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## **THE ROLE OF THE NGO'S IN STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE BALKANS AS PART OF EUROPE**

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**We have got used to taking for granted the non-governmental organizations and tend to forget that a mere 15 years ago they did not exist in half of the countries of Europe where an organization of that kind was both unthinkable and inadmissible. This was so because back in those days more than half of the territory of our continent was in the claws of totalitarian communism. And it is characteristic of the totalitarian system that there is no civil society, a society that would exist independently of the state. Figuratively speaking, the State had devoured the civil society. Therefore, it identified itself with that society, spoke on its behalf, represented it on all and sundry occasions, and precluded anyone from speaking for the civil society, let alone representing it. The fall of the communist system in Europe during the memorable 1989 had as its first and very visible result the emancipation of the civil society from the state.**

**It was, understandably, a two-way process, because not only the civil society became autonomous and free from the absolute control of the state, but, moreover, the state thus became democratic, as it stopped having a monopoly on the participants in the civil society.**

**It was then that the appearance of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as intermediaries between the autonomous civil society and the democratic state became possible and necessary.**

**It is common knowledge what a great variety of such intermediary roles between the civil society and the state the NGO's can play – either as a liaison between the two, or as representative of the civil society before the state, or as its opponent, as its replacement or addition of some sort or in some aspect of the *socium*, and so on and so forth.**

**In its great and motley variety, the NGO sector, starting with the charity foundations, through the research centers and ending with the political clubs and forums, is an inseparable part of the system of security and stability of the democratic state.**

**However, there is a peculiarity here. Unlike the totalitarian state where external security was hinged on dictatorship, that is to say –**

paralyzing and eliminating the civil society, here it is the other way about – security and stability depend entirely on the various initiatives of the civil society, on the dynamic relations between the civil society and the state, in which the NGOs play a considerable part.

When we talk about the role and contribution of the NGOs to the security and stability of the democratic countries, we should avoid simplifying or vulgarizing things. We should start from the presumption that only those research centers and institutes which specialize and work on the matters of security and stability are the ones that make a real contribution to the security and stability of the countries of Europe. All NGOs, some more, and some less, contribute to this through the very fact that they work and tackle the actual issues of society which the state cannot or should not solve. If these issues remain unresolved and there is no one to resolve them, they would inevitably generate social tension which would, sooner or later, explode and destabilize society, and in the worst case might result in grave clashes and even question the very democratic system in the country. In other words, the security and stability of a democratic state rest not so much on the army and the police, however directly these two institutions are involved in preserving public order, as on a working market economy and a well structured social sphere. To these latter the NGOs have both a direct and indirect relation.

The specialized centers and institutes which are involved in throwing light on the issues of security and stability, of course, make a greater contribution than a foundation engaged in charity, for instance. This, however, does not change the core of the issue: that with their good work all NGOs contribute to strengthening the security and stability of their country, and thence of our common home Europe. The NGOs are the offspring of democracy and, therefore, are its most zealous supporters.

I would like to tell you about the contribution of a *sui generis* NGO to the strengthening of security and stability in the Balkans – the Balkan Political Club. It was set up three and a half years ago in Sofia and has ever since achieved an impressive record of activities. Six thematic international conferences were held in different Balkan capitals: on Regional Security in the Balkans in Skopje (29-31 March 2002), on The Economic Revival of Southeastern Europe in Bucharest (11-13 July, 2002), on The European Prospects of the Balkan Countries in Athens (29 November-1 December, 2002), on The Cultural Potential of the Balkan Countries as a Factor of Development in Istanbul (29 May-1 June 2003) and on Regional Cooperation in Combating Organized Crime in Belgrade (5-7 December 2003).

