

American Interests in the South Europe*

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The enlargement of NATO will in the first phase considerably stabilise relations in Central Europe, and that region will become a part of the Western security community. Viewed in a wider, global light, it can be assessed that a zone of instability will be positioned in the South; the Balkans and the Mediterranean and Caspian seas. In these territories there will be new challenges, conflicts and instabilities, which American policy, if it desires to be a leading force within the new world order, can not oversee.¹ From the initial passive monitoring of the war in the territories of former Yugoslavia, to the present direct military engagement in the Balkans, and, the active search for options for co-operation in South East Europe, the Clinton administration has come a long way. In this time the administration has realised the fact that instabilities in this region may to large extent threaten the security of Central Europe, or that the Greek-Turkish tension may weaken the cohesion of NATO, the leading European institution.

Through the American role in the new relations, in spite of growing European cooperation, South East Europe remains an area where American policy will, seemingly, move in faster and faster.

In a global strategic analysis of the area, there are several important elements that must be considered, each having an influence on the new American engagement, which is being assessed by some Washington analysts as the most coherent part of President Clinton's foreign policy programme.

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The South East of Europe is a strategic link to important southern destinations that are of great importance (the Caspian region), to potential points of crisis (the Gulf), and to complex and unstable areas of the Mediterranean.

In South East Europe, although in minimal volume, Russian strategic and political interests, not always compatible with American plans, can be detected.

American Military Involvement

For all those who think within the "Clash of Civilisations" category, this region represents an image of an area ideal for the expansion of Islam, or new religion-based tensions.

All this calls for an American presence, ranging from military involvement, which has already been demonstrated, to attempts at the development of strategies for economic connections, and activities that could result in the higher engagement of American or European capital, thus drawing South East Europe closer to Europe.² If the stabilisation of the situation represents American interests, then American activity, especially in the field of the economy, and in cooperation with the EU, is essential in order to determine jointly the goals that are to be achieved in this region, as well as certain demands that the countries of the area should meet.

In spite of the differences that exist among the group of countries in this region, and in spite of their value for American policy, it is obvious that the principal goals of American foreign policy may be listed as the

The article discusses the new American role in South Europe and consequences of the NATO enlargement for the regional and global security situation. It can be expected that the US involvement in the South European region will increase and remain high in the near future. Such new US involvement is based on American strategic and political interests, i. e. the position of Southern Europe as strategic link to relevant Southern destinations; conflict potential in the region, the role of the Russian strategic interest. Further analysed are positions and prospects of the South-European countries and their foreign policy and strategic priorities. The main conclusion is that American presence and interest in this region are firm and established through political, military and economic instruments which include strengthening of NATO's role in the region and enabling the continuing US influence.

Key words: **NATO Enlargement, US Foreign Policy**

following: the creation of democratic political systems, open market economies, multiparty political systems, and respect for human rights and the rights of minorities. Within this focus American policy may be viewed in its concrete action, leaving ample space for each particular country to be treated in compliance with the progress achieved in the direction of the implementation of these American priorities.

Although it is being stated that **Slovenia** is already on its way to Europe, there are some other American views as well, saying that in spite of such closeness Slovenia could play an important role in connecting and bringing these countries closer to Europe.³ Therefore it is considered that it is Slovenian development that might be used as an incentive to other countries in South East Europe. Convinced that it would be useful for getting closer to European processes, the American policy wishes to see Slovenia in SECI.

Croatia, which had a much more difficult road to take to achieve independence, along with American assistance and support, often receives criticism, mostly regarding issues like reconciliation, the return of displaced persons, the implementation of Dayton and democratisation.⁴ Fulfilment of these demands should lead Croatia to Partnership for Peace, and to eventual membership in NATO. Having in mind the geo-strategic position of Croatia, and the American desire to be active in the South East Europe, it is apparent that American policy needs Croatia. With Croatian infrastructure and communications to Bosnia - Herzegovina, and conditional upon fulfilment of American demands, Croatia may become an important pillar for the stability of the area of former Yugoslavia as well. An unstable Yugoslavia, filled with crisis points, may have a counter-balance in a stable Croatia, and American policy an important partner. If the situation in Yugoslavia becomes stable, American policy will insist on intensification of cooperation between these two countries, and that regional security be achieved through regional cooperation. Closed ties to NATO could only help this process.

