Security Concerns in South-Eastern Europe at the Turn of Millennium

*Anton Bebler**

At present no war is being fought in SEE. However this outward tranquility was imposed from outside through energetic military interventions by the West, the establishment of international military and security protectorates over parts of the region, as well as by stationing peace-keeping troops, international police, armed and unarmed foreign observers at the hottest trouble spots in SEE. The suppression of armed hostilities did not however add up to real and durable peace. Thus security in the region still remains precarious. Security problems of South-Eastern Europe have been by and large concentrated in or directly related to the area called the Balkans. As mentioned earlier these two expressions are not synonymous. South-Eastern Europe is a wider notion which was recently given by the Western powers a curious political dimension supplementing its geographic content. The active involvement of NATO and EU member states in SEE as well as the presence of international peace-keeping forces will be necessary for, at least, a decade in order to prevent new outbursts of violence. However the structures of two international protectorates cannot provide for self-sustaining political and social stability in the area.

Key words: military security, international stability, South East Europe

1. Introduction

South-Eastern Europe (SEE) has during the last two centuries well merited the distinction as the most volatile and troublesome part of the European continent. Uprisings, revolutions, guerrilla warfare, mass extermination or expulsion of population, banditry, terrorism and other forms of violence, local warfare and coalition wars with continental implications have punctured the periods of relative peace at almost regular intervals from 1804 on. In the twentieth century only wars and other large-scale military operations took place in 1912-1913, 1914-1918, 1934-1938, 1941-1945, 1947-1948, 1956, 1975 and 1991-1995. SEE became again a scene of bloody violence at the turn of the 20th century in 1999. The quick deterioration of the security situation in the region followed and was largely triggered by otherwise positive de-velopments - by the end of the Cold War, by the break-down of most authoritarian communist-dominated regimes, the transition to democratic political systems and market economies.

At present no war is being fought in SEE. However this outward tranquillity was imposed from outside through energetic military interventions by the West, the establishment of international military and security protectorates over parts of the region, as well as by stationing peace-keeping troops, international police, armed and unarmed foreign observers at the hottest trouble spots in SEE. The suppression of armed hostilities did not however add up to real and durable peace. Thus security in the region still remains precarious.

The overall situation in this part of Europe at the turn of the millennium could be described as a combination of long-standing sources of tensions and conflicts with the consequences of the dynamic change, which has shaken the region since the late 1980s.

* Professor Anton Bebler Faculty of Social Sciences University of Ljubljana, Slovenia e-mail: anton.bebler@uni-lj.si

2. A General Overwiev

On the positive side it included:

The greatly reduced or perhaps altogether removed threat of nuclear, chemical or biological conflagration and also of large-scale interstate conventional warfare in Central-Eastern and South-Eastern Europe;

Very considerable to drastic reductions of military power in most states of the region (manpower under arms, inventories of heavy weapons, defence allocations, military industrial production, trade in weapons, etc.);

Progress in settling a number of conflict issues in the region related to contested borders, national, ethnic and religious minorities;

Increased participation by the states from the region in cooperative and peacekeeping activities both in SEE and elsewhere in the world.

On the other hand the tectonic geopolitical shift since the late 1980s brought on its wings a number of clearly negative phenomena:

The upsurge of nationalism, xenophobia, intolerance as well as the reappearance of previously suppressed cleavages and conflicts;

Several breakouts of mass armed violence; massive repression, persecution and expulsion of national, ethnic and religious minorities; the flight of several million refugees and displaced persons; massive destruction of housing, economic assets, cultural monuments, public facilities, etc.;

Disruptions in economic activities and movement of persons and goods caused by armed conflicts; considerable to drastic drops in the level of industrial production, intra-regional trade, GNPs and GNP p.c., sharp increases in unemployment and also poverty due to systemic changes, breakdown of the previously existing patterns of economic cooperation;

The intensification of several varieties of non-military threats to national and regional security (corruption, organised crime, illegal trafficking of arms, drugs, human beings, etc.).

