Debalkanizing the Balkans.
A Strategy for a Sustainable Peace in Kosovo

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As the United States debates whether and when to withdraw from Iraq; tries, in concert with other powers, to prevent any further proliferation of nuclear weapons; and explores ways to build a lasting peace in the Middle East, in another part of the world the United Nations is seeking to determine the future status of Kosovo, for which NATO, led by the US, went to war in 1999.

The US is entering a new period of its involvement in the Balkans. This period is not about the engagement of the global power, however, but about its withdrawal. The US is eager to create peace in the Balkans in order to be able to direct all of its attention to the Middle East, North Korea, and other more pressing and potentially more dangerous issues. But will such a withdrawal produce sustainable peace? Will it contribute to the lack of security, a possibility of further ethnic conflict, and thus a failure of peace making? Will they leave the Balkans in the form of a community of European-style peaceful and multiethnic democracies or will it remind us more of the fragile democracy of today's Iraq?

Previous resolutions of Balkan crises in the 1990s and early 2000s did not lead to a comprehensive and sustainable peace. Is it possible to make the next chapter of peacemaking in the Balkans a true success story and to render the peace that follows sustainable and likely to usher in regional prosperity and a peaceful and united Europe?

The Historic Background

History and Mythology

On the heels of the horrors of the Balkan Wars at the beginning of the twentieth century Winston Churchill observed that »the Balkans have the

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tendency to produce more history than they can consume.« While this might be true and the Balkan nations can be blamed for many of their own ills, Churchill's observation is only half the story. The other half is that the major international players (be they multinational empires or so-called great powers or global superpowers or international organizations) have over the centuries exported to the Balkans more history than the local political market could absorb. This unstoppable importation of outside history makes the peoples of the Balkans mere objects rather than subjects of history and forces them in turn to complement that outsider generated history by their own mythology.

Mythology is usually produced as a form of compensation by those who are unable to produce more history. In the end, it turns out that normal historic development becomes impossible because of the terror of mythology. Mythology rather than history captures politics, not to mention the present, the future, and even the past.

Understanding this contradiction between history and mythology in the Balkans is essential for all those trying to figure out the roots of *balkanization*, as well as difficulties connected with finding solutions to the multitude of Balkan crises. Without such an understanding, *debalkanization* of the Balkans is impossible.

For global – especially European – players the Balkans have always been the main gate to the mysterious and alluring Orient. The region was the crossing point of the ancient »Silk Road« and the »Amber Road«, while today the »oil-and-gas road« and the illicit »trafficking road« cross there. The Balkans are geopolitically important because the region bridges several areas which form a coherent geo-strategic unity, namely the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea. The need to keep these pathways open and secure explains the eternal desire of the non-Balkan powers to impose a sustainable order in the region; an order they trust in because it was an order they understand – their order.

Ottoman Multiculturalism and European Nationalism

The Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and Ottoman Turks all fought for the Balkans. The Turks managed to subjugate the medieval Balkan kingdoms and to establish their own order there. That order lasted for several centuries.

The problem was, however, that the order established by the Ottoman Turks was not an order that Europeans understood. Notwithstanding

the prevalent stereotypes, Ottoman rule in the Balkans was tolerant in nature and led to the development of a multicultural and multireligious cohabitational system within which the Turks were the only political elite while the Greeks kept control over the administration, the Albanians formed the military leadership, the Armenians held most of the commercial networks, the Jews operated the financial markets, and so on. This kind of ethnic melting pot was in strong contrast to medieval and intolerant Western Europe with which the »Great Turk« entered into a geopolitical conflict, having among other consequences the birth of European consciousness. In the war between the European powers (be they emerging imperial nations or multinational empires) and the Ottoman Empire, the former used, among other things, the weapon of inciting nationalism. Such a policy forced the various peoples living together in the Balkans to replace cultural cohabitation with cultural exclusion and to riot against the Ottoman rulers on behalf of their newly found aspirations of national and religious identity.

Today this first modern balkanization is considered to be a significant historic event that instills pride in most of the inhabitants of the region. The fact of the matter is, however, that instead of what we today understand as European tolerance, what for a time was called Ottoman internal tolerance was replaced by an intolerant confrontation between mixes of internally tolerant peoples for the achievement of ethnically pure state structures pursued in a xenophobic spirit by the cruelest means.

