

Has Anyone Seen Our Policy?

The Balkans threatened to explode again last spring. With the aid of some judgment and even more luck, the European Union and the United States prevented three tumors in the western Balkans from turning malignant.

The feared outbreak of widescale violence around Mitrovica, the divided city in northern Kosovo, did not happen.

Tension in the Presevo region of southern Serbia, called Eastern Kosovo by Albanians, did not degenerate into a messy firefight between Kosovo Liberation Army-backed rebels, Serb police, and Kosovo Peacekeeping Force forces as some at NATO headquarters feared.

Montenegro, the tottering domino, still stands.

Despite the good fortune, the EU, United States, and NATO still have developed no coherent strategy that will ensure long-term peace and democracy in the region. In the short term, the absence of a coherent strategy for Balkan reconstruction ensures that small but potentially dangerous crises can flare up unexpectedly at any time, as they did in both Mitrovica and Presevo. In the long term, the policy void may create a fundamental sense of mistrust between Balkan countries and the West that could undermine attempts to stabilize the region.

Clues to Progress

Last spring, as tension in these three areas relaxed, Western policymakers breathed a sigh of relief and turned their attention to more constructive matters. On the political front, the long-awaited Stability Pact Donors' Conference, held at the end of March in Brussels, did not break down in confu-

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sion as some had predicted. In fact, thanks to careful planning, the conference exceeded its funding target; \$1.8 billion will now be diverted over the next 18 months into the so-called Quick Start program. Quick Start is intended to finance high-visibility projects designed to have the maximum impact on the greatest possible number of Balkan citizens so that Western assistance ascends from the realm of bureaucratic imagination into an uncertain Balkan reality.

The shift from political crisis to economic reconstruction was a welcome relief. Chris Patten, the EU external affairs commissioner, has indicated that the success of Quick Start will be crucial in sustaining support within the region for the West's strategy. But already the sense of policy drift—especially in Kosovo and Serbia—has begun to overshadow the Stability Pact's promise of swift investment.

In Kosovo, Bernard Kouchner, the head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), seems determined to force through a bold program that could see municipal elections take place in Kosovo as early as October. To complement this renewed spirit of commitment, a rhetoric of complacency is at last yielding to a language that admits there is much unfinished business in the Balkans. Even Lord George Robertson, secretary general of NATO, for whom the glass is invariably half-full, now concedes that "no one can be satisfied with the current situation."

Patten and Javier Solana, the EU foreign policy chief, are more specific: "Western policy in the Balkans," they reported to the EU heads of government in March, "suffers from the multiplicity of institutions," and "from complex and lengthy procedures for policy formulation." Balkan policy is made and executed by a bewildering number of overlapping and competing organizations, and this clearly leads to a degree of confusion. But according to Carl Bildt, Balkan reconstruction faces a more fundamental hurdle: "It is less a question of too many cooks spoiling the broth," the UN special representative to the Balkans has said. "It is more that we don't have a recipe."

Deciphering the Strategy

To solve the baffling case of the missing policy, the EU and the United States have to disentangle operational problems from strategic goals before clarifying exactly what those goals are. Patten and Solana have now grasped the tactical issue. Their report and recommendations are sober and sensible. The most pressing problems are Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro, and Stability Pact implementation, in that order. On Kosovo, the big issue is civil and voter registration, a massive operation that is being jointly carried out by Kouchner's UNMIK and the Kosovo mission of the Organization for Secu-

rity and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Hostility or indifference to the electoral process represents a real threat to Western strategy.

The U.S. State Department has understood just how significant the election strategy could be for Kosovo and the wider region. So it has politely but firmly offered Kouchner (almost certainly using the influence of Kouchner's highly regarded U.S. deputy, Jock Covey) a political road map to guide Kosovo out of the present cul-de-sac: after elections, a local Albanian/Serb civil service should be established while the UN will define precisely the "substantial autonomy" that Kosovo is to receive in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which supposedly defines the province's status.

Once the "substantial autonomy" has been defined, the UN, the United States, and the EU will open the highly sensitive debate on "final status." Nobody is especially looking forward to that, because it seems primed to deepen the divide between Serbs and Albanians.

