



NATO Foundation
Defense College

BALKAN PERSPECTIVES

**ADAPTING THE PARTNERSHIP
AND INTEGRATION PATHS**

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ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO

President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

FOREWORD

This is already, I am surprised myself, the fourth time that the Foundation is dealing with the Balkan region. We have already published three books including the proceedings of the past conferences, and some of the previous speakers are here today.

The reason is clear to me: this is a very important part of Europe, very close to us, not only geographically, which is obvious, but it is also part of European history and, of course, of European future.

The objective we have in mind is clear, without possible misunderstandings. We wish to promote a closer integration into the European institutions and also in a Euro-Atlantic community of shared values and interests.

To achieve this historic goal, it is necessary to do a number of things, i.e. to improve regional cooperation, first, and to address existing disputes in a spirit of mutual understanding. There cannot be walls of any kind in our part of Europe.

It is important that every country continues to undertake internal reforms for the good of everyone, because reforms and mutual friendly recognition are crucial to overcome present and future challenges.

It is not our intention to criticise anybody and we welcome positive events, like the recent solution concerning the recognition of North Macedonia as well as the accession of Montenegro to the Atlantic Alliance. Instead, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo remain delicate issues.

NATO has invested a political capital and resources for more than twenty years with positive results, ensuring peace and supporting stability in difficult conditions.

The Alliance has worked, and I would like to underline that, hand in hand with the European Union, showing the best visible example of cooperation between two key organisations. And the European Union is also doing its best to make progress under present conditions.

We believe, in conclusion, that the region should remain a focus of attention in

the coming years with the purpose to give real support. To be honest, I have the feeling that in the last few years the relevance of South Eastern Europe has been somehow overlooked because of the challenges emerging elsewhere in the world.

It is true that a number of summits have taken place, but it seems to me that they remain in a rather symbolic dimension. If you read the background policy paper that we have prepared for the conference, you will find the elements confirming this view.

This conference is part of the programme called “Strategic Balkans”. The NATO Defense College Foundation wishes to draw more attention to the region, to provide a good analysis of the problems at hand, and to give, if possible, some guidelines for the future.

We have identified three panels addressing general issues that we consider to be of major significance. We have here speakers and moderators of an impressive quality, ensuring a high-level discussion. I thank them for accepting our invitation and I also wish to thank the public for being part of this event.

A special thanks to those who have contributed to make this event possible – PMI first and, of course, the NATO Defense College. Special thanks to the Hon. Marta Grande, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. We are honoured by her presence.



CHRIS WHITECROSS
Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome

WELCOME REMARKS

The NATO Defense College praises the excellent cooperation with the NATO Defense College Foundation. I am honoured to open this conference together with Ambassador Minuto-Rizzo.

I will keep my comments fairly short and speak about the efforts of NATO in the region throughout the last twenty years.

As you may be aware and as alluded to by the Ambassador in his opening remarks, NATO has been one of the main actors of stability in the Western Balkans since the early 1990s. This has been done through a number of different ways.

First, through crisis management operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM¹ and Kosovo. The NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) has provided for safe and secure environment in Kosovo in accordance with UNSCR 1244 for twenty years, since its start in 1999. NATO Headquarters Sarajevo has assisted defence reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has provided support to EUFOR Althea² under the Berlin Plus Agreement³.

Second, through NATO enlargement to Croatia and Albania in 2009, to Montenegro in 2017, and soon to the Republic of North Macedonia. As stated in the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration, “successive rounds of enlargement have enhanced our collective security and the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic region”.

This was also done through cooperative security and the Partnership for Peace (PfP)⁴ programme, with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and North Macedonia

1 Abbreviation for *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, officially renamed *Republic of North Macedonia* since February 2019.

2 The European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) – also known as Operation Althea – is an EU-led operation in the country to oversee the military implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

3 The Berlin Plus agreement refers to a comprehensive package of arrangements finalised in early 2003 between the EU and the NATO that allows the EU to make use of NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led crisis management operations.

4 The Partnership for Peace (PfP) is a programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO. It allows partners to build up an individual relationship with

being PfP members. Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) process since 2010. NATO's presence in the region also includes NATO Advisory and Liaison Team in Pristina, NATO Military Liaison Office in Belgrade, and NATO Liaison Office in Skopje.

PfP tools have helped countries in the region carry out defence sector reforms and develop interoperability for participation in peace support operations, also those led by the UN or the EU. Examples of cooperation in the framework of PfP include: certification of military units in accordance with NATO requirements under the Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC); regional exercises (REGEX); certification of national training and education centres within the network of Partnership Training and Education Centres (PTECs); support to partner countries in reforming their professional military education institutions in the framework of the Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP); NATO Trust Fund projects enabling destruction of landmines, in line with the Ottawa Convention; civilian research projects funded in the framework for the Science for Peace and Security Programme (SPS); and increasing civil disaster response preparedness through consequence management field exercises co-organised by the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and national authorities. In this environment, there of course exist some issues of concern. These include the lack of progress in defence reform and authoritarian tendencies in some Balkan countries; Russian presence in the region, with Moscow trying to move the countries away from Euro-Atlantic structures; the difficult reconciliation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina; an uncertain process of normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo and, in particular, instability in Northern Kosovo; a belligerent rhetoric by representatives of political elites; the return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq and local radicalisation processes, with possible connections with terrorist groups.

Finally, I would like to mention some of the challenges to NATO's more effective engagement in advancing security and stability in the region.

Firstly, it is paramount to reinforce cooperative security with the Western Balkans. In this sense, it may be important to take a more assertive regional approach instead of working with each country individually. Many security issues transcend national borders and hence understanding regional security dynamics requires an adequate perspective.

Moreover, it is vital to strengthen coordination on the ground between NATO and individual nations.

In fine, citizens' perception of NATO in some Balkan countries is rather negative. A more transparent engagement with media and the civil society is needed to reassure the public about NATO's objectives and counter propaganda coming from some other countries.

NATO, choosing their own priorities for cooperation.



ALESSANDRO POLITI

Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

POLITICAL SUMMARY

There are two narratives and political perceptions regarding the region, that in the end reinforce one another in keeping out the Balkan Six out of a full and swift integration in the Euro-Atlantic community: a first, essentially strategic, but not political, underlining external threats, risks, and malign influences and the other, more economic and bureaucratic, that highlights the weaknesses of these countries and their slowness to reform.

Apparently the first strategic narrative pushes major and fully integrated states to keep their engagements in the Balkans: in the end one cannot allow Russian, Chinese, dubious Arab influences, and problematic allies to compromise the Euro-Atlantic investment and presence. If one adds to the mix illegal migration, terrorism and, in a generic way, organised crime, the bottom line is clear: we have to stay in to keep them (the Six and their problems) out as much as possible. It is like re-uniting East Germany with a multinational civil-military intervention, waiting that the population accepts reforms and sheds totally its totalitarian heritage before integrating it into West Germany.

The economic-bureaucratic narrative goes on essentially ticking boxes: did the Balkan countries tick them? Yes, so keep the line. No? Well, sorry, stay out. Behind this logic there is unfortunately a political choice: richer countries do not want the problems of poorer ones, at least not now, until the next half decade. This is essentially the “enlargement fatigue”, reinforced by the democratic backsliding of some relatively more recent members of the club. The real problem with this political choice is that it mirrors precisely the logics of the richer republics that contributed to the end of the Yugoslav experience: on the one hand disintegration is continued in the region; on the other it replicates the exclusionist and anti-integration movements that are jeopardising the European Union and Atlantic solidarity. The Juncker declaration on non-enlargement was, despite all the good work done regionally by the international community, a loss of time and political sense.

The results of this conference have been successively overshadowed by the first

indictments handed by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers to high ranking former UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army) commanders, including the Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj, who quit his post. Since new general elections in Pristina are possible, the political set up could change, influencing a stalled dialogue with Belgrade. Yet, a number of essential issues emerged:

Belgrade and Pristina, the twin dialogue and confrontation partners, remain central for closing successfully the integration dossier at regional level, but other countries are able to progress or mark the pace by themselves, as Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia for instance.

How this issue will be solved is essentially a matter of internal political will by the respective elites and of non-obstruction by major national actors outside the region, but the palette of possible outcomes is rather limited (special autonomy for Serbian-speaking areas in Kosovo or territorial swap in exchange for full recognition).

Bosnia-Herzegovina is at risk of falling between the cracks of international attention due to its political stagnation, corruption, and obstructionist politics by the entities.

A substantial part of the debate was dedicated to internal challenges of the Balkans (after due mention of China, Russia and other external influences): stabilocracies, money laundering, corruption, the weakening of institutions and potential prosperity by the stranglehold of collusion with organised crime, the lack of connecting memories.

While the mentioned European hesitations play their role, political will at home is of paramount importance to change attitudes, use fully external assistance and freeing state and society from the “capture” of old-minded elites.

On enlargement the negotiation the lines are clearly drawn. One side talks about managing expectations, quality that must become before speed and firmness on fundamentals (e.g. rule of law, democratic institutions and freedom of expression). The other points out clearly that without the clear European message that “the door is open”, precious regional momentum, domestic will and hope for societies shall be lost. If societies are frustrated, elites will be unwilling, external help unconvincing and the brew for further troubles will ferment. The postponement of North Macedonia’s EU accession talks last June does indicate that European countries do not have yet the necessary long-term perception of their interest, will and vision to act decisively.



MATTEO TACCONI

Analyst, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

POLICY BACKGROUND PAPER

When the European leaders made the solemn commitment of enlarging the Union towards the Western Balkans at the Thessaloniki EU Council in 2003, the general mood about the region was rather positive. Politicians, diplomats and analysts thought that the Western Balkans would have joined NATO and the EU in around 15 years, following the same path of Central Europe and the Baltics, that at that time had closed almost all the negotiating chapters and were waiting for joining formally the EU on the 1st of May 2004.

After the fall of Communism in Central Europe in 1989 and of the USSR in 1991, the Visegrad Group and the Baltic countries embarked a long process of reforms in order to achieve first NATO membership and then the accession to the EU. Conditionality was key to make the process work. The EU spurred candidates to boost reforms, sometimes hard to swallow, offering incentives in exchange. Until few years ago, this scheme was seen as the benchmark for the Western Balkans.

Sixteen years after the Thessaloniki EU Council, only Croatia has joined the EU. Confidence about the future of the Western Balkans is not so bright anymore. Democratisation and economic growth have not spread across the peninsula at the required pace.

There was a surplus of enthusiasm in the script written in Greece in 2003. Some chapters must be re-thought. Not those concerning security, anyway. Croatia, Albania and Montenegro have joined NATO, allowing the Alliance to reach the goal of closing the Adriatic coast line. The peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, now run by the EU, secured peace and transfer of expertise to achieve the goal of unifying the then three ethnic armies of the country, a legacy of the 1992-1995 war. In Kosovo, KFOR represents a fundamental guarantee for stability, in a land still full of uncertainties and with a high circulation of illegal weapons.

Fostering economic stability and democracy, two themes closely linked, is far from being an accomplished mission. The Balkan Six lag behind. The global crisis depressed the region and revealed structural problems and social inequalities that the pre-crisis growth rate somehow hid. Experts and regional leaders think that growth, one way or another, would have delivered benefits to everyone and everywhere and this was an illusion. Today the Balkans' picture tells that common features are: an unsustainable economies and unemployment, too low wages, infrastructural weaknesses, and a growing migration trend among talented and educated young people.

There is a regression also on the sphere of rule of law, press freedom, and other relevant democratic standards. It is given by the combination between the local way to illiberal democracy, social frustration due to the crisis and disappointment for the unfulfilled promises made by the EU.

The scenario is not encouraging, but saying that the Balkan Six are becoming a failed region or Europe's black hole would be a mistake. The region needs objectively longer time, compared to that needed by Central Europe and the Baltics, or Romania and Bulgaria. In addition to the legacy of the Cold War, the Western Balkans suffered a hot conflict too in the last part of the XX century. Albania did not, but it had the toughest Communist regime ever seen in Europe outside the Iron Curtain.

However, time must not become an excuse. Local leaderships must be more responsible and accountable to their own publics. They should find a balance between short-term consensus building and enact reforms that can create conditions to attract more investments, provide jobs, secure workers' rights, strengthen democracy and pluralism.

The EU stimulus is still crucial to achieve such outcomes. However, Brussels must change approach because conditionality no longer works as it used to. An example is the issue of Kosovo. The EU mediation led to so-called "Normalisation Agreements" in 2013. Serbia partly dismantled its parallel structures in northern Kosovo, while Kosovo promised self-government for the Serbian minority. In exchange, the EU opened accession talks with Serbia and signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo. It should have been the beginning of a wide dialogue aimed at finding a comprehensive solution about the Kosovo status. Unfortunately, while progress has been achieved in 2017 on a wide range of technical issues with some political content, both elites still balk at making substantial steps. Serbia has a path for accession, but is wary to start the more difficult chapters of the EU *acquis*. The Haradinaj government is near a very much needed visa liberalisation, but still does not accomplish its indispensable fight against corruption. Belgrade is not ready to recognise Kosovo, but wants to normalise; Pristina, wants unfettered control over its territory, but does not want to give the Kosovo-Serbs a large autonomy.

As a result, the two countries are focusing more and more on the hypothesis of

land swap, so far rejected by the EU, which could have very negative repercussions in the entire Balkan area.