Thus, the first Europeanization of the Balkans was truly its first balkanization. And conversely: the Ottoman balkanization before the first European balkanization should be viewed as an early pattern for the modern Europeanization of today.

Balkanization Deepens

In an environment characterized by clashes between the great powers, their interests and even their civilizations, it became expensive to guard any consistent model of imported order and to make it sustainable. Therefore the best guarantee of order in the Balkans became a system of unstable equilibrium in which the great powers aimed at achieving a dynamic stability through a precarious equilibrium between local enemies. That negative dynamic was based on an endless zero-sum game. Local players were brought into this game with two opposite sets of traditions: one of tolerance towards neighbors and the other of xenophobia. However, only

the negative tradition was fueled, nurtured, cultivated, and exploited by the outsiders. In this zero-sum game only the negative and intolerant were regarded as exemplary.

An exemplary history consists of myths. They speak about a perfect model of society and perfect behaviors which must be maintained, perpetrated or rehabilitated in order to assure the continuation of a past happiness and glory which in fact never existed. Since every one of these competing models is perceived to be perfect they are exclusive. Those who believe only in their own truth are, consequently, intolerant. Each of the »mythological societies« from the Balkans was encouraged to promote its own model against the others. This was the second balkanization, this time bred from within the region. It resulted in the dismantling of a multicultural and multireligious tissue into several always desired but never achieved one-dimensional cultural societies. This new balkanization gave birth to the concept of balkanization now widely used in political science all over the world.

History is about orienting societies towards the future. Mythology is always oriented towards an imagined past since its only concern and its only project are to continue that kind of past into the future by using the means of the present. The clash between the historical approach and the mythological approach in the Balkans raises clear problems because it puts in contact and even in conflict two opposing political cultures. At the same time the situation is complicated by the fact that in the Balkans pre-industrial (tribal) societies coexist with industrial (national societies) and post-industrial (cosmopolitan) societies. Clashes between these political cultures and the confrontational character of their relations breed terrorism, corruption, and organized crime, coupled with lack of economic development and incomplete democracy. This is the third stage of the balkanization or rather the third balkanization – balkanization after balkanization after balkanization – which makes any prospect of a stable, positive and rational order in the region even more problematic.

Debalkanizations and Rebalkanizations

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and between the two World Wars, the Balkans became the site of a dramatic process of destruction of the multicultural and multiethnic tissue which was their main feature during the »Great Turk's« rule.

Later, after the Second World War, the biggest chunk of the Balkans remained behind the Iron Curtain in the communist and Soviet-dominated camp. This incidentally was certified by the agreement, in which Churchill himself had a hand, with Stalin in 1944 in Yalta. The region became a place of global confrontation not only between the Warsaw Pact and NATO but even between the USSR and China, and the USSR and the Soviet »dissident states«, such as Yugoslavia, Romania, and Albania. On several occasions during the twentieth century, such as by signing the Montreux Treaty governing the regime of the Black Sea straits or by the agreements of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, to name a few, the great powers left the Balkans under the shadow of Russia.

The Soviet Union tried to debalkanize the region in its own way. Mythological disputes were forced into a freezer in order to leave room for an imagined egalitarian and newly mythological society based on proletarian solidarity. This »debalkanization« did not succeed as the issues were not dealt with in any serious way. As soon as they were taken out of the freezer they came to life again.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar world system, the Balkans witnessed a number of developments which took place more or less in the following chronological order:

▶ *Post-Communist rebalkanization*, consisting of the thawing out and resurrection of cultural, ethnic and religious disputes and wars, in search of mono-ethnic states based on mono-cultural societies inspired by a mythology of perfect societies.

▶ *Internationalization* following the multiplication of international non-Balkan players involved in attempting to resolve the Balkans identity crises (facilitated by the initial weakness of post-Soviet Russia and welcomed by most former members of the Soviet system from the region, which perceived these international players as guarantors of their once and for all liberation from Russian influence) and trying to use the new unstable context to promote their own geo-strategic and geo-economic agendas.

