

according to the then still valid Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All the separatists were basing their demands for independence on a belief that ethnic groups are entitled to sovereign states of their own — an undemocratic, racist doctrine that led to genocide, atrocities, and "ethnic cleansing." None of these assertions of independence should have been treated as acceptable by the international community. However, since no such line was drawn, then there was little basis for rejecting any of the separatist states, including Republika Srpska.

Having gained their independence, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina insisted, on the basis of the "territorial integrity" principle, that their borders must be unchangeable; that was what the fighting was all about.¹⁰ The West, having recognized those states, also accepted this principle, which normally prevails in international relations. The Serbs inside those breakaway republics, however, did not see this principle as acceptable and some of the participants in the conference (especially peace activists) agreed with them. At the same time, almost all the conference participants (except probably the Serbian nationalists in the audience) regarded the Serbian militias, especially in Bosnia, as disproportionately responsible for military aggression and especially for war crimes. That their initial grievances may have been well-founded certainly did not exonerate them from blame.

Some participants noted that the United Nations abrogated its responsibility under the Charter when it transferred its peacekeeping operations in Bosnia over to the control of NATO. This happened because the United Nations was unable to act decisively because of the divisions among its Western members. In his paper, Johan Galtung argued in favor of the three simple principles which he said had been upheld by Secretary General Perez de Cuellar: (1) Don't recognize any breakaway republic or region in Yugoslavia before making absolutely sure that the minority problem there has been solved. (2) Offer "symmetric recognition" — not just recognizing your favorite groups while denying recognition to others. (3) Have a plan for Yugoslavia as a whole. Galtung claims that secession was delayed until Perez de Cuellar's term ended in December 1991. The solution would have been much easier if the West had followed Perez's principles.

Lessons in Politics and International Affairs

¹⁰See Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama*, second edition. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996) p. 182.

All our speakers seemed to agree that it was a mistake for the republics to hold separate free elections before the federal government did so. The local elections tended to legitimize separatism. Unfortunately, the devolution of power had proceeded so far that it was impossible for the federal government of Yugoslavia to hold the necessary elections by the time the republics started doing so and the Western foreign ministers did nothing to remedy that problem. They did force Milosevic to allow Markovic's successor, Mesic, to take office, but did not insist on a direct democratic election at the federal level, nor did they demand that the necessary constitutional changes be made to support the federal government.

The West and the United Nations can do little as long as the divisions exist within the West, with each major power pursuing its own agenda, paralyzing the European Union and the United Nations actions. The great powers of the West bear a heavy responsibility for the failure of the Yugoslav federal state. However, among the speakers only Papandreu complained that the West intervened inappropriately in Yugoslav foreign affairs. Some other commentators pointed out that strong responses had been required to the human rights violations that the Serbian government was inflicting on the Albanian population of Kosovo. The same relationship exists in Kosovo between Serbs and Albanians today, years after the break-up of the country. It is not clear what the international response should have been then, or should be now. However, the importance of intervening appropriately in defence of human rights (but how?) is an urgent lesson for the whole world.

The speakers all seemed to agree that international recognition of Slovenia and Croatia was premature, if indeed it should ever have been extended at all, given the lack of commitment in those new states to the protection of internal minorities. The participants also agreed that the early, illegal and widespread sale of arms by all parties constituted a violation of the UN Charter (though only Yugoslavia was suspended) and contributed directly to the onset of warfare.

The West also bears a heavy responsibility for the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which resulted from its acceptance of the verdict of a simple majority of those voting in its referendum.

Lesson: No separatist state should be recognized by the international community until all constituent minorities are satisfied with the terms of the partition, or until an impartial body accountable to the United Nations has ascertained that the minorities'