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THE BALKAN WAY TO REGIONAL CONFLICT SOLVING*

SUMMARY

There has always been a common ground for a political union among the peoples of South-eastern Europe, but somehow it has remained sidelined and mired in the turbid torrents of regional politics. The solution, which the small countries of Southeastern Europe could offer is a consociational Balkan region which could only be a non-national state, where every ethnic, religious or linguistic group would have its own cultural infrastructure. It would be a political and economic merger facilitating the consistency of cultural integrity. The Balkan Union could only be a democratic commonwealth of people who are driven by a strong commitment to doing common work. It would not eliminate differences, but would only manage them towards peaceful coexistence without any infringement upon individual liberties. The implementation of this dream depends predominantly on a mutual effort by all Southeast European states. The results from such an effort can only bring about a significant change for the better in the entire region, which is also important for the security and prosperity of Europe as a whole. The recognition of Southeast European heterogeneity is necessary for its future. Due to a crisis in knowledge production, the first step should be development of cultural exchange programs and pan-Balkan meetings, which would generate support for the idea of a Balkan Union. This is the topic on which this study hopes to provoke a discussion.

KEY WORDS: Southeastern Europe, the Balkans, Balkan Union, cooperation, cultural exchange

The recent movie *The Matrix*, which has already turned into a cult flicker for an entire generation, could be used as a comparison with the present-day situation in the Balkans. The pivot of the plot is the choice that the protagonist makes. He is offered a blue and a red pill. The blue pill will eliminate any knowledge of the choice he has made, while the red one opens the gates to the world of truth. Taking the red pill allowed the protagonist to cast off the limitations set up by the stereotypes of the world he lived in, and established him on a journey of awakening self-discovery. It is my conviction that at the junction of two millennia it is already hightime for the people of Southeastern Europe to make the choice between the

* Napomena hrv. čitatelju: u ovom broju *Migracijske teme* uvode oznaku »rasprave« za skupinu osobnih i katkad polemičkih priloga. Takav je zacijelo i ovaj prilog o Balkanu, koji uvelike odudara od prevladavajućih gledišta u Hrvatskoj. No dok u Hrvatskoj preteže negativno ili »izvanjsko« vrednovanje pojma Balkana, a o neodrživosti političke asocijacije s balkanskim zemljama svjedoči nesretno iskustvo bivše Jugoslavije, u Bugarskoj, Grčkoj i u zemljama koje nedvojbeno ulaze u tu regiju, ocjene su nerijetku pozitivne. Ovaj prilog mladoga bugarskog znanstvenika odražava takvo gledište iz nama *susjedne* regije.

blue and the red pill: a choice between the too well-known wasteland of antagonism and confrontation, and a new world full of opportunities to generate change, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. The solutions, which any foreign power can offer for solving the problems in the region, can never be durable in the long run unless they are supported by the Balkan nations; otherwise they would only be a source for more confrontations. Superpowers come and go in the political theatre of the region, but the people, who live here and call this peninsula their home, stay and have to suffer the consequences of foreign incursions. That is why a consociational Balkan Union is the solution, which the small countries of Southeastern Europe could offer towards the stabilization of the region. This is the topic on which this study hopes to provoke a discussion.

A consociational union offers the prospect of a genuine antithesis to the imbroglio of turbid nation state existence. The contemporary version of the nation state in the Balkans can no longer be upgraded, because its very essence is, in general, contradictory to notions such as individual freedom and peaceful coexistence. Southeast European nationalism flipped the script of individual self-determination by thwarting its strive towards the establishment of a democratic community and imposed on it enemy images derived from the benighted interpretation of the palimpsest of history. This, in turn, led to a bifurcation in the understanding of national identity: once as a cultural and once as a political phenomenon, which elevated nationalism to the status of all-permeating ideology (Barry, 1991: 352). The issue of nationalities ought to be viewed on the level of individual liberties and human rights. In this way the various national yearnings are going to be guaranteed via the exercising of personal freedom. This would provide the ground for the separation of state and nation and for gaining the accrue of long-term peace in the Southeast European region. Thus, within the framework of consociational union, Balkan nationalities would be viewed as free associations separate from the civil and political organization of the state. And this, per se, forms the quiddity of consociational multinational states: they proffer a more realistic and democratic environment to their citizens, which abrogate the nebulous, expansionist mythology of imagined nation states. The parochial perspective of ethnocentric mentality has jettisoned the region into the backyard of modern development.

