Challenges to European Unity During Conflict in its Neighbourhood: The Yugoslav Wars

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The European Union's peacebuilding efforts at the onset of the Yugoslav crisis showed little effect in preventing an uncontrolled escalation of violence. The violent collapse of socialist Yugoslavia vividly demonstrated huge Inner-European disagreements, leading to criticism by the EU's international partners, and raising the following question: Why does the EU – a union successful in stabilizing Europe and preventing violent conflict between its members – struggle with promoting peace in its immediate neighbourhood? Undoubtedly, the EU's failure in preventing the gruesome spiral of violence that shattered Yugoslavia for five long years signalled inherent political weakness within the Union and yet not unique in its genre. Indeed, the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2014, the Syrian conflict and the ongoing refugee crisis have further signalled the EU's limits in responding to growing instability at its borders and exposed the strength of national interests in undermining a cohesive EU response in the time of crisis.

Building upon the Yugoslav case, this paper unveils the complex mechanisms governing the EU's peacebuilding politics and practices in the early 1990s, by analyzing the inner discussions and decision-making processes of the EC/EU throughout the Yugoslav crisis. It draws on new archival research, including the European Bulletin and documents capturing the communication behind individual peace proposals. Moreover, it undertakes a press analysis of several major European newspapers and recently published reflections of key decision makers to evaluate the influence of European public opinion on EU's peacebuilding strategy in the early 1990s.

Introduction

In 1991, while speaking for the European Union (EU) Presidency, Luxemburg's Foreign Minister Jacques Poos claimed that "this is the hour of Europe, not the hour of the Americans." (Gompert 1994). These words greatly reflected public opinion between 1991 and 1992, a time in which the European Community (EC) made a firm commitment to mediate a peaceful solution and prevent the outbreak of a war within the former Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Following his bold statement, confidence would soon be replaced by bitter disappointment due to the ineffectiveness of the EC's policies. These policies ultimately proved that the EU was merely a civilian power, a term which specifically refers to "the influence that an actor has on the behaviour of another actor of the system by non-military means such as sanctions, rewards, persuasion, encouragement and support through the exercise of a controlled influence and penetration of the system" (Sjostedt as cited in Attinà 2001, 71).

This article discusses the European response to end the fratricidal civil war that shattered the Yugoslav Federation between 1991 and 1995 (Ramet 2002; Burg and Shoup 1999; Woodward 1995). Investigating the formative stages of the EC's conflict resolution policy in the Balkans, it seeks to understand why and how the European political community became a bystander to the bloodiest conflict that occurred after 1945 in the very heart of Europe. Although scholars have generally focused on the war itself, the dramatic experience of mass genocide and ethnic cleansing, as well as the process of post-war reconstruction in former Yugoslavia (Kappler 2014), few have devoted attention to the actions of the EC/EU during the Yugoslav crisis (Faucompret 2001; Marolov 2012; Doga 2012). Thus, this study fills this scholarly lacuna and broadens the scholarly debate on the role that the two-track process of European integration played on Europe's peacekeeping and peacebuilding capabilities after 1989. In line with Glaurdic's argument that "it was political realism which had a decisive impact on the violent nature of Yugoslavia's breakup" (2011, 7), this article suggests that the Community's inability to perform the functions of regional peacemaker and conflict mediator largely depended on its contrasting political views and limited resources, especially regarding its military dimension.

Most importantly, the conflict showed that the EU had to further deepen its process of political integration to adequately respond to the regional conflicts in the new post-Cold War international context (Bianchini and Nation 1998, 43-47). To demonstrate this point, this work mainly relies on the examination of the Bulletin of the European Community (BEC) as well as the study of selected memoires and reflections from European decision makers who shaped EC/EU policies toward Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995: the German Canceller Helmut Kohl, the British member of the House of Lords and EU Special Representative David Owen, as well as the former major of the city of Bremen, Hans Koschnik, who became EU administrator for the reconstruction of the city of Mostar in 1994. While the Bulletin of the European Community provides a glance into the views, strategies, and perceptions of the twelve members states that responded to the implosion of the Yugoslav Federation, the memoires of the European leaders offer insight into the political debate that marked the formative stages of a European Common and Defense Policy. Above all, studying a central episode of EC/EU history in a time of tremendous change enhances scholarly understanding of the difficulties that marked the EU's transformation from a union of states into an international peace builder. Thus, this study ultimately aims to better assess EU's strength and weknesses when it acts as a peace and security provider in and beyond its neighbourhood.

