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**EUROPE AND THE COLLAPSE OF YUGOSLAVIA:
EXISTING AND POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS**

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Even if some observers understood the Yugoslav state as an artificial and non-permanent entity, others believed in its structure as it stood, without questioning its future. As one author puts it, Yugoslavia was “a rare bird in Europe: Communist, yet moderately tolerant, open to trade with the West, and politically independent of both Cold War blocs.”¹ When the country started facing economic, political and social problems, academics turned their attention to the area trying to establish the causes and possible outcome of these problems. The wars in the former Yugoslavia “shocked the civilized West”² and encouraged an endless debate about the backwardness of the Balkans. In 2004, one study noted that “the very word ‘Balkans’ conjures up images of intrigue, war, and human suffering on a scale abhorrent to Western society. To some people, the Balkan countries lack a clear Western orientation and carry far too much cultural baggage to belong in the European club. Western leaders refer to the region as the back door to Europe, the Balkan powder keg, or Europe’s doorstep. What these euphemisms hide is, perhaps, the wish that the Balkans were located anywhere other than in Europe.”³ While opposing this at one point rather fashionable understanding of the Balkans as incapable of Westernizing, I argue that the Yugoslav wars sparked a debate over credibility and capability not only with regard to the international community as such, but also with regard to individual states and actors who were assigned important roles in the handling of the devastating situation. What the scholarship immediately did was to point the finger at one or more actors, most commonly at specific individuals (Josip Broz Tito or, more relevantly, Slobodan Milošević), while at the same time shielding a number of crucial contributing factors from serious criticism.⁴ Today, when the Yugoslav federation does not exist any more and some of the actions perpetrated have become well-known, scholarship continuously extends its interest with the purpose of re-examining the contributing factors, what could have been done to prevent the four Yugoslav wars,⁵ and what remains to be done in order to ensure that a similar disaster is never repeated, at least in Europe.

¹ Hitchcock, William I., *The Struggle for Europe: The History of the Continent since 1945*, London: Profile Books, 2004, p. 384.

² Lucarelli, Sonia, *Europe and the Breakup of Yugoslavia: A Political Failure in Search of a Scholarly Explanation*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. 1.

³ Gerolymatos, André, *The Balkan Wars: Conquest, Revolution and Retribution from the Ottoman Era to the Twentieth Century and beyond*, Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004, p. 4.

⁴ In his analysis, Robert Hayden comments: “Academic debates on the Former Yugoslavia are as polarized as those surrounding the creation of Israel or the partitioning of Cyprus, with criticism of a study often depending more on whether the work supports the commentator’s predetermined position than on the coherence of its theory or the reliability and sufficiency of its arguments. When one side in such a conflict wins politically, it usually also wins academically, because analyses that indicate that a politics that won is, in fact, wrong tend to be discounted. Political hegemony establishes intellectual orthodoxy” (Robert M. Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 19).

⁵ Ten-Day War in Slovenia or Slovenian Independence War (1991), Croatian War of Independence (1991-1995), War in Bosnia-Herzegovina or the Bosnian War (1992-1995) and the Kosovo War (1998-1999).