

European Issue
n°195
20th february 2011

EU-Western Balkans Relations: the European Bermuda Triangle?

from **Gaëlle Pério**,
journalist

SUMMARY The Balkan road to European integration seems to have slowed to the point of being at stalemate for the populations of the region who are not acquainted with the complexity of the integration procedure, which is moving along nevertheless. Since the grand declarations of the European Council in Thessaloniki in 2003 on the European future of the Western Balkans, which were re-iterated at the EU-Balkans Summit last June, seven years have gone by and yet the results that had been hoped for have still not been produced. Three Balkan countries are officially candidates (Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro) – the others are still waiting. Of course some major hurdles have been overcome – such as the liberalisation of the visas system but surely we can do better than that?

1. STATE OF AFFAIRS

1.1 Negative Image

The Balkans do not enjoy a good image with other European citizens – at least in the Member States which have had little contact with the Balkans. In many Member States these small countries are dogged by pre-conceived ideas – they are too complicated, too violent – and this distorts the impression and the interest that a portion of public opinion might have. Many European capitals know very little or nothing of the Western Balkans – either of their present situation, their desires or their hopes. The Balkans regularly suffer an image that matches a reality of the past but which is now rather simplistic; i.e. the Balkans rhyme with war criminals, mass graves, mafia and ethnic conflict. It is difficult with labels such as these to raise any positive interest. Hence there is a poor image which in part goes together with a lack of knowledge of these societies and how they work. But contrary to this relative indifference other Member States which either border the Western Balkans or in which there is an important diaspora (Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Austria etc ...) take greater interest in a region with whom they have a shared history in some cases, or in which they have a vested interest in others. For these countries the possibility of enlargement is the source of hope but also of some extremely important questions.

1.2 Hard Reality

It is true that in addition to their external image the situation in the Balkans is difficult: endemic unemployment (the official unemployment rate – just like the unofficial one – is all the more daunting), difficult situations, immediate, often violent reactions. The unemployment rate in Bosnia-Herzegovina for example is estimated at between 40 and 45% that of Serbia totals nearly 17%. The Balkans lay far behind EU national levels. In comparison the unemployment rate in Belgium lies at 7.9% and 4.2% in Denmark. The acceptance of European values is still not very marked even though an extremely motivated civil society is now emerging. Although the conflicts are truly part of the past a poor interpretation of those years of lead continues to be valid on several areas of society. It feeds resentment, bitterness and misunderstanding. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia are the first not to want to look history in the face. Some political leaders are doing commendable work but a long learning curve still has to be completed.

The Balkans has also suffered the loss of their populations, which emigrated during the fighting. The brain drain, ongoing for the last 20 years, is having a profound effect on Balkan societies. According to the last Gallup-Balkans survey 42% of Albanians want to move to another country, likewise one third of the Macedonians and 34% of the Kosovars. The restrictive visa

policy of the most recent years has made travel outside their countries extremely difficult – even impossible – for most citizens whilst paradoxically all – except for the Albanians – could travel freely when they were Yugoslav citizens. The maintenance of this isolation has impeded the opening of minds and has not helped towards the assimilation of the EU' common values.

1.3 Timing Issues

The integration of the Western Balkans has come at a bad time since EU Member States are all engaged in the fight to counter the economic crisis. Priorities now lie elsewhere even though the financial effort involved in the integration of a zone comparable in population to that of Romania i.e. 20 million, would not be more than 8 to 10 billion €. An attempt to disengage is understandable at a time when the Member States are themselves struggling to respect the Maastricht criteria.

The timing is also bad due to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty – which might seem paradoxical since the latter was drawn up to facilitate the functioning of an enlarged EU. But the complex implementation of the treaty is of great concern to the Europeans. To put it plainly, they say yes to enlargement of course, but not at the expense of European integration.

The integration of the Western Balkans is not or no longer a priority. It seems that Brussels has pressed the "pause" button without really giving the populations any prior warning. We now speak of "controlled enlargement"; but was this not the case before?