For the last ten years the region of Southeastern Europe has become a hackneyed expression for instability and backwardness in the world media. Violent intercultural conflicts have ruptured the fabric of Balkan societies. The fall of the iron curtain awoke the dormant spectres of history and revived memories of the days when the region was better known as “the powder-keg of Europe”. The turn of the 20th century finds the unstable Southeast European region in the same, if not more, precarious situation as at the turn of the nineteenth century. It is history, which is traditionally blamed for the problems of the beleaguered Balkan region. But if one were to look more carefully under the surface of history he or she would immediately stumble upon the forgotten roads to peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic groups in Southeastern Europe. Not so long ago there was a strong intellectual movement in the region, which espoused to the ideals of federalism and

unionism. It is as a result of this movement that the idea of a Balkan federation came forth. And it is my firm belief that any attempt for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the region would fail in the long run, if it were not put in the context of the dream of a Balkan Union.

The dream of a Balkan Union

The idea of a federal union in Southeastern Europe is not new to the region (Padelford, 1935). Some have even been tempted to view the ancient Hellenic, Bulgarian and Serbian empires as instances of this idea; and the Ottoman empire, per se, as a “federation of theocracies under the scepter of the Sultan” (Geshkoff, 1940: 14). But these assumptions are incorrect, because they misrepresent the genuinely democratic nature of the idea of a Balkan Union. It did not have as its objective the revival of any of the old regional empires, but rather it aspired to the formation of a completely new system of government and state. In many respects the idea of a Balkan Union, as it emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, viewed the memory of the ancient Balkan monarchies as detrimental to its objectives:

But let us [the Balkan peoples] leave our sins behind, and let us *lock our ancient history*, on which we can look only as a source of evil and misery... *The quarrels, which existed between us 450 years ago, are the reason for our plight today* (Каравелов, 1870; emphasis added).

For the revolutionary leaders at the dawn of the anti-Ottoman struggle, the recollection of the old Balkan empires posed a hurdle for the prosperity and security of the region. Even at this early stage, it was obvious that the peace of the Balkans depended on the ability of the different peoples to find ways for making the future their priority, rather than drowning in the memory of the past. The vision of a prospective union of the different Balkan peoples drove them to take part in each other's national struggles. It is germane to add that in this process was spurred the development of a higher community consciousness, which formed the backbone of Southeast European patriotism. In this way the different anti-Ottoman movements in the region, could be easily designated as Balkan. The revolutionary leaders spoke of the fundamental human rights of the peoples living in Southeastern Europe. They reasoned out that the nation consists of individuals, whose rights and freedoms should be recognized and protected, because “national affiliation is a result of a conscious act by the individual” (Ivanov, 1996: 31). And in the Balkans this could happen only when the rights and freedoms of individuals from all nations in the region are recognized. Hence, the only way to alleviate the misery of oppression was by fostering a *spirit of brotherhood*. This provided fresh hope that the darkness of oppression could be dispersed with the joint effort of the independent Balkan nations. This is the idiosyncratic aspect of all Balkan nationalism movements. Their objective was the creation of independent national states. They were the prerequisites that would prepare the ground for the union of the independent Balkan nations. Because “Union is the death of tyrants. If the nations wake

up and in thousands of voices uphold this great truth, only then will they be able to enjoy happiness and peace” (Каравелов, 1871).

This is how the idea of the establishment of a Balkan “federation of independent nationalities” was proffered (Каравелов, 1871). The formation of a national consciousness as a step towards federalism was an important facet of the Balkan liberation movements. The dream of a union was founded on the existence of a shared consciousness among the peoples of Southeastern Europe.

The vitality and inspiration of this image were tested in the 1930s during a series of Balkan Conferences, which challenged the status quo of the nation-state and proffered the bold and daring prospective of a genuine Southeast European federation as the first step to a distant “pan-European state” (Манчев, 1931: 51). The 1930s, *per se*, were marked by a growing perception that people in the Balkans were part of one common Southeast European community (Padelford, 1935: 11). But it is also important to mention that these conferences in a way challenged the status quo of the nation-state and proffered the bold and daring prospective (or what some might call *utopia*) of a genuine Southeast European union free from the limitations of national ideologies. Subconsciously, and perhaps not aware of what they were adumbrating, some of the delegates were calling for a more innovative approach to solving conflicts in the region. Even then it was obvious to some that traditional methods of hostilities regulations based on interstate relations were not working, because ethnic tensions are different in nature and are not subject to third-party power-based mediation.

