

**A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE
SECURITY IN THE WEST
BALKANS**

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROLAND BERZANI
Albanian Army

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE SECURITY IN THE WEST BALKANS

by

Lieutenant Colonel Roland Berzani
Albanian Army

Colonel Bob Applegate
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

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What is the present level of security and cooperation in the Western Balkans and what should these countries do in order to achieve a stable region in the future?

Regional developments and challenges will be examined initially through a short geopolitical introduction of Western Balkan countries. While today the countries in the region are more closely connected through various cooperation schemes than nine years ago, this fragile stability could be threatened by difficult issues, such as: the unlimited postponement and just definition of Kosovo's status, delays to the Euro-Atlantic integration process, minority and human rights issues, economic prosperity, and organized crime and illegal trafficking. The future stability of the region will depend upon strategies for improved cooperation and a better life for the people of all Western Balkan nations. This will require full integration into NATO and the EU for all Balkan countries, including Serbia. Additionally, the role of the USA, NATO and the EU will remain vital to the future security of the region.

A ROADMAP FOR FUTURE SECURITY IN THE WEST BALKANS

Introduction

The West Balkans in the past decade, following the collapse of communist systems and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, has made some successful steps towards Euro-Atlantic integration and institutional advances. However, the risks of regional conflicts and of state failure are likely to reappear as challenges requiring attention from the international community, particularly from the United States (US) and the European Union (EU).

Creating a stable security order in the region is likely to remain a major challenge for West Balkans countries, as well as for Western governments in the coming decades. Kosovo seems to remain the Achilles heel to regional stability. While Kosovo independence seems inevitable, there is great concern that Kosovar and Serbian interethnic relations will possibly grow more unsteady, with the possibility of unwanted effects in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). Sarajevo will continue to require the presence of NATO and EU security forces and, along with the newly independent state of Montenegro, continue to call for assistance in building democratic institutions. Regardless of significant progress on domestic reforms, Macedonia, Albania, and to a lesser extent Croatia, need to undertake more efforts to fight corruption, organized crime, and market disorder.

Membership initiatives with NATO and the EU are the major incentives of progress for the region. Therefore, these inducements remain the primary means for enhancing Balkan stability today. The EU's Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

plays, as well, a critical role for fostering regional cooperation and supporting Euro-Atlantic integration of the regional countries.

A variety of regionally based initiatives also seek to encourage closer coordination between the Balkan states themselves. Among these initiatives are: the South East European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), the Southeast European Defense Ministerial (SEDM), Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Central European Initiative (CEI), and the South East Europe Co-operation Process (SEECP). Widening these initiatives to all West Balkan states and extending their coverage to other important non-defense components such as interior and treasury ministries and security and law enforcement agencies, would create the necessary conditions for advancing Balkan regional cooperation.

These various cooperative initiatives are mutually reinforcing and an important—indeed essential—complement to international efforts to build regional stability. However, the strategy of Euro-Atlantic integration of the entire region, led by NATO and the EU, remains crucial to maintaining stability and preventing a brewing conflict.

Balkan Geopolitics and the West Balkans

The term Balkans is derived “from Persian through Turkish, originally referring to a high house or mountain. It was incorporated into the phrase ‘Balkan Peninsula’ by the German geographer Johann August Zeune in 1808 to call attention to the area’s mountainous terrain, but did not come into common use until the mid-19th century.”¹

The Balkans as a region represents, due to its geopolitical position, in the past as well as today, a specific crossroads between the West and the East, and the North and

the South. That is why researchers have written about it as a link as well as a gap between the worlds, as a house built in the middle of the road. Such a geographic position gave the Balkans its transition function. It is the territory passed through by numerous armies from the Crusades or earlier until today. It is on this territory that two great wars were fought in the 20th century. The Balkans has also been a pathway of numerous traders and travel writers.²

Most histories of the modern Balkans begin with a definition of the region based upon its physical characteristics. The Balkans is constituted as a peninsula, bounded by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas in the West, the Aegean Sea in the South, and the Black Sea in the East, and its ports of call have been a focus for commercial interaction since classical antiquity.

The Balkans has traditionally been characterized by political instability and turmoil. In the 19th century, the region was the object of Great Power rivalry and resurgent nationalism, as Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Britain sought to exploit the political vacuum caused by the deterioration of the Ottoman Empire to expand their influence in the region. This rivalry exacerbated local tensions and directly contributed to the outbreak of World War I. In the post-Cold War period the Balkans again emerged as a source of instability and concern. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the collapse of communism in southeastern Europe have led to an upsurge of political instability and conflict throughout the region.

What is the West Balkans?

