

# Western Europe Fails To Address Worsening Balkans Crisis

by Alexander Hartmann

Late November saw two international conferences, which can summarily be classified as “lost opportunities”: the European Union (EU)-Balkans Summit in Zagreb, Croatia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Foreign Ministerial Conference in Vienna, Austria. In both cases, the task was, or should have been, the reconstruction of the Balkan nations after a decade of war and international bombardment. In both cases, the problem was, that Western European governments did not—unlike the Association of Southeast Asian Nations plus South Korea, China, and Japan (ASEAN-Plus-3) governments meeting in Singapore—have the courage to form a “Survivors’ Club,” and break with their habit of “pre-emptive submission” to the policies of the United States and Britain. Meanwhile, the situation in South-eastern Europe was deteriorating, too, as a consequence of Western inaction, in southern Serbia and Romania, demonstrating the perils lying in the Western leaders’ Hamlet-like behavior.

## Ukraine Contributes, EU Does Not

On Nov. 24, EU leaders met in Zagreb with the leaders of five Balkans nations, coming up with many more-or-less empty words of praise and useless council, and promising 4.65 billion euros that had been pledged already before, to be spent among five nations, and with payment stretched over a period from 2000-06. This is about the amount that had been spent by NATO for the Kosovo bombing—in a matter of weeks.

One example of how stingy West European governments can be, when it comes to money for reconstruction, is the long-overdue clearing of the Danube: With all the nice words about commitment for peace and development coming from EU governments, it fell to poor Ukraine to pledge part of the money needed to clear the Danube of debris of bridges destroyed by NATO’s Kosovo war, because the EU would not pick up the bill of about 100 million euros. In the last 15 months, Romania, another one of the poor Southeastern European countries, lost up to 10% of its GNP because of the Danube blockage.

But the OSCE conference was even worse. On Nov. 28, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sabotaged the OSCE’s Foreign Ministerial Conference in Vienna, attacking Russia over the situation in Chechnya, thus preventing agree-

ment on a final communiqué, and wasting precious time that should have been spent addressing the opportunities created by recent changes in Yugoslavia. The EU governments, led by France, seconded Albright’s stunt, instead of insisting on conducting serious discussions.

Thus, Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica, who signed documents making Yugoslavia a full member of the OSCE, decided not to wait for the end of the conference. Apparently, his hope that OSCE membership was more than a symbol of the end of Yugoslavia’s diplomatic isolation, was frustrated; for, what is it worth to be a member of an organization that no longer functions?

It was a lost opportunity, and certainly, many of the participants would have been ready to use it. There is a flurry of diplomatic activity going on, with diplomats of practically all countries in Southeastern Europe working on bilateral trade agreements, to re-create economic cooperation among the region’s countries similar to the cooperation under the Comecon agreement.

## Deterioration in Serbia, Romania

As a result of the Western European governments’ inaction, the situation in Southeastern Europe took a turn for the worse, with the resumption of military activities in the demilitarized zone (DMZ) along the administrative border separating Kosovo from the other parts of Serbia, and with the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Romania.

After the recent local elections in Kosovo, which were won by moderate ethnic Albanian Kosovar leader Ibrahim Rugova, and which severely weakened the militant separatists of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), most people familiar with the situation breathed a sign of relief. Rugova’s party got nearly 60% of the vote among ethnic Albanian Kosovars, while the “political representatives” of the KLA, led by Hashim Thaci, got less than 30%.

This had to be considered a slap in the face for Albright. She had, at Rambouillet in 1999, replaced Rugova—who had earlier been elected President of Kosovo with more than 90% of the vote, and was thus the only legitimate representative of the Kosovar Albanians—with Thaci, whose KLA had been rightly characterized as “terrorists” by the diplomatic community until then. The resulting breakdown of the Rambouillet talks had led to NATO’s Kosovo war. Now, Kosovar Alba-

nians have demonstrated to the world, once again, who they believe is their legitimate representative.

This was the situation as of a few weeks ago. Now, there are reports about KLA-connected terrorists murdering Serbian policemen in the DMZ along the administrative border. This is a corridor of about three miles width on the Serbian side of the border, which is supposed to be controlled by NATO's KFOR troops and the UN's UNMIK forces (in this particular area, by the U.S. contingent of the forces). KLA terrorists have seized parts of the area in the Presovo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac districts, under the eyes of U.S. troops, while the Serbian military is forbidden to move into the area under the agreements which ended the Kosovo war.

