

The Propaganda War in the Balkans: A Deaf-Mute Dialogue

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At the turn of the millennium, the Balkans showed all the signs of a “deaf-mute dialogue” – especially the territory of the former Federated Republic of Yugoslavia. On one hand, the natives enthusiastically claimed their historical, ethnic, religious rights and ignored the similar rights of their neighbors. On the other hand, the leaders of the international community – be they world powers or NGOs – continued to advance their utopian theories of democracy, tolerance, compromise, multi-ethnicity, and prosperity. The metaphor of the deaf-mute dialogue stems from the fact that none of the conflicts that erupted in the Balkans in the 1990s were deterred by argument or talk but were ended through armed force. More precisely, after the unfortunate experience of the Blue Helmets, neither diplomatic negotiations nor even informational pressure stopped the murderous ground conflicts in Bosnia or Kosovo; military action did. In the years that followed both conflicts, it was not the PSYOPS or the INFO OPS that maintained a relative peace in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia but rather the presence of thousands of NATO military who were deployed to former or potential battlefields of the

Balkans. Military personnel and even politicians who had or have lived for some months in the respective theaters of operations recognize that the day after the SFOR or KFOR troops withdraw from the military enclaves in Albania and Macedonia, the interethnic conflicts will resume, probably even more fiercely. As has been the case for the past 200 years, neither the Balkans nor Western individuals have learned how to talk to each other; in fact, they do not even talk among themselves – each involved with their own self-interests, which often clash with those of others. In the era of cutting-edge real-time communications, all the actors on the Balkan stage keep talking to themselves and remain totally deaf to what the other has to say. The situation appears hopeless. But a way to resolve this may lie in identifying the differences not only in the ethnic and religious mix of the Balkans but also in the European civilizations divided into Catholic and Orthodox after the Great Schism in 1054. Only the exasperating murderous conflicts that have periodically burst out have obliged the Euro-Atlantic allies to really start to try to know and understand the troublemaking Balkan peoples.

THE REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BALKANS AND THE WEST

The mold for the futile opposition between the poor and backward Balkan states and the prosperous and civilized Western countries was formed early on, when the Balkans began to be viewed by the European powers of the 19th century as crucial to their own interests. The instinctive and clear division between the “good guys and the bad guys”, rooted in the values of the heirs of the Western Roman Empire, as opposed to those of their Eastern Orthodox “brothers”, became the foundation of the Western political approach to Balkan problems: the Balkan people should follow Western

prescriptions, otherwise they will be punished. This attitude of superiority has dominated over the past 200 years whenever West Europeans talked to East Europeans, especially the Balkan people. After the end of World War I, the memoirs, diaries, and considerations of Westerners, those who read *The Times*, *Le Temps*, *La Stampa*, or *Berliner Tageblatt* at the breakfast table, the Balkans seemed to be an exotic though boring land that would not be voluntarily visited by Westerners. Even though World War I had started there, the Balkans had

never been perceived as part of the Euro-Atlantic civilization.

There were ample arguments to support that attitude 200 years ago, and they still exist today. First of all, because of the successive regimes of occupation or suzerainty (Ottoman-Islamic, Austrian-Hungarian-Catholic, Russian-Orthodox, Phanariot), the population of the Balkan states have enjoyed their independence only beginning with the second half of the 19th century. Thus, they had a different view of the respect for law, order, and authority than did the Western Europeans. For centuries, each successive suzerain power or occupier imposed its own values, laws, common laws, and leaders. The occupied people were always on standby, ready to fight wars with foreign authorities to defend cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities.

Westerners consider the Balkan rebelliousness and seeming indifference to law, order, and discipline to be aberrant and at odds with the values that formed the cornerstone of the entire Euro-Atlantic civilization. The corruption and mass infractions that exist in all Balkan states are rooted in the secular hiatus that occurred between the foreign occupiers and citizens, between the imposed law and those who were supposed to obey it. With such a history, it is no wonder that immediately after the demise of the authoritative communist regimes, corruption and crime blossomed. It may be that a re-enforcement of law, order, and authority can take place only through an intense long-term program designed for a new generation that is not encumbered by the

nightmares of the past, social constraints, endemic poverty, and ethnic and religious violence.

