
Balkanism in Political Context: From the Ottoman Empire to the EU

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Abstract

This article investigates the British tradition of balkanism, paying particular attention to the forms of power that representation of South-East Europe has supported. Using travel writing as a source material, I shall exemplify the tradition through the study of two periods in which balkanist discourse – with its motifs of discord, savagery, backwardness and obfuscation – has been especially powerful. During the nineteenth century, firstly, such discourse legitimised British assistance for the Ottoman Empire against the threat of Russian expansion. In contemporary times, secondly, the denigration of the entire Central and Eastern European region has worked to endorse the systematic interference of the European Union. For the Balkans, this has entailed wide-ranging EU control of economic structures and political frameworks, repeating the nineteenth-century concept of the peninsula as a borderland available for Western intervention and control.

Introduction

The debate about what the term ‘Europe’ signifies has acquired increasing urgency in recent years. Since the end of the Cold War, questions about the nature and constitution of European civilisation – what it believes, what its borders are, what you need to get in – have become a staple ingredient of political speeches, newspaper editorials and academic publications. Far from reassuring Western European populations, the defeat of communism seems to have initiated a profound crisis of identity. On the one hand, commentators have outlined the difficulties of defining this small, multifarious, expansionist region that is, after all, merely an appendage to the vast continental landmass of Eurasia. Hayden White considers ‘Europe’ a geo-political concept that exists only ‘in the talk and writing of visionaries and scoundrels seeking an alibi for a civilization whose principal historical attribute has been [...] to destroy what it cannot dominate, assimilate, or consume’ (2000, 67). On the other hand, there has been a wave of neo-conservative sentiment that understands Europe to be the true locale of culture and

value, and that uses the contemporary fear of asylum seekers, economic migrants and international terror to forge the region's political coherence. Such sentiment has been exacerbated by the rise of exclusionary practices in a number of Western and Eastern societies. The growth of the extreme right in France, Germany and Austria, the nationalist conflicts in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the Basque Country, and the 'hard' border erected between 'East-Central Europe' and the Balkans all express the hierarchical notion of the continent as a nucleus of decision-making states, and a broader sweep of marginal nations and ethnicities for whom decisions need to be taken.

The Discourse of Balkanism

The Balkans – Romania, Albania, Bulgaria and the countries of the former Yugoslavia – have long exemplified the non- or quasi-European in the Western geographical imagination. Caught between Catholicism and Byzantium, Christendom and Islam, the Western powers and Russia, the peninsula has been conceived as an unruly borderland where the structured identity of the imperial centre dissolves and alien, antithetic peripheries begin. From the days of the Ottoman incursion into Europe, the Great Powers have considered Western control of these peripheries essential for the preservation of peace on the continent. In the nineteenth century, France, Britain, Austria and Russia all made incursions into the region, both to master Europe's eastern border and to pursue the strategic and economic gains that proceed from conquest. The persistence and violence of Great Power interference led inevitably to suspicion and rivalry, and produced many of the international crises – the Crimean War, the Russo-Ottoman War, the First World War – upon which the region's reputation has been based. It also helped to create the nationalist insurgency that the imperial nations so feared. It is interesting to note that the term 'balkanisation' – to divide into smaller, mutually hostile units – evolved in the early part of the twentieth century when the region's burgeoning nationalism resulted, via the First Balkan War of 1912 and the events of 1914-1918, in the expulsion of the Ottoman and Austrian Empires from the peninsula. In other words, integral to the term is an imperial anxiety about the breaking-up of empire by subject populations.

Needless to say, the tradition of interference persisted into the twentieth century, most obviously in the expansionism of Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union, but also in the contemporary enlargement of the European Union, in which gradual political and economic mastery is being achieved over Central and Eastern Europe. Adam Burgess, discussing 'the virtually colonial character of relations between the two halves of the continent', is not untypical in deploring the 'new division of Europe, one half of which enjoys the right to set targets for the other' (1997, 107-108).

The strictures on regional independence have been supported by one of the most powerful representational traditions in European culture. Accusations of discord, immorality, savagery, violence and congenital backwardness have littered the works of travel writers, novelists, diarists and historians, presenting the Balkans as one of the primary ‘others’ of Western civilisation. In British culture, this strand of ‘Euro-Orientalism’ (Murawska-Muthesius 2006, 282) was most forceful in the Victorian and post-Cold War periods, with a significant convergence occurring in discursive register, tone, imagery and evaluation. For the average nineteenth-century traveller, these were ‘wild stern regions’, characterised by ‘diabolical mountains’ and inhabited by ‘inferior nationalities’ who proved ‘great thieves and liars, and more backward [...] than any people in Europe’ (Tozer 1869, I, 196; Brown 1888, 105; Upward 1908, 279; Knight 1880, 36). One long-term resident there characteristically refers to ‘semi-barbarous countries’ in which ‘war and massacres come unexpectedly’ (Blunt 1918, 88 and 176). This was a style of regional portraiture that Britain was also deploying on its colonial possessions: an unremarkable practice in an age of empire, but strangely anachronistic in the early twentieth-first century. Once again, the region is being deemed ‘discordant, anarchic, demonic’, a ‘backwater’ pervaded by ‘bigotry and bull-headedness’, where the towns are ‘pure George Orwell’s 1984’ and the villages suggest ‘people living in bestial poverty’ (Maclean 1992, 186; Russell 1993, 198 and 252; Thurnham 1994, 8; Goodwin 1993, 259). The discourse is reinforced by constant analogies between the contemporary Balkans and the locations of nineteenth-century empire (urban poverty recalling ‘a dusty Indian city’, for example, or rural lawlessness invoking ‘the north-west frontier of Hindustan of 1887’ (Selbourne 1990, 112; Carver 1998, 193). The effect is to vindicate a politico-cultural condition in which some countries’ Europeanness is a given, while others have to work for it. Although the publication of Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* in 1997, which coined the term ‘balkanism’ as shorthand for such denigratory representation (1997, 10-11), has inspired wide-ranging study of its forms and development, the structures of power that balkanism supports are rarely explored. For a nation like Britain, these might not have been the colonial practices pursued by France, Austria or Russia, but certainly entailed political and economic frameworks whose strength and influence mirror those being endorsed by classic imperial discourse.¹

