

PROJECT ON ETHNIC RELATIONS

The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) was founded in 1991 in anticipation of the serious interethnic conflicts that were to erupt following the collapse of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. PER conducts programs of high-level intervention and dialogue and serves as a neutral mediator in several major disputes in the region. PER also conducts programs of training, education, and research at international, national, and community levels.

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Individuals and institutions wishing to receive PER publications should write to:

**PROJECT ON
ETHNIC
RELATIONS**



15 Chambers Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3707, USA
Telephone: (609) 683-5666
Fax: (609) 683-5888
E-mail: per@per-usa.org
Web Site: www.per-usa.org



DEC. 14-15, 2001

BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA

**PROJECT ON
ETHNIC
RELATIONS**



YUGOSLAVIA AT THE
CROSSROADS

BELGRADE, YUGOSLAVIA
DECEMBER 14-15, 2001

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PREFACE

On December 14-15, 2001, senior Yugoslav, Serbian and Montenegrin politicians, as well as Serb leaders from Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, met with political leaders and high-level officials from Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and the United States. Senior officials from the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) also took part.

The meeting, entitled “The New Yugoslavia and Its Neighbors: A Regional Dialogue,” was held in Belgrade and marked the start of a new Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) initiative, called “Serbs and Their Neighbors.”¹ This new PER series complements another, started in April 2000, called “Albanians and Their Neighbors.”² Their goal is to sustain a serious regional discussion about the two most pressing ethno-political issues in Europe today.

The meeting was held one year after the democratic change took place in Belgrade. The destructive regime of Slobodan Milosevic was toppled, beginning a new era not only for Yugoslavia but for the entire region. Yugoslav democratic forces had endured a decade of grave conditions and are now trying to lead the country back into the European family.

There are serious disagreements on many issues within the new Yugoslavia. A political struggle divides the new leadership on a variety of important matters. But the accomplishment of 2000, a peaceful transition from dictatorship, will always stand as a historic event.



At the press conference. Left to right: Allen Kassof, Stefano Sannino.



Left to right: William Montgomery, Alex Grigor'ev, Adrian Severin, Ioan Mircea Pascu, Sergiu Vintila, Zoran Zizic.

¹ PER originally intended to hold a roundtable under the title, “Serbs and Their Neighbors,” which more accurately describes key issues in the region, but demurred to the request of high-level Yugoslav federal officials to place emphasis on Yugoslavia as a country. Nonetheless, the issues of Serbs and Serbia kept coming up during the Belgrade meeting.

² The first meeting took place in Budapest in April 2000; the second in Athens in December 2000. PER held a number of regional follow-ups in Kosovo and Montenegro in 2001. PER is planning another regional roundtable in this series, to be held during 2002. The Budapest and Athens meetings are summarized in two different reports that can be found on PER's website, at www.per-usa.org/balkans.htm.

PER believes that, in order to guarantee the future prosperity and stability of Yugoslavia and its reintegration into the region as a political, economic and strategic partner with its neighbors, serious dialogues among the region's political leaders are needed.

The first is about the Yugoslavs and their aspirations for the future. What must be done to repair the damage of the past and to build future prosperity? Yugoslavia's federal units – Serbia and Montenegro – need to decide how to build their future relations. This dialogue can be helped along by the international community and Yugoslavia's neighbors, but ultimately the people of Yugoslavia themselves will have to undertake this debate if it is to be successful, and meaningful to ordinary citizens.

PER first began its engagement with Yugoslavia and the Serbs with a meeting in New York in 1993. The participants concluded that, until the Serbs were at peace with themselves and their neighbors, there would be no stability and peace in the region. This is still true. There will be no progress and stability in the Balkans until there is a peaceful, prosperous and self-confident Serbia, whether it is in or out of Yugoslavia. (This dialogue has become even more important since the Belgrade agreement of March 2002 on redefining relations between the two FRY republics and transforming the country into a loose union of Serbia and Montenegro.)

The second dialogue that must take place is between Belgrade and its neighbors. Some neighbors still have open political accounts with the Serbs. All of them have also undergone great changes in the last decade. And a new kind of "neighbor" is the international community, which also has a stake in this discussion.

The names that are missing from the list of participants attached to this report testify to the sad fact that not everyone is eager for these discussions. Some in Yugoslavia believe that there is no virtue in reviewing the past. And some neighbors are not ready to sit down with (or in) Belgrade, either because they do not want to, because they believe it will be politically disadvantageous at home, or because they do not wish to recognize the profound changes that are taking place in Belgrade. One prominent Bosnjak leader who was invited to this meeting told PER that he would under no circumstances come to Belgrade. And a Kosovar Albanian leader told PER that he did not care if Mother Teresa herself were to become the new leader of Serbia, because Serbs will never change and the Kosovar Albanians have nothing to say to them.

PER hopes that these attitudes about dialogue with a democratic Belgrade will soon change. Democracy in Yugoslavia is a precondition for peace in the Balkans, and a serious dialogue must be the starting point.

The roundtable took place at the headquarters of the OSCE Mission in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (OMiFRY). We are grateful to OMiFRY and its head, Ambassador Stefano Sannino, for encouraging this undertaking and

for offering gracious hospitality. The fact that the meeting took place at OSCE was more than a matter of convenience. This choice underlines the importance that the international community attaches to the success of democracy in Yugoslavia.

We also express our deep appreciation to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Serbia, to Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia and Minister of Internal Affairs Dusan Mihajlovic and his chief of staff, Ivan Djordjevic, for their indispensable help in providing security for the participants during their stay in Belgrade.

Mihailo Vojnovic, PER's representative in Belgrade, helped to organize the meeting.

Alex N. Grigor'ev, PER program officer, who was also a participant in the meeting, prepared this report. The photos are provided courtesy of OMiFRY.

PER takes full responsibility for the report, which has not been reviewed by the participants.

Allen H. Kassof, *President*
Livia B. Plaks, *Executive Director*
Princeton, New Jersey
March 2002



Participants in the roundtable.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Following PER's practice, and in order to keep the discussions both frank and flexible, none of the participants spoke for attribution.

In this report, the spelling of the name "Kosovo" is used (rather than "Kosova," the spelling preferred by Albanians, or "Kosovo and Metohija" or "Kosmet," preferred by Serbs), because that is the spelling most commonly used in the English-speaking world. For the same reason, Serbian place names are used. For example, the report uses Pristina and not Prishtina. However, the spelling "Kosova" is used in the names of Kosovar Albanian political parties and organizations.

The term "Kosovar" is used as an adjective for Kosovo and its inhabitants, whether Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Turks or others.

For the sake of simplicity, "Yugoslavia" or "FRY" are used for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "Macedonia" for "FYROM" or "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and "Bosnia" for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Serb" and "Croat" are used as ethnic terms, whereas "Serbian" and "Croatian" are employed when referring to the Republics of Serbia and Croatia, and this report uses "Bosnjaks" to denote ethnic Muslims living in the territory of former Yugoslavia.

Finally, for stylistic clarity in this report, participants from Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Greece, Macedonia and Romania are identified as Southeast European, Balkan or regional. The other participants are identified as Yugoslav, Serb, Montenegrin, US or European. This terminology, of course, does not imply that Yugoslavia, Serbia, Montenegro, or the Balkans are not a part of Europe.



Left to right: Dragoljub Micunovic, Livia Plaks, Mirosljub Labus.



Left to right: Miodrag Vukovic, Dusan Janjic, Gorgi Spasov.

INTRODUCTION

In October 2000, Yugoslavia experienced a revolutionary change that marked the end of a decade of wars, political destruction, ethnic hatred and economic decline for the country and many of its neighbors. This decade of devastation for the Balkans is connected with the name of Slobodan Milosevic, first the president of Serbia and later the president of FRY. In 1999, Milosevic was indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for crimes committed by the Serbian and Yugoslav forces during the war in Kosovo and a warrant was issued for his arrest. He is also charged with crimes against civilians committed in the early 1990's in Croatia and Bosnia.

On September 24, 2000, the first round of federal presidential elections was won by Vojislav Kostunica, president of the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) and a joint candidate of the Serbian Democratic Opposition (DOS), which was a multiethnic alliance of 18 Serbian parties. Kostunica received 50.2 percent of the vote, compared to 37.2 percent for the incumbent, Milosevic, who was president of the Socialist Party of Serbia at that time. Milosevic and his government refused to recognize the results of the vote, an act that sparked massive protests by Serbian citizens, in Belgrade and all around FRY. These protests continued until, on October 7, 2000, the federal electoral commission was forced to declare Kostunica the winner. Milosevic stepped down, and the federal parliamentary elections that were held at the same time secured a parliamentary majority for DOS. On December 23, 2000, in the Serbian parliamentary elections, DOS won 176 out of 250 seats in the republican parliament. On January 25, 2001, the new Serbian government, headed by the president of the Democratic Party (DS) Zoran Djindjic, was formed.

The era of Milosevic's dictatorship came to an end. This fact alone changed the face of Southeast Europe. In recognition of the new situation, and in anticipation of the first anniversary of the democratic government in Serbia and Yugoslavia, on December 14-15, 2001, the Project on Ethnic Relations (PER) held a roundtable, entitled "The New Yugoslavia and Its Neighbors: A Regional Dialogue," in Belgrade. In addition to senior officials from the Yugoslav, Serbian and Montenegrin governments and political parties, leaders of all Serb populations in the region took part, along with high-ranking representatives of Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, the United States, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations. (For most of the participants from Tirana, this occasion marked their first time in Belgrade.³)

At the meeting, one of the Yugoslav participants expressed the hope that the discussion would contribute to the shaping of Yugoslav foreign policy. An international official suggested that gatherings like the PER Belgrade roundtable

³ Fatos Nano and Luan Hajdaraga took the opportunity of a PER roundtable in Belgrade to meet with President Kostunica, Prime Minister Djindjic and other officials. A Greek participant noted that his government hopes that a visit by the Albanian Prime Minister to Belgrade will follow this meeting.

might lead to rethinking current policies that are applied by the international community. An official from a NATO country thanked PER for bringing senior Albanian politicians to Belgrade: “The closer Belgrade and Tirana become, the safer the region is going to be,” he said. And the Montenegrin participants on both sides said they considered the Belgrade roundtable very helpful.

The participants were invited by PER to discuss, and try to find answers to, the following questions: What is the new Yugoslavia? What is the state of the Yugoslav federation, and what is its future? What is the situation of the Serbs outside of Serbia, and what would constitute an acceptable relationship between them and Yugoslavia? What is the state of relations between Yugoslavia and its neighbors? Other topics under discussion included “Yugoslavia and Kosovo” and “Yugoslavia and the West.”⁴

DEMOCRATIC YUGOSLAVIA’S FIRST YEAR

During its first year in power, DOS took a number of major steps to improve the political and economic situation in the country and by bringing it closer to Europe.

In 2001, every month brought major progress. In January, the United States lifted most of the economic sanctions against FRY. In February, a border agreement was signed between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, the former head of Milosevic’s state security service was taken into custody, and the Serbian Interior Minister Dusan Mihajlovic announced that the police in Serbia had stopped tapping telephone conversations, unless granted permission by a Supreme Court decision. In March, FRY and Republika Srpska signed an agreement on special ties between them, and NATO allowed Yugoslav soldiers to enter part of the demilitarized zone between Kosovo and southern Serbia. In April, Milosevic was taken into custody in Belgrade, and 143 Albanians were released from Serbian prisons. In May, the first state delegation from Bosnia visited FRY, and the first Serb-Albanian multiethnic police patrols were formed in southern Serbia. In June, Milosevic was transferred to The Hague, and, at a donors’ conference in Brussels USD 1.3 billion in aid was pledged to FRY. In August, Belgrade asked the Kosovar Serbs to participate in voter registration in Kosovo. In September, the United Nations lifted sanctions against the sale of weapons to FRY. In November, Belgrade called on the Kosovar Serbs to take part in the Kosovar elections, and as a result, Serbs won 22 seats in the 120-member parliament of Kosovo; meanwhile, the Paris Club wrote off 66 percent of the Yugoslav debt.⁵ In December, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister went to Croatia on an official visit for the first time.