Most ethnic conflicts involve the rights of ethnic groups to maintain their identity, to have equal status with other groups, and to have equal access to decision-making. Societies with ethnic differences often divide along ethnic lines in such a way that some ethnic groups are forced to integrate into the national culture of the state in which they find themselves, the threat to their identity can readily lead to frustration, polarization and violence (Miall, 1992: 141).

Thus the nation-state cannot and could not with political tools resolve or influence ethnic tensions; it can only exacerbate them. Taking into account the wider perspective and all-permeating nature of ethnic conflicts calls for a broader approach to the problems of the Balkans.

The Balkan way

The perception of the common future of the different nations in Southeastern Europe was the main reason for embarking on this essay. Getting traction on intractable conflicts – particularly those that involve ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups with deep cultural differences between them – has always been a challenging issue. The developments in the Balkans in the last decade have emphasized the lack of cooperation among the countries in the region. Moreover, they have ac-

centuated the inability of various ethnic groups to find ways for peaceful coexistence. It is my distress and anguish over the present unfolding of the Balkan crisis that urged me to write these pages with the hope of generating a discussion on the possibility of creating a Balkan federation in the region.

There is a nascent necessity for a new kind of realm to cope with the contemporary developments in the Southeastern Europe. The region needs to re-establish internal security, empower civil society, and strengthen democratic institutions. In the post-Cold War Balkan experience the value of place has increased to an extent that it is no longer sufficient to belong to an abstract notion of society but to somewhere “in particular” (Sennett, 1997: 162) which has led to the evolution of ethnoanarchism. But as global civil society grows and becomes more robust the role of nation-states is changing. Every nation will inevitably learn that to defend its interest in a globally and technologically integrated planet greater effort will have to be devoted to multilateral strategies. Localities would and should no longer be viewed as refuges or safe heavens surrounded by belligerent *others*, but as ports of integration and cooperation. Differences borne out of age-old isolation gradually disappear with the advancement of new technologies. Group identity, as we know it today – be it local, regional, or national – would be altered to a degree that contemporary sagacity cannot predict. The diversity of communities should be realized as a repository of prospects for the future of the Southeast European region.

In this train of thought it is very commendable that recently the Balkans have been witnessing a “new” type of developments: the reawakening of regional cooperation. The conspicuous inference from these developments is that the Balkan region is at a turning point to break away from the vicious circle of violence, oppression, and instability. One instance came as a result of the NATO air strikes against Yugoslavia during its Kosovo campaign. The air strikes destroyed vital infrastructure not only for Yugoslavia, but also for the entire Balkan region, closing effectively the easiest land route for many Balkan states to transport goods to and from the rest of Europe. The destruction of several bridges spanning the Danube River and the virtual closure of this waterway cut a vital link to Europe for countries like Romania and Bulgaria. In the aftermath of these events the Balkan states united their efforts for requesting compensation for their losses. One example is the joint declaration by the governments of Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania to the foreign ministers of the European Union. Moreover, in December 1999, at the EU Summit in Helsinki, Finland three Southeast European states – Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey – have been invited to start talks for a full integration into the European Union. Before that, in November, 1999, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe held its forum in Istanbul, Turkey, which drafted the Charter for European Security signed by the majority of Balkans’ heads-of-state. The capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, hosted the First Southeast European Economic Forum where regional finance ministers, funding institutions, and NGOs met to discuss regional economic cooperation and the *common* future of the Balkans. In the post-Cold War period the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone has been developed as a significant tool for regional cooperation and Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and

Turkey have been among its most active members. The wake of these events indicates a shift in political mind-set to one that fosters openness and recognizes and efficiently utilizes the resources and skill resident in the new global civil society.

