

REVIEW ESSAY

GERMAN VIEWS ON THE YUGOSLAV DISASTER

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- Josip Furkes and Karl-Heinz Schlarp, eds. *Jugoslawien: Ein Staat zerfällt*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1991. 208 pp., paperback, ISBN 3-490-13074-2.
- Wolfgang Libal. *Das Ende Jugoslawiens. Chronik einer Selbstzerstörung*. Wien: Europaverlag, 1991. Illustrated. 174 pp., paperback, ISBN 3-203-51135-5.
- Dorothea Graf von Razumovsky. *Chaos Jugoslawien. Historische Ursachen-Hintergründe-Perspektiven*. München: Piper, 1991. 192 pp., paperback, ISBN 3-492-11577-2.
- Johann Georg Reißmüller. *Der Krieg vor unserer Haustür. Hinter-runde der kroatischen Tragödie*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1992. 191 pp., paperback, ISBN 3-421-06543-8.

“Irrational behavior,” writes Dorothea Razumovsky, “is not predictable... [t]hus, in Yugoslavia, anything is possible at any time. Even a sudden outbreak of reason.” That optimism about the wars in the Balkans is not shared by the other authors under review here, or by most outside observers. But the demand for information on the causes of the Yugoslav disaster and on prospects for getting out of it continues to grow, and these four works taken together represent a first crop of German books on the subject.

Why should we reach for German books to help us explain the current Yugoslav wars? Two important reasons are simply to search for new perspectives on the history of the crisis and to tap into the tremendous amount of knowledge and experience that many German scholars and journalists have built up over decades of activity in the region. Moreover, Germany currently wields more economic might than any other state in Europe, and potentially more conventional military might as well. Given their predilection for heavy involvement in Central and Southeastern Europe, it is worth our while to acquaint ourselves with how at least some German experts view the situation. Finally, since Germany was the first country to recognize Slovenia and Croatia, it is a point of interest for many just what German public opinion held about the crisis. Do they or their government know something that we do not about Yugoslavia?

The works by Libal and Razumovsky (who are both journalists for German newspapers) are historical narratives which follow Yugoslavia up to its final hours. The well-illustrated *Das Ende Jugoslawiens* is primarily a political history, while *Chaos Jugoslawien* is at once more comprehensive, more detailed, and more colorful. Both treat quite well the standard themes



of any work on the period: from Corfu through the Partisans, from 1948 through the Kosovo crises. Sometimes, as in the case of the disputed figure of "1.7 million Yugoslav dead in World War Two," they both employ data that may now be subject to revision. If Libal's book is short on economic and social information, then Razumovsky's is generous in its use of anecdotes.

One important difference between them, though, centers on the causes of the failure of Yugoslavia. Razumovsky concentrates on the personal importance of Tito in holding the authoritarian state together. The refrain "We are Tito's, Tito is ours" is her key to the state's survival; similarly, if "all of the land broke out in fits of chills" whenever Tito sneezed, then it is no wonder both are now dead! Libal, also a journalist, takes a much more complex approach. The second Yugoslavia fell apart for the same reason the first did: it had no *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* ("sense of community"). In both of its eras, Yugoslavia was caught up in a cycle of violence and repression and suffered from a lack of any effective reform movement which cut across national lines. Furthermore, a responsible federal structure was never achieved, and the population was steeped in far too many *Feindbilder* ("visions of enemy-ness") to support a stable democratic political culture.

Another important difference is Razumovsky's willingness to criticize Croatia and Slovenia. She stresses the need for Croats to elect capable politicians instead of dilettantes, to be sparing in their use of inflammatory national symbols, and to guarantee beyond question the rights of the Serbian minority in their land. She also looks askance at Slovenia's "re-schooled Communist" leaders and its "idle talk" (*Gerede*) of democracy. In addition, she reduces the reasons for Slovenia's slow pace in carrying out full secession to a desire to maintain an uninterrupted high standard of living. Such an assessment obviously gives insufficient credit to Slovene leaders for simply planning their departure from Yugoslavia well, thereby improving the chances for success and a relatively low level of violence.

The other two volumes on hand are collections of essays. *Jugoslawien: Ein Staat zerfällt* is easily the most scholarly work of the lot; it contains the best tables, charts, and bibliographies and was written by both academics and journalists. Especially strong are the essays on Milošević's rise to power (Furkes), the role of the military (Anton Bebler), the manipulation of the public (Dunja Melčić) and the balanced, penetrating chapter of historical background (Schlarp). *Der Krieg vor unserer Haustür* consists of the 1980-late 1991 editorials of one of the co-editors of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. It is colorful and provocative. On several subjects it provides excellent coverage of important but little-discussed topics, such as the background of Croatian reformers such as Tudjman and Dabčević-Kučar.

Both collections concern themselves more with analysis of Slovenia than do the other two books. Reißmüller delineates Slovenia's problem-filled relationship to the German world and reminds us that not all Slovenes were reluctant Yugoslavs or hesitant Communists. He also includes an excellent day-by-day account of the war on Slovene soil in the summer of 1991.



In the Furkes and Schlarp volume are details of the partly successful attempt by the JNA to confiscate the weapons of the Slovene Territorial Defense Force, and also on the export capabilities of leading Slovene firms, including Iskra, Gorenje, and TAM. Both books leave the reader with a positive impression of Slovenia and its drive for a new stability; it is certainly no "dwarf state," it is not yet an economic basket-case, and it is ethnically rather settled. Reißmüller stresses further how "German-like" the Slovenes are by dint of their industriousness and love of order; the other volume highlights Slovenia's position of high development and dependence on the southern market in former Yugoslavia.

