

The Kosovo Crisis and Russia

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The contemporary international relations still include Russia as one of the key actors in the Balkans politics. The relations between Russia and Yugoslavia were marked with an outright denouncement of Slobodan Milošević and his regime, which was also reflected in Russian's attitude toward NATO intervention in Kosovo. However, Russian politics is not unanimous vis-a-vis Yugoslavia—on the one hand it is still popular to use nationalist slogans for pre-electoral purposes and to uphold an aggressive foreign policy, while on the other hand there is growing awareness that the political situation in Serbia should be changed. The first meetings between Russian politicians and representatives of the Serbian opposition marked the change in Russian policy toward Milošević. Hence Russia has several options first of which is to join forces with the international community. If it wishes to assert itself in Serbia, Yugoslavia and the Balkans, Russia can only act as mediator, by taking part in peace activities in consultation with other factors in the region.

Key words: Russian foreign policy, the Balkans, conflicts, stability, changes.

1. Introduction

Due to historic circumstances and to numerous contemporary political factors, Russia has been - and remains - a key figure on the Balkan chessboard. It is also true, though, that after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the new Russia, heir of the Russian Empire, has lost a considerable share of its former power to influence the policies of the Balkan states. As a result, these nations view Russia's role from different positions. Most of our former partners in the "socialist brotherhood" cooperate today with NATO and the European Union. The present leadership of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on the other hand, is forced to rely on Russia in the hope of finding a counterbalance to US policies and to NATO.

Playing the big powers, or military-political alliances, against each other is a long tradition of Belgrade. This strategy is also the result of the geo-

political and strategic position of Serbia and thus of Yugoslavia. Moreover, as things stand, provoking conflicts between Russia and NATO is the only political option for survival left open to the former President of the FRY and his regime. For its part, Russia yielded to the stereotypes prevailing in a section of its own society and helped the Milošević regime to stay afloat for a too long time. A crucial role in all this was played by "personal" contacts and relations between the Serbian and Russian political and economic circles.

With very few exceptions, no Russian politician, even among the democratically-oriented ones, came forward with an outright denouncement of Slobodan Milošević and his regime. This also explains the results of the vote in the UN Security Council on 26 March 1999, when Russia proposed a resolution demanding an end to the air strikes against Yugoslavia and obtained only 3 out of 15 member votes in support of this proposal. At the same time, the Russian Duma, from LDPR to the "Apple", unanimously condemned NATO actions. The results of public opinion research confirmed that a permanent consensus exists in Russia opposing its involvement

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against the West and NATO. In other words, there is a great discrepancy between the mood of the political structures and the mood of the population.

In view of this situation, the extremely negative results of Russian policy during the conflict in Kosovo were only to be expected. At first, the West did not include Russia in its deliberations, both because of their evidently conflicting interests and because the support given by Russian politicians to the venture of S. Milošević was unacceptable as an alternative to military action. Inevitably, regardless of President Yeltsin's public statements ("We shall not give up Kosovo without resistance!"), air raids against Yugoslavia were launched in March 1999. The strikes were continued regardless of Moscow's official condemnation of "NATO aggression" and similar statements. According to Russian political scientist and Member of the Duma A. Arbatov, following on an unprecedented explosion of anti-American feelings, debates in Russia went so far as to suggest sending arms to Yugoslavia, as the victim of aggression. This, of course, would have implied a military confrontation with NATO, or using all available political means to pressure the West. However, everybody in Moscow gradually realised that a protracted dispute with the West (even if only for "internal use") would act against Russia's long-term interests.

There is an ongoing argument between two factions in Russia today, not only over the policy towards Yugoslavia but over foreign policy in general. There is a struggle being fought over the choice of the road to be taken after the year 2000. On the one side, it is still popular to use nationalist slogans for pre-electoral purposes and to uphold an aggressive foreign policy; there is still furtive talk about "protecting the Orthodox Serb brothers". On the other side, though, there is growing awareness that the situation in Serbia should be reversed, that Russia needs another policy, since the present one is obviously at an impasse. Soon after the termination of NATO military operations, the "Kosovo problem" and the "Serb national question" ceased to be used explicitly to manipulate Russian public opinion.