Nevertheless, the crisis in former Yugoslavia and its subsequent break-up has crudely outlined the quagmire of Balkan politics and their volatility. In the post-Cold War period the Balkan states were left out of the main stream of integrational processes sweeping across Central and Western Europe. That is how the region, *per se*, remained in the periphery of European politics. Stuck in the mud of primordiality, the Balkans have posed a major challenge to the centralist model of the unitary state. Ethnicity remains an important resource for organizing collective political action in the Balkans. The emerging democracies of the region are burdened by its inheritance; but living beyond the boundaries of ethnic identity is something inconceivable in the region. Southeast European isolation revived the old ghost of history and allowed for their spectres to resuscitate ancient fears and hatreds. The change of 1989, when most communist regimes in Eastern Europe were ousted from power, was driven by a rejection of the overbearing, centralized dictatorship of the state and its heritage of repression. In the Balkans an idiosyncratic aspect of this process was the search for a new identity. A majority of the people living in Southeastern Europe were expecting a new, utopian alternative to replace the old order. Many people expected that democracy would automatically solve the problems posed by multinational coexistence and few addressed the issue of emancipation of different ethnic groups. But when this did not occur many nations looked back to the memory of their “glorious” past, which consequently brought to the fore the clash between democracy and nationalism. This substitution of reality plunged the region into its present day confusion. As a result the present states of the Balkan Peninsula became an epitome of a new form of nationalism – ethnocentrism, which claims an absolute superiority based entirely on whether a person is viewed as a member of the group or alien to it.

It is in the wake of these developments that the dream of a Balkan Union, and particularly the very reality of the Balkan Conferences during the 1930s, suggests that the opportunities for a finding an enduring peace for the region are far from depleted. The first half of the 1930s saw Southeast European societies eagerly debating the prospect of regional cooperation. Today, most of them discuss and work for an integration with the European Union. To a great extent this is indicative of the legacy of Balkan federalism and the momentum it generated.

In the context of contemporary developments in the region the idea of a Balkan Union is perhaps the only viable approach to conflict resolution in Southeastern Europe. For one thing, in the Balkans, people as well as states were ready, at the beginning of the 1990s, to embrace the idea of their common destiny with the rest of Europe in a true European Union. The break-up of the former Communist Bloc was very much driven by a desire to stamp out the dominant position of the state as such and allow for individual diversity. Looking at the complexity of the Balkan conflict, I believe that the only durable solution to the problems of Southeastern Europe is the creation of a Balkan Union. In today’s multicultural world the

reliable path to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation should start from self-transcendence, both on the individual and national level. Transcendence marked by the need to overcome historical limitations.

The implementation of the idea of a Balkan Union would counter the clash of different interests in the region, because its realization can be achieved only through a genuine and dedicated participation of all the states in Southeastern Europe. The seeds of this cooperation have been planted for many years now, today they only need the proper cares to grow and bloom. The Balkan Union unlike any other attempt of conflict solving in the region is not going to be of short-term duration. This is mainly because it would involve not only governmental commitment to the process but also the active participation of ordinary people. The driving force behind it would be not only the recognition of particular ethnic and national rights, but mainly the establishment of a civil society in the region. That is why, I believe, that the idea of the Balkan Union can be implemented only through the active participation of non-governmental organizations. The Southeast European governments cannot create a Balkan civil society through bills or laws. This is a process that should be initiated by the very people who call the Balkans their home. This process would entail a change of vision as well. A turn from looking back into the past for finding the explanation of contemporary issues to making the future the prerogative. This would be a difficult process, but not necessarily an impossible one.

The implementation of the dream of a Balkan Union depends predominantly on a mutual effort by all Southeast European states. Once generated this mutual effort would in a snowball fashion clear the way for the achievement of this idea. The results from such an effort can only bring about a significant change for the better in the entire region, which is also important for the security and prosperity of Europe as a whole. Recent developments have indicated that ideas for more closer cooperation and integration are not foreign to the region.

It should be taken advantage of this momentum to further the process of regional cooperation. The recognition of Southeast European heterogeneity is necessary for its future, and the willingness to work within it and perhaps through it is the region's destiny. It is often overlooked that the endemic separatism of Southeastern Europe has also led to a crisis in knowledge production, which hampers the social, cultural and economic well-being of the region and has sentenced the region to its present-day backwardness. That is why the first step should be development of cultural exchange programs and pan-Balkan meetings, which would generate support for the idea of a Balkan Union.

