

On the Periphery: The Balkans in Contemporary Russian History

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the portrayal of the Balkans in contemporary Russian history and its impact on Russia's relationship in the region. There have been attempts to create a unifying European history to promote peace, security and a wider European identity since the collapse of communism in Europe. However, the Russian state has been cast unfavorably in the new Eastern European histories. This has caused friction in foreign affairs and seen attacks on the Russian historical narrative. By contrast, the idea of liberation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is important where the Balkans are concerned. School textbooks were used as a vehicle for championing a new European history, and the theme of liberation is key in the Russian historical discourse. This makes them an ideal medium through which to assess Russia's narrative and a relationship, which could be consequential.

Key words: Europe, history, liberation, narrative, Russia, textbook.

Introduction

Since the fall of communism in Europe, three competing narratives of European history have emerged: Western, Eastern and Russian/Soviet (Torbakhov, 2011). Each has its own peculiarities and are united them by their 'othering' of competing narratives. While this may seem obvious, steps were taken to try to avoid this scenario. What Russia and the nations of Eastern Europe (where the Balkans' histories fall under) share is the way its new histories were constructed post 1991. This coincided with political and economic transformations in each country. Eleftherios Klerides labels this as a 'return to Europe' (Klerides, 2014). This return aimed to champion a common European history, which would foster integration, greater co-operation and reject nationalism. Both Russia and Eastern Europe (the Balkans included) feel their histories have been disregarded and dismissed by the West. The Western version of European history became the dominant one, after all. Historically a region where the Western, Russian and Muslim civilizations collide, the Balkans' depiction in Russia's new national history reflects these frictions and issues with constructing a 'unified European history'. While not an immediate threat, the Balkans also show a potential vulnerability for the Russian state; despite a considerable influence in the region, it does not always have the upper hand. This paper considers the portrayal of the Balkans in the Russian historical discourse as this defines Russia's relationship with the region. In order to see how the narrative of the Balkans formed in the new Russia, it is necessary to choose an ideal medium to analyze. To cover the full spectrum of historical narratives through different mediums would naturally take several volumes. This paper focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as these reflect a core element of the Balkans' portrayal. The Balkans do not feature hugely in historical commemorations in modern Russia, but the exceptions are the two world wars and Russo-Turkish War 1877-78. Both of which are hugely significant to the Russian state and represent key traits of its new historical narrative. It is in school textbooks where a concrete and telling narrative exists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Furthermore, in the construction of a 'European' history post 1991, school history textbooks were viewed as a key instrument for this task. For this study, it makes them the most ideal medium.

Many of the historical battles surrounding the Balkans and Russia are now played upon in the expansion of spheres of influence. Russia feels a growing threat of encirclement with NATO's continued expansion and the prospect of EU membership. It is fair to say that the Russian state is still haunted by the Kosovo bombings of the 1990s and wants to uphold its historical affinity with countries it views as natural allies (Carnegie Centre, 2017). Meanwhile, the Western European powers fear Russia is trying to undermine the sovereignty of these independent states, disrupt their democratic processes and use it as a key sphere of influence. While the Balkan region as a whole is considered, there will be a particular focus on Serbia and Bulgaria. Historically, these are Russia's closest allies in the region, although recently the Republika Srpska has become of key importance (Rotaru & Troncota, 2017, p. 10). This

paper will briefly consider Moldova as well. While it is not regarded as a Balkan nation, it receives a similar treatment.

Constructing the ‘New European’ Histories

As the political and economic systems of Eastern Europe changed simultaneously, integrating former communist nations into the European framework required a lot of external support for internal reforms and restructuring. Much of this came from the West, as establishing a new national history post communism had to integrate the new democracies into its own established order. History is often a driving force in the transition to democracy (Pridham, 2015). For the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Russia history was used to promote a common European identity because of mutual influences and long symbiosis in the region (Klerides, 2014, p. 16). The Council of Europe (COE) envisaged history as the medium through which democracy, democratic citizenship, stability and reconciliation were to be enacted. It also focused on the promotion of European unity, bias and prejudice eradication, and conflict management (Klerides, 2014, p. 19). Along with the Caucasus, the Balkans was an area identified as ‘on the periphery of Europe’, which could become a source of instability. The COE, therefore, noted that assistance should be provided to the newer member states in bringing their history education in tune with European norms (Council of Europe, 2002, p. 4). That is why history textbooks received special attention. Textbooks target members of civil society who will legitimize the new historical narrative and democratic process. A rejection of the new historical narrative can delegitimize the new state’s claims to power.

