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Democratic Potential and Dynamics of Regionalism on the Former Yugoslav Territory

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Abstract

Paper deals with democratic potential and dynamics of regionalism in countries that emerged on the territory of former Yugoslavia, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, FYR Macedonia and Kosovo. Analysis of regional institutions is positioned in wider context of democratic potential of regional self-government comparison between the western and eastern part of Europe. Paper also analyses common roots of new countries on former Yugoslav territory and sketches main characteristics of regional institutions in every country under review. On the basis of that common trends regarding regional institution are established and causes explained. Basic data on countries under comparison are annex in the separate table. The paper is divided it two main parts. The first analyses the democratic potential of regional self government by comparison between the experiences of the west and east European countries regarding the introduction of regional institutions. The second part describes and analyses the situation with the regional institutions in the region, identifying common trends and their causes, and show country-specific circumstances that are important for the realisation of regional institutions' democratic potentials. Constitutional and legal documents, statistical data, scientific sources, domestic and international reports, as well as the results of own research is taken into account in the preparation of the paper

Key words: regionalism, regional self-government, regional democracy, former Yugoslav territory, Europeanization

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1. Introduction

Regional self-government enhances democracy by providing a democratic arena for channelling, discussing, establishment, and representation of the region-based interests of inhabitants, businesses and other subjects. There are several conditions for constitutional recognition of regional self-governments, such as historically stabilised regional identities in a country, strong political activism at the regional level, a relatively balanced territorial organisation of regions within a country, the consensus of the main national political actors with regard to usefulness of regional political institutions, etc. European regional and cohesion policy and political reliance on Europe of regions, activities of the Council of Europe in that area, and networking efforts of the established regions themselves add to overall regionalisation trend in Europe.

Democratic potentials of the regional self-government depend on many factors, such as the design of representative and other political institutions, on the channels of direct democratic influence of citizens, on the self-government scope of affairs, on the discretion of regional authorities, on regional human, financial, organisational and other capacities, on the overall territorial organisation of a country, etc. In spite of similar historical and socio-political context, there are certain differences with regard to these factors, decisive to democratic role of regional governments in the region.

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first analyses the democratic potential of regional self-government by establishing several factors which are important for the realization of democratic potential of regional self-government. It also presents a comparison between the experiences of the west and east European countries regarding the introduction of regional institutions. The second part describes and analyses the situation with the regional institutions in the region, identifying common trends and their causes, and show country-specific circumstances that are important for the realisation of regional institutions' democratic potentials. In the final part, several conclusions are drawn based on previous analysis. Constitutional and legal documents, statistical data, scientific sources, domestic and international reports, as well as the results of own research is taken into account in the preparation of the paper.

2. Democratic potential of regional self-government – comparison between the West and the East of Europe

2.1. Democratic potentials of regional self-government

There are several factors that are important for the realization of democratic potential of regional self-government:

- *Design of representative and other political institutions.* The first issue is how many directly elected bodies there are, if any, at the regional level. Regional governors could be elected by regional representative bodies, directly by citizens, or appointed by certain central state bodies. Combinations are possible, like in the cases when a regional representative body elects them, but certain form of confirmation is necessary from the central level. To conclude, if the regions in a country have political autonomy, it is confirmed by the right of regional citizenry to elect the members of regional *representative* bodies. *Direct elections of regional governors* can be seen as an additional channel of citizens' democratic influence.

Even regional representative bodies can be designed in different manners. They can be more closely connected with *regional constituency*, or they can be an additional field of influence of centrally headed national political parties. Further, they can be the arenas of party politics or they can be ameliorated by *independents*, at least to a certain degree. Even in cases when political parties are the main political actors at the regional level, in certain situations central interests can prevail, while in others *regional and local parties* can serve as a lever of regional interests. The type of election system can be decisive, too. In the systems with winner-takes-it-all principle (*majority principle*) people have representatives that ought to be in contact with their constituencies, in one way or another, while in the systems with proportional principle, such relations can hardly exist. Only independent lists, regional or other parties strongly committed to have tight relations with regional citizens can be slightly better performers in that regard – it is not easy, of course, due to the common problems with size and diversity of regional constituencies (in proportional system the whole regional unit is one constituency).

A very important issue is the *political importance of regional elections*. They can be perceived as highly important, or as second-rate, or even third-rate elections in a country (like Croatian county elections that are, according to their political importance, well behind the national or even local elections). It depends on a number of factors, such as the importance of regional self-government in a country, the significance of regional self-government scope of affairs, etc.

