

Balkans and Russian Foreign cultural policy

Balkans has extraordinary geographic position, it presents link between Europe and Asia, between Central Europe and Middle East, between Eastern and Western Roman Empire. This territory has attracted regional and global powers to realize their interests and to expand them to other regions. Balkans play significant role for realization of geopolitical interests of Russia. After period of stagnation when our country has been losing influence in the Balkans due to economic and political factors, Russia is coming back to Balkan with its greater involvement in Kosovo issue and particularly with cultural policy. Russia pursues an open, predictable and pragmatic foreign policy determined by its national interests

In the post-Cold War era culture plays a rising role in the evolution of international relations. Many countries focus on the power of culture in the international competition. Sympathy for idea of Slavic identity and unity is found in modern Russia, but it is based on cultural traditions, history, religion, while among Slavic countries deep divisions exist. Russian political and intellectual leaders are interested in expansion of cultural relations between the Slavic countries. Cultural exchange between Russia and the Balkans is one of the priorities of foreign cultural policy of Russia in the XXI, reflected in official documents.

At the same time Balkan countries put high priority in their foreign policy on joining the EU. Russian diplomacy takes into account this vector of foreign policy..

We assume Western Balkans will become part of the EU. In case of Western Balkans, membership is the most powerful tool for implementation of EU influence in the region. A new model of cooperation based on common interests, concerted action and coordinated positions is the most convenient way for Russia to re-gain influence in the area..

Simultaneously it is important to take advantages of experience, acquired by Russian diplomacy in the Balkans, to revive historical traditions, to establish contacts with local elites.

Russia in order to realize its national interests should take into consideration the Cultural and ethnic diversity of the population in the Balkans, the rise of national conscience.

Nowadays Russia- western Balkans cultural relations may be considered as successful. States aim to improve the respective images of the countries in each other's textbooks and media, to stimulate exchanges of students and artists.

Cultural relations are currently being developed within the framework of multilateral and bilateral and regional cooperation. Russia continues to promote Russian culture at the regional level as one of the key priorities of its own foreign cultural policy strategy. It supports new

initiatives as, for example The days of Russian Culture in the Balkans. Another project is international theatre festival «Balkan Theatre Space» established some years ago in Saint-Petersbourg. In 2009 the first «Russian center» appeared in Варна, Bulgaria and it was called the first «Russian center» in the Balkans. Deputy minister of education and science Ваня Добрева stressed the fact that the creation of center was very important for cultural exchange and orthodox unity of the countries. So this example demonstrates another dimension of Balkans-Russian cultural cooperation such as strengthening eastern orthodox church unity. This dimension is being realized in another forms of cultural cooperation such as conferences, activity of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations.

The prizes of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations (IFUOCN) are awarded annually to the heads of states, governments and parliaments, Primate of the Orthodox Churches, and major public figures for their contribution to the strengthening of economic and political ties among the states formed in the context of Eastern Christian tradition and for the consolidation of noble standards of Christian morals in the life of Orthodox community. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia is a president of the IFUOCN Board of Trustees.

Russian centre is the international cultural project supported by The Russkiy Mir Foundation. Its activity corresponds to aim of Russian foreign policy to contribute to the consolidation of the organizations of compatriots so as to ensure a more efficient protection by them of their rights in their countries of residence and to preserve the ethnic and cultural identity of the Russian diaspora and its links with its historic motherland.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation was established in 2007 by a decree of President Putin for the purpose of “promoting the Russian language, as Russia's national heritage and a significant aspect of Russian and world culture, and supporting Russian language teaching programs abroad. Today there are 3 russian centers in Bulgaria, 1 center in Greece, 2 centers in Serbia, 1 Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1 center in Montenegro. The Russkiy Mir Foundation intends opening centre in Croatia.

