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Regional wars and chances for the reconstruction of Balkan cities in a global information society

Cities and citizens, urbanity and multiculture in the past, present and future of Balkan civilization

Milan Prodanovic

The Berlin wall has not fallen in the Balkans. This is a statement that encapsulates a situation where, in no small measure, the still dominant 'nomenclatura' (state capitalist/bureaucratic class) maintains its hegemony through a systematic misuse of information and telecommunications technologies...
and the media to exercise a ‘monopoly of knowledge’. This control of information in large part ‘enabled’ initially informal groups of ‘aparachiks’ in the former Yugoslavia to induce regional conflicts and war as a principal means of retaining power in the face of otherwise determining processes of ‘transition’ (to the market economy and democratic politics) and to create new forms of ruling regime that can best be termed ‘post-modern dictatorship’.

The attempt to reconstruct a ‘normal’ life (and achieve a more humane transition) throughout the Balkan region cannot be sustained without a deep interrogation of: first, the ‘cultural void’ created by the previously existing socialist ‘exclusionary identity’ as the only source of affiliation and ‘meaning’; and second, a deep revaluation of currently existing ‘models’ of city living, urban and industrial processes, urban–rural dichotomy and regional relations that are shaping today’s processes of economic and political transition, and patterns of transformation in social, cultural and personal identities.

This account concentrates specifically on the impacts of the uses to which information technology (e-mail, internet), satellite communications, and electronic media (radio and television) are being put, in the Balkans and, inter alia, in the wider process of globalization. One impact involves the rise of the ‘post-modern dictatorship’ as a specific form of regime with a monopoly on knowledge and information, apparently able to shrink the room for inclusion of the computer illiterate and low-consumption groups, in which the ‘nomenclatura’ exercise hidden controls unthreatened by the actions of an ‘under-communicated’ civil society. Another, opposite impact involves the rise of civic society groups and ‘networks’ of NGOs and citizens associations, striving for a relatively free exposition of countervailing processes, including the stimulation of new political parties, independent media and autonomous universities.

So far in the Balkans this latter movement has been slow and led to sometimes sterile outcomes in terms of democratization and the real improvement in the quality of life in cities and the region in general. The argument focuses on the (mis)use of the new information and telecommunications technology to advance a specific (distorted ideological) interpretation of universal science, collective memory and communitarian culture. The hegemony of this interpretation has been fatal to the accomplishment of the post-communist transition in the Balkans, leading not only to the crumbling away of Yugoslavia by violent means, but to a humanitarian catastrophe, and in particular to the deterioration of life in cities to the lowest level of bare survival. The new controls over information (production and dissemination) have exercised a powerful force ‘enabling’ a vigorous insistence on combining ‘fixed’ time, i.e. the successful continuation of old authoritarian regimes, and ‘reduced’ space, i.e. the fragmentation of national territory into several minute, ethnically ‘clean’ separatist states.

The ‘populist revolution’ was initiated by the nomenclatura through the imposition (from above) of chauvinistic (ethnic) nationalisms, encouraged by organized mass meetings and rallies, in which a carefully ‘directed scenography’ of leader–mass interaction was ‘communicated’ to the population at large. The cumulative outcome of this communication has produced deep tensions (and cleavages) in the processes of deregulation and restructuring of the social fabric of cities. The attempt has been made to produce a new form of ‘homogenized’ city, in contradistinction to the classical definition of cities as providing a ‘heterogeneous’ social milieu. This goes along with the new form of nationalism, alien to either the ‘nation-state’ formations of 19th century Europe, or the ‘self-determination’ processes following the Treaty of Versailles in 1918. In both cultural and political terms, the complex interactions of
globalization and local identity formation have produced disintegration in Yugoslavia at the same time as the tendency in Europe as a whole is towards integration and spatial extension.

After ten years the sources of conflict and war in the Balkans are far from being rooted out (or even properly understood). The latest controversial intervention by NATO in the summer of 1999 produced acts of war on cities so far unknown in any previous UN interventions of a similar kind, involving a high-tech targeting of localities from satellite information, including the ‘strategic’ destruction of telecommunications centres used for dual military and civilian purposes. Such intervention imposes even more damage on local civil society, on the contrary strengthening the propaganda of existing regimes, in a manner that clearly mandates the need for a rethinking of ideas and policies to confront the realities of the Balkan situation, specifically its urban dimension.

