

Assessing the Perspectives of Bulgarian – Serbian Relations

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Introduction

Over the 20th century the political and intrastate relations between Bulgaria and Serbia have been particularly complex. The occurring isolation between both countries has led to the unrealistic comprehension of the “other”, building stereotypes. Even after the end of the Cold War these trends in the bilateral relations have not been overcome because of the ten years escalating crisis in former Yugoslavia that hindered the improvement of the political, economic and cultural relations between both states.

Although there are no serious political problems between countries under examination, a national political rivalry is structuring their bilateral relations. As far as any interaction between the two states exists, it is on central level, while the cooperation on regional and municipal level is rather an exception. There is no established practice in every day communication between different social, professional, territorial and civic communities from Bulgaria and Serbia, which brings about isolation in the bilateral relations.

On this basis it could be inferred that the development of the bilateral relations is not a natural process as far as during the referred period, both countries are experiencing crisis, lack of enough resources on central political level, and are unable to optimize those civil factors that are capable of powering up the major aspects of cooperation.

The changes in Serbia since the end of 2000 have set a new political opportunity for commencing a dialogue between both states. The main question here is how this dialogue will be carried on in the future. After the unseat of the Miloshevic regime the official dialogue between the authorities of both countries has introduced a new dynamics and atmosphere of cooperation in the bilateral relations. The political mobilization on institutional level, however, proved to be insufficient for unfolding the actual potential for cooperation between the Serbian and Bulgarian societies. The non-governmental organizations have an important role for putting into practice the major priorities of bilateral relations, such as overcoming relations' tardiness, identification of interests, groups and institutions that might boost or hinder the development of these relations, finding interaction areas between these agents making them communicate and cooperate.

In this context, the Institute for Regional and International Studies implemented the *Civil Strategy for Developing of Bilateral Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia* Project. The project united the efforts of prominent experts from the NGO community, opinion leaders, journalists, business executives, representatives of the central and local authorities for developing a framework

and structuring the opportunities for developing the bilateral cooperation in five major areas – political cooperation at central and local level, economic cooperation, cooperation in the area of culture, education and media, civic cooperation. An environment of intensive dialogue and exchange of opinions and views was created in order to provide the representatives of the target audience with the opportunity to identify common interests and initiate joint activities.

Two Bulgarian – Serbian conferences were held within the project. The first one was on July 6-7, 2002 in Borovets, Bulgaria and the second one was on October 26-27, 2002 in Niska banja, Serbia. The conferences provided possibilities for open dialogue on different bilateral issues. The participants were introduced to: the programs of the European Union and the Council of Europe for supporting transborder cooperation; the history, the main activities and opportunities for the Vidin - Zajcar- Kalafat Euroregion; the experience of Belogradchik municipality in developing infrastructure projects. Training seminar for the representatives of the local authorities was organized. It focused on such issues as the decentralization of the decision-making process at local level, NGO-local authority relations, the elaboration of local and regional development strategies, among others.

The major result of the project implementation was the adoption of a series of proposals and recommendations to develop the Bulgarian-Serbian relations in the areas of politics, economy, culture, education, media, civil society, local self-government and transborder cooperation.

It was decided that an Association for Transborder Cooperation would be established with the participation of NGOs, local authorities, representatives of the business community and media from the border regions.

Bulgaria - Serbia:

Opportunities and Problems before the Neighbourly Relations. Civil Strategy

Bulgaria and Serbia lived in their relations a very prolonged 19th century. It continued throughout the whole 20th century up to year 2000. These typically Balkan relations were the permanent victim of three ailments - the ideological, geopolitical, and psychological one. In other words, of nationalism, elementary East European geopolitics (i.e. we can be in good relations only with nations we do not have a common border with), and of what experts called 'psychology of small differences' (we can least tolerate the ones closest to us).

The Bulgarian-Serbian relations fell into the trap of history. They had unavoidably to be made hostages of the serious dramas on the border between the 19th and 20th centuries - the disintegration of the European empires and the distribution of the 'disputable' territories among the newly established states. This problem only suffices to poison for decades ahead the relations between any two separate national communities. But combined with the above-described explosive Balkan 'mix', it brought a remarkable dose of disagreement, competition and hatred between the two nations so close in their mentality and history.

Therefore, the task of developing a civil strategy to put the Bulgarian-Serbian relations on normal footing is extremely difficult. Neither is it eased up, just the opposite - it is hindered, by the fact that Bulgarians and Serbs understand each other's languages, that they drink rakia and have similar notions about good and evil in life. Because the aim is not knowing each other - the problem lies exactly in knowing each other too well. The issue at hand is how to come to liking each other, or at least to tolerating each other. We are assigned the task of developing a European pragmatic strategy for solving problems in spite of the stereotypes, and in the face of persisting national ideologies.

We should not be deceived: the first years of the 21st century will not wipe out the 19th and 20th centuries all together. But a minimum program can be implemented. And this should be a program of normal civil, intellectual, and economic contacts, which will overcome the battles, monarchs, disputes, and will bring new meaning to a common history of almost 1000 years.

Historical background.

The peaks in the historical development of the Medieval Bulgarian and Serbian states mark a difference of 400 years. Bulgaria at the time of Simeon rules over wide Serbian territories, and Serbia at the time of Dusan - large Bulgarian

territories. Both Medieval states faced problems with their legitimacy as 'empires' in a contest with the only 'legitimate' empire - Byzantium; both of them became tsardoms under extraordinary circumstances, which has later provided arguments to challenge their 'empire' status. Similarities are found even in the biographies of the two greatest rulers - Simeon I, and Stefan Dusan - although centuries apart: both of them grew in Constantinople as hostages without any plausible chances to inherit the throne, and both made the impossible to get for the first time the tsar title for their countries, they both had the same final goal, which neither achieved - the throne in Constantinople. In their highest apogee, both Serbia and Bulgaria allow themselves to dream with an almost universe-wide ambition.

The ascent of any of the neighbouring tsardoms is inevitably related to the humiliation of the other. Ivan Vazov has wrathfully criticised a Serbian poet's verse: "*... не може истодобно / блистати на Балкана / и круна Симеуна, / и скинтар Цар Душана...*". But the truthfulness of this verse is proven by history: let us only compare Bulgaria under Boris I, Simeon and Petar (when the Serbian notables were summoned for security reasons to stay in Pliska and Preslav); and Serbia under Milutin, Stefan Dechanski and Dusan (when the Bulgarian notables from the conquered territories, on their part, joined the Serbian national elite).

The ups and downs from Bulgarian domination to Serbian one marked a culmination with the total victory of Stefan Dechanski over Michail Shishman in the Velbuzhd battle in 1330. Earlier, the Bulgarian domination found its semi-miraculous metaphore in the captivity of Prince Vladimir at Samuil's court and his love affair with the Bulgarian ruler's daughter - Kossara.

The official national ideologies put enormous effort exactly in exploiting of confrontation, disregarding the obvious examples of good neighbourly relations, co-operation, and common history. St. Sava died and was buried and worshipped for a long time at Tarnovo; the Tarnovo Patriarch legalised Dusan's tsar's title, his grand-mother, mother, and wife were Bulgarians; Bulgarians fought for Lazar at Kosovo, and Serbs - for Petar Delyan against Byzantium; Grigorius Tsamblak and Konstantine Kostenecky wrote their most significant works in Serbia. The alphabet is the same, and in the past the orthographic rules as well as the languages themselves were similar to a much greater extent than presently. What beats everything else is the rivalry between the two Medieval states centered around the political issue of inheriting Byzantium, or at least which will be the second-rated tsardom after the Eastern Rome Empire.

The rivalry, discontinued from a short period of time by the Ottoman rule, grew again in the last century of Turkish domination. The Bulgarian and Serbian church, and later state authorities clash in a contest for the spiritual and political control over the controversial territories - Macedonia, the territories along Morava and Timok rivers. A curious, and at the same time macabre fact

is that the creators of the two national mythologies incessantly increase their claims - starting with the near-border territories, their appetites gradually grow to reach full absorption, total denunciation of their neighbour's right to exist at all. The mid and end 19th century mark the peak in the national phantasies and mythomania: some Serbian scientists (like Milos Miloevic) openly declare that 'true Serbs' live in the territories to Tarnovo, and Serbs turned Bulgarian - to the Black Sea. And some Bulgarian scientists (Dimitar Rizov among them) outline fictitious borders of Bulgaria to the Sava River, look for remnants of Bulgarian dialects in Smederevo, and print maps on which Belgrade existed as 'Alba Bulgarica'.

Put together, these theories are ridiculous. However, the representatives of the one community that are interested in the view point of the other are very few. The ice age in our relations started with the absurd Serbo-Bulgarian War (Slivnitsa in the Bulgarian memory corresponds to Velbuzhd in the Serb one), and ends with the First and the Second World Wars, and the Cold War into which Bulgaria and Serbia (Yugoslavia) were members of hostile configurations, or at the most allied configurations in cold relations. The unrecoverable happened, literally rivers of blood were flowing between the two people, and each nation knows only 'its own river'. The Toplich uprising and the village of Boinik speak nothing to a Bulgarian, as the village of Garvan and the fate of people like Dimitar Gjuzev ring no bell in Serbia. Nobody wants to know about the other party's dead, everybody is intensively counting his own. The inconvenient opposite point of view has been spared in the history textbooks, in the political analyses, even in the memories of the dramatis personae. The facts, however, are staggering: a King, a Prime Minister, a state and party leader of the highest rank, tens of intellectuals, and tens of thousands of ordinary people die in, in relation to, and as a result of these bilateral relations.

An important part of the analysis can be devoted to the subject of the ideologies as a) a reason, b) an excuse for the Bulgarian-Serbian rivalry continuing through the centuries. This is the classical example - if Bulgaria is in one ideological block, Bulgaria would be in the other. The two countries often mask their rivalry behind global ideas and adherences.

- 1914-41 - Germanophile Bulgaria against Francophile Serbia;
- 1949-87 - self-governing and Tito's Yugoslavia against the Bulgaria practicing real socialism;
- 1989-2000 - the Bulgaria of democratic changes against Serbia of Milosevic.

