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SELF-SUSTAINING PEACE IN THE BALKANS – A TWO WAY PROCESS

After the liberation from the Turkish Ottoman Empire, the Balkan states didn't have the same political direction, aspirations or the strategic aim. But now, for the first time in their modern history they do. Their focus is on the membership and integration into the most important Euro-Atlantic institutions: NATO and European Union (EU). I hope that Balkan countries are at the point where no return to the terrible scenarios of the past is possible. Despite many current problems, the future of the Balkans seems to look better. But, the process of establishing a self-sustaining peace in this region is fairly difficult and time consuming, requiring simultaneously the permanent commitment and supervision of the Euro-Atlantic community along with fundamental changes of the Balkan peoples themselves, as well.

In the last twelve years, after the fall of Communism and the beginning of wars in the former Yugoslavia, there wasn't a clear and sound strategic idea of what to do with the territory surrounded by the Adriatic, Ionian, Aegean and Black seas, better known as the *powder keg* of Europe. The European Union and the whole international community frequently acted in a rather confused manner, helpless to contribute long-lasting solutions in Balkan matters. After the Dayton Accords in 1995, some initiatives were launched towards the stability and prosperity of the Balkan region: the Royaumont Initiative, the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), the South East Europe Initiative (SEEI), the South Eastern Europe Cooperation Process (SEECF), and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe... But, none of them individually could offer a solid overall political, economic and security model for the progress of the region. Finally, the chance has been given by two powerful international organizations: NATO and European Union.

At this moment it is obvious that strategic partnership between these key Western institutions is taking over a care over the future of the Balkans. Within the Balkan frame, the Western Balkans (Former Yugoslavia, without Slovenia, with Albania) are drawing special attention. It is the area with the most sensitive inter-ethnic relations, characterized by the gravest conflicts throughout the 20th century. Therefore, it has demanded a carefully planned strategy for the future, which was, finally, offered on 29 July, 2003, in a press release entitled *EU and NATO agree (sic) concerted approach for the Western Balkans*, the framework plan for a joint approach to the issues of stability and security in the Western Balkans³⁰⁴. It is also clear that they will act in accordance, avoiding unpleasant surprises, sharing *a common vision for the future of this region*. That vision comprises of *self-sustaining stability based on democratic and effective government structures and viable free market economy*³⁰⁵. Although this document is aimed at the Western Balkans, its contents are logically extended to the rest of the region. Doubtless, the stability of the Balkans would encompass security, political and economic aspects.

Therefore, NATO as the strongest military alliance in the world can, more than any other structure, contribute to the security of the Balkans, representing at the same time a strong political authority. On the other hand, the European Union is the only structure capable of bringing political and, especially, economic order and prosperity to the region. Both of them have an inseparable role in this historical undertaking which is moving *from ad hoc cooperation towards a genuine common strategy*, as the former NATO General Secretary Lord Robertson said at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, last June in Thessalonica. It can make that region, so problematic in the past, never again the *focus of infection* for the rest of Europe. Authorities of the Balkan countries never separate their wish for achieving the twin goals of NATO membership and EU integration. It is the principal national inter-

³⁰⁴ <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2003/p03-089e.htm>

³⁰⁵ ibid.

est for all of them. Nevertheless, all Balkan countries don't move at the same pace towards Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Although the United States acts in the region as the leader of NATO, there is still a wider impact of the only remaining superpower in Balkan matters; despite the weakened interest of the United States for Balkan issues, after September 11, its political and military presence is still rather visible. This fact confirms the opinion that without the particular support of the United States, Balkan stability could remain a mere dream. Talking about the financial and economical potential in the reconstruction of the Balkans, this statement is even more convincing. It is quite clear that only with the assistance of the United States, Balkan countries can count on NATO or Partnership for Peace membership. So, the leading role of the United States in Balkan matters is indisputable and will remain such for a long period.

Within the complex Balkan issues, security represents the core element. Without security any of the other tasks leading to the stability and progress of the region would be out of the question. Perceiving that fact, NATO and the EU are harmonizing their security strategies towards the Balkan region, in the wider context, being aware both of old threats and the new ones that emerged through the last years. Further cooperation between NATO and the EU, based on the Berlin Plus package of measures and arrangements that set out conditions under which the EU can access NATO assets and capabilities, is of the highest importance.

Following this guideline, for the first time in its history, the EU led a military operation, named *Concordia*, in the FYRO Macedonia³⁰⁶, taken over from NATO, on 31 March 2003³⁰⁷. Furthermore, the EU Police Mission

³⁰⁶ Turkey recognizes Macedonia under its constitutional name.