2. Russian *realpolitik*

The declared Russian *realpolitik*, that is, the geopolitical direction chosen by this great state, has failed the test, in the opinion of D. Trenin, Deputy

Director of the Carnegie Centre in Moscow. This *realpolitik* is, namely, at odds with the policies that the Russian leadership is forced to implement. And this contrast is very much in evidence in everyday practice. On the one hand, military instructions were issued in the country concerning the "Yugoslav situation", in other words, a counterstroke against NATO was contemplated. Some political analysts declared that, in the end, Russia did not derive any profit from its confrontation with NATO, but, in spite of this, they are fascinated by the revival of the so-called "defence awareness" in Russia and are demanding a revision of the Helsinki accords on Kosovo. A military doctrine is being formulated whereby NATO is no longer regarded as a partner.

At the same time, though, in planning the operation in Chechnya in autumn 1999, the Russian military leadership was obviously inspired by the operation launched by NATO against Yugoslavia. On the other hand, first moves have been made by Russia to re-establish contacts with NATO. The activities of the Russia-NATO Consultative Council have been renewed, and General V. Zavarzin has returned to Brussels, even though he stated that his return did not signify the renewal of full-scale cooperation and that he had returned only because of the beginning of the operation in Kosovo. Russian Foreign Affairs Minister I. Ivanov is of the opinion that this has "served as an instance of new thinking about European security, a new view on the Russia-NATO relationship. Due to the activities of the North Atlantic Alliance on the Balkans, all of this has become even more evident".

Developments on Yugoslavia's domestic scene have placed Russia before a difficult choice of whose side to take: to side with the opposition, which was weak at that time and critical towards Russia because of its support to Milošević, or to continue endorsing Milošević, who was in power, while formally proclaiming the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others?

By supporting Milošević, Russia ran the risk not only of damaging its relationship with the West but also of finding itself in complete isolation in the Balkans. An alliance of this kind would be likely to disturb the fragile balance of forces, interests and inter-ethnic relations in Russia itself. The disruption of this balance could produce disastrous consequences for Russia itself.

On 30 July 1999, at the conference in Sarajevo convened for the signing of the Stability Pact for

South-Eastern Europe, the then Russian Prime Minister S. Stepashin distanced himself from the policies practised by S. Milošević. He declared that the "suffering of the Yugoslav people was not only caused by the bombing but also by the regime of S. Milošević". His words were in perfect harmony with those of B. Yeltsin, who spoke about the "pressing need to settle the Yugoslav situation and to establish friendly relations with the USA, Germany, France and other states".

The visit by the Montenegrin President M. Đukanović in August 1999 was taken by many analysts as a sign of Russian reorientation to Yugoslav democrats and a dismissal of "doubtful characters, obtained as part of the legacy of the Soviet empire". The beginning of contacts with the Yugoslav and Serbian opposition and the quest for alternative policies is without doubt a step in the right direction, but it must be also borne in mind that the people Đukanović met in Moscow were often the same persons who called for a union between Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia. The reaction by the Montenegrin President to this proposal is well known: he declared that Montenegro would leave Yugoslavia should these plans materialise. Domestic politicians ought to admit to themselves that they cannot maintain contacts with both the Serb and the general Yugoslav opposition based on "Slav-Orthodox brotherhood" at the same time, and that they must give up the fantasy of Russian access to the Adriatic Sea.

3. Jointly warning about Montenegro

Even the staunch advocate of close ties with Serbia Luzhkov considered it necessary to point out in an article published in August 1999 that "Milošević is responsible for the purges in Kosovo. The attempt to suppress Montenegro demonstrates the resolve of the authorities to use all available means in order to stay in power. Clearly, Russia and the European Union should jointly send out a warning that military force against Montenegro would not be tolerated. Should this nevertheless happen, joint action against such a policy of Belgrade would be indicated". This ambiguity and inconsistency on the part of Moscow was again manifested at the time a Russian delegation, headed by Deputy Foreign Minister A. Avdeev, visited Belgrade early in September 1999. The members did not only have talks with S.

