

Human Security in Southeast Europe: Just a Vanguard Rhetoric or a Genuine Ride for Security for All

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This essay is an attempt to explore uncertainties and convictions about long and widely manipulated Southeast European security issues which many unconsciously share. The paper is an initial observation which will hopefully put the beginning of a more comprehensive study on issues related to possibilities for enhancing human security in SEE. The main assertion of this work is that security can only be attained and grasped if the well-being of the humans is put in its centre. Modern and not so modern security concepts and ideas with sole state-centered roundabouts are incomplete, misleading and overly perilous.

I. The Human Security definitions passageway

In May 2000, an exhibition “War or Peace” was opened in the ancient castle in Stadtschlaining, Austria (also known as “the town of peace” - Friedensstadt). This exhibition had an exceptional task to display not only war and conflict but peace as well. Soon, however, the curators of the exhibition realised that the existence of peace is so natural and intelligible that they were short of artistic means to depict and show what it really is. Peace indeed, seemed to be a dynamic “harmony of tensions” which the creative human impulses could not delimit to a museum hall.

One of the sections in the exhibition was the so called Red Couch room. It was not fancily decorated – few huge pictures on the walls, a computer with some questions and a red couch which has travelled around the globe since 1975 and has hosted for interviews more than 16 000 people. Among those interviewed were homeless people, Chechen warriors, Peter Gabriel, Gorbachev, a Roma musicians family and many others (the project is ongoing). All of them were asked 16 standardised questions (What makes you feel (un)happy? What is the worst thing you have done, what is the worst thing that has happened to you, etc.) and their answers recorded and analysed.

The faster and further the project was developing, the more the Belgian photographer who started it as an arty eccentricity was convinced that behind the photo lenses, the Gallery of Mankind was in its making as a prove that at the launch of the 21st century geographical distance, cultural particularities, educational background and life experiences cannot impede all humans share some commonalties. Those common features were mainly expressed in terms of shared basic needs of food, shelter, safety and the fruitful milieu for the accomplishment of everyone’s human potential; in other words, the thread underpinning the human security concept.

The human security idea emerged in the environs of a gigantic and disastrous human insecurity for many people around the globe whose simple desires voiced were to bring to a halt the main sources of haphazard violence and enduring scarcity of life basics. And indeed, the accumulated insecurity and fear have driven the willingness to change the rhetoric, the focus and the way the security issues are addressed. The human being acquired the focal standing in the security discourse to transform the sterile state security-centered discussions to a more humanised and all-encompassing dialogue on human security.

In the Millennium Report of the UN, Secretary General Kofi Annan, human security concerns found expression in two phrases: freedom from fear and freedom from want for all human beings which encapsulate the merit of the started anew security discourse by focusing on the human dimension. Consequently, this mainly diplomatic change of rhetoric has brought about a change in the numerous interpretations of the meaning of security or rather a novel approach to broadening the concept to include as its primary concern the human well being what should have naturally found its place in the security discourse long ago. The

spotlight on the human being as well as the comprehensiveness of the human security approach is opening new facets for a security-related discussion.

In the Human Development Report of 1994, the ideas of human development and human security as well as the link between them were articulated for the first time even though the underlying sagacity has been implied for a long time. These two concepts were defined and related to bring a circle of ideas together and urge new rhetoric and verbal manifestations for changing the discussion itinerary which has been followed through military-invented solid and unyielding security doctrines. The 1994 Human Development Report stated that “human development is a broader concept - a process of widening the range of people’s choices. Human security means that people can exercise those choices safely and freely – and that they can be fairly confident that the opportunities they have today will not be lost tomorrow.” (p. 23)

The broadening of choices and the generation of more alternatives is certainly craved for by millions of humans locked into the impasse of dehumanising poverty, unmanageable conflicts, seemingly unbreakable criminalized societal weaves, insufficient and inequitably distributed resources, environment degradation as well as the overall incapacitation of realising one’s human potential. The accent on expansion of human choices and their sustainability over time reveals unmistakably a strive for empowerment and enhanced human security. Moreover, the multi-faceted nature of human life and needs has also been reflected in the concept of human security which accommodates a variety of different aspects.

The broad approach which human security discourse endorses moves along two major tenets: “Safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression and the protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether in homes, in jobs or communities.” All that makes us feel safe and secure as human beings and what gives us the feeling of being protected and not in danger is the pivotal core of the human security idea. All which supports a human living in dignity and safety, non-violent conflict transformation and conflict prevention, protection of the children’s well being and empowering environment for equitable human progress is complementing the defining of human security.