The Balkans fall within the ‘Eastern European’ section of the new historical narratives. The Eastern European nations, the Balkans included, all have three distinct features. Firstly, it is painted in largely dark and bloody tones, as lands constantly fought over where a lot of blood was spilled. Secondly, that this version has not been fully accepted or acknowledged by the West. Finally, there has been a tendency (with the notable exceptions of Belarus and Armenia) to cast Russia in a negative light (Torbakhov, 2011). Projecting a narrative of huge tragedies and victimhood whose histories were sucked up by Stalinism has created geopolitical frictions. Recent examples would be Soviet war memorials in Poland being defaced or removed following Crimea’s reincorporation/annexation into the Russian Federation (Reuters, 2015). An updated law on decommunization stipulating the removal of monuments and memorials that pay “a tribute to the memory of people, organizations, events and dates that symbolize communism or other totalitarian regimes” entered into force in Poland in late 2017 (TASS, 2017). The Polish government snubbed Moscow’s claims of any violations, however. The result is that instead of a unifying history of the twentieth century with Europe defeating Nazism, two different accounts emerge essentially forcing countries to choose sides. As will be explored below, while Poland does not accept the liberation narrative, much of the Balkans do.

Russia felt somewhat left out in the post communism reconstruction. Compared to post war Germany for instance, Russia was not given the same assistance in rebuilding and establishing democratic institutions (Sherlock, 2007, p. 10). For the West, the consolidation of a democratic Russia meant having Boris Yeltsin as its leader. It was Yeltsin, however, who suggested replacing NATO with the OSCE (Galbreath, 2007). Yeltsin viewed the OSCE as a more auspicious channel of unifying the European continent to tackle its shared challenges. More importantly, however, as one that would take Russia's national interests more seriously. The past century of Russian history alone showed that it would be difficult for Russia to lock into democratic practices. Unlike some former communist nations, Russia had established state traditions and a history of independence stretching back a thousand years. Thus, it was not nation building from scratch, rather reconstructing from the ruins. However, the fundamental 'who are we?' question lingered. Russia had no democratic legacy apart from the short-lived and chaotic Provisional Government 1917. The Russian people had never lived in a democracy and its borders had shrunk significantly. For countries such as Czechia and Estonia, it was easier to align with the West since they could locate a democratic past as a model for development. The Russian Federation would operate in an alien liberal democratic framework that ignored the reality of the situation it faced. Moreover, it would have to retell the imperial and Soviet history in a new language, free of ideology that its population could legitimize. In so doing, the Russian state would also have to identify its friends and foes in the national history to assert its own historic identity. The gradual expansion of NATO, war in Kosovo and the Color Revolutions would drive a wedge between Russia, the West and certain Eastern European countries, pushing them further apart. All of which, affected the telling and retelling of history as well as Russia's relationship with the outside world. This has, in many ways, defined the leadership of President Vladimir Putin.

The Russian version of twentieth century European history focuses largely on the defeat of Nazi Germany and the Cold War. This means that the new school textbooks must also explain why the USSR collapsed and place Stalin into a wider historical framework. By contrast, other former communist nations can (and do) accuse Moscow of military occupation and hostilities. At the European Histories conference Vilnius 2009, an agreement was reached to incorporate the totalitarian experience into European history, but no framework for doing so was established (COE, 2009). As such, the countries of Eastern Europe are able to continue casting Russia unfavorably. By contrast, the Russian government has labelled this a 'perverse habit', and takes particular offense when Stalinism is also labelled as an equal cause for the Second World War (European Parliament, 2009; RT, 2018). This is significant because while the Russian Federation is the legal successor state to the USSR, it does not accept any responsibility for the crimes it committed or violations of international law (Ekho Moskv, 2010). Initially, this was part of Yeltsin's attempt to distance his new Russia from the USSR. For Putin, this is about maintaining historical continuity as a sign of sovereignty. Of course, the USSR ended, but its people carried over into the new system. As de Tocqueville once asserted:

They took over from the old order not only most of its customs, conventions, and modes of thought, but even those ideas which prompted our revolutionaries to destroy it; that, in fact, though nothing was further from their intentions, they used the debris of the old order for building up the new (de Tocqueville, 1955).