Despite being a successful story for the EU conditionality strategy, also the historic deal on the naming dispute between Greece and Macedonia, now North Macedonia, shows a critical weakness. Athens and Skopje struck a reasonable agreement, but they were unable to explain civil societies its historic importance. People look tired. In North Macedonia, they do not see the way to the Euro-Atlantic integration, finally unlocked, as something that can ignite a new wave of enthusiasm in the country. This can depend on the fact that the EU conditionality is based too much on deals with governments and too little on the necessity of involving the civil society in integration processes. Brussels should take this into account, when and if it will re-formulate conditionality.

A stronger civil society could effectively pressure political *élites*, so that they do reforms and keep the Euro-Atlantic horizon close. After all, NATO is still the main desired security provider in the region, while the EU largely remains the main investor. Yet, old and new actors, with new political offers, are gaining influence. The West must find a way to re-energise its action in the peninsula to win the battle in the Western Balkans.



MARTA GRANDE

President, Foreign Affairs Committee, Chamber of Deputies, Rome

OPENING REMARKS

I am delighted to welcome you to the Chamber of Deputies for an extremely important event on a very important subject, namely the future perspectives for the Balkans and the role of NATO in this region, which is both historically and geographically close to us.

The Western Balkans have always played a crucial role, acting as a hinge between the West and the East, Europe and Asia, between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Islam, in a mosaic of peoples, alphabets, and languages that has “produce[d] more history than they [have] consumed”, as Winston Churchill put it. Knowing the Balkans allows us to understand more in depth our contemporary history, the transition from what was defined as the “Short Century” to the present century.

With the end of the Cold War, the area between the Adriatic and the Sava, suspended between Euro-Atlantic integration and proximity to Russia, has become the South-Eastern side of the European Union. New transnational challenges added to the traditional ethno-political fragilities of the states formed between the mid-nineties and the first decade of the following century: migration flows, the phenomenon of radicalism and organised crime that have required an increasingly assertive response from the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union to stabilise the area.

The Western Balkans may also be seen as an operational working hub for the Atlantic Alliance countries because – just under twenty years after the launch of the KFOR operation – they are still midway through their path towards stabilisation and institutional consolidation, which continues to be characterised by underground faults and deep fractures.

The action for the stabilisation of the Western Balkans in support of the development of democratic institutions is expressly recalled in the resolution whereby the Chambers approved last December the continuation of Italian participation in the KFOR mission for the last quarter of 2018 – and that we are going to reconfirm in the coming weeks.

These fractures might result in further instability and insecurity for the entire continent and are linked to old, undimmed nationalistic tensions, compounded by international networks of organised crime, illicit trafficking of human beings, as well as a significant and threatening presence of foreign fighters who, in recent years, have joined the *jihad* in Syria and Iraq.

The area of the Western Balkans, straddling the Southern flank of the Atlantic Alliance and the Eastern one, represented by Russia, has become a new testing ground for NATO effectiveness. Against the background of recurrent rumours about the Atlantic Treaty's obsolescence, international analysts instead observe its revival, that translates into greater investment in collective defence, the management of joint, increasingly ambitious exercises on a large scale and, notably, a growing and widespread perception of threats to Europe.

Indeed, the more the perception of threats to the West from Russia, China, the self-styled Islamic State, and the fragmentation of the Middle East exacerbate, the more the Atlantic Alliance seems to continue to offer an institutional anchorage, accompanied by essential and not-negligible organisational and military tools.

And it is precisely in its capacity to ensure the stability of Kosovo and its ability to effectively counter the hybrid and complex threats stemming not only from the traditional Eastern flank, but also from its Southern flank, that the Atlantic Alliance is demonstrating its persistent relevance, which manifests itself today through the full operability of the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub (NSD-S), based in Lago Patria. The Hub has become possible thanks to the incisive role played by our military instrument in peculiar theatres of crisis. The rationale behind its creation is to increase and deepen knowledge of the likely challenges and opportunities in the areas situated on NATO's Southern borders, through a holistic and cooperative approach involving experts, international organisations, and partners dealing with the Southern flank or coming from the territories concerned.

This approach is part of a broader Atlantic Alliance strategy aimed to project stability beyond its borders, reflected in the organisation of training activities in favour of local authorities, such as those recently approved for Jordan and Tunisia. To ensure the effectiveness of these training packages, a broader and more thorough understanding of local dynamics is crucial. The Hub should be situated in this context and conceived as a centre of collection, analysis, and dissemination of useful information for political and military decision-makers involved in the Southern flank. If structured in this way and kept active, this centre would display its effectiveness by contributing to NATO's operational activities, so as to avoid becoming a mere 'appendix' of the Alliance. The work of the Hub can thus become a useful tool for guiding NATO's action on its Southern borders; action that, starting from the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, has received an important impulse. On that occasion, in fact, the Alliance formally launched a new approach, the so-called "360° approach", which focuses on threats coming from all fronts and ensures a targeted and tailor-made response.

This strategy stands opposite to the posture that NATO had kept in the previous years under pressure of the most recent accession states of Eastern Europe, which implied a clear-cut distinction between the Southern scenario and the events occurring at the Eastern borders of the Alliance, with a particularly vigilant eye on Russia's behaviour.

After a strong increase of tensions following the second war in South Ossetia in 2008, if NATO's military component maintained its level of attention high concerning a possible assertive attitude from Moscow, the political branch of the Alliance rightly encouraged the start of a new phase of dialogue. Such line has been firmly followed until 2014, when Russia's annexation of Crimea led to a re-thinking of NATO's posture, that has newly identified Moscow as an actor with an aggressive behaviour and liable to pose a threat to the security of some member States.

Not by chance, since Ukraine's events onwards, new divisions have emerged within NATO, i.e. between the States located in the Eastern side of the Atlantic Alliance, that see Moscow as a possible danger, and those countries of the Old Continent, such as Italy and Germany, which are not only more exposed to the challenges coming from the other shore of the Mediterranean, but favour a more conciliatory approach towards Russia based on dialogue as well – also given their relevant economic and commercial relations with the country.

Consequently, in the years immediately following 2014, NATO retained the distinction between the Southern and Eastern flanks and focussed its attention on the possible developments on the Eastern side of the Alliance. Only from 2016, thanks to the political commitment of the Central-Southern states of the Atlantic Alliance, NATO started – at least theoretically – to embrace a comprehensive vision that considers all the borders of the Alliance on an equal footing, even if in practice it still maintains the duality between the two flanks. At a closer look, indeed, NATO has articulated its strategy and action for the South by first expressing the will of projecting stability towards its Mediterranean borders and, later, through the launch of training activities in some countries of the area and the creation of the NSD-S.

To sum up, in the recent years NATO showed commitment to defining a coherent and polyhedral agenda for the Southern flank, that would start from a comprehensive approach to then materialise into specific and targeted activities.

Nevertheless, in a highly fragmented and unpredictable scenario such as the one in some areas of the Middle East and North and Sub-Saharan Africa, the Alliance's engagement has to be – first and foremost – solid and well-defined, characteristics that are still missing.

In this perspective, it is important to reflect on the experience of the multinational NATO Force in Kosovo, a successful case study to which our country has made a very significant contribution, testified by the command position assumed by six Italian generals who, from September 2013 to date, have followed the lead-

ership of the mission. KFOR has in fact represented, and fully represents, the Italian model of participation in international missions. As affirmed by the Italian Minister of Defence Elisabetta Trenta last September during a mission in Pristina, the Italian leadership of this NATO mission keeps on receiving appreciation within the Atlantic Alliance and from the main regional players, and continues to be pivotal for the Italian interests, by contributing to safeguard our strategic role in the Balkans.

Today, Balkan Europe is standing at a crossroads between past and future; a past that does not pass and that, as wrote the great scholar Predrag Matvejević¹. “still fails to turn into History”, but rather continues to heavily condition the choices of the ruling classes; and an uncertain future due more to the hesitance of European actors, than by the penetration attempts of other international players that, for the time being, have very few political alternatives to offer to the states of the region, compared to the NATO and EU integration prospects.

In this respect, on the 6th of February, the newly formed Republic of North Macedonia officially signed the NATO accession protocol, as Secretary General Stoltenberg had promised a year ago following a positive resolution of the dispute with Athens over the official name of the Balkan state. In a year, Skopje will become the thirtieth state to join the Atlantic Alliance and the seventh of the Balkan area.

As far as Atlantic integration is concerned, the advent of the Trump administration does not seem to have altered the coherence of US policy in the region, as implicitly confirmed by the recent American green light on Pristina's decision to equip itself with its own armed forces. Instead, greater perplexity hovers around Brussels, unable to capitalise on this outstanding diplomatic milestone and still paralysed by an enlargement fatigue, certainly resulting from several of structural causes. Undoubtedly, the increasing difficulties in managing an enlarged Europe, the crisis affecting world economy, the instability in the countries of the Southern shore of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the rise in migration flows towards Europe, and the spread of international terrorism have further challenged the very definition of the European Union. In addition, the Brexit perspective and the weakening of Chancellor Merkel (who has traditionally been one of the most reliable interlocutors with whom to plead the pro-European cause) had an impact on this situation.

The most recent choices expressed by the European Parliament and the Commission lead us to believe that the Union has not yet overcome its minimalist approach to the issue, reflected in the choice of the year 2025 as a time-horizon for the conclusion of Serbia and Montenegro's accession negotiations, preceded by the opening of negotiations with Albania and Macedonia: such a distant deadline will hardly generate an eager enthusiasm within the Balkan civil societies.

¹ A Croat writer and scholar (7th October 1932 – 2nd February 2017).

It should be reasonably recognised that, with the election of the new European Parliament, we cannot continue to support a European approach to the enlargement, based on a 'business-as-usual' logic. What is needed is to send out credible messages and deeds to the wide segments of European public opinion that, inside and outside the Union, show disaffection towards the process of integration. By maintaining an ambivalent attitude towards enlargement and without providing the Balkan countries with concrete prospects, the political and economic conditions in the region could further deteriorate, giving the impression that the main enemy of the European Union in the Western Balkans is the European Union itself. It will be up to the new European Parliament to open a serious debate on enlargement, which will broach from the start – and not deny – the critical issues characterising the countries of the region, on the one hand, and the European Union, on the other. In this sense, the enlargement can be an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be European citizens today – inside and outside the current borders of the Union.

In this perspective, it is important to support the signs of confidence and openness towards Europe coming from another key country in the area, namely Serbia. In fact, at a time when it would have been easy to listen to the sirens of Euroscepticism and nationalism, this country has chosen to prioritise its European path through a great political evolution led, for the first time in the history of a Balkan country, by a female Prime Minister. During a recent mission to Belgrade with a Foreign Affairs Committee's delegation, while talking with Serbia's leaders, I noticed the effort of the country's political elites not to be imprisoned by their past, but rather to look at the future with pragmatism and determination.

Our country is called to play a crucial role in promoting and catalysing the EU enlargement process to Balkan Europe by putting this region at the centre of the new European political agenda which will be defined in the aftermath of the 26th of May. Italy has always devoted special attention to the countries of the region, with which it shares deep historical, cultural, and economic ties. Its leading role in supporting the Berlin process is only the latest in a series of commitments and initiatives that Rome has put in place to promote the gradual integration of the Balkan region into the European Union. After an important commitment in reconstruction efforts following the dramatic period of the Yugoslav wars, our country must have the ambition to present itself, today, as a key partner for the countries in the region, with a view to institutional strengthening and progressive integration.

The formalised institutional networks between Italy and the Balkan countries fit into the European dimension, as well as in the field of experiencing regional relations, such as the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII), the Central European Initiative (CEI), and the Adriatic and Ionian Macro-region (EUSAIR). This wealth of contacts and knowledge appears particularly relevant at the present time, when the pause from enlargement has contributed to push the Western Balkans into the shadow cone of mainstream information in many European countries,

except in the cases of security threats. Promoting a debate on the complexity of the region – too often reduced to an exclusively securitarian imaginary – and going back to talking about the Balkans are major objectives to be pursued along the path towards EU integration, also because of the benefits their accession would bring to the Union.

It is paramount that the future ruling classes acquire full awareness of the strategic and geopolitical determinants of the great international challenges with which Italy and Europe will be called to measure themselves in the globalisation scenario. We must do so as Italians and as Europeans above all, in light of what the Balkan Europe represents for understanding our time. We should be aware that we are faced with a unique opportunity, not only to reform and transform that area, but also to better define ‘which kind’ and ‘how much’ European Union we want in our future.

Session I

BALKAN POLITICS ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE



Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev and High Representative of the EU Federica Mogherini attend the North Macedonia Association Council. Brussels, 19 March 2019.





JELENA MILIĆ

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SERBIA AS REGIONAL DRIVER: CHANGE OR STAGNATION?

It is a real privilege and pleasure to be a regular participant to these events. I have great regards for them, and they are remarkable occasions for me, although I do attend several high-level international conferences every year and read numerous papers on the Western Balkans and Serbia. And I deeply appreciated the previous intervention of Hon. Marta Grande, who showed an optimistic approach and acknowledgement of the positive developments in Serbia.

In my presentation, I will try to remind some of the specific developments in that positive direction that are relevant for answering the question the organisers have posed, i.e. how NATO Member States, Western societies, and governments – and I would add pundits, commentators and media as well – can help the country overcome some of the current issues, and how we can commonly address such challenges in the future.

First of all, let us make an honest and genuine assessment on what is going on and answer to the following questions: What is the situation on the field? What are the real challenges, both spoken and unspoken? And what are the actual trends?