Milošević but also met V. Šešelj, which definitely helped to improve his political image. The delegation did not meet representatives of the Albanians in Kosovo.

By the same token, the first meetings of Russian diplomats with the representatives of Serbian opposition may be regarded as a new accent in our policies. The contacts, which are long overdue, are the result of Moscow's efforts to devise a more flexible and pragmatic line, a line that was initiated by the visit of M. Đukanović. The vast majority of political activists in Russia, who uphold the legacy of "love for the Slav peoples" and support their "Orthodox brethren", and thus do an immense service to Milošević, have no idea of the actual situation in individual countries and in the region as a whole. The fate of these peoples is of little interest to them. Moscow looks upon these as it did in the old times: as a mere instrument of its rivalry with the West, and views the region as the object of struggle for domination.

Furthermore, domestic politicians are increasingly demonstrating their complete lack of understanding of the nature of national movements and of the break-up of the SFRY. For example, in justly pointing out Milošević's responsibility for the dissolution of the SFRY, V.S. Chernomyrdin said that he had quarrelled with all **regions** (underlined S.R.); that he could not ensure the peaceful coexistence of Serbs and Moslems, which then led to war. Even now, Montenegro is referred to in Russia at best as an autonomous territory within Serbia, not as an equal and constituent republic of FRY, entitled to leave the federal state. In our country, both the former and the present Yugoslavia are considered a Serb state, destroyed by "bad guys", mostly nationalists from those nations which seceded from the SFRY.

Even today, many writings are found in our newspapers, stemming exclusively from Serb sources, which claim that Montenegrins are in fact Serbs, both by language and by religion, calling Montenegro an "Orthodox Republic". The authors do not mention, or do not know, that Montenegro was an independent state from 1878 to 1918 and that it had lost its independence by entering into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (becoming Yugoslavia in 1929).

It is also true that there are quite a few people in Moscow who do not understand, or arrogantly refuse to acknowledge, that the wish of post-Yugoslav states to join NATO and the European Union,

and thus to become equal partners in European integration processes, does not pose any threat to Russia. These strivings are the result of historical development and of a long-term policy in keeping with their national interests, not a passing whim of this or that political elite. It is a choice imposed by complex inter-ethnic and inter-state relationships in the region. In the countries of the region, irrespective of occasional rumblings brought about by pressures from the US or the European Union to accelerate the pace of their democratisation, most of their populations will endorse the line taken by their leaderships, due to regional relations and lacking an alternative development model. Peoples and states, tired of wars, want to have a security system that will guarantee the inviolability of present borders. As things stand today, Russia cannot offer either the material means or a transition model, or an alternative option for the regulation of international relations, or a security system. On the contrary, Russia is not only unable to guarantee stability and security but is itself turning into a factor of instability. The position of Russia can be strengthened only if it becomes economically viable, if it continues moving in the direction of democracy and the free market, and if it renounces pan-Slavistic tendencies and Stalinist rhetoric.

A considerable number of domestic analysts and specialists have drawn the oversimplified and wrong conclusion that Russia's foreign policy can only be either anti-West (i.e. patriotic and independent) or pro-West (i.e. antipatriotic and non-independent). The consequence of such reasoning is that Russia is forced to apply a second-class policy towards the countries of Western Europe and the USA, a policy which is reduced to merely reacting to their initiatives. This is also clear to the post-Yugoslav republics. During his visit to Moscow, the President of Montenegro observed the evident willingness of Russia to renounce its past: "Russia is a great state, and should formulate its own policies, policies motivated by its own interests rather than in opposition to US policies".

This opposition stems from the phobias and myths of the past (partly from Russia's mythical "legacy" to act as Serbia's protector), not from the realities of the present times. As a result, the interests of Russia are identified with the interests of the current rightist regime in Serbia, while the events in Kosovo are incorrectly and wrongly compared to the events in Chechnya.

