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**BALKAN REGIONAL PROFILE: THE SECURITY SITUATION AND THE
REGION-BUILDING EVOLUTION OF SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE**

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65

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I. Introduction

Three years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States and in the month of the Beslan tragedy in North Ossetia, in the Russian Federation, the topic of terrorism has become solidly entrenched in the national security agendas of the Southeastern European states.

In this context, the extent to which Europe, the US, and Russia share similar perceptions as well as conceptual, political, legal and institutional reactions to terrorism is vitally important. The level of awareness of the perceived threat and the public reactions to it in these three geographic regions targeted by terrorists also constitutes a major concern for some researchers and experts.

The mounting violence in Iraq and the wave of kidnappings and murders of foreigners are, for various reasons, becoming an intra-Southeastern European issue – be that because of the closeness to the area, or because of the individual countries' involvement in Iraq. Together with the many Turkish citizens kidnapped and murdered in Iraq and a few Bulgarian drivers who have been killed, now three Macedonian citizens have become hostages to undisclosed terrorist groups. Sofia is re-thinking its security strategy and is considering the establishment of a counter-terrorist center.

Various forces opposed to the occupation and the US-installed interim administration are hampering the efforts to start a democratic process in the country. The decision of the Iraqi interim government to go ahead with the elections in January 2005 raises the prospect of an additional deterioration in the security situation, but some decisionmakers in Iraq and in the US seem already to have accepted the idea that the elections might necessarily not be perfect. NATO is getting more closely involved with the training of the Iraqi security forces – inside and outside of the country. All these developments will be directly influencing the security and defense policies of the countries involved in Iraq – some of them from Southeastern Europe.

In the region of the Balkans, developments in Macedonia are causing real concerns in the light of the upcoming referendum on 7 November that might lead to problems for the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreements of August 2001. This may derail the security situation in the Western Balkans and hamper Skopje's chances for EU and NATO integration.

There were indications this month of a slowly improving economy in individual Balkan countries. The support of the EU, the US, and international financial sources remain a key factor in the accumulation of regional potential for sustainable development.

The coming months will also be crucial for Turkey's accession to the EU. That is why the meetings of high-level officials from Brussels and Ankara this month have had significant import for the EU's imminent decisions about accession negotiations with Turkey.

This month, the US Department of Defense disclosed its concepts and geographic intentions concerning the re-deployment policy of the US armed forces worldwide. US military bases in Romania and Bulgaria seem to be significant components of this process.

II. Security Threats and Post-Conflict Developments in the Balkans

1. Terrorism and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (PCR) of Iraq and Afghanistan

a. Terrorism

1) General Issues. (1) On 2 September, three Turkish drivers working in Iraq were executed by the Islamic group 'Tawhid wa-Jihad', led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Hostagetaking and murder are tactical instruments of terrorizing foreigners working for the occupation forces. Two US citizens – Eugene Armstrong and Jack Hensley – have been beheaded in the second half of September. However, most often victims of terrorist attacks are Iraqi civilians who happen to be present at the scenes of the bombings. According to a statement by the Iraqi interim ministry of healthcare, more than 17'000 have been killed in the last six months, mostly in Baghdad. Most of these casualties are the result of US airstrikes and artillery shelling. (2) On 15 September, Arab media sources quoted threats of the 'Brigades of Islamic Jihad in Iraq'. According to this group, Iraqi schools and universities would become targets of attack if the practice of equal education of men and women should continue. (3) German Federal Minister of Consumption and Agriculture Renate Kuenast distributed on the Internet a call to the citizens of the country to prepare stocks of basic food items for at least two weeks for the case of an eventual terrorist act or natural disaster disrupting the national infrastructure. Publicly, the German authorities are trying to prevent public disturbance and confusion

stemming from unrealistic perceptions of terrorist threats. However, society and business are taking preventive measures for this kind of disruptions. The German government has taken the issue seriously, but wants to avoid inducing undue public concern. The Internet statement by Kuenast caused some stir in the last days of September, but the Interior Ministry and other government officials quickly issued rebuttals, saying that such measures were unnecessary. (4) On 26 September, unidentified perpetrators killed a 32-year old French citizen in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He was assassinated while going into his car in front of a supermarket. Earlier, on 15 September, a British citizen had been killed in Saudi Arabia by suspected extremists, but this was the first murder of a French citizen in Saudi Arabia. Al-Qaida has previously taken responsibility for killings of foreigners in Saudi Arabia. Earlier this month, France did not give in to the pressure of the terrorists who had kidnapped two prominent French journalists in Iraq, demanding that Paris cancel the implementation of a law banning headscarves in French schools. This law had been perceived by some Muslims as offensive to their culture. On 15 September, the 'Islamic Army of Iraq' – the terrorist group that had kidnapped the two journalists– declared on the Internet that France was an enemy of Islam. The examples given included French foreign policy towards Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. Some analysts say this is evidence of attempts by extremist groups to influence the policies of democratically elected European governments on domestic and foreign issues. Similar observations have been made in the last months concerning militants' pressure on Italy, Spain (with a definite level of success), and other countries taking part in the occupation of Iraq. The strategic goal is to divide the European states from US policy in the "fight against terrorism".