Understanding the uses of information and telecommunications technologies and war in the context of ‘post-modern dictatorship’ in the Balkans and its impact on cities

Cities and towns are transmitters, in social patterns and symbolic forms, of ‘representative portions’ of a culture including, however little developed, significant traditions of both civic society and multicultural co-existence. Their position in the Balkan region has been overwhelmed by the processes of economic transition and the impact of regional wars. The context within which the transformation of cities and urbanity in ex-Yugoslavia has taken place is named by many authors as a framework of ‘post-modern dictatorship’. The emergence of this new (political) phenomenon has been characterized by the development of specific instances of selective and fragmented control whereby the dictatorial power no longer expresses itself in obvious and visible forms of oppression. There is no evidence of any massive scale of persecution or imprisonment of writers, intellectuals, opposition leaders— with the exception of the firing of a thousand journalists from Serbian state television and radio. On the contrary there remains the visible appearance of a multiparty system and a form of parliamentary life with quite frequent elections; there are also the symbols of ‘market economy’ with privatized commerce and advertising, giving the impression of an ongoing transition. Such appearances and images of a tolerated democracy are possible because the major but invisible levers of power are unreachable by democratic groups and ‘constructive’ traditional forces, including (most importantly) the main information technologies, above all control over national television and major newspapers, both of which continuously reproduce the aggressive culture of the regime(s) in power.

The quality of life in cities is rapidly deteriorating as a consequence of continuous war and an unstructured transition; the collapse of national economies and the impoverishment of all aspects of urban infrastructures— transport, public health, crime prevention, overall planning regulation; and above all, because of inadequate and inaccessible information flows. Citizens are denied a minimum of information about civil society, political and urban options and choices of lifestyle, and lack knowledge about alternatives that could affect their own future lives, to the point where society is suffering from ‘misinformation’ practices and distortions of the truth.

The official media is mainly engaged in politically vulgar propaganda, disguising the real destruction occurring in urban economy and social life.

The lack of normally available information in Serbian cities prevent the cities from competing to attract investment from the global capital market, despite the fact that most urban local authorities are controlled by ‘democratic forces’ following the successful protests after 1996 on the theme of ‘the
Free Cities of Serbia’. Such a deficit of communication due to an inadequate or persecuted media, restricting the formation of normal levels of public opinion formation and participation in accordance with contemporary global trends, have more serious consequences that appear to be generally understood by what is termed the ‘international community’. Experience so far shows that the ‘problems of transition’ in Serbia (and elsewhere in ex-Yugoslavia) cannot be effectively assisted by civic action, the activities of spontaneous local groups, door-to-door campaigning, or public protests on city streets, regardless of the numbers at public gatherings — even though in the winter of 1996–1997, over a three month period, half a million people were mobilized in Belgrade and other city centres. Much more serious (and sustained) assistance is required from the international community in terms of visible support to the democratic forces that exist in Serbia, but are isolated and marginalized in a post-modern dictatorship, with its elaborated technological possibilities which allow it such powerful means of informational control of social time and public space.

A major result has been the deterioration in the efficiency of urban management (and in the quality of urban life) expressed in the mismanagement of urban development, despite the possibilities offered by new technologies for urban monitoring and evaluation. The privatization of the housing stock for example, has proceeded in a distorted ‘informal’ manner, incomparable with any parallel practices in other East European states. Procedures for the granting of building permissions and exercising development control have in general been nullified by corruption and lawlessness, despite the enactment of new formal controls by local governments run by democratic parties — who in some cases are practising even worse standards of planning and housing management. The confidence of the public in many Serbian cities has been severely shaken by the evident attacks on the valuable public assets of the city through usurpation, illegal acquisitions, uncontrolled sales and chaotic development.

