

Europe's Balkan Dilemma

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The Balkans, over the years, remained an “unfinished business” (Larrabee, 2010) in the agenda of Europe and prevails to be tormented by several fundamental negative trends. In the wake of vicious squabbles marking the instable history of Western Balkans, European Union (EU) decides to provide support to the nations to get on their way of achieving stability and prosperity in the region, which is to be further followed by their accession into EU. The book acumens the knowledge of how EU has laid its steps in the Western Balkans towards a better future and is good for honing one's understanding of its staggeringly changing role.

The book begins with reflecting the condition of war-weary region of Western Balkans. It then throws light on how European Union is making an effort to bring about constructive changes in the region through the channels of NGO, being the first seed sown towards achieving a blooming civil society. And it has managed to address to these viewpoints efficaciously with the assistance of three extensive field works undertaken in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia and Kosovo. All these states have their own story of difficult transitions and thus the EU intervention in them comes with a bundle of contentions. But the main agenda of EU's focus in these states is to ultimately enable them to achieve a post-conflict reconstruction, state capacity and civil society development that will further assist them in paving their way into getting membership of EU. But because such a change cannot be brought over night, the donor assistance remains to fight some bristling discordances. The book provides with a good insight

of how the EU assistance channeled through NGO's (Non Governmental Organisations) generates many contradictory findings while it also tries to explain that this has the bright possibility of generating interaction between state and non-state actors. It has engaged in several arguments and detailing of facts which portrays a satisfying image of EU's hard work in the nations but also this detailing comes with several notions attached to it serving with certain contradiction attached to all the hard work. It also explicates that EU assistance to western Balkans majorly results in service provision outcomes than policy-related advocacy. This is evident in certain spheres where NGO's have tried to seed a change in BiH and Serbia.

While dealing with all these issues, the book discusses the case of BiH, Serbia and Kosovo, respectively. It talks about peace and mediation initiatives for Bosnia with an ultimate aim of assisting new membership with the increasing role of SAP (Stabilization and Association process) and local delegation in Sarajevo. It sheds due light on the historical context of the state and also the late Dayton political framework and the shift in power and influence towards EU. More than fifteen years after the signing of the Dayton Accords, Bosnia continues to face significant economic, social and political problems (Larrabee, 2010). It all leads to an understanding that EU has become the chief contributor development assistance to Bosnia and thus the main propulsion of its post-Dayton construction. However the qualitative data collected in case of BiH showcased that the impacts varied considerably. Though the data is not enough to draw appropriate conclusions but it could be understood that these variations tend to come up because of mainly the deep-seated structures of the state. State weakness and political fragmentation remain to make it difficult to ensure NGO-state partnership and a long-term advocacy role. In the following text, the book hones ones knowledge on the assistance provided to Serbia under the assistance of SAP (Stabilisation and Association Process), EAR and remits of CARDS assistance that faced the major challenge of country's contemporary politics and highly contested nature of the concept of civil society. The major line of work in this case, apparently, was infrastructure reconstruction and energy sector modernisation, which later got its strings attached with issues like democracy promotion, human rights and civil society. But the results of the projects carried out here are also very contentious due to certain factors. To address the issue of contentions of these projects in the countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, which

are also a result of their deep seeded structural reality, the book provides with enough qualitative data to study. The data contributes to the issue that book is trying to address as it portrays the loopholes of all the projects taken to bring the desired change. Finally, the book talks about the most recent intervention of EU in Kosovo that got independence after eight long years of direction under UN administration. After the Kosovo war, which came with long lasting and grave impacts, the EU has been keeping a close eye on Kosovo. Though the EU intervention in this case has been more ambiguous because the contested nature of the state and the also the fact, which the book seem to have ignored, that Kosovo still struggles to be recognised as a nation state at world stage. EU has been coming up with many manifestations in Kosovo, with its most recent one being EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo) and its assistance keeps entering into new and better phases of development making it EU's most ambitious and costly foreign policy adventure in its history. But the book seems to have insufficient data to access the role of EU's assistance in Kosovo for it being very recent. With this insufficiency of data, it becomes difficult to judge the situation and draw conclusion. The writer doesn't seem to have stated his argument properly in case of Kosovo and thus makes the picture hazier to understand his argument.

Thus, the book has broadly articulated how EU's intervention in the Western Balkan states has changed their face beyond recognition. Its intervention in the states has proved to be a test of its efforts. Though the book tries to address the attempts of EU to answer the question of Balkans in Europe, it still manages to remain to a question. The author has particularly focused on the ideologies of EU and its long-term intention and interests lying in the discussed three states. But the book has failed to cover the interaction of EU with US in terms of all the underlying projects in the Western Balkan states. The manner in which the writer proceeded with the text is influential and enables the reader to engage in the reading with due understanding. It also managed to address the interest of those who want to have a better understanding of EU's intervention in the states, its prospects, and the success and failures of the undertaken projects. It creates a broad caricature of EU's underlying interests in helping these states. Hence, in my understanding, with the extensive filed study, the book has fairly glossed the role of EU towards making an attempt of removing the dirt form these petals of Western Balkans – helping them end the era of instability and achieve an improved level of state-building.

REFERENCE:

Larrabee, F. S. (2010) “Unfinished Business in Europe”, Seminar Report, Paris: The European Union Institute for Security Studies

