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Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries have written what at first glance appears to be a general textbook that might appeal to undergraduates or the general reader; a history of the Balkans focusing on the modern age but including some pre-modern background, with individual chapters focusing on each Balkan country. However, the authors’ expertise on the subject is limited: neither is a Balkan specialist; neither appears to know any of the Balkan languages; and their sources are almost entirely in the English language. Bideleux and Jeffries have conducted no original research on Balkan history and are merely regurgitating the work of others. It is on this weak basis that they have chosen to construct a defence of the case for a Greater Serbia, involving a historical account that presents Serb extremism and war-crimes in a more sympathetic light than in any other textbook I have ever read.

Discussing the break-up of Yugoslavia and the emergence of newly independent states in its place, the authors unambiguously state their support for the Greater Serbian case, against what they refer to as the international community’s “double standard” (p. 200): the “Western-backed refusal of the Bosniak and Croat political leaders to allow Bosnian and Croatian Serbs the same rights of self-determination as they invoked for their own people” (p. 345). They argue that “it would have been quite feasible as well as reasonable to have redrawn republican boundaries in such a way as to attach most of the ethnic Serb enclaves to a ‘Greater Serbia,’ along the lines proposed by the (admittedly obnoxious) Milošević regime” (p. 200). The authors suggest that,
If it was internationally acceptable for the Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks and other Yugoslav peoples to exercise their rights to national self-determination by seceding from the SFRY [Yugoslavia], then it was logically inconsistent to deny the Bosnian Serbs the same right to national self-determination by seceding from the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, whether by settling up a republic of their own or by joining a ‘Greater Serbia’ (p. 345).

Here, Bideleux and Jeffries are simply parroting a Serb-nationalist platitude that is self-evidently false: far from employing ‘double standards,’ the international community recognized the same rights for the Serbs as it did for the Croats and other Yugoslav peoples. Thus, the right to secession was recognized for the republics of the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, etc.), but not for parts of nationalities within the republics (Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Croats, Serbian Muslims, Croatian Serbs, Serbian Hungarians, Macedonian Albanians, etc.).

Bideleux and Jeffries plea for the Greater Serbian case is based on a sketchy knowledge of Yugoslav history. The authors claim that,

[all parties had long known full well that the Yugoslav Communist regime established the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1945 and drew inter-republican boundaries in such a way as to include as much territory and as many Serbs as possible in the republics of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, in order to deprive Serbia of as much territory and population as possible, in conscious violation of the dominant principle of national self-determination (p. 345).]

Anyone who could write such rubbish clearly has not read a single one of the numerous scholarly studies of Yugoslav Communist nationality policy by authors such as Janko Pleterski, Desanka Pešić, Enver Redžić and others.

Bideleux and Jeffries are wrong on every count. The Yugoslav Communists established the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina to provide a common homeland for all of Bosnia’s peoples, Serbs, Croats and Muslims alike, in keeping with the principle of national self-determination; Bosnia had never formed part of modern Serbia, so Serbia was not ‘deprived of’ its territory and population; Bosnia’s borders were not gerrymandered, but were essentially those with which it had entered Yugoslavia in 1918. Far from the establishment of a Bosnian republic being evidence of a supposed ‘anti-Serb’ policy on the Communists’ part, the move was spearheaded by the Bosnian Serb Communists themselves, Bosnian Serbs having traditionally supported a self-governing Bosnia. In 1945, the Bosnian President, Prime Minister, and secretary of the Communist organisation were all Serbs, but as Bosnian patriots they all believed in the rightfulness of a unified, self-governing Bosnian republic distinct from both Serbia and Croatia. Far from trying to deprive Serbia of