- *Channels of citizens' direct democratic influence.* Regional tier is not so natural an environment for direct democracy as the local tier of government is, due to the larger

size of regional units, more diversified political and other interests of regional citizens, difficulties of assembly, discussion, and effective participation at the regional level, and the like. However, certain democratic channels can be introduced, designed and used, such as *recall procedures*, if regional governors are directly elected, regional *referenda*, *citizens' initiative* – probably supported by the modern information technology and social networks (*e-democracy*), etc.

- *Scope of regional self-governments.* Wider self-government scope of affairs can add to political importance of regional elections, attract more efforts of regional political actors, and devote more attention of citizens, civil service organizations and other democratic subjects to regional autonomy. In the cases where the scope of regional self-governments is narrow, regional elections and other regional political processes are of merely symbolic, not substantial significance. In such situations, regional elections can be a specific (and rather expensive!) way of polling.
- *Discretion of regional authorities.* It can be hypothesized that the wider the discretion of regional authorities, the wider the space for regional citizenry's influence on the official regional bodies. In real political conditions, such a space may be filled-in by the regional interests and influences of citizens and other regional subjects (private and civil sector organisations, etc.). However, there is a possibility that such a space would be dominated by other, not so democratic actors, and their influence.
- *Regional human, financial, organisational and other capacities.* Better conditions for quality democracy are prone to exist in those regions that have better capacities. On one hand, capacities are indicators of the significance of regional autonomy (greater the significance – larger the capacities). On the other hand, capacities are preconditions for processing and accepting the opinions of citizens and other democratic actors, for implementation of democratically made political decisions at the regional level.
- *Overall territorial organisation of the country.* Regional tier of government can be made more or less important by the means of overall territorial organisation. In certain countries, inclination to the large local units can be observed. In that case, there is narrower space for affirmation of the regional level. Contrary to that, the importance of regional tier and, consequently, regional political processes, is higher in the countries with more fragmented local structure, in which local units are rather weak and citizens have to search for realisation of their interests at the wider, regional level. Of course, the size of a country can add to this situation – small countries have difficulties with developing regional governments and genuine regional democratic processes (Slovenia, Montenegro).
- *Density of democratic actors at the regional level.* If all other conditions are equal (*ceteris paribus*), regional units with denser network of democratic actors can develop better regional democracy. Not only citizens, but also non-governmental organisations, private organisations (especially those with stronger social sensitivity and responsibility),

international actors, etc., which act within a region, can be seen as the elements in regional democracy network.

2.2. Comparison between the West and East of Europe

Among the contemporary tendencies of social development such as globalization, European integration, urbanization and the post-socialist transition, tendency toward regionalization certainly occupies an important place.¹ Regional or middle (*meso*) level of government today is an essential part of the institutional architecture of the modern European states. Regardless whether they are spatially and demographically large or small countries, the organization of government at several levels of territorial self-government – one of which is regional – has become commonplace. It is therefore fully justified to note that the changes that have occurred over the past fifteen years in the development of regional democracy on the European continent is more important than ever before in history (AER, 2006: 10).

Development and legitimization of the regional level in Europe happened in few waves. The first wave swept the countries of Western Europe during the 1960s and the 1970s, and consisted in the set-up of legal (very often, constitutional) basis for the introduction of political regions. That period can be called the formative phase of the regional level in Europe. The concept of the region tried to justify the existence of a separate regional identity, which in the idea of regionalism and strengthening the autonomy of the territorial units, saw the possibility of its own affirmation against the nation-state. Regionalism differentiated over time so today one cannot talk about a totally unique and homogenous regionalism movement in whole Europe. Rather it is a set of partial efforts connected with different ideologies, varying from "... the extreme left to the extreme right, passing through liberalism, social democracy and democracy-Christianity." (Keating, 2004: 570-571). The second wave, which has transformed then understanding of the regional level, takes place during the second half of the 1980s and during the 1990s. This wave in the foreground put focus on economic issues associated with the concept of the region and so gradually treading a path for the "new regionalism" (Keating, 1998), or "neo-regionalism" that is primarily based "... on functional or economic conditions, but which also involves an element of political and cultural identity that is at least partially developed in conflict with the central state level" (Johansson, 2000: 132).

Regionalization intensified in the Western part of Europe in the final quarter of 20th century, so that today some form of regional level of government exists in almost all European countries. Some of them even have two levels of self-governing units, and sometimes only one. Two tier

¹ While these tendencies reach the surface in individual countries or on certain continents with unequal intensity, they can be identified in almost every country to a greater or lesser extent. The exception is probably the post-socialist transition, which is a particularity of the transition countries, so it should be taken into account when analyzing the development of territorial administrative system of the countries that emerged after the collapse of communism in Central and South Eastern Europe.

systems of regional units are mainly conditioned by the size of the country, and this practice is found mainly in the populated and the large countries, like France, Italy, Spain and Germany. When it comes to transition countries, a two tier system of regional units has only Poland. However, there are several middle sized and even smaller countries that have opted for such a system (e.g. Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Greece, and Finland).