But even when they are in the same ideological context, Bulgaria and Serbia are again competing: from this point of view, there were curious relations between Ljoticevtsi, and Nedichevtsi on the one hand, and the Bulgarian pro-fascist elements - on the other, the relations between Dimitrov and Tito in the period 1945-49; the relations between Bulgaria and democratic Serbia after 2000.

The common ideology cannot stop, and the differing ideology cannot fully explain the eternal historic competition between Bulgarians and Serbs. A characteristic episode: before 1985-7, the official and unofficial Yugoslavian propaganda proved its righteousness as regards the Bulgarian state policy by 'western' arguments - free travel, Muslim's rights, American films, imported jeans, Mini-Max, Lepa Brena, politicians well accepted in the West, a basketball dream team. After 1990, the same arguments were used by the Bulgarians against the Serbs - free travel, Muslims' rights, American films, imported jeans, Slavi Trifonov, politicians well accepted in the West, the football dream team of 1994. The opposite argument - the party defending itself, has also been changed - the East, the Slav cause, family roots, Russia, the spirit against matter, etc. were quoted by Bulgarian propaganda in the '70-ies, and later by the Serbian one - in the '90-ies. What is funny here is the small time difference, i.e. the same people, implementing willingly or unwillingly propaganda goals were using both types of arguments - first, insisting how nice it was to be 'pro-west oriented', and then - how nice it was to be pro-east oriented, and then changing roles. Far more important than the ideological consequence was the assertion 'We are better off than you, because ...'.

Indicative of the dubious meaning of block belonging is the fact of the strong influence of French culture on Germanophile Bulgaria, and German culture on Francophile Serbia. We find interesting proofs in the language, in the translation of foreign words - the Bulgarian intelligentsia preferred the French word for asparagus, while the Serb one used the German one - 'spargli'. As it has often happened in the Balkans, loyalties are ambiguous, bridges do not join together, they separate.

The geopolitical framework and the dominating ideology are both a reason and a pretext for the troubled relations between Bulgaria and Serbia. How do these relations look like today, however? Let us face the facts from the two viewpoints - of the problems and of the opportunities, the pessimistic and the optimistic analysis.

Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia Today. Problems.

Contemporary relations between Bulgaria and Serbia are the direct outcome of the above-described 'east-west' exchange of roles in the early '90-ies, followed by a partial restoration of the status quo in 2000.

The time of government of the Serbian (later Yugoslavian) President Slobodan Milosevic drifted Serbia away from its position of the most prospective East European candidate for the European Community, and drove it into the geopolitical sphere of influence of Russia and China, towards partnership with the political regimes in Iraq and Belaruss. In the meantime, Bulgaria, which met 1989 with the reputation of the staunchest Soviet satellite and a country of human rights violations, started slowly into the opposite direction - to active membership in the Partnership for Peace, an invitation for NATO

membership, and the onset of negotiations for accession to the European Union. The opposite directions of movement turned into the main reason for the chill in the intergovernmental relations, and resulted in practice in freezing the relations in the cultural, economic, and even in the inter-personal sphere.

It is important to note that the border from concealed to open hostility has never been passed. In the period 1990-1997, Zhelyu Zhelev, Bulgarian President at that time, and all Bulgarian political parties declared themselves categorically against any intervention by Bulgaria or other neighbouring countries in the national affairs of Yugoslavia. At the same time, the efforts by the government team in Belgrade to be liked in Bulgaria never stopped. It was partially successful in these at the time of the government of the socialist Prime Minister Jan Videnov (1994-1997), who met with Slobodan Milosevic in Belgrade, and some books by Mira Markovic and Radovan Karadjic were published in Bulgaria, and part of the Bulgarian intellectual, economic, political and journalist elite openly sympathised with the Serbian cause maintaining intensive contacts with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

This intermission ended when the government of the United Democratic Forces (1997-2001) headed by Ivan Kostov, came into power. As early as the first meeting between Kostov and Milosevic on the island of Crete arranged within the framework of a joint Balkan forum, set the tone for personal relations which could be defined in short as mutual contempt. Bulgaria became one of the greatest regional critics of Milosevic, and in the rhetorics of official Belgrade, the Bulgarian authorities were allotted the inauspicious role of servants to the West, and traitor of their own people. Issues like the situation of the Bulgarians in Yugoslavia on the one hand, and on the other - the memories of the actions taken by the Bulgarian army and police in Serbian territory at the time of the First and Second World Wars were evoked with a new asperity. Each attempt made by Bulgaria to play any intermediary or at least active role on the Kosovo issue was indignantly rejected.

The culmination in the deteriorated relations came at the time of the Kosovo crisis and bombings of Yugoslavia in the spring and summer of 1999. Bulgaria's categorical position in support of NATO, and particularly the decision to provide a corridor for Alliance aircraft for actions against targets in Yugoslavia reverberated so painfully in Yugoslavia, that the nuances in the Bulgarian position were not perceived at all. It is not clear that the Serbian community was aware of the following: Bulgaria's refusal to accept Kosovo refugees, the in-principle condemnation of the war and of KLA extremism, the intensified relations with Montenegro; the fact that the Bulgarian air was not used intensively, and finally - the attempt made by Prime Minister Kostov to hear both sides in Kosovo, defending the Kosovo Serbs' right to stay in their own land. (It should be noted here, that not only the KLA leader Hasim Tachi, but also the leaders of Kosovo Serbs - Bishop Artemije and Momcilo Trajkovic were well met in Sofia.) In the meantime, the trial of the war became also a trial

of the Bulgarian society, which went through dramatic collisions on the pro- and anti-NATO issue. In spite of the victory of the pro-NATO line in Bulgaria and the start of negotiations with EU (which was accepted as a reward for Sofia's unequivocal position) these collisions played their role in the changes in the Bulgarian political landscape later.

Slobodan Milosevic's fall from power on October 5, 2000 warmed to a certain extent the relations between Bulgaria and Serbia. Both the changed geopolitical circumstances and the personal relations of people that until recently were Serbia's opposition leaders in Sofia where they could always rely on assistance, were of key importance for this. A clear signal for this warming up were the visits of Zoran Djindjic (still in his capacity of a Chairman of the Democratic Party), the Yugoslavian Foreign Minister, Goran Svilanovic, and the Speaker of the Yugoslavian Parliament, Dragoljub Micunovic to Bulgaria and the bilateral meetings of the Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov with his Yugoslavian counterpart - Vojislav Kostunica in Nis and Skopje. The calendar of visits does not end at that. It covers the intentions expressed by the present President of Bulgaria - Georgi Parvanov.

The framework of improving relations is clear - integration in the European and North Atlantic structures, the Stability Pact, economic and infrastructure co-operation (the Sofia-Nis freeway, the cleansing of the Danube river from the debris), new climate in the attitude to the Bulgarian minority. Nevertheless, we may not talk about perfect relations between the two countries and communities. Here are at least four underwater controversies, which have reverberated only within the close analyst circles, but which have dispersed the myth of the 'cloudless skies' in the bilateral relations from now on:

- Some declarations of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic of a common area of integration in the South Eastern Europe which would later accede *en bloc* the European Union, were not sympathetically accepted in Bulgaria. Leading Bulgarian representatives hurriedly declared themselves against the 'Balkan format', and against European integration 'at the speed of the slowest' - ideas which would obliterate the Bulgarian Euro-Atlantic advantage. In the same way Belgrade met the ambition voiced by Bulgaria 'for a leading role on the Balkans'. And another statement almost mirroring it: in the autumn of 2002, Miroljub Labus was leading his candidate president campaign under the motto 'Serbia - Leader on the Balkans'. It was the Bulgarians' turn to be scandalised.
- The Controversy if the Stability Pact should be predominantly channelled only to the recovery of FR Yugoslavia or to compensate as a priority some neighbouring countries outlined various ambitions and strategies.

- Bulgaria and Serbia declared aspirations to compete in attracting foreign investments. At the same time, when the then Bulgarian President Peter Stoyanov wrote to and received letters from Bill Gates, the Serbian Premier Zoran Djindjic declared in an interview his confidence that Gates will invest exactly in Serbia.
- While the UDF were in power in Bulgaria, they voiced in public suspicions about leading Serbian politicians, and particularly about the Euro-Atlantic 'orthodoxy' of the Yugoslavian President Vojislav Kostunica.

Of course, each of these suspicions can easily be explained or excused. It is a fact, however, that the first 'honey moon' in long years in the Bulgarian - Serbian relations was followed by indifference. It became clear that the build-up accumulated for centuries couldn't be overcome for days. Let us try to analyse this build-up - without any ambition to provide a comprehensive or systematic analysis.

- *Geopolitical differences.* Bulgaria and Serbia have ever been in 'two different worlds'. Even when both Bulgarians and Serbs were under the protection of the socialist system, Yugoslavia's break with the ComInformBureau determined its way - outside the direct Soviet auspices, on the border between the East and the West, with claims for the leadership among the non-aligned nations, and the Third World, and with a different form of socialism based on self-government. The oppositeness of the two countries in their relations to each other remained. Even if we accept the execution of Traicho Kostov as an 'Yugoslavian agent' as a relapse of Stalinism, we see the repressions against the interpreter and intellectual Gancho Savov in the '80-ies again with the same stigma and again with fabricated allegations. The situation looks pretty much the same on the other side of the border where to be a 'bugarash' is an insult and a cause for repression. Bulgaria and Serbia have been in two different worlds in terms of Germany/France, Soviet Union/the non-aligned nations, the West/East, the East/West. Such build-up is not easy to overcome.
- *Major ideologies.* Significant part of the problems between Serbia and Bulgaria in the 20th century come from or are projected through all the '-isms' on the great mass ideological plane. Bulgarians and Serbs often look at each other through the prism of nationalism, socialism, communism, slavophilism, Christian orthodoxy, instead of the pragmatic outlook of ordinary people and neighbours. As was already mentioned above, on the Balkans, the great ideologies have always divided, and never brought together people; they have always been a splitting factor

and never a mobilising factor. Here, in Eastern Europe, they have never provided a justified reason to love your neighbour.