The latest developments in Russia itself seem to have driven the Balkan problems to the background, but they can still have an impact on foreign policy.

The first of the possible foreign policy options in this regard would be to join forces with the international community, above all with the countries of Western Europe and the USA, in combating nationalism and terrorism, primarily of the Moslem type. In theory, this variant does not preclude an attempt to bring about a reconciliation between the West and Slobodan Milošević, the "fighter against Moslem terrorism" in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Another option open to Russian policy-makers is self-isolation and fight against the "Moslem" world and the West in alliance with the "Orthodox world"- Belarus and Serbia. The adoption of this variant could be sustained by the false identification of Kosovo and Chechnya, which is by now firmly rooted in the minds of a substantial part of politicians and politically active citizens. The Russo-Chechen conflict of 1995-1998 did not develop into an inter-ethnic conflict, although the Chechens do have aspirations for national self-determination and statehood. The conflict was more of an economic, political and strategic character, even though the Chechens, just like the Albanians in Kosovo, insist on their "historic inequality". Conditions for a transformation into an inter-ethnic conflict began to form in the autumn of 1999.

4. Kosovo as the "Serb Chechnya"?

A considerable number of Russians consider Kosovo as the "Serb Chechnya" and view the successes of the Serb side as "our" victory over "Moslems" and "separatists". Regarded from a purely legal point of view, as an issue of preserving the integrity and the borders of a multi-ethnic state and as a problem of ensuring minority rights, such a comparison could be valid. The position of Russia, which officially endorses the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Serbia, is focused at the moment precisely on the substance of this formal legal analogy. The "Kosovo case" need not necessarily become a precedent to be followed by other nations and states in Europe, including Russia, although it will be doubtlessly invoked on future occasions. There are also other instances of settling

similar problems, regardless of differences in interpreting various international documents dealing with the right to self-determination, minority rights and the like, which go both in favour of central government as well as in favour of national movements and ethno-territorial formations within multi-ethnic states.

"Many separatist forces in different parts of Europe can hardly wait to see Kosovo leave Yugoslavia and to form a mono-ethnic Community", considers I. Ivanov. "In that case it will be extremely difficult to halt such processes, in the Balkans and in Europe at large. Unfortunately, we are already beginning to feel the crunch."

There are major and substantive differences, however, even from a formal-legal standpoint, which do not permit equalising the situations in Kosovo and Chechnya. Moreover, references to historic parallels and legal precedents as universally valid and effective in approaching "national questions" do not lead anywhere. Each national question has its own unique characteristics. The issue of the preservation, or dissolution, of a multi-ethnic and federal state primarily depends on its internal viability. Equalising the situation in Kosovo with that in Chechnya, which seems to have had a hypnotic effect on some segments of Russian diplomacy, only serves to weaken Russia's position. If "Kosovo has been and still is regarded as the cradle of Serb civilisation", the same cannot be said of Chechnya in relation to the Russians. This, in turn, means that a powerful, myth-based, motivating factor is lacking in the latter case. In the popular psychology and historical memory of Russians, Chechnya does not occupy the place Kosovo does for the Serbs - even granted that it is just a question of mythology and stereotypes. The Chechens are a compact community, their ethnic territory is not divided into several neighbouring states. The Albanian question, on the other hand, is historically an inter-state and international issue, since the Albanians do not only live in Serbia and Montenegro, which constitute the FRY, and in Macedonia, where they represent a large national minority, but also in their independent national state, Albania.

Unlike Kosovo, the issue in Chechnya is not the self-determination of two small peoples (as are the Serbs and the Albanians) who inhabited the same territory at different historical periods. Chechnya has never been independent within the frame of the Soviet Union (as were Kosovo and Metohia). However,

what Kosovo and Chechnya have in common is the problem of preserving the territorial integrity of new states, created during the break-up of multi-national socialist states, and setting external boundaries.

And lastly: despite certain correspondences, is it justified to lump together President Yeltsin and S. Milošević, as well as their policies?