Parallel to the process of knowledge-exchange should be initiated a process of developing a common Balkan market, defence strategy, and foreign policy among the different Balkan governments. Integration along political, defence, and economic lines would cause less, if any, stress to ethnic selfhood. Cultural identity has always been the major source of conflict for Southeastern Europe. The residue of nationalism and most importantly the suspicion of the "other" born out of it has been the major obstacle to the fulfilment of federalism. The ingenuity of the Balkan Conferences was to proffer political and economic integration, while individual identity

remains unchallenged. They also indicated the important function of non-governmental organizations for generating public support for the idea of unionism in the region. Their main role is to work for the establishment of a civil society based on the recognition of the basic human rights of all ethnic groups and the knowledge of the common destiny of all people who live in Southeastern Europe. This would urge the reluctant Balkan governments to look more favourably on this process.

A very important factor for the creation of a Balkan Union is the existence of a supra-national, rudimentary form of Balkan consciousness. This shared cultural identity, could help in transcending the limitations of ethnic and national attachment. Southeast European folklore with its symbols of cooperation and friendship undermines the nationalist and separatist ideologies of the region. In other words the role of non-governmental organizations is to accentuate these and help for the creation of a Balkan civil society before the formation of a united Balkan state.

The Balkan Union could only be a supra-national state, where every ethnic, religious or linguistic group would have its own cultural infrastructure; for it is inherently inclusivist, embracing all portions of the population. In other words the prospective pan-Balkan state could be a consociational union among the different Southeast European states. Consociationalism is driven by the contemporary tide in civil societies towards inclusion, and infers that diverse communities are predisposed to effect political integration if the dominant borders of cultural partition between them remain unquestioned (Lijphart, 1977). Only a consociational federation could differentiate between the state and the national consciousness, because every citizen would enjoy equal political and human rights regardless of nationality. This would also call for a *transcendence* of nationality as a political entity to a cultural phenomenon. This would be a step for the establishment of a higher community consciousness, which would harmonize with the necessity for economic and cultural cooperation in the region. Consociational arrangements provide options for power sharing between different groups since they are based on the concept of separate but equal. Consociational principles do not force populations to move into ethnically pure enclaves, which would be tantamount to recognizing ethnic cleansing, but allows each group to administer its community needs, such as education.

In other words the Balkan Union could only be a non-national state, where every ethnic, religious or linguistic group would have its own cultural infrastructure. It would be a political and economic merger facilitating the consistency of cultural integrity. The uniqueness of such a political formation lies in the fact that it provides answers on the individual level. The Balkan Union could only be a democratic commonwealth of people who are driven by a strong commitment to doing common work. Being a macro-political model of conflict regulation, it would not eliminate differences, but would only manage them towards peaceful coexistence without any infringement upon individual liberties.

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These are some of the issues that could be a starting point for debating the future of the Balkans. There has always been a common ground for a political union among the peoples of Southeastern Europe, but somehow it has remained sidelined and mired in the turbid torrents of regional politics. I insist that a prospective Balkan Union would be the only viable solution to the problems of the region; and I am convinced that the present has made this conclusion obvious. Conflicts in the Balkans can be resolved only on the basis of shared interests, and this paper has been an invitation to converse on the issues it raises. It has been written with the inclination to pose the question of Balkan federalism without attempting to engage specific authors or texts, which could make it in the eyes of some more academically minded like a straw theory. But I believe in the better fate of South-eastern Europe and that history is full of surprises.

