

# **Our Responsibility for the Balkans**

**Speech by Mr Carl Bildt**

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I came to Belgrade today with a heavy heart. Normally, I would have sat down with Zoran Djindjic and gossiped about the state of affairs in the world, in Europe, in the Balkans, in Serbia. Talked about mutual friends – sometimes even mutual enemies.

But he is no longer with us.

Others have paid their tribute to him. But I must as well.

He was a man confronted with difficult tasks in difficult times. In order to achieve the things he – and many of us – wanted, he had to manoeuvre between - and sometimes with – the forces of heaven and the forces of hell.

Sometimes, that's the hand history gives you. Zoran was not a saint, but Zoran turned a hero.

Without him, we would not be where we are. Serbia is on the road to join the rest of Europe. To build peace and prosperity. To regain the future after having tried to revisit the past.

Others certainly played their important – sometimes even decisive - roles. But without Zoran, far less would have been achieved. He was not a saint, but he was certainly a hero. He was a true man of Europe.

He is truly missed.

I have had the fortune of working with the issues of this part of Europe since nearly eight years.

Sometimes full time as the representative of the European Union, the vaguely defined international community or the United Nations. Sometimes just as an individual devoted to the peoples and the challenges of the region. Sometimes having the fortune of representing nothing more than my own conscience.

For me, this region represents some of the most complex aspects of our past, and some of the most important challenges of our future. If I say that I believe that the future of Europe will be decided by the future of the Balkans, you might think that the man has got mad.

Let me try to explain.

The Balkans is the meeting place of cultures, traditions, nationalities and religions par excellence in our part of the world. No other part of our continent has been ruled by multi-national and multi-ethnic empires for such long period as this.

Few today would know that many of the emperors of the Roman Empire during its last centuries come from these lands. This was natural. This was in between the East and the West as it was defined in those days.

And few would know that some of the brightest brains and the most skilled statesmen of the Ottoman Empire come from here. The reasons were the same. When cultures clash, there can certainly be violent conflict, but there can also be immense creativity.

The horrors of this part of Europe really start with the process of setting up nation states. Here, it encountered a mosaic of peoples, cultures, traditions and religions without parallel anywhere else. Here, there was no way of drawing clear borders establishing nation states based on one people, one language, one history and one religion.

In a region that for millennia had not known national borders, such were more often than not drawn in blood.

I'm not trying to say that everything in the distant past was idyllic.

If you go to one of my favourite sources of basic truths about the realities of Europe and the world - the extensive briefing books prepared for the British and Imperial delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 – you get a fairly accurate picture.

They start their section on the Balkans by dryly noting that “the first attempt to solve the Balkan problem might be attributed to the Persians.” It went on by attributing the recurring challenges to the European order coming from this region to “the succession of various races who have from time to time entered it as conquerors or as settlers, sometimes occupying definitive areas, but frequently living side by side, with little mixture or amalgamation, in regions in which none of them can justify any exclusive claim.”

And it continued by saying that this worked OK as long as there was a firm and accepted and stable framework, but that “as soon as this was removed, [Balkan peoples] have shown a tendency to racial, dynastic, or national enmities which have led to internecine strife and laid waste the country.”

Language can be modernized, but the essence remains.

It was when the framework that was Yugoslavia was broken up by the national revivals of Europe that followed the fall of the evil Soviet empire that we saw national strife, ethnic brutality, cleansing and murders returning.

It was most certainly aided and abetted by the red or the brown political forces trying to retain and gain political power. A Milosevic here or a Tadjman there. It was most certainly fuelled by the politics of fear that they employed.

But it was also a return to what we saw during the difficult decade of Balkan Wars of the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now – as then – the sometimes naïve and ignorant policies of the international community were not without responsibility.

Since the wars, we have tried to heal the wounds, and show a path towards the future.

It's eight years since fighting stopped in Bosnia and Croatia. It's four years since there was war over Kosovo and our bombs fell also over Belgrade. It's two years there was open conflict in Macedonia.

I vividly remember the sounds of the exploding shells, the falling bombs or the thundering guns in all of these conflicts. Most of the people you meet in the streets do. They don't say it. But all over this part of Europe, be certain that they do.

But healings the wounds don't come easily. And creating the firm frameworks that takes away the potential for the politics of fear, and makes it possible to regain faith in the future, is far from easy.

Historians will certainly debate what we have achieved – and failed to achieve.

In Croatia, we turned a blind eye first to the ethnic crimes and cleansings of Milosevic in Vukovar and elsewhere, and then to the ethnic crimes and cleansings of Tudjman throughout the Western Slavonia and the Krajina.

