

EUROPE

In early 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of communist regimes across the continent, Europe seemed poised to usher in the final decade of the twentieth century free from the bloodshed and warfare of the past fifty years. Then, with the “hour of Europe” on the horizon and the possibility of stable peace for the continent, events began to unfold in the Balkans and the Caucasus that would herald some of the most turbulent years Europe would experience since the end of World War II. In the aftermath of these wars and in hope of once again finding a stable peace for wider Europe, its representative regional organizations and citizens needed to look back on the lessons learned of the past decade and decide upon the best strategies for future stability.

In an effort to explore how Europe has evolved in its abilities to face the challenges of weak and failing states and address post-conflict reconstruction, representatives from European non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, including the European Union (EU) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and international organizations, gathered in Budapest in January 2005 to discuss ways of strengthening the abilities of European regional institutions to prevent and mitigate conflicts that threaten civilians. The conference was co-hosted by The Fund for Peace and the Institute for Transitional Democracy and International Security (ITDIS) and occurred over two days, highlighted by plenary and workshop discussions.

In Europe, given its own particular history of conflicts and interventions and loss of life experienced in the last century, there is a commitment to limit the use of force by relying

more heavily on non-military approaches. While the use of military force to end conflicts remains an option, participants felt that it should be viewed within the context of a larger policy toolbox that includes regional cooperation and integration among all sectors of society. Thus, while the United Nations and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are both seen as vitally important institutions for security cooperation, particularly in the traditional understanding of military security, the OSCE and EU are also seen as important bodies for achieving security through non-military means.

Europeans, however, are acutely aware of the past failures of the OSCE and the EU to stop humanitarian crises. The failure of these organizations, along with the United Nations, to end the massive violence that consumed the Balkans in the 1990s, despite numerous attempts at a political solution, led to the ultimate use of military force. Particularly in volatile Southeastern Europe, participants argued, the threats posed by fragile and transitioning states need to be effectively confronted to avoid the return to chaos that exploded just over a decade before. While it was largely agreed that organizations like the EU have come further along in their willingness to confront the challenges facing the region and utilize a wider set of tools to prevent and mitigate conflict, the lessons of the recent past have proven that more needs to be done in order to guarantee civilian protection.

The Development and Growth of Civil Society in Europe

Compared with other regions of the world, civil society in Europe is highly developed although, participants pointed out, this does not necessarily

translate into linkages across borders. In Central and Eastern Europe, civil society movements developed primarily in opposition to oppressive communist regimes as a vehicle to demand greater freedoms and protest human rights abuses. In countries like the Czech Republic and Poland, civil society movements count among their greatest successes the overthrow of communism and the establishment of free and functioning local press. In other countries, however, like Romania and Serbia, civil society movements were brutally crushed by Soviet-style regimes and replaced with state-controlled equivalents. In these cases, the growth of truly free social movements has been dramatically slow and, where it does exist, remains very fragile.

Participants also pointed out that an analysis of civil society in “Europe as a whole” is impossible because the continent cannot be considered in its entirety but must be broken down subregionally into Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, and Southeastern Europe. Furthermore, the countries of the Caucasus, often considered the farthest edge of Europe, have their own unique histories influenced both by Soviet occupation and Asian domination. Thus, the wars that raged in both the Balkans and the Caucasus over the past decade greatly defined the nature of civil society in those regions but did little to alter the nature of civil society in other parts of Europe. As a participant from the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Caucasus pointed out, Europe barely noticed the vicious civil war between Armenia and Azerbaijan that claimed thousands of lives because “it was not in their backyard like Bosnia and Kosovo were.”

While Western European countries have for the most part enjoyed healthy traditions of civil society movements that have developed along with democratic governments, the rest of “new and emerging European countries” are at greatly varied stages. The legacies of communism and Soviet domination have also left a heritage of dependence on the state and a lack of true grassroots initiatives which have made civil society groups vulnerable to government influence and dependent on outside resources for their livelihoods. This has also

manifested itself, one participant noted, on a heavy reliance of civil society groups upon Western external support, both financially and for “agenda-setting.” Several other participants from the Balkans pointed out that in Southeastern Europe, NGOs were “built from the outside” by the West, particularly in the wake of the wars of the past decade. As the region has generally stabilized and funding is beginning to dry up, civil society groups have not only been left without financial support, but also without the institutional knowledge about how to carry on independently. “They told us what to do without ever teaching us how to do it,” a participant from Serbia observed.

The heavy reliance on outside donor funding and the delicate ethnic makeup of certain areas, particularly in the Balkans, has led to another characteristic of civil society in Europe that has had a particularly negative impact: the encouragement of competition and deepening separation rather than cooperation. As participants explained, most Eastern European NGOs have traditionally been reluctant to work across ethnic lines and, in Southeastern Europe, years of state-institutionalized segregation of minorities has translated into a similar pattern in civil society. International funding has tended to exacerbate rather than ameliorate this problem, despite intentions to the opposite.

