

# **POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA – DISINTEGRATION VS. INTEGRATION**

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Yugoslavia is one of the highest-ranking international issues in European politics. It has been so for a decade now, and it seems that it still is not quite clear in which direction the developments in the country could go, or when the situation could improve. In 1991 there was the disintegration of the former (Socialist Federative Republic of) Yugoslavia; now, in the year 2000, there are many scholars and politicians who share the view that the present (Federal Republic of) Yugoslavia is facing the danger of further disintegration. Of course, it is primarily the internal developments that produce such perspectives and speculations; on the other hand, the international community can no doubt react to these prospects either by trying to prevent such tendencies, or to encourage them. The question is – which option is the one that should be given priority in political considerations; which one is more realistic at this moment; or, which one of them is more desirable within the present regional and broader circumstances?

The disintegration of the former (SFR) Yugoslavia in 1991 came as quite a surprising development in European relations. Among all those events that have marked the international scene during the nineties, the disintegration of this multinational country has been a very outstanding example of consequences provoked by turbulences in world affairs, but also of the inadequacies in the international system when it comes to coping with such crisis. The fall of the Berlin Wall in the Autumn of 1989 was a world-wide sensation, a symbolic milestone marking the end of the Cold War; the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact was a rather unexpected continuation of this process in which bipolarism was dismantled more rapidly than expected; the break-up of the Soviet Union was yet another event that seemed only to justify the Western feeling of a sweeping victory over an ideology that influenced so many peoples during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the break-up of Yugoslavia was a different experience and a different example within the sequence of events that came in the aftermath of the Cold War – it did in no way corresponding with the general feelings of positive changes in the international environment, it produced huge negative consequences (humanitarian, political, legal, economic), and it paved the way for dilemmas in regard to crisis management in the future.

The disintegration of the country was certainly unexpected (in fact, for years Yugoslavia was mostly seen as an example of the possibility to have so many nations and religions within one state), generally speaking it was not encouraged, and initially it was not welcomed in Europe. When the international community engaged in various efforts to find solutions for the political crisis in Yugoslavia (like the EEC "Troika" visits), the primary aim was to prevent the disintegration of the country. The reasons were mostly of a more general nature (fear of a possible imbalance in regional and European political affairs) and much less were they related to internal Yugoslav circumstances. However, these attempts were not successful and the country broke apart, with quite a number of politicians saying that in the given circumstances the separation of the republics might be the key to the solution of the dispute. Once this happened, a number of historical, political and other reasons were put forward to explain why the Yugoslav federation actually was not a viable state, with the historical and internal political reasons being the main argumentation. On the other hand, two other socialist federations in Europe broke apart, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia; the Yugoslav case just seemed to have followed something that might have been seen as a pattern. The basic difference – the fact that in the Yugoslav case disintegration was not accomplished by agreement – did not seem to change the conclusion; neither did the fact that in the Yugoslav

case the international community was very much in favor of preserving the country's integrity. Anyway, all these arguments came as post festum reasoning in regard to something that actually was a defeat of the efforts of the international community: to preserve the integrity of the Yugoslav state.

In any case, ensuing events did not justify expectations that separation of the republics would bring an end to armed hostilities. The newly created independent states were not a guarantee for peace and stability in the territory of the former Yugoslavia – which was the ultimate argument of those in favor of recognizing the former Yugoslav republics as independent states. In two of the four new states armed conflicts continued, and it was only in 1995 that they were brought to an end. The international community did try to influence events in the area; it did encourage the preservation of the country's integrity; so the question is: did it interfere in the right and proper way and could it have been more successful in solving the crisis? Was it not taken by surprise in view of the persistent use of force? Was it not reluctant to use stronger pressure and thus maybe succeed in achieving the initial aim? Did it not give in to easier solutions, actually unaware of the outcomes?

Answers to these and other related questions are strongly influenced by political standpoints and basic attitudes in regard to both general issues (such as the role of force in international politics; role of international law; basic values of contemporary international relations), as well as those directly related to the concrete situation provoked by the Yugoslav crisis (such as the political and ideological attitude towards Yugoslavia; evaluation of the ideological and political orientations of the leaderships of the Yugoslav republics; the coordinates of the European political situation; the new role of a united Germany). These questions could be further elaborated to include different aspects and prospects and it probably is not possible to give simple and straightforward answers to either of them. Although these issues relate to past events, they still constitute a matter of great relevance today as well – and not only as a subsequent analysis of a turbulent time. In view of the contemporary situation in great parts of the former Yugoslavia it certainly can be useful to have in mind everything that was initiated, planned and done in order to bring peace and stability to the country and the region, as well as the outcome of certain moves and actions. This is particularly so today, when the internal political situation in FR Yugoslavia is very tense, when it threatens to produce more serious tensions and – as some scholars, politicians and analysts warn – even cause new armed hostilities in the area.

