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THE BALKANS TODAY: A PEACE ZONE
OR AN EUROPEAN POWDER-KEG ?

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Preliminary Statement.

The Balkans: the use of this word to indicate a political, strategical and geographical unitary area makes today much more sense than only one year ago. Deep transformations in the regional balance of power are going on: the change of relations between the two Blocs, the new situations provoked by the Gorbachev policies and the influence they played on the Balkans encouraged radical upheavals in Bulgaria and in Romania. From some points of view, today we can see a bigger similarity between the different Balkan countries, or - at least - a trend to achieve a bigger political-institutional and economic-structural similarity between them.

Instead, it should be put the question if the explanatory categories of the first IAI-IMEMO project with the use of the generic words "East" and "West" make still a sense, or if it is better to speak about a large number of subjects playing a role like: EEC, USSR, and Balkans; or Italy, Germany, USSR, and Balkans; or US, USSR, EEC, a (in perspective) unified Germany, Italy - as a country geostrategically and directly involved in the area - and Balkans.

On the other hand, the diminished likelihood of international clashes between the two Blocs encourages new tensions in the Balkan lands (tensions largely linked with the problem of security, because the actual open phase has changed the security perception of the States). These tensions, in their turn, can strengthen pre-existing conflicts with the risk to create new regional destabilizations. That is why the

situation of the Balkans countries today is half-way between the possibility to become a peace zone or to come back to the ancient role of European "Powder-Keg". Integrating and disintegrating elements are equally present, even if probably the last ones are increasing in the recent period.

I

Factors of instability in the Balkan area

Today one of the greatest factors of instability is caused by the increasing of the economic backwardness in the Balkan lands and by the deterioration of the national economies.

The Balkan lands, as it is known, are economically the most European underdeveloped countries, the so called "European South". Here we can remember that Yugoslavia has a debt of 15 milliard US \$ and an inflation rate of 2500% (1989); Bulgaria has a debt of 8 milliard US \$ and a stagnant standard of living; Romania has no debt, but a destroyed economy. Greece (with Portugal) is economically the weakest country of EEC. Albania and Turkey are largely underdeveloped. Generally speaking, in the Balkan area, Agriculture, Tourism, Communication Roads, Trade and Technology are underdeveloped fields. The big factories are mostly out of date. So, any economic policy adopted by a government to lead the country out of the crisis, will have enormous social costs, with the risk to break out social tensions, making vain any efforts and creating instability in the country.

Consequently, the economic crisis and the underdevelopment encourage illusions about the existence of a nationalistic way of "leading the country out of the crisis". I am referring now to the illusion of opposite (and in turn contradictory) opinions. For instance, on one hand it's growing the idea to lead the country out of the crisis appealing to nationalism - and breaking up the old multinational frames -. On the other hand, the same political members think possible to achieve later, as a little independent national unity, a EEC imagined as a last hope. At the same time, the cultural exasperation caused by the stalinist conception of "making sacrifice today for a better tomorrow" gives to large social strata (above all the weakest ones and the politically less informed) new illusions. In fact, they believe that it is possible to

achieve "immediately everything" just having strong links with the Western societies and Western parties, doesn't care with whom. All that is not practicable; great social conflicts can increase, with the risk - still more dangerous - that every ethnic group can see nationalistic meanings in the reasons of his own economic deterioration. So, an explosive mixture has been prepared.

The second factor of instability in the Balkan area is precisely caused by nationalism. The nationalism, as we have already stressed, is always linked with the economic crisis that had affected the Balkan countries. A short, but undoubtedly not exhaustive survey of the likely most crucial centres of regional instability should consider the influence of the following factors:

A) The danger of a Yugoslav breakup.