Sometimes, I think that when we comment and assess Serbia, in particular in comparison to what is happening in Kosovo, we are not objective. When I say “we”, I refer to the majority of Western pundits, think-tankers, commentators, and even policy-makers. As a citizen of Serbia, I am becoming pretty much upset about it, because I have always thought that the role of think tanks was to provide in-depth analysis of the events and put forward recommendations, value directions, and options, but not to manipulate data and spread fake news and narratives.

Let me remind you that we toppled a very autocratic regime (that committed heinous war crimes against its own citizens and foreigners in the region) through non-violent means, meaning that we had to make very tough compromises and that many of the perpetrators and protagonists of the previous regime are still part of the political-security structure. That was the cost that we had to pay for a non-violent regime change. You have to calculate it further when you predict how

fast society, particularly the sectors of foreign policy and the security system, can move on.

Nonetheless, these days, even within the US Congress, people tend to forget that we extradited six generals and two presidents, who were indicted in connection only with war crimes in Kosovo. It is not true that Serbia did not punish anybody for crimes in Kosovo. Our Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic lost his life because, after October 2000¹, democratic Serbia has started facing its past by cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Indeed, he was killed by the structures opposing and trying to bring down cooperation with the *ICTY*.

We peacefully separated from Montenegro. It was a challenging operation in terms of security, as *there were and still exist* legitimate identities issues, for starters: people from Montenegro who felt like Serbians did not want that, and many people in Serbia did not actually want it either; but we managed this situation, we went through it peacefully.

Now, we are negotiating with the EU, opening chapter by chapter. Besides, we are just renegotiating the second round of the Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, namely the highest form of cooperation between the Atlantic Alliance and a country that does not want money to become a NATO member but is eager to enhance political dialogue, which is exactly what is going on between President *Vučić* and Secretary-General Stoltenberg. This process started with the confidence-building measures posed by excellent cooperation during the refugee crisis a few years ago, that had a heavy impact on the entire region.

At the present time, Serbia is boosting its cooperation with three NATO and EU Member States, i.e. Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania through quadrilateral *fora*. I repeat: three South Eastern Europe and NATO Eastern flank countries which are both EU and NATO Member States. Serbia is also strengthening cooperation and relationship with two other important EU and NATO members: Hungary and Italy. Moreover, just a few days ago, President *Vučić* visited Slovenia, also an EU and NATO Member State, in a good spirit and atmosphere.

And I could go much further on. We have the highest number of troops from the Western Balkan countries participating in multinational operations; we are members of the international coalition to counter ISIS from its inception; two years ago, we had the biggest military exercise ever between Serbia and the US Army; six months ago, we had the biggest exercise ever between Serbia and NATO related to emergency response and crisis management.

As far as domestic politics is concerned, we have a gay female Prime Minister. Regarding pundits and policy-makers' demand for a multi-ethnic solution as a precondition for a one-dimensional request about the outlook of the agreement on future Belgrade-Pristina relations, it is worth noticing that Serbia has recently

¹ Slobodan Milošević was overthrown on the 5th October 2000.

organised national Councils elections for twenty-seven national minorities in direct form and for two more national minorities in electronic form. The majority of Serbs will continue to live in Kosovo, while the Albanian community of South Serbia in Serbia. Serbia is and will remain a multi-ethnic state, even in the event that an “adjustment of the administrative line” becomes an element of the multidimensional comprehensive agreement – as the CEAS has suggested in its Summer 2018 report titled “West Side Story”.

Is this the picture that you get from mainstream Western media and politicians, from those who are commenting the potential outlook of the multi-dimensional comprehensive voluntarily agreement between Belgrade and Pristina? I doubt. Against this framework, do you think that any bilateral agreement which would be verified by Parliaments in Belgrade and Pristina would set the Balkans on fire again? Are we dealing with the same Balkans of the 1990s, or have the rest of the Balkan countries actually improved, just like Serbia has? I think that today’s situation cannot be compared to that of the 1990s, because all of us have progressed along the Euro-Atlantic integration path and strengthened mutual cooperation.

When we look at the environment in which the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo has been ongoing until recently, we cannot forget that, by focussing only on the Western Balkans and demanding regional cooperation – hence identifying ‘region’ with the Western Balkan countries alone –, we are neglecting natural ties and serious cooperation with the Eastern Balkans. And somehow, the fact that Serbia is doing exactly that is falling below the radar.

In a nutshell, concerning short term measures, the adoption of the Individual Partnership Action Plan should not be stalled by Albania, as it happened last time – and it seems to me that time is passing due to the imposition of Tirana’s unfounded conditions. Genuine regional cooperation must take place until the conclusion of the Pristina-Belgrade with a comprehensive agreement which would not leave any party as a sole loser.

I think that it is very positive that Serbia is increasing its scientific cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance. There is a room for Serbian scientific institutions to address some of the crazy narratives about the use of depleted uranium and its consequences, like alleged epidemics of cancer.

I think that most EU Member States should remind Serbian public that they are also NATO Member States; that to discuss NATO and its affairs in a country which does not want to become a NATO member, but want to join EU, is a legitimate thinking. These countries should not behave like they come from two totally separate systems, just looking optimistic and talking about one perspective while hiding their affiliation with the other structure.

Indeed, the other structure recently marked the 70th anniversary of its inception, however there was no one single event suggested by NATO Member States and Serbia about it, apart from the initiatives organised by the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS), notably the extraordinary Spring edition of its annual flagship

programme “Belgrade NATO Week”. Why? We need that. Along the same lines, why are Member States and politicians avoiding discussing bombing and its correlation with the new status of Kosovo? By doing so, they are giving the impression that they are hiding something and muting the discussion, and this is exactly how it is perceived in Serbia.

Concerning fake news, I know that NATO Member States are not picking every battle, but Serbia is a unique case: we were bombed by NATO and exposed to a huge Russian operation of misinformation and fake narratives, particularly with respect to the usage of depleted uranium and the number of casualties. It is still ongoing and we are in a dire situation.

It is not easy to deliver on Kosovo and have a democratic validation for it. Sometimes, this angle is missed. It is not easy to listen to fake historical parallels that are force-fed to us. With all due respect for the Prespa agreement², it is only partially an example to follow with regard to political leadership and optimism in EU and NATO integration. In the case of Serbia, NATO integration is not the cookie, only EU membership is. And we will see what happens with Macedonia. But we cannot forget 13.000 lives lost during the Kosovo war and the bombardments as well. This is a significant distinction, as North Macedonia and Greece did not have to deal with such past issues.

These are unique circumstances that really need acknowledgement and a more tailored approach; this is why the CEAS and I believe and advocate that Serbia should be cut some slack. Belgrade should be helped to get out of the negotiations with Pristina not as a total loser. There should be an acknowledgement of its improvements and fate, as well as of many setbacks in Kosovo. A tailor-made approach includes a multi-dimensional comprehensive agreement, that will be appealing to both not-Orthodox and not-Serbian ethnicities in Serbia, who have other interests than those related to Serbian Orthodox Church or Serbs south of the Ibar river, i.e. maybe some resources (mines, water systems) that Serbia can put in the settlement. But, most importantly, any possible solution must keep Serbia on the EU path, because this is the democratic consensus in the country among minorities, women, gay, and everybody else. Clearly, there cannot always be a multi-ethnic reality in only 50 square kilometres, as many who are objecting the correction of the administrative line wrongly demand, masking other agendas they push for. See, for instance, some neighbourhoods in New York or in Rome.

And frankly, let us recall that there are strategic spots within small territories, like in North Kosovo, that are relevant in the new geostrategic game – let us think about the events in the Black Sea, or about international nuclear agreements which are falling apart. All this is relevant for Serbia, and we are aware of it.

2 The Prespa agreement was reached on the 12th of June 2018 between Greece and FYROM. It resolved a long-standing dispute over the latter's name. It sees the country's constitutional name, then Republic of Macedonia, changed to Republic of North Macedonia *erga omnes*.

I think it would be good to acknowledge that helping Serbia to remain on the EU path and feel recognised as a reliable partner by the US and NATO Member States is crucial, because the EU accession and membership now sound far-fetched. By doing so, you would actually act in the most natural way.

In conclusion, it is necessary to level the field for better regional cooperation in not only in the Western Balkans, but in the Eastern Balkans as well. A comprehensive multidimensional consensual agreement between Pristina and Belgrade would take out arguments for Serbs in Republika Srpska to object Kosovo's recognition by Bosnia and Herzegovina. BiH's formalisation of relations with Kosovo, that should follow a similar move by Serbia, is a precondition for better and stronger regional cooperation in security and defence, which then contributes to all of us in our joint, structured efforts to address common challenges and threats, namely terrorism, illegal migration, smuggling, organised crime, natural and man-made catastrophes.



ZORAN JOLEVSKI

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DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BALKANS, AND ENLARGEMENT: SUCSESSES AND SETBACKS

At the outset, let me express my appreciation to the NATO Defense College Foundation and in particular to Ambassador Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo and his staff for the excellent organisation of this timely event on the eve of the European Parliament's elections and the formation of a new European Commission.

Winston Churchills' quote "The Balkans produce more history than they can consume" is quite known and correct. History is often used to find answers to the current problems in South-Eastern Europe (SEE). It is time to start using positive examples of SEE history that unite – and not divide – the region. There are several communalities and joint achievements the region should be proud of. Future perspectives – not past conflicts – should now lead the SEE states to strengthen their cooperation. Balkan countries are deeply interconnected, and thus successes and setbacks in each of them are at same time the successes and the setbacks of the whole region, but also of Europe.

The priority of the SEE states is the integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic family. At the present time, there are three, intertwined processes underway in South-Eastern Europe: wide-ranging reforms, including at the societal level; Euro-Atlantic and European enlargement; and the interdependence and mutual reinforcement of these two processes: reforms and enlargement.

The SEE countries share the same values, the same commitment to freedom, democracy, and human rights and are dedicated to a vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Everybody – the politicians and the citizens from the region – should understand and acknowledge that reforms are essential for improving the quality of life. Strengthening the democratic processes, individual liberties, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, as well as creating well-functioning market economies is of vital importance. Therefore, the Western Balkans have the primary responsibility for these reform trajectories. In parallel, these processes should ensure that the European values become an integral part of their societies.

At the same time, such reforms are contributing to the Euro-Atlantic integration paths of the SEE countries. It should be acknowledged that reforms are stronger and faster when they are implemented in partnership with the European Union and NATO. Indeed, EU and NATO integration processes are powerful and efficient mechanisms for the transformation of the South-Eastern European societies. The prospect of European integration has encouraged the SEE states to undertake political and economic reforms and boost democratic development. In this sense, enlargement is the roadmap that is guiding and supporting the reform efforts.

The power of enlargement was shown in not such a distant history, namely after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The commitment to democratisation of the former members of the Warsaw Pact, whose leadership was taken up by democratic politicians, was overtly recognised by Western democracies. In order to strengthen their democratic capacity and to support their efforts towards political and economic transition, NATO and EU launched a massive enlargement process as a tool for transformation of Central and Eastern Europe.

The decision to embark on the enlargement process proved to be a strategic move. It became a catalyst and accelerator of democratic reforms and economic transition. The permanent attention paid by Europe, but also the United States, together with the clear and constant message for a Europe Whole and Free, resulted in the integration of Central and Eastern Europe into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

These efforts were crowned first in 1999, with the accession of Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic into NATO, and later in 2004, when seven additional Central and Eastern European countries became members of the Atlantic Alliance. NATO enlargement continued to be high on the Alliance's agenda, mainly on the initiative and strong advocacy of the United States. Albania and Croatia joined NATO in 2009. In terms of European integration, there are two time-periods. The first corresponds to the 'big-bang enlargement' of 2004, when eight new members accessed the EU, followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The latest round of enlargement occurred in 2013, when Croatia joined the Union.

Although the SEE countries are not perfect and have many challenges ahead of them, it is crucial to recognise the accomplishments achieved so far. The image of the region among the European public is not positive. In this context, these countries should individually and collectively start a charming offensive.

It is evident that, in the last decade, we have been witnessing an enlargement fatigue. This is clearly visible in the approach of some European political leaders and parties; but what is more worrying is that similar trends are widespread among the citizens of Europe.

Last summer, just after the signing of the Prespa Agreement, some friends from a European country made comments on the expectations of the Macedonians for accelerated Euro-Atlantic integration. According to them, integration into

NATO could be expected, but Macedonian citizens should have not presumed that the EU integration process would start before the European Parliament elections, precisely because enlargement was not popular among the voters of the EU Member States.

The message of some European countries has been “The EU internal reform first, enlargement second”. Does it mean that the candidate countries should be on hold until the Union finishes with its internal reforms? The accession process is not a quick one. If my country started the accession process today, it would not finish before 2025 – in the most optimist scenario. I do not see why there is the need to establish a sequential order in these two processes. The reform of the EU could easily go in parallel with enlargement. Both processes are complementary and should mutually support each other. History shows that the European Union always comes out stronger from crises.

A few facts about South Eastern Europe could show the extent to which these countries would not constitute a burden for the EU. Their total population amounts to 19,8 million inhabitants, that roughly corresponds to the total population of Romania, or to half of Poland’s population. The region has a geographical surface of 205.832 km², i.e. slightly less than Romania and two-thirds of the territory of Germany or Poland. It is obvious that there is enough absorption capacity on the part of the Union. This should be matched with a commitment to reforms aimed at encouraging the SEE countries to embrace the European values.