A participant from Bosnia explained, “Bosnia is already a country that is legally separated along ethnic lines, but when NGOs apply for outside assistance we have to state whether we are Bosnian Muslims, Croatians, or Bosnian Serbs because many aid organizations have criteria about how much money they can give to certain ethnic groups in a given cycle.” This, in turn, has led to a tendency for ethnic groups to compete with each other out of necessity and subtly contributed to the perception that the international community sees some ethnic groups differently, or more worthy, than others. “Rather than encouraging us to look past the ethnic differences that leaders manipulated in the past and led to much bloodshed, we are constantly reminded that they are there,” said a participant from Serbia.

Overall, civil society in Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe is still highly dependent on outside sources for both funding and infrastructure support. The current trend of Western donors beginning to exhibit “donor fatigue” and quickly trying to wean NGOs away from their heavy reliance on outside funding has caused alarm among civil society in the region because they lack the necessary skills to operate independently. Participants recommended that rather than funding one project in one country with one ethnic group, donors should begin to fund regional programs aimed at the transfer of knowledge and best practices across national boundaries. Donors need to include civil society in the designing of agendas and in building local capacities in fundraising and the execution of programs. Regional cooperation programs, such as the Bratislava Process¹, and partnerships between Western NGOs and local civil society groups would be highly beneficial to a region that is slowly recovering from years of war and the legacies of the brutal dictatorships of the past.

Defining Threats to European Security

Participants were asked to define what they perceived to be the greatest threats to the regional security of Europe and what measures civil society could take to address these threats. While several participants felt that Muslim extremism and acts of terrorism posed a growing threat to all of Europe, most believed that there was much more of a tendency on the part of the United States to focus on this threat than is the actual reality. The Madrid train bombings of March 2003 and the discovery of Al Qaeda cells in Bosnia over the past several years have resulted in heightened vigilance by most governments and have led to the reduction in acts of terrorism rather than an increase in the threat. As a participant from Switzerland explained, “In Western Europe, we have been confronting the threats posed from fundamentalist groups for much longer than the United States and have developed very coherent intelligence and monitoring systems...even now, we are less likely to face a terrorist attack than the United States.” In Eastern Europe, participants agreed that ironically the legacy of complete state-domination of all aspects of the public and private spheres left little room for

the infiltration of terrorist groups or the growth of fundamentalism. Although the old regimes are gone, this legacy has remained in many countries and has made it very difficult for terrorists to gain a solid footing in most countries, a participant from Romania stated.

The biggest threats to European security that exist today stem from two areas: the rise of nationalist movements and the existence of rampant corruption and transnational crime. These two elements pose the greatest risk to the security of not just Eastern Europe, but all of Europe as a whole. Participants referred to the recent elections in Serbia, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and several of the Baltic republics that brought into power government coalitions with strongly left-leaning nationalist agendas. The increase of attacks on minority groups, like the Roma, and the crackdown on opposition movements in these countries has evidenced the threat of rising nationalist propaganda on the populations. In several Central and Eastern European countries, there has been a sharp increase in the participation of youth groups in neo-Nazi movements and a spike in anti-Semitic demonstrations and marches. In Poland and Slovakia, one participant noted, the increasing proliferation of newspapers and journals espousing anti-Semitic and anti-minority rhetoric should cause major concern over the influence of these movements on both youth and workers’ movements. Moreover, the reluctance on the part of the governments in many countries to crack-down on this problem points to the complicit role nationalist coalitions have had on fomenting these tendencies.

Transnational crime, which is characterized by the smuggling of both humans and goods across state boundaries and a general increase in criminal activity, is on the rise. This fact, coupled with the near-institutionalization of corruption in several Southeastern European states, poses the second main threat to European security. Participants noted that transnational crime and corruption and the growth of nationalism should not necessarily be seen as separate, as they emanate from the same source: disaffection and isolation brought about by rising economic inequalities and growing

unemployment rates. Although Western Europe has always been more economically prosperous than its neighbors to the east, the wars of the past decade and the tendency of the European Union and the United States to favor and assist one country's transition to democracy over others has had negative regional effects.

After the fall of communism in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland, Western aid, in the form of both financial and technical assistance, allowed these countries to transition more easily to democratic structures than their neighbors. Although there are, and continue to be, "bumps in the road," the recent accession of all four countries into the European Union evidenced their quick transitions from Socialist structures to Western-based democratic institutions. Similarly, with a high degree of aid and influence from the United States, Bulgaria and Romania, once considered two of the most corrupt countries in Eastern Europe, have mostly transitioned to democratic and transparent systems of governance. In the former Yugoslavia, however, the civil wars that lasted from 1991 until 1999 have left disastrous economic effects in their aftermath. Yet, participants noted, an analysis of the economic situation in the Balkans is not that simple.

