Strengths and Weaknesses of Civil Society in the Balkans: Continuities from Conflict to Peace

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Firstly, it is clear that the recognition of new states as a form of conflict prevention,[1] and peace plans and peacekeeping as methods of conflict resolution characterized the – mostly unsuccessful – attempts by the international community (IC) to respond to the Yugoslav crisis and to stop the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Secondly, state-building and international governance of war-torn territories characterize the post-war conflict management strategy of the IC. This was especially the case in Eastern Slavonia (UN Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia), Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Office of the High Representative – OHR – set up by the *ad hoc* coalition of states and organizations – PIC), and Kosovo (the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo – UNMIK).[2] Thirdly, political conditionality is again being used, but now as a post-conflict management method in the framework of the state building and integration process. Conditional development assistance has included the promotion of human rights, democratization and good governance, with a specific focus on the development of a "vibrant civil society."

Against this background, the present paper briefly discusses – focusing on the Balkans; more specifically on the former Yugoslavia – the strengths and weaknesses of civil society, with the latter being understood as a "set of diverse non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counter-balance the state."[3] Thus, civil society may be referred to as the third sector between the state and the citizen and must be, of course, understood on its own terms in the complex Balkans societies. Lack of empirical data and extensive research makes it difficult to assess the effects of the civil society sector in the Balkans. My approach is an interdisciplinary one based on international relations; developmental studies; anthropological researches; comparative case studies; assessments provided by both foreign and local experts; numerous fact-finding missions; various research projects conducted in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia), and Croatia; and intensive presence in the field for some 15 years. The framework of this paper, however, does not allow me to develop either the complexity or the specificity of the transitions and democratization processes in each country, and how these influence the development of the third sector that is my topic.

Before focusing on the distinctiveness of civil society in these states and attempting to point out some trends and challenges characterizing its development in the 1990s, I will provide a very brief flashback in order to contextualize my main arguments. I have at least to briefly mention the past roles of the League of Communists, the Socialist Alliance, the trade unions and youth organizations, while remembering that the Yugoslav system differed fundamentally from that in the Soviet bloc, as well as in the West. Thus, I will highlight three periods: the end of the 19th century, the communist period and the end of the Yugoslav communist regime (1970–80).

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1 The strategic thinking behind the then European Community's recognition of the new states in late 1991 is discussed by Richard Caplan, *Europe and the Recognition of the New States in Yugoslavia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
2 See Richard Caplan, *International Governance of War-Torn Territories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3 Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p. 5.

1. Historical background

In 1862, the right to establish independent associations was decreed by the Ottoman Empire, but the intensive development of civil society only started later; in Bosnia, after the establishment of Austro–Hungarian rule in 1878, especially between 1908 and 1914. According to Djordje Pejanović, more than 1,256 Bosnian associations and societies had been established by 1916, ranging from cultural organizations and charities to athletic societies, the famous *sokol* ('falcon') associations.[4] This rather high figure is explained by the fact that Pejanović worked with rather generous criteria, in particular including as separate entities the different local branches of a particular association. Nevertheless, this mushrooming of associations can only be understood if it is related, firstly, to already active informal groups and networks; secondly, to the growth of a middle-class culture, combined with the development of a local intelligentsia; and thirdly, to migratory movements. It should also be noticed that most of these associations were educational and cultural societies that were formed on religious and national lines.

After 1945, all societies and organized networks, if not banned, were put to the service of building a society based on the ideology delineated in the programme of the ruling Communist Party. Persecutions and 'social cleansing' forced various groupings to go into hiding. But the 1948 Tito–Stalin rupture introduced some tolerance: intellectuals met within the framework of praxis,[5] and forbidden books were now published. Furthermore, despite the dominance of ideology and international openness, the concepts of decentralization and self-management – notably the *samoupravne interesne zajednice* (self-administered interest communities – SIZ), which were abolished shortly before the 1992 war – contributed to some extent to the development of various associations and interest-based groups.