Experiences up to now certainly indicate the necessity for contingency planning with special reference to the contemporary situation in, and pertaining to, Yugoslavia. This contingency planning could be relevant for avoiding further spillover of the conflict and its inevitable humanitarian consequences. A new crisis, or a new war within or among states in the region could bring no benefits to anyone, and it certainly would be a new burden (political, financial, military) for Europe. Therefore, it seems rational to consider carefully the entire situation and establish priorities as well as methods to achieve them. The Balkans has proven to be a complicated area, with many interwoven dimensions, which sometimes seem not to be understandable beyond its boundaries. History, geography, legacies, traditions, alliances, ethnic composition, mentalities – they all seem to be at play in a way that makes the handling of the Yugoslav crisis a very complex task.

The problem seems to be that most of the methods at the disposal of the international community in a way do not correspond to the challenges of the local situation. In the case of Yugoslavia a variety of steps have been undertaken in the last ten years, but obviously the results either were not present at all, or they were highly insufficient in relation to those, actually planned and expected, or they came both late and watered down. And it really is a great variety: diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, political isolation, bombing campaign against FR Yugoslavia. One of the last steps was to bring charges for war crimes against the President of the country, and some of his closest collaborators. And yet, both the global and

minor aims of the international community do not seem to have been accomplished – peace has not been brought to the region, stability is on a very low level, and the perspectives are not so clear.

### **What is the situation in FR Yugoslavia now?**

Initially, it was the foreign policy of the country that was the focus of the international community – its international conduct, and its consequences. However, in time, this attitude changed and nowadays the emphasis is gradually shifting to include internal economic, social and political aspects. The country's domestic politics gained therefore in importance. At one point it was recognized that the president and members of the ruling elite were not the only political option within the Yugoslav population that is important. It has also become evident that there is a significant degree of discontent in the country. Disassociation from the regime began, of course, from the very beginning of its installation; anyway, although the international political factors did not approve of Mr. Milošević, they did not identify these opposing forces as a reliable or promising element of the Yugoslav political scene. Now, however, this discontent did get attention beyond the country's borders and it was recognized that it was spreading, generated by political and economic failures which had placed the country among the lowest ranking states, not only in Europe, but also in the world. The international community decided to pay more attention and give more support to these alternative political options, realizing that the increase in their strength could lead to internal political changes

It is probably no exaggeration to claim that the internal situation in FR Yugoslavia constitutes a major problem: not only for its own political leaders, but also for the international and particularly European politics. After the Dayton-Paris Agreements were signed in December 1995, hopes for a more stable future of the region were logical. Although the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and to a lesser extent in Croatia, did not improve at an expected (or desired) pace, generally speaking events seemed to be under sufficient international control: in Bosnia-Herzegovina the international community established a clear presence and influence, in Croatia it seemed that it would be possible to slowly direct developments in the desired direction; in Yugoslavia it was expected that it would be possible to manage relations with its leadership so as to find a solution for the problem of Kosovo and Metohija, which was seen to have high crisis potential.

In the entire period the problem was actually that the country's leadership did not give in to the demands of the international community in regard to relations among the former Yugoslav republics (in the first phase) and in regard to the status of the Albanian population in Kosovo (in the more recent phase). It has rather chosen to pursue its own policy, regardless of the crisis it provoked and the pressures that were coming from outside, and obviously not reacting to unfulfilled desires and promises: as if there were complete misunderstanding, or a completely mismanaged communication between the leadership and the international community. The result was tensions within the country and in its relations with other countries. As this situation implied broader dangers, the international community was trying to interfere through different channels and to implement different methods. This is when the role of the internal opposition to the contemporary regime was recognized as a potential force of change, and when the opposition was seen as a possible partner in the promotion of these changes.

### **To understand the contemporary situation in Yugoslavia one should take into account that there are several layers which must be observed:**

- First, the international position. It should in no way be omitted from the analysis, since it has a decisive influence upon the internal developments. FR Yugoslavia is in conflict

with the most important international organizations and states, and this is what makes its international position so bad. A number of factors contributed to this:

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- UN economic sanctions from 1992-1995, with some of them still in force (the so-called outer wall of sanctions, which makes it impossible to get access to international monetary institutions);
- political isolation which keeps the country outside international organizations;
- military confrontation with NATO in 1998;
- the fact that a number of its leaders, including the President, are not accepted as partners by a prevailing part of the international community, and some of them are wanted by the Hague Tribunal.
- Second, the functioning of the Yugoslav federation itself. Recent events have proven that it is an unstable state, vulnerable whenever the political process cannot be conducted in full agreement of the parties included. The Constitution obviously did not envisage the possibility of genuine political disputes and conflicting interests, and its mechanisms have shown great weaknesses in this regard. This only added to an already existing dilemma with regard to the identity of the Yugoslav state. It is an unusual federation: it includes only two federal units (Serbia and Montenegro), with a clearly dominant position of one of them (Serbia).
- Third, the relationship between the two constituent republics of Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro. These two republics entered a period of conflict a few years ago, but it came to the surface particularly after parliamentary and presidential elections in Montenegro. The conflict broke out clearly when the Montenegrin leadership refused to give full support to the foreign policy concepts and activity of Mr. Milošević, and when it refused to follow him in his conflict with the international community. Milošević's position and power, together with the manipulation of constitutional norms, enabled the creation of federal bodies in which this new Montenegrin leadership was not represented. Thus, the conflict threatens the very existence of the federation, since the two republics do not actually communicate, and Montenegro has made moves that gradually disassociate it from Serbia and FR Yugoslavia.
- Fourth, the situation in Montenegro. This republic and its leadership made it quite clear that they would not follow the policies of Mr. Milošević and the politicians who support him. They act on the basis of their electoral victory, and they rightfully ask for equality between the republics at the federal level. However, they did not win a landslide victory and the population of this republic is dangerously divided in almost equal portions between the two prevailing political options. Both of these options present themselves as fighting for the preservation of Yugoslavia, and both accuse the opponent of trying to undermine it. Therefore, the situation is a very tense one, and it is severely aggravated because of huge economic problems in the republic: apart from it being generally in bad economic shape, Serbia is blocking economic communication between the two republics and thereby creating big problems in production and basic supplies. International economic support is not sufficiently present, so it cannot easily substitute for the damage done by Serbian politics. All this creates tensions among the population, and it could constitute sources of crisis, with a potential to lead to serious conflicts – this, in turn could be a trigger for a disintegration of the country.
- Fifth, the situation within Serbia. Actually, the political situation in this republic is the very essence of the crisis in which Yugoslavia finds itself these days: it is the dominant

republic in the federation and the federal power practically rests within its cadres. The situation in Serbia is very complex, and has a high crisis potential. One of the main sources of conflict – Kosovo – is now under strict international control which prevents outbreak of a large-scale armed conflict, but this does not mean that the problem of ethnic relations in this province is solved. The rest of Serbia is in no way in a good shape either. The economy is in a disastrous situation, and political disputes and discontent become visible through various channels. The problem is that the political process is under strong influence and pressure from the ruling coalition, and that in the circumstances genuine political dialogue in democratic institutions practically does not exist. The behavior and decisions of the ruling coalition with regard to different segments of social activity demonstrate their intention to control an ever-increasing portion of life in the country. This provokes additional tensions and a growing disapproval of the official policies. This is articulated in demands for more democracy and decentralization of the country, which include more local autonomy and in some cases even calls for an independent status in the federation. These opposing forces could in no way be seen as a homogeneous group of movements, parties or alliances; their basic (in many cases their only) common denominator is a strong demand for changes in the society and for free and democratic parliamentary elections, which should establish a true representation of the popular support for political forces in the country. Their main slogan for attracting additional supporters is a clear call for democratic and peaceful changes and for rapprochement with the international community.

- Sixth, it is very interesting to note that communication with the international community, takes place through channels diverse depending on which segment of the Yugoslav political scene is in question. Montenegro has its own way of communicating with the international community, and in a way its official leadership is privileged to get special favors from international actors. The organs of the federal state are mostly isolated from a considerable number of main international actors from the developed world (their communication being to a great degree restricted to necessary official technical contacts with a majority of them), and their international contacts are focused on relations with a rather limited number of states (among which many do not have an outstanding international position themselves). As regards Serbia, the official organs of the republic have pretty much the same treatment as the official federative bodies. On the other hand, there are alternative channels of communication with the international community, which are open to the representatives of a wide range of oppositional forces. Once they were opened, these channels have clearly shown their usefulness at least in showing a) to the world that there is a significant alternative to the present authorities; b) to the broader strata of the public that the foreign world is not necessarily as hostile to the Serb people as presented in the official propaganda (which is an extremely important aspect in view of the consequences in this respect after the NATO bombing).
- All these factors can be viewed separately for analytical purposes; in practice, however, they represent a network of rather inseparable influences. Mutually they are very connected in an active interrelationship – serious changes in either of them reflect upon developments in the others. Their interaction creates the general political situation in the country. Actually, each one of them has the potential of acting in favor of both disintegration, or integration of Yugoslavia. In which direction the support will go depends very much upon the general feelings of security, repression, perspectives for the future, etc. Since the present situation gives rise to widespread feelings of discontent and uncertainty, and fears of impoverishment and armed conflict, it should

not be surprising to hear demands for greater levels of autonomy, including independence of certain regions. The question, of course, is whether the key solution to the existing problems is along these lines, or whether it would lead to further tensions and escalation. In view of recent experience, it is necessary to be very cautious in this regard.