Clinton's administration has made **Bosnia - Herzegovina** an important goal of its foreign policy, and conditional upon its survival of the Dayton Accord, the involvement of American policy in the region would become even deeper. Dilemmas on a divided Bosnia - Herzegovina, or an integrated state, have apparently been overcome in Washington at this moment. Bosnia - Herzegovina should remain a single state, composed of two entities and three nations, even if it means even stronger, and more permanent American and international involvement. If the political preconditions for the functioning of such a state are met, then America, together with the EU, will have to considerably increase

its activities in the economic field and help in the overcoming of the war and its consequences. At the same time, along with the strict control of the behaviour of neighbouring states – Croatia and Yugoslavia – American policy will probably, and at right moment, attempt to strengthen pressure aimed at the establishment of a free-trade zone,⁵ enabling thus easier economic connections, which should lead to the emergence of a new structure of security relations.

New Engagement in Yugoslavia

Once it had finished pressuring **Yugoslavia** over the war in Croatia and Bosnia - Herzegovina, America is being urged to new engagement in Yugoslavia by the Kosovo crisis. On one side there is desire of the Albanian population to secede from Yugoslavia, and the dangers connected with possible forceful changes of borders, which would probably result in a chain reaction in the whole of the Balkans. Milošević's brutal use of force has led Albanians to a situation in which some forms of autonomy, or even a republic within Yugoslavia, could hardly be accepted. At the same time Albanian aspirations for the unification of all Albanians living in Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro may be seen by the US and Europeans as the announcement of new instabilities in the area. Reflexes would be immediately felt in Bosnia - Herzegovina, where neither the Croatian nor the Serbian people would want to live in an integrated Bosnia - Herzegovina, and soon demands for secession and the drawing of new borders would arise.

Macedonia was accepted by American policy almost from the very beginning of its creation. Due to American support and assistance, Macedonia has managed to resist some challenges in relations with its neighbours, and at the most sensitive times the UN (with a leading American role) has created a sort of buffer zone, thus excluding Macedonia from critical developments in Yugoslavia. The geo-strategic position of Macedonia, as well as still unsolved relations with its neighbours (even the issue of the official name of the state) along with the danger of the Kosovo crisis spreading over to Macedonia, are sufficient reasons for increased caution, and constant American presence.⁶ Also, should there be any changes in the status of Kosovo, it would be difficult to prevent the Albanians in Macedonia (22% or 35% of population) from connecting with the new, greater Albanian state, and, of course, this could not be achieved in a peaceful manner. Therefore, by supporting the survival of Macedonia, American policy will, at the same time, manage the maintenance of the peace and stability in whole region.

In **Albania**, American policy has taken a strong position, and close relations with the Albanian army

have been created through the Partnership for Peace. At the same time, American policy is carefully monitoring Albanian activities in the Kosovo direction, not supporting radical Albanians demands for the changing of borders, or the creation of "greater Albania". Reducing its activities to humanitarian issues, and to constant calls for political solution of the crisis, American policy is trying to motivate Albanians from Kosovo to accept negotiations, believing that a form of wide autonomy, that would grant self-government to Albanians, but keep them within the present Yugoslav borders, is still possible. Such ideas are being accepted by Fatos Nano, but not Mr. Berisha, who sees some chances for himself in new elections only in the intensification of the crisis. It is apparent that the American policy, with its presence and its strength, will be able to control the Kosovo crisis, if it decides to. Therefore any solution that is achieved will be done largely by the US; whether it will be a wide autonomy, or maybe some new Dayton. In the present situation, any such solution will be supported by official Albanian policy as well.