- *The problem with Macedonia.* For hundreds of years, this issue has been the bone of contention between Bulgarians and Serbs. Arisen as an issue of influence, transformed into an issue of territorial expansion, and again converted into an issue of influence, it has cost the bleeding to death and lost of faith in both national intellectual elites. There are periods when the whole range of relations between Bulgaria and Serbia came under the sign of the overwhelming Macedonian issue. Its radiation is so powerful, that it cannot be neutralised even by the great 20th century ideologies - and here comes the particularly convincing example of the fate of Metodi Antonov - Chento and his followers among the Macedonian communists.
- *The Bulgarian minority in Yugoslavia.* The situation of the Bulgarians, who were left after the Treaty of Neuilly, the Tsaribrod area (Dimitrovgrad region), the Bossilegrad region, and several 'kula' and 'tran' villages, is an incessant source of concerns for Bulgaria and worries for Serbia. There are no powerful nationalistic movements among these people, indeed. The Serbian authorities have persistently called them "one of the most loyal Yugoslavian citizens". They have a minority status and receive journalistic information in their own language. But there are problem issues like studying their mother language at school, church services in Bulgarian, the Bulgarian church buildings and monuments, the difficult economic condition in these areas, the problems of the Democratic Union of Bulgarian in Yugoslavia, the debates around the Cultural Centre in Tsaribrod, and particularly the attempts at institutionalising the 'shop' nation, which were received painfully in Bulgaria. It is interesting that some extreme nationalistic circles in Serbia (near to the Vojislav Sesel's Radical Party) tried to invent a reciprocal Serbian minority in Bulgaria. This has nourished the Bulgarian mistrust, which is anyway sensitive to the continuous inventing of new minorities in the Bulgarian territory. Doubtless, the issue of the Bulgarians in Yugoslavia is loaded with enough electricity not to allow for any rough handling through the arguments of national conceit.
- *The long historical memory.* Although they may insist on the opposite, the problem with the Balkan people is not in their short memory, but rather in their long historic memory. The capability of the modern inhabitants of South Eastern Europe to remember and reproduce historical events of the near and far past, calling to life ideologies of the 19th century, and even myths of the Middle

Ages is amazing, indeed. And the Bulgarians and the Serbs provide one of the best examples of this. This only can account for the fact that the hatred towards Bulgarians in Serbia decreases from the East to the West of the country, to reach to genuine love in Bosnia. In the eastern parts, however, the memory of the contact with the neighbour has been operating flawlessly for generations on end. This can account for the strange double faced Bulgarian extreme nationalism, which has one strongly anti-Serbian face (active on behalf of a family relatedness and geographical closeness with Macedonia), and one strongly pro-Serbian face (active on behalf of a lineal, ideological and geographic antipathy towards the Turks, and the Islam) The long historic memory is directly interrelated with the following phenomenon:

- *The internal resistance to getting closer.* The history of the Bulgarian-Serbian enmity has produced long-lasting strata in each of the two national elites. These social layers block the attempts at getting closer by populist and nationalistic arguments of the type "you have sold yourselves to the eternal enemy, you have sold our brothers in ..., and our dead from...". The assassination of the Bulgarian Prime Minister Alexander Stamboliisky in 1923 is an extreme example of this, but the problems that any supporter of mutual friendship has always faced are of an everyday character. The history textbooks are difficult to disremember.
- *Psychological barriers and stereotypes.* As we have already used the concept of 'psychology of small differences', it is easy for us to explain why we do not like the people of our own kind; and what is most important - why we do not admit our own deficiencies, always finding them in the Other. Without going into a psychoanalysis, we should note that Bulgarians and Serbs know each other well and often expose in each other exactly what makes them akin: primitiveness, drunkenness, mercantility, pompousness. The national psychology in combination with the long historic memory produce the national stereotype: for the Serb, the Bulgarian is rational, prudent, a brother in faith and blood, but also cruel, forsaking neighbourly relations and Orthodoxy. For the Bulgarian, the Serb is proud, brave, a patriot, a man of the world, but also mediocre, uncultured, a boon companion going to pubs and cursing, wild, bloodthirsty and cruel. There is no need to explain how the stereotypes are born from the national inferiority complexes, and how it generates a type of thinking 'We want only and solely to be better off than you'. The opposite stereotype creation is not productive either, -

we, the Bulgarians and the Serbs, are the best (in football, sex, rationalisations, in being smart), but we are being screwed up by the whole remaining world (insensitive westerners, mercantile Americans, Jews, masons, etc.) The way of thinking of the 'great conspiracy' type creates a common platform for self-admiration, but also a common alibi for doing nothing. So, if there is an ideological plane, on which Bulgarians and Serbs should never step on together, this is the plane of 'global conspiracy'.

- *Economic relations.* At the time of the UN sanctions against Yugoslavia, fruitful economic relations were first and foremost established by the mafia - the Bulgarian and the Serb ones. This has considerably facilitated strengthening cross-border crime, trafficking in drugs, people, arms and oil, creating mob welfare havens surrounded by the vast deserts of deprivation. It is a pity we have to admit that the Bulgarian and the Serb criminal worlds communicate much better than the people involved in culture, politics, not to mention the regular economic entities. After the wars, things started to gradually improve, but the volume of trade has not reached the full potential of the two neighbouring countries, Mafia money remained, while the small businesses, driven out by the big sharks, can hardly take part in the joint economic activities. Although small in volume, quasi-legal, and humiliating, 'suitcase' trade for a long time provided the subsistence of whole families. Regretfully, it was the only form of trade, through which ordinary people from the border areas could make some profit from their location.
- *Infrastructure links.* Regretfully, the two counties are not linked by a highway, and the large waterway connecting them - the Danube River - was virtually blocked as a result from NATO bombings. The highway Sofia-Nis - the missing leg from the Sofia-Belgrade-Central Europe highway - is a too expensive project that the two countries cannot afford on their own. According to preliminary estimates, the highway will cost EUR 700 Mil. in total, of which EUR 324 Mil. will be for the 80-km section in Bulgarian territory. In medium-term perspective, the construction of the freeway should start around 2003. The Stability Pact, the main expected source of funding, is delaying the project all the time. The great poverty on both sides of the border does not attract serious infrastructure investments, in spite of the good prospects of these territories in terms of geographical location. The condition of the road network in these areas (by tradition better in Serbia than in Bulgaria) ranks among the first in terms of disrepair in the domestic ranking of each of the countries.

- *Regional co-operation in politics and economy.* In spite of the priority, which Yugoslavia and Bulgaria give to regional co-operation, they both look to the West, disregarding the region. Both Bulgarians and Serbs look at the South Eastern Europe as a field on which they can deploy their future leadership. The Serbian political elite - government and opposition one, is used, since the time of the Yugo wars, to have as its counterpart the Western political elite, and finds it difficult to accept its retreat from the focus of world public attention to the status of a peripheral country. On its part, Bulgaria desires to encash its winning pro-West policy for a lasting distance from the unpleasant 'Balkan context' - it does not want to be outpaced in its European integration by a Croatia, for example, or to be forced to wait Serbia and Montenegro for a joint entry into European structures.
- *Culture.* Similar is the problem in the cultural relations between Bulgaria and Serbia. Bulgarians and Serbs know much better the English and French, even the Portuguese and Irish literature than the literature of their neighbours. The artistic product of a neighbouring country would become popular either after it has triumphed in the West (Ivo Andric, Emir Kosturica), or through the 'pub' culture (Lepa Brena) or thorough the mass culture (Ljubisa Samardzic who became popular in Bulgaria not with 'Walter Is Defending Saraievo' but with the series of 'Hot Wind'). The cultural relations of the Bulgarian minority with partners in Bulgaria are considered with suspicion in Belgrade and with condescension in Sofia. In general, Bulgarians and Serbs know the mass culture, rather than the high cultural achievements of their neighbours, which additionally distorts their mutual recognition: In Bulgaria, Serbs are viewed as men drinking with slightly-dressed pub singers in view; and for the Serbs - Bulgaria is the home country of Christo Stoichkov, a friend and blood brother of the folk singer Miroslav Ilyic. Without underrating the role of mass culture for the insights into the neighbour's national psychology (in the '80-ies there were Bulgarian peasants speaking Serbian with the case flexions learned from the texts of Saban and Wesna's songs; and in the '90-ies Bulgarian folk singers brought their 'messages' to Serbia), it is not always the best means for highly intellectual intercourse.

Let us summarise: everything written so far is not an attempt at a systematisation, but rather an improvisation on the issues of the relations between Bulgaria and Serbia nowadays. But an optimistic point of view towards them is also possible.

Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia Nowadays. Opportunities.

Obviously, the changes after 1989, and particularly the democratic changes in Serbia after 2000, opened real chances for reconsidering the inheritance in the Bulgarian-Serb relations. The Yugo wars and the bombings over FR Yugoslavia have shown an example of mutual interrelatedness of all processes in progress in a small part of the territory of South Eastern Europe.

Probably the most important lesson learnt from these wars and their end, a lesson sad and may be encouraging - depending on the point of view - was the recognition that the Balkans have ultimately lost their geo-strategic importance, they had at the beginning of the 20th century. The First World War started from here, but a Third World War cannot possibly start from here. What is sobering in this conclusion has also some ideological dimensions: we should not be misled to think we are the centre of the world and that everything starts from us. Hence, grasping this great change, which happened not so painfully for Bulgaria, and more so for Serbia, helps for the recognition of the new value: the establishment of free civil societies, featuring high living standards.

