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Challenges to Security in Southeast Europe

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Summary

After the vigorous engagement of the international community, which resulted in the Dayton Accord, Royamont Initiative, the EU's Regional Approach, the SECI and, finally, the Stability Pact, it seems that the likeliness of new challenges to the security has been eliminated from Southeastern Europe. The involvement of a number of significant international factors, plus the presence of military forces in the Balkans – whether through SFOR, KFOR or NATO – should all lead us to the conclusion that a possible outbreak of larger conflicts is impossible; moreover, even some other forms of insecurity are almost totally under control. If the security of this region is to be compared to the situation in other parts of Europe, it can be said with certainty that the challenges to security will continue to have their local, as well as their universal foundations. This will make the demands of the international community and local forces – on condition they truly aspire towards Europe – much more dynamic and committed. Only by such systematic efforts will it be possible to overcome the existing situation and create the necessary pre-conditions for the integration of Southeast Europe into Europe proper.

Systematizing attempt

In an effort to systematize possible challenges, we could start from the division into the military and the non-military threats. All the situations threatening with an outbreak of armed conflicts could be included in the first group of challenges. These include: the relations between Greece and Turkey, a further disintegration of Yugoslavia, the creation of the Kosovo state, or the emergence of a Greater Albania, and alike. It is obvious that these goals could hardly be achieved without the use of military force; also, some of these potential hotspots could lead to a further escalation of confrontation on a regional scale.

The category of military threats should, by all means, include the unfinished process of conventional arms control within the CFE, which proves that the link with the remaining European space regarding the conventional arms control has not yet been fully established, as well as that the Balkans has not yet been fully incorporated into the European system. Although this setback can be offset by Annex II of the Dayton Ac-

cord, it would be better if a comprehensive system – the one that would be linked to the OSCE system – was built.

Of course, these military challenges should, at this moment, be viewed conditionally as well. Given the presence of a plethora of international military forces, it would be difficult even to imagine an outbreak of hostilities, regardless of the strength of the involved countries. International community has sufficient military power deployed on the ground to nip any spark of a military conflict in the bud, and the military campaign against Serbia has clearly showed that NATO will not tolerate any continuing warfare in the Balkans.

Therefore, it may be said that the non-military challenges are far more numerous and threatening. All the conflicts that have not been solved so far can be included in this group of challenges, regardless of whether they have their roots in history, ethnicity or religion; also, they all have their territorial manifestations. Furthermore, the problems connected with economic development, experienced throughout the region, are due either to common transitional hardships, specific (irrational) national solutions, or are a consequence of the economic devastation of the central state of the former Yugoslavia (Serbia). Such non-military threats can easily cross the line and become military ones, either by political decisions or by a political leadership's political choices.

Having in mind the fact that the line separating the military from the non-military challenges is a very thin one, perhaps the existing challenges in the Balkans could be divided by taking into account all the dangers that might lead to instability, regardless of their military or non-military character, and then list them as the challenges that could jeopardize the security and stability of this region. Within such a classification, the following division could be drawn:

- traditional Balkan conflicts;
- new conflicts, a consequence of newly gained independence;
- potential crisis points;
- new challenges to the security.

Traditional Balkan conflicts

The variety of religious, economic, political, military, and ethnic factors that the Balkan region is rife with, opens space for numerous possible conflicts. Some of them have obscure historical background, and have become an inseparable part of particular national determination and to a large extent influence the present positions of particular states.

Although nowadays these types of conflicts, regardless of their duration and their national background, are largely subdued due to the presence of the international community, their existence, and the possibility of their revival, should not be completely ignored.

– The conflicts between Greece and Turkey regarding the territorial demarcation in the Aegean Sea and the conflicts over Cyprus¹ are the result not only of the different concepts of political leadership, but are also grounded in distant historical events and their evocations by both nations. In spite of their NATO membership, the two countries have been unable to settle these issues and every new incident results in a mobilisation of all national forces for the protection of a country's interests and positions. The relations between these two countries have affected NATO's South Wing for years now, and in spite of all the efforts to build upon the European and trans-Atlantic common denominators, all this has failed to improve them. Turkey's efforts to join EU are resolutely blocked by Greece, and even in their different positions regarding the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, both countries have demonstrated their national ideas inherited from the past.

