Foreign policy and state-building -
Insights from the post-Yugoslav States

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Abstract
Traditional Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) remains centred around the unit of a state and its engagement with other states in the international sphere. While some attention has been paid in the academic literature on the foreign policy of non-state actors (such as the European Union (EU)), overall state-centrism remains a key feature of contemporary FPA. This paper will demonstrate that this state-centrism is not only unhelpful when studying the foreign policy of new and weak states, but it will also highlight that foreign policy often starts before states are created, and is intrinsically linked to state-building. Using the countries that have emerged from the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo), the role of foreign policy and statehood will be discussed using three main categories. First, the extent to which foreign policy takes place before a state becomes independent will be assessed. In the Yugoslav case, the strive for independence took place in and beyond war. Second, we will discuss the relationship between foreign policy and state-building in post bellum situations. Third, this paper will look at the impact of changing statehood and external actors.
1. Introduction

The traditional foreign policy literature knew about the far-reaching effects of state-building. No matter whether the foreign policies of the US, China, Russia or any African country are presented - usually in the form of historical and chronological narratives - they used to start with problems of foreign occupation, wars of independence, decolonization and struggles for recognition i.e. state-building. With the emergence of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in the 1960s and 70s this insight was fallen into oblivion (for many: Hudson 2005). For gaining systematic knowledge on foreign policy behaviour, decision-making and foreign policy change it seemed useful to define a fixed starting point: the state. This ontological assumption, of course, triggered epistemological and methodological advantages by enabling large-n and cross-country comparisons. The negligence of state-building for foreign policy research has two further supporters. For one, the practical everyday system of foreign policy we are living in is based on the classic difference between "foreign" and "domestic" policy (in German even more drastic: "Außenpolitik vs Innenpolitik") which only makes sense in the case of an existing and functioning state. The second supporting push comes from IR-theories which have been leaving their footprint on FPA since the 1980s. The Realist (e.g. Waltz 1979) and Liberal\(^1\) schools of thought are primarily concerned with 3rd-image problems in the "system of states". Also broad currents of the "via media" in social-constructivism remains limited to state-centred thinking (e.g. Wendt 1998). Very rarely, the problem of state-hood is systematically analysed. One of the few exceptions is Georg Soerensen (2001) who assumes that foreign policy behaviour is primarily determined by its state constitution. By so doing, he differentiates between three categories of states: modern, post-modern and post-colonial states. A “modern state” composed of a centralized state, a strong feeling of community (a “nation-state”) and a rather introverted economic system (ibid 74-83). Such modern states are susceptible for security dilemmas and threat perceptions. A "post-modern state" is characterized by multi-level governance, de-centralized decision-making structures, post-national citizenship, multiple identities and a globalized economy (ibid. 87-91). "Post-modern states" remain rather unimpressed to international security dilemmas and strive instead for creating security communities. "Post-colonial states" are primarily concerned with guarding their newly won independence. As Robert Jackson (1990) had argued many newly independent states are “quasi-states” lacking empirical statehood. They conceive of the

\(^1\) This is obviously the case for the interdependence approach (Keohane and Nye 1989), or liberal institutionalism (Keohane 1984). In neoliberal approaches which make a 2nd image argument a functional government and the state are treated as given, too, e.g. Moravcsik 1997. Only the domestic politics argument that the form of government influences foreign policy, comes closer to our argument.
international system as an offer of resources which enable regime survival. These typologies, though, begin their argument with the end result of the state-building process. The same deficit can be attributed to Foreign Policy Analysis. Admittedly, many FPA-approaches seek to endogenize the state by focussing on organisations, bureaucracies, security advisers and decision-makers (Brummer and Oppermann 2014) but in so doing, they again start from the assumption of a given (and functioning!) state. Thus, the state remains the main actor in international affairs when studying FPA. As Smith, Hadfield and Dunne outline in their classic FPA textbook “*For much of the preceding twenty years, the dominant discussions in the discipline of international relations were about the structure of the international system [...]*. But the events of 9/11 changed this, primarily because they focused attention both on the centrality of decisions taken by states and other independent actors, and on reasons why the US and UK intelligence services turned out not be fit for purpose” (Smith, Hadfield, Dunne 2012:3). In a similar vein, the traditional definition of foreign policy remains “*the sum of official external relations conducted by and independent actor (usually a state) in international relations*” (Hill 2003:3). In other words, those who want to understand foreign policy, have to look at a state and examine its political elites and the way in which they take foreign policy decisions (Breuning 2007). While there has more recently been some discussion about the foreign policy of non-state actors such as the European Union (EU) (Bretherton and Vogler 2006), overall FPA remains intrinsically focused on the actions of states and state actors.

