SOME PRINCIPLES OF A DEMOCRATIC AND PEACEFUL ETHNIC CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

1. An analysis of complex phenomena such as conflicts in the territories of the former Yugoslavia could use a variety of different approaches. But there is no doubt that it has to take into account differences among these conflicts in terms of their context, namely it has to differentiate between conflicts within the former Yugoslavia and those which broke out following its disintegration and involve some of its segments, be they the newly created nation-states or parts thereof.

Conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, as well as those in the former USSR, could be divided into four different types according to the degree of intensity and the parties involved:

(1) **Conflicts between nation-states:**
Conflicts of the first type comprise those between federal units - republics that due to their determinants and status of nation-states necessarily assumed the properties of ethnic conflicts. In that context, the most prominent subclasses of conflicts are:

(a) First, the subclass of direct political conflicts between Serbia and Slovenia and Serbia and Croatia, as well as the hidden conflict between Serbia and Macedonian;

(b) Second, the subclass of open conflicts between the residual power of the federal state and federal units (in particular Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia) over the redistribution of economic and financial burden of the economic reform and the prerogatives of state authority (especially armed forces and foreign policy) which the federal units wanted to obtain and considered necessary for the completion of their respective independent nation-states. The central issue actually derived out of the question of the new setup of Yugoslavia with basically two concepts of either to preserve Yugoslavia or let it dissolve. This conflict was articulated in different ways depending on a variety of characteristics (including, inter alia, regional-ethnic and numerous other features);

(2) Conflicts within nation-state:

The second type comprises those conflicts within federal units themselves, which emerged in response to the ongoing tendencies of national-state centralization. These were actually conflicts between republican authorities seeking to strengthen
the processes of state centralization and ethnic homogenization, which directly encouraged similar tendencies among the minorities reflected in:

(a) Demands for ethnic separation (e.g. activities of the Albanian movement, especially in Kosovo, demands for the autonomy and ethnic mobilization of Serbs in Croatia and BH; ethnic mobilization of Croats in BH; Muslim ethno-nationalist movement in BH and in Sandak, in Serbia and Montenegro; demands for ethnic mobilization and separate organization of Hungarians in Vojvodina etc.);

(b) Efforts to renew (Kosovo and Vojvodina) or to establish (Istria in Croatia) the political autonomy of certain regions.

In order to analyze conflicts of these types, the following hypothesis could be used: the applied models of reorganization in the public sphere and the changes of governmental forms (from centralized federation to loose confederation), as well as the principles and mechanisms for the resolution of the national question, including the so-called elimination of nationalism used as an instrument for the management of conflicts of interest, proved unsuccessful to the extent that they could not provide for modern development, the establishment of democracy and the preservation of the state.

(3) **Conflicts between ethnic collectivities:**

Conflicts of the third type are the ones between individual ethnic collectivities. As in other multiethnic communities, the main element of these conflicts, are the fear
of hegemony of the most numerous and/or influential ethnic (Serbian) community? These conflicts are conducive to divisions into irreconcilably opposing blocks. This part of the paper will pay particular attention to Serbian-Croatian and later on Serbian-Albanian and Serbian-Muslim conflicts. The most drastic in this group are conflicts between Serbs and Croats and between Serbs and Albanians.

The view which is imposed as the starting hypothesis here is that the whole problem is that of a crisis of national identities and the fact that attempts to resolve this crisis on the basis of ethno-nationalism, taking into account only the interests of a single (one's own) nation, have failed. Effects of this approach on the national identity of one (Serbian) community will be discussed subsequently.

(4) Ethnic conflicts in personal relations:

These are conflicts developed in personal relations, in everyday life. The domination of collective - and thereby also national, ethnic - consciousness and identification, as well as a pronounced polarization of day-to-day life characterize them. Many of those overwhelmed by nationalist zest deploy all of their spiritual forces to serve their nations. Nationalism is regarded as a way of liberation. After many calls to "die for the nation" comes the one to "die for the homeland".

The hypothesis implied in this sphere is that the domination of collective-national, ethnic consciousness and ideology as well as the overall politicization of the ethnic factor (ethnification of politics and social life) reflects on numerous segments of individual life and personal relations, including the most intimate ones. These
issues will also be addressed below, but in relation to the question of ethnicity and national identity as mechanisms of ethnic mobilization.

2. There are a few lessons, which could be learned from the case of the former Yugoslavia:

**Lesson 1**: The Yugoslav federalism sought to solve the national question by resolving the following problems: first, the preservation of the national identity, establishment of statehood and state symbols; second, ethnic representation and balance, i.e. division of power among various ethnic groups or their federal units; third, the distribution of national wealth and national income, the problems of a "balanced economic distribution and development". While these problems were attended to, new ones emerged. In the end, the national question remained unsolved. Thus, it is not true that Yugoslavia was unique in solving the national question, but neither is it true that it was unique in falling apart because its ethnic groups have been totally deprived of their rights. The national question did remain outstanding, whereas nations and ethnic minorities enjoyed numerous rights (e.g. in politics, and particularly language, education, national tradition, etc.). What they did not enjoy were diverse socio-economic rights and political and religious freedoms. In the absence of democracy, national question was not dealt with politically. It was usually viewed in nationalist terms, involving the reduction and subordination of demos to ethnos. This approach, naturally, disregarded the fact that the national question was one of the "long lasting phenomena" and that it
could only be handled but not solved. Therefore, it gradually undermined and finally destroyed the communist ideology.

