

The role of external actors in the conflict and post-conflict era in the Western Balkans

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I. Introduction

The Western Balkans region has gone through a difficult period of post-conflict and situations. With the beginning of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the region began the first problems which later escalated into fierce and bloody conflicts which caused the death of thousands of people, massive displacing and horrific crimes. In these conditions, at a time when the conflict was coming from inside and the situation was getting worse and worse, the intervention and help of other actors not included in the conflict, who could contribute to the stabilization of the situation, was required.

Thus external actors such as the United Nations or the European Community and NATO and OSCE, became key factors in ending conflicts in the region. We can say that the contribution or role of these organizations is related to some initiatives and actions. First we can mention the diplomatic action and the attempts for mediation and to facilitate the dialogue between the parties to the conflict, attempts which have sometimes been successful and sometimes not, but we can mention here the mediation for concluding the Erdut or Dajton Agreement, and on the other hand we can mention concrete measures of a restrictive nature or the various missions of these organizations.

It must be said that in the period when the armed conflicts were present between the parties, the most concrete need was to end the conflict and violence and to establish a state of peace between them, so to create a negative peace. After reaching peace

agreements, these actors have played a very important role in building positive peace, establishing self-governing structures, overseeing the implementation of peace agreements, helping to build the rule of law and democracy, and what is important to mention is their impact on the processes of reconciliation and transitional justice. An important element in peacebuilding is the contribution that these actors have given in terms of funding for capacity building, growth and strengthening of democracy and economy between these countries by promoting regional cooperation and joint initiatives.

Although, we must mention that the analyse of the role of these actors in Western Balkans can be different depending on the situation and the characteristics of the development of the conflict, but in this lesson I will try to summarize the most significant moments of their presence in the region.

II. The role of EU as an external actor in Conflict and Post-conflict era in the Western Balkans

The European Union is an important international factor that has long established its ties with the Western Balkans region. The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia highlighted the need for its intervention in order to prevent conflicts and tensions between the parties. The first initiative for intervention by European Community was the Peace Conference on Yugoslavia, in 27 August 1991 which concluded in the creation of an Arbitration Commission to solve the disputes between the parties. However, it must be said that in fact, if we refer to the historical analysis of the European community, (later called the EU) found itself somewhat unprepared to face and intervene actively and successfully in the early stages of the conflicts that exploded in the Western Balkans. This was because there was a lack of a proper political strategy and institutional capacity to intervene quickly and effectively because the means of intervention at that time were limited to economic and diplomatic ones.

During that period, other important actors in the global arena intervened with various tools to normalize the situation in the region and to end the violence, which set the EU in motion to develop better strategies and a concrete plan to influence the region.

Considering the insufficient mechanisms and tools to prevent or intervene in Western Balkan, EU focused its attention in developing common security and defence policies and cooperation. However, through the Regional Approach, and later the Stabilization and Association Process, the EU managed to actively contribute to the peacebuilding process and institutional structures in the post-conflict situation, but also cooperated and provided concrete assistance in crisis management. The presence of EU in the region was channelled in two directions : peace-building missions and enlargement policy with the future objective of accession in this organization, as well as mediator in some situation created during these time.

We can mention here the important role of the EU in reaching the Ohrid Agreement in 2001. given that the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy was a key figure who not only mediated and was actively involved in resolving the crisis in the Republic of North Macedonia at 2001, but also addressed some very important issues that should be part of this agreement. Thus, among others, in the Ohrid Framework Agreement are issues of political representation of minorities, or disarmament of certain police groups, or even the construction of institutional capacities in the public security sector.

The EU presence in Republic of North Macedonia and its role as a mediating actor became apparent again in 2015 when, as a result of scandals and wiretaps showing corruption and abuse of power by high-ranking officials, the crisis in this country began again. The mediation of the European Commissioner for Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn and a delegation of three Members of the European Parliament between the four main political parties in this country facilitated the signing of the "Przino Agreement" and its implementation is one of the conditions for progress towards EU membership of Northern Macedonia.