This essay will examine the forms of Western interference during the two great periods of denigratory balkanism: specifically, Britain’s response to the nineteenth-century decline of the Ottoman Empire and the EU’s eastern enlargement after 1989. While acknowledging that differences exist, I will argue that the periods share a sense of the Balkans as a borderland that requires Western supervision, and demonstrate the remarkable levels of influence this supervision can achieve.

Nineteenth-Century Balkanism

During the nineteenth century, the question of what should be done with the territories vacated by the decaying Ottoman Empire – the so-called Eastern Question – was one of the great themes of Great Power diplomacy. This straggling eastern empire was still a force to be reckoned with in the early part of the century, its dominions stretching across the Middle East, northern Africa and the eastern and southern Balkans. Yet it was not the power that it had once been. In the Balkans, the signs of degeneration were everywhere: a corrupt bureaucracy, a chaotic administration, lawless and insubordinate armed forces and an unnecessarily onerous tax burden stimulated the rise of nationalist feeling, if not outright revolt, amongst the largely Christian population. The spread of nationalism was as much a source of concern for the Great Powers as it was for the Porte. Once its threat to Western Christendom had diminished after the seventeenth century, the Ottoman presence in the Balkans had helped to ease mistrust between Britain, France, Austria and Russia and, as long as no nation upset the balance of power, to facilitate stability in Europe. There were growing fears, however, about the extent and focus of Russian ambition. During the eighteenth century, Russia had benefited from the Ottoman withdrawal along the north shores of the Black Sea, and, as the oppression of the South Slav became more evident, a very real danger emerged of Russian intervention in South-East Europe. The inevitable fall of Constantinople and the Straits would have threatened Britain's Near Eastern trade, its sea routes to India and its naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. As a consequence, British statesmen – along with their French colleagues – spent much of the nineteenth century preserving the integrity of the Ottoman Empire through sustained diplomatic and military assistance. It was a policy that Austria also supported. Although it had expanded into the western Balkans after the defeat of Napoleon, Austria shared Britain's concerns about Russian expansionism and showed a willingness to assist British and French plans for the region. Indeed, all the Great Powers involved in the Eastern Question were working from the same basic principles: that it was their absolute right to manage South-East European affairs for the good of Europe and that Western interests were the only consideration.

The imperialist bent of the Western nations is best illustrated by their response to the 'Eastern Crisis' of the 1870s. Signalling the end of Ottoman power in Europe, the crisis comprised a series of insurgencies and wars across the peninsula, incited by economic distress, a growth of nationalist movements and a surge of Russian opportunism. In 1875, the Christian peasantry of Bosnia and Herzegovina finally rose against their overlords, inspiring insurrection in Bulgaria in 1876 and a declaration of war against the Porte by Serbia and Montenegro in the same year. The latter, a quixotic gesture at best, put pressure on the Tsar to come out on their side in April 1877, and the Russian army, despite resistance along the way, made rapid advances through Romania and Bulgaria, ending up ten miles from

Constantinople. Although faced with a South-East Europe under Russian control, British public opinion was divided. For William Gladstone, the liberal leader, the Ottoman reprisals against the Bulgarian insurgents in 1876, which included the wholesale destruction of villages and the murder of thousands of civilians, indicated a degenerate regime whose expulsion from Europe was overdue. For Benjamin Disraeli, the Conservative Prime Minister, the imperative was to obstruct Russian expansion in order 'to maintain the British Empire and the prestige and image of England in Europe and throughout the world' (Millman 1979, 105). It was the conservative camp that won out. By the terms of the Treaty of San Stefano, forced on the Porte by Russia in March 1878, full independence had been granted to Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, and an enlarged, autonomous Bulgaria had been created that was likely to ensure Russian control of trade in the Black Sea and the Aegean, none of which was acceptable to the Western powers. In June, at the hastily convened Berlin Congress, the independent Bulgaria envisaged by the earlier treaty was decimated, the larger portion being returned to the Sultan, and although Serbia was granted independence its territorial gains were significantly reduced.² The Treaty of Berlin also allowed Austria to occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, a province which Austrian strategists had long believed was necessary for the defence of Dalmatia, and which it went on to annex in 1908. The Berlin Congress, in short, disregarded the wishes of native populations, effectively returning millions of Europeans to colonial rule and sowing the seeds of further national struggle in the region, including the Austro-Serbian rivalry that would trigger the First World War.³

