

The conclusions of the Timisoara Conference

The situation from the Balkans is one of the important topics on the Bucharest Summit agenda, and it will be debated behind closed doors by the heads of states and governments. In order to offer a platform of public debate for this issue of high interest, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Euro-Atlantic Council of Romania (EACR), through the Institute of Public Policies (IPP) and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) organized the Conference of Timisoara - "NATO in the South-Eastern Europe – reconstruction and security in the Balkans”.

The intense debates of public diplomacy from Timisoara showed an increased interest in the issue of security in the Balkans, especially in the current context, of Kosovo’s proclaimed independence. The issue of Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans was also debated within other high-level reunions of NATO, but the Bucharest event promises some actual decisions to be taken about Croatia, Albania and Macedonia.

As part of the Timisoara debates, the **State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Victor Micula**, re-stated Romania’s position: we are not going to withdraw from Kosovo, even if we don’t acknowledge its independence. *“Our view on NATO’s future refers to an Alliance with a clear perspective on the Balkans, an Alliance endowed with the capacity of facing risks and threats addressed to our security, and that should consolidate partnerships with our neighboring countries or even with farther countries, but which share our common goals”*, stated Victor Micula. The State Secretary from MAE added that Romania expects for three major issues concerning this space to be among the April Summit’s outcomes: enlargement of the Alliance with the candidate states from the Western Balkans - Croatia, Albania and the Republic of Macedonia, strengthening NATO’s relationships with the three states admitted as part of the Peace Partnership- Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, as well as the NATO operation in Kosovo (KFOR).

In his turn, the **former Defense Minister, Sorin Frunzaverde**, tried to explain what the results of this state of uncertainty regarding the Balkans are: *“It has been 20 years since the conflict in the former Yugoslav region started and not only Kosovo lost its autonomy, but also Voivodina, another very interesting province from the area, lost all the autonomous democratic prerogatives. These are states with problems, surely, and most frequently these problems are diverse and specific, but all these states encounter a high level of organized crime, inability to build an efficient police force, and I believe that, since we are speaking of democracy, the existence of two types*

of opposition in each of these states: a political opposition and a nationalist and national opposition, of an opposition of the important minorities in those states”.

The manner in which the North-Atlantic Alliance is perceived in the Balkans is presented by **professor Luciana Ghica, from the Faculty of Political Sciences of Bucharest**: *“a large majority of politicians in the Balkans perceive NATO more and more negatively, which should ring a bell for NATO, since NATO is, together with the European Union, the main actor holding a record of decreasing popularity, in a previous year survey in the Balkans”.*

The statements made by Luciana Ghica were confirmed by **Avgustina Tzvetkova, the President of the Balkan Mosaic Foundation of Bulgaria**, who said that in his country the percentage of trust in NATO decreased from over 65% when joining the Alliance to only 47% in the present, this regress of popularity being the result of people’s understanding not only the advantages offered by NATO, but also acknowledging the responsibilities that come along with the advantages of being a member state.

On the other hand, **Michel Duray**, the representative of the **Public Diplomatic Division of NATO** underlined the fact the Alliance does not recruit new member states, does not make propaganda for its expansion in the non-member states, but offers a partnership relation starting from sharing some common values.

He voiced the belief that the evolution of the region will be a positive one, showing that all Balkan states are, at their own free will, either member states of the Alliance, or candidates, or included in the Partnership for Peace, which means that they want to understand and apply the NATO model of security, they want to be part of the western values world.

Also, the **former negotiator of Romania with the European Union, Vasile Puscas**, underlined that the role of NATO in the Balkans can no longer be perceived outside a tight collaboration with UE: *“The European Union as well as NATO hold a tremendous interest, a major interest for this area of the Balkans to no longer encounter the deviations it had in the past. So it’s in the common interest of both these two organizations to work together in order to speed up the integration process of this space in the two organizations. As far as the security interest is concerned, I don’t believe it would be neither fair nor accurate to say that NATO and the European Union are merely the bearers of certain values. They also have certain interests from this perspective, and we have the possibility to build a strategy in this space.”* Vasile Puscas’ point of view was supported by another participant in the Timisoara debates, **Sever Voinescu, on behalf of**

the Institute for Public Policies: *“at least on a real level, the relationship between NATO and the European Union bears little content. Many hopes, but not enough grounds. The Balkans can be an opportunity to bring substance and content to this relationship.”*

Alistair Cameron, the Chief of the European Security Programme from the Royal Institute of Defense Studies of London, believes that the situation in the Balkans, a security risk area, has changed and will continue to change the relationship between NATO- European Union: *“We all had to learn how to collaborate in the Balkans, as it is often need that brings the world together for finding a solution. This had often resulted in mistakes but also in success. (...) NATO, ONU, the European Union have approached the Balkans also as a way of redefining themselves, by the chosen type of action. The outcome was the emergence of organizations with different capacities and mandates. So, it is highly important, bearing the Balkans example in mind, for these institutions to collaborate in the field”.*

Zoran Vujic, Deputy Minister for NATO and Defense from the Foreign Ministry of Serbia draw the attention on the fact that the perspective of European integration of his country has received a serious blow after Kosovo’s proclaiming independence and the acknowledgement of such independence by some countries of the European Union. Zoran Vujic stated that the European integration has lost masses support and that for at least six to eight month from now on any progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration of Serbia is impossible, due to the frustration created by the proclaimed independence of Kosovo. Regarding the joining of NATO, *“now the support for the Alliance is completely dead in Serbia”*, as Minister Vujic said.

Present at the Conference’s sessions, **UDMR deputy, Toro Tibor** sustained that the insecurity and instability problems in the Balkan, Central and Eastern European countries originate in the treaties signed after the two World Wars, according to which the new established state boundaries did not coincide with those of nations. **Jonathan Eyal, the director of International Studies Department with the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) of Great Britain** stated that the representatives of the Hungarian minority, who have, till now, maintained a democratic line in their discourse, are wrong by making an analogy between the situation in Kosovo and the one in the Tinutul Secuiesc, Romania. *“You are not doing anyone a favour by comparing the autonomy model from Tinutul Secuiesc with the one in Kosovo, where the concept emerged after a very violent past”*, said Jonathan Eyal. Also, the analyst Jonathan Eyal added that Romania is a country that did a lot for the rights of the minorities and it is not isolated in NATO regarding its position concerning Kosovo, especially

if we bear in mind that Madrid is one of the capitals that did not acknowledge the independence proclaimed by Pristine, although Spain granted autonomy and collective rights for minorities.

In his turn, the representative of the Bulgarian minority in the Romanian Parliament, **deputy Niculae Mircovici**, considers that the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union would take a wise decision if they included all the Balkan states, together, within their structures.

Niculae Mircovici showed that although UN is not a reformed institution, it must take into account the decisions of the Security Council, even more so as this Council provided for world stability and balance, and was brave enough to decide on force interventions in areas threatening world peace, in the far more difficult conditions of the cold war.

During the debates, **the president of Timis County Council, Constantin Ostaficiuc**, stated that Timisoara is a multicultural and multi-religious model for the entire Europe, as it is a city where 18 minorities live peacefully together with the Romanian population. In its turn, the **Prefect of Timis, Ovidiu Draganescu**, underlined the fact that between 1970 and 1980, the Yugoslavian space represented for Romanians *'the route to freedom, an example for us, and this is why the difficult situation faced by former Yugoslavia after 1990 was not at all a reason for joy for the Romanian people.'*

(Source: RADOR, Radio Romania Actualitati, Rompres)