4. Balancing Security and Region-Building Information about Southeast Europe

I   Introduction

The aim of this short paper is to reach a broad range of "information masters and servants", producing or utilising information on Southeast European (SEE) affairs — official decision-makers, including, defence analysts, intelligence sources, diplomats and politicians; media and NGO representatives; internet information users and providers; and last but not least — the academic community of researchers, lecturers and students dealing with this region.

The reason of targeting such a broad audience sterns from the understanding of how important the particular Balkan situation is today for different decision-making processes, and from the need of improving the cognitional element of the perceptions about Southeast Europe on which longer-term psychological inclinations arc based. Both reasons have a direct impact on the knowledge formation of the region of Southeast Europe.

Addressing these issues to the Working Group on Crisis Management in SEE is motivated furthermore by the need to improve the structure of the information management in the field of security in the Balkans. On several occasions during the last century, including the last decade, there was a tendency to shape the notion of the invariant nature of the conflicts and crises in the Balkans or Southeast Europe. Lt is hard to disagree that crisis management in Southeast Europe is and will continue to be a viable academic and practical undertaking for many people, because it is needed for coping with dramatic and tragic social events in this region. However, the longer-term political and strategic objective of the majority of the interested countries in and out of the region of SEE is the reduction of the causes, leading to the application of the crisis-management tools. This prospect is directly linked to the transformation of the Balkans into a normal and compatible European region. For years to come the security information of the Balkans will remain an inevitable part of our life. But the future, whose prerequisites are shaped today, is linked with the social practices of region building. That is why the definition of the appropriate balance of information on security and region-building in SEE in each particular situation is a significant component of the general information management process in the field of security policy in this region.

II   Basic Presumptions of the Research Report

The improvement of the information management structure in the field of security policy in SEE may be carried out along three lines that also determine the logic of this paper:

First, both information and perception influence the knowledge, the decisions and the activities based upon them.[1] That is why perceptions of the Balkans should assume a more sophisticated contents, that would reflect the richness of factors determining the regional social, political and security developments. This is crucial in preventing information delivery or perception attacks transformed into miscalculations about strategy, concrete decision or into an incorrect cognition. Situational awareness, experienced by the people engaged with the Balkans necessitates a comprehensive and encompassing picture rather than certain

---

[1] See more in: Henrik Friman. Perception Warfare: a Concept for the Future. in: J. M. J. Bosch, H. A. M. Luiijf and A. R Mollema (eds.). "Information Operations", NLARMS 1999. Breda. p. 13-19.

outlines. And what has happened with the SEE region in the last decade was that it was identified with former Yugoslavia. The term "Western Balkans" correctly differentiates the zone with predominantly security-flowing information from the rest of the region, dominated by region-building information. The challenge for the observer and for the "doer" is to sense the post-conflict reconstruction developments in the Western zone and the security risks in the non-western part of the Balkan peninsula while reflecting Southeast Europe in its thoroughness.

Second, the information management in the field of security policy in SEE may be facilitated through a better balance of security and region-building information, a mid-to-longer term breaking of the mental and practical vicious cycle of conflict-hostile perception-threatening behaviour traditional for the Balkans and a more intense conflict.[2]

The "region-building" ingredient of the information and the perception of Southeast Europe may be a practical instrument of introducing a different perspective of the security developments in the Balkans. Drawing the vicious cycle in greater details may look like this: conflict => hostile perception => threatening behaviour => more hatred => acts of cruelty => acts of revenge => a more intense, even violent conflict. The key question is how to switch from a threatening to a more conciliatory behaviour. A recent step in the right direction in Kosovo, for example, has been the adoption of new rules by the Interim Administrative Council (IAC), governing hateful speech on Kosovo's broadcast media, though no corresponding rules exist for print media. A similar, but much broader and with multiple follow-ups was the beginning of the improvement of Greek-Turkish relations. Our concept is that the change of behaviour from a threatening type to a conciliatory one (including the so much needed historical reconciliations and rapprochements in the Balkans) is linked to presenting and proving there are more options for all – not in the field of conflicting attitudes, but in the area of constructive efforts. This holds true both for the bottom-up regional developments and for the top-down ones, i.e. for the relations inside the Southeast European region and for the relations of external for the region countries with the Balkan peoples. The concept is valid both from the perspective of improving the negotiation-management tools for Southeast European cases and from the sociological perspective of exerting an effort towards coping with the retarded modernisation of the region in comparison to other European regions in terms of economy, technology, infrastructure, social and human standards, political culture. The first perspective would mean introducing a broader range of positive incentives in handling the various and complicated conflict situations. The second one shows the way of making a breakthrough in the historical evolution of the region towards a compatible and needed part of the rest of Europe.

