

Abstracts

Bojan Baća

Defiant Civil Society – The Role of Social Movements and Contentious Politics in the Democratization of Montenegro

This article examines the ways in which social movements and contentious politics have contributed to challenging the status quo and promoting democracy “from below” in contemporary Montenegro. The analysis is divided into four sections, each dedicated to specific periods of Montenegro’s postsocialist transition: the authoritarian phase (1990–1997), the quasi-democratization phase (1998–2006), the backsliding phase (2007–2020), and the democratization phase (2021–present). All these stages have been characterized by turbulent socio-political transformation and an equally disruptive socio-economic restructuring, profoundly influencing the citizens’ engagement in public life. Accordingly, the article focuses on the defiance exhibited by civil society actors during each phase and their role in reshaping power dynamics in Montenegro.

Salim Çevik

Intra-Opposition Cooperation in Turkey in 2019 and 2023 – Which Factors Accounted for the Different Outcomes?

Turkey’s opposition won a surprising victory in the 2019 local elections, reclaiming Istanbul and Ankara after 25 years. This success was attributed to their unity around common candidates. In the lead-up to the 2023 general elections, conditions seemed favorable for the opposition due to ongoing economic turmoil and elite defections from the ruling AKP. Despite predictions the opposition lost. Several factors contributed to this outcome. First, the opposition nominated Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as the opposition candidate, an unpopular politician with limited appeal beyond the party base. He also belonged to an ethnic and religious minority, which allowed Erdoğan to exploit identity divisions. Secondly, the delayed nomination process for Kılıçdaroğlu highlighted disunity within the opposition, undermining its vision of cohesion. Thirdly, the differing nature of municipal and national elections affected the opposition’s ability to maintain unity. While municipal elections tend to downplay ideological divisions, national elections are more ideologically driven, posing challenges for opposition unity.

Bernard Nikaj

Using Institutional and Extra-Institutional Methods to Compete for Power – The Rise of Vetëvendosje

In February 2021, Vetëvendosje (VV) won the national elections with the largest vote share ever recorded in the history of Kosovo's young democracy. It also completed the full journey from a social movement through opposition politics to becoming the largest party in power. Along the way to power, VV has used a variety of strategies: from mass protests and the use of tear gas in the parliament to electoral campaigns, social media and coalitions with other political parties. This article examines the evolution of strategies used in competing for power and the relation with other political forces and events in Kosovo politics. It also argues that throughout the course of its development, intentionally or accidentally, VV has transformed from a fringe social movement into a mainstream political party by using these institutional and extra-institutional strategies.

Dušan Spasojević

Serbia's Opposition between Participation and Confrontation

The recent decline of democracy in Serbia and the predominant rule of the Serbian Progressive Party has pushed the opposition outside of the institution and toward non-institutional politics, including protests and boycotts. This paper analyses the tactics and arguments presented by the opposition leaders and evaluates the outcome of these processes. The key argument is that the opposition's usage of boycotts has been counterproductive as it has failed to generate both internal and international support or damage the regime's approval ratings. The opposition is caught inside a vicious circle – it is too weak to put pressure on the government and gain better electoral conditions, so it has been choosing boycotts and losing the advantages of institutional politics (e.g., state funding and media coverage), which eventually reduces the opposition's impact. The choice of tactics has become even more complex because of the regime's additional autocratization and increased electoral regularities in the 2023 elections.

Gian Marco Moisé

Does Politics Need Foes? – Three Focal Events that Explain Contemporary Moldovan Politics and the Risks for its Democracy

This article examines the transformative impact of two focal events, the 2014 \$1 billion theft and the 2019 paper bag corruption scandal, on the 2019 and 2021 Moldovan electoral outcomes. Four factors, including 1) focal events, 2) public mobilisation, 3) the ascent of new uncompromised actors, and 4) external legitimisation allowed at first populist forces (the PSRM, DA, and PAS) and then the PAS alone to assume government in the country.

The analysis will also focus on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as a third focal event that further consolidated political polarisation. While previously political competition was structured by mutual accusations of populism and corruption, the invasion enforced a dichotomy between “good” pro-European and “bad” pro-Russian forces, reinforcing identity-based voting patterns.

While focusing on three pivotal events, the discussion elaborates on how simplifications strengthened polarisation to the detriment of liberal democracy. The conclusion weaves together the intricate threads of historical events, media narratives, and identity politics.

Stefan Troebst

Annus Horribilis: 1989 in the Balkans

The annus mirabilis 1989 in East-Central Europe including the GDR was paralleled by an annus horribilis in Southeastern Europe: In Yugoslavia's Socialist Republic of Serbia the status of its two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, was cancelled, and in predominantly Albanian-populated Kosovo an apartheid-like Serbian occupation regime was installed; in Romania the policy of forced urbanization, played down as "systematization", which in particular threatened the national minorities, was stepped up; in Bulgaria, the violent assimilation policy towards the country's large Turkish minority, initiated in 1984, resulted first in violent protests, then in a refugee wave to neighboring Turkey; in Albania, Enver Hoxha's brutal and isolationist dictatorship was continued after his death in 1985 by his widow Nexhmije and his successor Ramiz Alia; and Greece was politically paralyzed by two consecutive elections resulting twice in a stalemate between the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the oppositional conservative Nea Demokratia.

Lumnije Jusufi / Linda Paganelli

Through the Lens – A Photo Essay on Cultural Transfer in the Context of Migration in Kosovo and North Macedonia

The photo essay deals with the diverse cultural and linguistic transfer from Germany by means of various forms of remigration to the Western Balkan countries of North Macedonia and Kosovo. In this essay, both countries are exemplary for the Albanian-speaking regions in the former Yugoslavia. This broad and diverse transfer is typical of the former Yugoslav region in general and of the Albanian cultural and linguistic area in particular, as it does not occur with this intensity and breadth in Albania. Italianisms in Albania vs. Germanisms on the outside, especially in the field of technology, are one of the main differences in pluricentric Albanian.

Christian Voß

Nikola Tesla – A Live Wire from Southeast Europe – A Conversation with Alida Bremer

Alida Bremer's new novel "Tesla, or The Completion of the Circles" (2023) tells us the migration biography of a young Dalmatian traveling from Trieste to New York in 1905. His Pan-Slavic narratives and aspirations center on the eccentric and genius inventor Nikola Tesla whom he meets in New York. The figure of Tesla leads Christian Voß and Alida Bremer to a broader discussion on literature in the fragmented post-Yugoslav region. Can literature contribute to intraregional reconciliation and share the traumas of victims and perpetrators? Is it able to perform like a second "Adriatic League" (as the multinational ABA basketball league in Former Yugoslavia)?