

**Transcript of Remarks by Elizabeth Pond, Author of *Endgame in the Balkans***

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Thank you very much Mike [Haltzel].

After that glowing introduction, I think I should just get off the platform, because anything I say is going to be a let down.

You confessed to me before we started that you had not been able to read my book before introducing this panel. And I have to reassure you, that with the first book I wrote, I discovered that very few of those who interview me or share panels with me have read my books.

The moment of truth came with the first book that I wrote, which was about the Soviet Union in the early 1980s. It was being published in London. I was being interviewed by British armed forces network. And I quickly discovered that I was being interviewed by their leading disc jockey. And we floundered around for a little bit and then finally, in his deep baritone voice, he said “what kind of a sense of humor do the Russians have? Tell us a good Russian joke.” Well all I could think of were jokes that were either scatological or were utterly incomprehensible to anybody who is not a Russian (about foxes and bears and rabbits in the woods, or something like that). So I suddenly thought of a good Polish joke, which was current at the time. And so I told this Polish joke (and, besides, it was concise and this seemed like a good idea). And the joke (which at least Mr. Balcerowicz will understand and has probably heard two million times) was: it’s a question to Radio Yerevan and that is “Could Brezhnev become a member of *Solidarity*, the Polish Trade Union?” And the answer was “No” and the question was “Why not?” And the answer was “Because he does not accept the leading role of the Polish Communist Party.” It was dead silence and the leading disc jockey said to me in his deep baritone voice “I don’t think that’s very funny.” The next thing that happened was when I fled that interview and came out to get my coat, which was where the technician was stationed. He said to me: “I didn’t get that joke either and the worst was when I met my publisher that evening and told her the joke, she didn’t understand it either.” At which point I just about stopped writing books. But I did not.

My latest book is about the Balkans. And I must give thanks to all of you in the audience who have not fled at the topic; since the Balkans is not very popular or very sexy at the moment. There is a lot more interest for obvious reasons in Afghanistan and the Middle East (and its various phases and forms and so forth). But I think that there is something to be said about the Balkans and I will try to say it.

You know, it is a mission impossible to write about the Balkans (or to talk about the Balkans) because there is no such thing as the Balkans. Every land in the Balkans is different from every other land, every corner of every land is different from every other corner. Robert Cooper, the top policy advisor to Javier Solana, very kindly wrote an endorsement of the book. And one of the things that he said about it (since I ended up to my surprise with a fairly positive conclusion) was that the angel too was in the details. And so what I would like to do is: I would like to talk about a few of the commonalities at the beginning, but then I would like to make a quick review of the various countries in the Balkans and give some idea of why I ended up more optimistic than I had expected to.

First of all I will say what the countries are that I will be covering: and that is all of ex-Yugoslavia (with the exception of Slovenia, which is already a member of the European Union) plus Albania, Romania, and Bulgaria. Now, Romania and Bulgaria will be members as of January of next year, but at the time I finished writing my book and publishing the book, a week ago, they were not yet. So that is how they came into this category and they are rather good, because they indicate the path toward European Union membership – which is the big difference in the Balkans. The basic question is: is the magnet of eventual membership in the European Union strong enough to bring these countries through the very painful reforms that they have to go through? In a way, you could rephrase the question to say: can the Balkan states follow the path of the Central Europeans to the European Union? And is that incentive strong enough to reform? I have excluded Turkey and Greece, simply because I could not manage anything more (I just did not in terms of time and space.

Turkey has not had a great interest in the Balkans; perhaps surprisingly so. So Turkey is less relevant and it is also less relevant in the sense that the issue of Turkish membership in the Europe Union eventually is too *sui generis*. It does not really have anything to do with the Balkans. Greece is quite relevant, actually – the sort of belated adjustment of Greece to European Union membership is often a pattern that I hear cited in the Balkans.

This said, there are then two sets of common dynamics. The one (throughout the Balkans) is adjusting or trying to overcome the wars of Yugoslav succession. Now, of course, this is particularly true in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo. But it is also true in other countries. It has certainly affected the economies of other countries around because of the embargoes and so forth, and the rising criminality in that period. And the other is the drive for European Union membership.