1.4 The Union's Strict Requirements

The demands made by the EU of the countries in the region are extremely strict. Having learnt the lessons of previous enlargements with community *acquis* that were not quite *acquis* in terms of policing and justice, notably in Romania and Bulgaria, Brussels has tightened up its requirements and now wants to integrate strong States that fall scrupulously in line with the Copenhagen Criteria which define the terms of membership. There is no longer any question of planning for reform – this now has to have occurred prior to membership.

The integration process has become increasingly difficult. Sixty five points demanding the unanimous agreement of all of the Member States can be vetoed by any one of them. The strategy used by Slovenia with regard

to Croatia and by Greece against Macedonia comprises the use of the integration process to settle issues that do not involve the community but are rather more of a bilateral nature [1]. The conditionality principle makes it impossible for a country to ascend the steps to European membership two by two or by skipping a stage. The phrase used by Brussels "each one according to its merits" implies that "group accession" as it occurred in the past is no longer possible.

The EU has stepped up its financial commitments in the region: with the PHARE programmes initially then CARDS together with military, civilian missions, investments in infrastructures – the European tax payer has paid and still makes his contribution to the Western Balkans which share all of its borders with the Member States. The instrument for pre-accession assistance aid totals 11.4 billion € for the period 2007-2013 (this also includes Iceland and Turkey).

However the process is stalling: it must be said that Brussels insists on the fact that "the respect of criteria is more important than the timetable."

1.5 Specific Details

There is an enormous quantity of work ahead of the region's countries which only adds to their initial handicaps:

- All are new States, not even 20 years old and which are therefore fragile. The rule of law and the functioning of their institutions need to be consolidated even though some distinctions can be made. Serbia for example, which inherited the administrative structures of the Yugoslavian Federation, can be considered more advanced administratively than Albania which as a State is older than its former Yugoslav neighbours;
- All are post-Communist states, just like some other EU Members, which integrated after the fall of the Berlin Wall;
- All emerge from strict – even totalitarian - regimes: from that of Enver Hoxha in Albania, of Tito in former Yugoslavia then of Milosevic for example in Serbia. In this respect they are like Spain after Franco or Portugal after Salazar.
- All except Albania have emerged from a period of war, since the last conflict dates back to 1999 in Kosovo, 2001 in Macedonia. A situation that has not occurred in Europe since the time of the founding countries.

1. (cf. details about countries p. 4).

The Table below presents total aid for each country in millions of €.

Pays	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Croatie	141,2	146	151,2	154,2	157,2	160,4
Ancienne République yougoslave de Macédoine	58,5	70,2	81,8	92,3	98,7	105,8
Albanie	61	70,7	81,2	93,2	95	96,9
Bosnie-et-Herzégovine	62,1	74,8	89,1	106	108,1	110,2
Monténégro	31,4	32,6	33,3	34	34,7	35,4
Serbie	189,7	190,9	194,8	198,7	202,7	206,8
Kosovo (au titre de la résolution 1244 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies)	68,3	124,7	66,1	67,3	68,7	70
Programmes multi bénéficiaires	109	140,7	160	157,7	160,8	164,2
TOTAL BALKANS	721,2	850,6	857,5	903,4	925,9	949,7

(Sources http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/planning-ipa_fr.htm et http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/how-does-it-work/financial-assistance/ipa_multi_beneficiary_fr.htm)

Le paquet annuel pour l'élargissement est accompagné par le cadre financier indicatif multi-annuel de l'IAP (L'Instrument d'aide à la pré-adhésion). Il couvre l'assistance à la transition et la construction des institutions, la coopération transfrontalière, le développement régional, le développement des ressources humaines et le développement rural.

Added together these specific details have complicated the reality of these countries' significantly. This complex situation has worsened because of the problems these societies and their political elites have experienced in anticipating the challenges caused by this threefold transition.

