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The good and bad of Yugoslavia

Jeffrey Kuhner himself is mistaken — not the Macedonian Prime Minister he quotes — about the Yugoslav idea and on several other counts (Yugoslavia, rest in peace, Commentary, Friday).

First, Yugoslavia was dead not when Montenegro declared independence this month, but when Slovenia and Croatia did so 15 years ago after Slobodan Milosevic had started to recreate Serb domination by force.

Second, the Yugoslav Federation consisted not just of six South Slavic republics but also of two autonomous provinces: mostly Albanian Kosovo and ethnically most diverse Vojvodina. The former is on the path to independence, while the latter — singularly among the eight constituent parts of the old federation — has not regained even the level of autonomy it enjoyed until 1988 when Milosevic's hired hordes seized it.

Third, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was not just an artificial creation by victorious Allies in 1918 but indeed the dream (much like German and Italian unification) of South Slavic intellectual elites, particularly those living in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. That it was later abused by those who pushed their own nationalistic goals of domination (as correctly observed by the author) could hardly be blamed on the dreamers more than the American Civil War could be blamed on the Founding Fathers.

Finally, while Mr. Kuhner correctly notes many atrocities committed in that country, he completely ignores the best of Yugoslavia by burying it between Tito's war conduct and the fall of communism. Yet, having been born there of deeply religious and anti-Communist parents and having grown up there as a member of the continuously decimated Hungarian minority, I am deeply grateful for all the intellectual and material opportunities the Yugoslavia of 1968-88 offered even to a non-Slav — especially compared to the much worse lot of Hungarians and others in the neighboring, and threatening, Soviet block.

Yugoslavia was many things both good and bad, but never a God, not even a failing one. Depicting it, however, as almost Satanic — instead of those who brought such fate upon its peoples — is warped and unjust

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