



NATO Foundation
Defense College

THE WESTERN BALKANS AT A CROSSROADS

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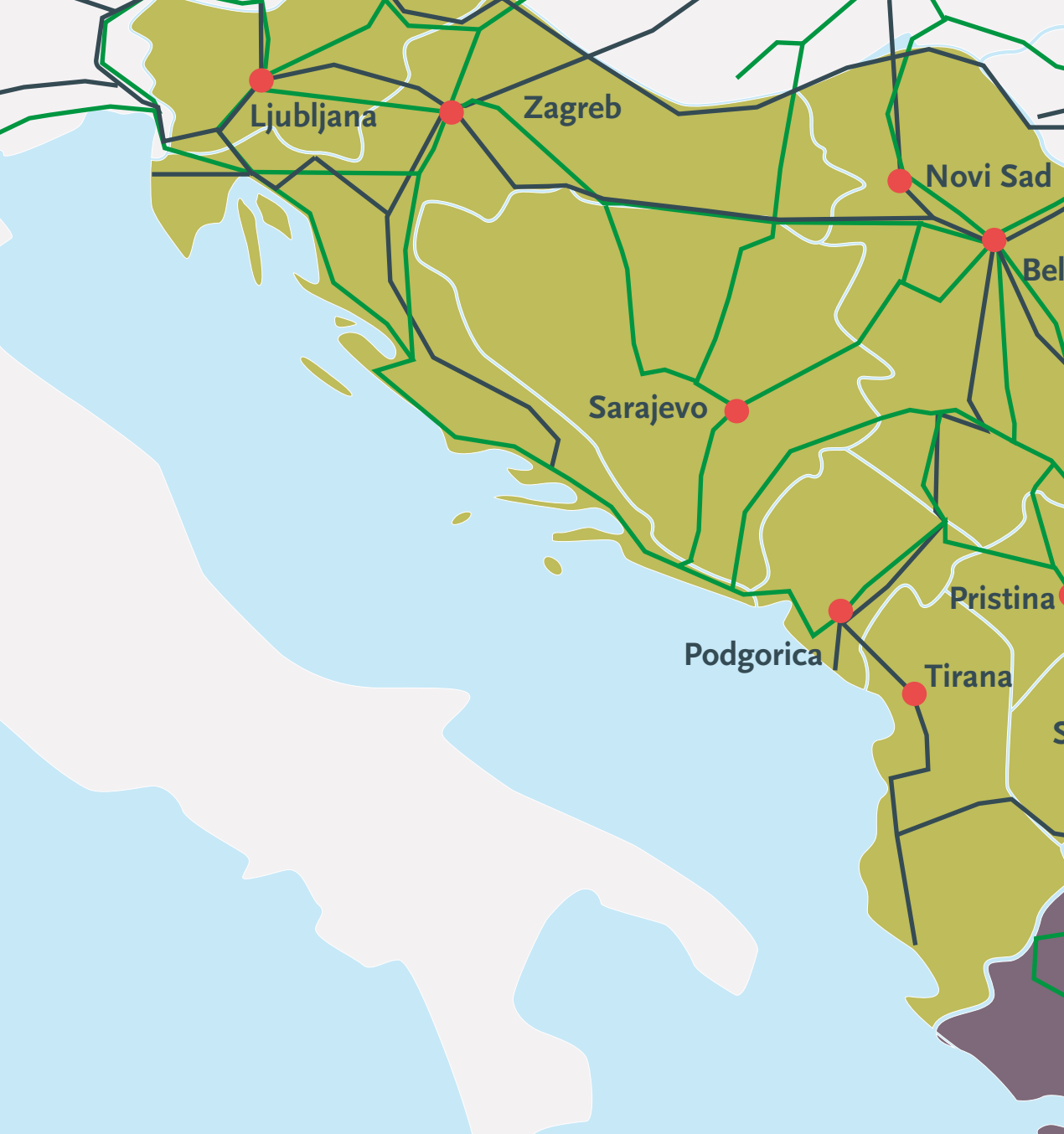
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Sunset in Prizren (Kosovo).

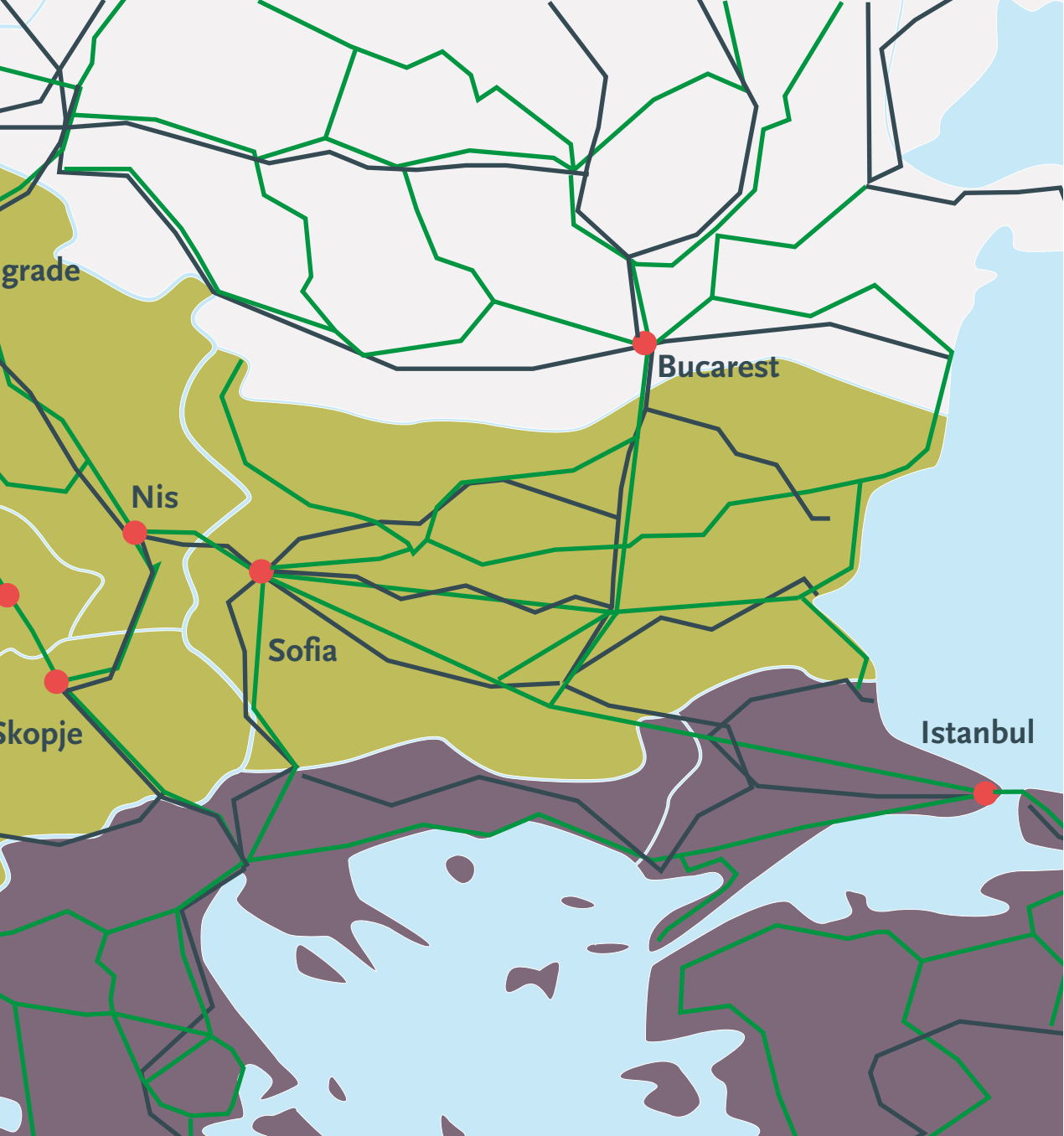




BALKANS' RAIL AND ROAD CONNECTIONS

- ROADS
- RAILROADS

This map has only an illustrative value. It does not represent any official or unofficial member state or NATO position



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ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO
*President of the NATO Defense College Foundation,
Rome*

WELCOME REMARKS

This book is focused on an important international conference dealing with the Balkans. It is the second time that we deal with this region in the year. Why such an interest?

The answer is that we cannot ignore an important part of Europe very close to us, not only in terms of geography but also of history and of common interests. The title of the conference, “The Western Balkans at a crossroads”, is evocative and we have discovered that it has been used frequently in international conversations.

It is clear that our aim is to promote a closer integration of the region into the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions; we are convinced that this is the only political option capable to ensure long term security and stability. We wish, therefore, to give our help to those who are working on this option and convince with good arguments those who are still in doubt. It is useful to repeat that the Balkans are part of Europe and it must be their final destination.

To achieve this goal it is necessary to move ahead on various fronts, improving regional cooperation, enhancing the rule of law and promoting open markets. Internal reforms are however needed in order to reach the final objective.

Lack of progress means fragmentation and poor statehood while accession to NATO and the European Union requires a level of requirements that has to be met and cannot be missed.

The Atlantic Alliance has invested for a long time into South Eastern Europe with the open door policy, projecting stability and security, ensuring peace. To this day it keeps an ongoing operation in Kosovo under Italian leadership.

NATO has always been working hand in hand with the European Union; this is the region where visible cooperation between the two organizations is more evident. Having said that, it is clear that the Balkans have not been at the center of the attention of the international community for some years. Perhaps they were considered an already solved problem forgetting a complex history and the specific situation.

We now see a renewed interest on both sides of the Atlantic and this is good news for everybody. In the past four years there have been yearly European Summits devoted to the region, from Berlin to Trieste.

Having in mind this background we have selected for discussion those issues that seem to us to be a priority.

Our methodology in addressing our projects is to call for the best international expertise, in a spirit of scientific freedom and respect for different opinions.

The NATO Foundation wishes to remain at the core of analysis on strategic issues. In doing so we draw from a large network of countries and an extended international expertise, starting with the NATO College itself.

We are gradually enlarging our focus to topics that are not strictly geo-political, but conceptually connected, like illicit trade, criminal networks and terrorism. They are very relevant not only for this discussion but in a general way. We will continue to follow this direction.

Today it is more important than ever to have a good reading and a clever analysis of events, as it is evident that the traditional separation of issues is not in line with our times.

We also believe in clear and concise language to be understood by everybody and not only by specialists. For this reason we are making an effort to reach out to a young audience, strategic issues are part of normal life and are interesting to follow. It is essential to attract young people and to share relevant discussions such as this conference on the future of the Balkans.



CHRIS WHITECROSS

Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome

WELCOME REMARKS

Ambassadors, Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, the 2016 Warsaw Summit affirmed Alliance interest in the Western Balkans, stating it “is a region of strategic importance ...” and that NATO “remains fully committed to the stability and security of the Western Balkans, as well as to supporting the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of countries in the region. They noted that “democratic values, rule of law, domestic reforms, and good neighbourly relations are vital for regional cooperation and for the Euro-Atlantic integration process.” The Communiqué from the Summit concluded “The Alliance will continue to work closely with the Western Balkans to maintain and promote regional and international peace and security”. Essentially what the Summit promoted was a continuance of current NATO activity in the Western Balkan region. I will leave it to you to consider whether this is sufficient to meet the emerging challenges such as criminal networks, illegal trafficking, and terrorist groups, as well as outside actors such as Russia, China and the Gulf States, who may, as one of the conference’s sessions suggests, try to take advantage of the situation to improve their spheres of influence. As you consider that question and how to move towards a future of social integration, economic development, and political stability reflecting regional cooperation as other conference sessions will discuss, allow me to briefly summarize NATO’s recent history in the Western Balkans for context.

The United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR, had been unsuccessful in quelling tensions and violence in the civil wars in the Balkans between 1992 and 1995, and in the wake of the catastrophes of Srebrenica and Gorazde, NATO was the force of last resort for the UN to stabilize the region. The Dayton Accord, signed 14 December 1995, facilitated the approval of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1031, authorizing NATO to assume responsibility for military operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina from UNPROFOR. This was a welcome mission for NATO, who had been searching for a sustainable *raison d’être* after the end of the Cold War. Under UNSCR 1031 and NATO’s Operation

DECISIVE ENDEAVOR, the Alliance effectively began to project power in December 1995 by moving 60,000 troops rapidly into BiH.

They separated rival Federation and Serb 'Entities' along an Inter-Entity Boundary Line, forced the cantonment of 'Entity' weapons and units under NATO supervision, and achieved stability. The arrival of this Implementation Force, IFOR, and the sustainment of forces under the NATO Stabilization Force to whom IFOR transferred authority in late 1996, brought breathing room to the conflicted region and allowed international partners such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Union to attempt to create the social and political mechanisms for enduring stability.

This stability was substantially threatened in 1999 with the Kosovo crisis, which saw the second NATO projection of power into the Western Balkans. Once the danger of general war subsided in 2000, largely because of presence of 50,000 NATO Kosovo Force soldiers in a relatively confined geographic space, optimism followed.

The face of NATO's stability projections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and into Kosovo changed in the early 2000's from large occupying forces to Partnership for Peace activities. Most Balkans states accepted NATO partnership and submitted to the journey toward eventually NATO and EU membership. Russia and other powerful international players seemingly chose not to spoil these efforts while large NATO forces remained in the Western Balkans.

NATO troop levels in SFOR rapidly drew down until it was replaced by the 2500 strong European Union Force Althea in 2004. KFOR was reduced to 17,000 in 2003 and then down to 4,500. The subsequent reduction of missions and mission size for the UN, OSCE, and EU since 2008 signalled a Western disengagement from the Western Balkans.

Today, NATO continues three essential activities in the Western Balkans to enhance regional security: operations; partnership programs; and membership processes. Ongoing operations include a presence in Kosovo, and liaison missions in BiH, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

These operations provide a forward presence to monitor numerous and varied activities of partnership with each nation. Through these missions, the Alliance also continues to encourage each nation to make progress toward NATO membership. I will leave it at that to perhaps whet your appetite for the discussion that is to come, noting the impressive number of participants across the myriad dimensions of the Western Balkans question and whose points of view I am very much looking forward to hearing.



PAOLO ALLI

President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Brussels

INITIAL REMARKS

Thank you Ambassador, thank you General Whitecross, thank you for the invitation to this very important conference. I think that the reason you have said in the opening of your speech is quite important. I think that initiatives like that, have to be carried out very often. We do the same in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, for example, because every year we have several initiatives in the Western Balkans countries, and inside our Assembly we very often draft reports and recommendations for NATO.

Personally, as President of NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I had the chance to visit practically all the countries in the Western Balkans this year, and so, I got more and more impressions, and after speaking with heads of state, governments and also representatives from the civil society many times, I had a chance to understand how many resources the region has, and how strategic is this area for Europe and for global security.

For Europe, because I think that Europe and the European project will not be complete until the full integration of the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkans are not outside Europe, they are at the heart of Europe and the process should be completed, in order to complete Europe. But also from the point of view of global security, in the position of the Western Balkans is not affecting only regional security, but also global security. So again, I think that the full integration of the Western Balkans in the Euro-Atlantic community should be, must be in my opinion, one of our objectives on top of our political agendas.

Let me spend just a few words about the historical process of Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries coming from the collapse of the Soviet Union. We see that all the countries, or almost all the countries, on the Eastern flank of Europe have become a members of NATO before joining the European Union, and also in the Western Balkans, except Slovenia, which became member of both in the same year 2004; we have Croatia which became member of NATO in 2009 and joined the European Union in 2013; and now we have Albania and Montenegro

fully integrated in NATO and not in the European Union and other countries still in a different position.