This notion that national aspirations were the least important factor in the arrangement of South-East European affairs is also apparent in the economic sphere. For the British Empire, territorial conquest was always supplementary to the achievement of commercial gain abroad, and its intervention in the Near East was not so much aimed at controlling territory per se, as at ensuring economic advantages. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English Levant Company was flourishing: French commercial activity had languished after the defeat of Napoleon and, with British traders looking for alternatives to the highly protected Russian market, the value of British exports to the Ottoman Empire rose from £88,065 in 1783 to some £7,620,140 in 1845. With the region coming to overshadow France, Russia and Austria as a destination for British manufactured goods, as well as a source of agricultural and industrial raw material, Lord Palmerston would declare, in 1841, 'that with no country is our trade so liberally permitted and carried out as with Turkey' (Stavrianos 1963, 227 and 321). The shifting commercial priorities of the later nineteenth century only re-emphasised the importance of the Near East. As competition for markets increased, Britain turned to investment as an alternative source of revenue, using the nation's considerable reserves of capital for speculation across the European mainland and beyond. The Porte, wishing to develop its railways, ports and military capacity, lent

heavily from British, French and German financiers, accumulating a debt of some 3.9 billion francs by 1914 (Ibid, 419). Despite severe tax increases for the peasantry (which served to exacerbate discontent), the debt repayments came to account for a sizeable percentage of the national revenue, with the Porte declaring itself bankrupt as early as the mid-1870s, the decade of the Eastern Crisis. The consequence was Western Europe's ever-greater supervision of the Ottoman economy and – with political considerations always underlying the advancement of loans – influence over domestic and diplomatic policy. Yet the West's economic penetration of the Near East was not limited to the Porte. During the late nineteenth century, those Balkan states that had gained independence also faced escalating budget expenses and an over-reliance on government loans for infrastructural development, accumulating huge levels of debt to Western European creditors that absorbed national income and inaugurated foreign control over the region's finances. By 1914, with Romania owing some 1.7 billion francs, Serbia 903 million francs and Bulgaria 850 million francs, such states were reduced to 'a chain of increasingly dependent economies, each one in turn more heavily fettered to its more powerful Western neighbours' (Jelavich 1983, 23; Okey 1982, 117).

Naturally, the style of nineteenth-century balkanism offered a convenient explanation for the multiple problems (poverty, insurgency, dependency) that Western interference helped to create. The accusations of semi-savagery, backwardness, ethnic strife and moral dissolution to be found in British travel writing not only suggested that such problems were an innate consequence of native deficiency, but also offered a triumphant vindication of foreign rule. This was emphasised by the direct support that travellers would give to British policy in the Near East. S.G.B. St. Clair and Charles A. Brophy are in no doubt that Russia interest in the Eastern Question is merely 'a pretext for aggression leading to territorial aggrandisement': that is, a desire for intervention on behalf of the Slavic Orthodox Christians only 'in the hope of one day becoming their sovereign' (1869, 405 and 313). With this in mind, and with the Christian population being 'brutish, obstinate, idle, superstitious, dirty' and lacking the 'uprightness of character necessary to form a basis for a national civilization' their solution is the continuation of a 'Turkish administration untrammelled by foreign influence' (Ibid, 408, 409 and vii). J.J. Best is aware that the Ottoman Empire is in retreat, but he wants it 'propped up by the external influence of the great nations of Europe' in order to ensure 'the preservation of the balance of power, and to prevent the far greater evil of endless and bloody contentions amongst themselves for the detached portions' (1842, 142-143).⁴ From the 1870s onwards, this speculation as to the fate of South-East Europe after the Ottoman withdrawal was increasingly common. During the uprisings in Herzegovina, W.J. Stillman believes that the last thing these 'ignorant' populations need is 'representative government, dependent on [...] universal suffrage', which can only lead to further 'anarchy': far better a

Great Power administration conducting ‘a system of patriarchal despotism’ (1877, 155-156). Arthur Evans’s solution is ‘an immediate Austrian occupation of the province’, and in the long term a ‘prolonged administration [...] by a European commission’ (1878, 83). This remedy was soon to be applied at the Berlin Conference, and Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was swift. Robert Dunkin, travelling through the region in the mid-1890s, had only praise for the subsequent advances in law, communications, sanitation, education, and the like, proclaiming that Austrian ‘administration of the Herzegovina is at once simple and admirable, and its results are a triumphant justification of the methods of civilization’ (1897, 192). On the eve of the First World War, travellers were still suggesting that ‘the misrule of the Turk is preferable to [...] freedom’ in some parts of the Balkans, and even that the best option is ‘efficient European control by the representatives of all the Powers’ (Foster Fraser 1906, 15-16). However the idea was expressed (‘administration from outside’, ‘the guidance and control of Europe’ (Upward 1908, 45; le Queux 1907, 291)), there were few nineteenth-century commentators who questioned Western governance of Europe’s eastern border.

