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International Community's Approach to Western Balkans: In Search of Stability and Security

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Abstract

The article presents research on the international community's engagement in the countries of the Western Balkans in the past and their possible approach in the future. The focus of our research is on the functioning of mechanisms through which the international community performs certain tasks in the region. These interventions are primarily political, in the form of conferences, political programmes, consultations, pressures and continuous persuasion. Economic initiatives follow afterwards. By using different reform approaches, international institutions try to improve cooperation with the European Union (EU) and countries such as the USA, Russia, Turkey and China. Our research attempts to identify possible methods and new solutions for individual cases of conflict in Western Balkans countries, especially where the international community is actively involved. On this basis, we created a more holistic approach. The application of these measures could make the necessary reforms of the future easier. Our approach emphasises all the elements of security that are essential to the stability of the region and for the prevention of conflicts in the future.

Introduction

At the end of the Cold War, socialist countries started implementing a more modern form of political system, that included multiple parties and an evolving civil society which sparked simultaneous processes of democratisation and the creation of democratic state institutions. For these reasons the political elites of the international community, the European Community (EC), US and Soviet Union, sought to restore new mutual political, economic and social relations with individual countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Democratisation processes were also taking place in former Yugoslavia, however they varied from republic to republic. They were subverted by inter-republican tensions and inter-ethnic frictions (Hayden 2013). Political and civil institutions in Western Europe and other world centres did not respond adequately to the coming threats of armed conflicts in Yugoslavia (Power 2013). There were concrete warnings of a possible war, but they were ignored by the international community or were even openly underestimated. Later, many wondered how the international community could so easily have left the events in Yugoslavia to unfold onto a course of unrestrained war and violence. The answer is simple: this happened because at least in the beginning the events did not in any way jeopardise Europe and the wider international community (Mojzes 2011). Europe and international institutions also did not have security concepts prepared. In addition, during the same period, the international community was intensively engaged with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, all of which implied a search for a new meaning of NATO. All of this led to a lack of interest toward events in Yugoslavia. They also did not have adequate qualified experts who could react to the violence triggered at those moments (Cohen and Lampe 2011). It was a period of relative peace in Europe as no regional armed conflicts existed in Europe since the intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary (1956) and in Czechoslovakia (1968). Those warnings from experts who knew how to read between the lines from the data obtained and who warned about the high probability of armed conflicts in Yugoslavia, were quickly removed from the daily agenda of political talks and media news. The military security concepts of that period were placed in the context of the Cold War, which were slowly becoming obsolete

(Hough 2004). Analyses with serious warnings of possible violent conflicts were being presented publicly, but no one was capable of forecasting inter-ethnic clashes, concentration camps, mass killing of civilians, burned down and destroyed towns, thousands of raped women and murdered children, let alone the Serbian genocide of Bosniaks (Donia and Fine Jr. 1995). None of this was foreseen in the security documents of the international community for wider Europe in the mid-1980s. The underestimation of previous warnings and the horrifying reality of massive massacre in Yugoslavia later led to the modernisation of security concepts within the wider European community (Juncos 2013; Booth 2007). These kinds of blockades when resolving major violent conflicts occur not only because of different interests within countries in conflict, but also because of the very diverse interests of the international community, which often does not have a common approach to resolving conflicts nor the means for a rapid action to prevent violence. This paper attempts to present a new approach to understanding the necessary measures and priorities that the international community should implement within the region in the future.

Methods

A combination of different methods was used in our research. We studied and analysed the content of a variety of sources, from expert literature, research reports, documents of international organisations, international agreements, examples of good practice, books, films, videos and sound recordings, to memories of the event from its actors, etc. Practices in non-Western countries, where similar problems have been dealt with in the past, served as a starting point for our analysis. The analysis and synthesis of the existing material was supplemented by our own research findings, which in the empirical part are based primarily on interviews and the method of participating as an observer through cooperation with research and expert groups in peace projects for the Western Balkans region. In addition to secondary sources, we used interviews with individual participants in peace processes in countries of the Western Balkans. We conducted interviews with 24 respondents for our research. They were selected after preliminary discussions with them. The sample included members of the international community,