⁴ Four major events took place after the meeting in Belgrade. A trial against Milosevic started in The Hague. After a lengthy process, the new institutions in Kosovo were formed. Ibrahim Rugova became the first president of Kosovo. Crisis within DOS continued and in March 2002 DSS stopped participating in sessions of the DOS presidency. In March 2002, an agreement was signed in Belgrade between the Serbian, Montenegrin, and the federal Yugoslav governments on transforming Yugoslavia into a looser union of Serbia and Montenegro.

⁵ The Yugoslav debt alone is much higher than the country’s entire GDP.

At the opening of the roundtable, the most senior Serbian official in the Yugoslav federal government delivered a comprehensive report on the government’s accomplishments, problems and shortcomings. He said that four major achievements mark the year since the fall of Milosevic. The incredible progress in the country’s democracy is the most important change. Many ordinary Yugoslavs feel free and speak freely, he said, but the new Yugoslavia “still needs a break with the past. This process is full of challenges but the country is on the right track.” Another remarkable achievement, he said, is Yugoslavia’s speedy accession to all major international political and financial institutions.⁶ However, the official noted, “There are many obstacles for proper cooperation with the international financial institutions.”

The third accomplishment, the Yugoslav federal official continued, is the progress made in the economic sphere. Even though the government is short of funds, it has initiated bold economic reforms. According to a transition report issued by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in 2001, FRY made the most dramatic progress among all East European countries. The government is working on changing the overall economic and institutional framework and trying to settle the extremely high fiscal deficit. All prices, especially those on basic foods, electricity and energy were liberalized. Unfortunately, such rapid change has its costs, and the population is extremely unhappy with their economic state and with paying a high price for these audacious economic reforms, the official said.⁷

The new Yugoslavia still needs a break with the past. This process is full of challenges but the country is on the right track.

The fourth major success of 2001, this participant said, was a peaceful settlement of the crisis in South Serbia, the region around Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, where there is a majority ethnic Albanian population. Another issue that attracted a high level of public attention was the transfer of Milosevic to The Hague. The government feels, however, a need for further development of Yugoslavia’s cooperation with ICTY, and a solid legal basis for providing that cooperation, the official said.

Despite these achievements, this official asserted, many serious problems still need to be solved. He said the main cluster of these problems is connected to the relations between Serbia and Montenegro. This is a serious constitutional issue, and the very survival of Yugoslavia depends on its resolution, he said. At the end of 2001, the process moved into a new phase, with the participation of

⁶ FRY still has not joined the Council of Europe. However, this is expected to take place later in 2002.

⁷ Average wages are under USD 100 a month, less than half what they were at the end of 1980s. The unemployment rate is 30 percent.

the EU and active facilitation by Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Kosovo is another major concern. The Serbs took part in the Kosovar elections, with the encouragement of Belgrade. "Now," this Yugoslav official affirmed, "We expect the new democratic institutions to elect their leadership and we expect proper functioning of those institutions. Serbs are determined to cooperate efficiently, and without any prejudice, in those institutions."

Another cluster of problems is advancement of the economic and institutional reforms, the senior Serbian official in the Yugoslav government said. The country needs to continue with its reform agenda. Much still "needs to be done, especially in the fields of restructuring the economy, implementing the new privatization law, restructuring the banking sector and building new market institutions." The rule of law, especially the fight against corruption, is another sphere where improvements are crucial. This will be the government's priority for 2002, the Serb official said.

FRY's strategic goal is to join the EU. It might be considered too ambitious, but the plan is for Yugoslavia to become a candidate country by 2004-2005 and by 2010 to join the EU as a full member said the official, who is an architect of Yugoslav economic reform. Clearly recognizing the significance of regional linkages, the official said: "We are urging our neighbors to proceed quickly on that path. If they are fast, there will be room for us to join the same train." After 10 years of isolation, poor management, and an open conflict, Yugoslavia as a country, as a society, and as an economy is in poor shape and needs more help in implementing difficult reforms. FRY needs more assistance, but not in the form of humanitarian aid. What is needed, according to this official, is significant growth in the quality and quantity of foreign investments in the Yugoslav economy.

FRY wants to join NATO's Partnership for Peace. There are, however, serious obstacles that need to be removed if Yugoslavia is to start talks on this issue. The official said the essence of these obstacles is concentrated at the level of the highest leadership of the Yugoslav military. The unclear future of the Yugoslav federal state presents another serious problem. There are also concerns about the costs of cooperation with NATO, but this issue could be a subject of negotiations with the alliance, the official said.

This official concluded his remarks by saying that, in the wider international arena, Yugoslavia is joining the fight against "terrorism and those who support terrorism, wherever they are." Yugoslavia supports the international action in Afghanistan and is ready to contribute as much as possible within its capabilities, he said, adding that the country is concerned with the global economic slowdown and the new risks of doing business and investing.

The foreign policy theme was continued by a senior official of the Yugoslav foreign ministry, who said that, although it is easier to have success in foreign policy than to solve internal problems, the accomplishments of Yugoslavia's foreign policy since October 2000 can still be considered remarkable. The first stage

of the Yugoslav foreign policy strategy has been more or less completed. Relations were normalized with many countries and the country has rejoined the most important international organizations. Yugoslavia has recognized that Milosevic's policies isolated the country from the international community, the Yugoslav foreign ministry official said. "We are still doing our best to catch up with the changes that have happened in the world since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact," he said. "We have to realize that this Yugoslavia is smaller and poorer than the previous Yugoslavia. We have to take a realistic and rational political line in order to safeguard our most important state and national interests."

However, he said, a successful foreign policy cannot compensate for internal problems or shortcomings. The problems that seriously affect Yugoslav foreign policy include the troubled relationship within DOS, the unresolved statuses of Montenegro and Kosovo and grave social and economic problems. The country must solve these pressing internal problems, the official said.

Several foreign participants applauded the significance of the Yugoslav government's first-year accomplishments. For example, a participant from Zagreb observed improvements in Yugoslav minority policies. The issue of Croats in Vojvodina is a very complicated one. For years they were denied not only minority status but their very identity as Croats, the participant said. Today, the DOS government in Vojvodina is stimulating the establishment of radio, TV and newspapers in the Croatian language. The situation is changing for the better, the Croatian participant said.

A senior DOS politician and a veteran leader of the democratic movement in Yugoslavia said that another key dimension of political reform is building and safeguarding democratic institutions. The most important democratic institution is the parliament, whose respect and integrity had to be restored in Yugoslavia and in Serbia. A functioning democracy is possible only when the status of the parliament and the division of powers are reestablished, the DOS politician said. The reactivation of the parliament has three dimensions: establishment of institutions, passage of new laws and development of parliamentary democracy, he said. The most important of these three is adoption of new democratic laws, according to the politician.⁸ These laws are adopted in consultation with colleagues from Europe and are modern, European laws.

One year is not enough, he said, to complete the revolutionary change required in the Yugoslav parliamentary democracy, he added. There are still remnants of the old political culture and the old political structures, but the country's new leadership is eager to complete institutional reform.

⁸ In 2001, both Serbian and Yugoslav parliaments passed a number of crucial new laws that include the labor law, privatization law and laws on taxes, courts, judges and prosecutors. A new democratic minority law, drafted by the newly established ministry for national and ethnic communities, was submitted in 2001 and was approved in early 2002. A new Criminal Code is to be adopted soon.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS WITHIN DOS

In its first year in power, DOS has already survived several internal crises.⁹ The three most significant ones were connected with the delivery of Milosevic to The Hague in June 2001,¹⁰ the murder case of a state security officer Momir Gavrilovic,¹¹ after which Kostunica's DSS left the Serbian government in August; and the revolt of special police forces in November.¹² In fact, DSS has established a separate faction from DOS in the Serbian parliament. Even though DOS has 176 out of 250 seats in the republican assembly, key laws are being passed by a very small margin.¹³ On several occasions, DSS officials asked for new elections, a classic maneuver for an opposition party.

PER's Belgrade roundtable was held in the midst of another such crisis, when Dragan Marsicanin, the Serbian parliament's president who is also a DSS vice-president, was forced by the DOS majority to resign and was charged with violating the coalition agreement and putting the interests of DSS first. Thus he was unable to fulfill his earlier intention, conveyed to PER in June 2001, to take part in the roundtable. A new president was elected who is not a DSS member, even though the DOS agreement prescribes for the position to be filled by a DSS member.¹⁴

As one of the US participants noted, outsiders are seriously concerned about divisions within DOS. A major worry of outside observers is whether this intra-DOS crisis could become society's crisis, the participant said. Under such

⁹ As a prominent Serbian political analyst pointed out, all crises within DOS are very similar and develop in four phases. In the first phase, DSS brings up a question or a problem that resembles an attack on the republican government (or at least is perceived by the government as such). In the second, DS starts a counterattack. In the third, DSS and DS start blaming each other, the strongest accusation from DS being that DSS is siding with the anti-reform opposition and wants the government's collapse. In the fourth stage, the sides find a compromise.

¹⁰ The Coalition For Yugoslavia (the Montenegrin allies of DOS in the federal government) did not accept the draft of the law on cooperation with ICTY. Zoran Zizic and the FRY federal government resigned.

¹¹ Hours before his death, Gavrilovic met with members of President Kostunica's staff and showed them evidence linking unnamed top state officials to the underworld.

¹² More than 100 members of the Red Berets paramilitary police blocked a main road into Belgrade with armored vehicles on November 12, 2001. The cause of the revolt was the Serbian Interior Ministry's arrest of two Bosnian Serbs and their extradition to The Hague.

¹³ A telling example is the vote on a new law on restoring Vojvodina's autonomy that took place in February 2002. Out of 233 deputies participating in the vote, only 118 voted for its adoption, significantly less than the entire DOS (176 deputies) or even DOS without DSS (131 deputies).

¹⁴ According to the Serbian constitution, the president of the parliament is the second highest official in the system of government. If the president of the republic resigns or becomes incapacitated, the president of the parliament becomes the acting president for three months.

circumstances, the participant asked, what would be the prospect for the political debate in Serbia, the prospects for Yugoslavia or the prospects for reform?

One of the senior DOS leaders heatedly replied, "The relations within the Democratic Opposition of Serbia are good, and tomorrow they will be even better. They should not be a subject of the meeting here."

Another DOS leader, however, tried to provide his perspective on developments for the outsiders. This official supported the notion that, with all its obvious difficulties, political life in Belgrade was beginning to take on a normal coloration, normal political tones. He said that the debates within DOS are merely signs of this normalcy, and outsiders should not be alarmed by the reports of splits in the leadership.

This DOS leader suggested that the West should pay more attention to the nuances of political life in Serbia. In October and December 2001, the electoral message of DOS was two-fold: The first message was that the opposition represents all of Serbian society. DOS is also a multiethnic coalition and includes the main ethnic

Western observers should remember that the Serbs still feel the scars of the war and the NATO bombing.

Hungarian party and a party of Sandzak Muslims. It was a difficult decision for the parties of ethnic minorities to make, simply because, if the opposition lost the vote, they would pay the heaviest price. This unification of 18 different political parties was a big shock after a decade of Milosevic's discriminatory policies. The opposition's second message was the message of reform, and this is where the differences among the parties have emerged, he said. Some consider these differences to be strategic, others tactical. This DOS leader said he considers the differences to be strategic. He said some parties in DOS represent a conservative layer of the population that is still ambivalent, hesitant or in opposition to radical reforms – and is hesitant to join the Western part of Europe.

