
Introduction: From the Balkan Wars to a Balkan Peace - A Century of Conflicts and Challenging Transformations

Birgöl DEMİRTAŞ*

The Balkans was continuously at the forefront of global politics in the last century, witnessing three successive world orders. During this period the Balkan countries did not only have to yield to the hegemonic aspirations of the global powers, they also experienced problems of hard and soft security within and among themselves. Although a century has passed since the end of the Balkan Wars, one can still mention continuing state- and nation-building processes, inter-ethnic disputes, border problems and global rivalries.

Despite the violent conflicts of the 1990s coming to an end with the intervention of the great powers, there is still only a very precarious peace in the Balkans. On the one hand, the countries have had to heal the wounds of the conflict-prone years, and on the other hand they have had to face the challenges of globalisation and the European Union accession process. This special issue aims

to deal with different aspects of the historical processes that the regional countries have experienced from the Balkan Wars onward.

The Balkan Wars showed what kind of tragic events would occur if expansionist micro-nationalisms joined forces with great powers' ambitions. The then neighbouring peoples who shared multiple identities and often spoke several languages became each other's rivals- even enemies- when they turned out to have single and exclusionary identities.

The security environment in the Balkans in the 21st century is different from the early 20th century. With the wars of the 1990s finished, one way or another, the Balkans has not received the attention of academia and the media. But there are still salient issues within and between the countries. Although there is no longer ongoing military conflict, the region has not reached the stage of positive peace yet. Among the security issues facing the region, one of the most predominant problems is the prevalence

* Assoc. Prof. Dr., TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Department of International Relations.

of ethnic nationalism in most of the countries. One should acknowledge that the wars of the ex-Yugoslavia replaced multiple identities with mono-ethnic ones, and how that process can be reversed is still unknown. Although more than a decade has passed since the wars, the electoral processes prove the continuing impact of the single national identities.

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Another important issue is the increasing homogenisation stemming from the migrations during the conflicts. As a result of displacement of people, the multi-cultural territories of the previous period have lost their authentic structures. This means the loss of the historical characteristic of the Balkan lands.

World history has showed that in order to have a positive peace in a particular region, all territorial issues should be solved. It is mainly because of the solution of all the major territorial issues that there is now a durable peace Western

Europe. In the case of the Balkans there are still disputed borders, which mean the persistence of existential problems that might possibly require emergency solutions.

Organised crime, economic problems aggravated by the European economic crisis, and the ambivalence of the European integration process are some other important problems facing the regional countries. Easy solutions to these complicated problems are not in sight. Another important issue is the reluctance of the actors to deal with the past in a critical way, be it the Balkan Wars or the Yugoslav wars of succession. Though there have been some small steps taken in the recent years, a lot more should be done if there is to be durable stability and peace.

The special issue covers articles whose topics vary from historical analyses of the Balkan Wars, to issues concerning the transition period, to internal politics, to foreign policy and to the policies of external actors towards the region.

The Balkan Wars have been dealt with in many academic articles and books but most have based their analysis on traditional state-to-state relations and military history. This special issue of *Perceptions* includes two articles on the Balkan Wars from non-traditional perspectives. The first sheds light on the

state of war by examining an important memoir. The second looks at the issue from the perspective of human security.

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The first article of this special issue is written by Prof. Dr. Maria Todorova on Trotsky's book on the Balkan Wars, *The War Correspondence*. Working as a journalist Trotsky witnessed the Balkan Wars himself. Prof. Dr. Todorova critically examines his writings and analyses his observations, and comments with regard to the state of socialist movements in the Balkan countries and the situation of the wounded people during the war. This rare analysis of Trotsky's war memoirs is an important contribution to the literature on the Balkan Wars.

The second article is concerned with the humanitarian situation of Bulgarian soldiers on the front lines, and examines this topic by looking at their letters sent to their family members. How were their living conditions? How did they feel? What kind of illnesses did they suffer from? The article by Dr. Snezhana

Dimitrova is a notable contribution to the humanitarian analysis of the Balkan Wars.

Many myths and debates are produced and reproduced with regard to Central and Southeastern Europe. Some argue that nobody foresaw the end of the Cold War, while others claim that the processes between 1989 and 1991 cannot be called a revolution. Prof. Dr. Sabrina Petra Ramet examines these two myths. At the same time, she analyses debates on transition versus transformation and the reasons for different paths of transition and democratisation. She also provides some comparative analysis of regional progress.

Another article with regard to the transition period of the region is written by Dr. Othon Anastasakis, who sheds light on how the illiberal start at the beginning of the 1990s affected the transition process in the region. If the Balkan states today are experiencing many problems, as stated in the previous pages, Dr. Anastasakis' article shows the links with the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Prof. Dr. Predrad Simić analyses the perceptions of Western actors towards the region and tries to unlock the prejudices and process of otherisation. Based on the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's reports on the Balkans in 1914 and in 1996 he argues

that the Western view of the region was full of misperceptions. The author refutes the ancient hatreds argument to explain the wars on ex-Yugoslav territories, instead he states that the main reason leading to the emergence of conflict was the use of nationalism.

One of the key countries in the region is Macedonia. The country lived through a difficult time because of the civil war in 2001. The Ohrid Framework Agreement signed between the parties was an important milestone in Macedonian history. Dr. Sasho Ripiloski and Dr. Stevo Pendarovski critically analyse the period after the agreement and shed light on the current domestic politics in the country.

The last article is written by Dr. Birgöl Demirtaş on Turkey's approach to the Balkan region. The paper analyses Turkey's regional policies in the last decade in order to understand the main continuities and changes. The main research question of the study is as follows: Has there been any considerable

change in Turkey's relations with the Balkan countries? The study has two fundamental arguments. First, although the main aims of Turkish foreign policy remain the same, different instruments have been implemented to an increasing degree. Second, relations have been transnationalising thanks to the spillover effects of globalisation.

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all the contributors to the special issue. They were very kind to give their assistance whenever needed. I am also indebted to the anonymous referees whose careful reading of the articles contributed considerably. Special thanks go to the professors and experts at the Center for Strategic Research at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Without their encouragement and kind help this issue would not have been possible. I hope that the articles of this issue will contribute to critical and alternative readings of the past and to the establishment of a stable and peaceful region in a not so distant future.