Regionalism in Central and South-Eastern Europe had slightly different development path. Mostly due to Marxism as dominant political ideology and communism as main principle of social organization, regionalism was not developed the same way as it was in the rest of the Europe. With the collapse of communism, values of local self-government were nominally proclaimed as desirable ingredient of newly established democracies, although many times they are not adequately respected in politico-administrative systems of these countries.

Significant differences between the transition countries² are exposed as a deeper analysis of each country is taken. After the collapse of communism, which represented a sort of ideological glue of these countries, each country is developing in its own individual way (Meyer-Sahling, 2009). However, it seems that at a general level it is possible to talk about a few common characteristics that have nothing to do with the particularities of specific cases. Also, it is evident that transition countries can be grouped by some common characteristics arising from a similar history or from the fact that during the communist period they were part of the same state.

Among the transition countries, there are many differences that are primarily the result of cultural, historical, ethnic and other characteristics. Transition countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe are largely still a very complex ethnic communities and often in some of these countries different minorities have a large share of the total population.³ As is the western part of Europe (e.g. Basques, Catalans or Welsh), sometimes it is case with such minorities that have aspirations to become an independent state to justify the historical, cultural and other reasons (e.g. Moravia Bohemia and Silesia in the Czech Republic and Poland). However, in most cases it comes to such minorities whose main national body is another, usually a neighboring country (e.g. Hungarians in Slovakia, Russians in the Baltic countries, Croats and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungarians in Serbia, Albanians in Macedonia, etc.) or the minorities who do not have their own home country (e.g. Roma population in Romania, Hungary, etc.) (Keating, 2006: 253). However, despite such a complex mosaic in terms of national minorities in the transition countries, the idea of regionalism has evolved quite differently from the development of these

² The term transition countries refer to the countries that emerged after the collapse of the former socialist and communist states of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

³ In some transition countries, minorities make up over a quarter of the total population, while in some countries (e.g. Lithuania and Estonia) this percentage exceeds thirty percent of the total population (Zielonka, 2001: 514, cited by Caramani, 2003: 21).

ideas in the western part of Europe, not letting the deep roots that would ensure the realization of the idea of regionalism in the form of strong regional units in transition countries.⁴

One more element should certainly be taken into consideration. Some of these countries before their independence were part of complex states such as the former Czechoslovakia, USSR and Yugoslavia. After the collapse of these complex states, the independent states emerged such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and the countries successors of former Yugoslavia. On the other side, there were countries that were during the communist period significantly influenced by political ideas formed in Moscow. Although formally independent, in reality they were mostly Russian satellites (Pipes, 2006: 141). These are Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Regardless the above mentioned differences after the fall of communism all transition countries have adopted the unitary structure of government, and today in that part of Europe there are no complex states (besides Russia).

The regional level of government in the former communist system often had a position of administrative units, i.e. territorially dislocated branch of the central government, not a political unit with an independent self-governing status. It was used as an instrument of central government and one of the main levers of centralization, which is why its role during the communist period was rather negatively perceived. This is probably one of the main reasons why the reaffirmation and strengthening of the regional-level did not fully correspond to strengthening of the local level. Regional units were simply perceived as the remnants of the former system that should be forgotten as soon as possible.

At the regional level, there were only territorial branches of central government entirely dependent on central government that has appointed the leading officials of these bodies. The process of regionalization in transition countries is still largely initiated and controlled by the central government (Sagan, Halkier, 2005: 271). The central level by dominating the process of political decentralization is directing it towards the realization of its own interest. Regionalization of the transition countries was mainly due to processes that are initiated by

⁴ Caramani, D. (2003) points out several factors that differentiate the development of the regional level in countries of Central and Eastern Europe from the developments of that level in Western Europe. The first factor is a different path of state formation and nation-building in the western part of Europe which through the formation of national states has also enabled the construction of administrative structures at regional level, while in Eastern Europe these structures remained largely fragmented and heterogeneous. Another important factor is the impact of the Reformation, which was in large part of the states of Western Europe based on the territorial organization of the Catholic Church (communes and parishes) which are easily transformed into a political-administrative structure based on the arguments of equal and uniform implementation of the legal system on the entire national territory. This has led to some form of association between religious and secular institutions, whose final result was the acceptance of Protestantism as the state religion in number of Western European states. The third very important factor is the influence of the French Revolution and Napoleonic reforms and their acceptance in the western but not eastern part of Europe. This resulted in the idea of nation states and the concept of national sovereignty has become the main motto of the organization of administrative and political institutions in western countries, while these institutions in Eastern Europe for a long time remained feudal-based institutions. Finally, the transition countries were over half a century influenced by communist ideology, which is reflected in the organization of local self-government, not allowing its autonomous development, but completely eliminating it, or where maintained, reducing its role to become an integral part of the centrally controlled administrative machinery.

external factors. In most cases there is no strong internal political force that would use the EU accession process for strengthening the political position of the regional level in relation to the central government. This is particularly evident in some transition cases (e.g. Czech Republic) for which it is stated that there are "regions without regionalism" (Bruszt, 2007: 14).

