

Prospects for the Balkans and the Limits to Stability

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The results of the summit in Prague recently changed Europe (and the world) forever. The acceptance of seven new NATO members and the agreement on full EU membership for ten additional members has reshaped the old continent. The old post-Versailles and post-Yalta political order is definitively over, and Europe is moving toward De Gaulle's then visionary idea of a Europe united from the Atlantic to the Urals. Giscard d'Estaing is proposing a future confederal structure, in which Europe would play a more important role in global issues, and be united under common ideals, visions, standards and laws in political life, economy, human rights, freedom of movement, and education. Only one little corner, one "enclave" (as Michael Steiner, UN representative in Kosovo, has said), Europe's "backyard" the Balkans, remains "pro futuro" excluded from the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. Why?

What are the prospects for countries considered part of the "West Balkan region"? What must these "West Balkan countries" do to become part of the European family?

Croatia is strongly opposed to the "West Balkan" category, for Croatia is a middle-European and Mediterranean country (based on its history, tradition, culture, geopolitical position, and self-determination). It is only the last seventy years of common history with the peoples of former Yugoslavia that have made it a Balkan country.

Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro (that is, their politicians, businessmen, scientists, and artists) try to explain the issues in historical terms, but such expla-

nations are greeted with scorn or lack of understanding. European politicians attempt to ignore our history, eradicate our differences, and destroy our memory. We, on the other hand, believe history freed from ideology explains the past and liberates the future.

European politicians consider this part of southeastern Europe a natural unit, which is true for Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; the shape of the two countries says more than hours of historical explanations.

You use the same language, you can understand each other is a frequent comment. But language similarities do not mean the language is the same. (The Serbo-Croatian language does not exist) There are vast differences that must be respected historical, cultural, religious. Differences in opinion must be accepted and valued (excluding chauvinism, hegemony, racism), for through differences, acceptance and common ground can be found. Pressure and force are unacceptable. Time must be allowed for wounds to heal; the process of conciliation cannot be imposed.

The West Balkan countries have been told that their individual economies are small and inefficient, and that only as a big, integrated region (i.e. former Yugoslavia) can they be successful in the open market and a globalize world economy. For this reason, it was argued, countries of the region must gradually come together (joint custom unions, integrated power resources, roads, pipelines), create better ties with neighbors (regional cooperation), form supranational structures, and unite with each other before entering into a larger entity such as the European Union.

Croatia is not opposed to better relations and economic and cultural exchanges with its Balkan neighbors, but would prefer (as expressed by the President of the State, President of the Government, Minister for European Integration, and the general public) an individual approach and assessment of achievements, instead of a role the European Union wishes to impose upon Croatia.

Croatia is not opposed to its neighbors; it is willing to develop bilateral and multilateral ties with neighboring Balkan countries through the Stability Pact, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), the Adriatic initiative (Macedonia, Albania, Croatia, and the three countries which remain a part of the Vilnius group) and others, but refuses to participate in the creation of the New-old federal or confederal union of states, and to be part of any future, supranational structure be it West Balkans, Yugoslavia, or South Slavia.

The European Union has a specific framework for the region EU association. There are three political conditions:

full and effective cooperation with the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY);

effective implementation of a refugee return policy;
active policy against organized crime, corruption, and trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms.

Non-compliance with the following conditions means that the EU Council and Commission would refuse to move to a further stage of SAP, or totally suspend financial assistance to any of the five countries. ICTY can be used as a political tool; for example, transforming individual responsibility for war crimes into an objective responsibility which can lead to serious political repercussions. This perspective equates the victim with the aggressor, aggression becomes civil war, and Europe, having done its best, is relieved of responsibility for allowing barbarism in its own backyard.

Simplistic wishful thinking and unrealistic political ideas imposed on the people of this region by European politicians has led to a stalemate in Bosnia Herzegovina; status quo in Kosovo; and political instability in Serbia and Montenegro.

The position of Realpolitik analysts such as Henry Kissinger, who opposed the liberal, utopian views of politicians who have been reshaping and experimenting for years with this part of Europe, was recently reiterated by William Pfaff (International Herald Tribune, October 10, 2002: 'Time to concede defeat in Bosnia-Herzegovina'). Pfaff believes the policy of the international community in Bosnia-Herzegovina has failed (has been defeated) and must be reinterpreted, and that one more partition (division) of Bosnia-Herzegovina would promote democratic values. Realism demands such an option.

Many fear a restructuring of the former Yugoslavia, so the EU has opted for the name West Balkans, which is intended to allay the fear of a former association. The Croatian journalist and macro-economist, Ivo Jakovljevic, wrote in Novi List, (October 16, 2002) '...within a framework of regional cooperation, the West Balkan countries of former Yugoslavia could again unite into an association of countries (Yugoslavia, South Slavia, West Balkan) under an international protectorate. They would become colonies whose sovereignty lies in Washington and Brussels, and in powerful banks, and telecommunications and media firms....the strategic goal of the US is control and recomposition of former Yugoslavia in order to maintain secure and free access to the Caspian region and its oil corridors, and the Kurdish route through Asia's soft underbelly, and to utilize controlled chaos and permanent crises as a geostrategic tool.'

Members of the European Stability Initiative-ESI, recently discussed the topic 'Assistance to the West Balkans, Cohesion, and New European Borders: A call for reform of policy' (October 5, 2002). It was argued there that imminent political and economical chaos looms large over the Balkans. Especially precarious is

the position of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Financial help from CARDS would decrease within such a scenario, unemployment would soar, and voters would turn to the right. Promises on the democratization of the Balkans at the Zagreb summit were hollow, for the gap between the EU and the West Balkan countries will become even wider. The responsibility lies in the failed policies of the EU. ESI believes Croatia needs little time to adopt and harmonize itself with European laws and standards.