In Turkey they are aware of the fact that Turkey is a bigger and stronger country, but the integration of Greece into Europe offered a strong "joker" to Greece, to be repeatedly used to secure concessions from Turkey. Having in mind the depth of the crisis in their relations, as well as the unwillingness to change their perceptions of one another, apparently such a situation will continue, and only eventually, when Turkey becomes a EU member as well – and then only maybe – all the tensions in their mutual relations will disappear.

– The conflicts between Albania and Yugoslavia regarding Kosovo can be included in this category of traditional tensions as well. In the days of friendship and cooperation, immediately after World War Two, when both countries belonged to the group of peoples' democracies, both sides were claiming that this issue was unimportant. Even more, within the plan to create a Balkan socialist federation (along with Bulgaria), both countries were supposed to set an example for other countries. But, after the Cominform Resolution of 1948, the Enver Hoxha regime became most vocal in its diatribes against Yugoslavia; in them, Kosovo was made an issue of. After Stalin's death, their relations were normalized once again, but they never reached the level of the relations with other East European countries, and the Kosovo issue re-emerged on several occasions. But the isolated Albania lacked the strength, as well as interested allies to support its claims. Only after the collapse of socialism, and Berisha's rise to presidency, the question of Kosovo once again became central. In a sort of an attempt to divert attention from internal problems, Berisha advocated the unification of all Albanians in one country, and began calling for the internationalisation of the Kosovo issue. Milošević's brutal regime, manifested through its policy of genocide, first opened the space for the internationalization of the Kosovo issue, as well as for the engagement of various international organisations and mediators, and later, by abandoning the negotiations in Rambouillet, for the NATO military intervention.

The present situation, very specific in many elements, led to the deployment of the UN i.e. NATO and Russian forces, in Kosovo, to the return of Albanian refugees, to the exodus of Serbian and other non-Albanian population from Kosovo, the creation of

¹ The official Turkey adds to these the question of the Turkish minority in the Trakia region and argues that Greece refuses to recognize the ethnic identity of more than 150,000 Turks.

Foreign Policy of Turkey, Ankara 1998, p. 16.

KFOR as the principal military, political and police force, and the ultimate exclusion of Kosovo from the Serbian state systems (monetary, energy, transport, economic, educational, etc.). Although both the West and Russia have recognized the fact that Kosovo is an integral part of Yugoslavia, not even a trace of this hypothesis can be detected in this situation. On the other hand, the West is resolutely expressing its opposition to any secession of Kosovo and the changing of the borders. The obsession with the dangers that the change of borders could represent is still present, and is especially noticeable regarding the volatile Balkan territories. The basic idea is that of a controlled stabilization of the situation and the creation of a possibility for multi-ethnic life. According to President Clinton, the most important thing is “to preserve democracy, self-determination, freedom, and that in these countries (meaning the Balkan countries) there would be no ethnic, religious or racial persecutions, regardless of the national borders”.² This is, of course, a very reasonable approach, but the question is to what extent this will satisfy the Albanian population that views the expulsion of the Serbian authority and Serbs as their freedom. It remains to be seen how many non-Albanians will return to Kosovo. Finally, UCK’s position regarding this issue will also be of significance, since this is now the organisation that controls the majority of Albanians and seems to represent their political leadership in fulfilling their desire for a full secession from Yugoslavia.

If this came through, then certainly a new set of questions would arise. Namely, would an independent Kosovo become an independent state, would it become a part of the present Albania, or would it be the beginning of the emergence of a Greater Albania in which certain other parts populated by Albanian majorities would also be included (parts of Macedonia and Montenegro)?

In any case, the issue of Kosovo, and with that the Albanian-Serbian (Yugoslav) relations as well, will remain a problem that surpasses regional significance. The international engagement,³ as well as all other efforts aimed at restoring stability in these areas, make the Kosovo issue a broader international problem, a problem that will continue to test the willingness and abilities of the international community to act within the context of the new world order.