Finally, it is very clearly stated that the history of transition countries "... includes scarce examples of complete autonomies, which could, nowadays, be an inspiration for the new political elites to start repeating such practice. The history of ethnic conflicts, redrawing of borders or dominance of one ethnic or cultural group over another, also invokes unpleasant associations. The period of single-party centralism at the time of the Communist regime, along with the inherited vast and inefficient state structure, cause additional complications in the process of creating a modern state, based on the principle of subsidiarity." (Skenderović Ćuk, 2007: 14).

3. Regionalism on the Former Yugoslav Territory

3.1. Common roots

Political organization of the Former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) after the Second World War was based on the federal principle. Country was composed of six federal republics (*republike*) – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia – and two additional autonomous provinces (*autonomne pokrajine*) situated on the territory of Serbia. These were the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo. During fifty years of communism the level of independence of particular federal units was different and several constitutional changes took place almost every ten to fifteen years after the Second World War. The most significant was one from the 1974 which gave the higher level of autonomy to federal units. That constitutional reform was the outcome of the strengthening of the political forces particularly in Croatia (known as the "*Croatian Spring*" movement from 1971) but also in Slovenia, Macedonia and Serbia that were asking for clear demarcation of the role of federal units *vis-a-vis* the Yugoslav federation. They were asking for the stronger role of federal units as a counter balance to unitary principle of state organization. In essence, these were real regionalist movements that advocated strengthening of the federal units. Some of the requests were finally built in the 1974 constitutional reform and should have guaranteed a peaceful development and economic prosperity of former SFRY (Smerdel, 2007). Less than two decades this proved to be incorrect assumption mainly as a consequence of strengthening nationalistic tendencies.

The whole system of local self-government during the communist period was built on the so called “Marxist concept of commune”⁵ and the doctrine of self-management (*samoupravljanje*). System was very locally oriented, at least on the surface. Communes were controlling most of public resources, had strong influence on local decision making, etc. Since the 1974 constitutional reforms communes were grouped into the “association of communes” (*zajednice općina*), comprising several neighbouring communes around bigger urban areas. This could have been perceived as a seed of some form of regional level in former federal units. In the reality the whole policy and decision-making process was concentrated in local branches of communist party and local political cliques. Nevertheless, introduction of the communal concept “... led to the autarchic separation of the communes, strengthening of the local political cliques, and domination of state administrative tasks over communal self-government affairs, weakening of political legitimacy and disintegrative processes in the system.” (Koprić, 2003).

Collapse of communism in the beginning of 1990s was followed by devastating war that took place mainly on the territory of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina resulting in enormous financial, human and infrastructure loses. Most of the previous six federal units, namely Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRM) became independent states and were recognised as such by the international community. In that process legal provisions of the 1974 Constitution were strong and clear basis for the declaration of independence of former federal units and clear guidance in determining borders of newly established states.

Meanwhile, Serbia and Montenegro continued to use the name of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until 2003 when they enter into a loose federation of Serbia and Montenegro which was mostly result of clearly articulated Montenegrin voice for independence. Finally, referendum on independence of Montenegro was held in May 2006 and resulted in declaring the independence of Montenegro.

Kosovo had status of autonomous province during former Yugoslavia and was characterized by intensive riots in the beginning of 1980s asking for the status of federal republic. After collapse of the former Yugoslavia it was formally part of Serbia. However, Serbia did not manage to have the full authority over the province during the 1990s and it was finally proclaimed as international protectorate in 1999 under the UN mission – UNMIK (under the UN resolution 1244) (Koprić, 2009). Although Kosovo declared its’ independence in 2008 it is still very much under the strong influence of international community and politically instable country. This is particularly the case in northern parts of the country populated by Serbian minority who does not allow Kosovo authorities to establish custom and police control on northern borders with

⁵ “The notion of the commune as a basic territorial unit was formed on Marx’s glorification of the 1871 Paris Commune as a prototype of the ideal socialist political community. It was considered that a commune had to provide the whole “life circle” to the local population; all public services the local population needed. It had to be a whole and to control all social processes in its territory. Finally, it was seen as a means of outgrowing the state-type political systems by building the system from the bottom, on the delegate principle (the concept of “withering away of the state”). In other words, political authorities on higher levels would not have their own political legitimacy but would be constituted of the delegates of the communes ...” (Koprić, 2003).

