

# ISSUE

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## Resilience in the Western Balkans

EDITED BY

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## Reports



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Cover image: Lorenzetti, Ambrogio (1285-c. 1348), 'Effects of Good Government in the Country - detail (hunters)'.

Cover image credit: Siena, Palazzo Pubblico. © 2017. Photo Scala, Florence

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## FOREWORD

The cover image of this EUISS Report is taken from a famous fresco painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico (town hall). Called *Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government*, the large mural encapsulates all the civic virtues of European polities of the time (1338 A.D.): hard work, carried out by both townspeople and peasants, but also learning and leisure, communal solidity and solidarity, stern but fair justice and osmosis between the urban and the rural landscape – all under the aegis of *Securitas*, embodied by a reassuring winged figure, allegedly inspired by a classical statue attributed to Lysippos. On the opposite wall of the council chamber, the inverse image of *malgoverno* is depicted to illustrate what happens when the right path is not taken.

While the stark opposition of good and evil is a typical feature of medieval culture, the ideal of *buongoverno* has since become a universal point of reference and inspiration – in political philosophy as well as practical policy. The EU even elevated the promotion of 'good governance' as a guiding principle of its 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), starting 'at home' and spreading to the adjacent regions of the enlarging Union – and beyond.

That overarching goal still holds, of course, and with the 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS) the EU has added an extra layer, trying to cover the nebulous space which lies between good and bad governance, and highlighting the many shades of grey that characterise it. The EUGS acknowledges the need to devise policies and undertake actions capable of tackling fragility and fostering resilience all across Europe – at its core as well as on the periphery. More recently, a dedicated Joint Communication by the EEAS and the European Commission articulated in more detail how to promote such 'resilience' in different contexts while still adhering to the broader ambition of pursuing better governance.

The Institute has accompanied and supported the implementation phase of the EUGS, and in particular the follow-up work on resilience, with a number of dedicated activities and publications.<sup>1</sup> This volume is exclusively devoted to the Western Balkans and the challenges currently confronting the region, and aims at identifying potential ways to implement the new policy guidelines successfully in that specific context. Experts from both the Union and the region itself have offered their insights (and sometimes critical views) on the drivers of fragility and resilience in southeastern Europe as well as the role of external players and domestic factors.

Most of the contributions published in this Report were drafted before the Joint Communication was released last June and, therefore, deserve to be read and appreciated also as a complement to the institutional perspective, in the hope that

1. See Florence Gaub and Nicu Popescu (eds.), *After the EU Global Strategy: Building Resilience* (Paris: EUISS, May 2017), which is mainly focused on the neighbouring countries.

they will feed into the policies that the Union will devise next *vis-à-vis* the region to achieve the shared goal of *buongoverno*.

This Report is the first major outcome of the close cooperation between the EUISS and the Belgrade-based European Fund for the Balkans (EFB). It is thanks to a generous grant from the EFB that it has been possible for the Institute to host three Research Fellows from the region,<sup>2</sup> to organise a series of events and activities to prepare this Report, and then to publish and disseminate it. While helping with the Report, the young EFB Fellows were involved in all the Institute's activities throughout their stay.

This mutually beneficial partnership with the EFB is planned to continue next year, with a special focus on 'Balkan futures'. The Institute is proud to see that its work on these issues has also anticipated the broader EU reengagement with the Western Balkans – which has already strongly influenced political developments in Skopje over the past few months and is set to materialise further in the months to come.

*Antonio Missiroli*  
*Paris, August 2017*

2. Jelena Beslin, Zoran Nechev and Marija Ignjatijevic were hosted at the EUISS Paris HQ between October 2016 and June 2017.

## INTRODUCTION

*Sabina Lange, Zoran Nechev and Florian Trauner*

Upon her return from a visit to the region, on 6 March 2017, HR/VP Federica Mogherini stated that ‘the Balkans can easily become one of the chessboards where the big power game can be played’. Three days later the European Council held a discussion on the region and the European Council President’s conclusions of 9 March 2017 acknowledged the ‘fragile situation in the Western Balkans’ and the ‘internal and external challenges that the region is facing’. The conclusions then reaffirmed the EU’s unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans and expressed the Union’s commitment and engagement to support the region in conducting EU-related reforms.

This EUISS Report is firmly anchored in the HR/VP’s analysis and the conclusions of European leaders. After several years of neglect, the Western Balkans have returned to the spotlight of the EU’s attention once again as a geopolitical arena where ‘big power games’ may threaten Europe’s stability as a whole and come to represent a test for the EU’s capacity to act on the world stage. However, much has changed since the beginnings of World War I, the Cominform period and also since the civil wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, to name just a few occasions when the Balkans constituted a risk for Europe or a test for the EU. The current fragility of the region is unlikely to lead to an open military conflict, neither between the countries on the peninsula nor among the big powers referred to by HR/VP Mogherini. More likely the region may become a geopolitical playground where rival powers vie for influence and different socio-economic and political systems as well as models of international order are tested, compared and played off against each other.

In this context, the fragility that currently characterises the region exposes a complex interplay of external and internal challenges – in particular, the bleak economic and social situation as well as the weak state of the region’s democracies have opened up space for external influences that are not always compatible with the EU’s vision for the future trajectory of the region. These challenges have exposed shortcomings in what has long been understood as the EU’s most effective foreign and security policy instrument – namely enlargement. When President Juncker announced, in the summer of 2014, that there would be no further enlargement of the EU in the five-year term of his Commission, he was merely acknowledging the state of (un)readiness of the applicant countries and the lack of progress in the accession process (including the lack of political interest on both sides to push substantially ahead).

The negative developments in the Western Balkans have exposed the difficulties of enlargement as a policy in the region, and once again raised doubts about the EU's capacity to act decisively at a time when mounting challenges to the security of EU citizens have raised expectations and led to calls for the Union to play a stronger global role. The influx of refugees and migrants along the Balkan route in 2015, as well as large-scale migration to the EU from the region; the worrying numbers of foreign fighters from the Western Balkans joining Daesh or Al-Nusra in Syria and Iraq or either side (pro-Russian rebels or forces loyal to the government in Kiev) in the conflict in Ukraine; investigations revealing that weapons used in terrorist attacks in Western Europe originated in the region and reports of the local rise of (home-grown as well as imported) Islamic fundamentalism – all attest to the extent to which the Western Balkans are embedded in the Euro-Atlantic security space, but also highlight the region's vulnerability to external drivers of instability and insecurity.

In order to effectively support the region on the path to EU membership, mechanisms and instruments beyond those of enlargement policy proper are needed in order to address this complex interplay of external and internal challenges. The EU's enlargement framework is implemented through a conditionality approach. According to the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS), a credible accession process grounded in strict and fair conditionality is essential to foster resilience in these countries. By nurturing state and societal resilience in the Western Balkans, the EU is not only directly addressing the region's capacity to cope with those multiple challenges, but it is also making a long-term investment in the interest of its own citizens. By seeking mechanisms to enhance the impact of the EU's external action and sustain progress, the Joint Resilience Communication released by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission in June 2017 acknowledges and acts upon the recognised need for a more preventive approach whereby crises are anticipated and dealt with proactively.

Applying this additional layer of resilience-building mechanisms to the existing enlargement policy tools and processes, however, raises a number of questions. How do internal and external factors influence the region's societies and their politics in relation to their progress towards accession? What makes Balkan societies susceptible to particular influences? What can help make them resilient against those influences? What is the correlation between societal and state resilience? How can policy approaches, mechanisms and instruments that have hitherto been applied be adapted to address and counter those internal and external factors that threaten the EU accession perspective? How should the EU respond to the altered geopolitical circumstances in order to maintain and revive its transformative power?

This dedicated EUISS Report seeks to answer all these questions. The Report analyses the drivers of fragility and resilience in the context of the internal and external challenges facing the region. It puts forward a series of recommendations that the EU and local actors may consider with a view to building up more resilient states



and societies. The Report is divided in two sections: the first one is devoted to the external drivers of fragility and resilience, while the second explores the internal ones.

In the opening chapter in Section 1, Corina Stratulat examines the role of the EU as a key external actor in the region. Although the EU has traditionally considered itself to be the main source of stability in the Western Balkans, in recent years it has come to be regarded by some as a potential destabilising factor for the region. The ongoing repercussions of the economic and financial crisis of 2008-2009, with which the EU and the eurozone in particular continues to struggle, as well as the migration crisis of 2015 have significantly contributed to this negative perception. This is also due to the region's deep integration into the EU political environment and its high degree of economic dependency on the Union.

The chapter by Rosa Balfour studies the impact that the convergence (or non-convergence) of EU and Western Balkan foreign policies have on the region, also in relation to other major players. Tobias Flessenkemper explores the role of the EU as such as well as some of its member states within the framework of the mini-intergovernmental 'Berlin Process' and its annual Western Balkan Summits. Besides the EU, the Report also looks into the behaviour of other external actors present in the region such as the United States, China, Turkey and the Gulf States, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). The chapter by Ivan Vejvoda analyses Washington's attitude under Obama – and more recently the Trump Administration – *vis-à-vis* the region. It assesses how the US can engage with the Western Balkans and improve existing capacities in order to cope with any external or internal threats, especially in light of the growing challenge to the internal liberal order. The role of Russia as an external actor is explored in the chapter by Dušan Reljić, which compares different attitudes towards Russia in the EU and in the Western Balkan countries. It analyses the Russian role as that of a 'spoiler' (a driver of fragility) or alternatively a 'promoter' of the region (a driver of resilience). Finally, the author outlines options for the EU to move forward in building resilience strategies, while working on improving cooperation with Russia in the interest of the whole region. Filip Ejdus goes further and investigates the impact of Turkey and the Gulf States, and whether their investments and policies should be regarded as drivers of fragility and/or resilience. He outlines options for the EU to engage with these external actors and cooperate in fostering the region's existing capacities in order to counter external or internal threats. NATO expansion in the region is also analysed through the prism of advancing state resilience. Sandro Knezović reflects on how the Russian government has responded to NATO expansion to the Western Balkans. In the final chapter in this section, Anastas Vangeli examines China's attitude *vis-à-vis* the region's objective to become part of the EU.

The second section of the Report identifies and explores the main internal drivers of fragility that need to be tackled in order to strengthen resilience in the region. The authors primarily focus on the pattern of semi-authoritarian political rule dominant in the Western Balkans and the issue of state capture of key institutions and

economic assets as its most visible manifestation. Elites across the region continually bypass institutions and laws and govern through informal rules. Power is exercised through party dominance. Not only are state institutions captured, but the media are muzzled as well.

Citizens and the wider civil society in the Western Balkans are identified as potential partners for the EU in pushing for the implementation of reforms. Florian Bieber, Nikola Dimitrov and Igor Bandović all explore the relationship between state and societal resilience, and provide a better understanding of whether these notions are complementary or opposing and mutually exclusive in this part of Europe. Srdjan Cvijić focuses on the continuous repression, intimidation and smear campaigns to which civil society actors have been subjected in his chapter: he analyses the potential of civil society to drive resilience in the Western Balkans especially with regard to the implementation of EU-related reforms. Ana Juncos elaborates in depth on the notion of ‘principled pragmatism’ – as enshrined in the EU Global Strategy – and its usefulness in fostering resilience in the Western Balkans at state and/or societal level. Alessandro Rotta highlights the necessity of building diverse and integrated societies as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable political and social development. In their co-authored chapter, Predrag Petrović and Florian Qehaja explore the nexus between internal and external drivers of fragility as exemplified by the emerging issue of Islamic radicalisation and violent extremism, which is exacerbated by an alienated and radicalised youth, returnees from Syria and/or resident foreign fighters. Finally, Julija Sardelić’s chapter is devoted specifically to how the Western Balkan countries coped with the migration crisis and the stream of migrants transiting through the so-called ‘Balkan route’ in 2015/2016.

Last but not least, Thanos Dokos focuses on the EU and the Western Balkans as a single security space from the perspective of fostering resilience and overcoming common challenges. In doing so, he proposes models for how the accession process with the Western Balkan countries could be expedited by using the concept of differentiated integration.

Finally, this Report reproduces also the Joint Communication released by the EEAS and the European Commission on 7 June 2017. As most of the contributions printed here were prepared during the drafting of the Communication and before its release, it may prove interesting to compare the specific views presented by the authors on the Western Balkan region in specific with the general approach suggested by the EU.

## Section 1

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# EXTERNAL DRIVERS



# I. DEMOCRATISATION VIA EU INTEGRATION: FRAGILE RESILIENCE AND RESILIENT FRAGILITY

*Corina Stratulat*

## **Introduction**

Reflecting on the experience of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after the 1989 revolutions, Ivan Krastev<sup>1</sup> remarked that one of the capital sins committed both by the European Union and the region was to ‘oversell’ democracy as the best form of government. Not as a choice arrived at by the respective regimes after due consideration but as the default option to secure peace, deliver prosperity and achieve good governance – all in one package. The fall of the Berlin Wall was hailed by many as a vindication of Western Europe’s ‘beacon of democracy’: Western Europe could now transform its Eastern vicinity in its image and convince the post-communist countries to imitate the democratic institutions and practices of their successful neighbours in the West. Less than a decade later, the challenge of spreading the EU’s democratic model elsewhere became obvious in the uneven political and socio-economic development of the CEE. Yet, by 2007, no fewer than ten formerly communist countries had become member states, emboldening confidence in the logic of democracy promotion as the sole remedy for the problems experienced by polities. This idea was articulated even more assertively in the Union’s external strategy and in the commitment given at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit with regard to the European integration of the war-torn Western Balkans. And, once again, the EU fell into the same trap: obsessed with the misleading notion of democracy as a ‘silver bullet’ and at the same time confronted with an ubiquitous crisis of representative institutions, the EU enabled the resilience of a failed *status quo* and sustained the fragility of the mechanisms of change and reform in the region.

## **The democratisation of the Balkans: a driver of resilience?**

It may well be that problems of the kind that plague the Western Balkans, like corruption, state failure and the integration of minorities, can be better dealt with in a democratic environment, but the argument that the introduction of elections and the adoption of liberal constitutions will necessarily address such difficulties does not hold water. While the decade-long efforts to democratise the Western Balkans have seen peace take hold in the region, they have failed to resolve the consequences

1. Ivan Krastev, ‘Democracy as self-correction’, Transatlantic Academy Paper Studies no. 1, 2012, pp. 7-8, 11-12.



of the breakup of Yugoslavia. In spite of the democratic agenda for the Western Balkans and in the absence of a pan-Balkan reconciliation process, enduring legacies such as open disputes over statehood (Serbia-Kosovo) or borders (Kosovo-Montenegro) and ethnic, social and religious conflicts (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), continue to cast a cloud over the prospects of stability in the region and obstruct these countries' ability to draw nearer to the Union.

Likewise, despite the firm and by now long-standing emphasis on the Western Balkan countries complying with strict democratic criteria in order to fulfil the EU's membership conditionality, public sector corruption remains endemic throughout the region. Although corruption is not a Balkan peculiarity – EU member states are also confronted with the phenomenon – it is more the norm rather than the exception in the region and this denies citizens in the Western Balkan countries what others would consider normal treatment in democracies, where everyone is expected to be equal before the law. It also means that Western Balkan political parties – otherwise key markers of modern democratic government – are the least trusted institutions across the board.

In addition, the justification of the democratic model's superiority in terms of producing economic growth or prosperity is also backfiring. Since 2008, the economic woes of the Western Balkan countries have been compounded by the cold winds blowing from the Union – the region's main trading and investment partner: as the EU's business and banking activity in the Western Balkans contracted, the region saw a steep rise in (youth) unemployment and state debt.<sup>2</sup> Unable to generate growth on their own and faced with a rapidly ageing population, the Western Balkan countries have been helplessly gazing into a future of relentless socio-economic deprivation.

Little surprise, then, that the majority of the region's better-educated young people emigrate to affluent countries in north-west Europe, while Western Balkan governments invite new business opportunities (accompanied by possibly unwanted political influence) from the likes of Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf States. The fact that Western Balkan elites look eastward might be motivated by pragmatism rather than a search for alternatives to the EU but their wandering eye is a powerful reminder that the 'job is not done' in the Western Balkans. Meanwhile external actors will brazenly take advantage of the Union's wavering commitment towards the region in order to score points in the overall tug of war with the West.

Overall, the Western Balkans have indeed become more resilient in the face of disruptive events or violence. But political and economic problems have turned out to be equally resilient, and the ability of the EU's democratic agenda for the region to fulfil dreams of prosperity, security or responsible government has revealed its limits. If anything, the utopian assumption that democracy is a panacea that will

2. See, for example, [www.tradingeconomics.com](http://www.tradingeconomics.com) and Dušan Reljić, 'Western Balkans' EU path: political and economic deadlocks', European Western Balkans, 16 February 2016.

solve all political, economic and social ills has inflated the public's expectations and is now breeding frustration with national governments and the EU integration process throughout the Western Balkans. For that reason, the legitimacy of democracy should be seen to derive not from its capacity to offer citizens instant gratification of their desires but rather from its ability to grant voters the satisfaction of having the right to do something about their discontent; for example, throw governments out of office, change the course of policies, and rectify mistakes. It is this self-corrective quality, above all, that gives democracy the upper hand.

### **Or a fragile strategy?**

But here is the catch: the advantage that democracy has over other forms of government by being capable of adjusting to the demands of dissatisfied citizens has also become increasingly disputed in practice, across Europe and beyond. Thus, the difficulty that the EU encounters in the Western Balkans, challenging both its power of attraction and ability to transform societies, is not only the conceptual fallacy regarding the real advantage of democracy but, more alarmingly, the widening gap between the democratic ideal and praxis. In this sense, the drivers of fragility in the Western Balkan democracies have as much to do with the cynical ploys of local political elites (which rule unchallenged) as with the failure of the European model of representative democracy (which stems from a lack of meaningful policy choice).

### **No political alternative**

If Western Balkan politicians seem to be 'faking' democracy in their countries it is because they can do so with impunity. To some extent, this was made possible by the context of state-building and conflict, which allowed politicians in the region to rely on nationalist mobilisation and war economies to establish themselves institutionally and financially: concentrating rather than sharing power, fusing economic and political clout in the process of privatisation, and adapting Yugoslav-era traditions of clientelism and clan politics to the new reality. Neither the adoption of democratic constitutions, nor the EU's democratic conditionality, managed to avoid the perpetuation of informal power structures, state capture and patronage that continue to thwart the region's democratic consolidation.

In fact, the rise of strong Balkan rulers, such as Nikola Gruevski (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Milorad Dodik (Republika Srpska, Bosnia-Herzegovina), Milo Đukanović (Montenegro), and Aleksandar Vučić (Serbia), and of their party machines, happened under the EU's watch and often with its support and tacit consent. These autocratically-minded leaders – all, obviously, self-proclaimed pro-European democrats – have been able to stay unrivalled in their domestic political arena because there is no democratic *acquis* to bring to bear on power monopolies, party organisation and competition or informal practices. Moreover, the EU has been

willing to tolerate or turn a blind eye to Balkan politicians who *inter alia* shy away from the EU reform agenda, control the media or rig elections so long as they deliver on issues that have high priority for the member states, like closing borders to refugees, radicalisation and terrorism or regional stability. By now, there is too much at stake for these politicians in terms of office spoils on the one hand or legal charges on the other to expect that they will loosen their grip on power. Yet, without *de facto* alternation of competing political parties in government and/or in the absence of viable opposition forces (as has already been seen with the rise of Viktor Orbán in Hungary), the worrisome degree of personal rule evident in these countries casts the value of elections into doubt and amounts to a key driver of democratic fragility in the Western Balkans.

### **No alternative policy**

At the same time, the strong dose of technocratic thinking that underpins the EU's democracy promotion through integration in the Western Balkans is a second main factor of fragility. Law-making in the region continues to sidestep policy deliberation and translates into the mere adoption and implementation of EU-compatible standards. Decision-making is conducted outside electoral politics and tied to EU demands and conditions, while popular opinion is ignored. As such, the Western Balkan polities become democracies without choices,<sup>3</sup> in which elites cite external pressure (like the EU, courts or media) to evade their campaign promises and governing responsibility. This discredits representative institutions and the separation of state powers in the eyes of the people, which can paradoxically feed the public perception that in order to hold someone accountable, voters must first give that person full control. In part, this could provide a justification for the popularity of the region's strong leaders. The fact that political parties' capacity to offer meaningful policy alternatives has been severely curtailed by the EU accession process can therefore go some way towards explaining the regional appeal of identity politics.

The situation is of course little different in other EU democracies, where the winter of public discontent with the de-nationalisation of decision-making is cooling popular engagement with conventional politics and threatening to follow up with a patriotic spring in which the illiberal buds of, say, Trump or Le Pen today, could blossom in the future.

### **The way ahead**

It is clear that such daunting regional and country-specific challenges in the Balkans, coupled with anxieties related to the EU's own internal economic, political and institutional crises, have gradually shifted the concern of European capitals from how

3. Ivan Krastev, 'The Balkans: democracy without choices', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 39-53.

the Western Balkan countries could be ‘transformed’ into member states to how the region itself might change (i.e. negatively impact on) the EU. From this new angle, the member states’ appetite for expansion towards the Balkans has begun to wane. But this broader trend of looking at interdependence as a source of insecurity could spell disaster for the European project, which is undoubtedly predicated on the notion of benevolent cooperation. The best response to the fact that in strategic, political and economic terms the EU and the Balkans face common sources of fragility and share an interest in building resilience is not retreat but further engagement and joint action.

Current geopolitical complexities call on the EU to consolidate its political space, which comprises the Balkans. The recent migration/refugee crisis underscores this point. To this end, sustained efforts on the part of the EU to empower the Balkan societies through smart, inclusive and probably expensive policies are required. Current proposals recommend the opening of European Structural Funds to the Balkan countries (such as to support infrastructural projects); extending the use of the EU’s financial stability mechanisms to the region or enabling circular migration and access to the EU labour market as a preventive measure against irregular migration; and deepening integration in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) for more effective joint action in relation to migration, the fight against corruption or organised crime. Others suggest that a more fundamental rethink of the model of representative democracy that the EU operates at home and exports abroad is also necessary.<sup>4</sup> Thus, there is no shortage of ideas for the way forward. What is lacking is vision and political courage. The worst that can happen now is to pretend that the EU can afford to go on keeping the Balkans at arm’s length indefinitely.

4. See Corina Stratulat, ‘The enemy within: are modern European democracies afraid of introspection?’, *EPC Policy Brief*, European Policy Centre, Brussels, October 2016. See also Peter Mair, ‘Polity-scepticism, party failings, and the challenge to European democracy’, Uhlenbeck Lecture 24, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS), Wassenaar, 9 June 2006.





## II. ENLARGEMENT: WHAT ROLE FOR RESILIENCE?

*Rosa Balfour*

### Introduction

The Western Balkans has shown considerable resilience over the past two decades. Societies, while grappling with the unfinished business of state dissolution and conflict, have also lived through a massive economic and financial crisis and are currently enduring the consequences of the dwindling interest in their integration into the European Union. Western Balkan elites have also been resilient. Many of the leaders today in power have managed to morph from warmongers and/or their henchmen into accepted elites, playing two-level games with Brussels while pursuing authoritarian policies at home to consolidate their hold on power. Clearly what needs to be seen is more transformation to ensure the resilience of democratic values and institutions in the Balkans.

The EU is a driver of both fragility and resilience in the Western Balkans, where one is the obverse of the other. This contribution will ask whether and how the notion of ‘resilience’ as it is emerging in the context of the implementation of the EU Global Strategy can be of use to the region. The main argument is that *the* key factor ensuring the resilience of the Western Balkans is the EU accession process, with its emphasis on the democratic transformation of the region’s states and societies, providing that transformation is not superficial.

Addressing the ‘resilience’ of the Western Balkans, in other words, would require reviewing the politics and credibility of the current accession process in consolidating the strategic aims of enlargement in the field. Deviating from that track would be in itself a driver of fragility.

The concept of ‘resilience’ appears to be of limited relevance to existing policies towards the Western Balkans. It can be useful in the context of conflict resolution, peacebuilding or reconciliation initiatives, such as to manage the details of the implementation of the Belgrade-Pristina agreement or to construct an approach to stabilise and democratise the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). Drawing on peace-building methodologies, ‘resilience’ can be factored in to ensure the sustainability and ownership of efforts made to promote democracy and good governance in the Western Balkans.

Conversely, introducing the notion of ‘resilience’ to a region which in 2003 was promised a prospect of accession could have significant political costs if it sends yet more ambiguous messages about the EU’s commitment towards enlargement.

## Drivers of fragility

Recent events, from the ‘train episode’ in January (when troops were deployed to block a train painted in Serbia’s national colours and bearing nationalist slogans from entering Kosovo) to the storming of the parliament in Skopje in April 2017, suggest that without that political commitment from the international community, the fragile stability achieved since the end of the 1990s conflicts is being eroded. Fragility is thus driven by external factors as much as resilience is. The EU’s lacklustre engagement is a key driver of fragility; conversely, other external actors (Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States) have stepped up their involvement in the region, contributing to its destabilisation.

Europe has exercised its power by stealth, distracted by its own internal problems, and with its democratic credibility seriously undermined by its own internal failings, conspicuously in some of the countries that have most recently joined the EU. Even if the accession process has kept chugging along, and EU aid has actually increased somewhat, political commitment has been waning since the Commission President’s infamous and unnecessary statement (of the obvious) that enlargement would not take place during the legislature of 2014-2019.

But trying to keep the Balkans interested in the EU without a strong political backing has undermined the strength of the accession pull: the correlation between moving forward on negotiation talks and democratic reform at home has not been forthcoming. Several countries, Serbia in particular, have regressed from the Copenhagen democratic criteria for accession while progressing in negotiations.<sup>1</sup>

Other external actors too are contributing to fragility. The new Administration in the US has so far shown no interest in the Balkans, and its position on Europe has oscillated from contempt for the EU to an assertive demand that it contribute more decisively to regional security – which implicitly can be interpreted as a loss of commitment towards the Western Balkans.

Other actors are increasingly visible in the region – primarily Russia, Turkey and the Gulf States – seemingly exploiting the vacuum created by the absenteeism of European political heavyweights to sow the seeds of disorder, with Russia in particular reviving Balkan ethnic tensions to pursue its goal of undermining the EU and its power of attraction. The EU has failed not only to beef up the strength of its

1. Beata Huszka, ‘Human Rights on the losing end of EU enlargement: the case of Serbia’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, forthcoming 2017; Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, ‘The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. Authoritarianism and EU Stabilocracy’, BiEPAG Policy Paper, March 2017.

own pull and model; it has also avoided responding to the propaganda and public diplomacy that Russia has been able to mobilise in the region with considerable success. The new strategic communications department of the European External Action Service (EEAS) does not have the mandate to design counter-propaganda initiatives in the Balkans, for instance, and general communication about the EU's activities abroad remains notoriously poor (although there are now moves to enable EU Delegations abroad to remedy this situation).

Even if the Kremlin has so far failed to make societies there attracted to the Russian model, the growing evidence of disruptive interference in Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia finally put the Western Balkans on the map of EU diplomacy, as attested by the March European Council conclusions issued after a trip around the region by HR/VP Federica Mogherini. The decline of Europe's standing in the region is evinced by the failure of the brief diplomatic visits of Spring 2017 to solve any of the outstanding issues – the political crisis in Skopje, Serbia's Russian drift, and the steady decline of democratic standards. Balkan politicians continue to use Russia as a playing card in their relations with Brussels to extort support and concessions and/or raise the spectres of Greater Albania or inter-ethnic conflict to get international attention.

This is reflected in the growing divergence between the EU and the Western Balkans on aligning to EU foreign policy preferences, including adapting to the EU Global Strategy, as set out in accession chapters 30 on External Relations and 31 on Common Foreign and Security Policy, which includes legally binding initiatives such as sanctions. Serbia in particular has avoided following the EU line on issues of relevance to Russia, but also China, Bosnia-Herzegovina and other countries.<sup>2</sup> Beyond convergence on foreign policy, the regional cooperation advocated by the EU through its Stabilisation and Association Process has been jeopardised by the souring of bilateral disputes and politicians walking away from commitments made towards reconciliation.

The ease with which external actors have managed to interfere in Balkan politics is striking when looking at their material relationships with the region. In real economic terms, Russia in particular is punching well above its weight. Even if it may be pursuing strategic investments in the media to push through its propaganda machine, foreign direct investment (FDI) from Russia to the region represents only 6.6% of total FDI, while Turkey accounts for only 2.9%. The lion's share of investments to the Western Balkans is from the EU. Similarly, three quarters of the region's share of exports is with the EU.<sup>3</sup> The EU is not matching its investment and

2. 'Serbia's alignment with EU foreign policy declarations continues to decrease', *European Western Balkans*, 9 February 2017. Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/02/09/serbias-alignment-with-eu-foreign-policy-declarations-continues-to-decrease/>. Strictly speaking, so far only Montenegro has opened chapters 30 and 31.
3. FDI data is from the European Bank for Development and Reconstruction, 2014; trade data is from the European Commission, 2016.

power by stealth with political action, proactive presence, commitment, public diplomacy, and strategic communication to counter anti-Europe propaganda.