Hence, our paper starts with the observation that the relationship between state-building and foreign policy is a neglected and under-researched area of IR in general and FPA in particular. The traditional FPA literature simply starts with the assumption that stateness is not contested. By lifting this assumption we hold that state-building becomes the prime objective of foreign policy: if the state as such (in his traditional dimensions territory, people, and government) is either internally or externally contested all foreign policy means will be devoted to state-building. Provided that contestation perseveres, the foreign policy runs the risk of becoming paralysed or nationalised. We believe that the experience of the post-Yugoslav states provide a rewarding empirical ground for case studies and new arguments. After the demise of Yugoslavia, the federation seceded in seven states (including Kosovo) which brings about a rich stock of empirical observation.
The aim of this paper is to go beyond this state-centrism. In doing so, it is not intended to argue that the state has become less important (or even unimportant) when studying foreign policy and international relations. Instead, it is foreseen to highlight that the state itself and statehood / stateness are rather problematic concepts when looking at foreign policy actions. Considering the example that a state only becomes an international actor when recognised as such by other states, and when it is accepted as an “equal” in the community of states, which is often symbolised by a state’s membership in key international organisations, most notably the United Nations (UN). Hence, the request for recognition and the application for membership in the UN are key foreign policy actions. Yet, at the time when a country asks to be recognised as independent and sovereign by others, it is evidently not a fully recognised state. So the very act of asking for recognition, which is the international confirmation of a state’s independent statehood, is an act of foreign policy that precedes stateness.

2. Foreign Policy before and beyond the State

While there is a slow recognition in the FPA literature that not only states can be actors on the international scene, the main discourses in this field remain state-centric and state-static. Yet, as has been discussed above, both supranational institutions like the EU and sub-state units such as constituent units in federal states have become active participants in different forms of foreign policy, which range from simple treaties of cooperation, border management and joint initiatives to more complex engagements with other international actors, as can be witnessed when assessing the role of the EU in development policy for example (Hadfield 2007).

A first group of actors eligible for a foreign policy before the state are sub-state units. It could be argued that many sub-state units, be they federal states in the US, the Länder in Germany or the Belgian regions are engaged in foreign policy (Requejo 2010). This development is particularly relevant when looking at the foreign policy activities of the Scottish, Catalan and Quebec governments, all federal sub-units with strong secessionist tendencies. A typical indicator for foreign policy endeavours of federal sub-units is the maintenance of embassy-like representations in other countries or international organisations (Catalonia may be a case in point, but also the "representations" of the German Länder in Brussels). To an extent, it can be argued that their foreign policy activities are linked to the preparation for independence of their units. In any case, it should serve the sub-units' will for autonomy e.g. when we consider programmatic foreign policy actions such as Bavaria's "Tunisia strategy". Yet not only federal units can pursue a foreign policy beyond the state. On rare occasions,
domestic ideological cleavages can also trigger a secondary foreign policy. For instance, this was the case in the Italian First Republic when the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano), opposition party between 1945 and 1991, attempted to establish special links to the Soviet Union and other communist countries (Leisenheimer 2001, 3). In the case, the communist party in Italy - for a long time Italy's strongest party - was excluded from government for decades which made her foreign policy ambitions look like compensation.