Serbia. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo and considers it still its autonomous province. In order to stabilise the country EU has established special rule of law mission to Kosovo known as EULEX with the main goal to strengthen the rule of law, fight against corruption and organized crime, strengthening the administrative capacity and protection of minorities.

New countries established on the territory of the former Yugoslavia are politically quite different with Slovenia already being the full EU member state since 2004; Croatia has finished accession negotiations and should become full EU member state on July 1 2013 and FYR Macedonia having a candidate status. Montenegro applied for EU membership in December 2008 and from December 2010 it also has a candidate status. B&H, Serbia, and Kosovo-UN 1244 have status of potential candidate countries having an obligation to implement necessary political and economic reforms that would transform those countries into stable democracies and functional market economies.

3.2. Situation with the regional institutions in the Region

Situation regarding the regional institutions on the former Yugoslav territory varies significantly from country to country. As shown in the Table 1 (Annex) countries are quite different regarding their territorial size, population and density as well as local and regional institutions. The biggest is Serbia with 7.5 million of inhabitants and 77.5 thousand square km of territorial coverage, followed by Croatia and B&H, with 4.2 million and 3.8 million of inhabitants. Slovenia and FYR Macedonia are almost equal when it comes to size and population with 2 million inhabitants each and approximately 20 thousand of square km of territorial coverage. Territorially the smallest is Kosovo with the size of only 10.8 thousands of square km but with the highest population density in the region (220 inhabitants per square km) which results in population of 2.2 million. Concerning population absolutely the smallest is Montenegro with only 0.6 million of inhabitants and very low population density of only 45 inhabitants per square km.

Regarding institutions of local and regional self government situation is also very different from country to country under review.

Slovenia as one of the smallest countries under comparison and an early comer from the region to the full EU membership (member from May 2004) still does not have middle tier of self-governing units. It is composed of 211 communes (*občine*) who represent units of local self-government, out of which 11 are urban communes (*mestne občine*). In spite the fact that Constitution from 2006 envisages introduction of provinces as middle tier of governance, they are still not introduced. Also, special law on provinces envisaging 13 provinces has been prepared and for several years discussed in political and academic circles, but it has never been adopted by the Parliament. Main reasons for that should be searched in relatively small size of the country, lack of consensus among main political forces and scholars regarding the number of provinces and lack of real political willingness to introduce provinces (Dubajić, 2010, 2011).

Situation is slightly different in *Croatia* which introduced counties (*županije*) in the beginning of 1990s but since then did not undertake any serious efforts towards decentralization and rationalization of its county structure. Exception is period of 2000/2001 when several laws that regulate county self-government were adopted but despite some decentralization efforts territorial structure of the country remained intact. Croatia is currently divided into 20 counties representing units of regional self-government and the city of Zagreb which as capital of the country enjoys special status of a city and a county. However, there are continuous requests to rationalize current territorial division of the country and to introduce regions (e.g. Koprić, 2010; Đulabić, 2011; Blažević, 2010, etc.). In the process of preparation for the EU membership Croatia introduced statistical regions (Koprić, 2007; Đulabić, 2007). It is currently divided into three statistical regions established for management purposes of regional development policy. They do not have self-governing rights or legal personality, only partnership councils composed of representatives of central and county level as well as social and economic partners (Đulabić, 2011a).

Neighbouring *Bosnia and Herzegovina* is a specific case due to political reasons and peculiar constitutional arrangements that took place in that country after the Washington and Dayton Peace Agreements from 1994 and 1995. Firstly, as a result of Washington Peace Agreement from 1994 Federation of B&H was formed from parts of the county that were held under control of Bosnian Muslims (Bosniacs) and Bosnian Croats. One year later, in 1995 the Republic of Srpska is formed by the Dayton Peace Agreement from the territories under control of Bosnian Serbs. Such division is the result of the “facts on the ground” (the military position of the ceasefire line)” (Osmanković, 2004: 7), and not any geographical, economic or democratic considerations. Current arrangements resulted in stopping the war but created political and administrative mess resulting in four different legal and political systems (Federation of B&H, Srpska Republic, Brčko District and the State of Bosnia and Herzegovina) that run in parallel and in many ways block the normal functioning of the country. This is one of the main reasons why B&H is sometimes characterized as ethnically divided state without people (*demos*) (Hayden, 2005). This seems to be the most serious obstacle for relatively normal functioning of that state. Regarding the regional level on the territory of B&H one has to take into consideration existence of 10 self-governing cantons in the Federation of B&H. They represent regional level of government within the Federation and are helpful in solving the inter-ethnic tensions between Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims. It has to be noted that these tensions were more expressed during the 1990-ies than today. At the same time, cantons are perceived as an ambience favourable for intensive bureaucratization due to complex governing structure consisting of cantonal governments, ministries, administrative apparatus, etc., that exists in parallel with similar governance institutions at the level of Federation of B&H and the level of state of B&H.