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Emilian Kavalski

BALKANSKI PUT ZA RJEŠAVANJE REGIONALNOG SUKOB

SAŽETAK

Glavni razlog pisanja ovog rada je percepcija zajedničke budućnosti različitih naroda u jugoistočnoj Europi, a to je mogućnost stvaranja balkanske federacije. Kao usporedbu sa sadašnjom situacijom na Balkanu autor navodi kulturni film *Matrix*. Ključna točka zapleta u filmu je izbor protagonista između plave i crvene pilule – izbor između već predobro poznate pustoši antagonizma i konfrontacije i miroljubive koegzistencije. Rješenja koja neka strana sila može ponuditi za probleme u regiji nikada ne mogu biti dugotrajna ako ih ne podupiru balkanski narodi; inače bi bila samo izvorište novih konfrontacija. Velike sile dolaze i odlaze u političkom teatru regije, ali ljudi koji ovdje žive i ovaj poluotok nazivaju svojim domom ostaju i moraju trpjeti posljedice stranih upada. Zbog toga konsocijacijska balkanska unija predstavlja rješenje koje male zemlje jugoistočne Europe mogu ponuditi za stabilizaciju regije. Namjera ovog rada je potaknuti raspravu baš o toj temi. Autor smatra da pitanje nacionalnosti valja promatrati na razini individualnih sloboda i ljudskih prava. To bi osiguralo temelj za odvajanje države i nacije i pridonijelo stvaranju dugotrajnog mira u jugoistočnoj europskoj regiji. Tako bi se, u okviru konsocijacijske unije, balkanske narodnosti promatrale kao slobodne asocijacije odijeljene od građanske i političke organizacije države. Zadnjih deset godina regija jugoistočne Europe postala je otrcanim sinonimom za nestabilnost i zaostalost u svjetskim medijima. Žestoki interkulturalni sukobi razorili su strukturu balkanskih društava. Pad željezne zavjese probudio je uspavane povijesne sablasti i oživio sjećanja na dane kada je regija bila poznatija kao europsko »bure baruta«. Na izmaku 20. stoljeća jugoistočna europska regija nalazi se u istome, ako ne i neizvjesnijem položaju nego na izmaku 19. Autorovo je uvjerenje da će bilo kakav pokušaj rješavanja sukoba u regiji na kraju propasti ako se ne stavi u kontekst sna o balkanskoj uniji. Ta unija može biti samo nadnacionalna, odnosno nenacionalna država, gdje bi svaka etnička, vjerska ili jezična skupina imala vlastitu kulturalnu infrastrukturu. To bi bilo političko i ekonomsko udruživanje koje bi olakšalo koegzistenciju kulturnog integriteta. Jedinstvenost takve političke formacije leži u činjenici da ona osigurava odgovore na individualnoj razini. Balkanska unija bi mogla biti samo demokratsko nezavisno tijelo ljudi koje pokreće snažna predanost zajedničkom poslu. Kao makropolitčki model reguliranja sukoba ona ne bi eliminirala razlike nego bi ih samo usmjerila prema miroljubivoj koegzistenciji bez ikakva narušavanja individualnih sloboda. Promatrajući kompleksnost balkanskog sukoba, autor vjeruje da je jedino trajno rješenje problema jugoistočne Europe stvaranje balkanske unije. Implementacija te ideje neutralizirala bi sukob različitih interesa u regiji jer se njezino ostvarenje može postići samo istinskim i požrtvovnim sudjelovanjem svih država jugoistočne Europe. Unija ne bi uključivala samo angažiranje vlada nego i aktivno sudjelovanje običnih ljudi. Jednom pokrenut, taj zajednički napor bi poput grude snijega oslobodio put za ostvarenje te ideje. Rezultati takvog napora mogu samo dovesti do važne promjene na bolje u cijeloj regiji, što je važno i za sigurnost i boljitak Europe u cjelini. Nedavni događaji su pokazali da ideje tješnje suradnje i integracije u regiji nisu nepoznate. Treba iskoristiti prednosti sadašnjeg trenutka za unapređenje procesa regionalne suradnje. Prepoznavanje heterogenosti jugoistočne Europe nužno je za njezinu budućnost, a spremnost da se radi unutar nje i možda putem nje jest sudbina regije. Često se previđa da je endemski separatizam jugoistočne Europe doveo i do krize u produkciji znanja, što koči blagostanje regije i osuđuje ju na sadašnje nazadovanje. Zato prvi korak treba biti razvoj programa kulturne razmjene i panbalkanski susreti koji bi pokrenuli potporu ideji o balkanskoj uniji.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Jugoistočna Europa, Balkan, Balkanska Unija, suradnja, kulturna razmjena