- The whole issue of disintegration vs. integration actually should be looked upon from one basic perspective: is disintegration, or integration instead, a solution to the problem, or is it a preface to a further escalation of the crisis. And this is the only parameter for evaluating all demands that vary from calls for a greater degree of local autonomy, up to separatist claims. These claims should be put into the context of the current situation, because this is the framework from which they emerged and in which they can get a response (positive, or negative). In other words, to be able to understand the consequences of these demands, it is important to understand their background and their motives. And, in this context, it is relevant to have in mind the timing of these various demands.

Of course, demands for greater autonomy and independence from central authorities are not an unusual phenomenon; it is hard to find states in which such demands were not put forward in different periods. Yugoslavia, the former, and the present alike, were no exceptions in this regard. The way in which they came to the surface differed tremendously, which is a natural consequence of the political circumstances (domestic and international) in which the two countries functioned. Therefore, it is safe to say that in the former Yugoslavia they were mainly subdued (even the strongest among them, the demands of Kosovo Albanians, were not always publicly well known) and treated as ideological deviations. However, once the political framework changed, the decentralization tendencies grew stronger and finally the country broke up. This disintegration (1991) went essentially along republican administrative borders which were supposed to have followed (more or less) ethnic distribution.

### **What are the concrete trouble spots?**

Among the newly established states in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the new, FR Yugoslavia, was the only federation. Its viability and *raison d'être* were immediately challenged within one of the two constituent republics – ethnic Albanians in Kosovo did not recognize either the Republic of Serbia or, consequently, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Their demands for autonomy and (ultimately) independence were strongly rejected. However, the problem was persistently present, it caused political and humanitarian problems, and eventually it led to a NATO bombing campaign in the Spring of 1999. Although the problem of Kosovo is not solved, its impact upon disintegration processes in the country has significantly changed. Nowadays it is not so much the demands of Kosovo Albanians that work in this direction (actually, the international community rhetorically strongly opposes Kosovo's separation from Serbia). Much more influential is the fact that with the signing of the Kumanovo agreement in June 1999 and with the arrival of international forces in Kosovo, this region is for all practical purposes a separate part of the country. Serbian and Yugoslav authorities have practically no jurisdiction in the province. So, there is a certain contradiction – the international community opposes independence of Kosovo, but there is practically no Yugoslav or Serbian jurisdiction over it.

However, FR Yugoslavia is facing other threats that no doubt undermine its stability and in certain cases even its very existence. Threats come from different levels, with different focus, and with different demands: one group of threats are based on discontent with the political situation and aim is to change the government and replace it with democratically elected forces that will lead the country out of the crisis and international isolation; the other group of demands targets the achievement of certain levels of autonomy from the central authorities in

Serbia; finally, there is the problem pertaining to the relations between Serbia and Montenegro and the functioning of the federation. There is no doubt that the major factor in the entire situation is the regime in Serbia – with its position in the institutions, control over the army, and numerous police force, it can certainly have a decisively influence on events in the country. In view of the steps undertaken by the Serbian regime in different fields (education, university, media, courts) it is also clear that there is no serious intention of calming down the situation and consensual management of outstanding issues. Therefore, it can be said that if not sliding into disintegration, Yugoslavia is certainly showing signs of very deep destabilization, which creates the feeling that the central Serbian authorities do not genuinely control all levers of power from the political top down to the bottom. There are two reasons for this statement:

- in Montenegro the power is held by a coalition that opposes the Serbian regime, and that has shown its capability of preserving its position;
- in a vast number of towns in Belgrade local authority is in the hands of parties that throughout the Republic strongly oppose the policies and position of Mr. Milošević.

Tensions in the relations between Serbia and Montenegro do represent an important factor of instability. This instability has reached such levels that many analysts and politicians hold the view that the federation actually does not exist anymore. In many aspects this is a valid statement: by blocking trade, Serbia has provoked the braking of economic ties between the two republics and there are no financial flows between them; Montenegro is challenging the validity of federal decisions because its present leadership is not represented in federal organs, and Serbia is turning a deaf ear to Montenegrin demands to be adequately represented at the federal level; there is a tension between the Montenegrin government and the federal army because of army activities in Montenegro, which brings to the forefront questions of jurisdiction; Montenegro is implementing a different regime for border crossing than is the official one persistently supported by Serbia; Montenegro is publicly speaking against the Serbian regime and is having intensive contacts with the international community (not to mention clear disassociation with Slobodan Milošević in the time of the NATO bombing campaign).