³⁰⁷ Monaco, Annalisa, *Operation Concordia and Berlin Plus: NATO and the EU take stock*, December 2003:
<http://www.isis-europe.org/ftp/Download/Concordia%20and%20BP-NN%20v5n8.PDF>

named *Proxima* (around 200 personnel) replaced *Concordia* on 15 December 2003. Also, the Berlin Plus package paved the way for the future EU-led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina that will substitute the present NATO-led SFOR mission, reducing the number of deployed troops to some 7500 (down from the initial deployment in December 1995 of 60 000). It has been foreseen that the ultimate commander of the new mission would be the most senior EU officer at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) who is also the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (DSACEUR)³⁰⁸.

This mission could be realized by the end of 2004, but the final decision will be made at the NATO Istanbul Summit. As a proof of the common effort concerning stability in the Balkans, joint meetings, on a regular basis, occur between NATO's North Atlantic Council and the Political and Security Committee of the EU. They lately met on 19 April, in Brussels, to discuss, among other issues, the recent development of the situation in Kosovo. It is well known that, at this moment, NATO is completely responsible for the security in Kosovo with about 18.000 deployed troops, under the immediate command authority of Joint Force Command in Naples.

A new addition to the strategic NATO-EU or broader Euro-Atlantic partnership in setting up a favourable security environment in the region is creating a Contact Group Plus, a month after the March outbreak of violence in Kosovo. The Contact Group Plus is consisted of representatives from the EU, NATO and countries included in the Contact Group: the US, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia. Its mandate is to facilitate a dialog and institution building in Kosovo, as well as to supervise the application of standards.

Taking into consideration the apparently considerable engagement of the EU in the field of security, the document *A Secure Europe in A Better*

³⁰⁸ Serry, Robert, *NATO's Balkan Odyssey*, NATO Review, Winter 2003: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2003/issue4/english/art3.html>

World, proposed by Javier Solana (EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy) and adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the European Council, on 12 December 2003 in Brussels, is considerably important, especially for the Balkan countries, because all cited threats are present or are likely to appear in this region (terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and organized crime)³⁰⁹. Also, security sector reform is a crucial goal for any serious intention for the integration in both NATO and the EU. However, along with the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkan states, regional security cooperation is incomparably valuable for the stability of the area. Despite the *supreme* care of Brussels or Washington, a huge responsibility is lying upon the Balkan countries themselves. Within the present general forms of Balkan regional cooperation the security aspect should always be enhanced. Some significant steps have been made towards development of solid border security and management at the Ohrid Regional Conference on Border Security and Management, held in May, 2003. Also, the project of a Multinational Peacekeeping Force, known as Southeast European Brigade (SEEBRIG) formed of the militaries from the Balkan armies, should be reinforced.

Concerning the Balkans, there is a predominant notion in the consciousness of the civilian public, present for almost two centuries: something obscure, barbaric, and unpredictable. For Europe, the Balkans have always been the focus of wars, conflicts and violence, but at the same time an exotic treasury of literary inspiration³¹⁰. From the Balkans some dangerous, untameable force always threatened, which jeopardized the order around. It was a whirlpool, which by its magnetism attracted Great powers and where one could disappear, where even rulers lost their lives easily. In the Balkans everything was possible, because there were no firm laws; a spark easily becomes an explosion. Hence the well-known expression: the *powder keg*. History has shown that in the Balkans' case this name justifies the latin maxim: *no-*

³⁰⁹ http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cms_data/docs/2004/4/29/European%20Security%20Strategy.pdf

³¹⁰ Fleming, Kathryn E., *Orientalism, the Balkans and Balkan Historiography*, American Historical Review, n. 105, October 2000, pp. 1218-1233

men est omen. All these aforementioned facts created an opinion that main characteristics of the Balkans are primitivism, inefficient institutions, corruption and bad manners. Even for the Balkan nations themselves, the term of *man from the Balkans* implies rudeness and primitivism, while the adjective *Balkan* indicates insufficient cultural development and uncivilised behaviour.

All Balkan history has been a history of divisions and conflicts. Nevertheless, the Balkans have also been a place of exchange of different cultures, religions and civilization circles. It is doubtless that in this exchange Balkan nations accepted and adopted one another's customs, beliefs, and mentality. The Balkans is a region rather mixed and for many Western people it is often very hard to distinguish one Balkan nation from another. For the Balkan peoples, characterized by such tiny differences, borders have always meant some kind of obsession³¹¹. The Balkans were always a theatre of borders dividing Western from Eastern Roman Empire, Catholic and Orthodox Churches, Muslim and Christian worlds, Communist and Capitalist blocs.