Once the Bosnian war was brought to an end in 1995, the motivation for defining a new regional grouping emerged. "It was clear that the new Dayton constitutional

framework for BiH was dependent on the relationship among Sarajevo, Belgrade and Zagreb. Albania and Macedonia were added to this core group because stabilization efforts could hardly be successful if those two countries were not included due to the existence of sizable Albanian populations within the Yugoslav autonomous province of Kosovo and also in Western Macedonia. Although the new region of ‘Western Balkans’ was baptized in 1999, it had in fact come into existence in 1996, being referred to in EU sources variously as ‘certain countries of South East Europe,’ or ‘countries of the region for which the European Community has not adopted directives for negotiation of association agreement,’ or ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina and the immediately adjacent area.’ Only after the Stabilization and Association Process adapted in 1999 did the term ‘Western Balkans’ become customary. It was the same old Balkans minus Greece Romania and Bulgaria.”³ This study will use the term “West Balkans” to indicate Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.



Figure 1.⁴

As in the 19th century, Balkan conflicts have not remained localized but have quickly escalated and dragged in outside actors. Bosnia and Kosovo have both demonstrated the degree to which such conflicts have broader implications for European security. The complexity and deep roots of the current Balkan conflict make framing a coherent strategy difficult. The problem grew from the breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. That complex state was formed after World War I from a diverse mix of cultures, ethnic groups, religions, traditions and histories. There was no history of a unified and independent Yugoslavia before that time. In 1989, Serbia's leaders re-imposed direct rule over the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, prompting Albanians in Kosovo to agitate for independence. Between 1990 and 1992, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia all seceded from Yugoslavia, leaving Serbia and Montenegro as the constituent parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This temporary union broke up in June 2006 when Montenegro declared independence.

West Balkans, Worrying Challenges

The years 2006 and 2007 brought disappointment and delay for the people of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. "Serbia spent much of it in political paralysis; progress towards political reform in Bosnia stalled; Kosovo's status remained unresolved as Russia put up stiff opposition to its independence. Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Croatia progressed to a greater or lesser extent on paths towards membership in the EU and NATO. Montenegro proclaimed independence from Serbia on 3 June 2006 after a close-fought referendum. It proceeded to address domestic issues which had been neglected over the previous decade when politics was dominated by the issue of independence." ⁵

The European Commission, in its annual progress reports on the seven Western Balkans countries released on November 6, 2007, register “insufficient progress in critical areas such as judicial and administrative reforms, the fight against corruption and crime, and market governance. The reports described that domestic reforms required under the political, economic and technical criteria for EU accession of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia have proceeded at a disappointingly slow pace.”⁶

Kosovo

The last phase of the Balkan conflict came in Kosovo,⁷ in 1999. Slobodan Milosevic [Serbian President] “set off a process which led to the disintegration of the Yugoslav Federation by abolishing Kosovo’s autonomy in 1989 and subjected the Kosovar Albanian majority to a demeaning occupation. The situation was untenable, and the observation that in Yugoslavia ‘everything started with Kosovo and everything will finish with Kosovo’ quickly became commonplace. After the Dayton Peace Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina, when United Nations’ sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro were lifted without any reference to the situation in Kosovo, support for radical alternatives grew. Given a tradition of Kosovar Albanian uprisings stretching back several centuries, a turn to armed resistance was inevitable.”⁸

Serbs consider Kosovo their cultural homeland and cradle of the Serb nation. However, this is not true for Albanians who believe that Serbs make up history for political purposes. It is hard to understand how Kosovo is the cradle of Serbia when there are at least two incontestable historical facts. First, Serbs started to come into the Balkans in the 8th century as opposed to Albanians who lived in the area for thousands

of years. Second, from the 13th century until early 19th century all of the Balkan Peninsula (including Kosovo) had been occupied by the Ottoman Empire. Albanians also harshly object to Belgrade's claims that Kosovo in the past had been predominantly populated by Serbs. There is lack of evidence, a high level of misinterpretation and vague historical data to prove which part is right. Yet, the famous British historian Noel Malcolm, based on Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian and other statistics of that time, asserts that at least since the 19th century, Albanians have been the distinguished majority in Kosovo. "Having made all the statistical adjustments, - concludes Malcolm, - it is still possible to say with reasonable certainty that the population of Kosovo contained an absolute majority of Albanian-speakers over Slav-speakers in the mid-nineteenth century."⁹