How can we view in particular the opportunities in the relations between Bulgaria and Serbia, on the basis of the logic valid so far:

- Bulgaria and Serbia are no more *geopolitical enemies*. This fact, alone, will not solve the problems, but it has been true so rarely in history (1911-13, 1942-43, 1945-49) that any time it happens is worth making use of. Today, FRY (future Serbia and Montenegro) is restoring its membership in international organisations, declaring its endeavours towards the European Union and to Partnership for Peace.
- Bulgaria and Serbia, at least in words, *are not slaves to the great mass ideologies*.
- Macedonia is already an independent state, towards which the states of Bulgaria and FR Yugoslavia have no open claims. And even if the underground struggle for influence continues (in the Bulgarian case - on the basis of more distant, and in the Serbian one - on more recent history), the international legitimacy of Macedonia makes talking of new redistribution of territories sound obsolete.
- *The Bulgarian minority in Yugoslavia* has the chance to get more attention to its civil and economic problems. The willingness of the Yugoslavian side to alleviate border and customs regime and to discuss all other issues, as well as the readiness of the Bulgarian side not to abuse the minority issue in a way jeopardising the sovereignty of Yugoslavia, are encouraging.
- *The history* is compromised as a mechanism to explain the present relations in South Eastern Europe: Milosevic, who launched on his march up in the name of tomorrow come never, was brought to the

Hague in the same day. The Balkans seem to have tired of fighting their battles of the past day.

- In Bulgaria and Serbia, *co-operative elites appeared, that are ready to overcome internal opposition against co-operation*. These are elites of political nature (based on the relations between the Bulgarian political parties and the Serbian parties opposing Milosevic) and foremost of civil nature - of those representatives of expert communities, the media, culture, who were building the bridges at the time of wars and sanctions.
- *Psychological barriers*, although the most difficult to break, are undergoing a serious test of the new intellectual review of Balkanism and the efforts at an optimistic European definition of what is characteristically Balkan.
- *In the economy, infrastructure and regional co-operation* - new opportunities are provided by the Stability Pact (with all the doubts in its real efficiency) and the trend of global multinational companies to expand their operations from Bulgaria to Serbia and the other way round. New private initiative economic entities are emerging, which are investing for the time being in few but promising joint ventures - forwarding, software sales, tourism. For the first time in 12 years, so much is being talked about the Sofia-Nis freeway. The developed forms of regional co-operation - tripartite meetings of mayors, the Stability Pact, informal ('no-tie') meetings - stimulate the regional dialogue.
- In the recent several years, a highbrow culture flow started from Serbia to Bulgaria, channelled though the natural interest towards it (regretfully generated by the 10-year long Yugoslavian drama), the serious Bulgarian translation school and the initiatives of enthusiasts like Gancho Slavov. As a result, the Bulgarian spectator, reader, and listener knows Milorad Pavic, Danilo Kis, Svetislav Basara, Vladislav Bajac, Dusan Kovacevic, Dusan Makavejev, George Balasevic. Regretfully, however, there is no such flow in the opposite direction. There are many reasons for this: due to the wars Serbia was more interesting for Bulgaria than Bulgaria for Serbia; and due to the former government elite in power in Serbia before, the permeability for Bulgarian art was comparatively low. But the positive trends are in place, and they can be availed of by both sides.

In a word, Bulgaria and Serbia have for the first time the chance to turn history around. And this chance is not so much in the hands of the states, not even of the nations, it is in the hands of the two societies. Of those active civil personalities, who will decide to turn the stereotypes into jokes, the location into business, and the past - into a pleasant tourist attraction.

Status and Prospects of Development of the Relations between Bulgaria and Serbia

The Bulgarian-Serbian relations at a state level are covered by the notion of and should be understood as Bulgarian - Yugoslav relations in terms of the recent and not so recent past. Serbia and the Serbian states and political leaders and public figures in all periods of existence of the Yugoslavian state have exercised a strong influence and have had a leading role in the shaping and practical implementation of the foreign policy of the country. This applies particularly to Bulgaria and the other neighbouring countries to Serbia.

There is a rare phenomenon in the Bulgarian-Serbian relations. On the one hand, two very close peoples, practically akin, with similar languages, folklore, national mentality, and fights for national liberation, with numerous linking threads and long-lived human contacts. On the other hand, a period longer than 40 years (after 1948) of almost permanent anti-Bulgarian propaganda and in some periods - campaigns led at a political and media level, which presented the Bulgarians as synonymous with "an occupier", and Bulgaria as a state of the "real socialism" and a member of the Warsaw Pact, as a number one "enemy" in accordance with the then Yugoslavian military doctrine. In Bulgaria, on its turn, there was a panic fear from the influence of the "Yugoslavian revisionism", which however did not have propaganda expression, since the topic of "Yugoslavia" and "Serbia" was a taboo and as a rule the Bulgarian general public was not informed about the real status of the Bulgarian - Yugoslavian relations. It is a telling fact which is already an anachronism that for 38 years there has been no Bulgarian-Yugoslavian visit at a top, presidential level. The presidents of the two countries have had meetings, but only within the frameworks of various multilateral fora. In the recent 13 years, the picture of the bilateral relations has been changing positively. It may be expected that in 2003 the statistics of the bilateral relations would be also enriched with an official meeting at a presidential level.

Seeking a balance between the objective needs for development of the relations with a neighbouring country, the regional policy and commitments of Bulgaria with regard to its candidacy for EU and NATO membership is typical for the Bulgarian approach to the bilateral relations with Serbia.

Another basic element of the Bulgarian policy in the bilateral relations is providing of transport and communication links of Bulgaria with the countries of the European Union and Central Europe through the territory of Serbia.

Along with that, the Bulgarian side confirms in the political dialogue the priority significance of resolving the issues of the Bulgarian minority.

A foreign policy priority of Serbia is to have possibly the best relations with the neighbouring countries, including Bulgaria.

The political changes after 5 October 2000 in Serbia created conditions for dynamism of the whole process of the Bulgarian-Serbian relations and co-operation, The governing elite, both in Bulgaria and in Serbia have set as their basic objective to overcome stagnation in the bilateral relations and the stereotypes of the past.

The series of top level meetings between the two countries in the past period shows the new spirit of the bilateral relations, which are developing now on the basis of the European standards.

The mutual contacts were activated, as the priority goal was to update the legal agreement basis of the bilateral relations and co-operation. Very fruitful meetings and discussions were held at the level of the President, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Prime Minister and line ministers, and in particular:

- Official visit to Bulgaria of Goran Svilanovic, Minister of Foreign Affairs (25 January 2001).
- Official visit to Bulgaria of Dragoliub Micunovic, Speaker of the Parliament (8 March 2001).
- Official visit to Belgrade of Solomon Passy, Minister of Foreign Affairs (26 November 2001). A Programme for Cultural Co-operation has been signed.
- Official visit to Bulgaria of Goran Svilanovic (25 July 2002).
- Within the framework of the annual meeting of the Presidents from Central Europe in Bled, Slovenia (31 May 2002) the first meeting between G.Parvanov and V.Kostunica took place, where on Bulgarian side a support has been expressed for the process of democratisation of Serbia and its integration in the international structures. The Presidents of the two countries met again in New York (September 2002) within the framework of the opening of the 57th Session of the UN.
- The Prime Minister, Simeon Koburgotski met the Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic within the framework of the forum in Salzburg (30 July 2002).
- A visit of the Vice Premier and Minister of Economy - Nikolay Vassilev in Belgrade and discussion with the Minister of Finance of Serbia - Borislav Djelic (July 2002).
- Meetings took place between the Ministers of Defence and the Ministers of Interior, the Minister of Energy; Milko Kovachev had discussions

with the Minister of Mining and Energy of Serbia - Kori Udovicki (Nis, 27 July 2002).

- The Ministers of Foreign Affairs - Solomon Passy and Goran Svilanovic met within the framework of tripartite meeting (the Ministers of Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania) in Vidin on 24 September 2002; in Skopje within the framework of the Prime Ministers of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (15 November 2002) and at the opening of the tripartite pyramid between Bulgaria, Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia (23 November 2002).

At all meetings and discussions, Bulgaria has supported the restoration of the membership of Serbia in the European and world organisation, including in the Council of Europe. In the field of security, there is understanding for the inclusion of Serbia in Partnership for Peace initiative of NATO, which would contribute for strengthening of the security in the region, for establishing of even better neighbourly relations, for development of democratic control over the armed forces and for improved opportunities for joint participation in peace-keeping activities.

Bringing of the border crossing regime in line with the European standards is an important factor for progress in the development of trade, construction of common cross-border projects, fighting the crime, resolving of problems of cross-border pollution and at the same time, it is an essential criterion for the overall position of the bilateral relations.

The public in the two countries connects its expectations for activation of the competent institutions for improvement of throughput of borders for facilitating the passage through the border-crossing stations, and also for opening of new ones, which is in the interest both of the business circles, and also for the promotion of border-side co-operation and of contacts between people on both sides of the border. The Bulgarian side has the understanding of the need for easing the visa system for the citizens of Serbia with the countries of the Schengen agreement and expresses its readiness to provide assistance and to share its experience concerning visa and migration policies.

Cultural co-operation develops under the sign of the positive changes in the whole character of the bilateral relations. Programmes for cultural co-operation in the field of science, culture and education are signed on a regular basis. The National Institute for Monuments of Culture, Sofia will assist in restoration of destroyed religious monuments in Kosovo.

The Bulgarian policy and the public are committed to the fate of their fellow-countrymen across the border, led by the desire that they should keep their national and cultural originality and have real possibilities for

free relations with the motherland. The Bulgarian position is that the Bulgarian national minority in Serbia should become a bridge of friendship and trust with Serbia. The expectations are related to guaranteeing to the Bulgarian national minority to be able to exercise the rights provided by the legislation, including the effective conducting of classes in the mother tongue and restoration of the Bulgarian language broadcasts in the national television and radio. The fact of the active involvement of the Bulgarian national minority in the democratic process in Serbia is a favourable circumstance. They support the policy of the democratic power in Serbia, with the confidence that the national minority rights will be guaranteed and effectively applied by the acknowledgement of the supremacy of law, the observation of human rights and strengthening of the democratic institutions.