A second aspect is that of education; it has been, for hundreds of years, a barrier between the Balkans and the West, and that barrier has become increasingly visible over the last two centuries. At the beginning of the 19th century when Western Europe already had established academic and educational traditions, primary school education in the Balkans had been provided only in institutions controlled by churches or mosques. If the 19th century was for the West the century of the industrial revolution, with its huge accomplishments and accumulations of wealth, for the Balkans it was the century of dramatic wars for independence. Those sons of wealthy families and meritorious young people who were sent abroad to attend famous universities in the great capital cities of the West returned to their homelands to become revolutionary leaders fighting for the emancipation of their countries and early advocates of nationalism. Despite Western influence, the huge economic and social differences could not be overcome. One of the consequences was a low average level of education and civic awareness for the majority of the Balkan citizens. Explanation for the squalor in the streets of some Balkan villages and cities and for the bad roads and poor hygiene are the low level of education and the "go with the flow" mentality typical of *homo Balkanicus*. However, this mentality has been induced by centuries of disastrous damage brought by Tatar, Ottoman, or Hapsburg invasions and wars.

THE PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVE OF THE BALKAN PEOPLE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

The first generations of young Balkan citizens who were educated in Western countries and their successors who lived in the 19th and 20th centuries both sought to understand and be a part of the host national's system of values, but they also worked to make the problems of their countries known in whatever cultural, journalistic or political environments they entered. Except for

the Greeks, who enjoyed the beneficial effects that their cultural heritage had had on the British, the Balkan people for the most part were unsuccessful in bringing their history, culture, and civilization to the attention of the Western Euro-Atlantic civilization, despite their propagandistic efforts of two centuries, Bulgarian historian Ivan Iliev writes:

At the beginning of the 19th century the Balkan people were practically unknown to Europeans. Their names evoked historical memories, but usually they have not been considered peoples able to live an independent life. After the inevitable fall of the Ottoman Empire, their destiny was rather one of the states to be included in an already existing European state...The knowledge or information about Romanians was poor, even if they have been engaged in the Central-European politics since the 16th century. Similarly, the Serbs remained unknown, too. The 1806-1815 Serbian riot was to a great

extent an internal problem of the Ottoman Empire. For a long time, the image of an ordinary Serb was one of a blind fiddler, sitting under a tree, singing joyful songs in front of a brandy-longing audience. To a certain extent this image was also the effect of a literary mystification, well known in the 19th century – Ilyro-Serbian songs of Prosper Mérimée. The information about Serbs emphasized their brutality and spirit of warriors – qualities that were both delightful and disgusting for Europeans¹.

The same is true today, except for a few who have briefly visited or experienced life in a Balkan country. Compared with the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Albanians, the Romanians – probably because of their Latin origin – have succeeded best in making themselves known to and supported by the West. They succeeded because of the persistent promotion of their values and interests starting with the second half of the 19th century. This brought them the first union in 1859 and the second in 1918, independence in 1877, and state and national identity earlier than their neighbors south of the Danube. On the whole, the Balkans of the 19th and 20th centuries, situated somewhere between the borders of Europe and Asia, came to the attention of the Euro-Atlantic area very slowly and not in a favorable way. Consequently, the propagandistic obstinacy of the Balkan states' foreign affairs seems justified. It began in the 19th century and

continues at the present time. The emphasis of Balkan foreign affairs at the eve of the 21st century remains on arguments for a European status.

The explosive ethnic and religious differences in the Balkans have repeatedly been exacerbated by the interference of European powers – the same powers that today contribute the largest number of troops in SFOR and KFOR: Germany, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the Balkan people have repeatedly turned to the same great powers during the last two centuries for solutions to various territorial problems. But these post-conflict solutions have not destroyed the germs of conflict because they have been temporarily “fixed” or simply compromises – often imposed by force – between the divergent local interests and those concerned with the balance of power at a given moment.