2) Romania-US. On 11 September, Romanian President Ion Iliescu wrote to President Bush on the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. President Iliescu called these attacks "a tragedy that has reverberated in the souls of the Romanian people". The letter said that the memory of the attacks had built a momentum of international solidarity against terrorism and a special appreciation of freedom, democracy, tolerance, equality, and the rule of law. The Romanian president wrote that his country had stood by the US in the war against terrorism as an ally in action even before becoming an ally by treaty. The letter concluded by saying that Romania, as a new

NATO member, could be relied on as a strategic ally of the US in Central and Southeastern Europe to promote the values of freedom and democracy.

3) US-EU. According to a US State Department press release, on 14 September, William Pope, the US State Department's principal deputy coordinator for counter-terrorism, addressed a congressional hearing to provide an overview of US counter-terrorism efforts and cooperation with European countries and institutions. The EU had been a "solid partners" in the "global coalition against terrorism", he said. However, the terrorist attacks and the presence of terrorist support networks in Europe – despite the best efforts of security services and European governments – remained a source of concern, according to Pope. The factors that complicated US-EU counter-terrorism efforts were the legal impediments to taking firm judicial action against suspected terrorists; some asylum laws that afford loopholes; counter-terrorism legislation is not always adequate in some countries; standards of evidence lack flexibility in permitting law enforcement authorities to rely on classified-source information in holding terrorist suspects. The US continues to work closely with the European partners to strengthen their counter-terrorism legislation and to help improve abilities to restrict terrorists' freedom of action, block assets, and address social conditions that contribute to the spread of terrorism. The US also continues to urge EU and G – 8 partners to keep their pressure on such states, sponsoring from US perspective terrorism as Syria and Iran, particularly regarding support for HAMAS, Hizbullah and others. Other legal, financial and enforcement tools that the USA hopes Europe will adopt include the criminalization of material and logistical support of terrorism, strict punishments for convicted terrorists, a national ability to freeze administratively terrorist assets, the removal of legal and technical impediments to intelligence and information exchanges, and bilateral agreements with the United States to implement the US – EU Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements. Pope acknowledged that addressing the factors that reduce the ability of the USA and EU to cooperate even more effectively would be a long-term effort. The need of an increased awareness of the threat and of the deficiencies that limit the abilities of both the USA and EU to address it was more and better understood by the partnering countries.¹

¹ <http://www.usembassy.ro/WF/500/04-09-17/eur503.htm>

This and similar analyses of the US-EU counter-terrorist relations has a special meaning for the Southeastern European countries in the light of the fact that they all are part of the EU and NATO enlargement strategies and some of them (Romania and Bulgaria) entertain special pragmatic relationships with the US. Tailoring the right measure of working together with both the US and EU in the fight on terrorism as well as with all other UN countries taking part in the US-led “anti-terrorist coalition” would have vital consequences for dealing with the danger and for the successful continuation of the integration of the Balkan countries in the European and Euro-Atlantic mainstream.

4) Bulgaria. On 3 September, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov called for the establishment of a counter-terrorism center during a public lecture in Sofia. Various institutions would participate in the eventual creation of the National Coordination Center for Countering Terrorism. A research institute on these issues would also have to be established, said the president.

b. PCR (Post-Conflict Rehabilitation) of Iraq.

