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NATO AND THE BALKANS

ELENA ZAMFIRESCU

Dr. Elena Zamfirescu is state secretary in charge of multilateral relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Writing on NATO and the Balkans¹ is by no means an easy task. Even more than in other parts of the Old Continent, the post-1989 contradictory developments in the area called, more or less accurately, 'the Balkans', defy the long-standing inclination of analysts to think in either/or terms. Front-page mass media reports about NATO's involvement in stopping armed conflicts in the territory of former Yugoslavia do quite often obscure other essential dimensions of the multifaceted presence of the Alliance within the area. Analytical efforts focused on identifying the new opportunities for a gradual re-linking of the whole area to mainstream Europe have to cope with die-hard stereotypes.

REDUCTIONIST PERCEPTIONS

At the time of writing, the negotiations between the representatives of Serbia and of the Kosovo Albanians, taking place at Rambouillet (France) with the help of mediators designated by the Contact Group, are still underway. The object of these negotiations is a comprehensive plan to restore peace and return to enhanced self-government to Kosovo. Their outcome is rather uncertain. Whatever the result, NATO is ready to either launch air strikes against Serbian military targets if only the Serbian party is responsible for the failure of the envisaged agreement, or, if agreement is reached, to deploy a NATO-led peacekeeping mission of about 30,000 troops to enforce it. This is now the only available way to put an end to the bloodshed and the human tragedy that have torn Kosovo for about a year, and to prevent the serious risk of hostilities spreading from Kosovo to the fragile democracies of Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. A continuation and escalation of armed clashes in Kosovo could also re-ignite the conflict in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina; a conflict stopped and a peace maintained with the help of the two NATO-led missions, IFOR and SFOR.

In view of the above, many analysts could feel the passing temptation to echo an already familiar verdict—the Balkans are just a headache for NATO. Things are not, however, as simple as that. The relationship between NATO and the Balkans is far more complex. It is hardly reducible to the involvement of the Alliance in the pacification of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the tense dialogue with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or the pressure exerted on both parties to reach agreement on a peaceful solution to the Kosovo conflict.

Another reductionist temptation is to see the Balkans as simply a part—usually one fraught with challenges and risks—of NATO's new strategic environment, and to equate NATO with an external actor which would endeavour to impose its own order on the area in question. This essay will try to bring some arguments against such a poor and inaccurate picture of the Alliance's relationship with

the countries in the examined area. For reasons that will be largely dealt with later, the year of its fiftieth anniversary finds the Alliance in a position that can be defined as that of an insider rather than of a Balkan outsider. Moreover, in all the area's countries except one, NATO's involvement in efforts aimed at enhancing stability and security in their part of Europe is not resented, but welcomed.

NATO: AN INSIDER OF THE BALKANS

NATO's interest and presence in the Balkans have behind them a long history. It began shortly after the creation of the Atlantic Alliance. It could have begun on 4 April 1949, as suggested by the United States during negotiations with the members of the Brussels Pact for the North Atlantic Treaty. Yet, the US's European partners shared the view that "Greece and Turkey, and the eastern Mediterranean were too far removed from the important centres of Europe, and their inclusion would have constituted a diversion of effort and a dilution of strength".²

One year later, in April 1950, Turkey and Greece formally applied for membership of the Atlantic Alliance.³ The US proposal for their inclusion "met initially with opposition and held the firm support of Italy. Denmark, Norway and the Benelux states expressed apprehension about assuming responsibility for the defence of a region quite distant geographically and culturally from Western Europe and their own acknowledged strategic interests."⁴

After heated debates, the September 1950 meeting of the North Atlantic Council in New York decided to accord to both countries associate status and allow them to participate in defence planning relative to the Mediterranean. If it were not for the Korean War and unsettling developments in the Middle East, opposition to full membership would have, perhaps, persisted. For both strategic and 'historical reasons', the USA backed the joint entry of Turkey and Greece, and formally proposed in May 1951 that full membership should be granted to them. The United Kingdom added its backing in July, after the outbreak of the Iranian crisis. In the end, the September 1951 session of the Atlantic Council unanimously recommended "although with reluctant approval on the part of Denmark and Norway, the inclusion of Turkey and Greece into NATO".⁵