people from different nations in the region, members of civil society, representatives of official institutions, political representatives in the region and military and security experts. The questionnaire used in interviews consisted of topics such as: international community efforts in the region, finding solutions to eliminate the blockade of Kosovo in relation to its neighbours, the question of recognition of the Macedonian name and the procedure for its invitation to the European Union (EU), the possibility of Montenegro's entry into the EU as the next country from the region, necessary democratisation of Serbia as an important stakeholder for stability and security in the region, and what forms of assistance from the international community would be most appropriate for long-term reform processes in the region. We evaluated the work of the international community in ensuring security, political, economic, social and cultural stability in the region. We also used the method of analysing policies in terms of designing, implementing and evaluating the policies of peace processes. Policy analysis, combined with the analysis of the political networks operating in the region, is the basis for a successful strategy for planning relevant policies and the preparation of long-term stability and security in the region. The variables we have focused on include: inter-ethnic conflicts, the rule of law, the country's entry into the EU, the importance of long-term security in the region, peace processes and the goals of the international community, conflict resolution, political and economic stability, human rights protection and regional cooperation. The analysis was carried out by comparing existing successful examples and already established good practices in the wider international community. Of course, our active participation in individual events was also very important to us in the field of our research work. Interview responses are particularly critical of poorly implemented actions already taken under partial regional agreements. Defining cooperation in this heterogeneous international community, with the aim of finding consensus solutions and putting them into practice, was certainly one of the most important goals of our research. With experience and observations acquired through research, what might be the actual aspects of the possible contribution of different partners within the international community to achieve common goals in the region? In the past, it has often been shown that various international interest groups and foreign political parties have exercised their support for local political actors who favour them. Such practices become very

adverse to effective reforms in the region. After conducting 24 interviews, this proved to be the fact. Thus, we have been able to construct an approach for conflict resolution, from the point of view of stability and security, and to clarify whether the approach is sufficiently effective to be implemented with the goal of integrating the five Western Balkan countries into full EU membership.

Meeting the problem — or what went wrong in the Western Balkans

The wars in former Yugoslavia have changed the security concepts of the European Community. In fact, EC was forced to change its foreign and security policy. Security was directly linked to a response to EC foreign policy activity and its active participation. Or as Stefano Bianchini (S. Bianchini, interview, 28 April 2017) put it: "If you do not do anything, it does not mean that nothing will happen to you. It rather means that you cannot expect anything good for yourself if you have done nothing good to somebody else. If you do not mediate peace in former Yugoslavia, you will not have peace at home." The security concepts in the EC were directed threats from abroad, especially military and in some cases terrorist and ecological threats. The concepts of a threat from an ethnic community within a state were not even debated within the European Community. Nobody in their right mind thought that members of one nation would decide to exterminate their neighbours from their homes using genocide (Rozman-Clark 2014; Hagan 2003). The international community was by no means prepared for it in its European Community backyard, even in its worst dreams. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of the international community is in some ways understandable (E. Petrič, interview, 8 September 2017). The events had simply surpassed the imagination of the military and security experts who had been dealing with these issues on a daily basis (Hitchcock 2003).

Today, after years of independence of all former Yugoslav countries, it has become obvious that small countries can not only survive but also can be equal interlocutors on a formal level in international relations and processes (Z. Živković, interview, 11 November 2017). The greatest danger in the region at the present is the further division of countries. The ambition of individual parts of states to secede is still present,

for example the secession of the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which would surely be followed by the Croatian part. The Serbian part of Kosovo has similar ambitions and the Albanian majority communities/regions in North Macedonia do not see themselves as part of the home country when interethnic disputes rise to the boiling point. Due to these potential ongoing changes with borders, the inaction of the international community is all the more problematic, since secessions can lead to examples of "unwanted practices", which many other ethnic groups in multinational European countries would happily like to exploit (N. Arbatova, interview, 24 December 2017). The security concept after the break-up of former Yugoslavia must become an integral plan for all of Europe and a part of the stability of the wider region. Excuses such as, "*it only concerns those Balkan people down there in the south*" should never be used again (Cohen in Lampe 2011).