The Twentieth Century and After

Once established, the concept of the Balkans as a frontier zone that required policing from without persisted into the twentieth century, although became re-routed into new channels. After 1918, full independence was extended to all the territories lying between the Adriatic and Black Seas, and constitutional monarchies were established which exerted sovereign control over domestic and foreign policy. It was a situation that could never last. When recession spread through the continent in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a bankrupt, impoverished South-East Europe became vulnerable to German penetration, which manipulated the trade clearing agreements arising from the depression to control the region’s agrarian exports and to insist on its purchase of German industrial products. By 1938, Hitler had gained such wide-ranging economic and political leverage that the Balkans ‘were more or less included in the Reich’s Großraum’ (Pavlowitch 1999, 271). German influence was consolidated during the Second World War, when Bulgaria and Romania experienced varying degrees of economic and military control, Serbia and Croatia languished under puppet regimes, and Albania endured German and Italian occupation. Nor did liberation arrive when the Axis powers were defeated. In October 1944, the notorious percentages deal struck by Churchill and Stalin⁵ led to the ascendancy of the Soviet Union, which attempted to reduce the region to a series of satellite states through trading and fiscal arrangements and political pressure. In the West, there was a good deal of sympathy for the oppressed populations of the communist East, cut off as they were from the freedom and prosperity of democratic Europe, as Cold War discourse had it. Once liberation arrived, however, the ‘free world’ was not sure it

wanted them. After the initial euphoria of 1989, the post-communist peoples were quickly re-imagined as an uncontrollable mass – of criminal gangs, traffickers, prostitutes – that threatened the imminent destruction of Western stability. That such invasion imagery should now be projected onto civilians, rather than being limited to governmental and military elites, illustrates how the Cold War division of Europe has broadened from the purely geopolitical implications of the ‘iron curtain’, understood as temporary and anomalous, to a ‘civilisational fault line’ that is viewed as innate.⁶ It was at this point that the control of the eastern border passed to a reinvigorated European Union which, with its rhetoric of ‘eastern expansion’ and ‘eastern enlargement’, began asserting itself like some nineteenth-century empire.

Originally entitled the European Economic Community, the EU emerged from the immediate concerns of the post-war period, when a collection of six nations, believing that ‘an exhausted and divided Europe [...] presented both a power vacuum and a temptation to the USSR’ (El-Agraa 2004, 25) sought closer economic and political ties. At the heart of the EU’s commitment to free trade between member states was a desire to preserve ‘European’ values and practices in the face of the ‘non-European’ mores of the communist east. The idea of the East/West divide as a motor for integration was shown in the community’s on-going programme of growth, drawing in Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom in 1973, Greece in 1981, and Spain and Portugal in 1986. It also partly explains its confused and indecisive response during the 1990s to the spate of applications from the former communist countries. In demographic terms, these applications proposed the most ambitious enlargement on record, entailing a 20 per cent increase in the population of the European Union and an accommodation of the sizeable economic disparity between the incumbent and accession nations (in terms of GDP per head, this ranged from Slovenia’s 70 per cent of the EU average to Bulgaria’s 25 per cent). Yet it was in Eastern Europe’s political dissimilarity during its transition from planned to market economy, not to mention the legacy of antagonism between the two halves of Europe, that one senses the source of the caution, and the explanation for the EU’s stringent admission criteria. By the time Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Cyprus and the Czech Republic joined in 2004, and Romania and Bulgaria were accepted for a second wave of accession in 2007, they found themselves with less sovereignty than they had had as members of the Eastern bloc.⁷

As established at the 1993 European Council in Copenhagen, and detailed in Agenda 2000 (1997), the EU’s measurable targets for admission focused upon the absolute adherence to the form of government, notion of citizenship and principal of competitive free market economics prevalent in the West.⁸ The preparation for simultaneous entry into the single market and the Schengen system has

necessitated in Central and Eastern Europe sweeping changes to monetary policy, fiscal arrangements, capital flows, immigration controls and political and institutional frameworks, including the fulfilment of a number of pre-accession 'criteria [...] that even the current members are not expected to meet' (Zielonka 2002, 8).

The fact that the latest enlargement has involved no changes whatsoever to these established nations, who claim to be promoting civil society but whose glaring deficiencies in such areas as minority rights, asylum policy and institutional transparency are a matter of record,⁹ suggests less a genuine merger than a wholesale take-over. A nation's entrance into the EU has always entailed surrendering to European bodies control of activities traditionally accorded to the nation-state; yet never before has EU expansion placed greater limitations on national sovereignty. The long-term members have taken upon themselves the right to choose the candidate nations, stipulate the pre-accession criteria, screen their progress, set the probationary period and, effectively, take charge of the domestic affairs of over fifteen nations. Needless to say, the enlarged *acquis communautaire* (the EU's extensive corpus of laws and policies) was not evolved in discussion with the Central and Eastern European countries (hereafter CEECs), who have been told that, however unrealistic the EU's demands, non-adoption will result in non-admission (Poole 2003, 9).