The West, he continued, should not take those differences lightly. Western observers should remember that the Serbs still feel the scars of the war and the NATO bombing, he said. Now, for the first time after a decade of retrograde tendencies, Serbia is going through the genuine problems of a systemic transition. Those scars of war and the difficulty of transition came after 10 years of life in isolation, the DOS leader said. According to this participant, today, per capita income in Serbia is USD 1,000, three times smaller than in 1989. He said that in Croatia per capita income is USD 4,000 per capita, in Bosnia it is USD 2,000 and in Albania it is USD 1,300. For all practical purposes this makes Serbia the poorest country in the Balkans. In the health sector, for example, the government of Serbia is capable of allocating a mere DM 10 per person per month, the participant said. Meanwhile, he added, Serbia shelters 700,000 refugees. There are problems connected with ICTY, with Kosovo, with the very survival of Yugoslavia, he said. A Montenegrin participant added that Serbia does not know what it is: "Is Kosovo a neighbor of Serbia or a part

of Serbia? At this moment, Kosovo enjoys a higher degree of independence than Montenegro does. Kosovo has its own legal documents and non-Serbian troops on the ground... Even the OSCE Mission in Kosovo acts independently of the OSCE Mission in Yugoslavia.”

But even with these problems and differences within DOS, the Serbian politician said, there is no reason to be terribly upset by what is happening within the coalition. The majority of parties are pro-reform and pro-Europe, and the majority of the population favors reform, he said, adding that the debate within DOS is over the speed of reform and its main bearing. No DOS leader advocates violence, and all advocate using peaceful means in resolving political conflicts, the Serbian politician and DOS leader said. Squabbling between the two major DOS leaders and the two biggest parties would have been called “cohabitation” in France. This is its Serbian version. The DOS official confessed, however, that it does get difficult on occasion. But he added that the most important achievement in Serbian politics today is that the prospect of a nationalistic and anti-European backlash is non-existent or negligible.

A high-level international official stationed in Belgrade said that the international community should not be too disappointed with the coalition, even if DOS splits. Yugoslavia needs not only a proper government but also a proper opposition, he pointed out. The present socialist-radical opposition is not of that kind.

WITHER MONTENEGRO?

The relationship between Serbia and Montenegro is an unsettled question with uncertain consequences for the region and for Yugoslavia's external relations. It came as no surprise to anyone in the room that this was a major topic of discussion. At the time of the meeting, no resolution had been reached concerning this issue, and the international community was applying heavy pressure to both sides to come to an agreement that would preserve Yugoslavia. This issue was at least temporarily resolved in March 2002, when an agreement was reached in Belgrade establishing a new state of Serbia and Montenegro in place of FRY.

The View From Belgrade

Characterizing the current situation of Serbia and Montenegro, a high-level Yugoslav official, who is a Serb, said that today's Yugoslavia is a loose federation. The republics share very few common powers, and these are mostly related to security. They share the military, and membership in international institutions.

On the other hand, Serbs and Montenegrins as peoples share many things in common, the participant said. He recalled a question recently posed by EU's Solana: “What is the real reason to have two separate states? You are 80 percent similar. You have the same traditions, culture, very tight family relationships, and you are very close. What is the problem? Why do you need to be independent now in order to join the same framework later on?”

This is all true. However, today it is an open question whether there will be a

long-term future for a common state of Serbia and Montenegro, the Yugoslav official said. He said that, if Montenegro chooses to stay in the federation, the new federal state would be a very efficient state, with a limited number of powers related to foreign affairs, international financial relations, security, the army and such core economic functions, as a customs union.

If Montenegro leaves the federation, Serbia will inherit all the international obligations and memberships of Yugoslavia, the official said, and Montenegro would have to apply for international recognition and membership in all major international organizations. Meanwhile, assets, liabilities and the army will be divided. “Both Serbia and Montenegro have a better chance of entering the EU... together. Separation will mean delays for both,” the official said. “But Montenegro will suffer even more on that account.” This Serb official also predicted serious internal instability in Montenegro and further fragmentation of the republic if there is a separation. He cited a well-known domino theory, saying that, if Montenegro secedes, it will be difficult to keep Kosovo within Serbia or Republika Srpska within Bosnia. Thus, the official said, the main outcome of such a decision by Podgorica will be a serious deterioration of regional stability. But, he added: “Belgrade will never encourage any instability or pressure the people of Montenegro.”

Another DOS leader, who was visibly upset by the troubled relations between brotherly Serbs and Montenegrins, spoke about the timing of Podgorica's move. He said it was a shame that Montenegro might want to secede at the moment when the victory of democracy in Serbia has been achieved. He reminded everyone that, in 1997, the Serbian opposition supported Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic and his DPS when they turned away from Milosevic and sought to pursue democracy and reform in the republic. A close cooperation was established between DPS and its allies¹⁵ and DOS. DOS supported the Montenegrin framework proposal for redefining relations in Yugoslavia when Milosevic, at that time the Yugoslav president, rejected it. The official said that many in DOS do not understand why the proposal that was given to Milosevic was not presented to the DOS government. This Serb ironically commented: “This means that they were willing to live together with Milosevic in some sort of redefined federation, but they cannot do so with a democratic Serbia.”

What is the real reason to have two separate states? You are 80 percent similar... Why do you need to be independent now in order to join the same framework later on?

¹⁵ The original allies of DPS in the coalition For Better Life were the People's Party (NS) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). DPS formed Montenegro's first interethnic government by including two ethnic Albanian parties, the Democratic Union of Albanians (DUA) and the Democratic Alliance of Montenegro (DSCG). Today, the ruling coalition partners in Montenegro are DPS and SDP. DUA and DSCG are also represented in the government.

Another Yugoslav federal official reported the view of the president of Yugoslavia, who strongly supports the preservation of the federation and its constitutional reform. Preserving the federal state will provide a better framework for the ongoing processes of reform, for growth in investment, and integration into the EU, this official said. If the country is not in the EU, it will be separated by a new iron curtain from the rest of Europe, he added. Adoption of a number of laws has been delayed because of the uncertainty in the federation's future. Whatever new Yugoslavia there will be, it will be subject to the democratic will of its citizens, the official said, adding that the only way to achieve this result is a democratic dialogue. But, he said, this dialogue cannot last forever because of FRY's strategic goals. If the talks do not bring results, then the only alternative is a referendum. The international community should decide on the technicalities of the referendum, the federal official said. He added that, for Belgrade, the lowest acceptable figure that would give legitimacy to such a referendum would be a majority of 50 percent of the Montenegrin electorate plus one vote.

A leading Serbian political analyst provided an interesting perspective by suggesting that a major problem of governance in Yugoslavia today is the turnaround in DOS's original slogans. From 1989, DOS campaigned on one key issue: the Serbian national and state question and interests. Their slogan was "For a New Serbia!" It was the slogan of both DS and DSS and this slogan mobilized the electorate during the latest elections. This is why, after this slogan was dropped by DOS in 2001, the main actors of the great Serbian change – the civic movements, trade unions and regional initiatives – ceased to be as active as they were before, the analyst said.

In the last 10 years, the Serbs were not allowed to talk about Serbia. The only place where such discussions were taking place was within the framework of Serb nationalism. DOS was formed on the platform of a democratic multi-ethnic Serbia. Continuing with the current trend, however, threatens that platform and helps further growth of nationalism in Serbia, he said.

Another key issue is Milosevic's heritage. He is in The Hague, but the structures that he left behind are functioning and are being kept alive, the political analyst said. Many in Central Serbia and in Vojvodina apparently do not understand why they are wasting their money by financing two governments, the federal and the republican, he added. In Vojvodina, there is also a Vojvodina provincial government.

From the international point of view, the situation is complicated. A serious question that has to be answered is whether the Badinter commission points are still valid or not, the analyst said.¹⁶ The answer to that question could either help, or obstruct, any further Yugoslav integration, he said.

Today, some members of the international community are telling Serbia not to

¹⁶ In 1991, the international Badinter commission ruled that all former Yugoslav republics have the legal right to independence.

build its own structures and institutions or pursue its own economic reform. Serbia is being asked to keep Yugoslavia alive, he said. The reason for that, he suggested, is that the management of the Kosovo problem is easier when there is still a Yugoslavia. The question though, according to the analyst, is how long such a framework will continue to be productive.

Meanwhile, some of the processes have to be synchronized. For example, the process of negotiations between Montenegro and Serbia and the process of creating a new Serbian constitution should be taking place at the same time, the analyst said. Adopting a new Serbian constitution is the main historic responsibility of DOS. Montenegrins cannot decide the problems of Vojvodina or Sandzak, the analyst said, adding that these problems should be solved in Serbia and by Serbia.

The View From Podgorica

Belgrade's views were disputed by a high-level official of Montenegro's ruling DPS, who emphasized that Montenegro has managed to build a new democratic state, with functioning state institutions, a strong civic sector and strengthened interethnic relations. Amid a region of wars, the DPS official noted, Montenegro has managed to preserve itself and maintain peace on its territory. Democratic Montenegro has developed a working partnership with the international community and sees its future as a part of the Euro-Atlantic community, he said. It is true that Montenegro has multiple economic, political and social problems, but it is fully devoted to solving these problems through reform and strengthening democracy, the DPS official said. The current government has passed and implemented more reform decisions than all its predecessors combined. Montenegro's independence project is not an ethnic project, the official said, adding that Montenegro's minorities support the republic's independence. The opposition to this process comes from within the Montenegrin ethnic group only. This is in striking contrast to all other independence projects in the Balkans, the official said. He added that Montenegro has displayed a serious economic policy. Another Montenegrin interjected to point out that today's inflation rate in Serbia is 40 percent, compared to 20 percent in Montenegro, and the industrial growth rate is negative 6 percent in Serbia and negative 1.6 percent in Montenegro.

Amid a region of wars, Montenegro has managed to preserve itself and maintain peace on its territory.

Montenegro survived a constitutional coup instigated by Milosevic on July 6, 2000, when the constitution of Yugoslavia was changed and Montenegro's rights were reduced. "A new state was formed, a state with no internal legitimacy, with no participation from Montenegro," the DPS official said. Even under these changed circumstances, Montenegro continued building democracy, he added. At the most difficult time, leaders of the Serbian democratic

opposition found refuge in Montenegro, the DPS official said.

According to this participant, even though Montenegro did not participate in the 2000 Yugoslav federal elections, it “has not obstructed the victory of the democratic opposition of Serbia either. Moreover, it helped to make sure that the democratic opposition of Serbia wins.”

Addressing this remark, a DOS leader said that he saw no logic in the decision by the Montenegrin government not to take part in the federal elections if they wanted Milosevic not to win: “What you said means that if you would have participated your voters would have voted for Milosevic.” The fact is that the authorities in Montenegro do not recognize the Yugoslav federal state, he said.

The senior Montenegrin DPS official recalled the time when DOS leaders were hiding in Montenegro, and they agreed that, as soon as the dictatorship was over, the two sides would sit down and talk about reestablishing fair, equal and honest relations between the republics. At present, the talks with Belgrade are proceeding with great difficulty, he said. This participant blamed Belgrade for being insincere at the talks. He cited President Kostunica’s words that “he only supports the option of a modern federation, even a loose federation is not an option.” In this way, the DPS official said, the federal center is obviously trying to decide, unilaterally, the fate of Serbia and Montenegro. The federal government only represents Serbia in talks with foreign counterparts, he said.¹⁷

Another Montenegrin official added: “Moreover, they are displaying a hostile attitude toward the legal government of Montenegro. We do not need such a federation.” The other Montenegrin seemed to be alarmed that, in Belgrade’s proposal, the notion of republic is mentioned only once. He said he is concerned with the movements toward restoration of the monarchy in Serbia. According to him, a true compromise between Belgrade’s and Podgorica’s positions would be a union of independent states along the lines of the EU, a model that functions so well in Western Europe: “Serbia and Montenegro are old states. The best relations between Serbia and Montenegro were when we were independent,” the Montenegrin official said. “Montenegro has a long history of statehood. Montenegro was among the states that congratulated the United States of America on its independence. We hope that, one day, the United States will return this favor to Montenegro.” Montenegro is bigger than 36 countries which are members of the United Nations, and it has enough resources to feed its citizens, the participant continued. The appearance of an independent Montenegro would not change the borders in the Balkans. “Montenegro has its borders,” he said. “The borders between Serbia and Montenegro are state borders, established by a bilateral treaty and verified internationally in 1913.”

