

VARNOSTNI IZZIVI V JUGOVZHODNI EVROPI

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Povzetek Namen tega članka je opredeliti glavne varnostne izzive v Jugovzhodni Evropi. Mešanica izzivov se je od konca hladne vojne in vojn v nekdanji Jugoslaviji korenito spremenila v korist nevojaških groženj. Zdi se, da se je izteklo obdobje verskih in ideoloških vojn ter preoblikovanja državnih mej na Zahodnem Balkanu. Mir v regiji, ki je bil zagotovljen od zunaj, sta podprla dva mednarodna protektorata. Zatiranje oboroženega nasilja se ni odrazilo v dolgoročni stabilnosti, saj se na Balkanu znotraj skupnosti še vedno razraščajo nacionalizem, nestrpnost in sovraštvo. Kljub precej izboljšanim meddržavnim odnosom možnosti za medetnične konflikte in nadaljnjo drobitev v nekdanji Jugoslaviji še niso v celoti izčrpane. Med najočitnejše nevojaške grožnje spadajo organizirani kriminal, korupcija, naravne in ekološke nesreče, podnebne spremembe in šibka varnost preskrbe z energijo. Vključitev celotne Jugovzhodne Evrope v evro-atlantske povezave je pri tem najboljša obljuba, zato obstaja pričakovanje, da bo Jugovzhodna Evropa sčasoma postala regija demokracije, blaginje in stabilnosti.

Ključne besede *Regionalna varnost, Jugovzhodna Evropa, Balkan, vojaške in nevojaške grožnje.*

Abstract The purpose of this article is to identify the principal security challenges in South Eastern Europe. The mix of challenges has changed radically since the end of the Cold War and the wars in the former Yugoslavia, in favour of non-military threats. The era of wars of religion, ideology and redrawing of state borders in the Western Balkans seems to be over. The tranquillity in the region, imposed from the outside has been buttressed by two international protectorates. The suppression of armed violence did not add up to long-term stability as the underbrush of nationalism, intolerance and inter-communal hatred still survives in the Balkans. The potential for interethnic conflicts and for further fragmentation in the former Yugoslavia has not

yet been fully exhausted in spite of much improved interstate relations. Prominent among the non-military threats to security are organized crime, corruption, natural and ecological disasters, climate change and weak energy security. The inclusion of the entire South Eastern Europe into Euro-Atlantic structures offers the best promise. There are thus good reasons for moderately optimistic expectation that the South Eastern Europe will eventually become a region of democracy, prosperity and stability.

Key words *Regional security, South Eastern Europe, Balkans, military and non-military threats.*

Introduction During the two last decades, parts of Southern Europe have prominently figured as the most turbulent on our continent and a notable source of insecurity spilling over to other parts of Europe. On the other hand, regional security in South Eastern Europe¹ (SEE) has been tangibly influenced by geopolitical developments in the wider Euro-Atlantic area. The shifts in power relations among major extra-regional powers have impacted on the (in)balance between conflict and cooperation within in the region.

Since the end of the “Cold War” and the wars in the Western Balkans, the chief sources of insecurity in SEE have evolved considerably. In the new mix, non-military challenges have in the last decade gained primacy over military ones. The question is whether the overall evolution of regional security could be positively assessed in spite the still present non-negligible intraregional conflict potential.

1 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

SEE overlaps partly with the regions of Eastern Mediterranean, Central Eastern Europe and the Black Sea. The central part of SEE – the Balkans has contained a unique and the most heterogonous mixture of peoples and ethnic minorities in Europe (culturally, linguistically and religion-wise per square mile) (Johnsen, 1995, pp. 9-60). Consequently SEE has never become a coherent region in cultural, political and economic senses having clearly lacked its own center of gravity. The high sensitivity of its elites to external influences and to the shifts in relations among major extra-regional powers stands out as the second salient feature of SEE as region. In these respects, SEE has differed very appreciably from other European regions, particularly Scandinavia. Not incidentally, the geopolitical fault line stretching from SEE eastward, all the way to the Pacific, was branded by Z. Brzezinski the “Eurasian Balkans” (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 7-25, 29-45, 99-108).