The sub-actors' foreign policies may strive for independence, but seek to preserve and enhance autonomy at least. This strive can take two dimensions. One is war. As prominent examples from history tell us (American War of Secession, Spanish Civil War) the non-state party's foreign policy in war (Confederates, Falange) is directed to become recognized as an international actor. Such a "para-diplomacy" can also be attributed to sub-state actors in post-war situations (the second dimension) which try to preserve their autonomy (and maybe prepare for independence in the long run). By so doing, sub-state units attempt to use foreign policy not only to increase their country's external legitimacy amongst other states and international actors, but it also used by political elites as a tool of increasing internal sovereignty (Keil 2014). Hence, rather than treating statehood as a fixed variable, states engage in permanent nation- and state-building activities and these are reflected in foreign policy decisions. This is particularly important in new and relatively weak states, but it is also reflected in the changing policies of more established states, such as Germany's ongoing search for a foreign policy position that reflects its changing state and nationhood after the end of the Cold War and the unification of East and West Germany. There is very little literature on the influence of changing statehood on foreign policy. While some work on Germany (Maull 2001) and Russia (Hopf 2002) has examined the importance of continuity and change after unification (in the case of Germany) or dissolution (in the case of Russia), overall this remains an understudied field in FPA.

A third dimension beyond para-diplomacy in war and post-war situations refers to external actors and external state-building. For instance, Russian actions in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine highlight how soft power means but also military force can be used in order to implement a certain understanding of Russian state- and nation-hood. On the one hand, as a consequence, sub-state actors like Transnistria and Abchasia emerge on the international scene and become quasi-states (yet totally dependent on their kin-state). On the other hand, Russian policies trigger massive consequences for the countries involved due to their change of statehood. When taking the argument of foreign policy as a tool of state-building further, it becomes obvious that states change. Not only do governments change and with them foreign
policy priorities, but a country’s borders can change due to state dissolution and secession. The changing nature of statehood and the impact of foreign policy on this will, therefore, constitute the third dimension of our analysis.

3. Foreign Policy as a Tool of State-Building: The post-Yugoslav states

State-building by and in war

When looking at the foreign policies of the post-Yugoslav states, it becomes obvious that foreign policy of sub-state units is essential, for example when attempting to explain the dissolution of the Yugoslav state. Not only did the Republics of Yugoslavia establish an internal “balance of power” system, in which negotiation and cooperation between them was common and necessary particularly after the constitutional changes of 1974, but their engagement with each other and other states in the late 1980s and the early 1990s was also of key importance in the process of Yugoslav dissolution (Ramet 1992, Glaurdic 2011). In 1991-92, war became the main feature of the sub-units' foreign policy for the elites in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia. Serbia saw itself as Yugoslavia's successor but strived for "Greater Serbia" with military means. By so doing, it enjoyed diplomatic recognition on the one hand but on the other hand pursued "ethnic cleansing”, war crimes and crimes against humanity on a massive scale in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, thus "becoming a pariah state" in the international community in the 1990s (Mladenov 2014, 148). As a consequence, Serbia's statehood depended, first, on the successes on the battle-field and, second, on the consent of the international community (see "external state-building" below). The fate of the seceding republics entirely depended on their survival in the war. Therefore, it was essential to establish links to pro-independence minded international allies, lobby for arms supply, and create awareness for the independence movements in the international media. For instance, beyond some substantial research on the role of Germany and the Vatican in the independence of Croatia and Slovenia, there is also a growing recognition in the literature that political elites from Croatia and Slovenia were very active in establishing links and discussing the prospect of independence with key European and world powers (Cular 2000). It should be kept in mind that between June 1991, when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence, and May 1992, when this was officially granted by the European Communities (EC), the elites of these two Republics engaged in active foreign policy to enhance the countries’ internal position by lobbying for their recognition by major powers (Bojinovic Fenko and Sabic 2014).
A similar observation can be made about Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Especially during the war in Bosnia (1992-1995), there was a strong link between foreign policy as a tool of the Bosnian government to ask for support of international actors for Bosnia’s independence and statehood, while at the same time this engagement also served as a tool of increasing internal legitimacy. At the same time, this internal and external legitimacy was contested by Bosnian Serbs (and the Yugoslav Army) and Bosnian Croats (and Croatia), which claimed that Bosnia should not exist as a state and that instead Serbia and Croatia were the only states that could represent their respective population groups in Bosnia (Hoare 1997; 2004).