The dynamics show that countries joining NATO before joining the EU, had considered security as their first objective and now this point could be in some way reversed, in some situations. Let's take Serbia, I had a long conversation with President Vucic. Serbia is not willing, the people there are not willing to join NATO, even if they have a strong cooperation with NATO at a military level, but some propaganda, some narratives tells to the people in Serbia that, as all the countries in the Western Balkans joined NATO before joining the European Union, so they say that NATO membership is a precondition for EU membership, and that is not true of course, but this is used by somebody to stop both the integration in EU and the integration in NATO. So I think that, politically speaking, we have to consider that in some cases, in some situations, particularly in Serbia, but probably maybe in the other countries (I don't know Bosnia, it is a different story as we know), the process could be reversed, so I mean that joining the European Union could be the way to also join NATO in the future.

If we consider other countries that are not in the Western Balkans, like Georgia or Ukraine, this also could be a way to speed up the integration in the Western community of those countries, because we know that it is very hard to think that in a short time they could become NATO members. So the political consequence of this, in my opinion, is that the cooperation between NATO and the European Union, or vice versa, has been great, and must be even stronger in the Western Balkans; if there is not a full cooperation between EU and NATO we will not succeed in completing the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans. I think this must be kept on top of the agenda of our countries in Europe, of our countries in NATO, and this is a reason why I fully agree with this initiative of the NATO Defense College Foundation.

Let me spend one word about Bosnia and Herzegovina, just to say something that I saw with my eyes and heard with my ears. We know the situation there, deriving from the Dayton agreements and still there is this veto between the three entities ruling together the country, and the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) is still not starting because there are some conditions set up by NATO, particularly the transfer of military properties from the army to the government, that are still not completed, but they are not completely by one of three entities, the Republika Srpska. So this condition that NATO poses for starting the MAP, is really and practically transforming itself into a veto from one entity against the others.

I spoke to Secretary General Stoltenberg several times about this issue, and I think, from a political point of view, we should get out of the impasse and find some political solutions in order to start the membership Action Plan, because the reaction of people in Bosnia is: "Look NATO is not opening up the MAP to you, NATO is not willing that Bosnia joins the Euro-Atlantic community". They

are trying to blame us for having set those preconditions, and this is not good, because “*cui bono*”? Evidently it will favour external actors. And this happens not only in Bosnia, unfortunately also in other parts of the Western Balkans, but in Bosnia and Herzegovina particularly: Saudi Arabia is making huge investments in supporting the Islamist sectors of the population, which could create a high risk of radicalization.

This is my opening overview, of course an incomplete one. I did not speak about Kosovo or FYROM, because I did not want to enter these arguments, but I wanted to sketch for you some situations.

Where lies now the responsibility to go forward? I have spoken about the responsibility of NATO and EU in opening doors, projecting stability, as NATO is saying since some years in the region, but of course there is homework also for the countries of the Western Balkans.

We know that there are still problems, even if many improvements have been done in the past years, but of course you will discuss about the illegal trafficking, organized crime, corruption, human rights, including terrorism and foreign fighters and so on.

So there is a need for the reforms, and for this reason I think that your initiative is very timely. You will discuss about reforms, institutional reforms, economic reforms, infrastructures and also from the point of view of justice. I think that we have to work together in supporting our friends in the Western Balkans, in order that our common values of the Western community can become increasingly stronger in the Western Balkans, and from the side of those countries more cooperation is needed in the region, less isolation, less individualism, at national level, more cooperation.

I think that there are also some common challenges, like for instance how to tackle the external propaganda from some countries, particularly from Russia, and from other countries influencing the cultural environment of the Western Balkans.

Let me just conclude with a few words about the role of our NATO Parliamentary Assembly, it is an opportunity to make some advertisement for NATO P.A., so you can forgive me for this. I think that the parliamentary diplomacy is increasingly important in this very complicate times and global environment. Very often the dialogue between two governments or among different governments is not so free as it can be among parliamentarians, so an Assembly, like ours, is giving a great contribution in terms of reassurance of our friends and partners, but also in terms of information to our Parliaments about what it is happening in different parts of the world, and in particular about the Western Balkans, our present subject.

My good friend Miro Kovač knows quite well what we are doing and our effort also in organising conferences, seminars in the Western Balkans in order to show that NATO is present there not only at military level but also at a political level, because NATO is a political and military organisation based on common values,

and, when we go with our Assembly to make seminars or meetings in those countries, this is a way to show that we are close to them.

I conclude my speech just underlining that in our Assembly we have started a special group on education and communication. I think that informing people correctly about security (what is security now?) and that security today is completely different than five years ago, is a necessity because people must understand that we have to pay for security, because security is not granted. To achieve this goal requires a long education process in schools, in the media, because we, as members of our Parliaments have, for example, the responsibility to take the decisions about increasing the defence budget.

We have been speaking about burden sharing in NATO since several years. If we are not able to explain to our people, starting from the new generation, that security is not for free, we have failed. Security must be paid, I am sorry for this crude wording but we have to pay more for our security. If we fail, then we will need to go every time to our parliaments, discussing about defence expenditures and we will listen people saying "You are wasting our money". So we need education, and I think that institutions like the NATO Defense College Foundation, and of course the NATO Defense College, as educational establishment are absolutely crucial in these very complex times. Thank you again for your invitation and have good session.



ALESSANDRO POLITI

Alessandro Politi, Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

POLITICAL SUMMARY

The overall message from the conference is that undoubtedly progress has been made both by local elites and the international community with respect to long term programmes. If one compares the actual situation and what emerged four years ago in another seminal conference (Western Balkans – The futures of integration, Rome, 7-8th of October 2014), one can see remarkable differences:

- Then the well-known declaration of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker “no further enlargement will take place over the next five years” was, despite all diplomatic softening, a blunt expression of indifference. Today timelines, albeit if tentative, have been set for almost all the Balkan six and there is a sense of purpose and action, despite all difficulties in carrying out badly needed reforms.
- Regional cooperation has not yet reached the point where local governments see clearly the interest of the whole region, despite cross-border dossiers like economy, energy security and security, but a number of initiatives are quietly working for the benefit of many. Admittedly the Visegrad Four model is still not being adopted, but even difficult counterparts like Kosovo and Serbia are able to agree on significant steps (e.g. a de facto free circulation of cars with different plates, a different phone prefix for Kosovo and the judicial integration).
- The Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue (BPD) remains of paramount importance and difficult to push forward. Year 2017 showed some important achievements, but at the same time a “dialogue fatigue” emerged. In this respect the European High Representative, Federica Mogherini, had to patiently wait for the end of dense electoral cycle in both countries, before starting to canvas again further agreements. On the other hand, once the more “easier” accords are closed, the harder it becomes to discuss the more political ones. Energy, the community of Serbian speaking municipalities and the modification of the Serbian consti-

tutional preamble are essential conditions for progress, as well as a measurable fight against corruption from both partners.

- Compared to four years ago FYROM, after having threatened to become a very serious crisis in the first quarter of 2017, has emerged as a bright spot, shedding an authoritarian and corrupt regime and re-engaging in a promising dialogue Greece and Bulgaria with a friendship treaty.
- Paradoxically the external factors are much less encouraging, namely the spreading of authoritarian populism and the widening of scope of opaque influences. What is happening in different Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian countries is sheer encouragement for old, corrupt and undemocratic politicians, who still cling to their privileges. Countries promoting jihadism or aggressive nationalism are the same that favour unfair competition and unaccountable leaderships. The new frontier of Russian influence does care definitely less about Western institutional membership and much more about economic penetration and manipulative political tactics.
- NATO's presence in the crucial junction of Kosovo has a direct stabilising effect both on Pristina and on Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to its reinforcement role to EUFOR in case of trouble. The indirect effect is much wider and was felt, for instance, during the FYROM crisis, when intense patrolling activities along the border contributed in preventing a possible repetition of the Kumanovo 2001 staged incidents and diversions in the Tetovo area. Prevention is the real mission of KFOR and its contribution as third responder during the elections in Kosovo had this meaning.
- The real issues for two very different but still relatively fragile situations, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, can be resumed within the wider Balkan Six context: political renewal especially vis-à-vis minority relationships and economic sustainability. Minorities should be viewed not as potential fifth columns but as diversity assets strengthening and enriching the social fabric, deserving more than shallow respect but real investment. Economic sustainability means overcoming the assistential post-war syndrome, ending state captures and allowing economy to flourish within a fair progressive taxation system and social welfare measures. Some bigger countries seem to be better off, but in reality there is still a lot to do for all six.

Session I

MOVING FORWARD: GOOD REASONS FOR GOOD REFORMS



Serbian costumes.





MIRO KOVAČ

Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee, Zagreb

PERSPECTIVES OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION. THE WAY AHEAD

I would first thank the President Minuto-Rizzo for inviting me; I was supposed to be here in Rome in the spring of this year, unfortunately I had to cancel my visit for some obligations: there was a vote in the Croatian Parliament, to which I had to take part. So I am sorry once again and thanks for inviting me nonetheless.

I am really happy to be today in Rome, I like to share five thoughts with you dear ministers. My first thought is something that was always mentioned by my friend Paolo Alli. If you look at the Western Balkans countries you will easily conclude, if you look at map of Europe, that these countries are surrounded by EU member states and by NATO member states, this means that these countries are in the stomach of the opinion, they are in our stomach.

Which are the countries which surround the Western Balkans? We have Croatia, Italy, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. All these countries are EU member states and NATO member states. So logically, it is our job to take care of these countries and we should not be astonished that external powers are present in that region, as you know. We have Russia, we have China, Muslim countries and we have Turkey.

If you look at the EU member states, you will also easily conclude that these external powers are also present economically in the rest of the European Union. If you look at Germany, Austria, Hungary, Croatia, in all these countries you have also the presence of Russia, China, Turkey and Muslim countries.

You have soccer clubs in the EU that are owned by citizens from these countries. So there is nothing unusual, but the unusual thing is that we do not really take care of the Western Balkans and we complain about the presence of these external powers. The problem is that these states are quite weak, fragile and this is why the foreign presence is felt more strongly than perhaps in the rest of the European continent.

So, but for us Europeans this could be a remarkable success story in the Western Balkans, because at relatively low cost we can have a success story in a situation

which is not very easy due to the immigration crisis, to the ongoing development of the Brexit and of course the financial crisis. So we have a chance, we have a possibility to do something in the Western Balkans, for the Western Balkans, but also for the European Union to show that we can manage and solve problems.

My second thought relates to what is going on in the European Union regarding this area and it is a good development.

Things are changing. After seven years we had a discussion in March within the European Council and the European perspective has been restated and confirmed. We had in September a speech of Mr Juncker and it was a very optimistic one regarding the future of the Western Balkans and the announcement that a strategy will be published by 2018 for two countries already negotiating on EU membership, Serbia and Montenegro.

While the European Commission is becoming more enthusiastic in tackling the issue, we have two friends in the area. I was in Sofia a week ago with the visit of the Foreign Affairs Committee, during which I also met two ministers of the government. One of the priorities of the Bulgarian presidency is to deal with the Western Balkans, and there will be a summit in May 2018 in Sofia about the Western Balkans. So we have much more attention for the Western Balkans in the European Union which is a good thing.

And if you look at the presidency in 2018 following the Bulgarian one, we will have Austria, a country that normally pays much attention to the region. Then in 2019 we will have Romania as chair and I am sure it will dedicate as much attention than the preceding country.

And successively the presidency will involve Finland, Croatia and Germany in 2020, and then Portugal and Slovenia; in this way we have at least four presidencies that should be motivated when it comes to the Western Balkans.

My third thought relates to the USA and things are changing there too. I would say in the last 6-7 years there has been no real attention; there was a continuous activity but not too much engagement.

There was a very interesting conference last week in Washington, organised by the Atlantic Council with six Foreign Affairs Ministers from the region attending. Moreover there has been a very important study of Daniel Serwer, published by Council on Foreign Relations (8th of November) about the unravelling of Balkans' peace agreements that I whole heartedly recommend.

Resuming, things are changing, also in the US with more engagement, we have clear basis for cooperation with NATO and we have agreements with the European Union, that clearly tell that has a to be compatibility between the European Union and NATO when it comes to their common foreign and security policy.

Mr Serwer's study stressed which could be the triggering incidents for a crisis in the Western Balkans, for instance: confronting a possible independence attempt of the Republika Srpska; an incident concerning the Serbian population of Kosovo; a possible fight between Albania and Macedonia; a terrorist attack or a possible

assassination with Islamist background and a possible Russian destabilisation of FYROM or Montenegro. Naturally we can, with a joint US and EU effort, prevent these events from taking place.

Therefore my fourth thought clearly stresses the need for an intense cooperation between the European Union and NATO, for which we have a legal basis in the Union, because only together we can achieve a transformation of the Western Balkans and get them into the European Union and NATO, evidently for those countries that want a NATO membership.

There is a very good study which also recommend, published by David Kennan in 2013, where he has made a comparison between the Western Balkans and the Middle East, and one can easily conclude that the influences are similar on both areas, and I wish we could do something together to impose ourselves and really change the Western Balkans.

When you look at the countries in the region you have: a) the mentioned Serbia and Montenegro that are basically moving in the right direction and achieve EU membership; b) FYROM and Albania which could start negotiations to access the European Union by 2018; c) Kosovo that is a very specific case because we still have a state-building effect there, so it will take some time to start negotiations and d) lastly we have Bosnia and Herzegovina that clearly is, as often Paolo Alli mentioned, the biggest problem in the area.

The two biggest problems are recently FYROM and Bosnia and Herzegovina. FYROM goes in the right direction, the deputy Prime Minister was in Zagreb recently, and from Albanian side the political partnership seems very solid, very structured, very motivated; so my feelings are that Macedonia is moving increasingly in the right direction.

But Bosnia and Herzegovina is a big, big problem and I wish the country to be much more assisted in becoming a country based on the rule of law. I will give you an example why this is not a case. We have a Constitution for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Constitution is a part of the peace accords, three countries signed the Dayton Peace Accords, Bosnia and Herzegovina itself, Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, today Serbia. So these three countries signed the Dayton peace accords and they have obligations to promote the implementation of the Constitution. Moreover we have six guarantors of the Dayton peace accords: the US, the UK, France, Germany, the European Union and Russia.

The Constitution says that there is a Constitutional Court and the decisions of the Court are binding and definitive. So the Constitutional Court has so far taken more than seventy decisions, that have not been implemented. One of them relates to the electoral law. In December 2016, the Constitutional Court issued the decision saying that the electoral law has to be amended to make sure that the three established ethnicities (the Croats, the Serbs and the Bosniaks) are equal in the electoral process, thus far, they have not in Bosnia and Herzegovina been able to implement the decision made by the Constitutional Court.

So if a country is a country following the rule of law, normally it should implement the decisions made by the Constitutional Court. It has not get happened. So we have to help our friends of Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement decisions made by the Constitutional Court, because as Mr Valentin Inzko put it recently (he is the EU High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina), the main problem is the constitution of the new government after the election in 2018 of October. So the problem of Bosnia and Herzegovina is that it is not a functional state, and we have to do something together to make it functional, of course based upon the Dayton peace accords.

My final thought will concern the future. I am personally not unaware of the problems that you are facing in the Western Balkans and still I am optimist. I think that we will be able with a joint effort to pacify in the long run these countries and integrate them in the European Union and in NATO, for those of them who would be interested in becoming NATO members.

And this is a very great chance for us to, in a certain way, prove ourselves that we can politically Westernise the countries in this continent, which are in the our surroundings. Now I will try to give an answer concerning the question of Mr Rupel regarding the ICTY: there was the decision last week concerning six accused for war crimes Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there was a suicide committed by one of the accused, and there was some trouble due to that, which is understandable because committing suicide in a court is something unusual in front of cameras.

Basically I would say that things have calmed down, our government has been in a close contact also with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and there was some exaggerated interpretation on the press.

In the long run we should try to establish some kind of region-wide reconciliation and truth effort to make sure that people understand what happened during the nineties, who has started the war and why we have had so many victims in former Yugoslavia. Thank you so much.