All four works can be studied together on the subject of predictions as to the outcome of the war. They were all written before Bosnia exploded, but only Razumovsky's stands out as truly optimistic. She even ventures the thought that "[t]he only solution is a new start," and that if the "power-hungry provincial potentates" woke up to the importance of negotiations and respect for fair play, then "the chance for a new treaty of union is not yet gone."

Reißmüller's editorials present the gloomiest views, and call also for the most forceful, concrete measures to stop the war. He correctly predicts that the secession struggle will become a war of liquidation against an entire people, but he errs in asserting that it is the Croats and not the Bosnian Muslims who will be the victims. Reißmüller calls for Germany to ignore the pleas of peace-obsessed churches and timid allies and recognize the new states, to offer them economic help while punishing Belgrade with sanctions, and to take the lead in sending military forces to halt Serbian aggression. Only then can peace-keeping forces fulfill their mission in the area; that mission, moreover, is not to save a Yugoslavia unworthy of the effort, as the French have proposed, but rather to protect its successor states.

Libal is convinced that the old Yugoslavia is dead. The interventions of the army dealt the final blow to "brotherhood and unity." While hoping for a peaceful *modus vivendi*, Libal's message comes through in his compelling descriptions of the recrudescence of national conflict after the mid-1960s: Yugoslavia has destroyed itself, and no outside force could have prevented it. The bloody past of conflict and conspiracy in the region render a long and murderous war possible.

Lastly, the volume edited by Furkes and Schlarp lends itself to the interpretation that, if not controlled, the Yugoslav conflict could easily spread to neighboring countries. But even if the war does end, many of its causes will not have been eliminated; there will remain minorities, economic despair, dreams of reestablishing glorious empires of old, large bureaucracies, a military that came to form a "state within a state," and a lack of international will to see through tough steps towards a settlement. Here the name of the United States crops up: Washington, like the EC, has been fixated falsely upon territorial integrity as the key to stability, instead of supporting the principle of self-determination.

All the authors fix the public eye as well on little-treated features of Yugoslav history. Especially valuable are the frequent discussions of



motives for important events. In reasoning on why the Croats did not come to the aid of the Slovenes when the JNA rolled into action, Reißmüller mentions not only fear of terrorist reprisals, but also lingering resentment over Slovenia's inaction during the Croatian Spring of 1971, a desire not to come across to the outside world as militaristic, and the hope that negotiations on new border settlements involving the Serbian minority could continue undisturbed. This same author reintroduces us to the massacre at Jazovka, which had a gruesome parallel at Kočevski Rog.

Writing of Heinrich Böll's 1974 audience with President Tito, Razumovsky notes that Böll was too taken by the dictator's openness and "warmth" to confront him with his list of political complaints. This seems to be an effect Tito had on many politicians and foreign visitors. Razumovsky also wrestles with, but only partially rejects, the pejorative connotations of the word "Balkan." At any rate, her assertions that Atatürk was a better leader than Central Europe's Hitler and that the current Balkan war is a full-blown "European" crisis are refreshing. Reißmüller, on the other hand, does not shy from making use of the loaded terms "oriental despotism," "Serbo-Communist," and "un-European."

Libal does a marvellous job of summing up leaders' social and political impact with pithy phrases: Tito is shown to be more of an "internationalist" than a Yugoslav, and Ranković is depicted as the last hope of Serbian nationalists who fear the influence of Kardelj, Bakarić, the Albanians, and the "Croat" Tito.

Finally, the outstanding essay by Slavenka Drakulić in the Furkes-Schlarp volume is poignant and thought-provoking. In as humane and understated a way as possible, it drives home the physical and psychological horror of the mounting bloodshed. But it also expresses the pain of another aspect of the war: the death of a country that never rid itself of *Feindbilder*, hate, and the glorification of battle.

In conclusion, this "early crop" of German reports on the war in ex-Yugoslavia provides the general reader with good background material and reliable guides through the maze of events comprising Europe's greatest crisis since the Second World War.

Insofar as it is possible to speculate from these sources on any sort of general "German" view, one could say that the writers for the most part evince a certain pro-Croatian tendency. Put another way, they tend to concentrate above all on the Serb-Croat conflict and, in doing so, to blame the Serbs for starting and exacerbating the war. There is a general conviction that Yugoslavia was from the start a flawed enterprise: in Reißmüller's words a "monstrosity" (*Mißgebilde*) or a "tyranny" (*Zwangsstaat*).

The Slovene struggle for independence definitely occupies the periphery here amidst the titanic Serb and Croat forces slugging it out over the federation. Nonetheless there is recognition of the key role Slovenia played in toppling the second Yugoslavia; there is appreciation of what still appears to be its well-calculated and reasonable method of winning statehood. More importantly, for the present, is the well-founded view that



industrious, peaceful, and forward-looking Slovenia will still require substantial Western aid to survive.

Whether this money appears in the needed amounts — \$7 to \$10 billion, according to Furkes and Schlarp — is not yet certain. There remains the frightening possibility that the hesitancy and short-sightedness which delayed Western recognition of the breakaway republics and which has allowed the brutality of the Bosnian war to rise to unthinkable levels could claim another victim: the Slovene economy.

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