The Western European tutelage of the accession and candidate countries is illustrated by the Europe Agreements, which require the CEECs to open their economies in full to Western European market forces. The Single Market Programme, which regulates continental trade via an integrated market economy, demands the removal of all barriers to the movement of capital, services, goods and persons, as well as the privatisation of industry, the liberalisation of prices and the development of regional specialisation in key areas of production. An example of the EU's economic interventionism is the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), an austere fiscal framework which requires all member countries to pursue a balanced or surplus budget. Although the terms of the Pact have altered in the interim, the Amsterdam Treaty (1998) determined that budgetary behaviour would be closely supervised and that – with exemptions for any annual decrease in output of more than 2 per cent – penalties would be imposed for excessive deficits. If negligence was shown in tackling deficit, there had even been provision for financial sanctions. For the transitional economies, under the constant surveillance of EU bodies, the punitive nature of the SGP has not only mitigated against borrowing (for the kind of investment in transport, education and health integral to economic growth) but has also been found to encourage cuts in public spending on essential areas of infrastructure. There are many other examples of the CEECs' loss of independent decision-making. The stabilisation of inflation and exchange rates necessary for the region's mandatory entry into the European Monetary Union,

and for its economic convergence with other EU members, is both controlled and monitored by the executive body of the EU, the European Commission, as is the package of educational and training schemes that comprise the Labour Market Programme, which aims to regulate employment and develop entrepreneurial spirit. Speaking of the pressure for compliance placed on the region, a Czech diplomatic once exclaimed, 'What can we do? If we want to become members of the Union, we have to accept what is decided' (Václav Kuklik quoted in Bretherton, 1999, 200).

As the SGP illustrates, many of the accession mechanisms may look reasonable on paper, but have proved disastrous in practice. Although it is difficult to tell how the CEECs might have progressed without external interference, it is certainly possible to itemise some of the negative effects of that interference. In the early 1990s, the high growth rates that were expected from the 'shock therapy' applied to the region failed to materialise, with a number of countries plagued by unemployment, falls in output levels, high inflation rates and, in places, the social unrest consequent on recession, crippling price adjustments and the influx of Western goods that people could barely afford (Barrell *et al.* 2004, 2). The burgeoning unemployment figures remain an on-going source of instability. The EU's insistence on regional specialisation means that certain industries will be phased out in each nation, resulting in an undermining of the labour market and an increased reliance on imports. By 2004, 50 per cent of these were already coming from the long-term EU members, who now represent the major source of trade for the accession nations, weakening their links to other markets. There are also signs that the free flow of labour will result in the more educated and skilled workers migrating to the 'core' nations, leaving the low-rent, low-wage 'periphery' for unskilled industries. In order to ease the transition to a market economy, long-term investment in the region is urgently needed, although this has proved disappointing. As an example, the 22 billion euros provided in grants and loans to the Balkans by the EU and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development during the 1990s, and the \$16 billion provided by the United States, compares unfavourably to the financial assistance given to Greece and Yugoslavia alone after the Second World War, particularly as much of the recent money has gone on political and economic reform (Lampe 2006, 290-292).¹⁰ Any direct investment has also tended to go to the Visegrad countries rather than those of South-East Europe, such as Romania and Bulgaria, whose economic progress towards membership, already obstructed through the 1990s by the embargo on Danube trade and the war in neighbouring Yugoslavia, is also hampered by shortfalls in structural aid. What would have greatly assisted these economies in the absence of significant investment was an ability to compete for EU markets in those commodities in which the region is rich. Unfortunately, throughout much of the 1990s, the EU pursued protectionist measures against almost 50 per cent of its industrial products and placed strict tariffs and quotas on its agrarian produce, a

particularly damaging limitation on a region whose climate and soil are advantageous for an agricultural industry in which 25 per cent of the workforce are employed (the consequent price gaps between member and accession nations are as high as 40 to 50 percent in both the crop and livestock sectors).¹¹ As Christopher Preston pointed out in 1997, '[T]he limitations imposed on "sensitive" agricultural products, steel, coal and textiles are precisely those in which the CEECs have a competitive advantage, and on which international trade theory suggests export-led growth should be based' (Preston 1997, 199).

Yet the West's anxiety about the integration of Central and Eastern Europe is not primarily economic. For governments and populations alike, the real fear is of immigration from the CEECs and beyond of a mass of people in search of refuge from poverty and crisis. The governments of the long-term member states, aiming to reduce public alarm, have devised a wide-ranging Justice and Home Affairs package with the intention of controlling crime, terrorism and immigration (three issues which have become inextricably linked after 9/11). The Schengen Convention, which ostensibly champions the free movement of peoples within the European Union through the abolition of identity checks at the internal borders, simultaneously (and paradoxically) advocates the tightening up of external border mechanisms, making free movement into integrated Europe even more difficult. Once again, the measure entails a range of directives that no previous EU enlargement has required. The accession nations, situated along Europe's eastern rim, are required to implement tougher immigration controls, prohibit cross-border trade, improve policing in frontier zones and obstruct the influx of people seeking asylum: in short, to recast themselves as a kind of buffer-zone for 'fortress Europe'. The restrictions on asylum, including the asylum seeker's need for correct visa documents (hardly likely when fleeing crisis) and the border officials' ability to automatically return them to the source countries, has provoked criticism from the UNHCR and the Helsinki Committee for their open contravention of human rights. Yet this is of little concern to an EU that is desperate to reduce the pressure of immigration on member states, and that will block or delay the membership of any candidate nation that fails to implement the Schengen criteria. As Alina Mungiu-Pippidi has commented, 'there is no room for negotiation here, with East European countries becoming passive consumers of asylum and border policies set by the EU' (2002, 67).