While he was writing about the French revolution, it is also applicable to Russia after the Soviet collapse. The education system is a prime example here. Although the Russian Federation is signed up to many of the COE's education reforms, they have mostly impacted the examinations. The education system still functions in the mold of the Soviet structure (Sanina, 2017). Moreover, the Russian state and population alike seem to be satisfied with this. Historical pedagogy in secondary schools is centered on the 'traditional' norms and practices, and has become more focused on instilling patriotic fervor (*Obrazovatel'niy standart osnovnogo obshchestvo obrazovaniya istoriya*, n.d.). This follows the lines of Soviet citizen education (Lunarchosky, 1925) and M.V. Lomonosov (1991) who were the two previous biggest influences of Russian historical education. As well as the four patriotic education programs, contemporary textbooks are starting to reflect 'preferred' images of the past instead of European unity. These are free of ideology meanwhile treating readers as members of a nation and passive (Apple, 2004). This is also, why the Russian state considers some European education reforms to be conflicting with its sovereignty. The main argument being that nations should be able to construct their own histories free of external influences. Initially, President Putin approached the West pragmatically to establish a mutually beneficial relationship. As such, the history in recent years has become more reactionary and assertive as order and stability were restored (Pearce, 2017). In fact, a somewhat unprecedented situation, history is written into Russia's Doctrine of National Security and many laws exist to protect it from falsifications or attacks (National Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2009). In more recent years there has been a growing fear that other nations are trying to rob Russia of its victory in the Second World War. Not only Poland, but also Soviet era monuments in Ukraine have been repeatedly defaced with little to no condemnation from international organizations. On the other hand, there are legitimate questions surrounding the legacy of Stalin and Stalinism. Western and Eastern European nations often do not accept Russian versions of the period. Criticisms are that certain school textbooks for instance try to 'normalize' the period and gloss over the terror (Zubkova, 2009, p.862). In the West, equating the USSR with Stalin seems obvious, whereas in Russia this is not so simplistic. Nevertheless, any narrative that does not condemn the Stalin era provides ammunition to attack Russia's backtracking from democracy. These laws combined with the new school textbooks are more symbolic of history's status in contemporary Russia than anything else is. History is above politics or anything 'human', and in this regard, is untouchable. As such, history has a special place that explains why things are and the way they 'ought to' be (Shelley & Winck, 1995). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that there have been campaigns to protect the 'glorious' episodes of Russian history (namely the Great Patriotic War).

Integrating the competing narratives is a necessary task. Not just to achieve the COE's goals, but also for European security and co-operation as a whole. This would promote the values of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Moreover, Eastern European history is designed to include Russia (and vice versa). Negative portrayals naturally spill over into foreign policy disputes. The current geopolitical situation makes a better relationship all but impossible for the near future, and from Russia's side, this is perceived as competition and a security threat. In this regard, using history for reconciliation in Europe has had limited success. Whilst every former communist nation experienced the politicization of history when democracy was introduced, Russia's narrative is morphing into a legitimization tool for the state to explain Russia's uniqueness and justify the modern situation. Where the Balkans are concerned, history is used present Russia as a viable alternative to the West.

Russia, the Balkans and the Historical Discourse in Geopolitics

The countries of Eastern Europe tend to be lumped together in Russian and Western histories. What sets the Balkans apart in the Russian historical discourse is the concept of 'Slavic Brotherhood'. For centuries, this has been used to maintain stronghold in the region. A shared history is a subtler yet equally effective soft power tool that has powerful connotations in other Orthodox Christian countries. The presumable goal is to loosen these countries' connection to the EU and present Russia and an alternative to the 'decadent West', thus fulfilling its messianic role. This is visible on Russian federal television channels and has been discussed in recent literature (Bacon, 2017; Kelly, 2017). However, the historical, cultural and religious ties are championed to show that a stronger unity with this region is more natural than the West. Not just with Serbia and Bulgaria, but in 2015 for example, the Greek President Tsipras' meeting with Putin in Moscow sent chills down through the EU, as many feared he would ask Moscow for financial aid and align closer with Russia (BBC, 2015). This was not inconceivable, as Russia and Greece do share many historical, religious and cultural ties.