Within the context of a prolonged war economy, confidence has been eroded in public morality and unlimited abuse of power exercised in the area of urban land policy where the key to ‘cheap profit’ is linked to the minimal or non-existent responsibility exercised towards the previous legal owners of urban land and property. The land nationalized by the ‘socialist revolution’ of the 1940s can today be acquired by the ‘developers’ associated with centralized strongholds of power, through a chain of closely if informally connected privileged individuals, who usurp any restrictions and acquire valuable assets virtually free. This informal network, now called even by some officials the ‘urban mafia’, is effectively deciding on the allocation of urban land, naming the developers and architects who will construct the infrastructure and buildings to their own specifications. The massive extent of corruption, taking decisions away from public eyes and control, is producing an increase in densities of development, the suppression of traffic and parking problems, construction of public open spaces, and an underestimation of ecological damage, resulting in long term damage to the public interest, the sense of urbanity, historic and environmentally sensitive areas and the overall visual city fabric. The destruction of interrelated sentiments and multilayered meanings incorporated in urban built form negates urban identity and feelings of belonging, seriously compromising the remaining signs of civic life still present in the form of the city.

There are similarly drastic consequences arising from the appropriation of information and telecommunication technologies by the ruling nomenklatura class at the centre of post-modern dictatorships. What Castells has described as an ‘ostrich syndrome’ among some intellectuals, has slowed the recognition that this appropriation allows for a mafia style of globalization, where vast
sums of money controlled by the central regime and by local warlords are circulating globally via ‘offshore’ banking and finance companies without control by any civic or state authorities. The international community appears to have lacked the insight or the determination to prevent the stealing of funds from citizens via pyramid banking practices which (in the case of Albania and elsewhere) have escalated to the extent of destroying city living, law and order, and human life itself.

Manipulation of the control and management of time and space relationships by the ruling regimes has produced a specific relationship between national states, municipal authorities and civic society, unknown in more conventional political practices. With the help of the new telecommunication technologies, the ruling regimes have been able to preserve and maintain inherited instruments of the old ‘Party State’ apparatus, where legislative, executive and juridical powers are combined together to reinforce overall hegemony. This means that politically ‘the vocabulary has changed but the grammar has remained the same’. This continuity has been enabled also by the lack of democratic traditions, habits of public control, and the non-existent experiences of supervision by citizens, which any democratic system and civic society understands as normal. The absolute and unchallenged rule of the previous political élite, once known as ‘the avant-garde of the working class’ and today ‘the saviours of the nation and avant-garde of the patriotic front’, actually involved the usurpers of power skilfully invoking nationalistic rhetoric to prepare for confrontation even with major national institutions. In this manner they compromised the Yugoslav National Army, Serbian Orthodox Church, major media newspapers and TV, intellectuals around the National Association of Writers, the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, and even major football club supporters associations.

The effect of the globalization process in the Balkans after the collapse of the Berlin wall and the dismantling of ‘real socialism’ did not conform to the integrational perspectives of European unification attributed among other issues, to the profound influence of the information revolution. The movements for change, transition to democracy, market economy, human rights, for freedom and betterment were instead subordinated to the control of time and space producing the wars for territories which are still going on. This situation expresses the confrontation of, however slim, a tradition of ‘Free Cities’ in Balkans, struggling against the Nation State, a confrontation whose symptoms can be traced from the 18th century, and are now exaggerated by ‘post real-socialist national statism’.

It must be emphasized that the term ‘postmodern’—meaning in general fragmented, inconsistent, heterogeneous, full of variety, culturally-based, tolerating physical differences — is used here as describing a dictatorial system controlling information flows and production of culture and collective consciousness; while allowing the promotion of individuals, groups and political parties, in fact allowing the surface freedom of alternative marginalized independent media and fragmented groups of civic society ‘simulating’ democratic practices through oral and direct face to face communication. On the other hand, the use of the most powerful electronic TV media and communication by picture, reminds us of the mediaeval struggle between believers in pictorial and written representation as a competition between senses. By simultaneously controlling electronic media and allowing visible oral communication in public space, but not covering it by media, the regime acquires legitimacy via the appearance of freedom of expression, without the real threat to its continuity. Such control of telecommunication and informational technology enable the control of economic activities as well. Outside the reach of public insight and opinion, the monopoly of access to monetary and currency reserves, national resources and territory, and international trade routes is coupled and rein-
forced by a monopoly of knowledge through controls of science and universities.