Within the former Yugoslavia, participants from Serbia and Croatia explained, there were vast economic differences based on resources and location. Slovenia and Croatia were closest to Western Europe and long the favored vacation spots of German and Italian tourists. They were also the economic backbone of the former Yugoslavia which depended heavily on the natural resources and tax revenue generated from these two republics. In the other republics of Yugoslavia and in neighboring Albania, a reliance on Soviet-style economic structures and policies greatly retarded growth resulted in a near-paralysis in the transition to Western-style democracies. Furthermore, although Slovenia and, to a much larger extent, Croatia, were crippled by the wars of independence fought in the early 1990s, Western aid and assistance flowed more quickly into transforming these two countries' economic and governance structures than in the rest of the region.

Although Bosnia and to a lesser extent Macedonia became the recipients of much foreign aid and assistance, little of it was directed towards the fundamental transformation needed to prepare either country for eventual European Union membership. Albania, emerging from decades of isolation and war, and Serbia, the pariah state in Europe, were largely left to stumble along on their own.

The legacy of this very disparate history of war and Western engagement has led to a rise in corruption and transnational crime in the region since these countries, long ignored by the rest of Europe, lack the vital knowledge and financial assistance to transform their institutions. One participant from Serbia noted, "It seems like everyone thinks we want to be corrupt...the problem is that we don't know any other way to survive." In Bosnia, one participant stated, the international community has been "driving the car" for the past decade but has never been very interested in "turning over the wheel" to build local capacities for transparent governance. An Albanian participant echoed a similar statement on how the international community has acted in Kosovo where, directly under the auspices of international stewardship, a flourishing criminal network has formed and created parallel structures of governance based in part on criminal allegiances. The problem is so serious that Kosovo, as has been recently documented in a report from the International Crisis Group and in private briefings with regional experts, could be more at risk for internal war arising from competing criminal gangs than from animosity between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians². Even more worrisome, the growing evidence of drug and human trafficking routes stretching all the way from Afghanistan (also under international stewardship) through Turkey and up into the Balkans should be high cause for concern for the international community and Western Europe, in particular.³

The presence of corruption and the failure of the international community to tackle the uneven economic growth of the region has reverberated throughout Europe, participants agreed. The problem must be seen as interconnected or an

effective strategy to combat the threat will remain elusive. As participants from Austria and Switzerland stated, the Balkan wars led to massive refugee flows from Southeastern Europe into the rest of Europe and contributing to the rise in nationalism in many countries, particularly in fragile Eastern and Central Europe. “Now nationalist leaders are telling the people that they not only have to worry that their jobs are being threatened by the Roma and other national minorities, but also from all of the immigrants that came to our country after the wars and are trying to steal our jobs,” a participant from Hungary pointed out. In countries like Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, still grappling with high unemployment rates as they attempt to adapt to EU regulations, these sentiments are increasingly finding a larger audience. It was mentioned that, ironically, what is being overlooked is the fact that what is undermining national economies is not the presence of refugees competing for jobs, but the failure of the international community and the various peacekeeping missions in Southeastern Europe to tackle corruption and organized crime that flows over borders and undermines regional security. As one participant from Bosnia stated, “We have all of these peacekeeping missions and international advisors in the region but does anyone really talk to each other?”

Finally, participants pointed to the existence of “frozen conflicts” in border areas in the region that have translated into the phenomenon of “states within a state” that operate as criminal black holes. The Transdniestria region of Moldova and parts of the Caucasus and Chechnya have all experienced brutal warfare in the recent past but once the fighting ceased or was ended by outside intervention, these areas have been allowed to fester away from international attention. Because they still remain part of the territorial jurisdiction of another state but operate, in practice, completely outside the political or legal frameworks of that state, they remain largely autonomous. In the wake of international obscurity, flourishing criminal enterprises have taken over. These areas remain resistant to political solutions although the crime they export destabilizes the region. “You can’t buy them off,” one participant stated, “They have plenty

of money and no interest in negotiating.” It is in these border regions, participants warned, that the threat of terrorism remains the greatest. Many are in former Soviet countries that harbor large stockpiles of weapons and potentially other dangerous nuclear material. A participant summed up: “The international community is so worried about terrorism in the places it is paying most attention to but it is completely ignoring the lesson that it is in the places where no one is looking that the threat remains the greatest.”

The Role of Regional Organizations in Europe

Except for Africa, the countries of Europe have had more direct experience with interventions by regional organizations than any other area in the world. This in turn has led to a well-developed sense of the successes and failures of the OSCE, NATO, the EU and the UN in prevention, intervention and post-conflict peacebuilding. Overall, participants still considered the UN as the the most legitimate actor to sanction an intervention. However, the failures of the UN, the OSCE and the EU to act successfully in the wars in the Balkans has led to a general sense that, if a military operation is to be undertaken to stop large-scale civilian atrocities, NATO remains the most legitimate and capable regional body. Participants analyzed each regional organization individually on its strengths and weaknesses across a wide spectrum based on the principles of human security and greater regional security.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The OSCE remains one of Europe’s oldest institutions for the monitoring and guaranteeing of human rights and the promotion of principles of fair and transparent governance. Participants agreed that the organization has generally been engaged in attempts to broker political solutions to crises in Europe and has remained a presence on the ground in most post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. The two main setbacks to the ability of the organization to function effectively remain the necessity of all member states to reach consensus before taking action and the lack of centralized mandates and coordination among the missions.