An important moment that should be underlined when talking about the role and mediation of the EU between the countries in the region is the facilitation of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which began in March 2011 and currently two phases of it have been realized. In the first phase that took place in the framework of technical negotiations, the parties managed to sign about 9 agreements, while in the second phase, held in April 2013, the 'First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations' was signed, which brought about the dissolution of Serb parallel structures in

Serb-majority municipalities. Regardless of the degree of implementation of the agreements or the fact that many issues are still pending, it must be said that the process developed in Brussels has somewhat normalized relations between the parties.

A number of civilian and military missions have been sent by the EU to the countries of the Western Balkans since the time of the conflict in order to help stabilize and maintain peace and on the other hand to support the domestic authorities in establishing self-governing and democratic structures. Among the first EU missions in the region is the Western European Union Police Advisory Mission to Albania, in the period 1997-2001, which aimed to support government structures on security and public order issues, and later transformed the role of itself in the training of police structures and police restructuring in this country.

Other EU missions in the region aimed at stabilization include the EU Police Mission as well as the EU military mission Althea, which replaced the NATO presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EU Police Mission. Another case of EU missions in this area is the Concordia military mission in the Republic of North Macedonia, which was the first military mission to implement the "Berlin Plus" agreement.

Regarding the enlargement, EU, through its conditionality policy, has tried to pull all the region toward a future and long stability, with countries that are trying to build democratic institutions and transform domestic structures through wide reforms and on the other hand to build strong regional cooperation and friendly neighborly relations.

After the start of the Stabilization and Association Process, the countries of the Western Balkans received the status of potential candidate and later a part of them the candidate status, signed the Stabilization and Association agreements, starting the journey towards the EU. During this phase, the EU has supported the countries of the Western Balkans with a series of financial instruments and programs such as Phare, Cards, IPA through which it intends to invest in various areas of the economy and reforms. Also during this period, the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and especially the rule of law has been one of the objectives of the EU towards the Balkans, in line with the policy of conditionality. One of the points mentioned in the latest EU Enlargement Strategy is reconciliation, according to which national structures must work to find the right mechanisms to achieve reconciliation before EU membership.

III. UN as an important factor in the Western Balkans conflicts

The UN, as an organization for the maintenance of international peace and security, has assisted in the conflicts that have taken place in the Western Balkans region since the early stages of this conflict. Thus, in the context of possible conflicts in this region, it helped with a series of instruments, both for peacekeeping and conflict prevention, as well as through diplomatic means and mediation to stabilize the situation and build the peace in the region.

The United Nations became actively involved in the situation in Yugoslavia on 25 September 1991 when the Security Council, meeting at the ministerial level, unanimously adopted its resolution 713 (1991) expressing deep concern at the fighting in that country and calling on all States to implement immediately a "general and complete embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Yugoslavia". The Council commended and fully supported the efforts already undertaken by the European Community and its member States, with the support of the States participating in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), to restore peace and dialogue in Yugoslavia. By its resolution, the Council invited the Secretary-General to offer his assistance in consultation with the Government of Yugoslavia and all those promoting the peace efforts. On February 1992 the Security Council with the recommendation of The Secretary General, by its resolution 743 (1992), approved the report and established UNPROFOR.¹

UNPROFOR was a mission initially, established in Croatia as an interim arrangement to create the conditions of peace and security required for the negotiation of an overall settlement of the Yugoslav crisis. This was a traditional peacekeeping mission that was engaged on monitoring the cease – fire agreements, monitoring and to ensure the security and the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the zones it was assigned. We must say that the escalation of conflict and the history of event about this mission, showed that that the UN needed to reform its tools and revise its framework, which brought later a transformation of the traditional peacekeeping missions to a conflict

¹ https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unprof_b.htm

prevention ones. UNPREDEP was the first UN mission of a preventive character which was firstly based in the Republic of Macedonia.

On 12 November 1995, with the mediation of UN and USA was concluded the Erdut Agreement which provided a one to two-year transition period to Croatian authorities; demilitarization of the area; extensive human rights provisions, including, above all, the right of refugees and displaced persons to return home; an insistence on non-discrimination and local elections. The Agreement requested the Security Council to establish a transitional administration to govern the region during the transitional period of 12 months, and to authorize an international force to maintain peace and security during that period and to otherwise assist in the implementation of the agreements conditions.