Attempts to revive civic society using information technology within the context of ‘post-modern dictatorship’

Antiwar activities and civic action in Belgrade

‘The war starts when communication stops; to stop the war — try communicating across the war lines’ was the slogan of The Centre for Antiwar Activities in Belgrade, formed in 1991 during the war in Croatia and Bosnia, as a citizens association engaged in various activities, which at that time were not disturbed locally as the regime kept stressing ‘Serbia is not in a war’, but was nevertheless marginalized by ‘underpromotion’. The war meant the disconnection of all telephone and other communication links for civil use with other parts of ex-Yugoslavia. What has been one country with a population mixed by numerous migrations in all directions, many mixed marriages, business contracts, technological dependencies, was suddenly cut off by the war — front line, demarcation line — with all communication ended except for the hotlines between the ‘governors of the war’.

To communicate across the war lines, the group called ‘Living in Sarajevo’ was formed, insisting with UNPROFOR (UN peace keeping force) to travel across the war zones. As a result Sarajevo was visited firstly by 6 activists in armed transports in 1994, and later by bus by 60 group members; and just before the peace was signed several hundred peace activists met in Tuzla with their counterparts from all over Europe. Meeting frequently in the premises of the Civic Alliance Party, the group engaged in several projects, establishing communication at all levels — sending letters via UN military post, distributing humanitarian aid through Protestant church channels, sending medicines, health aids, journalists’ projects and articles, then proposing joint film, theatre, architecture, and other forms of cooperation with groups in Sarajevo trying to remain active under siege. The anti-transitional, nomenclatura regime’s strategy of strangling the city, denying it access to humanitarian aid, water supplies and electricity, by bombing the public buildings and residential quarters is well known and described on many occasions. But less well known is the work of opposition groups from Belgrade that used various communication techniques, for instance telephone via third country ‘receiver to receiver’ systems, to reach Sarajevo. E-mail was established in Belgrade by an American student and in a short time became so popular that two volunteers were engaged daily so that refugees, relatives and friends of Sarajevo who were placed beyond the war lines, were queuing to send messages and coming the next day for an answer. The massive use of e-mail for many meant their introduction to internet techniques, in a scheme operated until the Dayton peace agreement was signed, which meant that the knowledge of the possibilities of internet access have been widely spread with favourable associations.

The experience of such actions brought together activists, peace groups, friends and cooperative individuals and associations working against the atmosphere of nationalistic euphoria and war, to form the nucleus for future communications across war lines, exploring the hopeful future reconstruction of life, culture, and economy. The Balkans ‘Green Network’ was initiated in 1998 with the ambition to connect environmentalists and others through the paper Republika, a magazine ‘for civic self liberation, against the element of fear, hatred and violence’. After the peace was established its exhibitions were held in Tuzla, in Sarajevo, and later was circulating in several of the ‘Free Cities’ of Serbia in 1998. Many other potential types of cooperation are not yet established, regardless of the Pact of Stability in the Balkans guaranteeing the safety of participant groups, because cultural and socio-psychological
wounds were much deeper and too enduring to be healed in such a short time. The argument that it is not possible to restore trust without a ‘catharsis’ after a war stresses the point that the Hague Tribunal for war crimes and crimes against humanity has so far been very inefficient. A globalizing world is in need of much more efficient institutions as instruments of global war prevention and peace.

The experience of ‘Open Cities of Bosnia’ 1994

The ‘Open City’ project started in 1994 was an attempt to explore the role of cities in a peace process in Bosnia, with the intention of involving the cities and civic groups in Europe engaged in the struggle confronting conflict and racism. The Sarajevo Cosmopolitan Charter was an attempt to link the struggle against the war in Bosnia with the struggle across Europe against xenophobia, racism and exclusivism. The principles of common identity and consciousness, collective cultural coexistence, autonomous associations of civil society, cosmopolitan interdependence and inclusion, were the founding principles of the ‘Open City’ campaign.

The spatial configuration of designated UN protected zones in Bosnia implied the creation of limited territories around historic cities with proven continuity of urban existence, forming a cross-section and cross-fertilization of major civilizations: Mostar, Sarajevo, Tuzla, Zenica. The emphasis was on places with a continuity of coexistence over time, and a merging of cultures and places of civic coexistence.