From the 1960s onwards, cultural life and alternative grassroots civil groups, which were networks of civic engagement – often influenced by Krležian subversiveness – began to flourish.[6] In some ways similar to those to be found in Western Europe, they were policy-related organizations carrying out advocacy work and civic education. As evidenced by Robert Putnam, the value of networks of civic engagement is to increase interconnectedness and to foster robust reciprocity and trust, because they cut across social cleavages; therefore, they contribute considerably to social capital and common meanings.[7] But recently in the Balkans, especially in rural areas, kinship- and community-based networks were the most influential: hierarchically ordered organizations (such as the army, churches, the mafias and other parallel networks) became privileged to the detriment of horizontally structured organizations (such as sports clubs, mutual aid societies, cultural associations and voluntary unions).

Zagorka Golubović, who conducted empirical studies in Serbia in the 1990s, explains why this happened. According to her, the belated civil society of Serbia is the result of complex internal sociological and anthropological factors contributing to the formation of an authoritarian mentality. Thus, a failed transition process alone does not explain why civil society development was arrested in the former Yugoslavia. Golubović considers the residues of a traditionalist society and patriarchal relationships to be the main factors that hindered the emergence of civil society organizations (CSOs). This would also explain why, with the fall of the communist system, Yugoslavia found itself in a more problematic situation than other East European countries, and why CSOs developed less intensely in post-communist Yugoslav society than under authoritarian communism.

Results of socio-anthropological and psychological research conducted in Serbia in the early 1990s do indeed indicate a high correlation linking nationalism, authoritarianism and traditionalism as the bases

[4] Djordje Pejanović, *Kulturno-Prosvetna, Humana i Socijalma Društva u Bonsi i Hercegovini za vreme Austrijske Vladavine* (Sarajevo, 1930).

[5] See Ursula Rütten, *Am Ende der Philosophie? Das gescheiterte „Model Jugoslawien“* (Klagenfurt: Drava, 1993).

[6] See Mladen Lazić (ed.), *Society in Crisis: Yugoslavia in the Early 90s* (Belgrade: Filip Visnjic, 1995). Miroslav Krežla (1893–1981) was a famous novelist, dramatist and poet whose work had a strong current of social critique.

[7] See Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 173–4.

of an authoritarian social character.[8] Not only did traditionalism and authoritarian communism merge in the period 1945–90, but in the context of the awakening of nationalist ideology and the strategy of forming nation states at the end of the 1980s, a process of re-traditionalization limited modernization in the former Yugoslavia and blocked – more than just through censorship – the emergence of a free and critical public opinion. Thus, "[t]he authoritarian personality as the desirable social character and the dominant basic personality type in Serbia gave rise to social behavior little in accordance with the necessary processes of the democratic transformation of society."[9]

This analysis explains why various forms of pre-war civic activity and interest-based associations – which were more developed in Ljubljana and Zagreb than in Sarajevo and Pristina – collapsed in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, oases of reform-oriented civil society and critical public opinion existed as elements from the protest movement during the 1960s and as intellectual groups resisting the revival of authoritarianism.

2. Wartime and post-war continuities in the civil society sector

During the wars, throughout the Balkans, delivering humanitarian aid became the main field of activity of a plethora of humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). But international aid-delivering groups often did not see that humanitarian aid might also strengthen the hands of the warlords and thus militate against the process of reconciliation. It turned out that the political sensitiveness of projects, as well as the structural legacies and social capital of the pre-war past, were very often not taken into account.

This has much to do with the questionable tendencies of, on the one hand, avoiding the necessity of building on existing local capacities (thus including authentic partnerships with local actors in all the stages of programme development and execution),[10] and, on the other hand, of equating CSOs and NGOs. As Thomas Carothers points out, "It is a mistake to equate civil society with NGOs. Properly understood, civil society is a broader concept, encompassing all the organizations and associations that exist outside of the state and the market."[11] Thus, the number of NGOs that have emerged in the Balkans is certainly not a guarantee of the further development of civil society, especially if NGOs are the dominant component and are overshadowing the absence of citizens' action groups, independent media and a critical public opinion.

Nevertheless, typically civil society and policy-oriented international networks – such as those of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (hCa), the Verona Forum and the like – were also present. They were much more sensitive to the political background, because they involved many local actors, notably prominent activists from the Union for a Democratic Yugoslav Initiative – and supported local initiatives in the areas of human rights and democratization. What is also significant is that – long before *ownership* became a slogan – they involved local experts in the conception of programmes and their implementation, and contributed to enhancing the local capacities for political and social transformation.