IVAN VEJVODA

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THE PATH TOWARDS EURO-ATLANTIC INSTITUTIONS. A CRITICAL POINT

If we consider the recent past of the Balkans, the answer, to the question “Could things have developed in a simpler way?”, in my sense, is very simple: yes life could have been simpler, but we are dealing with the factual reality of a country. The more desirable, wished for course of events did not happen.

I believe that some of the speakers present here and I were part of a not so large group that met in Ljubljana, then still in Yugoslavia, during 1989, to discuss the importance of the role of civil society for democratic change. This group composed of individuals coming from all parts the former Yugoslavia, before the disaster of conflict happened, was advocating for democracy, for the appearance of a democratic Yugoslavia, for more rule of law, for freedom of speech, for freedom of the association and for human rights.

Clearly the people discussing, whom I would simply call a group of the intelligentsia of the former Yugoslavia, were not enough, not influential enough, to move the first and second Yugoslavia [the first one of Karadjordjevic dynasty, and the second one of Tito, note of the Editor], to a third democratic Yugoslavia. The result of what happened in the 1990s was that we now have seven countries instead of one. The “brotherhood and unity” concept of post-World War II Yugoslavia was confronted with a strong nationalist wave led by communist elites in a power-retention strategy.

This nationalist, populist, identitarian wave was – we thought – at the time an exception to the rule of a “return-to-Europe” dynamic that was ongoing at the time in all other post-communist European countries.

The countries that had been under the rule of the Soviet Union, or occupied by the Warsaw Pact with Soviet troops on their territory, had one immediate clear and distinct goal and that was to see the departure of Soviet troops from their territory. The other was to (re)join the Western community, the EU and NATO.

We in former Yugoslavia at the moment of the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 had instead a huge advantage with respect to these other communist countries,

because one should remember that Yugoslavia had relations with the European Community since 1978. The then (last) Prime Minister of Yugoslavia Ante Markovic had begun negotiating in Brussels on Yugoslavia's joining the EC [during the 1989-1991 period, note of the Editor]. The country was the first in line given that it was the most advanced country outside of the Warsaw Pact. All that is history now. The nationalism led to war and violence. Yugoslavia descended into a complete catastrophe with huge loss of life.

We come out of that war, each country in its own way. In Serbia it took us 10 years to defeat Milosevic, our authoritarian leader, in the year 2000 and then we embarked on a belated transition to true democracy.

Only Slovenia and Croatia managed to join the EU and NATO. The others have all, and this is fundamental, opted for the path toward EU membership. It is the key priority for all of these countries, the harbour they are endeavouring to reach through democratic reforms and solving their bilateral disputes. All also wish to join NATO, it is Serbia who maintains a declared status of military neutrality and does not seek NATO membership, although it has an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO.

The essential historical fact is that our countries, for so long at a crossroads of history (as the Chairman aptly put it), were able, for the first time in their history, to choose of their own free will which union, alliance, partnership they wished to join. In the past this was not the case, because these lands, this region were the object of imperial policies and occupations. There was no possibility to choose.

There are now pressures from third countries, such as Russia for example that are trying to influence certain countries in their choice. This was particularly clear in the case of Montenegro joining NATO, but Montenegro had the courage as a country, a society and a leadership to clearly state what they wanted, so that what happened was done out of their free will not because somebody imposed anything. This is an important and often forgotten fact and needs to be repeated all the time.

The Vilnius Group was mentioned. It played a key role in bringing the other post-communist countries along, after the first three countries joined NATO in the 1990s. I believe the Adriatic Charter is another important group to mention here. It brings together the countries that want to join NATO, plus Serbia (with its neutrality status) and Kosovo as observing countries. This kind of regional organisation is one of many that spells out the ways in which the countries cooperate also in future.

Regional cooperation generally in this part of Europe is extremely intense; unfortunately, since this represents good news, it means that it does not ever, or very rarely make the headlines. Just to mention one example, the heads of military intelligence of our countries meet now twice a year through the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council, that is based in Sarajevo and run former Minister of Foreign Affairs Goran Svilanovic; people are mostly unaware of this. The discussions are very frank and open. Besides one generally does not mention all

the regional relations that exist at the levels of education and cultural cooperation or the private discussions that negotiating teams of different countries carry out in the context of the accession to the European Union or have with each other. For instance, people working on a specific problem in Belgrade call up their Croatian colleagues by phone and ask: "How did you solve this problem in the accession process?", and nothing passes along official channels. The same happens with Montenegro or with Slovenia; moreover we have a Slovenian advisor in Serbia working with a negotiating team. This really tells the difference between where we were about fifteen years ago and where we are today.

Clearly NATO has a key role in this moving forward the whole process of, as a title of our panel says. I believe that everybody acknowledges the importance of the role that NATO is playing in the region. Just three weeks ago in Serbia we had a kind of NATO fest. First, President Vucic went to Brussels, meeting with Jan Stoltenberg (13th of November 2017); then the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, led by Jelena Milic organised the Conference on NATO and Serbia. The Commander of the US Army in Europe (USAEUR), General Ben Hodges was among the speakers. Finally on the 27th of November there was a joint military exercise of US and Serbian and parachutists about a hundred of them, or more, with the presence of US Ambassador and Serbian President Vucic. Again, these events do not make the headlines but they show, if I may put it very simply, the clear Western alignment of the country, and this is echoed by the orientation within all the countries towards the European Union.

This is a chance for Europe and the Alliance, twinning the US and Europe, to show leadership in finishing what is called in Washington the unfinished business of the Western Balkans.

The conference held in Washington D.C. "A Coming Storm? Shaping a Balkan Future in an Era of Uncertainty", and the accompanying position paper "Balkans Forward: A New US Strategy for the Region" (28th of November 2017) that was published by Damon Wilson, are a sign of the renewed awareness both in Washington D.C. and in the EU of the importance of the Balkan region. The commitment, given at the Thessaloniki EU Summit in 2003 with the famous words of Romano Prodi "the unification of Europe will not be complete until our friends in the Balkans are part of the family", indicating that the Western Balkans would become members, when they will meet the conditions, is again moving forward.

I would add that the statement by Mr. Juncker pointing out that 2025 was a realistic goal in response to a plea from the region: "Give us an outlook, a possible, realistic date of entry", "Help us reverse the famous enlargement fatigue of the European Union", because there is something in our region that Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama creatively called "Patience fatigue".

Our countries are in the same position as a student that needs to know that there are four years to get a diploma, and now there is a realistic horizon, so the countries know enlargement is possible if you meet the conditions and requirements,

basically the Copenhagen criteria and the chapters. I think this gives motivation and energy to those who diligently strive and work toward democratic institutional reforms, the renewal of state administration. These people, and society with them, are motivated more if there is a clear outcome for a reform result.

In addition, maintaining NATO's enlargement, "open door policy" is essential. In that regard, Montenegro's membership, although belated, was extremely important, because the Euro-Atlantic security roof over the region is crucial for maintaining peace.

Clearly, researchers, analysts need to work on worst case scenarios (as for example in the recent memorandum "The Unravelling of the Balkans Peace Agreements"), but at the same time I would like to underscore, being cautiously optimistic (taking of course into account everything that happened in the past), that I do not think we will have a new conflict in the region.

"We" in the former Yugoslavia, did that eighteen years ago and ten years ago (whatever time framework you choose). No one wants to go back there, the citizens do not want it, the leaders do not want it, because everyone knows the huge cost that has been paid for that horrific wars of dissolution. But there are of course politicians, who for their own domestic political gain, sometimes "play with fire" using extremely biased rhetoric. Those who most play with extremist rhetoric are well known – it is very dangerous and one must never neglect the danger of that kind of rhetoric – but at the same time we have witnessed that whenever there has been a peaking of this kind of extremist fever in the region or in a bilateral relationship, things have also calmed down relatively quickly. This kind of dynamic is what we can expect in the future as well.

I would like to highlight as a positive example of regional, bilateral cooperation: the meeting between Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Serbian Prime Minister Vucic in June 2016 on the Danube border bridge Bogojevo-Erdut between the two countries. That day they signed in Subotica the Declaration on the furthering of relations and solving of open questions between Serbia and Croatia. This is testimony of leadership at a crucial time to speed up the foundations of peace and stability in the region.

The Republic of Macedonia, is another positive example. It found itself over the past years in a very bad situation and Prime Minister Zoran Zaev engaged decisively in the same kind of positive leadership and statesmanship. He made the choice of turning overnight the domestic and international politics towards a positive course.

I would also like to add that at this time it is of the utmost urgency and importance that our Greek and Macedonian friends can finally resolve this burdensome issue of the name of the country and its usage, because that has been a key impediment to Macedonia/FYROM (and the region) in moving forward, although it was the first candidate of this group of countries. It had become an EU candidate already in 2005.

Regarding the European Union, it had passed many decisional cycles and was actually mature to join NATO at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April 2009 along with Croatia and Albania, but the name dispute with Greece stopped all this and put Skopje in a limbo, into a *status quo* for the next ten years. Now the Skopje Government is keen in pursuing a solution and fostering democratic processes. We shall see how it fares once the political cycle of elections is completed. I would venture that even if the name is not resolved maybe it could be considered to help Macedonia enter NATO under FYROM's name, since it is essential to have the Euro-Atlantic roof moving over FYROM as well, leaving then just a sliver of countries that would have to join.

Another couple of things are key for the Euro-Atlantic peace project as well, namely transitional justice and shared history both for the short and the long term. When we talk about the ICTY, if we are serious about the democratic nature of our countries and their foundation on the rule of law, we must do the hard work of confronting the past and to spell clearly out what was done in our name by our governments. Nobody can shy away from that, and we can discuss endlessly who is to blame and what the portion of blame is among actors, but clearly everyone participated in one way or another to these crimes.

We have mentioned the trial of Ratko Mladic who was condemned on eleven counts, and of course the main count was the perpetration of the genocide in Srebrenica. This is a key milestone in international criminal justice because we have known since from many years what Ratko Mladic and his troops did, that in international legal terms it meant and that it was a genocide. But, and this is my second point, this needs to go into the history books of the respective countries in elementary schools and high schools, this forms the base of the values of democracy and liberal democracy that we are keen on deepening, so that we can have a consolidated form of democracy.

Undoubtedly, easier said than done because we have seen the reaction among parts of the population, by the far right groups in our respective countries. It is not easy, but this is again what leadership is about, to pursue the hard work of change. State and civil society have their respective roles. The message and the tone of the message has to come from the top leadership and different state institutions, because the civil has already deeply engaged even as the various conflicts were unfolding.

Taking forward the process of democratic reform, strengthening the rule of law, human rights and the basic freedoms are essential for the region of the Balkans, if it wants to make its contribution to the stability and peace in Europe, of course with the help and within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance.



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THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE EU: WILL THE WHEN BE REDUCED TO AN IF?

In order to treat an illness one should rely on a correct diagnosis. The Western Balkans suffer from a rather dangerous disease: AEDS – Augmented EU-Deficiency Syndrome. Switching its efforts and priorities from enlargement to internal arrangements was a logical and necessary step by the EU in times of crises, but it should not degrade enlargement (and completing the unification of the continent) to a secondary issue. Because it could be disastrous – for both the region and the continent – if the question “When?” regarding the EU accession is reduced to an “If?”.

THE GOAL: EU (AND NATO) MEMBERSHIP

The EU is everything that a Western Balkans country could strive for. Membership in the EU means peace – and for the region this is a very relevant notion after a decade of wars. It means security and stability. It means values. It means decent and prosperous live. For Southeastern Europe acceding to the EU seems to be the only long-term solution for centuries-old rivalries, ethnic, religious, political, cultural tensions and conflicts, nationalisms and territorial clashes, dissolving them into a larger entity, where even borders seemed irrelevant – until recently.

European integration of the Western Balkans means security not just for the region, but for the entire Europe. Southeastern Europe is the nearest and most vulnerable part of the continent to hotbeds of tensions and conflicts (Middle East and Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and the frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space, etc.), it lies on one of the main routes for the refugees and migrants trafficking, radical Islam and international terrorism cannot not spread to Europe without affecting the region first. Southeastern Europe is the external EU border and a barrier to a spill-over effect of conflicts and instability to the continent. That is why NATO membership for the countries of the region such as Montenegro (in 2017) and the Republic of Macedonia (hopefully soon enough) has such a crucial

importance for European security. And the EU cannot pretend to be an authentic global player with a black hole in Europe.

THE PROCESS AND THE ACT

The process of accession is at least as important as the act and the fact of becoming an EU member. The negotiating process engages the applicant countries into reforms, it leads to covering criteria, it necessitates adaptation, it requires public efforts and engagement. Negotiations are a political process with strategic implications for both the countries of the region and the EU. They should not be reduced to a simple technocratic exercise of opening and closing chapters. Neither should they offer short-cuts for accession. What we need is a more visionary thinking and strategic approach to the Western Balkans integration.

Europe is afraid of the Western Balkans, but Europe is also worried about the Western Balkans. A political vacuum in the region will readily be filled by external geo-political factors – Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the radical Islam. But it will be rather ridiculous if Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the radical Islam turn out to be the main driving force for the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans.

THE ALTERNATIVES – A REAL ONE AND AN ARTIFICIAL ONE

Russia – the artificial alternative:

Russia has always been a factor in the Balkans – at least for the last two and a half centuries. But Russia has never been an alternative for the countries of the region – for the last two and a half decades. Because all these countries have declared Euro-Atlantic integration as their strategic goal. Apart from that Russia itself does not have the necessary political weight to drive the region apart. It does not offer an ideological alternative as it did during the Cold War period. It is not by chance that the political partners of Russia in Europe belong to the far right and nationalist spectrum. And Russia lacks the economic potential (apart from the energy resources), that could guarantee a substantial long-term political influence.

Paradoxically, but Russia could acquire certain artificial, secondary geo-political alternativeness from the confrontation with the EU and NATO. And it is this confrontation that could transfer an artificial alternative into a real and serious risk. The Balkans might be facing two equally undesirable options: transforming the region into a buffer-zone (a grey periphery zone of instability) or a front-zone (playground for regional and global players in their fight for domination). The developments in Ukraine proved, that these two options are not necessarily incompatible with each other.

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia the Western Balkans countries faced a very complex task – to accommodate two contradictory processes into a strategic unity. The first one was the process of border-building, i.e. establishing institutions, consolidating societies, affirming their newly-acquired statehood and sovereignty. The second one was border-pulling down, abolishing, i.e. preparing to partly transfer their sometimes still immature sovereignty to supranational institutions in the process of their Euro-integration. EU's disengagement threatens to destroy this fragile balance.

The process of dismantling a multinational confederation and dividing the common political, economic and cultural space of ex-Yugoslavia was inevitably accompanied by the rise of nationalisms, especially in those cases, when the process of gaining independence was accompanied by conflicts and wars – internal or with neighbours. Preserving multi-ethnic and religious tolerance in such circumstances turned out to be extremely difficult – and that was a threat to the unity, stability and even the existence of some of these countries.

The disintegration of ex-Yugoslavia made much more visible the existing ethnic and religious dividing lines, underlining the lack of concurrence between ethnic spaces and state borders in the region. This results into the existence of large minorities in practically all states, ethnically belonging to their neighbours. Unfortunately in most of the cases these minorities do not serve as a bridge for co-operation and understanding, but are rather used as a pretext for interference, tensions and conflicts. The attitude towards national, ethnic, religious minorities in each country will be crucial for the future stability of the region – because it might easily generate instability and conflicts between countries.

Another characteristic feature of the region is the existence of specific ethno-national axes: Greece – Cyprus, Turkey – Northern Cyprus; Bulgaria – Republic of Macedonia; Romania – Moldova; Serbia – Republica Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania – Kosovo. Although the relationship within each couple differs substantially, generally this pairing is also more often a cause for tensions and conflicts (either between the two countries of the axis, or with a common neighbour – as is the case of Albania and Kosovo with Serbia), rather than an instrument for the promotion of friendship and good-neighbourly relations. In a region so rich in history the direct transfer of history into politics could only lead to rivalry and clashes (the war in Kosovo and the name issue between Greece and the Republic of Macedonia are just the most visible, but not the only ones).