Like the former USSR, Russia can invoke a shared history with many of the Balkan countries. There are also Russian language channels and or newspapers in Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro and to a lesser extent, Macedonia. More recently, the Russian state has financed antigovernment groups as a way of exerting its influence. Most notable are the Cossack Centres in Serbia, RepublikaSrpska, Macedonia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro. The opening ceremony in Kotor was attended by the biker gang 'Night Wolves'; a group close to the Russian President (Rotaru & Troncota, 2017, p. 11).

Serbia has been Russia's longest and most natural ally in the Balkans. This is a key feature in the historical discourse, particularly surrounding both world wars. During the Cold War, Yugoslavia cooperated with both the East and West. Serbia has largely continued this 'neutral' policy, walking a careful line between Russia and the West in recent years (Rastovic, 2017). In 2015, Serbia's president, Tomislav Nikolic, was one of few European leaders to attend

Moscow's Victory Day Parade commemorating seventy years since the victory in the Great Patriotic War. (Macedonia's president, Gorge Ivanov, was also in attendance.) A Serbian army regiment also took part in the parade. Many Serbs remember it was the Soviet Union, not Western Europe, who came to their defense during the Nazi occupation. Indeed, sanctions against Serbia's former liberator have been a tough sell by the EU. Putin's popularity in Serbia has drastically risen in recent years. Serbian media is quite Russian-friendly and one village even changed its name to 'Putinovo' after the Russian president (The Economist, 2016). In Montenegro, this was also the case until recently. After it joined NATO, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, claimed that Russia now reserved the right to take retaliatory measures (Reuters, 2017). There has since been vocal support of pro-Russian parties and candidates, as the move towards Western organizations is perceived as a historical betrayal. With that being said, the most recent polls show that only 6% of Russians view Serbia as an ally, whereas Montenegro did not even make the list (Levada, 2016).

Russia and Bulgaria were closely aligned during the Cold War, but fought against each other in both world wars. Powerful symbolic references to the 1877-78 war of liberation have underwritten Putin's visits to Sofia. It is commemorated in national holidays, street names and monuments. In 2005, for instance, a statue to Aleksandr II was erected outside Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral, which references the role he played in liberating Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire. Another monument to the war 1877-78 sits just outside the presidential administration building on Kitai Gorod, as well. The Moscow Patriarch, Kirill was sure to visit Bulgaria in 2018 to mark its 140th anniversary (TASS, 2018). During this visit, Kirill commented on the 'falsifications' of the war by Bulgarian politicians:

I was very aggrieved by the fact that, according to (Bulgarian) state representatives' official rhetoric, Poland, Lithuania and Finland had played almost the same role as Russia... every warrior who fought in the Russian army under Tsar Alexander II's flag and died for Bulgarian freedom, regardless of his nationality... No political correctness can justify a false historical interpretation. (Reuters, 2018).

However, Bulgaria was also low down on the list of nations that Russians consider 'friends', at just 4% (Levada, 2016). Though it has never peaked above 10% (which is interestingly higher than Serbia; 8%), the recent relationship has been somewhat frosty. Russians were quick to invoke the legacy of the Great Patriotic War when the South Stream project was cancelled. For his part, President Putin blasted the EU and NATO for not allowing Bulgaria to behave as a sovereign country (BBC News, 2014). Russian news media quickly followed in their strong criticisms (Rossiskaya Gazeta, 2014) whilst the Russian blogosphere burst out 'Bulgaria has betrayed us once more as in the First and Second World War' (Lankina, 2014). The Soviet involvement in Bulgaria after 1944 remains controversial, however, and tends to slip off the

radar in comparison to Katyn or the invasion of the Baltic States. Although, as will be explored below, the Russian state considers the latter to be a lawful incorporation and not an invasion. Developing the theme of ‘liberation’ further, it is a consistent one with these Balkans’ countries throughout Russian history. University courses, which study nineteenth century European history, focus on the Balkan nations’ “struggle for independence” against the Ottomans (Vladimir State University Rabochnaya Programma Distipliny Novaya Istoriya Stran Evropy i Amerika 1870-1918gg, 2017). The leadership continues to play upon the liberation aspect, as well. In the centennial year (2014) of the outbreak of the First World War, the Russian government had to finally come up with a Russian narrative of events; specifically, it had to explain why Russia did not have a victory. The First World War had been written out of history during the Soviet period, dismissed as a bourgeois imperialist war. The speech President Putin gave when unveiling the monument to the heroes of the First World War on Poklannaya Gora could not but mention Russia’s alliance with Serbia. Putin remarked that Russia was ‘obliged’ to enter and that