**Lesson 2:** The Yugoslav society suffered from many ailments of underdevelopment (e.g. erosion of moral and values; neglect of the young; unemployment; social differences and growing inequality; white-collar crime and corruption; lack of democracy and conservatism; irresponsibility and incompetence of elite), but by far the greatest problems were the national question and growing nationalism. Disintegrative nationalist tendencies were used by political oligarchies of the republics obsessed with state-building to carry out the idea of sovereignty for "their own" nation, republic. The disregard of the federal constitution, for the sake of old obsessions with the creation of a "sovereign national state", whether inspired by secessionist or hegemonic ideas, was in its essence based on the same aggressive "state reason". It left almost no room for illusions about the existence of Yugoslavia. Being a multi-national state and society Yugoslavia could not survive the "triumph" of nationalism, which considered the expression of nationalist passions a fundamental social value.

**Lesson 3:** When nationalist tensions started to grow most of the population thought that confederation might help achieve what was already impossible: a political structure in which the republics would be completely independent but still, somehow, interconnected. The policy of construction of national states - understood as ethnic or states where members of the minorities would be second-rate citizens, became the central point of the Yugoslav drama. For the purpose of creating a state of this kind "ethnic cleansing" was used as a means for
changing the ethnic-demographic composition of a specific territory. However, it turned out that the policy of "ethnic cleansing" was worse than the crime itself.

Newly created states, which emerged on the ruins of the former Yugoslavia, in terms of their internal structure is, with the exception of Slovenia, no less heterogeneous and conflicting than the former Yugoslavia. This particularly applies to the FRY/Serbia. In political and institutional terms these are not democratic nation-states, but rather new ethnically established structures of power and rule. In reality, however, revised constitutions of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia introduced new (constitutional) structures giving privileges to members of the "kin" nation. "Constitutional nationalism" establishes a state the sovereignty of which originates from a specific nation /ethnos/ which, again, determines the form and identity of such a state. It puts minorities in an inferior position and thus encourages their disloyalty and revolt. This was the case with Albanians in Serbia, but also with Serbs in Croatia. Multinational states can survive only if all nations they embrace have equal rights, whereas in the above cases the fear of domination of another nation was constantly growing and generating new and even more dangerous sources of instability. "Balkanization" became a widespread phenomenon. These developments were quite contrary to modern federalism, which involves pluralism and democracy. Federalism disperses power to various levels and thereby prevents absolutism and despotism. Federalism brings regional, ethnic and other kinds of autonomy into equilibrium and enables broader political unity. Thus, in principle, federalism is capable of providing both unity and diversity. But in the history of Yugoslavia federalism, pluralism and democracy had
never gone together. Since Yugoslavia had never developed into a liberal-democratic, plural and federalist state, its collapse was inevitable.

Lesson 4: the former Yugoslavia applied, mostly inconsistently, all available macro-methods of ethnic conflict regulation, namely, methods for eliminating differences (genocide during the existence of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) primarily of Serbs, Jews and Gypsies; forced mass-population transfers is a method used during World War II by the NDH, and by all parties to the war in BH and Croatia within their policy of ethnic cleansing and "dislodging"; partition and/or secession is a method used in 1991 by the authorities of the former Yugoslav republics Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonian revoking the right to self-determination; integration and/or assimilation are methods occasionally employed throughout the existence of the former Yugoslavia (especially in the period preceding and immediately following World War II) and the methods for managing differences (hegemonic control - a method used before World War II in an attempt at establishing Serbian domination in the whole of Yugoslavia and since the early '80s in all republics seeking to establish the power of the ruling nation. Serbia, i.e. Kosovo provide an interesting example: during the entire period since 1913 when this part was annexed to Serbia, there has been an obvious effort to establish the domination of the majority Serbian nation, but during the '70s and '80s, due to the strengthening of the statehood of Kosovo, there were also efforts to establish Albanian hegemony over Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo; arbitration or third-party intervention is a method which has been practiced since the early '90s, first by the EC, i.e. EU and subsequently by the UN; contonisation is a model supported by the Serbs in BH in the early '90s, but the application of
the model opened the question of the so-called ethnic territories and borders the solutions for which was sought for in war; federalization, as indicated above, is a method applied in Yugoslavia following World War II.

The only model which has for the time being remained untried, is the one of consociation or power sharing.¹ All this indicates that each of these methods has its own limitations and that not one of them enables resolution of ethnic conflicts once and for all.