The geopolitical instability in SEE has had deep historical roots. The Balkans has long merited the distinction as the most volatile part of the European continent. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, wider social upheavals and wars between

¹ For the purpose of this article South Eastern Europe encompasses the countries between Slovenia in the Northwest, Moldova in the Northeast and Greece and Cyprus in the South.

continental powers stimulated or provoked in the Balkans local, rebellions, revolutions, *coup d'états*, state breakdowns, warfare within the region, terrorism and other forms of violence. The latest bouts of armed violence and wars in the Balkans took place in 1991 – 1995 and in 1998-2003 (Blank, 1995). The former upsurge was largely triggered by otherwise positive developments in the Euro-Atlantic area – the end of the “Cold War”, the breakdown of Eastern European and of the Soviet communist regimes, the dissolution of the Warsaw pact and the ensuing transition towards democratic political systems and market economies.

Social instability, economic difficulties and political unrest have very significantly contributed to an explosion of interethnic conflicts. Their severity has been further magnified by modern mass media and often exploited by ruthless politicians. Political instability accompanied by violence has led since the 1970's to the fragmentation of Cyprus, Moldova, two Yugoslavias (SFRY, FRY) and subsequently three ex-Yugoslav republics. The process of “balkanization” doubled the total number of *de facto* existing states in SEE from eight to sixteen. The Balkan wars produced up to 130 thousand estimated deaths, with the most tragic results in Bosnia & Herzegovina with about 100 thousand deaths, in Croatia and in Kosovo. In addition, they created two to three million refugees and displaced persons. The wars also left thousands illegal caches of small arms and ammunition which have supplied the black market controlled by organized crime. By rough estimates, the wars has left at least a million planted anti-tank and anti-personnel land mines. Although de-mining activities, supported financially by the USA and several EU members, have been quite successful there are still several hundred planted mines in several areas of B & H and Croatia. There are also thousands of dangerous remains of cluster bombs in rural Serbia, the results of NATO bombing in 1999 (ITF Annual Report 2012, p. 49, 63).

SEE has won the distinction of the only region in Europe which has been the theatre of several UN peace-keeping missions and of the first NATO's “out-of-area” military intervention. In 1995, following unsuccessful attempts by UN, CSCE/OSCE and EEC/EU (Burg, 1995, pp. 47-86) and only after considerable hesitation a USA-led coalition of Western powers decided to impose peace on the Western Balkans by force. The end of armed hostilities was finally achieved in 2003 in Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia.

The consequences of political fragmentation and armed conflicts in the Western Balkans had caused huge dislocation and losses in the region's countries, their human capital, industrial and agriculture production and infrastructure (Altmann, 2004, pp. 69-84). In some parts of the Western Balkans, war losses, the breakdown of previously integrated transportation and energy systems, economic fragmentation and the loss of export markets had reduced the region's combined GNP to the pre-1990 level. The very unevenly distributed damage has greatly increased the intraregional differentials in GNP p. c. (Batt, 2004, pp. 7-19) and in the levels of unemployment. In the poorest SEE states, the latter have become the highest on the continent. The Balkan wars had led to a big increase in the governments' sponsored or tolerated trafficking

in war materials. The wars also contributed to a spill-over of organized crime into Western Europe. High unemployment and poverty in parts of the region have stimulated corruption, organized crime, illegal migration and numerous kinds of illegal trafficking, particularly in narcotics and small arms.

The tectonic geopolitical shifts in the early 1990s and the crisis of neutralism and non-alignment led to a radical political and military realignment in SEE. With the greatly reduced Soviet/Russian influence practically the entire region has become politically and economically oriented towards the West. The end of the NATO/Warsaw pact confrontation and the lack of large-scale mineral, energy or other natural resources led to a very considerable decline of the region's geopolitical importance. SEE has ceased to be an object of overt contests for political and military domination by superpowers. The region has gained instead the international notoriety as a source of troubles and a costly nuisance.

According to the statistics on armed conflicts around the world, recently compiled by the Uppsala Peace and Conflict Research Project (Harbom, 2009, pp. 577-580), among all continents Europe has experienced the deepest drop since the last peak in the early 1990s. The real value of this positive finding should however not be overestimated. Similarly as elsewhere, although less intensively than in Asia and Africa, a considerable conflict potential still remains on or close to our continent. This is particularly true of South Eastern Europe and also and more so of the adjacent regions in the Mediterranean, Northern and Southern Caucasus and in the Near East. In addition to power politics, unresolved interstate territorial and political disputes, domestic religiously-coloured extremism, competition for energy, water and other scarce natural resources, external meddling etc. the conflict potential in Europe's Southern neighbourhood has been enhanced by several aspects of globalization, including its mass information effects, and by, in the long-run the inevitable progress of individual and collective emancipation which internally destabilize established authoritarian political orders, particularly in multinational and multiconfessional societies.