¹⁷ Another Montenegrin said that the federal government has no place in the talks between Serbia and Montenegro. “I do not understand who the so-called “federation side” represents. I know who Serbia represents, who Montenegro represents, but whom does the federal government represent?” he asked.

Another puzzle for the Montenegrins is what Serbia thinks they will have to establish a federation with, the Montenegrin participant said. According to UN resolution 1244, Kosovo is a part of Yugoslavia. The resolution does not mention Serbia. Kosovo is an international protectorate. Will Kosovo also be punished like Montenegro for not taking part in the federal elections? Or, the participant asked, will there be a new Yugoslavia, with Kosovo just on paper and Montenegro as a functioning member?

Montenegro “wants to control our defense, our foreign policy, our currency” for ourselves, the Montenegrin official said. And, after achieving independence, the official said: “We are ready for cooperation. We are small and will never be a danger or threat to Serbia. We are ready to keep close ties between people of Montenegro and people of Serbia, maybe even closer than those among the peoples of the European Union.”

The View of the Pro-Yugoslav Montenegrin Opposition

Even though Montenegro is the oldest Balkan state, it is difficult to convince almost half of the Montenegrin electorate to vote for renewal of this independence. Montenegro’s community is deeply split. A representative of the ruling coalition characterized the Montenegrin parliamentary opposition as “a minority that is very conservative, destructive and follows old, outdated ideology and projects.” Another participant characterized “the political minority in Montenegro” as a gathering of “either former Milosevic or former Karadzic¹⁸ supporters ... who are used to inciting violence.” He added: “This proves that it is impossible to have a democratic and a federal Montenegro at the same time.”

A senior representative of “that minority” spoke at the roundtable. He argued that the above-described view is simply false. On the contrary, he said, the coalition Together for Yugoslavia¹⁹ fully supports the EU proposals in the talks between Podgorica and Belgrade. “Our goal is to democratize Montenegro, live in a stable republic, strengthen our relations with the European Union, and one day, as a part of Yugoslavia, to become its member.” The minority representative argued that, only by being together will Montenegro and Serbia succeed in their European integration. Applying for membership in international organizations anew will mean a waste of time and money for Montenegro, he said. Through FRY, Montenegro is already a member of all of the most important international organizations. In addition, it is not altogether clear if Montenegro will be able to pay its share of the Yugoslav debt if left on its own, the minority representative said. A common state will also mean

Only by being together, will Montenegro and Serbia succeed in their European integration.

¹⁸ Radovan Karadzic was the leader of Bosnian Serbs during the war in Bosnia.

¹⁹ The coalition Together for Yugoslavia is presently formed by the Socialist People’s Party (SNP), People’s Party (NS) and Serb People’s Party (SNS).

better opportunities for Montenegro's citizens, wider employment, credit and banking possibilities, he said, adding that voters should be able to see clearly what the internal and external consequences would be for Montenegro if it achieves independence.

This speaker also suggested that successful talks on redefining relations within Yugoslavia will encourage internal political dialogue in Montenegro. "If Montenegro leaves [the federation] there will be even deeper divisions within Montenegro," he said, "even dangers of a split of the republic and disintegration of Serbia." In the end, he asserted, if there is a fair referendum in Montenegro, the option of preserving the common state will certainly win.

The View From the West

Almost all international actors seem to favor preserving the Yugoslav federation in some form. During 2001, the international community began taking a visibly more proactive role in the Serbian-Montenegrin dispute. Official Podgorica, in fact, has noticed with pleasure what they describe as a change in the attitude of the international community, according to participants.

"Before [the international community] was against any referendum," a senior Montenegrin official commented. "Now they are just talking about technicalities of such referendum." He said this is effectively a position of active neutrality.

The delay in resolution of the issue will badly affect the cost of reform, and the prospects for the international integration of FRY, and will create uncertainty for foreign investors.

An EU representative said that the EU's engagement in the Serbian-Montenegrin issue is the consequence of the union's commitment to the region. The delay in resolution of the issue will badly affect the cost of reform, and the prospects for the international integration of FRY, and will create uncertainty for foreign investors, the representative said.

In October 2001, he continued, the EU was disappointed when the negotiations between Belgrade and Podgorica were broken off.²⁰ The EU foreign ministers and the heads of state agreed that the potential for dialogue between Podgorica and Belgrade has not been exhausted. EU foreign policy chief Solana was sent to investigate possibilities for continuing the dialogue. The EU wants to discuss concrete issues, such as property rights, health care, insurance, customs procedures, etc. The EU does not want years of dialogue but has no illusions about the complexity of the problem, said the official, adding that the EU cannot take a neutral position in the dispute either. He said the

²⁰ On October 26, 2001, President Djukanovic announced that the positions of the sides were too far apart for any agreement.

EU prefers a reformed federation rather than disintegration: "Together is the fastest way into Europe."

Another high level international official pointed out that the EU should help the sides to define common areas and find a common ground. Lack of clarity in relations between the two republics is damaging for them both, the official said, adding that the final choice should be an informed one and be based on the interests of the people, rather than on political generalizations.

A US participant characterized Montenegro's position as a "heartbreaker," saying: "I rarely hear a case argued with such eloquence, intelligence, brilliance, authority, elegance and passion." He said the Montenegrins want to be rewarded for the good policies they have pursued in the last few years. Suddenly, as they were expecting a payback for being on the side of democracy, the cast of characters has changed, and Montenegrins are left to sit in the same room with people who were pro-Milosevic allies and now are proclaiming their eternal support for a unified democratic Yugoslavia, the US participant said. He added that the international community has to understand this situation. The Montenegrins deserve a reward, and hopefully they have a contingency plan to find a way to be repaid for the good that they have done, the participant said. This reward might take the form of a radically realigned relationship with Serbia, with a very high degree of independence, he added.

An official from an EU country said that, if the Montenegrin-Serbian discussion had taken place three years ago, the conclusions would have been different, but the situation has changed. This has nothing to do with sympathy or antipathy toward Montenegrins or Serbs, but the West's fear of the domino effect, the official said.²¹

An American diplomat added that if, however, after all the EU efforts, the Montenegrin people decide to become independent, and all the parties in Montenegro agree on the conditions for a referendum, Montenegro will become independent. "This discussion should not blind us to the possibility that this could be a result," he said. Another participant added that independence or no independence for Montenegro will not be a life and death issue for the region: It will be an inconvenience or a problem, but it is not going to be earth-shaking. The main and the most difficult problem that is totally unresolved is the interface between the Serbs and Albanians, and that problem will remain high on the Euro-Atlantic agenda for a long time, the participant said.

²¹ A Montenegrin from the ruling coalition pointed out that the talks about the domino effect are senseless. "Montenegro is the last of the Yugoslav dominos. It has the same right as all other former Yugoslav republics according to the Badinter commission."

The Views of Neighbors

Most of Yugoslavia's neighbors seemed to favor preservation of the federation in some form. A cabinet-level official from a Balkan country suggested that the future should be projected without concentrating on the distant past. It is more productive to make sure that Montenegro's future resembles that of Europe rather than recent Balkan history, this official said. He warned that, if the situation in the Balkans continues to deteriorate, the international community might abandon the area, or at best move toward a policy of containment, and the region will be left alone to deal with its most difficult problems. All will suffer if that happens, the cabinet-level official said, because the region is incapable of dealing with problems on its own.

We cannot stabilize the area until we stabilize every individual component of the area.

In an apparent reference to the Montenegrins, he invited the countries of the region to not only be concerned with their progress toward European integration but also to see if they truly contribute in building regional security. "We cannot stabilize the area until we stabilize every individual component of the area," he said.

Some participants, however, suggested that there would be no major harm to the region if Montenegro becomes independent. A participant from a country that used to be a part of ex-Yugoslavia shared his country's experience in gaining and preserving its independence. When his country had just acquired independence, everyone was concerned that it would not survive, because of a great number of social problems, poverty, a substantial minority population, a weak economy closely linked with Serbia and lack of finances to support the government. There were predictions that the country would be divided by its neighbors, the participant said. Ten years later, the country is a member of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the UN, and it is seeking to join EU and NATO.

In its short history, FRY produced no democratic means for integration, according to this participant, who said the process of Yugoslav disintegration should not be viewed from a purely negative perspective. Yugoslav disintegration was "a way for the different parts of former Yugoslavia to reach independence, and it has created an opportunity for its members to integrate into the European structures by democratic means," the participant said. Democracy in Serbia and Yugoslavia is still poorly developed. Moreover, the creation of a stable federation will be impacted by a number of other factors, including the degree of independence that has been already achieved by Kosovo and Montenegro, the official from a former Yugoslav country said. It will be extremely difficult to try to reintegrate these territories into any kind of Yugoslavia, because the political elite in Montenegro and Kosovo are keen on pursuing their goals, he said. For them the success of independence means the difference between being treated as heroes or as traitors, the participant said. The decision to keep the federation would also mean political death for politi-

cians who were fighting against Milosevic and stood on the side of democracy and reform during the most difficult years, he said. If independence is pursued in a smart way, it could lead toward establishing good relations between the former members of the federation and toward democratic integration into Europe. Indeed, it could even foster that process, the participant said. And if it helps avoiding a new conflict it is certainly a positive thing to do. What the international community should concentrate on is building democratic institutions and democratic dialogues, he said.

An Albanian said that it should be up to the Montenegrins alone to decide whether to have an independent Montenegro or not. If Montenegro wants to be independent, it should be given that chance, and as far as Albania is concerned, he added, its security would not be affected by such a decision. The same rules should be applied in regard to Kosovo as well, he added.

A Serb from Republika Srpska said that the majority of citizens of this Bosnian entity want FRY to be preserved but will accept any decision of the people of Yugoslavia. A Serb from Kosovo added that almost all Serbs in Kosovo want the problems between Podgorica and Belgrade to be resolved as soon as possible. This will allow Belgrade to turn to the problems of the Kosovar Serbs, he said. The Kosovar Serbs do not feel that Montenegro is the factor that is going to keep Kosovo in Serbia. What the Serbs in Kosovo are interested in is a normal life for them and their children, the Serb participant said.

A SENSE OF FEAR

The so-called "Serb" question is one of the most controversial issues in today's Balkans. After the break up of SFRY, about 2 million Serbs found themselves living outside of Serbia.

As one of the Serb leaders from Bosnia said, the question of Serbs outside of Yugoslavia has two aspects: emotional and rational. He said this holds true for independent Bosnia and Croatia or for Kosovo, which is a part of FRY, according to UN Resolution 1244, but is under international administration.

Serbs in Bosnia

In Bosnia, Serbs from Republika Srpska, an entity within the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have strong emotional connections to FRY. Many of them grew up in Serbia or Montenegro or have roots or relatives there, the Bosnian Serb leader said. In rational terms, these Serbs got used to living outside of Yugoslavia. However, the Bosnian Serb leader said, Serbs who live outside of Yugoslavia still wonder whether they, and their rights, will be protected. He said that, so far, the international community has been unable to convince all the Serbs that they will enjoy equal treatment and that their national and human rights will be respected. The leader said these fears come from the fact that the international community has not been consistent in its policies in the ex-Yugoslav territories, where the key problem is the relationship between

respecting the rights of minorities and upholding state sovereignty.