Addressing and considering the Western Balkans as a whole according to common denominators is tempting, however this must not overshadow the extremely diverse situation of each country [3].

2 – AN EXTREMELY DIVERSE SITUATION

1.6 Fragile Democracies

As well as managing a post-war and post-communist situation democratically elected political leaders have had to establish democracies whilst still associating with the mafia and criminal gangs that helped in the war effort. The transition has been achieved in stages and sometimes with violence [2]. The legal system and the police forces therefore require support. Post-war periods often provide opportunities to settle political scores and to settle them once and for all, notably those between mafia members who supported the war effort and the politicians who did not have either the charisma or the vision of someone like Robert Schuman or Konrad Adenauer. These unsettled situations were to be seen in the founding Member States (France, Germany, Italy) in the 1950's after the Second World War. The Balkans are no exception to this but Europeans have a short memory with regard to their own history and their own responsibilities.

De facto, the Balkans are just starting on their European journey with a slightly heavier load than other candidate countries in the past.

For the time being three countries, Croatia, Macedonia (since 2005) and Montenegro (since 2010) have reached candidate status; only Croatia has started membership negotiations.

Croatia (4.5 million inhabitants) has finally just opened the last three thematic chapters of its membership and has provisionally concluded two out of 35. The date of its accession has still not been set. The most optimistic of us believe that the signature of the membership treaty may occur in the autumn of 2011. The ratification of its entry into the EU would follow, probably in 2013. The process will therefore have lasted nine years. This has been time enough for the enthusiasm of the Croatians to diminish. According to Balkans-Gallup institute 28% of the Croats interviewed during the last Balkan Monitor-Gallup believe that the integration of their country into the Union will be a good thing in comparison with 35% in 2006. In all events these rates are somewhat low in committing to a political change such as this.

Macedonia (2 million inhabitants) is in stalemate due to its name. Although the country achieved candidate

2. *La guerre des profiteurs trouble l'avenir européen de la Croatie*, par Gaëlle Péro et Delphine Saubaber, *l'Express*. http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/europe/la-guerre-des-profiteurs-trouble-l-avenir-europeen-de-la-croatie_714249.html

3. http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/Gallup_Balkan_Monitor-Focus_On_EU_Perceptions.pdf

status in 2005 membership negotiations have still not started. Neighbouring Greece has not accepted Macedonia to be called "the Republic of Macedonia" since its independence in 1991, on the pretext that Macedonia is also the name of a Greek region; hence Macedonia is obliged to accept the name of FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Athens like Skopje has still not found a compromise. The two capitals are using the bilateral quarrel for their own domestic interests and are stalling in an increasingly nationalistic context to the detriment of a joint European future. However thanks to the Union Macedonia succeeded in climbing out of a rut in 2001 with the signature of the intercommunity Ohrid agreements, thereby helping the country - inhabited by 30% of Albanian speakers against a majority of Slav speakers - to avoid a civil war [4]. The danger of conflict has not been totally removed however whilst tension over the name is increasing – an extravagance which is clearly rejected by the Albanian speaking minority.

Montenegro (700,000 inhabitants) achieved candidate status in December 2010. Governed with an iron fist by Milo Djukanovic, the everlasting pro-European politician who had been in power since 1991 [5], a record, Montenegro adopted the euro as its national currency on its own initiative. But again enthusiasm for Europe is failing since there seems to be no outlook for the future and the country is suffering the full effect of the recession.

Bosnia-Herzegovina (4.6 million inhabitants) has its work cut out in forming a State governed by the Dayton Agreements which ratifies the division of the country, which had been torn apart by war, into three entities (Bosniak, Croatian, Serb) according to a complicated geographical model. Two of these entities, Bosniak and Croatian, rally in a federation. The third, the Republika Sprska, regularly threatens secession in spite of the warnings issued by the High Representative's Bureau (established by the UN), which is in fact the country's governor. International supervision will now be replaced by a European authority. Bosnia-Herzegovina, that is finally sovereign, seems to be making the transfer over from international guardianship to control by the Union. Locked in a three-headed government the Bosnians consider this to be a provisional, ineffectual situation which has continued for the last 15 years; this had led to inertia in terms of reform, the political system and good governance. Recently the

long electoral campaign for the October election, followed by arduous negotiations over the formation of a government, significantly impeded European progress. The country's dislocation would have considerable repercussions on neighbouring Croatia and Serbia, but it would also durably compromise the credibility of the common European diplomacy and its External Action Service (EEAS).

