

BETWEEN OLD TIES AND NEW CHALLENGES: SLOVENIAN POLICY TOWARDS CRISIS SITUATION IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the twentieth century in the South-Eastern Europe is marked by presence of multinational peace-keeping forces, partly situated in Kosovo (UNMJK, KFOR), partly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH, SFOR), as also at the border between Croatia and Montenegro, *Prevlaka* horn. Ten years ago, the multinational (intra Yugoslav) police units came to the end of the stabilisation mission at Kosovo. In between, in past ten years, there was a war on the territories of nearly the whole former Yugoslavia: in Slovenia (1991), in Croatia (1991-1995), in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), Kosovo (1998-1999), in Serbia and Montenegro (1999). The sole exception was Macedonia, although it was also affected by the turmoil at its borders (with Serbia and Albania) and in its neighbourhood. Some experts would argue if these events constituted one war? The situation in practice would support the notion of different wars having been stopped by different peace accords. All mentioned events constituted the disintegration of second Yugoslavia, the state that was formed during Second World War (1943) as the partisan movement answer to the occupation from fascist and Nazis troops.

In Western countries, more in the USA than in Western Europe, these events were usually defined as a *Balkan War*. *Todorova* is asking, why does the war need to be Balkan, if the Spanish civil war was Spanish, not Iberian, and the Greek civil war was never Balkan (*Todorova*, 1997: 186). In past ten years, the crisis began “in former Yugoslavia“, during the war in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina it was determined as Balkan crisis, and finished as crisis in South-Eastern Europe. This is the way in which international community generalised the most dangerous and bloody regional European conflicts in past ten years.

Slovenia, a republic that formed second Yugoslavia together with 5 other socialist republics, followed the same pattern of describing the situation in the region. When Slovenia was attacked by troops of Yugoslav Peoples Army (on 25-26 June, 1991), the Slovenes would call it as “*Yugoslav army occupation*”. When the clashes have moved on to Croatia in autumn 1991, there was “the Balkan War”. The NATO’s air campaign against Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 happened to “Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro”.

The analysis of media and political leaders’ messages in Slovenia would show how reluctant they are towards two notions: Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Yugoslavia is the term, reserved for the historical states of which Slovenia was an important constitutional part. The Balkans is a geopolitical metaphor¹, in Slovenia understood as the region on the edge of Europe, territorially within Europe, but not part of its civilisation. The turmoil of the Balkans is contrasted with the European zone of peace. The Balkans security identity card in twentieth century, as described by *Aćimović* (1997:128:129), would serve as approval that the unanimous decision of Slovenian population to declare independence in 1991 was correct.

¹ It is an abstract symbol of violence, instability, corruption, aggression, militarisation, negative nationalism and brutality (Jelušić in Ma lešič 2000: 88).

The Kosovo phase of the Balkan war brought about a new category – South-Eastern Europe. South-Eastern Europe became a geographic alternative to the Balkans, which helped Slovenia to become increasingly more engaged in the region than in past ten years.

The main objective of this paper is to depict where and how Slovenia is approaching the problems of the Yugoslavia's successor states. As the word "Yugoslavia" is connected with the common past and with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as the term the "Balkans" is still burdened with negative connotation, the only widely accepted term that rests at dispose of the media and politicians is "South-Eastern Europe". The media coverage of recent visits of Slovenian economic delegations to Serbia (end of 2000, be of 2001) would like to instil the notion of "markets of former Yugoslavia" in the Slovenian public, which might show some softening of the clear distinction between us (the Europe) and them (the Balkans) from the past ten years. The mentioned distinction was the result of Slovenian basic foreign policy orientation to fulfil the security and economic interests of the Republic of Slovenia as a Central European and Mediterranean country within Euro-Atlantic structures. Full membership of the Republic of Slovenia in the EU and NATO is, therefore, its basic strategic goal, thus Slovenian politicians would like to show how Slovenia has successfully got rid of the Balkan heritage.

II. RETURN TO THE BALKANS (SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE)

Appearance of Slovenian diplomats, politicians and even scholars in other countries in South-Eastern Europe has been often accompanied by many unpleasant questions and critical judgements related to retained attitude of Republic of Slovenia to South-European region. Even in January 2001, there are some journalists of right wing oriented newspapers who would like to impose the intentions of restoring the old Yugoslavia to the politicians and economic that claimed for better political and economic relations with Belgrade².

Except for the relations with Croatia, which was treated as westward oriented neighbouring state, only a few Politicians have tried to establish some kind of official relationships with Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia, Montenegro, let alone Serbia. According to the results of the Slovenian media coverage of the South-Eastern European region problems, we would conclude that the main turn-around was achieved during the Slovenian non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in the period between January 1998 and December 1999. Why we should point out this period as the most important impetus for Slovenian diplomacy to become more engaged in the South East Europe?

First of all, Slovenian diplomats in New York felt responsible for the ongoing crisis in the Balkans, especially when it became clear that Serbian aggressive policy incarnated in the regime of *Slobodan Milošević* towards the neighbouring countries focused more on the Kosovo as part of Serbia, and on Montenegro as constitutional part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. During the first Slovenian presidency of the UNSC (August 1998) the Resolution on Kosovo, sponsored by Slovenia, was proposed. At the same time, Slovenia became a kind of tutor and a role model to the Montenegrin aspirations for independence. During the NATO air campaign against FRY, Montenegro received extremely positive outlook in the Slovenian media. It was due to the Montenegrin wide opening of the borders to large number of Kosovar refugees and due to its generosity towards the homeless people.

Second reason, why Slovenia should be more actively oriented towards the South Eastern European region, lies in national security of Slovenia. National security and economic

² Why we left Yugoslavia after all, comments somebody in *Demokracija* (18 January 2001, p.4).

development of Slovenia depends on security, democratic development and economic stability of the countries in the area of South Eastern Europe. Slovenia is still linked to the majority of these countries through some unsolved property issues and issues of succession to the dissolved SFRY. At the same time, this area offers Slovenia new opportunities for economic co-operation. Slovene exports to the countries of South Eastern Europe account for approximately 16% of the total exports, and the imports for about 7% of total imports. The value of annual trade with the countries of South Eastern Europe is approximately USD 2 billion, whereby Slovenia's surplus amounts to around USD 500 million (*Drobnič* 2000). At the end of 2000, it became very clear that the economic relations with the region will grow very fast in near future.

In terms of international status, Slovenia has proved to be a country with stabile and peaceful oriented democracy (being very serious candidate for EU and NATO membership), as also a country with very elaborated feeling for the needs and troubles of the area left behind on the way to "European civilisation". Slovenia is very active donor state in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Within the Stability Pact, Slovenia has so far proposed (or carried out) over 80 economic, scientific and technical, educational, cultural, and other projects. The international community expressed its greatest recognition for Slovenia by appointing it as the leading country and co-ordinator in the field of human rights and minorities (*Drobnič* 2000).

III. SLOVENIA IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS AT THE BALKANS

Slovenia has its police and military troops deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. Three contingents of military police (platoon size) were part of Italian battalion in Multinational Special Unit (MSU) in SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The costs of military police deployment in SFOR are covered by Slovenian military budget. The units of medical support and helicopter transport are also available for SFOR needs. There were also three contingents of military officers deployed in multinational units of KFOR in Kosovo (altogether 18 officers). Fifteen members of civilian police began the one-year term of work in Kosovo as part of UNMIK in November 2000. There are also teachers at the police academy *Vučitrn* coming from Slovenia.

Around 150 members of the Slovenian Army and Slovenian Police have been already experienced in the peace and stability-keeping units at the Balkans. They participated in the peace endeavours of the international community, but as members of the country that historically was a part of common homeland, and because they are able to understand all involved parties, they are well accepted among the local population and respected by other members of peacekeeping units in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. They are appropriately equipped, much better than the units in Slovenia. As Slovenian government has guaranteed to allocate more finances for peacekeeping operations in this part of the world in the following years, the Slovenian presence in the region would show the sincere interest of the country to help by conflict resolution, as also it would serve as the main source of military and police experiences in operations out of area.

Slovenian experts were also members in OSCE missions in this region. At the present time they are working on very important and delicate topic – democratisation of the media. With the co-operation and help offered by OSCE and other international organisations, Slovenia plays an active role in the procedure of education and preparation for bureaucracy, public administration and police.

IV. INTERNATIONAL TRUST FUND – THE BEST SLOVENIAN “EXPORT PRODUCT”

On the field of the defence co-operation Slovenia was a founding country of the Mine clearing foundation, named *International Trust Fund* (ITF). This project started in 1998 when mine clearing activities began on the territory of Croatia. Afterwards the objectives of the ITF moved to BiH and in recent time to Kosovo. ITF collected in only two years more than USD 56.000.000,00. The fund raising for ITF has special condition, connected with the Government of USA. US Government doubles the sum that leaders of the ITF put together from different donor states and institutions. With the help of this money more than 10 millions of sq. metres (7 millions of sq. metres in BiH) of the territory of Croatia, BiH, Kosovo and Albania were cleared and over 5000 mines were destroyed. At the same time, people who were severely injured by different types of mines are offered a possibility for special rehabilitation treatment. 350 mine victims (*Nedeljski Dnevnik*, 3 December 2000) were rehabilitated in the Slovene Institute for Rehabilitation of Mine Victims and 56 victims in rehabilitation centres in BiH. Help to injured people is offered without religious, national or other prejudice. Special attention is offered to the children who were many times innocent casualties of mines lying around. ITF provide all necessary equipment for mine clearing and organise special educational program for local peoples how to use the equipment safely. Slovenia that is alone also a great contributor to the ITF, runs the whole program of mine clearing.

V. THE POLITICS TOWARDS REFUGEES

Republic of Slovenia accepted more than 100,000 refugees from all republics that were part of former Yugoslavia. The greatest flow came from BiH with around 70,000 people in 1992. Over a half of them later moved on, to the West. About 45,000 stayed in Slovenia for several years — with their relatives and friends living in Slovenia from the times before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as well as in refugee centres throughout the country, operated by Slovenian government. The refugees were offered the level of standard that Slovenia could give at that time; there was a lot of help coming from NGOs, especially Red Cross and Caritas, as also coming from foreign countries. At the beginning, children were sent to the schools established inside the refugee centres, because there were a lot of teachers among refugees able to teach young people. Later on, when many of these people moved to other countries or back to Croatia or BiH, Slovenian government decided to incorporate the refugee children in Slovenian education system. Many of them are now students at the University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor. Some of them became integrated and probably permanently settled in Slovenia. The NGO's, like Red Cross and Caritas, are constantly collecting money, used clothes, food. Each September, when new school terms begin, Slovenian primary and secondary schools are sending school necessities to BiH (books, notebooks, pencils).

In 1999, Red Cross and Slovenian media started humanitarian action called *Hand to refugees – Slovenian village*. The initial idea was to build up a village in the Macedonian area with many refugees. After the NATO air strike on FRY, which forced Serb troops to leave Kosovo, many refugees went back to Kosovo, and Slovenian humanitarian action finished with a small village built near *Djakovica*.

Each summer, active members of Caritas and pupils from Ljubljana's Theological Gymnasium go voluntarily to BiH and help local people in everyday life. They are working on restoration of ecclesiastic buildings, which were destructed during the war.

VI. ACADEMIC CO-OPERATION

Academic community of former Yugoslavia was devastated at the beginning of the armed conflict in Slovenia. Slovenian scientists that were engaged in common Yugoslav projects turned to the western scientific community and entered the networks of European Commission or other scientific associations. For some years, the territory of former Yugoslavia was no more the attractive research matter. The scientists from the region moved westward in huge numbers, those who stayed lagged behind because of war devastation and poor budget of their war-occupied countries.

Some defence and military analysts, like *Anton Bebler* and *Anton Žabkar* (both from University of Ljubljana), worked continuously on the analysis of the Balkan conflicts. They published numerous articles and kept the presence of the Balkan war alive in the Slovenian and world social sciences. Slovenian Faculty of Social Sciences (Defence Studies Division) focused upon the analysis of media warfare (*Marjan Malešič* and international security aspect (*Anton Grizold*) of the Balkan war. Despite the officially broken bonds of former Yugoslavia, it continued to cooperate with some experts on defence matters from Zagreb Faculty of Political Sciences, among whom *Radovan Vukadinović* and *Siniša Tatalović* influenced significantly the polemological overview of the war in Croatia.

There was also a link established between Slovenian Defence Studies Division and Institute of Defence, University of Skopje, Faculty of Philosophy, through which the Macedonian defence analysts as *Biljana Vankovska*, *Zoran Nacev* and *Anastas Lakoski* presented Macedonian understanding of the Balkan crisis. Looking at this newly established scientific community in which scientists from Skopje, Zagreb and Ljubljana have put together the efforts to explain the roots and consequences of the Balkan war, we should notice that all of them belong to defence studies departments. These education branches were established 25 years ago at five different university centers in former Yugoslavia (Ljubljana, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Skopje) in order to educate civilian experts for defence system. Although their initial focus was on the national security systems of their respected republics, the common scientific network showed the elaborated expertise in military, polemological and defence analyses of the contemporary world conflicts. The network might serve to re-establish or further develop the conflict resolution and peace management studies in the South Eastern Europe.

VII. CONCLUSION

The process of co-operation inside the region of former Yugoslav republics, if not the whole Balkan region or even the region of South Eastern Europe would foster the sincere wish of the Yugoslav successor states to contribute to stability in the region and in Europe as a whole. There is a hope that they would gradually enter the European Union, the goal that was a leading star of the former Yugoslavia's government just before the war broke out. It will need a lot of years, much more than it would if Yugoslavia would democratise itself when the Cold War was over, if its nations would be able to stop the aggressiveness of the Serb nationalists under *Slobodan Milošević* if it would be able to reorganise its Armed Forces before they became a threat to itself. Unfortunately, all mentioned preconditions needed the period of ten years and a war with thousands of death and millions of displaced persons in order to be fulfilled.

Looking back to the beginning of the nineties there was no actor inside the former Yugoslavia able to force such reorganisation. Except international community! As many times in the history of the Balkans, the evil and good were initiated and brought in from outside the region. This is again an indicator of highly deficient cultural, economic and

political cohesion of the Balkans. The Balkans has proved the well earned reputation of troublemaker. After World War Two, the Yugoslav state, within the Balkan region and generally perceived as being in eastern Europe, sought to overcome the historical legacy of the Balkans by constructing a supranational civil identity – non-aligned Yugoslavia. Yugoslav identity collapsed in 1991 and *balkanisation* returned. The war that followed was fought in “the Balkans” and was a historical repetition of the Balkan wars from the beginning of the century. Cohen once stated: “The twentieth century began, and seems destined to end, with the major South Slav ethnic groups divided among separate Balkan states. Whether such division is a tragedy or a blessing depends on one’s vantage point.” (Cohen, 1995: xvii)

Slovenia projects stability and prosperity into the conflict region. Its diplomatic, economic, military, police and academic ties with countries in the region, its presence in multilateral efforts to stabilise the region, and its preparedness to act as a part of international community when bringing the initiatives for co-operation to South-Eastern Europe, would help to generate the positive experiences and desirable arrangements. Comparable efforts of all Yugoslav successor states would maybe avoid the danger of a vicious circle of dependency on the presence of foreign peace-keepers. We hope that South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans will overcome its centuries old distinction as the most volatile and troublesome part of the European continent in 21st century, and generations that are coming would face the durable and prospectus peace.

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Other:

- Presentation: International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance.
6. International Explosive Ordnance Disposal Conference.