



De-balkanizing the Balkans

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The Conference that, on the initiative of Yugoslavia, convened the Foreign Ministers of the six Balkan States in Belgrade, from the 24th to the 26th of February, 1988, constituted an event that has had no equal since at least the end of the Second World War. And its success raises the question of the possibility - in the new international environment - of the revival of the pre-World War II idea of a Balkan regional agreement for mutual security.

The original idea of this quite unusual, and remarkably successful, political gathering - in which took part the Foreign Ministers Reis Malile from Albania, Petar Mladenov from Bulgaria, Karolos Papoulias from Greece, Ioan Totu from Rumania, A. Mesut Yilmaz from Turkey, and Budimir Loncar from Yugoslavia, who also chaired the Conference - can be traced back to an informal proposal made on television in the spring of 1987 by the Yugoslav Foreign Minister of the time Raif Dizdarevic. This was already an interesting new fact in both the regional Balkan and domestic Yugoslav scene.

Indeed, for many years, Yugoslav foreign policy has devoted minimum attention to inner-Balkan relations, probably assuming not only that its security was mainly related to superpower relations, but also that the situation in the Balkans, in spite of being one of division among rival blocs, was basically stable and that sudden changes were unlikely. On the other hand, Yugoslav attention to world problems, and its attempt at playing a world role as a leader of the "non-aligned", naturally pushed the "little knot" of inner-Balkan relations out of the forefront, at least until the worsening of Kosovo problems brought the attention back to Yugoslavia's immediate environment, and at the same time the eventual coming of the day of reckoning after years of happy

squandering has taught the country a lesson in modesty, as also about its diplomatic possibilities. This does not mean that in the past Belgrade had no Balkan policy at all; but only in 1987, with the proposal of the Conference that eventually took place in late February, 1988, Yugoslavia finally took an initiative of its own in the region.

In the late autumn of the same year, after having secured positive reactions from all the capitals concerned - with even Albania accepting, though after some hesitation¹ - the Belgrade government had sent official invitations. Behind these positive reactions, as behind the initiative itself, there is probably the belief that after the success of the American-Soviet negotiations on intermediate nuclear forces in Europe, the global issue of nuclear arms on the Old Continent has become likely to be raised, and that the ideas concerning the creation of nuclear-free zones in Northern or Central Europe, and of course in the Balkans, could find a new vigour. But it is also very possible that, confronted with the many contemporary examples of successful regional cooperation (not only in Europe, but also in South East Asia, and even in South America), the Balkan countries are beginning to fear that the fragmentation of the region among passionately nationalistic States might mean isolation and economic marginalisation even worse than at present, and are realising the outmoded features of their reciprocal territorial claims. Their governments are obviously not ready to drop these traditional claims - which would require more courage and progressive spirit than any leading group now has -, but could probably make their reassertion just a matter of principle, and actually put them back on the shelf while newer and more urgent issues of common interest are being discussed.

The success of not quarrelling

It indeed goes without saying that neither the ministerial meeting, nor the improvement of relations, and not even the creation of a de-nuclearized zone would suffice to solve the old and new problems of the Balkans. These are indeed extremely complex problems, that in each country may have, apart from their international aspects, extremely dangerous domestic consequences (the Kosovo example being the most obvious case in point). Still, if one cannot expect very fast results in the field of the "old" problems (which are indeed age-old ones) related to borders and minorities, even a limited improvement of relations, and a certain degree of *détente* in the Balkans could be very important, in order to help facing the "new" problems that are related to

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impending economic decay. The structural crisis of the Balkan communist economies has indeed reached dramatic proportions in Rumania, as the Brazov bread riots have shown, but is also very serious in Yugoslavia, especially in terms of political and public-order consequences, given the fact that the population has been able to appreciate the taste of consumer society in these recent years of declining Titoism and post-Titoism.

In spite of these obvious common worries that led the Balkan governments to accept Yugoslavia's invitation, it was quite clear that, at the Belgrade Conference, none of the concerned parties had any intention of aiming at any specific conclusion, after such a long history of national and ideological hostilities. It was then to the satisfaction of all the concerned parties that the Foreign Ministers of the six Balkan States met in Belgrade without any fixed agenda. Indeed, the general opinion among the participating countries was that such a Conference could already be considered a success if the States taking part found no immediate reason to quarrel with each other. For this purpose, the Belgrade meetings were organized in such a way that open confrontation on the many bilateral issues dividing the countries was unlikely. Before discussion was open, each of the six Foreign Ministers had the opportunity to give an introductory declaration lasting approximately half an hour, in which all the points of principle and the "sacred", never-to-be-abandoned national claims could find space. This was followed by discussion, then in conclusion the proposals were gathered together, a first-sight evaluation was attempted, and a final *communiqué* was issued.