These two problems have translated into a lack of action when confronted by growing crises and a failure to anticipate and address properly the needs of affected populations on the ground. Further, the sense of institutional disorganization has led to the perception by civil society organizations that the OSCE is non-transparent in its operations and not nearly inclusive enough of local knowledge and capacities. "It seems, at least in Bosnia, that they are just kind of bumbling around sometimes and not really sure what they're supposed to be doing internally...never mind considering what we need them to be doing on the ground," said one participant.

Each OSCE mission has its own mandate and coordination mechanisms. These functions are not well-defined and the organization is viewed differently in each country in which it operates, depending on the strength of the head-of-mission and the areas of reform it is undertaking. Although the OSCE is generally credited with the successful formation of the Kosovo Police Service, it is still viewed negatively by many Kosovar Albanian citizens for its failure to prevent atrocities in the province prior to the NATO intervention in 1999 and its inept attempts to verify them. Even among OSCE participants at the conference, there remained a general feeling of bitterness that the Kosovo Verification Mission, undertaken in 1998 and at the height of the hostilities, was so poorly executed from mission headquarters in Vienna. "They didn't know who they had on the ground, how bad the situation was, or how to get anyone out when it was clear that we were in the middle of a war zone...plus we were there but had no mandate to stop the atrocities being committed before our eyes....it was a very frustrating experience" said one participant. Another participant noted: "Everyone wanted to know why the international community was more interested in documenting the atrocities rather than interested in actually stopping them. The horror stories didn't need to be written down, they needed to be stopped."

Another problem noted by participants is the process of "secondment" that the OSCE relies upon for hiring its international staff. Generally,

positions are solicited through the Foreign Affairs or State Department branches of member countries and there is little training received by staff prior to deployment. This has resulted in a lack of the necessary knowledge of local customs and the history of the conflict and has in turn led to inaccurate assessments of the needs of affected populations. Another issue raised by participants was the short term of employment of OSCE staff members, usually six months, and the subsequent "lack of ownership" for the mission demonstrated by international staff. Beyond the inability to demonstrate the needed dedication to the task, the quick turn-over rate of staff members also results in the loss of valuable lessons learned that the OSCE has not been seen to be addressing properly. "You start to work with someone on a project that you know is fundamental and then they're gone in six months and someone else replaces them who knows nothing of what's going on...after a while you just give up and work alone," said a participant from the Balkans.

Participants also felt that the OSCE has generally failed to involve enough people with local experience in both the planning and execution of its mandates. Although this varies from mission to mission, most agreed that the OSCE has generally failed to incorporate civil society into its work even though many of its tasks are specifically focused on strengthening local capacities. There was a strong sense among participants that the OSCE "arrives with a mandate decided on in Vienna with little to no local input, goes about trying to fulfill the mandate alone, and only later realizes that they need local help in doing anything successfully." The failure of the organization to communicate with civil society groups has also led to the general perception that it is a non-transparent actor. A lack of information campaigns and clear communication strategies was raised as a problem throughout the conference.

Like the UN, the need for the organization to have member consensus before acting has lessened its credibility and legitimacy in the region. Particularly in former Soviet countries in the Caucasus, the inability of the OSCE to act when Russia threatens a veto has greatly diminished its effectiveness. In

Georgia, the relatively successful OSCE border monitoring mission was abruptly brought to a halt when Russia threatened to veto a new mandate and not pay its dues. Similarly, as a participant from Nagorno-Karabakh pointed out, the OSCE has been present for more than a decade in attempting to resolve the status of the disputed territory but is seen by the local population as having done largely nothing because it is constantly subject to the political whims of Russia and the United States.

Additionally, much like UN missions, participants felt that the strength of the OSCE missions was heavily reliant upon the head-of-mission and the specificity and clarity of the mandate. In certain cases, such as Serbia, a dynamic and strongly engaged head-of-mission made all the difference in local perceptions of the organization. In others, particularly in some of the larger OSCE missions in Southeastern Europe and the Caucasus, the sheer size of the mission and the lack of communication and coordination among the various branches operating within the country amounted to similar confusion for civil society groups engaged at the local level. “We talk to each other more than they do,” observed two participants. Although the OSCE has recently introduced a new computer system intended to streamline communications among various missions and headquarters, participants felt that additional improvements needed to be made in the communication and coordination process between regional missions and civil society actors working on the ground.