There are lessons to be drawn from the short history presented above. The bumpy road of the two neighbouring countries to integration into NATO, and most of the arguments aired almost five decades ago ring a quite familiar bell, especially for the present-day southern aspirants to membership. The joint entry of Turkey and Greece does also say something. In spite of their long-drawn out frictions, it cannot be denied that ever since their admission the 'problematic aspirants' of the early '50s have turned into an essential asset for the Alliance. Imagination refuses to devise scenarios of possible post-Cold War developments in all the neighbouring areas of Turkey had it not been a NATO front-line state.

However difficult their journey, the fact is that as a result of the membership of Turkey and Greece, the Alliance and the Balkans have partially overlapped for almost 50 years. In other words, NATO has never been an entirely external actor in that region.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE AREA

Worried by the awkward remarks of less-informed writers who equate the 1389 battle on the plain of Kosovo with "the primal act of slaughter from which all Balkan history since has flowed", scholars from the non-Yugoslav Balkans feel entitled to complain about the Western and American ignorance

of the area's diversity. Maria Todorova remarks,

In the non-Yugoslav Balkans, the war in the former Yugoslavia is referred to exclusively as the Yugowar or the war in Bosnia. In Western Europe, it is usually defined as the war in former Yugoslavia or in Bosnia, although there is occasional mention of a Balkan war. In the United States, the war is usually generalised as 'the Balkan war', although there is occasional mention of the war in former Yugoslavia.⁶

It is true that a certain negligence in journalistic and even academic language has favoured more than once stereotypical references to the Balkans. However, at the highest levels of political decision-making, the diversity of the states in the area is not being ignored. Here are two most recent examples. In a recent address by the US President, William Clinton, focused on the importance of peace in Kosovo for America, a more than careful wording was used: "In this decade, violent ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia have threatened Europe's stability and future".⁷ The fiftieth anniversary edition of the NATO Handbook includes sub-chapters on "the process of bringing peace to the former Yugoslavia" or to "the furtherance of the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina".

The fact that the Western countries in general, and NATO in particular, acknowledge the diversity of the area is also highlighted by the relationships between some of the non-NATO countries there and the Alliance. Five of them—Romania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia—are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC).^{*} For various reasons, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia do not enjoy such a status.

The introduction of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative in 1994 not only added a new dimension to the relationship between NATO and its Partner countries, but also sanctioned the principle of self-differentiation. Is this not clear proof that NATO recognises existing differences between individual countries, in terms of both needs and achievements?

The provision contained in the Framework Documents, according to which active participation in PfP will play an important role in the evolutionary process of including new members into NATO, has catalysed the efforts of aspiring countries to fulfil former Secretary of Defence William Perry's 'five principles': democracy, free market economies, good relations with neighbours, democratic control of the military, and the establishment of a military compatible with the standing forces of NATO.

Not all the five Partners recorded the same degree of success. As a result, a further differentiation among them was drawn in the Declaration of the Madrid NATO Summit. Its article eight, which stresses the positive developments in Romania and Slovenia, has encouraged the two countries to see themselves as prospective beneficiaries of NATO's next enlargement. At the other extreme, as a result of its 1997 internal crisis that resulted in the disintegration of many institutions including the armed forces, Albania has lost its earlier hopes of rapid integration into NATO. Conversely, Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which were not mentioned at Madrid, consider themselves to have made noticeable progress and are very active in promoting their bid for accession.

What should be seen beyond the intensity of the individual co-operation of each of the five Partners with NATO, is the fact that their membership in the EAPC and PfP—based on their free choice—has

naturally extended the grounds of NATO's legitimate presence in the region they belong to. This raises the question of whether the NATO's old out-of-area concept is still valid in the case of the Balkans. The various, complementary facets of the Allied presence in the area, more of which will be treated below, seem to favour the idea that in this specific case a sui generis mixture of 'out-of-area' and 'within-the-area' has already emerged.