Albania (3.6 million inhabitants) won the wager in terms of transferring over from a totalitarian State to becoming a democracy and of avoiding the conflict on its doorstep in Kosovo in 1999 which is inhabited by 90% of Albanian speakers. Its economic results are spectacular but the parliamentary blockade by the Socialist opposition, which is challenging the results of the general elections in June 2009, is however impeding vital reforms. After a long boycott and the mediation of the chairs of the main political groups in the European Parliament (EPP and S&D), MPs went back to the Assembly's benches in February 2010 but continue to stall over their parliamentary work. The situation is increasingly tense.

Serbia (7.5 million inhabitants) celebrated the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Milosevic regime this autumn. These have been years of difficult, violent transition. The country experienced an initial electro-shock when Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was assassinated in 2003 followed by a second when Serbia lost Kosovo, an historic province, which declared its independence unilaterally in 2008. However in spite of the Kosovo crisis and withdrawal into nationalism the democratic government led by Boris Tadic was clearly elected four years ago because of its European programme. But since its first mandate no spectacular progress has been achieved in the integration process – except for last year with the liberalisation of the visa regime. The situation is worrying since the Serb presidential election is looming at the beginning of 2012.

In addition to this Serbia is regularly criticised by the Netherlands which would like to see it cooperate more with the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia); three war criminals are still on the run and Radovan Karadzic has been delivered to the international court. The obstinacy of the Netherlands is understandable but perhaps this is no longer a priority? Right now it is important to guarantee the region's stability even if cooperation with the ICTY must absolutely remain on the negotiation table. Hence the Union should continue to

4. http://balkans.courriers.info/article_boutique.php?id_article=10670

5. He resigned on 22nd December 2010

set the arrest of Ratko Mladic as a condition for the continuation of membership negotiations, for the EU itself and also to help Serb society to face its past to the full. Finally Berlin, London and The Hague want true dialogue to occur with Pristina. Talks were initiated in September by means of a UN resolution on the initiative of Serbia which enjoyed the Union's support. Belgrade has finally decided to face reality: a courageous act on the part of its government - whilst a Balkan-Gallup survey on 17th November 2010 [6] shows that 70% of Serbs reject the idea of Kosovo being used in exchange for membership of the EU. But whether they like it or not Serbia is in fact a burden for the region both because of its size and its sphere of influence. The EU might wisely use the country as a springboard to boost the dynamics of the integration progress without making useless concessions and yet stand firm. Paradoxically although the Serbs have to be taken in account the country is lagging behind on the road to Europe in comparison with other smaller States (Albania, Croatia, Montenegro), hence Belgrade have every interest in following their example.

Kosovo (2 million inhabitants) is neither candidate nor pre-candidate - this situation is a paradox in that this small country inhabited mainly by Albanian speakers has been under the protectorate of the UN since the 1999 war and for the last two years it has been under that of the EU which has deployed a police-justice-customs mission comprising 1,200 civil servants. During the last donor conference for Kosovo in 2008 800 million € were promised by EU Member States and the Commission to fund Kosovo's socio-economic development and to make up for the 1.4 billion € gap in funding covering the period 2009-2011. It might be supposed that with international and European commitment like this over the last ten years that the rule of law would have successfully been completed. But this is not the case. The liberalisation of the visa system for this country - which is the youngest in Europe (50% of Kosovars are under 30), is not even being discussed. In this sense the enlargement policy undertaken by the EU in the Balkans i.e. its credibility; its validity amongst the region's populations, is occurring in Kosovo.