It is not easy to prescribe pre-designed solutions. At the same time, the degree of willingness to find compromises among the people of former Yugoslavia proved to be extremely small. Peace agreements such as Dayton and Ohrid, the Stability Pact and the Ahtisaari's Plan for Kosovo, Nimetz's proposal for the name of North Macedonia, as well as subsequent reform proposals that made it possible for states to bid for EU membership, give us a realistic picture: positive changes even in such difficult situations are possible. In any case, the security elements in the region as desired by the international community do not only include the absence of armed conflicts but also the functioning of the rule of law, the provision of human rights, and the cultural dialogue between different communities in the region (L. D. Frčkoski, interview, 10 December 2016). Poverty, social exclusion, refugee migration, unemployment, organised crime and the unreliable globalisation of the economy all pose serious problems for the region. This causes great apathy and an inability for inhabitants of the region to deal with the situation on their own, which leads to mass emigration of young and qualified people from the region (Vesnić-Alujević 2012). The international community does not know how to change this course of events. Political elites in the region skilfully exploit this indifferent and dormant situation and as a result they can easily divert all financial sources, resources, and international assistance to their own benefit (S. Mesić, interview, 22 November 2016).

Certainly, developments towards Euro-Atlantic integration are important for the stability of the region. In the military field, NATO membership directly ensures the prevention of armed conflicts in the region and participation in common goals to guarantee the security of the wider alliance. Joining the EU, Euro-Atlantic integration and NATO provide motives, but these are often more conditioned by impulses from the outside than part of orderly processes from the inside. Looking at the situation as a summary of the effectiveness of the international community, North Macedonia has fulfilled all the formal requirements to become a candidate for NATO membership, and is still in the waiting room. The essence of the Ohrid Agreement was national consensus for common policy towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Mirko Pejanović draws attention to the slowness of EU enlargement and Euro-Atlantic processes in the region, which is particularly reflected in the deepening of interethnic conflicts in BiH and North Macedonia. He says these two countries should be admitted to NATO with no unnecessary preconditions. BiH highlights the importance of NATO membership and EU integration. The Western Balkans often pay the price for the ambiguity of the broader geopolitical situation, and in such a situation, a great deal of effort must be invested in development, security and the rule of law (M. Pejanović, interview, 13 February 2017). In the Western Balkans no one readily admits their guilt. There is no catharsis for the consequences of their actions. It is therefore important that the new generation does not fall into the traps and snares of new nationalism. Only in this way would they overcome the continuing conflicts, triggered primarily by individual nationalist movements, whose sole interest is to stay in power.

In order to secure the conditions of EU membership, Serbia will probably have to join the NATO military alliance before that. All neighbouring countries are already members, or like North Macedonia and BiH, are in the accession phase. Serbia has been a major generator and instigator of wars, violent conflicts and instability in the region in the past, so some EU member states, will not recognise its neutral status, and agree on its NATO membership. At the same time, Serbian membership for the EU will guarantee an adequate security situation in the region and be an assurance that Serbia does not bring with it unresolved security problems. Today, when EU membership is

a long way off for Serbia and its politicians manifestly claim that NATO membership is out of the question, these processes are still in their infancy. In the past, similar opposition was characteristic of Montenegro, but the country is now a member of NATO. A large part of EU member states will not want to risk unpredictable regional disagreements and will expect Serbia to join NATO as a condition for EU membership. It is therefore necessary to open up a constructive debate on this very sensitive topic. Consequently, technical assistance in this security area is also a very important part of the new model of international community action in the Western Balkans.

Toward a new model — Creating a proposal for a new approach of the international community's action in the countries of Western Balkans to achieve long-term stability and security

EU enlargement is unlikely to be realistic in the coming years. Therefore, constituting an appropriate security concept in the Western Balkans will be an important factor for the countries in the region. With consideration to the secessionist tendencies of some states, it clearly indicates that the EU is not joining glue, but a broader common interest in integration and cooperation and not just a mutual conflict management tool. The EU and its closure of borders is a policy that does not contribute to stability in the region. New security elements for the stability of the region and for the prevention of conflicts in the future will be presented in this paper.

Social, labour, pension, legal and health security for citizens are serious problems of the region. People often do not have basic health services provided and there is a lack of medical devices and medicines. Pension systems do not work and the treasuries and funds have been emptied. Not enough new jobs are being created to ensure resources for welfare state expenses. Education and school systems are often subject of political decisions and not of systemic long-term solutions which would lead to a more competitive society based on knowledge and skills (Perry 2015).

We defined the weaknesses and strengths of the measures taken by the international community. By comparing them, we have attempted to choose those methods of work that have a greater chance of success in the future. We analysed

the prevailing methods of work and the measures that the international community should take to bring its work closer to the inhabitants in the region, all those who are also directly affected by their engagement. We suggest a new model of conflict resolution for the Western Balkans.

