

# THE BALKAN CRISIS 1999: A YEAR AFTER

## I. The Aftermath of the Kosovo Crisis: Problems and Consequences

### 1. Security

**Ethnic Conflict.** The NATO operation in the spring of 1999 has substantially reduced the dangers of a large scale organized ethnic cleansing or other forms of intense violence, initiated by the Belgrade regime. Even if particular danger for the stability of Macedonia and the democratization process in Montenegro on behalf of Belgrade persists, the Milosevic regime is a regional factor, kept under control.

The basic source of ethnic conflict in the region after the crisis in 1999 is the revitalized and victorious Albanian nationalism, in particular – on the territory of Kosovo. The nationalist radicalism of the Kosovo Albanians (represented mainly, but not only by the KLA) has basically the same origin and contents as the radical Serb nationalism, which has initiated the last crisis in Kosovo. Both those nationalisms are completely intolerant, hostile to the representatives of other ethnic groups and overwhelmed by the idea of “national greatness”. In the environment of complete de-institutionalization of Kosovo after the NATO victory, followed by weak and ineffective UN administration, the nationalist organizations of the Kosovo Albanians have implemented large scale ethnic cleansing and organized revenge upon the diminishing Serb minority in the disputed region. The purpose of the cleansing is publicly defined as “ethnically homogeneous Kosovo”. Together with the representatives of the Serb community, all evidences of Serbian legacy on the territory of Kosovo – churches, monasteries, historical monuments – are subject of demolition.

The rise of radical Albanian nationalism, counting on “the NATO allies” might prove dangerous for the ethnic stability of all countries and regions with Albanian communities – Macedonia, Montenegro, Southern Serbia – in the near future.

Measures to contain and channel Albanian ethnic radicalism on behalf of the international community will prove crucial to the mid-term and long-term stabilization of the Balkan region.

Further efforts should be paid to transform the long-term and continuing practices of Serb nationalism to oppress the ethnic communities of Hungarians, Bulgarians and Albanians on the territory of Serbia. Those efforts should be considered an inseparable part of the democratization process of Serbia in the post-Milosevic era.

The delayed process of SEE regional reconstruction after the Kosovo crisis builds up pressure around the devastating economic and social status of the Roma communities throughout the Balkan region. The Roma of Kosovo, who remain the only completely displaced community as a consequence of the crisis, have received particular unjust treatment.

**Organized crime.** Several factors have contributed throughout the 1990s for its explosive development. **First**, the collapse of the communist regimes has left an environment of institutional vacuum, where illegal – clan based and mafia based – economic activities have flourished. **Second**, the long-term embargo over rump-Yugoslavia in the 1990s has created the most favourable conditions for organized smuggling of commodities, mass scale corruption and violation of the embargo rules throughout the countries in the region. **Third**, the development of the KLA as an armed instrument of Albanian resistance in Kosovo has employed all available forms of money making for the purpose of arms purchase – drugs trafficking, weapons smuggling, illegal trade of all other varieties. Powerful international mafia syndicates have been involved in the process. The criminal networks are built and reproduced on the basic structure of Albanian Kosovo society – the clans and the extended families.

The organized crime is not simply a challenge to the law-and-order system, which the international community is willing to develop in Kosovo. It is the basic obstacle – social and cultural – to the development of all initial institutions of modern society: the free market, the representative democracy, the legal guarantees for the citizen's immunity and freedom. Combined with the decent strategies of SEE economic integration, customs union and free trade, the organized crime may develop as the major factor, exercising power and influence – economic and political – on the Balkans.

The Stability Pact initiative may paradoxically strengthen the grip of the organized crime over the crisis-stricken parts of SEE. Major humanitarian and developmental initiatives are planned within the Pact, with no preliminary framework of institutional responsibility on the recipient side discussed. Are countries and regions as Kosovo, Bosnia or Albania ready to

host and properly utilize an international assistance program? The experience of the last year undoubtedly shows that big shares of the international humanitarian aid have been misappropriated and resold on the local markets.