All this seems to add up to the following general conclusion: models which the former Yugoslavia had used to solve the national question and to eradicate nationalism (first of all, reorganization of state and legal system, transformation of the system of government - from a centralized federation to a loose confederation) proved wrong. The reason for that, in the last decades of existence of the former Yugoslavia, is found in an essential limitation of state socialism, i.e. suppression of democracy and the use of the dictatorship of the proletariat by the governing elite for the purpose of achieving political monopoly on behalf of and by means of the communist party. Thus, the federal system was a mere facade and individuality was replaced by collectivity. The end results were: the dictatorship of politics over economy and national feelings; subjectivism and voluntarism as principles governing social and ethnic relations; increasing conflicts between republics and between absolutized nationalist interests; state protectionism and economic nationalism leading to economic wars and autarchy; decreasing capacity for free, democratic integration; national self-determination as a vital component of the regime policy.
The most important lesson which could be learned from the events in the former Yugoslavia since 1989, is that the absence of repression is not freedom and that the collapse of the communist, closed society does not automatically lead to an open society and there is no shortage of grievances, because communist regimes used to suppress all national or ethnic aspirations which did not suit their purposes. At the same time, there is hardly any chance of a return to communism. It is much easier to mobilize society for a real or imagined national injury than for an abstract idea like democracy or open society. Building an open society is essentially a constructive process, and it is only too easy to use ethnic conflict to undermine its foundations.

3. A large part of what is characteristic of ethnic conflict today has little in common with the real interests of these communities and is often confronted to than. That leaves a powerful impression of irrationality. Therefore, a feeling of rivalry and competitiveness is not always caused by the true collision of interests, while the question of (national) prestige often surpasses the importance of really existing economic, political and other objectives.

Starting from the fact that there are three groups of functions of social conflicts: identification of interests and needs of specific segments of society (social groups); elimination of obstacles to social change, and finally, integration or disintegration of society, than we could say that the most recent conflicts served the purpose of identification of interests and needs of bureaucracy, i.e. an enormous part of the old and newly-created political elite, as well as the emerging
private entrepreneurs and nouveau riches to turn their economic and social position into a status of the leading force in society, by means of a nationalist ideology; these conflicts enabled elimination - destruction of the old order as well as the very existence of the multiethnic Yugoslavia which did not provide a favorable environment for complete articulation and expression of nationalist platforms. They preferred the concept of the national state. Moreover, institutions and channels of social promotion in the former Yugoslavia were completely clogged and, therefore, also precluded social promotion of groups which recognized their interest in nationalism and, through the conflicts, managed to gain power in all newly-created states. Due to the limits of political institutions and social and economic basis, these groups could acquire power only by removing a part of the old communist elite, which refused to side with them. Therefore, the conflicts were violent.

In the Yugoslav case, these conflicts had ambivalent effects: they disintegrated a former society, but also witnessed new integration within specific ethnic communities, which imposed the need for building of the nation-state frameworks. That building acts as integrative factor in communities and states which, like Slovenia lack pronounced interethnic conflicts, but has a disintegrative effect on those states (such as are all other former Yugoslav republics) which have a multiethnic composition and a marked territorial concentration of Others.

This destabilizing effect appears as all conflicts are reduced to the interethnic - intergroup level, so that ethnic affiliation becomes a mark for a party to the conflict, while an individual can no longer recognize himself as a simultaneous member of
a number of conflicting groups. Therefore, one of the conditions to establish control of these conflicts and diminish their disintegrative effects would be their displacement. Bearing in mind that in multiethnic societies the most dangerous ground is the one of interethnic relation, the shift towards regional and other political conflicts, which can be resolved by electoral and parliamentary tools, would offer a way for peaceful conflict management. This shift, however, must be made with appropriate manipulation and partial threat, i.e. use of repression. From that point of view, a kind of an “enlightened” or democratically conditioned authoritarianism would not, in the short terms, be the worst possible solution. Naturally, the advantage is given to a more lasting solution, namely establishment of democratic institutions and procedures.

These conflicts are, therefore, mediated conflicts, and the meeting of interests at their basis has to take political mediation into account. Democracy includes certain institutions, procedures, rules of game, but not the ultimate positive outcome. However, these societies, in addition to the general problem of absence of democracy have been faced with a series of new problems due to the establishment of “majority democracy”. Among other things, this model enable the rule of “one man one vote” to be used as pretext for exclusion of minorities from the public life. That drives the minorities to disloyalty. Mechanisms of majority democracy proved to be mechanisms of centralization which seek to choke all autonomy, including even that of the parliament and strengthen the executive power and establishment of presidential and semi-presidential systems, i.e. authoritarian rule. All that refers to the establishment of the “rules of game” within
an appropriate model of democracy, as a way out of the present conflicting situation.

An analysis of conflicts in the territory of the former Yugoslavia shows the necessity for the institutional system, which will not ignore the existing ethnic differences or conflicts of interests, organized along ethnic lines. An institutional system which starts from the view that conflict might also have a stimulating effect, that they may appear as a challenge to people to mobilize for creation of new values.