

**SPEECH OF AMBASSADOR RAUNIG, HEAD OF OSCE PRESENCE  
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**Between Consensus and Compromise – Framing South East European  
Integration**

Compromise and consensus seem to be amongst the most often mentioned and used concepts in today’s development related and diplomatic language. South East European States’ current priority of European integration is accompanied – if not framed – by reprimands from the international side about an alleged lack of willingness of political actors and society in general to **compromise** on a range of issues. At the same time, the strongest **consensus** in South East Europe is about European integration itself.

**Compromise and consensus:** These are two concepts that are often used as synonyms. I would like to emphasize, however, that there is a significant difference between them, not only in linguistic terms, but in terms of substance. I will treat the concept of **integration** before coming back to these two notions.

Talking about “**integration**” in the Western Balkans nowadays apparently has one single connotation: “Integration into the European Union”. Whereas there are many aspects under which this integration process can be seen, one aspect – which is still the fundamental idea of the European Union – might not always get in the daily debate the attention that it deserves: Peace! We should not forget that the European project started as a peace project on the ruins of World War II.

Therefore, integrating the Western Balkans into this European project also means completing the plan of a wider more prosperous and peaceful Europe. This has to be seen particularly in the light of the traumatic disintegration of the former Yugoslavia in the nineteen nineties and the turbulences Albania went through in the aftermath of the breakdown of the totalitarian regime.

However, being the Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, it might be not so appropriate to focus my intervention solely on European Union integration. I will therefore mention another European framework that was born out of the need and desire for peace in Europe. The Helsinki Final Act, signed in summer 1975, proved that ideologically divided countries and leaders were able to make the leap and to approach each other over the deep trenches that divided the world at that time.

Today, the initiative taken in Helsinki continues in the OSCE, playing an important role in stabilisation and further development not only in Eastern Europe, but also in the Western Balkans. The OSCE's measures to empower and stabilise the countries of South East Europe go hand in hand with the EU integration process. While distinct in scope and mandate from this process, the OSCE's programmes and projects are nevertheless complementary to it and vice versa. In this regard, the OSCE's broad integration framework provides a distinct potential to be used in a comprehensive manner. Besides its **European dimension**, integration in the Western Balkans still represents a challenge, mainly in two other directions: the **regional dimension** and the **internal dimension**.

Looking at the region today, it leaves the impression of a rather geographic notion, which is former Yugoslavia plus – respectively minus – Albania, depending on the angle of observation. Although there are reportedly more than forty political fora, movements, initiatives and organisations, including the South-East European Co-operation Process, presided over this year by Albania, where politicians of the region frequently meet and talk, economic and cultural co-operation still remains at a relatively low level. Intra-regional connection is also often rather limited, due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure. Even the media still report very little about developments in the neighbouring countries, continuing to concentrate overwhelmingly on domestic issues.

This leads to a situation where the political leaders of the region are almost the only ones who interact quite regularly. I would like to emphasize that this interaction is extremely important for co-operation and further integration of the region, but is not enough. Only once people of the region work together on concrete projects – so-called people to people contacts – will they be able to overcome often still deeply rooted prejudices. At that point they will realise their compatibility in areas such as life attitudes, taste, humour and cultural patterns.

This brings us back to the initial topic of European integration, where a fundamental concern still seems to be: **Can the Western Balkans integrate into the European Union without having finished its own integration?**

Regarding **internal integration**, substantive challenges lie ahead yet: Quite a few South East European countries still have an internal political and social setup that is dominated by endless conflicts. Hence, the same question as for regional integration seems to be valid also in this regard: **Can a country successfully proceed on the integration path, be it regional or European Union integration, without having first healed its own deep internal ruptures?** How can a smaller entity integrate into a bigger one when it still is disintegrated itself? Seen from the perspective of the bigger entity, there might be a strong reluctance to import potential problems.

**What might be the reasons** for the obstacles to internal integration? First of all, a high level of political conflict impedes sound development and progress of a society by absorbing limited human energy for mostly non-productive issues. Secondly, not only limited human resources and time is thereby wasted for non-creative work, but also an atmosphere of

continuous conflict holds hostage the whole society by attracting most of the attention and fascination, especially when supported by sensation-seeking media.

**What might be the remedy?** What might break the vicious cycle of one conflict creating another? First, if societies and states that are affected by this phenomenon wish to cut the endless chain of conflicts, they have to do it out of their own conviction and will. Outsiders can assist, but can never take over the responsibility of such an exercise. If such a process is driven by external institutions or persons, it might function for a while, but it risks being unsustainable.

**What could deescalate** the internal political situation? I am convinced, it is **compromise**. Whereas compromise in the Western Balkans is still often seen as a sign of weakness, it is the basis of the European Union, the entity into which these countries would like to integrate. The OSCE, as the biggest regional security organization in the world – “from Vancouver to Vladivostok” – is also founded on the concept of negotiation and compromise. Hence, the challenge not only for South East European politicians, but for entire societies, of accepting compromise as a strength, a virtue, still lies ahead.

**What would be the most appropriate social group** to foster the concept of compromise? I am convinced it is the women of the Western Balkans. Women in this region leave the strong impression of having a different approach to problem solving than men. In general, they are more inclined to co-operate and bridge political and ideological gaps. Therefore, the recent decision of the Albanian Parliament to adopt for the upcoming local elections a fifty percent quota for women on the candidates list for municipal councillors, with male and female names alternating on the lists, is a laudable step ahead.

Before I close, I wanted to come back to the initial topic of compromise and consensus. **Compromise should not be confused with consensus.** Compromise allows the involved parties to keep their distinct opinion or position, leaving space to the opinions and positions of the other side. Compromise is the golden middle where everybody wins a little and everybody loses a little. It might be the best remedy against the widespread culture of “the winner takes all” and the misperception of consensus as the power of veto.

Albania’s transformation, the way out of transition, is a national project that will only succeed by closing the ranks and putting the good of the country ahead of narrow personal, economic or party interests. This is why Albania’s friends and the international community put so much emphasis on the requirement of sincere and sound co-operation based on compromise. The constructive way religious and ethnic communities deal with each other in Albania might serve as a very appropriate example for the further path of internal and external integration.