

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, TURKISH INTERESTS IN THE BALKANS AND THE STABILITY PACT¹

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Mr. Chairman,

We meet in this postcard beauty city of Antalya, thanks to the hospitality of Antalya University, under a very dark shadow of imminent war against Afghanistan as a result of international terrorism, which has drastically changed all the priorities of the international agenda. One may even venture to say that all problem areas including our topic the Balkans may now be reduced to a lesser place of priority in importance. This may be true not only for the United States which was the direct victim of a terrorist tragedy, an act of war of tremendous proportions since Pearl Harbour but also for the rest of the world, including our two countries Turkey and Germany as a reminder of how fragile is peace, how important is security.

This immediate change in the international agenda, indicates to the intrinsic importance and temporary priority of all the political problems we face to name a few of the questions of the Middle East, Macedonia, Kosovo, Kashmere, IRA in Northern Ireland, Basq in Spain and question of Cyprus. Now the focus of the attention is suddenly concentrated in Afghanistan and consequently the problems of the Balkans, like all the other problems, maybe pushed to the background and may somewhat be out of focus. I recall one paradigm right or wrong that "the United States does not intend to be involved in fighting in more than one front" and at any rate Bush administration wanted the GI back home from the Balkans.

The geographic area in and around Afghanistan was described as the center of the world by some strategists in the past, probably including Emperor Napoleon and due to the situation which has irrupted like a volcano with all its ramifications, one may be tempted to assume that the United States may loose interest also in the Balkans and leave the region to the European Union, as it seems that the rest of the world shall witness a long drawn war against international terrorism, although European Union may think that United States presence in the Balkans is indispensable.

The Balkans are of interest to Turkey; it is true strategically, politically, and socially not to mention also economically. It was true yesterday, and more so today as we hope to belong the EU as one big family tomorrow. The Ottoman

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Empire dominated the Balkans for about 5 centuries. The early years of the Republican Turkey showed less interest in the region when the Western World and Europe was the priority point of Ankara. Nevertheless, the importance of the Balkans remained fundamental if dormant, as a strategic link between Turkey and Western Europe, for Turkey's political and economic integration with Europe.

Turkish diplomacy considered former Yugoslavia, as a moderating power in the Balkans even after the death of Josip Broz Tito. Although, Turkey did not wish the dismemberment and fragmentation of former Yugoslavia, when first Slovenia and then Croatia declared independence in early 90's, Turkey established diplomatic relations with them and with Bosnia without delay. But it was in the war in Bosnia Herzegovina against the Serbs that Ankara had to take an important decision and recast its position with the Muslim population of Bosnia whom the Serbs called "the Turks". A broader Balkan war engulfing Kosovo, Macedonia, even Sandjak, Vojvodina and Albania was a nightmare scenario for Ankara, to be averted at all cost. Turkey stood behind the Bosnians and the Croatians against Milosevic, in no uncertain terms. Turkey has a population of about 5 million whose origins were in the Balkans who migrated to Turkey around 1878, as a result of the Austro-Hungarian take over of Bosnia from the Ottomans. Turkey took an increasingly greater responsibility in the Bosnian war, in the absence of an immediate Western response. The Bosnian conflict put Turkey on notice. We, in Zagreb, feared then that the Yugoslav conflict would spread from Bosnia to Kosovo and to Macedonia, a prediction unfortunately proved to be correct. Turkey was in the thick of the Balkan conflict. Hence the Turkish military contribution to the UNPROFOR during the Bosnian conflict and later in Kosovo and now in Macedonia with NATO.

Turmoil first in the Balkans and later in the Caucasus, and the emergence of new Turkic states from the ruins of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, placed Ankara in a position to play a new, more important and a dominant role across a vast area from the Adriatic to Central Asia. This new role entails many difficulties, as Balkans opened a Pandora's box of centrifugal forces.

Two years after the war in Kosovo, peace is still illusive in the Balkans. It is misleading to think that Kosovo problem is solved although to the credit of NATO and EU. Will Kosovo remain, as an entity as such is any much in doubt? Will it be divided? There is an uneasy truce in Macedonia between the Macedonian army and the Albanians. Milosevic is under arrest in The Hague, Yugoslav Federation is in disarray and disintegration. Montenegro may be pushing ahead towards independence. Muslim-Croat Federation has problems. This picture does not leave to much optimism about the future of Dayton Agreement, which brought time for peace, but peace is still a distant dream in the Balkans.

The ethnic divide in the Balkans is still as deep as before. Yet we must keep our hopes for a passified and stable region, within a larger European perspective, simply because recently the Balkans have made much progress

towards normalization and democratization. None of the leaders of the last decade survive; Milosevic, Tudjman or izzet Begovic are no more in the picture.

The Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe may be instrumental for opening up a new era for the Balkans, vis-a-vis the European future of the region. The Stability Pact shows the way to a better future for the first time in the history of the region. The alternative is hopelessness, continuation of ethnic strife and marginalization of the Balkans. The reconstruction and the democratization of the region must be the order of the day.

The international community and the Euro Atlantic partners where late in coming to the Balkan tragedy that started with the Bosnian conflict. The close partnership of United States-EU resulted with their commitment and involvement in the Balkans now which is a promise for the future of the region in its stabilization, democratization and economic reconstruction. As such the EU can take care of the civilian aspects of the future reconstruction of peace.

For the possible realization of this goal, I believe charity begins at home; the Balkan powers first and foremost must believe in their common future, which is Europe. They must believe that peace will be to their credit and to their interest. In one word there must be a common will; drawing lessons from history and past mistakes.

Truce in Macedonia let alone peace still hangs in the balance. The Balkans still lack leadership to defeat deep ethnic animosities. The Balkans should realize that their long-term future is in the European Union membership and integration. The European Union Stability Pact of 1999 supported by 28 states and relevant international organizations, will contribute towards the realization of this distant dream. The EU member states have earmarked about \$ 4,2 billion US dollars over the next 6 years, towards rebuilding infrastructure and for support of wide-ranging reforms, that could hopefully stop corruption, drug smuggling, human trafficking etc.

The Balkans have no choice but to believe in progress. The Balkans have to learn to act with rationalism and optimism. Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje and Sarajevo must learn from their history and engage in the establishment of civil and political institutions for their common coexistence.

The challenge for peace, for cooperation and implementation of the Stability Pact in the Balkans is great; but it is also true that the present conditions until 11 September dateline are obviously better than two years ago and reconciliation hopefully might have a chance.

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