TITO'S YUGOSLAVIA: AN EXAMPLE AND AN EXCEPTION

The case of Tito's Yugoslavia is at the same time an example and an exception. Conditions at the end of World Wars I and II were similar in the Balkans. Both historical moments lacked the strong German and Austrian influences since those powers had lost successive wars. The Wilsonian liberal and democratic principles of self-determination or those of the Atlantic Charter were paramount, and one of the winners was the power in Belgrade that could not be divested of territories or dictated conditions. In 1945, neither the Slovenians, who had never had an independent state, nor the Croatians, bearing the guilt of the fascist genocide, could count on Germany or Austria. At the same time, the three neighboring countries – Greece, torn by a bloody civil war, Bulgaria, newly freed by the Red Army and sheltered by Moscow, and Hungary, freed by Romanian troops but controlled by the Kremlin – could not afford to discuss the expansion by means of territories taken from Macedonia and Vojvodina. Likewise, Albania was also under the control of the partisans, led by the communist leader Enver Hodja and greatly helped in World

War II by Tito. When the Red Army entered Belgrade, it only replaced the German army in a territory that had been freed by the considerable military force of Tito's communist partisans, ending the war as a cobelligerent, winner, and ally of London.

From the beginning of the war, Tito had not recruited his partisans based on ethnic or religious considerations but rather on social ones, offering his partisans one empowering slogan: liberation of their motherland. Consequently, the draft constitution that Tito proposed provided a balance of ethnic liberties and vanities superior to those of the countries under the domination of Moscow. The well-known Yugoslav schism of 1948, when Tito, having a better geostrategic position than Moscow, dared to say “No” to Stalin, brought the people of the new Popular Federative Republic of Yugoslavia closer than ever. The new federation became a socialist paradise from the viewpoint of quality of life. Tito's enormous prestige (eliminating opponents in the Stalinist manner and firmly controlling the hegemonic tendencies of the Serbs), the

permanent Soviet threat during the governments of Hruscirov [Khrushchev] and Brezhnev, and the Western material support and capitalist economic elements who provided aid to the Yugoslavs, were elements that preserved the peace and cohesion of the federation; whatever feeble nationalist bursts did occur were extinguished immediately. Albanians living in Kosovo and Macedonia were perfectly aware that Yugoslavia provided a better life for them than their compatriots endured in the autarchic Albania of Enver Hodja.

The end of the Cold War totally changed Yugoslavia's position in Western strategy. Until 1990, a united and stable Yugoslavia represented an important deterrent and strategic element against the Soviets. The dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the interest criteria of the West, which began to demand a free market economy, rule of law, and respect for human rights from the East Europeans. Yugoslavia was unable to comply with those requirements. Moreover, there were moves for secession by Croatia and Slovenia and the independence of other federation peoples.

Comparing the situation of 1990 with that at the end of the World War II, a significant evolution of Yugoslavia's neighboring international environment has to be taken into account. Between 1990 and 1991, ten years after Tito's death, the reunited Germany and the neutral Austria had once again become attractive potential allies for the emancipated Croatians and Slovenians. The Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse and was no longer a threat. The age-old rivals, Greece and Turkey, both having interests in the Yugoslavian area, were prevented from

pursuing those interests because of their membership in NATO. Albania was emerging from the totalitarian communist night, while Kosovo had begun to strain against the nationalist pressure of Milosevic. The considerable economic differences among the Yugoslav republics had reached a critical juncture, with both Croats and Slovenes no longer wishing to have their revenues redistributed to the poorer Kosovars or Macedonians.

President Milosevic was one of the most violent and ambitious nationalist leaders of the Balkans of the 1990s. A comparison with Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian Dictator, could show many of the lethal viruses generated by the communist system. Unable to replace the disintegrating communism, many political leaders of the central and east European countries – former members of the communist nomenclature – chose instead to promote the acceleration of nationalism, even to extremity and violence. When the Iron Curtain fell, the West was content to happily applaud the deadly starvation of the enemy but did nothing to compensate for the economic and political confusion that resulted. Moreover, in Yugoslavia's case, between 1990 and 1992 the West sent a series of contradictory messages that contributed to the violent dissolution of the federation. The balance of power that had been maintained during the Cold War was disrupted but was not replaced by the necessary economic and social intervention of the wealthy Western countries. The poorer region of the Balkans, with its hot spot, Yugoslavia, quickly became the new European confrontation arena.