In its February 2018 report titled “*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*”, the European Commission stated that: “firm, merit-based prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union’s very own political, security and economic interest. It is a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong, and united Europe based on common values”. On that occasion, the Commission announced that it will support the transformation process of the Western Balkans, targeting specific areas of interest such as: strengthening the role of law; reinforcing engagement on security and migration; enhancing support for social-economic development; increasing connectivity; introducing a digital agenda for the SEE; and supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.

It took fifteen years after the first EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki to organise a second Summit, that was held in Sofia in 2018. The citizens, politicians, and scholars from the SEE countries who are following the EU Member States’ deliberations regarding enlargement may conclude that there has not been any progress. Euro-Atlantic integration might look more distant today than sixteen years ago.

It took much effort to bring the wording from the 2003 EU Western Balkan Summit into the 2018 Sofia Declaration, which reiterates “unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans”. The main message from the Sofia Declaration can be best described as an “encouragement without great

expectations". Besides, it is positive that the Sibiu Declaration, adopted on the 9th of May 2019, "recognises the European perspective of other European States".

Following the European Parliament elections and the formation of a new European Commission, it will be necessary to bring a new impulse to the integration of the SEE states. The European Union needs to look at enlargement strategically. It is in the interest and benefit of the EU countries as well. Deepening the process of European internal reform in parallel with enlargement will show that the Union is coming out of the crisis stronger. A reformed and enlarged Europe should be our aim.

The remaining months of 2019 should be used by European and SEE politicians, as well as the think-tank community, to start working on the creation of a strategic vision on how to accelerate the SEE countries' accession process. The results of this reflection should be presented next year, when the EU leaders will gather in Zagreb for a Summit with the Western Balkan countries, under the EU Croatian presidency during the first half of 2020.



DUŠAN RELJIĆ

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CRIMES, PROSPERITY, AND INSTITUTIONS: THE ENDURING NEGATIVE CYCLE

The conveners of this conference asked me to look into the connections between war crimes, corruption, and political evolution in order to assess the extent to which the international community has or has not contributed to democratic development in the Western Balkan region.

My presentation will be structured into three parts. The first one will tackle the question whether war crimes, organised crime, and corruption are endemic to the region. The second part will be about the relationship between institutions and political evolution in the Western Balkans. Finally, I will discuss issues related to the regional political economy, so that we understand the economic and social basis on which the institutions can – or cannot – evolve.

Between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m. in the morning, the soldiers had killed more than five hundred civilians, including old people, women, and children. They raped many of the women and burnt down the whole village. This was just one of a number of civilian massacres in that war. It became the most known and documented bloodbath of that war for a few reasons: several soldiers who were on the spot tried to prevent it and reported later about it; an army photographer made pictures; and also because, sometimes later, a famous journalist – acting on a tip from parliamentarians – made it public. The officer in charge of this attack was sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment for having killed at least twenty-two civilians. Later, he was twice pardoned, so he spent less than three years in prison. All other militaries who took part to the massacre were acquitted by courts.

This terrible episode did not happen during the wars in former Yugoslavia, although many massacres happened during those wars – the mass killing in Srebrenica being probably the worst one. The event that I recounted, quoting the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is known as the My Lai Massacre of the 16th of March 1968 in Vietnam. Now, why did I give an account of this massacre? For two reasons.

The first reason is the following: I contend that the West often sees former Yugoslavia and the Balkans in an essentialist way, according to which the region is

being ascribed an endemic proclivity to grotesque violence, corruption, and organised crime. The Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova wrote a famous book about this bias in the Western perception of the Balkans, titled *Imagining the Balkans*. Organised crime and corruption are unavoidable topics in any discussion about why the region should or should not join the EU. Indeed, between 2012 and June 2019, in Serbia and Montenegro alone, there were 147 killings, which the authorities attribute to violence between criminal cartels. In 2018, almost every ten days, there was a new execution of this kind. Just 10% of these cases have been solved.

However, war crimes, corruption, and organised crime are not exclusive to the so-called Western Balkans; they are not fundamental to this part of Europe. The European Commission says that every year criminal gangs are stealing €50 billion from EU Member States through various illicit actions. The *New York Times* recently reported that, in Italy alone, there are twenty journalists under police escort because of criminal gangs threatening to kill them. Roberto Saviano is probably one of the best-known among them.

Here I come to the second reason why I told you about the My Lai Massacre and its infamous epilogue. In this particular case, it was the institution of the free press – i.e. the journalist Seymour Hersh – who made the massacre known. He acted on a tip from members of the Congress who had received confidential reports about what actually happened. Thus, in a way, the “fourth power” in the state – the institution of the freedom of expression – corrected, to a certain extent, the failures of the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers.

In the region of former Yugoslavia, the problem is that the three basic institutions of the state are still extremely reluctant and slow in dealing with the cruel legacy of the past. At the end of the Yugoslav wars in 2000, the press had a moment of full freedom indeed. Yet, in the meanwhile, the authorities have learned how to restrain the press and roll-back this “fourth power”.

In sum, if institutions do not function, then we see that issues such as organised crime or dealing with the past become a huge problem.

Here in this second part I would like to refer to the seminal work of two American political scientists, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, who wrote a book titled *Why Nations Fall – The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. Their central thesis is that there is a link between political institutions, on the one hand, and social and economic prosperity, on the other. Consequently, positive political evolution can happen only if there is economic growth and increasing prosperity that allow for the development of inclusive political institutions.

Since 2008 and the spill-over of the financial and debt crises from the core EU countries to the Balkans, political institutions in the region are increasingly degraded and the rule of elites has become more and more authoritarian. Political power is less and less distributed, but rather centralised in the hands of a handful of leaders. Public goods, such as education, health, services, clean environment are scarce and deteriorating. Reconstruction and modernisation in the region are

mostly failing. In the last European Commission report on the region there is a famous sentence defining these states as being “captured” by the elites¹.

Now I come to the third point, that is: what happened to the Western post-war reconstruction effort, including democratisation and state-building? Here I go back to Acemoglu and Robinson, who infer that external engineering of the rule of law and economic development is a contingent effort, and the outcome is never guaranteed. We have the Washington Consensus, that is a list of improvements which the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union demand the governments to undertake at the receiving end of external aid, so that the countries take a rapid path towards development. The problems in many societies, including all those belonging to the former Yugoslav states, are historical, hence deep-rooted and often overwhelming. The consequence is that, in many cases, reforms are not adopted and not implemented. The Washington Consensus fails to deliver.

However, the EU and NATO have long ago ‘swallowed’ the region. Looking at the geographical map, one will notice that this area is surrounded by EU and NATO states, and part of its countries are members of the European Union and/or the Atlantic Alliance. But the EU and NATO did not manage to ‘digest’ these countries.

The past and present relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans is producing problems, as it is actually creating economic and social conditions that do not permit political institutions to evolve into functioning democracies. Simply put, the Western Balkan countries are small, open economies and 75-80% of their trade is carried with the European Union, mostly with Germany and Italy. Foreign direct investment, everything, is with the Union. Remittances from migrant workers, a most important sources of capital, come mostly from the EU. The Western Balkan states are far more integrated economically and financially with the EU than many EU members themselves.

However, as they are small open-economies severely handicapped by the recent war legacy, they do not have the capability to compete on EU markets. In the last ten years, the countries of the region have suffered a trade deficit of €100 billion with the European Union. And if you take into account the debt that has to be paid back for loans, about €150 billion has flown from the region to the core EU states.

This means that economic and social prosperity cannot take place under such political and economic conditions. Just look at Croatia: Zagreb receives more than €8 billion of structural funds from the EU in the present seven-years EU budget cycle. This is free money; this is a present. And only with this sum, Croatia has managed to achieve economic growth. Yet, the Western Balkan states are giving

¹ European Commission, *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*, COM(2018) 65 final, 6 February 2018.

money to the EU while they do not receive any compensation for opening their markets. This is the main reason why, under such conditions, they do not have sufficient economic growth and only little social prosperity.

The people in the region have understood the game and long ago, because prosperity is not coming to them, they are moving where the prosperity is. These countries have lost one-quarter of their population during the last twenty years and the exodus is continuing.

So, do we understand the Balkans? I do not think so. We are still using the paradigm of the 1990s, the Washington Consensus; we are just sticking to the pattern of reforms created forty and more years ago for countries with different backgrounds. Zero-priced capital coming from EU pre-accession funding instruments (€200 million per year to Serbia, for instance) is not sufficient.

What could work is a 'Marshall Plan' for the region, aimed at public services, research development, health, etc. managed by an EU development agency for the Western Balkans. Such a Marshall Plan should come with the obligation for the current power-holders in the region to include all those who are currently marginalised by them, namely opposition political parties, civil society and the press. Otherwise, if everything stays the same, I think that in this relationship between the EU and the so-called Western Balkan countries, both sides are betting on a dead horse.

Session II

NATO AND EUROPE: THE TORTUOUS INTEGRATION PATH



Abandoned Serbian monastery in Prizren, Kosovo.





MICHEL SOULA

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KOSOVO: AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR THE BALKANS' STABILITY

I am pleased to be part of this panel and to discuss the EU and NATO integration processes as a vehicle for stability in the Western Balkans. I want to thank the organisers, and especially my long-time friend Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, as well as Alessandro Politi.

I will try to deliver a NATO perspective, and my EU colleague will complement that with the European Union's one, because the two are actually complementary – although the NATO part is maybe the first one in the trajectory of all those countries towards Euro-Atlantic integration. But I will also present some personal views and speak very fluidly, saying some things that may not be politically correct.

This year we commemorate the 20th anniversary of KFOR. I think that this event is very timely, notably because the persisting problems between Serbia and Kosovo make it difficult to celebrate it in theatre. Indeed, we do not want to create unbalances and we also want the Kosovo leadership to understand that it has not made a right move in the recent past.

It is very important to have countries like Italy, which is a very strong contributor to our efforts in the region, precisely because we need to reflect on the Balkans, on what they are today, on how we can help them move on. It is very difficult to carry out such a reflection nowadays because of some elements that have already been raised and will be explained in the coming panel.

The first thing I will say is not very positive. There is a fatigue from the international community over the Balkans. The 1990s were the years of the Balkans. All the headlines of major newspapers and media were about the Balkans. These days, it is not the case anymore. This means that all the Balkan countries have to become more grown up and to take their destiny in charge. And it is not always the way they behave, I am so sorry to say that.

It is a very different time from the 1990s, and it is clear that countries like the United States do not consider the Balkans as their top priority; I am not sure even President Trump, with all the respect, is very concerned about the region. This is

worrying. And if the Western Balkan countries do not address this situation and change their behaviour, then we may have a problem.

From a NATO perspective, the Western Balkans today are experiencing an encouraging level of stability. Despite some slightly worrying elements, it is much better than it was and it has never been. As reminded by other speakers, Montenegro stands now side-by-side with the Allied Nations after it joined NATO on the 5th of June 2017.

Following the signing of the Prespa agreement, North Macedonia is firmly on the course to becoming a NATO member. Who could have said that there would be an agreement on the name of Macedonia? I have been working on the Western Balkans for twenty years now, and many people would have bet that never an agreement would have been reached. But it was reached, so it is possible to make progress. Hence, when I hear negative comments on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, I think the same: it could happen, it is possible – in the bad way but also in the best way – and the Prespa agreement is the example. Today, Skopje is standing as an invitee in all the Council's meetings in NATO, and the Allies are in the process of ratifying the accession treaty, which should be concluded by spring 2019.

So, currently, we have North Macedonia and Montenegro with us. This shows an evolution in the presence of the region within NATO.

In 2018, despite the country's remaining problems, and they are many, Allied Foreign Ministers decided that NATO would accept Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Annual National Program, which builds on the 2008 Individual Partnership Action Plan. This was also a big decision. Of course, at the present time, Bosnia has not taken up the offer because there is no consensus within the country to present this plan. But the fact that NATO lends its hand is a very positive sign.

Regional dynamics are changing, and the Atlantic Alliance plays a role in this respect. As I was saying before about NATO and EU integration processes, if you look at history, NATO process always comes first.

It is clear that all these developments in Montenegro and North Macedonia display NATO's open-door policy. They show that this is not a fiction, these are deeds. In fact, these countries are moving towards NATO's door. In my view, a tangible Euro-Atlantic perspective is pivotal in creating lasting trust and inclusiveness.

A close relationship with NATO reflects, above all, the willingness to take on a greater share of responsibility for security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. In this regard, Kosovo is not an exception. For instance, despite the problems I will explain soon, Mr Burim Ramadani – Deputy Minister of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) – was appointed as the coordinator for NATO integration. I am not sure that NATO integration is very close in time for Kosovo, however this move from the Kosovar authorities signals the country's willingness to show its clear determination to become a NATO member at one point in time.

Nonetheless, the current Western Balkans scenario remains fragmented, with

both challenges and opportunities. Indeed, we should not talk about the problems without talking about the opportunities, because we have both. In this way, we can move forward and this is the case in all our countries, the Balkans are not an exception.

In such a diverse context, the Western Balkans have to be considered as a whole. Within this ensemble, the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo is critical. That is my personal view and I also think that the fact that we still have KFOR in the middle of this region, with more than 3.000 troops, is a very important factor for the stability of the whole area. As such, we need to consider its role in a broader context. That indeed explains why, although in the past years NATO nations wanted to diminish its presence, this has not happened.