## Drivers of resilience

It is beyond doubt that large-scale international involvement has underpinned the stabilisation of the Western Balkans since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Most local and regional efforts towards stabilisation, improved relations between countries and internal political reform have been incentivised by the prospect of integration into the EU and, for some countries, into NATO. Recent setbacks should not cast a shadow over the path towards pacification and democratic change embarked upon close to a decade ago: it was bearing some fruit, even if results were still unsatisfactory and/or in need of consolidation. Despite growing disillusionment and misplaced expectations especially in the countries furthest away from accession, only 20% of Balkan citizens think EU membership is a bad thing.<sup>4</sup>

The overwhelming influence of the EU over the region can be counter-intuitively inferred from the willingness displayed by the countries in the region to line up towards supporting efforts in managing the refugee influx through the Balkans in 2015-16, when governments demonstrated the ability to converge and respond to the requests of EU member states. Yet, in doing so, the governments in the region learned a lesson about the current political situation in the EU: good relations may be conditional on the delivery of key EU needs, perhaps more so than on meeting the transformation requirements that accession entails.

The external factor thus continues to play a central role in the resilience of the Western Balkans, for good and for bad: it has prevented a descent into deeper destabilisation but it has led to the support – directly or implicitly – of governing elites which are prone to undermine democratic change in favour of bolstering their own resilience. Hence, even if it is clearly in the interest of local actors to work towards the self-sustainability of the region, responsibility for its resilience still falls squarely on the engagement of external actors, first and foremost the EU. Failing that, there is a real danger that local politics will quickly revert to old habits of mutual provocation, reopening old wounds and polarising communities – all for the sake of propping up the power base and bargaining capacity of political entrepreneurs.

## The way ahead

Can the concept of resilience address this malaise? There could be a powerful argument in favour of devising policies which aim to make the region less exposed to external drivers of fragility. There also could be a strong argument in favour of being

4. Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat, 'Balkan Barometer; Public Opinion Survey', 'Analytical Report, Sarajevo', September 2016. On the flip side, only 38% of Western Balkan citizens think the EU is a 'good thing'.

realistic about the prospect that the EU, in its present state, will be opening its doors to new members any time soon: building state and societal resilience could be the way to make the countries of the region more philosophical about their chances of eventually getting in – that is if the EU after Brexit and the resurgence of nationalist politics remains the organisation known so far.

But it is questionable whether the region and its governments, after over a decade of focus on EU accession, encircled by the EU, and without any palatable alternative to improving their own economic predicament, will embrace such realism and adapt to the new conditions. Indeed, resorting to the old opportunistic tactics of causing trouble to get international attention seems likely to be far more successful a strategy than building a resilience which has few chances of yielding concrete benefits to the region.

Even if the ultimate goal were to improve regional resilience to withstand the crises and uncertainties currently besetting the EU, this needs to be framed within the existing strategy of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures and practices regardless of what institutional architecture may emerge in the future.

In parallel to making this process more credible and better tailored to addressing evolving politics in the region, it is beyond doubt that the EU's overall engagement needs to be far more dynamic, bottom-up and, generally, sustained. In the field of the still elusive goals of reconciliation and peace-building, the diplomatic actors can use the concept of 'resilience' to improve the implementation of agreements (whether already reached or yet to be reached) to ensure local sustainability and ownership of conflict management efforts.

But the cornerstone of EU policy towards the Western Balkans is 'integration', which means it cannot just apply a traditional foreign policy approach in its dealings with the region. This focus on integration ought to lead to the expansion of the range of actors engaged in EU-Balkan activities: not just institutional representatives, but also European civil society organisations, political parties, local, national and regional institutions, and also political heavyweights in the member states, including those who have lost interest in the region, could be mobilised for the purpose of establishing links between present and future EU members. If this can be framed as a strategy for promoting resilience, so be it; providing the overall political message remains tied to honouring commitments made.





### III. THE BERLIN PROCESS: RESILIENCE IN THE EU WAITING ROOM

*Tobias Flessenkemper*

*In light of the internal and external challenges that the region is facing, the European Council discussed the fragile situation in the Western Balkans<sup>1</sup>*

#### **Introduction**

The Balkans and the development of European Union foreign and security policy are deeply interlinked. Confronted with the imminent collapse of Yugoslavia in June 1991, Luxembourg's then foreign minister and EU Council President, Jacques Poos, declared: 'This is the hour of Europe. It is not the hour of the Americans'. Ever since, the EU has oscillated between phases of common, even integrated, resolve to find answers to the challenges posed by the region, and intergovernmental, member state-driven approaches to address the Balkans. The 'Berlin Process' is the latest incarnation of such a member state-driven, intergovernmental approach, whereby Germany, in contrast to the 1990s, has come to openly play a pivotal leadership role.

The conflicts in the region during the 1990s and the failure of the EU member states to prevent war, mass expulsion and genocide, as well as the fallout of handling the post-conflict reconstruction, have for long shaped the European foreign policy discourse and action. The combination of the use of instruments laid out in the European Security Strategy (ESS) presented by Javier Solana in 2003, and operational policies such as the Security Strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2004) based on the Thessaloniki agenda for the eventual integration of the Western Balkans into the Union, attested to the EU's common resolve to overcome the difficulties of the past. The key options were: to adapt the methodology of the 2004 enlargement round, with a focus on post-conflict stabilisation and regional cooperation and including a central role for the European Commission, and on the other hand the mobilisation of member states' resources and engagement through CFSP and CSDP instruments. Yet, and despite the often declared importance of the region, the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003 was – a fact probably noticed by few outside the region – the last meeting of its kind.

Since then several high-level member state initiatives have steadily evolved alongside European external action in the Western Balkans. This creeping 'nationalisation' of

1. Conclusions by the President of the European Council, 9 March 2017, point 13.

the enlargement process weakened the role of the European Commission.<sup>2</sup> The last example of the EU Presidency taking an active role in the Western Balkans dates back to the year 2009. The Swedish Council Presidency, led by Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Rehn, with the support of the US, tried to negotiate a new constitutional settlement for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the Lisbon Treaty coming into force in 2010 and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) the trend towards member states driving the Western Balkans policy agenda did not stop but notably gained further momentum. The push for the Kosovo-Serbia ‘normalisation process’ came from member states, not from the newly-established EEAS. Although then High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commission Vice-President Catherine Ashton assumed her role and advanced the normalisation agenda, she did not strive to keep the Commission as a central player involved in the region. Her mediation reached a peak with the April 2013 agreement between Kosovo and Serbia in the wake of Croatia’s EU accession on 1 July 2013.

## The Berlin Process

The tenth anniversary of the Thessaloniki Declaration coincided with Croatia’s accession to EU membership. However the success of the Thessaloniki agenda was only timidly celebrated against the background of the exploding Greek debt crisis. Coinciding with the end of the institutional cycle and the outbreak of war in Ukraine in summer 2014, member state activism came to play a dominant role in the relations with the six remaining non-EU Western Balkan states (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). With Germany in the lead, supported by Austria, France and Italy, and EU regional newcomers Slovenia and Croatia, the Berlin Process became the most visible tool for interaction with the Western Balkans. In the wake of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the events in Sarajevo in 1914, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel initiated intergovernmental meetings with the aim to improve regional cooperation. The conference series was originally envisaged to end in 2018 on the occasion of the centenary of the end of the First World War. A period of four years – almost exactly the duration of the cataclysmic European war a hundred years earlier – was the timeframe indicated by the Chancellor ‘during which we will further our endeavours to make additional real progress in the reform process, in resolving outstanding bilateral and internal issues, and in achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region.’<sup>3</sup>

With its annual summits the process has established itself as a new framework to advance regional cooperation, connectivity, and address questions not covered by

2. See Christophe Hillion, ‘The Creeping Nationalisation of the EU Enlargement Policy’, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, Report no. 6, Stockholm, 2010.

3. See Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, Berlin, 28 August 2014. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Pressemitteilungen/BPA/2014/2014-08-28-balkan.html>.

EU accession directly, such as youth cooperation, ‘reconciliation’ and bilateral disputes. The method is entirely intergovernmental. So far, four summits have been held in Berlin (2014), Vienna (2015), Paris (2016) and Trieste (2017). The summits are held at the level of heads of state or government, while foreign affairs ministers and ministers responsible for the economy hold parallel meetings. No Berlin Process secretariat or permanent structure has been established. While the initiative remains intergovernmental, other actors such as civil society and business groups have come to play a limited role. The input of the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn is also noteworthy, but the European Commission only provides support to the process in the area related to trans-European networks – the so-called connectivity agenda. Overall the process relies on the benevolent commitment of Chancellor Merkel as initiator, the cooperation of the six Western Balkan countries and the willingness of the EU member state hosting the annual meetings.

However the drivers of fragility in the region which formed the basis and background of the first meeting in Berlin in August 2014 remain unaddressed so far: the region suffers from widespread economic stagnation; social and market-oriented reforms are minimalist at best; convergence with central Europe has become elusive and EU accession seems more like an uncertain option than an assured prospect. The (re-) emergence of alternative narratives to EU integration, particularly when pushed by Russia and Turkey, risks exacerbating these drivers of fragility. Small wonder that in such an adverse environment, the Berlin Process itself is regarded as one of the rare contributors to resilience.

## Drivers of fragility

In 2014, the building blocks of a decade of EU-Western Balkan policy were no longer solid enough to drive the enlargement process forward. Croatia’s accession in 2013 did not result in a fresh push and resolve to move ahead with the remaining six countries who remained entangled in structural difficulties which had been exacerbated by the economic crisis. The previously powerful instruments of CFSP, such as the EU Special Representatives, lacked authority and support and the CSDP missions were either in the process of being wound down or downsizing. Neither the outgoing Commission headed by Manuel Barroso nor the High Representative Catherine Ashton were preparing any new initiative.<sup>4</sup> The expectations were set for a continuation of the agreed formulas, even if these were becoming less and less convincing. The outbreak of protests against the governing ethno-national elites in Bosnia and Herzegovina in early 2014, amidst public fury over unemployment and rampant corruption, showed that the EU would face increasing internal fragility in

4. The initiative led by Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle to prioritise the work on chapters 23 and 24 of the *acquis* can be considered as a Community-led drive to strengthen resilience. See European Commission, ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2010-2011’, COM(2010) 660, Brussels, 9 November 2010.

the region if it pursued a policy of ‘more of the same’. The protests in spring 2014 raised awareness about the difficulties of a socio-economic integration model that on the one hand helped to shore up the dominance of political elites, while on the other hand failing to lift the majority of the population out of poverty, with no tangible prospect of a ‘highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress’ (article 3.3 TEU) in sight.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine, and in particular the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014, further heightened international awareness of the violent tensions in the region and the threat these posed to regional stability. Political and social fragility and externally-driven instability in the Western Balkans became a key concern in many capitals. At the same time as tensions in the Western Balkans attracted more attention, the politicisation of enlargement within the EU also gained momentum. In his European People’s Party (EPP) ‘Spitzenkandidat’ manifesto Jean-Claude Juncker announced that ‘no further enlargement will take place over the next five years.’<sup>5</sup> After the European elections and his own nomination by the European Council, Juncker reconfirmed his position during his investiture speech in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 15 July 2014. The uncertainty of the enlargement process became policy in the European institutions, while on the very same date German Chancellor Angela Merkel participated in the Brdo summit in Dubrovnik (Croatia) where she announced the meeting in Berlin that would launch the Berlin Process.

The protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014 exposed in a single country key drivers of fragility which are prevalent to various degrees in all six Western Balkan countries and can be grouped in three interlinking categories: (i) inconclusive state-building, in particular in Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, compounded all over the region by (ii) incomplete and increasingly uncertain democratic and socio-economic transition processes, with growing marginalisation of large parts of the population, in particular young people and women and (iii) in lieu of a fully predictable EU perspective, a strained atmosphere and ‘enlargement fatigue’ in Europe where the ‘global and European security environment has changed dramatically in recent years’ (May 2015 Council conclusions on CSDP). Responses to those drivers of fragility are framed in the Berlin Process in terms of: addressing bilateral issues; promoting economic connectivity and cross-border cooperation; and thirdly through the high-level meetings which represent an opportunity to demonstrate EU leaders’ peer recognition of the Western Balkan politicians, including through the symbolism of ‘family photos’ taken at these events, to manifest the collective drive for integration of the region into the EU mainstream.

Additionally, the EU has been struggling to cope with critical internal developments and pressures since 2014, principally the migration and border crisis in 2015/16,

5. Jean-Claude Juncker, ‘My priorities – A pause for enlargement’. Available at: <http://juncker.epp.eu/my-priorities>

and Britain's decision to leave the Union following its referendum on EU membership on 23 June 2016. At the same time the EU and eurozone countries are only slowly managing to overcome the effects of the financial crisis that erupted in 2007-2008 and hence, preoccupied with their own economic difficulties, could not support recovery in the Western Balkans. Yet, probably an even greater risk stems from the perception that the EU's core of normative values is eroding. Western Balkan populations and political elites have closely observed the weakening of democracy, rule of law, human and fundamental rights inside EU member states and the lack of resolve in addressing the dramatic rollback of democracy in Turkey after the attempted coup of July 2016. Moreover, the conduct of the US administration of Donald Trump has dented the credibility of the shared 'liberal Western model', on which US support for the EU perspective of the region was based. Those unchecked drivers of 'normative fragility' necessarily undercut the very basis on which resilience needs to grow, according to the EEAS/Commission Joint Communication on Resilience of June 2017. In recent debates, concern has been expressed that the countries in the region are turning into 'stabilitocracies', i.e. semi-authoritarian regimes managing and orchestrating internal fragility and external instability to secure their rule as guarantors of stability *vis-à-vis* the EU.<sup>6</sup> These questions, however, are beyond the limited agenda of the Berlin Process.

## Drivers of resilience

The Berlin Process is based on three main pillars: (i) regional political cooperation and consolidation, including bilateral dispute resolution; (ii) improved economic cooperation, with a particular emphasis on connectivity in the energy, transport and digital domains; (iii) people-to-people relations with a focus on young people and cooperation with civil society. So far, the process, despite its limitations, has managed to keep the key member states focused on the region and fostered their cooperation against the backdrop of politically weakened European institutions. To a certain degree the new 'minilateral' intergovernmentalism has managed not to deviate too much from the main thrust of European policy. Member state initiatives helped to build bridges when the European conditionality instruments had proved to be ineffective. In late 2014, for instance, framed by the Berlin Process cooperation, a British-German initiative deferred the political conditionality for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), thus allowing the BiH to enter into a contractual relationship with the EU and unblocking the Bosnian-EU integration stalemate. The work on addressing bilateral issues between the Western Balkan countries resulted in a declaration of governments which agreed 'that they will not block, or encourage others to block, the progress of neighbours on their respective EU paths.'<sup>7</sup>

6. Marko Kmezić and Florian Bieber (eds.), 'The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. An Anatomy of Stabilitocracy and the Limits of EU Democracy Promotion', BiEPAG Policy Study, March 2017.

7. Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015, Addendum, Annex 3, Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes, 27 August 2015. Available at: [https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Addendum\\_Western\\_Balkans\\_Summit.pdf](https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Addendum_Western_Balkans_Summit.pdf).

Also in Vienna in 2015, the focus on civil society managed to re-instill a certain degree of confidence in the European project against the backdrop of wide-reaching scepticism. A particular achievement of the Berlin Process had been the signing of the statute of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in Paris in July 2016. This intergovernmental format is not however unanimously perceived in the EU as an entirely positive development. The approach is in some ways reminiscent of the ‘Contact Group’, the coordination forum on the Balkans led by leading Western powers during the 1990s, albeit fully Europeanised. The Berlin Process excludes other EU member states with a keen interest and track record of engagement in the Western Balkans, such as the immediate neighbours Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, but also others such as for example the Netherlands and Sweden, both of which countries have a history of long-standing engagement in the region. As a process taking place outside the EU framework it is hardly possible for them to join in, thereby creating an ‘insiders and outsiders’ situation. A handful of member states, and among them particularly Germany, is now likely to exert a key influence on how EU institutions deploy their efforts within the accession process. The difficulties of this approach become even more palpable as the UK will host the next summit of the Berlin Process in 2018 at a time when Brexit negotiations will probably have entered a critical phase.

Furthermore, although an economic recovery is taking place across the region, growth rates appear to have no significant impact on creating employment. Hence the Berlin Process agenda of providing incentives to governments in the region to accelerate infrastructure projects in the area of connectivity. It is hoped that such initiatives will lead to job creation and brighter personal and economic prospects. However, the speed and efficiency with which these initiatives are put in place will inevitably be measured against Beijing’s commitment to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with some €10 billion worth of investments in sixteen countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe (16+1). Clearly therefore, the single most important driver of resilience remains a credible EU perspective for the countries of the region. In this the Berlin Process has to be considered in itself as a driver of resilience: it has become a unique forum in which to keep the EU perspective for the region alive for the participating actors.

## The way ahead

The German hosts of the first meeting in August 2014 stated that the new series of Western Balkans conferences will lead to ‘additional real progress’ in preparing the countries for eventual EU membership. The *extra push* of the Berlin Process to strengthen resilience in the region is necessarily dependent of the *unambiguous pull* of a tangible EU accession perspective. This pull seems in 2017 even more elusive than when the Berlin Process was launched. The Commission White Paper on the Future of Europe of March 2017 limits expectations: ‘While no further accession to the EU is expected in the short term, the prospect itself is a powerful tool to project



stability and security along our borders.’ Whether the positive effects of the accession perspective can be maintained indefinitely though is open to doubt, not least as the Berlin Process is politically losing clout. The original pre-Brexit idea of concluding the conference series in London in 2018 has been maintained, against the wishes of many of the participants and representatives of the EU institutions. The choice of the Brexiting UK as a host sends an ambiguous message in itself. Is the process still geared towards EU membership? Has the Berlin Process become a substitute mechanism for European powers to engage through mini-lateralism in Balkan affairs? What will be the consequences if the process is continued beyond 2018?

While these questions remain open, the more immediate challenge for the resilience agenda of the European Union is to integrate the work initiated by the Berlin Process into the EU framework. The next institutional cycle starting in 2019 and the coming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) can become key enabling drivers for the EU to foster sustainable resilience. However, failure to avail of this opportunity would only exacerbate already existing fragilities in the Western Balkans. So far, the Berlin Process has played a constructive role as an intergovernmental initiative contributing to resilience by promoting regional cooperation, and bridging a phase of internal consolidation of the EU. During this period of uncertainty, the process has allowed key member states to engage and help to prepare the Western Balkan countries for membership in a changing Union.<sup>8</sup> But the period up to 2025 also risks becoming a time of continued fragility for the region if the EU accession process as the decisive driver of resilience stalls completely. The question is whether the EU institutions and member states are able to stand by the commitment made at the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003 and enable the Western Balkans to overcome fragility by acceding to resilient EU membership.

8. See Matteo Bonomi, ‘The Western Balkans in the European Union: Perspectives of a Region in Europe’, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Working Paper no. 13/2107, July 2017. Available at: <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1713.pdf>.



## IV. THE IMPACT OF NATO

*Sandro Knezović*

### **Introduction**

The conflicts that engulfed the Western Balkans in the early 1990s put the region in the spotlight of international attention and led to the direct involvement of the transatlantic community in particular. After many unsuccessful attempts at engagement by different external actors, NATO took over responsibility for ending the military conflict and undertaking the peacekeeping and peace-building activities that followed. The Alliance has conducted numerous demilitarisation programmes in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Kosovo and deployed military missions to all the aforementioned countries, with the exception of Albania. Offering fully-fledged NATO membership to all countries in the region, using the conditionality mechanism during their accession processes to foster democratic transition, and providing different forms of assistance to this endeavour significantly contributed to the process of long-term consolidation in the Western Balkans. In other words, building on achievements made by peacekeeping missions by incorporating higher standards of democratic governance in the framework of the conditionality mechanism significantly contributed to the overall resilience of countries in the region.

NATO's Open Door Policy resulted in Slovenia joining the Alliance in 2004, followed by Albania and Croatia in 2009 and Montenegro in 2017. The enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic security community to the region undoubtedly brought stability and resilience, but on the other hand also highlighted substantial loopholes in Western policies. Their inconsistency and inadaptability to a changing geostrategic environment, as well as the lack of political determination demonstrated by Western countries in their approach to remaining 'problematic' candidates in the region, have opened possibilities for the (re)emergence of other geostrategic players (namely Russia, Turkey, the Gulf States and China) and democratic backsliding on the part of local political elites. Furthermore, the modest strategic policymaking capacity of the region's aspiring EU membership candidates makes further enlargement highly unlikely in the coming decade, which will in the long term surely open additional space for other interested parties to exert influence.

## Drivers of fragility

Unlike the heady days of the early 2000s when there were high levels of enthusiasm for the enlargement of the transatlantic community, there is now a visible inward-looking trend at both national and international level, with states and Euro-Atlantic institutions concentrating mostly on internal problems and challenges in the European vicinity. This is of course affecting NATO's Open Door Policy in particular. The issue of enlargement is barely even mentioned in election campaigns in different member states, and whenever it is alluded to it is rarely evoked in a positive light. Political leaders are focused more on growing challenges at the national level while they struggle to find compromises at the intergovernmental level on appropriate ways of tackling threats emanating especially from the eastern and southern European neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, the negative consequences are visible in the region with regard to the constraints on and limits of foreseeable NATO enlargement which creates a certain power vacuum between NATO and other emerging players. This is complicating the regional geostrategic landscape as well as bringing a fair amount of competition to the Alliance itself.

First, Serbia is attempting to pursue a so-called 'non-aligned security policy', having no intention of joining NATO in the forthcoming period and hence remaining open to the influences of other emerging actors. It has signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement and Defence Co-Operation Agreement with Russia and is continuously receiving extensive support in terms of military hardware and know-how from Moscow. It is also benefiting from Chinese and Gulf States' investments in strategic transport infrastructure.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's complicated political structure has impeded NATO accession not only because of an inability to agree on reforms in order to meet criteria for membership, but also due to firm opposition to the idea of joining NATO by the ruling political elites in one of its two entities. Lack of capacity to compromise on strategic issues like NATO membership will continue to represent a burden for the country and an opportunity for other rival players to consolidate their position. The role played by Russia in the Peace Implementation Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly illustrative in this regard. Moreover, while the growing influence of Turkey in the country is increasingly visible and has clear political ramifications, there is widespread concern about the role of the Gulf States and their contribution to the spread of Salafism at the borders of the EU and NATO.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia met all the criteria for NATO membership almost a decade ago, but then had its membership bid blocked due to a bilateral dispute with one of the Alliance's member states. The country has been on a downward democratic spiral ever since and has become increasingly open to the influences of other external actors in the region over the course of the last few years,

with negative repercussions for NATO's leverage. In the case of Kosovo, the long-lasting *status quo* in the wider regional political context raises a number of concerns and offers limited viable options for the period to come.

In addition to opening up space for other external actors' influence and thus changing the geostrategic configuration of the region, the waning NATO accession perspective (coupled with the prolonged accession process to the EU) is also creating opportunities for populist elites that are once again on the rise in the Western Balkans.

At the local level, the difficulties accompanying the interminable transition process, coupled with deteriorating living standards and poor economic growth, have contributed to the rise of populist political elites. Furthermore, a lot of current challenges such as terrorism and the phenomenon of foreign fighters, uncontrolled migration and organised crime that are threatening the wider region are actually leading to a backlash against the democratic reform agenda, with calls for 'stability and predictability' and growing tolerance towards less democratic and transparent methods of governance, thus further consolidating populist ideology and authoritarian politics. Additionally, unresolved national issues in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are reinvigorating the nationalist rhetoric of the 1990s. Clearly this is not helping the process of long-term consolidation that started with the EU accession process and which now appears to be indefinitely stalled.

## Drivers of resilience

Basic normative values and principles of Western democracies transposed to the region via the activities of deployed NATO missions were successfully incorporated in the conditionality mechanism for candidate states in their pre-accession phase. NATO's paramount role in resilience building hence continued, being enriched with different mechanisms and tools which are relevant also today.

The Partnership for Peace (PfP) has represented the cornerstone of NATO's resilience efforts for almost two decades, contributing to the long-term consolidation of the region. It is a programme of bilateral cooperation between individual countries from the wider Euro-Atlantic area and the Alliance, which is tailor-made for each partner, allowing it to select priority areas for co-operation. While it has been extensively used to help prepare candidate states for membership, it is important to emphasise that even those countries who do not intend to accede to NATO have benefited significantly from participating in the programme.

Activities on offer under the PfP programme touch on virtually every field of NATO activity, including defence-related work, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster response, and cooperation

on science and environmental issues.<sup>1</sup> In particular, participation in various NATO-led missions substantially contributes to the interoperability of the partner states' armed forces and consequently fosters the resilience of the respective states' security sector in an increasingly interconnected international arena. This is actually a good illustration of the wide spectrum of activities NATO is undertaking in its efforts to foster resilience in the region and beyond.

Taking a changing geostrategic environment which is increasingly challenging to NATO into account, it has to be acknowledged that the activities undertaken under the PfP have nevertheless proved effective and worthwhile. Given broad participation, including of countries with no aspiration to become NATO members, the PfP activities have contributed to bolstering the legitimacy of the Alliance even in a period of geostrategic competition in the region, enhancing NATO's profile as the most important long-term contributor to resilience in the Western Balkans and beyond.

However, while NATO conditionality represented an invaluable resilience tool for more than a decade, it gradually lost relevance and has been replaced by divisive forces related to the ongoing geostrategic power struggle in the region. The growing influence of other actors in the Western Balkans is forcing the Alliance to continue to go through the motions of pursuing the enlargement agenda and pretend that it is 'business as usual': this is its only viable response to the assertive actions of rival players in this geopolitical arena.

This is reflected in the geostrategic arguments put forward in support of Montenegrin NATO membership, the inclusion of various additional steps in the accession process as well as upgraded forms of cooperation with countries that are still waiting for an invitation to join NATO, in particular in the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While this is obviously not bad news for aspirant countries in the region, it is obviously an *ad hoc* geostrategic defensive measure rather than part of a thoroughly analysed and merit-based approach grounded on a realistic enlargement strategy for remaining difficult candidates in the Western Balkans.

This clearly leads to the conclusion that it is vital for the transatlantic community to reengage in the region. Such reengagement should, first and foremost, be based on a realistic assessment of the political will for further enlargement processes on both sides (within NATO and within the Western Balkan region) and accordingly of the relevance of its main tool – the conditionality mechanism. That is of existential relevance for the legitimacy of the 'normative power of the West' in the region, which is already facing severe challenges in the altered geostrategic environment.

1. See: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50349.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm).

The Alliance's commitment to the accession process of the countries in the region is of paramount importance not only due to the fact that it helps preserve NATO's role as a normative power in the Western Balkans, but it also – along with the EU accession process – keeps alive the drivers of reform processes which represent a cornerstone of resilience in that part of Europe.

## The way ahead

The transatlantic community and the Western Balkans undoubtedly represent a single security space, which is currently facing serious challenges to its stability. Therefore, it seems clear that the measures undertaken to build resilience in the former will have an immediate impact on the latter and vice versa. Hence, the reaffirmation of the indivisibility of security in the process of formulating a new policy for the Western Balkans should help keep any ideas about 'regional containment' or a *status quo* strategy at bay.

Resilience cannot be built, especially in a region like the Western Balkans, without the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in society. Not only does the institutional set-up of the state need to be strengthened in order to be able to meet contemporary challenges, but non-state actors like civil society groups should be given an important role in this process.

NATO obviously needs leadership for this endeavour. A key role in the process should be played by the most influential member states and their institutions in situations when overarching compromise on specific issues is not palpable at the intergovernmental level. NATO does of course have many tools at its disposal, but this obviously requires strategic vision and the capacity to reach political compromise about the future of the Western Balkans.

Unpredictability seems to be the only predictable scenario in the period to come. Growing tensions at the international level and the resurgence of geopolitics and rival spheres of interest represent a looming challenge for the transatlantic community and NATO in particular. New assertive global players with increased defence budgets – unlike the majority of EU and NATO member states – are openly challenging the resilience and functionality of the entire 'Western concept of governance'.

The stability of neighbouring regions like the Western Balkans, which requires a comprehensive, robust and coherent strategy that combines the use of hard and soft power tools, is therefore of the utmost importance. In this context, the role of NATO as the strongest military alliance with a particular interest in this part of Europe cannot be overestimated. The fact that the transatlantic community and the Western Balkans actually represent the same security space raises the question of realistic future scenarios for difficult accession candidates and their lack of capacity



to meet demanding criteria for membership. It is essential to develop alternative feasible options based on a clear assessment of the security implications and geo-strategic consequences of the deficiencies and shortfalls currently affecting the enlargement process in the Western Balkans.

## V. THE IMPACT OF THE UNITED STATES

*Ivan Vejvoda*

### **Introduction**

In terms of grand strategy, continuity has been the hallmark of US policy towards the Western Balkans since 1989. The White House has consistently sought to foster the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of the region – to complete the ‘unfinished business’ (in Washington DC parlance) of ‘making Europe whole and free’ as President George H.W. Bush put it in a speech delivered in Mainz, West Germany, in May 1989.

