



Contesting Territories in Southeastern Europe:

The Politics of Regionalism in Dalmatia, Istria, Sandžak and Vojvodina

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Abstract:

The main aim of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of the varied outcomes of regionalist politics in the four historic regions of contemporary Croatia and Serbia. The primary objective of the thesis is to introduce the analysis of sub-state territorial politics to the existing literature on Southeastern Europe (SEE) that has tended to be dominated by the national paradigm. The secondary objective is of a more theoretical nature and revolved around the argument against teleological and deterministic understandings of territories, nations and regions.

The thesis compared four cases of multi-ethnic regionalisms, Dalmatia and Istria in Croatia as well as Sandžak and Vojvodina in Serbia. The emphasis in each case was on histories, intergroup relations and economic factors as elements of region-building. The thrust of the argument advanced is that regional entrepreneurs use these elements in their endeavours to institutionalise regional self-government. Apart from regional entrepreneurs' political strategies, responses and opportunities provided by the centre influenced the outcomes of regionalist demands.

The findings show that pre-existing sub-state territorial structures served as rallying points during the periods of democratisation that started in 2000 in both countries. In the period of ethnocratic rules of the 1990s, bottom-up multiethnic regionalist projects did not expand nor (re)established self-governing competences. Interpretations of histories by regional political actors have strongly correlated with the way regional politics and memberships were defined. Economically privileged regions such as Istria and Vojvodina were generally more assertive and successful in achieving (limited) asymmetric decentralisation. The thesis further illustrates that multi-ethnic regionalisms as opposed to nationalisms in SEE differ by focusing on historically emerging territory-specific institutions and not necessarily on exclusive ethno-national forms of political membership. The thesis also shows that new regionalist politics that combine functional economic interests, culture and identity politics with drives for autonomy are possible in SEE, albeit in a contested manner. In terms of contribution to the broader literature on nationalism and territorial politics, the thesis shows that many of the common assumptions about territorial autonomy projects as well as about teleological and unidirectional path from regionalism to nationalism need to be reassessed in light of the findings of this thesis.



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Bio: Dejan Stjepanović holds an MA with distinction in Nationalism Studies from the Central European University and an MRes in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute. Before joining the EUI, he spent two years working for a number of think-tanks. Until September 2013 he will be based at the University of Edinburgh where he is a Research Fellow on the CITSEE (The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia) project. His research interests combine territorial politics, nationalism and citizenship studies in historical and comparative perspectives.