Yugoslavia faces a ten-years deeper and deeper crisis that has increased the disintegration forces in the economic and institutional framework. The different political alternatives for the future of this country risk to appear only "weak solutions". A too large decentralization, mostly in the economic field, and a ceaseless weakening of the role and the powers of the federal government make impossible to adopt any policy to balance the economy of the country. The authoritarian and centralistic option would break out strong oppositions in some nations of the country and in that way the preliminary statements of a civil war will be laid. A military action - because of the multinational framework of the Army - would bring the same divisions of the civil world inside the Army too. Consequently, the only unitarian institution of the present Federation (even if it isn't the only unitarian factor) would be removed. The multipartitism and the abandonment of the party guiding-role by the former League of Communist of Yugoslavia can really increase the country disgregation by making more and more involved the way of taking decisions. So, if Yugoslavia will not reach a new balance between decentralization and federal institutions (and consequent electoral Acts), the breakup of the country is possible.

This breakup could not be pacific, because it's not possible to split the Yugoslav regions in an ethnically clear way. In addition to this, it's not possible to break suddenly economic links, even if the serbo-slovenian conflict has given a blow to the market unity.

In that case the perspective of a civil war "everybody against everybody" is rather likely, with incalculable consequences: the Peace Treaties with the neighbouring countries will go down in value (for instance, Italy could risk a cancellation of the Osimo Agreements). Moreover, the problem of the refugees will change the ethnic balance in the border's regions: as far as Italy is concerned, this situation could have a negative influence mostly in Trieste, with a rapid spread of destabilization to the surrounding areas.

B) The Kosovo drama.

The Kosovo drama undoubtedly presents several problems linked to the problem of human rights. Of course, it affects the yugo-Albanian relationships. At the same time, it helps a new raise of serbian nationalism that, in turn, instigates the improvement of slovenian and croatian nationalisms. The evolutionary process of German unification makes unimaginable the creation of a Kosovo republic inside Yugoslavia, because the Serbs are afraid that, in the same way, an Albanian unification process could be started.

Anyway, in Kosovo it exists an Albanian enough spread belief favorable to the separation from Yugoslavia with the aim to achieve, later, a determining influence upon Tirana's government. This perspective can take advantage of better available funds, even monetary, due to the strong Kosovo clan's ties with Western Albanian emigration. At the same time, this perspective could provoke serious tensions among Albanian people with the likely risk to cause a civil war.

In any case, if the actual situation doesn't change, the Kosovo region will become, step by step, a "permanently destabilized" area as Northern Ireland or Euzkadi. Consequently, this will cause a deep clash among the other Yugoslav nationalisms till to encourage the disintegration of the country.

C) The Albanian unsolved enigma.

However directly or in an emotional way involved in the Kosovo drama, today Albania has all to lose by a Yugoslav breakup, because its security would be in danger. Anyway, how to explain the recent Albanian proposal (at the end of 1989) to the other Balkan countries to consider definitive the borders settled after the II World War? We shouldn't forget that Albania is the only european country that didn't

sign the Helsinki's agreements. Does this proposal mean a Tirana's tendency to take precautions while instability fears are increasing? Certainly, the Bulgarian and Romanian upheavals can influence the political and institutional future of Albania, even if we shouldn't underestimate the peculiarity of this country, nor its particular communist tendency.

Actually we can imagine 4 possible evolutions in future: 1) An Albanian participation to a "Marxist-Leninist" alliance (with Cuba, China and Northern Korea). This assumption is really rather weak, because a great geographic distance separates these countries and because each country lives in a specific and different context. 2) A large opening process to the Western societies (and, in this case, towards Italy, mostly if a solution of the problem, created - some years ago - by a family of Albanian refugees in the Italian Embassy in Tirana, will be reached). 3) An increase of the pro-perestrojka forces inside the CP of Albania with a gradual introduction of reforms in the society. 4) A popular riot and an overthrow of the régime: this is an assumption similar to the Ceausescu's overthrow in Romania, but it doesn't appear so probable for Albania at the moment, in spite of local protests that are happening in Albania.

This last assumption, anyway, could create the conditions for the growing of the multiparty system: in this case, Albania could become also much more attractive for Albanian people living in Kosovo (even when in Yugoslavia multipartitism will be consolidated). Consequently, separatist tendencies in Kosovo will raise, adding fuel to the Serbian reaction. Anyway, it is remarkable that, in the present period, Albania is carrying out a policy of prudent international opening and the Albanian participation to the Balkan multilateral cooperation (here mentioned later) is growing.

D) The Macedonian controversy.

