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HUNGARY AND SOUTHEAST EUROPE

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After the Cold War, there was only one region that threatened Europe's security and stability: the south-eastern part of the continent, the Balkans in a general sense. It was practically only in this region that the breakup of the artificially created states was followed by substantial violence – except from the events in the Caucasian 'republics' of the former Soviet Union. The events on the territory of former Yugoslavia assumed special importance for Hungary. The armed and not so violent conflicts in the neighborhood had an immediate influence on Hungarian interests on account of the geographic vicinity. Moreover, the situation of the Hungarian minority numbering hundreds of thousands, especially in Voivodina, gave rise to serious and, unfortunately, well-founded concerns in Budapest, where the Hungarian constitution obliges the governments to take responsibility for the Hungarians living in Diaspora in the neighboring states. However, the historical survey of events which happened in the years after the collapse of the multinational states in Central and Eastern Europe is not the subject proper of the present introduction; what is worth mentioning in this context is that the Hungarian government consistently took a position against the Serbs in the various conflicts. Thus, Hungary supplied small arms to Croatia, then provided transit routes and opened its skies during the NATO operations against the Milosevic-regime in 1999 and, finally, recognized the independence of Kosovo together with the majority of the member states of the EU despite Serbian protests. The Hungarian foreign policy had to take these steps in a way so the Hungarian population in Voivodina should not become the 'hostages' of Belgrade. As far as it can be ascertained at the moment, this balancing act was successful; this fact provides a good example of an area in which consensus prevailed in the foreign affairs of the country.

There are at least three spheres in which Hungary's policies vis-à-vis Southeast Europe manifest themselves. First, the Euro-Atlantic integration must be mentioned. It is a vital interest of the Atlantic community to create a united, secure and stable Europe; in the words frequently used by the Clinton Administration in the 1990s, a 'Europe whole, safe, and free'. The Western Balkans is one of the regions that have not been incorporated into this new Europe. We can find states here which are not members of either of the major Euro-Atlantic integrationist organizations; then there are some, which are members of NATO or are likely to join it in the foreseeable future; and there are some which are members of both NATO and the EU. The prospects of EU and NATO membership are also different for the currently non-member states; in short, a differentiated policy should be pursued towards them, the countries in the region cannot be lumped together. It is Hungary's interest of prime magnitude that the Western Balkans should be integrated as fully and quickly as possible into the Euro-Atlantic community. Budapest, therefore, has to give all the institutional and other forms of supports to the candidate countries in the region and has to do its best to help them meet the accession criteria. Hungary, though, has special interests in this process as well: the protection of the minorities in general, and in Serbia in particular, should be accorded priority – the establishment of the so-called National/Ethnic Councils recently is an appropriate step in the right direction.

The second sphere, naturally, is Central Europe in a wider sense. Hungary, because of its geopolitical position, has to be open towards each direction in the region. First, the Visegrad cooperation was born with basically northern orientation; then, under the Orbán-government (1998-2002) the so-called Little Danube cooperation opened new doors to the west (Hungary, Austria, Bavaria, and Baden-Württemberg) – especially in the fields of culture, education, and research. The Regional Partnership is an attempt at linking the V4 and Austria and Slovenia. *The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)* is specifically directed towards the Western Balkans, as well as the *Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI)* to a large extent.

The Central European Initiative (CEI) is concerned with Eastern Europe as well, and Hungary is also marginally interested in the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC).

In short, Hungary is situated in the center of a wide-ranging Central European network of political, economic, and social cooperation. This key position will be strengthened by Hungary's EU Presidency in spring 2011; one of the central themes of this presidency will be a Danube-strategy. Of course, a great number of questions should be answered before one talks about a more or less coherent Danube-policy; for instance, the dilemma of navigability versus water quality should be settled.

Another key theme of a regional policy – and that of Hungary's EU Presidency – is energy security. Basically, what is at stake is the alleviation of the one-sided energy dependence of the whole region. One of the most visible signs of this dependency is the near monopoly of the east-west oil and gas pipelines; a north-south cooperation in this field would not only diversify the sources of energy (Norway, the Middle East, North Africa), but it would also connect the Western Balkans with Central Europe. Another potential area of cooperation in energy security would be the construction of LNG (*Liquefied Natural Gas*) terminals in Croatia and Poland and the complementary pipelines with the countries in between.

The third sphere is that of the bilateral relations. Southeast Europe is one of the strategic areas of Hungarian FDI (*Foreign Direct Investment*) and foreign trade, though Budapest has to face an ever increasing – primarily Austrian – competition here. The Hungarian foreign policy strategies have all committed the country to support and increase the business opportunities and presence in Southeast Europe – even with government assistance if it is needed. Though steps have been taken in this issue, the opportunities have not been exploited fully at all.

The question of the Hungarian minorities appears in the bilateral relations as well. The mainstream Hungarian political forces agree that the strategic goal is to facilitate the Hungarian minorities to remain in their homeland, and to help them preserve their identity in all possible forms (institutional, educational, etc.). Paradoxically, the Southeast European political leaders have shown a better understanding of the position of the minorities recently. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, it was especially the Serbs who have got into the position of an ethnic minority in some places. The great majority of the Hungarians in the Western Balkans live under Serbian rule, so Belgrade's more lenient policies towards them – partly from *Realpolitik* considerations, partly from an intention to create precedent – helped mend fences between the two states. Moreover, European integration requires, among others, the adoption of certain norms and standards. Hungary has an opportunity to increase its cross-border cooperation (for instance, with waiving visa requirements) or create (macro)regions on the basis of the principle of territorial cohesion. The states in Southeast Europe have become more open towards certain cooperation in specific fields such as environment protection, education, etc. The Madrid Framework Agreement (1980) endorses the support of cross-border cooperation between local authorities with the support of bilateral treaties between the countries concerned. Thus, Hungary has established a *Hungarian-Slovene Cross-Border Mixed Committee* and, similarly, a Hungarian-Croat Cross-Border Regional Coordination Forum. There is no such institutionalized bilateral cooperation with Serbia and Romania, but intergovernmental groups operate in both relations.

As a sign of the Hungarian security interests in the region, troops are deployed as part of the peace-keeping forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; and a Hungarian engineer corps helped reconstruction in the former country. In addition, Hungarian civil organizations are also present in Southeast Europe; they provide assistance to civil society building and help democratize political processes (e.g. by monitoring elections in Albania). Finally, Hungarian experts have also been taking part in drafting the planned new, federal constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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