For NATO, the transition of the Kosovo Security Force is currently the key issue in Kosovo. I think my EU colleague will look at it from a different perspective, but for NATO this is a very worrying factor. The fact that the Kosovo authorities voted to turn the KSF into an army, disregarding all the advises by the Allies, was a bad move. They should have been more patient. Of course, this initiative was linked to quick political gains, but it was not a very smart idea, in my view. Now Kosovo is in deep trouble because all the capacity-building efforts NATO is carrying out in the territory have been stalled. This is not in the interest of Kosovo.

It is also clear that the participation of minorities in the KSF is of crucial importance. Here again I may be a bit provocative, but I believe the Kosovars have done their part of the way, while I am not sure that the Serbs have behaved very well. Indeed, Belgrade conducted a huge intimidation campaign to diminish the participation of Serb members in the Force, which now puts this outreach effort to close to zero.

There are of course other obstacles for Kosovo to become a vector of stability, that are related to: the poor socio-economic domestic situation; political fragmentation; persistent corruption; organised crime and the external influence of Russia (through Serbia), but also from China and the Arab countries, notably Saudi Arabia. So, Kosovo is a small country, but it is subject to many forces that are not always terribly good willing.

Today, the key point is the EU-sponsored dialogue. For NATO, the dialogue is the only viable, lasting political solution to the problems between Serbia and Kosovo, and such dialogue will then have an impact on the region as a whole. For the time being, a few signals suggest that NATO is not the only one to think this way. In particular, there are new bilateral initiatives. We have the Berlin Process¹, but also the Paris Summit². I hope there will be a resolution of the dialogue. It may

1 An intergovernmental cooperation initiative started with the 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States in Berlin, aimed to revitalise the multilateral ties between the Western Balkans and selected EU Member States, and to improve regional cooperation on the issues of infrastructural and economic development.

2 An EU-backed meeting between the Union's Member States and Western Balkans' representatives, initially scheduled for the 1st of July 2019 and then cancelled due to the intransigence of the regional partners.

be difficult, but I think it is possible, and the Greek-FYROM Prespa agreement showed it. With the resolution of the dialogue, all the problems we see in-between Kosovo and Serbia, but also in the broader region, will diminish.

Meanwhile, we still have KFOR as a driver of stability. Allied nations continue to be committed. There will be a Global Force Generation conference in the next days and I am sure that the NATO members will continue to provide the necessary forces to maintain this element of stability in the region.



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ENLARGEMENT AND MARSHALL PLAN: JUGGLING EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

Let me start by recalling an anniversary. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the 2004 big European enlargement, and we realised that the world has changed. There has been no realisation of the historical challenge/opportunity momentum of enlargement. This is gone, and we really have to make a collective effort to keep the process alive. And that is exactly what we are trying to do.

In one of the previous interventions, Dušan Reljić called for a “Marshall Plan” for the Balkans. Sometimes, while I have the impression that we are practicing martial arts, bending over backwards and trying to manage expectations of the Western Balkan Six, on the one hand, and our own Member States, on the other. This is not easy. But if you ask about a Marshall Plan, I will give you the classical answer of a good European official, which is two-fold: either “not possible” or “we are doing it already”. I will use the latter because we have the “Western Balkan Strategy”, which for us *is* kind of a Marshall Plan. And I am not convinced we need a lofty title for that: “Western Balkans Strategy” is good enough. It was adopted a year ago and sets out a clear path to enlargement. Well, with the indicative date of 2025 – which is neither a commitment nor a promise – we are very clear in what we need to do, “we” ourselves (the European Union), on the one side, and the candidate countries, on the other.

Within the Strategy, there are six clusters of issues that we call “flagships”. In some cases, they are very detailed and, obviously, some of these areas are of interest to NATO, i.e. the rule of law, security, migration, regional cooperation, and reconciliation. In writing the Strategy we wanted to be crystal clear that we expect all the legacy issues to be solved in a binding way – if need be, through international legal arbitration. *If need be* because we do not want to import any dispute into the European Union. It has happened in the past and there is a price attached to that.

Serbia-Kosovo is one of these issues, not the only one. It is probably the most complicated, the most political one, and I fully agree that it must be resolved in a

consensual way. The process has stalled now. The Commission was very clear in its communication with both sides and, most recently, with Kosovo in particular. In fact, it asked Pristina to revoke or suspend the punitive tariffs on Serbian exports from Serbia and BiH, because this does not help at all.

And indeed, the Prespa agreement is a good story. We need more good stories from the region. This agreement shows that negotiation and reconciliation actually pay-off and that things can change for the better. We are there to help. The EU will continue with its role in the process, but such process is between Serbia and Kosovo. Thus, we are just there to help and, of course, there are other formats that were put in place by the Member States, I mean the initiatives by Germany and France. It is fine, as long as it can generate momentum and we can get a break-through. We are perfectly happy with that and we will continue to play our role.

In a week from now, roughly, at the end of May, the European Commission will come up with its next enlargement report covering all candidate countries. I think that the methodology is well-established. We have consulted everybody and his brother on that, including NATO, by the way. The crucial part of this year's report will be a recommendation to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. And we know it is a tall order because the Member States still need to agree.

We are in the driving seat of the process but, of course, we are not deciding on our own – “we” as “Commission”. Yet, our recommendation will be clear. This was repeatedly stated by both Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Commissioner Johannes Hahn, so we will see where we get then. Our ambition is still to reach a positive decision by this summer, if possible in July.

Both countries have made progress. North Macedonia is a clear case due to the ground-breaking agreement; but also in Albania, where the main issue is the judiciary and organised crime, sufficient progress was made to go ahead, even though the latest developments on the ground do not help, i.e. the ongoing boycott of the Parliament by the opposition. This situation also adds to the bad image of this country shared by some Western European countries, causing a lot of friction and difficulties with our own Member States.

The “Western Balkans Strategy” has a clear security dimension. We have proposed a number of measures to deal with radicalisation, violent extremism, foreign fighters and weapons trafficking. We want to step up cooperation with different European agencies in such domains, but also engage more with the countries in the region through agencies like Europol, Eurojust, or the European Border and Coast Guard (also known as Frontex), because these threats are real.

Third-party meddling is one of them, however when we – including myself – speak in public about the different security threats in the region, we try to put it into perspective, because sometimes people get the impression that all the evil comes from the Western Balkans. No, we also have radicalisation in our countries in Europe; we have organised crime groups operating in Europe, too. Hence, there

is a clear case for more cooperation, more engagement, also because we need good outcomes, we need this track record showing that things in the region are changing and improving in such a way that, whenever we have an outcome – meaning an agreement on accession – we sell it to our public and, more importantly, to our parliaments.

There is clear scope for more EU-NATO cooperation. I think the objectives are the same. The NATO accession process is a bit less complicated about the objectives, but the basic criteria and values are the same symbolically, and I was very happy to be part of it. More than a year ago we organised the first ever joint visit of NATO and the European Commission to a Western Balkan country, at that time still called FYROM. My good friend Alejandro Alvargonzález, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary, and myself went to Skopje with a joint message to the government, that was quite well-received. We have the Warsaw Declaration¹ as well, encouraging us to do more together in our neighbourhood, also in the Balkans. I think our teams have been working closer together, closer than ever, at least since the Warsaw Summit in 2016.

Now, let us talk about funding, as several questions were raised about a “Marshall Plan” and the need for more investment. First of all, there is a lot of money already available, and when we put forward the draft Strategy, we decided to double the funding available for the Western Balkan countries. And when the Commission made a proposal for the next multi-annual budget for 2021-2027, the so-called Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), we proposed an increase by 27% in pre-accession assistance. As such, the figure is close to €15 billion for seven years.

But there are also absorption issues. This money has to be absorbed by the countries themselves, and this is something that “we” – the relatively new Member States – know from our own experience. So, of course, we are ready to offer a lot. We already provided nearly €200 million for various connectivity projects; we doubled the available budget for the Erasmus+ exchange programme, i.e. from €33 to €66 million. There will be more: we are also ready to provide more concessional loans and guarantees for private businesses that want to invest in the Balkans, which is quite interesting and competitive when you compare it to the interest rates of – for instance – Chinese loans. These rates are sometimes quite interesting, sometimes less. The Chinese provided Montenegro with a loan to build a section of a very important motorway; however such commercial credit pushed the public debt of the country above the 70%, which basically closes down the fiscal space. Thus, I think that our offer is much more valuable. Increasing our financial assistance would also allow us, in a way, to reduce the gap between pre-accession assistance and the future funding under structural funds, whenever it

1 On the 8-9th of July 2016, Warsaw hosted the 2016 Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the 27th formal meeting of NATO members’ heads of state and heads of government.

happens. Because we know this is an issue, we anticipated it and we want to build up a trajectory of financial assistance.

I will conclude, again, on the comparison with the 2004-2007 enlargements. There are many lessons learned: one is that we need to manage expectations; to recognise that quality must come before speed; and we have to be very firm on fundamentals, namely the centrality of the rule of law, well-functioning democratic institutions, and freedom of expression, also because some Member States and commentators claim that things did not go that well in the wake of this wave of enlargement. This also applies to timing: 2025 is an indicative date, and it is good to have a target date, but it is not cast in stone. We know that “we” – both sides – have to work very hard to get there.



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KEEP THAT DOOR OPEN: FOR YOUR OWN SAKE

I will begin by quoting the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia, Nikola Dimitrov, a friend of many of us. He toured European capitals and returned several times to the Netherlands, which raised questions about the opening of EU accession negotiations with Skopje. During one of these visits, someone asked him: “Mr Minister, the European Union has all these problems and challenges, why do you want to join it?”. He gave a wonderful answer that speaks for all of us in the region. He simply said: “You do not know how it is to be outside”. And I think this says it all.

Those of us who are living in European Union countries know the hassle of getting residence permits compared to my EU member Bulgarian friend who works in Vienna, the difficulty in crossing the borders, etc. There are a lot of practical daily-life issues at stake, and I think that many Europeans take the EU for granted, considering it as if it were the air we breathe. You do not know that it is there until somebody shuts your nose, and then you realise how much you depend on it to live and breathe properly.

The unfortunate thing is that when everyone – i.e. all post-communist European countries in the 1990s – were ‘returning to Europe’, the country where some of us come from and that no longer exists, called Yugoslavia, decided to deal with some domestic ‘family’ issues that it considered more important. The fact that we, in Yugoslavia, ended up in a war and that we are today a former country which is currently composed of six or seven states – depending on how you look at issues – means that we were very late in getting on board the train of European integration. And when you are late to the party, you do not get everything the others got. That is why the big-bang enlargement was such an important and strategic decision on the part of the European Union and NATO... and we will not go into all the reasons for that. To all those who are complaining that Bulgaria and Romania are both NATO and EU members, claiming that their rule of law and democratic standards are not up-to-date, I have a very simple question: what would have hap-

pened if the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union were without the membership of Bulgaria and Romania when Russia invaded Crimea and, of course, when it attacked Georgia – an event that we sometimes forget? We would have had a completely open Eastern flank in security, economic, and political terms. So, the decision to take in these two countries in the 2000s was absolutely right. Obviously, it implies some problems and complications. Yet, I would say the bigger problem has been addressed through a very far-sighted and deep understanding of what the future strategy of the European Union should be.

Concerning the difference between Central and Eastern Europe and South Eastern Europe, I think this is *numerical* in terms of volume and that the latter region is *strategically less important* than Central and Eastern Europe, namely that part of Europe that was under the URSS domination with the presence of Soviet troops. Indeed, Yugoslavia was an independent country outside of the Soviet bloc; it was not part of the Warsaw Pact or of Comecon; it had an independent army; and a non-aligned movement with a respected role in the world. Besides, there are about 18 million people in the Six Western Balkan states. Poland is much bigger than we are and so, numerically, we are less important than Central and Eastern Europe; as many have said, the Western Balkans are completely surrounded by EU and NATO Member States – I have long said that this region forms the “inner courtyard of EU and NATO”.

In this sense, it is about the credibility of both NATO and the EU to integrate what I also refer to as “the last core geographic part of Europe”. It suffices to look at the geographic map – you do not even need to look at the geopolitical one – to understand why this is fundamental. And the whole debate about the enlargement fatigue and the ‘Macron’s policy’¹ (“we need to deepen before we widen”) is – to put it a bit brutally – a vacuous discussion, because none of our countries is yet ready to join, at least not before 2025. I think it is very important to have a date: it is like when you enter university: you know it will take four years to get a diploma if you fulfil the requirements, thus you are incentivised to pass the exams within that time-frame.

The key thing – and this is disheartening for those who support EU and NATO integration – is that people are saying: “No, we do not want you”, and this always reverberates in a negative way. I think the simple message should be: “The door is open” – to use NATO’s language of the “open-door policy”. We should keep the momentum going and show that we foremost, citizens of these countries, say: “Yes, we want a real rule of law, an independent judiciary, a democratic political culture, and we do not want authoritarian trends”. Therefore, the fact that we are having discussions and controversies on this matter is frankly not helpful. We are all, in a certain sense, hostage to domestic politics in all of our countries. For in-

¹ Policy based on the formula “internal reform before enlargement”, introduced by Emmanuel Macron for the first time during the 2018 Sofia Summit.

stance, when recently in a national debate before the EU Parliamentary elections twelve French nationals, heads of list for European elections, were asked: “Do you want Serbia to join?”, ten of them – because of domestic political reasons – answered: “No we do not want Serbia to join”. This is simply an empty discussion. Two of them bravely said: “Yes, we want Serbia”. But Belgrade will only be able to join in seven or eight years, if everything goes well. And this attitude comes from a country, France, that is a big, historical friend of Serbia.