EU Membership as part of the Security Concept

On a map of Europe, a part of the Western Balkans is a grey area enclosed by EU member states. The long-term perspective is membership into this group, whereby the EU can advise and directly help with technical assistance, which is also the most effective. Countries of the region will have to earn membership on their own with work and diligence. For those countries in which membership will be very difficult to achieve, such as Kosovo (5 EU member states do not recognise Kosovo as a sovereign country), they will need a solid regional commitment to cooperation. There is a constant underestimation of the region by Western political elites. But the level of democratisation within society and individual countries has not increased greatly (Jović 2018).

We can describe the security, the social as well as the political situation in the Western Balkans, as a status quo. The international community is keeping the situation calm by implementing individual measures and promises, but is not proactive in current events. Representatives of certain countries such as Germany, Austria, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, Sweden and Turkey come to the region and try to resolve individual problems through direct negotiations with political players from the Western Balkan countries. No one, at least at the operational level is seriously concerned with the region as a whole, which was confirmed by US expert V. Perry as well as expert N. Arbatova from Russia. Regardless of their differences regarding the definition of conflict, both agree, along with many others, that there is no agreed upon approach to the functioning of the region by the international community. The international community has its key people deployed to other more important and more pressing conflicts at the moment.

Peace Processes as a Real Possibility for the Future Development of the Region

Studies of peace processes and implementing security concepts through peace improvements requires complex planning methods, flexible ways of implementing development and skilful negotiators for executing the proposed solutions that are accepted (Galtung 1996). Wars take place on a daily basis, making people flee from the violence and consequently they emigrate. People are killed, they are exposed to pressure, torture, enslavement, rape, and imprisonment. Their basic human rights are encroached on and they are deprived of their right to education and personal development (Paris 2004; Webel and Galtung 2007). War is definitely one of the most burning and dangerous components of instability and has a direct impact on the integrity of individual states originating from the former Yugoslavia, which are not members of the EU yet. The countries are politically weak, their economic power is small, and they have an unstable legal order. Conflicts within one country are transferred to another country and spread over a large part of the region (P. Sokolova, interview, 28 November 2016). Political and cross-party dissensions in Serbia have a direct impact on the Republic of Srpska in BiH, which in turn causes an additional unstable power ratio at the federal level. Croatia, through its interference in the regulation of relations in BiH through Bosnian Croats, also directly influences the functioning of the executive power at the federal level (V. Perry, interview, 23 January 2017). In North Macedonia, stability is often directly dependent on the situation in Kosovo and the influence of extremist and nationalist groups, and on the readiness of the Albanians in North Macedonia to work with the Macedonians in the governance of the country (S. Ordanoski, interview, 16 February 2017). The autocratic political regime in Montenegro is the reason behind the lack of any functioning and orderly democratic institutions in the country. This makes them a very unlikely candidate for membership in the EU (F. L. Altmann, interview, 13 January 2017). The lack of social, cultural, scientific, and political elites affects the slow and often completely inadequate development of individual countries. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect comparable development to those European regions that did not experience wars (S. Šelo Šabić, interview, 26 January 2017).

The countries in the region have formally depoliticised the military. In reality, it is a frequent instrument of political leverage and is often used for intimidation. Due to low living and working conditions, there are systemic problems with personnel. In the field of defence, they face challenges for which they are often not prepared for or for which they are under-equipped and undertrained. The depoliticisation of the military in the Western Balkans is not something that would be self-evident and clear to all. On the contrary, a great amount of work is needed for civilian parliamentary scrutiny, a democratic role, and loyalty to the law and the constitution. This is a lengthy process and it is especially difficult because political leaders in the region see the army as a means of direct use for internal political problems. The involvement of the military and civil peacekeeping institutions is not only a one-time intervention, but a process that must be based on proven experience and a professional approach (Garb 2016).

Multilateral Cooperation by the Wider International Community in the Region

Some very large and often key conflicts still exist in the region, which the international community causes with its initiatives (Glenny 2012; Erin 2015). These conflicts manifest in the form of various unverified peace processes and developmental projects, involving "international experts" who do not have the slightest notion or previous experience on the matter, region and problems (V. Bojičić - Đelilović, interview, 21 April 2017). The international community often negotiated and agreed with individuals who do not by any chance meet democratic standards and do not give any assurance that they will fulfil the agreements made on behalf of the community they represent (Holbrooke 1999). As a result, a large amount of international funds was misused or simply used for the personal interests of cliques and individual political elites, which in reality is more reminiscent of organised crime. Thus, it is becoming more and more difficult for the international community to justify the funds earmarked for the region (J. Rupnik, interview, 22 April 2017).