If one considers the "realistic" (i.e. sober and more than modest) expectations

that the Conference had suscitated, the Belgrade meeting may be termed not only a success, but even a great success. Indeed, as the Foreign Ministers stressed in their final *communiqué*, discussion took place in a "constructive atmosphere". They had successfully taken the trouble not to promote their bilateral problems, pushing them out of the forefront of the discussion, and giving them only secondary importance. Moreover, they had in the end been able - in approving the final document - to formulate a series of proposals for the development of multi-lateral dialogue in the Balkans. As the majority of the participants themselves saw it, however, the most important fact was that thanks to the Conference they had established a series of bi-lateral contacts, and in so doing had obtained concrete results that were previously unlikely, if not unthinkable. The agreements made in this framework are, of course, still preliminary to any form of multilateral regional co-operation, and can be considered just "raw materials" to which future practice has to give a more precise form, but they at least demonstrated the will to establish dialogue and improve relations.

Thus, the fact that the Belgrade Conference had offered such an opportunity and a forum for such contacts, and that the opportunity was seized and the contacts established, provides the proof that the initiative was more than justified, and that a new awareness is spreading among the countries of South-east Europe. "Without co-operation" declared the Yugoslav President, Lazar Mojsov, the Balkans would end up "on the fringe of planetary developments", remaining "an enclave of unresolved difficulties from the past."²

Bilateral successes

The global success represented by the political and diplomatic climate that reigned during the discussions, and by the very fact that the Conference took place at all, was strengthened, as we have seen, by the bilateral agreements that the Belgrade meetings brought about. It appeared quite clear that there was, on the sidelines of the Conference, a very serious effort by all the concerned parties to show the improvements in the global Balkan scene. On the other hand, the effort that was obviously put into showing that bilateral issues could be suppressed on the agenda, and sometimes even settled by balanced agreements, cannot be explained without some expectation of substantial results to be achieved or prepared at the global regional level, expectations that are in turn related to renewed interest of EEC countries for Central and East European economies, as well as to the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy



under Gorbachev. The latter might however be a double-edged transformation for the Balkan countries, which could either take advantage of some regional spill-over of the East-West detente process, or remain an outmoded area where hatreds and divisions inherited from the Cold War compound with even older ones, in sharp contrast with a world where the spirit of co-operation across national and ideological borders becomes widespread, especially between the two European economic groupings, to which most of the Balkans (namely, Yugoslavia, Albania, Turkey, and practically Rumania) do not even belong.

Amongst the bilateral agreements which accompanied the Belgrade meetings, mention should be made of the protocol signed on the evening before the

beginning of the Conference by the Foreign Ministers of Bulgaria and Turkey, regarding the resuming of political dialogue between the two States. This is an important agreement, since at the end of 1984, Bulgaria also decided to take an unprecedented step in the Balkans, viz. to "Bulgarize" by force the Turkish minority living within its borders, (according to estimates some 7 - 8% of the total population, or about 700,000 inhabitants). This led to incidents involving injuries and deaths, and the affair has still not been resolved up to the present day. For Turkey, which is basically not particularly interested in minority questions, and shows little sympathy for the like within its own land, the matter was extremely unpleasant.

Turkey wishes indeed to keep good relations with Bulgaria and all the other Balkan States, as these provide the transit routes which lead to Western Europe,³ but has also the problem of not offering to Islamic fundamentalists all over the world a reason for indignantly denouncing Ankara's lack of sensitivity for the plight of a suppressed Moslem minority. In the document signed on the eve of the Belgrade meeting, Ankara and Sofia declared their intentions to "further co-operation in political, economic and humanitarian fields", and decided to arrange for working parties to solve the problems existing between each other. And, since the mandate of the two committees created by the new agreement clearly includes humanitarian questions, such as the problem caused by the suppression of the Turkish minority by the Bulgarian government, it seems at first sight that the Turks have obtained a certain satisfaction over this issue. But Turkey has also shown great flexibility.

A second agreement between Albania and Yugoslavia, dealt with the re-establishment of cultural contacts between these two countries, and it was decided that a cultural convention would be organized by April. Moreover, a third important bilateral document was signed on February 23 by the Greek Prime Minister Papandreu, during a State visit to Bulgaria, in which he agreed with Zhivkov on the advantages of eliminating nuclear weapons in Europe.