Although still sharing the same goal (the fall of Milosevic), Western policymakers and the Serb opposition are becoming disillusioned with one another. Western frustration stems from the conviction that, although Milosevic has rarely been so weak politically, the opposition is even weaker and apparently incapable of capitalizing on the Serb regime's obvious inadequacies.

The opposition believes that Milosevic is able to use Serbia's isolation and, in particular, the network of sanctions operating against Serbia to legitimize his rule. But as in other key areas, the West is divided on the question of sanctions. "The tension between the Clinton administration and the EU over the efficiency of sanctions and how to bring down Milosevic surfaces regularly," Steven Erlanger wrote recently in *The New York Times*. He added that many Europeans believed that "opening up trade, contracts, and travel with Serbia will bring down Mr. Milosevic much faster than isolation."

The EU has dropped its ban on airlines flying to Belgrade and, although the opposition welcomed this symbolic move, it points out that it hardly amounts to a coherent strategy. The failure to achieve any result in Serbia becomes more embarrassing by the day. In their frustration, both the Europeans and Americans have started to explore what is called "the Ceausescu option." As the opposition cannot provide the leverage required to topple Milosevic, covert investigations are being carried out to identify anybody from within Milosevic's regime who may be willing to assume the role Ion Iliescu played in the downfall of the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in December 1989.

Western policy no longer has any leverage over Milosevic.

The recent outburst of capricious state violence aimed in particular against the independent media and the student opposition movement, *Otpor* (Resistance), has rendered any policy initiatives redundant. The new law on terrorism, due to pass Serbia's parliament at press time, confirms that Milosevic is discarding autocracy for totalitarianism.

The Serbian leader now prefers terror and bullying over intrigue and manipulation as his main instruments of power. Independent observers in Belgrade offer conflicting explanations for the recent dramatic increase in

murders of prominent regime figures. Some believe that the government is deliberately stoking an atmosphere of arbitrary terror in order to justify the draconian response of the terrorism law. Others suggest that the regime is being corrupted from within as mafia clans vie for influence.

Western policy no longer has any leverage over Milosevic, in part enabling him to shut down democratic institutions. In the absence of a significant popular uprising or the emergence of a powerful anti-Milosevic fac-

tion within the governing elite, one may assume that the Serbian leader will retain his grip on power.

Milosevic's domestic strength casts an especially long shadow over the reformist Montenegrin president, Milo Djukanovic. For three years, Djukanovic has been an effective thorn in Milosevic's side, preventing the Yugoslav president from steamrolling legislation through the federal parliament and providing both Serbs and Montenegrins with a real political alternative.

But Djukanovic's position is by no means secure. The recent local election results in the coastal town of Herceg Novi, which his coalition lost to Milosevic supporters, and the capital, Podgorica, where he won as expected, have weakened rather than strengthened his position. Montenegro hovers near bankruptcy at the moment, but its situation is set to deteriorate further in the autumn. Federal elections are scheduled, as are local elections in Serbia. Local observers expect Milosevic to mount a serious attempt both to wrest control of all local councils from the opposition in Serbia and, more worryingly, to undermine Djukanovic's base in Montenegro.

Western policy is faced with a series of grave, interrelated crises in the Balkans. It is striking that a year after the victory in Kosovo, policy has been torn this way and that by the usual cast of squabbling actors, incompetent acronyms masquerading as blimpish neocolonialists, and keystone cops. The resources invested in the military campaign against Serbia were vast, run-

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ning into many billions of dollars. The follow-up has been lamentable.

The sloth with which reconstruction is being undertaken has contributed to the development of a vast criminal fraternity which extends well beyond Serbia through Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia, Macedonia, and elsewhere. This region is now home to the most intense concentration of organized crime in Europe, dispatching drugs, women, cigarettes, and refugees into the EU and absorbing stolen goods from an even wider area.

The criminalization of the Balkans is headache enough for the EU. But if policymakers in Washington and Brussels continue to fail in their search for an effective common policy, then it is not just crime they will be facing. There will be more war.