▶ *Rebalkanization through localization* resulting from the support given (purposely or involuntarily) by the external (non-Balkan) players eager to disengage from the area to various local ethnic communities, sometimes going as far as letting those communities form their own paramilitary forces and eventually their own state structures in such a way as to achieve regional stability through an unstable equilibrium between the various groups in conflict. We believe that the United States,

even though it was not its original intention, has contributed to the myth that the Albanians were »the absolute victims« in the Balkans. Such a perception resulted from the fact that the Yugoslav wars and their reality were perceived in black and white and that all means of fighting Milosevic, even by encouraging an armed guerilla movement, were accepted as legitimate. The Albanians were perceived by the us only as victims and the Serbs only as aggressors and perpetrators (this changed somewhat after the violence of March 2004 in Kosovo), thus bringing another outside myth to the Balkans. Such a policy led the Kosovo Albanians to believe that Kosovo's independence is a done deal and that the us is solely on their side. The Serbs, on the other hand, wrongly assumed that the us is acting against Serbia and the Serbs in the Kosovo conflict. Another myth has been created, a myth that contradicted reality but that has had very real consequences in worsening traditionally excellent u.s.–Serb relations. Later, after realizing the consequences of such a misunderstanding, the us tried to change its message in Macedonia and Montenegro, and even in South Serbia, and called for inviolability of state borders in those cases.

▶ *Criminalization* partly consisting of the degeneration of the various fights for ethnic rights into criminal activity, a phenomenon stimulated to a great extent by the collapse of the previous Yugoslav governance system, was followed (sometimes with the silent acceptance or inability of the international protectors to act) by the emergence of a number of de facto mini-states unrecognized by international law, unintegrated into the international order and lacking legal economic resources for their normal functioning. The other side of the coin of this criminalization has been increased corruption on the part of many of those in power in the Balkans.

▶ *Europeanization* consisting of a debalkanization through the attempts at regional reintegration with the motivation of eventual eu membership. For the time being this process did not stop the desire of local communities to pulverize the Balkans into ever smaller and less viable independent states, nor did it achieve any well-structured and institutionalized regional cooperation.

The failure to reverse the present trend of pulverizing independence for an integrative process of regional interdependency could be explained by a number of partial factors:

▶ The crises of identity and of vision and leadership on the part of the eu which was unable to offer a clear European integration roadmap

to the Balkan states, a roadmap supported by adequate funding and a strong popular consensus among the member states.

▶ The locals' perception of the West's unequal treatment of different Balkan players.

▶ The wrong perception of some local stakeholders that the international community encourages the establishment of purely ethnic states, thus demotivating regional reconciliation and (re)integration.

▶ Finally, the shortsighted approach of the majority of global, regional and local players, stakeholders and decision-makers who considered it appropriate to look for solutions to all the problems of the Western Balkans at the expense of Serbia as it was considered to be the main, if not the only party responsible for the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, in disregard of Serbia's aspirations, the dangers of the Serbian people's humiliation and the international objective need to re-include Serbia in the regional system of geopolitical equilibrium.

The Balkans and Global Security

September 11, 2001 became the official starting date of the global war against terrorism. This war coincides with the advance of the Euro-Atlantic axis of global security from the Balkans–Middle East alignment toward Afghanistan–Iraq or Central Asia–Persian Gulf. This change of front lines caused a significant decrease in the u.s. interest in the Balkans. With a withdrawing us and a visionless eu, the Balkans have been forgotten and are in danger of another rebalkanization (or a failed debalkanization if we consider the attempts at eu enlargement throughout the Balkan region). The roots of the Balkan crises are not resolved but few seem to care. However, despite some strategic developments at the global level the Balkans still have an important strategic potential. The Euro-Atlantic players could not afford to leave the people of the Balkans to resolve their traditional disputes by employing intolerance and the logic of the zero-sum game.

The current power disequilibrium in the Balkans has a strategic character and it still has, at least in the medium term, the capacity to destabilize the entire continent of Europe. The solution for the frozen, active or latent Balkan crises is to be found at the intersection of the conflicting interests of the regional and global actors with the conflicting interests of the local actors. The question is, where is it placed at this point?

The Core of the Balkan Knot

The Need for Mutual Independence

The Kosovo problem is perhaps at the core of the system of Balkan crises. The sides in this conflict could not be further apart. The Kosovo Albanians desire complete independence of Kosovo from Serbia. Belgrade for its part invokes the international Helsinki principles of inviolability of Serbia's borders. Belgrade asserts that the solution must lie within its formula of »more than autonomy but less than independence.« These two positions are irreconcilable.