European Union

Participants, on the whole, viewed the primary role of the EU to be one of economic integration rather than as a guarantor of regional security through preventive diplomatic and military mechanisms. The EU has been mainly engaged in post-conflict efforts to reform and restructure the financial institutions of emerging states in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Participants felt, however, that it has largely failed in its efforts to prevent violent conflicts or respond appropriately when humanitarian emergencies occur. The historic December 2004 EU takeover of the NATO peacekeeping mission in Bosnia was judged by

participants to be too early in its inception phase to judge progress, although most agreed that, at least in the goals laid out for the mission, it was a fundamental step for the organization in accepting responsibilities for the security of wider Europe. On other issues, however, the EU was criticized for a lack of transparency and a failure to articulate its policies at the local level. “You need to have a degree in understanding the EU alone to begin to fathom what the organization does,” cited one participant. “Who has the time for that when we are dealing with real issues on the ground?”

Beyond the inherent complexities of understanding the various bodies and their respective powers and duties within the European Union, participants felt that the EU had been too slow to act in addressing problems in the region. Particularly in the Balkans, the EU had failed to understand the severity of the crisis until too late and even then engaged in “half-measures” to try to placate all sides without ever addressing the root causes of the conflicts. Several participants voiced the perception that the EU was too busy “having tea” and attempting to come to the most agreeable political settlement while blatantly ignoring the realities on the ground. “We were killing each other and they were trying to figure out how to make everyone look good at international press briefings...in reality, they were doing nothing but saving face at the cost of many lives,” one guest from the Balkans remarked. Others felt that the EU had manipulated its role during and after the conflicts to try to coerce unity at the expense of dealing with the root causes of the problems. “They seemed to think that a ticket to EU membership, in and of itself, was enough to make us forget the recent past and the realities of surviving in the near future,” one participant stated, “it’s important but you cannot heal wounds with the promise of Euros alone.”

The confusing structure of the EU, its various components, funding mechanisms, and complex doctrines have further contributed to the notion on the part of civil society that the organization barely understands itself well enough to help fragile states recover from conflict. Although the EU has attempted to present a united face in helping the rest of Europe confront its economic and political

fissures, the perception that the Western European founding members of the alliance are still competing on many of the same issues was not lost on participants to the conference from Southeastern Europe. “They want us to reform and act as a united region when they can’t even decide if they agree upon a common agenda in Brussels,” one participant remarked. There remained the fear and hesitancy to “buy into” the EU platform of reforms and goals as the organization itself seemed so “disorganized.” Particularly in the Balkans, Western European interests continue to compete for national allegiances and economic trade agreements based on historical alliances which, in turn, have undermined the notion of a “wider European community” based on a common agenda of integration. “The EU needs to figure out its own agenda before imposing it on us,” observed one commentator.

The presence of the EU on the ground in many post-conflict stability operations was given mixed reviews on the part of civil society organizations. While generally viewed to be more transparent than the UN or the OSCE, the EU still fails to engage local NGOs and civil society actors in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts and effectively explain the mission of the organization. The failure of the EU to open channels of communication with local civil society groups and institutionalize a process for sharing information was cited as a major shortcoming of the organization. Finally, almost all participants criticized the EU for being too quick to fund large international NGOs rather than civil society groups, and for a lack of transparency on how its funding mechanisms worked so local actors could compete for grants. With over 70% of EU funding in the region going to non-local initiatives, according to participants, most felt that the EU had a strong obligation to do a better job in addressing how to incorporate and fund civil society initiatives on the ground if the organization was to gain more credibility for its efforts in the future.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NATO was viewed by most participants as the most legitimate guarantor of security in the region and the most willing to act when large-scale

humanitarian crises occur. The two NATO interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo to stop the wars in the aftermath of UN and EU inaction was viewed by some participants as proof of the organization’s willingness to uphold the principles of the *Responsibility to Protect* civilians from violence. Others, however, pointed out that the political decision to use military force to intervene in the conflicts was primarily made by the United States and that NATO was merely the military vehicle for the decision. Concerns were raised that the “illegal” intervention in Kosovo set a dangerous precedent for how the organization might be used in the future. One participant questioned, “How much of an alliance is NATO really? It’s just a more palatable disguise for US unilateralism.”

Largely due to its military structure, NATO was viewed as being far better organized in the execution of its mandate than either the OSCE or the EU. Until the EU assumed full responsibility for both the military and civilian sides of the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia in December 2004, NATO was responsible for both military operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. In both cases, most participants agreed that the presence of NATO in both missions was essential in ensuring that hostilities did not resume. Some participants voiced concern, however, that the military separation of warring parties had gone on for too long and had impeded efforts at peacebuilding although most agreed that this was less the fault of NATO and more the fault of the other organizations tasked with reconciliation and reconstruction. Some also felt that the presence of armed military patrols had contributed to the “militarization” of societies which proved to be detrimental in putting the past behind and moving forward.

