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ALBERTO BASCIANI, *L'ILLUSIONE DELLA MODERNITÀ. IL SUD-EST DELL'EUROPA TRA LE DUE GUERRE MONDIALI*. SOVERIA MANNELLI: RUBBETTINO, 2016, 480 p.

Reviewed by Vojislav G. Pavlović*

The interwar history of South-East Europe has, as Alberto Basciani rightly observes, been widely considered as a mere period of transition from the era of empires (Habsburg and Ottoman) to the era of communist dictatorships, nothing more than an interlude between two great catastrophes that befell the region and the rest of Europe in the twentieth century. The Great War and the creation of the Soviet bloc produced the impression that the intervening years had had no particular importance. Furthermore, the Iron Curtain that descended on the major part of the region effaced the two decades from historical narrative.

Basciani decided to write a book in order to demonstrate the importance of the 1920s and 1930s for the history of South-East Europe, the years that, in his opinion, were marked by an undeniable striving for modernity, be it political, social, architectural or economic, which was motivated by the need to bridge the gap that separated the region from the rest of Europe. Basciani's intention was not to write a textbook but to trace the main lines of the region's political, economic and social evolution in the interwar years. Therefore he does not strictly adhere to a chronological approach and has no pretensions to an exhaustive analysis of the period. Having studied and written extensively on the region, he chose a number of salient events and changes which he sees as being the most descriptive of the evolution of the region. His book is based exclusively on works written in English, French and Italian. He decided to put aside those written in the languages of the region since he does not command them all.

The book is structured as a series of analyses of the Balkan kingdoms (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which was

renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) divided chronologically into two parts, the 1920s and the 1930s. The first part, a time of challenges, demonstrates Basciani's approach, since the challenges that he focuses on vary from one kingdom to another. In the case of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the foremost challenge was its very existence, and then relations between the nations that the Kingdom was composed of. The kingdom of South Slavs was not only a successor state of the defunct Austria-Hungary, but also its heir insofar as the harmonisation of different political, economic and social legacies was its major challenge along with the national issues that were the reason for its structural instability. Bulgaria in the same period witnessed the unprecedented rise to power of the agrarian party led by Alexander Stamboliiski with his particular vision of Bulgarian society with the peasantry at its core and the agrarian reform as the principal element of his political strategy. The assassination of Stamboliiski in June 1923 put an end to this unique experiment in making a peasant-centred society. The incorporation of Transylvania and Bessarabia into Greater Romania was the challenge that had to be addressed in the immediate aftermath of the war. The new electoral law introduced universal male suffrage, leading to the Liberal party coming into power. Albania came into existence only after the Great War, while a native dynasty led by King Zog faced the difficult task of creating the basic structures of the state. Greece came out of the Great War under the leadership of Venizelos, the advocate of the Allied cause and the architect of territorial expansion in consequence of the Allied victory. However, he lost the elections of 1920 and his arch-rival, King

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Constantine, was allowed to return to the country thanks to a quite dubious referendum. Thus, Greece under Constantine's leadership had to face the war with the Turkey of Kemal Atatürk and the subsequent population transfer codified by the Treaty of Lausanne.

The evolution of South-East Europe in the 1930s was interrupted by the Great Depression which the region began to feel only at the beginning of the decade. The progressive closing of European markets for agricultural exports from the Balkan kingdoms caused protracted economic and political instability in the region, leading to the emergence of authoritarian regimes. Democracy was a victim of the economic crisis, while the revival of German influence in the Hitler period created something of a German-dominated economic space in South-East Europe. King Alexander and Milan Stojadinović in Yugoslavia, King Carol and General Antonescu in Romania, Tsankov and Liapchev in Bulgaria, King Zog and his Italian mentors in Albania and, finally, Metaxas in Greece, were not in power at the same time, but taken together they demonstrate the fact that democratic processes in the Balkans were dying down. After Hitler's army overpowered western democracies, South-East Europe, already economically incorporated into Hitler's New Order, chose

to join it formally with the exception of Yugoslavia and Greece.

The Second World War and its aftermath confirmed the gap that had been created between Western Europe and its south-eastern part from the mid-1930s onwards. The domination of two totalitarian regimes over the region created the impression that the efforts the Balkan democracies had made in the 1920s and 1930s had not produced any result, but rather had been a failed experiment which had proved the ineptitude of these societies for democracy. Basciani's book, however, proves otherwise. Its merit is in putting forward the fruits of an important bibliography on the region that provides irrefutable evidence for its evident evolution, the evolution based on the idea of democracy and free economy. The common effort to bridge the gap which separated the region from the rest of Europe was thwarted by geopolitical developments on a broader European scale. Nevertheless, the illusion of modernity, as Basciani's book is titled, cannot and should not obscure the efforts to modernise Balkans societies. Their results may have been annihilated by subsequent communist dictatorships, but historiography such as Basciani's excellent study has the obligation to rediscover and present the interwar efforts of Europe's "Third World" to join the mainstream of European development.

MILAN RISTOVIĆ, *NA PRAGU HLADNOG RATA. JUGOSLAVIJA I GRADJANSKI RAT U GRČKOJ (1945–1949)*. [ON THE BRINK OF THE COLD WAR. YUGOSLAVIA AND THE CIVIL WAR IN GREECE (1945–1949)]. BELGRADE: FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET UNIVERZITETA U BEOGRADU, 2016, 461 p.

*Reviewed by Radmila Pejić**

Milan Ristović, Professor of Modern History at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, is a leading expert on the history of Yugoslav-Greek relations in the latter half of the twentieth century. He is the author of several distinguished monographs, which

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