Finally, in order to complete the list of the bilateral agreements related to this multilateral meeting, it is possible to suggest that the Belgrade Conference was instrumental in making possible the February 1988 Davos agreement reached by the Greek President Andreas Papandreou and his Turkish counterpart Turgut Özal, also concerning the re-establishment of dialogue between these two countries. It would certainly be exaggerated to see a direct connection here, yet the accord expresses the same spirit which the States participating in

the Belgrade Conference had been expecting and preparing for. That it was Papandreou rather than Özal who had previously avoided direct dialogue, however, may perhaps be explained in connection with a wider framework. Under Papandreou, Greece had already been particularly active in promoting a Balkan Conference, and the active Balkan policies which Athens was trying to follow would not have been realistic without a certain stability in Greek - Turkish relations.

The two multilateralisms

During their discussions in Belgrade, the Foreign Ministers did not overlook historical reference. And this not only because they had in mind the negative consequences for the Balkan peoples that had in the past been brought about by their lack of unity and the ambiguity of their relations, but also because they seemed increasingly aware of the fact that this ambiguity had always been



instrumental in enabling the great powers to keep a hand in Balkan affairs and play the Balkan peoples against each other. They were also thinking of the moments, quite rare, but still to be found in their past history, when there had been attempts towards co-operation, with correspondingly successful results. The slogan "The Balkans for the Balkan peoples!" that was often referred to, was another sign of this peculiar historical awareness. It was indeed in the spirit identified by these words that in 1912 the Christian Balkan States first attempted to escape being manipulated by the great powers, and succeeded in driving the Ottoman Empire almost completely out of the European continent. For his part, the Turkish Foreign Minister recalled the Balkan pact signed by

Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece and Turkey in February 1934. This had not only brought about a return of Turkish political presence to the Balkans - in a renovated, non-imperialistic spirit - but had also been the first attempt to establish a common security system in the region, founded on the new national States, and for the first time not directed against a specific threat.

These two historical reference points - 1912 and 1934 - have two different political meanings, and it could indeed be said that there are two different possible models of Balkan multilateralism. The 1912 war against Turkey, which - even though its results bore the seeds of hard future conflict - may undoubtedly be considered one of the highest points in the history of the Balkan peoples and of their co-operation, was fought against an external

enemy. On that occasion Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Montenegro, tied by a system of bi-lateral alliances, were attempting the enterprise of driving the Turks completely out of Europe and thus realizing their common national aspirations.

Although there was not long to wait before anti-Turkish unity gave way to renewed quarrelling over the division of the booty, the crucial element which - in this alternating convergence and divergence of interests - is at the core of 1912-style Balkan thrusts for unity, is the common reaction against outside interference by the great powers - and this in spite of the fact that in order to interfere, the outside powers have always exploited these divergences of interest and the rivalries of the Balkan nations, thus inflating and exacerbating them. From the beginning of the 19th century up to the First World War, the role of outside power was played by Turkey, who had most of the Balkan peninsula under its control and against whom were directed the so-called liberation movements of the Balkan peoples. The other great powers, above all the Austro-Hungarian empire and Russia, supported to a certain extent these movements whenever it lay in their interests, but also tried hard to substitute themselves for Turkey, either directly or through their "influence".

Even up to the present day, the Balkan peoples themselves have diverging opinions regarding the role played by the great powers in their history of national emancipation. As far as their present predicament is concerned, this obviously applies to the powers that have stayed "great" through the upheaval of the last century, that is the Russians (in both their Czarist and Soviet incarnations) and the Anglo-Saxons, first as Britain, and later as America.⁴

Moreover, not all the Balkan peoples perceive the 1912-13 period as a phase of national revival and assertion. In the Balkans there were two local questions whose potential for disruption remained unnoticed at first, but which then became the recurrent cause of confusion in the region. And one of them, the question of the Albanians in the Kosovo region, has recently, viz. since the 1981 troubles, become acute to the point of endangering the cohesion of the entire country. The other source of troubles is Macedonia, which in 1913 had been divided up, and precisely for this reason the Macedonians insist on the fact that the first Balkan war was under no circumstances to be considered a war of liberation, as the Serbs, the Greeks and others maintained: this "division" had made the Macedonians anything but "liberated." This interpretation is contested in particular from the Greek point of view that

Macedonia had always been a geographical concept, defining a natural region within which diverse peoples lived, and according to Greek opinion, this is still true today.⁵ On the other hand, the Bulgarians hold the view that the Slav Macedonians historically have been, and still are, a component of the Bulgarian political and cultural sphere, and that even though it might now be possible to identify a Macedonian nation, this is still no reason to re-write history. Both the Greeks and the Bulgarians conclude from their respective theses that it is questionable even to take into consideration Macedonia as the name for a new Slav nation, and the Greeks go so far as to see it as “usurpation”.