In the case of the Kosovo war, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA/UCK) had initially difficulties to become recognized as an internationally relevant actor due its maoist ideology and brutal assassinations of Serbian civilians after 1996 (Judah 2001, 66). But the excessive retaliation of the Serb security forces and their "ethnic cleansing" strategy in 1998 triggered a perception change of the international community (visible in the Security Council Resolution 1199 from September 1998) which made the KLA a respected partner in the Rambouillet negotiations (Weller 1999). When their chief negotiator, Hacim Thaci, finally agreed to the compromising proposal and the Serbs did not, NATO started the "bombing campaign" and thus effectively sided with the KLA. The international administration and the UN-Security Council Resolution 1244 secured the KLA's survival but, of course, the rebel group transformed itself to political parties, Kosovo’s Provisional Institutions for Self-government and the Kosovo Protection Corps. The former KLA-fighters not even refrained from taking action against the international community in order to strengthen the national unity of the state as became evident in the March 2004 pogroms against the Serbs in Kosovo (Ott 2013).

**State-building after war**

Montenegro’s quest to become independent had been prepared for nearly 10 years through extensive foreign policy activity of Montenegrin elites while the small country was still a part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) – and after 2003 the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. Hence, foreign policy is used as a tool to prepare states for independence and ensure their recognition and participation in international affairs. After the split of the main party in the country (DPS) in 1997, a process of “creeping independence” began that saw the slow detachment of the Montenegrin state from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and later the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (Roberts 2002, Morrison 2009). As Jelena Dzankic (2014:174) argues
During this period, and as part of the ‘creeping independence,’ Montenegro conducted its foreign policy differently from both Serbia and the FRY. That is, while the latter were largely isolationist and indistinct from one another, the former sought to reach out to democratic countries, thus overriding federal foreign policy.

Montenegro first turned to the West, and especially the USA after 1997, before focusing more strongly on lobbying different countries for its independence after 2000. While it was pressured to stay in a Union with Serbia in 2002 by the EU’s Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana, Montenegrin elites never gave up their aim of independence. When they prepared for an independence referendum in 2006, they worked closely with the EU to establish the rules for the referendum and ensure that the small Balkan Republic would become recognised as quickly as possible after the referendum. Hence, it could be argued that even the process of holding a referendum and becoming independence was “Europeanised” in the case of Montenegro, much more so than was the case in the other post-Yugoslav states (with the possible exception of Kosovo) (Dzankic and Keil 2013).

The Kosovo war had established a UN-protectorate but not an independent state. So Kosovo between 2000 and 2008 also demonstrates the importance of foreign policy before a state becomes independent. It could even be argued that the current foreign policy of Kosovo still fits this category, since its statehood and independence remains contested, with more than 100 countries having recognised Kosovo (including the USA, Canada and most EU member states), but countries such as Russia, China, India and Serbia (in addition to five EU member states) have not recognised Kosovo’s independence. This has prevented the country’s membership in important international organisations, including the UN. Yet, when looking at the foreign policy of Kosovo, what becomes obvious is that it uses its foreign relations to strengthen both its internal and its external legitimacy. Foreign policy, and independent statehood and sovereignty are therefore strongly connected, in other words, foreign policy becomes a tool of state-building. This process started with the question of what should happen with Kosovo after the UN took control of the former Serbian process. Kosovo engaged in a contested process of state-building, which has resulted in a contested state with contested statehood (Weller 2009). As Gezim Krasniqi (2014: 199) argues
In a situation of contested international subjectivity, Kosovo’s main foreign policy objective remains international recognition of its independence. As regards the relationship between foreign policy and statehood, foreign policy gains a dual capacity by serving both as a tool of state-building and as a statehood prerogative.