He noted that three different approaches have been used: In Croatia, the internationals accepted the fact that the sovereignty of the state of Croatia prevails and recognized the expulsion of the Serbs. According to this speaker, today, no one pays any attention to the rights or problems of Serbs in Croatia. In Bosnia, the sovereignty of the state was upheld, but the Serbs were allowed to form their own entity within the state of Bosnia. In Kosovo, the right of the Albanians was preferred to the sovereignty of Yugoslavia. As a Serb from Kosovo put it: “There is extremism among all ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia, but the international community punishes all these extremisms differently.”

Serbs who live outside of Yugoslavia still wonder whether they, and their rights, will be protected.

The Bosnian Serb leader called on the international community to treat all sides equally and not produce exceptions from this rule. For example, any change in the status of Kosovo will bring new problems to Republika

Srpska. If Kosovo was to become independent, he asked, why prevent Republika Srpska from doing the same?

The Serbs from Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo spoke about the fears that are very strong in their respective communities. The Serbs at large have fears that their rights will not be protected, and they say this is why the Serbs in Republika Srpska are panicky about any alterations of the Dayton accords – even the most logical changes and improvements. Today, Bosnia is engaged in changing its constitution. The main goal of these changes is to strengthen the joint institutions. The Serbs, however, say they fear that this process might weaken their rights and those of their entity. The international community has to work toward eliminating those fears if we are to see improvements in the Balkans, Serbs said. They added that these fears of the Serbs outside of Yugoslavia are the source of irrational behavior by those Serbs.

A senior Yugoslav official noted that the FRY government is “absolutely against any revision of the Dayton accords right now.” The government respects open borders and free cooperation in all fields, free movement of information, goods, capital and services. In that sense, there is no need for a special relationship between Serbia and Republika Srpska, the official said. The special agreement between FRY and Republika Srpska does not really include anything special, he said. The agreement is just a framework, “an empty agreement that provides no special advantages to Serbs in Bosnia compared to Croats or Bosnjaks,” the senior Yugoslav official said. He conceded, however, that in Belgrade there are different views on this issue.

A Bosnian Serb disagreed with this evaluation of the special ties between RS and FRY. There is a strong need, he said, for special ties as a guarantee that the rights of the Serbs outside of Serbia will be protected – that the international agreements that have been signed on that issue will be implemented, and noth-

ing will be changed against their will. Only when the Serbs are at peace in Bosnia can the country have a chance of becoming a true democratic multi-ethnic country. “What bothers us lately is that, in Yugoslavia, there has been a growing fear of contacts with Serbs from outside of Yugoslavia and of supporting those Serbs,” the Bosnian Serb said. He explained that Belgrade apparently worries “that any close ties with those Serbs will bring problems and sanctions against FRY.”

A local Albanian leader from Serbia said that the relationship between Serbs in Bosnia and FRY should be a model for handling other ethnic problems in the region. The best part about this model is that the issues are dealt with while existing international borders are respected, he said.

Another Bosnian Serb qualified the special ties between Republika Srpska and FRY as constitutional – and as a useful tool for connecting Serbs from Bosnia to Serbia. Establishment of full diplomatic relations between Bosnia and FRY will be another important step that will guarantee preservation of these ties, the Serb said.

Serbs in Croatia

It is argued that the Serb-Croat conflict is where the trouble in former Yugoslavia started. Observers say there has not yet been a complete resolution of these issues. As the roundtable in Belgrade was progressing, in Zagreb, the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Goran Svilanovic was completing the first official visit of an FRY foreign minister to Croatia. This historic event was reported by participants from Zagreb, who arrived late due to their participation in the bilateral Yugoslav-Croat talks.²²

A Croat participant said that the talks in Zagreb symbolized “the point of no return in improving the relations” between the two young Balkan democracies. A number of very important issues were taken up in preparation for, and during, the talks in Zagreb. Before the visit, both sides started discussions on a bilateral agreement on the protection of ethnic minorities.²³ In Zagreb, the parties started to discuss, in good faith, border problems, which include not only the outstanding issue of the Prevlaka peninsula but the entire bilateral border and the principles of its identification, the Croat participant said. The sides have also decided that they will not become hostage to the border problems. If speedy resolution is impossible at the moment, they will work on other issues in the meantime, the Croat participant said. Among the other issues to be taken up is a readmission treaty that will allow the two states to relax the pre-

²² It is true that the contacts between official Zagreb and official Belgrade existed before the democratic changes in both countries. As a Croatian participant ironically noted, the late president Franjo Tudjman had a very intensive telephone communication with Slobodan Milosevic. But the nations hardly benefited from those contacts.

²³ At the same time the parliaments of Croatia and Yugoslavia were discussing their new laws on ethnic minorities. As a Serb participant from Croatia noted, these new minority laws are important for both countries that lived through ten years of anti-minority state policies. “Now the challenge is to develop a pro-minority policy for each country, to develop a policy of tolerance.”

sent visa regime. Negotiations have been launched on a free trade agreement. Today, Yugoslavia and Croatia are moving from “normalization” of their relations to “good neighborly relations” and cooperation within the EU Stabilization and Association framework, the participant said.

A difficult issue in relations between the two countries is the question of the return of refugees and associated problems: property rights, rebuilding rights, legal issues and the question of individual responsibility for war crimes committed during the 1990s. If left unresolved, these issues will continue to be among the most serious obstacles toward building good neighborly relations, the participant said.

In an effort to prove that it is in fact a new regime in the qualitative sense of the word, the government of Zoran Djindjic returned the art collection taken

during the latest war from the city of Vukovar to Croatia. It is in that spirit the Yugoslav foreign minister made a statement in Belgrade expressing his sincere regret about the suffering that was forced on the citizens of Croatia, both Croats and Serbs, as well as the citizens of FRY, in recent years. Svilanovic invited the Croatian foreign

The challenge of democracy in Serbia and in Croatia is to help Bosnia stand on its feet.

minister to travel to Sarajevo together and talk with their Bosnian counterpart about Srebrenica and other horrible events of the latest war in Bosnia. This Croat official concluded, “The challenge of democracy in Serbia and in Croatia is to help Bosnia stand on its feet.”

A senior international official said that the greater the number of issues under discussion on the Croatian-Yugoslav table the better. There are not only issues related to statehood that need to be discussed, but also regular practical issues, the official said. Public television stations in both countries have started to cooperate and are broadcasting information about each other. The two countries’ police have already established cooperation in investigating drug smuggling and human trafficking. The parliaments have initiated regular contacts. An agreement on cultural cooperation is in the works. There are already discussions between Serbian and Croatian historians on history textbooks and evaluation of important history problems. There is cooperation between the writers’ associations of both countries. They are discussing which parts of Serbian literature should be a part of Croatian textbooks and vice versa. These efforts will help to overcome the psychological barriers that have existed since the Yugoslav wars started, the international official said.²⁴ Another Croat added

²⁴ In this context, one Croat participant had an illustrative story: He was born in Sombor, which is in Serbia, but lived in Zagreb for the last 50 years. He is one of those many people linked to both countries. Participation in PER’s roundtable was his first visit to Belgrade in the last 10 years. In a moving reference, he said that, after the meeting, he was planning to go to the grave of his father, which he was not able to visit since the disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia.

that it is up to the politicians to close the gap between the Serbs and the Croats. Cooperation with the ICTY will certainly help to narrow it, he said, adding that the Croats should learn why the Serbs do not understand what happened. And, he said, someone has to teach the Serbs why the Croats do not understand that the Serbs do not understand what happened. Most people in Yugoslavia are not aware of the fact that their state was involved in a war in Croatia, he said.

One of the leaders of the Croatian Serb minority said that improving bilateral relations is not only the policy of the two governments but also the position of the Serb minority in Croatia. After the collapse of ex-Yugoslavia, many did not accept the idea of becoming a minority, he said. Accepting minority status was painful for many reasons, and “it was also reasonable, until the appropriate moment. For some Serbs in Croatia it came after a disaster,” this Serb said. “I hope that most minorities in the Balkans will never experience such disaster and will conduct their policies in connection with their interests.” The Serbs in Croatia have shown, however, that they can and must contribute to creating a different atmosphere in repairing relations, he said. The minorities also have to take responsibility for what has happened, he said, adding that it is in minorities’ interests to encourage governments to make progress in the process of normalization. The main preconditions for every minority to exercise their rights are stability, security and normality. After the regime change, he said, the Croatian Serbs are finally in a position to address a great number of issues of concern to them.

Fear is something that leads people to commit the most serious crimes.

Minority return, this Croatian Serb said, is a challenge for all countries of the Balkans and for the international community at large. He explained that he is not talking about forced return but return that is in the interests of individuals who were forced to leave and now have a possibility to come back. His Croat colleague added that the return of refugees is a triangle problem between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – especially Republika Srpska. The Croatian government has promised that the housing and property problems of displaced persons and refugees will be solved by the end of 2002. The process is moving, the Croat said, but it is impeded by the vast psychological minefield that was laid in the last 10 years. Another Croat participant asserted that a massive refugee return would strengthen the Croatian political right and negatively affect Croat-Yugoslav relations and the situation of the Serb minority in Croatia.

A Serb participant from Bosnia was very cautious about the improvements in Croatia. He said he considers the Serbs in Croatia as neglected. “No one takes care of them,” he declared. “Many Serbs who lived there in so called social housing in Croatia have left, some are in Republika Srpska. They had to leave the apartments in Bosnia into which they had moved after leaving Croatia, because of the decision by the UN High Representative. But they cannot return to their homes in Croatia, because other people who were settled there by the Croatian

government still live in those homes. This creates fears for those Serbs. Fears that nobody cares [about the Serbs]. Everybody should know that, in the Balkans, if such fears exist, conflicts are around the corner.” Another participant quoted Svilanovic as saying in Zagreb, “Fear is something that leads people to commit the most serious crimes.” To destroy such fears should be the goal of the governments in Croatia, Yugoslavia and Bosnia, as well as the international community, the participant said.

Serbs in Kosovo

A year and a half after the Kumanovo Agreement, the situation of the Serbs in Kosovo remains a special concern of the international community.²⁵ It is of a special concern to PER as well. The last time PER took on this issue was in Pristina in October 2001, when it organized the first face-to-face encounter in many years between a senior Belgrade official – deputy prime minister Nebojsa Covic – and the presidents of the largest Kosovar Albanian political parties. The main subject at that roundtable was Serb participation in the Kosovo elections. Serbs did take part in the elections and entered the assembly of Kosovo. The first session of that assembly took place immediately before the PER meeting in Belgrade.

One of the Serb members of the Kosovo assembly, who had also been a participant in the PER Pristina roundtable, spoke about the elections and the work of the assembly. The international community put a lot of pressure on Serbs to participate in the elections, she said. She noted that Veton Surroi, one of the prominent Albanian intellectuals, has said that the Serbs did not want to take part in the elections because they got used to ruling Kosovo alone. This Kosovar Serb agreed: “Minority Serbs did dominate majority Albanians in an undemocratic way.” The history of Kosovo is a history of changes in domination, she said. There were times when the Serbs were mistreating the Albanians and there were times when the Albanians were mistreating the Serbs. The perception that the local elections that took place last year were not very helpful was another reason why Serbs were reluctant to vote in the latest election. The local elections were meant to produce new local leaders in the Kosovo communities and to improve peaceful coexistence among the ethnic communities in Kosovo. As the member of the assembly explained, after the local elections, Serbs were still afraid for their lives and did not dream about seeking protection from the new local Albanian officials.