RIVALRIES AND ALLIANCES

Analyzing the whole spectrum of interests manifested in the Balkans at the beginning of the millennium, Maj. Valentin Vasile, a military analyst² identified an array of possible rivalries and alliances that have the potential to generate a conflict at any time. While Greece (a NATO and EU member) and Turkey (only a NATO member but an EU aspirant) continue fighting for supremacy in the Aegean Sea and the bi-ethnic island of Cyprus, Bulgaria – NATO member and another country that aspires to EU membership – still considers the Macedonians to be Bulgarians, although the territory shelters a significant Turkish minority. The tensions among these three

countries erupt from time to time, and it is only by the membership control instruments and responsibilities that their belligerent tendencies are curbed. Neighbored by these countries, Macedonia survives, a country that is recognized by Greece under the intriguing name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), but only Turkey recognizes Racidonie under his constitutional name, a country that can be suffocated by its neighbors who are noisily claiming historical rights or protection for ethnic communities. The Albanian minority in Macedonia is the most aggressive enemy of that country and has formed the newest and most

active terrorist organization in the region, Albania National Army, or AKSh in the Albanian acronym. It strikingly resembles the former KLA and has expanded its area of operation up to the north of Kosovo, more precisely in all of the territories inhabited by Albanians but not dominated by them. The new Union of Serbia and Montenegro is only a new and fragile construction formed of two state entities weakened by wars, internal rivalries, and almost-ruined economies. They are trying to shed their dictatorial past and find their own way toward the European style democracy.

The old hegemonic nostalgia and the ethnic and historical problems cannot simply vanish, and Kosovo remains an open wound. Now, as was true 200 years ago, depending on international developments, these endless Balkan rivalries can emerge as alliances of mutual interests against one or several actors. It is not only because of common Orthodox faith but also because of its special position toward, Macedonia and the disputes with Turkey, that Greece seems to be a possible ally of the Serbia-Montenegro Union. Similarly, Israel, by supporting Belgrade, can counterbalance the influence in the Balkans of rich Muslim states such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, that try to strengthen the Albanian bridgehead. At the same time, Serbia and Montenegro maintain adverse positions against

Turkey, Bulgaria, and especially Albania. Italy and Germany are also very much interested in controlling the Albanian matters in Macedonia and Kosovo and even the evolution of the situation in Albania. Their aim is to defend themselves against the massive flow of emigrants and the huge problems they create, including organized crime. Because of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Hungary does not have a comprehensive attitude toward Serbia. Romania alone seems not to have any interests or territorial claims against its Balkan neighbors, although it is hard to believe that Hungary will ever forget its claim of the rich Transilvania or that Bulgaria will ever stop sighing for the southern Dobrudja.

From the viewpoint of this study, it is important to make the point that only the aspirations of these countries for full integration into the wealthy Euro-Atlantic area makes them refrain, for the moment, from violence. After World War II, only NATO membership and Euro-Atlantic pressures stopped the outbreak of armed conflict between Greece and Turkey. It was only by looking toward NATO and EU membership that Hungary and Bulgaria abandoned their traditional territorial claims in Romania and Serbia. Extremely weakened by years of war and dependent on European economic support, Serbia is also expected to put any hegemonic aspirations aside.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION: FULL EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

From this perspective, logical deduction leads to the conclusion that only by more rapid integration of the Balkan states into the economic, political, and military Euro-Atlantic structures can the current, latent, or potential conflicts be averted. Such an integration – perfectly possible and achievable – would be something new in the history of Europe, divided for more than a thousand years by the frontier of the Great Schism. In fact, it encompasses the complementary interests of West and East: security and prosperity. It is not about rewriting the old communist slogans of the Cold War or reviving the antagonisms between North and South, but about the same process that was developed for Western and Eastern Germany in the 1990s, except on a larger scale this time. Even if at present there are discussions and debates over the ethnic and religious conflicts in the Balkans, when the generation that did not

fight wars reaches adulthood and has a quality of life and the hopes for prosperity comparable to that of the Western Europeans, the older generations will no longer think in terms of guerilla warfare or armed riots. They will be preoccupied with the prosperity of their families and the success of their jobs or businesses and will no longer accept losing these or the threat of war. Unlike their parents and grandparents, the young people of the Balkans, like their Western counterparts, are more selfish and pragmatic and want first of all to have a good life, to enjoy life without historical, ethnic, or religious inhibitions. That is why they long for the Western system, where this life is truly possible. However, if they are confronted with an ongoing social and economic frustration, they will follow their parents' path – the path of war. Integrated into a prosperous and tolerant Europe, it is they who will not allow the winds of war to ruin their lives.