Third, the balance of the information on security and region-building issues of Southeast Europe is a significant aspect of the improvement of information management in the field of security policy in the region because it reflects the two dominating historical developments of the Balkans today: a) coping with its various hot and potential conflicts and, b) overcoming the region's belated modernisation.[3]

---

[2] See also about this issue in: P. Terrence Hopmann, The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts. University of South Carolina Press. Columbia. 1996. p. 120-132

[3] See: Pl. Pantev. Legitimizing Sub-regionalism: Envolving Perception, Initiative and Approaches to Subregional Relations in Southeast Europe. in: R Dwan (ed.). "Building Security in Europe's New Borderlands: Subregional Cooperation in the Wider Europe". M. E. Sharpe. Armonk. New York. London. England. .1999. p. 95-116; Southeast Europe: Ideas for Overcoming the Belated Modernization of the Region. in: International Relations. 1/1999. p. 109-114

As already underlined, crisis management remains an indispensable political and strategic instrument. The knowledge and information about the two tendencies, discussed in this paper can be importantly utilised in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction activities. Both conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction arc meaningful factors of preventing crises and crises-management losses.

III   Practical Issues of the Interaction of the Security and the Region-Building Information about Southeast Europe

First, the interaction and the eventual balancing of the security and the region-building information about Southeast Europe reflects the general tendencies of the respective government's information policy and the broader political objectives of the state. This is easily illustrated by the information policy of the *Milošević* regime. One aspect of this policy is the tendency to underestimate the bottom-up regional efforts of the Balkan governments but the Serbian one to take the initiative in improving the Balkan co-operation and the historical fate of the region on the basis of the standards of democracy and Human rights. A recent meeting of the Prime-Ministers of the countries in Bucharest in February 2000, participating in the so called "Sofia Process of Stability and Co-operation" definitely showed the Balkan countries do not want to do business with the regime of *Milošević*: due to the situation in FRY the Romanian hosts did not invite a Yugoslav representation. The reaction of Belgrade was of playing down the importance of the meeting. But the meeting was important because it added to the legitimising of regional co-operation and of the solidarity of the Yugoslav neighbours against the repressive regime.

Example number two: the Russian information policy about the Balkans. The region badly needs big economic projects and investments. Russia has been primarily engaged in conflict management participation – in SFOR. KFOR, trading armaments with Cyprus, etc. What has been missing was engagement with longer-term constructive projects of support for the economic prosperity of the Balkans. In an interview to a Yugoslav official journal Deputy Foreign-Minister of Russia, Alexander Avdeev announced Russia intends to stimulate economic co-operation in the Balkans within 10-15 years, with Yugoslavia as the focus of that cooperation.[4] No word is mentioned about the character of the regime Russia is ready to support. But clearly the Russian economic plans are opposed to the Stability Pact for SEE that leaves Yugoslavia, according to him in isolation.