After much hesitation, the Serbs did take part in the elections and, according to this Serb leader, can see now that it was a good move: The new parliament of Kosovo does provide some hopes for a good future for the Serbs in Kosovo. The assembly has already elected its highest bodies: the assembly’s president and deputy presidents, including one Serb. Virtually the next day, however, two members of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK), to which the new presi-

dent of the assembly belongs, were killed by other Albanians, this Serb reported. Now, she said, KFOR troops have to protect the president of the Kosovo assembly around the clock, just as they are protecting the Serb deputies.

This Serbian member of the Kosovo assembly said she saw clear signs of danger for the future of Kosovo. She explained that the biggest threat comes from the ethnic Albanian politicians themselves, rather than from the Serb-Albanian divide. The potential danger was apparent in the first meeting of the heads of Kosovo parliamentary groups with the president of the Kosovo assembly, she said. She characterized the meeting as one of intolerance and impatience toward the international community. The Kosovar Albanian officials were asking the president of the assembly to stop accepting what they called the diktat of the head of UNMIK. “Such an attitude represents a real danger and a threat to stability and peace in Kosovo. This could be the beginning of a serious conflict between the Kosovar Albanians and the international community,” she said. Today, “these politicians consider the international community to be the major obstacle in achieving their true goals.” These people do not have overwhelming support among the Albanians, however, and the latest elections proved it, the member of the assembly said. But she warned that they have enough strength, weaponry, and strong commitment to achieve their goals.

This participant also reported on the first round of voting for the president of Kosovo, a vote that took place just a day before the Belgrade meeting. She said Serbs did participate in the vote. The head of the Serb group met with deputies from all political parties of the Kosovar Albanians: LDK, the Democratic Party of Kosova (PDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosova (AAK). Each asked the Serbs to support their own candidates for the presidency. In reality, though, they believed that the Serbs would not vote at all, she said. There were even threats to the Serbs if they supported Ibrahim Rugova, LDK’s president.

She pointed out that the Serb coalition, Povratak, participated in the election in strict accordance with UN resolution 1244, the Kosovo constitutional framework, and the latest agreement signed between Belgrade and UNMIK. The announcement of Povratak in the assembly that the Serb deputies will participate in the election was received with silence by the deputies of PDK and AAK, she said. These parties apparently thought that there was an agreement between the Serb faction and LDK on supporting Rugova’s candidacy and a future government coalition. Under other political circumstances, such a situation would have been absolutely normal. LDK is perceived by the Serbs as being a more tolerant and peace-oriented option of the Albanian political spectrum, the member of the assembly said. The Serb deputies did take part in the election process, but they destroyed the ballots that they received and did not vote. As this Kosovar Serb participant explained, this act was intended to give the representatives of the Albanians another chance to find an agreement among themselves. She said the Serbs hope that the new institutions will improve the possibilities for their future life in Kosovo.

However, this Serb said, the feeling of fear still exists among the Kosovar Serbs.

²⁵ The Kumanovo Agreement signed on June 9, 1999, between NATO and the Army of Yugoslavia marked the end to the NATO military operation against Yugoslavia. The subsequent UN Resolution 1244 established an international administration in Kosovo.

Kosovo has a new reality. The Serbs live in enclaves, facing discrimination and segregation, she said. She said she felt the Albanian community is in power and behaves with the euphoria of a winner. They do not identify the Serbs as a group whom they should assist and whose presence in Kosovo should be encouraged. Not only Serb, but also moderate Albanians and the international community are hostages of the Albanian extremists and terrorists, this participant said. So far, a workable solution for conquering that extremism has not been found. There is currently a minute relaxation of relations between Serbs and Albanians, but there is still a fear that one might be killed at any moment. She called on the Kosovar Albanians to keep in mind that the Kosovar politicians – including Albanians, Serbs and other ethnic communities – should be concerned with the interests of Kosovo as a whole. There are a number of common problems: criminality, drug trade, illegal arms possession and trade,

How can anyone go on building multiethnicity or democracy effectively if one of the groups has to be surrounded by guards and live in enclaves?

human trafficking and illegal business practices, she noted. To fight against them, the participant said, will require all those who live in Kosovo today to come together.

Both communities in Kosovo have fears, she said, adding, “I understand the Albanian fear of the Serbian state because they saw nothing good coming from that state. The Albanians,

however, have to understand the Serb fears of Albanian domination, because nothing good came from that either.” She said the Serbs want decentralization of Kosovo, and they want to have their own self-government and to organize their own lives, health care, education, local security, local police, etc. This would help Serbs to remain in Kosovo. But, the participant added, Kosovo’s Serbs will never accept the idea of being institutionally disconnected from Belgrade. We should return Serbs where possible, she said, maintaining that to do otherwise would be against UN resolution 1244.

A senior international official working in Kosovo said that the concept of fear is one of the biggest obstacles to making any progress. After the NATO bombing, for right or wrong, UNMIK was perceived as an UNMIK of the Albanians. “This was untrue or should have been untrue” but perceptions often become a reality, the official said. The difficulty in Pristina now is creating any sort of progress in terms of multiethnicity. One of the sides has such a strong fear that it prevents them from taking part in democratic institutions, he said. He asked how anyone can go on building multiethnicity or democracy effectively if one of the groups has to be surrounded by guards and live in enclaves. Even Serb interpreters at UNMIK need bodyguards to come to work. Things are very slowly changing, he said, adding that, if the international community sticks to the path that has been already chosen, Kosovo will see small improvements, even during 2002.

KOSOVO: WHAT NEXT?

A US participant suggested that there is no fixed solution for the fate of the Serbs in Kosovo, simply because, so far, there is no fixed solution for Kosovo itself. Such a solution will require a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. In fact, after the end of the Kosovo war, PER succeeded on numerous occasions in bringing the Kosovar Albanian and Belgrade politicians together, but not in Belgrade. First, in April 2000, PER brought Ibrahim Rugova, Hashim Thaci, president of the Democratic Party of Kosova, and a number of leaders of the then Serbian opposition to meet with other regional leaders in Budapest. Later, in December 2000 in Athens, Rugova and Thaci, together with members of the new democratic government in Belgrade, took part in another PER-sponsored dialogue. As noted above, in October 2001, PER organized a meeting at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in Pristina, between a Serbian deputy prime minister and the leaders of the three most prominent Kosovar Albanian parties. PER hopes the time to organize a meeting in Belgrade is not far off. PER did invite Ibrahim Rugova to take part in the Belgrade roundtable, but apparently the time has not come for a Kosovar politician to accept such an invitation. Another problem is that, even if Ibrahim Rugova is welcome in Belgrade, former Kosovo Liberation Army commanders Hashim Thaci or Ramush Haradinaj, the president of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova, are far from welcome. That also creates a problem for Rugova, who must avoid aggravating internal political divisions in Kosovo.

The October PER meeting showed how difficult it is to establish any communication between Belgrade and Pristina. The sentiment of independence lies very deep among the Albanians of Kosovo, and nobody knows how to get around it. As this US participant said, “what one needs is a creative fiction to satisfy basic demands of both sides.”

How does the new democratic Belgrade approach the Kosovo problem? A high-level Yugoslav federal official said that FRY expects proper functioning of the newly-elected institutions of self-government in Kosovo and full implementation of the FRY-UNMIK agreement. FRY expects that the decision on the final status of Kosovo will be postponed for at least three years, the official said. He said FRY also expects that, after the creation of the new institutions is complete, Pristina will open a dialogue with Belgrade. He noted that President Kostunica has invited Ibrahim Rugova several times to meet with him.

A DOS party president pointed out that Belgrade has already proven that it wants to resolve problems in a different way from the previous government. Belgrade will not use force and is willing to allow the international community to participate in solving crises, the participant said. Despite obvious difficulties, the government decided to participate in Kosovo’s vote. Even after the decision was taken, there were officials in some DOS parties who actively campaigned against this decision, the official said. (Within DOS there are parties that have used anti-Albanian rhetoric in the past.) The registration of Serbs for the elections showed that the actual number of Serbs in Kosovo is

much larger than was acknowledged previously by the Albanians, the DOS party president said.

He said Serb participation in the election was a signal to the Albanians and the world that the new Belgrade wants to participate in the political life of Kosovo and wants to do it in a democratic way. This was the first and crucial step in reconciliation between the two nations. "We wanted to have a fresh start," the official said. He added that the nature of the society that is being created should be of greater concern than the state status of Kosovo. Is it going to be

We are very often asked why don't you give up this territory. But one does not often encounter the term 'give up' in politics.

a divided society with criminality, ghettos, hatred, or a democratic multiethnic society? he asked. This DOS party president maintained that the question of statehood and borders will become less relevant as the region moves toward the EU anyway.

Another problem in Kosovo is extremism, he continued. While Milosevic was in power, any means of fighting

against him were seen by many to be legitimate – even creating paramilitaries and encouraging extreme nationalism. Now Milosevic is no more, but those extremists cannot face the new reality, he said, adding that, after September 11, 2001, no extremism should be tolerated. The participant said he did find it encouraging that the majority of Kosovo's Albanians support Rugova's policy and do not want violence.

Belgrade is perfectly aware that all Albanians want an independent Kosovo, the DOS official said. But it remains to be seen what could happen if the two sides give some time to the process and start cooperating. Maybe both sides will come to a point when it will be easier to resolve this question, the official said. Opening discussions on the question of Kosovo's independence at this moment will reinforce tendencies that we have been trying to oppose for the last 10 years, this veteran of the Serb democratic movement said. He also pointed out that Serbian nationalism is just around the corner: "We are very often asked why don't you give up this territory. But one does not often encounter the term 'give up' in politics," the official said. "What is more often encountered in politics is the creation of better conditions for living, democratizing societies, and ultimately, while doing that, resolving the outstanding issues."

Today, Kosovo is a UN protectorate, this participant noted. He said it is admirable to speak about a multiethnic society in Kosovo, but maintained that, so far, a multiethnic society is a goal, maybe legitimate, but still just a goal. In Kosovo today, there is not even coexistence. Belgrade would be happy if there were simply a higher degree of coexistence at this stage, the official said. Luckily, he added, nobody in Serbia believes that Kosovo can be where it was. But he said everyone should remember that there are more than two answers to the dilemma of Kosovo's status – there are many creative

ways of allowing independence for all intents and purposes without establishing official independence.

A Serb participant, who has been involved in various kinds of Serb-Albanian dialogues for more than seven years, said he was very glad to see that one of the first moves of the new authorities in Belgrade was the release, albeit under political pressure, of Kosovar Albanian human-rights activist Flora Brovina. The process goes on, he said, noting that the current government has inherited from the previous one about 1,800 Albanian prisoners in Serbia, and at the time of the meeting, that figure was down to 170.²⁶ A week before the PER roundtable, President Kostunica pardoned Albin Kurti, one of the leaders of the Kosovar student movement. This gives some important moral ground to the new Belgrade authorities, the Serb participant said. Meanwhile, he added, the Serbian police have contributed significantly to finding bodies of Albanians murdered by the previous regime.

This participant said that Yugoslavia accepts the fact that the elections in Kosovo will lead to a substantial autonomy of the area, as prescribed by UN resolution 1244. But, he said, Yugoslavia also wants to know what will substantially change in the position of the Serbian population and other non-Albanians in Kosovo. After the end of the Kosovo war, 1,345 missing persons were registered by the Serbian government and relevant international bodies. So far there has been no information on the fate of these individuals, the participant said. He called it a moral, political, and economic problem, and cited some relevant figures: There are 236,000 Serb and non-Albanian refugees from Kosovo in Serbia proper. The population of Pristina before the war was 270,000 inhabitants; now that number has been doubled, but the number of Serbs in the city has fallen from 40,000 to 250. Out of 236,000 refugees, only 129 returned to Kosovo. A total of 140 cultural monuments were destroyed in Kosovo after June 10, 1999. Many are still under threat, the official said.