Allied without an enemy

The reference to the 1934 attempt at unity has a completely different political meaning. In the period between the two World Wars (1914-45), two new outside powers appeared with ambitions in the area: Italy and Germany. It was the impact of their interference that frustrated the effort (1934) to create a regional security pact that had been attempted by Balkan countries - with the notable exception of Bulgaria. After the First World War, autonomous national States had developed all over East and South-East Europe. Serbia and Montenegro had been included in the new “Kingdom of the Serbians, Croats and Slovenians”, later called Yugoslavia, in which the Serbs were the driving force. Rumania had won Transylvania, and Greece had completed its territory in the north-east. In reality there were new conquerors and conquered, and these new national States were anything but homogeneous. Hungary was the great loser in the northernmost parts of South-east Europe, whilst Bulgaria was the loser in the south. Both States, of course, showed little inclination to be content with the Trianon and Neuilly Peace Treaties.

The autonomous national States which were the offsprings of World War I found themselves beset with the task of establishing some kind of order in their area. In the northern part of South-East Europe, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania created the “Little Entente”, which had the disadvantage, however, of being the declared enemy of any *revanchism* which might arise from the Habsburgs or Hungary. France thus viewed the “Little Entente” and its member States as its allies “beyond” Germany and Austria. But it would be wrong to assert that the members of the “Little Entente” had waited for initiatives from Paris before reaching their alliance. In reality, the Entente had been forged as part of the front against Bela Kun’s Hungarian Soviet Republic.

During the late '20s, the idea developed of imitating in the South Balkans the "Little Entente" existing among the North Balkan countries and Czechoslovakia. But the initiators of this idea, (above all Turkey, with its Foreign Minister Rüstü-Aras, but also the Rumanian Foreign Minister Titulescu), knew of the teething troubles which had accompanied the birth of their model, wanted to avoid their repetition, and tried to find ways of establishing it on better foundations. Thus, the successive idea of a Balkan Pact, which was originated with the Greek-Turkish reconciliation of 1930 and given an ideal and political airing in the same year during the "officious" first Balkan Conference in Saloniki, was not intended to be directed against anyone. From a Turkish point of view, the Balkan Alliance had to be a collective security system - a kind of "Balkan Locarno",⁶ an alliance without a declared or known enemy.

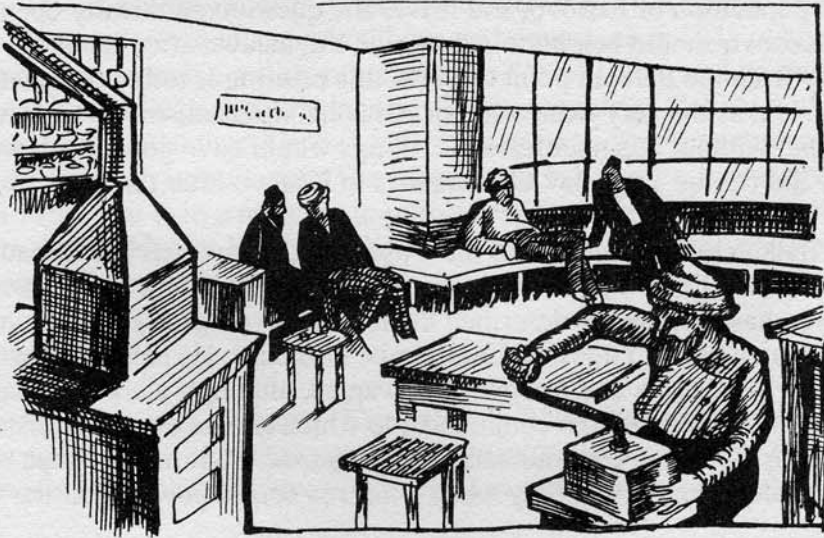
This idea was something new in this rivalry-ridden area, and it was not a coincidence that at the February 1988 Belgrade Conference the Turkish Foreign Minister recalled with such insistence the Balkan Alliance of 1934. If its model were followed in the future hoped-for Balkan co-operation, the real element of novelty would be that its historical reference point was not aimed against any foreign threat. This is what makes the proposal particularly interesting and innovative, but also suggests that its implementation might be difficult, since - even though it is radically simplifying the matter to say so - previous agreements between the Balkan States have mainly proved their worth only when directed against a specific object. On the contrary, in 1934, when the idea was different, it was unfortunately not possible to put it into practice. After some hesitation, Bulgaria declared it could not enter into the intended agreement as this would implicitly mean signing disadvantageous pacts, viz. the Treaty of Neuilly yet again. At the same time, Albania had just allied itself with fascist Italy, and thus neither wanted, nor was able, to take part. So in the end, Yugoslavia, Rumania, Greece and Turkey alone signed "the Balkan entente", (termed the "Pact"), on 9 February 1934, in Athens.