Going back to the recent conflict, in spring 1998, Milosevic unleashed a police and military campaign against insurgents in Kosovo. More than two hundred thousand Albanians, including women and children, were internally displaced in hills and mountains, struggling to survive from cold and starvation. Humanitarian catastrophe and instability seriously threatened security, not only in Kosovo, but also in neighboring countries. The US and NATO pressed both parties and eventually, in February 1999, brought them together in Rambouillet (France) for peace talks. The Rambouillet accords¹⁰ provided for a very broad form of autonomy for Kosovo which would have its own parliament, president, government, supreme court and security forces. Furthermore, all Yugoslav federal army and police forces would have to be withdrawn from the province and be replaced by NATO or UN forces. Although Albanians insisted on independence, they agreed to sign the peace accord based upon the promise that

the will of people will be taken into account in a final settlement in the near future. Serbia accepted some form of autonomy for Kosovo, but eventually rejected the agreement arguing that it was a violation of its national sovereignty and independence, and pushed on with the military campaign. This provoked a military response from NATO, Operation Allied Force, which consisted primarily of aerial bombing that lasted from late-March 1999 until early-June 1999. Milosevic's military, paramilitary and police forces immediately increased ethnic cleansing of Albanians with the aim of tipping the demographic balance within Kosovo. According to the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by June 1999, seven hundred and forty six thousands Kosovo Albanian refugees had fled to Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro.¹¹ Taking into account the amount of those exiled in other countries, to include around ten thousand killed or missing, the number reaches more than one million which constitutes roughly half of the total population of Kosovo.

The UN Security Council approved Resolution 1244¹² in June 1999 which contained a central contradiction. While it recognized the territorial integrity of the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, to which Serbia was the legal successor state, it also demanded that full account be taken of the 1999 Rambouillet accords, which spoke of a final settlement on the basis of the will of the people.

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, appointed the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari in 2005 as special envoy to lead a political process to determine the territory's future status. The Balkan Contact Group,¹³ which included representatives from the United States, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy, agreed on several guiding principles to shape the process of the future status

of Kosovo. They made it clear that (1) a return to the situation before 1999 is unacceptable, (2) there should be no change of the existing boundaries of Kosovo, and (3) no partition.¹⁴ Talks between Serbia and the Kosovar Albanians took place throughout 2006, but proved desultory and inconclusive, with the two sides unable to agree on the final status. In the end, Ahtisaari drew up a plan which he presented to the Security Council on 26 March 2007. He concluded that “Kosovo is a unique case that demands a unique solution. It does not create a precedent for other unresolved conflicts.” Ahtisaari proposed “independence, under international supervision for an initial period.”¹⁵

Given the fact that Kosovo's Serbian enclaves, (especially the north), are predominated by Serbs and strongly influenced by Belgrade, the Ahtisaari plan allowed for 'decentralization', under which Serbs would be able to run their own districts with special links, including financial, with Serbia. Areas with important Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries would also have special status. Ahtisaari reported that Serbs and Albanians had “diametrically opposed positions” and that “no amount of additional talks, whatever the format, would overcome this impasse.” His conclusion was that “the only viable option for Kosovo is independence, to be supervised for an initial period by the international community.”¹⁶

Russia strongly opposed the Ahtisaari plan, saying that only an agreement between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs was acceptable and that there should be more talks. Russian diplomats implied they would veto a Security Council resolution. Russia backed the Serbs, stating that Kosovo independence could set a precedent that could fuel separatist conflicts elsewhere (Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia,

Pridnyestrovye in Moldova etc.). However, Western powers warned that delaying a decision could be even more dangerous.

In mid 2007 discussions were under way among US, Russian and EU leaders. This "Troika" format, which directed new talks on Kosovo, was proposed as an alternative on the basis of convincing Moscow to become part of the solution. On 19 December 2007, following the troika failure to achieve success, the UN Security Council ended its attempt to resolve the status of Kosovo, leaving Kosovo exhausted after nearly two decades of isolation, war and political limbo.

In response to the aggravating situation in Kosovo, the NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated in Pristina that "NATO-led KFOR peacekeeping troops will stop any outbreak of violence in Kosovo" as the Albanian leaders prepared to declare independence against Serbia's wishes.¹⁷ After a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice indicated that diplomacy had been exhausted and that Washington was ready to move to the next phase.¹⁸ Later on she indicated that "Serbia and Kosovo will never be part of the same country again, and all those concerned should work for a stable outcome in the Balkans based on that reality."¹⁹

On the same course, the Portugal Summit of EU presidents and prime ministers decided to launch Europe's biggest nation-building operation, despite persistent divisions within the EU over how to react to Kosovo's secession from Serbia. "The Kosovars and the Serbs no longer want to live together," said Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president, "our goal is that Europe does not explode."²⁰ Again, Moscow strongly

opposes the EU decision saying that the deployment of an EU mission in Kosovo without a mandate from the UN Security Council will be illegitimate.²¹