The installation of a 'hard' border around Europe most obviously disadvantages those countries that are ostracised to the east (Russia, Belarus, Turkey, Ukraine) and to the south-east (Serbia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina). Degraded in the European hierarchy, excluded from economic development and denied cross-border trade with accession states, their obligation to seek membership and its privileges becomes all the more pressing. But the accession states have their own causes for concern. To begin with, the EU has decided that, with the history of

corruption in their police forces and lack of independence in their judiciaries, the CEECs cannot be left to themselves to supervise the eastern border, but require substantial assistance. This has involved funding, equipment and technology, as well as liaison officers and police attachés from France, Germany and the UK, who are being stationed in particular candidate countries to train and advise the local forces.¹² As Didier Bigo points out, the concept of European-wide policing means in practice Western European states carving out colonial-style ‘spheres of influence’ that reduce the CEECs’ sovereign right to control their own institutions (their governments commenting, pointedly, on ‘the imbalance between the number of EU police officers on their territory and the number of their own representatives [...] invited to EU countries’ (2002, 221). At the same time, the accession states have not found that freedom of movement has been greatly improved. The creation of a ‘hard’ border to the east of the old ‘iron curtain’ has not only increased economic hardship in the frontier regions, but also restricted the cross-border movement of those ethnicities who straddle borders, a stricture on interchange that involves millions of people across Central and Eastern Europe (between the Hungarians in Hungary and Serbia, for example, or the Romanians in Romania and Moldova). Nor is the EU enthusiastic about free movement westwards. The candidate states might have been obliged to implement the Schengen agreement from the moment that their applications were accepted, but the circulation of their citizens around the opportunity-rich West (to take up undesirable low-class jobs) will be phased in gradually. The European Commission originally established a restriction on labour movement of up to seven years after accession takes place, dependant on the Commission’s assessment of the labour needs within the long-standing member states (Barrell *et al.* 2004, 74-75).¹³ Throughout the 1990s, the westward migration of South-East Europeans was also curtailed by the humiliating and expensive process of visa application and by the necessity for letters of invitation from citizens of the country of destination; they were soon being asked for visas for such first-wave aspirant nations as Slovenia, which was once part of an Eastern Europe in which populations travelled freely.¹⁴ Rather than being ‘taught democracy’ by the West, such people are learning to cope with being second-class citizens denied the basic rights enjoyed by their Western counterparts. Commenting on how ‘the legacy of the Cold War divide persists’, Jan Zielonka details the way that many Central and Eastern Europeans view Schengen ‘as an imposed regime with discriminatory implications [...], a symbol of exclusion of the poor and allegedly less civilized European nations by wealthy and arrogantly superior ones’ (2002, 1-2).

In rhetoric that is usually associated with contemporary US policy in the Middle East, the Schengen Convention is part of the West’s stated political ambition to ‘export democracy’ and ‘promote human rights’ throughout the continent. What lies behind such phrases is the need for evidence that accession countries have broken with their communist past and will not relapse into authoritarian practices,

a fear accentuated by the gains made by socialist parties in several CEECs during the 1990s. To this end, Western Europe has been establishing institutions there that guarantee 'civil society' and the rule of law, nurturing and training local NGOs, screening public administrations, promoting an independent judiciary and monitoring human rights. There is no better instance of its current meddling in national life than the West's direct interventionism in the Balkans, which has even involved an attempted management of the political leadership. During the 1990s, the Albanian ex-communist, Sali Berisha, who had given assurances that Albania would not be pursuing irredentist goals in Kosovo and Macedonia, was championed by the West, receiving military support from the United States and economic and political assistance from Germany, including advice on re-election campaigns from the Konrad Adanauer Institute. In the tainted Albanian election of 1996, both Germany and Italy put pressure on the OSCE to validate the results in order that Berisha retain power. In a similar way, the OSCE was able to ban particular parties from running in the Bosnian election of 1996, and American organisations such as the International Republican Institute attempted to manage Romanian elections by promoting anti-government NGOs, sponsoring 'independent' media and training 'democratic' parties; as one IRI adviser put it, 'We taught them what to say, how to say it, and even what to wear when saying it' (Burgess 1997, 109). The United States has installed so many high-ranking advisers in the governmental administrations of the southern Balkans that, in Adam Burgess's words, 'countries like Bulgaria and Albania have been virtually run from Washington' (Ibid, 168). In the West's efforts to export its political structures one catches a glimpse of the embryonic federalism that has emerged in EU thinking, with the groundwork for an integrated supranational organisation already apparent in its rudimentary defence and foreign policies and in the proposed European constitution.

On occasion, when South-East Europe has failed to adhere to political directives, international bodies such as NATO and the UN have taken strident measures to ensure compliance. During the military crises in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, EU leaders proved far less qualified to intercede than in the more sedate realms of finance and administration. The incompetence, vacillation and mutual suspicion that marked their response to the Yugoslav Wars finally resulted in the United States assuming responsibility for stabilising Europe's eastern border, military action becoming a common occurrence in the 1990s. For one commentator, the air of moral crusade that pervaded these 'humanitarian interventions' evoked a kind of 'reworking of the white man's burden discourse' (Str ath 2000, 419). In Bosnia, this involved the deployment of peacekeeping forces, of enforced negotiations, of summary air strikes and, after the Dayton Accord, of the West's eventual mandate for economic and political reconstruction. Emphasising the country's status as a Western protectorate, Glynne Evans, head of the United Nations Department of the Foreign Office, expressed a 'desire to construct a great