It was soon obvious that the ideas of collective security and general solidarity were premature, as the the single States had diverging perceptions of their interests. The individual nations thus immediately drew away from their promises of reciprocal aid and registered their reservations regarding the military aspects of the agreements which still had to be concluded. Turkey did not want to be involved in conflicts between the other partner States and the

Soviet Union, mostly because on its easternmost frontier it had another dangerous border with revolutionary Russia; nor did Greece want to be involved in any conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia.⁷ The military agreements which eventually did painfully come to fruition over the following couple of years were hence already abortive creatures before they were in a position to exercise any force. The Balkan Pact itself was unable to resist against either the political pressure or, later on, the military offensives which Germany and Italy began, and which, after 1941, reached their apex with the occupation or domination, by the Axis Powers, of all the Balkan territories - with the exception of European Turkey.

Tito's "pan-Balkanism"

After the end of the Second World War, the spirit of both 1912 and 1934 was completely lost, and co-operation in the Balkan region was in bad shape for many years. The dividing line between East and West ran directly through the whole area. Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria belonged to the Soviet spheres of influence, whilst Greece belonged to the West, basically just as noted down by Churchill on the scrap of paper which, as he himself declared in his Memoirs, he had given to Stalin in Moscow during October 1944. Turkey was excluded from this division into "spheres of influence", and even though threatened by Russian pretensions, stayed on with the West. In Yugoslavia - an ally to the



victors of World War II -, the "influences" from each side should have kept a 50/50 balance, a balance or division between spheres of influence which Yugoslavia had always firmly rejected as imperialist haggling, even though in the end Yugoslavia itself brought about a similar result, in the sense that today it is a neutral State, trying to keep a middle position between the two blocs.

Titoist Yugoslavia was well aware of the survival of Balkan issues. During the war, Tito and his "liberation movement" in Yugoslavia had carried out actions aimed at spreading the idea of a new communist order throughout the south Balkans, but was immediately confronted with the Macedonia and Kosovo questions. Thus, making Yugoslavia's pre-war borders secure became the most urgent task for Tito's movement. In autumn 1941, the Komintern decided "for practical reasons" that Macedonia should remain within the field of action of the Yugoslav Communists, this after almost the whole of the existing Communist Party of this area had "gone over" to Bulgaria. In the Kosovo region and in West Macedonia the Albanian Nationalists ruled the field; this after almost the whole of the existing Communist Party of this area had "gone over" to Bulgaria. In the Kosovo region and in West Macedonia the Albanian Nationalists ruled the field;⁸ the Yugoslav Communists had no chance unless they showed more flexibility over the question of the future borders. On New Year's Day 1944, the leading Kosovo Communists met in Bujan, on Albanian territory, and proclaimed "self-determination even at the cost of separation" for the population of Kosovo. The document, which is also extensively quoted by Enver Hoxha in his memoirs,⁹ begins by dealing with the predominantly Albanian population of Kosovo, and leaves the question practically open as to whether Kosovo should belong to Albania or Yugoslavia after the war. Especially from the Serbian point of view, this meeting is today considered as "treason", and as the very expression of Albanian nationalism.¹⁰ The fact remains that without this manifestation, things would have gone much worse than they did for the Yugoslav Communists in Kosovo after the war.

The pan-Balkan oriented efforts of the Yugoslav Communists had already begun in the middle of the war, in particular with the journeys of Vukmanovic-Tempo who has extensively described them in his writings.¹¹ He was intent on leading Albania under Yugoslav-Communist influence. He actuated the uprisings in Macedonia and Kosovo, and wanted, although without success, to create a kind of "Balkan high command", to which end he even established contacts with the Greek Communists. The Bulgarian Communists kept themselves aloof, and it was only when Dimitrov seized power after the war



that it came to the project for a federation, which Stalin then later used as one of his excuses for his anathema against Tito. And under this banner, Bulgaria had to allow the existence of a Macedonian nation which included part of its own territory, though it later went back on this.