1) Analysis. (1) There is no doubt there are nostalgic dreams of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism in Iraq that require a new cult figure like the 30-year old Moqtada al-Sadr. However, difficult political reforms are in progress that strongly contradict these political reflexes of the past. National elections are planned for January 2005, and the Iraqi interim administration is decided to carry them out regardless of the rapidly worsening security situation. Despite these, certain political improvements may ensure that polls take place as scheduled. One could say that two political cultures are in conflict now in Iraq: the dictatorial political culture of a political leader such as Iyad Allawi or Moqtada al-Sadr, who have opposed Saddam in the past, but are essentially of the same breed, and the democratic one, which the US says is embodied by the provisional government, the temporary National Assembly, and the international democratic community that supports the transformation processes in Iraq. The ‘interference’ introduced by the terrorist attacks and hostage-takings cannot blur this major socio-political issue in Iraq today. Some analysts believe that the al-Sadr camp is supported by outside forces. It is in the interest of the broader Middle East region that the “democrats” in Iraq, whoever they turn out to be, succeed in getting the upper hand. (2) Analysis received from Bulgarian military

sources shows that most of the less than 40 car bombs detonated in Iraq in September have been carried out by supporters of the former regime.

2) NATO – Iraq. On 22 September, NATO ambassadors agreed to create a military training academy in Iraq and to raise the number of trainers from currently 40 to approximately 300, according to a US State Department press release. The expansion of the NATO mission in Iraq will be supported financially and by other resources by the US. The NATO mission will report to NATO, but will receive assistance from the US-led occupation forces, also known as “Multinational Force – Iraq”. A specific starting date for the expanded NATO mission has not been disclosed. The NATO training academy will train mid- to senior-ranking officers and NATO may offer additional training to Iraqi forces outside the country along with unspecified technical assistance. The NATO mission to Iraq was given political ‘green light’ at the Istanbul summit of the Alliance and initially launched on 30 July. It also helps Iraq develop its defence structure, in particular in the Ministry of Defence and Military Headquarters. The mission also plays a role in coordinating offers of equipment and training from individual NATO and partner countries. The NATO Academy will be under the command of the US Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus, who currently commands the existing training programme for Iraqi security forces. A permanent training centre will be created in Ar Rustamiya.²

The evolving relations between NATO and the Iraqi government and security institutions will inevitably have repercussions on the engagements of the individual NATO countries from Southeastern Europe. That will mean new specific national decisions and requirements for structuring the Balkan regional stabilisation policies.

3) Bulgaria-Iraq. On 3 September, Bulgarian President Parvanov said in Sofia that while the Bulgarian troops would not stay in Iraq forever, there was no hurry to pull them out. On 26 September, Bulgarian military experts announced that the Bulgarian battalion in Iraq would be rotated at least 1-2 times (each rotation is six-months long). The country’s battalion in Kerbala will move to another basing facility in another town in the coming months.

2. Post-Conflict Developments in the Balkans

² <http://usinfo.state.gov/is/Archive/2004/Sep/23-81828.html>

a. Macedonia. (1) Macedonian media outlets on 6 September quoted national intelligence sources as saying that radical Albanian formations inside and outside the country were forming a new armed force called the “Republican Army for Ilirida”. Its main goal, the reports claimed, would be the federalization of the country. Many former ANA and UCK militants had been joining the new army, the media quoted the sources as saying. (2) On 16 September, the Permanent Council of the OSCE held a regular session in Vienna and discussed political developments in Macedonia in the light of the referendum planned for 7 November that would try to abolish the Law on Territorial Organization passed by the country’s parliament in August. A possible success of the referendum would be in violation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of August 2001. (3) US Ambassador to Macedonia Lawrence Butler told the Albanian-language Macedonian newspaper “Lobby” on 25 September that the country would face insecurity, stagnation and chaos if the referendum planned for 7 November to prevent a new territorial division was successful. (4) The tensions arising in Macedonia with the nearing of the referendum on 7 November may lead to strong Albanian political reactions for more rights. Ali Ahmeti – the Albanian leader of the Democratic Union for Integration - has already called for boycotting the referendum. The country could plunge into a political crisis. The November local elections should probably be postponed in the ethnically destabilized situation. Early parliamentary elections should be prepared on an expedient basis. Patience and tolerance are now the most necessary qualities in the country’s political elite – no matter its ethnic characteristics. Macedonia’s neighbors should also do their best to limit ethnic tensions in Macedonian society by furthering efforts to involve the country in the regional, European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. The neighbouring states should not tolerate any extremist political behavior in Macedonia, as it would certainly would slow down the country’s EU and NATO integration.

b. Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to a press release from the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), the agency on 13 September awarded a US\$490’800 grant to BH Telecom in Sarajevo to develop plans for the deployment of a broadband

metropolitan network in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This would help increase Internet and telecommunications access in urban areas.³

III. The National Perspectives of the Balkan Countries: Specific Issues

1. Bulgaria. On 1 September, the chief of the general staff of the Bulgarian armed forces, Nikolay Kolev, announced that the General Staff had been tasked to draft a new military strategy for Bulgaria by the end of 2004. Currently in the making is a new strategy for the security of the country that should be completed in November. The new military strategy is a logical extension of the more general strategy for security of Bulgaria. The membership in NATO, the roles of an expected EU member, the evolving geopolitical situation around Bulgaria, the country's participation in the occupation regime in Iraq, and the fight against terrorism will define the philosophy and contents of the new strategies.

