

Achieving Stability in Southeast Europe

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The article questions the widespread belief in inherent instability and conflict potential of the southeast Europe. In fact southeast Europe is not necessarily more conflict-prone than the other parts of Europe. The origins of the 1990 conflict is further analysed by paying a special attention to the role of Serbia and structural make-up of the former SFRY. The position of the international community in the early stages of the conflict is further discussed in relation to the policy from Belgrade where the most notable was the initial inertia and lack of appropriate response of the international actors. The authors subsequently analysed the developments that led to the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis with special emphasis on the policy of the international community toward the former SFRY republics. Future development in Europe and its prospects for full unification will depend on the common values such as democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, but also common prosperity. Any north-south and similar division will necessarily have the opposite effect.

KW: conflict potential, Southeast Europe, Kosovo crisis

1. Introduction

It is often said that the states and nations of southeast Europe are burdened by historical divisions and that they constitute an ethnic patchwork, which has led to the area becoming a living case study for the "clash of civilisations" thesis. Indeed, living within a relatively small area are several national groups, the adherents of three major religions, diverse cultures as well as differing levels of economic development and political tradition. Yet, in spite of this, southeast Europe is not necessarily condemned to conflict any more so than the rest of the Old Continent. Its emergence as the primary European security issue at the end of the twentieth century can be attributed to the coincidence of several events, most notably the rise of nationalism in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) at the time when communist rule was coming to an end and creation of a security vacuum at the end of the Cold War.

The conflict¹ which began to spread through southeast Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, while having identifiable roots, was certainly not unavoidable. Rather, it was the result of a course of events in which domination-oriented Serbian nationalism, led by Slobodan Milošević, supplanted the previous communist ideology in Serbia, the largest federal unit in the SFRY, and came into confrontation with the defensive nationalisms and state-building aspirations of the other peoples and federal units. The confluence of these events with the end of the Cold War, and the attendant need for the redefinition of the roles of the EU and US in the period to follow, impacted upon the response of the international community to the emerging crisis. The initial steps taken proved to be slow, indecisive and unresponsive to the far-reaching geopolitical changes which had taken place.

At the time of the collapse of communism, the SFRY's institutional framework was a compromise

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¹ For the purposes of this article the term "conflict in southeast Europe" or similar references refer to an open period beginning with the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1990, including the recent events in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which are viewed as causally linked.

that none of the constituent nations and federal units really liked. The Serbs, being the largest but also the most dispersed national group, wanted to dominate whilst the others were inclined towards independence. Thus, as communism in Europe was being dispatched to the history books, Slobodan Milošević was commencing his drive for power in the Republic of Serbia and the SFRY. His now infamous address on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1989 marked the beginning of an aggressive pursuit of national homogeneity by dissolving the special status of both Kosovo and Vojvodina and, thereby, paving the way for control over all federal institutions. Instead of the introduction of democratic values and practices in Serbia, communism was replaced by another form of totalitarianism, namely, a belligerent nationalism aimed at the domination over other national groups. In turn, this development led to the rise of defensive nationalism in the other republics and national groups, which perceived the collapse of communism and the dawn of pluralism as a chance to finally constitute independent states.

During the Cold War the SFRY had been geostrategically important to NATO in blocking Soviet access to the Adriatic and the Mediterranean. As result, a special relationship was cultivated with the SFRY, involving financial support through the Bretton Woods institutions. However, this strategic policy was rendered redundant by the fall of communism in Europe, by rapprochement with Gorbachev's Soviet Union, and hence, by the end of the need to rely upon the pre-existing balance-of-power calculations regarding the former Warsaw Pact.