In Bosnia, we met in Dayton to agree on a complex constitutional structure meeting the minimum demands of everyone but the maximum demands of no one. Gradually and grudgingly, we are trying to help in taking that forward.

Here, we tried to aid in setting up some sort of structure between Serbia and Montenegro. If we are honest, it might have created more obstacles than opportunities. History will judge.

For Kosovo, we tried in Rambouillet to create a peace, failed and stumbled into a war that ended without a peace.

We celebrated success in making it possible for close to a million Albanians that had been force to or chosen to flee to return, but had to look failure in the face as close to a quarter of a million Serbs and other minorities were forced to or chose to flee after both the United Nations and NATO had taken over de facto responsibility.

In Macedonia, we again failed to see the signs of war and were negligent in countering the forces of confrontation, but managed to limit the damage, secure an agreement, and are now trying to help in taking that country forward.

I have met the men and the women, the children and the elderly, from each and every of these conflicts of this region. Often, these were not easy meetings. Their eyes sometimes spoke more than their words. They all felt betrayed by us.

Often they were right. We could have done more.

But as we recognize this, we should also recognize what we did under circumstances that were more difficult than most of us here today can image.

I remember the Danish girl commanding a Leopard tank in the north of Bosnia under the proud flag of the United Nations during one of the worst periods of that horrible war.

A group of Moslems had come under fire from a Serb pillbox position. She immediately opened fire against it. She saved the ones she wanted to save. Later, it was found out that she had fired no less than 72 tank shells into that poor pillbox.

Asked by the commanding general why she had fired 72 rounds, she answered that it was because she didn't have more.

Others were sitting far away, pontificating and having their views, but let's never forget that there were those that dared to go and face the devil on the ground in the horrors of the war in Bosnia.

They did not save everyone, and they certainly achieved less than they would have wished. But let's remember, that many more would have died, and far less been possible to achieve today, had it not been for the courage of them and the leaders that sent them.

When war is raging, realities are difficult to ignore.

We certainly failed to prevent the wars. We might not have been perfect in ending the wars. That's history. Today, the important question we must ask ourselves is whether we have done enough to build the peace.

The murder of Zoran Djindjic sends a clear message. We have not done enough.

So does the fertile ground for the politics of fear created by the unresolved issue of Kosovo. So do the young boys and girls seeking to leave Bosnia because they don't see an economic future there. So does the reality of nearly three quarter of a million refugees from the conflicts in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo only in this country.

We must give the peoples of this region a far more clear vision for the future. And we must be ready to extend to them a helping hand that is seen as firmer than it has been.

This will not be easy. It involves tackling all the outstanding issues. It involves trying to find new ways to extend the European structures of the rule of the law, the bridging over borders and the living together to this region.

It's not enough to say that issues are too difficult to solve, or that one day there will be membership of the European Union. There is a risk that people here will believe neither.

The issue of Kosovo is only a part of the wider issue. We still don't really know where we are heading as to the future of that often contested part of the region. And if one issue of this region is open, potentially all issue are open.

Zoran Djindjic might have been undiplomatic in what he said on that issue during the last months of his life, but we owe it to him and to us to concede that he was essentially right.

Open issues are open to exploitation. The politics of fear blocs the possibilities for the future.

As we meet here in Belgrade, the minds of many – also of us - are on Baghdad.

Our bitter experience here in the Balkans should have thought us two lessons.

First: we live in a world when we are sometimes confronted with an evil that can't be just appeased, where diplomacy at some points reaches its limits, and force has to be used.

Second: force is never enough, there are no simply military solutions, nor any quick fixes or easy and early exits. If we are interested not primarily in waging war, but in building peace, our commitment have to be long-term, deep and often difficult.

The mighty fortress of Kalemagdan, where the Sava meets the Danube not far from this building, was for my centuries a fortress of that Ottoman Empire that stretched from Bihac in the north-western corner of Bosnia to down to Basra by the Gulf of Persia.

Today, many of the difficult challenges in terms of security we are faced with are the challenges of this large post-Ottoman area from Bihac to Basra. And many of them boil down to the same question: can we build state structures in which different peoples, cultures and religions can live peaceful together?

Remember that Yugoslavia and Iraq were created under roughly the same circumstances at roughly the same time. Take note of the fact that the issues of Kurdistan might not be that different from the issues of Kosovo. And don't fail to observe that Cyprus – where the efforts at a peaceful settlement were just stalled by the intransigence of old forces - is roughly half the way between these two regions and challenges.