Usually one speaks about the difficulties for the Kosovo Albanians of obtaining their independence from Serbia. Nevertheless, it is at least as important and even more difficult for Serbia to obtain its independence from Kosovo.

In fact, things are much more complicated than they seem at first. The situation is complicated not only by Serbia's various international legal, internal constitutional, economic, and democratic problems, but first and foremost by the popular dimension of the psychological barrier. Indeed, even if the Serbian leaders realized for themselves the many political and economic advantages of getting rid of the Kosovo problem, even at the expense of giving away a territory that is extremely costly to control, the majority of the Serbian people, like their Albanian neighbors, still live in the universe of genuine nationalism. Such nationalism is fueled partly by the harsh and humiliating way in which Serbia has often been treated at the international level as the only guilty party in the »Yugoslav wars« and thus as the responsible heir, the collective guilty party for Milosevic's policy. All this only strengthens the nationalist spirit and the popular will of the Serbs to refuse to resolve the Kosovo issue in a way mutually acceptable to Belgrade and Pristina.

Therefore, any possible imposition of Kosovo's status on Serbia must be accompanied by a set of political and existential »compensations« which could motivate the highly charged Serbian society, if not to welcome then at least to accept the decision without any temptation to start some kind of guerilla resistance or revisionist movement.

The Impossible Agreement

Today, however, even if the Serbs realized the importance and necessity of liberating themselves from the Kosovo problem it is still politically

impossible for them to accept it freely. A direct agreement between the Serbs and Albanians is unfeasible. The current talks in Vienna between the delegations from Pristina and Belgrade prove this.

This leads to the unfortunate conclusion that the only viable solution for the Kosovo problem must be imposed by outsiders. Surprisingly, the chief un mediator, former Finnish President Martti Ahtissari, who is in charge of the Vienna talks, has already hinted at the possibility of such an outcome. Is anybody outside the Balkans ready to propose and, more importantly, to implement a smart resolution of the Kosovo crisis? Whoever imposed a solution (whatever this solution was) would invite harsh feelings from at least one, or maybe even both, sides for a long while. At the same time, how could such a solution be sustainable since those not involved in shaping it would not accept many of its components and sooner or later challenge it?

Having said that, the Balkans painfully need a solution to the Kosovo problem. If handled properly, this would not only settle a long and intractable dispute between Serbs and Albanians but, more importantly, transform the wider Balkans from a source of instability into a source of security. This development would make the need for long-term u.s. and European military involvement in the region a thing of the past.

A lasting solution for Kosovo, however, can only be found by also taking into account other urgent issues facing the countries of the region, most crucially, Serbia.

The Clash of Principles and General Frustration

Theoretically, the Kosovo problem is nothing new. It is just another reiteration of an eternal dilemma of international relations: the right of self-determination versus the principle of inviolability of borders. What is still unclear is the outcome of these conflicting principles in the case of Kosovo. The newly found interest of the international community toward untying the Kosovo knot and the launch of the un-sponsored Vienna process in November 2005 are a welcome change. Six years in political limbo has hurt the prospects of growth and foreign investment and hindered the development of democracy and institutions in Kosovo and, to a great extent, in Serbia itself.

Albanian frustration in Kosovo is overwhelming; one encounters it at every level when visiting Kosovo. The situation of the Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Roma is even worse. Not surprisingly, ordinary Serbs outside

Kosovo experience it as well. More and more of the Serbs consider Kosovo lost, and almost all Serbs would like to move on with their lives. According to the latest opinion polls almost half of respondents in Serbia would accept Kosovo's conditional independence and almost a third its complete independence. Most Serbian politicians would deny this, but they cannot deny that the uncertainty about Kosovo has a negative effect on Serbia's development. Instead of concentrating on improving people's daily lives, consolidating democracy, marginalizing the nationalists (which, incidentally, are still the strongest parliamentary party in Belgrade), energizing 1.5 million non-voters, passing a new constitution, or fully dedicating itself to the quest for EU membership, Belgrade's hands are tied by this dusty province of two million souls.

In the late 1990s, the Serbs and Albanians fought for Kosovo. Today, the mood is different. Few Serbs are willing to enter another bloody war. The Albanians, on the other hand, are willing to fight.