For the United States, the Western Balkans constitute a part of core Europe and thus from Washington’s perspective a European Union and Euro-Atlantic alliance without them is incomplete.

As the crisis that followed the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia unfolded in the early 1990s and the EU and the international community became increasingly involved, the United States eventually came to play a crucial role in the Western Balkans, culminating in a first phase with the Dayton Agreement that ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and later with the NATO bombing campaign in the spring of 1999 that led to the Kumanovo agreement of June 1999.

Successive White House Administrations since 1989, through the two Obama presidencies from 2009 to 2017, have favoured a concerted and unified transatlantic approach to the Western Balkans. Over time the European Union has assumed the lead mediating role with the full backing of the United States.

There has been no serious expectation that this policy and approach would change under the Trump Administration in spite of much speculation in the initial days of the new administration that a possible deal with President Putin might entail a reversal of this policy. The recent visit in August of Vice-President Mike Pence to Montenegro, the latest member of the NATO alliance, and his reassurance that ‘the future of the Western Balkans is in the West’ clearly demonstrated that US policy towards the region has not changed.

## Continuous engagement

With the 'return to Europe' of post-communist countries after the fall of the Berlin Wall it was clear that along with the other Balkan countries (Romania and Bulgaria, and Greece prior to that) the remaining countries of the Western Balkans would follow the path of Euro-Atlantic integration.

With the implementation of peace accords and the gradual stabilisation of the region the US progressively passed on the baton of engagement to the European Union, while remaining involved in a number of security, foreign policy and development aid issues. Particular emphasis has been placed on the essential role played by NATO in the context of the engagement of the US and EU in the region.

There have of course been periods when the US has been less actively engaged in the region due to other geopolitical priorities. As the region progressively stabilised, the engagement of the US State Department under the Obama Administration inevitably decreased, as illustrated by the lower-level visits of Assistant Secretary of State and of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS).

The UN General Assembly resolution on Kosovo of 9 September 2010, adopted with the backing of the US, opened the way for the EU to take the lead in mediation efforts between Belgrade and Pristina. This was a landmark moment and signalled that the EU now had a leading role to play in the Western Balkans, overseeing the resolution of the most violent conflict to have taken place on European soil since the Second World War, with the US in a fully supporting role.

The talks between Belgrade and Pristina that began in Brussels in March 2011, mediated by Catherine Ashton, the then High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, led two years later to the signing of the Brussels Agreement in April 2013. The Obama Administration gave its full support to this process, and throughout Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with the US State Department's DAS Philip Reeker, were actively involved in reaching out to all actors and facilitating the negotiation of the compromise.

It is noteworthy that immediately upon signing the two sides and HR/VP Catherine Ashton went to NATO headquarters where NATO pledged its support to guarantees for keeping stability and peace under the new agreement.

In a show of transatlantic unity, in October 2012 Hillary Clinton and Catherine Ashton travelled to Belgrade, Pristina and Sarajevo together to meet with all the relevant parties and emphasise concerted support for Euro-Atlantic integration.

NATO has played a crucial role in underpinning the US's security and foreign policy in the region and has been a key element in the Euro-Atlantic integration process, and thus in the post-war stabilisation of the region.

The US initially instigated the creation of the Adriatic Charter in May 2003 as a regional security grouping of aspiring NATO member states, modelled on the Vilnius Ten (May 2000). It was initially founded by Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> and subsequently joined in 2008 by Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and by Serbia as an observer member.

After a long wait it was at the NATO Riga Summit in November 2006 that Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had signed up to in 1995.

It was during Obama's first term that Albania and Croatia became members of NATO in 2009, and under his second Administration that the whole process of Montenegro's accession to NATO was completed. The US Senate's ratification of Montenegro's membership and the official accession ceremony at the US State Department in early June have taken place under President Trump's watch.

It should be noted that while maintaining intense security and military cooperation with NATO, with which it has an individual Partnership Action Plan since January 2015, Serbia is the only country of the region not seeking full membership of the Alliance.

In spite of Donald Trump's declaration while on the election campaign trail that NATO was 'obsolete', NATO appears now to have regained his full backing and support, and thus endorsement for its continuing role in the Western Balkans.

One of NATO's most important operations is the KFOR mission which has been deployed in Kosovo since 1999. Today this mission has 4,600 soldiers of which about 600 are from the US. Like the preceding Administration, the new Trump Administration also attaches great importance to resolving one of the most important post-war issues in the Balkans. On the occasion of the visit by Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić to Washington in July, the Vice-President expressed US support for Serbia's efforts to join the EU and emphasised the need for continued progress in normalising the relationship with Kosovo.

## Promoting resilience

Even though the EU and its member states have provided the bulk of support in terms of investment and development aid, the level of US support to the region is also significant. USAID has been supporting a variety of rule of law projects and institution building, along with support to civil society. Private foundations such as the Open Society Foundations, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the

1. The author of this chapter originally used the form 'Macedonia' in the text. The EUISS uses the name 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.

Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the German Marshall Fund have supported civil society organisations for a number of years.

Some of these have recently come under attack, most notably the Open Society Foundations, in a number of Western Balkan countries where the political climate has become increasingly authoritarian.

How the Trump Administration reacts to this criticism against certain US private foundations, and whether it adapts its development aid policies accordingly, remains to be seen. One early indicator is the support that has been given by US officials to the Budapest-based Central European University which has come under attack in Hungary. This comes in addition to the support given by the EU to the head of the Open Society Foundations, the philanthropist George Soros, to continue funding projects and initiatives related to building open societies in the Western Balkans.

Three other issues have been essential to US interests in the region: (i) foreign fighters; (ii) the fight against organised crime and corruption; and (iii) energy. It will be interesting to observe how the new Trump Administration continues engagement on these fronts based on direct US security interests.

The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the mid-1990s, the situation in the Middle East and the appearance of the so-called Islamic State/Daesch has led to numerous Balkan nationals travelling to the Middle East to join the ranks of fighters, to then return as potential terrorists prepared to carry out attacks on European soil and indeed elsewhere. Cooperation between the intelligence agencies of the US, Europe and the Western Balkans region has been significant and fruitful in this regard and will continue to remain so.

Previous and continuing intelligence cooperation between the US and European agencies, in particular the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and British Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and others in the 2000s led to a crack-down on a number of regional criminal networks that were globally organised and shipping drugs from Latin America to Europe and the region.

Energy has also been an issue of central importance in relations with the region. After the abandonment of the South-Stream Gas pipeline project spearheaded by Russia's Gazprom – a project that had raised many hopes of the region profiting from transit tariffs – there has been renewed discussion about ways of diversifying energy supplies, gas in particular, to the region, progressively weaning it off full dependence on the Russian gas market. Talks with the EU on interconnectors, and with the US on Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) are part of mid to long-term strategies in which the EU again has the lead role but where the US has an important supportive role to play.

In this respect the presence of the then US Vice-President Joseph Biden at the Zagreb Bled-Brijuni Western Balkans Summit of southeast European leaders in November 2015, along with European Council President Donald Tusk, sent another clear signal that the United States is paying attention and supporting the region's continuing trajectory towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Biden declared that the United States has 'had an overwhelming interest in this region for the last 25 years'. The former Vice-President is certainly the US politician who has been most systematically interested and engaged in this region over the past quarter century, and his trip confirmed the US's commitment to the Western Balkans, supporting both the European Union accession process and NATO in the region. Secretary of State John Kerry's attendance at the OSCE Ministerial in Belgrade in December 2015 where he met with all regional leaders was a further clear sign of support.

It is Russia's new assertiveness, coupled with the refugee crisis and concern about global terrorist threats, that have given all these visits a heightened relevance. Russia is deploying various tactics and stratagems to try to derail the process of integration, and to expose the weakness of the EU and the West. Against this backdrop it is all the more important for the EU and the US to support the region in its continued efforts towards democratic reform and thus integration.

Most recently, in April of this year Senator John McCain made a visit to the region and delivered strong messages to local political leaders but also to the Trump Administration. In an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* on 27 April McCain writes as if addressing the new White House Administration directly: 'the United States needs to maintain its support to the nations of southeastern Europe in their pursuit of integration into the Euro-Atlantic community through institutions such as NATO and the European Union ... the United States should maintain robust support for US programs that help to strengthen the rule of law and to fight corruption, essential steps on the path to Euro-Atlantic integration'.

The visit of Wisconsin Republican Senator Ron Johnson to Belgrade in September underscored these points.

## Conclusion

In this geopolitical context, the statement of the March EU Council reiterating its full support to the enlargement process to the Western Balkans is significant. The growing presence and role of 'third parties', namely Russia and Turkey, has led the EU and the US to renew their focus on the region. The international community is aware that the stability of this as yet unintegrated part of Europe is vitally important. Surrounded as it is by fully-fledged EU and NATO member states, it is in a sense the inner courtyard of Europe and NATO and therefore a reinvigorated enlargement

approach is of the essence. Clearly it is imperative that the aspiring Western Balkan countries accelerate their democratic reform processes. In this context the support of the new White House Administration has already yielded tangible results. The engagement of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, Hoyt Yee, in support of the EU's efforts, was instrumental in resolving the political crisis following the storming of the parliament in Skopje in April and the political stalemate in Albania before the parliamentary elections were held in June.

The 'Berlin Process' initiated by Chancellor Merkel in 2014 to give a new impetus to enlargement clearly needs to be further reinforced, not only because it is important to build upon the momentum generated at the latest summit held in July in Trieste but because the credibility of the European project and of the Western Alliance is at stake.

This region is crucial for Europe's stability. It is therefore in the best self-interest of the EU and its member states to continue fostering the enlargement process. The US along with the EU and NATO all have a key role to play in strengthening peace and security in the region. Continuity has been a defining feature of US policy towards the region of the Western Balkans since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, and this has not changed despite the recent transition of power at the White House. The present US Administration under President Trump is committed to promoting the Euro-Atlantic integration of these countries and assist the EU in achieving the dream of a United Europe.



## VI. THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA

*Dušan Reljić*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

There are so many ‘spinners of fairy tales’ in the West who present ‘Yugoslavia as the poor, helpless Little Red Riding Hood, about to be torn apart and devoured by the bloodthirsty wolf, the Soviet Union’ – thus spoke Leonid Brezhnev, with mock indignation, while on a state visit in Belgrade in November 1976. Josip Broz Tito, then socialist Yugoslavia’s celebrated leader, was 84 years old and the country was facing the twilight of his long rule. Western pundits had for long speculated about Moscow’s evil intent to incorporate non-aligned Yugoslavia into its sphere of influence once Tito was gone. Eventually, the ‘spinners of fairy tales’ were proven wrong and everything turned out completely differently: most of what used to be Yugoslavia soon became part of the ‘Euro-Atlantic system’.

Currently, many Balkan experts and observers have reason to ruminate over Brezhnev’s ironic remarks in Belgrade when confronted daily with alarmist warnings about an imminent ‘Russian threat’ in southeast Europe. Moscow is often depicted as a major driver of fragility in the Western Balkans, an external actor that aims at undermining the region’s already weak resilience against political and economic disturbances. Russia’s attempts to gain influence are consequently seen as a potential source of a major confrontation between the West and Moscow. ‘The Balkans will be America and Russia’s next (virtual) battlefield’, prophesied, for instance, one author in the spring of 2017.<sup>2</sup> Much in the same vein as four decades ago, there is abundant delusionary thinking, and even more ‘loose punditry’ (a phrase coined, in this context, by the veteran southeast Europe analyst Ivan Vejvoda). What is much less on offer is evidence-based analysis which reliably measures Russia’s capability to act as a driver of fragility and saboteur of resilience in the region.

1. The opinions expressed in this chapter are the author’s own.

2. James Jay Carafano, ‘The Balkans will be America’s and Russia’s next (virtual) battlefield’, *The National Interest*, 9 April 2017.

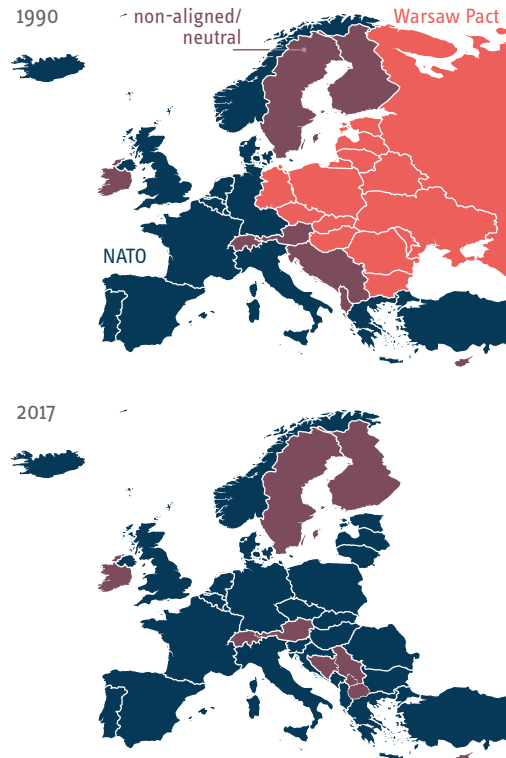
## Drivers of resilience: between the Baltics and the Black Sea

In fact, Brezhnev was telling the truth – the Soviet Union at the time was not economically or militarily capable of ‘devouring’ Yugoslavia and therefore had no intention of launching an intervention in the country. Scores of Warsaw Pact tank divisions would have had to be deployed in the face of a hostile population, thereby provoking a major political and perhaps even military confrontation with the West. Vladimir Putin’s Russia today is even less in a position to extend its influence all the way to the Eastern Adriatic. Figure 1 illustrates this: since 2009, a chain of NATO states has separated Russia from the Western Balkans. There are currently no indications that this modern *limes* stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea will in the foreseeable future become in any way more permeable and that Russia’s strategic displacement from central and south-east Europe could be reversed. This fact is the basis of the region’s resilience against Russia’s ambitions to establish a zone of influence anywhere to the west of the ‘NATO frontier’ should such designs ever take the shape of concrete political and military actions.

However, the map also shows several ‘blank spots’ in the Western Balkans surrounded by NATO and/or EU member states: Serbia with Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>3</sup> Priština (because of Kosovo’s unresolved international status),<sup>4</sup> Belgrade (because of NATO’s war against Serbia in 1999), Sarajevo (because most Serbs in this country see the West as the protector of their Croat and Muslim compatriots and contenders) and Skopje (because of the

Figure 1: Alliances

NATO, Warsaw Pact, non-aligned and neutral states, 1990 and 2017



Source: SWP, 2017

3. The author of this chapter originally used the form ‘the Republic of Macedonia’ in the text. The EUISS uses the name ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.

4. Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus (all EU and/or NATO member states) do not recognise the secession of Kosovo Albanians from Belgrade in 2008.

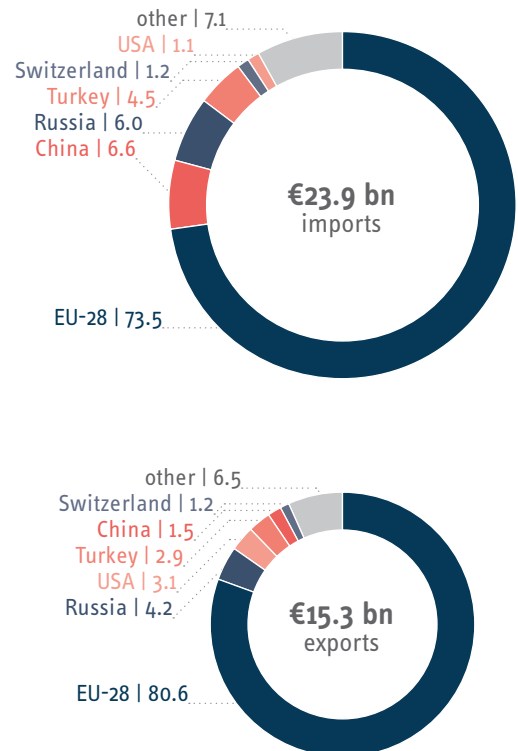
‘name dispute’ with Athens) are not going to join the Western military alliance at any time in the foreseeable future. Similarly challenging is their bid to enter the EU not only because of the many political and economic deficiencies with which these applicants are still burdened, but also because of the ongoing internal crises that the EU is experiencing.

The Kremlin has often criticised any further NATO expansion, not only in its neighbourhood but also in southeast Europe, as a threat to Russian security. Moscow however appears to be less perturbed about the Western Balkan countries’ ambition to join the EU: in one of his first comments on the subject, in Zagreb in 2007, Putin alluded to the Western Balkan countries’ EU membership plans primarily in the context of Russia’s energy strategy in southeast Europe. Moscow has shifted from this rather indifferent attitude to observing the EU’s quandary on how to deal with problematic Western Balkan applicants with a certain amount of *schadenfreude*: Russia had no objections to their bids for membership, they are only creating another headache for the EU, commented Russia’s Ambassador to the Union in early 2017.

Basically, as long as the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans is stalled, Russia has a window of opportunity to act as a ‘spoiler’ in the region and an additional driver of the region’s overall fragility, mostly through political manoeuvring, public diplomacy and propaganda – as well as, according to Western allegations, through undercover subversion.

Accordingly, Moscow habitually sides with rulers in the region, no matter how authoritarian and corrupt they might be, if they have open issues with the West. Russia has, for instance, given diplomatic support to the former right-wing political leaders in the Republic of Macedonia since 2015 whenever they attempted to suppress demands for democracy and the rule of law. According to standard Kremlin interpretation, such protests are externally orchestrated attempts to stage ‘coloured revolutions’ such as those

Figure 2: SEE6 trade in goods  
in % of total imports/exports, 2015



that took place in Ukraine in 2014 or in 2000 in Serbia, when the despotic ruler Slobodan Milošević was ousted.

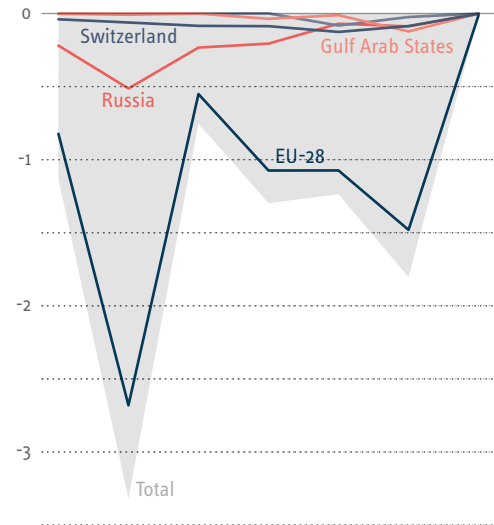
Similarly, Moscow insists that it is in fact NATO that is undermining the Western Balkans while pretending to offer stability to the region and accusing Russia of posing a threat to regional security while continually nurturing anti-Russian hysteria. A typical occasion for such charges popped up in April 2017 when Albanian leaders in Tirana and Priština threatened that a union between Albania (a member of NATO) and Kosovo cannot be ruled out if EU membership prospects for the Western Balkans fade. Moscow went to great lengths to highlight these statements as proof of the genuine intentions of the Western promoters of ‘a greater Albania’.

However, it is at the level of such diplomatic and propagandistic rhetoric against ‘foreign interference’ and the West’s ‘double standards’ that Moscow’s leverage also ends: in southeast Europe, Russia simply does not have the means or resources to substitute the West and in particular the EU as a pole of attraction for economic, far less political, integration. Statistics on trade and investments show this clearly.

In the Western Balkans, Russia’s clout is minimal compared with the region’s existing level of economic integration with the EU (see Figures 2 and 3). The SEE<sup>5</sup> import twelve times more goods from the EU than from Russia. They export twenty times more goods to the EU than to Russia. Also, in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio investments, Russia’s spending is dwarfed by capital flows from the EU to the region. Gazprom’s purchase of 56 % of the Serbian state-owned oil company NIS in 2008, allegedly for €400 million, with some subsequent payments, was a notable exception in this regard. Other significant direct investments from Russia have not been recorded since, as shown in Figure 4.

In fact, it is to Croatia, an EU country, that most Russian cash in the region has gone. Moscow’s state-controlled banks Sberbank and VTB were in 2017 among the chief creditors (with borrowings amounting to €1 million and €1.3 billion for both

Figure 3: Serbian net foreign direct investment in € billion

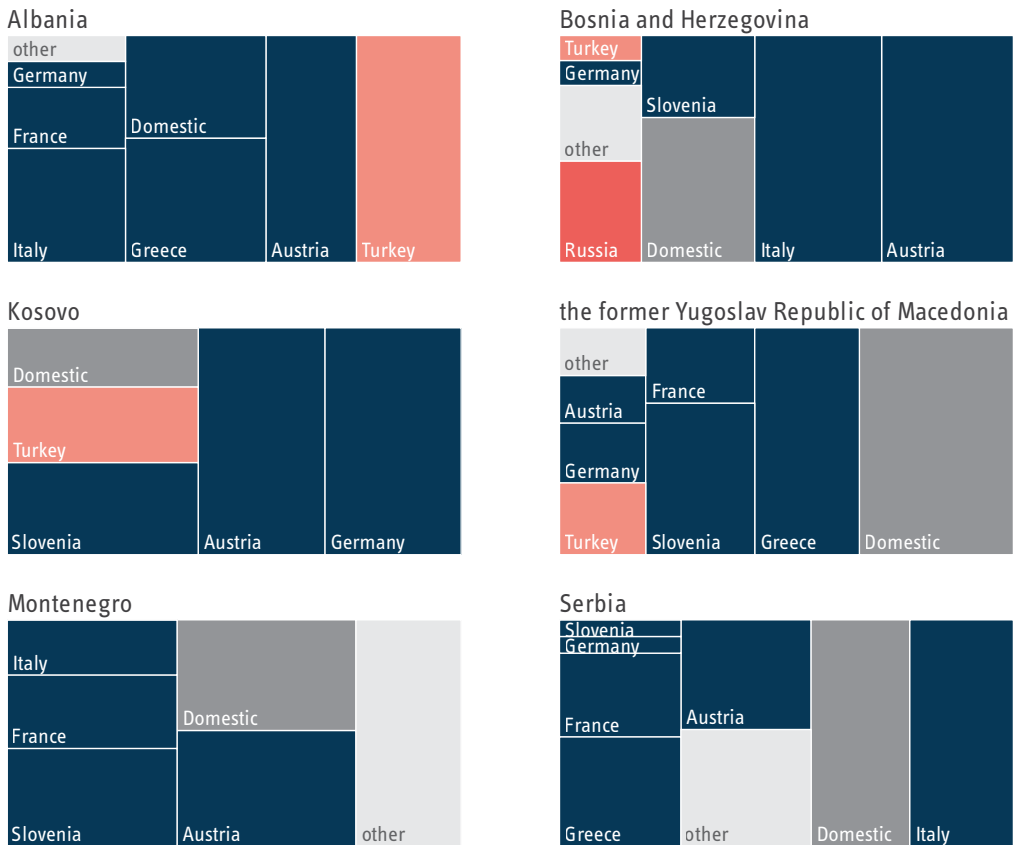


Source: Central Bank of Serbia, 2017

5. The regional EU applicants: Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

banks together) of the bankrupt food and retail company Agrokor, the region’s biggest business. However, as the *Financial Times* has reported,<sup>6</sup> so far Agrokor’s Russian creditor banks have not sought to use the situation to increase Moscow’s influence in Croatia and its neighbours. In essence, Russian ownership of banking assets in the region is very low compared to banks from EU countries.

**Figure 4: Ownership of banking assets per country**  
in %, end of 2014



Source: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development/Bancscope (end of 2014)

Last but not least, in the media industry, Russia is not known to possess any assets worth mentioning whereas Springer, Bertelsmann and other mostly German, Swiss, Austrian and US companies are significant media owners in the region. A Moscow-based company owns a minority stake in the Belgrade broadsheet daily

6. ‘Crisis at Croatia’s Agrokor poses threat beyond creditors’, *Financial Times*, 12 April 2017.

*Politika*; however, this Russian firm serves only as a front for a Serbian entrepreneur acting as a proxy for political factions in his country. Russia external broadcaster ‘Sputnik’ and its internet operations are present in the region, but only represent a marginal source of information compared with the domestic media outlets or even the US-funded Radio Free Europe.

### Three drivers of Russia’s influence in the region

Alongside its strategic and economic displacement from southeast Europe, Russian leverage in the region is also less and less effective. The **first instrument of Russian influence** was always more imagined than real: although Serbs, Montenegrins and Slavic Macedonians share Slavic roots and the Orthodox religion with Russia, and while memories of historic alliances with Russia continue to play an important role in the construction of their identities, the region’s numerous ethnic minorities, such as the Hungarians and Albanians, are indifferent to tales of historic and religious ties with Russia. On the contrary, overstated closeness to Russia breeds ethnic tensions that no government in the region can afford in light of the overall determination to join the EU. Also, many Orthodox Slavs in the region eye Russia sceptically as a great power whose actions, as demonstrated by a number of episodes that occurred in past centuries, were not always supportive of their goals.

Surveys attest that even in a country such as Serbia, where a majority of the population favours alliances with Russia and overwhelmingly rejects NATO membership, support for joining the EU hovers at around 50 percent. In fact, public attitudes towards the EU in the whole region are contradictory and shifting. Support for membership shot up after the completion of successive steps in the EU accession process, such as the lifting of visa requirements in 2010, only to fall again when bad news came from Brussels – whether in connection with the euro crisis, the flow of migrants through the Balkans, the difficulties in the EU-brokered talks between Belgrade and Priština, or most recently the Brexit referendum. The foreign policy leanings of the Serbs and other Western Balkan nations considering EU accession are plainly shaped more by political perceptions of current events than by supposedly deep-seated historical preferences and animosities.

Moscow’s **second instrument of influence** – stemming from southeast Europe’s dependency on Russian energy supplies and especially natural gas – is also diminishing. In 2015, Russia abandoned the planned construction of the South Stream gas pipeline partly on account of the EU’s strict conditions, alongside high construction costs and uncertain price trends for fossil fuels. The Western Balkan countries are members of the EU’s Energy Community and have agreed to adopt its *acquis*. This has prevented Russia’s Gazprom from using South Stream to expand its predominance in southeastern Europe.

Moscow's **third instrument of influence** in the region relates to Serbia and is the threat to use its Security Council veto if the West attempts to make Kosovo a member of the United Nations. This is the only critical tie between the two states. Moscow is keen to draw Serbia further from the West because no politician who wants to succeed in Serbian politics can risk losing Russia's support over the Kosovo conundrum. A sign of Moscow's success in this respect would be for Serbia to raise its military and security cooperation with Russia to the same level that it has with the US and NATO. According to Russian figures, 22 Serbian military exercises were conducted jointly with NATO in 2015, and only two with Russia. Consequently, it would be counterproductive for Brussels and the leading EU member states to pressurise Belgrade to distance itself from Russia. Serbia's accession to the EU is not imminent in any case. Excessive Western pressure would only reinforce the perception in Serbia that Russia is the country's sole ally.

### **Eliminating the drivers of fragility**

The EU can achieve all the leverage it wants in the Western Balkans if it decides to engage in regional 'geo-economics'. The starting point is to consider itself and the Western Balkans to be a single security – and stability – space. The EU's own stability rests to a great extent on the ability of the welfare state to curb social inequality which is the main source of grievance and instability. In southeast Europe, exactly the same premise applies.

Since opening up their economies and forging closer ties with the EU after the regime change at the turn of the century, there has been a steep increase in social inequality as well as public and private indebtedness in the Western Balkans. Unemployment has increased and living standards have deteriorated. In fact, between 2006 and 2016, the SEE6 have accumulated a trade deficit with the EU of almost €97 billion, mostly with Germany and Italy, their chief trading partners. Loans from abroad keep the states in the region afloat, leaving it to the coming generations (and there is a sharp demographic decline in most of the countries) to settle the debts.

As long as political, legal and economic conditions in southeast Europe show no signs of converging with the rest of the continent, the region will remain unstable with little resilience to domestic or externally induced calamities. To trigger convergence, the EU should enable applicant countries to access the European Structural Funds before formal membership. Including them into the portfolio of the new European Fund for Strategic Investment, and the EU's financial stability mechanisms should also be on the accession agenda in Brussels. The EU labour market should be opened up to citizens of the SEE6 to enable circular migration.

The crucial task is to raise living standards in the region and open up improved employment and life prospects, especially for the younger generation. That is the only



way to preserve the attraction of the EU's model of democracy in southeast Europe and curtail the disruptive influence of other external actors like Russia, Turkey and the Gulf Arab states as well as an erratic US under Donald Trump.

## VII. THE IMPACT OF TURKEY AND THE GULF STATES

*Filip Ejdus*

### **Introduction**

The implosion of Yugoslavia in the 1990s created favourable conditions for both Turkey and the Gulf States to increase their presence in the Western Balkans. Turkey directly supported Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians through its engagement in NATO interventions, thereby allowing Ankara to show its relevance for the Alliance in the post-Cold War period. While the Gulf States formally stayed out of the conflict, they mobilised on behalf of their fellow Balkan Muslims through the provision of humanitarian aid, but also with clandestine arms transfers and thousands of volunteers. After the wars, and particularly after the arrival of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002, Turkey intensified its economic and diplomatic activities, which were particularly geared towards Muslim communities in the region. The Gulf States also stepped up their humanitarian assistance, focusing on building mosques and schools and steadily increasing their foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to the region.

