

Now it's Time to Finish the Business

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The kind invitation to prepare a Guest View for the current issue of the international scientific journal *European Perspectives* presents a special pleasure and privilege for me. In the following few pages I will try my best to offer my humble contribution to this perspective.

Here I stem from the fact that among countries of the region Bosnia and Herzegovina is going through specific social and historical circumstances, while implementing its EU membership ambition. There was a war going on between 1992–1995 with unprecedented sufferings and genocide in Srebrenica in 1995. Process of forming democratic institutions advances with difficulties and there is a shortage of democratic, economic and administrative capacity for establishing of European standards. Therefore it is necessary to offer BiH help from the EU institutions through the EU Special Representative as well as within the frame of the EU's responsibility in implementing the Dayton Peace Accords and building peace. The faster and the better approach is speeding up the integration in the EU and NATO.

There are at least three reasons how I understand my input to this issue of the *European Perspectives*.

The first one is, of course, the journal's jubilee – it started with its important and noble mission exactly a decade ago. The anniversary not only coincides with other important in this year, but also reflects the understanding of time and of its needs. With its new publisher – the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies – the journal has stepped in the next period of its existence. It should be the

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decade of further advanced policy thought and advice, of an upgraded and broadened author's community, and of a direct, scientifically sharp and thoughtful contemplation. There is never enough of it and there is always a variety of ways and approaches to do it.

The second one is the fact that the respected journal discusses topics, which are directly linked to our region. And we are in a desperate need of everything that would bring us closer to the Euro Atlantic integration area, what also means ordering our societies in the way to we live better. We need policy advice to know what to take into account and to follow, and we need policy experience to know what not to follow and why not. We want to learn from others and share experiences and views. I've been following this journal throughout these years and became convinced of the usefulness of articles and book reviews for what we need, our civil society and academic community in particular, but also our political elites. Along with this also goes the fact that the journal particularly offers its pages to young, promising and not established authors from the region, as well as from elsewhere. It has never been easy for young authors to receive a place in journal, since the majority of them tend to favour well-known names. But without having an opportunity nobody becomes a name.

And the third one is the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the Cold War that we are witnessing nowadays. The year of 1989 marks a special turning point in our political history. Much has been written and contemplated about it, so one would hardly see any special need to focus on it. But in spite of this, break even points like the 1989 presents, have to be discussed and researched on and on. And observing it from our point of view, how we in the Western Balkans perceive it is never without reasoning.

Thirty years ago we shared a dream of Europe free and whole. Socialism and communist ideology disappeared, Germany was united, and we felt historical change. It was the time of expectations, hope, and enthusiasm. And then with the dissolution of Yugoslavia – much contrary to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and not to speak about the Czechoslovakia – a war broke out in the Balkans. It was the result of highly irresponsible political leaders, driven by nationalism, extremism and absolute absence of human touch with what at the end of the day no discussion was possible. No solution was possible otherwise

with arms, what at the end proved to be no solution as well. We will never get to know who all had interest in cruelties that were going on, but we know that local politicians could have prevented it. They could have agreed on reconstituting of the former state, they could have reached a peaceful consent on dissolution. But they did not, and basically we know why. Instead, as the 20th century began with the two Balkan Wars, it also ended in the same way. We who witnessed it, we know what we speak about. We also know and remember what was the stream of events and how did the international community react: slow, hesitant, and naive. Hadn't it been for the US President Clinton and the consequent intervention of NATO, the agony could have lasted. It would have been neither the first one nor the last one.

I am pointing out this with one and only ambition: to present that roughly three decades in between would be enough time to consolidate affairs. Had I've been asked this as a member of the BiH War Presidency, I would have bet on it.

To simplify: We witnessed four enlargements of the NATO Alliance during these three decades. The first one took place in 1999 by three new members, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. The second one was achieved five years later in 2004 with seven new members, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia. Four years later in 2008 this was the case with Albania and Croatia, and only a decade later with the next one, by Montenegro. We are all carefully following the ratification proces for the North Macedonia as the next, thirtieth member in due course.

Additionally, we also observed four enlargements of the EU in the same period. The first one took place in 1995 by three new members, Austria, Finland and Sweden. Almost a decade later in 2004 the second one was on the agenda with ten new members, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. Only three years later in 2007 two new members joined, Bulgaria and Romania, and then in 2013 also Croatia.

