

THE NATURE AND SOLUTION OF ETHNO-POLITICAL CONFLICTS. BULGARIAN EXPERIENCE Ilia GANEV, Valeri LAZAROV

“Neofit Rilski” South-West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
i.ganev@mail.bg, valerilazarov@yahoo.com

Abstract: *In the beginning of the 21st century, the international community tries to do its best in order to guarantee that our civilization, entering the new millennium, puts an end to any form of domination of one peoples over another, to the reasons for such domination, and to the whole idea of inequality. Ethno-political conflict appears to be a permanent form of social and political struggle in the modern world. No major region is free from it. In its more acute manifestation, it may turn into murderous, destructive violence. Bulgarian ethnic model is a concrete historical concept. This is a specific way to find a way out of the impasse of Interethnic relations in which the "revival process" was plunged the country. Bulgarian ethnic model is a transformation of the ethnic contradictions and conflicts in the political process, which neutralize them and makes it possible to restore good neighborly relations in the everyday life of Christians and Muslims before the start of the conflict situation.*

Keywords: ethno-political conflict, conflict solution, conflict management, Bulgarian ethnic model

There are two methods of dispute resolution: one - by negotiation, the second - by force. The first method is peculiar to the people, the second - for the animals. The second should be resorted to only the latter case, if you can not use first.

Cicero

1. Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the main challenge faced by peace policy is that of ethno-political conflict. Contrary to the optimistic expectations of many theoreticians of modernization, ethnicity has lost none of its importance as a defining characteristic. Indeed, in the crises of transformation that have occurred since the dissipation of the East-West conflict, parties amongst whom violent disputes are taking place, or threaten to take place, are making increased use of the argument about ethnic membership to mobilize their adherents. Some of these disputes have long histories, in the course of which the

relations between the parties have become charged with a host of conflictual factors - from clashes of interest and disputes over resources, through one-sided or multi-sided experiences of domination and violence, up to an including ideological differences and dissension over values and beliefs. Typical examples are the protracted conflicts in Northern Ireland and Cyprus, or between the Israelis and Palestinians.

2. The Nature of Ethno-political Conflicts

Any ethno-political conflict involves struggle by two opposite trends - the desire for stability and commitment to change. Some people are satisfied the current situation.

They are happy with it, while others, on the contrary, seek to change. In the conflict action and counteractions are tied into a knot: if one party wants something, then the other with the same certainty unwilling.

A realistic assessment of the possibilities and limits of peaceful intervention in ethnopolitical conflicts cannot be made without consideration of the structural framework- conditions in which such conflicts are rooted and which crucially affect the way they proceed. Of course, each of these conflicts has its own history, and as a rule that history is influenced by a complex collection of diverse factors. None the less, a number of common structural points can be discerned, which are decisive in driving the escalation forward [1]. The two chief ones are, first, massive difficulties with, if not the complete breakdown of, socio-economic modernization, and, secondly, attempts made by ruling groups to favour individual ethnic groups to the detriment of others in the process of political integration and social development. One of the prime requirements in regard to constructive intervention by third parties must therefore be that such parties should help bring about a massive improvement in the economic framework-conditions in the transforming and developing societies of this world. Development is *one* of the crucial preconditions for peace; this observation is now common currency in almost all programmatic declarations of intent at the international level [2]. But the global assertion „peace through development” is of little help in planning concrete measures of support in situations threatened with an escalation of conflict. Furthermore, many (transitional) development strategies propagate a kind of social differentiation that harbours considerable explosive potential in social terms.

Therefore, the main geopolitical conflict solution is the quest for balance. All actions of the social parties, ultimately, will be

directed to achieve a dynamic equilibrium. The elite will choose - to save or to change the existing order. There is another reason arising conflicts. It is related to the rate of changes in different areas of human life.