**Sanitary Belt Around Belgrade and Kosovo.** The NATO campaign was designed to stop ethnic violence and to speedily remove the basic source of ethnic conflict and instability in the region – the regime in Belgrade. Even if the mass scale violence has been restricted, the source of the conflict remains. All forecasts to remove Milosevic in short term with the united effort of the international community and the Belgrade opposition proved illusory. This status quo has substantively changed the security agenda of SEE in the aftermath of the crisis. The original plan to speed up the Balkan region integration into the security system of the Euro-Atlantic community had to give way to a temporary alternative security arrangement – sanitary belt around Belgrade.

Aiming to isolate the Milosevic regime, the international community has re-imposed a package of sanctions upon Belgrade, heavily influencing the processes of commerce and investment in the region. All major trade routes on surface, plus the Danube River water way are cut off. The potential civil conflict in Serbia, the mounting crisis between Serbia and Montenegro, the growing potential of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo and the neighbouring countries and regions – the combination of all those tendencies does not encourage independent investment and entrepreneurial activities in the troubled region.

The countries, surrounding the crisis-stricken zone – Serbia and its regime, and Kosovo – are serving as a belt of ‘sanitation’ and ‘isolation’ of the crisis nucleus from the rest of Europe. This is a painful service, especially for the fact that all those countries suffer their own deal of post-communist crises and challenges. The combination of regionally rising organized crime, institutional disintegration and administrative chaos in the crisis region, the risk of further ethnic conflict and nationalist escalation, the sanctions on the Belgrade regime, and the consequences of all those factors over the region’s economy represents the essence of the sanitary belt effects upon the Balkan region in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis.

**The Belgrade Regime as the Major Instability Factor.** Neither one of the above listed challenges to the Balkan regional security could be properly addressed and resolved, unless the Milosevic regime is removed and the Serbian democratic process gains momentum.

The regime in Belgrade had restricted resources to influence the security situation in the region in the last year, compared to the situation throughout the 1990s. Still, Belgrade could seriously endanger and resist the democratic process in Montenegro and indirectly influence the political process in Macedonia. Milosevic enjoyed stable control over Serbia and the democratic opposition in the country could unite for stronger action against the regime only for short periods of time and on concrete purpose – meetings, demonstrations etc.

An overall assessment of the Belgrade regime shows its relatively preserved ability to resist change, but a steadily decreasing potential to cause major regional crisis or other forms of spilling over instability outside Serbia. Nevertheless, the resources of the Belgrade regime to provoke and stand radical forms of civil conflict in Serbia, especially if its power is seriously endangered should not be underestimated.

## **2. Reconstruction and Development**

The **Stability Pact** for SEE, initiated last June by the European Union and the US, with the participation of the OSCE and Russia represents a framework strategy to assist a process of recovery and development of SEE in all major fields of public life:

- in strengthening democratic institutions and interethnic tolerance;
- in economic development and in particular – infrastructure improvement;
- in developing a sustainable security system, representing part of the European security framework;

The Stability Pact remained inactive most of the time throughout the year after the Kosovo crisis. The bureaucratic helplessness of the Brussels organizers contributed substantially to this poor record. The major reason of this inefficiency, though was the unfavourable environment for any peace plan implementation in the troubled zone. The complete institutional disintegration in Kosovo, the preserved regime in Belgrade, the sanitary belt effect over the entire ring of neighbouring countries has jeopardized the opportunities to speed up recovery in the region.

The **donors' conference** of the Stability Pact, held in late March (another one is expected in late May) has marked the first successful effort to proceed with the Pact's implementation. About 25 urgent and more than 50 mid-term projects have been endorsed in a package of about \$ 3.5 billion. The initial financial framework planned for a period of 5 years has been \$ 10.5 billion. The democratic process in Serbia is expected to release the larger part of this entire package.