The EU is still the most important trading partner of the Western Balkans (it accounts for over 76% of the region's trade), the biggest donor and in most countries the most important source of FDI. However, the slowdown of the EU enlargement process in recent years has emboldened both Turkey and the Gulf States to further intensify their presence in the Western Balkans. Ankara has sought to compensate the lack of progress in the EU accession talks by launching diplomatic initiatives, stepping up trade and investment, facilitated by free trade agreements, and engaging more strongly with all Balkan countries. The Gulf States, on the other hand, see their Balkan investment as an opportunity to diversify their economies in the face of plummeting oil prices.

In its recent Global Strategy, the EU declared resilience in the neighbourhood to be one of its key foreign policy interests. If the EU is to achieve its objective of promoting resilience in the Western Balkans, it is of the utmost importance to understand the effect of this increased involvement of Turkey and the Gulf States on the resilience of states in the region or their ability to adapt to external shocks and 'bounce back'.

## Turkey and the Gulf States as drivers of fragility

The Western Balkans is a fragile post-conflict region composed of economically challenged, weak democracies with a set of unresolved ethnic and territorial disputes. While the key drivers of fragility, such as state weakness, ethno-national disputes and poor economic performance are all internal to the region, the rising influence of Turkey and the Gulf States has amplified their impact in several ways.

While Turkey officially still supports the Euro-Atlantic integration of the region, the stalemate in EU accession talks has increased Ankara's assertiveness on this issue in recent years. Its attempts to act as a mediator in intra-regional conflicts have had limited success and at times have even deepened the existing tensions in the region. For instance, during his visit to Prizren in October 2013, Turkey's then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that 'Turkey is Kosovo, Kosovo is Turkey'. This infuriated Belgrade, which temporarily pulled out of Ankara-sponsored trilateral talks (with Bosnia). Although Turkey still shares the EU's stance towards the key issues in the region, including the recent crisis in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a further deterioration of Ankara's relations with the EU might turn Turkey against the European integration of the Western Balkans. In spring 2017, for example, pro-Erdoğan anti-EU protests were held in Sarajevo. Although still small in size, these protests indicate Ankara's capacity to derail the European project in the Western Balkans.

Turkey's internal tensions and democratic regression have also started to slowly spill over into the Western Balkans. For years, Turkey facilitated the spread of the Hizmet movement in the region through a network of civil society organisations, schools and religious centres. After the leader of the movement Fethullah Gülen and Erdoğan fell out, Turkey started applying pressure on the Western Balkan states to crack down on schools and individuals related to the Hizmet movement which is now labelled by Ankara as a terrorist organisation.<sup>1</sup> Another potential driver of fragility is the potential of Erdoğan's authoritarian governing style – based on a personality cult, tight media control and majority rule – to become a role model for the Western Balkan leaders. Just like Erdoğan, for example, Aleksandar Vučić was elected president of Serbia during his tenure as a Prime Minister in April 2017 while democracy has been gradually backsliding since his Serbia Progressive Party (SNS) came to power in 2012.

The increased presence of the Gulf States has also contributed to regional fragility. To begin with, it has led to the spread of the ultra-conservative doctrine of Wahhabism in the region. This has been facilitated by hundreds of Saudi-funded mosques and schools that have mushroomed across the Balkans in the past two decades. It is very difficult to estimate the exact number of people in the region who have fallen under the spell of fundamentalist imams preaching in those mosques,

1. So far, the pressure has only worked in Serbia where the local government in the city of Novi Pazar announced that it will not provide any support to Gülen's 'terrorist organisation'.

some of whom had also received scholarships to study Islam in Saudi Arabia. However, opinion polls suggest that the percentage is still among the lowest in the Muslim world. Although still in a minority, this increasingly vocal cohort of fundamentalists undermines the fragile cohesion among the Balkan Muslims and threatens inter-ethnic relations. The extent of their influence is reflected in the fact that Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are the European countries which have produced the highest number of foreign fighters per capita who joined armed groups in Iraq and Syria. Upon their return, these Balkan jihadists can be expected to further disseminate radical ideas and exacerbate fragility in the region.

The economic presence of the Gulf States in the Western Balkans has also not been entirely uncontroversial. The €3.5 billion worth Belgrade Waterfront project signed in 2015, for example, has created a huge controversy which peaked when a group of unidentified masked men demolished several legally disputed buildings. Although the culprits have never been identified, the aim of the demolition seems to have been to clear the ground for the real estate development in order to meet a deadline that had been previously promised to Arab investors. This sparked a series of public protests in Belgrade, gradually growing into a social movement against the Belgrade Waterfront project in its entirety. Non-transparent investments have also raised concerns about their sustainability. In 2015, for instance, a Dubai-based investor announced plans to invest €4.3 billion in building a luxury tourist resort near Sarajevo, which promised to be one of the biggest investments of its kind in Europe. Two years later, the project has still not taken off the ground and doubts have been raised about the credibility of the investor.

Finally, the lucrative arms deals with the Gulf States have, albeit indirectly, also driven fragility in the region. The Gulf States have taken advantage of lax export controls in the Western Balkans to purchase large quantities of weapons, re-exporting some of this weaponry to various armed groups in the Middle East. By feeding the wars not just in Syria, but also in Iraq, Yemen and Libya with the weapons, the Gulf States have contributed to the escalation and perpetuation of military conflicts in the region. This, in turn, led to the increasing number of refugees transiting through the Balkan route on their way to the EU (almost a million of them in 2015 alone). However important these negative influences have been, they also arguably have a positive flipside which is explored in the next section.

## Turkey and the Gulf States as drivers of resilience

The influence of Turkey and the Gulf States has also several positive effects on the region. To begin with, their investments have been an important substitute for the reduction of FDI from the EU, which halved in the period between 2010 and 2013.<sup>2</sup> Since the early 2000s, Turkey's investments have provided an important boost for

2. Nazif Mandaci, 'Western Balkans and the Gulf: Interregionalism in the making', *Mediterranean Politics*, 6 March 2017, p.9.

the economies of the region especially in Kosovo (€340 million) and Albania (€1.5 billion) where Turkey tops the list of partners and foreign investors. Major Turkish banks such as Turkish Economy Bank, Halk Bank, Ziraat Bank and İşbank have opened up branches and made acquisitions in the region. Turkey also made significant investments in the construction sector (e.g. the Vermice-Pristina-Merdare highway), airports (e.g. Pristina, Skopje, Ohrid) and the textile industry among others.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the Gulf States have also started investing in the region to diversify their oil-based economies, a move which has been wholeheartedly endorsed by Western Balkan countries seeking to expand economic partners beyond the crisis-stricken EU. In the past few years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has stepped up investments not only in Albania (e.g. the Tirana-Elbasan road, Sheik Zayed Airport in Kukes) but also in Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In anticipation of Montenegro's NATO and EU membership, the UAE has made several investments in the real estate sector including the takeover of Porto Montenegro in the Bay of Kotor in 2016. This is of strategic importance for a future NATO member state where Russia accounts for nearly a third of foreign investments.

In Serbia, the UAE has invested in aviation, urban construction, military technology and agriculture for the sake of its own food security. In 2013, it acquired 49% of the Serbian national carrier JAT.<sup>4</sup> In April 2015, the government of Serbia struck a €3.5 billion worth deal to develop Belgrade's rundown riverfront. In recent years, Belgrade secured two low-interest \$1 billion loans from the UAE, first to avoid bankruptcy in 2013 and then to plug its public deficit in 2016. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the UAE is the second largest non-EU donor. Qatar has also stepped up its investments in the real estate, health, media and transport sectors across the region while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have announced further investments in the real estate, banking and defence sectors. Finally, the lucrative arms deals between the Gulf and the Western Balkan create new jobs and contribute to boost sluggish economic growth across the region. Virtually non-existent before 2012, arms exports from the Western Balkans into the Gulf region increased to €561 million by 2016.

In addition to clear economic benefits, a case could be made that the influence of Turkey and the Gulf States on the political resilience of the region has not been entirely negative either. In the years following the Balkan wars, Turkey's political and military involvement in the Western Balkans was part of broader efforts to integrate the region into the EU and NATO. More recently, states in the Western Balkans have welcomed the increased political presence of the non-EU actors as a way of widening their foreign policy options. Increasingly weary about the uncertain prospect of the

3. Alida Vračić, 'Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans', SWP Research Paper 11, December 2016.

4. Will Bartlett, James Ker-Lindsay, Kristian Alexander and Tena Prelec, 'The United Arab Emirates as an emerging actor in the Western Balkans: the case of strategic investment in Serbia', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, pp. 94-112.

European project more broadly, states in the region have sought to diversify their partnerships to hedge their bets. This, however, could also act as a driver of fragility as it could further weaken domestic incentives to reform and sharpen geopolitical competition.

Finally, through its cultural influence in the region, Turkey has sought to strengthen the resilience of local Islamic communities against the fundamentalist forms of Islam propagated by Saudi-trained clerics and local indoctrinated recruits.<sup>5</sup> A clear majority of the Balkan Muslims follow the moderate Hanafi School of Islam that was dominant in the Ottoman Empire. It is certainly more compatible with secularism, democracy, and the European integration aspirations of the region and acts as a bulwark against Wahhabism spreading from the Gulf. Turkey's efforts to restore the Ottoman cultural heritage and connect with the Muslim communities in the region has therefore acted as a driver of resilience although in the future much will depend on the nature of the relationship between Ankara and Brussels.

## The way ahead

The rising influence of Turkey and the Gulf States has had a mixed impact on the Western Balkans. However, neither their positive nor their negative impact on the region should be overstated. The region is not a strategic priority for them while their economic and political clout is still much less significant than the EU's. Moreover, in contrast to Russia, which openly undermines the EU's influence in the Western Balkans, both Turkey and the Gulf States still treat the region as a bridge to the EU.

In the next decade, the impact of Turkey and the Gulf States on the Western Balkans will depend on four interlinked factors. The first one relates to how the EU faces up to current challenges. If the EU weakens internally and/or its enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans halts, other external actors including the Gulf States and Turkey will seek to fill the vacuum and not necessarily for the benefit of the region. The second factor is the wider geopolitical environment in the Middle East. As political, economic and security interdependence between these regions increases, the Western Balkans will be increasingly susceptible to import both their positive and negative influences. The third factor is how the EU's relationships with Turkey and the Gulf States will evolve. Their deterioration would deepen tensions in the Western Balkans while a wider geopolitical convergence would boost regional resilience. For example, a proposed formal end of accession talks following Turkey's controversial constitutional referendum and the announced retaliatory withdrawal of Ankara from the migrant deal with the EU might have a devastating effect on all states along the Balkan route. Finally, if the democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans continues and a solution

5. Kerem Öktem, 'New Islamic actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey's return to the Muslim Balkans', European Studies Centre, University of Oxford, December 2010.

to the political stalemate in Bosnia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia/Kosovo is not found, external players will be increasingly tempted to exploit divisions in the region, thus seriously jeopardising its development and prosperity.

## VIII. THE IMPACT OF CHINA

*Anastas Vangeli*

### **Introduction**

In 2012 China announced a new comprehensive initiative for cooperation with sixteen countries in Central, East and Southeast Europe (CESEE), including the five countries of the Western Balkans that are not (yet) EU members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> Montenegro and Serbia – but not Kosovo which China does not recognise. Analysts in the region, but also in the broader China-watching community, did not pay much attention to what at the time was regarded as an obscure diplomatic undertaking. Five years later, in addition to the increased economic cooperation which it has driven, the ‘16+1’ initiative has evolved into a complex networking platform consisting of a web of transgovernmental institutions: diplomatic exchanges between China and the respective countries have intensified, while countries from the region have gained a prominent role in China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The cumulative result is that today the Beijing-based 16+1 is the largest and most elaborate multilateral framework directly engaging with the CESEE, and as such, the largest non-Euro-Atlantic initiative that involves the Western Balkan countries – even though the volume of economic cooperation between China and the sixteen is still minuscule compared to the level of cooperation that China enjoys with the rest of the EU and the continent, in particular Western Europe.

As China’s role in the world becomes ever more significant, especially at a time of diminishing American global leadership, its engagement in the Western Balkans is of particular importance for both the trajectories of economic and political development of the countries themselves, and the EU as a stakeholder in the region. The Chinese vision of the Balkans means that the EU has to reflect not only on its China policy, but also on the way it perceives and handles intra-EU, and moreover intra-European, issues of diversity and developmental discrepancies. It will also have to be proactive in fostering synergies between the Chinese approach and its own strategy.

With the 16+1 subregional cooperation format, China has managed to establish a novel platform for intensifying and expanding cooperation with the Western Balkan states while circumventing traditional stakeholders in the region such as the EU and the US – but also Russia and Turkey. The rapid development of the new

1. The author of this chapter originally used the form ‘Macedonia’ in the text. The EUISS uses the name ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.



platform – but also the Western Balkan states’ and traditional stakeholders’ relative unfamiliarity with China – has polarised opinion on the initiative: some see China as a threat, some see it as an opportunity, with little nuance in between.

In reality, however, China is a complex, multifaceted and often enigmatic actor whose geopolitical strategy is quite different to that of other stakeholders in the region. It has championed an incremental and experimental foreign policy which both perpetuates and challenges the *status quo*. The outcomes of the relationship with China are greatly dependent on the partner countries themselves. The Chinese approach to cooperation is inclusive: while an overall framework exists, there is ample space for the details to be incrementally developed, and for the voice of the partner countries to be heard in the process.

## Drivers of fragility

China and the EU are strategic partners engaged in a relationship of ‘coevolution’ as both sides try to avoid and minimise conflicts, and boost their cooperation where possible, while adhering to their own domestic imperatives. It is a partnership not necessarily driven by high politics, but rather by intense two-way economic exchange, cooperation on climate change, and people-to-people contacts.

Yet, dealing with China is one of the most challenging external issues for both the EU, and for its member states. In the last decade, as the EU has undergone multiple crises that have limited its capacity to act as a global power, China has gradually become a more resolute and influential global actor thanks to its economic rise. At the same time, the major problem for the EU *vis-à-vis* China is not China itself, but the difficulty of speaking with one voice. Prioritising bilateral economic cooperation (framed as national interest) with China, individual European member states have often overlooked Brussels, accommodated Chinese interests, and thus contributed to fragmenting the EU’s China policy. The incoherence on China also extends to how the EU handles the growing presence of China in its neighbourhood and the enlargement area – while the EU may seek to promote normative principles and values, member (and candidate) states prioritise lucrative interests, and sometimes even compete with each other. Eventually, the different perspectives on China will have to be reconciled so as to maximise the benefits and reduce the costs for Europeans.

Today, China as a global actor is concerned not only with immediate economic interests, but also with questions that directly concern policy frameworks and governance issues. While not explicitly promoting any normative blueprints, China’s size, clout and resources have rendered its relationships with most of the countries in the world – including the countries in the Western Balkans – highly asymmetrical. The multiple asymmetries have enabled Beijing to create an environment conducive to

the advancement of its own development agenda and to engage other countries on its own terms through the creation of new, China-centered institutions.

The fact that China-Western Balkans cooperation takes place almost exclusively on Chinese terms could be challenging for the regional governments. To counter any potential sources of fragility stemming from the asymmetry between China and the Western Balkans, both the national governments in the region, and the EU as a stakeholder, need to take China seriously, develop their own China strategies and pro-actively approach the new opportunities for cooperation, thus contributing to the shaping of the agenda.

Chinese policymakers have capitalised on what they perceive as a certain ‘flexibility’ enjoyed by the subgroup of the five Western Balkan countries by virtue of their being outside of the EU. In practice this means that China can avoid EU regulations governing large-scale projects with which it otherwise has to contend in its bilateral dealings with EU member states. In other words, what China cannot do in the EU due to regulation issues, it can often do in the Western Balkans.

To a certain extent this represents a ‘competitive edge’ enjoyed by the Western Balkan countries compared to other countries in Europe. For instance, most of the infrastructure projects launched under 16+1 are in Western Balkan countries. The major infrastructure projects have been implemented not through public bidding, but by special legislation which diverges from EU norms. While this may often be a result of specific sets of circumstances and not necessarily illicit, in order to avoid all suspicion and maintain transparency, national governments in the Western Balkans should find a way to foster a model of holding competitive public tenders.

This can also serve to minimise risk. A major controversy has surrounded the construction of two highways in Macedonia via a Chinese loan, by a Chinese contractor, leading to one of the most high-profile corruption scandals that have shaken the VMRO-DPMNE government under Gruevski. Moreover, the projects have been accompanied by major errors that resulted in the construction being postponed as well as increased costs. It is however worth noting that infrastructure projects carried out by European companies in deals arranged by the Gruevski government shared the same fate. Corruption-free governance, including transparent and competitive public bidding, is at the core of the reform processes required by the EU, and is therefore one area where further monitoring is needed. However, rather than slowing down or compromising the current level of cooperation, anti-corruption should be framed as another area where there can be convergence with China – especially at a time when China is undergoing one of the most thorough anti-corruption campaigns in its history.

## Drivers of resilience

China has unequivocally supported the process of European integration and the Western Balkan countries' accession to the Union. Chinese officials have gone to great lengths to assure their European counterparts and in particular EU officials that 16+1 is complementary to the overall Sino-European relationship. While the notion of the strategic partnership between China and the EU is absent from Beijing's discourse in the Western Balkans, common interests and potential convergences do exist.

The Chinese interest in the economic renewal of the Balkans is very much welcome for both local governments and the EU. The main focus of Beijing's cooperation with the region – the infrastructure and connectivity projects – are crucial for the development of this part of Europe, as also recognised by the EU which launched the Berlin Process to address these issues specifically. In the Chinese view, the payoff from having developed infrastructure comes in a non-monetary form, as the flow of people and ideas between the areas that have been newly connected or reconnected as a result of the new railway and motorways is expected to catalyse economic activities along these routes. Another significant pillar of the cooperation – production capacity cooperation – can be instrumental in reviving some of the lost industrial capacities of the Western Balkan states, and creating new ones.

Politically, China refrains from commenting on the internal affairs of the Western Balkan countries – pursuing cooperation with whoever is in power (while nurturing relations with opposition parties too). Nevertheless, there are signs that as it becomes more involved in the region, it is also increasingly concerned about the reliability and professionalism of its partners. While adhering to the core principle of a state-led economy, Chinese experts have often pointed out the necessity of reform. At the same time, the exponentially increasing pace of 16+1 cooperation is driving the Western Balkan countries to acquire more China expertise and to strengthen their capacity as actors in international affairs. In some areas – such as local governance or e-commerce – there is indeed an opportunity for the Western Balkan countries to learn much from China.

Through 16+1 and the BRI, China has promoted regional economic integration, transcending national borders, and uniting around projects that pass through countries that have historically been divided by bitter national disputes. Pragmatic cooperation with China can bring the governments in the region to work closer together, thereby transcending the 'zero-sum' logic that tends to prevail in the region – in order for them to benefit from the BRI, for instance, they will need to develop a regional strategy towards China. Consequently, China has argued that despite all the setbacks, the future for the region is bright, which is one of the rare messages of optimism in the Western Balkan these days. China has also implicitly recognised the Western Balkan countries as being as equally European as other EU member states, in view of their structural and geographic proximity, by giving them all a seat at the

table of the 16+1. Somewhat paradoxically, this makes the Chinese approach relatively successful in the eyes of local stakeholders, at a time when the predominant narratives coming from the West are not only rather pessimistic, but also convey the idea that the region is not fully European.

## The way ahead

Through the 16+1 subregional cooperation format China has also become an unlikely but important voice in the debate on the future trajectory of the Western Balkans. In essence, instead of perpetuating the pessimistic discourse on the Balkans so often heard in the West, China has presented its ambitious new paradigm and grand narrative, best expressed through the BRI and the idea of pooling together resources and investing in a common future without interference in each other's internal political affairs. China has portrayed the Western Balkans as a region with untapped economic potential which can be a landbridge connecting Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia, contrary to the common perception of the Balkans as a peripheral region plagued by political crises, ethno-nationalist conflicts, and competing geopolitical influences. While China acknowledges the existence of some of the problems Western Balkan countries are facing, questions that commonly arise in discussions on the Balkans in the West are notably absent from the Chinese agenda.

In the coming years, it is to be expected that unless a major security crisis (involving large-scale violence) erupts in the region, China's interest and engagement in the Western Balkans will increase. While many in Brussels may see this as a challenge, some elements of the discourse deployed by China can potentially have an empowering effect on the region. China in this sense provides them with the incentive and the opportunity to raise their profile as actors in international affairs and rethink their role in a more global context.

However, there is also a potential for unintended consequences, the issue of regulation and compliance with EU standards being only one of them. Populists in the region rashly portray China as a potential alternative in case of a deterioration in relations with the EU – but at the same time, others also portray China as an anti-European and anti-Western force. In reality, China has neither the interest nor the resources to overturn the current *status quo*, and prioritises a stable international environment. In the coming years, the EU will have to first and foremost ensure that it does not let populists hijack the China agenda, and concentrate on promoting its Strategic Partnership with Beijing. At the same time, while striving to 'Europeanise' the China policy of the Western Balkan countries, it must also allow enough space for these countries to develop their own discourse on and approach to China, and pay heed to their needs and demands for economic rewards. Equally, Western Balkan leaders and citizens must be careful not to oversimplify the issue of cooperation with China while also finding a way to ensure that in their cooperation with Beijing, they also comply with their own EU accession agenda.

In order to play a constructive role in this process, the EU will need to better coordinate its strategic external relations with its enlargement and neighbourhood policy (and personnel). Such improved coordination is likely to have a positive long-term outcome in fostering resilience in the Western Balkan region, both in terms of boosting development and connectivity, but also in the overall capacity of the Western Balkan states to act more independently and gain more autonomy and leverage on the international stage. Finally, the EU should further explore ways to find complementarities between China's ambitions and its own goals. Just as Brussels and Beijing have figured out a way for China to contribute to the Juncker Plan under the BRI scheme, they can also explore ways in which China can support the Berlin Process, to the benefit of everyone involved. After all, close cooperation with China during its period of reform and opening up has greatly benefited the core EU economies. China's 16+1 platform is also a way for the post-socialist countries of Europe, including those from the Western Balkans, to have the opportunity to catch up with the countries of 'core Europe' in their cooperation with China.

## Section 2

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# INTERNAL DRIVERS



## IX. TOO MUCH RESILIENCE? GETTING USED TO CRISES

*Florian Bieber*

### Introduction

The Western Balkans have been shaped by recurrent crises over the past generation. Since the 1980s the region has experienced only a few years of ‘normality’, understood as periods of economic growth, moderate or declining unemployment and political stability. The 1980s were marked by economic crisis and political confrontation. The 1990s were a decade of war, authoritarianism and nationalist mobilisation. The early years of the new millennium saw a brief interlude of stabilisation, expressed in a move towards democratisation, the end of violent conflict and economic reform and EU integration. This process gradually came to an end as a consequence of the global economic crisis of 2008-2009. Thus, familiarity with crisis has been a hallmark of the Western Balkans over the past 25 years, and this has led to a fusion of fragility and resilience.

After a gradual improvement in democratic governance in the 2000s, stagnation and decline in standards of governance have marked the region since.<sup>1</sup> The Western Balkan states have not managed to establish consolidated democracies, and many observers are currently worried about an overall trend of ‘democratic backsliding’. Today, the political space is dominated by parties representing powerful clientelistic networks.

The political stasis and democratic regression are mirrored by economic stagnation. Unemployment rates among the general population averaged between 15 and 30 percent between 2012 and 2016, even if gradually declining, and between 30 and 60 percent among young people. These numbers, reaching a regional average of 47.7 percent in 2015, are staggeringly high.<sup>2</sup>

However, economic woes and a drift towards more authoritarianism have, ironically, not produced a large-scale regional political crisis. There have been, however, a number of national crises across the region, including the protracted stalemate in

1. ‘The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans: Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy’, BiEPAG Policy Paper, March 2017. Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-authoritarianism-and-eu-stabilitocracy/>
2. World Bank and Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW), *Western Balkans Labor Market Trends 2017*, April 2017. Available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/336041491297229505/170403-Regional-Report-Western-Balkan-Labor-Market-Trends-2017-FINAL.pdf>



the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>3</sup> between 2015 and May 2017 over the widespread abuse of power by the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party.

The region has recently attracted international media attention, focusing on its potential to relapse into violent conflict, in a context where the prospect of EU accession has become more distant and joint transatlantic support for democratic reform has become less tangible.

The main challenge facing the region concerns its ability to absorb and withstand crises. The continuous crises in the region have made citizens resilient to upheaval; however, this resilience can be best understood as an ability to endure crises, rather than the ability to overcome and become less vulnerable to future crises. Indeed, the region's motto could be encapsulated by 'trpi i šuti', the title of a song by the Bosnian hip-hop and reggae band *Dubioza kolektiv* – meaning 'suffer and shut up'.<sup>4</sup>

## Drivers of fragility

The region is characterised by various structural causes of fragility, which are in turn exploited and reinforced by various political actors. First, **structural economic underdevelopment** has deep historical roots related to the location of the region on Europe's economic periphery. Modernisation efforts undertaken during the socialist period were only of limited success. The economic transition after 1990 and the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008-2009 have accentuated the region's peripheral economic position and thwarted progress towards economic convergence. Periods of high growth during the early 2000s were linked largely to a second wave of privatisations – following earlier privatisations during the 1990s that mostly favoured government cronies – and foreign direct investment (FDI), mostly in service sectors (banking, financial services and retail), but this has failed to create long-term economic growth and employment.

This precarious economic situation has a number of consequences. First, it leads to large-scale emigration, both of well-educated and less educated citizens. This trend is a historic phenomenon and has been a central feature of the region's economic and social structure for two centuries. However, the loss of well-educated, talented young people due to emigration can create considerable shortfalls in the economy and society. Furthermore, the emigration 'safety valve' can reduce social pressure for change. Second, the structural economic weaknesses reinforce the **centrality of the state**. The significance of the state as a provider of employment and economic resources is again historically embedded, and not a consequence of socialism alone, at least in the post-Yugoslav region. The centrality of the state magnifies the

3. The author of this chapter originally used the form 'Macedonia' in the text. The EUISS uses the name 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.

4. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAd0fQZs5UQ>.

importance of political elites who jostle for control of power and resources, leading to a polarisation of the political space. More immediately, the overriding central authority enjoyed by the state has provided it with far-reaching means of controlling society and the political system.

Third, another important structural feature of fragility is the role of **informal networks and practices**. The historically central role of the state, and the repercussions of the political, economic and social transformation after 1989, have resulted in a system where formal institutions are bypassed through informal networks. These both reinforce power structures (i.e. through the use of employment to secure loyalty to the state and the ruling party), and subvert them (by using family and other personal connections to secure favours). The key issue here is the absence of equal and fair access to social and economic opportunities. Instead, alternative, non-transparent mechanisms of access to services (bottom-up) and control over society (top-down) are in place that are enduring and deeply entrenched. These can absorb societal change and institutional and legal transformation, but remain fundamentally unequal and usually reinforce hierarchical dependencies.

Fourth, the **state system and borders** are not based on near universal consent. While in most of the EU existing states and borders are widely accepted (with notable exceptions in Spain, Belgium and the UK), in the Western Balkans the current state system does not reflect broad agreement. A significant share of citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would prefer to live in a different state arrangement, either integrating territories of neighbouring states, populated by ethnic kin, or seceding to join them.

This does not mean that most citizens would actively like to change the *status quo* or see this as an important issue – election results would suggest that this is not the case, as parties advocating radical change receive mostly modest levels of support. However, the latent discontent with the state system can be exacerbated by the region's structural economic weaknesses. If states are unable to deliver on economic improvement, their legitimacy will suffer and the discontent of citizens can be channelled towards demanding a change of the *status quo*.

Fifth, the **legacies of the wars of the 1990s** continue to constitute a source of contention and division. The dominant narratives of self-victimisation and apportioning blame to the other side, as shaped during the wars, have persisted and are reproduced in school textbooks and the media. The impact of international efforts, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) or domestic civil society initiatives, such as REKOM, have been modest. While some war crimes, such as the Srebrenica massacre, are now widely acknowledged, these narratives are still pervasive throughout the former Yugoslavia and can easily be instrumentalised to mobilise nationalist sentiment and poison intercommunity relations.

These five structural features of fragility in the region have not been addressed in recent years and as a result have generally become more entrenched. They provide the backdrop for more immediate sources of fragility in the countries of the Western Balkans. The deteriorating international environment, as noted earlier, can be viewed as a negative intervening factor: this presents an array of challenges including the overall crisis of liberal democracy, as well as the institutional and identity crisis of the EU, and the erosion of transatlantic ties. More recently this also includes the rise in geopolitical tensions in the Balkans resulting from the migration flows through the region, and the stronger presence of external actors such as Russia and Turkey. Economic stagnation is both a result of the adverse international environment since 2008 and internal structural factors.

Regional elites have been incorporating these considerations into their system of rule. Few of them appear to be committed democrats and political competition remains highly polarised and based on a zero-sum game. Consequently, the system of rule has moved towards greater authoritarianism and democratic institutions, where they exist, have been undermined and instrumentalised.