The above-mentioned groups acted against the background of a political analysis that correctly focused on the fact that the strategy of the authoritarian regimes was to build a community without a civil society.[12] These were also the actors lobbying for the establishment of a trusteeship or an UN

[8] See Zagorka Golubović, Bora Kuzmanović & Mirjana Mašović, *Društveni karakter I društvene promene u svetlu nacionalni sukoba [Social Character and Social Change in Light of National Conflicts]* (Belgrade: Filip Višnji, 1995).

[9] See Zagorka Golubović, "Traditionalism and Authoritarianism as Obstacles," in Dane R. Gordon & Davic C. Durst (eds), *Civil Society in Southeast Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 93.

[10] See Eric Gordy, "CRDA and Civil Society in Serbia" (Watson Institute, Brown University, seminar paper, 2003), available from <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/muabet/new_site/gordyWatsonreport1.pdf>.

[11] Thomas Carothers, "Civil Society: Think Again," in *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), p. 100.

[12] See V.P. Gagnon, Jr, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Vukašin Pavlović (ed.), *Potisnuto civilno društvo [Suppressed Civil Society]* (Belgrade: EKO Centor, 1995).

Transitional Authority.[13] This proposal proved to be not only the most appropriate, but also the correct one. Because of the lack of coherence and coordination among competing rather than cooperating CSOs, there was unfortunately no follow-up in the form of a genuine local think tank able to review and improve the post-war international administration models, as well as the democratic planning and political strategies adopted by the political elites of the countries involved.

During the war, CSOs proved to be too weak to create a reform consensus within the various countries of the region and to push the process of state building, and for the most they were "small oases" acting in "highly limited spheres of public, political, and cultural life."[14] And, last but not least, they remained marginalized and overshadowed by larger international organizations.[15] But what is more worrying is that this applies to the post-war period as well, despite the massive support for NGO development and the strengthening of civil society. This is one of the many continuities in the transition process from conflict to peace in the Balkans. It questions not only the coherence and efficiency of the donor countries' assistance programmes,[16] but also the intervention itself – which contributed to the perpetuation of the war economy.[17] Other continuities that can be briefly mentioned are systematic donor dependency and the development of some of the NGOs along ethno-political conflict lines – especially in Bosnia, Macedonia and, of course, Kosovo.

The added value of the above-mentioned networks and similarly oriented CSOs was also their awareness – during and after the war – of the regional dimension as a way to rebuild bridges between communities, overcome divisions and (re)establish cross-border relations. This applies in particular to the highly sensitive issue of justice, truth and reconciliation. A good example is the Sarajevo and Belgrade-based Centre for Nonviolent Action, working at the regional level through active cross-border networking, promoted public debates about individual responsibility for violence and providing space for individual story-telling in local communities. Another example is the recent initiative of three NGOs from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia – the Humanitarian Law Centre (Belgrade), the Dukumenta or Centre for Dealing with the Past (Zagreb), and the Research and Documentation Centre (Sarajevo) – which aims to develop regional cooperation in the process of dealing with the past. One main objective of this joint venture is the creation of a shared documentation archive on crimes and human rights violations committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

At the political level, this regional focus is of the utmost importance, since the challenges in the Balkans are regional in origin and manifestation – while the European Union's strategy is essentially based on a country-by-country approach, with a regional dimension in policy formulation marginalised in favour of a specially tailored individual approach. But we may question if most of the NGOs today are not following the same path as the states: focusing only on state building and European integration, and thus undermining regional cooperation. Despite the rhetoric on regional cooperation, only a few projects are truly regional.