2 THE CURRENT SECURITY SITUATION

The suppression of armed violence did not add up to long-term stability in the Balkans, as has been manifested since 2001 by the local outbursts of violence in Kosovo, Serbia, on the Kosovo-Serbia border, in Macedonia and by the paralyzed central government in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

The "European Security Strategy", adopted by the European Council in 2003, posited as the main global threats to the EU members: the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states, terrorism and organized crime, cyber security, energy security and climate change (Vasconcelos, ed., 2009, pp. 38-41, 64-67). Other EU documents mention also as real or potential problems the unresolved conflicts among and within neighbouring states and securing the EU external borders. The actual situation in SEE and even more so the public perception of security threats differ

substantially from these official EU assessments. Respondents in public opinion surveys in most European states have been generally more concerned with other aspects of human insecurity, such as unemployment, crime, drug abuse, corruption, environmental damage, natural disasters (floods, fires) traffic accidents etc. than with the threats highlighted in the official EU and NATO documents (SJM, 2009, p. 494, 2012, table V7).

Once imposed from outside the tranquillity in the region has been buttressed in the Western Balkans by two international protectorates - in B & H and Kosovo. In B & H, the NATO-led SFOR has been replaced by the much smaller EUFOR, supported by a small NATO special unit and rapid intervention capability. In Kosovo, NATO maintains also about 6,000 military personnel in the multinational KFOR, while EU runs the 2,300-strong mission EULEX which include international police, prosecutors, prison officials, administrative overseers etc. Since 1975 the line of demarcation between two parts of Cyprus has been guarded by the UN peacekeeping mission UNFICYP, today with about 600 soldiers. Two decades since a local mini-war caused by the secession of Transnistria, there are today about 1,500 Russian military personnel, among them 335 “peace-keepers” in Moldova (Military Balance, 2013, pp. 103, 203).

Although much less intense than during the Cold War, the rivalry between USA and the Russian Federation for the influence in SEE has been revived. The Russians have since been using energy exports and sizeable parastate investments as their main tools, particularly in the energy sectors in Serbia and the Republic *Srpska* in B & H as well as in industry and real estate in Montenegro. A brigade-size military outpost in Moldova, a large naval and air base on the Ukrainian territory in Crimea, the Russian Navy in the Black Sea and a rotating squadron in the Eastern Mediterranean mark the decreased Russian military muscle in SEE and its immediate vicinity, compared with the Soviet pre-1991 levels. There are also some US and Russian operational tactical nuclear weapons still present in or close to SEE. The US military presence in SEE has, on the other hand, moderately increased largely due to the volatility in the Near-and Middle East. In addition to the USN Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the US Air Force’s presence in Italy, Greece and Turkey USA has built up a substantial land base Bondsteel in Kosovo and acquired the rights to use military training and transit facilities in Romania and Bulgaria. In July 2011 USA concluded an agreement with Romania on placing on its territory a battery of antiballistic missiles. These activities presage SEE’s future role in the declared US and NATO’s Theatre Missile Defence against potential threats from Iran (while the Russians view this development very differently and as a threat to them).

One important aspect of security in SEE since the end of the “Cold War” has been a very considerable change in the levels of defence spending, military manpower, stocks of conventional weapons, arms production and exports. These movements were reflected in the holdings of heavy conventional weapons prior, soon after and in 2011 the incomplete implementation of the CFE Treaty due to disagreements between

NATO and the Russian Federation (see Table 1). The table shows that the former Communist-ruled states drastically reduced their defence outlays, both for political and economic reasons. This applies not only to the two former WTO members (Romania and Bulgaria) but also to the former non-WTO states not included into CFE- to Albania and to seven ex-Yugoslav states. The present levels in the latter are as follows (see Table 2).