Responding to the Yugoslav Crisis

In the 1970s, the Yugoslav Federation began to experience a steady economic decline. Richer Republics of the Yugoslav Federation such as Slovenia and Croatia increasingly opposed the transfer of local wealth toward the central government. Over time, the opposition between centralists and its opponents boosted political antagonism. In addition, the discriminatory measures of the Federal government and the uneven taxation of the non-Serbian minorities, as well as the territorial confiscation of Kosovo to the Albanians inflamed the socio-political confrontation. These factors ultimately intertwined with the increasingly nationalist tone of both Serbian and Croatian leaders and fomented phenomena of ethno-political violence that underscored territorial ambitions.[i]

The EC, firmly intent on preventing tragedies such as Auschwitz from happening again, promptly claimed its willingness to handle the Yugoslav crisis (Pond 2006). Indeed, during the

first phase of the conflict, which lasted from June 1991 to April 1992, the EC were the main contact for the peace process. The EC initially interpreted Slovene and Croatian declarations of independence as threats to the Yugoslav geopolitical stability. In particular, it feared that the dissolution of the Federation would fuel separatist ambitions in other regional contexts and produce a massive wave of refugees, an issue that would demand further financial efforts on its part (Reno and Lynch 1996). Thus, both the European Council and the European Parliament strongly underscored the unity of the Yugoslav Federation.[ii] Above all, the EC used terminology such as "Balkan tribes" to explain the war as a uniquely Balkan phenomenon that resulted from previous irrational animosity, equally blaming all members of the Federation (Bennett 1995, 194). This skewed view, while certainly reinforcing EC's aspirations to preserve the territorial integrity of the Yugoslav Federation, caused the reverse effect and facilitated the rise of a devastating wave of micro-nationalisms (Turkes and Gokgoz 2006, 673).

Analysis of the 1991 Bulletin of the European Community proves that the European Council supported Ante Marković, the last prime minister of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and signed a protocol including financial, cultural, and economic cooperation. In addition, the EC invited the Federal government to revise its Constitution to firmly reassert the indisputable nature of human rights, including the right of self-determination.[iii] Nonetheless, Serbian violations against the Albanian minority in Kosovo quickly proved the ineffectiveness of the European measures to enforce the leading principles outlined by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Meanwhile, Serbian President Milosevic "made crystal clear that he would not shun violence to reach his aim" (Faucompret 2001, 6). After the June declaration of independence, Slovene troops faced the Federal Army for about ten days in what became known as the Ten Days War. On July 5, 1991 the European troika (Jacques Poos, Gianni De Michelis, and Hans Van den Broek) exercised political pressure on both the Slovenian and Federal governments to reach a cease-fire and open diplomatic negotiations inside the CSCE. Moreover, it also imposed an embargo on weapons and suspended the economic and financial agreements previously signed. A few days later, on July 7, under the EC's political sponsorship, Slovenian, Croatian, and Federal governments signed the Brioni's agreement, which postponed the recognition of Slovenian sovereignty by three months and saw the gradual withdrawal of the Federal troops.[iv] This agreement was the EC's single diplomatic success during the conflict, however the EC was unable to contain the escalation of the conflict in the following months (Marolov, 12). Indeed, the conflict in Croatia, anticipated by the May declaration of independence of the Serbs living in the region of Krajina, opposed Croatian troops to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) as well as irregular Serbian militia until January 1992 and later again in 1995.

During the summer of 1991, the EC called for a peace conference and created an International Arbitration Committee, which was led by the President of the French Constitutional Court, Robert Badinter. Although the Committee blamed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (the new subject consisting of the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro) for the escalation of conflict in the Balkans, it also advised the European Community to proceed with the recognition of the Republics once they met the CSCE criteria for democracy and respect of human rights (Noutcheva and Huysseune 2004, 117-118). At the same time, the Badinter Committee supported a free union of independent republics with a single custom policy, cooperation in economic and foreign policy, and broad political autonomy in regions that were

inhabited by multiple minorities.[v] However, in a few months, European support for the maintenance of a united Federation had waned.

At the opening of the Hague Peace Conference in September, Federal President Mesić, Prime Minister Marković and EC negotiator Lord Carrington sought for a negotiation on the inviolability of the current borders, and reached a new cease-fire in Croatia. At the time, however, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a mosaic state with a large Muslim majority, took on an overwhelming ethnic meaning (Greiff 2018, 38-46). Its Muslim population fell victim to Serbian authoritarianism and, more critically, international ineffectiveness. By the beginning of 1992, after being occupied by the Federal Army in September 1991, and following the proclamation of the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, Serbian troops occupied roughly 70% of its territory. Due to Serbian continuous violations of the Hague's deliberations, the EC asked for the support of the UN Security Council on October 25, 1991.[vi] While recognizing the right to independence of the Yugoslav Republics, the EC also stressed the major implications of the Yugoslav conflict for international peace. To defuse this threat, the European Council imposed economic sanctions on the Yugoslav Federation and asked each Republic to elaborate a plan for the protection of minority rights.