**Bulgaria and Romania** have been invited to start a negotiating process for EU membership in December in Helsinki. Both countries have been awarded for their determination to proceed with the painful economic transition in an unfavourable regional environment, as well as for their support for the NATO action in Yugoslavia. Another package of 5.5 billion Euro is considered for the both countries development to cover the membership criteria.

## **II. Strategic Priorities for mid-term development of the Balkan reconstruction process. The lessons for the international community in the upcoming global world.**

**1. Institution building.** There is no reason in pouring any sum of money into recovery or development projects in SEE before minimal standards of institutional performance are being covered. This principle refers both to the local democratic and public administrative institutions and to the international (UN, EU and NATO) administrations in the region. The capacity of effective functioning is the substance missing to a large extent from all public administrative systems in the region. The international administrations need a speedy process of adjustment to the priorities of the protected regions. The NATO troops could not serve as policemen, and the UN administrations should not serve as a group of observers, but as a system of administrative actors. The examples of Bosnia and Kosovo could well serve as case studies to structure the priorities of any international aid program or peace-keeping mission. Institutions should always come before the money and the physical reconstruction in a post-crisis situation.

**2. Individual Human Rights Defence.** There is a general fault in the attitude of the most international institutions and public opinion towards the human rights issues in regions

like the Balkans. The first priority of human rights advocated is the respect towards “minority rights”. Minorities – as all ethnic groups – in a traditional society are communities, most often governed by authoritarian kinship-clan elites. Defending their rights before having guaranteed the individual rights of citizens’ equality and respect to personal freedoms, initiates a process of primitive and brutal corporate competition among those authoritarian communal elites, aiming at more and more privilege and sovereignty for smaller and smaller communities. There are no rights out of the stable network of responsible liberal-democratic institutions and practices. They represent the guarantees for the initial - the citizens’ – human rights, and all collective – minority or majority – communal rights are built as a second level of the democratic institutions functioning. Advocating ethnic group rights in an environment of liberal-democratic vacuum is a primary prescription for disaster.

**3. Self-Determination and Change of Borders.** The uneasy debate about the future of Kosovo is clear evidence that both options – self-determination or preservation of borders at any price might not work in a process of an international crisis of the Balkan type for quite a long period of time. No one could return Kosovo back to Serbia – even if Belgrade is governed by democrats. Neither it is reasonable to declare Kosovo independent in the particular environment of chaos, crime and lack of institutional perspective, in a situation of growing Greater Albania nationalism. Evidently, such crises will require longer periods of time – years or decades – when the legal status of sovereignty will be replaced with the protectorate formula. Even if de-legitimized by the decolonization process after the WWII, protectorates under the auspices of the international community seem to be the only answer to the self-determination – sovereignty dilemma. This is a very expensive answer. This is why the international community has to decide whether to pay the price before deciding to intervene in particular crisis region or situation.

**4. Economic Sanctions and Economic Development.** Serbia is severely punished by the international sanctions, but the neighbours of Serbia are punished for no guilt too. Summing up the results of 7 years international sanctions over Belgrade could give enough arguments for both the supporters and the opponents of such an international instrument. Nevertheless, large share of the corruption, the institutional and economic destruction, the mafia economics in SEE represents a primary consequence of the economic sanction over Belgrade. Even if

used, such measures need much more sophisticated instruments of implementation to prevent the vast damage over much broader regions.

**5. Conflict Prevention and Security System for SEE.** A substantial share of the conflict potential in the post-Yugoslav space could be avoided if the international community has employed much more restricted, but decisive measures to contain and isolate phenomena like the Milosevic regime, nationalist radicalism and organized crime. One basic tool to act in effective prevention is to use the potential of the democratic nations and institutions in the conflict-stricken region as basic **donors** and not mere **recipients** of security and stability. In the case of the Balkans this principle could be reasonably implemented through fast accession of the established democracies of the region into NATO. This could be the safest and the most effective operation NATO could afford to pacify SEE and turn the region into an integral part of united Europe.