Political elites promise stability and continuation of the *status quo*, based on modest overtures towards the EU and paying lip service to democratic practices and reform. Their rule is not based on consensus seeking and institution building. Thus, the inherent polarisation of the political landscape has a high potential for conflict and in combination with the abuse of institutions renders an orderly transfer of power through elections increasingly more difficult. This encourages the proliferation of extra-institutional politics (boycotts, protests, violence), which reinforces fragility. Furthermore, non-democratic regimes thrive on crisis and use crisis to shore up their power and divert attention from their undemocratic system of rule. Thus, elites take advantage of or even manufacture crisis to secure control.

Taken together, there are multiple levels of fragility that are interlocking and currently mutually reinforcing. In discussing and confronting the more immediate challenge posed by elites and their autocratic system of rule, there is a need to bear in mind that, unless comprehensively addressed, the structural causes of fragility will persist no matter what government is in power.

## **Drivers of resilience**

Populations across the region have been resilient and resourceful in surviving the multiple crises with which they have been confronted over the past few decades. Persistently high unemployment and poverty rates pose an ongoing challenge, giving rise to widespread emigration. Local economies are as a result heavily dependent on remittances. The region is one of the world's key remittance-receiving areas, together with Central America (which receives high volumes of remittances from the US) and Central Asia (from Russia). Most remittances in the Western Balkans

originate from the EU and Switzerland and the phenomenon is particularly significant in Albania and Kosovo. The region depends heavily on the export of labour (both legal and illegal) and there is a strong reliance on informal networks and families in local economies.

While authoritarian and nationalist views are common, as evidenced in the results of surveys, these are counterbalanced by high levels of scepticism and distrust towards political elites, traumatic memories of the wars of the 1990s and re-emerging informal cross-national cooperation.

On a larger scale, the relatively small size of the countries in the Western Balkans, plus their far-reaching integration into the economies and social and political structures of the EU, result in links and dependencies that prevent them from seeking alternatives to EU integration. Attempts to build close ties to countries outside the EU can at best supplement, but not replace, ties to the EU. This orientation towards Central and Western Europe is historically embedded and unlikely to weaken.

## The way ahead

The current *status quo* in the Western Balkans is exacerbating democratic, economic and social stagnation and regression, resulting in an increased potential for crisis and conflict. The region has clearly become more fragile in recent years. This trend is largely the result of developments outside the region, combined with structural factors that compound the challenges, as outlined above.

The close, enduring ties between the Western Balkans and Central and Western Europe will persist and are unlikely to be permanently disrupted. The key question is whether the offer of integration, as embodied by EU membership, will become more plausible again and entail the possibility of equality and convergence as its central promises, rather than a permanent centre-periphery relationship.

The Brexit crisis and fraught transatlantic relationship mean that, in the mid-term at least, the EU is not going to be a transformative actor in the region in the way that it was a decade ago. Whether it will regain this dynamic will depend on factors external to the Western Balkans. However, the question remains whether the current approach can bridge the crisis of enlargement and transformation. This appears unlikely. The EU and its member states have been insufficiently critical of the decline of democracy in the region and offer few solutions to the structural weaknesses and sources of fragility that have been outlined in this chapter. This would require a new approach that reasserts the role of the EU as a normative and transformative actor. In addition, the current crisis highlights the difficulty of achieving enduring change through external conditionality alone. Thus, overcoming fragility in the region will require more influential domestic actors willing to initiate change who are committed to the normative framework of the EU.

Today the region has few political actors who openly oppose EU integration: but most only pay lip service to democratic reform. Clearly, much of this commitment is insincere and risks undermining the content of the EU accession agenda itself. Citizens, especially those active in social movements, and other pro-reform civil society actors note that declaratory commitment to EU principles and reform by local political elites appears to suffice to receive external support. The danger is that the pro-reform movement might become increasingly anti-EU, as they see EU support for governing elites as ultimately an obstacle to reform. Such a trajectory could inflict lasting damage to the EU integration project in the Western Balkans that it would take years to overcome.

## X. NO OPEN SOCIETY - NO RESILIENCE

*Srdjan Cvijic*

### Introduction

There is a paradox at the heart of the story of EU enlargement in the Western Balkans.

On the one hand, Montenegro and Serbia started the EU accession negotiations process; Albania, a candidate country, is expected to open the first negotiating chapters before the end of 2017 or at the beginning of 2018. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,<sup>1</sup> essentially blocked on its path to EU membership, or in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, still waiting for a meaningful process of European integration to start, a semblance of normality is maintained both by the local governments and the EU.

On the other hand, democracy in the region is backsliding. Numerous electoral observation reports by the OSCE/ODIHR cast doubt on the freedom and fairness of elections. The 2016 World Press Freedom Index concludes that the Western Balkans experienced the steepest decline in media freedom worldwide since 2012. Corruption, in some cases amounting to state capture by ruling parties, and unreformed security services restrict freedom and rule of law across the region. In the case of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, even a traditionally tactful European Commission Country Report for 2016, explicitly uses the term ‘state capture’ to describe the situation on the ground.<sup>2</sup> Recent developments in the country, such as the storming of the parliament on 27 April by Macedonian nationalist hooligans and violence against elected officials, allegedly facilitated by the passivity of the police force, demonstrate that the government-inspired clampdown on civil society should be considered as a warning sign of a deterioration of the security situation in the country.

Particularly worrying is the rapidly closing space for civil society organisations and independent and critical media. Last December, Skopje came close to passing legislation reminiscent of Russia’s foreign agent and undesirable organisations laws, following months of government-orchestrated attacks against the Foundation Open Society–Macedonia, and other civil society organisations in the run-up

1. The author of this chapter originally used the form ‘the Republic of Macedonia’ in the text. The EUISS uses the name ‘the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.
2. For a comprehensive account on the crisis of democracy in the Western Balkans see: Florian Bieber et al, ‘The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans: Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy’, BiEPAG Policy Paper, March 2017.

to parliamentary elections. This would have been unimaginable only a couple of years ago.

The situation is similar in the rest of the region. While the first decade of the twenty-first century brought an expansion of freedoms in the Western Balkans, since 2010 this is in sharp decline. The region is now back to where it started in the early 2000s.

### **Drivers of fragility: *Pax Junckeriana***

In 2015, for a brief moment, the refugee crisis put the Western Balkans back on the political map of Europe, highlighting the region's strategic importance for Europe's security and stability. But hopes that this heightened attention would translate into greater political commitment towards EU membership were quickly shattered as it became clear that Europe's attention was limited to ensuring the effective closure of the Western Balkans migration route.<sup>3</sup>

Not just in the context of the migration crisis, but more generally, the EU is ready to trade democracy for stability. The 2003 Thessaloniki European Council promise of future EU membership to the countries of the region seems to be fading into oblivion. The European Commission's 'White Paper on the Future of Europe' published on 1 March 2017 does not mention EU enlargement once. Instead, the EU turns a blind eye to local leaders' authoritarian tendencies and at times actively supports local strongmen regardless of democratic backsliding in their countries and the intimidation of civil society.<sup>4</sup> This is not an isolated example but a consistent policy.

Even before the global financial and economic crisis, when EU integration still enjoyed momentum, the 2007 Berlin Declaration issued on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome referred to 'the unnatural division of Europe [as something] consigned to the past.' The Declaration did not mention EU enlargement a single time. In 2009, the EU enlargement portfolio was merged with the European Neighborhood Policy under the mandate of a single Commissioner and single Directorate General. Grouping together enlargement countries with the countries of the neighbourhood under the same portfolio – ostensibly an organisational matter – was yet another manifestation of a policy announced in July 2014 with the statement of the then nominee for the presidency of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker that 'there will be no new enlargement in the next five years.'

3. For a comprehensive account on the effects of the EU's response to the migration crisis in the Balkans on the state of democracy in the region see Srdjan Cvijic, Nikola Dimitrov and Natasha Wunsch, 'The migrant crisis: a catalyst for EU enlargement?', Policy Paper, BiEPAG, June 2016.

4. An illustrative example is the participation at the pre-electoral rally of the former Yugoslave Republic of Macedonia's VMRO-DPMNE party and explicit backing of a contender in the election by Austria's Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz. Such actions of unwarranted support gave local strongmen a sense of impunity, thus creating a political environment where the abovementioned May 2017 electoral violence could occur. See <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/critics-slam-kurz-s-support-for-macedonia-s-ruling-party-11-28-2016>



Juncker's 2014 'moratorium' on EU enlargement announced grim times for the civil society of the region. The absence of a political momentum in EU enlargement had two consequences: it showed that the EU's membership carrot is illusory; and it simultaneously weakened the stick that could be used to enforce reforms, thus leaving the region's civil society vulnerable to increasingly intolerant ruling elites. This is how the Western Balkans ended up in a vicious circle, a perennial *status quo* of *Pax Junckeriana*.

## **Drivers of resilience: a citizen-centred approach to resilience**

The EU's transformative power in the region is in free fall and this issue urgently needs to be addressed. Slowly, the EU's leadership is waking up from its winter sleep. During her visit to the region in the first week of March 2017, Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, delivered words of hope: 'this is not an "enlargement" of our Union but a reunification because the Balkans are part of Europe'. The 9-10 March 2017 European Council conclusions echoed her words: 'the European Union remains faithful to the promise of Thessaloniki and fully committed to the stability and prosperity of the region'. Faced with growing tensions and divisions in the Western Balkans, as well as the 'unhealthy' influence of other geopolitical actors (such as Russia and Turkey), the EU is finally contemplating a more active engagement in the region. An acknowledgment by Brussels, Berlin and other EU capitals that the EU's insufficient engagement has allowed other powers to gain ground in the region, is still counterbalanced by a fear that the populations in the EU member states are hostile to further enlargement of the Union. The Rome Declaration issued on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome on 25 March 2017 is a good illustration of this. In it the EU Heads of State and Government pledge 'keeping the door open to those who want to join', but then add a politically and semantically unnecessary qualification – 'later'.

Regardless of the shortcomings, this is an important change of tone, but strategic communication is not enough. In order to keep the Western Balkans on a reform path towards membership, the EU needs to adopt a citizen-centred approach to resilience.

Presently, EU accession negotiations are almost exclusively a dialogue between the EU and governments of the region. Parliaments and civil society remain largely sidelined. Even in Montenegro, which formally adopted a more inclusive approach to civil society participation in the negotiations, until recently civil society organisations (CSOs) did not have access to reports prepared by different Directorates General and agencies of the European Commission, as well as expert missions to Montenegro. Parliaments of the region do not have full access to such documents either.



Despite the attempts of civil society organisations to gain access to them, the European Commission is reluctant to disclose the reports claiming ownership of the documents and thus a right to decide who receives them. Hence the negotiations process remains opaque and undemocratic.

Due to vaguely defined goals in the Action Plans within the framework of the negotiating chapters, governments are able to manipulate perceptions of achieved results and communicate them in a way that fosters unrealistic expectations to other stakeholders and to the general public. Oversight of the reports by NGOs and the general public would make potential manipulations much more difficult. But it is not just the Western Balkans that need more transparency from Brussels. It is the EU's own credibility in the region that is at stake.

## **The way ahead: a new partnership with the citizens of the region**

Inviting civil society to provide input to the annual country reports of the European Commission is not enough.

An empowered civil society is a precondition for a successful EU enlargement process and a more resilient Western Balkans region. In a situation where parliaments are severely marginalised by, and the judiciary subservient to, the executive power, civil society is the only hope for a functioning system of checks and balances. The EU accession negotiations process carries in itself a bias toward the executive power preventing true parliamentary debate. By exacerbating the democratic deficit in this way, the EU is copying the strongmen politics it seeks to combat.

The task of creating independent parliaments, courts and other institutions cannot be achieved overnight. But empowering civil society requires relatively little effort in comparison. All the EU has to do is publicly stand in its defence and increase the transparency of the EU enlargement process.

Transparency and meaningful participation of civil society in the EU enlargement process is vital also to counter the propaganda of other geopolitical actors whose influence in the region is growing. The EU's approach of deal-making with political elites (i.e. encouraging so-called 'Stabilitocracy') achieves the opposite: it breeds instability by fuelling discontent, delegitimising and thus weakening support for the EU in the region, and allowing other geopolitical actors to gain traction and influence.

## XI. PRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM AND RESILIENCE

Ana E. Juncos

### Introduction

The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) adopted in 2016 proposes ‘principled pragmatism’ as a new operating principle in the EU’s foreign policy. According to the EUGS: ‘We will be guided by clear principles. These stem as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world.’<sup>1</sup> In this way, principled pragmatism seeks to reconcile interests and values, which according to the EUGS go ‘hand in hand’. The EU appears to embrace a more assertive and self-interested strategy: fostering resilience abroad can enhance the security of the Union by promoting more stable and prosperous states in the neighbourhood. At the same time, this new approach appears to be in line with the EU’s liberal narrative and its normative and soft power ambitions regarding the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

The notion of principled pragmatism is also in step with the rise of resilience in EU foreign and security policy, as reflected in its emphasis on a more pragmatic approach.<sup>2</sup> This pragmatist orientation could serve as a new catalyst for EU foreign policy in the Western Balkans and provide an opportunity to move beyond previous policies towards a more ‘bottom-up’ approach to building peace. Accordingly, a stronger focus should be placed on local practices and the practical consequences of the EU’s actions, thereby embracing and further enhancing the already existing internal capacities of the Western Balkan countries. In doing so, the EU will need to carefully manage several challenges (drivers of fragility) and draw on existing capabilities (drivers of resilience) in order to develop a renewed and more effective approach to the region.

### Drivers of fragility

Principled pragmatism entails a careful balancing act between the promotion of interests and values, as well as some compromises and trade-offs in practice. The EU will need to take into consideration the ‘reality’ of power and interests by recognising that norms can only be advanced when they are sustained by the right

1. European External Action Service, ‘Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy’, June 2016.
2. Ana E. Juncos, ‘Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: a pragmatic turn?’, *European Security*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-18.

configuration of power and interests. Moreover, the EU should consider the consequences of norm-driven actions and the fact that pragmatic tactics will sometimes need to be employed to avoid undesired social outcomes, but with the view of promoting moral principles down the line.

An approach that seeks to reconcile values and interests is of course nothing new in the EU's foreign policy towards the Western Balkans. While the promotion of EU principles has been at the core of the EU's enlargement policy, security considerations have always played a role in this part of the world, including regarding the offer of EU membership at Thessaloniki in 2003. The notion of principled pragmatism seeks to bridge these two elements by ensuring that the long-term goal of EU membership for the Balkans can be achieved in the short and medium term by a more adaptable and flexible policy informed by a 'realistic assessment' of the local politics, security considerations and geopolitical context. For instance, according to the EUGS, geostrategic considerations will play a key role in determining where the EU should be more active, with the EU focusing on the neighbourhood (broadly understood), and only engaging elsewhere on a case-by-case basis. This suggests that the EU will continue to be heavily involved in the Western Balkans, where it can make a difference through the offer of EU membership, and where the geopolitical context has become more complex and competitive in recent years with the increasing involvement of Russia, Turkey and other international powers.

While a more pragmatist stance offers new opportunities for the EU's policy in the Western Balkans, there are still a number of challenges associated with it. The EU will continue to face criticisms that it lacks consistency in its foreign policy, especially where normative considerations might be seen as the price to be paid to maintain security and stability. The apparent tension between stability and democracy promotion remains particularly pertinent in the Western Balkans, where the rise of autocratic leaders and semi-authoritarian governments challenges key principles such as democratic oversight and freedom of the press. Yet, to what extent is it pragmatic to accept authoritarianism as a way to maintain stability? Will the EU hide behind the convenient label of 'pragmatism' to do less or, even worse, nothing in the face of human rights violations? While in the short term, some might see the promotion of stability as the best strategy, repressive regimes will no doubt result in more instability further down the line as they fuel more popular discontent. Hence the EU should avoid the dangers of a 'resilience as stability' paradigm.

This discussion also highlights the tensions between state and societal resilience insofar as a strong and resilient state might not always be in harmony with a resilient society. For instance, the region continues to suffer from a lack of capacity at the institutional/state level, with many Western Balkan countries characterised by weak rule of law, state capture, organised crime and corruption. To address these drivers of fragility, the EU will need to continue to invest in building state resilience. Yet, building the capacity of the security forces in the Western Balkans could result in more assertive policing (e.g. crowd control) undermining democratic accountability

or the respect for human rights, and aggravating the tensions between state and societal resilience. In sum, principled pragmatism might leave the EU open to the same criticisms about inconsistencies and double standards in its external action, especially if the EU follows a ‘resilience as stability’ paradigm.

## Drivers of resilience

While there remain important challenges, there are also some assets and expertise the EU can draw on to implement a policy driven by ‘principled pragmatism’ and contribute to fostering resilience in the Western Balkans. Firstly, the EU will be able to draw on the accumulated experience of the enlargement policy and, particularly, the emphasis on nationally-owned processes. Having said that, there is certainly a need for a more people-centred and inclusive approach, by seeking to embed ownership not just at the governmental level, but also at the societal level. Yet, even if the EU is able to achieve a more pragmatic bottom-up approach, a tension between conditionality and local ownership will remain as the extent of local ownership that can be exercised in the context of enlargement is limited by the fact that the objectives are already externally determined by the *acquis communautaire*. On the positive side, the notion of resilience and the pragmatist approach associated with it provides room for a more flexible, responsive and adaptable approach, which might ease some of the rigidities related to the application of EU conditionality in the region.

The enlargement process has also the advantage of being a multi-stakeholder process, involving a plurality of actors (both within and outside the EU), which should increase the opportunities for accountability and the transparency of the process. From an EU perspective, the involvement of the European Commission and the European Parliament could prove particularly important by acting as a brake on any potential moves towards a ‘resilience as stability’ paradigm – which some member states might be more inclined to adopt. The European Parliament, for instance, has been particularly vocal in this regard and largely unwilling to close its eyes to violations of human rights and the rule of law in the past. More generally, in a post-Brexit and post-Trump EU, there also seems to be a growing internal awareness of the dangers of neglecting the rise of illiberal democracies within the EU and the need to intervene early on (as suggested by the cases of Hungary and Poland). This might also influence the EU’s policy towards the Western Balkans and other neighbouring countries.

Last but not least, the EU will also be able to draw on its previous capacity-building activities, both in the context of the enlargement process and its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. These include twinning programmes, training activities and the monitoring, mentoring and advising mandates which have so far targeted civil servants, security officials, and a range of organisations and institutions across the Western Balkans. It is imperative however that the EU learns from both the successes and failures of these past activities to ensure

that capacity-building programmes target the right institutions and individuals. In particular, a stronger focus should be placed on fostering and further enhancing the already existing internal capacities of the Western Balkan countries, rather than starting from scratch with each iteration of a capacity-building programme.

## The way ahead

What does the notion of principled pragmatism mean for the EU and resilience in the Western Balkans? This new approach implies a mix of realism and idealism by (a) making a realistic assessment of the geopolitical context; (b) moving forward towards the formulation of a political vision through credible and concrete steps; (c) communicating this vision to the Western Balkan governments and populations; and (d) strengthening local ownership and supporting capacity building.

Implementing the notion of principled pragmatism in the Western Balkans suggests that the EU will need to carefully manage expectations and local realities. First, a more pragmatic approach should be based on a ‘realistic assessment’ of international politics. In other words, the EU must take into account both the need for cooperation, but also the fierce competition it faces from other international powers vying for influence in the Western Balkans. Again, such a realistic assessment should not serve as an excuse to do less, or nothing, in the face of growing authoritarian trends in the region. Realism will need to be carefully balanced with respect for European values if what the EU seeks to promote is resilient states *and* societies.

Second, the EU needs to set out a clear vision for the future of the region. Lack of commitment and hesitant policies have led in the past to a rise in euroscepticism among Balkan elites and populations. The result has been a preservation of the *status quo* whereby Balkan political leaders pretend to reform, while EU policymakers pretend they support the enlargement process. This also requires visible and concrete steps that positively contribute to the welfare of Balkan societies in the short and medium term – as was the case with the visa liberalisation process. The citizens of the Western Balkans need to experience the benefits of closer integration into the EU in their daily lives. This should also contribute to fostering societal resilience in the medium term.

Third, the EU’s vision toward the Western Balkans needs to be better communicated to a number of different audiences. Internally, the EU needs to better explain this vision to its own populations as a way to ensure the legitimacy and credibility of the enlargement process. The EU should also seek to engage partners in the Western Balkans, involving them in the design and implementation of specific programmes. The EU and the local governments also need to engage in a better public diplomacy exercise *vis-à-vis* local populations in the Balkans. This might not only increase

support for EU accession across the region, but also decrease support for other alternative narratives offered by competing powers.

Fourth and finally, the EU needs to deliver on its promise of stronger local ownership, with the proviso noted earlier that there will always be a tension between conditionality and local ownership. While local ownership entails a commitment to work with a variety of local actors (national governments, municipalities and civil society), given current authoritarian trends, the EU would be well advised to strengthen its support for civil society in the region. Capacity-building interventions should be designed in a way that promote not just effective delivery of services by state institutions, but also respect for European principles, such as human rights, democratic oversight and accountability. A stronger focus should be placed on existing local practices and capabilities with a view to further enhancing already existing internal capacities.



## XII. BALKAN STRONGMEN AND FRAGILE INSTITUTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Igor Bandović and Nikola Dimitrov*

### **Introduction: the European promise**

Following the violent conflicts that accompanied the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation in the 1990s, the Western Balkans was promised a European future. At the Thessaloniki summit in June 2003, the European Council declared that ‘the future of the Balkans is within the European Union’.<sup>2</sup> But, after two decades of engagement and 14 years after the promise of Thessaloniki, it appears that the EU has lost its power of attraction in the region.

The EU accession process – the best bet for the Western Balkans countries to transform into stable and prosperous democracies governed by the rule of law – has run out of steam. Worse, for those who hope to join the EU, the accession path often seems like a road to nowhere. Many of the accession candidates have come to believe that the EU treats them unfairly. Sceptical EU member states, on the other hand, are increasingly unconvinced that the transformative power of enlargement actually delivers real results. They feel that the accession process is not strict enough. Faced with this mood of waning enthusiasm for the project, politicians avoid debates on further enlargement. Besides, in the past few years the EU has been too busy ‘fire-fighting’ a series of internal crises and coping with bigger and more pressing external challenges to worry about the Western Balkans. At least for as long as the region remains peaceful. The refugee crisis of 2015-2016 highlighted the strategic importance of the region, but did little to foster more long-term strategic thinking about its future.

This has created an unhealthy symbiotic relationship between the Balkan strongmen on one hand, and European political elites under pressure from the far-right and an increasingly Eurosceptic public opinion on the other hand, which ultimately plays in favour of maintaining the *status quo*. The ruling Balkan elites pay lip-service to reforms and tighten their grip on feeble institutions, while feeding their popular base a rhetoric of victimhood and stoking anti-EU sentiment. For European leaders, growing authoritarianism, corruption and impunity keep the region off

1. This text was written in April 2017 and therefore only takes account of events and developments in the region up until the end of that month.
2. European Council, Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit, PRES/03/163, Thessaloniki, 21 June 2003.



the unpopular enlargement agenda in their national parliaments.<sup>3</sup> The European Commission is caught in the crossfire, trying to keep the process alive and make it more credible, but it faces a Herculean task. On paper, there is some progress in terms of climbing up the ladder, at least with some countries, such as Montenegro and Serbia, albeit at a very slow pace.

## Drivers of fragility: the rise of authoritarianism

In reality however, the Western Balkans are clearly moving backward. Laws are adopted, usually without much prior debate in parliaments, but not implemented. Corruption remains pervasive, justice selective and freedom of the press is declining. Authoritarianism is on the rise, as is citizens' growing apathy and disillusionment with political elites in the face of rampant unemployment, widening inequality and a political system characterised by entrenched cronyism. The recent Nations in Transit Report released by Freedom House paints an alarming picture of the region where 'nationalists are in a race to the bottom'.<sup>4</sup> The deterioration in the quality of democracy has been most marked in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>5</sup> Once a hopeful frontrunner in the accession process, its score is now nearing the low point of 2001, when violent ethnic conflict erupted in the country. Despite its formal progress in EU accession negotiations, Serbia's democracy score has reached its lowest point since 2003, showing that the process of legislative approximation with the EU *acquis* does not necessarily translate into progress in democratisation. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index in 2016 places Albania between Guatemala and Ecuador, and Bosnia and Herzegovina just before Lebanon.<sup>6</sup>

A 'winner takes all' mentality seems to be prevalent in the region. Political leaders often interpret their election victory as a licence to dictate their will, rather than as a mandate to navigate their respective countries through the complex democratic process of debates, cooperation, coalition-building and compromise. Once in office, their prime concern is to shore up their power and destroy the political opposition, along with the nascent systems of checks and balances, thereby endangering the fragile democratic scaffolding of the Western Balkan societies.

One of the biggest challenges and a major driver of fragility in the region is the rise of authoritarianism. Reforms undertaken over the last decade in three key areas – the creation of an efficient public administration, the development of an

3. Florian Bieber and Marko Kmezić, 'EU enlargement in the Western Balkans in a time of uncertainty', BiEPAG Policy Brief, September 2016. Available at <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/EU-Enlargement-in-the-Western-Balkans-in-a-Time-of-Uncertainty.pdf>.

4. Freedom House, 'Nations in Transit 2017: The False Promise of Populism', 2017. Available at [https://freedom-house.org/sites/default/files/NIT2017\\_booklet\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://freedom-house.org/sites/default/files/NIT2017_booklet_FINAL_0.pdf).

5. The authors of this chapter originally used the form 'Macedonia' in the text. The EUISS uses the name 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.

6. The Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2016: Revenge of the "Deplorables"', *The Economist*, 2016.

independent judiciary and the fight against corruption – have failed to pass the test of sustainability and irreversibility. The rule of strongmen goes hand-in-hand with political interference in the judiciary, control and manipulation of state institutions, patronage, and impunity. The rule of law presupposes an independent judiciary, strong institutions, and accountability. In Serbia, two-thirds of the population see corruption and crime, and the venal behaviour of politicians, as the main internal threats to democratic governance.<sup>7</sup> The European Commission Enlargement Strategy Report released in November 2016 stressed that ‘strengthening the rule of law remains a key challenge’, adding that ‘corruption remains widespread in all countries, with continued impunity, especially for high-level corruption’.

In addition, according to the Report ‘freedom of expression and media remains a particular concern’ in the region. There is widespread interference in editorial policies, a clampdown on critical and investigative reporting, clientelist ties between political elites and media owners, threats against journalists, censorship, and widespread abuse of public advertising for electoral purposes. This undermines the concept of an ‘informed citizen’ as the backbone of any functional democracy.

Although Balkan strongmen like to be seen as guarantors of stability, as has particularly been the case in the context of the refugee crisis, their governance erodes structural stability and institutional resilience. To divert attention from authoritarian practices and avoid accountability, they often actively exploit and even instigate ethnic tensions, using a specific brand of ‘Balkan populism’ combining ethnic identity, issues of statehood, a narrative of victimhood and witch hunting of domestic ‘traitors’ and foreign ‘enemies’. Caught red-handed in the wiretapping scandal, Nikola Gruevski’s ruling VMRO-DPMNE party in Skopje has resisted a peaceful transition of power and striven to avoid political accountability, stirring up ethnic tensions as a diversionary tactic.

## Drivers of resilience: the democratic constituency

To borrow a saying attributed to an Austrian officer in the final days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ‘the situation is serious, but not hopeless’. The widespread protests that took place in Skopje in April 2016 and in Sarajevo in 2014, and more recently in Belgrade, show that people’s understandable disillusionment with the political elites is increasingly matched by a growing sense of empowerment among civil society and whole swathes of the population at large, and a determination to hold authorities to account and challenge the *status quo*.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to take but one example, President Ivanov’s response to the problem of impunity and lack of accountability exposed

7. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, ‘Public Opinion on the Security of Serbia and Dialogue with Pristina’, February 2017 Available at [http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/public\\_opinion\\_on\\_the\\_security\\_of\\_serbia\\_and\\_dialo.pdf](http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/public_opinion_on_the_security_of_serbia_and_dialo.pdf).

by the wiretapping scandal, was to issue blanket pardons to senior government figures, thereby putting the political elite above the law. He was enabled to do so by a highly controversial decision of the Constitutional Court, annulling the legislative limitations upon his abolition powers. It was the citizens who took to the streets and forced the President to reverse his decision. In this instance, the societal drivers of resilience (the citizens) stepped in once the state institutions (the President and the Constitutional Court) failed and revealed themselves instead to be drivers of fragility. Similarly, the failure of the Serbian police to react in the Savamala case in Belgrade, when a group of masked men used bulldozers to demolish buildings in a historic area of the city earmarked by the government as the site of a major redevelopment project, brought the drivers of resilience to light: the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, the Ombudsman and the citizens. The silence of the European Commission 2016 Serbia Report on the Savamala incident undermines the EU's credibility and is a bitter disappointment to its core constituency in the region.

In both cases, the mainstream national media remained largely silent. None of the biggest TV channels in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia dared to broadcast the intercepted communications, exposing apparent direct involvement of senior government and party officials in corruption, abuse of office, electoral fraud and political interference in the judiciary. Access to accurate and reliable information is mainly possible due to the work of alternative news outlets, regional media networks and courageous investigative journalists. Investigative reporting plays a crucial and indispensable role in the fight against impunity and corruption.