In December, in an attempt to support the Yugoslav economy, the EC decided to reactivate the PHARE program, the financial aid program of the European Bank for Investment, and the regime of preferences for the agricultural products coming from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia. Despite the efforts of the EC members to pursue a strategy which concurrently aimed to both economically and politically isolate the Serbian government, in December 1991 they firmly supported the independence of the Yugoslav Republics.[vii] Thus, on December 17, under the pressure of German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who vouched for Germany's unilateral recognition of sovereign and independent Yugoslav Republics in absence of a common European declaration, EC's members agreed to recognize those Republics that satisfied criteria, such as the respect for human rights, including minority rights; the use of diplomacy to resolve controversy; respect of current borders; and constitutional as well as political guarantees for its citizens. These principles became the object of a harsh dispute between the German, French and British governments (Faucompret 2001, 11; Holbrooke 1998, 31-33). While the former supported the secessionist Republics, the latter feared that the European recognition could further exacerbate the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Above all, while the German government saw, in the right to self-determination, a mirror of its recent past, the French government opposed unilateral action by any member of the EC and feared the extension of the German influence to the Balkans.

Meanwhile, the German pressure against Belgrade's ambition for a Great Serbia clashed with the UN resolution 724 (December 1991), which explicitly required members of the international community to avoid any action that would further escalate the conflict.[viii] Furthermore, differing opinions among the EC members quickly extended from diplomacy to the use of military action. Each state envisioned differently the use of the Western European Union (WEU) and the military branch of the EC (Bianchini and Spanò 1993). Since September 1991, the European Council had debated sending a military contingent only if the Yugoslav Republics could effectively commit to a cease-fire.[ix] In particular, Kohl and Mitterrand agreed on using a European contingent to enforce a temporary truce of arms between the belligerents. Denmark, Great Britain, and Portugal, however, opposed this option. Not only were some members of the European Community opposing any military intervention

but also the Serbian and Russian governments firmly pitted against any military external interference in the conflict. While the former feared an extension of German influence and condemned its support for the secessionist Republics, the latter feared an uncontrolled escalation of the conflict and threatened to use its power of veto inside the UN Security Council. In such a context, German constitutional constraints, Italy's past military aggressiveness toward the Balkans, British memories of guerrilla warfare in North Ireland and French perplexities toward the level of hostility, further undermined the European military response to the crisis (Owen 1995, 12). Despite the latent disagreement inside the European Community, its members decided to proceed with the recognition of the Slovene and Croatian Republic on January 15, a decision that was further reinforced by the support of the Holy See.

Meanwhile, the Badinter Committee stated that only Slovenia and Macedonia met the European criteria to be recognized as independent Republics. Croatia, instead, still lacked Constitutional guarantees toward its minorities, especially its Serbian residents.[x] After the Croatian Parliament's approval of a law to enforce minority rights, the EC also recognized Croatia as an independent Republic in October 1991. The Macedonian Republic, for its part, met the insuperable opposition of the Greek government, which claimed the historical, cultural and geographical right over its denomination. Any decision toward Bosnia-Herzegovina, instead, was postponed until after the results of its national referendum. The Badinter Committee also stated that the Yugoslav Federation, contrary to Serbian opinion, was experiencing a process of fragmentation and, therefore, its dissolution had to be handled according to international law. Thus, the different Republics had to freely agree to take up and share former responsibilities of the Federation. The European Parliament's recognition of both Slovenia and Croatia further validated the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation.[xi]

As discussed so far, the EC attempted to respond to the Yugoslav implosion by means of both diplomatic talks and economic sanctions until 1992. However, differing political views, historical traditions and commercial interests toward the Balkans undermined the cohesive political action of the EC. At the same time, the overlapping process of EU construction, the concurrent process of the German unification and, above all, the reticence to militarily intervention in the region decisively impaired European ambitions (Salmon 1998, 235). In such a complex political context, the February 1992 EC Peace Conference in Lisbon, also known as the Carrington-Cutileiro-Peace-Plan, proposed the creation of a weak central government in former Yugoslavia and the devolution of ample administrative powers at the district level. Most importantly, it proposed to classify all territorial units as "Bosniak, Croat and Serb" even in cases lacking a clear ethnic majority.

1992-1994: Europe Who?

On February 21, 1992, in a proposal from the UN delegate Cyrus Vance called for the deployment of a peacekeeping force, the Security Council approved the resolution 743 which authorized sending a UNPROFOR contingent to Croatia.[xii] Its goals were to supervise the withdrawal of the Federal troops (JNA), facilitate the return of the refugees, and disarm irregular militias. The UN mission, however, lacked both the capacity and authority to respond to any military aggression, a factor that strongly affected its ability to contain possible phenomena of ethno-political violence. General Rupert Smith, a Senior international command who was highly involved in NATO and UN operations in the Balkans, magnificently summarized this problem by stating that the UNPROFOR mission was deeply undermined by the decision to send a peacekeeping mission where "the combatants did not

want collective peace" (Smith 2008, 338). A few months later, in April 1992, Bosnia was also officially recognized as an independent state by the UN. Despite this, the European Community merely acted as a bystander to the violence and occupation of the newly independent and sovereign state, by the new Federation of Serbia- Montenegro. Due to European inaction, the UN rather than the EC became the pivotal actor to find a solution to the Yugoslav crisis by imposing economic sanctions, deploying military troops and creating safe areas in Sarajevo, Goražde, Žepa, Bihać and Tuzla in May 1993 (Leurdijk 1996, 3-16).

