

Policy Thought in Turbulent Times

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It is my great pleasure and honour to write the Guest View for this issue of the renowned international scientific journal *European Perspectives*. The journal is entering its tenth year, which is an important achievement. Its publication begun – symbolically – upon the twentieth anniversary of the end of the Cold War.

During this time it has published numerous views, analyses and commentaries of various international events. All this time the journal has fulfilled its basic mission: presenting the Western Balkans region with its problems and achievements and promoting its EU and NATO integration. The journal has another important role: it has published high quality articles written by young and less known authors, especially from the Western Balkans.

It should be noted that each article published in *European Perspectives* goes through double blind peer review procedure, which ensures a high scientific level and impartiality. The journal has been included in various index databases, which makes it an even more interesting medium for publishing original views on international topics.

This year the journal passed into the hands of a new publisher: the internationally known and renowned IFIMES Institute (International Institute for Middle-East and Balkan Studies). I am convinced that this will further strengthen the reputation of *European Perspectives* in the academic world. At the same time, the journal will reach a wider response among the political circles, especially in the regions covered by the IFIMES Institute, bearing in mind that the latter has a wide network of connections even at the highest political levels. On the other hand, with the *European Perspectives* IFIMES will gain additional academic reference, which is all the more important in view of the Institute's

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empirical research activities. Thus, the journal and its new publisher represent a very good combination, which is expected to bring about many synergies.

It should also be stressed that the journal's previous publisher Centre for European Perspective (CEP) accomplished a very important task of introducing a high quality journal into international academic circles with an enthusiastic and original approach in terms of the range of topics and authors. Therefore I am glad that CEP remains associated with the journal. This will enable cooperation at a high-quality level, which is so very important in today's international political arena, where large-scale and far-reaching results can only be achieved through integration and cooperation.

The situation in modern multipolar international community is complicated and full of new challenges. The emergence of new centres of power brings along new possibilities for well-being and development as well as new problems, in addition to those that have hampered international relations for several decades. Although swift technological development has enriched our world, it has not ensured more safety and justice. It is rather our hope than expectation that those, who are based on their political, economic, financial, technological and military power, are most responsible for peace, welfare, development and justice in today's world and, even more importantly, in the world of the next decades, will be willing and able to respond to the old and new challenges through the multilateral dialogue and in the interest of all mankind. Those challenges include many spheres, such as environmental and climate changes, discrimination and human rights violations, demographic imbalances, massive illegal migration, poverty and wealth inequalities, safety risks and crises that could be triggered by nationalistic, imperialistic and hegemonistic ambitions of the superpowers as well as of some smaller states. I do not agree with sceptics, who claim that in the multipolar world with several centres of power it is more difficult to face international problems than it was in the bipolar world. However, I am afraid that in the next decades the risks for global peace may increase, especially if those who are most responsible put their national interests before the interest of all the mankind, and if unilateralism prevails over multilateralism, which means cooperation, mutual agreement and shared responsibility.

A question of special importance for us is the future of our part of the world – Europe, the West and the transatlantic community. At least at the time being it is still the safest part of the world with the highest levels of well-being, human freedom and freedom of creativity, social security with best access to health and education, rule of law, and freedom to make life choices. How are we going to preserve all this and at the same time contribute to more safety, wealth, freedom and justice in the rest of the world? And how are we going to regulate our relations with Russia, our big eastern neighbour, which had once been a special part of our Western world until it was cut away by Bolshevism? How are we going to preserve our values and our identity, our Western world that we inherited from Hellenic and Roman times? How are we going to work with others to ensure co-existence, welfare and safety on our planet? All these questions will represent important challenges for the future generations.

Despite all open questions one thing is clear: we have to work together, united in Europe and also with the other side of the Atlantic. European integration and security cooperation on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are *sine qua non* of our safety and welfare. Also Slovenia can only be safe and successful in a safe and successful European Union, or whatever the name of this European alliance might be in the future. If we are to remain each on his own, we are exposed to winds and storms coming from all sides, like our forefathers were throughout the past.