– The dispute between Turkey and Bulgaria, although greatly toned down in recent times, remains. In a situation where over 800.000 Turks (Pomaks) live in Bulgaria, who were forcefully “bulgarized” during the previous socialist regime, it is difficult to establish normal relations overnight. And as the fundamentalism of Muslim provenance is in different parts of the Balkans often mentioned as one of the most dangerous threats, in all the communities with Muslim population there is distrust regarding their true commitment and inclusion in the state they live in. In the calculations regarding Muslims in the Balkans as a destabilizing factor, and with the fears of the emergence of fundamentalism in these areas, Bulgaria with its considerable Muslim-Pomak population has an important place. Nevertheless, the results achieved in the incorporation of Pomaks into the Bulgarian social, political and economic life are encouraging for future relations,

² President Clinton during a conversation with journalists in Sarajevo, Feral Tribune, 9/8/99.

³ For more, see: Kosovo and NATO: Impending Challenges, Washington 1999.

especially since Bulgaria has committed itself to the European path, which means strong imperatives for respecting human and minority rights.⁴

– The relations between Romania and Hungary, due to the status of Hungarians living in Romania, were at certain post-cold war periods quite tense. In Causescu's times the policy of national homogenization demanded that all Romanian citizen demonstrate their loyalty to the nation i.e. the state. The large Hungarian population in Transylvania had a strong sense of national identity and the fall of Causescu's regime was expected to create better conditions for them in Romania. Although there was no chance that Romania would cede Transylvania back to Hungary, in various Romanian Hungarian circles and in Hungary, attempts were made to obtaining full autonomy, which would then lead to the demands for self-determination. Romanian authorities were firmly against such a course of events, and sometimes it was suggested that the situation called for a future deployment of European forces. It is interesting to mention that the then WEU Secretary, Van Eckler, mentioned the relations between Romania and Hungary as a possible testing ground for the WEU action.

This did not happen, and both states have demonstrated some restraint. This restraint was primarily a result of the EU pressures, which made it clear to both states that there will be no closer relations with the EU for them unless they establish normal relations between their two neighbouring countries. Also, both countries were influenced by their desire to join the Partnership for Peace. This all led to the agreement on bilateral relations, which, in part, regulates the issue of Hungarian minority in Romania.⁵

On the other hand, Romania also has certain claims on Dobruja, as well as on Moldova. At first, Romanian politicians expected that Moldova, the state created out of the Socialist Republic of Moldova after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was to be united with Romania. As that did not happen, certain discontent was noticeable in Bucharest, illustrated by the statements that Moldova had formerly been a Romanian territory and that it would be only natural if the two countries united. But, since in Romania, like in Moldova, besides the population of Romanian descent, live Ukrainians, Russians, Turks, Jews, and Bulgarians, it became clear that the eventual unification with Romania would mean the beginning of new dramatic events. As a result of the fears that Moldova would become a part of Romania, the Ukrainian and Russian population created the Transdniester Republic in south Moldova in 1990, which still exists.

At present, Romania is occupied with its internal problems, which will obviously be very difficult to solve, unless the country quickly speeds up its pace of accommodation with Europe. At the same time, this is the principal reason to leave all the demands that could give rise to nationalism behind, since it is clear to the majority of Romania's political forces that Europe would not tolerate such a development. Romania, aware that its inclusion in the next group of future EU members is in its best interest, and with the Associating Agreement with the EU already in place, considers Europe its priority, which in practice limits the scope of action for those nationalistic forces that would curtail autonomy for Hungarians, or demand some territorial changes. Besides, the new

⁴ Ts. Tsvetkov, *Bulgarian Security Policy: Alternatives and Choice*, Gröningen 1999, p. 33.

⁵ A. Agh, *The Politics of Central Europe*, London 1998, p. 157.

Moldovan independence is becoming a commonly accepted fact, and the Moldovan political structures are far from seeking any kind of unification with Romania which, economically, is not a very attractive option. Moldova is nowadays expecting much more from the SECI and the eventual rapprochement with the EU, since this is viewed as the only way for its faster development and for overcoming economic hardships.