All these are very crucial questions for the functioning of the federation, since they comprise all essential functions: the army, the economy, the judiciary, the decision-making process, relations with foreign countries. In a way, there is hardly anything left that the two republics do on a basis of mutual consent. However, possible Montenegrin separation is highly dependent on at least two elements: first, international support (which at the moment is given extremely vaguely; when mentioned at all it is mainly conditional, and one could say that it appears in a way as an international tool for exercising pressure on the Serbian regime); second, support by a prevailing majority of the Montenegrin population (this majority, if at all clear, is by all indicators rather marginal at the moment). International support for the present Montenegrin government could significantly strengthen its position – but only if it goes beyond declaratory encouragement and promises.

Further, there is another layer of problems that influence the situation in the federation and threaten its integrity – that is the situation in Serbia itself. As already mentioned, the internal and international problems give evidence of unsuccessful politics and the population is increasingly withdrawing its support. In a situation where there is no tradition of political changes this creates problems: challenging governmental decisions is officially almost regularly presented as unpatriotic and traitorous, and in view of the rather authoritarian tradition and historical experience this is a very influential element of the political scene. Therefore the divisions along the lines of different political options are acquiring an almost explosive significance: the opposition is presented as a disturbing element, an enemy, rather than as a political partner with different views. In such a situation political fighting gives rise

to too strong emotions and divisions. In the general surroundings, and particularly after the bombing campaign, it is the official standpoint that opponents are not patriotic nor reliable. All these elements come very well into focus when applied to those parties and alliances which advocate stronger power for local authorities. In a centralized country, such demands do face political problems. In Yugoslavia they come as initiatives for not only placing bigger power in the hands of local authorities, but also as initiatives for the elaboration of a process of regionalization of the country. Many analysts see regionalization as a key solution to the growing tensions in the political system, and particularly as a tool for soothing ethnic tensions; however, there is no official response to it, and one could say that the broader public is not quite aware of the scope and significance of regionalization, nor of such tendencies in Europe. On the other hand, there are demands for concrete autonomy, and in this context the most often mentioned examples are the region of Vojvodina, the region of Sanjak, and the position of ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina.

As regards Vojvodina, this is already an autonomous province, as stated in the Constitution. The provincial government has certain powers, but they do in no way compare to those held by the 1974 Constitution. However, when they were taken away, there was no such public protest as in Kosovo and Metohija. Nowadays there are demands from certain political parties in Vojvodina to get greater autonomy, and some of them, like the League of Socialdemocrats of Vojvodina, have recently explicitly spoken about programs for declaring Vojvodina a republic. There is no doubt that in Vojvodina there are significant portions of the population that are dissatisfied because of the financial position of the province, and who are convinced that the profits go to the central authorities in Belgrade. However, it is hard to say whether this discontent would be sufficient to support such radical ideas and solutions; parties in Vojvodina – those which oppose fiercely the regime – did not exactly side with this campaign of the League of Socialdemocrats. Of course, the fact that ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina demand certain aspects of autonomy (personal autonomy being most frequently mentioned) adds to the impression of a volatile situation in this region. It is no doubt that democratic changes in Serbia could improve the general situation in the province.

On the other hand, Sanjak is a region with a different situation. First of all, it has never had a special administrative status, nor did it present an administrative unit. Its specific features stem from developments in the past, when the majority of its population opted for Islam and as such had a better treatment in the Ottoman Empire. The region itself is territorially speaking divided, with parts of it being in Serbia, and parts in Montenegro. Therefore, the demands for autonomy, or the creation of a separate unit, are not realistic. It is hard to imagine that it would be possible to create such a unit, and not include parts of Sanjak in Montenegro; on the other hand discussions on this topic practically do not exist in this republic. The whole idea of Sanjak autonomy gained momentum during the war in neighboring Bosnia-Herzegovina, when paramilitary troops of Serbs did threaten the Moslem population and did commit crimes and atrocities. In the meantime, the situation improved. However, the Moslem population feels endangered and neglected in the republic and they are trying to get some privileges. A general improvement in the political situation in Serbia would no doubt contribute to a decrease in tensions in this area.