Moreover the system of governance in Kosovo is determined by five authorities which often contradict each other: the government of Kosovo, MINUK (UN), ICO/EUSR (EU), EULEX (EU) and the Serb system that runs

parallel to this and which governs the region of Mitrovica. Finally Kosovo, a former Serb province which unilaterally proclaimed its independence in February 2008 has still not been acknowledged as such by five Member States (Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Slovakia). The new country also has one major problem: the area of North Mitrovica, which borders with Serbia, inhabited mainly by Serbs, refuses the authority of the Pristina government and functions in line with Belgrade to the dismay of the Albanian Kosovars, the UN and the EU. If the principle of reality applied in terms of the declaration of Kosovo's independence the problem set by Northern Mitrovica requires the same kind of pragmatism. Burying one's head in the sand is not the solution and in the Balkans less than anywhere else. The European process is an opportunity to start negotiations between the two countries according to the real needs of the region's population. One alternative has to be investigated: the Ahtisaari option [7] which in 2007 already planned for the autonomy of North Kosovo with functional links with Belgrade (health, education etc ...).

3 THE INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS IS THEREFORE BEING IMPEDED. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH THE REASONS FOR THIS ARE CLEAR, IT IS NO LESS DAMAGING FOR THE BALKANS AND THE EU.

3.1 Loss of Confidence

The Balkan countries are starting to lose confidence in their leaders who were mainly elected because of their pro-European electoral programmes. If the EU does not honour the promises made in Thessaloniki notably with the political leaders it supported itself, it may endanger the democratic direction taken by the countries in the region over the past fifteen years. A nationalist u-turn might occur - moreover the alarm signal has been set off in several countries notably in Macedonia. A return to the past would only lead to even greater instability in the region, which would be damaging both for the populations and for the neighbouring Member States. A weakening of local leaders is not desirable especially since elections are drawing close in Kosovo in the next few months, and in Serbia at the start of next year. This is especially true since the Union will never regain the credibility it enjoyed at the end of the Bosnian war,

6. http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/files/BalkanMonitor-2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf

7. http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/rapport_Ahtisaari.pdf

or when the Ohrid Agreements in Macedonia were signed or when there was the peaceful divorce between Serbia and Montenegro.

3.2 Problems for the European Union

The Balkans – the black hole in the map of Europe – are the cause of problems within the Union itself [8]. The fight to counter illegal immigration, one of the priorities on the community's agenda, is now in the balance since the Balkans region is now a transit area for populations that are trying to settle in the Union. In spite of the liberalisation of the visa regime many believe that the European perspective is too uncertain, so that exasperation and impatience has found expression over the last few months in the massive inflow of refugees from the Balkans, notably into Belgium, Germany and Sweden.

According to the Annual Report 2010 delivered by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime [9], 37% of Afghan heroin transits annually to the European market via the Balkans. Arms trafficking, a heritage of the war years, supplies Europe's criminal networks via the Balkans. Counterfeiting is also undermining European businesses. Re-initiating the membership process can but support and boost those involved in police and justice in the Balkans (legal system, police, customs services), and enhance regional cooperation which, long term, will enable the Union to have better control over the movement of criminals.

However slowing the integration of the region's countries even more would lead to greater Union investment there without this ever producing any real effect.

3.3 The Right Pace

Given the delay in finalising integration the solution might come from the opposite direction – ie in the acceleration of the membership process? But the answer to this is "no": it is in the Union's interest to integrate countries which meet the requirements demanded exactly – which fulfil the community acquis so that the populations of the EU are convinced of the importance of the work undertaken with regard to enlargement. The EU's Member States, some of whom have been weakened by social and even political crises no longer have the strength to face the consequences of difficult enlargements. The populations both in the Balkans and in Europe are tired of enlargement whilst prophets of

doom warn of the difficulties in governing a Union of 34 in spite of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty.

