Sabrina P. Ramet / Marko Valenta, eds,
Ethnic Minorities and Politics in Post-Socialist Southeastern Europe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xviii + 302 pp., ISBN 978-1-107-15912-9, £ 67.99

Sabrina P. Ramet and Marko Valenta have edited a comprehensive volume that substantially and coherently tackles one of the most debated topics in postsocialist studies: minority regimes and their political intricacies. The contributing authors strive to provide 'a multidisciplinary, in-depth exploration of ethnic minorities and relevant political developments of minority groups in countries of Southeastern Europe' (19) of the two decades between 1995 and 2015. The narrative of the volume under review guides the reader with subtlety into the region's internal and external boundaries and shifting identities. The editors have brought together authors who fine-tuned their accounts to emphasise the twists and turns of identity politics in the postsocialist era. The long-durée analyses, spanning more than twenty-five years of politics, provide a corporeal picture of the region interspersed with nuances that are often lost in more short-sighted explorations of ethnic identity controversies or conflicts.

Some chapters zoom in to interethnic and intra-ethnic issues, on ethnic minority parties and their political strategies in an environment that was undergoing a change in its ethnic composition due to mass and forced migration. By contrast, other chapters zoom out to capture ethnic political dynamics within a country, a region, or a province, demonstrating how local actors who are caught in a conflict depend on (renascent) discourses about a historical or imagined community on the one hand, and may use the same discourses to oppose or contend more powerful sociopolitical

actors, both locally and internationally, on the other hand. Exceptionally, this book reflects the editors' skills to choose authors providing similarly valuable work.

After the editors' introduction, *Janusz Bugajski* provides a concise overview of the main topics addressed in the book: interethnic reconciliation; multiethnic state building; validity of administrative borders; credibility of governments; and legitimacy of statehood. He sheds light on ardent issues such as Bosnia's ethnic division and its UN established tri-ethnic quota parliamentary system, or Macedonia's struggle over the state's naming and composition. The short chapter spans regional and international issues, such as the trans-border actions stemming from Albanians' political temptations to construct a panethnic policy in the region, and the shadow roles constantly played here by actors like the United Nations, the European Union, NATO, and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

A systematic exploration of the 'inter-ethnic relations both within and across post-Yugoslav societies' (42) is what *Zan Strabac* and *Marko Valenta* aim to achieve with their comparative analysis of ethnic and religious divisions as well as using 'social distance' and the wider political context to explain the dynamics between different minorities: Turks, Greeks, and Albanians in Macedonia; Orthodox Serbs and Bosnian Muslims in Croatia; as well as Bosnian Muslims and Turks in relation to Albanians in Kosovo. The complex study of the social relations between minority groups reveals that 'symbolic conflicts [...] might reduce acceptance of minorities' (52), and even if majority group tolerance towards minorities is visible in mundane social relations such as marriage or neighbours, then a similar acceptance in political life remains low.

The volume leaves the reader with a bewildered sense of geography revealing the political dynamics in regions unclearly defined due various names such as Western Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe, or plainly the Balkans. Often, it depends on the research question or on a given author's perspective whether, say, countries like Romania, Slovenia, or Greece are included, or left out. In exchange, the nation state solidly remains the standard when analysing minority politics, despite the many intersections of ethnic, national and religious minorities that exist.

Importantly, the Roma population is no exception in the volume. Roma ethnic politics are addressed throughout the book, with each chapter managing to point to the importance of the Roma in local and national politics as well as in international debates. From Bugajski's predictions of 'a potential for escalating inter-ethnic violence provoked by poverty, organized racist attacks, and the creation of Roma self-defence groups' (33) to the more focused analysis of violent anti-Roma attacks in Bulgaria and across the Balkans by other authors, they all point to dangerous ethnic politics that may easily digress in any state of the region. The acceptance of the Roma minority by other ethnic groups oscillates depending on previous conflicts, but also on the degree to which the Roma are perceived as outsiders. However, not all authors address anti-Roma racism through a sufficiently critical lens, for example when they fall into dangerously stereotyping statements such as the one about the 'rapidly growing Roma population' (73) without grounding it in any research; or when authors tackle only Bulgaria or Romania, where the EU *acquis communautaire* obliged the countries to implement specific politics towards the Roma minority.