Regionalization of *Serbia* was not seriously considered until the constitutional reform in 2006 mainly due to political reasons and persisting problems with Kosovo that were burdensome for the whole country during more than three last decades. Since the independence of Kosovo in

2008 the only autonomous province that left in Serbia is Vojvodina despite the fact that it is sometime labelled as “superficial autonomy” (Komsic, 2007: 226). Vojvodina is northern part of Serbia which represents about 27% (2 million inhabitants) of overall population and 28% of Serbian territory (20 thousand square km). It is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious area with approximately 35% of population being members of different ethnic and religious groups. This ratio in the rest of the country is only 10%. Today, there are very clear and straight forward proposals in favour of regionalisation of Serbia (Stančetić, 2009). The whole country is divided in communes (*opštine*) which are the basic level of self-governing units. For promotion of harmonious development of the whole territory special law on regional development has been adopted in 2009. That Law established 7 statistical regions at the level of NUTS II. It has to be noted that they are established for pure statistical purposes without any self-governing rights and legal personality (Milosavljević, 2009: 13). During 2010 number of those regions is reduced to four. Will they represent the basis for future political regionalization of Serbia it is yet to be seen?

Montenegro belongs to group of the youngest independent countries in the region and due to its size and population it did not consider any regional self-government yet. Country is currently divided in 21 municipalities and there are no serious efforts to introduce regional ties, although in the past there were administrative regions. In 2011 Montenegro adopted Law on regional development which introduced three statistical regions (Coastal, Central and Northern region). They are established for statistical, planning and analytical purposes and – as in other countries – do not have any self-governing rights or legal personality.

FYR Macedonia declared its independence in 1991 becoming independent state recognized by international community. Political and administrative division of the country rests on 85 local municipalities (*opštini*) and 10 of them constitute the City of Skopje, county’s capital with special status. On the middle level FYRM is divided into 8 administrative regions with approximate size of 250.000 inhabitants, representing pure statistical regions without any self-governing rights or legal personality. Specificity of Macedonia is relatively numerous Albanian minorities settled mostly in the North-western part of the country along with the border of neighbouring Albania. Along with Macedonians that represent the largest ethnic group (65% of population), there is significant Albanian ethnic group which constitutes a quarter of overall population of Macedonia. That sometimes creates inter-ethnic tensions, because Albanian minority asks for greater rights in education (e.g. use of Albanian language) and other public services.

Kosovo is the youngest state in the region with the independence proclaimed in February 2008 after almost ten years of international protectorate and more than thirty years of political instability in former SFRY. Due to its size it does not have regional level of government but only basic level of self-governing units. It is divided in 30 municipalities including the capital city of Priština. However it is divided in 7 administrative districts without any self-governing rights. Northern part of the country mostly populated by Serbs is facing with very intensive political

instability due to the fact that local population do not recognize legitimacy of Kosovo government in Priština.

During the respective accession periods to the EU, the analysed countries in the region have been establishing statistical regions under perceived conditionality policy of the European Union. However, as shown previously some of them are characterised by genuine domestic political efforts to establish regional autonomy and self-government, based on historical tradition or on other considerations. In the whole region, efforts to establish federal units are nonexistent with the exception of B&H which has peculiar politico-administrative system. Several countries in the region have two-tier local government systems, with higher tier that *pretends* to be a kind of “regional” self-government.

All in all, on the continuum of statistical regions – administrative regionalisation – autonomous self-governing regions – federal units, the majority of countries in the region are closer to the left than to the right extreme point, with certain national specificities.

3.3. Common trends and their causes

What is common to countries under comparison in the region? It seems that it is possible to trace several common trends in development of regional self-government and establish their causes. Due to similar political environment during second half of the 20th century it is possible to establish several characteristics of regional institutions in the region.