So in fact the real (and negative) alternative to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans countries are the old and new nationalisms and the awakened *revanchisms* in the region.

THE HORIZON

The time factor is becoming more and more important. Long-term postponement will lead to deep disappointment in local societies and trigger negative processes that might turn irreversible. Jean-Claude Juncker's statement when entering into office, that there will be no EU enlargement before 2020 carried no surprise in terms of timing. But it was politically counter-productive. It was a blow to reforms, it deprived the countries of impetus and horizon and robbed the societies of the cohesive force of the common goal and joint effort.

Integration and enlargement do not seem a plausible cause now, but the process should be kept alive, offering a reachable horizon. Recent declarations of the president of the European Commission Juncker and the Commissioner on Neighbourhood policy and Enlargement Hahn, mentioning 2025 as a tentative year for the accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the EU go along this line. But it is equally important not to give rise to false expectations.

THE WESTERN BALKANS – BULGARIA'S PRIORITY FOR ITS EU PRESIDENCY

Bulgaria declared that the Euro-integration of the Western Balkans will be the main priority during its presidency of the Council of the EU, starting on the 1st of January 2018. I wish this has been done sooner and in a more coherent and comprehensive manner. But even the mere fact, that enlargement is back and high on the EU agenda and the political attention and public awareness is focused on the region once again in a positive manner could be instrumental in the process of integration. The goals of this presidency should be:

- to re-invigorate the strategy – the Thessaloniki Agenda of the EU for the region, adopted in 2003 during the Greek presidency;
- to generate processes – for reforms in the applicant countries; for enhancing bilateral and deepening multilateral co-operation in the region;
- to stimulate policies – the implementation of a “Connectivity Agenda” (transport, communications, energy, education, digital) with the understanding that it aims at improving specifically the links with the EU Single market.

A more ambitious goal – and one rather difficult to achieve, but which is worth the efforts – could be the adoption of a Sofia Road Map for the EU integration of the region as a final document of the EU-Western Balkans summit, scheduled for mid-May 2018. This would offer a strong impetus for reforms, open a tangible horizon for the countries in the region and prove, that the EU is once again serious in its strive for the re-unification of Europe – without backyards on its map. In fact the crossroad notion could be a positive one: in any case it looks much better than the No Road Ahead sign.



JELENA MILIC

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A VIEW FROM BELGRADE. HOW STRONG IS RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN THE REGION?

First of all I am very pleased to be here today, and I would like to use this opportunity to express not only mine but also the gratitude of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS) to NATO Defense College Foundation and to Mr Minuto-Rizzo in particular, for being a great host of a great NATO event.

I think that we did make small progress in the right direction and the officers that came here from Serbia are the proof of a good momentum after a year or two characterised by a pretty tense situation, if I may say so. I really hope that the CEAS and the NDCF will continue to cooperate together. Also thanks to your Strategic Balkans Trends and Press Review. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss broader political aspects.

It just reminds me that more than ten years ago I actually wrote part of a book published by John Hopkins and Daniel Sandler, in which I made some kind of distinctions between the then history and conditionality of East European countries accession to NATO and EU in comparison with what is still before the Western Balkans states. I would have liked to highlight the fact we also in the Balkans had the same soft authoritarian regime inheritance to deal with, but I think that the legacy of bloody Nineties was so burdened by war crimes that this distinction was and is the one that really distinguishes the EU and NATO accession of Eastern European countries from the Western Balkans countries' experience.

I think that the way Montenegro managed accession in the new geopolitical circumstances, marked by a revisionist Russia, is being very present in the mind of regional leaders now. Moreover the way Montenegrins addressed their own past, being part of the country that was bombed by NATO and that also suffered civilian casualties, is a key experience that Serbia now and Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYROM and to a certain extent Kosovo (in whatever form it may happen), should actually learn from, regardless whether they just opted to become NATO members or would like to continue improving just the cooperation with NATO, as

stated by the current Serbian government. Anyhow I really think that message coming from Serbia, as well as from NATO, is very positive.

Having said that, the CEAS published on September 2017, a report called “Basic Instinct. The case for more NATO in the Western Balkans”. We have tried to be complementary with some excellent exercises happening in the region, like the Berlin Process and whatever is going under the aegis of the Regional Cooperation Council, as Mr Vejvoda mentioned, and being in sync with some good reports about the Western Balkans that have been published highlighting some of the big problems that the region is facing.

But we thought maybe these three topics that we have picked up (war crimes’ trials, reform, security sector reform), are also relevant and can offer a more new, comprehensive and useful picture of what is going on in the Western Balkans so that international community partners can help us all, them and us to move on in the appropriate election, and if I may say so, complete this great vision of a Europe been all free at peace.

The first of the three issues points out at the unfinished war crimes’ trials in front of domestic courts. We are not dealing with reconciliation because this is for me a too arbitrary and broad concept although we would like to see government’s gestures in this respect. This is relevant, as is also the continuation of war crimes’ trials in front of domestic and regional courts. I do not know how to explain and how to define the new set up of the Specialist Court in Kosovo, but it has my full support, no matter why.

The second issue, and this is the topic of this panel, what are the missing reforms. I think that the Balkans have gone in a good direction with many reforms that were required or expected, not imposed or forced on us, if we want to be part of the liberal and free and democratic world.

In Serbia we have witnessed the prioritization of the reform of the tax and financial system in the past and of privatisations now. In last few years there was this reform related to the liberalisation of the labour market and the conditions for investments, all of them were very needed.

Nevertheless I think we also have to finally address the third issue of uncompleted processes vis-à-vis the security sector reforms in the region; here again the Montenegro case can be a good example for us, because it is not just that we have got the clear message by NATO that the open door policy is alive and kicking despite pressure coming from Russia and other challenges within NATO, within EU, within member states and from abroad.

Actually the country has taken some very difficult steps and addressed some painful issues that the EU is still not tackling or does not want to, or simply does not have the tools to do so. The two practices that EU and NATO integration are basically complementary, but I will never say that you have to become member of NATO in order to become member of EU, this is not fair, this is not a good service towards NATO and member state.

But I think at this point in time becoming a member of the NATO or increasing cooperation with NATO, like Serbia has decided, means actually buying time and creating the political consensus in order to continue with the more demanding reforms that the EU integration process rightly demands. I believe that this is the best option and, despite some comments (we are talking about this EU and NATO comparison), there are some good messages coming today from the Brussels Summit of Foreign Affairs Ministers and that we have to some content in the exercise. I think that the idea and decision to discuss in Belgrade the significance of improving the cooperation between EU and NATO is giving some kind of results and this has filled the media and political space in a good way, I hope so.

Regarding the security sector reform, I observe that there are not many legal ways, being a country that peacefully transitioned after the conflict from authoritarian regimes to a process of consolidation of their democracies (like Serbia did or even Bosnia), to purge your security system from the perpetrators of crimes or those supporting them, or who set up patronage networks, earning money by smuggling through the security system reforms. Anyhow through these verdicts related to the trials for war crimes, one achieves tangible results and this is why these results are so important, because it is via the security sector that the Western international community needs to cooperate more with the countries of the region against emerging challenge, that in the last years came out as consequences connected to the migration and refugee flows.

So it is, I think, a mutual interest now to focus on these reforms and it would be good if these actions can be more streamlined, if there would be more coordination between member states, organization and donors in that regard. These are two big problems or challenges that we have added along with well-founded complaints that the EU is leaning towards just maintaining stability instead of pushing for more democratic reforms or addressing real problems with the media. There is a democratic decline, you know, a Serbian trend influencing the region, but there are also some other positive trends and we should agree on how to balance the negative with the positive ones.

The third underlining problem that we addressed is the fact that, as a result of having just limited options available in these peace settlements, most countries in the region inherited and actually negotiated the result of having overly politicised ethnicities. In this context you are almost forced to be a political group syrup, crowd, mass or to have a strong political opinion in order to articulate not only your identity affiliations, but other political affiliations. It may have been opportunistic when we, and even the Western international community, have been using these politicised ethnicities; to a certain extent it was useful to achieve some of our and their goals, but it was a serious obstacle for the genuine consolidation of the region. And now it can become, I think, an issue that hostile state and non-state actors can weaponise, abuse and turn against all of us.

I will just give you a small example, I do not want be a boy who cries wolf, but

we heard about this event directly from the Russian side, because the chief officer handling the Balkans for Moscow recently told in Washington that he openly suggested to instruct the Kosovo Serbian MP's in Kosovo's Assembly to actively obstruct the settlement of the border dispute between Kosovo and Montenegro. These words were not heard from our Serbian President, Vucic, or the Prime Minister who have influence on these dealings, we heard them instead from the Russian guys dealing with the region.

And our report is full of this kind of examples, where the Russian authorities are currently trying to weaponise ethnicities in the region and in the context of uncompleted security sector reforms to let occur some. We have to be aware of it. Thus we have recommended member states NATO and EU to project more confidence in their own values, principles, strength and leverage in the region, while being aware there are not only the issues deriving from migration flows, or now maybe from the defeat of ISIS and the potentials of radicalization in the area, but also all these underlying problems that can be abused if not honestly and openly tackled.

The common effort is to tackle the problems, avoiding to intimidate the local authorities, while still explaining that there are some issues that really have to be solved. The combination of both messages and explanations, like for instance in negating any support to a border exchange between Kosovo and Serbia, can be very useful as shown by the recent declarations of the US diplomat Brian Hoyt Yee.

He told to Vucic "*You cannot sit on two chairs*", and I think that it was a friendly and timely delivered message by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. Here we not are talking whether Serbia should support the Rome, Milan, Barcelona or Madrid football clubs, we are talking whether Serbia, formally declaring to move towards EU and NATO, is adopting these values as other democratic and free countries. The question is if Serbia is also willing to address serious internal problems or whether Belgrade is opting to become an authoritarian state and to have revisionist Russia as the best friend for ever. These are the choices and there is no choice in between, as there is none between blue and red; on that we must be very clear.

I think that this kind of mixture between messages and incentives to Serbia will get two more chapters being opened in a few more days. This combination is good and it may surprise some of you, and many in Serbia in particular (knowing that I am not shy in criticizing the current government), that now I would like to wrap up this part of my presentation with some good trends that are, oddly enough, somehow under the radar in Serbia. Our government is not promoting them to extent they should, but we have witnessed several high levels meetings and agreements regarding the improved cooperation between Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, so that they will develop further in future. I really think it is a very good sign coming from Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, that they are willing to participate into EU battle groups. Just recently it was agreed to improve the Serbian legal

framework allowing to send civilians to multinational missions; all good news as you see.

Finally NATO burst the bubble of this silence on the level of cooperation between Serbia and NATO in the Individual Partnership Action Plan. Maybe it did a good service to the Serbian Government by stepping up and doing that on behalf of Belgrade, which has its own share of responsibility for public diplomacy. Now in fact we see a positive dynamic and a more relaxed atmosphere in which new political actors can mention the fact that this cooperation exists and that there are good reasons and future new benefits deriving from the improvement of relations between Serbia and NATO. And this, until recently, was not the case in my country.

Session II

OLD AND NEW ROADBLOCKS: HOW TO REMOVE THEM?



Detail of the house designed by the architect Ferenc Raichle (Raichle Palace) in Subotica, Serbia.





PETER NEUMANN

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TERRORISM AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS. AN ENDURING CHALLENGE?

Thank you very much and good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you and thanks to Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo for having me here. I am speaking to you as a researcher who has studied terrorism and radicalisation from nearly 20 years now but I also speaking to you as a current OSCE Special Representative on countering violent extremism (CVE), a position that I have held since about 11 months and in that post it was natural to travel to the Western Balkans. A number of times I have made visits to five countries and I have spoken to a large number of people from ministers to ordinary representatives of civil society. What I want to tell you is how I see the situation and what I have recommended the OSCE should do. My argument is very simple and straightforward: there is a need for all of Europe to engage more deeply on countering violent extremism in the Western Balkans and now is the time to do it. Why the Western Balkans matter to themselves and to all of Europe? I want to give you some of the priorities that I have identified during my visits and finally highlight some of the challenges that I see lying ahead.

There are two caveats before I begin: first of all, of course, it is completely wrong to reduce the Western Balkans to a breeding ground of terrorism. We all know that, this is a much more diverse and interesting region, so I apologise for focusing very much on that particular aspect. It happens to be my area of expertise and this is a security conference. Second caveat: there is obviously a lot of diversity within that region and this is not something I can do justice to in 15 minutes of presentation.

With that out of the way, let me quickly tell you why I believe Western Balkans matter in relation to counter terrorism (CT) and CVE. First and most obvious reason is perhaps because they have been a source of weapons and people who end up within the European Union. The guns in the Bataclan attacks in November 2015 in Paris were bought in the Balkans and we know that it was through the Balkans that the terrorists who carried out that atrocity went back to their Euro-

pean home countries. Both of this types of transfer, of people and dangerous goods via the Balkans into the European Union, remain a significant reason for concern and especially now that the physical so-called Caliphate [also known as Islamic State, note of the Editor] is coming to an end and especially now that a lot of European countries expect fighters to return to their European home countries. There is a good chance that some of these people will attempt to travel through the Balkans or in fact end up getting stuck there. So now is the time to prepare for that.

The second reason is that the Balkans are of course in many ways linked precisely to western and northern European countries. There is a significant diaspora population to the extent that extremist networks often actually cross borders and in some cases span the entire continent. A very significant number of Swedish foreign fighters, for example, were of Bosnian origin and conversely the radical preachers whose videos inspired people inside of Bosnia's were in some cases located in Austria. So, it makes no sense to actually only look at the Western Balkans, this is in fact a trans-European phenomenon that needs to be looked at in a trans-European way.

The third and final reason is why the Western Balkans matter to Europe? Is because terrorist attacks in places like Bosnia for example, could have a very significant negative effect in term of re-igniting ethnic conflict. I do not want to be gloomy, but look at what three or four terrorist attacks in France have achieved. The French society today is more polarized, more divided, more fragile than ever before. Before the elections, one journalist said: "It is a country on the verge of a nervous breakdown" and that is not because of a mass movement of terrorists, it's not because of millions of people on the streets, it is because of these actions by a few dozen bad people. If that can happen in a country like France with strong institutions with a very long history, imagine what terrorists can do to some of the countries that are younger, that have more brittle institutions and where perhaps the fault lines of recent conflicts have not completely healed. So yes, terrorism is not a mass phenomenon, not here, not in the Balkans, but it is always just a few people that have an extraordinary impact on society. I mean no just physical destruction but also political and psychological destruction, in some cases in the Western Balkans, these countries could be tinderboxes where just one spark reignites a problem that is much bigger. That means we have no choice but to care about the Western Balkans what happens there in terms of counterterrorism affects all of us, it is a region of strategic importance and there is a lot to do.

Let me give you quickly three of the priorities. The first priority I believe is classical police training and capacity building; this does not mean countries in the Western Balkans are uniformly badly equipped or with low capacities, on the contrary there several good practitioners, but in practically all countries they could benefit from tapping into the expertise of more experienced countries, especially within the European Union. This could be a capacity building in terms on counterterrorism laws, prosecutions, building up specialised expertise, police forces

technology, better platforms for sharing data etc..Within the abilities of better policing I would consider auxiliary crimes like financing terrorism, smuggling, counterfeiting. All these improvements are necessary, they are not happening everywhere to the same extent and at the required speed and we have to look carefully now where we can perhaps improve the situation.

The second priority is in the area of CVE. Every country in the region, I believe, should have a so-called referral mechanism. Referrals are typically early warning systems, where people who display signs of radicalisation are being spotted, reported and dealt with through a non-coercive intervention, be it by social services, psychologist, theologians and the community. This is something that exists in many countries from Germany to Britain, to Netherland, now also in France. It is generally believed to be a very good success which allows governments to deal with cases early and in a way that frees up time, energy and resources of law enforcement and intelligence. Kosovo in fact, early this year, has started making its first experiences with this; Serbia, with the help of the OSCE, is building up a similar capacity in its municipal safety councils. These are good initiatives that I would like to see replicated.