Looking at the Western Balkans through the prism of this evidence, the conclusion is twofold clear: there exist a small number of the Western Balkan countries that still are not formally members of NATO and the EU, and at the same time they all have some form of institutional cooperation with both organizations. As far as NATO is

concerned, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia participate in its Partnership for Peace Programme, with a remark that Serbia is not interested in the membership. And with a regard to the EU, Montenegro and Serbia are already in the negotiating track, whereas Albania and North Macedonia as candidates expect soon the date to start the negotiation proces, and while Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo concluded the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU.

So the nexus of the region is connected, but in a standstill. Integration network that includes the non-members hasn't brought enough results and performed much dynamics for the core of the region, to its grey zone. It is rather loose with no significant progress recently. We remain surrounded with the EU and NATO, we are in the middle of the circle, but we are not in.

It is not my ambition to dwell on why it is like this, who should do more and what. But one issue is obvious again: as it was clear thirty years ago that the Wall has to be torn down, it is apparent now that it is high time to finish the business. This is for my understanding the most important message from the *Annus Mirabilis* and from its current anniversary.

There are three issues that countries of the region can do in a coordinated manner to improve their wellbeing and hence the relation with the EU.

Firstly, they shall upgrade their infrastructure. Commuting, logistic and transportation routes and traffic, this is the backbone of cooperation and better life. Travelling around the region is still a nightmare. It is so because road connections are outdated, overcrowded and not functional. Also border services have to be updated with introduction of modern technologies, applications and networks that will link together services of the countries in the region. Also the overall digitalization of the region lacks much behind.

Secondly, economic cooperation has to be enhanced. Countries of the region have to upgrade mutual cooperation and their bilateral exchange has to grow. One of the main rules in each economy is doing business with neighbouring countries and with those from the closest region. This is closely related to the improvement of transportation

and commuting. It is not a vicious circle as it might look at first glance. Very pragmatic, operational and target oriented. This is not the area of high politics, but of daily life. Everybody is in a needed of this.

Thirdly, young population has to be brought in the focus. This should become a commandment. Educational possibilities and employment opportunities for young people directly relate to the previous two points. During at least throughout the last decade we witness a strong trend of young people leaving the region. They do not see perspective, they are unsatisfied with the overall living conditions, they see how easy it is to change some things for better that nobody is changing them, and they do not care and think about it. They just want to have a decent life where they can show what they are capable of. In our close and distant vicinity there are countries that know how to do it and they do it. Therefore, it could be done here as well, in our region. Of course we need the economic recovery, but above all we need a psychological Marshall Plan.

These are all practical issues that do not relate to politics and differences as well to open questions among the countries. It is rather easy to upgrade the quality of these services and activities, without losing much time. It will influence daily life, improve relations and change the atmosphere. We all need positive mood and examples, which show that development is possible and things achievable and doable.

Altogether, in these days the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the Cold War is the name of the day. But its *mantra* will be achieved if we all manage to focus on steps that bring us forward. We all know what to do, so there is no need to lose time for high talking. Countries of the region share the ambition for the EU membership and want to advance along that road. The EU wants to bring our countries closer and in. With the new composition in Brussels and with the new negotiation methodology on the screen it is time to move on.

Hence, I call upon the new European institutions, the Parliament, the Commission, and the Council in particular, to finish the business. And this business is the enlargement with the countries of the Western Balkans. The enlargement is the solution also now as it had been in the past. All preconditions for the higher integration speed are available. You have to motivate and push us, and we have to respond. And we will. If we do not, nobody will be ready to understand it and young

population will go. Optimism, devotion and improvement have to be within a reach and not a watered down utopia.

Victor Hugo, who before 170 years evoked for the first time the idea of the united Europe, would agree with us. The Western Balkans used to be the region with the stigma of the periphery, where wars were starting – now it's time to recognize creativity, vitality, and dynamics and move on. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War and a decade after the Treaty of Lisbon, we have to do so. Integration dynamics in a form of the negotiation process, be it already in deeds or be it in intensifying for it, has to embrace the region and take it forward.

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