Vienna is not the first place where Serbian government leaders and Albanian political and later Kosovan government leaders have met since the 1999 war. Their first meeting in Athens in December 2000 was followed by multiple sessions in Athens, Lucerne, Thessaloniki, Vienna, and Bucharest. The current Vienna meetings, like previous encounters between Serbia's and Kosovo's senior politicians, have produced very little in terms of resolving the Kosovo issue. During such encounters the sides usually silently agree to disagree and try to score points with the international community, rather than find common ground or a possible workable compromise.

Whatever the ultimate result of the UN-sponsored negotiating process, it is essential that it provides a clear solution accepted by both Belgrade and Pristina. Confusing talks resulting in half-measures or delayed solutions will not resolve the problem but only complicate the situation. Life in Kosovo since 1999 is proof that half-measures or delayed solutions do not work in the long run. Life since 1999 also proves that a sustainable solution has to be acceptable to both Belgrade and Pristina. Quick-fix solutions or artificial deadlines will not work either.

In working out a possible solution, special attention has to be paid to one crucial Kosovo group, the Kosovo Serbs, a victimized minority that feels threatened by their Albanian neighbors. Since the U.N. replaced the Serbian government in Kosovo, they have suffered physically and emotionally, as well as economically and politically. Very few have returned to their homes after roughly 200,000, or two-thirds of the pre-war Serb

population, fled the province after the 1999 war. Returning their lives to normal, giving them a sense of security and of a future in their own home, and bringing them back into Kosovo's political life will be as difficult – and as important – a task as negotiating the status of Kosovo itself.

Too often in the past, the international community has recognized the results of ethnic cleansing or expulsions in the name of greater security or peace. Too often minority rights were neglected in the service of a seemingly higher cause. One need only look at the borders of the entities in Bosnia, certain areas in Croatia, the Abkhazia region of Georgia, or the border areas between Rwanda and Congo. Such solutions did bring an end to violent conflicts but were far from being fair for all sides and in fact did not bring about a fair or often sustainable peace.

Towards a Solution

An International Conference on Kosovo

The inability of the Serbs and Albanians to find a workable compromise over Kosovo and the important precondition that any solution, even internationally imposed, must be acceptable to both sides leave only one option for a sustainable solution, an international conference. But how can it be ensured that such a conference does not repeat the previous long history of balkanizing the Balkans by external factors? The first step for the international community before convening such a conference would be to agree not only on its format and procedures but also on its legal basis. A successful international conference would not only resolve the Kosovo crisis but also debalkanize the Balkans once and for all.

Format

As for the format of the conference, placing it under the auspices of the United Nations would mean bringing to the table all five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the UN Secretary General. The European Union will be another participant, besides Germany and Italy, the only Contact Group members which are not permanent members of the UN SC. Serbia should also be a participant, and although from a legal standpoint Kosovo is not currently a subject in terms of international law, some inventive way should be found to give Kosovo its own voice at the conference.

Grigor'ev/Severin, Peace Strategy for Kosovo

It is becoming more and more clear that at such a conference Serbia would again be obliged to agree on something hitherto unbearable to it. However, as we pointed out earlier, in order to be sustainable the solution should be, in principle, unanimously accepted, which includes Belgrade. How could one reach a credible and sustainable outcome against the will of one of the participants, in this case Serbia? To offer Serbia a plan prepared in advance is acceptable, but to adopt a plan against a participant's vote would transform the entire exercise into a farce. The same would be true of Pristina.

How can such an outcome be avoided? Several possible formats should be explored. One possibility is a two-round conference. In the first round, the representatives of Serbia, including the Kosovo Serbs, and the representatives of the Kosovo institutions of provisional self-government should be invited for hearings and as observers at the debates. They should also be entitled to address the conference and to present evidence when needed. In this way, one could have all those interested technically involved in the debate while avoiding the legal problem of the lack of internationally recognized statehood and the feeling that the change of Serbia's borders has been decided *a priori*. In the second round, Serbia as a state and the elected authorities of Kosovo will be invited to discuss the plan agreed by the other conference participants (all minus Serbia and Kosovo) during the first round. At this stage the alternative for the two is either to accept or to reject the settlement (in the latter case the conference fails and the parties are sent back to square one) or to consider the plan as accepted (since in fact everybody was present at its negotiation) and to discuss the modalities for enhancing and implementing it.