The final and third priority I believe should be prisons and this is, I think, the most predictable issue. We know that prisons can be breeding grounds for radicalization, we know the number of people with terrorism related convictions has increased and will continue to increase significantly and we know that many of them, especially in the Western Balkans countries, will be out within relatively short periods of time often two or three years. So what are we doing? Every country should be preparing a plan, should study what other countries are doing, what can be learned from successes and failure, allocate properly resources and think not just about the time spent in prison, but also about what happens to people after they are being released. Now is the time to do it.

Finally let me conclude with the challenges: the first challenge is duplication, no doubt. The Balkans and, I followed that for some years, have recently been discovered by the international CVE community. Now in several countries international actors are falling over themselves. NATO, the EU, national governments, even the World Bank are now active apparently in CVE. Many CVE initiatives in some places are reaching out to the same people, the engagement is often quite superficial and different initiatives are not sufficiently coordinated among each other. I have heard this complaint many times in different capitals. We need better coordination and you would expect me to say this, but I say it anyway. The OSCE should be in my view the lead actor because it plays this role in many places in the Western Balkans, it is the strongest actor on the ground, it has very good field operations; moreover the operators know the local players, they know the local dynamics, they have been there for a long time and they well connected. Consequently, I believe the OSCE should be in charge of coordinating these efforts.

The second challenge is that the international community is often going for

what in English you call: “the low-hanging fruit”, the easy targets are not necessarily those that require the most intense engagement. For example, there is a huge amount of international activity in Kosovo, because it is a place that is easy to reach out to where the international community has a very heavy footprint and so the number of initiatives there is very large. In Bosnia, where arguably there is more need, the engagement is considerably smaller and in Macedonia (FYROM) until recently it had been almost non-existent. This happens despite Macedonia has in fact produced a very significant number of foreign fighter that have gone to Syria and that half of the people from Kosovo who joined ISIS in Syria actually were radicalized by a guy who was based, by the way, in Skopje and they were from a number of small villages directly on the border with Macedonia. It is more difficult or it was more difficult to do this kind of work in Macedonia and Bosnia for sure, but that is where it is most needed: an international engagement should be driven by need, not by the ease of access.

Final point, and then I will end, there are of course a huge structural problems in the Western Balkans, which simply will not go away, and which have an impact on radicalisation and have no illusion about this. There is economic stagnation. There is a perception amongst young people that they have no prospective in their home countries. There is a perception that their country’s political systems are corrupt and dysfunctional, there is ethnic division in many countries and each one of the fault lines that I have just mentioned, each one of them are being exploited by violent extremists for the purpose of recruitment and radicalisation.

These are the structural conditions that make recruitment narratives resonate. They are not the sole cause but they are, if you want, the fertile ground on which extremist narratives flourish, sometimes quite literally. One of the first speaker mentioned that the influx of money from de Gulf, from Saudi Arabia, from Qatar in Kosovo and Bosnia has not been entirely positive, but, if you ask me, do you understand why? When a country that has not been able to generate economic growth, where opportunities are sparse, I find it understandable that they will not turn down what seems like free money coming into the country. So yes, we need to work on all the things that I have described, they will not necessarily solve the problem entirely, there are structural factors that are really very difficult, but is very important to start building consensus and to start building actions. Now is the time to do it seriously and rigorously. Thank you.



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WHICH ARE THE LINKS BETWEEN ORGANIZED CRIME AND TERRORISM IN THE AREA

Thank you for having me here, it's a pleasure to be in Rome and it's an honour to be invited here, thanks to Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo, thanks for the friendly introduction and the difficult question of the moderator.

I was quite happy with my first speaker who, with practitioner's approach, focussed on: what we have to do, where are the deficits, how we fill them, what are the policies that we have to introduce, where are the cooperation nexuses and where we have to intensify the synergies. You ask me about how we could strengthen weak states, challenged by organized crime and terrorism, without compromising the rule of law and I have small solutions.

Concerning terrorism the situation is very similar to the past and even today when we look at the Balkans, we talk about of jihad and thoughts go quickly back to more than 20 years ago. One of the most important foiled attempts dates back to 2007 and regards the Ramstein plot, set up by a group of persons that actually wanted to go and fight for Chechnya. Since they could not reach that country, they joined an Uzbek group, close to the networks of the Afghani and Pakistani region, but radicalised by Bosnian war veteran.

The Egyptian who radicalised them who was at a time in the Bosnia conflict, member of a mujaheddin group and at the time he was one of the starters of video footages; he was a camera operator for the jihad at the very early days when it was not so fashionable as it is nowadays. It was he who filmed a group playing football with the decapitated heads of their enemies. Then he came back to Germany, then he radicalized these people and other people as well. At the end he lived in Berlin and I think that approximately in 2013 he left to Syria and Iraq and became a high-ranking member of the IS (Islamic State).

It is a long way from the Bosnian war to IS but there is continuity and this man had a great influence: the Ramstein plot was foiled as well as other plans to attack with explosives an American air base, the airport in Frankfurt and other localities. A relevant trajectory in this subject.

The second case I think is relevant is the one about we news today i.e. the foiled attack in Pristina in Kosovo where seven people tried to attack an Israeli football team. They were radicalised in Albania, a country where we had a small research project to try to find out what is happening there, concerning jihad.

As you see, we had these different cases and there are quite interesting, because jihadi groups have the capacity of attacking in their home countries, in the Balkans, but there is also a trajectory to Europe. And then we have this very important ethnic Albanian jihadi foreign fighters group joining IS led Lavdrim Muhaxheri. It is very ironic, he was working for NATO before he became radicalised but I think this is not a crucial component in his biography, others I think are more important.

He was leading a brigade in SYRAQ of about 500 ethnical Albanian from the diaspora, coming from Kosovo, FYROM and Albania, and now there are news that he had left Iraq and Syria to join with 400 people towards Europe. Nowadays the last information is that he was killed by a drone strike in 2017 during the last summer.

In terrorism research we see that, once a language and a nationality is becoming dominant in a certain area where jihad is taking place, this makes it more attractive to people to join their kinsmen. When you have a battalion, with an Albanian leader who is making videos in Albanian language, then you will have people from the diaspora (Germany, Switzerland) and from whichever autochthonous location, showing more obedience to the leader.

So I think these are the three points. It's not only the weak states in the Balkans that are affected but I think the Balkans as a whole are a crucial point, like what the Americans regard Central America, it is our soft underbelly. From the Balkans the connections are fast in these affairs, they are very close to Italy or to Germany (our first radicals came from the war in Bosnia and in German hospitals the wounded mujaheddin were treated).

There is a broader question that started at a doctrinal level and ended as an empirical truth: once you have a war somewhere, you'll have spill over effects and the spill over effects consist into three components. Number one is geographic proximity: Turkey, of course, was immensely influenced by the war in Syria but the Balkans are not that far away from the Middle East. They are just on the other side the Mediterranean Sea.

The second point concerns existing terrorist groups, if you have terrorist groups in your country, the probability that you will have more terrorist groups in the jihad abroad is quite high, higher than if you have no group in your country. This is a given as well in the Balkans.

In Albania we found out that the presence was not really consisting in terrorist groups. Albania was used and is used as a safe haven. The Islamic foundations that under the umbrella of being legal entities were responsible for founding also terrorist groups. We had all of them there: we had Bin Laden's brother, the Al-

gerian jihad, the Egyptian jihad. All were merrily transferring money and setting up building, let us say creating radicalizing nexuses, it was fertile ground; it was not the funding of terrorism but it was a funding of radicalisation that showed its effect ten, fifteen, twenty years later.

Albania is the instance where we now can bridge to the rule of law aspect (the question of the moderator): when one looks into the history of Albania, this is a very interesting case. After the collapse of the totalitarian system Albania tried to transform itself and the European Union asked to fulfil certain rules and criteria, in order to become a member of Europe: one of these was freedom of religion.

Now the Albanian Hoxha regime had forbidden religion for decades, so it was forbidden to show a religious belief and to be religious. The problem was that, once the law changed, the authorities had no legal and policing infrastructure to cope with this new Takfiri groups. During and after the Bosnian war in certain Muslim major and smaller countries sprung out the idea that Muslims in the Balkans had to be helped. Therefore, there was an involvement of the Gulf countries first and nowadays much more of Turkey as well, with the consequence that different types of Islamism were imported that were very different from the Balkan Ottoman tradition.

In short the state was too weak to cope with these foundations before 9/11. After 9/11, I think the international community, the United States and other countries put under pressure Albania to cope with the problem and the country tried to throw them out. Most of them just changed names and but most of them are still the fertile ground of radicalisation and it still it was very interesting to see that the same regions where these foundations operations were also the same that showed the first jihadist recruitment waves in the same marginalised urban and rural regions that nowadays provide the new foreign fighters recruits for Syria and Iraq.

When it comes to how shall we cope with this challenges without neglecting the rule of law, I think it's not that difficult, I think may be similar to what Dr Neumann said before, there are paradigms to cope with what we already know in some countries. I think the external factor plays a role, it's not the autochthonous Muslim communities which always refer to the Ottoman Empire to the tolerant Islam that they had. It's something that is perceived as being coming from the outside. Therefore, I think strengthening the Muslim communities would help. In Germany nowadays we have Imams in universities, we educate Imams that are compatible to our state. We educate people who then educate other people. We try to help, to build up an Islam, a religion that is compatible and that fits much better to the needs and to the challenges that people have to face in the liberal democracy like in Germany. I also think this would be an interesting point because what the Muslim community, we did many interviews, says all these radicalization efforts take place outside of our umbrella organization, these are mosques that are not controlled because we don't want them because they are foreigners, they are different, they are Salafists usually. I think we need integrations systems there.

The second point would be, you talk about violent extremism, I think we should maybe go further because we have noticed that prevention of terrorism is one thing that we focus on violence we have to also look more backwards the radicalization we have to stop radicalization as well. We have to think about the bigger movement not about the violent people. Therefore, in the academic field this means that we have both this old terror crime nexus which combines terrorist groups, organized crime, illegal foundations and new the terrorist crime nexus that is named “petty crime” and I think we have to keep both in mind. Thank you very much.



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ILLICIT TRADE AS A COMMON SECURITY THREAT AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS, EUROPE AND NATO

First, I want to thank the NATO Defense College Foundation and, in particular, Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo, for the opportunity to contribute to this timely conference. If the Western Balkans is at a crossroad, this is also true of Europe. I will focus my remarks on an emerging area of systemic risk for Europe and NATO that the Siracusa International Institute believes urgently requires a more proactive and indeed assertive response, especially when it comes to engaging with the Western Balkans and South Eastern Europe more broadly. “Illicit trade” means different things in different contexts but the term is generally used to encompass a wide range of commodities that may be moved across borders in contravention of law. It is typified by billion-dollar industries involving a diverse and diversifying range of criminal and terrorist actors across the world. These industries include, for example, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, endangered wildlife, weapons, cultural artifacts, cigarettes, as well as the trafficking, smuggling and enslavement of people. What these activities have in common is that they are highly profitable, they entail a broad spectrum of serious criminality along supply chains and across borders, and organised crime and corruption are almost always present.

And the threat presented by illicit trade is quickly evolving as criminal groups respond to changes in structures that impact on risk/reward profile of certain illegal activities. For example, recent studies highlight that, while drug trafficking has traditionally been one of the most lucrative forms of illicit trade with a consequently longstanding position on the global policy agenda, counterfeiting is now regarded by criminals as less risky and more profitable.¹ In fact, it is estimated that organised crime in the European Union generates higher returns than all forms of narcotics put together.

¹ See generally, Europol and the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market, *2015 Situation Report on Counterfeiting in the European Union*.

These transnational illicit activities are inextricably tied to the global economy, thereby facilitating the easy transfer and laundering of criminal profits throughout the international monetary system. The overwhelming majority of illicit financial flows are neither detected nor seized by authorities.

This is deeply problematic because there are plenty of examples to show that criminal profits, in turn, fuel organised crime, terrorist groups, extremists and insurgency, and terrorist attacks in fragile and conflict-affected countries as well as in the developed world. Illicit trade also fuels local, transnational and regional conflicts that undermine development and contribute enormously to broader instability, systemic corruption and related security threats worldwide. Smuggling and violence often drive post-conflict economies. Particularly in these environments, criminal and other actors increasingly exercise, manipulate and subvert political power through illicit trade activities, which are a central factor undermining states' ability to build credible institutions, encourage economic growth, consolidate security gains and establish the conditions necessary for stability, peace and the rule of law. Right now, we are seeing this play out in the context of Libyan militia which now control the human smuggling trade, merely one component of much more complex illicit economies.²

The multidimensional security challenges of illicit trade are addressed in a highly fragmented way, with sectoral responses to drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling, the illicit trade of tobacco products and other excisable goods, as well as cultural property. This means that different teams, departments and institutions often have responsibility for different sectors of illicit trade.

On the one hand, a sectoral approach to illicit trade makes sense because of the specialised skills and techniques required to fight different forms of crime. On the other hand, there is growing awareness of the many interconnections, interdependencies and convergences between forms of illicit trade, in terms of perpetrators, modus operandi and trafficking routes. The myriad harms caused by illicit trade are compounded as a result of traffickers, facilitators and routes converging for diverse commodities.

Therefore, a sectoral approach to illicit trade cannot adequately take account of these linkages and increasing convergence between related forms of crime. It does not reflect the way that criminal groups operate in reality. But it is also problematic because a sectoral approach results in criminal justice 'silos' that restrict information-sharing, analysis, coordination and cooperation between relevant agencies at the national and international levels.

Without analysing all of these dimensions of the phenomena, correct analysis of the actors involved in the trade, the routes used and the profit is not possible. This directly bears on the effectiveness of our enforcement efforts. Because each

² See, e.g. recent analyses by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, <http://globalinitiative.net/tag/libya/>.

of these challenges is linked, a new and integrated response to illicit trade is both necessary and overdue.

In addition to a sectoral approach to certain illicit trade commodities, illicit trade is addressed indirectly through policies, action plans and legislation for combating organised crime and corruption. While organised crime and corruption are closely connected to illicit trade, these frameworks are insufficient to tackle the scale of the illicit trade problem. This is because, even though organised crime is a key mechanism for trafficking and smuggling activities, and corruption at borders, ports and consulates is their most significant facilitator, illicit trade represents something conceptually distinct: the market opportunity “on-the-ground” that, in turn, fuels organised crime, corruption, terrorism and conflict. And yet there is no common approach, integrated policy or strategy at the national, regional or international level to address these related risks and threats.

Engagement between the Western Balkans, the EU and NATO is at a crucial juncture. Most countries in South Eastern Europe that are not already EU members have expressed their intention to join the EU and NATO. Overall, prospective membership has been a force for good, spurring reforms and fostering regional peace and stability. Ensuring that EU integration is properly incentivised, as well as that all regional states have clear and realistic prospects of membership as soon as possible, are key challenges for Europe. The stakes for regional security and stability are high.