In addition, the book's declared intention to extract and reflect on the dynamics of ethnic politics in a multidimensional manner is unfortunately carried out without sufficient data, which leads to somewhat superficial interpretative schemes. For example, the gender perspective and reflections on the politics of sexuality, announced as part and parcel by the editors, do not make it to the core of the analysis in otherwise often rich chapters. Neither are the economic interests of the various ethnic groups in the region clearly developed or presented. The reader looks for an answer to more fundamental questions concerning what was the biggest wave of ethnic refugees Europe has seen since the Second World War, and thus remains somewhat unsatisfied to read mostly about the political strategies of small, if consistent, ethnic minority parties. While the expectation the editors build up in their introduction is fairly addressed, a critical position of an all-too-Western narrative about the desirability of small states to engage with big players such as the EU or NATO, and consequently a unilateral dependency of the former on the latter, might have been strengthened more.

The book is of great value for scholars of political science, sociology, and international relations primarily, but also for social anthropologists and historians who engage in debates on Europe's most recent history, social trauma, minority regimes, and minority conflict solutions. The analysed data is contextualised in an interdisciplinary manner, which adds significant value to the field of postsocialist studies. The authors' critical analytical positions towards citizenship, sovereignty, and state formation are well informed in terms of the existing literature, and enrich the fields of conflict studies, minority and ethnic studies, as well as area and regional studies.

Thus this collective volume contextualises in a differentiated manner concepts such as 'communist'/'socialist', 'liberal democracy', or the 'homeland' a refugee might have the right to return to. Moreover, the authors do not shy away from using and explaining more complex concepts such as 'conditioned citizen' and 'minority regimes'. They clearly avoid buzzwords such as 'transition' as a label for the postsocialist space. In sum, the volume builds on the existing literature of the region and, by focusing on ethnic minority questions, contributes to the advancement of studying critically the political spaces and the (re-) formation of power relations in Europe.

Ioana Vrăbiescu (Amsterdam)

Tobias Flessenkemper / Nicolas Moll, eds,
Das politische System Bosnien und Herzegowinas. Herausforderungen zwischen Dayton-Friedensabkommen und EU-Annäherung, Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018. 320 pp., ISBN 978-3-531-18501-9, € 29.99 (Softcover)

The political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is often described as one of the most complex in the world. Established after a four-year-long war, as part of a comprehensive peace agreement, the political system of the country is based on power sharing but includes contradictory elements that incentivise confrontational politics. At the same time the region of Southeastern Europe is currently once again in the international limelight due to increased authoritarian practices, European Union enlargement prospects, and renewed geopolitical contests. A volume that attempts to portray the entirety of the political system of BiH is therefore more than welcome.

The edited volume *Das politische System Bosnien und Herzegowinas* is such an attempt, directed towards a German-reading audience. It consists of an introductory and ten thematic chapters. The editors, Tobias Flessenkemper and Nicolas Moll, have brought together nine further scholars who focus on BiH from both an academic and practitioners' perspective. The interests of these scholars span across several academic disciplines, including political science, history, religious studies, civil society studies, educational studies, and economics. The editors make this extensive focus clear in their introduction by portraying the volume as a broad overview of BiH and its political system today that is intended for a wide audience, as well as being a contribution to European applied geography (*europäische Landeskunde*). Written in German and with explicit reference to previous German language literature on Southeastern Europe, the book is meant to meet the demand for academic scholarship on BiH in light of renewed interest of the country in German, Austrian, and Swiss politics.

In the first chapter, Moll provides a historical overview on the tumultuous past of the territory, its people and state institutions, over the past few hundred years. He aims to provide an understanding of historically competing views of what Bosnia and Herzegovina means as a country and who its people are. With a deep understanding of the country, he portrays the essence of politics in BiH as constitutional politics (*Verfassungspolitik*), a struggle to regulate spheres of influence among the main ethnic groups. In this sense he rejects the notion that conflict among ethnic groups in BiH is evidence of grievance and hatred but rather as an ongoing competition over power and resources. In fact, reference to historical forms of group accommodation in BiH can open the readers' eyes to see beyond the