Although there were differences in approach, generally speaking the international community was, for the most part, passive towards the dissolution of the SFRY. While not encouraging them, it tolerated the quest for independence of the newly emerging states. Unfortunately, however, this passivity extended to the period in which the Serb-controlled former Yugoslav army moved against the new states. The lack of clarity about the "roles" in the protection of peace and security in Europe at the end of the Cold War left Milošević's aggression unopposed by an adequate response. Early on in the crisis, the United States was happy to go along with the assertion of Luxembourg's Foreign Minister that the challenge to resolve matters was the "hour of Europe". "We have no dog in this fight" was James Baker's somewhat less lofty summation of the impact upon

US interests of the escalating crisis, following his visit to Belgrade in 1990. Not without reason, this position was subsequently widely seen as having been interpreted by Milošević as the "green light". Hence, while the US waited for Europe to resolve the trouble in its midst, the European Community, unprepared for this new role and divided by the divergent interest of its member states, failed the test.

The crisis drifted south and stop-gap measures were introduced, but it was not until the Kosovo events that the international community took more comprehensive steps to avoid future conflict in the area. Even if the humanitarian drama in Kosovo is successfully concluded, the situation in southeast Europe will remain depressed. The wounds inflicted during the recent conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FRY are deep. The states in the region, although at different levels of development, are stagnating in comparison to other post-communist European countries, especially in achieving their aim of joining the Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Given that, in the period immediately preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall, the republics of the former SFRY were the most promising candidates in comparison with the other European states under communist rule, this is a major setback. Today only Slovenia is among the states seen to be making progress, although even it is not in the most advance group. The entire region, itself artificially defined by the scope of the conflict, requires an impetus which would mobilize new efforts and coordinate a policy of incorporation into the rest of Europe, leading to lasting stability and security.

2. The International Tools for Achieving Stability

Following the fatefully slow initial response, there has been a proliferation of initiatives throughout the second half of the 1990s, both national and multilateral, directed at attaining long-term stability in southeast Europe. These initiatives have also been instructive as to the positioning of states in the post Cold War global system, since they represent the geostrategic interests of many of the key actors. Also important among the tools for achieving stability are the visions and interests built into the existing regional organisations: NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, initiatives such as the Royaumont Process, Southeast Europe Co-operation Initiative, Central European Initiative, the Black Sea Economic

Co-operation, the South East European Co-operation Process, as well as other arrangements proposed by individual states or groups of states which complete the picture of multilateral initiatives for the region Europe. The rapid expansion of initiatives can be attributed to the fact that they are not only directed at achieving stability but also at ensuring the lasting, if not predominating, influence of their proponents in the region.

Prior to the outbreak of large-scale hostilities in Kosovo, the primary policy of the European Union towards southeast Europe was the "regional approach", which places Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the FRY, Macedonia and Albania into a single group by imposing a policy of conditionality for their accession. Such a policy, which continues to remain in force, effectively means that progress to institutional relations with the EU, which is the common desire of all countries in the region, can only be achieved following a subjective judgement that the countries have fulfilled the conditions set for them. Whilst the proclaimed aim of the "regional approach" is to develop the bilateral relations of the countries in the "region" so as to ensure stability and development, an unfortunate by-product of this approach has been the isolation of the region, since accession is envisaged for all states at the same time, somewhere in the indeterminate future.

The Southeast European Co-operation Initiative (SECI) is an American-led initiative dating from 1996 which seeks to promote regional co-operation among a broad assortment of countries nominated as belonging to southeast Europe, including Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Slovenia and the "regional approach" countries. It may be viewed as the American counterbalance in the region to the Euro-centered initiatives. The primary areas of co-operation are meant to be development of infrastructure, particularly transport links, and environmental protection. Co-operation among countries involved in a particular project is carried on through technical working groups and within the framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The initiative has been differently perceived by the participating states. Whilst some view it as almost an unnecessary diversion from direct access to the EU, others, perhaps unjustifiably, view it with suspicion over the issue of institutional links between participating states. The fact that it has not yet strayed from joint projects in the economic and environmental fields has lent it added credibility.

The EU's recently adopted Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (Stability Pact) represents both a refinement and departure from the philosophy of the "regional approach" and SECI. It has the veneer of a new and promising initiative, proceeding from the healthy foundation of the inclusion of all states in the region into the European integration process. However, its success shall depend upon whether progress by states will be measured individually, and if the criteria are simple, clear and well-known. The announced third type of EU contractual relations, specifically designed for southeast Europe, the Agreement on Cooperation and Stabilisation, whilst innovative and commendable, possesses the potential of a double-edged sword. If it is not immediately made available to all five of the intended recipients on equal terms, namely Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FRY, but only to the first two, it will only serve to add a new dose of conditionality. In that event the principle of progress towards accession on individual merits will be lost.