3. Ethno political Conflict Management as a Solution to Material Disputes and as a Means of Improving Interethnic Relations

Among the various approaches to negotiation in the narrower sense (mediation and facilitation), two in particular have emerged strongly over the last two decades in relation to ethnopolitical conflicts: mediation procedures geared to the matter at issue, and consultation procedures geared to relations between the parties. [3] Both approaches are concerned with establishing face-to-face interaction and communication between leading or (potentially) influential representatives of the parties to the conflict. The essential difference between the two procedures lies in the fact that *mediation*, is meant, if possible, to end in a concrete agreement about how to regulate a previously precisely defined contentious issue - e.g. an agreement about erecting dual-language place-name signs in bi-ethnic localities. The aim of *consultation*, on the other hand, is at one and the same time more modest and more ambitious: namely, to improve relations between the representatives of different ethnic groups. In the example with the place-name signs, the goal might be to increase both sides' understanding of *why* the other side is making/rejecting this demand. The need, in ethnopolitical conflicts, to work not only on the contentious material issues but also on relations between the parties results from the fact that disputes - or lengthy ones, at least - typically operate at two levels: the more or less openly negotiated level of political demands and interests, and the deeper level of collective experiences, stances, and attitudes integral to the formation of identity. An important role in constituting and shaping these two levels is

played by events in which large numbers of the members of a group have been the victims of despotic rule, expulsion, military conquest, or some other form of violence.

The field of application and target groups of relation based consultation-procedures are quite a lot broader, because all the individuals affected by the conflict can, in principle, take part in them. Very often, elements of this kind of third-party involvement are combined with other forms of constructive action aimed at influencing the conflict. These include: training sessions in methods of communication, negotiation, and mediation; the organization of programmes of encounter and exchange; the initiation of bi- or multi-ethnic projects designed to improve shared living-conditions, and so on. In academic circles working on this approach, it is the 'problem-solving workshop' that has become the bestknown form, probably because in such workshops, the role of the third party has up to now been assumed primarily by academics. Such workshops involve a group of influential representatives of each party to the conflict being invited to a series of seminars of a half academic/analytical, half sensitivity-based kind [4]. The consultation approach itself, and its importance in constructively transforming conflicts, are subjects of dispute. As I see it, experience with thirdparty intervention would seem to indicate that the two approaches should be regarded as complementary[5].The comparative advantages of the consultation approach are: that it can be set in motion even in phases where negotiations between the official leadership-groups are blocked; that an ever-larger group of open-minded potential negotiators can be mobilized with its help; and that forums can be created in which more deeply seated conflicts can be dealt with and in which new options for co-operation can be explored without loss of face by political leaders.

4. Conclusions and lessons for settlement of the Balkans conflicts

"External factors" manifested in the Balkans in different forms. They were and diplomatic activity and blockades, embargoes and sanctions and mediation, and military intervention.

Experience in the Balkans on the settlement of modern ethno-political conflicts leads to several conclusions:

First, the intervention of the world's leading players, both of nations and supranational structures occurs in the military phase of the conflict, and on the losing side in an open military confrontation.

Second, the resolution of the conflict on the international level through the United Nations and the European Union takes place after the implementation of a massive military intervention of NATO (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo) or direct intervention in the conflict of the alliance (Macedonia).

Third, as a result of the Balkan crises of the most important peacemaker, not only in the region but also in the world has become NATO. There has been a self-legitimizing and exclusive role of the alliance in conflict resolution. "Using NATO was gradual - first as an element of peacekeeping operations, and then as an independent factor under the banner of peacemaking, and then without this flag and without the approval of the UN Security Council." [6] As a result, NATO has secured a long-term and direct military presence in the strategically important region.

Fourth, the documents governing the relations between the parties of the conflict, developed by international mediators, and not by the parties to the conflict.

Fifth, the proposed model does not take into account the settlement equally the interests of the parties to the conflict, and to promote and protect the position of non-Slavic and non-Orthodox parties.

Sixth, the implementation of the proposed models require a permanent international military and political presence and tight control by the relevant documents from the

supranational structures.

Seventh, the proposed model does not lead to stabilization of the situation in the conflict zones, but only perpetuate division sides in the conflict, turning it into a latent phase.

Actually proposed and implemented in the Balkans model of conflict resolution is a way of expanding external presence in the region and wider - approbation of technologies to create a system of world governance from a single center. This technique is used today in other countries (for example, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya) and, as we have seen, does not bring neither peace or stability. So maybe it's time to propose alternative projects?