Finally, there is also a special aspect of the Serbian/Yugoslav situation: the fact that obviously the crucial role in the entire process and situation is attributed to one person, that of the President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević. He is no doubt seen by practically all of the involved actors as the central figure to be addressed in regard to any plans and demands for change. During his thirteen years in power, changes in the region were dramatic and many analysts are inclined to see them as the result of his politics. However, as influential as he has been from his first days in power, it is impossible to overlook the fact that he had partners who did not counter his moves strongly and unequivocally – both in the former common country, and beyond. Although very critical in regard to Milošević's policies, the international



community communicated with him, seeing him as the individual with concrete power to implement agreements and decisions, sometimes regardless of his legal status in the political system (like, for instance, his signature on the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreements). This pragmatic approach, advocated for reasons of efficiency (and justified by impressive popular support), strengthened his position and sent such a message to Yugoslavia's population, at the same time undermining the efforts of forces opposing him. Nowadays, his international position has changed dramatically and obviously irrevocably, and for the time being the consequences are burdening very much the population of the country. On the other hand, his retreat from power has been made very difficult, if not impossible, in view of the Hague indictment for war crimes. This creates a sort of impasse in which there is very, very limited space for the moves and actions of oppositional groups. There is no doubt that the task for change in the government lies primarily on the citizens of Yugoslavia; however, the situation developed to the present level of tensions not only as a result of their activities. Therefore, international support for democratic initiatives is of crucial importance as a message that the world is not hostile to the citizens and that there is no conspiracy against the Serbs. This is particularly significant to have in mind after the negative effects of the sanctions and, most of all of course, the bombing. The population mainly did not see these acts of the international community as a reaction to policies initiated by Yugoslavia, but rather as an unjust and illegitimate international conduct.

The general conclusion seems to be that the ultimate key for solving tensions in Serbia is democratic change in all aspects. This sounds as an unnecessary remark, but in view of the concrete situation it is very important also to have this in mind and it is important to comprehend how complicated it is to achieve it in the given circumstances. Certainly, success in this regard depends highly on domestic action and developments – however, efficient support could accelerate this process with a broader view of contributing to the improvement of the situation in the neighborhood as well.

### **What is the role of the international community?**

As already indicated, the role of the international community in developments in the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia has been very much present from the first day of the outbreak of the crisis that led to the disintegration of the country and war with severe political and humanitarian consequences. The interference of the international community provoked a number of dilemmas and criticism. Most important, for its long-term orientation, are doubts in regard to some basic questions, like the mandate, the aims, the motives, the efficiency. In a way, the international community did not have real operational and strategic plans with regard to Yugoslavia – it reacted to events that were occurring, rather than being in the position to make preemptive moves. At least that is how things look when viewed from the perspective of the concrete results achieved, and particularly having in mind the pace at which they were accomplished.

When it comes to FR Yugoslavia and the current situation then, once again, the international community faces similar questions: whether to interfere, in what way, and with what aims in mind.

In this context the growth of disintegrative tendencies represent a threat that should raise particular concern and attention. In view of the recent experience, there can hardly be any doubt in regard to the potential dangers of such a situation. This matter is hardly left solely to its domestic promoters. With opposition to such tendencies (and it comes both from official circles and from great portions of the opposition groups), it is highly unlikely that this disintegration could be accomplished without interference from outside. Experience shows that the international community mainly is influential when it comes to decisions on preserving the integrity of a given state; generally it is reluctant, to do the opposite but the case of the former Yugoslavia illustrates that it is also ready to reconsider its initial

standpoint. Now, in the case of Kosovo, it energetically supported only greater autonomy of the province within Serbia, and is repeatedly against its independence; the motive being obviously the fear of a possible "domino effect" or a spill over of the conflict to neighboring countries.

It is necessary to keep in mind that in order to have strong separatist movements, it is quite important for the region in question (regardless of its administrative status) to have already a common and separate identity; otherwise discontent is mainly channeled towards different political targets. In the case of FR Yugoslavia there are parts with more or less identifiable common identities, which could direct themselves towards disassociation from the central government. Apart from the identity of the two constituent republics, and leaving aside Kosovo and Metohija, Vojvodina is certainly distinct in comparison to the other regions in Serbia; although it is in no way ethnically homogeneous, its history speaks much in favor of seeing it as a separate territorial unit. The territory of Sanjak is certainly also identifiable within certain boundaries, and its majority Muslim population has built up a separate identity. However as mentioned already, the fact that its territory stretches across republican borders speaks very much for the complexity of the situation. There are other regions in Serbia that can be separated in some traditional historical and geographic sense, like Sumadija; anyhow, these have not developed movements that would ask for territorial autonomy. Montenegro has also regions which can be distinguished in a certain manner, but in this republic there are no significant tendencies in this regard. In any case, here we come back to the already identified conclusion: greater democracy would most probably be a solution under which separatist tendencies would in all probability gradually calm down. Anyway, internal democratization is something that depends highly on domestic activities, although international support and directed assistance can contribute; on the other hand, further disintegration of the Yugoslav state – although occasionally put forward as an option by domestic political forces – can be accomplished only if it enjoys international support.

