From this point of view, unfortunately, we must note that the contemporary situation in the region is far from real democratization and stabilization. On the other hand, the specific developments in this region provide an interesting opportunity for research and gaining new knowledge which could potentially enrich many theories. The volume in question *Party politics in the Western Balkans* demonstrates this fully.

A collective of authors under the leadership of V. Stojarová and P. Emerson have chosen as the subject of their interest the theme of political parties and party systems in the Western Balkans (including Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania) after 1990. Geographical and thematic restrictions are appropriate measures. Although all the countries of this region have had problems with democratization and stabilization, at the same time, these problems are on a much larger scale in the Western Balkans, and the causes are also very different. The thematic reduction is also appropriate because the limited range of publications do not allow for study of a broader theme in such a heterogeneous and intricate region in greater detail and complexity. The difficulty of research is also the main reason for the predominance of works devoted to particular countries (case studies) over works studying particular themes over the entire region. Therefore, at the very beginning it is necessary to appreciate the courage of the authors in choosing the more difficult path of research, and their goal of making a comprehensive study of the selected theme.

The book we are reviewing is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to specific factors which have influenced the specific nature of political parties and party systems, and which

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have made the process of democratization and stabilization more complicated. The second part consists of case studies of the party systems in particular countries.

The first part has four chapters. The first chapter *Electoral systems and the link to party systems* (P. Emerson and J. Šedo) describes the development of electoral systems. Using the cases of individual countries the authors show the general instability of electoral systems in the region, and the general trend in the transition of countries from majority to proportional systems (this trend was completed in Albania in 2008). The placement of this chapter at the beginning of the book is certainly appropriate, because the electoral system is a fundamental factor that influences the character of parties and party systems. But there are many other factors that have a direct effect on the impact of electoral systems in the region. This is confirmed by the authors' remark that theories (Duverger's laws) about the links between electoral systems and party systems are sometimes not fully valid (p. 23). Although the authors present some factors (in particular the development of political systems, the frequency of electoral reforms, election fraud or boycotts of elections) (p. 23), and also mention some other factors in the following chapters, probably it would have been better to include a chapter about the social-cultural background in the region at the very outset of the book. Together with the chapter about electoral systems it would have provided a more coherent context for the next chapters.

The second chapter *The legacy of communist and socialist parties in the Western Balkans* (V. Stojarová) concentrates on a traditional problem of post-communist countries: the presence of post-communist parties and their complicating role in the process of democratic transition (visible in the frequent absence of lustration laws, laws on the financing of parties etc.). The author briefly describes the situation in individual countries just before the fall of communism, and with the help of Kitschelt's typology of undemocratic regimes she remarks that all countries in the region started the transition from a situation corresponding to Kitschelt's patrimonial communism (with the exception of Croatia). Here, it is only a pity that Kitschelt's definition of this regime is missing. Otherwise the chapter elaborates further. In the cases of individual countries the author shows that after the fall of communism a liberal approach to the actions of communist parties in systems generally prevailed in the region (only in Albania was the communist party outlawed in 1992, p. 26-27). But the new parties with a communist ideology were quickly marginalised, and they have generally failed to attract voters in the region so far (p. 39).

However, this does not mean that post-communist parties (elites) have lost power and did not influence the transition. Altogether, the authors distinguish three ways in which post-

communist parties have developed after 1990. In several cases they gradually transformed themselves into modern social-democratic parties (Croatia, Macedonia), elsewhere into socialist parties (Albania by the mid 1990s) or into socialist parties with a nationalist programme (Serbia, Montenegro) (p. 37). The author, on the basis of a brief overview of their development, their representation in parliaments, and their participation in governmental coalitions, shows that in most countries these post-communist parties have formed one of the main poles of party systems, and for a long time they were among the central players in these systems, participating regularly in ruling coalitions.

The chapter *Nationalist parties and the party systems of the Western Balkans* (V. Stojarová) turns its attention to another feature of party systems that has complicated democratization and stabilization of the region: the presence of nationalist parties. The specific situation in the region at the very outset of transition (ethnic strife, and the unfinished processes of nation-building and state-building) caused a large majority of parties to be built on ethnic grounds, flirting with nationalism to no small extent. The author aims her attention at major nationalist parties in particular countries, presents their main ideological attributes (e.g. authoritarianism, ethnic xenophobia, unification of all ethnic areas, negative attitudes to cooperation with ICTY, NATO or EU), and through practical examples she shows that these parties have long been a fundamental part of most of the party systems in the region. In some cases they were the central parties of a system (HDZ in Croatia, SPS in Serbia); elsewhere they participated in governments or had strong representation in parliaments. Interestingly, the authors note that the influence of nationalism and nationalist parties have gradually decreased in the region, mainly where the processes of democratization and consolidation of political and party systems have successfully moved forward (Croatia, Macedonia) (p. 44-45). However, in many countries – where ethnic and state issues have not been successfully solved (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina), or where a clear reckoning with a recent and dark history has not been fully realized (Serbia) – the power of nationalism and the potential of nationalist parties have continued to be very high.

