



High-level Conference

Balkan Perspectives. Adapting the partnership and integration paths
Aula dei Gruppi Parlamentari, Palazzo Dei Gruppi Parlamentari,
via di Campo Marzio, 78, Rome

16th of May 2019

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The High-Level Conference was organised by the NATO Defense College Foundation with the support of the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and the NATO Defense College. It took place in Rome at the *Aula dei Gruppi Parlamentari, Palazzo dei Gruppi Parlamentari*, via di Campo di Marzio 78, on the 16th of May 2019.

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo (President of the NATO Defense College Foundation) opened the event stating the need to acknowledge and uphold the geopolitical relevance of the Western Balkans, a region that has been often overlooked by the international community during the past years. Indeed, although NATO and the European Union have worked hand in hand to ensure the political stability and security of the area, only “reforms and mutual friendly recognition are keys to overcome present and future challenges”.

150 participants together with the insightful interventions of the speakers, including experts and institutional representatives from the region, contributed to the event’s great success. The debate provided innovative insights on how to rethink and reshape policies towards EU integration and NATO membership, as well as up-to-date guidelines to map and tackle criminal networks and activities in the area.

As stated by Honourable **Marta Grande** (President of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Italian Chamber of Deputies), regional and international actors operating in the Balkans are witnessing the rise of new transnational challenges, today flanking the endemic ethno-political fragilities that affect the countries of the area since the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. Together with nationalist tensions still simmering, such rifts could jeopardise the stability and security of the whole region. In response to the Atlantic Pact’s alleged obsolescence, the Western Balkans thus represent a test bench for all the members of the Alliance, currently committed in supporting the path of institutional consolidation and stabilisation of the area.

On this matter, **Michel Soula** (Head of the Operation Section in the Operation Division at NATO HQ) argued: “This year we commemorate the 20th anniversary of KFOR, a very timely event. The mission remains indeed the main guarantor of stability not only in Kosovo, but in the Western Balkans as well. [...] However, Kosovo still has to overcome some obstacles to become a vector of stability itself (poor socio-economic domestic situation, public dissatisfaction with local institutions, political fragmentation, persistent corruption and organised crime). Today, the key point is the EU-sponsored dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina: from a NATO perspective, it remains the only conduit through which a lasting and comprehensive solution can be achieved in the Western Balkans. Meanwhile, NATO nations will continue to provide necessary forces to ensure security and stability in the region”.

With a focus on the challenges affecting Balkan governments and civil societies, **Vladan Joksimovic** (Head of Secretariat of the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative in Sarajevo) pointed out that corruption and security are inevitably linked. Indeed, the former affects human security, i.e. security of people as intertwined with the security of states. “How to find the good balance between prevention and repression, then? A strong political will as well as an effective independent judiciary are obviously the pre-condition to have a fruitful fight against corruption, together with constant investments in prevention”. Through the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative

(RAI), a coalition including authorities, civil sector, media and academia, effective steps have been taken in corruption prevention, such as in risk assessment and legislation, financial investigation, and law enforcement.

For any further questions or requests, contact the NDCF Press and Communication Office:

Sofia Mastrostefano – ndcf.pressmediarelations@gmail.com, +39 366 254 20 29

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