3.4 Stepping up the Procedure

However it might be possible, without any further budgetary cost to step up the membership procedure according to the principle "each according to his own merit" which is so dear to Brussels; this would mean progressing the integration process in the various countries at the same time. The initial questionnaire delivered by the Commission on the country's candidature that has to be completed by each State could then be dispatched quickly to Serbia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and even to Kosovo.

The simultaneous nature of this process would lead to healthy competition and even cooperation between the governments of the future candidate countries which could no longer accuse Brussels in order to escape their own responsibilities with regard to their electorate.

3.5 Transparency and Firmness

For its part Brussels has to remain transparent and maintain the clarity of the procedure implemented with regard to the liberalisation of the visa regime. The goals of this must be clear and the same for everyone – progress has to be acknowledged.

The "enlargement package" which includes annual progress reports for each of the countries has the merit of being transparent for the States and public opinion. Re-launching the process in this way would boost the States and their institutions, encouraging them to assume their responsibilities on condition that promises are kept.

This very same process is not an innovation. It was used for the membership of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1998 and would at least send out a strong message to the countries in the region.

3.6 Responsibility of the leaders or "help yourself and the EU will help you"

The leaders in the Balkans must not however expect the Union to help them over the benchmarks with the stroke of a magic wand. The responsibility of integrating Europe is primarily theirs. It is up to them to fight against a certain type of regional fatalism or "Bice bolje malo sutra" (maybe things will get better one day).

The politicians of the Balkans have a major responsi-

8. «Les nouveaux pirates de l'entreprise : Mafias et terrorisme », Bertrand Monnet et Philippe Véry, CNRS éditions.

9. 2010 Report, UN Office on Drugs and Crime. <http://www.unodc.org/>

bility with regard to their populations since more than one generation has been sacrificed. A ten year time span to complete the membership process means that the children born during the Kosovo war might possibly be Union citizens by the time they are twenty. This historical challenge is major for the countries in this region as it is for the European Union. It is no longer the hour for political disputes nor short-sighted individual measures – the citizens of the Balkans need politicians with a vision; for the time being these personalities are lacking. Clearly it is not the time to argue over who will be the future European commissioner – the means for membership have to be provided before this happens. Moreover the Balkan States have to have a better understanding of the Union's desire to undertake a common foreign and security policy and integrate this into their own foreign policy. To put it plainly the Balkans have to harmonise their own foreign policy with that of the common foreign policy totally and ahead of time. This will be a chance not to be missed, to show their added value in this area and put an end to a certain kind of ambiguity in terms of the relations they entertain with their partners (Russia in Serbia and Montenegro's case, the USA or Turkey in Kosovo's case since the latter is so active in the region).

3.7 Encouraging Regional Cooperation

It is increasingly urgent to start pragmatic work in order to achieve tangible results amongst the populations and not just to receive approval from Brussels. In spite of history and the difficult relations which exist between the various parties regional cooperation is primordial. Businessmen and public opinion have understood this very well. For several years a new "Yugosphere" has emerged as the British journalist, Tim Judah [10] called it is a community of interests between populations that share a history, a similar language plus common economic and social interests. The displacement of people during years of fighting has raised issues that require cross-border responses (property, pensions, social contributions, acknowledgement of diplomas, transport, infrastructures, telephone service providers, the crossing of borders, water and electricity supplies). At the same time as the "Yugosphere" we can also talk about an "Albanosphere" between various countries in the region (Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia)

which rallies communities together because of their language, their culture, their interests and because they are people [11]. The interest of these two spheres is not because they are opposites, but because they can communicate in a constructive manner. Inter-regional cooperation does not threaten specific national features but may lead to mutual enrichment. However this is not about the renaissance of Yugoslavia or even a rash theory of a Great Albania: these ideas are dead and buried. It is more a question of mutual interest working together in "good neighbourliness." Serbia and Croatia have shown the way in fighting organised crime together.