- *Weak democratic potential for establishment of strong regional institutions.* What clearly comes out as an outcome of the above analysis is the fact that in the whole region there is weak democratic potential for establishment of strong regional institutions. In almost every country under comparison there are no strong regional political powers. This is mostly due to the federalist structure of former SFRY. Political environment was not favourable for development of sub-federal regional units in the former SFRY. With this inheritance, former federal units entered the process of ex-Yugoslav dissolution having mostly only one tier of self-governing units. Political forces that would be labelled as regionalist did not exist at the sub-national level in most of the countries under review. The exemption could be Istria in Croatia which is politically highly homogenous area which is under control of Istrian Democratic Party, a regionalist party that promotes interest of Istria. Other exemption is probably Vojvodina in Serbia which already has a status of an autonomous province and this is the only case of existing asymmetric regionalism in the region. B&H due to specific political situation is not considered in this category because there are clear destructive tendencies in Srpska Republic, whose political leadership continuously engage to disintegrate the country and block the political institutions at the state level. Depending on the future political situation with the north of Kosovo, it might be reasonable to consider as one possible solution establishment of some kind of asymmetric regionalism for the Serbian

minority in northern part of that country. That would give some clear signals for stabilisation of the country and promising chance to fragile coexistence of Serbian minority and Albanian majority in the same country. Size of the countries is also very strong obstacle for strong regionalism in the region. All of the countries, with the exception of Serbia with 7 millions, are under 5 million of inhabitants, while Montenegro has population of only 0.6 million. Most of the countries are quite homogenous and separate regional identities do not have political environment favourable for its strengthening.

- *Regional issues are on the agenda only in some countries of the region.* Question of regionalisation is on the agenda of several countries in the region, especially Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. Slovenia has been dealing with the introduction of provinces for several years, but legislative base for that is still non-existent. There are very strong voices in Croatia who advocate rationalization of territorial division and in the election campaign for the 2011 parliamentary elections issues of regionalization were significantly present. Regionalization of Serbia is being discussed for some time and several political parties advocate introduction of five regions. Unsettled situation with Kosovo in last few years slows down the whole process, postponing it for more stable political future. B&H should again be treated as completely separate category and unique case. Solution for that country could be searched in the simplification of overall governing system of the whole state of B&H starting with the abolition of Federation of B&H an Srpska Republic and setting up cantons on the whole territory of state B&H. At the same time, full rights to the three biggest ethnic groups should be guaranteed on the whole territory of B&H. Smaller countries in the region such as Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro do not pay special attention to regionalization mostly due to relatively small country size. Introducing another administrative level does not seem to realistic solution for these countries.
- *Statistical and administrative instead of political regionalization.* Almost all countries in the region have some kind of administrative units at the meso level. Slovenia is divided in 12 statistical regions, Macedonia in 8 statistical regions, Serbia in 4 statistical regions, Montenegro in 3 statistical regions and Kosovo in 7 administrative districts. Middle units with self-governing rights could only be found in Croatia (20 counties), part of B&H (10 cantons in the Federation of B&H) and Serbia who has Vojvodina as autonomous province, while in the rest of the country there are no regions with the right to self-government. This is similar to the situation in some of the other East-European transition countries who have only administrative regions (e.g. Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and some western European countries as well (e.g. Portugal, Ireland, Greece before 2010 reforms) (Đulabić, 2010). Having in mind that many of western European countries have been going through transformation of their administrative into self-governing regions during 1980s and 1990s, it is reasonable to expect that similar tendencies will take place on the former Yugoslav territory in the future.
- *Political regionalization is still very much perceived as a threat to national sovereignty.* If potential for real regional institutions exists these institutions are seldom perceived as a

threat to national sovereignty. This was the case in Croatia in the beginning of the 1990s when territorial division of the country was drafted for the first time after the collapse of communism. Some political options were afraid of introducing smaller number of regions fearing that they would become an open door for country's disintegration. Same situation is present in current debates about regionalization of Serbia (Stančetić, 2009: 84).

- *Some of the countries have large ethnic groups on their territory and regionalization should be considered as practical solution for loosening potential political tensions. Several countries in the region are at least in some parts multi-ethnic and multi-religious and giving special status to such areas would be very viable and possible solution for peaceful coexistence of these various groups within the existing country borders. This is particularly the case for Vojvodina in Serbia who already has the special status of autonomous province. It is advocated that the level of its autonomy should be raised at higher level (Komsic, 2007). Same could also be applied for Serbian minority in the northern part of Kosovo, an area that is currently very unstable with uncertain political future. FYR Macedonia also has large Albanian minority concentrated in the north-western part of the country along the Albanian border for which the same solution could be applied. Setting up regional self-government in above mentioned areas should serve as a clear sign of democratic potential of regional institutions to loosen multi-ethnic tensions and stabilise the particular countries.*
- *Regionalization is very much perceived as a precondition for utilisation of EU cohesion policy. Even though EU does not have any formal means to influence nor impose regionalization to candidate countries nor the member states, it is quite strongly perceived that the establishment of formal regions is precondition for effective and efficient utilisation of EU funds allocated through its cohesion/regional policy. In this way process of the EU accession becomes very strong trigger of dynamism when it comes to institutions of regional democracy on the former Yugoslav territory.*