Improvement of relations between Tirana and Belgrade is the first step, he said, adding that a similar process for relations with Pristina should follow. The new authorities in Belgrade have done a lot within one year. The new democratic authorities in Pristina should start addressing these issues as soon as possible, the official said.

An American called Kosovo the major battleground in the region when it comes to stopping violence. The test in Kosovo is whether a multiethnic society can work there or not, and the answer is still unclear, the American said. He said that outside military presence will certainly help make it happen. According to the American, after the elections in Kosovo, it is the time to ensure that nationalism and extremism do not prevail.

Most of the Tirana participants emphasized strengthening the new institutions in Kosovo, rather than talking about the status of the area. Some of them stressed the beginning of the power transfer from the UN to the local Kosovar

²⁶ Most of these 170 were transferred to Kosovo in March 2002.

institutions. One of the Tirana participants, however, said that the real problems need to be addressed. "Talking in general terms will not bring solutions to the problems. Postponing the solution of the problem of Kosovo does not necessarily mean facilitating it," that official said. The international community should guarantee respect for human, minority and community rights, the official continued. Legitimate elected politicians in Kosovo should talk about the future status of Kosovo, and there should be no taboo on that subject, he said. The will of the great majority of the Kosovo public for independence should be respected, he said, adding that what can be debated is the form of that independence. The Albanians, together with all ethnic minorities in Kosovo, have to prove that Kosovo is a viable state, but it should be only the people of Kosovo, in dialogue with the international community, who decide the status of Kosovo, he said.

A high official of a European security body warned that, whenever the international community deals with a request to recognize a new state, it must be able to see that the new state is an institutionalized society, tolerant and multi-ethnic – and has a culture of confidence in state institutions. People are not taking up arms because they are criminals but because they do not believe in state institutions, the official said, adding that a society should not have a culture of violence. He said that he could not claim to know the hearts of the Kosovar Albanians but was sure that the underlying factor in their wish for independence is their desire to be certain that the final outcome in the Kosovo saga will not lead to the previous terrible situation, that history will not repeat itself. The international community has to reassure them that this will not happen, but also has to tell them that there can be no talk about independence until their society is tolerant, multiethnic, non-violent and has strong democratic institutions, the official said.

KOSOVO'S NEIGHBORHOOD

According to many participants, instability in Kosovo, and other unsolved issues, still hinder regional progress.

A Macedonian participant said that Kosovo's instability brought a war to Macedonia, the only state of the ex-Yugoslavia that left the federation peacefully. Macedonia has adopted the most democratic constitution in the Balkans – a constitution that includes full protection of minority rights, the participant said. But as soon as Macedonia and FRY signed the border agreement, militants from Kosovo attacked Macedonia, resulting in a war on Macedonian territory, this participant said. This happened despite the fact that, in 1999, Macedonia accepted some 360,000 mostly ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo, and despite Macedonia's cooperation with NATO during the Kosovo war. The war in Macedonia resulted in the EU-and US-brokered Ohrid agreement that changed the country's constitution. Presently, Macedonia is trying to reintegrate its territory and to continue its European integration, the Macedonian participant said.

A local minority leader from Serbia expressed his skepticism about the conclu-

sion that the crisis in Macedonia started because of the signing of the border treaty between Macedonia and FRY. There were, and there still are, many internal problems in Macedonia, he said.²⁷ He added that the events in Macedonia and South Serbia showed that the proactive role of the international community is essential in resolving ethnic problems. Management of the Presevo crisis is good news for the region, marking the end of the phase of military solutions and the beginning of the phase of solutions through political engagement, the minority leader said. The issue of whether the international community has a favorite in ethnic disputes is not important, he said. What is important, according to the minority leader, is to see that the privileges that were formed within the old framework are eliminated in the new states, and that societies stop accepting everyday acts of intolerance and discrimination as normal.

In Presevo, the local Albanian leaders convinced the Albanians there to take part in the Serbian elections in 2000. But the Albanians are still not included in the local administration in the communities of Medvedja and Bujanovac. This minority leader asked the Serbian government to organize new local elections for those municipalities.²⁸ Another problem for the local population there is the continuing presence of the former Kosovo police and the former Kosovo Corps in the Presevo valley, he said.

In the meantime, a senior international official pointed out, with the help of the OSCE Mission in Yugoslavia, a multiethnic police force was formed in southern Serbia. The international community is capable of facilitating a change on the ground, but it was a commitment of the Serbian government and the local Albanian leaders that made peace and improvements possible, the official said. He added that the international community has recognized that the government in Belgrade did not send tanks to Presevo, as would have happened under Milosevic, but started a dialogue instead.

Kosovo's instability brought a war to Macedonia, the only state of the ex-Yugoslavia that left the federation peacefully.

²⁷ In reply to this comment, the Macedonian insisted that the war was started by extremists from Kosovo who crossed the Macedonian border: "They were ready to exploit the Macedonian interethnic problems for their own gains. This short war was not a war for better and wider rights for the Albanians in Macedonia, but a war for 'liberation' of ethnic territories of Albanians in Macedonia. The international community did and should continue to show that no territorial solutions to ethnic problems are allowed... The mistake of the Macedonians was not to resolve the ethnic problems at the time and allow them to develop into a more serious crisis."

²⁸ In early 2002, the Serbian government announced that early local elections will be held in those municipalities. The agreement to that effect was signed by the mayor of Presevo Riza Halimi, Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Nebojsa Covic and the head of OMiFRY, Stefano Sannino.

YUGOSLAV-ALBANIAN BILATERAL TIES

Relations among the various Albanian communities in the region are diverse. Tirana obviously plays a crucial role in the developments there. During the war in Kosovo, Belgrade and Tirana's ties, which were never rosy before, worsened significantly, and diplomatic relations between the two countries broke down. The change of regime in Belgrade allowed FRY and Albania to reestablish these relations in January 2001. (At the roundtable, a high level Serbian official called for bringing relations between the two states to the ambassadorial level, and this idea was supported by the Albanian participants.) Since the reestablishment of relations between Serbia and Albania, a number of contacts were made, not only between the foreign ministers but also between other officials, businessmen and people from cultural and artistic circles. Both countries are part of the EU Stabilization and Association process.

In Macedonia, Albania has already shown that it can provide a good, moderating influence... Why not do the same in Kosovo?

An Albanian official proposed creating a mini-Schengen agreement for the Balkans. Albanians are ready for that, he said, but the Bulgarians or Romanians are not, because they are not allowed by Brussels to move in that

direction. He said such an agreement could foster further regional cooperation and advised the EU to be more attentive to the region – and take into consideration the specifics of the Balkans. This could also help Kosovo, because Tirana sees Kosovo within a larger Europe as well. A leading Albanian politician invited politicians from the area and from the rest of Europe to offer models for a customs union for the region, regional trade associations and a regional parliamentary assembly. Another Albanian participant noted that the progress in relations between Albania and Yugoslavia would not be complete if there is no progress in Kosovo.

A member of the Albanian opposition said that there should not be any problem in improving relations between Belgrade and Tirana. Despite Tirana's often discordant political climate, the opposition did not object to the ruling faction's plan for reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, he said. He warned, however, that there is still some hostility against the Albanians in Belgrade. There are statements about "Albanian" terrorism or bin Laden bases in Albania. Such remarks do not help improve the relations between the two countries, he said.

As for the relationship between Tirana and Kosovo, he said that the very fact that the Albanians from Tirana came to Belgrade shows that there are possibilities for the Kosovar Albanians to talk with Belgrade officials as well. The venue, however, is not that important, he said. He called on his own government to be open about its interests in Kosovo and its interest in the lives of the Albanians there. In Macedonia, Albania has already shown that it can provide a good, moderating influence, he said, asking: Why not do the same in Kosovo?

INTEGRATING THE BALKANS

The participants also deliberated on the relations between the international community and Yugoslavia, as well as the rest of the region. The sentiment was expressed that the international community owes a clear and more precise set of expectations and assistance to the region – a predictable package. But, conversely, some participants noted, the region itself, including Yugoslavia, bears considerable responsibility for behaving in ways that will make it possible for the international community to address its own concerns about regional security and progress. The conclusion of this part of the discussion could be summed up in the words of a participant from Zagreb: "Tomorrow we will need each other, because tomorrow we will be in the European Union and we will no longer be counterparts or enemies, we will be members of the same Union.... We will also have to learn how to work together to make our region stronger and more competitive economically in the vibrant and very competitive European and world markets."

A US participant pointed out that even though Milosevic is gone, the problems are not. The fragmentation on an ethnic basis has not stopped, she said. Furthermore, she noted, the economies of the region are in distress and, if they rely on financial assistance from the West, they are not viable economies. The West needs to accelerate its political and economic assistance to the region, the US participant said. She invited the other participants to think of the future generations: "You do not want them to be raised in the spirit of suspicion and hatred that has existed in the region in the last ten years. It is the time to sit down and talk about the painful events of the nineties but also to talk about the future. If you do not do this, you will be left behind."

An exchange took place on the issue of the role and efficiency of Europe and European institutions in resolving ethnic problems. It started when one of the US participants asked whether ethnic problems could be solved in a united Europe, simply because borders have disappeared. So far, united Europe has not been able to solve multiple problems in relations between ethnic groups, the participant said. There should be some reexamination of these issues by the EU, Council of Europe, and OSCE, the participant said, adding: The aspirations for Europe can be a beacon, a guiding light, but that alone might not solve the problems; the devil is in the details, the American said.

A Balkan country politician said it was hard to be sure that the absence of meaningful borders in Europe would solve ethnic problems. Europe is, however, approaching a new era. Until now borders produced diasporas, the politician said, adding that it is unclear how a united Europe will affect that process.

The American said that, despite the prospect of a united Europe, the Europeans have to think more about the diasporas and their legal status. He wondered whether the European response, which takes the form of protecting minority rights, language rights and human rights is a sufficient response to resolving the problems of diasporas. It seems that Europe tries to escape the political and legal issues of diasporas simply because it is so difficult to deal

with them, he said. The Balkan politician who spoke before agreed that the issue is very serious, noting that the problems of diasporas are problems of identities. "To whom will you be loyal, to your mother state or to the state where you live?" he asked. It is one thing to be in Catalonia, because there is no Catalonia outside of Spain, but there is an Albania outside of Kosovo, there is Hungary outside of Transylvania and there is Russia outside of northeastern Estonia, the Balkan politician said.

A European official said that the EU is not a panacea for the ethnic problems of the region, but it does help to have the EU involved in resolving those problems.

While the countries of the region should continue to look toward Europe, they should start thinking about how to produce security themselves – and not only to consume it.

There are a number of places in Western Europe where the EU has helped, the official said: Borders can become more transparent, people can work, study, live wherever they want, and use the same currency.

A senior international official working in the Balkans commented that, while the countries of the region should continue to look toward Europe, they should start thinking about how to produce security themselves – and not

only to consume it. This approach is a qualitative change in the attitude of the international community, the senior official said.

The international community, he continued, spends too much time concentrating on ethnic relations, and it should, at some point, move from defending minority rights to defending civic rights. A modern Europe recognizes not just Albanians, Hungarians and others, but primarily citizens of states, he said. This is not something that has been achieved everywhere in Europe. For example, he noted that, in Italy, only recently the issue of South Tyrol (Trentino Alto Adige) has been finally resolved between Rome and Vienna. There are sensitive discussions on similar issues between Italy and Slovenia and Italy and Croatia, the senior international official said. One has to find the best framework in which to deal with these problems. Europe just might be that framework, he said: It is not the answer, but certainly a framework. The former Yugoslav states might not be accepted into Europe immediately, but Europe is a framework that will produce a qualitative change in the ways that these countries deal with the problems, the senior official said.