On this basis, the Institute believes that there are unrealised opportunities for collaboration between NATO, the EU and Western Balkans countries on developing a cross-sectoral policy response and strategies for combating illicit trade as a common security threat and strategic opportunity. Such a response would serve to address a missing link in the existing policy framework (i.e. by targeting the market opportunity that fuels organised crime and corruption) and bolster regional engagement on issues of mutual concern. In an effort to highlight these strategic and security issues as an urgent priority, the Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights in Italy is implementing a two-year research and capacity-building project in South Eastern Europe. The project aims to strengthen the criminal justice response to illicit trade in the region, including by strengthening further the capacity of national criminal justice institutions. The project will achieve this aim by assessing specific national needs in the fight against illicit trade for 12 countries, while also seeking to ensure a coordinated and harmonised regional approach that aligns with EU strategies and priorities for the region. The specific objectives of the project, which will be pursued from a criminal justice perspective, are to identify practical challenges and obstacles to combating illicit trade at the national and regional level, to develop innovative cross-sectoral recommendations to strengthen the criminal justice response to illicit trade and promote regional harmonisation and cooperation, and to strengthen further the capacity of criminal justice officers to combat illicit trade and related crimes. We believe that

this project is the start of a new and crucial conversation that we must be having together. It is but one example of the potential for enhancing collaboration and cooperation on issues of mutual concern and interest such as illicit trade. It seeks to contribute to putting illicit trade on the table as a common security threat and strategic opportunity for mobilisation and collaboration. Of course, these issues are not unique to the Western Balkans or to Europe. But for the EU, NATO and partners in the Western Balkans to seize the opportunity for global leadership and coordinated strategic action against illicit trade is in everyone's interests.

Session III

REGIONAL CO-OPERATION: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART



Traditional Balkan black coffee from fildzan (copper pots).





MARTINUSZ ZOLTAN

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A VIEW FROM BRUSSELS. A FORECAST ON PRACTICAL INTEGRATION

Thank you very much, before I share with you the view from the “Brussels bubble”, let me congratulate Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo for this fantastic conference that you put together with the cooperation of the NATO Defence College Foundation. This is truly remarkable. I will say just a few words about the state of play where we are, then perhaps a few words about regional cooperation then conclude with a perspective for the coming year which is going to be a fairly intensive year for the Western Balkans. In order to put regional cooperation in context, let me just say a few words on where we are. The EU approach to the Western Balkans is a mix of regional and individual elements. The strategy, as you know, is the EU perspective; it starts with the Thessaloniki 2004 commitment whereby the whole region was offered a European perspective.

Of course, the implementation of that perspective proceeds on an individual and bilateral basis and individual accession perspectives. We are currently negotiating with Montenegro and Serbia, actually two chapters are going to be opened for each country in December. Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia enjoy candidate status, just like Bosnia. We are in the middle of the questionnaire process with Bosnia and Herzegovina. With Kosovo the EU signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement which was a major step forward, and we do have a perspective for a further progress provided certain conditions are being met.

In this sense, there is clear progress. Therefore, I find it interesting that yesterday for most of the speakers the references were somewhat negative regarding the past few years. Everybody referred to (European Commission) President Juncker’s statement in 2014, when he said that enlargement was going to be on the back-burner during his presidency and during the tenure of this Commission. I would like to paint a slightly more positive picture because, obviously, we made progress not only at a technical level but also at the political one.

Let me recall that in March 2017 the European Council confirmed its com-

mitment to the enlargement perspective of the region as a whole. Then president Juncker announced the new strategy in his state of the European Union speech in September where he, the Commission, will present its annual report by April 2018 and there is an expectation that the Commission is going to make recommendations to carry on with the process of accession negotiations. An EU – Western Balkans Summit has been announced for the 17th of May 2018 in Sophia: a summit between the EU and the Western Balkans leaders, the first such summit since Thessaloniki 2003.

All of these steps provide a quite clear reflection about the European commitment to the Western Balkans. If you look at the actual situation on the ground, it is not necessarily always positive, particularly in terms of deliverables to the people in their daily life. One could say we made progress at the summit table but at the kitchen table we have few developments that are not yet fully satisfactory.

A number of problems remain:

- insufficient growth in the Western Balkans countries;
- a very high degree of youth unemployment;
- a degree of economic inactivity;
- difficulties of access to finance;
- lack of foreign investment and
- very low regional trade.

How we can overcome these problems? One of the approaches the EU is promoting and advocating consists in regional economic cooperation as a booster to the socio-economic situation in the Western Balkans. This is not without precedent, the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Southeast Europe 2020 strategy already focussed on jobs and prosperity.

The Stabilization Association Agreements (SAA) with the Western Balkans countries include a free trade element as well, but more was required. Therefore, the Berlin process was started in 2014 and there have been already some major deliverables in that process in terms of commitments. In 2015 in Vienna participants agreed on the connectivity agenda, in 2016 in Paris they agreed on the concept of a regional market for electricity and in 2017 the Western Balkans Transport Community Treaty was signed after nine years of negotiations. This was a major step forward. There is now a community between the Western Balkans and the European Union, which in turn is very much promoting the connectivity agenda, the integration of the Western Balkans with the EU Transport Market.

The underlying idea is to facilitate the flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour and it is not a coincidence that these ideas actually coincide with the Four Freedoms (now the four fundamental freedoms of the European Union, are: freedom of movement of goods, people, services and capital over borders). This is a market of 18 million people that could attract investment on a much higher scale and this could unleash the economic potential of the region.

There are few questions which need to be answered quickly. First of all, whether this process should be considered an alternative to EU integration. The very clear answer is no: this is not an alternative, it is in addition to or, actually, in preparation for the EU integration. It requires the very same institutional reforms, it requires fight against corruption, judicial reform, the improvement of the business environment and doing away with red tape. It requires the very same reforms in the regulatory framework that we talked about in the context of the preparation to EU membership, and this endeavour has the full support from the EU and the European Commission.

In conclusion, I would like to come back to the title of this conference; it says Western Balkan at the crossroads. I would say I slightly disagree with the title of the conference. "Crossroads" implies there is a choice to be made; I think the choice has been made already both by the Western Balkans and by the European Union.

The commitment is quite clear. We both have homework to do, for example in terms of public support, not only and not even primarily in the Western Balkans but within the European Union as well, however, the choice has been made. What I would like to underline as a closing thought is that enlargement is and will remain a performance-based enterprise. There is no strategic shortcut to EU membership. But I can guarantee that 2018 is going to be a great year for the Western Balkans. Thank you very much.



GORDANA DELIC

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ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TOWARDS EURO-ATLANTIC INSTITUTIONS

Thank you very much. I wish I could be as optimistic as you are. Although I perfectly and totally agree with you that the picture is not as negative as very often these painted from Western Balkans but I really would like to remind us of the fact that the Balkans have been a platform for a successful trans-Atlantic cooperation and I think that the involvement of the US is very important in the Balkans.

However over the past decade the United States have sought to decrease its involvement and commitments in the Balkans by passing this on to the EU. This appeared sensible given both its proximity and the greater leverage to encourage those political and economic reforms we have just heard about, but we need to remind ourselves also that the EU since 2008 has been rather distracted, by facing its own challenges that started with a financial crisis (highlighted but not caused by the Greek fiscal crisis), a migration emergency and finally Brexit.

Unfortunately all this has been topped by the spread of foreign negative and illiberal forces that are trying to influence and gain a foothold in the region. Thus the EU attitude towards enlargement was quite lukewarm. It is not insignificant to point out to what Mr Juncker told recently, although we have seen a different narrative in the past several months towards the region: this is a very positive development and I think that the region has regained a new boost through this new portrayal.

I think that the vacuum that has been created allowed these illiberal forces to gain a strong foothold in the region and I am talking here especially about Russia and Turkey that have increased their political influence and some Arab states that are able to spread the hard-line Islamist vision the Balkans. These external influences are playing a huge role in the Balkans and these external influences have formed what, in my view, is a dangerous mix with ethnic tensions, political polarization and the rise of illiberal and autocratic regimes in the region.

Western Balkans are an important part of the European peace project. We have

heard that yesterday as well, and, if we want the European peace project to be complete, we must remain engaged even if, as someone put it nicely, the Balkans are the soft underbelly of Europe. We have in the next 18 months contingency planning to do. In order to avoid not outright loss the region but to avoid the influence of these mentioned illiberal forces, we must accelerate the accession to EU and NATO membership. I would not insist though that this process should be much more political in the next 18 months than it so. I would argue instead that it has to be by far less technical and technocratic compared to the past and that we should need to develop a new set of tools and “carrots and sticks”, if you want.

The Western Balkan countries, and this is a really good development and has been clear even in the midst of this dangerous vacuum, have understood that regional cooperation in is in their very best interest for three reasons. The first one is the nexus between politics economics and security. Mr Zoltan spoke already about this, so the question is what should to the international community or trans-Atlantic community? I would say that they need to remain focussed on the same developments since 2000. From the first summit that took place in Zagreb (2000) and the following in Thessaloniki (2003) we discussed institution building, the separation of powers and the separation of public-private relations: this needs to be still the focus.

The second point is the EU Justice and Home Affairs dimension must concentrate on organized crime and corruption, cross-border cooperation by promoting economic and social cooperation (especially in the border regions and among youth) plus the involvement of the civil society, a must for social cooperation.

Youth focus must be in forefront and it should be the cross-cutting theme for everything. I am really pleased to have seen the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) that is a cross-regional, cross-sectoral effort, established by the countries with the seat of Tirana and a huge involvement of the civil society.

The third point revolves around private sector development by promoting FDI (Foreign Direct Investments), but avoiding those FDI of suspect origin we have seen lately. Important is the infrastructure development through initiatives in the sectors of transport, energy, environment and information society and the three last Western Balkans Summits have increasingly put these issues high on the agenda.

Then I would mention the unfinished business with political parties. We have trained political parties really well on how to win elections but we have never worked on the democratisation process of the political parties from within and this gets then translated on how they govern the countries, one of the reasons why we have autocratic regimes. As seen in other democracies, autocratic parties express autocratic tendencies once in power.

Another unfinished business is represented by specific situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and even perhaps FYROM; here diplomatic efforts are required

to mediate certain hotspots and then the energy dependency from Russia: this is one of the key things that needs to be tackled and especially in the following 18 months. I think we really need to work on diversifying the energy sources in the region. Moreover, we have to prevent foreign meddling into the electoral processes because we have seen that too often and especially engineered by Russia.

The Berlin process gave some palpable results both in infrastructure and strategies for the youth points. It is also initiated the Western Balkans Summits series in Vienna, Paris and Trieste; the next will be in London, although the UK is in Brexit transition.

In Trieste we focussed on connectivity, economic integration and people-to-people themes and these three will be very important in the following 18 months just as well. Let me just remind you that I think we are on schedule here and I am thinking that during following 9-18 months the timing and the sequence of what we do will be of absolutely critical importance. How, when and what is done, in order to allow for the Balkan countries to keep their integrity and not be subject to foreign influence at the level they are now or they could be, is going to play a crucial role in their drive to become part of the European Union family.

Since we recently had a seminar about the Western Balkans Summit in London and these issues came to the fore, I would anticipate that in London the cross-cutting themes will be youth, the digital dimension (like creating and building up a secure digital market) and a particular focus on security.

It is very important that the commitments made during the Berlin process and signed at these summits be implemented. One of them is for example RYCO. On their side the Western Balkans countries need to fulfil their promise and fill up the budget of those intergovernmental and intra-regional institutions that they have created with the help of the highly successful and well established Franco-German Youth Office.

All this is even more important because we have heard that again even regional borders are on the table again. The link between Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and a potential land swap, how they call it, is coming up again; this must be very carefully monitored by the international and trans-Atlantic community to avoid that they go in the wrong direction and I assure you that the aforementioned foreign influences are very interested that this goes awry.



HAAKON BLANKENBORG

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Norway, Oslo*

THE PATH TOWARDS REFORMS TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION. WHERE ARE WE?

Let me thank the NATO Defense College Foundation and the Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo in particular for having kept the Western Balkans on the agenda in a period where it nearly disappeared.

Now we are in a totally different situation over the last six months. The Western Balkans has elevated nearly to the top of the Agenda all over Europe, Russia included. This is a timely conference again and what has happened over the last six months? Mr. Zoltan mentioned a number of these events and I would mention one more and that was the speech by the German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel in Berlin at the Aspen conference where he talked about the need for a Berlin Process reloaded or called later the Berlin process plus. This is an indication that the integration and the cooperation of the Western Balkans into the wider European cooperation is something more than the reforms leading up to the membership in the European Union and now it is more about the interdependence between the Western Balkans and the rest of Europe.

It is in the interest both the countries in the region and the other countries in Europe. This perspective is even more complete when we are taking also into account the State of the Union speech by the EC President Junker and of course the conclusions of the Western Balkan Summit in Trieste. Now we have a new picture of the Western Balkans in Europe, compared to the one of six months ago.

In this issue where is the other player? The US, and I think I will leave to others to elaborate where the USA are heading but in the Western Balkans what I can observe it is a bigger US again. However, this is mainly a European affair and now with this clear focus on the interdependence between the Western Balkans and the rest of Europe, what will happen in the next phase? I think, we will see a deeper commitment from a number of countries in Europe on the Western Balkans: a political commitment, hopefully also a financial one. This bilateral approach has to be combined with the Berlin process where have additional instruments to what

the EU institutions can offer on the membership path. If this continues, I agree with what was said earlier, and I think I even would go a step further.

Year 2018 might become the year of the Western Balkans in Europe, but it very much depends on if we, my own country included and the other countries, remain committed and of course, if the countries in the region remain committed and do the really hard work with the reform programs.

Now, it should be said that the Western Balkans is a complicated affair, they sit on the crossroads, they have always been on the crossroads and we will maybe be there, but that is not the point. The point is that from time to time we have a different definition of what is the Western Balkans and different countries in Europe have a different definition of what the Western Balkans is, which countries are included and then some countries, when they join the European Union, are suddenly no more the Western Balkans and so on and so forth. I think what now it is much clearer that we are talking about the Western Balkans Six and if that is a region, it remains to be seen. I would even agree with what was said yesterday: we are often thinking more about in this part of Europe as something involving essentially regional contacts and cooperation.

On the other hand it's a very diverse mix of countries and what they have in common? The six countries of course have in common that they are not members of the European Union but all of them have the aspiration to become members. But some the countries are NATO members and it should be said that maybe one of the main events of the 2017 was Montenegro's accession to NATO but it makes the so called region more complex: some NATO, some non-NATO, all of them non-EU. One of the common challenges is that they are struggling to catch up with their EU neighbours. Now to close a gap that is economically wider and wider is not easy, but they need to and this is a strong common interest.

Is there an interest for the rest of Europe and why? Why is there an interdependence? Yes, the rest of Europe should be interested in a closer integration of these countries. History shows it exists an interdependence, as well as the most recent events. The migration crisis demonstrated that this is not a far-away region of Europe, it is in the middle: you have seen people entering the Western Balkans from the Schengen EU and with the ambition to enter another Schengen country. Yes these are the Western Balkans.

Some have said that the Western Balkans Six are what the European Union will make of them. A wishful thinking? I think indeed that now the European Union and the other countries in Europe have that kind of defining power on the things to happen. Some of the initiatives that has come about lately have the potential of being game changer and I would mention in particular, together with some other speakers, the Regional Economic Area. That could be the beginning of something completely new because it entails a lot of other reforms, it contains a lot of the other programmes. Therefore, the Regional Economic Area could make this part of Europe a more integrated region before the accession.

Now, this Commission proposal has been met by some valid objections from people of the region as Mr. Zoltan mentioned. A first objection is that it will replace the EU and a second is that it will be dominated by the biggest country in the region, e.g. Serbia. On the other hand as Mr. Zoltan said, what is the alternative? If one does not manage to implement the reforms required by EU, one does not become a member and maybe this is the instrument to prepare for the EU membership by an internal market more or less in the region.

The second objection, concerning the domination by the biggest economy, takes into account that the biggest economy will always benefit, but ignores the fact that the weakest economies are those most dependent on international regulations and laws because the biggest one will always win, if the regulations would not level the playing field.

The REA is the flagship, the symbol of something new in the making and if we have these various initiatives, bilateral initiatives within the Berlin process plus and the reinforced integration process in the European Union, then yes, we will see the 2018 as probably the year of the Western Balkans.