The IFIMES Institute and the *European Perspectives* journal dedicate special attention to problems in the region to the south-west of Slovenia, i.e. the Western Balkans, and the Middle East. Both these regions are characterised by long years of instability and, consequently, lagging in development, weak democracy and inefficient rule of law, dissatisfaction and a sense of futurelessness among the (especially young) population. The international community seems unable and often also unprepared to seriously tackle the problems in those regions. The rise of ISIS and radicalisation of Islam in the Middle East are the consequence of decades of unresolved problems and conflicts in the region and of inadequate and inappropriate action by the international community. External actors involved in this region mostly follow their own interests rather than pursuing peace and resolving the problems.

For the Western Balkans region there is still hope that it will not become an area of instability and a threat for peace. However, almost a

quarter of a century after the tragic and bloody Balkan wars that raged most brutally through Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, this region is still waiting outside the EU's door. The tensions, lack of prosperity and pessimism about the future are increasing, especially in areas, where the war was most destructive also for the relations between the local population. There is too little development, democracy and rule of law and too much hatred and mistrust with insufficient attempts to achieve reconciliation and rehabilitation. Europe only offers empty words and promises with little understanding and action that would enable the countries in the region to move forward on their way to their European future. It is not surprising that in this deadlock with a very remote European perspective, especially for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, ideas are emerging about new solutions that would lead to stability and European accession. One such increasingly popular idea is that the road to the EU should lead through changing the borders rather than through realising the demands and conditions for the Europeanization of those states. Recent wars in this part of Europe were led because of the borders, the ideas of Greater Serbia, the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the statehood of Kosovo which is still not recognised by some, and the clashes of various nationalisms. A careful consideration of the increasing tensions that are further exacerbated by external efforts to maintain instability, shows that the attempts to change the borders will inevitably lead to further conflicts and instability, and not to final solutions and Europeanization. As it is very disputable where the new borders would run, the ideas on border changes would definitely fuel nationalistic demands that may lead to the creation of Greater Albania, the undermining of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multinational state and the risks for other borders. Being very familiar with the situation in this part of the world, I dare advise those, who find it so easy to change the borders to think again of the possible consequences of their policies and actions.

Nevertheless, the "name agreement" concluded between Macedonia and Greece has proven that it is possible to resolve peacefully severe disputes also in this part of Europe. Like any other compromise, the agreement to use the name of North Macedonia and other solutions contained in the Prespa Agreement are not ideal. The aim of any compromise is not to reach a perfect solution for one party but to resolve the dispute in the interests of both parties in order to enable their co-existence, cooperation and, ultimately, friendship. In order to achieve a compromise both parties have to make some sacrifices. A

compromise requires political maturity on the part of state leaders and their nations. The Macedonian and Greek people and their leaders showed such maturity. The door to future partnership between Greece and North Macedonia in NATO and EU is now open.

In any event, both the IFIMES Institute and *European Perspectives* will continue to provide scientific, fair, impartial and critical views of the situation in the Middle East and the Western Balkans. Especially we will lend a critical eye towards the role of political elites and their irresponsibility, incapacity and misuses as well as corruption, which represents a big or perhaps the major source of problems of the countries in the region.

We will continue to pay special attention to the role of the Republic of Slovenia in the Western Balkans as well as to its role in Europe and the world in general. With numerous initiatives and activities Slovenia has made an important contribution to the prevention of conflicts. At the beginning it was the only EU and NATO state from the Western Balkan region to provide help to other states in the region in their accession process.

In the end, it should also be noted that the international scientific journal *European Perspectives* ensures promotion of Slovenia, its foreign policy and diplomacy. This provides an excellent proof that even small nations can find their niche in the increasingly demanding and complicated area of international politics.

I am also pleased to state that this year the IFIMES Institute was granted a special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This is an important achievement for the Institute and also a good reference for the journal. It also strengthens the role of IFIMES as an international actor, who contributes to better understanding of international relations and influences international politics with its activities. The consultative status within the UN confirms the importance of the IFIMES Institute and the *European Perspectives* journal.

As the Vice-President of IFIMES Advisory Board I would like to take this opportunity to wish *European Perspectives* and its new publisher a lot of journalistic and academic success and to wish the Institute to continue its work with plenty of enthusiasm, persistence, innovation and scientific excellence.