The strengths of the Stability Pact are, firstly, its program for incorporation of the existing international organisations and regional initiatives for the purpose of achieving "lasting peace, prosperity and stability for South Eastern Europe" and, secondly, its vision of the integration of participating states into Euro-Atlantic structures. In this way it is more than just a new initiative, but rather a method for marshalling the currently dispersed energies of the international community.

A number of regional initiatives and other organisations are given special mention in the Pact, in view of the contribution they can make to the overall process of stabilization. Accordingly, the Royaumont Process, which seeks to increase stability and strengthen democracy and civil society by renewing good neighbourly relations, particularly in the fields of education, culture, and communications, and which came into being as a regional security pact following the signing of the Paris/Dayton Accords, is given pride of place. Similarly, the Central European Initiative, SECI, the South-Eastern Europe Co-operation Process (SEECOP) and the South Eastern Europe Defence Ministers (SEDM) group, which originates from a framework for the co-operation of Balkan states, are described as having special roles within the Pact.

The Pact also places emphasis on pre-existing organizations and the roles they have developed for themselves in addressing the crisis. Of these types of organizations the most notable are the oldest pan-Eu-

ropean top bodies, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The latter in particular, has developed a role for itself in the area of human rights monitoring and institution-building, and therefore has an important function in the aftermath of military-based peacekeeping. What distinguishes these fora is the participation in them of states which are members of the EU, those with more advanced institutional relations with the EU, and those without such relations, conferring on them a dimension not available elsewhere.

Just as economic integration into the European Union has been made conditional, so has accession to the security umbrella of NATO, firstly, through the establishment of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), and subsequently through the addition of a preliminary "roadmap" which contains conditions precedent to the PfP. Whilst not expressly created for that purpose, the PfP has come to be used as a carrot. In both the cases of the EU and of NATO conditionality the net effect on the aspirant countries of southeast Europe has been to demotivate them by placing arbitrary barriers upon their progress. The participation of NATO, the Western European Union and the OSCE within the framework of the Pact, as well as cooperation with the "front line states" during the Kosovo crisis, point to a more inclusive approach. However, given the sensitivity of the security issue in Europe, greater inclusiveness hinges also on factors such as the future positioning of Europe within NATO, which is an issue of broader import than just southeast Europe.

3. A Division of Roles

The wealth of fora available for the treatment of the crisis necessitates a consideration of the division of labour among international organizations in the implementation of the task of stabilization, transformation and integration of the area. One of the results of the action of the international community over the course of the crisis in southeast Europe has been the precise definition of linkages between different international organizations and their specialization in different areas of activity, some of which have been referred to above. The areas of specialization have been recognized in the division of responsibilities built into the Stability Pact and in some of the initiatives preceding it. They include institution-building, civil society, the environment, transport and others, most of which have their natural base

organisation or arrangement. It is interesting that, whilst all of these fora claim to be complementary and mutually enforcing, they are also competing with one another for influence, limited resources and relevance. The re-emergence of the United Nations, on the strength of its universal membership and peacekeeping capability coincides with the cycles of the crisis, in which the response of the international community can be divided into phases, from the initial European phase, to the American entry during the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, the reconstruction of a joint approach together with the joinder of the EC conference with UN efforts, the impact of the security debate surrounding NATO and Russia, and, finally, a return to the United Nations, but this time in parallel with the Stability Pact. As the conflict has moved from one epicentre to another, the struggle to be the pre-eminent player in the crises was also being waged. The return to the Security Council, whose chief weakness is also its strength (the veto power of Russia and China versus potential broad political consensus resulting in legitimacy), has brought all of the key players back to the table.