Let me add at the end that there are some other aspects as well. The security part and the defence part of this integration. The NATO has one instrument in particular that is normally considered to be the guarantor of security and stability in the region. The KFOR is already there and the KFOR should be the link between NATO and the countries in the region because it is respected and accepted by all; this is the key instrument for stability and security. Take it from there and develop the cooperation with the various countries in this diverse region into a deeper partnership with NATO, whether the countries have the aspiration to become members or not. Certainly, the KFOR is a key link.

Let me close with technical some details. As I mentioned before, since there is an interdependence between the EU and the Balkans Six, some details have to be considered by the partner countries. When the various countries are now developing their technology platforms, it is extremely important that, when they are carrying out this procurement, the interoperability with the rest of Europe is kept as important requirement, i.e. the system purchased should be able to communicate with those accepted by the rest of Europe. If this rule is respected then we will have a complete Europe, communicating freely and securely on the most sensitive issues: from migration to security to defence. So please observe also the technical part of the procurement processes. Thank you very much.



MICHEL SOULA

Head of the Operations Section in the Operations Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE AND ITS ROLE IN THE REGION

Thank you very much chair. In the first of all let me thank the Foundation for inviting me, I'm very pleased to be here and especially with Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo a long-time friend, who put this conference together. I'm also very pleased to be here in Italy because Italy is a great contributor to NATO operations and in particular to KFOR, having provided for many years now commanders to the force. We have now General Cuoci that just took office a few months ago. It's all the more important to have this discussion in Italy today.

I agree with Mr. Zoltan on the progress achieved in the region, for me also, if we see the famous glass, I think it is more half-full than half-empty, yes there is a tendency in the Western Balkans always to complain and to dramatise but indeed in the end the region is much better today than 20 years ago. Everybody agrees with me on that. It does not mean we should not continue to look forward to progress, but it means also we have to accept our achievements because otherwise we are always self-whipping ourselves and this is not productive.

One of the reasons to be positive of that is that over the past years we had free and fair elections in the region. This is not the case everywhere in the world and what I see, because I travel to the region very often, more and more the concerns of the region are the concerns of our countries. I would mention among them terrorism or corruption. To add on the theme, I was for instance at a conference we organized in Kosovo a few weeks ago and there you had a lady standing and complaining about gender diversity in Kosovo and that is also a common problem we are tackling in NATO these days, but on the other hand indeed in Kosovo there was the first female president namely President Jahjaga. This means the concern of these countries are our concerns, this means normalisation and I think it is a very positive step.

Nevertheless of course we have a problem today. Why? Because the Western Balkans, and this was said by the previous speakers also, is not the top priority of the world agenda and clearly there are other and bigger priorities. It is not for me to say what is the key one among priorities but it is clear that the Western

Balkans compared with the 90's is not anymore on the top line and that is a bit of a problem, because it begs the question: why it is so important? This conference has been organized to answer this question: that we keep the focus on the Western Balkans. For me and other practitioners the Balkans are objectively very important, although it has not top priority for the mainstream international community. It is a region that has a strategic interest for all of us and about which we have to be extremely careful to make sure it goes in the right direction, so that all our efforts are rewarded.

Indeed NATO is committed to regional stability in the Western Balkans, it is a long effort, for we have been there for 20 years now, even more than 20 years if we consider that we started in 1995 in Bosnia and then we moved on to Kosovo. We had this operation also in Macedonia, so we have done a lot for this region. I think it would be a pity to see all this investment wasted because of a bad management or a lack interest; that is why we have to continue to work with the Western Balkans.

But of course it is a two-way street: it is not only the Western Balkans that have to open their arms to receive our presence, it is also for them to do their homework. Sometimes this is not a very nice message for them to hear, but for me I think we have to work with them like responsible people; if they want assistance they can get it, but they have also to do their bit and that is the way we can grow together and we benefit from the process from both sides.

NATO's role in the Western Balkans: first of all (it was mentioned also by the previous speakers), we have some countries in the region that are already NATO members, the latest example is Montenegro. I think that more than the accession of Montenegro itself, it was very important the signal it sent (that was said yesterday in the conference), the signal of the door remaining open

It is of paramount importance because I do not know when will be the next accession to NATO in the future, given the current budgetary constraints. If NATO's door is open this means a lot for other countries – I think about Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM because all of them have an Individual Partnership Cooperation Program with a perspective to become a NATO member one day.

Yesterday again it was raised that Bosnia had this problem you know (immovable defence properties registration, the so called Tallin condition) and for FYROM you have the problem of the name in addition to all the reforms that were mentioned by many speakers that have to be carried forward.

Yesterday, and on this I want to make a special point, many speakers said yes, there are problems but the membership of Bosnia or FYROM may help in solving those problems. Yes maybe it may and I take the point, but I tell you that is not the actual temperature in NATO. In NATO you know the consensus is intransigence. The Tallin conditions have to be respected for Bosnia for sure and the name has to be solved for FYROM. It is true that maybe there would be some benefit in membership but that is far away from the present consensus – you know the beauty of NATO is consensus, maybe sometimes the ugliness but that is the way we work.

In those three countries Serbia, Bosnia and FYROM we have liaison offices, military liaison offices and on this we help them with the implementation of reforms necessary to the NATO path. This is a good work because they are small offices and very modest ones, but it is a good cooperation I think it is valued by all these countries and in my view it's also very important to keep this NATO footprint because is symbolic and, although it is not a huge presence, it gives a guarantee of stability and of NATO's interest in the area.

Of course I will dwell a bit more on Kosovo and I'm very happy that the previous predecessor has talked about the role of KFOR, because in the end you know KFOR today is the biggest NATO operation, as strange as it may look. We still have more or less 4.000 troops deployed and this is of course a warrant of stability in the middle of the Western Balkans.

It is clear that the situation in Kosovo in these days is stable, we call it stable but fragile in our assessments but in the end it is stable: as you know, we have not seen major disruption in the past month. This means it is normalised, but KFOR's presence is very important and it is the first pillar of NATO's presence.

KFOR these days represents a strong commitment by the organization because, if you remember, three-four years ago there was a big tendency from NATO nations to withdraw. You had big countries like UK and France that withdrew their presence from Kosovo. This trend has been reversed now and in the past two years we see a commitment to the Western Balkans through KFOR due to all the things that were discussed in this conference, among which the signs of possible instability.

This is a good sign and it's a strong commitment. Beyond providing stability to the country and the wider region, we do also capacity building, it is the future and the ticket for the country autonomous security providers. This is done through the NALT (NATO Advisory and Liaison Team) that supports the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in different domains in order to achieve a more and more professional force. I would like also to mention the fact that the Kosovo Police (KP) these days deals with normal police tasks without KFOR's support; it shows a remarkable progress for Kosovo in providing for a safe and secure environment for its residents. This capacity building effort represents the second pillar of NATO's action.

The third pillar is even more important because we have to think to the important NATO and EU relationship in this context.

You have Serbia that got accession negotiations in the European Union and you have Kosovo getting the Stabilization and Association Agreement. In NATO you have Serbia (I said it before) that participates to an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) but then Kosovo has nothing. Unfortunately we have still the situation where we have the four non-recognisers of Kosovo and this poses a problem because NATO as such cannot recognize Kosovo and for the organisation this is still a UN Protectorate under the UN Security Council Resolution 1244. It may look weird but it is a fact and NATO Secretary General has to stick to this given and it is a big limitation.

This means we cannot talk about Kosovo's Partnership for Peace and we had to find out a solution. The solution devised through a decision at the Warsaw Summit was to have a special relationship between NATO and Kosovo (which required another wording because the word partnership is a taboo). Now at the Warsaw Summit we did not succeed, we succeeded only by the end of last year (December 2016) and now we have that is called enhanced interaction due to our negotiations. Language subtleties count and it is clear that enhance interaction is a way to partnership. In my view it is a balance between Serbia and Kosovo and between NATO and EU in terms of reciprocal importance and weight.

In this enhanced interaction we have two different important things: the first one is the dialogue, that means that now in NATO we have twice more councils in "KFOR format" which is a political dialogue with and on Kosovo. We have also had just on the 27th October 2017 a North Atlantic Council visit to Kosovo that was the first one in four years, so this represents more engagement.

In addition to this we have also pragmatic cooperation. I mentioned this before, during this conference. We organized a few weeks ago in Pristina a conference with countries of the region, whose theme (no coincidence) was regional interaction exactly what we are discussing in this panel. I think this is very important because we have to show Kosovo as a projector of stability and not just as a consumer of stability and this is worthwhile for all the countries in the region. Indeed I think that the Western Balkans region as a whole has to be perceived in the future as a security provider and not any longer as a consumer of security.

This of course requires a few things: first of all it requires a joint concerted action by the international community because NATO is mostly a military organization although it can have a political say if it is militarily efficient, but of course the European Union, the UN have other tools at disposal and all these organizations, including the OSCE and EU, have to work together within their own field of competence because only synergies will produce success.

On the other hand countries in the region and the region itself have to gain maturity and continue to gain maturity and work together for this is a two-way street. For them it is not just being recipients, but to become providers; this will be difficult, it will be a long road but I am absolutely sure that together we can succeed and we will succeed.

I want to thank again Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo and Italy for organising this conference because the topic is very important. There is clearly a general disinterest on the Western Balkans due to other topics of major importance in the international sphere, but it is evident that if the region does not take responsibility to be on the forefront of change, then we may risk of forgetting the Western Balkans and then to run into a disaster in the future. Thank you very much.

Session

CONCLUDING REMARKS



The Vavedenie Bogorodichno (Virgin Mary) church in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.





BENEDETTO DELLA VEDOVA
*Under-Secretary of State, Ministry
of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Rome*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Distinguished speakers, honourable guests, I thank the NATO Defense College Foundation and Ambassador Minuto Rizzo for the kind invitation to offer a few concluding remarks. The relationship between Western Balkans and NATO has changed in the last two decades. We have a moral obligation and a historical duty not to forget the tragic events that have shaken and marked the region in the Nineties. But it is now time to look to the future.

The re-shaping of NATO as a pro-active peacemaker and peacekeeper, that was launched here in Rome in November 1991 has characterized the Alliance's engagement in the region. At the same time, the Western Balkans' approach towards the Alliance has been transformed as well. This mutual process of change is still ongoing and has already borne fruit. Montenegro joined NATO in June; Albania is a Member State since 2009. Great expectations are coming from FYROM, which has resumed confidence-building measures with Greece after years of stalemate, creating a new positive momentum on the name dispute.

Bosnia Herzegovina also aspires to join NATO and is working to satisfy the conditions. Kosovo too aims at being admitted to NATO in the future, and in Kosovo still operates as overall security third responder the KFOR mission. Last but not least, Serbia has been strengthening its cooperation with NATO despite its neutrality status, as witnessed by the recent visit of President Vucic to NATO. This mutual engagement clearly shows that NATO, as a system of shared values and common principles, is a key tool to promote peace, stability and security beyond formal memberships. Not only NATO and the Western Balkans have evolved.

Times have changed as well. Home-grown terrorism, foreign fighters, religious radicalism, migrations, criminal networks put strains on the Western Balkans, Europe and the world. In tackling these new threats, Western Balkans are and must be part of the solution. Countries in the region have made impressive progress. Some of them are already NATO allies or security providers within NATO operations.

But, as a result of the complexity of the region, its stability should not be taken for granted. Western Balkans are still at the intersection of traditional and unconventional challenges, which could benefit from instability, lack of prosperity, institutional uncertainty. The EU and NATO should continue to keep the Balkans high on the agenda, to pursue political dialogue and practical cooperation, and to ensure a political perspective of Euro-Atlantic integration to the interested countries of the region.

Focusing on NATO, the momentum is positive. Under Italian leadership, the Alliance has started a strategic transition, adapting to an evolving security framework that includes terrorism and hybrid threats. Deterrence and defence and projecting stability, are two mutually reinforcing sides of the same coin. Strengthening the resilience of NATO Partners in the Mediterranean and the Balkans is crucial to fortify NATO's posture to face the new unconventional challenges.

As part of this process, Allies consider raising NATO's profile to counter terrorism, also in the Balkans. Against this background, KFOR remains, in our view, an essential tool to strengthen the security environment in Kosovo and in the whole region, also in the fight against terrorism, including monitoring foreign fighters, within its mandate. We shall continue to support KFOR's pro-active role and its security approach. The position of KFOR Commander once again given to our country was a welcome acknowledgement of our engagement. Despite being distinct, European and Euro-Atlantic integration paths remain parallel and strictly interlinked.

In this process, Italy remains at the forefront in promoting the gradual accession to EU and NATO of the Western Balkans, in order to foster social and economic progress, to strengthen regional stability and to encourage good neighbourly relations. This was our core message at the Western Balkans Summit in Trieste last July 12th 2017, reaffirming our commitment to the region and endorsing its efforts towards European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. In Trieste we refocused the attention on the region and since then we have seen renewed engagement by the EU institutions.

The EU Commission's "Strategy for the successful accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union" was published in September 2017, with a perspective of accession to the EU by 2025. The upcoming Bulgarian Presidency of the EU put the Western Balkans' integration at the core of its agenda. I strongly hope that the Western Balkan countries will take advantage of this momentum and continue undertaking the necessary reforms to go on along their integration path. At the same time, we should not underestimate external influences which may be interested in destabilising the region. Regional integration represents a key tool to promote economic development while enhancing reconciliation and integration.

In this regard, the European Union itself is a story of success. Nationalists and advocates of unfettered national sovereignty in some EU member states, who dis-

regard the results of an unparalleled period of more than 70 years of peace, should take a closer look at the Balkans' past. Bold economic and administrative reforms, measures to enhance the rule of law, regional cooperation and good neighbours' relations is what we look forward to in the region after a horrific past.

The remarkable achievements of the Trieste Summit, such as the creation of a Regional Economic Area and the signing of the Community Transport Treaty within the Western Balkans, are useful in this respect. Interconnectivity brings development and development brings peace. Actually, every instrument that may help in this direction is welcome.

One of the priorities of the Italian Presidency of the Berlin Process, for instance, has been to foster regional cooperation and deepen the economic and social ties in the area. The Berlin Process is just one of several tools of regional integration that Italy supports and contributes to, such as the Central European Initiative or the European Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Finally, Italy is committed to bringing NATO-EU cooperation to a new level, not only as partners, but as complementary organizations. It is time to be ambitious, especially now as the EU is creating, through PESCO, the conditions to become itself a security provider. Especially in a region as the Western Balkans, the EU and NATO are bound to think and plan strategically together.

So yes, the Western Balkans are at a crossroads: they have already made it clear that they want to join the European and Euro-Atlantic family, but it is time to give this perspective a fresh boost. It is not about "choosing sides", but about which legacy we all want to leave to the next generations: whether we want to live in the past or in the future, whether we want to complain or to create. We all have to seize this unique opportunity to build together a secure, strong and prosperous European and Euro-Atlantic region. Thank you all for the kind attention.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

WELCOME REMARKS

Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo

President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

A strong focus on strategic outlook in complex issues. High level contacts and negotiations. Special attention on countries of strategic relevance i.e. the Gulf region. Frequent public diplomacy activities to discuss policies and open issues. He held the position of Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, between 2001 and 2007. His mandate was mostly carried out in the strategic- political-industrial area, in relations with sensitive countries such as those in the Gulf and the Southern Mediterranean. He is the author of the books: “The road to Kabul”, (Il Mulino-Arel, 2009) and “A political journey without maps, diversity and future in the Greater Middle East” (Rubbettino, 2013); “NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership” (New Academia Publishing, 2018).

Chris Whitecross

Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome

Lieutenant General Chris Whitecross enrolled in the Canadian Forces in 1982. Successive postings have taken her from Germany to almost every province in Canada, notably at the Canadian Air Division. Lieutenant General Whitecross has also performed for the Force Engineers at United Nations Protection Force (former Yugoslavia). In February of 2015 she was appointed Commander of the Canadian Forces Strategic Response Team on Sexual Misconduct. In June 2015, Lieutenant General Chris Whitecross was appointed Commander, Military Personnel Command.