The trade and economic co-operation is a basic element of the Bulgarian-Serbian relations. The business also develops under the influence of the general positive atmosphere in the bilateral relations. After the year 2000 the following more important documents providing for the legal basis between the two countries were signed:

- Treaty for Avoiding Double Taxation
- Veterinary Control Treaty
- Maritime Navigation Co-operation Treaty
- Air Transport Treaty
- Treaty for Co-operation in the Field of Posts and Telecommunications
- Treaty on International Transportation of Passengers and Cargoes.

At the end of 2000 the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria adopted a Programme for activation of the economic co-operation with Serbia. A Protocol for co-operation between the Bulgarian Chamber of Trade and Industry and the Serbian Economic Chamber was signed.

At the end of 2000 the mutual trade exchange got to the record figure of USD 397 Mil. The analysis shows that in the exports of Bulgarian goods mainly raw materials, inputs and primary goods prevail, which take about 80 % of the overall Bulgarian exports. In terms of imports, there is certain balance between the primary goods and finished products. The stronger presence of food industry and agricultural products is a new development in the export list. The imports keep their traditional characteristics, as mostly vegetable products, lead ores and various products of copper are imported.

The overall picture shows a tendency of an excessive deficit for Serbia in the bilateral trade - about 10 times in favour of Bulgaria, which is mainly due to the inability of Serbian companies to offer competitive goods to the Bulgarian market, and also to a certain lack of funds for carrying out export operations. The deficit to Bulgaria, however, is not an isolated phenomenon, since it is fully comparable to the total Serbian foreign trade deficit.

In accordance with the Programme for activation of the economic relations with Serbia, last year three rounds of negotiations for signing of Free Trade Agreement were conducted, which were finalised by initialling the Agreement. The signing of the Free Trade Agreement is forthcoming, whereby it is expected the same to overcome an essential barrier - the relatively high custom duties and charges on imports and exports of goods.

The Bulgarian investments in Serbia are implemented in the form of "own registered companies" with a hundred percent Bulgarian capital, joint or partnership companies. 65 companies with 100 % Bulgarian capital, 150 joint companies and 10 partnership companies have been registered.

In the territory of Bulgaria, 20 companies with Serbian capital only, 120 joint companies, and 300 companies of natural persons have been registered.

The two countries are exchanging information and discussing possibilities for participation of Bulgarian construction companies in the construction of projects in Serbia and jointly in third countries. Bulgarian construction companies have shown interest in participation in joint investment projects, such as the railway line Dimitrovgrad - Nis, the freeway from Dimitrovgrad to the Bulgarian border.

The construction of the main freeway Sofia - Nis, which is part of the European Corridor 10, and the electrification, rehabilitation, and modernisation of the railway line Dragoman - Dimitrovgrad - Nis are considered as a priority in the bilateral relations. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs S.Passy and G.Svilanovic expressed a clear political will by signing of a Joint Statement for Expedited Development of the Joint Project for Cross-border Transport Infrastructure along the European Corridor 10 (Sofia, 28 February 2003). Joint actions for ensuring funding of the infrastructure projects are forthcoming.

The implementation of the above major projects will resolve the problem of linking of our region to the Western Europe and at the same time facilitating the communication of Serbia with the Black Sea Region.

The infrastructure is a key factor promoting not only the development of trade relations. The developed infrastructure creates conditions for intensifying of the direct contacts between people, and communications between them and deepening of the cultural co-operation are the best shield against distrust and animosity and against terrorism, in particular. Therefore, the Bulgarian side has been assigning since long time an exclusive attention to rehabilitation of the existing infrastructure and construction of new transport links with the neighbouring countries, including Serbia. The modernisation of the railway line Sofia - Nis and the construction of a freeway in this section has been proposed to the donors for funding within the framework of the Stability Pact, which shows their significance for our countries, and for the whole region as well, since their implementation will ensure fast and easy communications along one of the busiest lines between Central and Western Europe and the Middle East.

The economic and financial problems faced by the two countries in relation to restructuring of their national economies are well known. At the same time, it is certain that the investment in transport infrastructure will be of crucial importance for overcoming economic and social effects, which Bulgaria and Serbia are facing at the present stage. And furthermore, modern infrastructure means not only good neighbourly relations, it gives a real physical dimension to still abstract notion of the United Europe for this region. A dimension, which will mean a real participation of our countries in the European market, a real presence in the European cultural space and the most important - it will give a real European and North Atlantic perspective to our countries.

The cross-border co-operation with the participation of Bulgaria and Serbia is intensified. At a Bulgarian initiative, on 24 September 2002 in Vidin the first meeting between Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania took place at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The possibilities for regional co-operation between the three countries in the context of the common European and North Atlantic perspective for South Eastern Europe were discussed. An Action Plan was adopted on the basis of the understanding that the common problems of the communities with common border require joint decisions. The above Plan is just a start for a future extensive Programme for cross-border co-operation between Bulgaria, Serbia and Rumania and it aims to outline the priorities and to establish tripartite mechanisms for co-ordination of the co-operation. The specific projects are as follows:

- A gas pipeline connecting Kalafat - Vidin - Zajecar.
- Reconstruction of the road Parachin - Zajecar - Kula - Vidin - Kalafat - Krayova.

- Construction of railway line Vidin - Negotin.

A Tripartite Council for co-ordination was established, which envisages tripartite meetings to be conducted on quarterly basis. Each country will estimate financial requirements for the projects on its territory in accordance with the national legislation. Funding is envisaged also through programmes of the European Union and other international financial institutions.

A very useful co-operation between local authorities is in progress/Agreements for establishing of Euroregion Danube 21 were signed (with the participation of Vidin and Nis), Euroregion Sofia-Scopje-Nis, and also an Agreement of co-operation between the National Association of the Municipalities in Bulgaria and the Permanent Conference of the Towns and Municipalities in Serbia.

The careful analysis of the geostrategic and regional factors, of the domestic and foreign policy priorities of Bulgaria and Serbia give grounds for an optimistic forecast of the future and prospects for development of their bilateral relations. By the removal of the negative historical heritage, which has hindered the bilateral relations for more than a century, and by coming to power of governments, elected in democratic conditions, a vista opens for overcoming of prejudices, of disputed issues and claims. There are no more obstacles for the co-operation between Bulgaria and Serbia. What is more, Bulgaria and Serbia today have close interests and foreign policy priorities, which is a prerequisite for trust and partnership.

Bulgaria welcomes the ratification of the Constitutional Charter of the new United State of Serbia and Montenegro. The democratic and stable Serbia corresponds also with the interests of Bulgaria, and of peace and security in the region. As neighbouring countries, Bulgaria and Serbia have many common interests and a great potential for co-operation, which should be used.

The assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was strongly condemned in Bulgaria. Hope was expressed that this tragic loss will have no negative consequences for the security of Serbia and for the situation in the region, because in Serbia still there are forces, which will continue the democratic reforms and will lead the country to Europe.

Certain delay of the dialogue may be expected in the transitional period of establishing of the institutions of the new united state. Problems in identification of partners are possible in view of the absence of important institutions in the executive branch at a state level. In this sense the development of a specific approach and co-operation of Bulgaria both with Belgrade and with Podgorica become an indisputable necessity, particularly with Serbia as a closest neighbour. The effectiveness of the exchange of opinions and co-ordination of positions on specific aspects of the bilateral co-operation needs activation of the political dialogue with the government of Serbia. A priority attention in the co-operation with Serbia as a neighbouring

country to Bulgaria will be given to the issues for establishing a new type of relations and communications with the Serbian authorities and to the issues of the regional co-operation.

A priority task is to intensify the bilateral relations in all areas, as the political relations are placed on a pragmatic basis in accordance with the European standards. The adoption and acknowledgement of these standards and common European values is the most dependable indicator that a complete positive change has occurred and a long-term prospect for good neighbourly relations and co-operation between Bulgaria and Serbia has been ensured.

Co-Operation and Exchange between Bulgaria and Serbia in the Field of Culture, Science and Media

“I do know that we are not to blame, don't I; those foreigners again, to hell with them! That have done it on purpose, so that to make a laughing stock of us. And you may guess why; out of envy, of course! All of them are like that!” - cried out Uncle Ganiyo, entering Serbia by train on his way to Europe. “I know them all!” - four words charged with distrust, suspiciousness, unwillingness for tolerance, obstinacy towards the closest neighbours in terms of language and religion... That is the way Aleko Konstantinov depicts the character of Uncle Ganiyo (i.e. of the Bulgarian).

The Aleko's contemporary, Radoe Domanovic is not less sarcastic to his own people: In an old book I read an unusual story (...) about a funny time, when there were many liberty-loving laws, and there was no liberty; speeches were made, and books were written on production, and nobody has ever sown anything; the whole country was overwhelmed with moral admonitions, and there was no moral; the attic of each house was full up with logic things, and there was no wisdom; everywhere speeches were made about savings and the well-being of the country, and squandering was everywhere, and each usurer could buy for pennies the title “a great patriot”.

Thus wrote the two giants of the Bulgarian and Serbian culture and they were both blamed for national apostasy... as long as hundred years ago. Even at this point, if we change the territory and the name of the people, the similarity will be striking.

And today, in the age of communications, of quick travel to any given point on the Earth, of access to any type of culture, has anything changed? The conclusion and the negative answer are strikingly painful.

The biggest problem between Bulgaria and Serbia is the MUTUAL DISTRUST. Regretfully, it is still kept by some media and political forces, which though marginal, have a manipulative influence in our modern time. (A mention is made of Slivnitsa, but no mention is made of the tombstones in the cemetery of Kiustendil after the Balkan war. “Let the one who causes a quarrel between two brothers be damned”; various bilateral claims smouldering under the thin ice of the “good neighbourly relations” suppress such facts as the printing of the first Bulgarian arithmetic and primer books in Novi Sad and Belgrade, the establishing of the first Bulgarian bookshop by Hristo G. Danov in Serbia, which was moved by him to Plovdiv after the Liberation, the number of students and pupils who came to Bulgaria during the UN sanctions against Milosevic is passed over in silence; quite a few people are aware of the fact of the emigration of several thousand Bulgarians to Serbia at the time of Alexander Obrenovich, when he had given them land “in order to teach the Serbs in gardening and fruit-growing”; silence is kept over the exclusively close cultural contacts between the two countries in the period of the first half of the 30ies, where the Sofia Opera and Ballet have had about 200 guest-performances at the Belgrade stage(!),...).