2. Serbia and Montenegro. On 4-5 September, the EU Foreign Ministers met in Maastricht and adopted a "twin-track" approach to the union of Serbia and Montenegro. The decision was taken after months of stalemate in the relations between the two constituent republics of the union on economic issues concerning their joint bid for EU membership. The EU firmly supports the state union idea. However, it has also indicated that it would be possible to treat the two republics separately on the road to EU membership. Whatever the developments within Serbia and Montenegro, the neighboring countries hope for a tolerant, peaceful treatment of the various issues that might arise in connection with an eventual separation. Such a diplomatic approach would benefit the people of Serbia and Montenegro and contribute to a positive image of the Balkans.

IV. State of Bilateral, Multilateral, and Regional Relations in the Balkans:

1. Bilateral Relations: Bulgaria- Albania. Albanian President Alfred Moisiu made an official to Bulgaria on 10-11 September at the invitation of Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov. Moisiu met with Prime Minister Simeon Coburgotsky and with the speaker of the National Assembly, Ognyan Gerdzhikov. The two delegations discussed bilateral economic, political, military, and cultural issues. They also discussed the regional

³ <http://belgrade.usembassy.gov/current/040916.html>

situation, including EU and NATO enlargement to Southeastern Europe. Moisiu said it was in his country's interest to better understand the experience of the Bulgarian state and government in the integration processes in the region and in Europe. Moisiu said that the status of Kosovo had to be resolved by 2005 in order to further stabilize the broader Western Balkan region. Tirana still needs to arrive at a balanced and solid position in this issue.

2. Multilateral Relations: Cooperation on Fighting Organised Criminality

A multilateral conference on fighting organized crime was convened on 27-28 September in Istanbul. The US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) participated together with representatives of the EU, Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, and Central Asian republics. The police experts agreed that organized crime groups act internationally, and raised the specter of their possible involvement in "terrorism". The officials agreed that crime has no religion, nationality, race, or state borders, and that global cooperation is required to counter it. Many bilateral meetings took place during the multilateral forum.

V. The Economic Situation in the Balkan Countries and in the Region

1. International Labor Organization (ILO) – Southeastern Europe. On 6 September, ILO disclosed the results of its study on how 90 nations rate according to the criterion of "personal economic stability". Greece was rated 27th; Bulgaria, 28th (with an index of 0.582 out of a maximum of 1); Romania, 44th, and Turkey, 56th. The study took into account the security of incomes, the level of unemployment, guarantees for the rights of the employee, job safety, the possibility to apply acquired knowledge, the influence of trade unions, and chances for career improvements.

2. World Bank (WB) – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Romania. On 21 September, the US State Department announced in a press release that the WB had "recently approved measures to help further economic development and structural reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Romania. The bank has launched a new country assistance strategy for Bosnia and Herzegovina for 2005-07. It was designed to improve public finance, invest in key infrastructure, and promote sustainable growth led by the private sector. It has pledged US\$100-180 million to finance new projects over the next three years. For Montenegro the WB approved a US\$18 million credit to support

reforms in public administration and in the financial, energy and healthcare sectors. For Romania, a new US\$150 million WB loan will support continued government efforts to privatise state-owned enterprises, strengthen corporate governance, and develop a transparent and efficient civil service and an independent judiciary.”⁴

3. USTDA – Romania. (1) On 1 September, according to a US State Department press release, the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) “awarded a US\$340,100 grant to the Romanian National Administration of Meteorology in Bucharest. Its aims are to fund a feasibility study of a national system that would expand and integrate Romania’s three existing programmes for monitoring dangerous weather, flooding and pollution.”⁵ (2) On 21 September, the USTDA awarded a US\$220’840 grant for a project that would study proposed upgrades in the electric-power sector in Romania, according to a State Department press release. The aim is to provide the Bucharest ELCEN power-generating plants with modern control mechanisms.⁶