Meanwhile, the Lisbon agreement in its original form was first rejected on March 11 to be later approved in an altered version that included ethnically split cities on March 18; however, on March 28, the President of the Republic of Bosnian and Herzegovina Alija Izetbegovic also firmly rejected the altered version. In Izetbegovic's mind, any plan that included the partition or division of Bosnia was fundamentally anti-Bosniak (Doga 2012, 59-60). To further complicate any effective response to the Yugoslav crisis, the EC was also entangled by the irreconcilable views over the Atlantic or European leadership in any possible future military operation. This diatribe, which was aroused in the weeks that anticipated the signature of the Maastricht Treaty, saw the net contraposition between Great Britain and France. While the former was favourable to connect the new political union to the Atlantic framework, the latter advocated a separate and autonomous European organization (Corbett 1992). Italy and Great Britain underscored their special relationship with the US and auspicated a major European contribution to international peace by the means of the Western European Union (WEU) whose activities remained subordinated to the decision of both the European Council and the Atlantic organization. To contrast, France and Germany, while recognizing the crucial role of the WEU, called for its unique submission to the decision of the European Council. The unified French and German brigade became the hallmark of the European will to further enhance political and military cooperation in the area of defence. The Treaty of the European Union ultimately supported the aspiration of the French and German governments to forge a European identity in the field of international defence. Yet it also requested significant convergences with the policies and decisions that were taken by the Atlantic organization.

In June 1992, after months of debates and negotiations, the European members approved the use of the WEU for peacekeeping missions.[xiii] This declaration, which also became known as the Petersburg Declaration, approved the use of European military forces for humanitarian goals if required by the CSCE and left the ultimate decision to each member state. For example, Denmark and Ireland decided to participate as observers while Turkey, Norway, and Iceland chose to temporarily refrain. Thus, after the European Council of Lisbon, the WEU supported the actions of NATO, such as in the naval blockade stemming from the UN Resolution 713 of September 1991 and Resolution 757 of May 1992.[xiv] During the Lisbon Council, the EC also pointed to Serbian responsibilities and refused to recognize Serbia-Montenegro. While supporting the UN resolution 758, the EC also agreed to enforce a global commercial, economic, and cultural embargo toward Serbia. In the midst of this apparent unity of intents, French President Mitterrand travelled to Sarajevo. While many observers read this initiative as a demonstration of French traditional ambitions to play a prominent role in a future and united Europe, others speculated that Mitterrand intended to prove to the European public that France had a special relation with Serbia and, therefore, could successfully lead future peace negotiations.

Between August 25 and 27 of 1992, at the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia (ICFY) in London, the Community took a firm stance toward the prosecution of war crimes and the respect for national sovereignty as well as territorial integrity of the new Republics. By doing so, the Community also advocated major international control to end the violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[xv] In addition, European members agreed to establish a permanent steering committee headed by the two co-chairmen, the UN representative Cyrus Vance and EC representative David Owen, as well as six commissions for the examination of issues related to Bosnia such as the economy, the succession of the former Yugoslav Federation and the implementation of a wide set of propositions drafted by both the CSCE and the UN. From then onwards, the ICFY continued to permanently meet in Geneva (Owen 1995, 1-2).

During the Fall of 1992, the Geneva negotiations experienced a prolonged deadlock, and the international community designed a peace plan that, named after the two co-chairmen of the permanent steering committee, became known as the Vance-Owen-Peace-Plan (VOPP). The VOPP proposed dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina into 10 cantons, entrusting the local administration to the European Union, and disarming the conflicting factions to stop ethnic cleansing. During the Fall, the VOPP found support by all EC members and the hopes for a diplomatic solution grew. However, many issues adversely affected the implementation of the plan, and its main terms merely remained on paper. Thus, internal disagreements among the EC members as well as resistance from the warring parties facilitated the continuation of atrocities on the ground (Owen 1995, 149). On 4 December 1992, after more than sixty consultations, German Chancellor Kohl and French President Mitterrand released a joint declaration that demanded the immediate stop of the mass killing of civilians, to prevent the conflict from spreading to other parts of the Balkans, and the search for a diplomatic settlement among the warring parties. In addition, both agreed on an immediate emergency support initiative to bring relief to the people struggling to survive in the kettle of Bihać. A week later, during the Edinburgh meeting, the EC members echoed the German-French position (Kohl 2007, 508-509). However, the European powerlessness in stopping the spread of extreme atrocities against civilians in Bosnia led to a growing critique from Atlantic partners, and to the symbolic resignation of the German Federal Minister Christian Schwarz-Schilling on 14 December 1992. Later, Schilling became the High Representative of the EU, the principle agency to supervise the Dayton Peace Accord. Schilling's resignation and similar political changes led to a new governmental Cabinet in Germany, and heightened interest by German citizens in the Bosnian crisis; however, it did little to increase German or European efforts to stop the violence. Due to the continuation of heavy fighting and atrocities after the winter of 1992-1993, and despite an initial period of isolation in which U.S. President Bill Clinton did not consider the Yugoslav conflict as an American vital interest, the United States became increasingly influential in the peace process both from a diplomatic and military point of view (Glenny 1995). The growing U.S. interest first led to the UN Resolution 816 of 31 March 1993, through which a no-fly zone was implemented over Bosnia to control airspace and reduce violence from the air. This no-fly zone had to be enforced and controlled by an international NATO AWACS unit comprised of soldiers from the US and several European nations. However, even under a clear UN mandate, and as part of an international force, Germany was unprepared to send its 162 soldiers into the mission. At the time, the German Constitution (Grundgesetz) did not allow German soldiers to engage in military actions in other states. Only after a rushed decision of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany was

the German government able to send its share of soldiers into the first military action for Germany since the end of World War II (Kohl 2007, 565-568).