This work, which is extremely difficult for countries that were at war just fifteen years ago, should be acknowledged and rewarded for its true value. "Each according to his own merit" of course, if we follow Brussels, but merit is really great when it is a matter of working hand in hand with yesterday's enemy.

3.8 Settling Bilateral Issues

Bilateral issues are impeding the membership process. The Union should be more involved in terms of their settlement or of putting forward a system to settle matters such as that adopted by Croatia and Slovenia. The Slovenians placed their veto on Croatia's candidature due to a conflict over their maritime borders. The Slovenians accepted by referendum the use of international jurisdiction or arbiters appointed by the two States to settle the dispute. A solution that was accepted by Croatia led to the lifting of the veto.

It is however difficult to defend the idea that one EU Member State can involve all of the other partners in a veto against a candidate country over bilateral issues. At best the Union should, and if it can, anticipate this type of action – or at least punish it. Bilateral conflict should not be part of the membership process and even less that of integration.

3.9 Speaking with one voice

At a time when a common foreign policy and European diplomacy are being defined the Union would benefit from clarifying its positions by speaking with one voice with its partners: whether this means the conditions imposed on the countries (in the case of Serbia but also with regard to the liberalisation of visas for Alba-

10. Tim Judah on the Yugosphere. <http://www2.ise.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/.../Yugosphere.pdf>

11. Les Derviches du Kosovo fêtent la naissance d'Ali, par Gaëlle Péro, La Croix. <http://acturca.wordpress.com/2007/07/12/les-derviches-du-kosovo-fetent-la-naissance-dali/>

nia that was a problem for France) or with regard to the acknowledgement of Kosovo.

4 EXISTING TOOLS SHOULD BE USED BY PROVIDING NEW ENERGY AND YET AVOID ANY FORM OF COMPLACENCY WITH REGARD TO THE STATES IN THE REGION.

4.1 The Example of the Liberalisation of Visas

From this point of view the visa liberalisation procedure is remarkable. The States that have been encouraged by their extremely motivated public opinion – have completed the procedures which were extremely complicated and cumbersome for them in a record time: a readmission agreement, the establishment of biometric passports, border controls and illegal immigration, countering corruption and organised crime. This achievement has proven their ability and the Balkan countries' commitment even when technical and political requirements are high, on condition that mutual interests have been understood.

4.2 Finally there are reasons to support the Balkans' membership procedure:

- An inspiring multi-religious, multi-cultural heritage for the EU Member States since some are facing the difficult exercise of social cohesion with their minorities; European Islam that has been established for over 500 years, heavily influenced by Sufism, encourages moderation and dialogue. The multifariousness of religions and ethnic and linguistic minorities which live alongside one each other and the fragility of living together could serve as a case study for the Union.
- Economic interests since the Union is the leading economic partner of the Balkan countries.

- There is an historical responsibility with regard to countries that have suffered immensely and still hope, in spite of the disappointments, to become EU members. Europe was built on the ruins of the Second World War thereby making it possible for many generations of never having to face war with their neighbours. The Balkan countries hope for the same chance and the same future.
- Finally it would be shame, because of a lack of commitment, to allow this neighbouring area of the Union to fall into the American sphere of influence, which is already established, or into that of Wahabi Islam which is strong in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The integration of the Western Balkans is therefore an opportunity for the European Union on condition that:

- the membership procedure is stepped up and intensified – very rapidly – for all of the regions' countries: it is not interesting in terms of the region's stability for a country to lag behind in the European process;
- the European Union maintains a clear, transparent line in terms of its requirements whilst honouring its promises within a reasonable time span which can be understood by its populations;
- the leaders of the Balkans also commit more clearly to the reform of their countries in line with the Copenhagen criteria;
- regional cooperation is enhanced by the region's leaders and that is supported and acknowledged by Brussels.

Each and everyone must now look reality in the eye and adjust their policy.

Author : Gaëlle Péro,
journalist

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.