Russia did everything it could to convince Europe to find a peaceful and bloodless solution to the conflict between Serbia and Austro-Hungary. But Russia’s calls went unheeded and our country had no choice but to rise to the challenge, defend a brotherly Slavic people and protect our own country and people from the foreign threat. (Putin, 2014).

Dmitry Medvedev mirrored this five years earlier when he established a law against the ‘falsifications of history’. Medvedev stated that any country defending itself cannot be considered an aggressor (Medvedev, 2009). Understandably, the theme of liberation is of special importance to the Great Patriotic War. After all, Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz.

The Balkans in Russian School Textbooks

A handful of the 2015 textbooks were selected for analysis, which were a publishing initiative of the Russian government. All of these reflect similar tendencies. Like in most countries, the Russian school curriculum separates world and Russian history into different classes; universities generally do the same. These have different textbooks and are taught separately. In order to understand the Russian view of the Balkans, one should consider its portrayal in Russian history lessons as opposed to world history. World history, as the name implies, does not only study other countries, but is taught and portrayed in a much broader, non-homogenous context. Moreover, most of the attention and reforms to school history textbooks concern the narratives in Russian history textbooks. As alluded to above, the focus of pedagogical reforms is designed to impact Russian history lessons.

To expand on the above assessments, Russian school textbooks solely focus on Russian liberations of the region. This includes liberations from the Ottomans, Fascism and other

European imperial powers such as Austria-Hungary (Gorinov, 2016). Compared with other nations, the Balkans feature sparingly and modestly. Moreover, the region commonly comes up in the context of diplomacy and alliances. The Balkans feature most prominently in the more significant historical events, such as the two world wars. While the background to these is provided, specific mentions of the Balkans are quite concise. When these references begin to emerge, there is a particular emphasis on Serbia and Bulgaria.

Following the same line of President Putin, the narrative in school textbooks of the First World War tells of a peacefully minded Russia who had to defend Serbia. Austria and Germany are equally blamed for the outbreak of war. The wording of one textbook in particular is quite interesting: 'Austria-Hungary *blamed* the assassination of Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand on *Serbia*' (Volobuev, 2015, p.8). The implication here is that the blame is placed not on the terrorist Black Hand Gang, but Serbia as a whole. The textbooks all note the patriotic feeling the war generated among Russian society (Kiselev, 2012, p.33). Fighting to defend Serbia and prevent Germanic domination of the European continent is considered a good cause, and therefore, the reason a military conflict became unavoidable. However, there are no noteworthy mentions of the Balkans during the conflict. During the interwar period, the Balkans completely disappear. This could be partly due to no diplomatic relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia between 1917 and 1940. In other words, to even consider this would undermine the more significant narrative of this special relationship.

The Molotov Ribbentrop Pact is important to understanding the contemporary Russian view of Eastern Europe as a whole. It is a stain on the diplomatic history of the Russian state and undermines the message of a heroic victory. The blame is placed fully onto Germany and Hitler personally. As one of the more recent textbooks writes, 'Hitler decided the spheres of influence' (Torkunova, p. 172). Another states that 'Germany initiated it'. This also aids the justification for the incorporation of Moldova into the USSR. Writing that 'Bessarabia became a part of Romania' suggests this was an unnatural or abnormal incorporation (Volobuev, p. 139). This is significant because of the important military victories against Sweden and the Ottomans fought in modern Moldova. Many of these battles were led and fought by national hero, Aleksandr Suvorov. To imply that Moldova was unlawfully annexed discredits the legacy of Suvorov and his victories. As the modern Russian state detaches itself from responsibility for the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, denying responsibility for the dividing of territories complements the liberation narrative of the Great Patriotic War. Then again, most textbooks also dedicate barely a paragraph to the liberation of the Balkans during the Great Patriotic War. The Soviet army also defeated the Nazis in Romania during the Great Patriotic War, but this receives just a few lines in each of the textbooks. When the liberations are discussed, they are told in a timeline like fashion (Kiselev, 2012), as is each victory during the Great Patriotic War. One of the more popular textbooks (Dannilov, 2013), dedicates slightly less than a paragraph. Bulgaria gets a paragraph and as an 'ally of Germany', is painted as a greater