At the same time, the general elections in France led to a shift in the composition of the parliament. With the success of the conservative parties, Balladour became the Prime Minister of France, creating a difficult political situation for President Mitterrand to follow through on his promises. Just weeks before the elections, Mitterrand had convinced Milosević to put more pressure on the Bosnian Serb elite to return to the negotiating table. Not only did Mitterrand emphasize the historical close alliance between France and Serbia, but he also voiced French support to lift UN sanctions against Serbia (Owen 1995, 124-125). This episode demonstrates that election cycles adversely affected EU's engagement in Yugoslavia and, more generally, its ability to intervene both militarily and politically in its neighbourhood.

Not only national politics, but also changes in international politics impacted the EU's strategy toward Yugoslavia. The April 1993 meeting between Van den Broek (representative of the political cooperation, EPC) and Russian Foreign Minister Tchourkin demonstrates this point. Following the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, many European states saw Russia as a valuable ally in the effort to force Serbia to the peace table. Thus, aware of the Russian-Serbian amicable relationship as well as Moscow's desire to move forward with a comprehensive agreement that would "establish a basis for the inclusion of Russia within the European economic space," Van de Broek persuaded the Russian Government to actively engage in the peace negotiations (White and Feklyunina 2014, 63). As a result, Russia became a key player in the management of the Yugoslav crisis. By contrast, the EU's role was further minimized.[xvii] Meanwhile, at the European Council in Copenhagen, the Community reaffirmed the principles of the VOPP such as the respect for human rights, inviolability of borders, engagement in humanitarian aid, and financial support to the UN. With the support of U.S. President Clinton, German Canceler Helmut Kohl proposed in Copenhagen to strengthen the Muslim/Bosniak party by directly supplying them with weapons. Kohl stated that "we must answer the question if it is not a moral duty to help the Muslims defend themselves" (Los Angeles Times 1993), a statement that showed wavering support among the members of the European Community in their opposition to lifting the UN arms embargo against all of the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, Kohl's proposal met widespread support among other European state representatives who also promised to send troops to Bosnia (Kohl, 2007, 599-600). In addition, the European Council in Copenhagen welcomed U.S. and Russian diplomatic intervention and publicly supported Resolution 836 authorizing UNPROFOR to return fire if attacked in areas declared protected. At the same time, the Community condemned Bosnia's abandonment of the Geneva negotiations and expressed concern for the deteriorating situation that was leaving increasingly less room for diplomacy and more room for force.[xx]

In such a context, growing U.S. involvement also led to a significant breakthrough in the Athens negotiations of May 1993. During these negotiations, Slobodan Milosević, the President of the Socialist Republic of Serbia and defacto President of the still existing state of Yugoslavia, persuaded Radovan Karadizić, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs and the president of the Republica Srpska, to sign an agreement towards peace. In the meantime, France, Russia, the UK and Spain also pressed for a UN Security Council resolution that would incorporate the Athens Agreement on the Serb sanctions. However, the US strategically waited to support any UN Security Council Resolution (Owen 1995, 437-438). General Mladidć, commander of the Bosnian Serb forces, interpreted American appeasement as proof that Karadzic's

agreement with Milosevic had less weight in international negotiations. As a result, division inside the Bosnian-Serb leadership as well as between the Serb and Bosnian-Serb leadership grew stronger. More importantly, these tensions significantly contributed to the demise of the VOPP and further demonstrated the necessity of a major shift in the EU strategy (Owen 1995, 151-184).

In May 1993, the UN approved the Resolution 827 which established the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) to punish war crimes committed since the break out of violence in 1991.[xxi] In July, Thorvald Stoltenberg, who succeeded Cyrus Vance, together with David Owen drafted a new peace plan that, unlike the VOPP plan, foresaw a three-way ethnic division of Bosnia rather than its preservation as a set of ethnically defined cantons (Burg and Shoup, 263-279). Thus, multilateral negotiations about partition resumed in September 1993 on board of the British vessel HMS Invincible and led to an amendment of the initial Owen-Stoltenberg proposal as well as a new road map to peace (Burg and Shoup, 280-286). The idea of the Invincible talks fed into what later became known as the EU Action Plan. Although the three-way division of Bosnia later became a two-way division, it also represented a core feature of the successful Contact Group Proposal of 1994 (US, UK, France, Germany and Russia) that led to the end of the Yugoslav conflict.