This is a geopolitical central question for the stability of the Balkan. The recent upheavals in Bulgaria seem to wake old nationalistic passions, in spite of the contrary tendency of the new government and of large part of the opposition forces. The last demonstration held in Sofia in march 1990 revealed the return to some panBulgarian tendencies with the risk to open a new front in the yugo-Bulgarian relations. And what's more in Greece, the Athens government hasn't recognized, till

now, the degree of the Skopje University, rising in Macedonian people the frustration for every kind of non-recognition.

F) The Islamic revival.

Since the last decade and in different ways, this revival is playing a role everywhere in the Balkan peninsula. Bulgaria has to face not only the problem of the Turkish population (with all the economic implications in the areas of Kardzali and Razgrad), but also the future of the Islamic Bulgarian minority. In Greece, the Cyprus controversy that affects the relations with Ankara is still open. In the meantime the status of the Turkish minority in Thrace seems not solved, as well as the complex question of the territorial waters in the Aegean sea, the control of that sea and the consequent mutual security. In Yugoslavia too, the Islamic fundamentalism is increasing in Bosnia, whilst also the Kosovo drama can be seen through the prism of the religious clashes. In this sense, the links emerged between the well-known Agrokomerc firm and Gheddafi's Libya could appear significant in the building of the Zagreb Mosque, as well as the reactions of the Islamic Conference (held in Ryyad in March 1989) in connexion with the "Albanian-Islamic persecution" in Kosovo.

G) The Albanian-Greek relations.

Even if they are surely improved in the last years, the Albanian-Greek relations suffered, at the beginning of 1990, from some internal tensions emerged in Southern Albania for religious (and political) reasons. As it's known, people living in that area believe in the Greek-Orthodox religion: the Greek-Orthodox Church considers Greek all this people, in spite of the different ethnic origin, either Greek or Albanian. At the beginning of this year, Europe was informed about political tensions in some areas of Albania, including the South, by the Greek mass media and the Greek Orthodox Church. These last ones had paid particular attention to those areas because of the situation of the Greek (religious) minority (that is partially Albanian). The informations given created confusion and negative influence in the mutual relations between Tirana and Athens.

H) The difficult transition to democracy in Romania.

After Ceausescu was ousted and killed, this country has lived a period of easily breakable transition to democracy, threatened by constant pressures of destabilization. Xenophobic nationalism emerged again in Transylvania. In addition, a new controversy risks to involve Soviet Union in connexion with the status of Bessarabia (or Moldavian Soviet Republic): in fact, because of the Romanian upheavals and the consequent freedom from despotism, moldavian people living on the other side of the Prut river can increase the feeling of a strong attraction for Bucharest. In this case, also, the integrity of the Soviet State could be directly involved.

In the meantime, great social tensions are growing up in Romanian countryside, where the peasants are not satisfied of the new land-property Act. Romanian anticommunism (for certain aspects quite understandable) caused some border incidents with Yugoslavia, that hasn't had - up to now - great consequences. The Romanian government revealed divisions and deep hesitations when, last January, it had to face some tumults caused by exacerbated and politically confused people.

So, it seems that, generally speaking, the political members of the new Romania haven't yet adequate instruments and enough political culture to face political and social tensions, mostly when they show intolerance and violent feeling; in this case, a particular danger can raise when the delicate relations with the Hungarian minority are involved.

As a matter of fact, the country appears - for some aspects - to go adrift and the possible explosion of Romania can have serious consequences on its neighbouring countries too.

From these short notes it's clear that it exists the possibility for Italy (because of Yugoslavia), as well as for Soviet Union (because of Romania) to be directly involved into Balkan nationalistic tensions, even if this could happen only at the borders.

II

The multilateral cooperation in the Balkans

In spite of all the factors of instability existing in this area, the Balkans - known in the mythology and in the popular belief as an historical "Powder-keg" - boast also a tradition of historical thought and concrete diplomatic attempts to achieve local

form of integration (from Svetozar Markovic to the yugo-Bulgarian project of Balkan Confederation till the Balkan Pact of 1954). A similar process has developed again during the second half of the Eighties. It is my belief that this is the only "positive" alternative for the future of the Balkan area. We should, therefore, concentrate the attention on the efforts of Balkan multilateral cooperation that are under way.