Bulgaria and Romania, with their new, non-socialist governments, both have a strong interest in cooperating with America. They are intensively using Partnership for Peace as a starting phase for their eventual fast joining of NATO, and accession to the EU; this gives them additional credibility in their steps towards Europe. Developing cooperation with the US, both countries have accepted American assessment of the events in the South East Europe, and support all measures that could contribute to peaceful solution of disputes and to the stability of the region. Along with the active support of SECI and the acceptance of the Clinton Plan for South East Europe, both countries are advocating the regional cooperation as well, assessing it as useful and necessary, aware that such a position is at the same time the best recommendation for their accession to the EU. Therefore, American policy will have no problems with these two countries, and they will support any American goals in this area in future as well, knowing that American reward, in the form of accession to European and Transatlantic integration is waiting for them. And this is what both countries are interested in. It can, therefore, be expected that it will be through these two countries that American policy will attempt to build the relations of regional, Balkan cooperation. This has a special significance considering the fact that there are no problems, nor tensions, existing between these two countries. A positive competition in the speed at which European integration is achieved may be used as a stimulating factor that Washington will most certainly appreciate.

Traditional American allies, and NATO members, **Greece and Turkey** will continue to be extremely important actors, but American policy will have to work

additionally with them. Greek policy, at this moment the much more realistic of the two, is on the way to solving its relations with neighbouring countries (Macedonia and Albania), and given its membership in the NATO, may be an important factor in the Balkans. Traditional Greek activities regarding Balkan cooperation will not be abandoned in these new conditions. Although these activities in times of open conflicts (Kosovo) do lack some importance, they constantly promote the idea of cooperation, which is not far from American and European ideas on the need for cooperation in South East Europe. America will therefore support such tendencies, convinced that no initiatives that would be contrary to American policy could arise from them. Open problems in Greek relations with Turkey will continue to be a significant obstacle for positive developments in the bilateral relations between the two southern NATO members. Looking in the long term, it may be presumed that Greece will attempt to block the Turkish approach to Europe, which is contrary to American interests. But, looking at things through the scope of general political and economic relations, as well as Greek membership in the EU, American policy will continue to be a very important factor that Greece will not be able to ignore. Although nowadays it does not have the power needed to solve the problems existing between Turkey and Greece, American leadership is still unquestionable, and many of the ties connecting the two countries guarantee future co-operative activities. Additionally, the similarity of their positions regarding developments in South East Europe may only strengthen these alliance relations, established a long time ago.

Current American relations with Turkey, on the other hand, are significantly more complex. In the post-Cold War relations, Turkish policy has more freedom for manoeuvring, and influenced by domestic political forces it is not being turned only Westward, but is developing its options in the East and South as well. A country that used to tie up 24 Soviet divisions, and that provided territory for American military bases, is today being viewed differently both by Europe and America. Threats of the strengthening of Muslim forces, the Kurd question and some human rights issues have all put some negative aspects up front. But in spite of these facts, Turkish strategic importance remains, even in the conditions of the new world order being created. This especially refers to American policy, which is forced to connect almost all of its central political issues in the Euro-Asian area with Turkish policy. The activities of NATO, the Balkans, the Aegean Sea, Sanctions against Iraq, Russian relations with the former Soviet Asian republics, Middle East peace and transit corridors for oil and gas from Central Asia – all these issues are, in one way or another, connected with Turkey. Growing Turkish ambitions in the direction of Central Asia are challenging some interests of Russia

and Iran, and sometimes America as well, confirming even more the need to maintain relations of alliance.