Participants believed there had been far too little consultation on the part of NATO in incorporating local views and knowledge. One participant from Belgrade noted that early efforts to engage Serbian NGOs in stopping the violence and assessing the best way to confront the conflict using non-military means was merely window-dressing, especially leading up to the Kosovo intervention. “They asked us to put together an assessment and then the next week went ahead and bombed anyway....we were

just like ornaments on a Christmas tree to make them look good so they could say they exhausted every option when they really did not.” The failure to consult civil society groups and incorporate them into planning the military interventions and subsequent peacekeeping operations has also led, in many cases, to an exacerbation of trauma experienced by victims. One participant from the region observed that the constant presence of the military, and the “macho culture” of military organizations, was a daily reminder of atrocities just recently endured. Similar sentiments were voiced on how a failure of sensitivity-training about local religions and customs had led to some fundamental misunderstandings that could have been easily avoided if civil society assistance had been solicited.

Overall, NATO is viewed in a positive light for its role in stopping the wars in the Balkans when the EU and UN were unwilling or unable to act. The role of the organization in maintaining security in Bosnia and Kosovo was generally lauded, although many Serbian participants noted that they were distrustful of NATO’s initial intentions to protect Serbian minorities in Bosnia and Kosovo: “How can you trust an organization to protect your citizens when they have just attacked your country?” asked one participant. Most felt that NATO, as a military organization, did its job well but should not be tasked with the “soft side” of peacekeeping that falls within the mandate of other international bodies, like the UN, OSCE and the EU. Participants also believed that greater local knowledge should be solicited by the organization to avoid incidents where “more harm than good is done” in protecting local populations.

Finally, a main concern on the part of civil society about all three regional organizations is their failure to communicate well with each other and with the UN. Beyond shortcomings in not engaging civil society in their missions, the OSCE, EU and NATO are viewed as often having no clear lines of communication with each other. In Bosnia, where the Dayton Accords set up multiple and often redundant structures of interim governance and responsibilities, civil society participants noted a general lack of communication among the various

regional bodies that manifested itself in either needless duplication of activities or complete inaction. “It seems that they’re not sure who is supposed to be doing what from month to month, which makes it difficult for us to determine which regional organization to talk to about our specific concerns,” said one participant. Another noted that, in Bosnia specifically, it was often more about competition than cooperation, with each organization being more concerned about “ownership” over its area of responsibility than working together to get tasks completed. Similarly, the March 2004 riots that swept unexpectedly through the province of Kosovo caught all three regional bodies, and the UN, off-guard and led to unnecessary destruction property and loss of life until NATO finally quelled the violence. “Someone should have anticipated the violence and it shouldn’t have taken all of these organizations so long to get their acts together,” said a Serbian participant, “It was obvious that no one had been talking too each other very well.”

The Impact of Conflict on Vulnerable Groups

Participants were asked to evaluate the impact of the past decade’s conflicts on women, children, the elderly and the disabled and how civil society and regional organizations have played a role in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in the aftermath of conflict. Participants debated the role that international interventions have had in contributing to the exploitation of women and the increase in human trafficking in the region and how such negative consequences of an intervention can be avoided or reduced in the future.

In the Balkan wars, as in most other internal conflicts, rape was used by all parties systematically as a weapon of war to demoralize and defeat. Women and girls were most often the victims of rape, although men and boys also suffered. What participants pointed out as being particularly traumatic to victims were the rapes that were committed by former neighbors or friends and not unknown assailants. This made many victims unwilling to come forward about the crime and more likely to hide it out of shame. One participant conveyed privately to the hosts that many women

felt embarrassed rather than enraged at having been raped by “the next-door neighbor’s son” who, until a year earlier, had gone to school with their children. Other participants emphasized the sheer shock at seeing the conflict escalate so quickly and claiming so many lives. This resulted in many victims of violent crimes merely wanting to “go on surviving” rather than confront individual horrors. One participant who works with women in the region, said, “It was enough that, for either side, your husband, son or brother was likely to have been killed....it was considered selfish to spend too much time on your own problems when you had a family to take care of.”

A participant from Bosnia identified a deeper problem: “Women in Bosnia, Serbia and most of the former republics were all well educated and very engaged in the social and political life of the federation....we had one of the highest percentages of female participation at both the local and national levels of governance. So admitting to being raped was admitting to being defeated, not as an ethnic group, but as a gender.” Similarly, another participant spoke to the crimes committed against Muslim Albanian women in Kosovo and there equally demoralizing and traumatic consequences on the population as a whole: “It is a traditional society and many women were shunned by their families afterwards.” Although in the years following the wars, many women have come forward to seek counseling and help, several members of the group said that a large percentage still live with the trauma in silence.

