

The EU as a state builder in international affairs: the case of Kosovo; A book by Labinot Greicevci¹ —

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The topic of the international state building in general and the case of Kosovo specifically has generated quite an number of scholarly articles and studies from different fields related to foreign policy, but also in other contexts such as human rights, global security, legal studies, political economy, post-conflict and peace studies, even media studies and so on and so forth. Few of them are focused on the EU role as an international global player related to the case of Kosovo. The book by Labinot Greicevci “The EU as a state builder in international; affairs: the case of Kosovo” is one of them. He endeavours to assess the results of the state-building mission of the EU in the case of Kosovo and by doing so sets out to evaluate the importance of Kosovo’s intervention as a crucial point in international affairs and state-building missions.

There is now in place quite a new global disorder with the Russia-Ukraine war developing as we speak, that might constitute another turning point in international affairs. However, in the case of Kosovo we already have a practice that is carried out by the EU, the United Nations, United States and its allies, with a certain success, one would argue. Indeed, in the past 25 years, the EU has increasingly become involved in international state building operations especially in the Western Balkans like in Kosovo, but also in BH, North Macedonia or elsewhere in the world... The reactions towards such interventions have been mixed to put it mildly, with many contesting those international missions for lack of efficiency or fragmentation and lack of coherence, calling the liberal state building framework overall a policy blip

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that was always destined to fail and based on more of a naïve idealism rather than realist prospects.

Despite the criticism, the state building paradigm continues to evolve and seems to have been gone through development of a new pragmatist consensus seeking to increasingly situate itself as part of domestic and local processes, taking therefore a more human face in terms of sustainability and local legitimacy rather than an externally-led transformation.

The author of the book under discussion today evaluates the EU state-building project in the case of Kosovo rather favourably. He maps out the tangible and normative impacts of the international mission and calls it cautiously successful overall. His perspective is supported by evidence and is based on adequate scholarly literature, namely the Liberal peace approach and the normative approach, combined. I broadly agree with his findings and his arguments, as the role of the EU has proved to be essential for the emergence of the state of Kosovo and its state-building process in international affairs. The international intervention approach from within the neo-liberalism paradigm as a state project might have many flaws and has not always proven the most effective, due to many factors, but the case of Kosovo and arguably that of other countries of the region of the Balkans, have the prospects of a rather successful story.

Furthermore and in response to few critical voices, I would like to argue that in the case of Kosovo, there has been a previous basis for statehood and working institutional frameworks in place, so it is not quite fair to deem Kosovo or other Western Balkan countries as failed states despite their problems. Historically speaking, Kosovo has always had a social basis for governing legitimacy, so one cannot call it a failed state from within as scathing critics often relate the so-called statehood failures to some intrinsic characteristics of those states, apart from international inadequate intervention. I would argue that this does not hold true in the case of Kosovo that has covered by itself a wide range of institutional capacity-building measures encompassing everything from the legal and political system to education, health, and welfare.

I would like also to mention that a strong element of national identity paired with a liberal spirit of its people and a western affiliation in terms of cultural, social but also democratic values and sentiments, might have helped. One should mention, for example, the fact that with Kosovo we have in the region of the Western Balkans a country that has already set a tradition of free and fair elections, where the results are not contested as elsewhere in the region. We can also name a set of other achievements in terms of democratic values expressed both internally and in their foreign policies and international relations.

Regarding the use of interviews collected during field work that apparently inform the book content, and referred by the author in terms of methodology of

the study it can be said in a critical stance, that the fact that they remain anonymous might be considered a limitation whereas transcripts of those interviews would have helped to openly grasp the views of those interviewed for the book.

Therefore, as a point of conclusion, I would like to emphasize that despite the fact that the role of the EU as a state-builder in the case of Kosovo has been subject to weaknesses of its fragmentation from within the alliance, it has however been crucial for the emergence of the state of Kosovo and later in terms of institution-building, but also in terms of immediate economic reconstruction and free market economy, as well as ethnic accommodation and overall results, in accordance with the findings of the author of this book.