First and foremost, the international community could find more competent people to join its tasks. Over the years, many active international actors have not had sufficient

skills to work in the Western Balkans. At the same time, the international community and its institutions did not check whether people sent to the region actually had the necessary qualifications to work in the specific circumstances that were needed considering the specific situation in the region. Thus, research and interviews have shown that special training and testing of experts sent to the Western Balkans is needed. These preparations could be carried out effectively with the involvement of state institutions, civil society and individual NGOs from the region itself, and with the involvement of local experts assisting on specific problems that would be addressed. In fact, in the past, there has been a considerable shortage of qualified experts who would be able to draw up plans for the monitoring and involvement of the international community in these extreme circumstances. Interviewees from the Western Balkans all agree on the need for more engagement of qualified professionals and experts from the region. While foreign interviewees claim that what the international community has to offer to the region is actually a limit for professionally staffed, financial, political, and operational support. The lack of qualified international experts shows that there is no greater pressure from countries of the international community and also there are no demands of their civil and political society to take appropriate action in the Western Balkans. Today, Europeans are preoccupied with their own problems, such as environment, terrorism and migration issues, and above all with their own security and future. It could also include examples of good practice and their transfer to the level of enterprises and civil society. The effect of the Berlin Process is reflected as a positive and bright perspective for the future, whereby a part of the programme includes the exchange and socialising of young people. This process guides the possibility of future integration of the region into the EU through gradual stages of development and acceptance of membership conditions (Vogel 2018). This includes the physical gathering of young people that goes beyond digital social networks. Young people from the region get to know their peers from other parts of Europe and they jointly build networks of connections for the future. These changes and movements are created for overcoming ethnic differences, which have often been the cause of separation (Rupnik 2011; Mowle and Sacko 2007).

It is extremely difficult to obtain written commitments, official documents and constructive strategic plans on how

to implement reforms from regional politicians. It is almost illusory to expect them to explain how all these commitments will be upheld, implemented and respected. In the past, the international community expected the region to carry out the following commitments very quickly (E. Busek, interview, 13 October 2016): the adoption of key constitutional reforms to democratise society; a strict commitment to the rule of law; the construction of functioning state institutions; socio-economic reforms and care for a welfare state; cooperation with international financial institutions; and the elimination of ethnic nationalist interests as the primary leverage of local politicians.

It is therefore necessary to re-implement reforms in the direction of state institutions and to achieve the efficiency of management, governance and state control with all the constituent elements. The integration and direct involvement of the international community at this point is necessary because this is the only way objectives such as the rule of law and socio-economic reforms to ensure the functioning of the welfare state can be achieved in a normal time period (Sebastián 2014).

Introducing Key Reforms as Part of a New Model of Action by the International Community

Introducing reforms is difficult in an environment where, even after the last wars, a very strong resistance to change exists. Obstacles are also caused by many recommendations and lots of advice from different centres of political power. Often the recommendations and instructions on what is needed to be done are very abstract (Štiblar 2007). Nevertheless, our research has identified some of the levers that could allow the reforms to make key changes step by step. We have divided them into several work areas within the framework of a new model of action for the Western Balkans. The first step is undoubtedly regional integration, where some factors have priority. These include transport and energy, entrepreneurship and the economy, sport, culture, social assistance programs, institutional integration, cooperation in meeting EU requirements for legislative alignment, constructively addressing the issue of interstate borders and resolving wartime disputes.

Field	Activity	Who
Regional integration	Infrastructure	International Financial Institutions for Development. EU Regional Development Programmes.
	Trade, economy, tourism and investments	
	Education, science, research and the environment	
	Institutional renovation	
	Culture and sports	
Required reforms in the region	The rule of law	EU programmes for the region in the framework of technical assistance. Local offices of international institutions to assist countries.
	Public administration reform	
	Business environment, fiscal policy, financial institutions	
	Competitiveness and the labour market	
	Social, health and pension systems	
	Promoting civil society	