This participant concluded by saying that the EU must clearly point out that there also must be a regional framework as the first step toward entering the European framework. The EU is responsible for providing such a framework in the region, and it should work together with the local actors on producing it, he said.

Another senior international official agreed that the countries of the region should talk about regional or sub-regional integration before they start dis-

ussing European integration. Everyone wants to integrate with the UK, Germany, or even more so with the US, the official said, but nobody in the Balkans wants to integrate with his neighbors. There will be no European integration without integration with the neighbors, especially here in the Balkans, he said.

This senior international official said that politicians in the region plead to the international community all the time, but nobody has considered the interests of that community, as if the only thing the international community has to do is to solve the problems of the Balkans, to give them aid and support and get nothing in return. He complained that the countries of the region feel no obligation toward the international community and show no respect for its interests, which are stability, cooperation and peace. The international community is not interested in states that are not economically sound, in ethnically clean states, in states that create instability in the region, he said. If you can prove that the new state will be more tolerant, more stable, strongly multiethnic, that it will produce more prosperity, then the international community will be interested in supporting such a state, the official said. But, he asked, if it produces none of that, frankly, why should we even be interested in such a state?

This stimulated a US participant to comment on the nature of European integration. European integration, he said, does not only mean giving up one's sovereignty to Brussels, it also means strengthening one's own sovereignty, creating a strong state. An Albanian participant noted that a major problem in the Balkans is the lack of strong states. The sources of this weakness, he said, are the lack of rule of law, the communist heritage, regional rivalries and the continuing presence of a corrupt elite. The real task for the international community is to challenge that situation, he said, adding that the EU is interested in strong states only, states that can manage themselves.

But, the US participant asked, what does a strong, modern state mean? Is it a nation state, a centralized state, a state with economic protectionism? No, he said, it is a decentralized state, with a free market economy, with good neighborly relations, and if it is multiethnic, with good interethnic relations. In multiethnic states, he said, integration has two faces: one is integration into Europe, the other is integration of different ethnic communities inside of the countries. This is the only sure way toward creating a strong state, the US participant said.

Another factor that will positively influence state building is fostering the maturity of local leadership, the participant continued. This should not be confused with building civic societies. After all, Serbian civic society was flourishing under Milosevic, but the political leadership lacked maturity, the American said. That maturity includes such virtues as accountability, responsibility, statesmanship, etc., he said, adding that a new, reform-minded, and capable state bureaucracy is needed for the Balkan countries as well.

The US participant emphasized that the lack of a strong state is exactly the rea-

son that European integration is far away for Kosovo or Bosnia. These places are virtual protectorates of the international community. If the international community is serious about these territories, it has to develop them in a serious and profound way, to strengthen the countries themselves and their economies, rather than just to contain the trouble and distribute humanitarian aid, said the US participant.

A Balkan diplomat said that years of sanctions against Yugoslavia, Macedonia, and a number of other countries in the Balkans, created a particular set of elites, who would like to keep the economic positions they gained during the times of sanctions and are ready to fight to prevent regular investment from coming into their countries. Organized crime and human trafficking are the most serious challenges to national security in the Balkans, the diplomat said. Crime undermines any efforts by the region to strengthen itself and its economies and move toward Europe, he said. The crime situation in the region is the best proof that terrorism and extremism have no passport, religion or ethnic origin, he added.

This participant mentioned another serious problem of the region, namely, the lack of infrastructure and lack of transportation links.²⁹ Outside of some Greek and Italian investment, the diplomat said, there is no serious investment in the region. It is still unclear how major investors will come to a region with poor infrastructure and communication links, he said.

This is a part of a dilemma mentioned by a European official: On one hand, the EU needs to encourage good behavior by the candidate countries; on the other hand, institutions within those countries are not strong enough to deal with the problems and to implement EU-style laws.

Another European official said that the EU should help the Balkan countries adopt European legislation. He recalled that a Belgrade official told him recently that he would gladly become a translation office for translating documents of the EU into Serbian.

At the Zagreb summit on November 24, 2000, the EU promised all Balkan states future membership, the official said, noting that the stabilization and association process is a powerful machinery that has been employed by the EU in the region. This new EU instrument for Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia and Yugoslavia is endowed with a financial reference amount of EUR 4.65 billion over the period of 2000-2006. It will accompany and support the democratic, economic and institutional reforms of the five countries concerned. Major trade concessions were made for these countries that will favor access to the EU market for their industrial and agricultural products, the European official said.

As for the region's expectations from the international community, they want to be free of the fears that troubled West Europeans after World War II – fears of poverty and war, said a head of a European body. The international com-

munity should try to help these countries to overcome these fears. There is a bad tradition of the zero-sum game in this region, the European official said. To change that tradition will require a change in mentality. The international community should make a strong and clear statement that the borders are not going to change, that violent means are no longer accepted, the official said. It has to mobilize financial means to promote security through development within the framework of sub-regional integration as a part of the European integration process, he added.

A member of the Serbian government invited the European institutions to work together in developing further mechanisms of integration. Regional prospects are good the Serb leader said. There might be some incidents, the leader admitted, but the wars are over: In Serbia and Montenegro, in Macedonia, and in other countries, the problems are being solved now through political means. For the first time in the history of the Balkans, all of the governments have been democratically elected and all want to join Europe, the Serb leader said.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE BALKANS

The power of the European example and a European future is strong, but, in some cases, pure physical military intervention was needed in the Balkans. In Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia, there are European and US armed guards on the streets to prevent conflict from restarting. Bosnia is certainly not a successful case in European integration, but might be a successful case in peacekeeping. In Kosovo, even with the presence of those guards, violence is still taking place, though on a smaller scale than before their arrival.

A US participant pointed out that his country played a very important role in securing peace in the Balkans. It is not clear how US political goals will shift, or if Europe will be capable of dealing with these problems without the US, the participant said, adding that the US supports a pro-European orientation of the Balkan countries. The US is not trying to compete with the EU, said a US official – far from it. It is very telling that the amount of assistance given to Serbia and Yugoslavia increased after September 11, 2001: The number of personnel that is being sent to the region is growing, the American participant said. In the areas where the EU is taking the lead, the US is going to be very supportive, the official said. America is going to maintain its presence in the region, and its interest in the region will not change after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, according to this official. There might be some reductions in troop levels in Bosnia or in Kosovo, reflecting the needs of the war on terrorism, but they will not mean abandonment of the Balkans, the participant said. The US brings something

The US brings something to the regional equation that is unique and necessary.

²⁹ e.g., a participant from Tirana had to travel to Belgrade through Zurich and Munich.

to the regional equation that is unique and necessary, the official said, adding that, without a continuing active US involvement there will not be the success that everybody wants in securing democracy, stability and peace in the region.

An EU official seconded these remarks. The EU favors strong US involvement in the region, and the US is essential for the stability in the region and its development, he said. The EU and the US have managed to build a strong partnership in the region. For instance, in the case of crisis management in Macedonia, a coherent EU-US team worked productively together toward helping the country to produce a peace agreement, the EU official said.

America has a unique military capacity of engagement in the Balkans that will be necessary for a number of years, this European said. There is, however, already a shift toward a stronger EU engagement, he added. More than 80 percent of all troops deployed in the Balkans come from the EU countries. In Macedonia, the deployment exclusively uses troops from the EU, within the NATO framework, he said. Gradually the EU will take on more tasks and the US will gradually reduce its presence, he said, but it will happen slowly. A very comforting thought and reassurance for today is that the slogan, “In Together—Out Together,” works well for both the EU and the US, the European official said.

In this context a diplomat from a Balkan country warned that any pull-out, even a partial one, of the US military from the Balkans will most certainly generate some negative political repercussions in the region. A senior official of a European security organization agreed that the American presence is absolutely needed: It is important for balance in the region, and it is important in order to give a certain level of self-confidence to all those involved, including the local populations. The Balkan countries can only welcome the reassurances that the Americans did not lose their interest in the Balkans, the official said. A Kosovar Serb said that US presence in Kosovo is of great importance and is vital for preservation of human rights in Kosovo.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Republic of Albania

Luan Hajdaraga, Deputy Foreign Minister

Edmond Haxhinasta, Charge d’Affaires, Embassy in Yugoslavia

Paskal Milo, Minister of State for European Integration

Fatos Nano, President, Socialist Party

Genc Pollo, President, New Democrat Party

Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Radomir Bogdanovic, Minister-Counselor, Embassy in Yugoslavia

Mladen Ivanic, Prime Minister, Republika Srpska

Ljubisa Markovic, Member of Presidency, Social Democratic Party;

Mayor, Municipality of Central Sarajevo

Republic of Croatia

Josip Paro, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs

Milorad Pupovac, President, Serb National Council

Ivo Skrabalo, Member, Parliament of Croatia; Member,

Foreign Relations Committee, Parliament of Croatia

Hellenic Republic

Alex Mallias, Ambassador; Head, Southeast Europe Department,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Michael Spinellis, Ambassador to Yugoslavia

Republic of Hungary

Jozsef Pandur, Ambassador to Yugoslavia

[Former Yugoslav] Republic of Macedonia

Gorgi Spasov, Secretary General, Social Democratic League of Macedonia

Romania

Ioan Mircea Pascu, Minister of National Defense

Sergiu Vintila, Chief, Defense and Security Policies Department,
Ministry of National Defense

Republic of Turkey

Ahmet Acet, Ambassador to Yugoslavia

Hakan Olcay, Head, Coordination Office in Pristina

United States of America

Glenn Chafetz, Political Officer, Embassy in Yugoslavia

William Montgomery, Ambassador to Yugoslavia

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Federal Institutions

Miroljub Labus, Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Economic Relations Abroad

Rasim Ljajic, Minister for National and Ethnic Groups; President, Sandzak Democratic Party

Dragoljub Micunovic, President, Chamber of Citizens, Parliament of FRY; President, Democratic Center Party

Predrag Simic, Foreign Policy Adviser to the President of FRY

Vladimir Veres, Ambassador; Director, Department of Planning and Analysis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Republic of Montenegro

Ranko Krivokapic, President, Social Democratic Party; Chairman, Committee on Human Rights, Parliament of Montenegro

Miodrag Vukovic, Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Issues to the President of Montenegro; Head, Parliamentary Group of the Democratic Party of Socialists, Parliament of Montenegro

Zoran Zizic, Vice President, Socialist People's Party

Republic of Serbia

Riza Halimi, President, Party for Democratic Action; Mayor, Municipality of Presevo

Dusan Janjic, Director, Forum for Ethnic Relations; Member, PER Council for Ethnic Accord

Zarko Korac, Deputy Prime Minister; President, Social Democratic Union

Vojislav Stanovcic, Member, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts; Member, PER Council for Ethnic Accord

Rada Trajkovic, Head, Coalition Povratak Group, Kosovo Assembly; Vice President, Christian Democratic Party of Serbia

The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Shannon Lawder, Program Director, Central and Eastern Europe

Walter Veirs, Associate Program Officer

European Union

Stefan Lehne, Head, Western Balkans and Central Europe Task Force, Political Unit, Council of the European Union

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Stefano Sannino, Ambassador; Head, OSCE Mission in Yugoslavia

Adrian Severin, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; Member, PER Council for Ethnic Accord

Project on Ethnic Relations

Alex Grigor'ev, Program Officer (USA)

Allen Kassof, President (USA)

Livia Plaks, Executive Director (USA)

Mihailo Vojnovic, Representative in Serbia and Montenegro

United Nations

Andy Bearpark, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General; Head, EU Mission in Kosovo

Fabrizio Hochschild, Acting Representative to FRY, High Commissioner for Refugees



Left to right: Rasim Ljajic, Fabrizio Hochschild, Mladen Ivanic.



Left to right: Vojislav Stanovcic, Stefan Lehne, Riza Halimi.



Left to right: Milorad Pupovac, Ivo Skrabalo.

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