We must confront the truth. The international community has placed Croatia in the West Balkans, and the main purpose of the Hague Tribunal is to relativize the guilt of the aggressor. Europe feels responsible for the crimes committed in the wars in former Yugoslavia and wishes to place the burden on the opponents of regional cooperation.

The integration of the West Balkan countries into Europe and the world is inevitable. Though September 11th had an impact on the situation in Southeastern Europe, Francis Fukuyama feels that this terrorist blow did not initiate the beginning of a phase of history, but that it was only a pause in the process of globalization. He believes that his prophecies from *The End of History* will still be realized. The consequences for the West Balkan countries of this act of terrorism are serious. Issues of security have made political and economic associations much more difficult to achieve, and living standards have fallen. Democratic development and economic growth in the West Balkans are now being monitored by many international organizations and programs. But countries in the region act, as all other states, according to their own interests in the following areas:

- Relations with the US-EU, countries in transition (for instance, Rumania, which has a strategic partnership with USA, ICC), stance toward the Axis of evil/Iraq conflict, and forbidden trade relations with so-called Terrorist states are all dependent upon issues of globalization and national interests;
- Relationship to EU and NATO. Countries in transition interested in entering the EU or NATO are in doubt as to which side to take (that of the EU or the US);
- Relationships toward Muslim and Arab countries (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey, Greece, Israel, Russia-Chechnya, Macedonia & Albania - SR Yugoslavia - Kosovo, Moldova & Transnistria & Russia), are also dependent upon national interests;
- Unresolved national issues depend upon one's view of the combatants. Are they national liberation fighters or terrorists pretending to be freedom fighters?

These categories often overlap and can also be influenced by pressure imposed by the US, EU, or NATO; one's position toward

membership in EU or NATO; open national or territorial issues, i.e. the tempo of democratization in Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Moldova, Chechnya; issues from the past regarding boundaries, succession, property, and war victims (Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo); and terrorist activity (Kosovo, Macedonia, BH, Chechnya, and Georgia).

On the eve of possible war with Iraq, the following must be taken into consideration:

- Increase in Arab-Muslim solidarity;
- Opposition to individual American action and questions about the role of the UN (Russia, France, China);
- Preparation of Al Qaeda for counterattacks;
- Israeli response to defend its existence;
- Human rights in the US and some European countries endangered;
- Pressure from the US regarding the International Criminal Court (ICC);
- Misuse of the fight against terrorism in order to gain advantage in territorial disputes; i.e., Macedonia, Chechnya, Transnistria;
- Unresolved national problems (Kosovo, Moldova, Macedonia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Georgia).

The struggle against terrorism, whether to support or oppose war against Iraq, and relations toward the US and ICC are dependent on each country's national interest assessment.

The future stability of the Balkan countries will be determined by:

- Bosnia- Herzegovina issue; that is, whether there will be a Dayton Two's a partition, or renewed dialogue between the three constituent peoples, conducted without pressure or preconditions;
- Kosovo: will there be independence or expanded autonomy within the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia?;
- Macedonia. Is it an oasis of peace or will there be a new round of confrontations?;
- the Albanian question. Although the majority of Albanian politicians (Conference in Lucerne, November 15-16th) rejected the idea of a Great Albania new militant organizations have replaced the older ones. The most recent was founded in Tirana, (United Albanian National Front with links to ANA);
- obstacles on the road to full democracy in Serbia-Montenegro. Nationalistic forces are still strong; even President Koštunica talks of unification of Republika Srpska with Serbia proper.



Croatia is vitally interested in good relations with all its neighbors, and especially with Bosnia-Herzegovina. Lack of stability in these countries can spill over to Croatia. Instability in Serbia-Montenegro, Kosovo, or Macedonia could jeopardize its political and economical stability.

What are the prospects?

- the EU must understand and respect reality, provide more economic assistance, and develop civil societies and democracy;
- there must be full regional cooperation - bilateral and multilateral - free of any institutional preconditions (new associations), and based on individual state (national interests) of each individual country;
- peace, security, ethnic tolerance, free market economy, and European standards (acquis communautaire) must be instituted.

The prospects for Croatia depend upon several factors. European standards and laws (harmonization) must be implemented, full cooperation with the Hague Tribunal (individual responsibility not objective) is necessary, and full privatization must occur. Infrastructure, globalization processes, and preservation of national and cultural differences must also be addressed. Relations with neighbors, democracy, civil society, and NGOs are other issues. As Otto von Hapsburg, president of the Pan-European Union, said recently at his 90th birthday celebration: "....there are two challenges facing enlargement of the EU. It must negotiate with every possible candidate, and those with different views or opinions should not have the European door slammed shut on them." Croatia is such a candidate, and Europe is neglecting Croatia! He advised Croatia to apply for full EU membership in spite of differing views.

Doris Pack expressed her position at a Hamburg conference (EU enlargement - is Croatia the next candidate for the EU?). She said the EU has pursued an erroneous policy toward Croatia, that suspension of the PHARE program in 1995 led Croatia into isolation, leading to a slowdown in democracy, and that there was no harmonization with the EU. She called on the EU to consider a new strategy for the region.

An upcoming conference in Solun would define future EU steps towards the region. The document "Directions for strengthening EU coordination and communications in the West Balkans between EU operatives on the ground" is replete with criticisms of past methods; therefore, it appears that the EU is aware of its faults and wrongdoings in the Balkans. Hopefully, the EU will rethink and redefine its future policy towards the West Balkan



countries, allowing individual countries to enter the EU and NATO on their own merits.