It is, therefore, apparent that, in spite of the complexity of these relations, and in spite of some oscillations in them, American policy simply can not afford not to work on good relations with Turkey. American policy has for a long time now been suggesting to its allies that Turkey be accepted into the EU,⁷ and is aware that the SECI may be used as a way of incorporating Turkey in regional cooperation in the South East Europe. Turkey is also very important in calming down the situation in the Balkans, where it can play the role of American ally in Bosnia - Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sandjak, and Macedonia, thus assisting the American plan for stabilisation and peace. Having all that in mind, it is not difficult to conclude that American policy will continue with its efforts to maintain good relations with Turkey, to help resolve its disputes with Greece, and, at the same time, will continue with a careful monitoring of internal Turkish developments, to protect the fruits of their cooperation so far. A more free and extensive Turkish engagement, especially in Central Asia, will be coordinated with American interests, along with a continuing effort to maintain the role of NATO as a principal link between Turkey and the US and the West.

American engagement in the South East Europe, today, has all of its clearly stated diplomatic, political, military and economic instruments firmly set forth, with the intention of staying present in this area. Although these instruments have different strength, volumes and dynamics in different cases, they are transparent, and, compared with the activities of the EU, for example,

quite strong. This should, among other things, lead to the statement that it is a result of a wish for permanent activity in the area, which was not only directed to ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but a part of the plan to enter, and remain in the areas of South East Europe.

Through such activities, Clinton's policy has succeeded in:

Firmly positioning the US in this very important region of South East Europe, which has a long-lasting value, especially considering the vicinity and the connections with neuralgic spots of American foreign relations activities (Middle East, Caspian region, the Gulf, East Mediterranean),

Along with designing a new profile for Central Europe – by NATO enlargement and the creation of new security zones further to the East, and in calming the situation in South East Europe, American policy has clearly presented itself as a leading power that can successfully operate on European soil, and by that, only reaffirm its leading role within new model of the world order.

In its not overly rich foreign policy, entering the area of South East Europe is perceived as the biggest success of the Clinton's administration.

Clinton's administration will, most certainly, continue its engagement in this part of the world, and this will probably be continued by the next American president, if elected from the Democrats. But since a variety of American interests are being involved in the matters in question, which are already now viewed as long-lasting and inter-connected, it may be concluded that American policy has firmly positioned itself in South East Europe and that it intends to stay there, regardless of lives in the White House. ■

Notes

1 On assessments of value of this area and new instabilities, see: Z. Brzezinsky, *The Grand Chessboard*, New York 1997, pages 123-150.

2 One of the leading American analysts of the Balkans is constantly arguing for the development of closer economic and regional cooperation among the Balkan states. He correctly points out that in the absence of steady economic growth and development, many of the democratization-type reforms started will not succeed, which could lead these countries towards new instabilities and new ethnic conflicts. S. Larrabee, "The Balkans", *Strategic Appraisal 1996*, ed. Z. Khalilzad, Santa Monica, RAND 1996, page 115.

3 By accenting the fact that Slovenia is situated in the crossroads between Central and the South East Europe, the Slovenian interest in peace and stability in Balkans is illustrated. This could

have significant security and economic effects for Slovenia. A. Grizold, "Varnost i sodelovanje v Jugovzhodni Evropi", *Teorija in praksa*, Vol. 35. No. 3. 1998, pages 483-484.

4 W. D. Montgomery, "Croatia's Roadmap to Partnership for Peace", *Croatian International Relations Review*, Vol. IV, No. 11, 1998, pages 88-90.

5 F.S. Larrabee, "US Policy in the Balkans: From Containment to Strategic Reengagement", in the: "Crises in the Balkans...", quote from page 292.

6 See: S. Clement, *Conflict Prevention in the Balkans: Case Studies of Kosovo and FYR Macedonia*, Paris 1997.

7 F.S. Larrabee, "U.S. and European policy toward Turkey and the Caspian Basin, Allies Divided: Transatlantic Policies for the Greater Middle East", R.D. Blackwell and M. Sturmer, *The MITI press 1997*, pages 166-169.