As of this writing, Serbian military and militarized police forces are amassed along the DMZ, and are threatening to move into the area if NATO fails to protect the population from KLA atrocities. More than 3,000 ethnic Albanians have fled from the area to Kosovo and Macedonia, and an unspecified number of ethnic Serbs have fled to Serbia, creating a situation which is, in many respects, similar to that which led to the Kosovo war. Thus, the writing is on the wall as to what will happen, without massive reconstruction of all the economies in the region.

The other ominous development was in Romania. On Nov. 26, there were Presidential and Parliamentary elections in this nation, which has been economically devastated in the ten years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. At that time, Romania was the only country in eastern Europe, where the end of the communist regime was accompanied by a civil war between the Ceausescu regime's security forces, the "Securitate," and its opponents, which led to about 50,000 deaths.

Ceausescu's successor was Ion Iliescu, who governed during 1990-96, introducing "democracy," "market reforms," and "privatization," until the population voted his government out because of the economic decay and corruption associated with the privatization process. These "reforms" were made in order to qualify for International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance and EU and NATO membership, and they were continued by Iliescu's successors.

Before the Romanian elections on Nov. 26, the polling institutions predicted a landslide victory and comeback of Iliescu. President Constantinescu had announced that he would not stand for reelection, and Prime Minister Mugur Isarescu, who had been installed a year ago at the urging of EU Commission President Romano Prodi, decided to run as an independent, rather than as a candidate of his party, the Christian Democratic Peasant Party, because he did not want to be tainted by its reputation for corruption. Each of the government coalition parties had its own candidate, as the mood spread: "Let each save himself!" In the end, the election result was an even bigger disaster for the reformers than anticipated, with the Peasant Party not even making it into Parliament.

But, Iliescu's (post-communist) Social Democracy did

not win an absolute majority, as had been expected, or even 60% of the seats. Despite his electoral campaign attacks on the government, for destroying the standard of living of the population, and the introduction of a motion in Parliament by the Social Democracy to halt the privatization process, the voters did not turn to a politician who they felt had betrayed them before. In fact, voters just did not believe he was ready to break with the policies imposed by the IMF, the EU, and NATO. Thus, Iliescu and his party garnered not even 40% of the votes, forcing Iliescu into a run-off election on Dec. 10, and his party into a delicate situation in Parliament.

The big winner of the election was the chauvinist Greater Romania Party of Vadim Tudor. The party increased its share of the popular vote from about 5% to 22%, and Tudor himself got about 28% of the votes in the Presidential race, easily winning entry into the run-off. Tudor ran his campaign on straight opposition to any compromises with the IMF, hitting on the corruption rampant among the present (and former) governments, and the rise of mafia-like organizations, saying, "Romania can only be governed with machine guns." It is well known, that many of Tudor's supporters come from the former middle level of the Securitate. Because of his anti-Hungarian slogans, a victory of Tudor would spell trouble in Transylvania, where about 3 million ethnic Hungarians live.

It is likely that the Social Democracy will form a minority government, tolerated by the "reformist" parties, and the Hungarian Union. But this creates an impossible situation for such a government: Because all parties supporting or tolerating it have membership in the EU and NATO among their primary objectives, it will be impossible for Iliescu to break with the IMF, even if he wanted to.

Thus, in Romania, a development can be foreseen like that in the Czech Republic, where the Social Democrats under Prime Minister Milos Zeman have a similar toleration agreement with Civic Union, led by free marketeer Vaclav Klaus. In recent elections to the Czech Senate, which saw a 33% participation in the first round, and 20% in the second round, the winners were the conservative "Quad Coalition," a coalition of four small parties, and the Communist Party.

If the Romanian Social Democrats destroy themselves, as the Peasant Party destroyed itself, trying to please the leadership of the EU, NATO, and the IMF, it is most likely, that Tudor's Greater Romania Party will be the big winner of the next general election. There are only two ways out of this situation. Iliescu and his potential Parliamentary partners can stop expecting anything from the EU, the IMF, and NATO, and work to rebuild the economy based on the national interest, as Malaysia, for example. Or, the Western European governments can stop forcing these insane economic policies upon other nations, and start reconstructing these countries in the spirit of the Marshall Plan. Unfortunately, as can be seen in the Zagreb and Vienna failures, the European governments have to learn to stop being Hamlets.