Besides Russian centres there is another form of bilateral cultural cooperation, such as russian centre of science and culture . Russian cultural centres are the representative of Rossotrudnicesstvo abroad and they operate in more than 70 countries all over the world and their work is an essential component of foreign policy implemented by the Foreign Ministry of Russia. The Russian *Cultural Centre* is the official home of Russian culture in another countries. The purpose of the RCC is to develop and maintain positive relations between the Russian and people of another country by sponsoring activities in the areas of Education, The Arts,

Commerce, Athletics and Science. Russian centre in Serbia is one of the oldest. Rossotrudnichestvo has office in Serbia, intend opening office in Macedonia and Croatia.

The another dimension of Balkans-Russian cultural relations is linking the Slavic cultures. The Forum of Slavic Cultures is an international institution that was founded in 2004 and has been active ever since. The founding member states were Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, and Serbia and Montenegro.

The Forum of Slavic Cultures wants to become a referential global platform of intercultural dialogue among Slavic cultures and a hub for Slavic arts and sciences. The Forum has participated in numerous literary festivals, organize Slavic Film festival and concerts of Slavic ethnomusic, contributes to preservation and promotion of the Slavic cultural heritage, especially in the sense of ethnography, folklore studies, museology and archive studies.

The development of bilateral cultural cooperation need to be considered as one of Russia's foreign policy priorities in the Balkans. Cultural links with the countries of Western Balkans are actively developing; Days of culture become important form of cultural exchange as well as public institutions and individuals are thought to be important actors.

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Albania is a country of three religions: Muslim, Christian Orthodox, and Catholic and this situation is unique within the Balkan Peninsula. Our countries have a lot of common. The followers of different religions live in both countries, both countries had suffered from atheistic ideology, experienced a difficult period of political and economic restructuring, and religious revival. In both country interreligious cooperation is developin and the Interreligious Council works.

The restoration of the Orthodox Church in Albania 1993 led to greater contact between members of the Russian and Albanian Orthodox churches. Delegation visits, meetings and exchange of official letters between heads of churches contributes to the development of relations between the two Churches. Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania, Anastasios considers Albania as a bridge between orthodox people in Europe and in Russia and as a bridge between orthodox people and muslims.

The continuing policy to broaden Russia's relationship with the Muslim world contributes to Russian-Albanian relationship. Through cooperation the Committee of Muslims of

Albania and the Russian Mufties Council have conducted efforts to develop mutual understanding between Russian and Albanian Muslims. Visiting the significant Albanian mosques, cultural centres and medreses constitutes an important aspect of cultural cooperation. The Committee of Muslims of Albania and the Russian Mufties Council carry out joint activity, for example exchange experience in conducting arrangements dedicated to Mawlid.

The Catholics have their own religious institutions, many religious educational centers for children and for the training of staff. But the relationship between Russian and Albanian Catholics is rather weak, despite the relatively active role of Catholic mass-media in mediating information between Russian and Albanian Catholic communities. This situation may be caused by the fact that while Russian Orthodoxy is the dominant religion in country Catholic-Orthodox ties in Russia became tense after the 1991 over Orthodox complaints of Catholic proselytism.

Cultural links with the Albania are actively developing, Public institutions and individuals are thought to be important actors. The very closed relations existed between Albanian and Soviet people in the framework of the former socialist camp and the nostalgia a certain part of Albanian elite for the time they lived, studied or worked in the Soviet Union contributes to affiliation with Russian culture. The main pillars of cooperation are the bilateral cultural agreements between governments: An intergovernmental agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation was signed in 1995, agreement on cooperation in the field of archives, library science, interuniversity and academic exchange. Every three years governments approve the program of cultural and scientific cooperation. Last program has been just approved, in October 2012, while Moscow and Saint-Petersburg have been hosting the Days of Albanian Spiritual Culture. In September 2011 in Albania there were held Days of Russian Spiritual Culture. Days of culture become important form of cultural exchange, the festival's program includes a show of present-day movies, concerts, performances of musicians and actors. The two countries have engaged in many cultural exchange programs, particularly in the fields of artistic exchanges

So the cultural cooperation between Russia and the Western Balkan States is based on mutual interests and historical traditions. Russian foreign cultural policy contributes to new forms of cooperation. Development of linkages between our countries in the XXI century is an objective, natural character.