Emilian Kavalski

UNE VOIE POUR LES BALKANS VERS LA SOLUTION DU CONFLIT REGIONAL

RÉSUMÉ

Ce travail a été motivé essentiellement par la sensation que les divers peuples de l'Europe du sud-est partagent un futur commun. Le développement des Balkans dans la dernière décennie met en évidence un manque de collaboration entre les pays de cette région et l'impossibilité pour les diverses communautés nationales de trouver la voie d'une coexistence pacifique. L'auteur espère que ce travail suscitera une discussion sur la possibilité de créer une fédération balkanique dans cette région et il cite le film-culte *Matrix* comme une comparaison avec la situation actuelle dans les Balkans. La clé de l'intrigue réside dans le choix que doit faire un protagoniste entre les pilules bleues ou rouges: choix bien connu entre, d'une part, la terre brûlée des antagonismes et des confrontations, et d'autre part une coexistence paisible. Les options qu'une puissance étrangère peut proposer pour solutionner les problèmes de la région ne peuvent jamais être durables si elles ne sont pas soutenues par les nations des Balkans; sans leur appui, elles ne sont qu'une source de nouvelles confrontations. Les grandes puissances ne font que passer sur la scène politique de la région, mais les gens qui vivent dans cette péninsule et la considèrent comme leur patrie, y restent et doivent supporter les conséquences des intrusions étrangères. C'est pourquoi la création d'une Union balkanique « consociationale » constitue une solution que les petits pays de l'Europe du sud-est peuvent proposer pour la stabilisation de leur région. L'intention de ce travail est de susciter un débat sur ce thème. L'auteur considère que la question de l'appartenance ethnique doit être examinée au niveau des libertés individuelles et des droits de l'homme. Cela fournirait une base permettant de séparer les notions d'État et de nation, et contribuerait à l'établissement d'une paix durable dans le sud-est européen. Ainsi, dans le cadre d'une Union « consociationale », les communautés ethniques balkaniques seraient considérées comme des associations libres, en marge de l'organisation civile et politique du pays. Pendant les dix dernières années, le sud-est européen est devenu dans les médias du monde entier un synonyme éculé d'instabilité et d'arriération. Les violents conflits interculturels ont ravagé la structure des sociétés balkaniques. La chute du rideau de fer a sorti de leur sommeil les fantômes de l'histoire et ranimé les souvenirs du temps où cette région était volontiers désignée comme le « baril de poudre » de l'Europe. Au seuil du 21^{ème} siècle, le sud-est européen se trouve dans une situation identique, voire plus incertaine encore qu'au seuil du 20^{ème} siècle. L'auteur a la conviction que chaque tentative de solution des conflits dans cette région est vouée à l'échec si elle n'est pas placée dans le contexte du rêve d'une Union balkanique. Cette Union ne pourrait être qu'un État supranational, ou plutôt non-national, où chaque communauté ethnique, religieuse ou linguistique aurait sa propre infrastructure culturelle. Ce serait une association politique et économique qui faciliterait la coexistence de l'intégrité culturelle. La spécificité d'une telle formation politique réside dans le fait qu'elle fournit des réponses au niveau individuel. L'Union balkanique ne pourrait être qu'un corps démocratique indépendant mû par un franc dévouement à la tâche commune. En tant que modèle macropolitique de régulation des conflits, elle n'éliminerait pas les différences mais se contenterait de les gérer au service d'une coexistence pacifique, sans porter aucune atteinte aux libertés individuelles. A la vue de la complexité du conflit balkanique, l'auteur pense que la seule solution durable du problème du sud-est européen serait la création d'une Union balkanique. La progression de cette idée neutraliseraient le conflit des intérêts divers dans la région car sa réalisation ne peut se faire que moyennant une collaboration réelle et altruiste de tous les pays du sud-est européen. L'Union ne supposerait pas seulement l'engagement des gouvernements mais aussi la participation active de tout un chacun. Une fois donné le premier coup de pouce, cet effort commun ferait bouler de neige et ouvrirait la voie à la réalisation de cette idée. Les résultats d'un tel effort ne peuvent qu'aboutir à un changement positif notable dans cette région, ce qui est également important pour la sécurité et le bien-être de l'Europe dans son ensemble. Les récents événements ont montré que les idées de collaboration plus étroite et d'intégration ne sont pas sans écho dans cette région. Il faut exploiter les

avantages du moment présent pour promouvoir le processus de coopération régionale. La reconnaissance de l'hétérogénéité du sud-est européen est une nécessité pour le futur de cette région, et sans doute son destin veut-il que l'on soit prêt à travailler dans le cadre de cette hétérogénéité et à travers elle. On néglige souvent le fait que le séparatisme endémique du sud-est européen a aussi suscité une crise dans la production de connaissances, ce qui freine la région dans son accession au bien-être et la condamne à l'arriération où elle se trouve aujourd'hui. Aussi le premier pas à faire serait-il le développement d'un programme d'échanges culturels et de rencontres pan-balkaniques, qui jetteraient les assises d'un soutien à l'idée d'union balkanique.

MOTS CLES : Europe du sud-est, les Balkans, Union balkanique, co-operation, échanges culturels