BRINGING PEACE TO THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

During most of the Cold War period, non-aligned communist Yugoslavia, which had succeeded in escaping the embrace of the Soviet-imposed Warsaw Pact, was perceived as being closer to the West than to the 'Eastern bloc'. To those who recall that in the early '50s that country seemed to wish for the protective cover of NATO and even worked with NATO, its post-1989 evolution looks undoubtedly striking.

Instead of leading the way to integration with the Western structures, it steadily distanced itself from them. It is not the intention of this essay to dwell on why and how all this happened. The fact is that present-day Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are the main causes of security concerns in the region they belong to.

There is no need to present in the few pages of this essay the long road to peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina and its appalling cost in human lives and suffering. They are very fresh in everybody's memory. What needs recalling is that without NATO (especially the USA's strong involvement) and its Partners (including some neighbouring countries), and without co-operation between NATO and its special security partner, the Russian Federation, one could not have spoken today about peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina. On the other hand, it is no less true that self-sustainable peace—the creation of a self-sustaining democratic state that is able to integrate with Europe—cannot be achieved unless the local actors take entirely upon themselves all the tasks discharged for over three years by international organisations. As a matter of fact, this was the unanimous message addressed to the Bosnian authorities and Entities by all the participants in the latest meeting of the Peace Implementation Council (Madrid, 15-16 December 1998).

As far as the relationship between NATO and its Partners in the region is concerned, the direct contribution of neighbours like Romania and others to bringing and keeping peace in, and to reconstructing, Bosnia-Herzegovina tells more about shared values than any written declaration. The promptness of their involvement in difficult, real-life operations does also attest to the willingness and preparedness of contributors to take upon themselves the obligations ensuing from eventual NATO membership.

The stable, democratic states of the area can shoulder the constructive involvement of the Alliance in many other ways. One of the common traits of the feeble states in the Balkans is the lack of even an incipient democratic civil society that can substantially contribute to their reconstruction from below. Romania is deeply persuaded by its own experience that the dialogue between authorities and civil society is a must for the entrenchment of democracy, the rule of law, a market economy and full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is equally aware that an all-inclusive regional dialogue could become an inexhaustible source for the enhancement of stability and security throughout the area. That is exactly why, in its capacity as holder of the 1999 chairmanship of the Co-operation Process in South-European States (the only sub-regional initiative in which the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia takes part), Romania has taken the initiative to organise a seminar on good

governance at the end of March 1999. Given the country's good relations with all the states in the area, it is to be expected that representatives of authorities and civil societies from all participating states will attend the Bucharest seminar.

Based on its multifaceted contribution to the stability and security of the area south of its borders and of Europe as a whole, Romania likes to define itself as a de facto Ally. Officials of both NATO and the Allied countries have confirmed the accuracy of this term on more than one occasion. Its decision to join the NATO-led peacekeeping mission to be deployed in Kosovo, in case of a successful ending of the Rambouillet talks, will give new substance to such a perception.

WASHINGTON SUMMIT: WHAT ABOUT FURTHER ENLARGEMENT?

The strengthening of NATO's southern flank is an obvious priority for countries like Romania and Slovenia, which are in specific ways proportionate with their weight security providers for the region, as well as for all the Allies situated within or close to the area. A similar opinion can be found in a number of strategic analyses produced in NATO member states.

The bitter pill received by Romania and Slovenia on the occasion of the 1997 Madrid Summit was more easily swallowed because it was coated in the sweet promise of article eight of the Madrid Declaration. However, as the Washington Summit approaches, all the aspirants to integration with NATO, the two 'favourites' included, have received signals that the much-hoped-for invitation will most probably not be issued.

A thorough answer to the question 'why?' can be given only by the Alliance. Hoping for the better, Romania prepares for a second best. Its expectation and suggestions point to the need to: list prospective members, starting with Romania and Slovenia; preserve the principles according to which the eligibility of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were judged in 1997 as the yardstick for future invitees; approve a NATO accession schedule for the designated countries with a clear timeframe for launching new invitations to start membership negotiations with the most deserving aspirants, and of a reasonable horizon for the completion of accession procedures.