Independent institutions with a proven track record of integrity are subject to smear campaigns. The Special Public Prosecutor's office in Skopje, an institution that commands high levels of public trust in the country and that is tasked with investigating and prosecuting crimes arising from the wiretapping affair, has been subject to a continuous negative campaign by the ruling party and the pro-government media.<sup>8</sup>

## **The way ahead: democracy and rule of law are not negotiable**

The EU should establish clear red lines in the key areas of media freedom, rule of law and democratic governance and never hesitate to cry foul when they are crossed. State drivers of fragility in the form of captured institutions must be denounced and state drivers of resilience praised and supported. Delivering clear and public messages backed by strict conditionality when it comes to the state of democracy and the rule of law in the Western Balkan countries will keep both governments and broader societal constituencies focused on the core purpose of the accession

8. International Republican Institute (IRI), 'Macedonia: political instability escalates while confidence in democratic institutions declines', June 2016 Available at <http://www.iri.org/resource/macedonia-political-instability-escalates-while-confidence-democratic-institutions-declines>.

process: democratic transformation. European party families must never tolerate or turn a blind eye to major democratic shortcomings of their associative members in the region. The current refusal of Skopje's ruling VMRO-DPMNE party to transfer power peacefully, culminating with the storming of the parliament in April, during which MPS were violently attacked by a mob, must trigger a decisive response by the European People's Party (EPP).

In its communication with the Western Balkans, the EU should never focus exclusively on the state actors and governments but always strive to include civil society. The citizens are the core constituency supporting European integration and EU representatives should directly engage with the public in the region on a regular basis. The EU should boost free media and civil society by supporting civil society organisations with a proven track record of mobilising citizens around critical issues of justice and democracy, as well as credible independent journalistic networks at national and regional level to ensure the sustainability of impartial and investigative journalism as a key precondition for accountable governance.

With the right support focused on the fundamentals – media freedom, the rule of law and democratic governance – this wider civil society constituency could provide the internal impetus to revitalise the accession process and demonstrate to sceptical EU member states that real change is within reach in the Western Balkans. And remind the EU that its enlargement policy is still a powerful instrument for enhancing resilience in the region.



## XIII. INTEGRATED SOCIETIES AS A VECTOR OF RESILIENCE

*Alessandro Rotta*

### **Introduction**

Upholding multi-ethnic polities, reinforcing the protection of minorities and fostering intercommunal tolerance was one of the international community's chief aims in the Balkans after the wars that accompanied the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. This strategy was based on the idea that the inability to manage relations between different ethnic groups was among the main causes of the conflicts that ravaged the region in the 1990s. Over twenty years after Dayton, however, in most countries and entities in the Western Balkans, the objective of building integrated and cohesive societies in which diversity is considered an asset and a strength is far from being achieved. Constitutional, legal and policy mechanisms aimed at protecting minorities and enhancing their participation in public and political life are largely in place and often modelled on very high standards. However, their implementation and effect on actual societal integration is limited, if not counter-productive. Even where they actually work, power-sharing agreements, territorial and non-territorial autonomy regimes and other forms of minority protection tend to segment society into parallel, non-communicating spheres, accentuating deeper faultlines and producing the paradoxical effect of estranging communities further. Moreover, resort by political leaders to exclusionist rhetoric targeting ethnic and other minorities as a means of galvanising support is an unfortunate and growing trend throughout Europe. This trend is aggravated in the Western Balkans by elites' use of ethno-politics and revamped nationalism to appease discontented publics, divert attention from social and economic grievances, and consolidate their hold on power.

The international community, with the EU in the lead, needs to continue fostering and strengthening the region's domestic capacities to respond to governance challenges, ensuring that growing political turbulence does not transform into organised violence. In this context, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) has a key role to play: the Commissioner's mandate is to detect tensions related to ethnic relations that could potentially lead to conflict, and alert the wider OSCE, as well as to work on removing the causes. Based on their engagement in the Western Balkans, as well as elsewhere in the OSCE region, successive HCNMs have gathered significant expertise on how policies aimed at managing diversity can help defuse such tensions and prevent them from escalating into conflict, distilling

this knowledge in a series of thematic Recommendations and Guidelines.<sup>1</sup> In the Balkans, besides surveying tensions and warning about conflict signals, the HCNM has provided legislative and policy support to improve and strengthen the lot of national minorities, as well as promoting the overall cohesion of societies. Measuring and analysing the gap between the current situation and a desirable degree of societal integration is a way to map fragility in the Western Balkans, and HCNM expertise on shaping integration processes can provide relevant insight on how to build, strengthen and move beyond resilience in the region, towards security and prosperity.

## Drivers of fragility

Factors weakening the social fabric in the Western Balkans, while magnifying the gap between different communities within each country and entity, are many and interrelated. The exploitation of identity politics and nationalism by political elites to divert attention from governance deficiencies, deteriorating democratic standards, the co-optation of institutions by political parties, segregative education policies and economic difficulties can widen the distance and deepen divisions between ethnic groups, and are, in the HCNM institution's view, main sources of fragility.

1. Numerous observers and various indicators have recorded **the deteriorating quality of democracy** across the region, and the risks of a slide towards authoritarian rule. The captivating notion of '*stabilitocrats*' describes local elites who while outwardly assuming a constructive role in guaranteeing regional stability and protecting purported EU interests, including by filtering waves of migration from and across the region, in reality disregard democratic standards and rely on informal networks and control of the media to consolidate their power.<sup>2</sup> The resulting poor governance, along with shrinking democratic spaces and practices, fosters exclusion. This affects society as a whole, but possibly has particularly undesirable effects on specific ethnic groups or communities. Attacking neighbouring countries or different ethnic groups within one country is part of the ordinary political arsenal of many local *stabilitocrats*.
2. Nationalist rhetoric is often a cover for political parties' patronage and **clientelistic policies** at the local and central level, assigning employment and directing economic investment based on party allegiance,

1. The seven individual thematic Recommendations and Guidelines address recurrent issues that the successive High Commissioners have faced in their work. Intended for policymakers and States' representatives, they offer guidance on developing policies that may help ease inter-ethnic tensions. See: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/thematic-recommendations-and-guidelines>.

2. On this see, for example, 'The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy', BiEPAG Policy Paper, March 2017. Available at: <http://www.biepag.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BIEPAG-The-Crisis-of-Democracy-in-the-Western-Balkans.-Authoritarianism-and-EU-Stabilitocracy-web.pdf>.

rather than on merit, economic needs or policy. This creates an additional faultline, alongside ethnic segregation, between those who are included in the spoils system, and profit from it, and those who are not. It contributes to a sense of exclusion and disenfranchisement among citizens, irrespective of the ethnic group to which they belong, and can further aggravate community divisions. Party control over institutions also reduces their responsiveness, efficiency and accountability.

3. **Ethnically segregated education**, which is the norm in several multi-ethnic Balkan countries and entities, can cement divisions between communities, rather than mending them, exacerbating distances and making the prospects of social cohesion across ethnic lines more distant. Mono-ethnic schools favour the teaching of monolithic and ethno-centric historical narratives, to the further detriment of mutual understanding among communities.
4. The **slowdown of the EU's economy** in the past years has affected the Balkans due to their strong interdependence with the EU in terms of trade, investments and remittances. While Western Balkan countries grew faster in 2016 than in 2015, economic growth does not seem to address striking inequalities, including between different ethnic communities, and is insufficient to reduce high unemployment rates.<sup>3</sup>

Political, social and economic factors may explain the high propensity of the population in the region to leave their countries and entities. According to opinion polls, almost half of the population of the Balkans would live elsewhere if they could, which in itself is a clear indicator of limited trust in the capacity of domestic institutions and signals a form of disengagement from efforts towards political change and building a better society.<sup>4</sup>

While the factors listed above relate to internal drivers of fragility, the role of external actors should not be neglected. The EU's massive political and financial investment in the region supports continued reform efforts alongside other actors, including the OSCE. However, the EU's ability to sort out local political crises, including between different groups, is limited, including because accession prospects are too distant and do not provide sufficient incentives. This has allowed competing narratives from neighbouring powers to take hold in the region. When it comes to managing diversity and societal cohesion, negative examples stemming from within EU member states may have diminished the EU's ability to project its normative power, or lead by example, again leaving room for alternative governance models,

3. World Bank Group, *Faster Growth, More Jobs*, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report no.11, Spring 2017. Available at: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/310431491458109659/WBRER-11-v6.pdf>.

4. Regional Cooperation Council, *Balkan Barometer 2016*. Available at: <http://www.rcc.int/seeds/results/2/balkan-opinion-barometer>.



from within or outside the EU, which provide a fertile breeding ground for local *stabilocratic* leaderships.

## Drivers of resilience

Drivers of resilience are present across the region, as a result of both domestic strengths as well as external support and long-standing international intervention. The list below juxtaposes resilience factors with the drivers of fragility enumerated earlier. It combines both aspects of resilience already observable as well as areas that the international community should further support.

1. As noted, recourse to nationalist rhetoric and the demonisation of other ethnic groups is often a tactic designed to deflect attention from issues of poor accountability and governance, lack of respect for the rule of law and other undemocratic practices. **Strengthening accountability in the political process** in the region and demanding high standards of democratic practice and the rule of law is a way to address general governance challenges and to unmask nationalistic politics and curb their pernicious effects. An inclusive political process, the participation of all members of society – including young people, women and minorities – transparent government processes and institutional responsiveness can all contribute to making Balkan societies more resilient. The growth of significant civil society movements, even if often focused on single-agenda issues such as urban renewal or environmental protection, is also an indicator of societal resilience and illustrates the presence of an audience that is receptive to a discourse different from the dominant ethno-national one. These self-organised movements, which are quite different from service-providing NGOs, often need political rather than financial support, and for the international community to live up to its commitments, rather than preaching certain values while supporting elites who undermine those same values.
2. Fearmongering by domestic elites does not automatically or necessarily augment the distance between ethnic groups. This can be partially explained by communities' relatively recent experience of violent and disruptive conflicts, which has made them wary of falling into patterns of political behaviour that might lead to the recurrence of large-scale organised violence. A case in point is represented by recent examples of **voting across ethnic lines** in some countries, despite the ruling elites' use of strident nationalistic rhetoric, showing that criticism of poor governance could even become a factor uniting different ethnic communities. This can be explained by the failure of ethno-centric parties and agendas to bring positive change and improvements, and address pressing socio-economic challenges. Further support by the international

community to **societal integration along civic, rather than ethnic lines**, could help provide an anchor to communities moving beyond the ethnic divide.

3. In the field of education, to reverse prevailing trends, major political and financial investments are needed to move towards establishing integrated and multilingual education systems at all levels designed to provide equal access, opportunities and educational outcomes for all pupils, regardless of whether they come from a majority or minority ethnic background, as well as to allow for multiple perspectives, ensure that there is space for different ethnic communities to interact inside and outside the curriculum, and to learn each other's languages to bridge the divides. Particularly in parts of the region with a high young population, such **investment in education** is crucial to consolidate peace and promote positive societal transformation. The use of the languages of different communities in education, access to public services and political representation is essential to **foster a sense of belonging for all groups in multi-ethnic societies**, and should be used to strengthen integration and resilience.
4. **Economic development**, and the opportunities for **social mobility** that go with it, is a crucial precondition for building and strengthening resilience. Job security based on private, rather than public, investments would also help break the cycle of clientelistic patronage, whereby local and central governments selectively provide work and welfare in exchange for political allegiance. Implementing further labour mobility schemes with the EU could also help release pressure on local labour markets and provide financial resources to domestic economies.

## The way ahead

The factors contributing to fragility and resilience listed above are dynamic, evolving and interwoven, making their interplay very complex. External support remains essential to ensure that resilience prevails over fragility. Beyond mere resilience, overall security, for states and entities as well as for the communities within them, can only derive from a deep-seated sense of belonging and inclusion in a wider security and political community. This depends on local political dynamics being strongly anchored to EU accession prospects and on respect for OSCE commitments. Besides contributing to strengthening democratic standards, inclusion in a wider political space enhances shared values, strengthens cohesion and reduces the likelihood of conflicts. It also counters the 'us versus them' perception that often accompanies conditions and solutions 'imposed' by the international community. One key feature of HCNM involvement in a given context is to point to local authorities' and communities' vested interest in adopting sound integration policies

and strategies and fostering the development of cohesive identities, which can nurture a sense of belonging among members of different communities. As detailed in the latest, most comprehensive set of HCNM Guidelines, *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies*, developing integration policies is part of the rights and responsibilities that sovereignty entails, based on good and democratic governance, non-discrimination and effective equality, recognising diversity and multiple, multi-layered identities. This requires the involvement of all relevant actors and stakeholders and all levels of government, and should inform all relevant policy domains, from citizenship to participation, security and law enforcement, access to justice and media. The Ljubljana Guidelines are innovative, as they put the onus of integration on society as a whole, and they refer to the integration *of* societies, rather than making specific groups responsible for integrating *into* society. Challenges in implementing them derive from the need for states to assume the full responsibility that sovereignty entails, abandoning an ethno-centric narrative and moving beyond the majority/minority divide. Also, the creation of an inclusive and integrated society requires the coordination of a number of complex policy fields, and cooperation between several layers of government.

Arguably, the way ahead lies in a convergence of domestic and international efforts towards pursuing the goal of integrated societies in the Western Balkans. Integrated societies should be based on dialogue and interaction between different communities, and be characterised by tolerance and mutual respect. Their members should feel that they are represented by common public institutions and have a shared sense of belonging to a common state and an inclusive society, without excluding the possibility of distinct identities, which are evolving, multiple and context-based.

Creating such societies is a long-term objective, which still requires major efforts in the Balkans, but it is also an objective that parts of the international community seem increasingly reluctant to uphold. Yet this is the best recipe to achieve long-term and sustainable security and conflict prevention.

## XIV. VIOLENT EXTREMISM: BEYOND FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND BEHIND NUMBERS

*Predrag Petrović and Florian Qehaja*

### Introduction

The fact that from 2013 until 2015 almost 1,000 people from the Western Balkans left to fight in Syria and Iraq is a matter of ongoing concern.<sup>1</sup> Even though the number of foreign fighters began to decrease as of 2015, it is estimated that more than 300 have returned to their home countries. The return of foreign fighters however represents only the tip of the iceberg: the problem becomes much more complex when other individuals from the region who were not necessarily foreign fighters but subscribe to the ideology of Islamist extremism are factored into the equation. While the returned foreign fighters potentially represent an ongoing security threat, the major challenge derives from individuals and groups aiming at fragmenting society and especially radical Islamist preachers and practitioners. In particular, the traditional practice of Islam has been undermined in recent years by a new wave of radical clerics who have sought to spread the doctrines of conservative Salafi-inspired Islam.

In order to counter the potential of violent extremism, a holistic approach is *a sine qua non* for a successful outcome in the long term. The notions of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) or Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) should be used in reference to the legal and policy framework of the countries in the Western Balkans. This should imply taking steps which will not only reflect a consultative process in terms of design and implementation but also emphasise the importance of fostering resilience. As the findings on fragility below will show, there is a wide spectrum of push and pull factors driving individuals into the arms of violent extremist groups. These include personal, societal, economic and religious factors: all equally important. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the key fragilities that are common to all Western Balkan countries, describe how serious they are and identify measures for addressing them.

1. Predrag Petrović, 'Islamic radicalism in the Balkans', *Alert* no. 24, EUISS, 10 June 2016.

## Drivers of fragility

There is no single argument explaining the complex process whereby drivers of fragility foster the spread of (violent) extremism in the Western Balkans. Islamic extremism is probably the most acute of the externally-driven challenges that has emerged in recent years in the societies of the region which, preoccupied with indigenous challenges in the aftermath of the 1990s wars, are now confronted with this unprecedented phenomenon. It is true however that the drivers combine a diverse range of factors that include individual, societal, political and economic dimensions. First of all, the negative legacies of communist rule, violent conflicts and mismanaged economic transformation have left the economies of the Western Balkans countries in very poor shape. The unemployment rate is very high (averaging around 25% in 2016), and widespread poverty and social inequality create additional challenges for the young people of the region. Today, inequality is more a social than an economic issue, and could lead to further discrimination against already disadvantaged segments of society.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the lack of economic and social opportunities drives marginalised and alienated young people towards the radical alternatives offered by the purveyors of religious and political extremism. Certain remote areas and enclaves in the Western Balkans have become fertile recruiting grounds for radical imams and certain Islamic NGOs and charities using humanitarian aid as a cover and tool for spreading extremist ideology.

The dire economic situation is exacerbated by endemic corruption. Political parties, governments and parliaments are popularly perceived as the most corrupt institutions. It is not surprising then that citizens' trust in public institutions has steadily declined in the Western Balkans. Lack of trust in political institutions could lead to refusal to comply with their decisions and even to (violently) oppose them. This undermines the legitimacy of these institutions and increases the likelihood of disaffected young citizens being attracted by the radical alternatives offered by the jihadist recruiters and conservative religious preachers.

On the other hand, local government structures are very passive and largely dependent on the state budget as well as political and economic dynamics at central level. In particular, municipal safety councils which were established after the conflicts of the 1990s are barely operational and largely rely on donor support. Local communities are rarely invited for consultations on local security and safety concerns, with the result that their voice is disregarded.

Poor educational standards, leading to a lack of critical and analytical skills, is a particular problem. There is a mismatch between the educational system and market needs resulting in a workforce trained for low-skilled occupations and lacking a satisfactory level of professional or practical skills. Teaching methods and techniques are based on ex-cathedra lectures favouring rote learning and the memorisation of

2. Nemanja Džuverović, 'Socio-economic roots of extremism in the region', in Filip Ejodus and Predrag Jureković (eds.), *Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans*, Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence and Sport, 2016, p. 30.

facts which discourages critical thinking among students. While it cannot be said that the deficiencies of the education system directly fuel extremism, their negative experience of the system may contribute to the alienation of some young people, thus making them more receptive to the messages of radical Islam.

The fragmentation within the Muslim community and the challenges facing the traditional practice of Islam presents another opportunity for extremism. These factors have created a fertile ground for the spread of conservative Salafist ideology propagated by imams trained in certain Middle Eastern countries. While the spread of Salafism represents a substantial problem for traditional practitioners, especially due to the challenge it poses to the secular order, the main problem is with the so-called Takfiri groups and those Salafist elements who choose to use force in order to attain their ideological goals. The involvement of certain Gulf States in the region is viewed with suspicion, while the activities of so-called humanitarian NGOs whose goal is the promotion of non-traditional Islam and violent extremism pose a notable risk in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

## **Drivers of resilience**

An increasing number of projects and programmes seek to invest in preventing violent extremism. Such efforts need to be based on full local ownership which can only be ensured by the participation of national actors and in particular community engagement. As such, they should focus on building resilience – a process whereby communities can overcome or resist negative forces and influences that threaten to damage or destabilise them. Furthermore, the assistance should be targeted geographically and not necessarily be explicitly identified as having the aim of reducing extremism, so as to avoid mistakes encountered by previous initiatives that have been implemented with limited to no success.

First, community engagement is essential to the process of building resilience. In the Western Balkans, civil and property-related conflicts are traditionally solved by resorting to mediation. For example, in Albania and Kosovo village elders or other respected figures often performed the role of go-betweens and mediators in interpersonal disputes, including blood feuds. Using this mode of mediation can help foster dialogue between Muslims in the region, secular society, and state authorities by harmonising ideas, activities and approaches. Mediators often successfully facilitate dialogue for the purpose of reducing internal clashes within the Islamic associations across the region, between so-called ‘moderate’ imams mainly from the Hanafi school of Islam, and so-called ‘conservative’ imams advocating a radical Salafist interpretation of Islam.

3. Vlado Azinović and Muhamed Jusić, ‘The new lure of the Syrian War: the foreign fighters’ Bosnian contingent’, Atlantic Initiative, Sarajevo, 2016.

Second, the experience of recent years has showed that due to lack of knowledge about radical Islam and an overall lack of information many parents were unaware of the danger of their children being indoctrinated and lured to join extremist militant groups. Only with targeted awareness-raising campaigns has the level of knowledge increased and this has led to a fall in the number of foreign fighters and extremist recruits in the last two years. Such awareness-raising campaigns should be undertaken by civil society, which needs to play a central role in this matter. A robust involvement of institutions may harm national efforts due to the crisis of legitimacy affecting political elites and institutions across the region. This endeavour should not rely solely on traditional seminars or workshops but rather on face-to-face meetings and community involvement in order to disseminate important information throughout society.<sup>4</sup>

Third, indigenous safety mechanisms should be further operationalised and used for the purpose of mitigating the risk of violent extremism at the community level. These may include a diverse set of governmental and non-governmental actors at the local level. In this way, existing mechanisms are strengthened instead of creating new tools and mechanisms as a part of an increasing donor-driven approach to preventing violent extremism.

## The way ahead

While the aim is to identify and optimise the drivers of resilience in the short term, it is essential that other actions and investments are undertaken in the long term in order to counter the further spread of Islamic extremism. To this end, there need to be three overarching investments in the future.

*Further reform of the educational system* is essential for preventing violent extremism. The Western Balkans continues to be plagued by an inefficient and outdated education system that at all levels fails to address the pedagogical and skills training needs of its students and the economy. Despite some recent improvements, there is poor professional development for teachers, an inadequate and outdated curriculum, and a shortage of learning materials and equipment. It is imperative to invest in an educational system which will be more attractive to young people and adapted to their needs. In this way, the trend whereby controversial imams peddling extremist propaganda exert more appeal and influence than teachers might be reversed.

*Increasing opportunities for young people* is an antidote to extremist recruiters. Governments should create better opportunities and alternatives for the youth of the Western Balkans. As a result of feeling isolated, neglected and excluded from social and cultural activities, young people often experience a strong sense of alienation. This leads to them becoming engaged, for example, in Islamic NGOs and

4. Florian Qehaja, Skender Perteshi and Mentor Vrajolli, 'Mapping the State of Play of Institutional and Community Involvement in Countering Violent Extremism in Kosovo', Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), 2016.

so-called humanitarian organisations. The assistance should be tailored to the development aspects which may include investment in cultural and sport facilities, including large-scale capacity building for young people. If they were able to avail of such enhanced opportunities they would be less receptive to the messages of extremist recruiters.

*Investing in institutional trust* is essential. More trust in the state and its institutions, as well as more opportunities for young people, would encourage them to follow paths which do not impact negatively on society, avoiding extremist religious ideologies. This is an investment which can be successful only if a secular society which puts the citizens' interests first while respecting individuals' religious rights can be substantively developed. Such an endeavour should be tailored to the ongoing efforts to strengthen trust in public institutions. Lack of such trust explains the current overall apathy among the citizens of the region, resulting in alienation which leads some to succumb to Islamist propaganda and join the ranks of violent extremist groups.





## XV. MANAGING THE BALKAN ROUTE: THE 2015/16 REFUGEE CRISIS

*Julija Sardelić*

### Introduction

In the 1990s, the region of southeast Europe faced multiple refugee crises due to the armed conflicts that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Entire communities who had been forcibly displaced were often a source of bitter contention between the newly established countries. Yet the 2015/16 refugee crisis<sup>1</sup> re-united some of these countries in a common goal: two EU member states, Slovenia and Croatia, and two candidate countries, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>2</sup> During the refugee crisis between September 2015 and March 2016, the common goal was to coordinate and manage the Western Balkan route in order to enable the transit of refugees and other forced migrants mainly from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan towards the EU member states willing to accept them (notably Germany). After March 2016 the objective eventually shifted towards sealing the Western Balkan route and reducing the number of migrants moving north. The management of the Western Balkan route between September 2015 and March 2016 deserves special attention because it did bring the countries of southeast Europe (including countries that were previously in conflict) together again in cooperation. The cooperation between the four former Yugoslav countries was significantly affected by the development of the asylum legislation and politics of the EU and certain of its member states. Both politics and EU legislation contributed to the fragilities that complicated the response to the refugee crisis in the four former Yugoslav countries. Yet these countries also demonstrated their resilience in achieving their objectives in the management of forced migration, especially by positioning themselves as transit rather than host countries.

### Drivers of fragility

All the post-Yugoslav states along the Western Balkan route (both the member states and the candidate countries in order to comply with the EU *acquis*) harmonised

1. Despite the fact that it was used in public discourse (both by politicians and the media), the term 'refugee crisis' needs to be used with caution. According to UNHCR data, a much larger number of refugees (2.9 million in Turkey) are displaced within the region around Syria or internally displaced within Syria (6 million).
2. The author of this chapter originally used the form 'the Republic of Macedonia' in the text. The EUISS uses the name 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' in accordance with the guidelines concerning the official nomenclature of this country issued by the EU Office of Publications.

their national legislation on asylum with EU law, in particular to comply with the Asylum Procedure Directive and Reception Conditions Directive, which came into effect in July 2015. Yet in reality the EU member states as well as candidate countries along the Western Balkan route faced a different kind of challenge from the summer of 2015, not foreseen in the procedures laid down by these two directives. The circumstances that surrounded the 2015/16 refugee crisis, with a major influx of forced migrants and the emergence of the Western Balkan route, were the main drivers of fragility as EU legislation did not offer a conclusive answer on how to tackle such an unprecedented situation.

According to different available sources, in the period between September 2015 and March 2016 (until the EU-Turkey refugee deal was struck), more than half a million migrants passed through the four former Yugoslav countries along the Western Balkan route. Similarly, 20 years ago the EU faced a large influx of displaced people in need of international protection because of the war on the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). Based on that experience, the European Community designed the Temporary Protection Directive as a mechanism for managing an unexpected mass influx of people. The situation in 2015/16 seemed like a textbook example of when the Directive should be invoked, but there was no decision by the EU Council authorising such a course of action. Thus, while the legal mechanism for responding to the refugee crisis in the EU was in place, there was no political decision to invoke it. This indirectly contributed to the fragility of the four former Yugoslav states on the Western Balkan route: they were left to cope with a situation where they had to create their own *ad hoc* response to the influx of forced migrants. In the beginning their response and the cooperation between the countries in question was chaotic, even signalling a possible trigger for a new wave of instability in the region. Having a history of conflicts and border disputes, neither Slovenia and Croatia nor Croatia and Serbia saw eye to eye in this cooperation in the beginning. Yet the cooperation became more robust when it was clear that these countries shared the same approach: they were hesitant to become the final destination countries as they did not have the capacities to receive or to integrate such a large number of migrants. However, they did respond to the situation by positioning themselves as transit countries, especially in response to Germany's decision in September 2015 to allow refugees taking the Western Balkan route to cross the border towards Austria and enter Germany.

In September 2015, Germany decided to examine the asylum applications of those forced migrants whose first EU country of entry was not Germany (as stipulated in the Dublin III Regulation). With Berlin's decision to apply this discretionary clause in the face of a humanitarian emergency, the widespread perception was that Germany was opening its doors to welcome all the refugees that were not wanted in other states. Here the post-Yugoslav states found themselves affected by the unilateral decisions taken by Germany. While the Dublin III Regulation defines the role of transfer countries in relation to asylum applications in the international transit

area, it does not address how other EU member states should react when one of them applies discretionary clauses to examine more asylum applications.

Germany had previously been one of the most desirable destinations for refugees. The application of the discretionary clause reaffirmed its position. While the Western Balkan route existed prior to the 2015/16 refugee crisis, in this period it officially became one of the main routes of forced migration to Europe. When Hungary in the autumn of 2015 erected a fence along its southern border with Serbia and then along its border with Croatia, Slovenia and Croatia became two additional transit countries along the Western Balkan route, alongside Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. One of the main challenges for these countries was that there were many ambiguities with regard to how to interpret the relevant provisions of EU law, which should have bound the member states, as well as shape the responses of candidate countries aspiring to join the EU. The reality also was that most of the refugees and forced migrants did not want to seek asylum in the four post-Yugoslav countries, but wanted to continue on their path. The Asylum Procedures Directive as well as Reception Conditions Directive contain clear guidelines and provisions regarding admission and reception of asylum seekers, but are less explicit with recommendations regarding the treatment of people who are transiting through the territory. At the same time the four former Yugoslav countries along the Western Balkan route preferred these migrants to pass through their territory rather than stay. Arguing that they did not have the capacities for the integration of such a large number of asylum seekers, they concentrated on assisting in the passage of the migrants to another destination further north.

## **Drivers of resilience**

To fully comprehend the drivers of resilience in the four former Yugoslav states, it has to be noted that they derive from three different sources: from the states, but also from civil society, as well as from the migrants themselves taking the Western Balkan route. As stated by many different sources, most refugees taking the Western Balkan route remained resilient despite the obstacles and changes with which they were confronted on their path: they were determined to continue towards countries such as Germany even before it decided to open its borders and examine a larger number of asylum applications. Therefore, most of them did not apply for international protection in the countries along the Balkan route. Civil society organisations in all the four former Yugoslav countries argued that they should take a different approach towards refugees taking the Western Balkan route than for example Hungary, which had erected border fences to keep them out. They called for a humanitarian corridor towards Germany and were against denying entry to the refugees at the border, but advocated rather helping them to continue on their desired path.