humanitarian empire, policed by British forces under United Nations auspices' (Simms 2001, 244). In Kosovo, similarly, NATO's bombardment of the Serbs in 1999, spearheaded by the US, was pursued without approval from the UN Security Council, and, while failing to either prevent expulsions or depose Milošević, imposed an international administration of some 50,000 NATO troops. James Mayall echoes the sentiment of many commentators when he described Bosnia and Kosovo as 'trusteeships in all but name' (2001, 277), a situation that has pertained to a lesser extent in Macedonia and Albania. Even Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, countries not directly involved in the Yugoslav conflicts, found their air-space appropriated and their territories used for military bases (it was due to their compliance during the Kosovo crisis that, in December 1999, Romania and Bulgaria were finally invited to open EU accession negotiations). Inevitably, Serbia has been particularly exposed to the West's 'civilising mission'. Between the end of the Bosnia War and the fall of Milošević, the EU froze government funds, prohibited foreign investment, backed the bombing of non-military targets, and imposed both limited sanctions and a flight ban between member states and Yugoslavia (Moussis 1991, 518). The Rambouillet Agreement, which proposed the occupation of Yugoslavia prior to the bombardment, went so far as to demand that 'NATO personnel shall enjoy, together with their vehicles, vessels, aircraft, and equipment, free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY [Federal Republic of Yugoslavia] including associated airspace and territorial waters', a provision that entailed 'the right of bivouac, manoeuvre, billet, and utilization of any areas or facilities as required for support, training, and operations' (quoted in Chomsky 1999, 17). The document was a powerful articulation of the West's sense of itself as a region that intervenes, and of the Balkans as a place for intervention.

I would not argue that, as the death toll rose in the Yugoslav Wars, intervention did not become necessary. In fact, some form of disinterested arbitration, shorn of economic or political ambitions, was exactly what was required to prevent the continuation of Serbian and Croatian atrocities in Bosnia, and should have been pursued far more swiftly than it was.¹⁵ What I am contending, rather, is that the form of intervention that occurred was a part and parcel of the EU's broader project of gaining dominion over its eastern border, just as British policy towards the Ottoman Empire had intended dominion in the nineteenth century. The historical continuum becomes even clearer when considering the kind of culturalist racism that has vindicated the last fifteen years of EU enlargement. The West's authority to evaluate and master the political conditions of Central and Eastern Europe is predicated on a symbolic ordering of the continent that positions the region at a lower level on the evolutionary scale. Behind the images of congenital violence, corruption, poverty and ethnic unrest that one finds in contemporary cultural production, lies the implicit argument that the region cannot progress by itself, but requires external guidance to avoid slipping into the mistakes of the past.

The point is often made explicitly in Western travel writing and journalism on the Balkans. Robert Carver, pondering Albania's apparently endless cycles of unrest, finds the answer in a 'European-enforced order and industry', and a reinvigoration of 'the centres of ultimate power' that pertained in 'the old colonial days' (1998, 133 and 169). Robert Kaplan, an American author whose depiction of the Balkans in *Balkan Ghosts* (1993) is one of the most notorious example of post-Cold War balkanism, confidently asserts that '[O]nly western imperialism – though few will like calling it that – can now unite the European continent and save the Balkans from chaos' (quoted in Krasteva 2004, 105-106). In the early 1990s, the Canadian liberal intellectual, Michael Ignatieff, was finding a direct link between South-East European disorder and the absence of imperial restraint. Noting that the transition from communism was achieved without the Great Power regulation that marked Versailles in 1919 or Yalta in 1945, he says of the Balkans:

Not surprisingly, their nation states are collapsing, as in Somalia and in many other nations of Africa. In crucial zones of the world, once heavily policed by empire – notably the Balkans – populations find themselves without an imperial arbiter to appeal to. Small wonder then, that, unrestrained by stronger hands, they have set upon each other for that final settling of scores so long deferred by the presence of empire. (1993, 8)