From the position of the present - when Europe and the Balkans are reallocated, when new borders are made (despite of the declarations for unviolability of the borders), when new spheres of interests are created - perhaps the exchange of cultural, academic, and media contacts would be the most painless and most effective exchange for the Bulgarian-Serbian relations.

With no ambitions for summarising and generalising, and making no pretence for covering all events and contacts, implemented until now, I'll dwell on some of them.

- On the initiative of the Belgrade private Clio Publishing House, an Association of the Balkan Private Publishing Houses BAP 2000 was established, its goals being a mutual acquaintance, exchange of authors, participation in Balkan national book fairs. In addition of the mutual acquaintance with the neighbouring literature and culture as a whole, one of the major goals of the Association is the presentation of the Balkan literature in Europe and all over the world. In accordance with the initiator, Bulgaria and Serbia are the core, the pillar of the Association.
- In its historical sequence Polis, the Clio Publishing House started publishing the histories of the neighbouring countries of Serbia. The publication of the History of Bulgaria through the perspective of the Bulgarian historians, including also events concerning Serbia and

Bulgaria is forthcoming. After publication of each book, the Publishing House organises round tables, where the main subject is the historical truth.

- The reputed GEOPOETIKA Serbian Publishing House has created a Balkan-express series on the Balkan literature, where the Bulgarian literature takes an important place (to date books by Georgy Gospodinov and Prof. Dimitar Popov have been published).
- More and more modern Serbian authors are published in Bulgaria, and such names as David Albahari, Danilo Kis, Dubravka Ugresic, Svetislav Basara, or Vladislav Bajac are well known to the reading public. I should stress here that the most active among the periodicals is the LITERATURE PAPER, and among the publishers - the small private publishing house STIGMATI.

So far as the Bulgarian literature, theatre and fine arts in Serbia is concerned, irrespective of the political climate between the two countries, the information flow and exchange has not been interrupted. During theatre festivals theatre directors are still more frequent guests. Small theatre groups are touring on guest performances (e.g. M.Kurkinski on the chamber stage of the National Theatre in Belgrade). The penultimate play of the Serbian playwright Dusan Kovacevic is played on the chamber stage of the 'Ivan Vazov' National Theatre. There was an exchange of exhibitions of Dechko Uzunov and Sava Sumanovic at a state level. Recently, contacts were established among the new generation of people of art - the XXL Gallery, Sofia, Remont Gallery, Belgrade. The Belgrade Ethnographical Museum opened its doors for the Bulgarian ethnology and provides its halls for exhibitions. The virtual communication is even more intensive.

- Some of the academic institutions and media have become active after signing of the bilateral program to the Agreement for Cultural Co-operation between Bulgaria and Serbia. It seems it is most difficult to break the ice exactly among the academic circles. Despite of the Agreement for the Exchange of University Students, the difficulties concerning competition and travel of Bulgarian students to Belgrade has not decreased. Regretfully, the obstacles are again caused by the state institutions and the Ministry of Culture in particular, either by sending candidates who are unprepared or failing to meet the requirements of the particular subject. Nevertheless, the relations between the two Universities are quite good. The initiative of the Department of Bulgarian Language in the Belgrade University to publish a book by Prof. Boyan Biolchev, translated by the students of Bulgarian philology is an example for that.
- Though it might seem unbelievable, in view of the recent historical heritage, the state media are more active than the private ones. A Co-

operation Agreement between RTS Radio, Belgrade, and Radio Sofia was signed, which will be implemented through an exchange of programs - the second program of Radio Belgrade - Belgrade-2, and the second program of Radio Sofia - Radio 'Christo Botev'. After the democratic changes, the Serbian National Radio has changed its program scheme, the second program 'Belgrade 2' contains a 24-hour cultural programme with a special emphasis on the Balkan cultural life. I would like to stress that until now, the broadcasts dedicated to the Bulgarian culture and art are the most numerous. ('Eye of the Balkan', musical broadcasts, 'Pelican Code', etc.). A similar scheme is featured by 'Window With a View To Culture' of "Christo Botev" Bulgarian National Radio. The first radio bridge between Radio 'Belgrade 2' and Radio Sofia 'Christo Botev' dedicated to literature, culture, and art was also implemented at the end of February 2003.

Problems in Implementation of the Cultural Exchange

As a result of the deep-rooted patterns of thinking and most of all as a result of the historical mythologism both in Serbia and Bulgaria, the problems in implementation of the cultural exchange (or the cultural co-operation) arise along several lines.

1. The democratic society in the two countries is still in process of creation. The presentation of the culture of the neighbouring people in most of the cases is received with reservations by the general public;
2. The administrative mechanism of the Ministry of Culture is rather cumbersome and politically committed, and thus unable to respond quickly and adequately to any idea of cultural co-operation brought forward;
3. Due to the closeness of the two languages, the problem arising in the translated literature from and to either language is not considered seriously. As a result, a distorted picture of the literary style and talent of the author occurs;
4. The media, still by inertia, accentuate their culture and art broadcasts on persons and events known to the mass listener/reader and allocate comparatively little time to the presentation of neighbouring cultures;
5. The privately-owned audio and visual media spend almost no time (with small exceptions) on culture, and even less on the culture of their nearest neighbours. In the cases where a cultural event or a person draws their attention, they boil down to ordinary reporting information;
6. The educational curricula of the philological faculties at the Universities are rather obsolete. The education syllabus is still focused on the classical literature and the historical aspect of the respective

culture. Comparatively less modern language culture and literature is taught and required. The new technologies of cultural communications are almost totally neglected.

7. The high-budget mass culture - like the music one (the so-called 'newly composed music' in Serbia, and 'chalga' - in Bulgaria), as well as the high-budget 'literature' - which caters for a quite high share of the population is of a rather problematic aesthetic quality, and is a serious problem for the genuine and real achievements of both national cultures, and for the valuable pieces of art and artists, primarily due to their economic superiority in terms of distribution.

8. Although inter-governmental agreements have been often signed, and in spite of the conditions set by the European Union, when it comes to respecting the intellectual property in general, and copyright, they are violated all the time, and even worse - **THEY ARE REVOKED.**

Proposals for Improvement and Development of Cultural

Exchange

As a base line for development and improvement of cultural relations, the following should be considered:

1. Closer links and relations between private publishers, who have the enthusiasm, energy, and willingness to provide to their readers fiction and scientific literature of the neighbouring country. In the context of this activity, intensified efforts of NGOs and local intellectuals for lobbying before the respective Ministries of Culture and foreign foundations for financial assistance to the publishing houses.
2. The initiative of the Serbian Clio Publishing House to publish The History of Bulgaria, and similarly a Bulgarian publishing house to publish the history of Serbia.
3. Specialisation and further improvement of translators from Serbian into Bulgarian and from Bulgarian into Serbian, including three to six month specialisation in Serbia, respectively in Bulgaria.
4. Establishment of an association of the private audio-visual media between Serbia and Bulgaria, aiming at ensuring information flow on a daily basis by promoting and supporting the cultural information flow.
5. Proposals for establishing a new, modernised training programme in the field of linguistics at the Universities. Encouragement and support for the actions for collection of books from the publishers and libraries in Serbia and Bulgaria.

6. The existing experience shows that in the recent decade and in the recent two years, in particular, almost all contacts in the field of fine arts, theatre, literature and musical events were a result of personal contacts and friendship. It is extremely necessary to establish cultural and information centres (Serbian in Bulgaria and Bulgarian in Serbia), which could assist in co-ordination of the contacts and which would present the most valuable achievements of their national culture, aiming at presenting and bringing closer the two cultures.

Due to inefficiency of the respective state institutions and ministries in the two countries, and also due to the problem, related to funding of such centres, it is proposed the same to be registered as non-governmental organisations.

7. Promotion of cultural tourism, which has an enormous potential. The common projects of Bulgarian and Serbian tour operators could participate in the big European and world tourism fairs.
8. Failure to respect copyright is a huge problem, which directly favours DIS-trust, NON-acquaintance, NON-interconnection, NON-development of the cultural relations between Serbia and Bulgaria. For that purpose, a commission of independent experts is proposed to be established for analysing the existing laws in the two countries and to find a way to observe the rights of the authors, and in case of infringement of such rights to take energetic steps before the respective authorities in the state and to ensure legal protection of the authors. At a later stage, an attempt to develop a common legislation should be made.

Conclusion

The diagnosing of a disease does not mean that the same has been cured.

The findings of the existing problems in the cultural relations and exchanges between Serbia and Bulgaria do not mean that the same have been resolved.

And the unrealised proposals and agreements remain "silent words on a sheet of paper" and would sink in.

Developing Transborder Cooperation at Local Level

Considering the prospects for transborder cooperation at local level is based on the assumption that transborder cooperation between local authorities of

different states acts as an effective catalyst to the process of European integration.

The European Concept for Local and Regional Authorities

Since the 1980s within the Council of Europe consistent attempts have been made to elaborate a legal framework stipulating for the role and competence of local and regional authorities. These efforts culminated in the conclusion of the European Charter on Local Self-governance, which emphasized that:

... the local authorities are one of the main foundations of any democratic regime;

... the existence of local authorities with real responsibilities can provide an administration which is both effective and close to the citizen;

... safeguarding and reinforcement of local self-government in the different European countries is an important contribution to the construction of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and the decentralisation of power;

Prior to the adoption of this Charter another document of the Council of Europe has been prepared, which has had significant ramifications for the years to come. The document, referred to herewith, is the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities.

The process of European integration and cohesion used to build well on these documents, which to, certain extent, happened to be precursors of the EU regional policy afterwards. Henceforth, the approaches of the Council of Europe and of the EU interwove into a comprehensive concept of the role of local authorities in the policy making on both national and European scale.