There have also been important changes in the geopolitical make-up of the region. These followed the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and of two multinational "socialist federations" the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the USSR. As the result the total number of internationally recognised states and of unrecognised separate para-state entities has more than doubled. Instead of seven previously existing states (two NATO members, three WTO members and two non-aligned/isolated states) we observe today twelve recognised states and at least four other entities with different status. Smaller entities which resulted from the breakdown of larger states are by and large less heterogeneous than the preced-ing states from the ethnic, religious and national viewpoints. The potential for further political fragmentation in the region has not however been exhausted, in spite of the clearly negative attitude towards it displayed by major powers and international organizations. The number of real or potential conflict pairs of states has substantially increased and even more so the multitude of intrastate sources of conflicts. All this has more than compensated for a decrease in the previously existing conflict potential between states belonging to different and competing political-ideological orders and to two military-political blocs. South-Eastern Europe has thus proved to be much more unstable and sensitive to the shifts in relations between major powers than the northern half of former Eastern Europe. In this and in some other respects SEE has been similar or analogous in the make-up to the geopolitical fault-line stretching from Turkey all the way to China. Z. Brzezinski called this belt of instability the "Asian Balkans".

Having been for many centuries divided between several empires SEE has never become a coherent and viable region in cultural, economic or political sense. Even its geographic delimitation remains contestable. In fact the presumably politically neutral term "South-Eastern Europe" came into use in contemporary diplomacy as an imperfect substitute and euphemism for another notion, which became negatively value-laden in the last century. Which states belong to South-Eastern Europe and which to its most problematic core called the Balkans is a debatable proposition, particularly as far as its Western and Northern rims are concerned. Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia have displayed in the past reticence to being included into South-Eastern Europe, while Romania and Moldova did not. Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova represent the Northern limits of the region. To the South and to the Southeast the region encompasses the European part of Turkey, the continental and insular parts of Greece, and logically ought to include also Cyprus.

3. The specificity of the Balkans

Security problems of South-Eastern Europe have been by and large concentrated in or directly related to the area called the Balkans. As mentioned earlier these two expressions are not synonymous. South-Eastern Europe is a wider notion which was recently given by the Western powers a curious political dimension supplementing its geographic content. In fact from a purely geographic stand-point SEE ought to have encompassed also Ukraine and the South-European part of the Russian Federation lying between Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the Caucasus.

However the West preferred to keep both Ukraine and Russia in a different category of states.

Since it was used for the first time, about three centuries ago, the concept of the Balkans, on the other hand, has had a specific substantive political and cultural meaning. Its inventors were German geographers who used the Turkish word "Balkan" (mountain) to designate the European possessions of the Ottoman Empire. Since then the term "Balkans" has been closely related to the political and cultural imprint left by about five centuries of the Turkish rule in the area of the Southeast of the Austrian Empire of eighteen century. Historically an area of invasions, contests of extra-regional powers and of massive migrations the Balkans have as a result become a living ethnographic museum of a sort. For several centuries already they have been the most heterogeneous part of the European continent per square mile in ethnic, religious and recently also in national terms. Thus the inhabitants did not have a common indigenous name for the area and later accepted the German invention, although it was based on a geographic misconception. The lack of a regional focus and of cohesion contributed greatly to conflicts among ethnic, religious and national groups, between regional powers, para-states and newly founded states once the process of decolonisation (and partial democratisation) reached the Balkans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These intermittent clashes assured for the Balkans the well-earned reputation of a (or the) European "powder keg". The Balkans' internal weakness and incoherence as well as continuous squabbles among its rulers made the region in the twentieth century also an easy prey for extra-regional imperial and expansionist powers - Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union.

The end of the East-West confrontation in the last decade of the twentieth century brought about a geopolitical shift of seminal proportion. With the demise of the Warsaw Pact the Balkans have ceased to be an object of sharp contests for political and military control or domination by external imperial powers. The area lost its previously considerable geostrategic importance. As it also lacks extraordinary mineral, energy or other resources crucial for the world economy it is likely that the risk of conflicts, over the Balkans have been greatly reduced or eliminated altogether. This state of affairs is likely to persist for at least several decades to come. On the other hand the interest of big powers, compared with the Cold War has gone down as well. The West's primary motivation became to contain, manage and, if need be, directly or indirectly control the geographically closest sources of instability threatening the EU area and also the cohesion in the Euro-Atlantic community.

The post-Cold War movements on the world scene have generally diminished tangible extra-regional military threats to South-Eastern Europe. On the other hand future conflicts outside the region (e. g. in the CIS area, around the Caspian Sea and in the Near East) might well indirectly affect the Balkan security as well. Moreover the proliferation of capabilities for producing chemical weapons and middle-range missiles has already reached the Near East and North Africa. This particular combination of military capabilities could in the future become a dangerous instrument of threats and blackmail related also to SEE. Furthermore the level of non-military threats from outside the region has increased dramatically. Technological developments and the processes of globalisation have exposed South-Eastern Europe to new risks of social and ecological instability.