However, a potential point of difficulty may arise from the fact that, whilst the United Nations has the advantage in the areas of peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and development, its resources are in practice more limited than those of other players. Certainly, the early indications are that the task of financing the so-called new Marshall Plan will be left to the European Union and to the framework of international financial institutions. The latter shall ensure the presence of the United States in the economic aspect, whilst the US will have a larger direct role in the political and security components.

4. Preconditions for Stability

Whilst Western Europe became more secure with the end of the Cold War, the converse was true of the former communist states. Indeed, if the conflict in southeast Europe has confirmed one thing, it is the continuing importance of the notion of "America as a European power". The United States has had to intervene on several occasions, including NATO bombing of Bosnian Serbs, hosting the Proximity Peace Talks in Dayton, and now by leading NATO in defending the Kosovo Albanians. Indirectly, the United States, through the post of Transitional Administrator as well as through its diplomatic

commitment, also participated in the peaceful restitution of eastern Slavonia to Croatian control (UNTAES), in the implementation of the Paris/Dayton Agreements for Bosnia and Herzegovina (IFOR and SFOR), and in halting the spread of the Kosovo conflict to Macedonia and Albania (UNPREDEP).

The price of instability in southeast Europe, as has been proven, is vast, not only for the states located there, but for the whole of Europe (instability, refugees), and the rest of the international community (United Nations peacekeeping operations, NATO intervention, the deterioration of relations between Russia, China and the West). The attempts to date to resolve the problems of the area have, unfortunately, been characterised by a pragmatism which has patched the problems rather than treated them substantively. In the meantime, the center of the crisis merely shifted from one area to another. With the return of this epicenter to Kosovo, the evident imperative need became the achievement of a holistic and lasting solution due to the potentially dramatic geopolitical implications.

There is no easy formula for the establishment of stability in southeast Europe. However, the obvious starting point is to take heed of the lessons that should have been learned from the actions on the part of the international community to date. Although integration of the countries in the region may be an idea born of the most noble intentions, it is a non-starter. Countries which have achieved their hard-won independence early this decade, whether from totalitarianism or from multinational states in which they could not express their own identity, do not find the prospect of any kind of political "reintegration" attractive – it is merely perceived as the imposition of foreign interests.

Specificities need to be considered rather than ignored. Perceptions are important. It is necessary to respect the sensitivities which have resulted from the recent traumas. The states of south-east Europe should not be forced into any initiatives that would bind them exclusively together; instead, incentive should be provided for their co-operation on the basis of their rational interests (such as transport and trade) and the formation of a broad consensus – between states as well as within them encouraged regarding the rules and criteria for moving forward in the integration process. The misplaced notion that the "Balkans need to be reintegrated" expressed by some shows an alarming misunderstanding of the causes of the crisis and represents the kind of sim-

plistic approach that shall not bring an end to instability.

The integration of southeast Europe can only be successful if it is achieved as a by-product of a larger process of integration of this region with the EU. Croatia's experience of multinational states has shown that a part of sovereignty can be given up only if something attractive can be obtained in exchange. Belgrade as a capital city was never attractive to Croatia, whereas Vienna, a lack of independence notwithstanding, once was, and Brussels is today.

Through participation in the European integration processes the importance of the region's sensitive border questions would become relatively less significant, and the protection of human and minority rights (monitored by the Council of Europe and the OSCE) would firmly entrench the mechanisms of the rule of law. In such circumstances, there would be a weakening of calls for the protection of national groups through border changes. All Serbs, Albanians or Croats can live within the same borders without conflict, provided that these are the borders of a united Europe.

A holistic approach needs to be used, given the proliferation of initiatives and conditionality for the progress of the countries in the region towards the integration they desire. The Stability Pact represents such an attempt to bring coherence to the anarchy of initiatives, by bringing them into play through "working tables" on democratisation and human rights, economic reconstruction and reform and security issues. Most of the existing initiatives are envisaged as having their place within the relevant "working table", thus granting the Stability Pact a co-ordinating and policy role. It is envisaged that in the long run the existing initiatives would be integrated into a single European policy, leaving open the question of the place of the American initiatives.