What one wonders about here is Ignatieff's liberal credentials. One might be equally surprised to find, in the pages of *The Guardian*, Julian Borger suggesting that a 'benign colonial regime' was necessary for democratic development in Bosnia, and his colleague, Martin Woollacott, advocating 'an open ended occupation' (Burgess 1997, 111).¹⁶ The similarities to nineteenth-century prescriptions for the region – a 'European commission', 'efficient European control' – begin to remind one of the anxious debates that formed the basis of the Eastern Question. Indeed, there is a sense in which it was only after the decline of the Soviet bloc, mirroring the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent concerns about policing Eastern Europe in the wake of imperial dissolution, that Great Power supremacy finally came to pass. At the same time, however, continent unity has been as difficult to achieve over the last fifteen years as it was during the nineteenth century. With Russia and Western Europe at loggerheads over Bosnia and Kosovo, Britain expressing suspicion about French pretensions to continental leadership, and a number of Western governments fearful about a strong, reunified Germany, it appears that '[T]he echoes of the states and empires of old Europe are once again clearly perceptible among the continent's political elites' (Niethammer 2000, 91).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that positive advances have been made in the Balkans since the end of the Cold War. The structural funds that have been made available to less developed regions, the advancement of equal opportunities and the distinct, albeit gradual, rise of productivity have had their benefits (Kaminski 2000, 306-331). Nevertheless, one might wish that progress could have been achieved without the peremptory demands of an EU whose intention, after all, has been to protect the economic and political dominance of long-term members, not yield that dominance to impoverished newcomers. One might also wish that alternative political systems could have been posited and tested after the upheavals of the 1989-1991 period. This is not only for the sake of the Central and Eastern European nations, for whom aggressive, market-led capitalism has hardly helped the transition from centralised economies, but also for Western mass publics that are increasingly sceptical of the decision-making processes of European-wide institutions even more politically remote than national governments. Yet there has been little chance of a 'third way' in the face of the West's absolute sense of political righteousness. The so-called 'return to Europe' of the CEECs is clearly an inauthentic process when the right to award or deny European citizenship is monopolised by Western nations who are simultaneously obstructing the exchange of ideas and influences that might occur across a more egalitarian continent. Without doubt, the last one hundred years of Eastern European history offer profound insights into the forces that have shaped modern Europe. Étienne Balibar, speaking in October 1999, called for Europe to 'recognize in the Balkan situation not [...] a pathological "aftereffect" of underdevelopment or of communism, but rather an image and effect of its own history', one that it should use 'to put itself into question and transform itself' (2004, 6). Sadly, the opportunity to learn from Eastern Europe's alternative experience of the twentieth century, and to gain a closer understanding of 'what is Europe and how European is it' (Pieterse 1994, 129), has been neglected.

Notes

¹ K.E. Fleming understates Western imperialism in the Balkans, and underestimates the way that balkanism manages both to vindicate imperial interference and to blame the 'natives' if interference goes wrong (2000, 1220-1224).

² The major articles of the treaty are set out in Anderson 1970, 108-112.

³ Significantly, the Berlin Congress either banned or silenced representatives of the aspirant Balkan nations. 'At Potsdam there are mosquitoes', wrote the head of the British delegation, 'here there are minor powers [...]. I don't know which is worse' (Lord Salisbury, quoted in Anderson 1966, 211).

⁴ Likewise, seeking ‘a satisfactory settlement of the Eastern Question’, Henry Fanshawe Tozer believes that independence might one day come, but that for the present the ‘Slavonic races [are] willing to accept permanently the suzerainty of the Porte’ (1869, I, 393).

⁵ In what John Lukacs terms a ‘sphere of interest agreement’, Churchill and Stalin resolved that the Soviet Union would have primary control of Bulgaria and Romania, Western Europe would have full control of Greece, and Yugoslavia would be divided equally between the two (1953, 589).

⁶ The term ‘Eastern’, with all its cultural, rather than geographical, implications, has also come to incorporate the features of what is perceived as the communist mentality: that is, suspicion, paranoia, secretiveness, a lack of individuality and a bent towards authoritarianism and censorship.

⁷ In the same period, Turkey, Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia began accession negotiations, and European Partnerships were set up with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

⁸ Hans van den Broek epitomises the Western-centric view of the membership criteria, saying that the EU seeks evidence that candidate nations ‘are becoming “normal” European countries’; that is, countries that ‘share the fundamental values on which our own institutions are founded’ (1998, 4).

⁹ For instance, previous accession states have not had to sign up to the ‘Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities’ (1995) – which was specifically designed for Central and Eastern Europe – despite the fact that racism and ethnic hostility are burgeoning in these countries and elsewhere in the West. As an example in kind, the EU seems incapable of understanding the contradiction inherent in condemning the treatment of Roma in Eastern Europe while generally denying them asylum in Western countries.

¹⁰ Much of the direct investment that occurs is aimed at companies producing goods for the local market which have negligible competition (with Western European investors even insisting upon tariff protection in order to safeguard their investment).

¹¹ While tariffs continue to protect the Western market from certain Eastern European produce (such as fruits and vegetables), the Common Agricultural Policy also demands a modernisation of production and restructuring of management, which will drive up prices. Naturally, Western investors have the capital to buy up the best farmland, threatening small, semi-subsistence farms, just as they have the capital to take over the most promising industries.

¹² In 1999, European Police College was established for training constabularies in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Orwellian-sounding Eurojust was created for assisting Central and Eastern European nations in areas of law enforcement and judicial practice.

¹³ At the time of writing, the unexpected number of Polish immigrants from 2004 onwards is encouraging the British government to restrict the rights of Romanians and Bulgarians to work in the UK after their nations have joined the EU (Woodward 2006, 10).

¹⁴ This is not to mention the use of military force to prevent unwanted migration: both Austria and Italy deployed troops during the 1990s to deter Romanian gypsies and Albanians respectively (Burgess 1997, 57).

¹⁵ The embattled population of central Bosnia had to wait three and a half years before the West intervened. Despite Article 51 of the UN Charter granting member states an inherent right to self-defence, the West also placed an arms embargo against the Bosnian government that often made self-defence impossible (Meštrović, 1994 39; Gow 1997, 90).

¹⁶ Some commentators have been more critical. Zoë Brân, on meeting various representatives of the international organisations in Bosnia, comments: 'The list of acronyms in my notebook gets longer, as the extent to which this country is directed by outside agencies becomes clearer: OHR, SFOR, UN, UNHCR, UNPROFOR, OSCE, ICTY, PHR' (2001, 201).

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