There are only a few regions in Europe characterized by such ethnical, religious and cultural diversity. Peoples of the Balkans lived next to each other, sometimes cooperating, trading, exchanging experiences and sometimes fighting and mutually exterminating each other. The heavy heritage of the past, comprising all diversities of the ethnical, religious, ethnopsychological, cultural and economical character is the key for the understanding of relations in the Balkans, as Carl Bildt, the Swedish diplomat for many years involved in the Region, correctly pointed out³¹².

The centuries have clearly shown that in mutual relations prevails a negative historical heritage. If we try to list all the deepest inherited factors that conduct and burden relations, no doubt, among them would be: nationalism,

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Bildt, Carl, *Foreword* in Looking ahead: Security Challenges in the Balkans through 2010, Belgrade, EastWest Institute-DCAF, 2001. pp. 7-8

religious exclusiveness, unresolved territorial questions, economic and cultural differences. All these factors are interlinked and interdependent, originating one from another, frequently overlapping, making the peculiar Balkans a vicious circle. In the Balkans, ethnical identity prevails over civic identity. It is an indisputable fact that nationalism in the Balkans often comprises a strong chauvinist dimension. In the Balkans, nationalism has always meant exaggerated euphoria combined with unmeasured apotheosis of often fictionally embellished history, then unfounded praising of the values of the own nation and belief in its special historical “mission”, all together comprising hatred towards the “hostile” nations, in its neighbourhood. Prejudices and stereotypes exist among all Balkans peoples. They are directed towards the immediate neighbours. These prejudices and stereotypes are extremely strong because they have been formed during a long historical period. None will make a mistake if they declare that these stereotypes are dominant in mutual political, and not only political, relations in the Balkans. Their existence is visible from top to bottom of each Balkan society: from political and academic elites to inhabitants of remote villages. The region has not shed this burden.

There is still so many things on the agenda to be done, by the Balkan peoples themselves, in order to establish self-sustaining peace and long-lasting development: overcoming of the *ghosts of the past*, along with radical changes in the political, economic and cultural realms, new attitudes towards human rights and human diversity, as well as abandoning any national and religious exclusion. Quickly, the region needs profound changes in the mentality of its peoples, petrified by centuries. Also, giving up any idea of territorial pretensions over neighbouring countries is of the highest importance. Only fulfilling these prerequisites and under permanent interest of the EU and NATO, can the Balkans reach a better future. Hungarian Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati suggested that the “*shadows of the past must be*

finally overcome by the promises of a brighter future in which, among other things, European integration replaces ethnic segregation.”³¹³

It is high time that Balkan countries stop demonstrating their differences, by proving that each of them is better and more advanced than others, searching for the support of powerful countries. In connection with this, the United States and the EU should avoid any selective protectionist approach to a particular Balkan country. Such competition would be the continuation of the common Balkan politics to gain support of some great power for the benefit of their own nations, naturally, to the disadvantage of the *rival* nations. It is a very sensitive and important point that has to be overcome by enhancing the common interests of the United States and the EU in the Balkans. For example, signing Article 98 of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Treaty, led some Balkan countries to declare that they are more committed to the United States or to the EU, than others.

The only possible efficient and longstanding method which can bring prosperity to the Balkan region, and subsequently contribute to its political, social, economic and cultural development, as well as to the overall security in the area, is to overcome these deeply inherited factors, so called *ghost of the past*, which so far ruled over the conscience of the Balkans’ peoples. Regarding this, the best example has been given by Bulgarian diplomat Konstantin Dimitrov, who said, comparing with the Balkan situation, that French-German friendship after the Second World War became possible when mechanisms of out fashioned, 19th century national thinking were replaced by Euro-Atlantic thinking³¹⁴.

It is quite clear that only through a strategic cooperation between NATO and EU can be achieved a permanent turn away from the past in the Bal-

³¹³ Gyarmati, I., *Introduction* in Looking ahead: Security Challenges in the Balkans through 2010, Belgrade, EastWest Institute-DCAF, 2001, p. 15

³¹⁴ Danopoulos, Constantine, *Toward Cooperation in Post-Cold War South Eastern Europe*, Mediterranean Quarterly, 2001:
<http://www.uottawa.ca/associations/balkanpeace/texts/danopoulos-cooperation.pdf>

kans. But, this remains a two-way process: one characterized by the readiness and decisiveness of key Western institutions to work on the prosperity of the region, and the other characterized by the willingness of the Balkan countries to accept all the standards of modern democracies along with fundamental changes of the Balkan peoples themselves, laying in that way the cornerstone for a stable, long-lasting and self-sustaining Euro-Atlantic partnership. This is a historical chance and no one among the crucial actors is allowed to fail. Otherwise, it might be the very last chance for the Balkans.

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