This Euro-Atlantic integration project for people of the former Yugoslavian area would be difficult to implement not only because of Europeans' obtuseness and cupidity but because of the considerable social and political problems

that exist there despite the sincere desire to integrate the former Yugoslavian citizens. Nemanja Nenadic, Chief of the Transparency International Office in Belgrade, told about the Serbian citizens' attitude toward Europe in 2004:

The current situation is rather bizarre. The reforms did not have the expected results; that is why a constant threat from the extremists or populists does exist. Serbia still has a lot to do to join the European Union, and the politicians are not ready to implement those reforms. There are times when they understand the reforms, but they do not want to undertake the necessary measures, as they fear not to increase the popularity of the nationalist and populist parties even more. At their turn, ordinary people are not very satisfied with the democracy. Many of them have the nostalgia of Tito's times. There is a large consensus with regard to EU integration, but people are scarcely informed on what that action means. They see only the chance to be part of a large community, after such isolation and the chance to use the common market (in fact the labor market). The negative effects are less known (because of the competitiveness), and the serious discussions on that topic take place only in academic groups³.

WHO ARE THE CITIZENS OF TODAY'S BALKANS?

Today in the Balkans and the southern territories of the former Yugoslavia, amazing wealth exists alongside abject poverty and high unemployment. Culture and education continue to be interrupted by warlike and revenge propaganda. The appetite for ethnic and religious revenge remains. Former and current rivals cannot hear each other – totally deaf and constrained by a mutual and inborn lack of trust. It is impossible to separate the warlike past from the current politicians. There are people who fought the most murderous wars in Europe since World War II, who are part of the generation formed and educated during Tito's communism, who are still mentally imprinted with communist propaganda and its warlike and totalitarian elements and who were and still are the main target of Western information operations. The way these people think and the way they relate to human and social values is marked by the clichés of the communist ideology and with the capitalism and the nationalism of the early 20th century, augmented by several democratic

slogans. The result is a hybrid mentality – an amalgam of concepts neither communist nor democratic, that brings together the ghosts of the past and the frustrations of the present. When those complex and unique psycho and social realities erupted in armed warfare, they began to be sifted through the sieve of Western values. The result is an extremely damaging deaf-mute dialogue, which in the final analysis explains the poor results of the information operations in the Balkans of the 1990s. Such hybrid mentalities had to be fought by the Blue Helmets of UNPROFOR, armed only with a labile political mandate and an even poorer informational system that produced humanitarian and peace-seeking clichés that nobody listened to. Only the demonstration of force by IFOR in the spring of 1996 slowed the nationalism that was brewing and the savage ethnic and religious intolerance among Serbs, Croats, and Muslim Bosnians whose parents had been the most solid supporters of Tito's communist Yugoslavia.

CAUSES OF WESTERN INFORMATIONAL FAILURE

Perhaps the most clear informational failure of the West (be it only in terms of the lack of real effects) was that of the war of 1999 between NATO and Yugoslavia. Lt. Col. Steven Collins, former Chief of PSYOPS Branch in Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, acknowledged that "Despite a tremendous

amount of money and energy, the NATO PSYOPS effort was not effective during Allied Force. The Serbs proved very resistant to the NATO PSYOPS effort"⁴.

The same Serb citizens who opposed Milosevic joined him against NATO strikes and proved to be more sensitive to the nationalist and

anti-Western propaganda of the regime. That was another example of a deaf-mute dialogue, of mutual inability to understand and communicate.

Additionally, the former SACEUR, Gen. Wesley Clark, who led the allied forces in 1999, recognized Serbian superiority in exploiting every NATO raid error or incidence of collateral damage, which seriously affected not only the political spheres but the allied command as well⁵. Military strategists called this counter-reaction an asymmetric one, and it was not the asymmetric response that was new but the transfer of that counter-reaction from the military conflict area to the informational field.