These cities as places of continuity were supposed to encourage the renewal of a tradition of tolerance and coexistence, combined with policies of establishing communication links among them on all levels—civic, cultural, social, humanitarian—in order to create the framework for the peace process and fruitful transition. The telecommunication links were understood as essential when technical conditions allowed, and the media situation was seen as equally crucial, leading to the establishment of independent television stations by the UN and the EU.

The strategy underestimated the deeper significance of the designated ‘spots’ on the map of the post-communist Balkans. Besides the inherited internal boundaries and cohesiveness of urban culture, involving both tolerance and hatred, homogenization and differentiation, very significant urban–rural divisions and confrontations also signify a particular historical spatial culture. Urban–rural relations are characterized by non-communication and deeply imbedded differing urban and rural cultures and ethnic confrontation. High culture, in this case Islamic, has been predominantly urban, flourishing during Ottoman rule, where religious tolerance and unrestricted trade confronted rural culture which flourished under the monasticism of Orthodox Greeks and Catholic Franciscans.

The global and European initiatives and interventions in the Balkan conflict exposed the futility of underestimating the depth of cultural differences, sensibilities suppressed and conserved during fifty years of communist isolation, amplified by the strategy of continuity and survival of the current regimes, which involved inducing conflict and perpetuating war. The deeper civilizational determinations at work are neither understood by the main actors of the international community, nor could adequate responses be undertaken with limited resources. Although the ‘Open City’ idea expressed an essentially correct and progressive analysis, it resulted in what has proved to be a so far sterile attempt to link the multi-culturality of European cities to the social processes of the post-communist Balkan city. In the event the resolution of the Bosnian war was imposed mainly by the Americans by the enforced acceptance of a dividing line which deferred to techniques of ethnic territoriality,
and by sustained military action aimed at military targets of the Bosnian Serbs. The confrontation of different urban traditions, the urbaniy of the well advanced processes of civil society and mature civil consciousness, was set against the lack of democratic traditions, expressed tribalism, then authoritarianism, which resulted in a deep fear to express free opinion, and undermined the basis of the externally imposed solution. The futility of efforts for Mostar's renewal, regardless of the renewed schools and health centres, roofs and so on, is shown in the outcome five years after the war: the city remains divided along ethnic lines, with the complete expulsion of members of one of the previous three communities sharing the city.

The project ‘City and Citizen’, Media Centre Belgrade

The most comprehensive view of current urban processes has been attempted in the research and communication project carried out in Serbian cities during 1997–1999. When the political parties of democratic opposition, the coalition ‘Together’, gained municipal power, the Association of Free Cities of Serbia was formed. The regime, the red and black coalition of national-communism, tried to fake the electoral results. A grand civic protest in Belgrade in winter 1996–1997, joined later by student protest, regained the electoral victory. Led by democratic parties in about 40 cities, towns and boroughs, they set out to reform and exercise the new democratic local autonomy. By forming an Association stressing the idea of self-government and coordination of efforts linking local transitional processes to international/global ones, they were helped by several groups of experts—research, analysis, communication, and media. Created through a dynamic interaction the Association became a new force in exchange firstly for the citizens and then for the political parties, NGOs and governmental agencies. Despite very difficult conditions of brutal and aggressive resistance from the regime, unfavourable international conditions and UN sanctions plus isolation, the new local government which was more legitimate than the central government, became an increasingly important political and social factor of change. A broad and well-organized network of local authorities and self-government daily attempted to stop currently regressive processes and to become ‘a strong force for further democratic changes’. Within the Association, seven committees were formed to enable transitional restructuring: culture, education and media, health economy and finance, social policy, urbanism and public services, environment, legal and international cooperation.