The project for a communist Balkan federation was, however, not the kind of co-operation in the Balkans which is to be seen today. It was a kind of combined Yugoslav and communist pretension to hegemony, represented by the victorious partisan leader Tito, and Albania, Bulgaria and even Greece were to be united, after the victory of the Communist partisans, under the *aegis* of Belgrade. Tito consciously ignored the Churchill-Stalin agreement with respect to Greece, and he supported the Greek Communist partisans. This was unrealistic, and Churchill's immediate sharp reaction against the Communist uprising in Athens towards the end of 1944 made it quite clear that in this part of the world the Western powers would stand their ground as far as "spheres of influence" were concerned. Stalin also sharply criticized Tito's and Dimitrov's behaviour, even though he would probably have tried to capitalize on the outcome of the Greek civil war, if it had been favourable for the Communists.

Communist pan-Balkanism had of course become totally unrealistic after the Moscow-Belgrade schism, and the project of a regional alliance that seems to be made more likely by present-day *détente* is a totally different one. Between these two periods (the era of the Tito-Stalin rift, and of Gorbachev's "new thinking") there are of course several ups and downs; after 1948, while he was under pressure from the military threat of the Soviet Union and its satellites, Tito entered into talks with Greece and Turkey (countries that are both members of the Atlantic Alliance), and went as far as reaching agreements regarding military consultation. The formal treaty, however, was signed at Bled only in 1954, that is in a moment in time when, because of the reconciliatory contacts that took place between Krushchev and Tito after Stalin's death, it had lost most of its urgency and meaning.

The thaw

For the first time in many years, Krushchev's de-Stalinization brought back various possibilities of multi-lateral contacts in the Balkan peninsula. The borders and the divisions between the blocs began to open somewhat. In 1957,

the then Rumanian President Stoica proposed a meeting between the presidents of all the Balkan countries. At the time, this attempt was perceived by all the observers as a manoeuvre on behalf of the Soviet Union, but later it became clearer how it had rather been a preliminary sign of the policy of autonomy which the Rumanians openly introduced in 1964.¹² The idea of a Balkan Conference on the level of heads of government or State has since remained a permanently recurring postulate in Rumanian politics. In the meantime, the Rumanian president Ceausescu seems to have elected a Balkan summit meeting as the crowning of his political career, and at the Belgrade Conference there was the distinct impression that this was the only problem which the present Rumanian government was interested in at all as far as the Balkans were concerned. The Foreign Ministers of the other Balkan countries, however, with an eye for politically more sensible matters, showed that they would be willing to put to test the Rumanian proposal only when the time was "ripe", a formula which was a rejection in practical terms.

In 1974, after the downfall of the military regime, the then Greek President Caramanlis was the first - long before Papandreu - to spread out Athen's feelers in this sense. He was acutely aware of the necessity for Greece to intensify its contacts with its northern neighbours and in more general terms achieve well-balanced relations in the Balkans, and obtained a first result at the beginning of 1976, when a multilateral Conference for experts in different technical fields of common concern was convened in Athens. Albeit limited in scope, this meeting could be considered a not negligible success, since the assumption underlying it was proved true, when discussion made clear that many issues in the Balkans, ranging from traffic routes to energy production, could only be faced through general co-operation.

In the following years, while Greece proved by far the most active promotor of multi-lateral co-operation in the Balkans, the attitude of Bulgaria stood for a long period in the way of any further development, as the Bulgarians wanted to give preference to bilateral forms of agreement. Many observers saw the influence of Moscow in this attitude, as it frowned upon the idea of independent and common collaboration amongst the Balkan peoples. Sofia's attitude, however, seemed to change in 1981, when - in coincidence with the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of the first Bulgarian State - the Bulgarian Party Leader and Head of State Zhivkov had also put forward a similar proposal. By many outside observers, this move was intended more as a way of honouring the occasion, even though all the emphasis put on the celebrations

and the effort at drawing attention to Bulgaria's historical priority over the other Slavs had a subtle anti-Russian meaning.¹³ The climate was thus more favourable when Andreas Papandreou took over the Greek government at the head of the *Pasok* Socialist Party in 1981, and Balkan policy became an important component of Athens global foreign policy, at times being used as a demonstration towards its Western allies, and at times as a gesture towards the left-wing voters. In September 1986, Papandreou even managed to come to an agreement with Bulgaria over "consultations", to be held in case of developments affecting the Balkan territory as a whole.