Unlike the medieval armies that had employed the "scorched earth" strategy (everything was burned and destroyed on enemy's was so that it lacks any supplies), a staple of warfare for six centuries, the Serbs could not use this tactic against an enemy that struck only from the air. Instead, they used informational strikes and skilfully controlled the ground, where the Allies did not have any independent video cameras and where journalists were guided to the sites of collateral damages caused by NATO bombing errors. Even Gen. Clark recognized that only one NATO video camera on the ground would have been worth as much as striking a dozen Serbian army vehicles⁶.

NATO's informational inferiority was due not only to the absence of a free and independence

media on the Serb territory but also to their failure to understand the reactions and the mechanism of the Serb psychology. For example, as previously noted, British Prime Minister Tony Blair's anger with BBC correspondent John Simpson when the latter, broadcasting from Belgrade, related collective actions of resistance, spontaneous or organized, such as weddings celebrated collectively in the central square of Belgrade, rock concerts, volunteer human shields on bridges or close to potential targets, and target-marked badges and banners⁷. In fact, it was the West's inability to predict the Serbs' reactions, something quite similar to the aftermath evolutions in Iraq after the Second Gulf War. The Serbian media counter-offensive was much more efficient, and the Serbian propaganda struck more effectively the sensitive points of Western public opinion. The encounter of the Euro-Atlantic and Serbian informational systems led to the crash of the NATO informational superiority myth, emphasizing instead the dangers generated by informational saturation and asymmetric response. A deaf-mute dialogue took place in 1999 because the Serbs, whether leaders or ordinary people, were not impressed with NATO messages. Neither were the NATO/Western leaders impressed with the rhetoric and diplomatic and propagandistic moves of Belgrade, with the exception of the effect on the public of the reports of collateral damage.

KOSOVAR REALITIES

The same lack of cultural and historical understanding is present in KFOR informational campaigns. For instance, in June 2003, the informational branch of KFOR HQs Main in Pristina, together with PSYOPS structures of the four multinational brigades, organized a multi-ethnic market day in Mitrovitza, a town divided between the Serbian and Albanian communities, that was intended to attract and bring together the small traders and other Albanian and Serbian ordinary people. The military distributed small gifts (hat, pens, note-books, and other trinkets), in which PSYOPS messages were inserted, and newspapers and magazines filled with PSYOPS stories. Despite the significant KFOR investment, the event failed since the number of the organizing military present outnumbered the targeted visitors, most of whom were poor kids who were attracted by KFOR presents. Officially,

the failure was recognized only at the level of KFOR HQs, but the true cause of the failure was not understood: the former communist Yugoslav citizens simply declined to take part in a propagandistic demonstration that had nothing in common with the reality of a society profoundly divided both ethnically and religiously, in which each side harbored intense hatred for the other.

In accordance with their mandate, both the SFOR (replaced by EU after December 2004) and KFOR troops in Bosnia and Kosovo continue to preach the utopia of a multi-ethnic, tolerant, and prosperous society, as did Sir George Robertson, NATO Secretary General, on the occasion of his visit to Pristina, on June 26, 2003. Attainment of the three objectives appears more likely in Bosnia than in Kosovo, but the normalization of the situation and the implementation of Robertson's three requirements – multi-ethnicity, tolerance,

and prosperity – are still far from consolidation. Minorities and their churches survive only in enclaves guarded by the military of the international force in Kosovo. Only with the strong protection of KFOR do the Serbian orthodox churches, or what remains of them, still exist. Inter-ethnic hatred is fomented in local newspapers, and murders are commonplace. There is no prosperity, except through some mafia-like clans that are politically represented and supported. In Kosovo, the threat of a major social riot is imminent because of the high unemployment rate (65 percent in 2003), poverty, and lack of hope for jobs, and also because of the progressive reduction of the military and international organizations presence. Even the prime minister of the Kosovar embryonic government acknowledged on June 23, 2003, before the North Atlantic Council, that the extremely fragile presence of local small business is totally dependent on the Western presence in the province.

