

**The Role of Diplomacy in Handling International
Crises in the Post-Bipolar Era. The Case of the Balkans**

by Ambassador Emmanuel Spyridakis

Since the time of appearance -for the very first time- of the concept of the national states in Western Europe in the early 16th century, the need for contacts, between such state units becomes evident for the settlement of serious issues as well as the management of current needs. So gradually and on a state scale organisational administrative units are being created which deal with the relations with other states and the shaping of the official state foreign policy, a particularly arduous and complex task given that, for the mapping out of general directions as well as specific actions, historical, cultural, national, military and economic considerations must be taken into account, while the involvement of parameters outside the state may exercise an influence on the shaping of the final choices. Therefore, the implementation of the specific choices and actions in the field of foreign policy is the principle expression of diplomacy-without a diplomat's task being exhausted solely in the implementation of some orders or instructions.

Had we wished to give a handy definition of diplomacy, E. Plischke's would be our definition of choice, according to which "diplomacy is a political process under which political entities -states usually- are interconnected with official relations in the framework of the international environment".

The period between the 17th and 18th century could be characterised as the classical period in the development of the international relations, when political philosophers and thinkers like Grotius, Hobbes, Abbe Saint-Pierre, Kant and Rousseau are concerned with the problems of the international society -war mainly- and the manner in which these may be resolved. At that time, a major role in the shaping of not only decisions but of the relevant administrative structures was played by the Privy Councils while, from an historical point of view, we can note the first attempts aiming at a multilateral negotiation and settlement of problems, characteristic examples the set of agreements called "the Peace of Westphalia" (1648) and the treaties of Utrecht (1713). In the 18th century the role of diplomacy is further upgraded and the adoption of specific choices is based on a more rational approach. The flood of revolutionary ideas noted throughout this period, climaxing in the French Revolution in 1789, leads to a new increase of conflicts in the Vienna Conference in 1815 where the Great Powers of that time attempted to establish the status quo and to stop the expansion of the revolutionary ideas and movements that swept Europe. At the same time, however, in the Vienna Conference, the channel of diplomatic communication is codified and the role of the career diplomat is instituted. So this classical period for diplomacy is characterised by viewing Europe as the point of reference for every diplomatic activity where the main role is played by the great powers which may at the same time also employ their military power for imposing their views or aspirations, while contact and deliberation among them is continuous and, to a great extent, non transparent. The notion of the great powers of the time for forcing countries or people to submission to

the status quo of the time derives from the armed intervention in various revolutionary insurrections and is enriched by other forms of military diplomacy, like the use of the fleet for naval blockades, e.g. the well-known to us Pacifico incident.

The appearance of some rudimentary forms of multilateral deliberation as above mentioned takes now the form of an evolutionary trend in the 20th century. The tribulations of World War I give way to a new period of evolution of the international relations, that of idealism, having as main vehicle the ideas and principles voiced in 1918 by the USA President Woodrow Wilson, which resulted in the creation of the League of Nations, having as main objective the maintenance of peace via the application of moral principles and international law; this, however was not achieved and we came to World War II, due to the prevalence of the totalitarian regime in Germany.

After the end of World War II we arrived to the establishment of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) and the creation of a whole network of specialised Organisations. However, along with the initial spirit of co-operation developed within the framework of UNO, the first signs of confrontation between USA and USSR can be seen, which are gradually aggravated leading to the establishment of the defence organisations of NATO in 1952 and the Warsaw Pact in 1955, which ensured a balance, widely known as the "equilibrium of fear" and which averted for half a century a third World War.

However, apart from the predominant role of the United States after the end of the Cold War in 1989, we enter a new form of action of the United Nations where new activities and operations are undertaken, the so-called second generation activities and operations, e.g. the protection of humanitarian aid missions, the disarmament of belligerents, the control of election procedures or the implementation of the provisions for the protection of human rights, with characteristic example the Mission for the Provision of Transitory Aid to Namibia (1989-1990).

At this point, I believe that it is worth mentioning another element of the course of co-operation of states after the end of World War II, which is related to the regional forms of co-operation through international institutions such as the European Union and the CSCE or, as the later is now called, OSCE.