VI. The Process of Differentiated Integration of Southeastern Europe in EU and NATO: EU

* **EU – Turkey.** On 23 September, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Brussels and met with European Commission President Romano Prodi. The purpose of Erdogan’s visit was to prove to European Commission representatives that Ankara was ready to launch accession negotiations with the EU. On 6 October, the EC will publish its report about Turkey’s progress and clearly state whether Ankara will be given a precise date in December for beginning such negotiations. Turkey has had “EU candidate” status since December 1999. The main reforms that the EU urged at that time were concerned with the improvement of the state of human rights in the country, especially those of the Kurds, who comprise 20 per cent of the population. In June 2003, the Turkish parliament allowed TV and radio broadcasts in Kurdish language, and in May this year it changed the constitution to institutionalize equality of the sexes in Turkish society and state. Apart from Turkey’s problems, Europe also needs to cope with its old stereotypes and historical reflexes towards Turkey, many of which go back to the 17th and

⁴ <http://bucharest.usembassy.gov/WF/200/eur218.htm>

⁵ <http://www.usembassy.ro/WF/300/04-09-01/eur303.htm>

⁶ <http://bucharest.usembassy.gov/WF/400/04-09-23/eur409.htm>

even the 15th century. Recent polls conducted by the German Marshall Fund in the EU countries show that 40 per cent of their citizens are not sure that Turkey's membership is for the better of the EU.

VII. The Influence of Other External Factors on the Region: National Great Powers and International Institutions: US

1. US-Romania, Bulgaria. On 23 September, US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld discussed the concepts that are motivating the US forces' transformation and shape the new alignments of the country, as described in a US State Department press release:

- US troops should be located where wanted, welcomed, and needed.
- The troops should be placed in locations where they can easily and quickly be moved.
- US forces need to be in places that allow those troops to have reasonable access to ample training areas on land, sea, and in the air. Host nations will need to provide access free of encroachment and unreasonable restrictions.
- Advanced technology has increased military capabilities so that more can be accomplished with fewer numbers of troops and material.⁷

Concerning Europe, Rumsfeld said that bases in Germany, Italy, and the UK would be consolidated, but retained. The US would also look for lighter and more deployable ground capabilities, he said, as well as stronger special operations forces, with each positioned for more rapid deployment to other regions.

Romania and Bulgaria have been considered as host nations for US military bases in recent years, and both expect they will host the new, lighter, and more flexible US basing facilities.

2. US-Bulgaria. In mid-September, 20 Bulgarian policemen completed an upgrade course in the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The course was one month long and covered skills in dealing with serious crimes. Other experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior have also taken courses in the FBI Academy.

⁷ <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/acda373.html>

VIII. Conclusions

A terrorist threat is perceived by some in the Balkans societies. Although there are other, more pressing issues – legacies of the past, post-conflict situations, residual ethnic tensions in certain parts of the Western Balkans, economic and technological backwardness and poverty, etc. - the mounting pressure by Islamic extremism and terrorist groups on European states, including some of them in Southeastern Europe, assumes higher positions in the priority security concerns of society. Fortunately, processes of ethnic, religious, or cultural antagonism have not developed as a consequence. Religious tolerance continues to be an important characteristic in the Balkans. The tragedy in Beslan, the Russian Federation, and the kidnappings of European and US citizens by Islamic extremists in Iraq have added to this threat.

The possible greater involvement of NATO in Iraq would have repercussions for all members and candidates for membership from the Balkans. The generally negative reactions of the public to the war in Iraq have not changed, but the sense of even greater security problems that would come if this country was left in chaos militates in favor of an increased international involvement in Iraq.

Developments in FYRO Macedonia will definitely be in the spotlight of international attention in the coming weeks. The stability of that young state is linked to the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement of August 2001, and any act of violating it would slow down Skopje's hopes for accession to both NATO and EU.

The postponement of another political promise – that of Turkey's accession to the EU - may create tensions in Turkey. The ability of the Turkish political elite to preserve the pro-European policy, if the EU continues to press for more reforms, would be crucial for the stability of the country and the adjacent regions. Turkey has come a long way on its reform process in preparation for EU membership, and it would be a waste of national energy to give up when the adoption of EU norms and principles should start giving positive results for Turkey. Every country that is a candidate for EU membership has a national obligation to build the EU in its own society before expecting the EU to integrate the country. And the Turkish elite is morally obliged to inform its people that the negotiations with the EU will not be a bargain, but a purposeful problem-solving effort to

advance Turkish society to a level that would allow it to become naturally a member of the EU family.

And finally, the US global force re-structuring is in progress – the conceptual and geographic arguments for this policy were distributed in September, and Southeastern European states, especially Romania and Bulgaria, may well meet the requirements for new bases.

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