Another, and less talked about, consequence of the wars was a rise in domestic abuse and sexual violence towards women after the hostilities ended. A participant from Romania noted that after the fighting ended in Kosovo many men who had taken up arms or been members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) found themselves without “a war to fight or a job to return to.” In both Bosnia and Kosovo, the staggering rates of unemployment following the interventions was directly correlated with a sharp spike in the level of domestic abuse incidents reported to police as well as rising rates of alcohol-related crimes. A participant from the Balkans also related that many men felt

“emasculated” by the traumas they had endured and, in turn, took out their frustrations on their wives and children. “Although some women came forward for help and counseling, it is almost unheard of for men to do the same in our culture. . . unfortunately, it was usually their families that suffered,” another participant stated.

The wars and the devastated societies that existed in their aftermath had particularly negative effects on children. In Serbia, one participant said, the single largest problem facing the country is disaffected youth. Prior to the war, Serbia enjoyed one of the highest rates of education and employment for new graduates in all of Southeastern Europe. It also sent thousands of students abroad every year in exchange programs with Western European and American universities. After years of sanctions, the NATO interventions and continued international isolation, the largest victims continue to be Serbia’s young population. “It’s not the older generation that’s suffering the most,” said a participant from Belgrade, “it’s an entire new generation that is growing up angry and with few prospects for employment.”

In all of Southeastern Europe, the high rates of unemployment have contributed to “brain drain” as parents who can afford to send their children abroad increasingly do rather than have them face the bleak prospects that exist at home. An Albanian participant noted that most of Kosovo’s young population is working abroad and, with official unemployment rates hovering over 60%, the province is highly dependent on a remittance economy. The other negative effect of having so many young people unemployed and with few prospects for higher education is that they are increasingly turning to the black market and criminal gangs for their livelihoods. They are also much more susceptible to nationalist politicians preaching anti-minority or, as is the case in Serbia, anti-Western views. “They are telling these kids that the U.S., Western Europe and western institutions like NATO and the EU are bad when joining them is really the only hope for their countries and their futures,” said a participant from Serbia.

Similar problems of isolation and hopelessness confront the handicapped and the elderly in Southeastern Europe. Most countries are simply unable to pay adequate pensions or provide compensation for individuals injured in the war or from landmines. It was noted, however, that, particularly in regard to the handicapped, civil society has been quite successful in lobbying governments and international donors for funding to help train landmine victims and provide jobs to those injured in the wars. Another participant agreed that civil society has had other successes in pushing governments to recognize the rights of the elderly and handicapped in law. "In these areas, we have worked across national boundaries with each other and closely with Western Europe," said a guest from Romania.

Civil society in the region is also closely engaged in fighting human trafficking. Fueled by the large presence of international personnel in the peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo as well as the demand in Western Europe, the trafficking of women and girls has exploded in the region in the past decade. Criminal gangs use well-established routes for the trafficking of drugs and other contraband to smuggle humans across national boundaries. The majority of these women come from Ukraine, Moldova and Romania and are trafficked through Southeastern Europe into Western Europe. Many are also sold to brothels and bars in Bosnia and Kosovo where international personnel are present. The mountainous terrain and porous borders make it particularly difficult for national police and militaries, as well as international peacekeepers, to close down the smuggling routes.

Participants reflected that civil society has been working closely with international organizations in both countries of origin and destination to confront the human trafficking problem but they needed to create more networks across the region. A participant from Romania noted that civil society in that country is working closely with border police and has been successful in lobbying for the presence of more female police officers at national frontiers. There have also been successful media campaigns launched by civil society organizations

aimed at informing the public about the problem. "We need to really work better with the local communities that these girls are coming from," said another Romanian participant. Because many girls from poor villages are lured into the trade with false promises of employment as waitresses or maids in Western Europe, participants agreed that information campaigns needed to be more targeted at these communities. Others stated that civil society can do more about working with international peacekeepers and personnel to educate them about human trafficking and how to recognize it and prevent it.

Conclusion

While civil society in many parts of Europe has an evolved history of working with national governments and international organizations, it needs to be able to work more cooperatively across national and ethnic lines on a regional level. In Eastern Europe, it is particularly important that civil society learn to operate free of donor-imposed agendas and improve their fundraising capabilities. Participants agreed that civil society could learn a lot from the successes and failures of other regions and they needed to make an effort to reach across state lines and form more regional coalitions. In lobbying outside funders to give money to regional coalitions of NGOs as well as local initiatives, civil society organizations could focus on cooperation rather than on competition.

Participants also viewed the biggest threats to the region emanating from nationalism and corruption and agreed that more needed to be done on the local and regional level to combat these two dangerous trends. In lobbying for greater government accountability and educating the public on corruption and organized crime, civil society can be a powerful voice in effecting change. The dangers posed by "frozen conflicts" and territories that are beyond state control also need to be effectively addressed as they pose threats to the entire region with the crime and weapons they export. Participants underscored that the threat of terrorism stemming from these areas needed to be confronted quickly.