As in the war of 1999, the emphasis of KFOR international campaigns based on tolerance and multi-ethnicity (even if they are well hidden behind some PSYOPS programs against extremism, organized crime, and violence) has only a tenuous connection with the Kosovar reality and has been dictated by political events. The military that commands the PSYOPS and INFO-OPS structures seems not to perceive the amplitude and the secular subtleties of the conflict between the warrior culture of the Serbs and Albanians, the legitimacy of revenge under Albanian *Kanun* (medieval customary law), or the Serbian mentality of winning war through resistance. The Albanian or Serb Kosovar adults are not interested in multi-ethnicity or tolerance. They would gladly slaughter each other immediately upon the departure of the international military. They are interested only in the future of their province and worry only about surviving tomorrow or the next day. Four years have passed since the end of the conflict, and none of these problems has been clearly addressed by the international community. Billions of euros from the European Community have been wasted on unfinished houses with no central heating, electricity, or running water, and for equipping the Kosovo police. Several modern mosques, generously sponsored by the Arab community, are virtually ignored by the Muslims in the area. Local Albanians survive day to day

more from the aid sent by a diaspora that grows thinner and thinner as most of the European states send the Albanian refugees back, or from smuggling rather than from working in private companies or international organizations. In the north, the Serbs survive with the help of Belgrade and the support of a more intense manufacturing activity. In spite of this situation, KFOR has not initiated any campaign to stimulate or educate the population but keeps pushing new amnesties for illegal weapons possession and encouraging the return of refugees.

The issue of the future status of Kosovo is a source of violent passions between the Serbs and the Albanians. The province currently survives as a kind of UN protectorate even if, from the standpoint of international law, it remains part of Serbia. The Albanians claim full independence and reject firmly any form of authority from Belgrade. The division of the province, granting the north part to Serbia, would set a dangerous precedent that could again inflame fragile Macedonia, where Albanian extremism was reborn under the name of the National Albanian Army (AKSh). The alternative of a Kosovo full of cantons does not seem to be satisfactory to anyone. The obvious solution is a compromise negotiated and based on a fair and realistic division of the ethnic, demographic, economic, and cultural patrimony, since a potential divorce between the Serbs and Albanians has been obvious for many years.

The international community seemed caught by surprise by the violent riot of the ethnic Albanians in March 2004 emerged in Mitrovitza, the ethnically divided town in the north of Kosovo. The riot ended with tens of dead and hundreds of injured, and it was perfectly predictable for any observer or participant involved in Kosovar matters. The riot had clear objectives of ethnic cleansing, and the rioters were intent on singling out and attacking any physical or symbolic Serbian element. Thus, not only the Serbian enclaves were attacked and set on fire but also the multi-secular Orthodox churches certifying the historical rights of the Serbs. Triggered by a minor and unclarified incident (the deaths of some Albanian children from Mitrovitza supposedly at the hands of some Serbian kids), the revolt, regardless of whether or not it was urged by Albanian extremist and terrorist organizations, resonated with the Albanian Kosovars, most of them unemployed

and with little or no future, who rapidly provided a flexible mass subject to manipulation. The waves of young Kosovars who attacked not only the Serbian enclaves but also the UNMIK police units and the KFOR barracks had nothing to lose economically or socially and thus were extremely susceptible to the perspective of a different future emerging from battles fought for the independence of a province ethnically cleansed. Not only the low level of culture and education with origins in the Albanian *Kanun* filled those young people with blind hatred and made them kill, set fires, and cast stones. Equally to blame were poverty, social frustrations (most of them had been expelled from Germany, Austria, or Italy), and the lack of purpose or a credible hope for a better life. In their minds, such ethnic cleansing would simplify and open the way for an international political decision with regard to the independence of Kosovo and would lead to total separation from the Serbia and Montenegro Union. In their minds, that would attract economic prosperity, as well. The guilt for such a rationale lies equally with the international community that, in spite of its legal and moral obligations and responsibilities, has left the Kosovar problem unsolved for five years. If Bosnia and Herzegovina have enjoyed peace since 1996, this is not due to the presence of SFOR troops but to the Dayton Agreement, which set up an administrative and political formula that made peace possible, achieved

through negotiations conducted in the presence of all the parties involved. Kosovo does not have such an agreement; consequently, the Albanian Kosovars may resort to violence.