The integration process in Europe brought about legitimizing and increasing power of local authorities as stakeholders in policy-making at the expense of central governments. The prospects of further political integration within EU underscores the potential of local governance as an actor in the policy-making process.

Will the municipal and regional authorities of the EU applicant countries be up to face that challenge? Local governments of the EU countries have gradually evolved and developed such capacities. Their experience is worth being replicated in the EU applicant countries. Building on the best EU practices, the local administration in Bulgaria has undergone profound reform and transformation process during the last decade. This has increased the level of accountability of local authorities and has shaped their profile as policy-makers. However, their performance in the domain of transfrontier cooperation needs further improvement. The efforts towards achieving these goals have been consistently supported by the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The Subtle Policy Making of Transborder Cooperation

Besides improving their good governance capacity, local government officials should embark on new endeavors and should demonstrate abilities relevant to what might be called the virtue of statesmanship. What is this supposed to mean? Above all, I refer to the virtue of statesmanship here as to the ability to meet the challenge of policy making. Hence, what is needed most is not staff with background in administration or civil service but policy-makers to head and direct local government authorities. Effective policy making on local and regional level necessitates proactive measures on behalf of local authorities. Their policy should not be only reflection or ramification of central government policy, but rather pave its own way in terms of needs assessment, interests identification strategic planning and policy development. All these impel political shrewdness and administrative expertise.

The sustainability of the transborder cooperation requires foremost the active functioning of transborder communication channels between the local authorities. This communication should be conducted at both political and functional (technical) level, based on political and administrative expertise, respectively. This translates directly into a staunch political will and capable administrative establishment within the municipal authorities.

The political will rests to the elected representatives of local self-government who are supposed to provide the general guidance and sustainability of transborder relations. This goes beyond occasional contacts to establishing consultative patterns of cooperation on issues of common concern as well as on formulating particular common transborder interests in domains that do not contradict central government competences and state interests. Whenever feasible, common transborder interests should be promoted. This makes the process of transborder policy making complete and imbeds local authorities in this process. Along with that, within the municipal authorities administrative units should be set up in charge of maintaining transborder communication channels, coordinating activities and programs with partners. They will be also responsible for fueling up the transborder cooperation by elaborating with their respective counterparts joint proposals to be supported by European funds.

Priority Areas

Major priority areas for transborder cooperation have been first enlisted in the Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation, adopted in 1980. They cover a wide range of issues, some of which are:

- setting up consultation groups between local authorities;
- coordination in the management of transfrontier local public affairs;
- setting up private-law transfrontier associations;

- provision of supplies or services between local authorities in frontier areas (public-law and private-law types);
- setting up organs of transfrontier cooperation between local authorities;
- interregional and/or intermunicipal economic and social cooperation;
- interregional and/or intermunicipal transfrontier cooperation in the field of spatial planning;
- creation and management of transfrontier parks;
- creation and management of transfrontier rural parks;
- creation and management of transfrontier parks between private-law associations;
- development of transfrontier cooperation in civil protection and mutual aid in the event of disasters occurring in frontier areas;
- transborder cooperation between schools and local communities;
- institution of transfrontier school curriculum;
- transfrontier or interterritorial cooperation concerning land use along transfrontier rivers;
- transfrontier cooperation establishing the statutes of transfrontier cooperation groupings having legal personality.

Facilitators of Transborder Cooperation

The level and efficiency of transborder cooperation depends primarily on who participates in the process and on the environment the process takes place in. According to the first criterion, the participants should be as many as possible and of various backgrounds. The second criterion – the environment of cooperation – necessitates the cultivation of a proper mode of interaction. The interface of cooperation usually varies from political through contract-based to private-law types.

The approach undertaken within this project merged the interests of different stakeholders. Therefore, one of the specific results of the project was the initiative for establishing an Association on Transborder Cooperation including local government officials, local NGOs, business associations and media from the border regions of Bulgaria and Serbia. The Statute of the Association has been drafted outlining its main objectives and future activities. Mediana Association has been set to achieve the following objectives:

- promoting and facilitating transborder and regional cooperation;

- improving border passing;
- adoption of EU norms of environment protection;
- transborder and regional cooperation in case of disasters, health care and environment protection;
- transborder and regional cooperation on issues of interethnic relations, culture, sports and youth;
- transborder and regional cooperation in the field of education and vocational training;
- improving transborder and regional communications; fostering civil and information society; developing the tourist industry in the region;
- promoting economic development and raising the living standard in the border regions;
- advocating transborder infrastructure projects.

The draft Statute envisages that the Association will embark on the following activities:

- Establishing and maintaining contacts with state authorities, citizens and like-minded domestic and international organizations committed to handling issues of common concern;
- Organizing and holding conferences, symposia, seminars, projects, exhibitions, promotions, presentations, contests and training courses, along with the aims of the association;
- Developing and implementing projects and initiatives alone or in partnership with other organizations in order to achieve its goals;
- Informing the members of the association, the general public and other like-minded organizations about the current and forthcoming activities and initiatives of the association by publishing a newsletter or through mass media;
- Establishing centers and tasks forces for coordinating and supporting the activities of its members.

Support for Transborder Cooperation

Transfrontier co-operation has a role to play in the creation of a genuine area of democratic security and stability in Europe and is foremost an effective confidence-building measure. It offers new opportunities to establish neighbourly relations, and to promote tolerance and understanding between frontier populations, especially where minorities exist.

The lack of established tradition in transborder cooperation, especially between municipalities from Bulgaria and Serbia, necessitates both firm commitment of national authorities and staunch support on behalf of European institutions. The elaborated set of mechanisms for advancing transborder exchange and cooperation should be optimally exploited and utilized as catalyst to the processes of transfrontier interaction. The awareness of both the political and administrative establishment of municipalities should be raised about the prospects and potential of programs and initiatives sponsored by the European Union and the Council of Europe in the domain of transborder cooperation.

The Council of Europe is committed to advance the transborder exchange by means of providing the political and intergovernmental framework for laying down the principles and facilitating the transborder relations.

The Council of Europe's policy on the promotion of transfrontier co-operation is based on:

- confidence-building to increase tolerance, understanding and good-neighbourly relations between populations, especially in border regions where minorities exist (transfrontier co-operation in cultural and linguistic spheres and local and regional media are important factors in this regard);
- improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the provision of public services through the sharing of facilities and services across frontiers;
- dealing with problems that spill over the frontiers: air and water pollution, natural and other disasters, such as floods and fire;
- co-ordination of policies for mutual interest, such as in the field of regional planning, urban and rural development;
- dealing with specific needs of border populations, such as the question of taxation and social security rights of transfrontier workers, arrangements for facilitating local border traffic;
- establishing transfrontier co-operation bodies to ensure that transfrontier relations are sustained and improved.

In 1994 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was established from the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities. Bringing together grassroots politicians from the councils and regional bodies of Europe in its Chamber of Local Authorities and Chamber of Regions, the Congress tackles problems that affect the day-to-day lives of people in cities, towns and villages all over Europe. Its work is carried out in statutory committees, which replaced working groups after CLRAE's structural reform in May 2000, and in annual plenary sessions, where resolutions and recommendations are adopted for governments, national parliaments and local and regional authorities. The

Standing Committee, composed of representatives of all the national delegations, acts on behalf of CLRAE between sessions.

In Central and East European countries, the LODE (Local DEMocracy) programme is working to ensure that newly drafted legislation meets the Council of Europe's standards. Promoting the participation in public life at local level and fostering transfrontier cooperation in culture, education, sport and the media are other important areas of work to strengthen local democracy.

The support on behalf of the European Union to foster transborder relations has been provided through a number of structural and pre-accession funds, mainly INTERREG and PHARE - Cross-border Cooperation, and some specially designed instruments like Small Project Facility and CARDS.

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe provide a comprehensive set of instruments for either expert/political or financial assistance to initiatives of cross-border importance. These instruments however should be thoroughly examined by those concerned and adequately applied in different forms of transborder activities.

In the case of transborder cooperation at local level, this impels the raising of expertise of local administration to handle issues concerning EU programs and to communicate effectively with administrative units and departments of the EU. It is only when municipal authorities and local communities avail of the opportunities provided by European programs that large-scale cross-border cooperation will be plausible.

Conclusion

In view of the integrationist trends in Europe, the local authorities emerge as an important link between citizens and the European policy-making. This link however needs further advancement and care. Presumably, cross-border cooperation enhances the opportunities for municipalities to participate in mainstream European processes by identifying and pursuing common transborder interests and goals. The transfrontier activities of municipal authorities, though being already molded at its initial phase, are still far from being self-driven and self-sufficient (self-sustainable) in terms of structures and mechanisms. What is indispensable in this regard are some triggers and instigators to act as catalyst to sustain/ ensure the dynamics of the process. Civil community and NGOs are eligible to substantially contribute to cross-border cooperation at municipal level in particular. The joint efforts of municipal authorities and civil society organizations backed up by the national and European establishment lay down the foundations of a cooperative environment for cross-border exchange and dialogue.

Conclusions and recommendations

Main recommendations for developing bilateral relations at central level:

I. Interaction at central political level - aimed at promoting activation of cooperation between the Parliaments and the Executive power of the two states. In this case, a concrete objective is the initiation of regular meetings between the inter-parliamentary groups for friendship between Bulgaria and Serbia and Montenegro at both parliaments for outlining concrete objectives for a certain period of time.

II. Bilateral economic cooperation. Major priorities of Bulgaria and Serbia in the field of economy have to be defined and coordinated within the context of new political, social and economic realities. The results that are worth being pursued include:

- establishing free trade area and facilitating the movement of people, goods and services;
- increasing the amount of the trade exchange;
- strict customs regulations of exporting and importing goods;
- setting up a favorable environment for economic cooperation and reciprocal investments – initiate business forums at central and local level for developing specific bilateral business projects;
- developing specific forms of cooperation in the field of agriculture, chemical industry, energetics, trade and tourism;
- better protection of economic, commercial and financial interests of the two countries;
- development of important infrastructure projects facilitating the bilateral contacts and exchange – it is recommended an external public pressure to be exerted on the state administration for advancing the implementation of the Stability Pact projects concerning both countries; Special attention has to be paid to the construction of Sofia- Nis highway as well as to further developing the existing railway;
- Initiating projects for overall development of the Dunav River region.