Greek policy over Albania earned particular note for its services. In August 1987, Athens formally ended its so-called "state of war" with Albania, which it had been holding on to for the sake of form in the North Epyrus question, and in doing this it cleared the Balkans of the last remaining juridical relic of the Second World War. Relations have rapidly intensified since then, and Athens without doubt largely contributed to the fact that Albania finally took part at all in the February 1988 Balkan Conference. Greece also reminded the other partners of the necessity to show some regard for Albania, though it was obviously unable to avoid the Yugoslav press, in particular in Macedonia and Serbia, from launching rather violent attacks on the Albanian minority during the Conference itself, attacks which caused some wrinkling of foreheads amongst the Albanian delegation.

The two edges of *détente*

Assuming that the 1988 Conference can be considered a movement in the direction of multilateral co-operation among the Balkan countries, the steps are certainly extremely slow and confronted with obstacles that the governments concerned help to create. The 1960s in the Balkans were marked by a new awakening of sentiments of national self-sufficiency. Rumania followed its own autonomous policies, Bulgaria at least began to stop feeling like a simple Soviet and communist outpost, and Albania changed over from Soviet to Chinese patronage, only to disclaim this a few years later by going over to a policy of "diversification" in its political and economic relations. The two non-communist Balkan States, Greece and Turkey, had come to an agreement over Cyprus in 1962, but diverged once again as this solution did not prove its worth. This kind of development created above all more national freedom of movement in the countries belonging to the communist bloc. And in this sense it is possible to speak of a slow abandonment of the logic of the two blocs, and

of an embryonic return to the independent national State system with relations similar to those existing between the wars.

In the beginning, this hardly made collaboration in the Balkan territories any simpler. On the contrary, the latent conflicts simmering between the individual States actually took on a more serious character as the years passed, the cause being nearly always a question of national minorities. This development has continued up to the present day, and if the situation of the Hungarian minority in Rumanian Transylvania is considered, or the movement of refugees towards Hungary, which led to the most striking developments in the relations between these two socialist countries in the spring and summer of 1988, it must be asked just what is to be expected of this region in the future. In 1984, it was already rightly called "the split and scattered Balkans" and today, in 1988, in spite of tendencies in the opposite direction, this definition is still valid.

The most important of the surviving conflicts is, beyond any doubt, the problem of the Albanians in Yugoslavia: the Kosovo crisis broke out openly in 1981 and exposed in full light not only the failure of socialist "federalism" to solve the historical problems of this multi-national and multi-religious State, but indeed the growth of its national contradictions. For a long time the Yugoslav government has tried to identify in Tirana the culprits for its own errors and problems, and has accused Albania of "irredentism", thus increasing the risk of adding fuel to the fire of a potential "Balkan" conflict. Tirana, on the other hand, has been very cautious, and with the passing of time it has proved that the Yugoslav attitude was merely calculated propaganda, as in reality communist Albania is worried about the movement in Kosovo, which it is unable to control. The Albanians in Kosovo have a different standard of living, and have gradually become accustomed to a degree of intellectual and media freedom, as well as to an intensity and style of political activity, that might seem primitive to western eyes, but is inconceivable in the Albanian communist State, and whose influence would lead the Tirana regime into trouble. On the other hand, however, Tirana cannot completely give up supporting some of the rights of the Kosovo Albanians, because otherwise it would have to give up any pretence to national legitimacy. According to Tirana, the Kosovo Albanians ought to at least be able to enjoy the rights given them by the Yugoslav Constitution, and, if possible, create their own Republic, as a sign of their equal status with the other Yugoslav peoples.¹⁵

The other unresolved conflict, the one over Macedonia, has remained a slow-

working fuse in the Balkans, though today the borders at least are no longer thrown into doubt. In this sense, the Helsinki Conference, in which Albania did not take part, but all the parties concerned with Macedonia did, and which brought about a quasi-settlement of all post-World War II territorial disputes, can be credited with introducing a certain clarity into Balkan affairs .

With the softening of the two blocs, the risk of seeing these nationality conflicts increasing in intensity and bitterness could be an important reason behind the development of the idea that common interests between the Balkan countries should once again be given priority through careful and realistic efforts, not only in bilateral, but also in multilateral forms of cooperation. Indeed, the international environment leads it at least to a start on specific issues, as an offspin of superpower agreements. The project for a nuclear-weapon-free zone, (and recently also a chemical- warfare-free zone), has always met with a certain unanimity of reaction, though it is clear that no real basis for such a development presently exist, either in Athens or elsewhere. Thus, in Belgrade, the Foreign Ministers paid little attention to this idea. Nevertheless, the project probably allowed Bulgaria a certain amount of freedom of movement, and softened its resistance against the idea of too much multilateral co-operation.