New Balkan traumas and new independence

– The disintegration of the federal state of Yugoslavia triggered off the emergence of some new disputes, and also strengthened a number of previous animosities among certain nations in this area. It is almost certain that numerous disputes will continue to fester due to these problems, while the international community will have to continue with careful monitoring of the behaviour of the new states.

– The relations between Croatia and Serbia have their roots in their coexistence in the two previous Yugoslav states, as well as in the war that erupted after the collapse of Yugoslavia. The Dayton Accord, and especially the Agreement on the Normalisation of Relations between the two states (1996), initiated the process of gradual normalization. The issue of Prevlaka remains an open sore, since Croatia views it solely as a security issue, while Yugoslavia demands the change of the border in its favour. There are also questions connected with the return of refugees and numerous property issues. Finally, the issue of the restitution of war damages suffered by Croatia could come up as well.

Although the relations between the two countries have entered a phase of a sort of “cold peace”, it is obvious that time, and the instruments of the international community, will influence the development of better relations. It is only understandable that between the two countries which existed within the same state for several decades, numerous links and connections were created, ranging from personal to economic and cultural links that will continue to exist and develop. Naturally, some changes – democratization among them – should occur first, as a precondition for developing better relations – which should this time be founded on mutual interests, rather than on some pan-Slavic illusions or “brotherhood and unity”. The very moment when interests become the basis for developing good neighbourly relations, these two countries will demonstrate their readiness for establishing the European type of relations.

– The disputes between Croatia and Slovenia, although not major, are felt in bilateral relations of the two countries. The current demarcation in the Bay of Piran does not satisfy Slovenia, and is an issue generating other, sharper political accents occasionally heard on both sides. It is plausible that this question can be solved relatively easily, as can be the problems connected with the Krško nuclear plant and the restitution of damages to the Croatian clients of Ljubljanska Banka. It is obvious that the creation of a better political climate, as well as certain accommodation in the political positions of both countries would help that these problems are overcome. But even as they are, these issues are not of the nature that could lead to significant tensions in the area.

– The Macedonian-Greek dispute is a consequence of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the creation of an independent Macedonian state. Greeks immediately rejected Macedonian claims that a large number of Macedonians live in Greece; at the same time

they found – in the Macedonian flag and in some constitutional provisions dealing with the protection of Macedonians abroad – the justification for the resolute Greek rejections of the new state. Analysing the creation of Macedonia primarily through the prism of the relations between Greece and Turkey, one of the more serious reasons for Greek concern is the question of the further development of the relations between Macedonia and Turkey. Any new infiltration of Turkey in the Balkans is something that Greeks would like to prevent at any cost.⁶ But the initial mobilization of national sentiment on both sides gradually gave way to the easing of tensions. Greece finally lifted the blockade which completely cut off Macedonia in the south, an agreement on the alterations in the Macedonian national flag and some provisions of the Constitution was reached, while the question of the official name – the Republic of Macedonia – remains open.

It can be expected that the Kosovo crisis, along with all other consequences, will have a positive impact on the relations between Macedonia and Greece, since they both have a vested interest in the peace on the Balkans, and thus in overcoming the existing disputes among them.

– The relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria are also very complex. Although Bulgaria was the first country to recognize the independent Macedonia, nevertheless it does not recognize the existence of the Macedonian nation, and occasionally comes up with the interpretations that Macedonians are actually Bulgarians. This could, in some other circumstances – if Bulgaria had some other possibilities and abilities – result in additional dangers for Macedonia, particularly if Macedonia became imbroiled in some internal problems (for example, an attempt at the separation of the western parts of Macedonia populated mostly by the Albanian minority). However, since the international community is firmly present in Macedonia, with the goal of establishing a lasting peace in the whole area, it is obvious that such Bulgarian aspirations cannot be realized. Besides, Bulgaria also sees its future within Europe, therefore the EU has sufficient resources to eliminate this dispute with minimal efforts.

Potential points of crisis

If the list of new disputes contains issues that do not threaten with some serious disturbances, especially after the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia, the set of open questions and potential new hot spots looks quite different.