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The building of joint state-level institutions remains the major challenge of BiH. The draft constitution which envisioned strengthening the state over ethnic entities failed and had to be postponed until after the October 1, 2006, parliamentary elections. Haris Silajdzic, who won the Bosniak (Muslim) seat with 62.8 percent, in the collective state presidency wants to eliminate the entities and build a stronger centralized state. However, the Republika Srpska leader, Nebojsa Radmanovic, who won the Serb seat with 53.2 percent, does not want a unified Bosnia.²² Sarajevo created a new state-level defense ministry in January 2006 and was invited to join Partnership for Peace (PfP) in November 2006. In a move to contain Balkan tensions, on 04 December 2007 the European Union initiated a pre-accession agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina, after the country's rival ethnic leaders eventually agreed on a set of reforms. Muslim, Serb and Croatian parties have adopted an "action plan" for police reform - the main obstacle to beginning the process of integration with the EU 27 member bloc.²³

Weak governance and a destroyed economic base have led to chronic unemployment, which official statistics put at roughly 40 percent.²⁴ EUFOR's mission will be accomplished when BiH state-level institutions have been created and are functioning adequately, although it is hard to predict when that will happen.

Montenegro

After the Montenegrin referendum in 2006, the "new-old" state is reemerging for the first time since World War One. The May independence referendum was untouched

by any form of violence or disturbance, in sharp contrast to the violence, disturbances and war that accompanied referendum and independence from Belgrade in most other former Yugoslav republics in the 1990s.

However, Montenegro is starting from a very weak institutional, human, and financial resource base. It proceeded to address domestic issues which had been neglected over the previous decade when politics was dominated by the issue of independence. The new country needs now to write its initial constitution, which presumably will define the powers between the president and prime minister. Members of parliament also need assistance in developing appropriate skills to perform necessary defense committee oversight of operations and budgets. Montenegrin financial resources will likely prove to be a major constraint to conducting appropriate reforms required for joining the EU and NATO. As a result, despite the peaceful separation from Serbia, Montenegrins need to work hard on building institutions in order to meet expectations concerning Euro-Atlantic integration.

Serbia

The new Serbian government is deeply divided between pro-Western and nationalist forces. “Facing two difficult issues – Kosovo’s status and cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) – its choice is between moving towards European integration or on to a more isolationist path.”²⁵ The new government does plan to continue gradual economic reforms but social and political change risks being bogging down in disputes between President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica. The real point of contention between the two will be foreign policy, as the latter attempts to continue nationalist and confrontational policies.

Kostunica is likely to try to hide his Milosevic-era nationalist policies behind Tadic's pro-Western inclinations, making it difficult for Washington and Brussels to confront Serbia effectively on key issues.

There is a Western common understanding that by re-engaging Serbia via the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the West can encourage pro-European forces and ease the pain of Kosovo's formal loss, but this has been misguided so far. It seems that the new government will choose Kosovo over Europe; the pro-Western forces would weaken; and in the short-term at least, security structures are unlikely to arrest war criminals.

Regardless of the way the Kosovo question is finally resolved, the integration of Serbia into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream will be a major challenge. The country's politics are still roiled by bitterness and resentment over the wars of secession that split apart the old Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. NATO and the EU will need to reach out to Serbia to help build democratic structures there and in its Balkan neighbors to ensure that its surrounding environment is secure and stable. While the EU told Serbia on September 29, 2006 that it would not resume suspended talks because of the failure to turn over Ratko Mladic, NATO, in a significant move at the Riga Summit, invited Serbia to join PfP.²⁶

On the other hand, this may prove difficult in light of hardening positions on Kosovo. On September 30, 2006 the Serbian parliament unanimously approved a new draft constitution that defined Serbia as an independent state for the first time since 1919, strengthened parliament's control over Vojvodina, and declared Kosovo to be an integral part of Serbia. A referendum held on October 28-29 ratified the constitution,

and the Serbian parliamentary elections of January 21, 2007, returned Tomislav Nikolic's Serbian Radical Party, which is staunchly opposed to Kosovo independence, as the largest parliamentary party (with 81 of 250 seats). President Boris Tadic's pro-European Democratic Party increased its share by 30 seats to 64, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (47 seats), Mladan Dinkic's G17 Plus (10 seats), and the Liberal Democratic Party (15 seats). President Tadic did manage to form a coalition with Kostunica, but he had to grant concessions on Kosovo as a prerequisite to remain in power.²⁷

Albania, Macedonia, Croatia

The fundamental goal of the foreign policies of Albania, Macedonia and Croatia is integration into Euro- Atlantic institutions through membership in the EU and NATO. As members of the "U.S. - Adriatic 3 Initiative,"²⁸ they have been able to better coordinate the steps forward and are ahead of the rest of other aspirant countries in conducting necessary reforms. The three states are eager to receive an invitation to join the Alliance at the NATO Bucharest Summit in April 2008. Even so, each country will be evaluated based on its own performance. The EU Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, and the NATO Riga Summit in 2006, have reinforced their Euro-Atlantic perspectives and given them new impetus to increase their efforts in that direction. However, there is still much work to be done in order to fully meet the criteria.