Presently, the axis of the diplomatic endeavours for resolving international crises remains the European Union Treaty, which is a qualitatively diversified system since the second gateway of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (an evolution of the European Political Co-operation) is considered the basis for the creation of a new frame of diplomatic activity, the content of which shall be defined by the practice followed as well as the resolutions of the Intergovernmental Conference of 1996. Furthermore, in the overall network of international organisations reference should be made to the Paris Charter of 1990, which reflect the wish of the member-states for peace, security, economic development and human rights within the framework of democratic systems and market economy.

Concluding, from the overall course of the 20th century and particularly after World War II, one can establish a wane in the role of bilateral diplomacy and an increase in the role of the so-called "multilateral diplomacy" through the existence of international

organisations and conventions of various forms. This development proves, inter alia, the intensity of the interdependence of states and realisation of the need of finding global solutions in problems having a universal nature. Naturally, this change also has its impact on the mission of the diplomats who are obliged to move within different contexts of action, thought and perception of international problems, shaping new strategies and tactics for the completion of their role.

Let us now see what is going on in the post-bipolar era. Before analysing however the Balkan particularities I believe that brief mention should be made of certain other international problems in order to demonstrate the way in which modern diplomacy attempts to settle various crises

Firstly, the importance of low-profile diplomacy must be stressed; low-profile diplomacy led to the happy outcome of the Arab-Israeli talks that began in November 1991 in Madrid aiming at the signing of agreements between Israel on one side and Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians on the other. The role of diplomacy in this case has been uncontested since, despite the heavy and bloody past of that particular conflict, the steps achieved, thanks to the efforts of the USA mainly as well as of other countries, have brought results. A fact evidenced from the Washington Declaration, September 1993, as well as from the positive outcome of the talks and the agreements between Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Jordanians.

As regards the Cyprus issue, the diplomatic marathon through the UN has not yielded the results expected and the talks, as known to everyone, have not progressed in the last twenty-two years period due to the fact that the snag in the whole procedure is attributed to the delaying tactics followed by one of the interested parties and to the inability of finding ways out since no sufficient pressure is exerted on our Eastern neighbour by those able to do so. Let us have no illusions, though; any procedure either within the UN framework or within the framework of the European Union cannot bear fruit, unless the necessary political will exists for exerting strong pressure and the Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot side accepts the rules of fair play in the settlement of the dispute.

Let examine now what is going on in our narrow geographical European area, where the collapse of the bipolar system had direct and dramatic consequences, one of which was the commencement of a long process of transition to a new system of social, economic and political organisation, a fact that had and still has huge economic and social cost for many countries. The change of the state was not effected in a smooth manner everywhere and the power void gave to new forces the opportunity to move to the spotlight and/or behind-the-scenes of power. Such forces have, however, brought out nationalism as their political line, awakening for the people historical memories and wounds which have complicated and still complicate the diplomatic efforts for finding compromise solutions in the differences dividing them.

Particularly in the case of the former Yugoslavia the advancing course of the federation's disintegration was already coming into sight after Tito's death in 1980. In any case, we must not forget that, as of the establishment of Yugoslavia in 1918, this state has never operated under a purely democratic regime, and the differences existing among the Former Yugoslav peoples or nations have historical origins. We must also

take into account that in the new republics of the Former Yugoslavia, key personalities of the communist past maintained power or returned to it.

Thus one can easily understand that rivalries between them was the main obstacle in the search of peace. From this optical angle one can easily come to the conclusion that the personal factor has played a major role in blocking the prevalence of peace and explain why the strenuous diplomatic efforts of third countries for solving the crisis took so long to bear fruit. In my opinion, the lack of sufficient democracy in conjunction with the economic problems and the violations of human rights, were the main causes for obstructing the solution of the Yugoslav problem which was also linked to the existence of uncontrolled paramilitary forces and the creation of a mess of illegitimate interests accompanying them.

As it is known, initially the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, after Slovenia and Croatia became independent in June 1991, and the subsequent outbreak of war in Bosnia have constituted the visible war expression of the complex Yugoslavian problem. However, elements of flaring and tension existed in other areas as well, as in Vojvodina and mainly in Kosovo and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Concluding, in the case of the Yugoslav crisis a complex problem re-emerged, which had -under different circumstances- preoccupied the international community at the time of de-colonisation: it was the interweaving of principles and concepts like the self-determination of the people, the rights of minorities and the territorial integrity of the new states in conjunction with the internal borders arbitrarily traced by Tito. It should be noted that the shaping of unwise precipitate choices may lead to explosive situations, particularly in areas inhabited by populations with stressed national and religious differences and, therefore, a move initially characterised as morally imperative, e.g. implementation of self-determination, may not be practically feasible, or its realisation may be possible only after carefully calculated diplomatic handling. However, the inadequacy and possible failure of such handling for the settlement of a crisis should not lead to the rejection of the diplomatic procedure. On the contrary, I believe that diplomatic efforts must be strengthened in order to prove the importance of the diplomatic methodology as a means for solving differences.

