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Including the Balkans in the West

Unlike what has happened with Central-eastern Europe and the Eastern Balkans, policies conducted by the West towards Western Balkans after the end of the Cold War have had a largely *reactive* character.

By and large, although the fragmentation of Yugoslavia had been widely feared and anticipated, developments in Western Balkans took the West aback because of their violent and uncompromising character. For this reason, with respect to this area the European countries and the United States have shown continuous hesitations and oscillations on how their interests in the area had to be understood, how much they had to feel involved and what they had to do.

So, they have just reacted to events, without coming to set out a coherent shared strategy. Only today, Western policy towards the area seems to have shaped out its basic orientations and begins to look more confidently in its chances or some success.

The intervention in Kosovo and the civilian policies which are following up to the intervention, essentially managed by the Europeans, have put an end to the reactive character of Western policies. The West has recognised and accepted its entanglements and has given way to durable and structural policies in order to impress, once and forever, a systemic political turnabout to the region. In this sense, there is no doubt that the Western governments are now aware that they are there to stay and willing to do so. In principle, even if the U.S. will diminish its military engagement on the ground, the Europeans would be prepared to stay and intervening, if it need be, with their new force, alone or in combination with NATO. At the end of ten years of terrible events, by implementing peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation the EU is conducting a strong *inclusive* policy towards the Balkans.

A consideration of Western policy towards the Balkans must include Turkey as well. Turkey is not part of the Balkan region. However, for historical and political reasons it is strictly tied to it and an essential part of South-eastern Europe sub-regional balance of power. Furthermore, these ties are magnified by its dispute with Greece. When coming to Turkey, one can easily ascertain that after the Cold War Western problems towards this country have concerned its inclusion in the European institutional setting, highly promoted by the United States and widely put in question by European quarters instead. After oscillations and disputes, Turkey is today a candidate to become full member of the EU, as envisaged by its early treaty of association with the then EEC, and negotiations are moving relatively fast (albeit among problems and disputes which should not be underestimated).

This policy recognises the essential Turkish role in the Balkans and generates the notion of somehow a Greater Balkans, reaching out the borders of Caucasus and the Fertile Crescent. The same policy involves NATO and the EU in the Black Sea, the Caucasus

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and Central Asia, thus making the expanse from the Balkans to Central Asia a Western interest that overlaps with a traditional Russian projection.

In conclusion, what trends seem to characterise Western and EU policies towards the Balkans (in the greater sense adopted here) after ten years of military and political convulsions?

- the West, in particular the EU, has worked out a Balkan policy that brings together the Balkans proper and Turkey. This policy is characterised by aims of ***inclusiveness, stability and democratisation***, in other words it is targeted to stabilise and democratise the countries concerned by including them in the Euro-Atlantic process and its institutions;
- there is a growing and large EU commitment towards the Balkans whereby they emerge as a priority ranking higher than the Mediterranean and the Middle East (where EU's interests to stabilisation and democratisation, understood by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership's Arab Partners as unacceptable interferences, have been flatly rejected²); the outcome of the November 2000 elections in Serbia, the fall of President Milosevic and the rise to power of Mr. Kostunica have entrenched Western policies so that, while the military protectorate is beginning to see its time shortened, the long-term perspective is that of an embodiment of the Balkans countries and Turkey in the EU institutions;
- it is clear that future possibilities to come to terms with political problems in South-eastern Europe and its Eastern Mediterranean surroundings are now strongly dependent on EU; NATO military victory alone without the subsequent EU's long-term political-civilian intervention would have brought about nothing more than an unconsummated solution - similar to Iraq/Saddam Hussein;
- all these developments are identifying a new transatlantic division of labour, after so many controversies, and take place within the framework of a strengthening and expanding transatlantic framework.

Impact of Western policies towards the Balkans on Russia

The picture regarding Western policies towards the Balkans is drawn in a deliberate optimistic way. As a matter of fact, ground for optimism is not lacking (the Croat democratic course after Mr. Tudjman passed over; the rise of Kostunica in Belgrade; the emerging consolidation of non-ethnic parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina), still there is at least as much ground for pessimism (the persisting force of ethnic factors in Bosnia-Herzegovina; most of all, the enduring force of the Albanian ethnic nationalism in Kosovo; everywhere, the consolidation of organised crime). The establishment of a germ of democracy in Serbia is generally regarded as the key to a change in the region. However, it cannot be overlooked the extreme difficulty of the task of this infant-democracy to make cohabitation in Kosovo again possible as well as to deal with the hard radicalism and fears of Serbian secessionists in addition to internal opposition from nationalist-communist quarters. Despite EU support, the newly-born Serbian democracy, like that of Russia, by just trying to achieve its reforms could stir more domestic opposition and get involved in inextricable dilemmas.

² On the Euro-Med Partnership see Á. Vasconcelos, G. Joffé (eds.), *The Barcelona Process. Building a Euro-Mediterranean Regional Community*, EuroMeSCO, Frank Cass, London, 2000.