In October 1993, the European Union also made its first statement of common foreign and security policy toward former Yugoslavia. It condemned the repeated violations of the agreements on the passage of humanitarian convoys and threatened to interrupt their flow, should the belligerent factions fail to guarantee security. While acknowledging the diplomatic deadlock over Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Community also reclaimed a prominent role in the peace conference, supported Bosnian territorial demands and maintained a total embargo against Serbia and Montenegro.[xxii] Despite this apparent unity of intentions, the EU was crossed with lingering tensions (Allen and Smith 1996, 70-72). First, Greece's view toward Macedonia remained unaltered and significantly diverged from the rest of the Union. Second, the member states could not reach a common position toward the option of using military force by NATO. Finally, the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, which prospected a presumably uneven and pro-Serb partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was rejected by the Bosnian government and was completely marginalized in international politics. Moreover, towards the end of 1993, economies of bordering EU states such as Hungary started to suffer from the trade embargos against Serbia and Montenegro. In order to maintain their political and economic stability, different states vouched for a gradual relief of the sanctions. In addition, France and Great Britain started to openly talk about the withdrawal of their military contingents. Both feared that the increase of violence on the ground would threaten the lives of their personnel (Woodward 1995, 312).

As discussed above, between 1992 and 1994, the EU enhanced its political cooperation and agreed on the use of the WEU in support of the actions of the international community. At the same time, however, the Community's ability to effectively influence the peace process was adversely affected by lingering political disagreements and the increasing role of other international actors, above all the UN and the U.S. government. As a result, the EU was replaced by the Contact Group, which was comprised of USA, Russia, Great Britain, France and the country in charge of the EU Presidency (Kramer 1993). While the Contact Group became the main political broker to find a peace settlement to the Yugoslav crisis, NATO became the Western leading military tool during the last year of the war.

The US Torpedoing the VOPP

On January 1994, NATO members met in Brussels and decided on airstrikes against the tightening of the sieges of Sarajevo as well as other UN Safe Areas. On January 30-31, Kohl met President Clinton in Washington. At this time, it was clear that none of the three sides in Bosnia were innocent. The Bosnian Army had heavy arms, gained territory, and committed atrocities. Several international actors recommended putting pressure on the Bosniaks, but Clinton and Kohl agreed not to exercise any unilateral pressure. Instead, Kohl privately asked Clinton to support Bosnia against the Serb militias (Kohl 2007, 653-654). The Clinton-Kohl talks continued in July 1994 during Clinton's visit to Berlin. While the German-American axis further proved the EU's inability to stop violence in Bosnia, it also strengthened trans-Atlantic cooperation between individual EU member states and the US, spearheaded by the Contact Group and backed by NATO forces. A few months later, in March 1994, increasing pressure by American Secretary Hoolbroke and the Contact Group forced the former Yugoslav Republics to reach the first agreement on the creation of a Croatian-Muslim Federation, also known as the Washington Agreement. At the time, the European members firmly believed that the conflict depended on the opposing factions' will to fight and could be resolved by diplomacy. Nonetheless, members of the Atlantic Council agreed to authorize military operations outside the territory of its states to prevent threats to its collective security (Leurdijk 1996, 33-54). In April 1994, the European Council also issued a note asking the Serbian troops to withdraw from one of the safe enclaves, Goražde, and to release the UN personnel.[xxiii] In addition, it strongly supported the American-Russian initiative to impose a cease-fire to all the belligerents and further demonstrated its firmness against Serbian violence by approving the initiative of the European Parliament which advocated the action of the International Court in the Hague against genocide and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia.[xxiv]

When analyzed retrospectively, this set of initiatives demonstrates that the European Union had already embraced a new political role in 1994 as an agent of political stabilization in the Balkans. Unlike the rhetorical claims of the summer of 1991, the EU gradually projected its image of a civilian rather than military power, and, though unable to stop the conflict, it strongly committed to the socio-political reconstruction of the former Yugoslav Republics. Indeed, beginning in May 1994, the EU made an economic contribution to the Mostar administration and approved the participation of its troika to the peace talks set by the Contact Group. The EU's involvement in Mostar, which originally had been requested by the warring parties during the VOPP negotiations, further confirms a new phase of EU peacebuilding on the ground. Through humanitarian and economic support, this time overseen and organized by an EU administrator permanently deployed to Mostar, the EU tried to foster peace in this central city, which many viewed as the key to the stability of the young Croat-Muslim Federation (Koschnik and Schneider 1995, 23-35). In particular, European countries understood Mostar as an example of successful peacebuilding to be expanded to other divided areas of Bosnia. While major successes in terms of infrastructural reconstruction and improvement of livelihood of the population could be reported rather soon, the larger goals towards a stable peaceful social and political order in Mostar was not be achieved as expected. Again, EU's long internal decision processes, inefficient organization, major delays in mandates, and administrative mistakes not only left the EU personnel vulnerable to attacks, but also hindered the administration of the city. It ultimately impeded a prompt end to ethnic cleansing, the building of a unified and trustworthy local police force, as well as the definition of stellar answers to the pressing questions about émigrés' return and properties (Koschnik and Schneider 1995, 233).