Under these circumstances, the limits of the KFOR INFO OPS and PSYOPS became obvious: they did only what they were allowed to do. Also, it is possible to assume that the intelligence reports of the services acting in the area were ignored or minimized by the decision-makers, leading finally to the riot of March 2004. Only when the political geography of the province is decided will the KFOR INFO OPS find a clear and efficient way of action by aligning its objectives with the Kosovar reality. Maybe only then will the West accept as the only possible solution the rapid integration of the Balkans into the social, political, and especially the economic system of the European Union, effective for both parties. For the time being, however, more than half a decade after the end of the 1999 conflict, the great powers seem to consider the Balkans problem as quasi-solved and are much more concerned with the Iraq war and the war against terrorism. Even the North Atlantic Alliance has fundamentally changed its concepts and strategies, accepting to replicate the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan and thus stepping outside the limits of its classic area of responsibility for which it was created almost 55 years ago.

MYTHS AND CONTEMPORARY INFORMATIONAL REALITIES

After the widely reported success of the American PSYOPS during the first Gulf War in 1991, the Western military had great expectations for this new military specialty. Things went so far that within a Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) command the PSYOPS was placed on the same level with the ground, naval, air, and special operations components. PSYOPS politics, doctrines, and specialized structures have been created at various levels of command and execution, and they act in all national and international theaters of operations. Subsequently, the Americans launched the information operations concept as a breakthrough solution to the challenges of the global village and real-time communications. It was received with reservations by some Europeans but was integrated by NATO.

The informational disaster suffered by the military in relations with the local Somalian population and war lords and later internationally by withdrawal of the American contingent during Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1994 was somewhat rehabilitated by the success of the American diplomatic and psychological pressures in the Haitian crisis. The challenge to prove the real efficiency of PSYOPS and information operations came with Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia in 1996 and with the 1999 conflict between NATO and Yugoslavia. After those military campaigns, in which much was invested both from psychological and information operations points of view, the question is how efficient were they really, and to what extent did they contribute to achieving the objectives of the respective missions?

A precise analysis of the results is difficult and questionable, as are the conclusions for the half-failures of those campaigns that could be drawn from this book. All that has happened in the former Yugoslavia during this bloody decade should trigger a serious warning against over-estimation. For the military, it is clear that neither INFO OPS nor PSYOPS can perform short-term wonders, except for some spectacular imagologic events. At the sale time, a legitimate question may be asked: Would Operation Joint Endeavor (1996) or Operation Allied Force (1999) or the SFOR and KFOR missions have had the same level of efficiency without any PSYOPS contribution? Nor even the efficiency or lack of it that derived from the intervention of the guiding political factors within INFO OPS or PSYOPS can be evaluated except from the perspective of the passage of time. However, it is virtually impossible to imagine that wars, in their actual violent and murderous form, would ever be totally replaced with techniques or super-

sophisticated attack and informational defense strategies.

People have used propaganda since ancient times to legitimize their political or military approaches because people must be persuaded, and effective persuasion is hard to resist. The enhanced communications technology has led to the amplification and complication of this phenomenon. Thus, the excessive planning of PSYOPS and INFO OPS could have unintended consequences, as we have already seen in the spring of 1999. The limits born of selfishness, meanness, self-interests, and human superficiality – be they at the level of government leaders or military commanders in the field – will always weigh heavily within the psychological and information operations. This does not mean that the spiritual evolution of human society, of civilization's standards and requirement will not imprint the political and military persuading focus. The question is at what price, at what level, and how that will happen.

NOTES

¹ Ilcev, Ivan, *Even if He Has Right or Not, She's My Country* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2003), 32-33.

² Valentin Vasile, "Between independence and partition – A personal essay concerning the situation in Kosovo in the aftermath of Yugoslav crises", presented to J3-RO MoD, 2003.

³ Quote from analysis published by the Romanian magazine *Dilema* in 2005.

⁴ Steven Collins, *NATO and Strategic PSYOPS: Policy Pariah or Growth Industry*, a personal point of view in [in press, 2002; to be published by INFOCOM, the Romanian Military PSYOPS magazine].

⁵ Wesley Clark, *Waging a Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat*, (New York: Public Affairs), 441-43.

⁶ Clark, *Waging a Modern War*.

⁷ In May 1999, the Yugoslav Army Press Center published under the military control of Col. Milivoje Novkovic a photo album, called *Resistance and Victims*, carrying photographs of collateral damages and spectacular moments of individual and collective resistance of Serbs under NATO air raids. However, this issue was not obviously anti-Western or anti-American, as there were the vitriolic comments on Serbian post-cards published in the same period.