Table 1

	Tanks			Artillery			Aircraft		
Romania	2,960	1,375	437	3,928	1,475	899	505	430	69
Bulgaria	2,209	1,475	80	2,085	1,750	311	335	234	42
Greece	2,276	1,735	1,462	2,149	1,878	3,353	458	650	282
Turkey	3,234	2,795	2,494	3,210	3,529	7,807+	355	750	354

Source: *The Military Balance 2013, 2013*. London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. pp. 118-119, 141-142, 168-169, 183-185. Goldblat, J., 1994. *Arms Control, A Guide to Negotiations and Agreements*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute: London: Thousand Oaks: New Delhi: Sage Publications. pp. 176-177.

Table 2

	Active	Reserve	MBTs
Serbia	28,150	50,150	212
Croatia	18,600	21,000	72
Bosnia & Herzegovina	10,550	-	316
Slovenia	7,600	1,700	45
Macedonia	8,000	4,850	31
Montenegro	2,080	-	-
Kosovo	2,500	800	-
Total	78,445	78,521	883

Source: *The Military Balance 2013, 2013*. London: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. pp. 117, 120, 154-155, 157, 170, 173.

In the group of ex-Yugoslav states most reductions took place after the termination of Balkan wars. The drawdown produced much lower totals of military manpower and heavy conventional weapons compared with those in the 1980s in the defunct SFRY.

Active armed forces have been roughly reduced by half, while those of the reserves and heavy conventional weapons by, at least, two thirds. On the other hand, the two older NATO members (Turkey and Greece) have continued with high defence spending inter alia due to the unresolved disputes over Cyprus and the airspace over the Aegean Sea. This policy in Greece has contributed significantly to its near bankruptcy.

Another aspect of regional security has been related to the existing nuclear installations. There are today only five operating nuclear power stations in the region and a small number of nuclear research reactors. Although all SEE states adhere to the NPT regime, the problem of nuclear safety (including the disposal of nuclear waste) however exists. Its acuteness has been reduced by the shutting down, under the EU pressure of four out of six older Soviet-built reactors at Kozluduy in Bulgaria.

There are in the region three *de facto* existing states whose legal status has been contested – the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Republic of Transnistria and Republic of Kosovo. The latest addition to the list – Kosovo remains an internally very weak state, lacking the control over its entire territory and population and *de facto* an international protectorate. The unsettled situation of the three states provides grounds for new potential conflicts in the region. Moreover there have been recently public threats by and accusations of secessionist intentions against some prominent politicians and public figures in the Republic Srpska in Bosnia & Herzegovina and in Sandzhak and Voivodina in Serbia. So the potential for sharp interethnic conflicts (also in Macedonia) and for further fragmentation in the ex-Yugoslav space (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia) has not yet been fully exhausted. Low-level armed clashes generated by vigilante militias or by armed civilians could still occur in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo. (Bugajski, 2013, pp. 149-150) Moreover, among the six internationally recognized ex-Yugoslav states there remain a number of unresolved and very sensitive issues, including the problems of succession such as contested segments of interstate borders on land, on the Danube and in the Adriatic Sea.

In the adjacent region of Transcaucasia there are additionally three flashpoints of sharp interstate tensions. In 2008, they resulted in a mini war in Georgia and in 2012 in deadly border shootings on the demarcation line between Armenian and Azeri forces. These armed conflicts have directly involved not only three secessionist and internationally practically unrecognized parastates – Abkhazia, Southern Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh but also the Russian Federation, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. All three “frozen conflicts” remain on Europe’s security and political agenda (Bebler, ed., 2012).

Among other political issues in the Balkans, one should mention the situation of underprivileged ethnic minorities, particularly of the Roma whose population has been fast growing in the Balkans. In autumn 2011, the Roma became targets of racist attacks in 14 Bulgarian towns. (Bugajski, 2013, p. 152) Moreover, there is in

the region, at least, a half million refugees and displaced persons. SEE has recently witnessed mass unrest, violent demonstrations and vandalism provoked by economic troubles, high unemployment and political dissatisfaction in Albania, Serbia, Croatia and Greece. Official data on unemployment rates show 45 percent in Kosovo, 32 percent in Macedonia, 27 percent in Bosnia & Herzegovina and 20 percent in Serbia indicating very difficult social and political conditions in the Balkans. Those difficulties have been magnified by deficient state building and often divided and poor leadership. (Bugajski, 2013, p. 144) Greece has also been under strong pressure of illegal migration, principally from the Near- and Middle East. From among up to 120,000-150,000 estimated irregular migrants across the Mediterranean, at least, a third reaches the EU via South Eastern Europe. The increased flow caused by wars in North Africa and the Near East has led to troubles and subsequent militarization along the short EU external border between Greece and Turkey. On the other hand, the newest EU member states - Romania and to a lesser extent also Bulgaria "exported" into the rest of the EU a part of their own social insecurity when, e.g. a large number of their Roma migrated to and overstayed in illegal encampments in Italy, Spain and France. Severe police countermeasures produced political ripples in EU institutions while the flood of other Romanian job seekers in Spain posed additional problems for the freedom of movement of persons within EU.