However, it is perhaps not the holding of these thematic international conferences that has made the real contribution of the Club to security and stability, nor is it the priority task that the Club has shouldered to

implement (the putting in place of a contemporary communications infrastructure in the Balkans). It is rather more so the simple fact that 48 politicians and intellectuals from nine Balkan countries among whom ten presidents (of them three incumbent), nine prime ministers (three incumbent), seven former and present ministers, five ambassadors, and of them all ten with the academic title of professor, gather in order to discuss the most important and sensitive issues of the region and to seek ways of resolving them. So, all these people, united in a non-governmental political organization of a kind, have committed themselves to work for the restoration and revival of the Balkan states, and for their security and stability as part of the general effort.

Here I touch upon the issue of political culture as a factor of security and stability of a region – not political culture in general, but the political culture of the politicians themselves. When politicians of the left and right of the political spectrum, as well as of the center, who in their countries are tied in in ferocious battles for power in times of election or during parliamentary debates, join forces in a Club in order to put on the table for discussion the big issues of the region, seeking ways and means of their solution, it is an indication of a political culture of higher order, to say the least, of good knowledge and command of the whole range of political tools that go to make real politics and without which politics is doomed to failure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Politics, just like science and the arts, has its own categories and basic elements, which cannot be broken up into smaller components. I mean here contacts, dialogue and compromise. Politics is impossible without establishing and maintaining contact with the adversary or the partner. Politics is impossible without a dialogue with the adversary or the partner. Without a dialogue with them we can not understand their position, we can not follow their logic and the arguments on which it is based.

Compromise, in turn, is indispensable if a reasonable decision equally acceptable to both parties is to be taken. When we talk of compromise, we, of course, do not mean unprincipled compromise in which meaningful social values are sacrificed in the name of selfish personal or group interests and objectives, and vice versa, when second- or third-rate values are sacrificed in order to achieve great strategic goals. In this sense compromise brings closer the positions of the parties and makes possible the pushing of dialogue towards the taking of a generally acceptable political decision.

Today's is a meeting of politicians, so, we all know that the most difficult thing in politics is the making of compromise because there will always be those who are dissatisfied, there are always suspicions of favouritism or of betrayal, sometimes even of high treason. Yet, we have to

live with it! Real politics must per force be made with the help of compromise, whether smaller or bigger depending on the case. Unfortunately, in the political realities of life we must in most of the cases choose not between the good and the evil, but between the lesser and the bigger evil.

The only ones who do not need compromise are the fascists and the communists. They put up barricades and start shooting at their political opponent, whom they had already called "the enemy" and do not let go unless they have destroyed him physically.

But we all know this is not making politics, it is making war.

The role of the main elements and categories of politics is most vividly manifested during political talks, as the latter contain at one and the same time contact, dialogue and compromise. Political talks are not even feasible if just one of these three categories is missing. For the same reasons these categories are the main elements of the political culture of a person, and of the making of real politics. But because political culture, just like any other culture, must be learned and mastered and its principles and norms must permeate the very spirit of education, it is very important that such political skills and modalities as the will and patience for conducting negotiations, for staying in touch and for making the necessary compromise should be inculcated in the young politicians. Such a political education can be conducted with various means and in various ways in the real-life political process itself. It can be cultivated not only in Eaton and Princeton.

One possible form, and a very successful one, it seems to me, are the non-governmental political clubs of the kind of the Balkan Political Club and the Marmara Group Foundation. They have as private members both incumbent politicians and ones that are outside the government or in opposition. The least such political forums can do is give chance to politicians of the region to meet and talk, to exchange ideas and informally discuss the big problems of the region, that can be resolved only through the united efforts of all countries.

Last summer during my visit to Georgia I could not overcome the temptation and told President Saakashvili about the work of the BPC and suggested that a similar political club be set up in the Caucasian region, let us call it a Caucasian Political Club, in which, initially politicians and intellectuals from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia participate. It is very important for that troublesome region that politicians of the three countries meet informally and talk, discussing the most difficult issues of the region and laying out a new vision of its future in the conditions of European integration and a globalizing world. Should that idea be translated into a reality, later on politicians from other countries who would be interested might be invited to join the club.