

After the War in Yugoslavia: New Dangers for Hungary and Europe

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In June 1997, I had the pleasure of participating in a Conference in Berlin, called to discuss the coming enlargement of NATO. Representatives of governments and civil organisations from Germany, Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary had a last chance, one month before the NATO Summit in Madrid, to express their opinions on the dramatic situation. Let me quote part of my statement there:

'Presidential and ministerial statements in the NATO countries, full of enthusiasm and even more, combined with local voices filled with expectations in Central Eastern Europe, to try to make the impression that something very good is going to happen soon in Madrid. In fact, something dramatically bad is happening, right now. Instead of making overall preparations for a real, peaceful co-operation of all countries, of all nations of Europe in the 21st Century, old Cold War warriors are taking over the international scene. The very aim of enlarging the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (basically a military pact) with new Member States in Central Eastern Europe will build up new bastions of the West against the East. In other words – not a common European home, as most Europeans were hoping and dreaming of in the decades of the Cold War – but a new division of nations'. *Berliner Europa Forum*, July 1997.

But Hungary still became a new member of NATO, and, within two weeks of joining, was a partner in the war against a sovereign neighbouring country – Yugoslavia. The so-called 'New Elite' of mid-Eastern Europe, including my own country, has demonstrated complete irresponsibility.

The Hungarian Government gave a military base in Tazsar to the American Air Force, and opened the whole air-space to NATO bombers. In my opinion, this decision created the basis of co-responsibility, together with other NATO countries, for more than 1,000 deaths and several thousand people wounded by the NATO bombings in Yugoslavia, even if no Hungarian soldiers took a direct role in the war.

In the name of all those Hungarians who

were standing up against this NATO war, I wrote a letter to the biggest Budapest daily paper, *Nepszabadsag*, 22 April 1999, with the title ‘*What would be the message of Prime Minister Paul Teleki for today?*’ Here are some lines of this letter:

‘The late Prime Minister, Count Paul Teleki, took his life in 1941 because he was no longer in a position to halt Nazi troops using Hungarian soil for their attacks against Yugoslavia. I am convinced that his message for today would be the very same: we would never allow Hungarian territory to be used by foreign military for attacking a neighbouring country...’

These lines have found a very broad echo with Hungarians. Other peace movements, trade unions and civil organisations stood up against the war, too. A strong, united civil movement has been organised, named ‘Movement for Peace in the Balkans’, with the participation of many well-known intellectuals, artists and scientists. On 9 May 1999, more than 10,000 people demonstrated in front of the Hungarian Parliament, and demanded an end to the bombings of Yugoslavia.

Hungarian public opinion still faces a delicate situation today. Both the Conservative and Socialist-led coalition Governments told people only about the advantages of being a NATO member. Now they can see the terrible consequences, as well: they have learned that, between 24 March and 10 June 1999, 32,000 bombing operations were made by NATO bombers against Yugoslavia, killing civilians, devastating cities, factories and bridges.

In Hungary, many people were especially afraid for their friends and relatives living in the neighbouring part of Yugoslavia, in Vojvodina. This was once, before World War One, a part of Hungary. In Vojvodina there are at least 300,000 people belonging to the Hungarian minority. It is quite understandable that Hungarian public opinion became more and more critical when we got the news about the bombing of Vojvodina towns, such as Novi Sad. Even Hungarian television has shown pictures of ruined houses, factories and hospitals, and three destroyed bridges over the Danube. This last alone has brought very tragic consequences for Hungary – although we later learned that, altogether, ten bridges were destroyed in Vojvodina.

Today, some months later, we can witness many dangerous consequences of this terrible NATO war. I will name only the most important ones, without going into details.

- 1) The international situation: the relationship of the Great Powers in West and East has become worse than before. The level of mistrust is higher than ever in the last ten years.
- 2) Despite the very strong diplomatic steps by many countries – first of all the Peoples’ Republic of China – the United States and some other NATO members suggest that the example of the Yugoslav war should be accepted as a new general rule of international relations. In other words, they are trying to take over what is the sole responsibility of the United Nations Security Council!

- 3) There are all kinds of signs, not only in Europe, but in other parts of the world, and especially in Asia, that a new wave of militarisation and modernisation of military forces has started. Defence ministries are calling for higher military expenditure.
- 4) NATO experts are probably thinking of new military adventures in the Balkans, the Middle East and, perhaps, in the Caucasus region. It is very important for all these territories to make Albania, Kosovo and other parts of the Balkan peninsula, politically and militarily safe.
- 5) One of the new dangers for peace and security in Europe after the Yugoslav war is the growing tension among the states of Middle and South-East Europe. Becoming members of NATO made Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland none too popular among their former partners and associates. Now, their participation in the war, and signs of their militarisation, is adding to the emerging tensions. If they buy new weapon systems, their neighbours will immediately follow suit. Hungary is a small country, with limited resources and a lower gross national product than 10 years ago. Despite this fact, we are already facing some crucial consequences of the war.
 - a) NATO's military leaders are not at all content with the state of the Hungarian army. For that reason, we will have to buy a lot of military hardware, mostly American-made, in the coming 4-5 years. In the fiscal year 2000 alone we have to spend 43% more on the army. In comparison, old aged pensioners will get a maximum 8% increase, which is about equal to the rate of inflation.
 - b) During the bombing of Yugoslavia, at least 30,000 people left Vojvodina for Hungary, and a good part of these refugees still remain in Hungary – some with relatives and friends, some in the care of humanitarian organisations, state and local authorities. The really rich NATO member states – the United States, Canada, Great Britain – are not at all in a hurry to let in those refugees from Yugoslavia and Kosovo who do not want to return to their homeland.
 - c) Hungarian foreign trade and transport is continually suffering heavy losses as the consequence of this bloody war. No one can use the extremely important Danube route south of the Hungarian border, because the ruins of the devastated bridges still lie in the river. At this time, nobody is offering any monetary assistance for the reconstruction of these bridges. Damage to the Hungarian export/import trade will amount to several hundreds of millions US dollars. But there is also a terrible danger of winter floods in large areas of Yugoslavia, Croatia, Vukovar, and South Hungary, Dunafoldvar. Experts are all of the same opinion: this winter and next spring we shall face extreme difficulties if nothing is done to clear the blockages in the river caused by the ruined bridges.

We could say a lot more about the humanitarian aspects of this NATO war. And there will come a time to deal with the historic responsibility. I certainly hope that this was the last imperialistic war. Let us hope that the 21st Century will not belong to the Cold War warriors, but to those people and politicians who want to use all possible resources for the wellbeing of all.