The dramatic change, wars and other developments since the late 1980s have caused huge economic dislocation and damage to the region. They wiped out the result of many years and in some areas up to three decades of the preceding progress. Considerable, even dramatic drops in industrial (and to a lesser extent also in agricultural) production and in GNP in some countries have increased disparities between the most and the least prosperous areas within SEE. Today Greece, Slovenia and Cyprus constitute the upper crust in terms of GNP per capita, while the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) and Albania are at the bottom. The differences in average pay and in the level of unemployment inside the region have become tenfold or even higher. Such disparities across the borders in the same region inevitably feed social instability and political unrest particularly if they are magnified by modern mass media as well as manipulated and exploited by ruthless politicians. The traumatic history of the region serves as a powerful tool of mass mobilization behind nationalist, religious and xenophobic slogans. Deep economic and social roots of political instability also contribute to the continuation of the negative features in the Balkans' past.

The potential for unleashing armed violence and exploiting it for political purposes has been reflected in the quantity and quality of stocks of arms and ammunition, of domestic arms production and arms imports to SEE from other regions. The overall level of armament in the inventories of the armed forces has appreciably decreased since 1990 partly due to the application of the conventional arms agreement (CFE). This compact however covered only the members of NATO and of the Warsaw Pact. In addition the Dayton-Paris agreement imposed limitations on inventories of heavy weapons in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the FRY and Croatia. A more important reason for the downslide was the reduction in defence appropriation and in the size of armed forces due to severe economic strains and political change in former communist-dominated states. Furthermore large quantities of heavy weapons became obsolete due to the dismantling of the Warsaw

Pact and to greatly reduced domestic production of relatively advanced weapons systems. An appreciable increase in domestic arms production seems to have been recorded only in Turkey.

4. Varieties of existing security concerns in South-Eastern Europe

Intra-regional security concerns in SEE have been reviewed by a number of authors and categorised by them according to criteria such as history, geography, the types and mixtures of conflict issues at stake, etc. Jeffrey Simon, for example, divided "the roots of Balkan insecurity and instability" into four groups: (1) psychological factors; (2) state-building challenges; (3) economic development issues and (4) security/defence issues. As conceivable armed conflicts in the region will be reviewed in another paper I shall concentrate on security concerns with only indirect or without obvious military implications. They could be classified as follows:

1. Still unresolved disputes among SEE states over parts of the borders, their delimitation and marking, minority issues, various aspects of succession of ex-Yugoslavia, access to international waters and waterways, transit rights, etc.

2. Dangerous leftovers of the past military conflicts in the Balkans such as several million unexploded anti-personnel mines, large illegal stocks of small arms and explosives, etc.

3. At least two million refugees, displaced persons or other migrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia proper, Cyprus, etc. who still cannot return to their homes.

4. Social and political unrest caused by poverty, high unemployment, shortages of essential goods, by the lack of housing, corruption, etc. in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia proper, Albania and in some other former communist-ruled Balkan states.

5. Conceivable inter-communal clashes in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Macedonia, Moldova and elsewhere.

6. Posible political protests, demonstrations and clashes with security or peacekeeping forces in Serbia proper, in Kosovo and in Republic of Srpska (Bosnia-Herzegovina).

7. Political tensions caused by minority grievances and by the demands for a higher collective status (regional autonomy, enhanced autonomy, federal or confederal status).

8. Terrorism, organised crime, illegal trade in drugs and arms.

9. Organised mass smuggling of workers, children, prostitutes and human organs from Asia and Africa into Western Europe (with the FRY and Bosnia-Herzegovina as the main gateways).

10. Transboundary pollution and ecological disasters (like the cyanide poisoning in a Danube tributary caused by an Australian-owned gold mine in Romania).

This list, by no means exhaustive, demonstrates the diversity and gravity of numerous social, economic, political, cultural-religions and ecological problems threatening the stability in South-Eastern Europe. The overall preponderance of non-military threats to security during the past decade has been a common feature in the entire formerly communist-dominated Eastern Europe. In its Southern part nevertheless this preponderance has been less pronounced and was at times overshadowed in the public mind and mass media by dramatic war events.