The other question concerns the kind of environment we live in, with Trump as US President, with Brexit, with Russia’s assertive policy, etc. Such a context is not conducive to a civilised political dialogue because we have fallen into, simply put, a populist framing of events.

That comes in addition to the backsliding of democracy and the threat to the rule of law that we see in countries like Poland and Hungary – full EU-NATO Member States – and now in Romania as well. Hence, those who are populists and nationalists in our countries say: “If these people – who are full members of the European Union and NATO – are behaving like this, we have some leeway to act in our own kind of free-style way”. Thus, I think it is very important that the EU has, all too slowly, begun infringement procedures² and is organising itself to counter serious illiberal dynamics in certain Member States.

Also, the fact that Slovenia and Croatia have still not solved their border dispute is frankly not good. That is why the Prespa agreement, reached on the 12th of June 2018 between North Macedonia and Greece, is an extremely positive sign showing that deep-seated historical divisions can be overcome. Many of us do not want to be in a situation such as that of Kashmir (that is yet to be solved after seventy years) or Cyprus, that has been lingering in its unresolved situation for forty-five years; not to mention Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South-Ossetia.

I worked for a Prime Minister³ who said from day one that we needed to resolve the dispute with Kosovo, because this was a serious historical challenge, one impeding us to move forward more swiftly on Serbia’s democratic path. The Kosovo issue always arises when we are about to make an additional democratic step, and I would say that President Vučić has basically taken on the same argumentation to resolve this challenge that was put forward sixteen years ago. He acknowledged that Serbia had to solve the conflict with Kosovo. Let us not go into the details, but what is important is that both sides – Pristina and Belgrade – realised that they need each other to move forward. We already mentioned all the obstacles in that

2 Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union provides for the Council of the EU, acting by a majority of four fifths of its members, to determine whether there is a clear risk of a serious breach by a Member State of the common values referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty.

3 Mr Vejvoda acted as a Senior Diplomatic Counsellor of Zoran Djindjić, who served as Serbia’s Prime Minister from 2001 until his assassination in March 2003. During his mandate, he advocated pro-democratic reforms and the integration of Serbia into European structures.

path, but I think that where there is political leadership and courage, this can be done and, again, North Macedonia and Greece are emblematic examples in this sense, whatever the differences between the two situations may be.

Yet, we need a 'little help from our friends' and the European Union and NATO, in their diverse roles, are key to this. I would say that the EU has not done enough. The fact that German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron recently organised in Berlin, on the 30th of April, the Balkan Summit is very positive. Yes, we all know that not much was achieved, but such initiatives show their understanding that this situation cannot be resolved without their help. Zoran Djindjić, former Prime Minister, considered that this issue could be only solved with the blessing of the European Union, NATO, the US, Russia, etc. It cannot be a deal solely agreed upon by Belgrade and Pristina, as it needs to be framed within the value system of international law. This is crucial to understand the 'Marshall Plan' Mr Reljić referred to.

Now, let me just make a footnote on China. Zoran Jolevski mentioned the highway project between Skopje and Tirana that has not been realised. The Berlin process asked for joint infrastructure projects, and Presidents Vučić and Thaçi came forward. Five years ago, they agreed to build a highway between Niš and Pristina, but nothing has happened. Why not implement such a project with EU funds? This would be above all a very important geopolitical project to link the two and thus facilitate both regional reconciliation and economic cooperation.

Let us not preach lessons to others. China owns Volvo and Saab in Sweden. It has bought a €10 billion stake (about 10%) in Daimler-Benz. So, the region of the Western Balkans is picking up the crumbs of the Chinese 17+1 one table⁴. In Belgrade, thanks to them, we have a second bridge over the Danube which I, as a citizen of that city, very much like because it has relieved traffic. Moreover, Beijing is building a high-speed train between Budapest and Belgrade. At the moment, it takes seven hours to travel 400 kilometres, so it will definitely become quicker. The *Visegrád countries recently announced that they are planning to connect their four capitals via a high-speed railway: just now, fifteen years after enlargement*. I believe it would be much better that these projects were funded primarily by the EU, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the World Bank.

Let me finish on a note about what I personally think about the current EU decisions on opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. The European Commission adamantly states in its conclusions that accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania should be opened at this June's EU Council meeting. If this does not happen, then I will quote the great French diplomat

⁴ 17+1 is an initiative launched in 2012 by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs aimed to promote business and investment relations between China and 17 countries of Central and Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

and statesman of two-hundred years ago, Charles-Maurice de *Talleyrand*, who famously said: “This is worse than a crime: it is a mistake”.

Tony Barber wrote yesterday an article in the *Financial Times* in which he concluded: “This will be another time where the EU shoots itself in the foot and is not being strategic”⁵.

⁵ *Financial Times*, “The EU must not cut the Balkans adrift”, T. Barber, 15th May 2019.

Session III

SYNERGISING PARTNERSHIPS IN LONG-TERM STABILISATION MISSIONS



Some refugees living in abandoned buildings near the Serbian border with Croatia, waiting for a convenient moment to take the Balkan route. Niš, December 2017.





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NEW AND ENDURING CHALLENGES FOR THE BALKANS

Some twelve years ago, the Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces published a *Study on Regional Security Threats and Challenges in the Western Balkans*, edited by two distinguished experts¹. One of the editors, István Gyarmati, who is also a distinguished diplomat, observed in his introduction that “Despite some differences in the terms used, perceptions of the main security threats are strikingly similar in all countries, and they include: organized crime; economic instability; corruption; state failures; natural disasters”².

Gyarmati was quick to point out that, although the same threats are considered as important security issues facing Europe as a whole, in the Balkans corruption represented a particularly dangerous kind of threat “not only to security, but also to the democratic transition processes and economic progress of the region”. The most dangerous aspect of the corruption endemic to the region – he argued – was that it “is systematic and well-organized and has taken root in and in some cases rules state institutions of power, including the judiciary, police and secret services”³.

Most of the regional security threats and challenges to good governance described graphically in the 2007 study remain today imminent or potential threats to the region’s stability. The current situation across most of the region raises questions on whether anything much has changed since the end of hostilities in 1999. The region’s endemically weak institutions, especially in those countries that have not acceded to the EU, fail to uphold the rule of law and thus allow powerful interests to capture and use the resources of the state for their own benefit.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to claim that nothing has changed in the region over the past two decades. The end of hostilities, as noted, and the improbability

1 I. Gyarmati and D. Stančić, eds., *Study on the Assessment of Regional Security Threats and Challenges in the Western Balkans*, DCAF, Geneva, 2007.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3 *Ibid.*

of renewed armed conflict in the Balkans point to significant progress achieved. In the meantime, however, new threats and challenges to the region's stability have arisen.

Some of these new challenges are singled out and discussed in a recent Chaillot paper, *Balkan futures*.⁴ In this work, six megatrends defined as "processes that have been happening and that will [...] continue to be present in 2025 in the Western Balkans"⁵ are identified as follows: declining population; high unemployment and high public debt; underperforming institutions; ethnocentrism and contested statehood; updated and deficient education; globalisation and urbanisation. Of the foregoing six megatrends, only the last one can be said to have positive implications, while the other five point to ongoing threats to progress and stability in the region.

The same Chaillot paper also proposes six game-changers acting on the region and examines how they might reinforce or detract from political stability and economic development.⁶ Three out of the six megatrends, i.e. the prospect of EU accession (if pursued), improved regional cooperation (if achieved), and steps (if taken) towards good governance (that will serve as a means for stemming corruption), can be expected to have significant positive effects on the long-term stability and development of the region.

However, the three others stand to detract from the region's potential improvement. These are: the disruptive influences of external actors; the lack of a common security architecture to enable regional actors to address continued bilateral disputes; and uncertainties with respect to the region's ability to create a stable, investment-enhancing environment to set in motion a process of sustainable development.

I feel compelled to add *populism* to this list of game-changers because of its increasing regional and global effects. Although there is a growing awareness of the destabilising effects of populism, the extent of its threat to democracy, to the rule of law, and to good governance has not yet been fully understood. Populism has been serving to obscure the essential objective of democracy to protect, by means of independent judiciary, the rights accorded by law to the individual and to the citizen. Instead, it has offered a confusing grey area where the notion of freedom is diluted and disguised as *volonté générale* thrown into a majoritarian context⁷. By rejecting universalism in favour of ideological particularism, populism is driving a wedge between countries of the North Atlantic Alliance in such a way as to invalidate common values. It is not hard to imagine the extent of damage populism can cause in the Balkans, a region that has a history of extreme polarisation along eth-

4 M. Čeperković and F. Gaub, eds., *Balkan futures: Three scenarios for 2025*, Chaillot Paper n°147, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2018.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-27.

7 J.-W. Müller, *What is Populism?*, Penguin Books, London, 2017.

no-linguistic – not to mention confessional – lines. Moreover, populism is more than likely to reverse the region's progress towards EU membership.

Therefore, in this period of geopolitical flux, the challenges facing the Balkans are formidable. A keen understanding of the nature of those challenges is essential for the region to deal with them and for the Atlantic Alliance to be able to keep the region anchored in the West. Will this be possible – one is inclined to ask – in view of the formidable centrifugal tendencies that have not only affected the region itself, but also play a polarising role within the EU and the Western Alliance as a whole?

While a stable and prosperous future for the Balkans lie in their European vocation, the very tensions that bedevil the EU and the transatlantic relationship undermine the appeal of the Union as a model for convergence and cooperation, i.e. the two essential ingredients for the development and stability of this region in particular, as well as other areas in not so distant neighbourhoods.

Two specific challenges to the region's integrity must be borne in mind. One is the divisive nature of external influences. Both Russia and Turkey strongly project bilateral preferences, thus detracting from regional cooperation. Their actions have also the effect of reinforcing ethnic, confessional, and linguistic differences that stand in the way of developing a sense of a common region. Second, the region itself is prone to the effects of such external influences, not least because of its historical divisions. Moreover, because of its deep cultural cleavages, the Balkans – more than most other parts of Europe – demonstrate a tendency for selective historical memory, which also prevents the adoption of a common narrative among the peoples of this region.

However, my intention is not to project a sense of doom and gloom but convey a sense of realism regarding the future of the Balkans in Europe. Thus, I shall now turn to the means of pursuing such a future under the current circumstances.

Foremost consideration should be given to the key role that the EU is capable of playing in this regard. The potential of the EU's influence in the region is underestimated, not only in the region itself but, ironically, within the EU as well. Investments in the Balkans from other sources are dwarfed in comparison to those from the EU, which remains the unmatched locomotive for the region's economic development. Neither Russia nor certainly Turkey have the kind of financial resources to make as significant investments in the region as the EU is capable of making. Their financial constraints would be expected to have a limiting effect on their ambitions to promote their respective geopolitical agendas. As I earlier implied, they can only detract from convergence among the regional actors and encourage centrifugal tendencies.

When it comes to China, its geopolitical vision does not seek political reorientation in this region or anywhere along the Belt and Road initiative, for that matter. To the contrary, China's aim is to establish a reliable infrastructure network to connect the supercontinent to its largest trading bloc. Convergence of values

makes little difference as far as China's global economic vision is concerned. Beijing may well have the objective of creating dependencies, but the idea of destabilisation along its multiple silk roads is contrary to its interests.

Despite its potential as economic driver in the region, the EU has unfortunately become a "stabilocracy" – a term modified by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group⁸. It means a passive, defensive stand that avoids proactive involvement to push reform. Europe, in a sense, is still responding to the traumas of the 1990s, while it is missing an opportunity to shape the region's future more effectively.

Secondly, I would like to mention the September 2018 report by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly on *Security in the Western Balkans*⁹. What can the Alliance and the EU do together? For one, the report concludes that the West cannot take progress towards democracy in the Western Balkans for granted, but both the Alliance and the EU must pursue that aim vigorously. While the report acknowledges that the process of "European and Euro-Atlantic integration can have a transformative effect that helps strengthen democratic institutions and consolidate respect for human rights and for the rule of law – which are the foundation of economic progress and political stability", it also underscores the fact that the "relations among the Western Balkan countries must not be considered as a zero-sum game"¹⁰.

Western policy-makers must heed the message that has been clearly voiced in all recent official and think-tank reports on the Balkans. Both NATO and the EU have the capability and know-how to train security services in the region to combat organised crime, human trafficking, corruption, and terrorism. A regional rather than a bilateral approach and, to the extent possible, cooperation between the Union and the Alliance are certain to yield more effective results. A recent example of this has been the cooperation between the Albanian and Macedonian security forces that successfully prevented a terrorist attack in Skopje.

With respect to energy supply security in the region, the prospects are mixed in the face of Russia's aim to keep its domination on the energy markets. The Turk-Stream pipeline, nearing completion, ensures the region's continued dependence on Russian gas. On the other hand, Azeri gas via the Trans-Anatolian pipeline (TANAP), recently commissioned, might alleviate some of the region's dependence on Russia, if the entire volume of gas transited from Turkey is not pumped through the Trans-Adriatic pipeline (TAP) to Italy. Liquefied natural gas supplies and distribution by means of the much-delayed Ionian-Adriatic Pipeline (now

8 M. Kmezić, "EU Rule of Law Conditionality: Democracy or 'Stabilocracy' Promotion in the Western Balkans?" in J. Džankić, S. Keil, and M. Kmezić, eds., *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: The Failure of the EU Conditionality*, Palgrave, New York, 2018. [The pre-existing term is stabilocracy, also employed by regional authors and it is less awkward Note of the Editor].