For some time, Russian foreign policy has been subject to the current ratio of political forces in the country. There is no consensus on two fundamental issues: should Russia take part in the peace-keeping operations in Kosovo, and should it participate in the economic reconstruction of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo? The "patriots" say firmly that it should, regarding the peace-keeping operation as a new form of "Russian opposition to the West", and Kosovo as its first line. Many democrats, on the other hand, advocate an isolationist policy and say that it should not. "The fateful fantasies of Russian Slav-lovers are coming true: dressing in armour, meddling in the affairs of strangers, giving offence to everybody, uniting Gogol and Meša Selimović, the sun and the crescent, Lukašenko and Milošević, dipping their boots in the Adriatic Sea, and finally, stopping at a Slav airport and having lunch with the British" - so wrote ironically V. Novodvorskaya in June 1999.

But, in the actual complex situation, neither of them are right. The problem lies in the fact that Russian policies can represent both a stabilising and a destabilising factor, in Yugoslavia as well as everywhere else, including Russia herself. There can be no doubt: Russia should have participated in the peace operations, but in a completely different way and with different aims. The legal expert G. Kunadze wrote in the "Novoe Vremya" that the "leap on Priština" was a dangerous move, and could have caused irreparable damage in the case of a conflict between the Russian and NATO peace-keepers. Furthermore, had that "leap" proceeded as planned, even though this might sound incredible and even ridiculous, the union of Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia would have become reality overnight. (In one of his recent interviews, the Yugoslav Ambassador to Moscow B. Milošević stated that this idea has still not lost its topicality.) This would mean the reinstatement of bloc divisions and the erection of a new wall - this time in Priština.

The popularity of Russian foreign policy is certainly not enhanced by the interview given by G. Seleznev to the daily "Jutarnji list", in which he

claims that access to the Adriatic Sea is an imperative for Russia and that the alliance between Russia and Belarus ought to be extended to cover Yugoslavia, with President S. Milošević at its head. Needless to say, statements of this kind find an extremely negative reception in political and social circles. By such ill-considered and aggressive statements, which ignore the current political and psychological facts in the post-Yugoslav space, Moscow not only fails to strengthen its influence in the region but increasingly weakens it.

The idea of creating a political alliance between Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia, and thereby establishing strategic positions in the Balkans and the Adriatic can only be assessed as a primitive provocation, which, if realised, would only serve to weaken the position of Russia in Serbia, or Yugoslavia, and in the Balkans as a whole. Although today, in Russia or in the West, practically nobody takes seriously the prospect of such an alliance, politicians ought to be aware of the impact of merely mentioning plans of this kind. Moreover, similar calculations have proved unfounded in the past, to put it mildly. It is quite evident that neither Russia nor Serbia would profit by peace operations conducted by our soldiers on behalf of our "Serb Orthodox brothers" with the aim of buttressing the regime of S. Milošević, who never was, and never will be, an ally of Russia. Furthermore, a large part of the Serbian population are disgruntled with the ten-year rule of S. Milošević and would turn against Russia.

This problem can be also viewed from another angle. Russian isolationism, be it of the imperial or democratic type, and possible non-participation in peace-keeping forces would definitely serve to bolster the Milošević regime. Such a move would lead to another defeat of the reformist forces, not only in foreign but also in domestic policies. Withdrawing the Russian peace-makers would not make much sense, and would be as risky as the famous "leap to the south". On the other hand, though, this would be a logical sequel in the series of disastrous and short-sighted episodes of Russian policy. Moscow proved to be unprepared when events did not develop according to its scenario, and, as usual, NATO ignores Russia's objections, especially those it declares to be "imperial ambitions".

5. Normalisation of relations with NATO

It is absolutely crucial that Russia should normalise its relations with NATO. To begin with, this is in the interest of Russia, which has become entangled in the establishment of a tripartite alliance between Russia, Belarus and Yugoslavia, that is, with countries which are no longer able, or willing, to act as strategic partners in the games for which Russia is, anyway, no longer strong enough. Against this background, it is difficult to evaluate Russian participation in joint peace operations. True, our participation would have a high cost, only this price would not be paid for false prestige but rather for our peaceful and civilised future. In Kosovo, like in Bosnia, those who serve as soldiers must receive adequate remuneration, because a weakened army can change from a force protecting the society into one that threatens it.