It had never happened, in the past, that the representatives of all the six Balkan governments (at the Ministers for Foreign Affairs level) have met together to discuss about the future of one of the most tumultuous and crucial areas of Europe. This happened, instead, the 26th February 1988 in Belgrade. Of course, at that time, it didn't take place (and it couldn't be otherwise) any "historical turning-point" in the inter-Balkan relations. Anyway, the prudence is never enough, when you have to consider the events of an area so tormented like this.

However, if these six States could carry on according to the layout defined in Belgrade, in conformity with the spirit and the atmosphere predominating in that occasion, then something of really new will catch the attention of the Old Continent.

The importance of that meeting, in fact, lies either in the active participation of all the countries of the area (including Albania), or in the cultural and methodological approaches predominating. In short, a common firm belief has grown: the overcoming of the Balkan backwardness is tightly linked to a new view of the international relations and of the security, with reference to the principles enacted in the final Act of Helsinki.

Moreover, there is a fact not taken for granted at all.

Everyone has agreed that the problem of the minorities should be faced with comprehension and toleration, considering them as a "Bridge of Friendship" between the States and not an Instrument of division and clash.

Since then, the convergence of the inter-Balkan efforts has produced several meetings (a dozen only in the 1989), about lots of questions of common interest.

A special convergence has been achieved about the questions linked to the fight against the illegal drug traffic, the international terrorism and the illegal traffic of weapons (this last policy is not taken for granted at all).

A good level of convergence has also been achieved about inter-regional transports, while the activity to establish a Research Institut for Balkan Economic Cooperation to be founded in Athens is still pursued.

At the moment, instead, the research of agreements on problems so crucial and delicate like the convocation of a future meeting of the Heads of State, the creation of a nuclear and chemical weapon free zone, the solution of the problem of human rights and the respect of the minorities, seem to be more complicated.

It's important, besides, that - after the deep upheavals in Bulgaria and Romania, the process of multilateral cooperation hadn't stopped. In fact, it's continuing: a meeting of High Officials of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs had been held in Athens from 7th to 9th March 1990. The next summit of Ministers for Foreign Affairs will be held in Tirana in the second half of October 1990, while other twelve meetings on various fields of common interest and significant activities have already been summoned for the current year.

It's also very important to remember that during the last meetings of High Officials of the Ministries for Foreign Affairs in Tirana (1989) and in Athens (1990) proposals and tendencies of particular interest had emerged.

Here I would like to quote only some of those proposals:

- a) the Bulgarian proposal to hold - in the frame of the new democratic processes that followed the 1989 upheavals - an Assembly of Balkan peoples with the participation of personalities of the scientific, political and religious world;
- b) the convocation of two meetings on cultural, humanitarian and mass media matters to be held in Sofia (at the end of 1990) and in Ankara (1991);
- c) the Albanian proposal to elaborate a "Code of goodneighbourliness" for Balkan lands;
- d) the creation of a Center whose task will be to avoid crisis in the Balkan peninsula. This proposal gained a general agreement and it shows the existence of a common effort of the Balkan countries to save regional stability by themselves.

Among the other proposals under discussion, there is also the one to create a Parliamentary Group of Friendship and an inter-Balkan Cooperation, as well as the idea to establish a "Balkan Economic Chamber". It exists even the possibility to adopt a kind of little "Helsinki Act", particularly valid in the Balkan region.

So, there is a strong impression of deep and intense working among political diplomacies and economic experts of the Balkan countries with the aim to create a new inter-regional atmosphere. It is my belief that it's absolutely necessary to avoid a dramatic stop of this process that could be caused by one of the several latent regional crisis, mentioned above.

