

Abstracts

Vedran Džihić

Serbia after the December 2023 Elections – A Reshuffle of Cards

On 17 December 2023, Serbia went to polls to elect the new parliament as well as city and municipal governments in more than 60 municipalities across the country, including the capital city of Belgrade. Political competition was massively restricted in the run-up to the early elections. On election day itself a massive manipulation and voter fraud was recorded. As both international and national election observation missions concluded, the elections were neither fair nor free.

The following article provides an analysis of the situation in Serbia prior to elections and discusses the results, consequences as well as chances of the opposition to challenge Aleksandar Vučić's regime. A particular emphasis is placed on the reactions from the EU and Member States. Confronted with questions around elections and already under certain pressure after the violent attack in Banjska, Kosovo, in September last year, the regime shows increased signs of nervousness, which opens up new chances for anti-regime oppositions and movements.

Grigorij Mesežnikov

2023 Early Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia – A Turning Point or Just a Further Episode in the Turbulent Post-Authoritarian Development?

Early parliamentary elections in Slovakia, held in September 2023, returned to power political forces that seemed to be politically non-revivable after the events of 2018 (the murder of the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, mass civil protests and the subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico), but especially after their electoral defeat in 2020. However, a combination of several internal and external factors contributed to the fact that these forces became considerably more radical and mobilized in 2020–2023. They used the dissatisfaction of the population with the rule of the previous coalition of center-right parties and managed to obtain sufficient support to form a new government. The victory of the national populists in 2023 and the first steps of their government created a real risk of losing some accomplishments of the democratic transition after the collapse of the communist regime.

Claudia Bălan / Miruna Butnaru Troncotă

Romania's Troubled Journey towards Schengen – Between Double Standards, Politicisation and Legitimate Claims

In 2007, Romania formally entered the European Union, a pivotal step in its European integration process although long overdue considering the journey of other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. After the integration, together with Bulgaria, Romania aimed to become a full member of the Schengen Area. During this complex quest to join Schengen, Romania has encountered numerous obstacles. The peak was in December 2022 when Austria vetoed the accession of the two countries in the European Council. Despite Romania's efforts to meet the technical conditions that were always pointed out to be the main focus of the subsequent rejections, shifting opposing arguments from some Member States led to the final decision being postponed, leading to increasing tension and politicisation. This analysis aims to understand the context of Austria's veto against Romania's accession, focusing on the political motivations in public debates among various domestic and EU institutional actors. It covers the debates around Romania's Schengen rejection in 2011 and focuses on the period from December 2022 to June 2023. The analysis points out how Romania's Schengen membership turned into a political negotiation among EU states and different EU institutions.

Dirk Tröndle

Neo-Ottomanism: Fiction of a Revisionist Foreign Policy or a Political Battle Cry? – A Conceptual Genesis Attempt

The term neo-Ottomanism has pervaded debates on Turkish foreign policy since the end of the 1980s and increasingly over the past 20 years, often without any further definition. Authors and opinion leaders use the term to describe Turkey's pro-active foreign policy in neighbouring regions that had been under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. However, the term is misleading because it implies the continuation of a policy under different auspices, which can neither be derived from Ottoman history nor traced back to Ottomanism as one central political thought in late Ottoman mentality history. Protagonists of Turkish foreign policy also reject the term. Critics use it as a fighting term and object, among other things, to Turkey's foreign policy shift away from the West to the East and its Islamist character. The term has thus become part of the "culture clash" that continues to be fought between the conservative-Islamic and secular camps even in the post-Kemalist era.

Christian Voß

The Taboo Breaker from Lilliput – Experiences of Violence in the Novels by Drago Jančar

The novels by Slovenian writer Drago Jančar tell us the history of Yugoslavia in the 20th century from the perspective of the periphery, focusing particularly on the Central European experience of violence. Three of the novels under review tell the story of Jančar's hometown of Maribor in the 1930s to 1950s, focusing on the violent excesses of the 1940s

between the Nazis and the immediately following Tito-Yugoslav Stalinist terror against the local population. Yugonostalgia faces a tough trial, as the unpunished war crimes of Tito's partisans are repeatedly addressed.

The Slovenian demand for pluralism (including the banning of the youth magazine *Mladina* 1988 from Belgrade) and the secessionist movement during the 1980s are relatively minor factors in the process of Yugoslav disintegration. Nevertheless, the failed politics of memory that Jančar illustrates in his novels contributed significantly to the collapse of the common state and favored the ethnic violence of the 1990s.

The references to Kosovo or North Macedonia show that Jančar is not an isolated phenomenon, but that in the literatures of the former Yugoslav periphery similar and not quite euphoric memories of the Yugoslav period are articulated.

In literary and political terms, Jančar stands alongside Milan Kundera or Václav Havel as impressive artistic and moral instances of the democratization movement in Central Europe.