Where is the point? In the fact that Russia, a great power and an old player in the Balkans is entering the region-building field in a conflicting pattern, opposed to the parties of the Pact of Stability for SEE of which Moscow is also a member. The worst of the recipes for the Balkans is to have the great powers of Europe and the world involved with the region in a conflicting manner. The past experience has shown the result is the "Balkanisation" of the region, i. e. the fragmentation of the region and local wars. Mr. Avdeev promises that Yugoslavia could become the gas distributor for all other Balkan countries: A similar promise, stemming from his Ministry when he was Ambassador of Russia to Sofia in the mid 90s, was given to the Bulgarians. After Bulgaria disagreed with the terms of the project and later demanded a NATO membership the same promise was shifted to another eventual key-partner in the Balkans. Russia is a great state needed in the Balkans, but not for the sake of building sophisticated balances of power that have traditionally led to disasters and to the

---

[4] See: Russia - Reliable Friends of Yugoslavia. Interview & Alexander Avdeev First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, in: Review of International Affairs. Vol L-LI No 1087-88. December 1999-January 2000, p.24-25

absence of a regional economic space in the end of the 20th century. Any great power and centre of economic might is welcome in Southeast Europe, but only as a contributor to the gradually accumulating integration potential for membership in the EU and NATO. The Balkans need these anchors of stability and guarantors of prosperity and any external to the region power should assimilate this necessity. Unless the respective great power elects to be hated and discarded by the people of the region. Hence, an effective information policy should be adapted to these regional needs.

Second, the dilemmas of the long-term engagement of NATO and the EU in Southeast Europe. This issue has a key role both for the security and the region-building information about the Balkans. Though it is logically linked to the previous issue – of the general political objectives of the governments of the respective countries that have engaged with the Balkans, it bears the risk of turning into a de-motivating factor for the stability and progress of the region.

The overcoming of the economic, technological, infrastructure, social and political retardation of the region is invariably linked by the Balkan governments with a lasting benign engagement with Southeast Europe. lt is a legitimate and sovereign right, for example, of the US Administration and Congress to withdraw from the Balkans after the presidential elections. The unclear part of this scenario is who will fill the vacuum on security and, to some extent, on region-building issues the Americans will create, if they withdraw. The people in SEE arc not sure if this is an internal American problem or an issue between the USA and the EU. The pledge of NATO that KFOR will stay as long as needed for the stability of the Balkans is perceived seriously, in earnest by many Balkan people and analysts. Any demonstration of dubiousness on future attitude to the Balkans by US politicians or EU member-state representatives tends to ruin what has been already done. The least of the negative results is the prolongation of the *Milošević* regime. What matters more is the political credibility of the political and social forces in all the other Balkan countries that have undertaken the long-term effort of homogenising the societies of Southeast Europe and slowly, but purposefully arc trying to turn the region into a security community, compatible with the rest of Europe. The information management of security policy in SEE faces a real problem in that area.

Third and last, the success of the Pact of Stability for SEE has a key role in promoting both conflict-prevention efforts and post-conflict rehabilitation in the region.

The international community agreed to provide financial and technical help and the leaders of the countries of the region agreed to initiate reforms to create conditions conducive to development. The Pact of Stability for SEE is a catalyst for co-operation, bringing the states and societies of the region closer together, facilitating the learning of the difficult lesson that thinking and acting in the Balkans as a team would turn into an individual success for each of the countries. Furthermore, the Stability Pact is the catalysing factor that gives the upper hand to the future prospects for the people in the region while narrowing the meaning of past grievances. By tradition in the Balkans the latter have obscured the importance of the former.

An effective Information management on Southeast European issues in the area of security and region-building should become the needed catalyst for the success of the Stability Pact. It would turn into the practical contribution to preventing crisis-management situations and eventual losses, stemming from such contingencies.

IV Conclusions

Part of the efforts on information management in the field of security policy in the Southeast European region should be devoted to preventing crisis-management situations and the losses with which they are usually linked. Conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation are significant tools in that aspect. The latter are dependent on the ways security is guaranteed and region-building is carried out. A balanced approach to informing on these two aspects of the crisis-prevention activity has the potential to become part of a longer-term information and perception formation strategy about the region of Southeast Europe for EU, NATO and PfP countries.

Prof. Dr. Plamen PANTEV
Director of the institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS), Sofia