In this context there were recently very important concrete projects aimed at strengthening democracy, i.e. forces which advocate its promotion, like sending oil for heating or other basic articles to the population, or lifting sanctions on air traffic. The fact that the government made this process as difficult as possible is in itself a proof that an adequate mechanism was set in motion. The Stability Pact is also an example of what can be done once the country takes the path towards democratization. The message that it will be implemented only after changes occur, is something that again can be used for propaganda purposes on the part of the government – still, the small steps made (like oil etc.) can be an indication that this is possible, and only if they believe in such a possibility will the citizens find the energy to engage in actions for change. However, it is clear that this cannot be done overnight, especially in view of the constantly repeated motto of the necessity for peaceful and democratic change.

On the other hand, it is not right that the entire population is hostage to whatever the international community wants to do about the main personality in the country; neither should its political future and perspectives depend on this. The inability to achieve the wanted results should in no way put aside the consciousness that without international assistance hardly any changes can be accomplished. And, whenever that will occur, it is also necessary for all those involved – the citizens, and the international community to keep in mind – that no positive results can be achieved overnight: neither can it be immediately forgotten in the country the results of international community activities, nor can the international expect instant stable democracy; equally, the population should not be disappointed when economic and other improvements do not come the same day.

All the moves of the West in regard to Serbia/Yugoslavia are actually evaluated through this optic –where they focus their activities and declared support and assistance. Practically every move made sends a message. Therefore, it is not at all irrelevant how the message is

understood, how clear it is and what it says. Whatever the international community is doing it must in no way be forgotten that in the country there is uncertainty and hesitation in this regard. The citizens are facing huge problems and regardless of the motives with which they were made, most of the moves from the international community resulted in suffering and a deterioration of the general situation. In the given domestic circumstances, it was rather easy to divert discontent to the outside, and not to the domestic politicians. On the other hand certain hesitation on the part of the West is understandable, since it is true that the political scene in Serbia has not yet acquired a clear profile.

In any case, stability in the region is a *conditio sine qua non* for general European stability. Therefore, it is in the best interest of European countries to do everything possible to promote peace in the region, and particularly in the territories in which there were armed activities. No doubt, one of the basic incentives would be a clear-cut perspective of the possibility to get integrated into European processes. The cases of other countries in Southeastern Europe testify to this.

Having all this in mind, it is obvious that there is no simple answer to a very substantial, crucial question: what can be done to revert Serbia (FR Yugoslavia) to the path of democratic development and adaptation to the global European trends. Namely, this is what is the declared goal of all those international actors involved in political affairs in the region, as well as of those forces in Serbia and Montenegro which oppose the present official policies of the country. The measures that the international community has undertaken on different levels were all justified as being directed towards this goal. However, the outcome was not the one that was expected, or desired. Things in Serbia and FR Yugoslavia do not seem to go in the wanted direction – on the contrary, they seem to be getting even worse in many aspects.

**Any plan for action should start from a few premises:**

- without international assistance, the situation cannot be improved in any foreseeable period of time;
- without a strong engagement of domestic forces opposed to the present regime, and acquiring broad support of the population, the situation also cannot be reversed;
- no substantial changes in Serbia/FR Yugoslavia are possible without a change of the regime;
- this acquisition of broad popular support for the alternative political forces must be viewed as a process during which actually the involvement of the international community is crucial;
- there is no doubt that all this requires a plan, requires activity and great persistence, regardless of the slow pace in which anything could take the desired direction;
- and, certainly, it requires financial resources – the longer it will take for the changes to occur, the amount needed to remedy the generally declining social situation will rise.

In regard to general policies that are implemented towards Serbia/FR Yugoslavia, probably the most frequently mentioned one are the sanctions – first, those imposed by the UN in 1992, and nowadays the "outer wall" of sanctions as well as sanctions introduced by the EU. The general mantra, so to speak, seems to be that sanctions have not fulfilled the aim, and particularly the domestic opposition sees them as counterproductive and as having harmful effects upon the ordinary people and no effects upon those who make political decisions. On the other hand, the EU and the USA are very reluctant to lift the sanctions and make things easier for the Yugoslav economy. It is understandable that the sanctions – once introduced – are difficult to remove without clear evidence that they 'have worked'. They

were introduced in order to bring about changes in the attitudes of the population, and if there was no change, there does not seem to be justification for the lifting of sanctions. And of course there is a hesitation because any relaxation of sanctions would most certainly be welcomed by the regime as a sign that its policies were not wrong and that the international community was wrong from the very beginning. This is one way to see this issue.