The research and communication project ‘The City and the Citizen’ started in 1997 with ‘Media Centre Belgrade’, involving at first groups of activists and journalists fired from state media at the time of the nationalist revolution in 1989, and several university professors, writers and artists gathered at the editorial board of the papers Republika, Svetles and Kragujevac. The project intended to focus on changes of public opinion in cities, relying on the facts that interest in urban environment, urban history, urban sociology, and ‘politicology’ have been for years concerned as well with the destiny of city and citizen, particularly explaining regional wars in terms of ‘urbicide’. Due to newly emerged circumstances it concentrated on exploring and explaining the process of destruction of cities, of human life and physical fabric by war, and also by reduction of urbanity in Vukovar, Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, and Banja Luka. With the cessation of war in Bosnia attempts were made to introduce a more thorough, holistic and deeper understanding of cities in Serbia—Kragujevac, Valjevo, Uzice, Nis, Vranje, Pancevo, Zrenjanin, Subotica, Sombor, Novi Sad, and Beograd.

Understanding urban public opinion involved communication questions: how citizens are informed; how the conception of
the world and view to the national and local politics are formed; the citizen's sense of identity; local and collective global consciousness; how these are determined by a hypothesized influence of local history; time expressed as continuation of place; and, the social and political interests shaping the city. The cultural bias from local economy and job structure, from cultural life and environmental quality as potential for change were analysed by the groups critical to the present regime. The monthly outline in issues of ‘The Herald of Free Cities of Serbia’ took the form of a monograph of each city, intending to initiate a dialogue and further research, communication and action, directed mainly towards urban public opinion. The split in public opinion and difference in voting for local against national level elections, indicated different influences of communication patterns, namely, face to face, oral and direct, with local press and radio, produced voting for members of democratic opposition parties supporting transition and reforms, while on national issues, generally informed by State controlled media voting went for the parties of the regime. The exact data is not accessible and the research would require much more resources than ones which researchers in the alternative movement had at the time.

The body of contributors to the project ‘The City and the Citizen’ were journalists from local papers and from city journals, contributing in the form of articles and opinions; more systematic research (quantitative, questionnaires and statistics) was not possible in the circumstances.

Another ambitious project started using electronic media, by alternative democratic groups, several local private and municipal authorities, and local radio and TV stations but had a limited territorial coverage of about 30 km. The city of Nis with a population of 200,000, had five stations. The ruling regime's intention is to fragment the electronic media scene by limiting frequencies and territorial coverage and recently bringing a very oppressive law on media. The Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM), attempted to bridge the fragmentation, producing centralized informational programmes, distributed daily via video cassettes informally using the help of inter-city buses. The project ‘The City and the Citizen’ did not reach the form of a final synthetic report, just as many other activities, even those of ANEM, because everything was disrupted by NATO bombing. Martial law was introduced ordering that all local and national broadcasting centres and stations in Serbia have to broadcast a single information programme, namely the news from State radio TV Serbia. Some local services resumed when Martial law ceased, but the new laws introduced are very similar to one during NATO bombing, leading to the present catastrophic situation for independent media and of course life in general in cities faced with economic and humanitarian catastrophe.

Use of e-mail during NATO bombing and cities

The experience of NATO bombing of Belgrade and other cities could be described as unique in the history of warfare, thanks to new telecommunication and missile navigation techniques. But communication from within bombed cities was still possible and messages were sent via the internet, producing the sense of a possible civic use. After a first few combat actions, the population of Belgrade realized that the bombing was very precise, that it was confined to designated targets and one was witnessing unreal (or surreal) scenes. Despite the closed schools, universities and public buildings on sunny summer days in Belgrade the streets were full of people although everyday life for a majority of people has really become surreal with meanings detached from senses in a kind of post-modern collective war game experience. Pilots in sophisticated jet planes in the sky, detached from their targets seen only on the TV screen, made people on the ground, also detached, living a relatively normal life, going
to market, to shops, going by public transport to the city centre, seeing friends and having meetings in small groups, even getting used to a regular daily siren sound and detonations all around.

Additional detachment comes with listening to radio Free Europe: what an abstraction, one hears from Prague about the destruction of parts of one's own city or other cities in Serbia. Tragedy and hypocrisy: the set of these actions made life horrible to anyone who concerned himself as part of the 'democratic force' of Serbia, now being exposed to various xenophobic and anti-western feelings, to dangers and threats. The nationalistic, xenophobic homogenization on the streets of Belgrade increased and was at an early stage militant when the 'masses' smashed windows of foreign cultural centres, embassies, offices of western airlines, McDonalds restaurants and so on. Suspicious neighbours looked for 'spies', a wartime psychology was at work. As a result the voices of democratic Serbia attempting to think out the optimistic scenario had no chance to say even a word against the forces of reaction who actually produced all this, and with yet another wave of refugees the city was once more punished and restructured.