Moreover many non-military threats feed and stimulate political tensions and conflicts with possible military implications. It stands to reason then that the attaining durable and self-sustaining stability requires cardinal improvements in socio-economic conditions in SEE. As one of the least prosperous regions in Europe (in addition recently afflicted by armed violence and resulting human losses and destruction) South-Eastern Europe lacks the material, technical and human resources to deal effectively with this seminal challenge. Even more damaging is the inability, insufficient willingness or outright unwillingness of the elites to cooperate across state borders in overcoming these difficulties. There are various historical, psychological and other reasons to explain this lack of a culture of regional cooperation. This peculiar feature sets South-Eastern Europe apart from most other European regions (e.g. Scandinavia). The SEE elites, with a few exceptions, have instead historically tended to align themselves with and look for support from major powers outside the region. The still present reticence to cooperate even with neighbouring states requires from the international community (essentially the West) to provide not only economic and technical assistance as inducement for cooperation but also to actively exert political pressure on recalcitrant parties in the region.

5. The experience of the international community in dealing with insecurity in South-Eastern Europe

Since, at least, 1919 there have been several attempts by SEE states to deal collectively with common security threats. With a few and only temporary exceptions these attempts have been largely unsuccessful. The extension of the Cold War polarisation

to SEE and of the two originally extra-regional military alliances (NATO and Warsaw Pact) has imposed on their members constraints of bloc discipline and pushed under the surface numerous intra-regional conflicts. The geopolitical highly sensitive and prominent position of the SFR of Yugoslavia between the two blocs also contributed to putting a lid on internal conflicts in that multinational and multi-confessional state. The result was a relative calm and stability, which persisted in the Balkans until the end of the East-West confrontation.

Consequently the outbursts of violence and destruction, particularly on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia came as a great surprise to the international public, to most decision- makers in the West and also to the movement of non-aligned (in which Tito's Yugoslavia gained a respectable and influential position). By then the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union were themselves in the process of disintegration, while China was too distant and already without its former Balkan client Albania. It wisely chose not to be embroiled. The Third World remained beset with its own problems and also divisions and quarrels. All this left the Western powers as the only important actors capable of influencing the dynamics of conflicts in the region and also projecting military power onto it if needed be. The West's potency was however greatly reduced by erroneous assessments and wrong prescriptions as well as by disagreements and frictions among Western powers. The West generally reacted slowly and displayed only secondary, reflective concern for the region, as it primarily feared SEE's domino effect on USSR's breakdown. USA used then diplomatic pressures, admonitions and warnings and essentially left the room for a stronger action to their Western European allies. The latter tried also diplomatic pressures, coupled however with financial inducements, promises of membership in EEC and explicit threats of economic sanctions. As a rule at every turn of the quickly developing situation the West's actions were late and ineffective. At the time when a brief but robust demonstration of Western military power might have prevented the outbreaks of armed violence in the Balkans there came none. As military clashes started spreading in Croatia the West Europeans tried mediation and sent for the first time in EEC history unarmed observers for the crisis area. Neither instrument prevented the violence from spreading. Unable to agree among themselves on the best course of action the Western powers asked the UN (and CSCE) to introduce international peacekeepers and humanitarian organisations as well as to apply sanctions. The West tried essentially, at a low cost to itself, to contain the area of conflict. It let the unruly Yugoslavs "to boil in their own stew" in the hope that the armed conflicts and violence would

by themselves come to a halt through exhaustion of the parties involved.

This strategy did not work either. Although the feared spread of armed conflicts into neighbouring states and into the CIS area did not occur it proved to be impossible to stop the spill over of other negative consequences (refugees, displaced persons, losses in trade, disruptions in communications and flows of goods, persons, services, etc.). The UN peacekeeping force (UNPROFOR) could not possibly accomplish its primary mission, as there was no peace to keep. In addition the force was wrong-footed from the beginning having been based on the inappropriate notion of impartiality towards the warring parties. It was also only lightly armed on the basis of an obsolete doctrine of peacekeeping. Furthermore the UN General Assembly did not provide for adequate military and financial means. The UNPROFOR capabilities were clearly insufficient for carrying out the mandate, which underwent numerous modifications by the Security Council. The growing political disagreements and tensions among Western powers, related to the Balkans, had also burdened Euro-Atlantic relations. Eventually the West realised that the accumulated direct and indirect financial and political burdens of containment considerably exceeded the probable costs of an energetic military peace-imposing intervention. The brief air and land operations were conducted against the Bosnian Serbs in 1994 and summer 1995. Combined with Croatia's military campaign indeed it stopped warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina and paved the way to the Dayton-Paris peace agreement. The inappropriate analogy with this successful military operation has led however to faulty calculations and a number of serious mistakes prior to and during NATO's next operation in the Balkans in March-June 1999. The Western record in dealing with the Balkans in 1990s could be summarized as a chequered experience of learning by trial and error.