III. Cooperation in the area of culture, education and media.

A pragmatic approach will be sought, that transcends the narrow boundaries of stereotyping i.e. problems that are most likely to cause discord will be placed in the periphery of the dialogue.

Communication between the two states should create among the general public an image of the other, congruent with the “Other’s” own perception. Communication can take form of:

- Translating and publishing the most valuable, cornerstone products of national literature, drama and poetry to introduce and presenting the cultural context of the neighbor;
- Civil initiative for the establishment - throughout of the territory of the two states, of vital and well-functioning Bulgarian-Serbian cultural and information centers working in close cooperation with the state administration;
- Working out joint projects between Bulgarian and Serbian NGOs for preserving monuments of cultural heritage on the territory of both Bulgaria and Serbia;
- Developing a web site for cultural exchange between the two countries;
- Finding funds for mutual publishing of the history of both countries – as history could not be forgotten nor a common history could still be written, there is a necessity for presenting the Bulgarian viewpoint in Serbia and the Serbian one in Bulgaria;
- Promoting educational and academic exchange - exchange visits of students and academicians, public lectures on exchange basis, academic literature;
- Signing contracts for cooperation between the national and local media including exchange of TV productions, news and articles, creating co-productions.

IV. Civic cooperation. Such cooperation is based on the fact that the nongovernmental organizations are in general more flexible and apt to cooperation. Having in mind the general trend of the state to limit its functions, NGOs are in position to cover all major areas that are out of states' attention and obligations. Civic cooperation should be developed within the following spheres: Democracy strengthening; environmental protection; social safety nets improvement; economic development.

The establishment of a network of NGOs as well as the development of close cooperation between these NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the two countries is worth being pursued. This cooperation aims at sharing information and better coordinating bilateral projects and initiatives.

The participants in the conferences outlined the necessity of creating an information portal for the relations between Bulgaria and Serbia including information on the countries, NGOs and their area of interests and activities.

V. Local Self-Government and Transborder Cooperation

Local Self-Government Training Seminar was organized and took place within the framework of the Bulgarian-Serbian Conference on Transborder Cooperation. The participants were representatives of municipal authorities from the border adjacent area. The Seminar was aimed at presenting the way the systems of local self-government in Bulgaria and Serbia are functioning. Exchanging and sharing best practices of local self-government was considered as an initial step to cooperation.

The trainers and participants in the Seminar discussed in comparative perspective the legal arrangements and practice of local self-government in Bulgaria and Serbia, which institutions perform the functions of local self-government and what their powers are. Special concerns were given to the interaction between central and local government and how their responsibilities are assigned, especially in the area of decentralization of decision-making process and procedures. Other crucial issues debated at the Seminar were municipal finances and financial policy. A particular emphasis was put on the strategies and initiatives for local economic development.

After deliberating at three sessions the participants in the Seminar reached a couple of basic conclusions and recommendations. In general, the systems of local self-government in Bulgaria and Serbia are alike. Both systems have accepted the founding principles of the European Charter for Local Self-government. The structure and organization of local government is similar, though in Bulgaria there is only one level of local self-government (the municipality), while in Serbia there are three levels (local community – municipality – municipal city). An important difference in the two systems is that Bulgarian municipalities have their own property, arranged in legal terms, while municipalities in Serbia are not entitled to have own property. Municipal finances and financial policies in both countries also have a similar structure, but in Bulgaria municipalities are more independent in financial affairs than in Serbia, where there still is a greater centralization. In terms of local economic development, however, both Bulgaria and Serbia make the initial steps.

Proposals for Cooperation

1. Establishing free trade areas along the border;
2. Opening borders, new border check points (Kadaboaz Pass between the villages of Salash and Novo Korito; St. Nikola Pass; between the villages of Dolni Krivodol and Smolcha);
3. Cooperation between Bulgarian and Serbian companies, supporting joint ventures;
4. Improving infrastructure, coordinated efforts for promoting new roads and the Nis – Sofia speedway; joint infrastructure initiatives;

5. Joint environmental protection, water protection (along the Nisava river), establishing Stara Planina Natural Park;
6. Harmonization of legislation in the sphere of finance and property rights;
7. Establishing new Euroregion(s) along the border following the example of Vidin-Zajecar-Kalafat Euroregion;
8. Developing trade relations; cooperation between Chambers of Commerce;
9. Promoting *Stara planina* Regional Development Fund;
10. Establishing a Regional Development Bank, which will extend credits to border municipalities;
11. Cooperation and coordination between institutions and bodies of local self-government on both sides of the border;
12. Initiating and elaborating employment projects;
13. Fostering the information exchange – a newspaper in Bulgarian and Serbian, respectively, with local and transborder news; regular bulletin covering the activities of those municipalities; developing Bulgarian-Serbian transborder Internet website (portal).

Bilateral Treaties and Agreements

No. 1	
Name of Treaty:	Minutes of the Extraordinary Session of the Joint Yugoslav-Bulgarian Commission for the Renewal, Repair and Maintenance of the State Border
Date of signing:	March 31, 1993
Date of ratification:	June 2, 1993
Date of Coming into Force:	
No. 2	
Name of Treaty:	Minutes of the Extraordinary Session of the Mixed Yugoslav-Bulgarian Commission for the Renewal, Marking and Maintenance of the State Border

Date of signing:	Nov. 11, 1993
Date of ratification:	May 4, 1994
Date of Coming into Force:	May 6, 1994
No.	3
Name of Treaty:	Minutes of the Final Session of the Mixed Yugoslav-Bulgarian Commission for the Renewal and Maintenance of the State Border
Date of signing:	Oct. 10, 1994
Date of ratification:	Dec. 2, 1994
Date of Coming into Force:	
No.	4
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on Trade and Economic Cooperation
Date of signing:	Nov. 28, 1995
Date of ratification:	Aug. 29, 1996
Date of Coming into Force:	Sept. 12, 1996
No.	5
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on Mutual Promotion and Protection of Investments
Date of signing:	Feb. 13, 1996
Date of ratification:	Aug. 29, 1996
Date of Coming into Force:	Jan. 9, 1997

No. 6	
Name of Treaty:	Protocol of the First Session of the Mixed Yugoslav-Bulgarian Commission for Economic Cooperation
Date of signing:	March 7, 1996
Date of ratification:	April 11, 1996
Date of Coming into Force:	
No. 7	
Name of Treaty:	Programme of Cooperation in the Fields of Education and Culture between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria for 1996, 1997 and 1998
Date of signing:	May 13, 1996
Date of ratification:	
Date of Coming into Force:	
No. 8	
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on Cooperation between the Customs Authorities and on Mutual Assistance
Date of signing:	June 4, 1997
Date of ratification:	March 3, 1998
Date of Coming into Force:	April 11, 1998
No. 9	
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of Bulgaria on Cooperation in the Field of Tourism

Date of signing:	Dec. 17, 1997
Date of ratification:	Dec. 4, 1998
Date of Coming into Force:	Feb. 5, 1999
No.	10
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on Cooperation in the Field of Veterinary Medicine
Date of signing:	Dec. 14, 1998
Date of ratification:	Dec. 24, 1999
Date of Coming into Force:	Jan. 10, 2000
No.	11
Name of Treaty:	Convention between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on Cooperation Relating to Plant Quarantine and Plant Protection
Date of signing:	Dec. 14, 1998
Date of ratification:	Dec. 24, 1999
Date of Coming into Force:	Feb. 9, 2000
No.	12
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria on the Avoidance of Double Taxation in Relation to Taxes on Income and Capital
Date of signing:	Dec. 14, 1998
Date of ratification:	Dec. 24, 1999

Date of Coming into Force:	Jan. 10, 2000
No.	13
Name of Treaty:	Protocol Concerning Cooperation between the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria
Date of signing:	Dec. 7, 2000
Date of ratification:	Dec. 7, 2000
Date of Coming into Force:	
No.	14
Name of Treaty:	Agreement between the Federal Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria Concerning the Return and Readmission of Persons Staying Illegally in the Territories of the Two States
Date of signing:	Jan. 25, 2001
Date of ratification:	Jan. 25, 2001
Date of Coming into Force:	Aug. 8, 2001

REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
39th NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
Parliamentary Group for Friendship
Bulgaria - Yugoslavia

Sofia, October 4, 2001

President:

Mihail Mikov – Coalition for Bulgaria

Vice-presidents:

Stefan Minkov – National Movement Simeon the Second

Yordan Nihrizov – United Democratic Forces

Stefan Danailov – Coalition for Bulgaria

Naim Naim – Movement for Rights and Freedoms

Members:

National Movement Simeon the Second:

Prof. Petko Ganchev

Nina Radeva

Margarita Kaneva

Yordan Pamukov

Borislav Vladimirov

Vanya Tsvetkova

Nonka Matova

Nina Chilova

Coalition for Bulgaria:

Dimitar Dimitrov

Tatyana Doncheva

Lyuben Petrov

Georgi Anastasov

Todor Boyadjiev

Toma Tomov

Emilia Maslarova

Georgi Bozhinov

Lyubomir Pantaleev

Yanaki Stoilov

Rumen Petkov

Lyuben Kornezov

Rumen Ovcharov

Mihail Mikov

Alexander Paunov

Asen Gagauzov

Andrei Pantev

Vassil Kalinov

Nikolai Kamov

Petar Agov

Evgeni Kirilov

United Democratic Forces:

Yordan Nihrizov

Dimitar Yordanov

Movement for Rights and Freedoms:

Ramadan Atalai

Arso Manov

Nesrin Uzun

Hussein Chaush

Emel Etem

Ahmed Hussein

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