According to this argument foreign policy serves two main objectives. In the first instance, it is designed to enhance Kosovo’s international standing by enhancing the number of countries that recognise it and ensuring that Kosovo is able to join certain international organisations. In this respect, foreign policy is designed to enhance international, i.e. external legitimacy of the Kosovar state. Furthermore, by increasing its international standing, Kosovo also strengthens its internal situation, i.e. further strengthening its independent statehood. In this regard, foreign policy is designed to enhance internal legitimacy through the confirmation and strengthening of Kosovo’s independence and international actorness.

The post-Dayton Bosnian state that emerged after 1995 also highlights the connection between foreign policy and state-building. On the one side this is visible by the foreign policy of the entities, the constituent units of the Bosnian state, which are engaged in some foreign policy activity. This is particularly relevant for the Republika Srpska (RS) entity, where foreign policy is not only linked to strong ties with Serbia, but also to the enhancement of the Republika Srpska’s visibility in international affairs. For instance, the RS not only opened eight governmental representatives abroad but also hired US-lobby firms in order to influence US foreign policy vis-à-vis the RS (Huskic 2014, 129). On the other side, Bosnia post-war foreign policy as a whole has been very limited. While there is some agreement on EU integration, key foreign policy issues such as NATO membership, relations with the USA and Russia and the relationships with Croatia and Serbia remain highly contested. As Adnan Huskic (2014: 128) argues, “when it comes to [the complex] decision-making procedures [in foreign policy], the resulting foreign policy of BiH is limited mostly to non-contentious issues around which a consensus can be build.” In many respects, Bosnia’s limited foreign policy in the post-war period, and particularly its lacking behind in the EU integration process can be explained by the fact that it is a weak state, in which there is no agreement on the nature of the state between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats (Perry 2015). This results in a lack of a common vision of where the country should be going and where its future lies, both internally and as an international actor (Keil and Perry 2015).
The cases of Montenegro and Kosovo have highlighted that foreign policy can start before a state becomes independent and is strongly linked to state- and nation-building. The independence of these two countries had a particular impact on the state of Serbia, which has been a member of five different state formations since 1990 (Socialist Yugoslavia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, State Union of Serbia and Montenegro [2002-2006], and since 2006 independent Serbia, followed by the 2008 declaration of Kosovo). Hence, like Montenegro and Kosovo, the changes of legal status and territory have had a massive impact on Serbian foreign policy. While it was massively involved in the wars of Yugoslav dissolution in the 1990s, it became a pariah state and internationally isolated. Its President, Slobodan Milosevic, became a persona non grata in many countries and the country was left isolated and faced heavy international sanctions in the 1990s (Sell 2003). After 2000, Serbia adjusted its foreign policy in light of the commitment of the new elites to re-enter the international community and aim for accession to the EU. However, during this process the state-formation movements in Montenegro and Kosovo, as well as different developments in BiH, where the Serbs still toyed with the idea of secession and accession to Serbia, impacted heavily on Serbia. Furthermore, as has been argued in the case of European integration, Serb elites (particularly evident during the Kostunica years) failed to consolidate the state (and the nation), and instead linked the Kosovo question with the future of Serbia’s EU integration process (Stahl 2013). Indeed, the move towards independence in Montenegro and later Kosovo have not directly resulted in an adjustment of Serbia’s state/nation concept, to use Ole Waever and Lene Hansen’s (2001) framework, but have instead strengthened feelings of victimhood and betrayal.