Other ideas refer to charging the North Atlantic Council with periodical reviews of the progress made by the aspiring countries, and possible authorisation to make not only recommendations, but also to extend invitations to begin negotiations; launching of a set of guidelines and practical measures (Membership Action Programme—MAP), aimed at enhancing the ability of the eligible aspirants to shoulder NATO's efforts to project stability and security beyond its current area, as well as their preparedness to integrate into the Alliance. Once adopted by the Washington Summit, it would be desirable to start the implementation of MAP as early as possible. The identification by NATO and each aspiring country of the best ways to do it, as well as of an appropriate calendar could be the first step in an Upgraded Individual Dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The post-1989 relationship between NATO and the Balkans is one of the most convincing illustrations of the inherent capacity of NATO to adapt to new challenges. Analyses belonging to a new school of thought in international theory, one that endeavours to check the validity of complexity theory in the field of international affairs, have proven helpful in designing a plausible explanation thereof. The different fates of the opposing political-military structures of the Cold War period, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, can be attributed to a crucial qualitative difference. The very

bases of NATO's creation, its values, principles, organisation and functioning, have made it a complex adaptive system, able to co-evolve with its environment. The Warsaw Pact vanished together with the Cold War environment, because it was an artificial structure imposed from above or outside, devised to defend the unnatural values and practices of communism.

Although unwanted and unintended by anybody, the tragic history of the Former Yugoslavia's dismantlement and its ensuing consequences have played, in a certain way, the role of a catalyst for the Alliances' adaptation to the post-Cold War period's new challenges and risks. In turn, NATO's adaptation has favoured both its willingness and ability to become an essential instrument for the gradual re-linking of the entire area to mainstream Europe.

There is no doubt that an early extension of the invitation to join NATO to eligible aspirants like Romania and Slovenia, to be followed by others, would be beneficial not only for the area under examination, but also for the Alliance itself. In a recent speech, US Secretary of Defence, William Cohen, remarked:

...half a century ago, another generation of Europeans and Americans dared to defy the historical determinists who predicted an inevitable decline into those patterns [of struggle and strife] of the past. Their answer was an alliance called NATO, and for 50 years there has been this aspect of life that has not changed: the stability, peace and prosperity made possible by our Alliance, founded on our shared vision of Euro-Atlantic Security.⁸

Mutatis mutandis, one is encouraged to raise the question: could not past patterns in the Balkans vanish sooner if NATO's presence there would be further strengthened through the inclusion of the area's like-minded countries which are both willing and able to bring added value to the Alliance?

1 *The author's views on the inaccuracy of the term 'the Balkans' can be found in Elena Zamfirescu, Mapping Central Europe, The Hague: Clingendael Paper, May 1996.*

2 *Lawrence S. Kaplan and Robert W. Clawson, 'NATO and the Mediterranean Powers in Historical Perspective', in Lawrence S. Kaplan, et al. (eds.), NATO and the Mediterranean, Wilmington, Delaware, Scholarly Resources Inc., 1985, p. 4.*

3 *Out of sheer symmetry, the author would like to remark that literally speaking, the geographical spread of NATO–North Atlantic–is as inaccurate as that of 'the Balkans'.*

4 *S. Victor Papacosma, 'Greece and NATO', in Lawrence S. Kaplan, et al. (eds.) op. cit., p. 191 (emphasis added).*

5 *Ibid., p. 192.*

6 *Maria Todorova, Imagining the Balkans, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 165-186.*

7 *William Clinton, 'Radio Address by the President to the Nation', in European Wireless File, American Embassy, USIS, Bucharest, February 16, 1999, p.25.*

* *The EAPC replaced the initial framework of co-operation between NATO and former*

members of the Warsaw Pact, the North-Atlantic Co-operation Council, in July 1997.

8 *William S. Cohen, Transatlantic Partnership on the Threshold of the Next Millennium, Munich Conference on Security Policy, 6 February 1999, p. 5.*