If it was just a video-game one could laugh, but it has all become a sad and dangerous reality. The human suffering in Kosovo—at first expelled Albanians but now Serbs and gypsies as well—coupled with a growing frustration of democratic forces in Belgrade, helpless and in great danger to show any meaningful sign of resistance. Our paper for civic self liberation (Republika) still comes out but it reaches subscribers only by post—if post works—as there is no public sale, and on the internet, but in Serbia very few people have access to computers. The war propaganda jammed e-mail networks with all sorts of disinformation, even with e-mail, democratic voices were outnumbered. The schools and universities did not work, the regime has taken over the streets and squares providing populist mass happenings in 'turbo-folk' music concerts and fake patriotic—for which read hatred, nationalistic, xenophobic propaganda—spectacles with powerful loudspeakers that made the whole city centre roar aggression to normal senses.

Sending messages to friends on 27 March 1999, I wrote:

'We are witnessing at this very moment the military action of NATO over Yugoslavia (rockets and bombs are bursting around us in Belgrade every minute while we sit in our basement studio with e-mail). As we have already stated on many occasions such an action of bombing will only strengthen the present disastrous regime. The military intervention will be misused by the regime's media to create a "stampede" to xenophobia and give additional impetus to already growing extreme nationalism. Previous UN sanctions helped only the junta group to accumulate greater financial and property power over the rest of the local community; war criminals have not been prosecuted by Hague Tribunal which is more than inefficient. Money laundering via Cyprus banks and elsewhere and other Mafia type activities that we are sure could be stopped by the West, have not even been tackled. Human suffering and disaster will continue and even worsen. The evil cannot be fought with negative action of bombing and more sanctions, but only by the positive engagement in improving communication through free media and by the greater support to similar groups in the newly created states in the region even during the most dramatic moments of the last eight years.'

It was stated that the only effective way for real democratization is not 'from above' diplomacy with bombing and hi-tech action from a distance, but with more concrete, intensive, efficient activities on the ground and in the 'grand route' environment. With much stronger visible support for democratic forces—peace activists, credible and respected highly professional individuals, inde-
dependent intellectuals who stood against the war crimes since the beginning of social restructuring, NGOs lobbying for civil society issues, independent media, and democratic political parties. Bombing of military targets in Serbia will not achieve desired changes towards stability and a real democratization in Balkans. The source of the real trouble are the junta type of nationalistic regimes in Belgrade, Zagreb and elsewhere — including the Albanian tradition of tribal nontolerance — and in other regional centres where post-communist ‘monarchs’ engaged in national-communism adventures. Recent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina show a sad profile of the dominance of nationalistic forces despite the terrible human suffering during the civil war, and despite the considerable political, military and humanitarian involvement of the international community.

The transition pattern in the Balkans took a disastrous route due to a complete failure of the way in which it has been handled and managed from the centres of power. Instead of giving adequate support, integrative economic/banking/market/cultural/institutional, to improve, however little, democratic standards and civilization achievements, and whatever remains of the multicultural society, the international community has instead negotiated with, and in that way recognized, the ‘governors’ of war.

Messages sent during the bombing campaign were completed with suggestions of research into a thoroughly worked out mega-project of reconstruction of the Balkans: not just the renewal of economy, jobs, infrastructure and so on but the more complex patterns of actions that could assist in leading to a deep catharsis akin to the German experience of denazification. It was hard to envisage at that moment project suggestions for the concrete sequences of reconstruction of culture which is seen as the ultimate goal. That would include the renewal of university life, as well as the reform of the whole educational system on the lines of sustainable economy, urbanity and overall civic life. The projects should start in a wide and thorough partnership within multiple layers of European and worldwide networks, NGOs, new independent media, involving all contemporary knowledge and available energies within the region.

Note
This article will be concluded in the next issue of City.

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