
Robert M. Hayden
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, USA
rhayden@pitt.edu

As Josip Glaudric notes in the Introduction to this book, the breakup of Yugoslavia has produced a very large popular and academic literature. As he is perhaps too polite to note, after the initial round of books by scholars who knew the region before the end of Yugoslavia and who drew much of their information from sources there, many of these works were written by people who knew nothing about Yugoslavia before they saw the terrible pictures on television, at which point they knew all that they thought they needed to know. Glaudric, on the other hand, has written a book that is very well grounded on local-language sources, and he also makes effective use of the records of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), a source not available to the first generation of academic experts of Yugoslavia who wrote on the breakup of the federation, such as Susan Woodward, Steven Burg, Paul Shoup, Sabrina Ramet, Lenard Cohen, Xavier Bougarel and myself.

*The Hour of Europe* is thus a welcome contribution to the expert academic literature on the breakup of Yugoslavia, all the more so because his focus is on the interplay between the “Western” powers and the various Yugoslav parties in the period from 1987 until mid-1991. Glaudric’s title, which quotes the words of Jacques Poos, Chair of the EC Foreign Affairs council in 1991, is a reminder of just how badly the incipient European Union failed in handling the first major challenge to come its way. The book is diplomatic history at its most detailed, covering interactions between the various EC states and the Americans, Russians and others, plus the Yugoslavs. Few other writers have been as ambitious in integrating sources written in the former Serbo-Croatian with the accounts of the international players at the time, both their official statements and materials that have been declassified more recently, as well as the academic literature.

The principle contention of the book is that attention should be directed towards those political actors in the West who “stifled” outside involvement
in the breakup of Yugoslavia, and that “our main object of study ought to be those many Western foreign policy makers who not only continued to signal their support for Yugoslavia’s center over its periphery, but who also continuously tended to appease the strong and push the weak” during negotiations (p. 7). Glaurdić states that the motivation of those who made such mistaken (to him) decisions “was simple – it was the pursuit of stability in the face of a great upheaval which engulfed the whole continent” – the demise of the Warsaw pact and the USSR (p. 7). The fear was that the collapse of Yugoslavia could serve as an example for Soviet disintegration, the possible consequences of which were feared, but Glaurdić asserts that people who thought this way made the mistake of thinking that Slobodan Milošević would protect Yugoslavia’s unity, whereas he really intended to create an enlarged Serbia “on the ruins of the Yugoslav federation.” The assumption seems to be that had NATO intervened earlier militarily, Yugoslavia’s collapse would have been less violent. On the other hand, Glaurdić repeatedly criticizes those who advocated against military intervention as being grounded in a “political realism” paradigm, apparently against a more principled position. As he notes (p. 7 n. 11), similar arguments have been made by Viktor Meier, Reneo Lukic, Christopher Cviic and Sabrina Ramet, among others, mainly in the decade immediately following the start of the war in 1991.

For Glaurdić, there is a hero in this tale: Germany, which “stood alone in its demands for Western action and the recognition of Yugoslavia’s northwestern republics [Slovenia and Croatia] … alone because it correctly perceived what was happening in Yugoslavia and because its Western allies were less concerned about the actual reasons for its alarm and assertiveness than about the fact that it was indeed the unified Germany which was trying to steer the West towards some foreign policy action” (pp. 6–7). It is unusual in contemporary academic work to see such cheerleading for one state player in a multifaceted, multi-year, improvisational performance of diplomatic/military actions and counter-actions, such as was the breakup of Yugoslavia and the international politics surrounding it. One must wonder whether the Germans really got it all right, or rather were simply taking positions that Glaurdić finds congenial, and thereby are presumed by him to have been uniquely in the right, and it may be relevant that Germany was solidly in support of Croatia at the time in question.

Glaurdic is able to dismiss other scholars’ work as supposedly corresponding to a putative “mainstream Serbian narrative… that Yugoslavia fell apart because of the secessionist Slovenes and Croats who were decisively assisted by Germany, Austria, the Vatican and possibly the United States” (Glaurdic 2014: 392). Were we to adopt his practice of attaching national labels to academic arguments, we might say that this book conforms to a mainstream Croatian