Regional Integration

Regional integration was singled out as one of the main principles for the future of the Western Balkans at the conference organised within the framework of the Berlin Process in the summer of 2017 in Trieste. Non-EU member states do not have a clear enough perspective on membership, which is why in the meantime, their engagement can be directed towards strengthening important areas in which the region can achieve common progress (M. Pejanović, interview, 13 February 2017). The possibilities of joint cooperation are as follows:

a) Infrastructure (high-speed and regional roads, railways, telecommunications, water resources, agricultural areas, energy and environmental management etc.) Each country plans independently, which is understandable because of the conditions of financing. In any case, projects at the regional level could be placed in a common matrix, gradually obtaining system interoperability, thereby improving their performance, having more economical maintenance and operating at lower costs. The region is unattractive in terms of business investments, which are more likely to go to Central Europe or the Black Sea. The manufacturing of products, which will then be exported from the region, will surely return after the modernisation of the region and the appropriate infrastructure is implemented.

b) Trade, the economy, tourism and investments have also been areas of separate regulation within the individual state for more than two decades. Mutual agreements exist but due to the poor economic situation in the entire region, individual states do not compete with one another and do not create a common environment, where initiatives would succeed on the basis of performance and innovation. They are instead controlled by local monopolies of the state, which often protect their unfair, uncompetitive economy and protect the privileges of the ruling elites. The Western Balkans can become a common economic environment during the interim period of entry into the EU, making it easier to set up international funds for entrepreneurial economic cooperation initiatives in the region, with which they could overcome local barriers.

c) Culture and sport are linked to the region's tradition and exchange of events, professional and scientific foundations and a direct economy related to activities. These include competitions, festivals and events. Regional associations are members of international associations. Major cultural events often have a multinational and international context as well as content. By nature, these include the basic elements of regional integration. It is necessary to develop a strategy where the inhabitants of the region will see their participation in a multicultural environment

as a civic interest. The spiritual component is an important part of the formation in the wider region, where values and tolerance towards difference are shaped, within the cultural exchange.

d) Education, science, research and the environment are social areas, which are always put to the side when planning. Because of such neglect one of the worst consequences for the region is the emigration of young people and older qualified people. It is not just about finding work, but also professional and intellectual challenges that make people move and look for new opportunities. Skilled people are leaving, because the region simply does not allow them to realise career ambitions and to develop personal potential. This is crucial for the future and functioning of the previous three elements for regional integration. The EU and the international community have developed models to promote all these activities. Such knowledge could be transferred to the region via the establishment of regional offices of already existing institutions operating in the international environment.

e) Institutional renovation can be a continuous and gradual process for the democratisation of society, although reality shows completely different situations. Democracy without a demos is a condition of the system where all the institutions of the state exist, and the public administration is completed with all the necessary offices and yet the entire functioning of the state does not meet democratic standards one bit. The international community has a large number of offices, bureaus, envoys and semi-official representatives in the region and at the same time cooperates in concrete projects. Key objectives must exist for the renewal of state institutions such as justice, intelligence services, fiscal, health and pension systems, in which the international community must set up and at the same time prepare a thorough cooperation and assistance plan. When defining which institutions of the state do not function, help from a developed civil society is very important.

f) A functioning security policy is of utmost importance and must be strategically planned together, both by the international community and Western Balkan countries. Although Yugoslavia literally disintegrated

in the war, the change in local geopolitics has led to the fact that the region should take up regional security issues together. Mass migrations, terrorism, environmental issues, and the continually recurring threats of local armed conflicts are a clear signal to the region that their political elites should establish regional cooperation with their experts. The problem lies in the fact that the states are burdened with national issues and within this context, neighbours are seen as part of their problem rather than a solution. This is reflected in the increased re-armament of Serbia and Croatia, where the rivalry of the United States and Russia is certainly taking place in the background. This must be overcome, otherwise regional cooperation on key security issues cannot be achieved.

The Goals of the New Model for the International Community

There are serious problems for the future of the Western Balkans regarding blockades and failure to respect parliamentary systems, the lack of legal order, the defencelessness of individual social groups and inaccessibility to work, healthcare services, social benefits and pension insurance rights. Social protests are often misused for political interests[1]. Failure to implement socio-economic reforms, which have been the focus of the international community and its policies towards the region, have led to significant resistance to political elites, with mass protests in BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. Most of the blame for failure in reform processes is on the side of local elites. Local elites have used the stagnant period for their own benefit, and they have paid no intention to any required reform. The international community, however, made extensive demands and at the same time was not systematically consistent in implementing its own reform principles and decisions (S. Bianchini, interview, 28 April 2017). The ways of introducing reforms were incomplete experiments that excluded entire segments of populations.