I do not want to take too much time, because I would like to leave it open for discussion. Let me just then say that, to my surprise, I concluded that things are not as bad as I thought in the Balkans, and I hope it is not just because of the contrast with Iraq and Afghanistan. I think that there are some things that are really working right in the Balkans (or have the potential for working right). The first is that the international intervention really has ended war as the default mode of settling disputes. Now, this operates in different ways in different countries. There may be some questions about if there would be further eruptions, but basically the countries in the Balkans do not resort

to war at this point. Second, the intervention has really worked to empower local reformers – sometimes people who did not know they were reformers and have learned about what reform means by looking at the example of Poland, by looking at the example of the Central Europeans, by seeing some of the possibilities now. For an American audience, perhaps it is worth stressing that the kind of political, economic, social development that the United States, Britain, France, Germany went through (that shaped their systems over 150-200 years), the Balkans are now trying to do in one generation. So it is very, very difficult. There is a lot of indigestion and it is not surprising that not everything works. But there really has been an empowering of local reformers (which – I am convinced – is the only way this kind of democratic reform, this kind of modernization can come about). And through this, there has started to be a kind of institution building – very uneven (but we may talk about that a little later), but it has started in a way to reinforce some of the reforms. And finally, I would say that there is a critical mass which has been reached, in which this common striving for European Union membership (and therefore the necessary striving to meet the requirements and the conditions of European Union membership) is reinforcing each other. In other words, if neighboring countries see that Croatia has gone ahead with reforms, went ahead with sharing enough intelligence information with international police so that they could eventually arrest Gotovina and therefore get the green light to become a full candidate for membership in the European Union, then other countries respond to this and say “Ok, maybe we have a chance; we were promised in 1993 in Thessaloniki that we would eventually have a crack at EU membership, maybe it’s for real.”

Let me go quickly down the various countries (or lands). In Bosnia, I think the most important point is that it has ended the wars. There has been a return of refugees that is quite remarkable. Half of the population (two out of the four million) was displaced in the wars in Bosnia in the early 1990s. Half of those refugees have returned to their homes (some of them have decided to sell their homes, but that is ok, they have returned). They have returned without – by and large, after the early days – ethnic violence (they have been protected in this) and this has gone ahead.

And there has been progress toward constituting a single country, starting with the license plates (that would not immediately identify you as someone from the Republika Srpska or someone from the Federation), going on to customs, going on to police intelligence, going on to the army. Now, there is some dispute about whether the army is really being unified. But what I am told – and it sounds rather persuasive to me – is that if you have a single command and you have a single chief of staff, and – maybe most particularly – if you have a single budget, then, even if individual regiments remain ethnically Croat, Serb, or Bosniac, you do basically have a unified army.

I would also add here (this is kind of as an aside, but it has to do with Bosnia as well as Serbia and Croatia) that I have been impressed, by and large, with the record of the International Criminal Court for ex-Yugoslavia in The Hague. Maybe what everyone initially thinks about is the fact that Milosevic died after an interminable trial (that was something like fifty court hours short of a verdict) and so the various victims of the wars were cheated of seeing a verdict and justice done in the case of Milosovic. But what the

court has done, as far as the wars of Yugoslav succession are concerned, is: it has established legal truth, not historical truth, but legal truth. So it makes it much harder for any would-be deniers to deny the massacre in Srebrenica or to deny other atrocities. In addition of that, something that the court has done that is not too well known is that it has tutored and trained local prosecutors, local judges, and conveyed something of a modern sense of justice. So that, starting last year, courts in Serbia, courts in Croatia, and courts in Bosnia have all begun bringing indictments and holding trials of their own ethnicity for war crimes. I think that is quite an accomplishment.

There are all sorts of problems with Bosnia and maybe one of the greatest ones is the low turnout for votes at this point. There have been various mistakes made (maybe voting started too early and so forth and so on), but there was only a 54% turnout in the last elections and of course this tends to enhance those who are most motivated (which can equate with those who are more extreme) and to disenfranchise – if you will – those in the center. But, in any case, that is Bosnia.

Macedonia. The big thing is that they were pulled back from the brink of ethnic war by the skin of their teeth and there still is question if fighting might again erupt there. But, basically, they saw what happened if you did not pull back from the brink and it was enough to bring them (kicking and screaming) to decide that there must be a better way to do it.

Croatia. This is perhaps the country where the pull of the European Union is the most obvious, both in the reforms and, again, in providing the intelligence information that allowed the arrest of Gotovina.

In Romania, it looked for a while – to me, at least, and some others – as if Romania was going to go ahead basically with the old system and many of the same old people from the communist times, just with different party labels in government and in that there would be rotating parties (but it would simply mean that the new ministers who came in would get a chance to fill their pockets before they got voted out and the new guys came in). Well, surprisingly – through some circumstances that I will not go into – what has happened in the past year is that a crackerjack minister of justice (who used to be a human rights lawyer) has become the minister of justice and really has pursued corruption cases. I would like to add here that some of the cases that she has built and has pursued were already started under the last government, but could not be pursued under the last government. So what has happened now is that there are several high ranking politicians who looked as if they would never be brought to account, who are being indicted, who are being investigated, and so forth.