Although it is questionable whether or not the former Yugoslav countries along the Western Balkan route did set up a humanitarian corridor, the majority of political leaders favoured taking a humanitarian approach towards refugees while they were passing through their territory. One of the drivers of resilience in this case was the fact that these countries had previous experience with their own refugee crises. During the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s 4 million people became refugees or were internally displaced: a large proportion remained displaced in the territory of the former Yugoslav countries, which developed different approaches on how to integrate displaced populations into their societies. Many politicians claimed that these countries' previous experience with refugees helped them develop a specific humanitarian approach not witnessed in the Visegrad countries, who categorically refused both the passage and the resettlement of refugees. However, the parallel between the former Yugoslav refugee crises and the 2015/16 refugee crisis also has its limitations. In the 2015/16 refugee crisis the primary goal was not to provide accommodation to the refugees, but to help them travel on to other countries such as Germany.

Given that EU legislation on the transit of forced migrants was too vague, the four former Yugoslav countries took the initiative of adopting a number of amendments to their national legislation in order to help refugees continue their journey. For example, in June 2015, the parliament in Skopje passed amendments to its Law on Asylum and International Protection. According to the new amendment, foreigners irregularly entering the territory of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia could express their intention to seek asylum and were then granted 72 hours in which to lodge their asylum claim with the authorities. This meant that within these 72 hours people taking the Western Balkan route were not considered to be in the country illegally and could also use public transport. These amendments were also introduced because of pressure exerted by civil society and events that occurred early in the year when a number of migrants were killed by a train while walking on railway tracks. In other cases, civil society opposed the introduction of new amendments to legislation. For example, Slovenia introduced an amendment to its Defence Law, according to which it granted new police-like powers to the army to patrol the border and manage the passage of refugees through Slovenian territory. Many civil society groups were against such powers being given to the army. For them this represented a new form of militarisation of society, but the state representatives claimed these measures needed to be put in place to ensure the additional safety of citizens.

Cooperation between countries in the management of the Western Balkan route worked smoothly as long as all countries were pursuing the same goal and had their border 'open' for transiting refugees. However, problems occurred once one of the countries decided to close its border and did not allow the passage of refugees for a period of time. This caused tensions both between Serbia and Croatia as well as between Slovenia and Croatia. It was not clear how the countries should act in order to be compliant with EU law, but at the same time they did not want to become

overburdened by asylum claims and felt unable to cope with such a huge influx of people given their limited reception capacities. Yet they demonstrated resilience in creating *ad hoc* solutions for these situations. This was indeed also seen in their firm position at the EU-Turkey Summit in March 2016 where the representatives of all four post-Yugoslav countries agreed that leaving the Western Balkan route as an open corridor managed by states was not a sustainable solution and that it needed to be closed down.

## The way ahead

While the Western Balkan route is now officially closed off, the crisis exposed a number of issues that need to be re-addressed in the context of Europe's future asylum policy. Currently the four former Yugoslav countries straddling the Western Balkan route lack policies that would enable them to be effectively prepared in the event that another refugee crisis were to occur. Although there is a Temporary Protection Directive in place, it was not triggered in response to the refugee crisis, since many countries in the EU as well as the candidate countries were not prepared to accept the refugees on a longer term basis, but only help them while they were in transit.

Here the EU could take the initiative by developing and promoting successful refugee integration policies as well as mobility and diversity policies. The EU slogan 'United in Diversity' needs a fresh boost: the refugee crisis requires not only an emergency response, but also a long-term plan on how refugees can be successfully integrated within the societies in question. While the post-Yugoslav countries did have previous experience of responding to a refugee crisis they had not developed policies that could be transferable to the current context.

Here the EU needs to take a more active role in developing and also supporting refugee integration by offering relevant funding. Developing effective measures for integration would also have a positive effect on burden-sharing among the EU member states. While the Dublin Regulation is currently being revised, it needs to be taken into account that the 'first country rule' does not work and disproportionately affects certain countries, and also creates particular challenges for candidate countries located along major migrant routes (as many observers have warned before).

Nevertheless, effective integration policies can only be developed in an equal partnership between EU member states as well as candidate countries, who shouldered a large share of the burden during the 2015/16 refugee crisis. In addition, it needs to be remembered that integration is a two-way process: this cannot be a matter decided only by the EU host states – the perspectives of refugees themselves as well as of civil society actors working on asylum should be given much greater weight in these issues. Engaging these diverse actors in dialogue is a precondition for the formulation of new policies. It is essential that such policies should be put in place before the EU as well as the Western Balkans are confronted with another major refugee crisis.



# CONCLUSION: THE EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS AS A SINGLE SECURITY SPACE

*Thanos Dokos*

## **Introduction**

Just over one hundred years ago the Balkans were, literally, the powder keg of Europe: it was here that the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914 triggered a chain of events that would lead to World War I. In the 1990s, the brutal Yugoslav civil wars brought back traumatic memories of the region's history of conflict and violence and served as a wake-up call for Europeans regarding the security and stability of the continent. Although it is becoming clear that this wake-up call has so far gone largely unheeded, at least the Balkans are now a relatively more quiet neighbourhood and inter-state conflict in the region appears on the whole rather unlikely. However, there are other security concerns, especially in the Western Balkans. As pointed out in another chapter of this publication, 'over twenty years after Dayton ... in most countries and entities in the Western Balkans, the objective of building integrated and cohesive societies in which diversity is considered an asset and a strength is far from being achieved.' As almost all regional states are associated with the EU and/or NATO, those institutions have a key role to play in strengthening resilience (defined as the internal capacity of governments to deal with home-made or imported crises, shocks or threats) in the Western Balkans, and in assisting these countries in their efforts to overcome a range of challenges. This concluding chapter will try to offer a concise synthesis of policy recommendations offered by contributors in this volume.

## **The concept of a single security space**

For security purposes the Western Balkans should be considered as an integral part of core Europe. The area from the Atlantic (UK included) to the borders of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Turkey should be treated as a single and indivisible security space because of the various socio-economic networks connecting those countries with the EU and the high permeability of the Union's external borders with those countries. The notion that Europe could somehow insulate itself from these regions, especially the Western Balkans, is completely unrealistic. Even if the EU were to choose not to include the region in its internal security arrangements, visa-free agreements with Western Balkan countries, in combination with the Union's own internal freedom of movement arrangements (the Schengen Area), would facilitate



the conduct of various illegal activities from and through the Western Balkans into EU territory. Furthermore, the region occupies an important geostrategic position on Europe's energy map.

The concept of the indivisibility of security and of a single security space and the treatment of countries in the Western Balkans in this context as both partners and as a buffer zone to prevent the spillover of security problems from this fragile region to the EU itself look almost like mandatory choices for the Union. The EU needs to invest in increasing resilience in the Western Balkans by providing both political inspiration and more extensive, and more efficient, technical and economic assistance. However, despite being located in Europe and NATO's 'inner courtyard', and being completely surrounded by members of the EU and NATO, the political/institutional map shows several 'blank spots' in the Western Balkans.

## The way ahead

An important first step would be for the EU to conduct a resilience mapping exercise, identifying the factors of fragility and assessing the capacities of countries in the Western Balkans in an effort to target deficiencies and weaknesses and suggest corrective measures. Current and future security concerns, threats and challenges in the Western Balkans include the following:

1. *Inconclusive state-building processes and state fragility* in countries like Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Kosovo (also due to the fact that the state system and the borders do not command broad legitimacy in the eyes of the population), in combination with the burden of (both older and more recent) history, and the rise of autocratic leaders and semi-authoritarian governments which challenge key democratic principles such as rule of law, accountability and governance and the freedom of the press. Interestingly, there is a rather widespread perception that the EU and its member states have been insufficiently critical of the decline of democracy and have offered few solutions to counter sources of fragility. The growing apathy and disillusionment of citizens with political leaders in the face of rampant unemployment, clientelist practices, the negative role of local elites (*'stabilitocrats'*) and increasing inequality also exacerbate fragility.
2. *Population movements*, as large numbers of refugees from Syria and other conflict-afflicted countries in Europe's Southern neighbourhood, as well as economic migrants, have been trying to reach Western European countries through Greece and the so-called Balkan route. The refugee crisis of 2015/2016 highlighted the strategic importance of the region, but did little to foster more long-term strategic thinking about its

future. Europe's attention was limited to ensuring the effective closure of the Western Balkan migration route.

3. *Radicalisation concerns*, as more than one thousand foreign fighters from Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia travelled to the Middle East to fight with the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq. While the returned foreign fighters potentially represent an ongoing traditional security threat, the major challenge derives from extremist Islamist elements seeking to fragment society and destroy societal cohesion. Although the phenomenon can be partly explained by limited employment opportunities that drive young people to seek alternatives offered by radical Islamists, a better understanding of the motivations that lead young Muslims from the Western Balkans to become radicalised is certainly necessary. There is concern that the rise of ultra-conservative Salafist Islam is undermining cohesion among the Balkan Muslims, threatening inter-ethnic relations and that, if left unchecked, this may pose a challenge to the secular order and the wider social fabric in the Western Balkans.

Even long-standing EU member states in the region, such as Greece, should also expect to be affected by radicalisation trends in the medium- to long-term, because of their own large resident Muslim immigrant communities, although left- and right-wing radicalisation will also be a problem as is already the case in several European societies. Addressing the root causes of religious radicalisation in European societies should obviously be an important priority, along with more short-term measures intended to bolster state resilience and mitigate the impact of radicalisation on regional and European security.

4. *Organised crime and corruption* are widespread in several countries in the Balkans, including EU member states in the region. The nexus between organised crime (including trafficking of refugees/migrants), corruption, terrorism and radicalisation is a complex phenomenon which presents law enforcement agencies with a difficult challenge.
5. In recent years, *the slowdown of the EU enlargement process* has allowed other powers to intensify their presence in the Western Balkans as states in the region have sought to diversify their partnerships to hedge their bets. The rising influence of Turkey and the Gulf States has had a mixed impact on the Western Balkans, giving rise to new challenges. Moreover, both Turkey and the Gulf States still treat the region as a bridge to the EU, in contrast to Russia, which is perceived as openly seeking to undermine the EU's influence in the Western Balkans, but does not have the means to substitute the EU as a pole of attraction for economic, far less political, integration. In addition to direct interference, Balkan

politicians use Russia as a playing card in their relations with Brussels to extract support and concessions. On the other hand, the EU is not matching its investment and projection of soft power with political action, proactive presence, commitment, public diplomacy, and strategic communication to counter anti-Europe propaganda. As argued by one of the authors in this volume, the EU can achieve substantial leverage in the Western Balkans if it decides to engage in regional ‘geo-economics’.

It should also be noted that with the ‘16+1’ initiative, China has managed to establish an elaborate multilateral platform directly engaging with the countries of the Western Balkans, while circumventing traditional stakeholders in the region such as Brussels and Washington. However, while China’s increased interest and presence in the region will not necessarily lead to conflict or confrontation, the EU will have to work out a new *modus vivendi* with China in this regard.

Among drivers of resilience, democracy and the rule of law, political stability and a well-functioning security sector are extremely important. The role of the EU and NATO, although the latter’s transformative power is more effective in the hard security (military) rather than soft security (law enforcement) sphere, cannot be overstated. It should be mentioned, however, that as a result of the EU’s ongoing institutional and identity crisis, the broader crisis of liberal democracy and strained transatlantic ties, at least in the medium term the EU is not going to be as dynamic and transformative actor in the region as it was a decade ago.

As the European Global Strategy (EUGS) acknowledges, ‘fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests’, and ‘a credible enlargement policy grounded on strict and fair conditionality is an irreplaceable tool to enhance resilience within the countries concerned’, where the EU ‘can make a meaningful difference’. This criterion suggests that the EU should continue to be heavily involved in the Western Balkans, where it can make a difference through the offer of EU membership. However, because of ‘enlargement fatigue’ and because the EU is currently faced with multiple crises, enlargement in the Western Balkans has been moving at a slower pace than initially anticipated. The region is not yet part of the EU but the delay should be perceived as only temporary as the Western Balkans are clearly part of Europe’s *finalité*; also because of their relatively small size (in terms of population and economy) they are relatively easy to integrate.

Depending on more general developments inside the EU, especially in the light of the French election result in May and the upcoming elections in Germany in September, the accession process of selected countries in the Western Balkans could be expedited, perhaps using the concept of differentiated integration, if the Union is not prepared to take in new full members. Upon fulfilling basic membership requirements, candidate countries could be invited to join an ‘external’ cycle, with strong emphasis on security cooperation (accompanied by financial incentives).

The EU and NATO invested significantly in Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts over the past two decades. The effort should be continued and expanded. A change in focus will be necessary, however. As mentioned in the Global Security Strategy, ‘we will ... enhance our partners’ capacities to deliver security within the rule of law’. Whereas rule of law, democratic control and accountability should remain important objectives (in order to avoid the usual dilemma of stability vs democracy), EU-NATO efforts should focus on making the security sector in the Western Balkans (but also in the Union itself) substantially more capable of dealing with new security threats (especially those of a transnational nature). What the security sector-related agencies urgently need are new training methods that would provide them with new skills, but also cutting-edge technologies and new organisational structures that would facilitate a change in mentality that is absolutely essential in dealing with complex security problems. More specifically, training opportunities for security sector personnel from Western Balkan countries should be substantially increased. Promoting interagency, bilateral and multilateral cooperation should also become important priorities for the EU.

Radicalisation is another area where more cooperation would be necessary. Following a radicalisation mapping exercise in the Western Balkans, EU member states which have been addressing radicalisation and violent extremism for quite some time should start sharing experiences and best practices, where available, with countries in the region. Cooperation at various other levels should follow.

Border protection is also another promising – and necessary – area of increased cooperation in view of continuing migration and refugee flows. The EU needs to safeguard its external borders from all kinds of security risks. The establishment of a European Borderguard/Coastguard Agency is an important first step in this direction. Enlisting the cooperation of countries in the Western Balkans would facilitate the task. Greece in particular has much to gain from cooperation with its Balkan neighbours and should be among the leading EU countries to promote SSR reform in the Western Balkans, as well as in Bulgaria and Romania to the extent that this is necessary. It should be mentioned here that there is already reasonably good security cooperation between Greece and Albania and whatever problems may exist are due to a lack of capabilities, not a lack of political will.

Whereas the input of NATO can be moderately helpful, and possible synergies should be explored, this is a task mainly for the EU. Adopting the concept of ‘functional resilience’ can be quite useful. Such capacity building should ideally be combined with stronger local ownership, hence the significance of civil society actors who could embrace and support such reforms, while championing the causes of transparency and accountability. The following ideas have also been suggested by several contributors as complementary elements of an EU-promoted strategy to foster resilience in the Western Balkans:

- A deep-seated sense of belonging and inclusion in a wider security and political community should be cultivated;
- Any new vision of the region's European trajectory needs to be better communicated, preferably in a direct dialogue with citizens;
- There is a need for a holistic approach which would include, *inter alia*, community engagement in fostering inter-religious dialogue, further reform of the educational system and increased opportunities for young people;
- The EU needs to establish clear red lines in the key areas of media freedom, rule of law and democratic governance. This is especially the case given that reforms undertaken in the last ten years in three key areas – the creation of an efficient public administration, the establishment of an independent judiciary and the fight against corruption – have failed to pass the test of sustainability and irreversibility.

At the EU level, adopting the concept of an indivisible and common security space, approaching external and internal drivers of fragility as interlocking and mutually enforcing, bolstering European resilience, as well as promoting SSR in the Western Balkans on the basis of pragmatic policy recommendations, would go a long way towards increasing stability and resilience in both the region and the EU itself.

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# ANNEXES



# JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, ‘A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO RESILIENCE IN THE EU’S EXTERNAL ACTION’, 7.6.2017

## 1. Introduction

The EU and its Member States have established a robust policy framework to guide the Union’s external action, anchored in Article 21 of the Treaty and the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy<sup>1</sup> (“EU global strategy”), and linked to commitments they have taken at global and regional level. The challenge now is how to sustain progress in the transformational agenda the EU has set itself, against a backdrop of a more connected, contested and complex global environment. The EU global strategy identifies strengthening state and societal resilience as part of the response to this challenge.

The aim of this Joint Communication is to identify how a strategic approach to resilience can increase the impact of EU external action and sustain progress towards EU development, humanitarian, foreign and security policy objectives, given the more fluid landscape of global challenges and risks that the EU global strategy describes. It recognises the need to move away from crisis containment to a more structural, long-term, non-linear approach to vulnerabilities, with an emphasis on anticipation, prevention and preparedness.

It argues that given the rapidly changing environment, a political approach is needed, underpinned by a coherent mobilisation of political dialogue, the diplomatic resources of the Union and its Member States, EU assistance and sectoral policy dialogue and bilateral initiatives. And it proposes the principles and working methods that need to be put in place to implement it. It builds upon the experience of implementing the 2012 Commission Communication on Resilience<sup>2</sup>, which continues to guide relevant EU work, as well as experience drawn from the EU’s promotion of resilience when addressing complex domestic policy challenges.

This Joint Communication also recognises that the EU is not insulated from the pressures affecting its external partners, and that EU external policy can make a contribution to strengthening resilience within the Union itself. In that spirit it

1. “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy”. June 2016
2. “The EU Approach to Resilience – learning from Food Security Crises”. COM(2012) 586 final, 3 October 2012



proposes that proper linkages need to be established between internal and external policy, particularly in relation to the European Agenda on Security.

## 2. A strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action

**An ambitious policy framework.** There has been an intense effort by the EU over the past few years to re-shape its external policy framework in response to the changing global environment. This new framework comprises multilateral goals such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Commitments to Action taken at the World Humanitarian Summit, as well as the EU's own major reviews of the European Neighbourhood Policy, of its relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, the European Consensus on Development, and the establishment of a new level of ambition for the EU's security and defence policy. The Rome Declaration has reconfirmed the EU's commitment to a stronger role on the global scene.

**A more fluid landscape of global challenges and risks.** The EU will be taking forward this agenda in the context of a world where the pace of change is increasingly rapid and the pressures on states, societies, communities and individuals are increasingly disruptive. Pressures, marked by the unprecedented pace of globalisation, range from demographic, climate change, environmental or migratory challenges beyond the power of individual states to confront, to economic shocks, the erosion of societal cohesion due to weak institutions and poor governance, conflict, violent extremism, and acts of external powers to destabilise perceived adversaries. There is constant pressure on the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. And there is vast unmet humanitarian and development need.

Chronic vulnerability and fragility in Europe's wider neighbourhood is exacerbating the impact of these pressures. It is hampering the development of entire regions with potential spill-over beyond their borders.

**Fostering resilience to sustain progress.** The 2012 Commission Communication on the EU approach to resilience defines resilience as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks". The EU global strategy takes the concept further. It speaks of resilience as "a broad concept encompassing all individuals and the whole of society" that features "democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform". Support to resilience at all levels is also an integral part of the new European Consensus on Development.

The EU's strategic approach to resilience aims at achieving and sustaining the ambitious set of objectives for the EU's external action described above, by strengthening:

- the adaptability of states, societies, communities and individuals to political, economic, environmental, demographic or societal pressures, in order to sustain progress towards national development goals;
- the capacity of a state - in the face of significant pressures to build, maintain or restore its core functions, and basic social and political cohesion, in a manner that ensures respect for democracy, rule of law, human and fundamental rights and fosters inclusive long-term security and progress;
- the capacity of societies, communities and individuals to manage opportunities and risks in a peaceful and stable manner, and to build, maintain or restore livelihoods in the face of major pressures.

The ten guiding considerations in Annex identify some of the major methodological insights that will shape this work.

### **3. Implementing a strategic approach to resilience**

Work will be taken forward along the following three interlinked lines:

- expanding the contribution that EU external action can make to strengthening resilience of partner countries and their citizens while consolidating and delivering on existing resilience commitments;
- enriching sectoral policy dialogue with partner countries by drawing upon the EU's experience in promoting resilience in its domestic policy, and its research base;
- ensuring that EU external policy effectively contributes to resilience within the Union.

This work will be grounded in the EU's commitment to democracy and human and fundamental rights.

#### **3.1 Expanding the contribution that EU external action can make to strengthening state, societal and community resilience in partner countries**

The EU will continue to implement the 2013-2020 Resilience Action Plan, guided by the 2013 Council Conclusions on an EU approach to resilience. But the EU's resilience approach will expand to address state, societal and community resilience, informed by the new European Consensus on Development. It will place a greater emphasis on addressing protracted crises, the risks of violent conflict and other

structural pressures including environmental degradation, climate change, migration and forced displacement.

This approach will be aligned with EU commitments in the 2030 Agenda, notably to “leave no one behind” and the pledge in Sustainable Development Goal 16 to promote “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions”.

### **Resilience and inclusive and participatory societies**

There is a strong body of evidence showing the link between inclusive and participatory societies, with accountable, transparent and democratic institutions, and sustainable development and the prevention of violent conflict. Conversely, shortcomings in governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, gender equality, corruption or the shrinking space for public participation and civil society, pose a fundamental challenge to the effectiveness of any society’s development efforts. The quality of governance and public administration determines the performance of a country in all public policy domains, shaping economic prosperity, social and territorial cohesion, and sustainable growth. Resilient societies are underpinned by sustainable and balanced socioeconomic development that anticipates and addresses socioeconomic inequalities, vulnerabilities, and their root causes. This understanding is at the heart of the EU’s approach to state and societal resilience.

*The EU should:*

- *continue to support domestic efforts, tailored to the needs and context of each society, to build sustainable democratic states, accountable and transparent institutions, reform the security sector, strengthen the rule of law, broad-based inclusive growth and employment, participatory decision-making and public access to information. The involvement of local governments, communities and civil society stakeholders will be given particular attention.*

#### **Resilience in practice – building resilience in a post-conflict situation: the case of Nigeria**

Addressing vulnerability and fragility in Africa is a global priority, demanding collective action from all stakeholders to address the interlinked challenges of poverty, inequality, conflict, violent extremism and climate threats. Protracted crisis in the region also has significant spill-over effects for the EU.

The EU response to the crisis in Northern Nigeria is an example of a joined-up resilience approach, based on joint analysis (conducted together with the World Bank and UN) and joint strategic planning. A substantial package of assistance will aim to enhance resilience of conflict-affected people and begin reconstruction in North Eastern Nigeria. It builds on the existing emergency response, to gradually move into recovery and rehabilitation, utilising both humanitarian and development funds.

**Resilience in practice – resilience and support to our partners in the EU’s five guiding principles towards Russia**

The internal resilience of the Union is an integral consideration of our external policy towards Russia. The five guiding principles agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council in March 2016 recognise the need to strengthen engagement with a neighbourhood that extends as far as Central Asia. They also identify the need to strengthen the resilience of the EU, in particular on energy security, hybrid threats and strategic communication. They aim to ensure that both the Union and its neighbouring partner countries remain free to make their own political, diplomatic and economic choices, by reducing the scope for external leverage or coercion.

## **Economic resilience**

Economic resilience is a key factor of the overall resilience of a country, and is strongly correlated to other facets of resilience. Enhancing economic resilience includes sound macroeconomic policies. It also requires attention to other factors such as ensuring adequate financing of the infrastructure necessary to provide essential public services, ensuring a more diversified economy with efficient and secure energy supply, and the necessary financial contingency measures, and measures to ensure continuity of business and the protection of vital services and key facilities in the face of shocks.

While macroeconomic stability is essential for social development, macro-level stabilisation and adjustment policies can entail costs. Such pressures can exacerbate existing inequities and societal tensions, particularly when they affect the most vulnerable. Policies need to be designed to mitigate these consequences. The upgrading of statistical and forecasting capacities is a condition to improve policy making and monitoring.

Economic resilience also requires providing the conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth, investment and financing. This starts with a diversified economy that is not overly dependent on single sectors or companies, and has a supportive environment for new businesses and SMEs to grow. The promotion of the circular economy, which reduces resource dependency, can also contribute to this goal. Moreover, giving workers the necessary skills and access to training will help them to adapt to structural changes.

Investment by foreign companies can help countries upgrade their economies, but this needs to be matched with incentives for multinational enterprises to ensure respect for human rights, including labour rights.

*The EU should:*

- *support partner countries in developing economic resilience underpinned by macro-economic stability, and accompanied by measures aimed at promoting inclusive growth and mitigating the potential negative transitional impact on some groups in society; particular attention should be given to skills development, creation of decent jobs, social protection, and economic empowerment of disadvantaged groups in this context;*
- *work with the European Investment Bank, other International Financial Institutions (IFIs), business sector organisations and social partners to enhance investment frameworks for economic and social resilience, underpinned by inclusive economic development, job creation and the promotion of business and access to finance; it should make full use of the proposed External Investment Plan in pursuit of this agenda.*

### **A greater emphasis on needs resulting from protracted crises**

The level of humanitarian need related to displacement resulting from violent conflict is the highest ever recorded. Whole regions are stuck in a state of protracted crisis and fragility, where the impact of chronic natural disasters, environmental degradation and conflict intersect and magnify each other. Currently 22% of the world population, or 1.6 billion people<sup>3</sup>, live in fragile situations, with the figure expected to rise further by 2030.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the rising numbers of people in humanitarian need, people are affected for longer periods of time. The average duration of displacement is now 17 years. Two thirds of international humanitarian assistance now goes to long-term recipients, as a result of protracted crises or recurrent disasters in the same region.

The traditional linear division of labour between humanitarian aid and development cooperation has been changing in the face of this new reality. Structural fragility, which has both short-term and long-term socioeconomic and political impacts, needs to be addressed more effectively in order to break recurring cycles of emergencies. The EU's current model of addressing crises needs to become better attuned to a situation where poverty, population growth, climate change, rapid urbanisation, competition for limited resources, conflict and violent extremism are creating whole regions of instability.

3. OECD(2016), States of Fragility 2016: Understanding violence

4. One Humanity: Shared Responsibility - Report of the Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016

*The EU should:*

- *prioritise and enhance close cooperation of EU political, humanitarian and development actors on protracted crises and protracted displacement, while respecting the distinct mandates established by the Treaties, and humanitarian principles;*
- *encourage Governments, through political dialogue, with support from development partners, to take more responsibility for chronic vulnerability and strengthen local capabilities for risk management and an earlier, local response;*
- *mobilise its capacity for diplomatic engagement, sectoral policy dialogue and assistance programming in a coherent way around an improved shared analysis of all factors – including socioeconomic, political and environmental risks that compound vulnerability to existing hazards.*

#### **Resilience in practice - understanding the gender dimension, an example from conflict and disaster policy**

Case studies show that climate change, disasters and violent conflict can affect gender groups in different ways. These factors need to be properly understood and addressed in any resilience analysis.

In some cases disasters and conflicts can underscore patriarchal social norms that disproportionately restrict women and girls' equal access to rights and resources, and they can also create a shift in gender roles and norms.

Women and girls can also play an active and important role in contributing to societal resilience that can underpin peace. Ensuring that women and girls are well informed and actively participate in peace building and recovery efforts not only ensures that their specific needs and capacities are taken into consideration, but can also create a window of opportunity for social change, by challenging traditional gender roles and gender-based discrimination. This is a further factor of societal resilience, and can ensure more suitable and sustainable outcomes for EU-supported work.

The specific contribution of women to strengthening resilience to violent conflict within societies also needs to be fully recognised, as well as their role when engaging communities in the prevention and resolution of conflict and countering violent extremism.

## Resilience and the prevention of violent conflict

A resilience approach to the prevention of violent conflict aims at improving interventions, through better understanding of the factors that lead to violent conflict and identifying the endogenous capacities within a society that can allow some communities to resist a drift towards violence. It can give traction to initiatives for peace, and support to local conflict-resolution mechanisms, particularly in countries where the state may have an ambiguous role as both a source of political authority and as a source of violence or coercion.

Such an approach also means broadening the range of responses considered, for instance by giving greater weight to contribution of employment and social policy to societal resilience in national recovery programmes, working to ensure social inclusion in governance arrangements for access to natural resources, and strengthening the gender dimension (see box above).

There is also scope to enhance the contribution of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) partnerships to strengthening resilience, in line with the May 2017 Council Conclusions on Security and Defence. This could include training and capacity building, and work under the Capacity Building in support of Security and Development initiative.

All of this needs to be underpinned by joined-up political and diplomatic work by the EU and its Member States.

*The EU should:*

- *strengthen its work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding through introducing a resilience dimension that puts a stronger emphasis on a more complete, shared analysis, engagement at community and state level, and, where appropriate, the rolling out of the integrated approach to conflict and crisis set out in the EU global strategy;*
- *give greater weight in its conflict assessment methodology to local capacities to deal with risks, and the positive factors of resilience within a community, alongside an analysis of the power relationships and external pressures that can lead to societal breakdown; also take greater account of the link between environmental fragility and the risk of violent conflict, and systematically include climate and environmental indicators in conflict early warning systems;*
- *use this strengthened analysis to inform and enhance political efforts by the EU and its Member States to prevent conflict, through political dialogue, a collective diplomatic response, and engagement with partners such as the UN.*

## Resilience, climate change and environmental degradation

Climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation are interlinked and have a far-reaching impact on the resilience of communities and the ecological support systems upon which life depends. They are cause or contributing factors to many conflicts worldwide.