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1   These civil society protests have also moved the international community forward, seeking to take a more active role. The concrete results of this multi-faceted cooperation were the elections in North Macedonia in December 2016. Everyone acknowledges that civil society has set new standards for combating and resisting abuse of power, and yet protests still give hope for future reforms (S. Ordanoski, interview, 16 February 2017).

In introducing reforms, the international community has bypassed the involvement of civil society and even parliaments. All this took place at the level of international officials and local politicians in the region. Excluding such a wide range of social control, parliaments and civil society, there was no policy pressure against the non-implementation of reforms (V. Teršelič, interview, 15 October 2016). But resistance by the citizens has exposed the following important problems: individual cases of state capture, an example of the very serious failure in the operation of fundamental institutions, is the biggest problem in the region; the passivity and inactivity of international institutions in the region established with the purpose of helping to set the region on its own feet; the radicalisation of religious oppositions and involvement of foreign countries regarding regional religious problems and conflicts; overturning the European migration flows solutions to individual countries in the region; and uncertainty about the status of membership in the EU and thus causing opposition from citizens towards EU integration.

Regional blockades at all levels of institutional decision-making and governance can be prevented with international initiatives. The EU should set up the following basic support with technical assistance for the operation of institutions of the countries in the region in cooperation with other international stakeholders:

a) The functioning of the rule of law. Without this basic postulate for each state, it is not possible to implement any serious changes in the direction of the rule of law. This is why the establishment of professional teams that can advise, assist and make proposals by the EU is an important element in the systematic training of countries for democracy. However, there is a problem at the purely operational level when high-level representatives of the EU and institutions of the international community have good relations with autocratic politicians, who attack the constitutional order, laws, and judicial systems. International institutions give local authorities legitimate acknowledgment by tolerating these deviations.

b) Public administration reform. This is something that needs time and democratic tradition. The abuses in this area are numerous in autocratic regimes. By employing loyal people for the elites, without

competitive services and with a complete lack of professional supervision over the functioning of public administration, abuse is a daily phenomenon. States budgets are being shaken by excessive and ineffective public administration, which directly threatens the country's economic and social security. Over decades and through the education of citizens, Western democracies have achieved efficiency in the public system by using very strict rules for the interaction between the state institutions and their operations in favour of the citizens. This is not an easy task, which is why it is necessary for the international community to address it with patience. Only then will international funds and aid not be used for public administration, except in cases where this is part of the agreed technical assistance, which must be directly checked by the effects of its performance. This form of technical assistance, which checks for efficaciousness, is actually the common thread of all measures within the framework of the new model.

c) The business environment, tax policy, financial institutions, the competitiveness of the private sector and the labour market. Some proposed measures are being achieved in this area, whereby international institutions and agencies are taking most of the credit. These requirements are directly linked to the external inflow of money which is why local authorities respond to them quick. Recommendations by international institutions in the region should simply have to be directly binding and not conditioned by EU membership. There is still time to establish normal operations until the moment of EU membership. The region should achieve these standards much earlier than accession to the EU. International institutions that already have existing regional offices with project staff are an elegant solution to address these barriers, while at the same time, transferring good practices enables comparability and efficiency. These types of regional offices could become a concrete contribution as technical assistance, which is seen as part of the new model.

d) Social, health and pension systems. These systems depend on the taxes that are collected and the distribution of money in their operation. This is

something that does not work and their fragility directly affects the quality of life of citizens. Since there is massive unemployment and a large proportion of the population receives some benefits in one way or another, this is an unsustainable burden for budgets on the other hand. Transparent public finances, an efficient tax system and regulated fiscal performance are a prerequisite for social, health and pension systems. Political elites are aware of this, but due to their short-sighted selfishness, they disregard it since they are only worried about their own interests. The international community invests quite a bit in promoting the competitiveness of the region's economy and certainly the emphasis on the importance of economic growth, an appropriate business environment, and the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services is of key importance in increasing the number of jobs. This is the only activity that will fill the sources of social, health and pension systems. No other sources exist — with the exception of borrowing, which still has limited possibilities. Reforms have been implemented in similar cases elsewhere in the world and are operating, which is why technical assistance at this point is crucial for a new model.