It is also essential that Russia participate in Yugoslavia's reconstruction, first of all, because this is the more important, even the overriding, aspect of the peace operation, whose purpose is not parading and flag waving. The only question is: what to reconstruct, and for whom? Reconstructing facilities so as to provide the minimum of comfort and shelter for the population is one thing. Reconstructing facilities that are used by the military or serve as a propaganda tool for the regime is another matter. Russia's participation in such projects would be quite unacceptable, again, primarily in her own best interests. The reconstruction of facilities for peaceful purposes, such as bridges and power plants, would create new jobs, not only for the Albanians, Serbs and Montenegrins but also for Russians, and all of it together would help to normalise life in Yugoslavia. Joint economic activities with other countries, even with competitors, is much better than voluntary isolation within the confines of the "sector" in Kosovo, which might turn into the scene of new controversies and from which Russia might have to depart soon at the request of the Serb side. These are the reasons why the West would be making a great mistake if it excluded Russia from peace-keeping operations in Yugoslavia. The absence of Russia would not only lead to its isolation but would motivate its politicians to establish closer ties with Milošević. This,

however, would represent a violation of international conventions. Economic activity is a realistic alternative to military games. Russian help to Yugoslavia in establishing peace would be a realistic option to a policy which has already become anti-Russian in some military circles. In recruiting volunteers, some Serb generals have already declared that Russia is to blame for Serbia's defeat. This is just another instance of the Milošević propaganda, which always tries to shift onto others the blame for its failures. Serb nationalists attribute their defeat to Russia, who was supposed, in the name of some mythical debt, to sacrifice not only her interests but also the lives of its citizens, and to enter into war, like 1914, only this time against NATO. The alleged responsibility of Russia for Serbia's defeat is an obvious example of the propaganda practised by Serb nationalists, who always look outside for scapegoats for their misdeeds. This type of propaganda has become an equally large threat to freedom and democracy as the "alliance" of Moscow, Minsk and Belgrade.

Serb analysts (lately also joined by politicians) of liberal orientation consider this situation absolutely intolerable. In their opinion, in the present day and age, the relationship of Russia and the West can only be that of partners, not enemies. Hostile propaganda against Russia has become an obstacle on the road to freedom and democracy, no less than the propaganda based on the ethnic kinship of the two peoples and on the idea of their alliance. Russian isolationism and refusal to participate in the peace-keeping military and economic activities conducted by the international community would actually only help to bolster the current regime. It would be another defeat for the forces of realism in foreign as well as domestic policy.

In the future, no government in Serbia is likely to want a unilateral and long-term alliance with Russia. Serbia does not need a strong Russia in the Balkans, but Russia does need a strong Serbia. This is the result of the geopolitical position of the two states and of their inevitably common interests in the region. The Russian leadership regards Yugoslavia as the strategic centre of the Balkan Peninsula, so that the interests of Belgrade and of Moscow inevitably coincide. For this reason, once Yugoslavia overcomes

the current crisis, it is more than likely that their relations will cool down. In the case of radical forces taking power both in Russia and in Serbia, a dispute resembling the Stalin-Tito conflict is a distinct possibility. Besides, the first task of the governments of Serbia and Yugoslavia will be to rehabilitate the economy, devastated not only by the bombardment but also by the long years of Milošević's policy. For this, it will be necessary to turn for help to the European Union and to the USA.

In the eyes of Serbian opposition, Moscow has diminished its standing by ignoring the interests of the democratic opposition in Serbia and by upholding the Milošević regime, and also due to its irresponsible policy in Kosovo. For its part, Russia would find in Serbia, or Yugoslavia, with Milošević or with another radical nationalist politician (and others are nowhere in sight for the moment) at its head, only a poor ally, whose geopolitical position and national interest would result in a constant tendency to seek ties with the West, regardless of everything. Yugoslavia does not need Russia for this, what is more, it is a competitor in the contest for loans. Moscow cannot give Serbia either money or the technology wherewith to reconstruct its economy, devastated by nationalists and socialists, and crime-ridden as the result of international sanctions. As long as the current FRY President and his followers remain in power, they will try to shift on Russia the blame for all their failures and mistakes, and this would definitely not be conducive to better relations between them.