The trend impressed on the Balkans by Western interventions and EU support (alongside the important support provided by the UN and the OSCE) can or cannot succeed. In both cases, a relevant question is what impact this trend is going to have on Russia and Russian relations with the Western countries. After 1992, these relations have been uneasy³. Western Balkans policies have constantly been perceived as negative, not only - as obvious - by nationalist and communist quarters but also by an important sector of Russian liberals⁴. Because Russia is after all more important to the West than the Balkans, the question of whether Western policies towards the two areas are consistent makes sense and deserves due attention (and indeed it got as much attention as little success).

To respond to this question, one can start from Russian foreign policy and the interests it asserts and tries to pursue in the region. So far, Russian foreign policy has passed through two stages⁵. In a first stage, this policy almost renounced to be guided by a distinctive set of national interests and was self-integrated in Western foreign policy. With the demise of Mr. Kozyrev, Russian foreign policy began to be predicated on different notions of national interests, though basically upholding a co-operative attitude towards the West and Western values and identity.

The early passive focus on the West neglected, first of all, Russia's basic nature of "centrally located continental power"⁶, with interests towards eastern and far-eastern areas (like Iran, Japan and China), more often than not, at least as important as its relations with the Euro-Atlantic complex. Secondly, it overlooked the fact that because of the end of the Cold War, the game inside Europe and in transatlantic relations is more and more based on the exercise of national competition, although such competition takes place - unlike pre-Cold War times - in a strongly structured and institutionalised framework of international co-operation.

Approximately by mid-nineties, Russia has shifted to a more active foreign policy, based on national interests and international competition, without departing from its fundamental Western option. Such shift has been obvious and legitimate (and it looks like the re-nationalisation process in Western Europe). It asks, however, for resources and instruments that Russia, more often than not, is presently lacking and exposes the country and its governments to failures with international and domestic repercussions. Generally speaking, countries trying to assert interests more or less beyond their capabilities tend to engage in a search for international role or status that is not necessarily related to their actual ability to exercise international responsibilities. The role and status are a claim rather than the consequence of actual responsibilities and resources. A role or a status is sought independently of capabilities and/or other countries' role and status may be put in question and opposed.

³ F.S. Larrabee, "Russia and the Balkans: old themes and new challenges", in V. Baranovsky (ed.), *Russia and Europe. The Emerging Security Agenda*, Oxford University Press for SIPRI, Oxford, 1997, pp. 389-402.

⁴ See N. Alexandrova-Arbatova, "The Balkans test for Russia", in V. Baranovsky (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 403-423

⁵ The different positions on foreign policy in the Russian Federation are illustrated by A. Arbatov, "Russian Foreign Policy Thinking in Transition", in V. Baranovsky (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 135-159.

⁶ S.E. Miller, "Russian national interests", in R.D. Blackwill, S. Karaganov, *Damage limitation or Crisis? Russia and the Outside World*, Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, CSIA Studies in International Security No. 5, Brassey's, Washington D.C., 1994, p. 77.

With respect to the Balkans, the Russian Federation has actual as well as role interests. As for actual interests, the Balkans are part of a large area going from the Balkans themselves to Central Asia throughout the Caucasus; this area comprises sectors of “far abroad” as well as “near abroad”, i.e. areas which were not part to the Soviet Union alongside areas which were so; it revolves around the vital basins of the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea and is the gate to Russian interests towards the Mediterranean area and the Arab world; this expanse is rightly perceived by Russia as an important factor of its security because of its political, military and economic interests and because of its immediate interplay with vital and delicate parts of its “near abroad”⁷;

As for role and status, Russia is interested in playing a role in the Balkans but reasons why it does are different according to whether the government or the opposition is taken into consideration. NATO is regarded by nationalists and communists alike as a factor denying legitimate Russian role in the Balkans and, thus, as a threat to Russia and its “grandeur”. The government and the liberals have a more realistic view on NATO and Western role and the objective limitations to Russia’s role in the area. Still, they are weakened domestically by the success of the opposition in alleging that Russia is denied by NATO its legitimate historical and cultural role in the Balkans and its security is thus threatened. It is essentially for this reason that the Russian government claims a role and acts to assert it (though it must be pointed out that a sense of frustration is certainly not lacking in the liberal and governmental areas as well). A more visible and assertive Russian international role is thus claimed as a cost to be paid (by Russia and Western countries) to allow for the domestic consolidation of the young Russian democracy and, in turn, its ability to contribute to international co-operation⁸.

This author believes that the West has a strong interest in matching the need to consolidation the young Russian democracy is expressing in the Balkans and elsewhere by paying benevolent attention to the international role of the Federation. In this perspective, Western policy towards the Balkans includes both assets and liabilities.

The most important asset brought in by Western policy on the Balkans - if it will succeed - is the tremendous task of stabilisation it has assumed and undertaken (a task Russia cannot accomplish). The success of this undertaking is not to replace or avoid legitimate competition between Russian and Western interests (as well as between Western interests). It is intended, however, to generate a factor of stability, co-operation and prosperity in the region that suits everybody⁹. For example, by strengthen polities and economies, it would make sub-regional co-operation¹⁰ in the Balkans possible and set up suitable conditions for co-operation in the wider Black Sea area. Unless regional

⁷ See N.A. Kovalsky (ed.), *Russia: the Mediterranean and Black Sea Region*, Institute of Europe, Moscow, 1996; s.a. .), *Europe, the Mediterranean, Russia: Perceptions of Strategies*, Interdialect+ for the Institute of Europe, Moscow, 1998.