3. Main trends of the post-war period

An NGO boom characterized the first post-war years in the Balkans. NGOs were generally working in fields such as human rights protection and/or education, non-violent conflict resolution and mediation, women's issues, civil society and democracy development, ecology, the return of refugees and

[13] See Zoran Pajić, "UN Trusteeship Can Halt Ethnic Ghettos," *War Report*, No. 11 (London: IWPR, 1992), p. 1; Žarko Puhovski, "UN Protectorate a Pre-requisite for a Political Solution," *War Report*, No. 15 (London: IWPR, 1992), p. 15; and *Conflicts in Europe: Towards a New Political Approach*, hCa Publication Series No. 7 (Prague: hCa, 1993), pp. 35–47.

[14] Obrad Savić, "Concept of Civil Society in Former Yugoslavia," in Dane R. Gordon & Davic C. Durst (eds), *Civil Society in Southeast Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 77.

[15] See James Lyon, "Overcoming Ethnic Politics in Bosnia?" in Martina Fischer (ed.), *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ten Years after Dayton* (Berlin: Lit, 2006), p. 67.

[16] See the various International Crisis Group (ICG) and European Stability Initiative (ESI) reports, 1997–2005.

[17] See Michael Pugh & Cooper Neil, *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004); and Michael Pugh, "Transformation in the Political Economy of Bosnia since Dayton," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 448–62.

displaced persons, psychological and social care, humanitarian aid, relief, reconstruction and local business development. Thus, on the one hand, some NGOs focused on social tasks, providing a range of services that were supposed to be delivered by the public sector and, on the other hand, others proactively engaged in public relations work, creating the core of a civil public sphere clearly opposed to the ethnicized general public. The latter may be considered as proper CSOs contributing to democratic consolidation in the Balkans.

The significant increase of local organizations after the war is explained by the intrinsic country dynamic and the transformation of projects established initially by international NGOs. Some wanted to leave something behind; others had a clear strategy in promoting local initiatives; and in some cases it was the local staff of these organizations that took the initiative. By the end of the 1990s, new NGOs had developed via spin-off effects and via tutoring from more experienced local NGOs, but also through a strategy of the handing over of projects initiated by international organizations, and through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) strategy of focusing on neglected areas.[18] In the best cases, the 'mother structures' ensured effective, more or less long-term follow-up assistance.

Meanwhile, in the early 1990s, civil society – and consequently civil society aid – consisted essentially of emergent groups devoted to public-interest advocacy, such as human rights groups and civic associations, as well as of new, independent media. From the mid- to late 1990s – partly under the pressure of donors' changing priorities – civil society development corresponded mainly to the mushrooming of NGOs, especially service-delivery NGOs, NGO development, self-help, therapy and micro-enterprise creation. In the last five years, we may observe new trends, which are related to a new political context and to the fact that Western aid for CSOs and NGOs is both shrinking and shifting its priorities.[19]

3.1. The new political context and CSO success stories

The first shift is related to the erosion of authoritarian regimes in Croatia, Serbia and, to a lesser extent, Bosnia. In Croatia, the death of Franjo Tuđman in December 1999 was followed in January 2000 by the victory of the reform platform presented by a centre–left opposition coalition and the election of Stipe Mesić as president. In Serbia, Vojislav Koštunica defeated Slobodan Milošević in the presidential elections in September 2000. This paved the way for the victory of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) in the December 2000 Serbian parliamentary elections. The reform-oriented forces won an absolute majority in the parliament and Zoran Đinđić became premier of Serbia in January 2001. These main changes opened a process of strengthening democracy in Serbia – in June 2001, Slobodan Milošević was handed over to the UN War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, where he died in March 2006. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the reform-oriented ten-party coalition known as the Democratic Alliance for Change won the November 2000 general elections. Thus, the year 2000 marks the beginning of democratization and reform in the Balkans.

In this new context, CSOs proved to be capable of becoming a motor for democratic change. The Serbian G-17 think tank, which prepared the political and economic programme of the DOS, illustrates this. CSOs also began to become more influential in Bosnia. Various citizens' forums scrutinized the work of municipal authorities, requested greater transparency in decision making and contributed to the development of a critical public. In various municipalities, such as Tuzla, Bihać, Bijeljina and Sarajevo, groups of observers – delegated by NGOs – were allowed to attend the local council meetings. In 2003, the cantonal parliament in Tuzla established a commission on cooperation with the civil sector. The work of the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues illustrates another

[18] The OSCE Democratization Branch (Sarajevo) elaborated this strategy concerning certain geographically or politically isolated municipalities and the entire eastern part of Republika Srpska in May 1998. In Kosovo, the OSCE introduced more effective and rapid hand-over strategies; see Christophe Solioz, *L'Après-guerre dans les Balkans* (Paris: Karthala, 2003), ch. 4.