In general terms, it can be said that diplomacy, as a procedure for the settlement of international crises and problems remains a unique outlet. The collapse of the cold war era, and the dissemination of points of tension in the Balkans and the Commonwealth of Independent States prove that war is not the solution to the problems and differences. Therefore, the long lasted inability to find a solution to a problem, like the Bosnian one, could not have been attributed to an inadequacy of the diplomatic procedure for solving the problems, but to other parameters among which a part was played by the different targets of countries outside the region, that envisaged the creation of zones of influence in the new order which is under construction and the new geopolitical balances which shaped in the horizon mainly by the USA and Russia.

I think that, the way in which a crisis shall be dealt is related to a large extent to the political will of the directly or indirectly interested parties. A will which however is being interwoven with the notion of threat or not to state interests at a given circumstance. Furthermore, the knowledge of a problem, its historical course and its

future dynamic may positively contribute to dealing with an tensed situation. Furthermore, in addition to wisdom sangfroid that are constituent parts of diplomacy, the nature of the crisis itself may define the probability of its control or not. Therefore, international issues require direct, systematic and, as much as possible, thorough study of all their dimensions in order to reach sound conclusions, in other words planning and strategy, two fields in which, unfortunately, we have not been so strong up to now.

At this point I believe it is useful to briefly view the role of Mass Media and publicity in general, in the exercise of diplomatic practice relevant to the democratic and pluralistic organisation of modern societies where, nowadays in every aspect of political activity there is the possibility to exercise public control. The role of printed and electronic media in this field may prove positive since they give information to that part of the public not having specific knowledge and a certain specialisation. However, an extensive publicity may harm the diplomatic efforts for solving a difference, efforts often requiring discretion and secrecy, as was the case, e.g. with the successful negotiations conducted in Oslo by the late Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Johan Holst, with the Israelis and the Palestinians. Besides, a shallow information on a question with great sentimental charge and a partial position of the press in favour of one side may create sensation, with result such a negotiation to be considered as a defeat in the internal political front and push a government to the adoption of an intransigent line leading to dead ends.

Anyhow, from the long experience I have had in the diplomatic service of my country, I have been convinced that for a successful outcome of a diplomatic effort, an important role is also played by the diplomat's personality, the breadth of his education, knowledge of history and his familiarization with international law. A relation which is mutually supported since, through various international conferences and meetings, law is shaped and subsequently the moves and actions of diplomats are defined by it. Finally, at this point, I would like to mention what has been stated on the importance of the factor of history in the settlement of international disputes: "Those who ignore history are fated to repeat it".

As derives from the above, the role of diplomacy in the settlement of crises is not always crowned with success, due to the existing intrinsic and external factors, especially in sensitive areas like the Balkans. It is, however, universally admitted that, despite the shortcomings of diplomacy and its methods, it has been historically proven that no other firm basis for the settlement of differences has so far been invented to replace diplomacy. Wars, blockades, and other methods of coercion like sanctions employed at times, have proved to lead to dead ends that diplomats are once again called to solve. This is the reason why diplomacy is considered to be the art of the feasible, because it embodies the elements of understanding, convention and compromise which are the only elements normally leading to the finding of solutions and ensure for people the much desired peace, via the conjunction of common interests and away from inopportune publicity an chauvinistic loud tones and rivalries that surely lead to conflicts, particularly in areas characterised by the lack of balance in the post-bipolar era.

Finally, I would also like to underline once again the importance that a competent and able diplomatic service has for small or relatively small countries. It is well known that the survival of small countries depend to a considerable degree on international co-operation, successful diplomatic handlings and linking of interests with other states through the economic diplomacy, which may serve effectively the wider national interests of a country. Today more than ever, on the eve of the third millennium, the role of diplomacy has acquired a special importance due to the upsetting of the international balance and the non building of a new world order, as a result of which the international relations are in a critical stage, particularly in the countries which are in a state of transition and where still prevail fluidity, economic instability and uncertainty for future developments.