⁸ This is the way I understand the basic argument developed by many Russian liberals. See N. Alexandrova-Arbatova, “Russia and NATO in South-Eastern Europe”, in N.A. Kovalsky (ed.), *Europe, the Mediterranean, Russia: Perceptions of Strategies*, op. cit., pp. 193-200.

⁹ This argument is developed with respect to Central-eastern Europe by F. Salleo, “La Russia che vorremmo”, *Limes*, No. 4, 1998, pp. 207-220.

¹⁰ On Balkans’ perspectives and advantages of sub-regional co-operation see S. Clément, “External Institutional Frameworks and Subregionalism in South-Eastern Europe”, in Renata Dwan (ed.), *Building Security in Europe’s New Borderlands. Subregional Cooperation in the Wider Europe*, EastWest Institute, New York, 1999, pp. 71-94, and P. Pantev, “Legitimizing Subregionalism. Evolving Perceptions, Initiatives, and Approaches to Subregional Relations in South-Eastern Europe”, *ibidem*, pp. 95-116.

stabilisation is secured, the prospects for Russian co-operation with the areas concerned would be as poor as for any other actors.

The liability is that western policies in the Balkans risk denying the young Russian democracy the international success and role it needs in the short- middle term to consolidate itself with respect to non-democratic opposition. Also, this makes difficult for the Russian Federation to compete with others' national interests without incurring in excesses and sliding from a physiological defence of national interests into nationalism or chauvinism.

This liability is inherent in the broad "Russian question" rather than the Balkans only. The risk is to exclude Russia by conducting policies of inclusion at its rims, as justified as they can be. To counter such risk, policies of damage limitation can help, but these policies would have only a limited impact if the West fails to carry out a paramount strategy of Russian inclusion in the more comprehensive Euro-Atlantic or European circles.

As for damage limitations, negative impacts from ongoing Western policies of inclusion with respect to the Balkans can be offset by co-operative steps on other issues concerning the wider expanse going from the Balkans to Central Asia. There are Western policies opposing Russian legitimate interests which can be put in question by allies without putting at risk transatlantic solidarity, like the senseless American option to deny Iran and Russia a fair logistics in pulling out hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Caspian region¹¹. It is in the West's interest that Russia and Iran multiply their resources alongside Azerbaijan and Turkey. The idea of privileging the latter is damaging to Russia and to global welfare. Also, co-operation with Russia in NATO and the OSCE must be reinforced (and to a good extent this is happening).

Besides, however, a positive strategy of inclusion should be developed in the kind of scenario that Levgold has called "liberalising the international setting"¹². Unless this is done, the Balkans risks to become one dimension on a policy of neglect and broader exclusion of Russia. Thus, an element of broader crisis in the international relations.

Trends in EU's institutions and their role in Europe

The kind of future this paper has tried to envisage is threatened by varying variables. First, by the objective uncertainties which surround the Balkans' stabilisation. As already pointed out, there are reasons of optimism, but the overall context remains very fragile. Stabilisation is fairly possible but not certain. Second, overwhelmed by frustration and nationalism, the stabilisation of the young Russian democracy may fail to materialise or be slowed down beyond effectiveness. Third, the transatlantic context is apparently being reinforced by the effective co-operation in crisis management and the positive division of labour that is taking place between the US and the major European countries. However, it would be difficult to say how stable present trends in transatlantic relation may be.

On the American side, despite rhetoric, a full isolationist trend can hardly be envisaged. Still, it may happen that rhetoric is misinterpreted by a new administration and division

¹¹ Amy Myers Jaffe, Robert A. Manning 1998-99, "The Myth of the Caspian 'Great Game': The Real Geopolitics of Energy", *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter, pp. 112-29.

¹² R. Legvold, "The 'Russian Question'", in Vladimir Baranovsky (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 42-69.

of labour mishandled, so that the process of reform and transformation in the Alliance risks being desegregated. This, for example, would be the case if the new EU force for crisis management is left prematurely alone in performing its tasks, particularly in the Balkans.

It is especially on the EU side that there are risks of instability, however. Both a firm transatlantic and European frameworks are needed to stabilise the Balkans (and maybe other areas in the Mediterranean and the Middle East). It must not be overlooked, though, that on the ground, after military interventions, the process is now spearheaded by the EU. Only the civilian and economic capabilities of the EU can bridge the gap between the Balkans' societies as they are and the stable, economically self-reliant societies that the ongoing process is expected to generate. Will the EU be stable and strong enough as to accomplish the task?

At the end of the Cold War, the members of the EU pointed out the strict complementarity of enlarging and deepening the Union. The enlargement is by far prevailing, though, with its tendency to preserve states' prerogatives and generate unmanageable institutions. Whether a looser Union will be able to create in the Balkans, or elsewhere, the same framework that permitted Germany to develop its force and identity without generating insecurity, remains to be seen.