Albania has made some positive developments particularly in combating the trafficking of illegal migrants and smuggled goods across the Adriatic. Further progress depends on Albania's ability to address the serious challenges it needs to face, for

example in its fight against corruption and organized crime or the strengthening of its judicial system and public administration.

For Macedonia, the Ohrid Agreement²⁹ was an example of successful international intervention to prevent the conflict between Albanian fighters and Macedonian security forces. The conflict started in February 2001 and was about to transform into a civil war. The Ohrid Agreement opened the door to numerous amendments to the Macedonian constitution and far-reaching legislative changes which met Albanian demands with regard to establishing the official status of the Albanian language, the Albanian university, and the status of representation in local and national administrations. In spite of significant steps to improve inter-ethnic relations, there is still much to be done to bring the two main ethnic groups together.

Macedonians feel that their country's international position has been seriously jeopardized. On one side they face intensive Greek pressure on the name "Macedonia" issue, which Athens believes belongs to Greek heritage (Greece has threatened to block Macedonian accession into NATO and the EU unless it changes the name). The second issue is Kosovo, whose unresolved status threatens to bring about a new explosion in the Balkans. Third, Macedonia's unfulfilled obligations toward NATO and the European Union which may undermine its 15-year-old foreign policy plans.³⁰

Croatia has made significant improvements in moving toward EU and NATO's political and military standards. There are high expectations that during the NATO Summit in Romania in April 2008, Croatia might be the only one of the "Adriatic-3" countries to receive an invitation to join NATO. Croatia is aiming for EU membership in 2010, which would require it to finish negotiations in 2009. EU Enlargement

Commissioner Olli Rehn recently said “Croatia could finish the negotiations by mid-2009, thereby granting an enormous vote of confidence to the country. This is characteristic of a wider positive approach towards Croatia on the part of the EU, which is keen to showcase Croatia as a success story in the Western Balkans, given political instability and the stagnation of economic reform in its neighbors.”³¹

The Role of International Organizations

NATO and the EU have played a significant role in West Balkans stability. After a period of more than one decade of non-special commitment, the situation changed in 1995 with the Dayton Accords that ended the Bosnian War. Subsequently, NATO and the EU have engaged in stabilization, cooperation, and integration activities in the region. Dual enlargement and integration incentives have played, and continue to play, a vital role in enhancing West Balkan stability and security.

In May 2003, with strong US support, Macedonia, Albania and Croatia adopted the Adriatic Charter. In this document, the US urges NATO to accept the three countries in the next round, as soon as they demonstrate the ability to assume the responsibilities of membership.”³² The Adriatic Charter incorporates the principles of cooperation of the three countries but affirms that each country should be evaluated according to its own achievements.

NATO's PfP and Membership Action Plan (MAP) program keeps Adriatic Three countries constructively focused and engaged in cooperative security activities consistent with NATO principles. The incentive of PfP also keeps the remaining West Balkan states - Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo (after final status), and to a certain extent Serbia, focused on reform because they perceive PfP as their initial

pathway to Euro-Atlantic structures and legitimacy. To help maintain this course, NATO's Riga Summit in November 2006 sent a strong signal to the Adriatic Three regarding membership invitation prospects for 2008 and offered invitations to join PfP and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to BiH, Montenegro, and Serbia to temper nationalistic tendencies and to enhance long-term stability in the West Balkans.³³

Regarding the EU, in May 1999 the European Commission presented the rationale for moving towards a more ambitious vision for the region's development. The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), as the new approach was called, was intended to help the region secure political and economical stabilization while also developing a closer association with the EU.³⁴ The SAP contained three promises. The first was the promise of economic and financial assistance. The second was to liberalize trade between the EU and SAP countries. The third, most important promise was that of eventual EU membership, embodied in the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA), which were to be concluded once EU conditions were met. Regarded as the centerpiece of SAP, the SAAs were, once signed, to be considered the first formal step in the EU accession process, to be followed eventually by candidacy and the opening of negotiations for full membership. The Thessaloniki Summit of June 2003 reconfirmed the European perspective for West Balkan countries as potential candidates, and enriched the Stabilization and Association Process through new initiatives, aimed at better supporting these countries on the way towards European integration.³⁵