One could conceive of a single-round conference with the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians invited as active observers and informal contributors (see the format of the first round of the two-round option above). To this approach one might object that it is too close to the former Versailles model, and so to the unfortunate tradition producing the history and eventually the mythology of the Balkans without the participation of the Balkan players.

One could finally try to organize a conference with all those concerned as participants from the beginning. However, on this option, with the decisions of the conference being made by some kind of consensus or by unanimity it is likely that the whole exercise would be inconclusive since it is hard to imagine that the Serbs and the Kosovo Albanian leaders could agree on a mutually acceptable solution.

The international community should consider all these options and select the one most likely to produce a solution. We believe that the first option presents far more opportunities for an agreed upon solution than the other two.

Procedures

The problem is not how to make the parties agree on an outcome but how to make them feel that the arrangement imposed on them is fair, while engaging them as much as possible in the process of devising that arrangement and making them feel that they were consulted on the outcome.

From the procedural point of view, the conference should take its decisions either by consensus or by consensus minus one. How could one argue in favor of the latter? Usually one thinks that consensus is a marvelous way to make decisions without voting. In reality the consensus rule ultimately leads to a single-country veto and is thus the perfect recipe for failure. At the same time, when consensus is used, each participant, reassured by its capacity to block any decision, has no real motivation to negotiate with flexibility, imagination and in a spirit of compromise. Therefore, bearing in mind the difficulty of the matter to be overcome and the divergent interests of the participants, one should think of a different way of reaching decisions rather than consensus. One could also opt for a qualified majority vote (for example, a two-thirds or three-fifths majority) but, since current interests are so much divided it is hard to imagine that the participants would accept the decision. Alternatively, one could imagine a consensus minus three rule which would simplify the decision, mainly if Serbia and Kosovo were full-fledged members of the conference. However, this would put in jeopardy the credibility and legitimacy of the final decision when by such a procedure the opinions of Serbia and Kosovo will be precisely those remaining in opposition. It is crucial, however, that all participants agree on the rules before convening the conference.

The Legal Basis

From the legal point of view, the battle between the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity will certainly dominate the conference. Many states which might qualify to attend the conference might

have difficulties accepting the principle of self-determination, fearing that this might open a Pandora's box in different parts of the world where various ethnic or trans-ethnic communities are also contemplating secession. Russia, for example, has on several occasions made this reference to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition, in this particular case the principle of self-determination conflicts with the principle of territorial integrity stated in UN Resolution 1244 which speaks about the preservation of borders. Since nobody will ever agree on these two principles together it looks as though it will be impossible to find any solution for the Kosovo crisis that is based purely on respecting the principle of self-determination. Therefore, one should try to settle the problem on an ad hoc basis following the general lines of fairness, equilibrium, pragmatism, and common sense. What the participants could agree upon is an outcome based on the idea of global security. Thus an ad hoc solution would address an ad hoc problem. A settlement would not be the conclusion of a syllogism of international law but an unrepeatable outcome for an unrepeatable dispute. In this way, one would alleviate the fears that Kosovo might create a dangerous precedent for other cases (crises), from Chechnya to Transdniestria, or from Abkhazia to Tibet.

Substance of the Solution

On the substance of a possible outcome, one could reasonably believe that a feasible and sustainable solution, bearing in mind the actual state of facts, balance of power and conflict of interests, would be the one based on the following four points:

1. Kosovo's problem will be separated from Serbia's problem.

2. A major challenge of the Kosovo negotiating process will be making sure that Serbia does not end up feeling like the loser. Serbia must not leave the negotiating table empty-handed.