[19] Considering Bosnia, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) listed 420 (136 international and 284 national) NGOS in 1999 and 280 (84 international and 196 national) in 2002.

way of collaboration between a CSO and the state: in cooperation with the ministries for social affairs, it prepared a study on social protection, recommending that the state should take responsibility for the coordination of social protection, while local NGOs should provide support for the management of joint programmes. The strategy was accepted and implemented in 15 municipalities in the two entities. This proves once more that good non-governmental advocacy work strengthens – and does not weaken, or is not opposed to – state capacities; and that "[c]ivil society and the state need each other and, in the best of worlds, they develop in tandem, not at each other's expense."[20]

3.2. Emerging voices and the future

Another of these shifts is illustrated by the recent focus on emerging voices and youth networks. The post-Tito generation is supposed to offer strong potential for social innovation and is considered as a promising target group for reconciliation work in war-torn societies.[21] Various development agencies included youth support in their agenda, such as the United Nations Development Fund, which placed the incoming generation at the heart of its strategy to promote civil society. Nevertheless, to consider this new generation in general as a natural agent for social change or the advancement of the peace process is not only misleading, but wrong, and is to forget that "the nationalist and xenophobic propaganda have found fertile soil,"[22] even among the youth. Needless to say, volunteering for civil society work is far from being a generally accepted way of social engagement. Consequently, and in most cases, the emancipatory potential is not present at all. Further, specific youth organizations also contribute to the fragmentation and competition among NGOs. In order to avoid these effects, as well as the marginalization of a new generation, a more inclusive approach – aiming to integrate emerging voices in existing structures – should be followed.[23]

To work in a – if possible international and well-funded – NGO often corresponds only to the need to secure a decent salary (with a well-furbished office, brand-new laptops, opportunities to travel abroad, etc.), with the additional prospect of using it as a springboard to emigrate abroad; thus, it is used to replace the lack of employment opportunities in the country. The issue must be addressed not by creating new NGOs; the challenge to be faced here is to provide economic perspectives and professional opportunities for young people. Job creation presupposes, of course, a major reform of the current economic conditions and relations in each country in the region itself, but also regional-based economic integration. This highlights the necessity of taking into account the relationship between particular forms of NGOs and the socio-economic conditions of the target countries.

3.3. The think tank as a new phenomenon

Policy research represents another of the shifts of international assistance to help civil society development. This is especially relevant in the context of international missions that have such extensive political powers, such as the OHR in Bosnia and UNMIK in Kosovo. The specific character of these internationals missions – their power over legislation in particular – means that local organizations working in public policy have been difficult to sustain because of a lack of demand for their services: international organizations have conducted both public policy research and legal drafting in-house.

These international organizations have rarely if ever requested assistance or consultative input from local organizations in researching public policy issues and in drafting specific laws, and that practice

[20] Thomas Carothers, "Civil Society: Think Again," *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), p. 105; see also Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p. 250.

[21] See Martina Fischer, "The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work: Education, Interethnic Networking and Income Generation," in Martina Fischer (ed.), *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ten Years after Dayton* (Berlin: Lit, 2006), pp. 233–55.

[22] Aleksandar Bošković, "Tolerance and Alterity in Southeastern Europe," in Dane R. Gordon & Davic C. Durst (eds), *Civil Society in Southeast Europe* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), pp. 131–2.

[23] This was the approach successfully developed by the Association Bosnia and Herzegovina 2005 (the predecessor of the Center for European Integration Strategies), which integrated emerging voices not only in its different task forces, but also in its management group.

is now being perpetuated by Bosnia's governments at the various levels, as they have taken over much of the legal drafting previously done by the OHR. To this day, there is no formalized system in the legislative process of consultation with stakeholders outside public administration. Even though many local NGOs have considerable experience and expertise in various public policy fields, their influence on public policy is negligible and, where it does occur, haphazard.[24] Additionally, we might question when and how the countries of the region might develop the resources to integrate, sustain and develop these think tanks; and if so, how many of them, considering the fact that there are currently more NGOs than the market can realistically sustain.