– Among these, the dominant questions are those concerning further development, and even survival, of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The formula: one state, two entities and three nations should satisfy all the existing interests in the best and most democratic manner. Nevertheless, if one tried to imagine such a development in another environment, and having in mind the recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as other historical experiences – the state ones and the national ones – then such an outcome might seem very dubious.⁷ Optimists, who believe that after the war and all the suffer-

⁶ D. Triantaphyllou, “The Greek Approach in the Balkans”, The Southeast European Yearbook 1997-1998, Athens, 1998, pp. 212-214.

⁷ For example, see: M. O. Hanion, “Bosnia: Better Left Partitioned”, Washington Post, April 10, 1997.

ing, certain critical mass that supports peace, development and stability has been created, find that the international presence, as well as the willingness to keep it there for a longer period of time, is the crucial component of future stability. And it is this question of the duration of international presence that acts both as a controller and a protector and within which the possibility of the preservation of this model should be viewed.

If the international community forces – the sign of its political, military and economic commitment (which should, in time, lead to the creation of a new, democratic society) – remain present in Bosnia and Herzegovina long enough, then it could be expected for this model to work. In such a case the return of the refugees and displaced persons could occur, and the preconditions for a multi-cultural coexistence and a degree of mutual prosperity can be created. Of course, the key question is – how long? Three or five years would not be long enough; a decade or two should be optimal.

In another, extremely pessimistic scenario, all the aforementioned hypotheses would fall apart at the moment when this time period was shortened, or if the international community rapidly withdrew from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In that case, the three-sided formula would dissolve, and the conflicts over the return of the refugees, over territory, revenge and alike would recommence, with all the sides seeking allies for their cause abroad.

– The country that has been radiating instability in the Balkans for the past ten years still represents the most serious challenge to the Balkan security today, and still remains the biggest enigma. SR Yugoslavia, at the time of the – probable – agony of Milošević's regime, is tearing along the seams. Montenegro is on the brink of separation, Kosovo can be practically written off, Sandžak is demanding autonomy, and the ethnic Hungarians – supported by the nationalist political forces from Hungary – aspire for a full secession from Yugoslavia.

Milošević's regime, which has hardly survived, and has sustained on crises, and which has at the same time lost every war, is today facing challenges to the very territorial survival of SR Yugoslavia, as well to its own survival.

In this dramatic breakup of Yugoslavia, the international community, for the time being at least, is not willing to go all the way. The Montenegrin proposal for the creation of an alliance of two states – Montenegro and Serbia – was endorsed neither by Washington nor by Western Europe, nor by Moscow. Kosovo is still a part of Yugoslavia, and assurances have been given that it will remain so. Sandžak and Vojvodina might perhaps gain some level of autonomy, but it would be difficult to envisage the international community supporting their full secession from SR Yugoslavia. The world would primarily like to see democratic changes taking place in Belgrade, which would create the basis for subsequent democratic solutions of all other problems. It is expected that within a democratic Yugoslavia the problems related to the union with Montenegro, and the autonomy of the multi-ethnic Kosovo, Sandžak and Vojvodina could be solved. In this way, the question of changing borders would be avoided, since no one is

keen on renewing it; this would most probably result in new, long-lasting tensions in the Balkans.

The question remains which are the forces that should carry out these democratic changes and open the doors to democratization? It is also clear that such democratization would not be limited to Serbia, but would spread all over the region in the form of a universal process of build-up of civic societies, elimination of war criminals, respect of human and minority rights and acceptance of the European codes of behaviour. Even if we are getting closer to such solutions, the process is still too slow.

– Territorial and minority issues, unless a high level of democratization and Europeization of the Balkans is achieved, will continue to present a significant problem in these areas, and a constant challenge to security. Not a single territorial or minority question in the Balkans has been completely solved so far, and following the recent war it is obvious that it will be even more difficult to solve them.

The question of Albanians, who live in Albania as well as in Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and in Greece, remains unsolved. Will it be enough to guarantee human and minority rights in their case, or should a creation of a unique Albania be allowed?

Milošević's policy has further complicated the Serbian question. That policy resulted in a large number of Serbian refugees from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, who were practically forced to live in one country. Their return is slow and in many cases questionable, which leaves this issue open. Perhaps a universal Europeization of the Balkans is the only solution to this question as well.