In foreign policy, this has been reflected in numerous ways. On the one side, Serbia continues to have strained relations with Montenegro, and questions over language, religion and double citizenship remain contested. Even more problematic are the relations with Kosovo. Despite a process of rapprochement under EU mediation, Serbia still has not recognised Kosovo and it is unlikely that it will do so in the near future (Lehne 2012). On the other side, it can be noted that Serbia’s foreign policy has excessively focused on preventing the recognition of Kosovo by other states (Ker-Lindsay 2012). While this has resulted in some positive side-effects such as a revival of Serbia’s relations with the non-alignment movement, it has also increased Serbia’s dependence on Russia as the major power to block Kosovo accession to the UN. Changing statehood, in short, has had a massive impact on Serbia’s foreign policy and continues to do so. Unless the relationship with Kosovo is
sufficiently defined and Serbia has gone through an internal process of defining its state, it can be predicted that its foreign policy will be rather limited, and in many aspects also not coherent and full of contradictions, as can be seen in its aspiration to join the EU, while at the same time refusing to follow the EU and other countries in sanctions against Russia in the wake of Russia’s actions in Ukraine.

Serbia’s foreign policy has heavily been influenced by developments in its near neighbourhood and by its changing status as a state. As Mladen Mladenov (2014:167) has identified, Serbia is stuck between a foreign policy that is backwards and saddened about the dissolution of Yugoslavia, while at the same time searching for its place in the world in the 21st century. He argues that “Serbian foreign policy positions are not set in stone” but political elites remain so far unable to cope with the multiple changes that the country has had to face in recent years (Ibid).

Finally, the link between foreign policy and state-building is also clearly visible when looking at the case of Macedonia. External conflicts, such as the name dispute with Greece, have an effect on the internal situation in Macedonia, strengthening the gap between Macedonians and Albanians. At the same time, internal developments such as the more recent revival of Macedonian nationalism have had a direct impact on its foreign policy. As Cveti Koneska (2014: 104) argues, “Macedonia’s neighbors have reacted to these developments with a varying amount of concern and retaliation.” What is more, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which ended the short conflict between Macedonian security forces and Albanian rebels in 2001, is a key example for the connection of internal state re-adjustment and foreign policy, as the Agreement was negotiated under the auspices of the EU and with NATO providing military support to stabilise the situation in the country.

4. Conclusion

When examining the foreign policy of certain countries, it is important to move away from statehood and a fixed and static concept. Foreign policy is always linked to processes of state-building and nation-formation and re-adjustment. It is often as important for a country’s external positioning in a world of states as it is for internal legitimacy, not only of a country’s independence but also of its ability to engage with other states and promote its interests. The post-Yugoslav states have been used as examples, because they demonstrate a vast variety of statehood forms and situations.
As this brief examination of the post-Yugoslav states has shown, when moving away from state-statism in the study of FPA, we can observe new insights into foreign policy formulation, adjustment, and more importantly continuity and changes. It has been argued that when looking at the role of foreign policy before a state is “officially” a state, when assessing to what extent state-building underlines foreign policy activity, and when assessing the impact of changing statehood conceptions on foreign policy, it can be observed how closely foreign policy and state- and nation-building and adjustment are connected. From the externally contested state of Kosovo, to the internal contested states of Bosnia and Macedonia, statehood is neither static, nor always given as a condition sine qua non for a political actor to become active in foreign policy. Even the developments in Slovenia and Croatia, and Serbia’s current struggle to find its place in Europe and the world, highlight that shifting perception of state- and nation-hood have a direct impact on foreign policy formulation and foreign policy change. In Croatia, the Tudjman regime of the 1990s promoted Croat independence above everything else, arguing that the EU is weak and left Croatia alone in an hour of need, while after 2000 successive governments have promoted Croatia’s EU integration as a form of fulfilling the overall objective of manifesting and stabilising Croatian independence. This contradiction can only be explained when looking at the impact of different governments, changing international environments, and most importantly, changing state conceptions and understandings of what the nation and what the state is. In order to do this, we need to move away from state centrisim and state statism in the study of Foreign Policy Analysis.

**Bibliography**