According to the results of a survey carried out in Serbia in October 1999, less than 10% respondents opted for an alliance with Russia, while almost 60% of them supported cooperation with EU countries.

Serb intellectuals are unanimous in their opinion that Milošević should resign, but they differ on the issue of the abolition of sanctions and economic assistance. The leader of the "Alliance for Change", Z. Džindžić publicly endorses such assistance, seeing in this also support for a part of the opposition. The well-known publicist Milorad Pavić comments this in the following manner: "If Russia or anybody else helps, they will not be helping Serbia or Yugoslavia but only S. Milošević."

Official Belgrade has not adopted any definite stand on the events in Chechnya, but these events did not pass without any comparisons. Belgrade was inclined to compare the conduct of military operations in Kosovo and in Chechnya. The liberal weekly "Vreme" writes that in its strategy and its tactics the Kremlin fully imitated NATO's operation against Yugoslavia. Tending to the traditional Yugoslav world view and balancing between the "great powers", the weekly "Nin" concludes in an editorial that Russia did not support Serbia because it had to finish the "job" in Chechnya. That is why the Kremlin failed to speak up against the NATO action in Kosovo, and why NATO does not declare its views on the operation in the Caucasus. The Kremlin and the US are collaborating, claims the weekly, and concludes: "Big nations can act in accordance with their interests, while small nations, the Serbs among them, had better not count on false friends as long as the present ratio of forces prevails."

It may sound paradoxical but it is true: the operation in Chechnya might thus undermine Russia's position in the Balkans, even in Serbia itself. After the end of the military conflict, Russia should define its relationship with the Belgrade authorities in a broader sense. By maintaining relations with the Russian left radicals and by not distancing itself from them, in a certain sense Russia bears the responsibility for the Kosovo crisis. And even if this did not make matters worse, this circumstance has not permitted the improvement of relations with neighbouring Slav countries, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and even with Montenegro, the second constituent republic of the FRY. Montenegro is increasingly opposing Milošević's policies, and is balancing between the prospect of the overthrow of the present leadership, headed by M. Đukanović, and secession from the FRY. Relations with the Albanian side are difficult, if not impossible, to envisage. In a long-term perspective, Russia would benefit by stability on the Balkans, and this is why its strategic task is to establish normal relations with the Balkan states, and the settlement of existing differences and disputes in alliance with these countries. To be able to perform this role, Russia must adopt a neutral and non-partisan stance, not only in relation to the Albanian-Serb

conflict but also with respect to the Milošević regime, to the post-Yugoslav countries and also to NATO. The main interest of Russia in the Balkans is not to support President Milošević and his fellow-nationalists but to work towards the normalisation of relations and the implementation of the fundamental guidelines set by the international community.

If it wishes to assert itself in Serbia, Yugoslavia and the Balkans, Russia can only act as mediator, by taking part in peace activities in consultation with other factors in the region. This is the only feasible role it can play, as an alternative to confrontation with NATO. This position is examined by some of the leading political scientists. "National interests should be compatible with those in each centre of power with whom Russia wishes to cooperate in the 21st century on a partnership basis, and towards this end talks should be carried on with a maximum of care and patience. In that case, nobody will be able to point the finger at Russia and claim that it had pushed the world into another cold war," in the words of the Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies A. Piontkovski, uttered in 1997.

"In the long run, it is crucial for Russia to retain a sense of reality. It should cultivate a realistic approach in foreign politics. Equally important is that this realism should not turn into hostility towards everything Western, as this would lead the country into isolationism and autarchy", is the opinion of I. Kobrinskaya, Director of the East-West Institute in Moscow.