struggle to overcome. This is also the case with the former Yugoslavia, which is surprisingly given only a passing mention in virtually all of the textbooks. Then again, this falls within the wider context of the build up to an eventual stunning victory over fascism in Europe. The Soviet involvement after the liberation is not mentioned within the context of the war, and all casually transition into the interwar period.

The issues discussed in each history textbook surrounding the relationship with the Balkans are prevalent today. Thus, one can conclude the historical discourse is the backdrop, and in many respects, the key legitimization for today's relationship between Russia and the Balkans. The cultural, religious and historical ties are far easier to exploit than with many other Eastern European nations. The textbooks do buck a certain trend, and unlike periods in Russian history (namely the revolutions of 1917), there is a broad consensus over the Balkans. This is unlikely to change and it is an important political card to have in the state's arsenal. This, therefore, begs the question why is it not exploited more?

Conclusion: Perspectives for the Future

The Balkans is on the periphery of Russia's foreign policy priorities and remains a frontier where it competes for influence against the West. Consequently, the Balkans is on the periphery of Russia's historical discourse, as well. A region which has often been the staging grounds for a 'clash of civilizations', the modern geopolitical situation is mirrored in Russia's historical discourse. Serbia is still inside of Russia's sphere of influence and provides a buffer in the Balkans. The Russian leadership routinely states the importance of its Slavic brother and their close relationship as a way of diverting the growing attention on the West. The underlying message of this is that the Russian state is unwilling to back down from its interests in the Balkans. The West also treats Moldova as a Russian buffer zone to Europe and the Balkans alike, which is certainly an interesting comparison (RFERL, 2012). While Moldova is not usually included in any Balkans' definitions, its portrayal in the historical narrative reflects the same arguments. On the other side, Bulgaria is an access point for Russia into the EU, and represents a different sort of periphery.

Among the recent rise of populism, 'Brexit' has bought the future of the EU into question as it experiences an 'expansion fatigue' in Eastern Europe. This allows the Russian state to use history to present itself as an attractive alternative in the Balkans. This has seen some success. The political leaders of most Balkan countries are openly empathetic to Putin in different ways. Likewise, Russia feels that it has an emotional (and historic right to intervene in the domestic affairs of certain nations). However, increasing attractiveness in this region is becoming much harder, as it is pulled ever closer to the EU and NATO. An important access point, Russia is highly unlikely to remain silent over the direction the Balkans nations take. Public opinion is likely to have a forceful impact in this regard. Although there is sympathy toward Russia's allies in the region, there is also a lack of active interest amongst the Russian

population. In the aforementioned Levada poll, the only other Balkan nations to receive mention were Greece and Romania. Just 4% of Russians viewed Greece as an ally in 2016, whereas 2% considered Romania an enemy (Levada, 2016). In other words, if the state could gain more support in this region, it may allocate greater attention and resources. Such a situation could see the Balkans become 'proxy area' and this scenario would be bad for the European continent as a whole. In Russia, it would feel almost like a betrayal if certain Balkan nations become deeply entrenched into the Western alliances, which is another reason why the historical narrative is so protected. A move closer to the West could make the region even more unstable in the long term as Russia would continue to feel surrounded. As with Ukraine, it may be wise to consider that the region should remain militarily neutral for a generation (Al Jazeera, 2015). This is not to say a sovereign country should not have a right to choose its own allies and trade relationships. As other papers in this volume discuss, the Berlin Process is underway (albeit, with limited success). Yet, an explosion of history in a country like Serbia could lead to a Ukrainian scenario in the Balkans with the potential to develop into a larger conflict. As history shows, both Russia and the West should be keen to avoid this happening again.

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