In reviewing the efforts of regional organizations to respond to humanitarian emergencies, participants concluded that the efficacy of the OSCE, EU and NATO could be enhanced by increasing their transparency and accountability within mission countries. They also agreed that the efficacy of the UN could be increased by encouraging a more active role for local NGOs in all phases of an intervention and in post-conflict peacebuilding. Civil society itself has a responsibility in engaging regional bodies and also educating the public on the functions of these organizations.

Finally, participants concurred that civil society has enjoyed most of its successes in lobbying for the rights of vulnerable groups across the region. Participants pointed out that more needed to be done, at local and international levels, to address the growing trend of disaffected youth turning to crime and nationalism. The regional problem of human trafficking is also being tackled at the local level but needs to be addressed regionally in order to end the phenomenon.

Recommendations

I. The EU, OSCE, and NATO need to increase their transparency, their efficacy, and their accountability in humanitarian military interventions.

International organizations need to be clearer in communicating their mandate and adhering strictly to its parameters.

Local expertise should play a greater role in the shaping of any intervention by an international organization.

There should be both internal and external evaluations on the progress of field-mission programs to ensure transparency and accountability.

IGOs should establish an appeals board so that local populations have a way to address their concerns and better communicate their needs when decisions taken by international bodies are not in the best interests of local populations.

There should be greater cooperation between and among IGOs to make their work more effective and less redundant.

IGOs should strive to shift resources wherever possible away from internal administration costs and into actual programming needs.

International organizations need to do a better job to communicate their organizational structure and the availability of resources to local populations. The EU in particular needs to streamline and simplify its funding mechanisms.

II. Non-governmental organizations should work to improve the effectiveness of the EU, OSCE, and NATO in protecting civilians.

Prior to an intervention

NGOs should serve in an early warning function. NGOs have a wide range of local knowledge and access and should serve more actively as a source of information for both local populations and intergovernmental organizations. NGOs could play a particularly important role in alerting intergovernmental organizations to potential outbreaks of conflict and in identifying and executing programs to offset conflict.

NGOs should serve as advocates for their constituents. NGOs can function as a conduit of information from citizens to intergovernmental bodies, especially in reporting violations of human rights where national authorities are either unwilling or unable to address the problem.

NGOs should have an active voice in shaping any international intervention through the provision of local expertise and strong advocacy campaigns aimed at influencing policy decisions. NGOs have a role in ensuring that there is effective communication between local actors on the ground and intergovernmental bodies.

During an intervention

NGOs should play a more active role in disseminating information about or from IGOs to their constituencies concerning their structures,

mandates, processes and the availability of funding and other types of resources.

NGOs should promote dialogue between local populations and IGOs in order to create better linkages and facilitate more common understanding.

NGOs should serve in a monitoring function in order to ensure the accountability of the work done by IGOs on the ground as well as local developments.

NGOs should facilitate contact groups between peacekeeping forces and local communities.

NGOs should improve their ability to communicate the needs of civilians to multilateral organizations by:

- Cooperating among themselves more effectively,
- Engaging more constructively with media,
- Advocating that national governments include NGO representatives in their delegations to multi-lateral organizations,
- Serving as an institutional base for cooperation between individual EU countries and affected countries.

Post-Intervention

Through advocacy, NGOs should help ensure that post-conflict peace-building is a part of any intervention. NGOs should help involve local populations in the peace-building process.

III. IGOs need to actively foster their partnerships with NGOs.

- There should be greater interaction between civil society organizations and IGOs at every level, including the decision-making level. There should also be regular meetings in the region between civil society organizations and IGOs on the ground.

- IGO-sponsored training for civil society organizations should be tailor-made and designed in response to local needs. Training should also not rely exclusively on international experts, who are often costly and not well informed about local issues and culture.
- IGOs should fund NGOs to undertake research at the local level, not just activism.
- IGOs and NGOs should cooperate in building databases of existing financial and human resources.
- IGOs should identify and support relevant pre-existing or ongoing programs that are being carried out by local NGOs.
- IGOs should reexamine their policies of “secondment.” Short-term deployments of international staff undermine relationship-building with local NGOs and also contribute to the loss of institutional knowledge.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Bratislava Process began in 1999 at a conference in the Slovakian capital that brought together representatives of pro-democracy forces from throughout the Former Republic of Yugoslavia including the major opposition parties, trade unions, NGOs and independent media along with key figures of the international community like the EU, Council of Europe and the OSCE. The purpose of the initiative was to promote networking across the region on democracy, transparency and free enterprise. For the next two years the Bratislava Process Task Force worked on promoting democracy in Serbia. Many credit the movement, and its ability to cut across all sectors, with the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000.

² “Kosovo After Haradinaj” International Crisis Group Report Number 163, 26 May 2005. Available online at : <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3474&l=1>

³ See website of Southeast Europe Cooperative Initiative: www.seccicenter.org