6. Conclusion

On the basis of the conclusions inevitably drawn from the Yugoslav crisis, the most essential is to realise all the dangers for Russia which could arise should it become isolated from the outside world. Serb nationalism, playing on the weak points of the Russian political class, is not the first and only one to try and push Russia to the brink of a precipice. The defence against falling into it is cooperation with democratic forces, the quest for dialogue with European structures and the rule of international law.

However, as long as Russia is trying, albeit unconsciously, to save the Milošević regime, it is doomed to failure. For successful mediation in the

present, not too simple, situation, Russian politicians must break the vicious circle. This circle is closed, on the one side, by the adverse effects of the Yugoslav crisis on the domestic scene in Russia, and on the other by the circumstance that foreign policy is the hostage of domestic policy. It is imperative, therefore, to strengthen relations with the USA and with the countries of Western Europe - so as to prevent Milošević from playing on the differences between these states and involving Russia into risky undertakings on the basis of the contacts he had with Russian left radical politicians. If such ploys can be prevented, Milošević will be deprived of his internal political base and of room for foreign-policy manoeuvring. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that, as was confirmed in practice, sanctions and isolation have failed to weaken Milošević's regime and to transfer power to his opponents. A sudden decline, or even break-up, of the FRY in any form would not bring peace to the Balkans but rather even greater destabilisation in the region and the revival of inter-ethnic and inter-state conflicts.

Both political scientists and publicists agree that events relevant to the settlement of the situation in Serbia could occur next spring. This expectation, however, implies danger for the opposition, as a more or less organised force, and thereby also for democracy in Serbia. The opposition runs the danger of losing the support of its followers, disillusioned by its poor performance so far. This, in turn, might bring to the fore much darker forces than those represented by Milošević and his supporters. The Western European countries would try and prevent such a course of events, probably by intervention outside the borders of the FRY, above all with respect to the rehabilitation of the electric power grid and the reconstruction of power plants.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the peace-making action has not been able to establish peace between the nations in conflict and to create a political civil society in Kosovo. The policy of ethnic cleansing has resulted in the shrinking of the Serb population in favour of the Albanians, even though it would be wrong to compare the policy of Belgrade with the policy of the Kosovo Liberation Army. The future status of Kosovo within Serbia is likewise still undefined. Granting it the status of a third constitu-

ent republic in the FRY, or autonomy under international protectorate - finally to merge with Albania, would threaten regional stability and substantively undermine European stability in general.

The West considers the agreement between NATO and the KLA of 20 September 1999 a major step on the road to peace in Kosovo. Moscow, according to statements by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has adopted a completely contrary position. Although any further deterioration of relations would not serve either Brussels or Moscow, more and more reference is being made lately to April 1999, when NATO began its attacks on the FRY. If both parties fail to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution, they might have to pay a high price.

The impression is created that, as things stand today, both air raids and peace operations have lost much of their justification. Not only have they bolstered S. Milošević and Serb nationalism but have had the same effect on Albanian nationalism. Paradoxically, interference by other states for the purpose of protecting multi-ethnicity, creating a civil society and defending human and minority rights has resulted in the creation of a mono-ethnic totalitarian state within new boundaries, adding new ethnic conflicts to the old ones. Russia could again decide to stand behind S. Milošević and his regime, while the West seems to have accepted the new Albanian leader A. Taqi. It is quite clear that neither of the two can be classed among advocates of a democratic civil society. Likewise, they cannot figure as protagonists of a "democratic multi-ethnic Kosovo" and cannot be expected to renounce their ideas about changing boundaries.

It hardly bears thinking what stance an ethnically pure Albanian Kosovo would adopt towards Yugoslavia and Serbia, regardless of UN Resolution No. 1244 and the statement by NATO Secretary-General J. Solana, who said that the Albanians should be placated by an interim status and by leaving them the hope of independence. Moreover, a NATO-supported recognition of changed boundaries could result in further destabilisation of the situation in the Balkans and in Europe at large and put a question mark over all the boundaries established after the Second World War. ■