In June 1999, the Council of the European Union launched a post war initiative called the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe."³⁶ The Stability Pact (SP) was

meant to contribute to overcoming the chronic instability and frequent local conflicts in the Balkans, to foster regional cooperation and to support Euro-Atlantic integration of the regional countries. The region welcomed the SP which saw it as a new opportunity for forging political links with the West, and attracting much needed funding to cope with the costly consequences of the conflict and the region's troubled transition. The SP, formally placed under the auspices of the OSCE, was established as a new scheme of intergovernmental cooperation between twenty-eight countries and a range of international organizations. Partners from the region are Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Moldova, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.³⁷ The SP has important achievements of which it can be proud, despite having been subject of some early criticism and dissatisfaction,³⁸ and the fact that some of the high expectations of the early years could not be met. The functioning of the SP has largely complemented EU and NATO policy endeavors in the region, thus helping countries in the region move toward their most cherished goals – European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The West Balkan aspirants see EU accession as a longer-term process than entry into NATO, yet the benefits obtained by the former are more tangible. As it is, the EU has played a critical stabilizing role, particularly since the June 2003 Thessaloniki Summit opened up prospects for their ultimate inclusion.³⁹ Nonetheless, recent events have raised some questions. Following the failed referendums in France and the Netherlands on the EU constitution in May and June 2005, respectively, the EU foreign ministers meeting in Salzburg on March 11, 2006, conveyed the message to the West Balkans that their integration prospects are slipping into the distant future.

Regional Cooperation Initiatives

The instruments for enhancing Balkan stability today include also a range of regional initiatives promoting cooperation. Among these initiatives are the *South East European Cooperative Initiative* (SECI) bringing together Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey; the Southeast European Defense Ministerial (SEDM) includes Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Albania, Macedonia, Croatia, Italy, and more recently Ukraine and Moldova as observers; the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC) whose 11 members include Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Turkey; the *Central European Initiative* (CEI) with 16 members including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovenia; and the *South East Europe Cooperation Process* (SEECPP) including Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia), Greece, Macedonia, Romania, and Turkey, with Croatia as an observer.⁴⁰

The South Eastern European Initiative (SECI) was launched in 1996 and aimed at supporting the Dayton Peace Agreement implementation. A US initiative, the SECI was concentrated almost exclusively on economic cooperation and reconstruction of the region, mostly through private funding, in the fields of infrastructure, trade, energy, transport, the environment and private sector development. Now linked with Europol, the SECI Center in Bucharest, Romania, currently comprises 12 members (all 10 Balkan countries from Slovenia to Turkey, plus Hungary and Moldova) and 16 permanent observers. All 12 members, including BiH and Serbia (without Montenegro), maintain 24 police and customs officers at the SECI Center. In October 2000, the SECI broadened its activities to combat trans-border crime involving trafficking of drugs,

weapons, and humans, and money laundering. In 2003, it added task forces on anti-smuggling, antifraud, and antiterrorism, to include small arms and light weapons and weapons of mass destruction.⁴¹

The Southeast Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM), with robust US support, began annual meetings in 1996 to enhance transparency and build regional cooperation in Southeastern Europe. At the November 5, 2004, SEDM in Ljubljana, Slovenia, Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina were "guests," and Ukraine requested to become a full SEDM member, which took place in December 2005.

In 1999 the SEDM approved the creation of the Southeast European Brigade (SEEBRIG),⁴² which comprises a 25,000-troop force that can be assembled and employed in conflict prevention or peace support operations under NATO or EU leadership. Once the US Joint Forces Command in Naples certified SEEBRIG with full operational capability in October 2004, it deployed a brigade of 350 troops to Afghanistan ISAF on February 6, 2006. The brigade operated successfully under NATO command for its 6-month rotation.⁴³ In addition to peace support operations, SEEBRIG has also begun focusing on developing disaster relief capabilities within the framework of a Political Military Steering Committee project called Employment of SEEBRIG in Disaster Relief Operations (SEDRO).

The Central European Initiative (CEI) was launched in 1989 on the basis of an Italian proposal to contribute to the economic development of Central Europe, broaden the opportunities for dialog over the whole area and prepare non-EU members of the CEI for future membership in the Union.

The *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC), initiated by Turkey in cooperation with Russia in 1992, aims to foster interaction, stability and prosperity as well as good neighborly relations in the Black Sea Area.