9 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, *Security in the Western Balkans*, Report, 178 PCNP 18 E rev. 1 fin, 21 September 2018.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

suspended for environmental reasons) might further decrease the region's energy dependence on Russian gas.

Finally, in a region fraught with historical memory, a suggestion for conflict resolution in the *longue durée* is in order. The region needs a common understanding – not necessarily agreement – of issues in order to take meaningful steps towards convergence and cooperation. A shared history for the region must be developed and incorporated into textbooks and curricula so as to instil a sense of the region as a shared space. The pioneering work done by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe (CDRSEE) in its Joint History Project must be reinvigorated and revitalised for this purpose.



PAUL RADU

Executive Director, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Bucharest

IN MONEY LAUNDERING, OUT DEMOCRACY

I am the executive director of the largest investigative reporting network in the world, namely the Organized Crime Corruption Reporting Project, that I co-founded about eleven years ago. As the name says, our main goal is to expose organised crime and corruption and, in the past eleven years, we have been successful to some extent in doing it.

Security in the Balkans and elsewhere is affected by organised crime. What I have been doing for the past fifteen years is to try talking to high-level criminals and corrupt politicians all over the world. In the past three or four years, I spent most of my time living in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and other countries, especially in states where most of the narcotics are produced.

While living there and investigating organised crime scheming, as well as the behaviour of corrupt politicians, at some point you realise that you are investigating on the same things over and over again. It is always about a company that holds an off-shore bank account; it is always about the bank that launders money; and it is always about networks that go across borders. Indeed, whenever politicians from the Balkans or elsewhere steal inside these countries, they do not invest their money back there, notably because they have created around them an unsafe environment. In sum, you do not keep your money where you steal from. When you realise that there is a common pattern, you start wondering why all this is happening.

We are talking about fighting against corruption; about the money that the EU and NATO countries are investing in combating corruption and organised crime across borders. Yet, a lot of this work is not very efficient, and I think I have part of the answer “why”.

Almost ten years ago, I was investigating a company based in New Zealand, in Auckland, but had a bank account in Latvia, in Riga. I found out from a Canadian intelligence report – which was made public on the Canadian intelligence website – that this company was involved in money laundering for the Sinaloa, i.e. one of

the largest and cruellest drug cartels in Mexico. So, you had a company in New Zealand, a bank account in Latvia (in the EU), and then money laundered from Mexico, most of it being money from cocaine. I will cut this story short: when the company was subpoenaed by law enforcement in a fourth country and details concerning one of its bank accounts were enclosed in a court case, I looked at these information and found something 'amazing': one single bank account laundered about \$680 million for criminal groups across the world. Thus, it was not just Sinaloa using that single bank account, but also Vietnamese, Chinese, Russian, and other organised crime networks.

At about the same time, I was a member of the World Economic Forum. I was part of a Council on organised crime, where I was delegated by my peers to be the liaison with the banking system. I was presenting these cases at the World Economic Forum, so the CEOs of big banks were attending the meeting. I told them: "Look, your banks are used for large scale money laundering by several criminal groups and corrupt politicians at the same time".

Indeed, about fifteen years ago, criminals realised that they needed to join forces and that, if they laundered their money together from arms, drug trafficking, etc., they could be more successful. To this end, they also needed banks, therefore they bought small ones in various countries. But guess what: these minor banks had access to the international banking system because they had corresponding bank accounts with larger banks, such as Deutsche Bank, Wachovia, Danske Bank.

At that point in time, to describe this phenomenon, I coined the term "Laundromat". In my view, these are all Laundromats. The first one I exposed was the Russian one, which laundered about \$20 billion via a few countries in the EU; then, the Azerbaijani Laundromat and, this March, the Troika Laundromat...but there are so many more out there. Again, we are talking about wholesale money laundering systems that enable politicians to launder their money and make possible the connection between politicians and criminals.

Honestly, it does not matter how much money you provide to the Western Balkans and how much you work to integrate these countries into democratic structures, as long as this black money is not stopped.

I will give you one example of how such a Laundromat works. The Azerbaijani Laundromat was mostly used by politicians in Baku to buy luxury goods: they bought cars, they hospitalised their family members and peers in good hospitals in Germany, for instance. However, the same Laundromat was used to pay politicians within the Council of Europe and in various parliaments in Western Europe. The same system was used to bribe journalists in order to have a positive coverage about what was going on in Azerbaijan, a country that does not really respect human rights.

There is one more, very interesting user, especially in the current context: Iran. In 2011, Ayatollah Khamenei openly declared the financial *jihad*. Because the international community imposed sanctions on the country, he looked for people

able to bypass such sanctions in its stead. A man named Reza Zarrab, who held a passport issued in Skopje, was very well-connected with Turkish and other international bankers. He decided to 'help' the Ayatollah by creating a network of companies through which he laundered many hundreds of million on behalf of Iran. The New York Court opened an investigation about Zarrab. This court case shows how one of the Laundromats – the Azerbaijani one – which was mostly used for the profit of local politicians, was also used by Teheran to bypass sanctions. Nevertheless, even Iran was scammed, precisely because when you ask for help from organised crime networks, the latter will steal money from you. Iran lost considerable money and is now in a difficult situation, because instead of trying to build a system that would last over time, it resorted to shortcuts.

In a nutshell, this mix of organised crime and corrupt politicians act across the Western Balkan region and everywhere else with the help of banks. For example, there are now huge scandals involving Danske Bank, Deutsche Bank, and Raiffeisen Bank. All these dirty money flows were possible because such banks turned a blind eye to what was going on.

In conclusion, you cannot build democracy without effectively tackling these phenomena, because a few people can ruin everything. Indeed, although only a small number of politicians benefit locally from this money, when they will get into positions of power, they will likely challenge the law and try to counter every move that goes towards creating more cooperation between countries.



VLADAN JOKSIMOVIĆ

Head of Secretariat, Regional Anti-corruption Initiative, Sarajevo

FROM POLITICAL WILL TO DEFEATING CORRUPTION

Let me start by briefly presenting the Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI), where I come from.

We operate wider than the Western Balkan region, from Zagreb (Croatia) to Kishinev (Moldova). There are a couple of other countries that are outside of the Western Balkans Six. Some of the RAI members are already members of the European Union, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia; some of them are already full members of NATO; and yet others are in the Partnership for Peace.

We consider the diversity of our membership as one of our highest values. This composition gives us a unique comparative insight into the societies' behaviours when it comes to corruption practices as well as anti-corruption efforts.

It would take us another full day to present and appraise the different methodologies governments apply to address corruption phenomena. In a nutshell, significant efforts and resources are invested in transparency and accountability, but the impact is not as high as expected. Corruption remains a major threat to economic growth, stability, and security.

One thing that all our member countries agree on is that corruption cannot be addressed by individual governments only, and that the regional cooperation of a wider anti-corruption coalition has to be further strengthened. This broad coalition of stakeholders includes not only our peers from the government, but also the civil sector, media and academia.

In terms of regional cooperation, steps are made in the corruption prevention field, such as anti-corruption assessment of laws (better known as corruption proofing of legislation), corruption risk assessment, protection of whistle-blowers, abolishing nepotism, etc. On the enforcement side, steps have been made in asset recovery, financial investigations and the strengthening of law-enforcement institutions.

We are definitely trying to find the good balance between the prevention and repression side in the fight against corruption. I cannot tell you out of my mind the

formula, but what we need to further continue investing in prevention. In parallel, we need efficient prosecutions and independent judiciaries.

The precondition to have a fruitful fight against corruption is, of course, political will. This always reminds me about one anecdote, and I apologise to my colleagues from Serbia if they already know it. The patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church – the highest priest in the clergy – was heading to a village. A well-established practice says that the church bells must ring when the patriarch is coming. In that place, there was no sound, no noise, so he asked the bishops around him: “Do you know that there is a rule – when the patriarch is coming, the bells shall ring loudly and for a lengthy?” “Yes, of course we know this rule. Yet, there are several reasons why the bells are not ringing” – answered the people in the *patio*. “Could you list them out?” – inquired the patriarch. “The first one is that we do not have church bells. There are other reasons, but this is the main one”.

In our case, “no bells, no noise” means “no political will, no fight against corruption”. Of course, there could be other obstacles on the table, but without political will we cannot go anywhere.

Let me mention one bright example from the region, where the political will does exist. Within the RAI, we developed the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations, which will hopefully enter into force by the end of the year. We have just finalised the technical negotiations and we are now completing the political ones. The last meeting took place in Podgorica, a month and a half ago, and I must acknowledge that many countries and jurisdictions in the region expressed their willingness to become a part of the treaty.

As the name suggests, the agreement concerns the exchange of data and assets verifications. According to the law, all public officials in the Western Balkan and wider in Europe must submit their assets declaration once they take the post. Imagine that in one country – let us say Montenegro – domestic authorities suspect that a public official might hide some property or doing some business in Bosnia or in Serbia. Thanks to this Treaty, they will directly get in touch with their colleagues from preventive anti-corruption bodies in Bosnia and Serbia who will come back to their Montenegro colleagues within a very short time, denying or confirming those allegations. This mechanism allows to avoid the long-lasting mutual legal assistance procedure.

The treaty will be also advantageous for Kosovo¹. For the time being, Pristina does not have any formal status within the RAI, even if it benefits from our activities. In the future, the country could become part of this cooperation agreement. Indeed, “Th[e] Treaty is open for accession by any State or any *territory* able autonomously to accomplish the purpose of the Treaty [...]” (Art. 14.3).

Coming back to safe societies, we believe that corruption tackles human security,

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

which is firstly the security of people and communities, as opposed to the security of states. In this sense, corruption only amplifies already unstable processes in our Western Balkan countries: experts claim that their societies are in frozen conflict.

Let me conclude by highlighting that corruption and security are strongly inter-linked and interdependent.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

FOREWORD

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); "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).

WELCOME REMARKS

Chris Whitecross

Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome

Lieutenant General Chris Whitecross enrolled in the Canadian Forces in 1982. Successive postings have taken her to almost every province in Canada, notably at the Canadian Air Division. Commandant Whitecross has, among many other posting, performed the duties of G1/G4 for the Force Engineers at the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR, former Yugoslavia) and was Deputy Chief Of Staff Communications, ISAF HQ, Kabul, Afghanistan. In February 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.

POLITICAL SUMMARY

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.

POLICY BACKGROUND PAPER

Matteo Tacconi

Analyst, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

Journalist and analyst, he covers the Balkans for a wide range of media networks. He worked as electoral observer for the OSCE/ODIHR in Albania, North Macedonia, Russia, Georgia and Ukraine.

OPENING REMARKS

Marta Grande

President, Foreign Affairs Committee, Chamber of Deputies, Rome

After graduating in languages and international trade in the United States, she has obtained two MA in International Relations and in European studies. In 2013, she was elected to the Chamber of Deputies for the Five Star Movement and since then she has been a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. During the XVII legislature, she has been also Secretary to the Standing Committee on

Human Rights. She has focussed her legislative work on women empowerment, transatlantic relations and BRICS countries. On June 21, 2018 she was elected, as first woman during the republican history, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

SESSION I

Haakon Blankenborg

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

Ambassador 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 Senior Adviser at 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, he left the Parliament to become Norwegian Ambassador to Serbia and Montenegro. He holds degrees in History and Political Science from the University of Oslo.

Jelena Milić

Director, Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Belgrade

Jelena Milić is among the most influential political analysts in Serbia and in the region. 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. Her areas of expertise are: Serbian security sector reforms; 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.

Zoran Jolevski

Former Minister of Defence, Republic of North Macedonia, Skopje

Former Minister of Defence of the Republic of North Macedonia, previously he served as Ambassador to the United States from March 2007 until June 2014. After serving in various capacities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - from 1988 until 1999 - he founded the Ohrid Institute for Economic Strategies and International Affairs (Skopje). He worked as Vice Chairman of the UN/ECE Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (2005-2007) as well as a Member of Team of Specialists on Internet Enterprise Development at UN/ECE (1999-2003). He has also authored two books and several articles.

Dušan Reljić

Head of Office, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin

Head of the Brussels office of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), since 2013. Dr Reljić works on international relations and security with a specific focus on the EU, NATO and Southeast Europe; democratisation; issues of transition in former socialist countries; nationalism and ethnic strife as well as political communication and media performance in situations of tensions and conflict. Between 2003 and 2013 Dr Reljić was research associate in the SWP division EU External Relations. Previously, he was Researcher and subsequently Head of the Media and Democracy Programme at the Dusseldorf-based European Institute for the Media (EIM) (1996–2003). He has been Senior Editor at Radio Free Europe in Munich, the Foreign Editor of the Belgrade weekly *Vreme*, and Co-Founder of the Beta Press Agency in Belgrade during the critical years of 1991–1993.

SESSION II

Kai Eide

Former Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations in Kosovo, Oslo

Kai Eide is a retired Norwegian diplomat and writer. He was Norway's Ambassador to the OSCE (1998–2002), NATO (2002–2006) and Sweden (2014–2017), UN Representative to the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (1993–95), Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General to Bosnia-Herzegovina (1997–98) to Afghanistan (2008–2010), to Kosovo (2005) and author of "Power Struggle over Afghanistan" (2011). Ambassador Eide was State Secretary responsible for foreign and security policies in the Office of the Norwegian Prime Minister during 1989 and 1990. He also served as Special Adviser to the CEO of the Norwegian oil company STATOIL before re-entering the Norwegian Foreign Service. During his career, Ambassador Eide has written extensively on foreign policy issues, primarily on Balkan affairs.