It will not be easy but the solution to the Kosovo problem is as much about Serbia as it is about Kosovo. By creating an eight million-strong pariah state in the middle of the Balkans, all hopes for a lasting peace in the region will be damaged. A continuation of Serbia's isolation, failure of Serbian democracy, and a victory by the Radicals would crush any hopes for a peaceful Balkans in the near future. A way should be found for reconciliation between the West, and especially the United States, and Serbia. There is a huge gap in communication between Washington and Belgrade. This gap should be filled by closer contacts and efforts by both

sides to understand each other better. This will not be possible, however, without Serbia's reconciliation with its neighbors, including the Kosovo Albanians, and without Serb reconciliation among themselves. Serbia should get: (i) a clear road-map for EU integration; (ii) generous pre-EU accession financial assistance, including forgiveness of its total foreign debt in order to rehabilitate its infrastructure, energy facilities, and economy, as well as to improve its social safety net (this will also be important for Serbia to achieve its necessary interoperability with the EU and to accelerate its EU integration); (iii) cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia should remain a commitment but will no longer be a condition of EU accession, while the trial of accused Serb war criminals will gradually be transferred to the Serbian courts. The recent »Package Plus« proposal made by the Serbian government to the European Commission provides a perfect blueprint for what would help Serbia.

3. Kosovo will remain an international protectorate under the UN aegis [protectorate enhanced by a joint contribution of the U.S. (crucial in assuring hard security) and the EU (crucial in assuring nation building and soft security)] and with no legal ties to Serbia until a civic and multicultural (democratized, decriminalized and demilitarized) nation is fully functional (one could also put a time limit on this protectorate, deciding that if within x number of years Kosovo does not meet the conditions and fulfill its commitments, the conference shall reconvene or the UN Security Council decide on the future of Kosovo). EU enlargement in the Balkans, including Kosovo – facilitated by the decisions of the conference – would certainly simplify the abovementioned processes.

4. Special cultural ties will be authorized between Belgrade and the Kosovo Serbs and a system of serious security and political safeguards put in place for the rights of the Kosovo Serbs and the special rights of Serbian Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo. It is important to realize that the Kosovo problem is as much an Albanian issue as a Serbian one. However, such special ties must be based on the general principles of international law and placed under appropriate international supervision in such a way as to avoid being misused for geopolitical goals.

An International Conference on the Western Balkans

Will a resolution of Kosovo's status alone provide for a lasting peace in the Balkans? Regrettably, the answer is no. In fact, if an independent Kosovo is created it might encourage separatist tendencies among the Bosnian Serbs or the Albanians of south Serbia. A Kosovo settlement has to include firm international guarantees of the inviolability of Macedonia's present borders, especially following the ongoing change of government in Skopje.

These issues cannot be isolated from the other problems of the region. A lasting solution would require that an international conference on Kosovo's Status eventually becomes an international conference on the Western Balkans. After the Kosovo round of the conference, a final round should take place with the participation of all those taking part in the first round, plus all the Balkan states and those that once bordered Yugoslavia, as they have a key interest in enhancing Balkan security. Both rounds should be convened by the United Nations.

All regional capitals, with their neighbors, and the major international powers as guarantors, must pledge that the resolution of the status of Kosovo represents the last remaining piece of the ex-Yugoslav puzzle, that no further border changes will be acceptable in the region, that the framework of the Dayton agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in Macedonia need to be respected by all while also being adapted to the developing realities on the ground (mainly the desired evolution of the actual ethno–national states into civic and multicultural states along with the emergence of the European cosmopolitan nation), and that there will be a serious and concerted effort to bring all the countries of the Balkans into the EU. Such an effort should include not only pledges of general political support but smart and significant financial assistance, meaningful help in completing institutional reforms, including those aimed at creating sustainable interethnic and civic democracies, and a clear and understandable EU admission schedule. Such a general agreement could be ratified by a resolution of the UN Security Council. This would be the best precedent for resolving conflicts in other parts of the world.

In fact, although we suggest that the Western Balkans round of the regional conference take part after the Kosovo round, the two are closely connected as the resolution of the Kosovo problem is impossible without an overall regional settlement, and any regional peace in the Balkans is

impossible without resolving the most difficult issue, Kosovo. Each agreement in turn would facilitate the other.

We have presented a few ideas on the context and possible solutions. One could not find solutions without an analysis of the context – with its Balkan and extra-Balkan dimensions – and without taking into consideration all the relevant interests. On this basis a settlement must be tracked by an approach which should be at the same time visionary, creative, bold, and pragmatic.

This is not an easy task, but only such an approach will make the Balkan wars a thing of the past and assure successful and final debalkanization of the Balkans. This is in the interests of the people of Serbia and Kosovo, the peoples of the Balkans and Europe and the world.