SEE has been exposed to a number of other non-military challenges to security. Some of these have originated in SEE itself, while some have been imported from or linked to similar phenomena in states outside the region. Prominent among non-military challenges are organized crime and corruption. According to some analysts, they have the potential of becoming the gravest threat to regional security (Grahovac, 2012). Organized crime from the Balkans, often in cooperation with Italian and other extra-regional criminal organizations has been active in bank and post office robberies, in various forms of smuggling and illegal trafficking, including in humans, human organs, drugs, arms, counterfeit goods, tobacco products etc. It has been estimated that about three quarters of heroin (mostly from Afghanistan) and a considerable part of cocaine (from Latin America) enters Western Europe via SEE. The single biggest source of light weapons illegally exported from SEE has been reportedly the Russian-protected and internationally unrecognized Republic of Transnistria in Moldova.

Since the termination of the last wars the Balkans – previously a hotbed of political terrorism – have lost a good deal of this notoriety and become mainly a transit or hiding area for terrorists and indicted or sentenced criminals. However, there have been individual acts of terrorism in Sarajevo in October 2011 and in Burgas in July 2012 as well as arrests of presumed Islamic extremists in Bosnia & Herzegovina and in Sandzhak. (Bugajski, 2013, p. 151)

Among real or potential non-military security threats which affect SEE (and other parts of Europe) one should mention also natural and ecological disasters, climate change and energy security (Kovačević, 2011, pp. 62-64). Parts of the region have

suffered recently from devastating floods and forest fires. The Russian-Ukrainian squabbles over gas transit have exposed the fragility of energy security in SEE. The interruption of gas supply in winter 2008/2009 hit worst the city dwellers in B & H. The already high dependence of SEE on imports of carbon fuels is likely to further increase. Several competing projects of trans regional gas pipelines, notably Russian-promoted Southern Stream and the EU-backed Nabucco, envision crossing SEE. If and when implemented these very demanding undertakings will strongly impact on energy security not only of SEE but also of EU at large (Altmann, 2011, pp. 37-41).

3 SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND THE WIDER INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The political conflicts on Cyprus and in Moldova, as well as between Macedonia and Greece have testified to the Balkan elites' very low ability to find pragmatic solutions through compromise and mutual accommodation and to assure regional stability. So far, none of the regionally generated initiatives of enhanced cooperation has proven viable. The efforts to infuse from the outside the cooperation with and among the region's states have been more promising (Delevic, 2007, pp. 31-72). These efforts have resulted since the 1990s in a web of international organizations, almost exclusively Western in origin. This web has included the "Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe", CEFTA, SECI, NATO's "Partnership for Peace", "South East Europe Initiative, Regional Cooperation Council", *et al.*

The international record of dealing with the sources of instability and insecurity in SEE has highlighted the complexity of its problems which defy quick one-dimensional solutions and the underestimated links between the region's security and the security in other parts of Europe. There is a need for a robust international action to improve the economic and social situation in most of the Balkans while avoiding the vicious circle of the region's external dependency. Foreign military and police presence will be still needed, probably for many years to come. The ability of the international community to help manage numerous problems could be best enhanced by further strengthening the EU's and NATO's role and influence in SEE. The NATO Strategic Concept of 2011 stresses the aim of "facilitating Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans ... [in order] ... to ensure lasting peace and stability based on democratic values, regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations" (NATO, 2011, p. 31).