The Human Development Report of 1999 went a step further and classified the threats to human security in seven major categories: economic insecurity, food insecurity, health insecurity, personal insecurity, environmental insecurity, community and cultural insecurity, political insecurity. All these threats to human security are recognised as intertwined and interdependent. They form the realm of the negative definition of human security as the absence of all those threats while the positive way of defining human security is as presence, respect and fulfilment of the whole pallet of human rights as elaborated in the Bill of Rights. The categories of threats listed in the 1999 Human Development Report also show that arguments in terms of state security vs. human security which are the most widely spread misunderstanding of the concept lack cogency and validity since a genuine state security can only be achieved by means of successfully addressing human security concerns.

Human security should be seen as an indispensable element of complementarity to state security within the traditional security discourse, for state security’s utmost goal should not be protecting the state’s citizens against external aggression or military attack but rather catering for an intra and inter-state environment of comfort and safety for all. Probably, the comprehensive term, the Commission on Global Governance put three sets of security issues together: people’s security, state security, and the security of the planet. Whichever of the terms is employed however, the bearer of the right to existence which immediately implies a guarantee to safety and security is the human being. A state cannot denote itself a secure state with insecure and unsafe individuals inhabiting it. Providing for the security of borders and relying on security notions based on territoriality and sovereignty only is not and cannot be a sound security compound due to the rising non-traditional threats to security today.

The addressing of those non-conventional threats to security will bring about the human state in which choices can really be exercised freely and safely and a state in which a human can enjoy his/her human existence in dignity and equality. If the rights elaborated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are lived through by humans, not excluding the human obligations they generate, some human wrongs in SEE could have been avoided.

II. The Human (In)Security in SEE

Split and artificially bordered, misunderstood and entangled, the Balkan states are coming into fashion these days. War and peace, conflict and reconciliation in black and white are being explained and lightened by people who never ever put their feet in Southeast Europe. Interestingly enough, the claimed “Balkan expertise” from the outside develops with such a velocity that both Balkan audio-visual and literary markets sections are flourishing.

Ethnicity, cultural and religious differences are frequently being exploited to shed light on the complexities the Balkans face; however, rarely an intellectual sharpness and cognition is the accompaniment of the discussion about SEE actualities. Balkan stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies are easily sold through the global media market to the world audience. Only the similarities and commonalties extracted from the Balkan context, which fit well the Western tradition and ways are emphasised as an “island of civility” and hope for betterment of “this misconstrued region”. The change is, however, predicated on the interaction of the different elements manufacturing or manipulating the region’s cultural specificities and conflict-prevention aptitudes both within and outside a distinct cultural context as well as the inherent capacities of every cultural milieu to transform (mostly its periphery) but further develop and enrich its core.

Within the confines of the Balkan nation-states, one can encounter a variegated heritage of cultural diversity due to its tremendous concentration in a relatively small territory. The distribution of apparently similar characteristics is nothing more than a dispersion of identical culturally-bound or driven communities within the borders of different states. Modern history of the region and particularly the traits left over by the Ottoman Empire have shaped quite a level of commonalties which are fervently rejected by the nation-states due to the threats they might pose to their security, i.e. their existence and wholeness. Being neglected though, those common features have devitalised and the systematically manifested differences reinforced by the ideology of over-emphasising them as factors of division and separatist spins gained precedence.

Those imagined pre-fabricated divisions and splits have been quickly exploited and turned into a background for escalating conflicts, highly creeping hatred and unbearability easily transferred into fanatic inter-cultural repulsion. The markers for division, especially during the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, most often referred to were religion, ethnic affiliation, gender, and incompatibility of values deriving from those fundamental differences. There has been no anthropologically-driven, or behavioural patterns-driven, open public discourse on what has kept all these “different people” together for such a long period of time and how those so tremendously differing cultures were coexisting peacefully. When ideas aiming at discovering the broader context of similarities and differences and what purported their violent expression were endeavoured upon, there was a scientific blockage and inability to reach reconciliation of competing claims.

One of the major challenges when Balkan security is being discussed is the misrepresentation of the dynamics of the processes which weave the region’s culture-fabrics. At any point of time, when analysis is attempted, the process is being reduced for the purpose of analysis to its outcomes which can be measured. The tendency to visualise the lack of security, to turn its detrimental consequences as needed and capitalise on them was widely taken advantage of during the conflicts in former Yugoslavia. The neighbours were watching

the horror stories fearful and kept on wondering as to where the conception of antagonism and repugnance is born and emerges from and how humans mutilated so much as to bring about the violence and the destruction which tortured for a decade the peninsula. The Balkan security-insecurity melange was always underlined by the West as a the lack of ripeness and competence of local and regional structures (implied-local uncivilised cultures) to resolve their inherent and inherited conflicts but it is much deeper indeed.

