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Introduction: Methodology and the Study of State-Building in the Western Balkans

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The academic literature on state-building has focused largely on actual policies and practices and how to understand its challenges and improve on practice. Particularly salient recently is the relation between external actors and local resistance. In its course, this literature and its practitioners are implicitly developing a field of scholarly study, as a community of researchers focusing on post-conflict countries and asking a set of questions about what works and does not to create a sustainable peace. What is missing thus far to make it a clearly articulated and recognized field of academic study, we suggest, is discussion and elaboration of a specific methodology. How does one study state-building interventions? This special issue, on state-building interventions in the Western Balkans, aims to fill that vacuum in the academic literature with contributions from scholars doing research on international state-building interventions in the Western Balkans by asking them to discuss their methodological approach and research questions for which they had to think methodologically. No canon will emerge because one of the great qualities of this research is its interdisciplinarity, but making methods and issues of methods explicit should make a major contribution to the development of this field of study, not just on the Western Balkans but generally. Without that, knowledge from each particular piece of research does not combine and accumulate, and the critical analysis of what we have learned and why and what new questions emerge that is essential to that accumulation of knowledge cannot take place.

These articles began as discussion papers for a workshop and their deep discussion among participants at the London School of Economics and Political Science in December 2010.¹ They have been substantially revised for this special issue. The focus on the Western Balkans has a major comparative advantage because the region has been host to multiple state-building projects since 1992, from Croatia to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, and briefly, in Serbia and Montenegro, and because all were parts of the same starting point, the former socialist Yugoslavia. In addition, the external actors are many, allowing comparisons among them as well as among countries: the United Nations and its many agencies, NATO, the European Union, the United States, the Organization of Security and Development in Europe (OSCE), and many countries acting individually. An advantage of the comparative analysis of the Western Balkans methodologically, moreover, is that all countries emerging from the former Yugoslavia are undergoing multiple transitions in addition to that from war to peace, that of a post-socialist system in both political (from one-party to multi-party, competitive) and economic (now neo-liberal) aspects. Methodologically, those studying war to peace transitions are thus supplemented by researchers interested in state formation, political economy, globalization (especially the fact of criminal organizations and trafficking), and democratization.

The discussions focused on questions such as how to study informal, illegal, underground behavior; our conceptions of the state and how it informs how we research state-building and state formation; the widespread interest in and focus on legitimacy; the local effect of external interventions (e.g. sanctions, supervised statehood, and the particular role and instruments of the European Union's transformational power) and how to measure it; the role of violence; the distinction between public and private behavior; longitudinal analysis; the separate consideration of citizenship from that of state-building; and the role in research of the paradigmatic trap of evaluating success or failure.

The very rich collection of articles here focus on legitimacy, state-building vs. democracy promotion, power-sharing, citizenship, local level interventions, and the state as a vertical hierarchy or set of horizontal networks, as direct components of international projects of state-building; and, focusing more on local dynamics, on conflict networks, the informal, extralegal, and criminal, the transition of guerrillas to political parties, and ethnographies of political will. Starting from different vantage points, the articles provide a rich repository of analytical tools and methods their authors have deployed to study international state-building interventions and arrive at explanations of its challenges. They

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demonstrate that the study of external state-building stands to benefit from embracing those explanations in their totality and not taking them as mutually competing accounts, because each chosen method individually captures an aspect or dimension of what is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon.