

## Introduction

Time and space dimensions have different meaning in the Balkans. During just one year (May 2000 to May 2001) this statement has been proven in the case of the main activity organised by the PfP Consortium Working Group on Crisis Management in SEE. At the last Working Group's meeting in Reichenau the idea on organising an international conference was born. The idea was fully supported at the PfP Consortium meeting in Tallinn and eventually realised in Ohrid, Macedonia. The scholar conference under the title "Ten Years After: Democratisation and Security Challenges in SEE" (27-29 October, 2000) without false modesty can be seen as one of the best events organised under the auspices of the PfP Consortium between two annual meetings.

The conference was co-organised by the Working Group on Crisis Management and Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Skopje (Macedonia), which Institute of Defence was celebrating its 25th anniversary. It brought together around 100 participants, out of whose around 50 scholars had a role of paper presenters and panel moderators. Prior to the conference there had been some sceptical views on the effect of participation of such a big number of participants, but since the very beginning of the event all doubts vanished. The reasons were manifold: first, there had been obvious (and probably, a decade-long) need to get together scholars from the region; second, the dramatic developments in the past decade called for comprehensive re-consideration and evaluation; third, in the eve of the conference another historical event with long-term consequences happened (i.e. fall of Slobodan Milosevic and his regime in FR Yugoslavia). One of the main qualities of the Ohrid conference was its success in bringing on the same table many distinguished scholars from the US, Western Europe, Russia (and CIS) and, what is most important – from all the countries in SEE. Maybe not visible on the surface, but the conference also consisted of representatives of different 'schools', from the security and peace academic communities, as well as scholars, professors, public persons, NGO representatives and journalists. Not surprisingly, the debates were often not only interesting and lively but also dissonant. As a result, all presentations were highly sincere, deep and with high quality of arguments. The conference turned out to be more than a nice time; our conference became a challenging and creative meeting place, even more so than the organisers had hoped.

From today's perspective the Ohrid conference deserves another careful retrospection. The collection of presented papers is the best proof of the seriousness and the big efforts invested in this event. Nevertheless, the developments that have marked the period of one year since the decision to organise such a conference was made – call for one more analysis of the real meaning of time and space in the region considered. Namely, at the time when the decision on undertaking such an ambitious activity was made, nobody could predict the dramatic events in Yugoslavia. The conference was, therefore, held under a visible excitement among the scholars and analysts for the expected positive developments in the region. Thus, the paradigm 'ten years after' changed into 'SEE after Milošević'. The optimistic atmosphere was additionally strengthened because of the Skopje Summit of the heads of states of SEE countries that had happened just a day before the opening of the Ohrid conference.

Indeed a dialogue turned out to be what we badly needed because of a decade of turmoil, ruined bridges, and ceased personal, institutional and academic communication and co-operation in the Balkans. However, this meeting should also be seen as an extraordinary opportunity for

promotion of another dimension of the dialogue – between the SEE and the Western academic communities. For almost a decade there has been no dialogue but only one-way communication coming from the Western academic and political community to the Balkans. Democratic and security models and, especially human rights concepts were ‘exported’ from the West, the SEE scholars and politicians seemed to welcome these ideas – but the real achievements were lacking.

The lack of a critical thinking about the process of democratisation, conflict resolution and human rights implementation was equally present in the West and in the Balkans. The failure of the West to democratise the Balkans and the obvious conflict mismanagement in the region call for an explanation. On the other hand, in the last horrible decade the Balkans have learnt many difficult and painful lessons and seems to be ready to open the process of recovery and reconciliation. Only joint efforts of two equal partners (i.e. the Western and the Balkan institutions/academic communities that are embraced by the PfP Consortium) seem to be the right approach in giving the right impetus to the new prospects in the troublesome region.

The starting point of the Ohrid conference was that the issues of democratisation, human rights and regional security in SEE go right into the heart of the problem but, at the same time, are some of the most explored and often most oversimplified topics of the academic and political discourse. The so-called democratic transition in the Yugoslav successor states started in the most unusual way – by misuse of democratic rhetoric and principles for most retrograde purposes. ‘Democracy’ helped the hard-liners and worse nationalists all over former Yugoslavia to get in power in a legal way and even by mass popular support in 1990. The deep-rooted and long-lasting Yugoslav crisis culminated into an inevitable loss of legitimacy of the communist elites (both federal and republican ones). The vacuum was de facto fulfilled by nationalist ideology and practice although nationalist elites took advantage of the newly declared democratic postulates (such as multi-party system, free elections, etc.).

The worst abuse was made on expense of human rights, which in the political agendas were defined as collective rights (i.e. rights of by then ‘deprived and discriminated’ nations). Newly established regimes were not so much anti-democratic as “a-democratic”. New rulers came to power with two slogans emblazoned on the banners. One read “Democracy,” while the other demanded “Justice for the People”. Undoubtedly, nationalists had no democratic credentials, and no plans to deepen democracy once they came to power. Instead, their emphasis was on the claims of nationhood. Political opposition as well as ordinary citizens who dared to question the regime and its actions were labelled traitors, international spies, foes of their country and its independence.

The scene for forthcoming wars/conflicts was set up with almost no resistance. Long time ago, Alexis de Tocqueville warned that the most dangerous period for a bad government is the moment it gets better. The moment when the ancient regime is not being dismantled completely but the control mechanisms are being made so loose and ineffective is perfect for setting the stage for various kinds of societal, political and economic deviations.

The relationship between nascent democracy and ethnic conflict is not a straightforward one. Truly, democratisation has a potential to help mitigate ethnic conflict. But, the potential can hardly be activated as the transition towards democracy produces a fertile ground for ethnic hatred, animosity and political demands of the internal and external power-thirsty political forces and leaders. Especially in the case of former Yugoslavia, ethnic mobilisation was made in the name of multi-party democracy.

War by definition is a negation of the very essence of human rights and individualism. Former Yugoslavia's dissolution was made in the name of collective rights i.e. belonging to one's own nation and self-determination. False patriotism and self-sacrifice were promoted as the most appreciated values. In the concept of the *people-victim* is the basis for the belief that individualistic values have no meaning because the individual life is completely subordinated to the community and its mission. Collective martyrdom to the cause of the preservation of the state/nation is the highest value, while self-sacrifice becomes a behavioural stereotype. Ethno-nationalism produces intolerance and animosity towards the other nations, but also leads toward deprivation of human rights and freedoms even for the members of one's own nation.

The records are not more favourable even in the countries that did not suffer from these conflicts. The poor results of the democratisation process and a long list of violations of human rights are also typical for the 'peaceful' states, such as Macedonia and/or Albania. All reports and findings of the international and domestic monitoring missions and organisations indicate continuous electoral manipulations (and even violence), police forces abuses, politically dependent judiciary, etc. Although the roots of the problems and obstacles for democratisation are of mainly internal character (i.e. are deeply embedded in the respective societies) partly these infamous records are a consequence of the regional interdependence and spilling over effects of the general crisis in the Balkans.

Having proved unable to cope with the conflict situations in a peaceful manner, the Yugoslav successor states (which is also true for Albania) became a scene of a decade-long presence and interference of the international community. In that sense the external influence (both positive and negative) has become a very important determinant of all significant developments and processes in the region. The effects of this unique external policies regarding the former Yugoslav republics can be seen through two main dimensions i.e. conflict resolution endeavours and political/economic impetus. Both efforts have been ambiguous, unprincipled, changeable and even in some cases hypocritical. The international actors (such as OSCE, EU, NATO, and USA) have not defined it yet what is the goal and what are the means how to achieve it. The dilemma security vs. stability is still hanging over the Balkans due to the disagreement and misconception among the international agents as well as among the regional ones regarding the most crucial point – what is the precondition and what is the final goal. The conflict managers who have been able just to 'fix' things in the short run, never addressed the roots of the conflicts and finally – a decade later - the only result is what can be called conflict mismanagement. None of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia has been resolved and many other potential flash points have emerged. Nevertheless, there is lot of 'peace business' for all kinds of international, governmental and NGO missions in the region. That is a guarantee that they will stay there for years to come but there is no guarantee for the prospects of the region.

'West' and 'democracy' have been the most often mentioned paradigms in the Balkans throughout the 90s, although the reality was negation of all promoted ideas. The democratic West is perceived like the 'Promised Land' – the place where all misfortunes end and the bright future begins. The irresistible attractiveness of this illusion has served as a strong stimulus – until certain degree. The countries and people from the 'grey zone' have lost all hopes to re-build the region and their own home yards but instead have turned towards the unreachable West. Life has become a hyper real – full of expectations, false self-perception and unrealistic hopes, at least, for the unhappy citizens. The elites could only benefit from such a self-deception.

Given the disastrous results of human rights and democratic reforms in the SEE countries, regional stabilisation is usually defined as a big challenge both for the domestic actors and the

international community. Obviously even the bare definition of the goal is made in a problematic way. It is very questionable whether the priority in the region is its stability or its security. What comes first? Stabilisation of the region is perceived as a minimal goal, or better a situation in which the conflicts will cease and the reconstruction of the region will start. Even this minimal expectation does not necessarily mean that people will feel more secure and the human rights and freedoms will be better promoted and realised. Stabilisation without (human) security may be preservation of the tragic *status quo*.

Stabilisation in the Balkans can mean only security for the state(s) but does not include human security i.e. security of the individual citizen. The right to life and liberty together with the right to security of persons are defined as fundamental human rights according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is believed that human security can be achieved only through a global political culture based on genuinely shared values, particularly those of human dignity and human rights. The citizens of the majority of the SEE countries are victims of their own political immaturity i.e. of the governments they (very often) freely elect. At the same time, due to the unprincipled behaviour of the 'international community' which uses double standards in defining human rights values and 'global' culture, their feeling of insecurity often comes from the very advocates of human rights and 'exporters' of democracy.

After a decade of intra-state (and/or inter-state) conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia, these societies need economic re-construction, institution-building, but also a change in the mental state of affairs. At the moment, the shortage of fresh financial investments and the loud silence over the conflict reconciliation issues do not give much hope that human rights and democratisation endeavours will give positive and fast results. On this territory there have been deployed and engaged the biggest number of peace support missions, peace-workers, NGOs and governmental organisations '*per capita*'. Yet in some regions (Kosovo) the mass violations of human rights, forced migrations and executions are happening in front of the eyes of the entire 'international community'.

As temples of knowledge, human dignity and prosperity, academic institutions and research institutes are expected to give expertise and even to warn politicians on their activities. The Western academia has built a lot of analyses, studies, projects and degrees over the tragic experience of the former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, so far, the advice coming from the West has been one-sided in terms of disrespect for the local expertise and knowledge and in terms of picturing 'black&white' situations and solutions. The possible conclusion may be that each academia (in the West and in the region) have lot of things to do in its own 'yards' i.e. the promotion of (both negative and positive) peace begins in one's own society and only then - on a basis of equal co-operation - it can be re-directed outward. The SEE institutions still need support and expertise from abroad, but first of all they all have to finish their own homework in terms of defining their independence and relationship with the current regimes.

The memories from the conference were still vivid when the new wave of Balkan crisis occurred exactly in the country that had been the host. The question that can be rightly posed is: was the Macedonian conflict difficult to predict? From a point of view of the future activities of the Working Group on Crisis Management (and the PfP Consortium itself), there is even more important issue: what is the purpose of the meetings of the experts and scholars at such gatherings, and what should and could be done in order to promote peaceful conflict resolution?

Many issues are open and even more are pending, but one thing is clear: the existence and active engagement of this very Consortium Working Group is of utmost importance. The focus

of its activities and more importantly its purpose are not (and must not be) purely academic. Scholarship has far more important mission in this case – it is expected to deal with real human destinies, sufferings, fears and hopes. Occasionally, scholars and experts should meet and exchange their findings, but in the rest of their engagement they must be involved in field research, must be present there where they are needed, and must offer concrete assistance. Finally, looking forward to the future activities of our Working Group, let's recall wise Gandhi's messages about some of the most renounced human sins:

- Knowledge without character
- Science without humanity
- Worship without sacrifice
- Politics without principles.

Prof. Dr. Biljana Vankovska  
Head of Institute of Defence, Faculty of Philosophy  
University of Skopje, Macedonia