5. Bulgarian ethnic model as a success of the transition

In 1989, in any Balkan country ethnic tensions was not as great as in Bulgaria. In the mid 80s of last century, the regime of Todor Zhivkov (1956-1989) made a strategic decision country to homogenized ethnic Bulgarian Turks.

In fact, the regime sought by reviving nationalism and criminal ethnic violence additional psychological and ideological power resource. The resulting ethnic conflict may be characterized by several dimensions: State violence against the person of around one million Bulgarian Turks; Retaliatory terrorist acts; Atmosphere uncertainty in which the relations between the two communities quickly worse; Repression. In the hot summer of 1989 over 300 000 ethnic Turks crossed the border, some of them twice. In country create an explosive atmosphere.

Bulgarian ethnic model is a concrete historical concept. This is a specific way to find a way out of the impasse of Interethnic relations in which the "revival process" was plunged the country. Bulgarian ethnic model is a transformation of the ethnic contradictions and conflicts in the political process, which neutralize them and makes it possible to restore good neighborly relations in the everyday life of Christians

and Muslims before the start of the conflict situation. The reverse process took place in Bosnia, namely - political contradictions were transformed into ethnic conflict.

At this time Bulgaria was on the verge of civil war. The outcome was unique. The elements themselves of the outcome of this situation are: Political representation of minorities; Refusal of ethnic party of ethnic nationalism minority by a line of revenge and vengeance; Failure of the main political forces of ethnic nationalism of majority; Mediating role of civil associations and individuals; Opening and evolution of ethnic formation to normal political party with a liberal orientation.

Particular historic character of the Bulgarian ethnic model determines its strengths and its limitations. This is a model of transition that can be transferred to the new post transition conditions without updating to complement, to develop further. Agenda stands new questions. Central problem for ethnic balance becomes economic situation and the formation of ethnic underclass among Bulgarian Roma.

The most intense Bulgarian ethnic conflict faded faster than could imagine the biggest optimist in 1989. Ethnic party in the electorate, which feared it would undermine statehood proved balancer in critical situations and important stabilizing factor.

Can to be summarized: norms, institutions and practices of managed ethnic heterogeneity receive strong international support, but their implementation ultimately is a local issue and the result of decisions taken by the respective societies and governments.

6. Conclusion

Finally, I believe that the best international experts from the best international organizations, with their best recommendations can not resolve any ethnic conflict, unless parties in this conflict truly desire resolution, and are willing to cooperate with each other on this matter. Willingness means that parties

must accept the fact that ethnic diversity is a permanent condition of their lives, and that they may have to share citizenship with other ethnic groups or nationalities. But more importantly, willingness means that parties are willing to put aside their most extreme claims, are willing to sacrifice some of their own ambitions, and are ready to compromise in favor of mutual interests based on common human values.

Unfortunately, this is the most difficult task in ethnic conflicts, because parties often prefer to prove their rightness and

defend their claims to the end. That is why willingness to put an end to a crisis situation should be considered the most important element in resolution of ethnic conflict, without which no attempt would be successful. Only when the parties accept the fact that the continuation of a conflict will affect in the first place their own national interests and agree on the establishment of the constructive relationship of mutual cooperation without discrimination of ethnic groups on their territory, will a conflict be considered completely settled.

References

- [1] See the overview in Donald L. Horowitz: *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley et al., 1985), and Ted Robert Gurr: *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict*, (Washington DC, 1993).
- [2] On this, see the close links between conflict management and the *Agenda for Development* in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the work of the UN: UN General Assembly, 51st session, New York, Aug. 1996.
- [3] For a more detailed treatment of these approaches, see Norbert Ropers: *Peaceful Intervention: Structures, Processes, and Strategies for the Constructive Regulation of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, (Berghof Report 1; Berlin, 1995).
- [4] See Herbert C. Kelman: *Informal Mediation by the Scholar/Practitioner*, in Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Z. Rubin (eds.): *Mediation in International Relations*, (London, 1992), 64–95.
- [5] A view first put forward by Ronald J. Fisher and Loreleigh Keashly in: *Third Party Interventions in Intergroup Conflict: Consultation is not Mediation*, *Negotiation Journal*, 4 (1988), 381–93.
- [6] Guskova E.Y. Decree. Op. p. 479.