The West, and particularly the European Community, have an indisputable interest in seeing peaceful and stable relations amongst the Balkan countries, if only because the transit routes between Western Europe and Greece or Turkey run through Balkan territory. In their February Conference in Belgrade, the Balkans marked an encouraging beginning, even though it should not be forgotten that the history of the region demonstrates just how hard it is to balance diverging national interests, and create a sense of collective responsibility. In the pre-war period, efforts in this direction succeeded only partially, and since the Second World War it has taken forty years for the Foreign Ministers of all the Balkan States to sit together round a table. Yet there would seem to be good will: the first results have been achieved, and further prospects do not seem to be without any hope. It will be interesting to see, if progress in multilateral Balkan cooperation is actually accomplished, which of the two models this hoped-for cooperation will follow; either the one that aims at excluding the great powers from the region; or the collective regional security and economic cooperation model; or - finally, and potentially the most fruitful of all - a new, original model that could combine both these objectives.

References

- ¹ - Initially, Tirana had denounced the conference in its typical extremist language.
- ² - See in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 2, 1988.
- ³ - Up to a point, anyhow, the reverse is also true, since Turkey provides the only land road to Iran and the Middle East.
- ⁴ - A certain degree of confusion is created by the inclination to see Russia's historical "godfather" role in the founding of the Bulgarian State as a reason for the present-day (at least apparently) pro-Soviet behaviour of communist Bulgaria. It should not be forgotten, however, that there have also been periods in the history of Bulgaria when this friendship with Russia has been more than doubtful. In any case, contemporary Bulgarian historiography is growing more and more intent on portraying Bulgaria's own efforts as the important factor in the obtaining of its independence, with the uprising which began in 1876, thus putting Russian intervention into a position of secondary importance. See, for instance, *Kratka Istoria na Blgarija*, Sofia, 1983, p. 198. On the contrary, in Greece, Marxist historiography since the Second World War has been trying harder and harder to emphasize the Russian contribution in the war of independence, not only at the expense of Western help, but even at that of Greece's own efforts. See, Pavlos Tzsermias, *Neugriechische Geschichte*, Tübingen, 1986, p. 71.
- ⁵ - Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, *History of Macedonia: 1354-1833*, Thessalonika, 1973.
- ⁶ - Eliza Campus, *Intelegerea Balcanica*, Bucarest, 1972, p. 27.
- ⁷ - *Ibidem*, pp. 126 and 131.
- ⁸ - When Serbia occupied the Kosovo region in 1912, the Albanians in the area turned to arms for defence, and did the same in 1918 and again in 1944. It is thus not true that the Albanians had in any way committed themselves to either Serbia or Yugoslavia. Serbia was thinking of its medieval empire, and was attempting to re-establish the earlier population situation through colonization. In Yugoslavia between the two World Wars, which was dominated by the Serbs, the Albanians were not taken into consideration as a nation, and thus stayed divided into two parts. At present, the inhabitants of Albania itself amount to some 3 million, whilst those living in Yugoslavia reach 2 million. The Albanians in Kosovo and in West Macedonia thus greeted the Italian occupation of April 1941 as a kind of national liberation, contrary to the reaction in Albania itself, where the occupation of spring 1939 was considered an act of hostility and national repression. Under the Italian protectorate of "Greater Albania", the Albanians in Kosovo and in West Macedonia obtained, for the first time, the right to the free use of their language, in Albanian schools and Albanian administration, and this fact is admitted even by contemporary Yugoslav communism.) See Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, *Memoari*, Belgrade, vol. 1, p. 332.
- ⁹ - Enver Hoxha, *The Titoites*, Tirana 1982, p. 117.
- ¹⁰ - Spasoje Djakovic, *Sukobi na Kosovu*, Belgrade, 1984, p. 210.
- ¹¹ - Svetozar Vukmanovic-Tempo, *Memoari*, cit. and *Borba za Balkan*, Zagreb 1931.
- ¹² - In 1958, Rumania was able to obtain the retreat of Soviet troops from its territory.
- ¹³ - A crucial role in Bulgarian government was at the times played by Zhivkov's daughter, the British-educated Minister for Cultural Affairs Ludmilla Jivkova, who started a cautious opening towards the West, and gave to the celebration of the 13th centennial of the Bulgarian State the meaning of a reassertion of priority in civilization over the Russians. She died suddenly, at 39, of "overwork". Suspects about KGB responsibility for this unlikely illness have frequently since resurfaced to explain Zhivkov's attitude towards the USSR.
- ¹⁴ - *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 14, 1984.
- ¹⁵ - "Eine Sprache und Kultur", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 2, 1988.