The South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), a genuine Balkan cooperation forum, was launched in 2000. Only countries of the region participate in this forum. SEECP focuses on political cooperation and dialogue, covering a wide range of issues from security, economic cooperation, humanitarian, social and cultural cooperation as well as cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs.

These initiatives are clearly beneficial undertakings, complementary in nature, often coordinated with the work of the Stability Pact, and paralleled by a wide range of dynamic bilateral relationships. However, their success is constrained by limited resources.⁴⁴

The Possibility of Resurfacing the Challenges

The recent years for the Western Balkans have been years of waiting. After positive developments in all countries of the region - especially in developing closer relations with NATO and the EU - serious security challenges are likely to resurface. There is increasing worry in the region that the promise of eventual membership given to the Western Balkan states by the EU in 2003 may be beginning to dim. Following the rejection of the European constitutional treaty by French and Dutch voters, some major EU countries have questioned the benefit of full West Balkans membership, as opposed to some form of 'privileged'⁴⁵ or 'strategic' partnership. There is also a fear that the Balkan states could suffer collateral damage from other disputes - for example, the EU's 'absorption capacity' could be used as a convenient excuse by those whose real target

is stopping Turkish accession. Given the fact that the Euro-Atlantic membership process is taking so long, there is growing frustration among the population, questioning the credibility of the process itself: do NATO and the EU really want us in? Maintaining the credibility of integration prospects is very important, otherwise security in the Balkans could be severely undermined. Some nations might be tempted to move in unhelpful directions as corruption, organized crime and ethnic tensions will regain much wider terrain and the reforms will slow down.

The Kosovo issue is certainly the biggest concern for the region and furthermore, how it is handled has major implications for the region's relations with both the US and Russia, for internal EU unity, and for the stability of the whole European region.

Russia is going to veto any decision on Kosovo made by the US and EU that is not supported by Serbia. Moscow will attempt to become involved in the struggle to regain geopolitical influence in the Balkans by enabling instability in Kosovo. Kosovo's fate could be caught up in Moscow's broader tensions with the West on issues such as missile defense, Iran, and the possible NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. In the absence of a UN resolution, chaos might engulf the UN mission. With its clout weakened, it would probably have to wind down drastically or even withdraw, leaving the Kosovar authorities to cope on their own. This could encourage a more clearly defined partition in the north of Kosovo, and the possible flight or expulsion of Serbs from the enclaves. Serbs are likely to look to the Serb military for their protection. Belgrade is likely to repress Albanians in Southern Serbia and push the Republika Srpska to separate from the Bosnian Federation. The same logic could be followed by

Albanians in Macedonia, who constitute 25 to 30% of the population, demanding the same solution as in Bosnia and in Kosovo.

On the other hand, Kosovo is de facto independent. Any form of status under Serbian rule will be harshly opposed by more than 90% of the population in Kosovo. Moreover, partition of Kosovo is the worst case scenario, as it could result in a reopening of the Preshevo Valley insurgency. Albanian demands that the Preshevo valley in Southern Serbia be united with Kosovo, to compensate for the loss of the towns of Mitrovica and Leposavic, would be problematic. The present status quo in Kosovo (where the economy is in chaos, unemployment reaches 50% of the working force, foreign investments are almost absent, and the future is uncertain), is intolerable. It will lead to disorder in a short-term period, as hardliners will lead the people to riots to undermine both the Kosovo leadership and UNMIK.

The Road to Maintain Stability

There is a general (regional and international) understanding that the Kosovo question, if not addressed in time, will inflict instability not only in Kosovo, but in all the Balkans. Therefore, a long-term solution of the Kosovo issue becomes the primary task for the international community, especially for the US and the EU, as the largest contributors to regional security and stability.

Kosovo's status is a European issue and has to be solved within a European Union context. The status process has to involve both Belgrade and Pristina moving towards EU and NATO membership, a process that would ease misgivings on both sides. Nevertheless, it is critical for the United States to remain engaged on the final status issue—and not continue a process of shifting the burden of the Balkans to

Europe. The US is the only acceptable supplier of security guarantees to Kosovo Albanians, and the Balkan region, and has credibility as a world power that the EU cannot match.

A realistic assessment of the range of possibilities for the final status of Kosovo must take into account the fact that most of Kosovo is de facto independent. Therefore, the negotiations must be centered on how to legitimately make the independence permanent, to guarantee that independence will be achieved peacefully, and to result in prosperity and security for all the inhabitants of Kosovo. The Ahtisaari plan seems the best solution in the circumstances because it provides the maximum rights for Serbs in a monitored independent Kosovo.