The other one is that sanctions cannot 'work' in an undemocratic, authoritarian society, with no democratic tradition and a sense of pluralism. The population could decide if it were exposed to information, to different standpoints, to different explanations, to a comparison of opinion. In the last years, this has not been the case in Yugoslavia, so the regime made use of the sanctions for its own benefit. And this was the case all the way from economic sanctions to political isolation and finally the bombing. It is important to note that among the great variety of political options that constitute the opposition to the present regime, there is none which did not speak out clearly and unequivocally in favor of removing sanctions. And this should not be neglected. They know the local situation, they know the obstacles, they know the local mentality, and they should be seen as those who would not advocate a solution that would be in favor of the regime. They might not be seen as the ideal alternative, but these are the forces that represent at the moment the core of the resistance to the regime.

However, until the time when there will be a decision made in regard to sanctions, there are fields in which the support and assistance of the international community could play a very crucial and concrete role:

- the information field: there is no doubt a lack of information on what is going on in the world and in Yugoslavia, and when given, the information is usually wrapped up in an explanation and often incomplete, so that it gives a distorted picture of the political reality. Therefore, assistance for domestic non-regime media, which are under tremendous legal and financial pressure, must be understood as a very important task. There are foreign broadcasts, of course, but in the specific situation in which the world has been demonized, they cannot be as influential and successful in transmitting messages as is the case with domestic media led by domestic people.
- the political field: as indicated by practically all opinion polls recently conducted, it is obvious that within the present system the opposition can win the elections only if it is united. However, as is known, the political leaders within this grouping are numerous, and many of them with a history of bad mutual relations. Their common approach in the forthcoming elections is crucial for any political future at this moment. Having in mind their contacts with international actors, it is realistic to expect that the international community can pressure them to find common denominators and acceptable frameworks for common work. The international community should make it a priority to encourage by all means those forces which can bring about democratic changes (non only political parties, but also non-governmental organizations).
- the economic field: as said, the lifting of sanctions should be an issue to which the international community should give very serious consideration. Steps like black and white lists seem to be practical and efficient – in practice, however, they are of little use. They either contribute to some sort of criminalization of the economy in which Western firms do have their part; or, they can easily be misused by the regime, as is suspected will be the case with firms on the white list – the regime can easily racketeer those firms, or deny them export licenses. In any case, for all such moves, the international actors (the EU and the USA primarily) should take into serious consideration standpoints of Yugoslav experts, professionals and politicians coming from a variety of political options; this could be a good way to avoid mistakes as were made in the past. These are issues in which politics and economics must take into

account local traditions, experience and mentalities – otherwise, the messages are misunderstood.

- the field of culture and communication: isolation of the country has been lasting for many years now, which has very detrimental effects also in the field of culture and communication. After the NATO bombing started, the cultural centers of a number of countries were closed, and even this limited channel of communication on this level was closed. University cooperation and exchange with the European and American academic centers are present, but on a low level. All this is harmful for the way in which an entire generation was brought up – with xenophobia induced by the official propaganda, it only widens the gap particularly with Western Europe, and with limited possibilities to travel abroad, the young generation gets the feeling of marginalization on the European level. Different channels of bringing new books, new literature, new movies and plays, scholarships, support for learning languages – these are some of the possibilities to work in this field.
- assistance in different fields: like, for instance, the program "oil for democracy", "asphalt for democracy", assistance for reconstruction of schools, medical programs, etc. Although blocked in many ways by the government (oil could not be imported so easily, now the Ministry of Education forbid schools to receive foreign donations for their reconstruction, etc.) such programs are crucial for transmitting the message to the population that the international community is not hostile to the entire people.
- targets of sanctions and consistency: it is obvious that sanctions do not work efficiently for the cause for which they were introduced. And apart from their positive or negative effects, it is certain that they cannot work generally. A personalization of sanctions, like the one introduced with the list of persons who cannot get European visas, seems to have been more efficient than the previous very hard sanctions imposed upon the economy. However, if that is to be convincing for the people, it must be consistent – there is no way to explain why some of the prominent government officials, whose names are on the list, could travel to some countries in the EU. This only arose suspicion and certainly sent a wrong message to the population.
- the Yugoslav level: the international community must have a clear stance in regard to the existence of the Yugoslav state (regardless of internal moves by the regime which point to a certain direction), with an analytical awareness of the consequences of either of the options. As seems to be the case at present, there is a strong orientation to preserve the state unity. However, if that is so, then the actions performed up to now do not necessarily send to the people a clear-cut message in this regard. The example of Montenegro is quite illustrative – the support has been strong in words, but in the present situation that is not sufficient. The situation in this republic is a very complex one and the present government and president have a hard time in preserving the balance and stability, having as their immediate opponent the regime in Serbia and the federal bodies, which are under its control. The West might be more helpful and efficient in economic assistance and support – the ever-deteriorating economic situation cannot be expected to secure support of the broader strata of population. On the other hand, concrete, efficient and timely support would send a message both to the people in Montenegro and Serbia that pro-democratic politics can be rewarded and can lead to an improvement of life.

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