A complimentary venue of international action was manifested in efforts to induce and infuse economic, political and security cooperation with and in SEE. All these efforts were initiated and brought in from outside the region. Among them one should mention the web of cooperation, customs union and association agreements with EU, the Central European Initiative (CEI), CEFTA, SECI, NATO's "Partnership for Peace" program et al. None of these schemes proved to be simultaneously universal (region-wide) and effective. The further enlargement of NATO into SEE (with the admission of Hungary in 1999) and the enlargement of the EU (possibly around 2004-2005) have so far reduced neither the number nor the intensity of security concerns in the region.

Soon after the termination of hostilities with the FRY and the implantation of an international

peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) a new and ambitious tool was created for dealing with SEE's long-term problems. On July 30, 1999 the participants of an international summit in Sarajevo signed the "Stability Pact for South East Europe". The Pact was designed to "promote political and economic reforms, development and enhanced security". Western powers, primarily EU, committed considerable funds to the fulfilment of these ambitious goals. (However the total sum of projected disbursement for the next five years cannot be compared with the magnitude of the Marshall Plan and is several times lower than the value of Western assistance to Tito's Yugoslavia between 1949 and 1995). Their implementation has been also too slow and burdened with excessive bureaucratic red tape.

A novel development manifested itself in the creation in January 1999 of a Balkan rapid reaction capability called "South-Eastern Europe Multi-National Force" (SEEMNF). Participant states represented in the force are Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Romania and Turkey. Force headquarters until 2003 is Plovdiv (Bulgaria). This project, if successful, will help to dampen the edges separating the NATO and EU members from non-members and to develop the lacking culture of regional security cooperation.

The international record of dealing with the sources of instability and insecurity in SEE has highlighted the importance of:

Clear understanding and realistic appreciation of the complexity of security problems in the Balkans, which defy quick one-dimensional solutions;

The previously underestimated interconnection between the security in SEE and security in other parts of the continent;

Great advantages of energetic preventive military demonstrations and deployments;

A robust and well-coordinated international action to improve the economic and social situation in SEE, to develop its infrastructure, to facilitate and encourage cooperation among the countries of the region;

Extending the webs of Western-based integrations and their cooperative programmes into the region (EU, NATO, PfP) as well as strengthening international organizations and other instruments for economic and political cooperation in and for the region (Stability Pact, CEFTA, Black See Cooperation Council, etc.);

The need for a rational division of labour and effective coordination of activities between numerous international organisations operating in and/or dealing with the region (OUN, OSCE, NATO, EU, UNHCR, IBRD, etc.).

Learning from the lessons of the past decade and acting accordingly could improve the international community's ability to manage security problems in Europe's still most volatile region.

The chief conclusion of this review is that active involvement of NATO and EU member states in SEE as well as the presence of international peacekeeping forces will be necessary for, at least, a decade in order to prevent new outbursts of violence. However the structures of two international military/police/civilian protectorates cannot provide for self-sustaining political and social stability in the area. The Dayton agreements and the LTN Security Council resolution no. 1244 are based on two legal fictions - the existence of a single state in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the FRY sovereignty on Kosovo. Furthermore the Dayton agreement imposed on Bosnia-Herzegovina a political system whose cornerstone is separate national/religious representation and institutions of three largest communities in their respective majority areas. These provisions run counter the basic democratic principle of equal rights of all citizens before the law and against the stated principles and objectives of the international community. The existing arrangements have in fact solidified national/religious separation in spite of the commendable efforts of resettling and protecting minority refugees. A very similar and even more drastic spatial separation has occurred in Kosovo since the armed conflict in 1999. The objective of both cases, which is creating multiethnic, multireligious and multicultural societies, is simply unattainable but still remains the official dogma or pretence of the West.

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