Despite numerous hurdles, the EU and NATO have actively fostered multifaceted regional cooperation, particularly among the ex-Yugoslav states (Rupnik, 2011, pp. 17-30). Since 2008, the net of EU stabilization and association agreements has been extended to cover the entire region, except Kosovo. These agreements have served as steps in bringing closer to and eventually admitting all remaining Balkan states into the ranks of EU members. The admission of Croatia and Albania into NATO in 2009 also contributed to the stabilization in the region. In 2013, Croatia

entered the EU, while Turkey, after a very long waiting period became an official candidate and started pre-accession negotiations which were for some time stalled largely due to the Cyprus problem. Serbia and Montenegro entered the groups of candidates in 2012, while Macedonia's candidacy (both to the EU and NATO) remains in limbo due to Greece's ridiculous veto over Macedonia's name. Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and also Kosovo (within the context of UN Security Council Resolution no. 1244/99) remain potential future candidates although the implementation of the EU's Thessalonica promise to embrace in its ranks the entire Balkans keeps being delayed due to financial and economic crisis in the Eurozone and to the enlargement fatigue among the old members. (Grabble, Heather, 2013, pp. 109-113) The NATO summit in Chicago in May 2012 reconfirmed Macedonia's candidacy, welcomed Montenegro's progress towards NATO membership, praised Bosnia & Herzegovina's membership aspirations, expressed support for Serbia's Euro-Atlantic integration and for the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue as well as for further consolidation of peace and stability in Kosovo. In the decades to come, the process of EU and NATO enlargement indeed provides the best hope for progress of SEE regional security.

However, a note of caution would be in order. The promised inclusion of the entire region into the European Union is not around the corner. Even when it happens it would be security-wise insufficient. The record shows that despite the simultaneous membership of both states in the European Union, it took Great Britain and Ireland more than three decades to reach a symbolic reconciliation and conclude compromise within the Good Friday Agreement on Ulster. After a similarly long simultaneous membership in the EU and NATO, the conflict between Great Britain and Spain over Gibraltar still remains unresolved. Sixty years of two countries' membership in NATO have not stopped the arms race between Greece and Turkey and did not bring closer a resolution of the Cyprus problem. The admission of the Republic of Cyprus in the EU also did not advance its resolution and perhaps made it more difficult. Today, more than 60 years since the country's joining NATO and the European Communities, the relations between the two main national communities in Belgium are worse than they have ever been.

The historic record also shows that in the 1860s, late 1870s, early 1880s, in 1908-1913, 1914-1921, 1937-1945, 1947-1949, mid-1970s, late 1980s, in 1991-1995 and 1999-2003 the flare-ups of violence have almost regularly punctured the periods of relative peace in the Balkans. The last time peace did not come from within the region, but was imposed by the West's military intervention. The underbrush of nationalism, intolerance and inter-communal hatred unfortunately still survives in the Balkans. In some Balkan countries, the societies became more nationally and religiously segregated than they were a quarter of century ago. This is particularly true of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. This is why, in order to break with the negative pattern of the last 150 years, the Balkan elites need to show much wiser and more responsible behaviour than their predecessors did.

The present security situation in the region is certainly better than it was at the turn of the century. It was due to a number of encouraging developments. The extra-regional sources of conflict in, over or about SEE have been radically reduced. The Western Balkans is no longer Europe's powder keg as it was in 1914. The era of wars of religion, ideology and of redrawing state borders in the Balkans seems to be over. Compared to the early 1990s, the relations between ex-Yugoslav states have greatly improved. The latest achievement – the agreements on normalization between Serbia and Kosovo has come about with the help of active prodding and mediating involvement by the European Union. The Brdo Process initiated by Slovenia promises to further develop and intensify regional cooperation. Most countries in the region have undergone radical transformation of their political orders. Instead of authoritarian and, among them also totalitarian regimes of the late 1980s the region is composed today of, in various degrees, democratic political systems. And democracies almost never fight wars among themselves. Moreover, the considerable demilitarization in most Balkan states has greatly reduced their warfare capabilities. The Balkan elites have hopefully also learned from the negative experience of the last two decades and of its harmful consequences. Unlike in 1990-1991, the hottest potential trouble spots in the Western Balkans are today under international surveillance in the form of present foreign troops, civilian controllers and two *de facto* protectorates. In addition, the countries of the region are recipients of considerable financial assistance and developmental loans. There is also a web of the above-mentioned regional cooperation schemes, including those in security and defence matters. The SEE states themselves contribute today their peacekeepers to a number of NATO, EU and UN stabilization and observation missions in Europe, the Mediterranean, Transcaucasia, Near and Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa. All this provides good reasons for moderately optimistic expectation that the Balkans will become eventually a region of democracy, prosperity and stability enhancing and not diminishing the security on and around the European continent.

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