All over this vast region, the most difficult issue is the choice between disintegration or integration. And all over this area, our policies should be policies of design rather than policies of default as things are being left to drift until there is the need for a frantic rescue as the consequences of drift become apparent.

Superficially, the disintegration option often looks like the less complicated. With military might, you can always separate armies and states.

But the options that are easy early are often dangerous further down the road. One disintegration easily leads to another. One border leads to another. Balkanisation is not a stable state of affairs. Balkanisation is a process without an end.

As we are about to be confronted with all the complex issues in the direction of Basra, we have every reason to refocus attention also on all the remaining outstanding issues in this region. We cannot claim that we are able to create true conditions for peace and prosperity there, if we are seen to be failing in those tasks here.

I believe that all of the issues of the Greater Middle East require a true partnership between the United States and the European Union. There might be disagreement on tactics. But there can't be much of a disagreement on strategic goals.

But equally, I do believe that all of the issues of this region require a true leadership by the European Union. I am convinced that such a leadership, that brings in also the United States and Russia in the process, will be truly welcomed on the other side of the Atlantic.

We are investing massively in preventing war in this region. There are no truly reliable figures for the costs of our combined military commitments to the region.

But a task force by the Council on Foreign Relations in the US recently estimated the costs of US military forces in this region from now until 2010 to be between USD 8 bn and USD 12 bn.

This was based on a substantial draw down of US forces. Since app 85 % of the forces are European, and since these forces tended to be on the average somewhat less expensive than US forces, we can estimate the European costs for preventing war in this part of Europe to be between € 50 bn and € 80 bn in the years ahead.

These are vast sums. But that's not the issue. The issue is if we are ready to invest as much in biding peace as we are in preventing war. European Union financial commitments to the region – the by far largest individual one – runs at app € 0,5 bn a year. The discrepancy is great.

These countries have been hit by a horrible combination of old style economic systems, sanctions and strife. During the 1990's, the GDP per capita of Poland increased by app 50 %. During the same time, the GDP per capita of Serbia decreased by at the least the same amount.

Huge efforts have been made to turn the situation around. The economic reform team here in Belgrade remains one of the most impressive we have seen anywhere in the vast historic shift from socialist to market economic systems.

But the task is of staggering proportion. The process of de-industrialisation continues. There is huge underemployment in the countryside throughout the region. For many, migration seems to be the only way in which a better future can be built.

We have every moral and political and social reason to help in meeting this challenge. The European Union should be ready to take further steps in integrating these countries in its effort to achieve economic growth and cohesion throughout Europe. NATO must do whatever it can through

Partnership for Peace and other programs. We should discuss if the time has come to reform the institutions we have built to help and assist the region in its task of integrating with the rest of Europe.

We have done a lot during the last few years. But far more needs to be done. History will judge whether we live up to the challenge.

I started out by saying that I believe that the future of Europe will be decided by what happens in this part of our continent.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century left a horrible legacy of ethnic separation, ethnic cleansing and genocide on our part of the world. The creativity and culture of Europe suffered losses of monumental dimensions.

Gradually, we have tried to start to create a new future. Gradually, we are starting to build a federation of nation states that – I believe – will one day encompass all of Europe to the west of Russia and the Ukraine, and ultimately stretch from the shores of the Arctic Ocean in the north to the edges of the plains of Mesopotamia in the south.

And gradually, we see our nations opening up not only to each other, but also to the world outside. Globalisation is not an empty concept. Gradually, we are starting to reclaim the cosmopolitan past that gave Europe its true greatness in the past.

Not long ago, there were more Turks than Greeks in Thessalonica, more Albanians in Belgrade than in Pristina, more Serbs in Sarajevo than in any another city with the exception of Belgrade, and more Jews than Lithuanians in Vilnius.

This will never come back. But our future is dependent on us being able to live together far better than we managed to do during the last century. That is the essence of our effort not only to secure the peace, but also to promote the peace and to rekindle the creativity of Europe.

It is not always easy. The past can often be a vast barrier to the future. We often fear the uncertain. We tend to stick to what we know. We are all – more or less – tribal creatures.

It is in this part of Europe that we have seen the stark consequence of failure more than anywhere else in our generations. It is here that many of us had to wake up to the fact that we could no longer claim that we were part of some post-war generation of Europeans. The issues of peace and war, of integration or disintegration, of the meeting of cultures creating conflict or unleashing creativity, are more clearly to be seen here than anywhere else in our part of the world.

How we all – Swedes or Serbs, Croats or Canadians, Bosnians or Belgians, Albanians or Americans – handle them will set the stage for our future. Not only here, but in our own societies as well.