Michel Soula

Head, Operations Section, Operations Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

Michel Soula is responsible for 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 George Robertson. A French civil servant, Michel Soula was seconded to the French Foreign Service where he held various positions, notably in relation to chemical and biological weapons control and disarmament.

Maciej Popowski

Deputy Director General, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, Brussels

Ambassador Popowski is a Polish diplomat with 25 years of professional experience. He was Director for EU affairs at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time of Poland's accession negotiations. In 2001–2008 he was Deputy Head of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union. In 2003–2008 he was Poland's first Permanent Representative in the EU's Political and Security Committee. He then joined the European Commission as Director of DG Development focusing on policy coherence, aid effectiveness, financing, relations with other donors, and public information. In 2009 he was seconded from the European Commission to become Head of Cabinet of Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament. From 2011 until 2015, he was Deputy Secretary-General of the European External Action Service.

Ivan Vejvoda

Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna

Before joining the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna as 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 Zivkovic. Prior to that, he served as Executive Director of the Belgrade-based Fund for an Open Society. During the mid-1990s, Vejvoda held various academic posts in the United States and in the U.K., including Smith College in Massachusetts, Macalester College in Minnesota and the University of Sussex in England.

SESSION III

Søren Knudsen

Faculty Adviser and Danish Senior National Representative, NATO Defense College, Rome

Col. Knudsen joined the Danish Army in 1979. After his conscript service with Zealand Life Regiment (infantry), he served in various assignments in combat supply battalions. More recently, Colonel Knudsen has served as a Defence Attaché in Croatia charged with regional affairs and as a Military Advisor / Defence Attaché at the Royal Danish Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, focusing on the Danish Peace & Stabilization Program for the Horn of Africa. In 1997, Col. Knudsen was the Commanding Officer of the Danish Contingent during "Operation ALBA"

in Albania. In 2006, he acted as the Head of the CIMIC Branch (CJ-9) in the Headquarters of Coalition Task Force Aegis (later NATO RC(S)) in Kandahar, Afghanistan. From October 2011 to May 2012, he served as the Deputy Commander of NATO Rule Of Law Field Support Mission in Afghanistan. He was also awarded the Order of the Trefoil of the Republic of Croatia, the Presidential Medal of the Republic of Albania for Distinguished Civil Service, a Bronze Star Medal by the President of the United States, the Medal for Distinguished Service by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Albania and the Military Commemorative Medal by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Serbia. He has a Testimony of Distinguished Service by the Chief of Defence of the Republic of France.

Ahmet O. Evin

Founding Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, Istanbul

Professor Evin had received his B.A. and PhD degrees at the Columbia University. He is currently founding Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Professor Emeritus at Sabancı University, serving as Senior Scholar and Board Member of the Istanbul Policy Center. He has previously taught at Harvard, New York University, the University of Pennsylvania (where he was Director of the Middle East Center), the University of Hamburg and Bilkent University (heading the Political Science department). He has authored and edited several volumes on politics, culture, and development.

Paul Radu

Executive Director, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Bucharest

Paul Radu is the Director and Co-Founder of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and Co-Creator of the Investigative Dashboard concept, of Visual Investigative Scenarios visualisation software and Co-Founder of RISE Project (a platform for investigative reporters and hackers in Romania). Holder of various fellowships, he is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2004 Knight International Journalism Award and the 2007 Investigative Reporters and Editors Award, the Global Shining Light Award, the Tom Renner Investigative Reporters and Editors Award, the 2011, Daniel Pearl Award for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting, and a 2015 European Press Prize. Paul is an Ashoka Global Fellow, a Board Member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network and a juror for a number of global awards including the Allard Prize and the Data Journalism Awards. Mr Radu worked at the Panama Papers, the Russian and the Azerbaijani Laundromat, and the Troika Laundromat.

Vladan Joksimović

Head of Secretariat, Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, Sarajevo

Mr Joksimović was selected Head of Secretariat at the 24th RAI Steering Group

Meeting held in Belgrade on December 5, 2016. He graduated from Law Faculty, University of Belgrade and he also completed the Diplomatic Academy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade. Prior to joining Regional Anti-corruption Initiative, Mr Joksimović worked at the Anti-corruption Agency of Serbia as a Deputy Director. During his professional career, he shortly served as Adviser to the Director of the Office for Human Rights and Minority Rights, Republic of Serbia and as a Legal and Human Rights Adviser to the Council of Europe National Office in Belgrade. He also has years of experience as legal expert in the civil sector and was a Member of the Steering Board of the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights from 2012 to 2015.



BALKAN PERSPECTIVES

ADAPTING THE PARTNERSHIP AND INTEGRATION PATHS

CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY
the NATO Defense College Foundation
with the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division
and the NATO Defense College

ROME, 16TH OF MAY 2019
Venue: Aula dei Gruppi Parlamentari, Palazzo dei Gruppi Parlamentari,
Via di Campo Marzio, 78, Rome

THURSDAY, 16TH MAY 2019

- 13,30-14,15 Arrival of participants – Registration
14,15 **Welcome remarks**
- Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
 - Chris Whitecross Commandant, NATO Defense College, Rome
- Opening remarks**
- Marta Grande, President, Foreign Affairs Committee, Chamber of Deputies, Rome

Session I

BALKAN POLITICS ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE

Two decades after the arrival of KFOR in Kosovo, the Balkan Six have experienced a long peace that has helped healing many of the scars of the war of dissolution. Regional politics are struggling with the paradox of progress, on the backdrop of the ups and downs along the path towards wider integration. In the region are evident the risks of authoritarian tendencies and foreign manipulation following a trend “less democracy and more political and economic opacity.” How can national societies and governments counter these developments and how can the international community and especially NATO and Partnership for Peace countries assist in an innovative way against hybrid internal and external threats?

- 15,30-17,00 Chair: Haakon Blankenborg, Director, Western Balkan Section/Section for South East Europe, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo
- Jelena Milić, Director, Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies, Belgrade
 - Zoran Jolevski, Former Minister of Defence, Republic of North Macedonia, Skopje
 - Dušan Reljić, Head of Office, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Q&A

THURSDAY, 16TH MAY 2019

Session II

NATO AND EUROPE: THE TORTUOUS INTEGRATION PATH

The watershed for African wars and crisis management has been the end of the Cold War and of the intervention of superpowers in international conflicts. The following decade witnessed a host of local conflicts led mainly by African entities, starting from the Somalia conflict in 2006. The number of peacekeepers in the continent has increased substantially, with a renewed foreign presence and international involvement (i.e. UN, EU, NATO). A natural evolution would be the progressive transition from foreign intervention to a more effective African Union direction in managing crises, a transition to be supported by the international community.

16,15 -17,30 Chair: Kai Eide, Former Special Envoy of the Secretary
General of the United Nations in Kosovo, Oslo

- Michel Soula, Head, Operations Section, Operations Division, NATO HQ, Brussels
- Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director General, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, Brussels
- Ivan Vejvoda, Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna

Q&A

THURSDAY, 16TH MAY 2019

Session III

SYNERGISING PARTNERSHIPS IN LONG-TERM STABILISATION MISSIONS

As clearly shown by the KFOR mission, NATO's longest and yet most successful, the classic military environment is just part of a more multifaceted co-operative security effort. The Balkan Six are clearly affected by regional threats such as organised crime, trafficking of human beings, corruption, energy security supply and terrorism. Some countries are already NATO members, others are involved in the Partnership for Peace or similar programmes, all need to better co-ordinate resources, efforts and to strengthen regional stability.

17,30 - 18,45 Chair: Søren Knudsen, Faculty Adviser and Danish Senior National Representative, NATO Defense College, Rome

- Ahmet Evin, founding Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, Istanbul
- Paul Radu, Executive Director, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, Bucharest
- Vladan Joksimović, Head of Secretariat, Regional Anti-corruption Initiative, Sarajevo

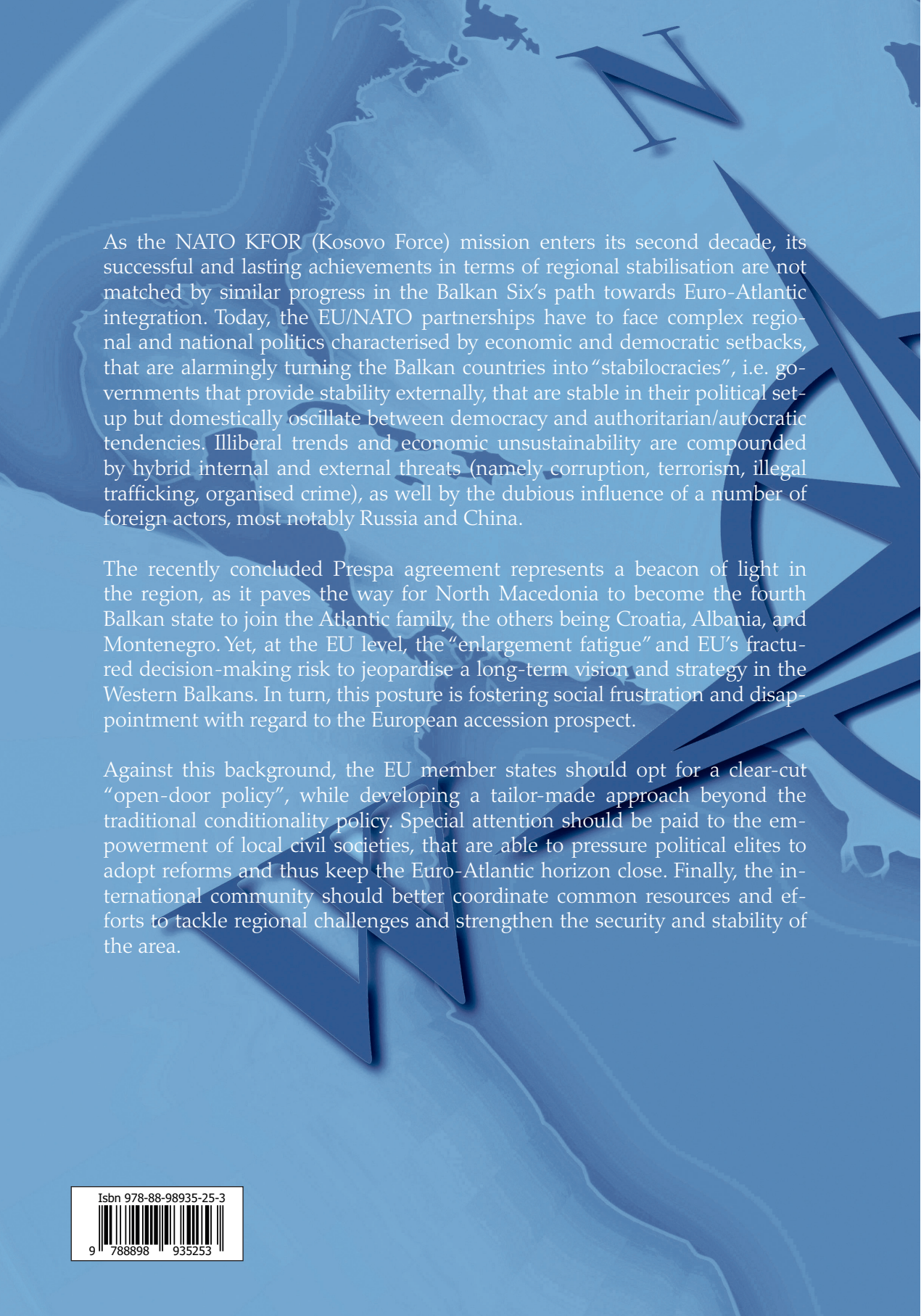
Q&A



Lead mosque (Xhamia e Plumbit) in Shkoder, Albania.







As the NATO KFOR (Kosovo Force) mission enters its second decade, its successful and lasting achievements in terms of regional stabilisation are not matched by similar progress in the Balkan Six's path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Today, the EU/NATO partnerships have to face complex regional and national politics characterised by economic and democratic setbacks, that are alarmingly turning the Balkan countries into "stabilocracies", i.e. governments that provide stability externally, that are stable in their political set-up but domestically oscillate between democracy and authoritarian/autocratic tendencies. Illiberal trends and economic unsustainability are compounded by hybrid internal and external threats (namely corruption, terrorism, illegal trafficking, organised crime), as well by the dubious influence of a number of foreign actors, most notably Russia and China.

The recently concluded Prespa agreement represents a beacon of light in the region, as it paves the way for North Macedonia to become the fourth Balkan state to join the Atlantic family, the others being Croatia, Albania, and Montenegro. Yet, at the EU level, the "enlargement fatigue" and EU's fractured decision-making risk to jeopardise a long-term vision and strategy in the Western Balkans. In turn, this posture is fostering social frustration and disappointment with regard to the European accession prospect.

Against this background, the EU member states should opt for a clear-cut "open-door policy", while developing a tailor-made approach beyond the traditional conditionality policy. Special attention should be paid to the empowerment of local civil societies, that are able to pressure political elites to adopt reforms and thus keep the Euro-Atlantic horizon close. Finally, the international community should better coordinate common resources and efforts to tackle regional challenges and strengthen the security and stability of the area.

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