The same can be applied to the Macedonian national question, since some Macedonians live in Bulgaria and Greece.

For the advocates of small national states, the Muslim question should also be put on the agenda, since a large number of Muslims live outside Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sandžak).

Therefore, when listing all these potential challenges to security, it must be concluded that in the present circumstances it is easier and, at the same time, more difficult to solve these issues. Easier, since the Balkans ceased to depend exclusively on the actions of the Balkan factors and their "ways" of solving problems; more difficult since the outrageous bloodshed and suffering of the past decade in this area are difficult to ignore or forget. All these challenges may be controlled only by careful policies of the international community, its efforts to understand both the historical and the present relationships, and its willingness and commitment to keep its presence in the area for a longer time, since as long as the forces of the international community are stationed in the Balkans, it would be hard to imagine any conflicts, even attempts at the realization of some national aspirations by force. This is certainly encouraging, but at the same time it encumbers the international community with many obligations regarding their activity in connection with further developments in this part of Europe.

New challenges to security

In a classical sense, the new challenges to the security in this region arise from the geostrategic position of Southeastern Europe, from a permanent lack of resources needed for the organisation of a modern and efficient military force, from the non-existence of stronger bilateral and/or multilateral alliances (apart from the Partnership for Peace) and from the attempts to create the pre-conditions for multilateral linking i.e. NATO membership, as soon as possible.

This projection is also the basis on which almost all of these countries, with the exception of Milošević's Yugoslavia, see their future security, which should also guarantee as fast as possible the inclusion of the entire region into the European and trans-Atlantic integrations.

Along with these usual issues that represent threats to the security, or traditional challenges that are connected with the deployment and use of military force, new forms of challenges are also emerging. The transition from the socialist regime into a capitalist system accelerated the opening of the whole area of Eastern Europe, as well as the activities of organized crime; all this has led to the situation in which Southeast Europe is also becoming faced with different kinds of new challenges to the security. New immigration patterns, terrorism, arms and drugs trafficking, prostitution and enormous spread of organized crime, are parts of such non-traditional challenges whose consequences are increasingly felt.

– New immigration patterns represent a major issue in these areas, situated at the crossroads of several regions (East European, Russian, Balkan, Middle Eastern) and where practically every country has problems connected to uncontrolled immigration. Whether they are used as transport venues, mostly to the West, or as targets for illegal entries, the immigration is characterized by a number of social and economic problems. Large profits are earned on “smuggling” people from various countries, where organized groups already exist for conducting such activities. Some immigrants are used by the mob as cheap labour force or for prostitution. In the situation in which all the countries of the region lack financial resources for effective border controls, the possibilities for new immigration channels are created.

– Terrorism has deep roots, especially in the Balkans, and may easily find fertile soil in national and ethnic conflicts, as well as in the consequences of recently ended war conflicts. Minority groups, if unsatisfied with their status, or strengthened nationalist movements (as was recently the case with the Serb rebellion in Croatia) may easily become prey of the organizers of terrorist activities.

But there is always the question of outside support which makes the fight against terrorism even more difficult. Unresolved national questions may always serve as the grounds for the inclusion of outside elements, either connected to some state, or to some groups of organized crime that will use the situation to their own advantage.

– Arms and drug trafficking are expanding rapidly after the cold war system of relations dissolved. The geography of this area, as well as the wars fought on the territories of former Yugoslavia, have all created an opportunity for a wide zone surrounding it to earn extra profits from arms trade. The arms embargo, which has proved – for the nth

time – inefficient, has only increased the price of arms that were supplied to all the warring parties. In that way, huge extra profits were made, and despite the fact that the wars are now over, the whole southeastern Europe will continue to feel the consequences of this for some time. Simultaneously with the arms trafficking, the channels for drugs were opened. In many cases, the routes for drug trafficking were in place in this area even before the recent events, as part of the transit routes across Southeast Europe, but a large part of the expansion can be attributed to the recent wars. The question of finances needed for the arms was relatively easily compensated by the drug trade or by securing its transit, which all added to the problems of Southeastern Europe: an increase of local drug production, international trafficking routes passing through it, and all this increased the number of domestic users and addicts.