In consequence of this process, East and West cannot remain an inactive audience, but they must encourage and support it. Particularly, it seems to me of great importance to turn the attention to the following questions:

a) how to face the problems of the regional economic and social backwardness and what kind of policies should be better to adopt in order to overcome the actual situation. The Balkan lands need regional infrastructures (for instance, good communication systems), firstly to make easier the economic integration of the area and the reasearch of unitary policies; secondly, to improve the multilateral trade and the tourism. The organization in Belgrade of a "Balkan Fair" for June 1990 opens new perspectives. These countries need also high developed technologies as well as great help to save the Environment. In connection with all these aspects, particularly the EEC could assure its help, stimulating the modernization of that area.

b) how to make faster, in the Balkan region, the creation of a nuclear and chemical weapons free zone. This perspective is of a great importance because it allows the increase of military confidence, and the research of new security-building measures in all the Balkan peninsula. In this context, for instance, Yugoslavia has already suggested, in May 1989: 1) to establish prior notification of military manoeuvres and exercices as well as of major military movements; 2) to exchange military informations on the organization of armed forces; 3) to promote contacts between garrisons and visits to military units as well as a gradual reduction of armaments.

c) how to cancel every subversive meaning from the minority and territorial question. In the Balkan countries a firm belief is spreading: it's necessary to separate the ethnic minorities problems from the territorial problems. This should be faced in a frame of multilateral relations, because History has shown that the bilateral approach is too often without any positive perspective. Only in a frame of multilateral relations, it seems possible to reduce the old enmities and to make easier the research of general criterias that should inform, later, the policies of each government. This is a real stake, but it must be strongly supported from East and West, because the peace of the Old Continent is involved.

III

Final Remarks

East and West cannot afford the luxury of a destabilization of the Balkans; the risk for Europe to be directly involved in one of the conflicts, that could sooner or later break out, really exists.

In order of that it should not happened, in case either of bilateral or multilateral conflicts the Great and Medium Powers, and the EEC too, should avoid to support one or the another country . History has already shown several times that the Balkans are a "Powder-Keg", mostly when the Great Powers add their contradictory interests to the old regional enmities; for exemple, when the Great Powers decide to become a kind of "protector" of one or more Balkan countries. On the contrary, today it's necessary to pour oil on troubled waters and to look to the Balkan area with great caution and prudence.

So, it's necessary to encourage every tendency to regional integration in the economic as well as in the political field, even if this last perspective seems to be very difficult to realize in short-term. It seems to me that the opening process of Belgrade (1988) and its developments offer to East and West new chances to overcome step by step old mistrusts and clashes.

In the last analysis, the stability of each Balkan country must be assured as a condition for regional stability and for a mutual confidence between East and West. This stability will be reached only:

- a) if the multilateral ties among the Balkan countries will be improved;
- b) if the development of a local democratic political thought will be encouraged;
- c) if strong links between the Balkan region (as a whole and not as separate areas) the EEC (where Italy can play a leading role) and Soviet Union will be assured. Of course, adequate infrastructures of communication, trade and transport should be developed.

In addition to the above mentioned questions of economic cooperation between EEC and Balkan lands, particular help must be sent in short-term to each country of this area. That help will allow, in the Balkan countries, the realization of economic balancing policies and social assistance with the aim to avoid too strong social conflicts and to make easier the reconversion of unemployed workers. So, it should be possible to diminish the tensions and to encourage a better integration of the Balkans in Europe. At the same time, policies of well-balanced development could gradually take shape, making less utopian the perspective of the future Balkan Confederation as an autonomous regional subject integrated with EEC or into a new European political frame. In fact, throughout these transformations a direct political and economic link with Soviet Union could be strengthened. In this way it could be possible to offer to this country new openings and markets as well as sufficient guarantees for its security in an area always delicate and crucial for Moscow.

In the end, it's not possible to underestimate the need of a great debate about the Oversovereignty question in Europe. A political and cultural thought must be developed with the aim to overcome the concept of "Nation-State". This concept, as a matter of fact, is not practicable for the Balkans.

In fact, national sovereignty and economic sovereignty of a Nation-State are concepts that must be considered again in accordance with the new paneuropean perspectives of the XXI century. This is not the case of cultural sovereignty. The Italian democratic political thought, on these specific aspects, numbers, among the others, the ideas of Mazzini, Gramsci and Spinelli. This political thought should deepen the concept of European democratic federalism firstly to go further the