e) Promoting civil society, expert opinion groups, and the establishment of NGO projects. Unfortunately, regional dialogue cannot function without financial, professional and logistical support of the majority of good and really successful civil society initiatives. A wider social environment is not sufficiently inclined towards these types of activities and often exasperates them with political affiliation, financial donations and their affection for individual national groups. There are concrete examples of good practice (renewable energy, environment, culture exchange) and evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of this type of support in the region. With the involvement of parliaments, expert opinion groups and civil society should be more engaged and simply put more time, work and resources into achieving goals. Shortcuts do not work and once again this has proven to be still true in the region. In many cases these shortcuts are "fait accompli", a decision made somewhere at

the top, and parliaments do not even have a say in it. Politicians adopt key agreements outside of agreed procedures without taking into account formal decision-making rules, which normally functioning parliamentary democracies are familiar with.In the last twenty years, elements of the new reform model described above have already been introduced into the region. Many of them failed. Some reforms have only been partially successful. Finding a new name for North Macedonia, for example, took experts a decade and a half to find an acceptable solution for both sides. The new model is not a magic wand that will work or fix problems overnight. Neither is the model presented as a pre-ordained rule of individual procedures. Many of the experts we interviewed and asked for their professional opinion on the new model have directly introduced several reforms in the region in the past. Our research and expert opinion from interviews have shown us that a new model needs to be presented as a purpose for integral regional reforms. Changes could be implemented step by step and will need a long time to reshape societies. However, in order to put in place the above-mentioned necessary reforms, it is necessary to have the coordinated action of the international community, taking into account the basic common denominator, that partial changes bring with them solutions that affect the whole region. It is certainly not possible to introduce a new model in one package of solutions. However, past reform solutions in the region were also set as a broader common goal, followed by successive individual operational steps. If we look at the region from the perspective of the post-war period, we see that progress was made. There are many debates within the international community regarding the reasons why similar efforts in rule of law, public administration reform, civil society/youth support, environmental and infrastructure reconstruction, etc. in last twenty years failed to effect change. What is very often overlooked by many experts and is at the same time very important for understanding the situation is that the war has caused great human, social, material and environmental damage. The consequences are still not being alleviated, much less

eliminated. Many people were killed during the war, and many more emigrated from the region. There is simply a lack of life potential in the form of a larger number of creative people. This is why many people think that nothing works and that changes in the region are impossible. Such comprehensive reforms as the new model in our research requires a longer period of time and can only be achieved by people who live in the region.

Conclusions

At the level of the international community, a basic mechanism of reform for the Western Balkans region is needed. Without it, any good initiatives are condemned to long-term difficulties. This has already been demonstrated by the experience so far. It is not easy to draw up a feasible plan of how to get real structural reforms started with an international paternalistic attitude towards the region. Democracy is the basis and everything else is built on top of it. A legal and social state, open borders for people, the economy, culture, transport and knowledge can be those common denominators needed to start a new cycle of attempts for change. EU membership is certainly in the wider interest of the entire Western Balkans, but the attitude of all EU countries to the region itself is ambiguous. Accession conditions, negotiations and entry modes are a refined mechanism developed by the EU. The EU has already completed the accession of a larger number of countries at once in 2004 with 10 countries and at the administrative and operational level it has experience and knowledge as far as this is concerned. In particular, there is no political will and the crisis and conflicts especially at the EU's borders are causing discomfort to its citizens, which is why no EU policy wants to promise quick negotiations for membership and even less to determine the indicative entry dates. This is stressful for the candidate countries and without a clear future, people are leaving the region, especially those who are most capable and who should be the bearers of future progress. This is why reforms need to be implemented today and now. In any event, both the region and the international community can do a lot of different things up to the point when the will, the readiness and consensus for EU accession policy will be found.

Regional integration is a very important part of the content for the necessary reforms in our new approach for long-term stability. Areas of development are infrastructure; trade, economy, tourism and investments; education, science, research and environment; institutional renovation; culture and sports. International financial institutions for development and EU regional development programmes can provide direct support for improvement through technical assistance, expert's platforms and consulting. The essence of the new model is to achieve the functioning of the rule of law, the modernisation of the public administration, the unification of the business environment with fiscal policy and supervisory institutions, to open up and protect the competitiveness of the workforce, to establish functioning social, health and pension systems and create conditions for the functioning of civil society. All these reform processes can be reached with existing international and EU programmes for the region in the framework of technical assistance and local offices of international institutions to assist countries. A proactive and dynamic development of relations at the level of the international community needs to be created. The security concept for the Western Balkans must become a plan for the whole of Europe and the wider international community as part of the stability of the wider region.

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