4. Conclusion

As shown in present analysis it seems that regionalism on the territory of former Yugoslavia is very much determined by the common political and legal development that took place in the second half of 20th century. The common history of communism didn't create favourable environment for political regionalisation below the level of former federal units. This is the main reason why strong regional institutions are no-existent in most of the country under review. Also there are no strong political forces promoting regionalism and advocating establishment of institutions of regional democracy. Most of proposals for regionalisation come from academic community and political parties are not very strong advocates of political regionalization.

Most of the countries have some institutional arrangement on regional level. However, on the continuum of statistical regions – administrative regionalisation – autonomous self-governing

regions – federal units, the majority of countries in the region are closer to the left than to the right extreme point, with certain national specificities.

Due to decentralisation and democratization efforts that are evident in last two decades it is expected that regional institutions in these countries will be strengthened. Similar way of transformation of administrative to political regions could be traced in western European countries, so it is expected that similar trends would appear in transition countries on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

Several things should also be taken into consideration in this respect. On one side, the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine and present economic crisis creates pressure for stronger economist considerations, rationality, and the creation of institutional structures for development. This pressure is much stronger today than it was during the period of classic welfare states. There is also much more discussion about local, not only regional development. All this puts the question of regional democracy slightly in the background. It is less important than it used to be before. Maybe that is also why the EU is satisfied with the statistical regionalization of transition countries, without insisting on autonomy and democracy of regional units.

But on the other hand, opening up the issue of regional development, such has happened in Croatia in the last decade, strengthens also thinking about new possibilities for regional democracy. New institutions such as the Partnership councils in statistical regions are created and they allow promotion of regional development and regional democracy. Newly established institutions for regional development policy exist in almost all countries in the region. They could be used as nucleus for future democratisation and introduction of democratic institutions on middle level. But this can lead to the opposite direction also. The very good example for this statement could be found in Slovenia, who adopted law on regional development in the late 1990s and still does not have provinces as institutions of regional democracy.

However, it seems that if central government institutions are not considered as “sacred institutions”, chances of democratic institutions at local and regional level are higher. Also, if economic and social development is pronounced as one the core purposes of territorial self-government, there is more likeliness that regional institutions will be developed, although not necessarily with their own democratic legitimacy. Same argument could be applied in situation where the local government on the basic level is more fragmented. In such situation regional institutions could be used not only as channels for regional democracy, but also as an instrument for realization of more complicated and expensive affairs.

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Annex

Table 1 Basic data on countries under comparison

Country	Population and Density (inhabitant per sq. km)	Territory (in square km)	Local level	Middle level
Slovenia	2.053.014 / 101	20.273	212 communes (<i>občine</i>) out of which 11 are urban communes (<i>mestne občine</i>)	No political regions 12 statistical (NUTS III) regions without any self-governing rights 58 administrative units (<i>upravne enote</i>)
Croatia	4 219 612 / 74.6	56 542	126 cities (<i>gradovi</i>) 429 communes (<i>općine</i>)	20 counties (<i>županije</i>) with self-governing rights 3 statistical (NUTS II) regions without self-governing rights Special status of Zagreb (county and city)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H)	3.843.126 / 75.2	51.129	142 local units (79 communes in FB6H + 62 communes in RS + Brčko) Capital Sarajevo (divided into 4 communes)	2 entities and one district: - Federation of B&H (10 cantons with self-governing rights) - Republic of Srpska (no cantons) - Special district Brčko (status of the commune)
Serbia	7.498.001 / 106.34	77.474	134 local units (communes – <i>opštine</i> , towns (<i>gradovi</i>) and special status of Belgrade)*	One autonomous province (Vojvodina – 21.506 sq km; 2.031.992 inhabitants; 45 municipalities) 4 statistical regions (NUTS II)
FYR Macedonia	2.022.547 / 81	25.713	84 local units (10 municipalities constitute the city of Skopje capital)	8 statistical regions, no self-governing rights
Montenegro	620.145 / 44.9	13.812	21 municipalities	3 statistical regions, no self-governing rights
Kosovo	2.200.000 / 220	10.887	30 municipalities	7 administrative districts without self-governing rights

Sources: various sources – EU (www.europe.eu), Wikipedia, Milosavljević, Dubajić, Koprić, Đulabić, Komsic, etc.

*Data do not include Kosovo which Serbia does not recognize as independent state and always presents Kosovo as its integral part