Hon. Paolo Alli

President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Brussels

He has been a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies for the New Centre Right Party (NCD) since March 2013. He serves on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the European Union Policies Committee and the Joint Committee on the Implementation of Fiscal Federalism. Mr Alli joined the NATO Parliamentary Assembly immediately following his election to the Italian parliament in 2013. He is Deputy-Chair of the Italian Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Within the Assembly, Mr Alli is a member of both the Political Committee (PC) and the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM), and has served as Rapporteur of the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships and Vice-Chairman of the GSM. He was elected President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at the Assembly's Annual Session in Istanbul in November 2016.

Alessandro Politi

Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

Alessandro Politi is the director of the NATO Defense College Foundation, the only NATO-affiliated NGO think tank. A political and strategic analyst with 30 years of experience, he was political advisor of two KFOR Commanders. He was senior researcher for the Italian MoD (CeMiSS-Centre for Military and Strategic Studies) responsible for the strategic monitoring of Latin America. He also created and has led the Global Outlook project within CeMiSS, published in Italian and English (third edition, 2015). He has contributed to the Italian Defence White. He has directed the CEMRES research on CBMs in the framework of the 5+5 Defence Initiative, presenting the conclusions to the Ministers in Granada. He teaches geopolitics and intelligence at the SIOI. He teaches conflict management, crisis, peace-making and analysis at different governmental centres. He has been acting director of the School of Intelligence Analysis at a private establishment in Rome. He has been advisor in Italy and abroad to four Defence ministers (among which the actual President of the Italian Republic, Hon. Mattarella), one National Armaments Director, one Intelligence Co-ordinator, one Chairman of the Oversight Intelligence Committee, one Head of the Italian delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (actually EU HR, on. Federica Mogherini). Born in Germany, lives in Rome. He has published as author or co-author 25 books on strategic and security matters. His most recent publications will be on the Belt and Road Initiative.

SESSION I

Dimitrij Rupel

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ljubljana

Founder of the Slovenian Democratic Party, Dimitrij Rupel joined the govern-

ment and became first Slovenian Foreign Minister (1990-1993). Then, he served as Mayor of Ljubljana and Ambassador to Washington. He was reappointed Foreign Minister from 2000 till 2008, and was responsible for Slovenian memberships in EU and NATO. In 2005, he was Chairman in office of the OSCE. In 2008 he was in charge of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of the EU. Minister Rupel has published several literary and academic books – on literature, politics and foreign relations. He teaches at the European Faculty of Law (Ljubljana, Nova Gorica) and the Faculty of State and European Studies (Kranj).

Miro Kováč

Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia

He is a Croatian historian, diplomat and politician who served as the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs in the Cabinet of Tihomir Orešković from the 22nd of January 2016 until the 19th of October 2016. In 1995, Mr Kovac became employed in Office of the President of Croatia in the Department of Information in which he worked until 1999 when he was transferred to the position of the assistant advisor for Euro-Atlantic integration. He started his diplomatic career in 2001 as the Counsellor at the Croatian Embassy in Brussels. In 2003, Kovac became Minister Counsellor at the Croatian Embassy in Paris. When Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) came to power after 2003 elections, Kovac was named Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and in 2005 Head of Diplomatic Protocol of the Ministry. In 2006 Kovac was appointed to the position of ambassador. From 2008 until 2013 he served as Croatian Ambassador to Germany.

Ivan Vejvoda

Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna

Before joining the IWM as a Permanent Fellow in 2017, Ivan Vejvoda was Senior Vice President for Programs at the German Marshall Fund (GMF) of the United States. From 2003 until 2010, he served as Executive Director of GMF's Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project dedicated to strengthening democratic institutions in South-Eastern Europe. Vejvoda came to GMF in 2003 after distinguished service in the Serbian government as a senior advisor on foreign policy and European integration to Prime Ministers Zoran Djindjic and Zoran Živkovic. Prior to that, he served as Executive Director of the Belgrade-based Fund for an Open Society from 1998 to 2002. During the mid-1990s, Vejvoda held various academic posts in the United States and the U.K., including at Smith College in Massachusetts and Macalester College in Minnesota, and the University of Sussex in England.

Lyubomir Kyuchukov

Director, Economics and International Relations Institute, Sofia

Lyubomir Kyuchukov is a career diplomat and politician. He served as Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, member of the Council on European

and Euro-Atlantic Integration to the President of Bulgaria, Member of the National Security Council, Ambassador to the United Kingdom. Currently Mr. Kyuchukov is Director of the Economics and International Relations Institute (EIRI) and member of the Board of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Society.

Jelena Milic

Director, Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Belgrade

Jelena Milic is among the most influential political analysts in Serbia and in the region of the Western Balkans. She worked as a political analyst and researcher for the International Crisis Group and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. Member of the Forum for International Relations, a think tank set up by the European Movement in Serbia, she maintains, as well, an op-ed column in a leading Serbian daily newspaper, and a blog on one of the most frequently visited online portal in Serbia. Her areas of expertise are: Serbian security sector reform; Serbia – EU and Serbia – NATO relations; Russian influence in the Western Balkans; Kosovo; links between non-violent regime changes, transitional justice and security sector reforms.

SESSION II

Giovanni Russo

Deputy Prosecutor, National Anti-Mafia Directorate, Rome

From 1994 to 2002 he was a member of the District Antimafia Directorate at Prosecutor's Office of Naples. Since September 2002 he has been a consultant to the Investigative Parliamentary Commission on Mafia and other Organized Crime. Mr Russo also took office as Deputy Prosecutor of the National Antimafia Directorate, in 2016 he was promoted to Assistant Prosecutor. He is appointed for the processing of business relating to the Technology and Safety Resources Service; delegated to the exercise of the coordination functions with regard to the subjects "Information Technology", "Telecommunications", "Experts list", "Security" as well as "Collection and flows' analysis" and designated Magistrate in charge of the Service for Technological Resources and Security.

Peter Neumann

Director, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College, London

Peter Neumann is Professor of Security Studies at the Department of War Studies at the King's College of London and has directed the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. He currently serves as the OSCE Chairman's Special Representative on Countering Violent Radicalisation. He taught courses on terrorism, counterterrorism, intelligence, radicalization and counter-radicalization at King's College of London and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington.

Matenia Sirseloudi

Researcher, Institute for Police and Security Research, University of Bremen, Bremen

Matenia Sirseloudi works as sociologist at the Institute for Police and Security Research (IPoS) at the University of Applied Sciences and Public Administration in Bremen. She conducts researches on political violence, early detection and prevention, terrorism, radicalization, jihadism and Islamism. Ms Sirseloudi led research projects on “Radicalization as a Spill Over Effect of Armed Conflicts” and “Dyadic Mobilization and Enemy Constructions between radical movements”. She is member of the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (EENeT) and of the Advisory group of the European Counterterrorism Centre (ECTC) with publications in Defense & Security Analysis and Terrorism and Political Violence.

Tobias Freeman

Senior Legal Officer, Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Siracusa

Tobias Freeman is an Australian lawyer, international investigator and consultant with professional experience in human rights and international criminal justice, planning and conducting complex, large-scale investigations into the commission of international crimes as well as violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Prior to joining the Siracusa Institute as international research fellow and legal officer, he co-founded the International Crimes Evidence Project (ICEP), a ground-breaking initiative established in 2012 with leading global experts in the investigation and prosecution of atrocity crimes. He was admitted to the Supreme Court of New South Wales, Australia. He is also an alumnus of the University of Sydney Law School, the Siracusa Institute, and the Institute for International Criminal Investigations in The Hague.

SESSION III

Richard D. Hooker, Jr.

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for NATO and Europe, National Security Council, Washington D.C.

He previously worked as National Defense University Director for Research and Strategic Support and Director, Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) in September 2013. As a member of the Senior Executive Service, he served as Deputy Commandant and Dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome from September 2010 to August 2013. He holds The Theodore Roosevelt Chair in National Security Affairs at NDU and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the International Institute of Strategic Studies, and the Foreign Policy Research Institute. A former White House Fellow, Dr Hooker previously taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point and held the Chief of Staff of the

Army Chair at the National War College in Washington, D.C. He also served with the Office of National Service, The White House under President George H.W. Bush, with the Arms Control and Defense Directorate, National Security Council during the Clinton Administration, and with the NSC Office for Iraq and Afghanistan in the administration of George W. Bush.

Martinusz Zoltan

Director, Enlargement, Security, Foreign Affairs Council Support, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Brussels

Before joining the Council of the European Union, Ambassador Zoltan worked for the Hungarian Ministry of Defence first as Attaché to Permanent Mission of Hungary, then as Head of NATO Department and Head of Defence Policy Department. From 2002 to 2005 he took office as Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister. Also Deputy State Secretary for Multilateral Affairs for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Hungary in the North Atlantic Council. Mr Zoltan was therefore member of the Hungarian Atlantic Council, the Hungarian Foreign Affairs Association, the International Institute of Strategic Studies and the Academic Advisory Board of the NATO Defense College (2001-2004).

Gordana Delic

Director, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Belgrade

She is the Director of the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall fund of the United States. Ms Delic has the knowledge of both non-governmental and governmental sectors in the Balkans as well as the knowledge of international donor strategies, programs, procedures and operations in the central, eastern, and southern Europe regions. Prior to her employment at the Balkan Trust for Democracy, Delic worked at Freedom House Serbia. Her international experience includes six years of work on different democracy development programs in Slovakia.

Haakon Blankenborg

Director of Western Balkans /South East Europe Section, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Oslo.

Mr Blankenborg has been director of Western Balkans Section/Section for Southeast Europe in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2011. From 2010 to 2011, he was the senior adviser for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, he served as a member of the Norwegian parliament from 1981 to 2005, and chaired the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs from 1993 to 2000. In 2005, Blankenborg left the Parliament to become Norwegian ambassador to Serbia (and Montenegro). He holds degrees in history and political science from the University of Oslo.

Michel Soula

Head of the Operations Section in the Operations Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

Michel Soula deals with NATO's current Operations at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, namely maritime operations and Kosovo. He also dealt with NATO's operation in Libya. Beforehand, he held the position of Deputy Director in the Private Office of the NATO Secretary General, working with Javier Solana and Lord Robertson. A French civil servant, Michel Soula was seconded to the French Foreign Service where he held various positions, in particular on chemical and biological warfare.

CONCLUDING REMARKS**Benedetto Della Vedova**

Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy

Member of the European Parliament from 1999 to 2004 and of the Chamber of Deputies until 2013. From 2014 Mr Della Vedova has been appointed as Under-Secretary at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During his career he worked also as researcher for the Centre for Research and Environmental Economics and Policy (IEFE) and as Assistant Professor at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Milan). From July 2005 to May 2006 he was appointed Councillor of CNEL (National Council for Economics and Labour).



NATO Foundation
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UNITED STATES EMBASSY
TO ITALY

THE WESTERN BALKANS AT A CROSSROADS

CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY

the NATO Defense College Foundation

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ROME, 6TH – 7TH DECEMBER 2017

Venue: Centro Congressi Roma Eventi – Piazza di Spagna, Via Alibert, 5/a, Rome

THURSDAY, 6TH DECEMBER 2017

- 14,00-15,00 Arrival of participants – Registration
15,00 **Welcome remarks**
- Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
 - Chris Whitecross, Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome
- Initial remarks**
- Paolo Alli, President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Brussels

Session I

MOVING FORWARD: GOOD REASONS FOR GOOD REFORMS

Since 1991, year of the Yugoslav dissolution, gaps between the Western Balkans and the European institutions have been covered, however much still needs to be done. The Balkans are at the crossroads of history. They should move towards a future of social integration, economic development and political stability and the rule of law.

- 15,30 -17,00 Chair: Dimitrij Rupel, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, Ljubljana
- Miro Kovač, Chairman, Foreign Affairs Committee, Zagreb
 - Ivan Vejvoda, Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna
 - Lyubomir Kyuchukov, Director, Economics and International Relations Institute, Sofia
 - Jelena Milic, Director, Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Belgrade

Q&A

Session II

OLD AND NEW ROADBLOCKS: HOW TO REMOVE THEM?

The Balkan region is known for producing more history than it can digest. In addition to the heritage of fragmentation and hardship, new challenges are emerging, such as criminal networks, small arms proliferation, illegal trafficking and terrorist groups. These challenges are often of a more political nature, including external actors trying to take advantage of the situation to enlarge their sphere of influence.

17,30-19,00 Chair: Giovanni Russo, Deputy Prosecutor, National Anti-Mafia Directorate, Rome

- Peter Neumann, Director, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College, London
- Matenia Sirseloudi, Researcher, Institute for Police and Security Research, University of Bremen, Bremen
- Tobias Freeman, Project Manager, Strengthening the Fight against Illicit Trade in South Eastern Europe, International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights, Siracusa

Q&A

Session III

REGIONAL CO-OPERATION: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

The key priority for the Western Balkans's path towards the Euro-Atlantic integration is to move from post-war societies to a true regional co-operation. This means building new infrastructures, passing economic reforms and fostering a renewed dialogue on security among the countries in the region. Nowadays, it is important to avoid nationalistic and protectionist backlash. In this context, the European Union and NATO must be actors able to foster a genuine conversation among the stakeholders of the area.

10,00-11,30 Chair: Richard Hooker, Senior Director for NATO/Europe, Russia and Europe Directorate at the National Security Council, Washington D. C.

- Martinusz Zoltan, Director, Enlargement, Security, Foreign Affairs Council Support, General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Brussels
- Gordana Delic, Director, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Belgrade
- Haakon Blankenborg, Director Of Western Balkans Section/Section for South East Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Oslo
- Michel Soula, Head of the Operations Section in the Operations Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

Q&A

12,00-12,15 **Concluding Remarks**

- Benedetto Della Vedova, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Rome



Friendship between two people who wears traditional costumes Romanian specific area Banat, Romania.



The Western Balkans at a crossroads: is still possible to move from the turbulences that have undermined the region in the Nineties towards a future of social integration, economic development, political stability and the rule of law? A positive answer could be found in the process of Euro-Atlantic integration. The Western Balkans are the beating heart of Europe, they are surrounded by EU and NATO members states and it is logical to think about them as part of us. We have the moral obligation to pursue political dialogue and practical co-operation as well as to improve connectivity through and within those countries. It is now time to keep this region on the top of the political agendas. It is time to make a choice moving beyond crossroads considering also the new challenges that are emerging from the instability and institutional uncertainty, such as criminal networks, small arms proliferation, illegal trafficking and terrorist groups. As Jean-Claude Juncker stated: "Accession is not a dream but a reality, a reality that is going to come", and in this context, the European Union and NATO must play a key role as vectors able to foster a genuine conversation among the region.

More than twenty years after the end of the wars of Yugoslavia's dissolution, the easy-to-obtain part of the integration process between the Western Balkans and the Euro-Atlantic institutions has been reached, however today we are at a crucible.

The prospect of EU/NATO integration remains the main vehicle towards achieving sustainable regional stability and development. Constant commitment and periodical encouraging signals and incentives are the key elements to support the Western Balkans towards peace, stability and socio-economic progress. According to this context, the conference is structured in three panels.

The first panel focuses on the valid reasons to make the good reforms to guarantee in the Western Balkans a future of social integration, economic development and political stability. The Balkans are at a crossroads and it is essential to prevent them to fall into the instability of the past.

The second panel considers the new threats the Western Balkans are tackling, such as criminal networks, small arms proliferation, illegal trafficking and terrorist groups. Economic inequalities are just the immediate consequence of these problems that, on the long-run, might lead to social cleavages and risk to enlarge the reach of terrorist recruitment.

The third panel highlights that the key priority for the Western Balkans towards the Euro-Atlantic integration is to move from post-war societies to a truly regional co-operation. This means building new infrastructures, passing economic reforms and fostering a renewed dialogue on security within the countries in the region.

The conference aims at a high-quality added-value interaction; contributing to an in depth analysis and also to draw a sense of direction for security providers.

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