Bulgaria. I would say that Bulgaria was a little bit slower on the corruption issue. They have recently tried to pull up their socks, as the issue of whether they would be admitted in 2007 or not became more acute. They brought in a Dutch prosecutor general to help them out, they stripped ten MPs now of immunity in corruption charges, they have indicted ten prosecutors for corruption. They have extradited, for the first time, thirty Bulgarians to Italy over trafficking issues. So there seems to be something of a change

there. And I must say that I have something of a soft spot for the Bulgarians, because the first time I was there in recent years was in 1996-1997, when they went cold turkey – the crisis was so bad that there was no way to go but up. Reformers came in, they set up a currency board, they got rid of the hyperinflation, and they worked very, very hard on reforming the economy. I asked one of the economists who was involved in this and incidentally it was a lot harder for Bulgarian economists before the changes to get an education in market economy than it was for Polish economists, and so they had to use various tricks to do it. One economist I talked to learned Polish in order to read the Polish literature. Another economist I talked to went to Moscow to study, not because he wanted to have the teaching there, but because then he would have the access to secret, closely-held libraries where he could read some capitalist literature. Anyway, that is Bulgaria.

Albania and Kosovo have enormous problems; organized crime is not the least of them. Organized crime is a problem throughout the Balkans, but it is particularly difficult to crack in Albania and in Kosovo because of the very, very tightly held clan structure of the gangs and the brutality of the gangs. I am told that intelligence (with difficulty) can infiltrate some of the other gangs, but it is very, very hard to infiltrate the Albanian gangs. In Albania and Kosovo, they do not have the beginnings of institutions that they do in some of the other countries. They do not even really have political parties: they are called political parties, but they are patronage networks and they are sort of expanded clans. I am not going to talk about a final status for Kosovo, I will just say that my assumption for what is going to happen is that Kosovo will receive conditional independence sometime early next year (and that may be something you [Ambassador Vujacic] wish to talk about from the Serb point of view). But we can talk about that more, if you want to, in the question and answer.

So we finally come to Serbia, and I have to say that Serbia is one of the countries I am most worried about in the Balkans. In some ways, you know, it really was a tragedy for Serbia and the Balkans that Djindjic was assassinated. He was no saint and nobody says that he was; but he had an energy and he had a desire to reform that was unparalleled, and when he was killed, this died. There are several things I would like to say here and that is that there are no activists for human rights, for decent rule of law, and so forth, who are better and more energetic than the Serbs. They are tremendous. That is not the problem. And I do not even think that the problem is the public (Sonia Licht said to me, at one point her estimate was that maybe 15% of the public you could consider to be extreme nationalists). The problem is that politics has been hijacked by the extremists and by the radicals, so that in many ways the Serbian politics does not really reflect the views of the public. Part of it is exhaustion. You know, all those people who went out and demonstrated for years and years, and finally in 2000 managed to get Milosevic to step down in accordance with the election results (which he had not been willing to do before) – it was a tremendous effort. And after Djindjic was assassinated, cynicism has grown and indifference to politics, which – again – leaves the field to the radicals (who are now something like 38% in opinion polls and are tipped to possibly form the next government). It is very difficult politically for the centrists, for the democrats, because the issue is constantly: “Basically, who lost Montenegro? Who is losing Kosovo? And it

is the centrists who are in the government; the radicals have not been in government and they say “We did not do this” and “We would not allow this.” If you hold elections in December (before the final status – or the “future status,” as it is now called – of Kosovo is decided), it is probably better than if you do it afterwards as far as the center is concerned, but it is still very problematical.

And I would add one thing, and that is that it has seemed to me as an observer that Prime Minister Kostunica is not moved by the prospect of European Union membership as Djindjic was. Therefore the drive is not as great as it has been in some of the other countries, and the willingness to pay the costs of the reform and the kind of things that are being demanded of Serbia is not as great.

I will just add one final thing and then open it for questions or comments. And that is that one of the hopeful signs that I see is a project that is not too well known, but is based in Thessalonica. And that is: a group of historians from all of the Balkan countries have gotten together to try and write a common history of the Balkans that can be used throughout the region – an agreed history of the Balkans. I mean, this is incredible! It has taken fifty years for the French and the Germans to get one volume out, a couple of weeks ago, in French-German history. So you can imagine what this task is like. But the fact that they are doing it and that some of the materials that they already have out there are meeting a favorable response, I think is an encouraging sign. So with that, I will turn it over.