– The wave of prostitution that has swept the area of Southeastern Europe can also be linked to the breakup of socialism in the East, to the new freedom of movement and travel, transitional crises and failures, and to the wars in the former Yugoslavia. A large number of prostitutes from the East, mostly from Ukraine, Russia and Romania, in their efforts to get to the West, spend some time in these areas. In an environment of unregulated social relations, with the possibility for blackmail and extortion, many of them become victims of organized crime and their merciless exploitation. It is believed that at this moment there are over a thousand prostitutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, mostly from the East, who are generating profits for all kinds of criminals, as well as for some corrupt government officials.

– The spread and growth of the forces of organized crime is certainly one of the most significant security risks in Southeastern Europe. At the same time, it represents a major threat to political stability and economic development. Exploiting chaos, insecurity, lack of proper organization and nonexistence of the rule of law, the organized crime have established their strongholds in Southeastern Europe and created links with high-ranked political officials and parts of the military establishments. Such a network, at the time of very slow transitional processes, has resulted in the emergence of special interest groups, deepened the polarization of internal forces, led to radicalisation and – especially dangerous – constantly undermines the confidence of citizens in the possibility of establishing the rule of law.

Different national mafias (Russian, Turkish, Italian, Albanian, and Serbian) have managed relatively easily to find and agree over mutual interests and have sufficient space for their activities. To a large extent, the Turkish mafia controls the area of Bulgaria and partly Macedonia, the Russian mafia has traditionally been strong in Bulgaria and today is the strongest in Serbia, the Italian mafia in Montenegro and Albania, while the Albanian organized crime is getting increasingly internationalized with a diversified network stretching from Albania and Kosovo to Western Europe. Arms and drugs trafficking, gambling, money laundering, real estate purchasing, attempts to sell nuclear technology and materials flourished during the wars, the situation especially acute in the territories of the former Yugoslavia.

The crisis in Albania led to an enormous growth of Albanian organized crime, which is, it seems, presently stronger than the state. Prostitution, arms and drugs trafficking, cigarette contraband, transport of immigrants, and oil trade are just some of Albanian mob operations, and they are now spreading in the direction of Kosovo. This

represents a threat for Kosovo as it could be completely engulfed by the Albanian mafia, the situation which would aggravate the gradual easing of tensions and impede international activities.

The criminal activities, conducted by organized crime groups, are already multi-ethnic in their character, and with some exceptions, the area of their operations is the entire Southeastern Europe. By eliminating the mechanisms of state control and protection, organized crime represents one of the largest sources of crime and corruption which undermines internal relations in a society, stands in the way of foreign investment, of economic growth and institutional development of democratic forms of government throughout the area.

The forms of cooperation among the states of the region in fighting crime have mostly been bilateral or Interpol-based, but that is not enough. Romania has, for example, established the centre for investigating and combating organized crime, Bulgaria has launched a campaign against crime and corruption, and the international community is advocating for the same to be done in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar campaigns have been launched in other countries as well. But all this has had a very limited effect on eliminating crime. It is obvious that these countries are faced with a completely new situation, which occupies a very high place on the list of non-traditional challenges to the security in Southeastern Europe. Although it could be argued that this is a development characteristic for all post-socialist societies, it must be added that in Southeastern Europe, due to the recent wars in the region, the situation is much more complex. What is increasingly needed is a firm hand and action of the state bodies against the joint activities of political officials and organized crime, the creation of pre-conditions for cooperation at the regional level with the establishment of joint agencies, and even joint police forces, the fastest possible inclusion of Southeastern Europe into the existing European systems which would help the stabilisation of the area and, at the same time, hasten the elimination of all those forms of corruption and crime which have become characteristic for the region.

If the security of this region is to be compared to the situation in other parts of Europe, it can be said with certainty that the challenges to security will continue to have their local, as well as their universal foundations. This will make the demands of the international community and local forces – on condition they truly aspire towards Europe – much more dynamic and committed. Only by such systematic efforts will it be possible to overcome the existing situation and create the necessary pre-conditions for the integration of Southeast Europe into Europe proper.

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