The demonstrations and the illustrations of rising human insecurity in every SEE country abound today. The sources of this insecurity differ from state to state and they are not only to be ascribed to Milošević or other authoritarian regimes, inter-ethnic clashes and incompatibility of cultures. The sense of insecurity more intensely derives from quite non-conventional threats to security like organised crime, terrorism, drug trafficking and abuse, environmental degradation and pollution, social and economic insecurity as well as a chronic inability to handle intra-societal conflicts in a non-violent way. The lack of trust between different communities locked within the borders of the same state as well as the lack of will and perspectives those communities see for mutual co-existence turn these days to be the biggest challenges.

Rising social insecurity, suffocating unemployment rates and poverty delimiting the choices of many people in the region, combined with a future amputated by mines in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo are forming a new collage of unpredictable tension clusters.

Another extremely strong indicator of growing human insecurity in SEE is the constant outflow of people from the region, especially young people. In a recently convened meeting between representatives of all Austrian Universities with representatives of the universities in Serbia and Montenegro, the newly appointed acting Rector of the Belgrade University said that more than 400 000 young people have left the FRY for the last 10 years. The situation is not any better in Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and is particularly frightful in BiH.

The brain drain issue is closely related to transition and reform processes in the region whose main goals are reinstating political, social and economic stability at the SEE societies at large. The outflow of people is a consequence to a high degree of social and economic insecurities as well as the discernible lack of choices and perspectives those people see at home. In ten to fifteen years the region will be short of quite a few of its human resources and the social fabrics will be detrimentally affected unless in the meantime the anchors are found to bring back those people by enhancing their human security.

III. Viable strategies for enhancing human security

Let me name a few strategies but core ones: education, better use of the new information and communication technologies, and regional functional integration.

Education is presumably an instrument of popular democratic empowerment and a strategy for enhancing human development and hence human security. However, when addressing issues with strategic, long-term implications, education is rarely given the priority which it deserves. The record for investment in the field of education as compared to defence and arms production is meagre. Nothing new but recording this as statistics from year to year does not bring about real changes. Obviously, a more pro-active approach to stronger lobbying for larger investments for education has to be embarked upon. The SEE regional education networks have to be more actively supported; there should be a serious passageway built between education and employment in the region and the younger generation accepted to the labour market more willingly and vigorously. Through various policy mechanisms, these much needed links can be assured and put into force. This is not short-term planning but a long-run strategy whose implementation will bring about genuine transformations at a later stage.

Inter-cultural education with no tendencies of selective memories and glorious reminiscences of the past has to finally find its way in the formal educational curricula in the region. The type of learning most needed today is anticipatory and not learning from disasters and catastrophes. Learning combined with better usage of the new information and communication technologies for promoting tolerance and understanding should also be accelerated and the infrastructure and technical development in the region supported more actively. Also, matters of connectivity and accessibility of the new technological advances cannot be taken for granted in SEE but their availability needs to be mindfully upheld.

Last but not least, cross-border functional integration which increases the vested interest in co-operative activities rather than hostilities has to be urged. Functional integration is an old mechanism for enhancing security in different clusters of activities. The Stability Pact is a good illustration of such an attempt to put regional focus and functional, area-specific integration ahead by creating value networks capable of addressing and resolving conflicts at their genesis. However, the Stability Pact is still a disperse series of activities in key areas but the links between these areas are hardly established. The lack of viable overall funding strategy turns the Stability Pact into scattered attempts of addressing issues of importance in SEE. Hopefully, this initiative will soon start bearing the sustainability mark.

The multi-dimensionality of the human security concept which goes far beyond the traditional state security notion is a good face-saving strategy to talk about many things. The human security idea puts in the centre of the security debate the HUMAN being and is thus closely linked to the ideals and aspirations for full-fledged human rights protection as expressed and endorsed through all international and regional human rights instruments.

Discussing the security, peace and stability in Southeast Europe has to take a due consideration of the possibilities for enhancing the prevention of violence against persons, organised crime, terrorism, pollution, trafficking in human beings, corruption and the detrimental cross border effects of them. Those non-conventional threats to security have to constitute the core of the discussion of a new European and more particularly Southeast European security agenda for the years to come. The achievement of freedom from fear and freedom from want as the strategic agenda for the further development of mankind is a move closer to the juncture of providing for “the basic infrastructure for human survival” (Ambassador Walter Lichem).

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