The International Community, led by the US, must be more energetic and move quickly to reach a Kosovo status definition. This will discredit any Russian attempt to enable instability in the region or inflict division within the EU, in order to regain its former geopolitical influence. The US and EU must warn Albanians that the Serbs or Serb properties in Kosovo must be protected, and any disregard in this direction will discredit their cause and will take away Western support for their self determination. BiH and Macedonia must be committed (urged) to full compliance with the Dayton Peace Agreement and the Ohrid Agreement, respectively. It is necessary that NATO troops in Kosovo, Macedonia, and EU troops in BiH be ready to defuse potentially violent situations during this period of time. The US and EU must get all member or aspirant countries in the region, including Albania, Macedonia and Croatia, to help support the process.

The Western strategy in the region should continue to be based on the pull factor of NATO and the EU. Using Partnership for Peace and the Stabilization and Association processes, NATO and the EU should keep seeking to enhance state-building, modernization and reforms, much as it did in the former communist states of eastern and central Europe.

A convincing political perspective for eventual integration of Western Balkan states into NATO and the EU is crucial to keep their reforms on track. A new NATO-EU Balkan strategy would build on this and provide the necessary conditions for nurturing military cooperation and coordination with border troops, police, and intelligence agencies to enhance West Balkan security and stability. PfP programs should place new and greater emphasis on combating organized crime, which is prevalent in Southeast Europe, and the EU focus on furthering West Balkan cooperative regional security sector reforms. The objective is to improve interagency coordination and cooperation within and among Balkan states.

NATO and the EU should establish more precise goals and timelines for keeping their "Open Door" policy credible. It is important that NATO keeps its Riga Summit promise for the three remaining MAP members (Croatia, Macedonia, Albania) to get an invitation in the April 2008 Summit as well as an establishment of the prospects of membership for the remaining countries (including Serbia). Similarly, the EU, which counted Bulgaria and Romania among its members in January 2007, needs to reiterate and make credible its 2003 Thessaloniki Summit's commitment to remain open to the new and possible future states of the West Balkans.

There are a series of practical measures the Western Balkans needs to follow, especially in the field of regional integration and cooperation. First, the EU and NATO need to exploit SEDM, SEEBRIG, and SECI successes to deal with the new West Balkan risk environment and prevent future conflict from emerging. Second, the areas of cooperation should be broadened to include interior and treasury departments as well as other agencies dealing with security, law enforcement, and information. Third, the Stability Pact and other regional initiatives should continue to focus on fostering political, economic and cultural relations among Balkan states as well as building mutual understanding and trust. In the end, for the same purposes, every Balkan state should be committed to build and strengthen transparent bilateral relations with all its neighbors. Only common interests can establish a common vision for long-term cooperation among all countries of the region.

Conclusions

Despite the progress made in the last decade in promoting democracy, economic free enterprise, the rule of law, partnership and good neighbor relations, security in the West Balkans region remains fragile. Major challenges such as the indeterminate status of Kosovo, the respect of ethnic minorities and human rights, the insufficient rule of law, weak administration, corruption, and organized crime might undermine the progress, delay necessary integration reforms, and revive ethnic conflicts.

Conditions on the ground suggest the absolute imperative for a quick solution of Kosovo's status. "There are no easy solutions available to the Kosovo situation. Supervised independence is the only ultimate way forward, because all the alternatives are worse. The primary responsibility for achieving this lies with the US and EU

member states. Hard decisions about recognition are going to have to be made; and they are going to have to be made soon.”⁴⁶

Fortunately, NATO’s Membership Action Plan and the EU’s Stabilization and Association Agreement constitute the necessary incentives for all West Balkans countries, except Serbia which is undergoing many dilemmas. NATO and the EU should ensure that Balkan states are given all these incentives to make further strides towards security and prosperity.

Serbian participation is critical to building West Balkan regional stability and security. However, the West may well have to accustom itself to a Serbia that for a number of years is anti-West, pro-Russia and unrepentant in its dangerously self-destructive nationalism. In any case, the door for Euro-Atlantic integration should remain open to Belgrade. Surrounded on all sides by NATO and EU countries, Serbs will soon understand that the isolation path does not serve their country’s best interests.

The Western approach should focus on programs of development that are beneficial to the entire region and promote regional cooperation. Development should also go hand in hand with the building of democratic institutions and the security of minorities in the region. Regional cooperation initiatives are essential to building consensus, confidence and mutual understanding.

To sum up, well coordinated ends, ways and means of NATO and EU strategies on the Balkans, integrated with regional initiatives, provide an indispensable framework of principles and a roadmap for the West Balkans in their course toward Euro-Atlantic integration. This roadmap is crucial to avoid ambiguity, regional instability, and to prevent a possible backslide into conflict.

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