*The EU should:*

- *broaden its approach to these challenges and put greater emphasis on the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, and maintenance of the services that they provide. This should be done alongside current work on building resilience in relation to extreme events such as drought, famine and floods<sup>5</sup>;*
- *when assessing vulnerability, look not only at the intensity of events, but also at their frequency and likelihood; factor long-term environmental pressures into the assessment and response, such as deforestation and increasing water demand, as well as the need to anticipate the consequences of natural disasters and slow-onset events, such as land degradation, ocean acidification, sea level rise, and melting of glaciers;*
- *require more systematically environmental, climate and disaster risk assessments, integrate them into early warning systems to identify the potential impact of catastrophic sudden and slow onset risks, as well as to identify and prioritise preventive and/or adaptive measures for risk informed investments, development, territorial and urban planning.*

The EU is also committed to work with local authorities to boost resilience in rapidly-growing urban areas, where lack of planning or investment in measures to mitigate climate and geophysical risks can expose populations to significant human and economic damage when shocks and stresses occur. Addressing underlying risk factors through risk-informed public and private investments is proving more cost-effective than relying on post-disaster response. In this context, the EU will also continue to build on established sectoral dialogue on sustainable urbanisation with major partners and institutions, including regional and local authorities, to strengthen their resilience and innovation capacity, in line with the objectives of the New Urban Agenda.

*The EU should:*

- *promote the use of ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk-reduction;*

5. The crucial role of well-functioning ecosystems, and the services they provide, is recognised in the EU's Nature Action Plan.



- *promote risk transfer through risk financing mechanisms such as insurance and contingency credit;*
- *work with local authorities to develop governance systems that promote resilience to climate change, and the sustainable management of natural resources.*

This work will be accompanied by reinforced EU political outreach, notably through the Green Diplomacy Network, the G7 working groups on Climate and Fragility, the G7 InsuResilience partnership, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The EU should also work through other relevant fora, including the UN and relevant multilateral environmental agreements to raise awareness among partners of the environmental contribution to stability and security.

### **Resilience, migration and forced displacement**

The 2030 Agenda recognises the positive contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and sustainable development. It also takes into account the vulnerabilities and needs of forcibly displaced people. Properly designed migration policies can strengthen economic resilience, both in the host countries and in the communities of origin. Moreover, at an individual level, migration and flight can be a legitimate adaptation strategy to severe external stresses. But sudden, sustained or large scale migratory pressures, including pressures from forced displacement, often fall most heavily on some of the poorest parts of the world, putting further stress on fragile coping mechanisms. Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly affected by this. And Europe can also expect to remain a destination for many, which in addition for the impact this will have on the EU, has implications for the transit countries on its geographical periphery.

A resilience approach to migration means designing policy to reflect how migratory patterns respond to the complex interaction between demography, institutional and democratic weaknesses, economic and social imbalances, violent conflict, environmental degradation and climate change. It means continuing to invest in a sound evidence base for policy, and making timely investments in response.

*The EU should work to further develop the following key dimensions of a resilience approach to migration and forced displacement by:*

- *ensuring that work on migration is fully embedded in our overall political relationship with partner countries. And that it is based on the principles of ownership, shared responsibility and the full respect of humanitarian and refugee law, and human rights obligations, including the right to protection;*
- *addressing root causes of irregular migration, some of which are deep-seated, including poverty, inequality, demographic growth, lack of employment, education and econom-*

*ic opportunities, instability, conflict, climate change and environmental degradation, and the long-term consequences of forced displacement;*

- *fostering self-reliance and enabling the displaced to live in dignity, including as contributors to their host societies<sup>6</sup>. This requires a new people-centred development-oriented approach for the forcibly displaced and their host communities that supports access to education, housing, decent work, livelihoods and services, and aims to end dependence on humanitarian assistance;*
- *countering trafficking and organised crime networks that exploit migrants and refugees, and apply a gender-sensitive lens to the specific forms of violence affecting them;*
- *supporting host communities. The EU should further support targeted initiatives to improve language and professional skills, access to services and to the labour market, inclusive education, foster inter-cultural exchanges and promote awareness campaigns targeting both host communities and migrants;*
- *strengthen the evidence base for interventions, including through devoting specific attention to forced displacement, drivers of migration and cooperation with non-EU countries in the EU framework programme for research and innovation.*

### **Resilience in practice – understanding the drivers and the interlinkages between pressures. An example of migration, environment and climate change**

Migration to the EU is thought to be heavily influenced by environmental and climate changes, though this driver is difficult to disentangle from economic, demographic and other drivers and often goes unreported. Many migrants from Western Africa or Eastern Africa have first been driven away from their homes as a result of desertification and soil degradation, contributing to a pattern of rural exodus in Africa, largely driven by environmental disruptions on agricultural systems.

The effects of natural disasters are compounded by economic and demographic trends and rapid urbanisation. As a result, African cities are often overwhelmed by a large expansion of population, and unable to meet the needs of their inhabitants for jobs, housing or basic services. Recent studies have shown how migrants largely congregate in informal settlements in the outskirts of large African cities, as for instance in the case of Accra, where more than 90% of migrant households live in one severely deprived area with no access to running water.

6. Commission Communication on Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance – Forced Displacement and Development (COM(2016) 234 final)

### 3.2 Strengthening resilience through policy dialogue and bilateral initiatives

The EU is increasingly using a resilience approach to break down silos when addressing complex domestic policy challenges ranging from economic policy to climate adaptation and security of energy supply. It has also made a significant investment in research to ensure a sound evidence base for this approach, and has developed a range of analytical tools to support policy implementation. For many of these challenges the domestic and international dimensions of the response are closely interlinked (see box below). This allows us to enrich policy dialogue with partner countries by bringing to the table insights from the EU's domestic policy experience. Policy dialogue is a two-way process, and the EU also has much to learn from its partners in this way.

*The EU should:*

- *draw upon the EU's technical experience of building resilience in its domestic policies to strengthen bilateral sectoral policy dialogue and initiatives; it should seek to expand the contribution of specialised EU agencies to this work;*
- *seek to ensure that EU best practice and standards are reflected in relevant multilateral instruments and policy frameworks, including in the ILO, WHO and G20;*
- *foster a shared international knowledge-base on resilience by involving non-EU countries in resilience-related research and innovation under Horizon 2020, and to share and operationalise the results in our international cooperation.*

#### Resilience in practice – linking the EU's internal and external policy work

**Critical infrastructure protection** - The concept of resilience has been embedded in the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection since 2013. This has resulted in the development of risk assessment methodologies and research that already informs cooperation with a number of non-EU countries, including Ukraine. The concept has been further developed in the proposed Regulation on Security of Gas Supply, which includes provisions relating to risks stemming from non-EU countries and including effective cross-border measures in national emergency and preventive action plans. A similar approach is taken in the electricity sector.

**Energy security** - EU policy on security of energy supply links the concept of a resilient Energy Union to global energy security and to the EU's climate change policy\*, including enhancing the energy security of partner countries by accelerating the global energy transition towards carbon-neutral economies and societies and increasing energy efficiency. EU energy and climate diplomacy aims at promoting this approach.

**Climate adaptation** - The 2013 Climate Adaptation Strategy has promoted resilience through comprehensive adaptation strategies at national and municipal level, addressing vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and critical infrastructure. The Strategy is currently being evaluated, and the experience gained within the EU shared with its external partners.

**Civil protection** - the EU civil protection mechanism contributes to resilience by improving the effectiveness of prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disaster in the EU, neighbouring countries and beyond. It promotes the development of risk assessments and the financing of prevention and preparedness, training and exercises.

**Economic resilience** - the EU is contributing to ongoing work in the G20 focused on building the capacity to achieve sustainable growth in the face of risks and pressures related to structural challenges; avoiding excessive build-up of risks, imbalances and vulnerabilities in the face of shocks. Although this does not establish binding obligations, the work has resulted in a useful conceptual framework to inform policy. Moreover, in line with the EU global strategy, the EU is developing a more integrated European Economic Diplomacy, aiming to foster growth and jobs both in non-EU countries and within the EU, by encouraging increased involvement and participation of the EU private sector in our partner countries.

**Employment** - The EU is supporting the development of a Recommendation on Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience within the International Labour Conference. This will provide guidance to governments on targeted employment and social policies linking humanitarian assistance and longer term development.

**Global health risks** - The EU has recognised that major human and animal health threats such as Ebola, avian influenza, anti-microbial resistance and African swine fever pose a threat not only to the resilience of health systems, but also to societal and economic resilience. Drug-resistant infections could by 2050 cause global economic damage on a par with the 2008 financial crisis\*\*. The EU's response has been to develop domestic capacities to anticipate and respond to severe and sustained outbreaks, while strengthening international cooperation, including with the WHO. It has invested in research and innovation projects to improve early detection and surveillance, and develop adequate medical countermeasures. Lack of access to water and sanitation, and air pollution, are also recognised as important health threats that the EU is actively addressing.

**Research** - The EU is already working under Horizon 2020 to develop a sound evidence base to inform our action to strengthen resilience. It funds work on resilience in relation to security, radical ideologies, the economy, social sciences, water and food security and the challenges of large-scale migration and forced displacement. Much of this is done in collaboration with partner countries\*\*\*. Specialised services such as the European Commission’s Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography, further the evidence-base, while research-informed risk indexes such as the Global Conflict Risk Index and the Index for Risk Management support decisions about prevention, preparedness and response.

\* Commission Communication on Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance – Forced Displacement and Development (COM(2016) 234 final)

\*\* World Bank figures

\*\*\* Examples include the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area 2018-2028 (PRIMA), which aims at developing novel solutions for sustainable water management and food production, and the EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership in the area of food, nutrition security and sustainable agriculture.

### **Resilience in practice - Fostering a strategic approach to resilience in the EU’s neighbouring countries**

The EU global strategy places a particular focus on resilience in the EU’s neighbouring countries. This reflects the special political commitments of the accession process and the EU’s neighbourhood policy; the close integration of our economies and societies; the interdependencies in our broad security interests; and the exposure that some of our neighbouring countries have to geopolitical rivalries.

A credible accession process grounded in strict and fair conditionality provides the political foundation to enhance resilience at state and societal level of countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey. At the core of this process is the “fundamentals first” approach, focusing on rule of law, human and fundamental rights, democratic institutions, including public administration reform, as well as economic reforms and competitiveness.

The 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was closely coordinated with work on the EU global strategy, and its four priorities\* already reflect much of the Strategy’s thinking on resilience. Taking forward the Review will, therefore, be a major part of our work on strengthening resilience in the region\*\*.

The ENP works towards long-term social, economic and political transformation which requires the building up of institutional capacities, working at different levels of civil society and with local and regional authorities as well as central government, tackling the entrenched interests of authoritarian elites and sectarian narratives and implementing security sector reform.

Our collaboration on security policy is based on developing a shared understanding of interests and risks. This is particularly the case in our work on the prevention of violent conflict, radicalisation and extremism, and in our work to strengthen cybersecurity and resilience against hybrid threats.

An important dimension of our resilience approach is to strengthen linkages between our interventions in the region and those beyond. For example our work on energy, transport and connectivity links Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood countries, Iran and Central Asia; the EU Trust Fund for Africa tackles the root causes of irregular migration across the continent; the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis supports Syrian refugees and host communities in the Neighbourhood and Turkey.

A number of key tools underpin our strategic approach to strengthening resilience in the region: engaging partners at both state and community level; increased collaboration with Member States, partner countries and national and international stakeholders to enhance ownership; greater flexibility of funding; more tailor-made and differentiated relationships with partners; and improved public diplomacy and communication. At the core of this is a political approach based around new, mutually agreed Partnership Priorities or revised Association Agendas, based on a clear assessment of shared, medium-term priorities, underpinned by a commitment to respect human and fundamental rights.

\* Good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights; economic development; the security dimension; migration and mobility

\*\* See Joint Report on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review, JOIN (2017) 18 final of 18.5.2017

### 3.3 Resilience and the security of the EU

Under the EU global strategy, peace and security are indivisible from sustainable and inclusive development, the respect of global norms and rules-based international systems. Promoting this agenda remains central to the EU's external action. But the Global Strategy also recognises that the EU and its Member States are subject to many of the structural pressures that test the resilience and expose vulnerabilities of our partner countries. That is why it identifies the protection of the EU as a key task ahead. Building more resilient neighbours is part of the response. But EU external policy, including through the CSDP, has also a role in directly contributing to resilience within our borders, at a time when the Union has a greater responsibility than ever before to contribute to the security of its citizens. That requires better detection of external pressures and threats, coupled with adequate mechanisms to ensure an appropriate political response.

The EU's work on the Security Union also puts resilience at the heart of its approach, while addressing the issue of external non-state actors. Under the April

2015 European Agenda on Security, the Commission has focused on two broad pillars: tackling terrorism and organised crime, and strengthening the Union's defences and building resilience.

The challenge now is to knit together the internal and external security dimensions of EU policy in a way that mutually reinforces them, effectively raises the cost of coercive action by external parties, and allows the Union to anticipate and take early political and operational action in response to other kinds of pressures.

The EU will continue to pursue six main strands of concrete work in this regard:

- **Resilience against hybrid threats.** Building on the Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats, a central objective of EU efforts will be to strengthen protection of critical infrastructure, while diversifying energy sources and suppliers, and strengthening defence capabilities. Priority will be given to ensuring effective operational cooperation and secure communication between the Member States, and to work with actors across sectors, making use of common tools. Cooperation with non- EU countries, particularly in the EU's neighbourhood, will be stepped up.
- **Cyber-security.** The malicious use of Information and Communication Technologies can undermine both societal and economic resilience. Cyber threats have safety and security implications, and can cause major damage to the economy. In response both a normative agenda and an operational one will be pursued. Work will continue in line with UN efforts to build international consensus around the rejection of the malicious use of ICT in or against any kind of essential services, regardless of its source, motive, nature or geographic origin. At the same time the EU is working to promote the resilience of essential services both internally<sup>7</sup> and at the international level, and will enhance its cross-border cooperation on this agenda<sup>8</sup>.
- **Strategic communication.** The EU and some of its partner countries are targeted by external disinformation activities that form part of concerted strategies to discredit the political and social systems that are central to our identity, to our security and stability. In response measures to increase citizens' resilience to hostile disinformation will be further developed by raising awareness, by supporting greater media plurality and professionalism, and by communicating positive narratives and fact-based messages.

7. For example, Directive (EU) 2016/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 2016 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union, COM(2016) 410 final and the review of the 2013 EU Cybersecurity Strategy planned for September 2017.

8. Including work with the EU's main trade partners toward stronger cybersecurity for connected objects, as announced in the Digital Single Market mid-term review COM (2017) 228 final of 10.5.2017

The EU should strengthen the resources of the East Stratcom Task Force and intensify its cooperation with EU institutions, Member States and likeminded partners. Longer term strategic approach and outreach towards Eastern Partnership countries will be further developed, focusing on people-to-people exchanges, and on working with existing civil society networks that already represent a source of community-based resilience. A similar approach will be pursued in the Western Balkans and Turkey, with a reinforced team to deal with strategic communication in candidate countries and potential candidates.

The EU should also develop an outreach strategy to the Arab world that addresses terrorist propaganda and the use of the internet in radicalisation, and promotes human and fundamental rights.

- The work to strengthen state and societal resilience described above is central to the EU's approach to **counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism**. Prevention of radicalisation requires a carefully adapted strategy that responds to the various drivers of violence. Improved legal frameworks and effective institutions to detect, prevent and disrupt terrorist organisations and their sources of funding is essential. But to have the desired impact, such work will need to go hand in hand with ensuring the protection of the rights and civic space that helps create peaceful and stable societies less susceptible to the message of violent extremism. The EU will encourage partner countries in its Counter-Terrorism dialogue to address the issue across all relevant policies, not just as a security response. This includes ensuring that local practitioners can identify and address the early warning signs of radicalisation, including online radicalisation.
- **Enhancing the security of critical transport infrastructure.** Increased security of critical transport is an important element of co-operative, connected and automated mobility that underpins a global, inter-connected economy. The EU should strengthen its engagement with non-EU countries to mitigate threats to transport infrastructure and services. It should reinforce the access to co-operation at expert level, in support of capacity building, awareness strategies, tools and information networks, as well as improving the role of police and judiciary systems.
- **Further developing cooperation with NATO and the OSCE.** The EU and NATO have agreed a number of measures to bolster resilience as part of their work on countering hybrid threats. These include intensification of staff contacts on resilience requirements, promoting greater coherence between the EU Capability Development Plan and the NATO Defence Planning Process, and working to be ready to deploy experts upon request to support EU Member States or NATO allies in enhancing their resilience, either in the pre-crisis phase or in response to a crisis.



This work has underlined the interdependencies between civil authorities, military and private sector in strengthening the resilience of Member States to hostile acts by state and non-state actors. These interdependencies range from the reliance of the military on civilian logistical and telecommunication capabilities, to the reliance of civil authorities on military capabilities for handling disruptive events affecting large numbers of citizens. These interdependencies will be explored with a view to coming forward with proposals to the Council for further possible future co-ordinated work-streams with NATO.

There is considerable scope to explore collaborative work on resilience with the OSCE, in view of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security encompassing the military, the economic and environmental as well as the human dimensions.

#### **4. The way forward – four building blocks to incorporating a strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action**

The EU global strategy's emphasis on resilience underlines a significant change in the way the EU manages the risk and impact of disruptive shocks and pressures in its external policy. It recognises that these pressures and shocks are part of the context in which the EU operates and should be factored into the way we work, rather than being seen as an unexpected exception. This implies a progressive shift in emphasis from crisis containment to upstream measures founded in long-term, but flexible, country and regional strategies that are better risk-informed and less instrument-driven. It also implies a greater attention to risk factors affecting EU interests. Ultimately the aim will be to combine political dialogue, sectoral policy dialogue, technical and financial assistance in an effective way upstream of a crisis.

All this requires a rethink of the EU's problem analysis and design of programmes, as well as of the methods of assessment of the sustainability of EU's interventions. In response, four basic building-blocks to incorporating a resilience approach in a systematic way into the EU's external action are proposed:

- improving and sharing analysis of risk at country and regional level so as better to inform strategy, political dialogue and programming of assistance;
- instituting a more dynamic monitoring of external pressures, and working with the Council to ensure a more timely political and diplomatic response;
- integrating the resilience approach in EU programming and financing of external action;
- developing international policy and practice on resilience.

## 4.1 Improving analysis of risk at country and regional level

The EU has access to a formidable body of information about risks, pressures and vulnerabilities to shock in its partner countries. This knowledge comes from the EU's diplomatic and intelligence networks, its operational field presence, the sectoral policy expertise available in the institutions and Member States, and the monitoring mechanisms of the EU agencies. There is a multiplicity of overlapping risk assessment processes reflecting different policy perspectives: humanitarian, conflict, environmental and economic. There are, nonetheless, significant gaps, for instance in our ability to predict the impact of climate change, environmental and other factors on migratory movements. In addition, analysis often gives too little emphasis to local resilience capacities and the positive dynamics these can generate. And risk assessment processes are not always able to capture in full the possible impact on EU political, security and economic interests.

While respecting the different mandates, there is a need to bring the various sources of information together in a way that gives decision-makers a full picture of how different factors may interact to affect the development and stability of a country or region, or programme objectives.

*The EU should:*

- *improve conflict sensitivity, and address gaps in our understanding of risk, for instance by developing better mechanisms to assess the nature and impact of future flows of displaced people and migrants, and the relationship between climate pressures, environmental degradation and violent conflict;*
- *streamline current assessment processes to ensure that a single succinct country assessment identifying both risk and resilience factors is available to guide policy across the various actors of EU external policy. This single country assessment will integrate in a more systematic and dynamic way information from the EU's diplomatic network, humanitarian, crisis response and development actors as well as the specialised knowledge about the external environment held by the EU's internal policy Directorates General and agencies. It would inform political dialogue and the design of assistance programmes. It would provide an analytical contribution in support of the established decision-making processes governing the development of EU country strategies, CSDP operations and the programming of external assistance;*
- *promote joint analysis with multilateral partner organisations and bilaterally with like-minded development partners addressing the different dimensions of resilience.*

## 4.2 A more dynamic monitoring of external pressures to allow early action

The EU needs to be able to monitor and respond to external pressures affecting the resilience of its partner countries and of the EU in both a medium-term and a short-term time frame.

*The EU should:*

- *further develop the EU's Conflict Early Warning System in order to integrate appropriate indicators of resilience alongside the risk factors currently monitored. The Early Warning System already picks up on many broader indicators of risk and vulnerability, such as environmental, climate and demographic pressures<sup>9</sup>, as well as indicators of governance and institutional capacity to cope with such pressures. Monitoring of resilience indicators could help identify the tipping point at which pressures overwhelm coping mechanisms;*
- *reflect the strategic importance of resilience when developing the EU's Integrated Approach to external conflicts and crises. The Integrated Approach, as envisaged in the EU global strategy, expands the scope and ambition of the Comprehensive Approach, and should succeed it following completion of the 2016-2017 Comprehensive Approach Action Plan.*

The Conflict Early Warning System is designed primarily to identify potential drivers of violent conflict in third countries, within a four year horizon. It is now proposed to complement this with mechanisms focused on identifying external pressures and their consequences in a short-term horizon, with a view to informing a strengthened and timely EU political response.

*The EU should:*

- *establish a light-touch short-term horizon-scanning system mechanism to identify the impact on EU interests of external pressures identified in a three to six month time frame. This will focus on identifying external pressures that could present a risk of derailing in a significant way a partner country's development process or security, or that could have significant consequences for the resilience of the Union. To the extent that data is available it would also provide an initial measure of the consequences for the broader interests of the Union, such as external disruptions to the security of energy supply and critical supply chains, public health emergencies, the impact of crises on EU citizens abroad, and major migratory movements,<sup>10</sup>*

9. In identifying these indicators the EU will draw upon scientific research conducted by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, and that funded under Horizon 2020.

10. This could include data from the Justice and Home Affairs agencies such as the European Border Guard and Cost Guard Agency on migratory pressures, and the advance cargo information and customs risk management system that identifies certain threats to the security and integrity of international supply chains, and to critical infrastructure such as sea-port facilities, airports or land borders.

- *support efforts, including at the UN, for the early detection and prevention of atrocities, including through the development of an atrocity-prevention tool kit.*

Both systems will be designed to support effective decision-making processes upstream of a crisis. The Council and the Commission both have central roles to play in this.

*In view of this:*

- *the Political and Security Committee (PSC) will be invited to consider the results of the horizon-scanning mechanism on a regular basis in order to ensure timely political guidance for early action;*
- *the Presidency will be invited to consider the relevance of the information from the horizon-scanning mechanisms to other relevant Council formations, such as the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI);*
- *the EU should continue to develop mechanisms that integrate flexibility into assistance programmes, to allow early appropriate action when risks are identified.*

### **4.3 Integrating the resilience approach into EU programming and financing**

The EU will build on existing practice to make an assessment of risk and resilience factors a standard component of programming processes and project design across EU humanitarian, crisis response and development assistance, including the EU Trust Funds. Key lessons from the resilience approach include the need to be able to work at multiple levels, including community-driven interventions, the need for longer term programming cycles (including planning of humanitarian aid) combined with short term flexibility, and the need for contingency financing arrangements to address potential disruptive pressures and shocks that could otherwise derail the achievement of longer term strategic objectives. This should be taken into account in joint programming processes with Member States, which will be further encouraged.

*The EU should:*

- *update programming guidance where necessary, drawing on EU experience and the methodological work of other multilateral partners on resilience. It should underline that humanitarian and development assistance in fragile environments should be conflict-sensitive to avoid the potential of negative impact and to improve effectiveness. Methodologies to identify and address such risks will be further developed;*

- *take account in programme monitoring and evaluation frameworks the fact that strengthening resilience requires long-term interventions with a high degree of innovation and flexibility in their design, identifying appropriate indicators and acknowledging the challenge to collect qualitative data;*
- *take into consideration the strategic approach to resilience in its current and future financing of EU external action;*
- *cost-effective innovative risk financing solutions at a regional, national and local level should be explored (e.g. contingent credit, catastrophe funds and insurance).*

#### 4.4 Developing international policy and practice

The EU is working closely with major international partners that have developed their own resilience policy frameworks, including the United Nations, World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The EU has an interest in developing a shared understanding and practice around resilience, and in cooperating at operational level where possible.

*The EU should:*

- *intensify policy and practical cooperation with international partners in order to share research findings and methodological knowledge and, where possible align resilience approaches, share data sets and alert systems;*
- *cooperate more closely with regional and sub-regional organisations on resilience frameworks, by sharing and exchanging evidence and experience.*

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission invite the European Parliament and the Council to endorse and support the approach set out in this Joint Communication.

#### Annex – 10 guiding considerations for a strategic approach to resilience

Based on the EU's experience following the 2012 Communication, and the insights gained from the wide consultation process in the preparation of this Communication, the following guiding considerations for an effective and strategic approach to resilience can be identified:

1. **Strengthening resilience is a means not an end.** The EU's strategic approach to resilience is about building upon underlying institutional and societal strengths in partner countries in order to achieve long

term sustainable development or security goals. It is about securing progress towards these goals by addressing vulnerabilities and underlying structural risks. It recognises that development, and progress towards democracy, peace and security, is not a linear process, and that sectoral approaches, on their own, are not always enough to ensure sustainable results.

2. **Understanding the factors of resilience in a given context can help us plan against pressures and contingencies in a more effective manner.** To do so requires a proper understanding of the linkages between different parts of the complex systems that govern and sustain states, societies and communities, as well as of how they respond when faced with sudden-onset shocks, recurrent or long-term stresses.
3. **Resilience is context-specific, and requires tailor-made approaches.** Although there are a number of common characteristics of resilient systems, it will be for practitioners and local actors to develop context-specific working definitions. The role of the EU and other external actors is to support this process and to foster societies better empowered to identify and solve their own problems. It requires policy makers and development partners to adopt a long-term approach that tolerates the necessary adaptability as approaches are tested and refined.
4. **Identifying and building upon existing positive sources of resilience is as important as tracking and responding to vulnerabilities.** Such factors may take the form of institutionalised or informal democratic and good governance or justice systems, non-state institutions and organisations, embedded cultural norms and practices or ad hoc community-driven solutions that complement state capacities or compensate for their absence. **Resilience has to be addressed at multiple levels – state, society and community.** Local governments and civil society are often the basis on which resilience can take root and grow at community level. Women have a specific and essential role that needs to be recognised and acted upon, while addressing the structural causes of gender inequality.
5. **Resilience is about transformation not preserving the status quo.** If resilience is about sustaining the core identity and capabilities of states, societies and communities in the face of disruptive pressures, it is also about ensuring their ability to adapt and reform to meet new needs. Harnessing the transformative dimension of resilience is key.
6. **Resilience requires a political approach.** Governments have primary responsibility for catering for the needs of their populations, and international assistance should not be a substitute for local responsibility and political action. All countries have committed to the Sustainable

Development Goals, which include specific references to strengthening resilience. Thus the primary responsibility for integrating resilience into national and local policy frameworks lies within each country. However, the EU and its Member States can support the strengthening of resilience through raising the issue as an integral part of its political dialogue, including at the highest level.

7. **Resilience requires risk-informed programming.** Action to address the underlying diverse causes of fragility should be accompanied with risk management measures to protect populations from shocks and stresses, limit their impact through early response and assist a quick recovery.
8. It will not always be possible to address sustained pressures at their point of origin, or to escape the consequences of a sudden-onset crisis. But addressing problems at the point of failure is disproportionately costly. That means **building flexibility and adaptability to change into programme design from the outset**. It also means thinking about the possible stresses that strengthening or weakening one part of a system can place on another.
9. **Early warning needs to be linked to early action.** It is not possible to avoid all risks, so an effective resilience approach requires decision makers to be able to identify and assess pressures in the long, medium and short term, and to take effective early action. This means that a complete assessment has to be linked to appropriate decision-making processes. This is not just about shocks (as in the case of natural disaster, inter-state conflict or economic crisis), it is also about slow-onset crises, recurrent pressures, or cumulative long-term pressures that can reach a tipping point (demographic, environmental degradation, climate change, migratory and other chronic stresses).
10. **The operational starting point is a broader analysis of strengths, vulnerabilities and pressures.** States and societies are built around complex interdependencies between political and security actors, the private sector, civil society, communities and individuals. Traditional sectoral policy approaches may not identify all vulnerabilities, their interconnections, or anticipate how a system as a whole will respond when it comes under pressure, including possible consequences for other States. That means that for any given outcome, risk – and the ability to cope – needs to be analysed at multiple levels, particularly at the points at which one factor of resilience, or one set of actors is dependent on the resilience of others, or where power relations between different levels of society play an important role. Typically this will mean an “all-hazard” approach, bringing together analysis at regional, state, organisational, community and individual level.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CESEE	Central, East and Southeastern Europe
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSO	Civil society organisation
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFB	European Fund for the Balkans
EPP	European People's Party
ESS	European Security Strategy
EUGS	EU Global Strategy
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Foundations
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
SEE6	Six countries of southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia)
SOEs	State-owned enterprises
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	United States Agency for International Development





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