3.4. Questioning the promotion of democracy?

Progressively, NGO development has also become the subject of critical discussions and foreign studies. Some country experts and activists have started to criticize the external influence on local NGO development. This external ascendancy is seen as a strategy of international organizations to survive, or as an attempt to create an NGO world similar to that of the West. The argument is that it is time for the international organizations to let the country NGO world develop more by itself. All other criticisms aside, this is equally a sign of the awareness of local NGOs of the need to be self-governing and to become independent.

Various foreign experts have also criticized the strategy of some international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations. In his study, Mark Duffield concludes: "In practice international intervention has so far produced a largely weak, divided and vulnerable NGO sector."[25] Ian Smillie's view is also very negative: "The domestic NGO community in BiH ... is in serious trouble. It is weak and fragmented, and is largely the creation of external donors and international NGOs in a hurry."[26]

Some international organizations have now caught on, perhaps as part of a bout of what Thomas Carothers calls "fads in the democratization domain," to the importance of promoting local policy research;[27] but their support, with the exception of a recent United States Aid Agency for International Development programme, appears to be without much strategic direction or, indeed, understanding of the local scene. We may also question the above-mentioned shifts. Certainly, these correspond to the country's needs, but they are also donor driven and very dependent on foreign aid and groups rushing to create programmes in these areas. As Carothers points out: "A boom period follows, but then within a few years the hoped-for dramatic results do not appear and cracks in the edifice start to show. Restless aid providers move on in search of a new romance."[28]

4. Conclusion: Is more always better?

'Definitely not' is the short answer to this question. But how then can local civil society best be developed? There is an obvious need to redesign policies and strategies that enhance democratic consolidation – including plans for long-term economic growth – but the prerequisite is a change in the way external assistance interacts with local actors. Ownership must most certainly be taken seriously, but this may turn out to be very difficult in a context characterized by the proliferation of conditionality.

Against this background, recent research based on the cumulative prospect theory – originally developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky – deserves more attention. This approach emphasizes, firstly, that a limited set of programmes, each with fewer conditions, may be valued more than an extended programme with many conditions; and, secondly, that streamlined programmes may

24 Thanks must go to T.K. Vogel for this insight.
25 Mark Duffield, *Social Reconstruction in Croatia and Bosnia: An Exploratory Report for SIDA* (Birmingham: Centre for Regional and Urban Studies, November 1996).
26 Ian Smillie, *Service Delivery or Civil Society? Non-Governmental Organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Ottawa: Care Canada, December, 1996).
27 Carothers, *Critical Mission*, p. 7.
28 Carothers, *Critical Mission*, p. 7.

muster greater ownership.[29] Limited programmes facilitate the donor–recipient negotiation process and, above all, favour domestic consensus, bearing in mind that this could represent a first step before formulating more ambitious reforms later on.

This approach provides the opportunity to consider from a new point of view the complex and highly extended reform programmes designed by the numerous international agencies and foundations active in the Balkans; especially before a time when most of them will start to consider streamlining and shrinking their programmes. Against this background, it seems that more money is not the answer, and that a change in thinking and a more imaginative policy are necessary. In particular, fewer but better-focused programmes are needed, with conditionality limited to a few key policy actions. As Nuri Erbas states, the fewer requirements the better: 'less is more' is a principle that could most usefully be applied to conditionality, with a greater chance of more effective ownership being the likely result.

After more than 15 years of democracy promotion, including NGO development and civil society assistance, it may be worth testing a new and innovative paradigm paying more attention to context and sustainability. It is time to work out less naïve, more finely tuned programming to be linked with realistic expectations. In the Balkans, as so often elsewhere in the world, less could mean more.

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[29] See S. Nuri Erbas, "IMF Conditionality and Program Ownership: A Case for Streamlined Conditionality," IMF Working Paper No. 03/98 (Washington, DC: IMF, 2003), pp. 3–4.