Only in early June of 1994, the US officially removed the arms embargo on the Republic of Bosnia and recognized its right to self-defence. During the Corfu meeting of June, the European Council asked both Croatia and Serbia to abide by the cease-fire previously agreed upon and supported the prospected partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina: 51% to a Croat-Bosniak Federation and 49% to a Serb Republic.[xxv] After the parties accepted this solution, the European countries also agreed to ease the embargo on the Federal Republic of Serbia and Montenegro. A month later, the G7 meeting, or the first G8 meeting counting Russia as a guest, was held in Naples. The war in Bosnia was one of the central topics and led all sides to publicly agree to support the Contact Group in its work. However, even with all the international support, only minor progress was made in moving towards peace in the Fall of 1994.

However, throughout January and February 1995, the Yugoslav crisis appeared to take a decisive turn. Indeed, the four-month truce that was achieved after the mediation of former American President Jimmy Carter with Milosević, Izetbegović and Croatian President Franjo Tuđman boosted European confidence in an imminent resolution.[xxvi] In appointing Carl Bildt as the co-chair of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICFY), the EU also hoped to facilitate the political dialogue as well as the mutual recognition between the different Republics. Despite this, Serbian violations during the four-month truce provoked the military intervention of NATO forces. In response, Serbian militias captured and used blue helmets of the international force as human shields. Moreover, the Serbian attack on Bihać fueled EU's fears of a new possible escalation of the conflict. Following the Serbian violations of the UN resolutions 819, 824, and 836 in Srebrenica, the European Council issued a note in which it firmly criticized the Serb violence, requested the release of the UN hostages, as well as the end of the bombing of the city of Žepa.[xxvii] In such a tense context, Croatian forces carried out a military attack in the Krajina region.

Although the EU was unable to militarily contain new clashes between Serbian and Croatian forces, European countries further embraced their role of regional peacebuilder and designed a set of specific guidelines to further pursue peace negotiations. First, it demanded the recognition of the multi-ethnic and democratic nature of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the inviolability of minority and human rights, as well as the national sovereignty of each former Yugoslav Republic. It also auspicated the creation of a free-market economy and gradual disarmament of the popular militia throughout the Yugoslav territory. With regard to Kosovo, it instead advocated its broad regional autonomy. Finally, the EU confirmed its commitment to support refugees and assist the local population. To better coordinate the European efforts, the EU suggested appointing one personality, a High Representative, who would be chosen by the UN Security Council to work as a liaison between the units of peace-keeping and the international agencies to better assist the civilian population. While Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia were promptly included in the program of both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), the Federal Republic of Yugoslav (composed of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro) was asked to first abide by the terms of the peace treaty, cooperate with the International Court and recognize Kosovo's autonomy. While the CSCE controlled the disarmament and weapon control process, the EU decided to continue the administration of Mostar and, after overcoming the Greek opposition, reached an agreement with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).[xxviii]

Nonetheless, the statements of the European Union remained substantially theoretical and did not affect the strategies of the opposing factions on the ground. It was rather the Croatian offensive and the massive bombing by NATO that induced the Serbian government to peace talks and ultimately led to the Dayton Agreement of 21 November 1995. These agreements were a direct consequence of U.S. military intervention. In the words of Carl Bildt, “the simple and fundamental fact of this story was that the United States was the only player who possessed the ability to employ power as a political instrument and, when forced into action, was willing to do so.” (Chollet 2005, 29) Although Dayton, also portrayed as a “bold blueprint for the Bosnian state,” effectively led to peace, critics highlighted that it symbolized the triumph of short-term pragmatism and ultimately “rewarded ethnic cleansing by dividing Bosnia into ethno territorial entities.” (Toal 2005, 33)

As discussed above, between 1994 and 1995 the EU firmly supported the initiatives of the international community and confirmed its commitment to the process of post-war reconstruction. It greatly relied on financial support through international organizations such as the IMF and WB, the use of communitarian programs such as PHARE, support from NATO troops in Bosnia- Herzegovina and Macedonia, and the democratization of local and national state institutions. At its meeting in Madrid, the European Council issued its last statement on the Yugoslav war by praising its contribution to the Paris Agreement of December 1995. It reaffirmed its political support for Bildt in his action as High Representative and announced the deepening of political cooperation between the EU and FYROM.[xxix] While assessing the impact of the conflict on the historical process of European integration, the European Council bluntly affirmed that the Yugoslav crisis showed how Europe transformed from divided countries into a united continent based upon the principles of democracy and tolerance. We now can see that the Yugoslav crisis not only forced the European Community to re-think its role in international affairs and deepen political integration, but the Yugoslav events made also a point in case - as Erik Faucompret suggests, “the cart was put before the horses” and the Common Foreign and Security Policy mechanisms crumbled in front of different minds (Faucompret 2001, 30).