The fourth chapter *National minorities in party systems* (F. Bieber) is devoted to another problem stemming from these complicated ethnic relations. As the ethnic division of the region continues to be apparent, and election behaviour has been constantly conditioned by ethnicity, there are a number of minority parties in the region. Although the ethnic minorities in the region have their political representation (own party subsystems), ensuring their representation in political systems has remained a long-term problem (as it is an essential condition for successful

democratisation and stabilization) in many countries. The author reminds us that “reducing the representation of minorities in the political system has (still) been the implicit and at times explicit policy of numerous governments” (p. 67). On the basis of practical examples, he demonstrates the main practical obstacles for the representation of minority parties (ethnic gerrymandering, size of constituencies, electoral threshold etc.), while also showing that in every one of the countries (with the exception of Macedonia) some measures to support the representation of minority parties (reserving seats in parliaments or governments etc.) have been generally introduced (p. 70). Unfortunately, despite a certain amount of success for these measures, they have not ensured the representation of smaller minorities, and the positive impacts of these measures have been limited by the weak loyalty of minorities to existing states, or by boycotts of elections by minority parties (e.g. by the Serbs in Kosovo).

The second part of the book consists of seven case studies of party systems in individual countries, and one special study of regional party systems in Serbia (in Voivodina, Sanjak, and the Preshevo Valley). Because of the large number of case studies and the limited scope of the book, it is understandable that the studies are mainly of a more general character.

All the case studies begin with a short overview of the development of the political systems after 1990 (a basic description of major constitutional institutions and of the most important events). After that, a brief evolution of the party systems from 1990 to the present (2008) is outlined, including the basic delineation of the main party systems' cleavages (or delimitation of party subsystems respectively), a brief outline of the development of the larger and smaller parties (their election results, leading persons, internal strife etc.), information about the party composition of governments and the opposition during different election periods, and a sketch of the prevailing trends in coalition patterns, trends of polarisation, the degree of fragmentation/concentration, and consolidation of party systems from 1991.

After the evolution of party systems is briefly described, almost all political parties having some representation in national parliaments in 2008 are discussed (with the exception of marginal parties with only one mandate). All the authors of the particular case studies utilize the classic concept of 'party families' for the classification of parties. Although this approach is problematic because there are still countries where ethnic cleavages remain dominant, or where the programmes of parties are not advanced (Kosovo), this is still probably the only way we can differentiate the parties in the region for now.

In their descriptions of individual parties the authors generally inform readers about the circumstances of the parties' founding, the evolution of their personnel, patterns of election

support, and about the evolution of the parties' role and position in the systems up until 2008. It is understandable that the description of a major party is more detailed and expansive on fundamental policy positions, on attitudes towards EU, NATO, and ICTY, and on links to the international party organizations and to Euro-parties. Unfortunately, the descriptions of many parties are in some places too general, mainly due to the inclusion of an unnecessarily large great number of parties in the analyses. From this standpoint it would have been better to devote more space to a detailed analysis of the central parties, and pay less attention to some of the marginal parties without any influence in the systems. Nevertheless, the authors decided to give priority to breadth over depth in their studies.

However, we can still regard the second part of the book as very good. The authors managed to clearly describe and reveal the basic directions and current situations of the political parties and party systems in the region. For various cases the authors' findings are sometimes very different, which clearly shows that individual party systems are in differing periods of evolution. In some places the authors find evident tendencies towards gradual consolidation and bipolarisation (Croatia, Macedonia, Albania), but the situation in the majority of the other countries has remained unclear, and far from stabilization or consolidation. On the other hand, in most of the case studies the authors find a low degree of intra-party democracy, strong personalization of parties behind their leaders, unclear funding, and close links of parties with non-political sectors (economy sector, media etc.), clientelism and corruption etc. Thus the various authors of the individual case studies reveal not only some of the specific characters of party politics, but other factors (besides those discussed in the first part of the book) that have complicated the process of successful democratization and stabilization of the Western Balkans. It is only a shame that the closing chapter (V. Stojarová) is more oriented towards giving a brief summary of the previous chapters than to putting the previous findings into the context of the region as a whole.

Despite some reproaches we can say that the whole book is a high-quality contribution to the research on politics in the Western Balkans. The authors managed to cope with a difficult theme very well, and they submit a valuable "interim report" on the evolution and present state of party politics in the Western Balkans. Over a limited number of pages they managed to clearly describe the fundamental character and trends of party politics in the Western Balkans, and show the general system-wide problems as well as specific intra-party problems that have complicated successful democratization and stabilization of party politics and political systems in the region.

Therefore, we can fully recommend the book to all researchers, students and members of the public who are interested in politics in the Western Balkans and politics more generally.