UNTAES² was set up on 15 January 1996 for an initial period of 12 months, with both military and civilian components. The military component was to supervise and facilitate the demilitarization of the Region; monitor the voluntary and safe return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes of origin in cooperation with UNHCR; contribute, by its presence, to the maintenance of peace and security in the region; and otherwise assist in implementation of the Basic Agreement. The civilian component regards the establishment of a temporary police force, define its structure and size, develop a training programme and oversee its implementation, and monitor treatment of offenders and the prison system; undertake tasks relating to civil administration and to the functioning of public services; facilitate the return of refugees; organize elections, assist in their conduct, and certify the results.

The mission has also been requested to undertake other activities relevant to the Basic Agreement, including assistance in the coordination of plans for the development and economic reconstruction of the Region and monitoring of the parties' compliance with their commitments to respect the highest standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms, promote an atmosphere of confidence among all local residents irrespective of their ethnic origin, monitor and facilitate the demining of territory within the Region,

² <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/untaes.htm>

and maintain an active public affairs element. UNTAES is also to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in performing its mandate.

During this period other mission on the region were deployed from the UN, as we can mention here UNCRO, UNBIH, UNMIK, etc. We discussed above the case of these three mission just to have a clear view how the traditional peacekeeping mission of the UN were transformed to preventive and peacebuilding ones. Of course that we should mention here that the UN combined its measures and cooperated extensively with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which during this time was transformed from a defence organization into an organization for the enforcement of peace and the implementation of peace agreements. After the period of conflict and implementation of the peace agreements, UN has gradually left the place to regional mechanisms such the EU missions.

OSCE

Another external actor that has played a very important role in the Western Balkan countries in their road of constructing peace and stability among them and among people is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The former Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, became an international organization with e permanent institutional framework in 1994.

This organization has been present in the region of Western Balkans since 1992 with her first mission in Republic of Macedonia and with the later missions in the other countries. This missions have had a strong cooperation with the three other actors mentioned before and have been supported by them constantly.

Considering its limited tools and also the presence of other dominant actors in the area like EU, NATO and UN, but on the other hand having a realist point of view about its possibilities, this organisation focused its activity in security matters and in the civil area of peacebuilding, monitoring the creation of democratic institution and protection of human rights.

According to scholars, the OSCE has been credited as one of the most reliable international institutions involved in the Western Balkans for the process of stabilisation, peacebuilding and peace-keeping of the region, because the peculiarity of

the OSCE when compared to other international institutions is that the organisation is based on a common and more comprehensive idea of security and that it is the only pan-European security institution that has linked the human dimension of security to the political-military concept of security.

OSCE today offers a strong support to the process of reconciliation while is trying to involve the civil society organizations and groups with a large number of joint initiatives and projects that bring the people of the region closer, preventing conflicts securing stability.

Development aid

During armed conflicts, external or interested actors can contribute in different ways to the relief of the conflict, and the case of the EU and the UN mentioned above showed that in different periods they have served with different mechanisms. Thus other states can be provided with humanitarian aid or development aid, through which they try to create initiatives or disincentives during or after conflicts to reduce violence or build stability and peace.

Such initiatives relate to all kinds of aid aimed at building peace through the influence of the parties to the conflict, or in other ways such as strengthening the capacities of pro-peace movements, changing relations between the hostility parties, or even investing in the socio-economic development of the country in conflict. Disincentives are the opposite of what we mentioned, because they are in fact incentives to discourage activities that are intended to be violent and develop or fuel conflicts.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can say that in the region of Western Balkan, from the beginning of the conflict until now, four major external actors (among others) like UN, EU, NATO and OSCE have been engaged in various ways during the road to peace and stability. These actors have contributed in the process of ending conflicts, managing conflict and peacebuilding. Each of them has assisted with diplomatic, politic, military and monitoring tools according to their activity and possibilities and has contributed in creating democratic institutions, regional cooperation and reconciliation in the region.

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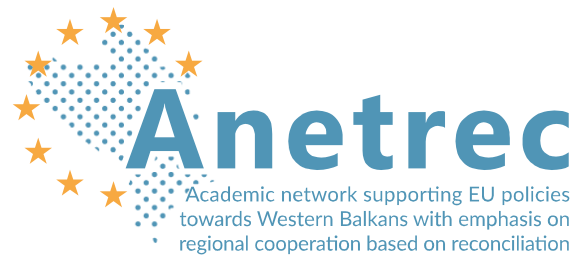
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