Conclusion

This article has stressed that a lack of political unity and military power weakened Europe’s ambitions to stop a local conflict which quickly escalated into a humanitarian tragedy marked by ethnic cleansing and mass genocide. Over time, the EU's means of preventive diplomacy and economic sanctions proved gravely inadequate in ending the conflict in Yugoslavia (Glenny 1996, 67). In addition to exposing the impotence of the European Union, the events in Yugoslavia highlighted a wide gap between the Community’s expectations and its capacity to implement them (Holland 1995, 555-559). The failure of the European policy was the result of its inefficacy to impose penalties, constitute common strategies and effectively mould national interests in the sphere of a common foreign policy and security (Nuttall 1994).

In September 1992, a Parisian newspaper stated that “Europe died in Sarajevo” (Finkielkraut 1996, 30). These words correctly described Europe's repeated failures to stop the conflict and, as later re-proposed by Alain Finkielkraut in his book “The Crime of Being Born,” vividly exposed the European weakness to respond to the abrupt geo-political changes that followed 1989. The premature recognition of national sovereignty for both Slovenia and Croatia, the ambiguous policy toward the individual responsibilities of each belligerent, as well as the conflicting views toward both the WEU and the Atlantic Alliance decisively undermined the communitarian strategy. In particular, the Yugoslav case demonstrated that the centrality of the nation-state and the strenuous defence of national sovereignty within the communitarian political framework debilitated European ambitions to act with a single voice in a time of crisis (Lavdas 1996, 228). Above all, it showed that “decades of integration have transformed Europe's nation states into member states but not into a unified super-state.” (Thomas 2011, 4). Its bureaucratic structure and norms, rather than its alleged indifference toward the Yugoslav tragedy, effectively became the primary reason of the European failure to respond to the Balkan crisis.

However, following the Yugoslav crisis and especially the Stabilization and Association Process of 1999, the EU firmly committed to effectively cope with political instability inside the region. According to Karen Smith, the Stability Pact represented one of the rare successes of the Common Foreign and Security Policy after 1989 (Smith 1999). European commitment toward the region was further confirmed in 2003 during the EU-Western Balkans Summit. On this occasion, the European countries declared that the “future of the Western Balkans is within the European Union” (Prifti 2013, 13). This statement, also known as the Thessaloniki Declaration, greatly exposed Europe's interest to peace and stability in its backyard after years of bloody confrontations. Nonetheless, in an international context which is still highly de-stabilized by the Syrian conflict, the Ukrainian crisis and the tragedy of refugees escaping across both the Mediterranean and South-Eastern Europe, one may wonder whether Europe has learned anything from its past.

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ENDNOTES

i. During the first few months of 1990, Croatian violence against Serbs in Vukovar and Serbian discrimination against Albanians in Kosovo exponentially aroused animosity between the Republics. For a study which explains the breaking-up of Yugoslavia by emphasizing the ethno-nationalist dimension of the conflict see Stefano Bianchini and George Schöpflin (1998), *State Building in the Balkans: Dilemmas on the Eve of the 21st Century* (Ravenna: Longo Editore).
ii. Bulletin of the European Community (BEC) January-February 1996, 96.
iii. BEC June 1991,13, 88, 92, 104.
iv. BEC July 1991, 86, 105-110.
v. BEC September 1991, 48, 63, 64.
vi. BEC October 1991, 71, 85, 87, 89.
vii. BEC December 1991, 98, 116-117.
viii. S/RES/724 (1991).
ix. The WEU was originally established in 1948 by 5 of the original members and later joined by the others. Immediately overshadowed by the creation of the NATO and the failure of EDC, this organization, which represented European ambition for military integration, experienced a long impasse. Only after 1975 and the Helsinki Act, the European countries decided to re-launch their dreams to act as a single political subject in international politics and gave new impulse at the WEU as a response to US aggressive Cold War's policy.
x. BCE January-February 1992, 82-84, 98, 104-105, 110.

xi. BEC March 1992, 83, 89, 98.
xii. S/RES/743 (1992)
xiii. BEC June 1992, 15, 17, 19, 21, 90-93, 108-109.
xiv. S/RES/757 (1992).
xv. BEC July-August 1992, 82-86, 106, 108-110.
xvi. BEC January 1993, 74 -76, 86, 88, 95-97.
xvii. BEC April 1993, 57, 72, 74, 79.
xviii. S/RES/713(1991).
xix. S/RES/836 (1993).
xx. BEC June 1993, 14, 19, 107,115,117,121,123,125.
xxi. S/RES/827 (1993).
xxii. BEC October 1993, 8, 11, 23, 84, 91.
xxiii. BEC April 1994, 69, 73, 98.
xxiv. S/RES/808 (1993).
xxv. BEC June 1994, 19, 105, 115.
xxvi. BEC January-February 1995, 35, 99.
xxvii. BEC July 1995, 13, 82, 83, 102-104.
xxviii. BEC September 1995, 50, 64-65.
xxix. BEC December 1995, 20-21,40-41,151-155.