The stability of southeast Europe cannot be achieved by isolating it and then waiting for the area's internal problems to be resolved. It was this policy which allowed the spread of instability and, consequently, the eruption of the conflict to Kosovo. Rather, bold policies are required, such as the acceptance of responsibility by Europe for Europe. The Euro-Atlantic integration processes have undoubtedly played a key role in encouraging and assisting the transition of eastern European states and ensuring their stability and security. However, if they had acted earlier, in southeast Europe, more clearly and unequivocally by treating it as an equal, perhaps the crisis could have been stemmed far earlier.

In ensuring the stabilization of Kosovo, the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that the intervention of the international community needs to be broad and powerful, and the powers of any transitional administration wide, so as not to repeat the Bosnian error, where the process has moved in the direction of seeking greater authority rather than a gradual decrease in the powers of the international community. The results of the failure to move forcefully and energetically in the first place can be seen there: the pursuit of a policy of patching-up has resulted in the entrenchment of the international presence rather than in its gradual down-sizing both in size and function.

In order to achieve lasting stability, the resolution of the issue of succession to the former SFRY has particular importance. It is not a mere matter of the division of rights, assets and liabilities between the states that have emerged after the dissolution of their common predecessor. It is a matter of principal political relevance, since it was the unwillingness of the Serbs and Serbia to accept the other nations as equals, and as such equally entitled to their sovereignty and integrity, that was one of the causes of the conflict. Finally ending the process of succession on the basis of the full equality of all states that emerged after the dissolution of the SFRY is of vital importance for the future stability of the area.

5. Towards Sustainable Stability

The factors that need to be addressed to ensure stability are not very dissimilar from those which influenced the patching-up, and hence prolongation, of the crisis. Notable among them are the unsettled question of post-Cold War security relations in Europe and the capacity to develop a tangible, comprehensive common foreign and security policies. If these challenges are not met, then the effects of the "contradictory trends of fragmentation and globalisation", as Kissinger called them, will remain unharnessed as forces for building sustained stability in southeast Europe. Indeed these forces, which have resulted in the dissolution of multinational states and their numerous successors seeking participation in collective economic and security arrangements, can be the building blocks for integration into Europe on the basis of common interests.

If Europe in its totality is to be united, then this must occur on the basis of common values such as democracy, rule of law and respect for human

rights, but also common prosperity. If Europe continues to consist a wealthy north and a fenced-off, unstable south, these common values will not have the desired effect. Should the prospect of integration, and hence prosperity, be placed within reach, if Europe is brave enough to take the risk, then the reward will be stability. Guidance should be taken from the actions of the European Economic Community which took such a step when it received Greece and Portugal into full membership, allowing those new and fragile democracies to attain stability by inclusion into a common system and institutional structure. The time is long overdue for taking such a step towards southeast Europe. If taken, it is likely to invigorate the political forces which will change southeast Europe from within. Otherwise, no matter how well-intentioned, objective and useful in the long run, changes which come from the outside shall be viewed as imposed.

The chances for Euro-Atlantic integration may in these circumstances have a positive impact even upon domestic politics. Voters will support those that promise to take them in the direction they wish to head for. Efforts should be concentrated upon assisting states seeking integration into the Euro-Atlantic institutions on their individual merits. The final goal, however, is to be achieved in the second phase, in which all states of the region would come on board, including, following democratic transformation, the FRY. Thus, the process should be directed at making stability contagious and, in the end, completely merging the area into the EU zone of stability.

If there is a positive development to be extracted from the crisis in southeast Europe, it is the gradual building of a common strategy by the European Union and the United States as well as increased co-ordinating between international institutions. The fora and initiatives referred to constitute evidence of the search for a solution, whilst the Stability Pact represents the best attempt to date to institutionalise and consolidate them. Whether the lessons have been learnt from the recent history of the area, which has made it a testing ground for peacekeeping, peace-making, reconciliation and reconstruction, remains to be seen. The shift from pure *raison d'état* towards a more coherent and inclusive response on the part of the main international actors, at least for the moment, bodes well for a better future. ■