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

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## **I. Introduction**

There were two particular issues that continued to affect the Balkans in March: first, the state of the ‘enclaves of instability’, and second, the progress of the rest of the peninsula, and the stabilizing roles that some Southeastern European countries play elsewhere in the world.

The attraction of the Balkan region for students and practitioners of security is connected to the cases of Kosovo, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The resignation of Kosovo Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj was not only a sign of the effectiveness of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY), but also prompted the Albanian Kosovars to press their case for independence more decisively. The status of Kosovo can be expected to be decided by the international community this year. The results of efforts for the rehabilitation of Kosovo in the last six years will be measured by the outcome of that assessment, including efforts to repair the effects of the war. At the ICTY, former prime minister Haradinaj – a war hero for many Kosovar Albanians – categorically denied any guilt or wrong-doing, despite accusations from the ICTY prosecutors saying he was responsible for various atrocities and killings .

Local elections in Macedonia again demonstrated the country’s ethnic volatility and the rocky path it must travel towards membership in NATO and EU accession negotiations. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is similar, though more complicated. This country has not yet embarked decisively as a single state entity on a path towards NATO’s PfP Program, nor has it begun adapting for future EU membership. Ethnic strife continues to complicate the federal state’s domestic politics and is preventing opportunities for all ethnic groups to close the gap with the rest of Europe.

In the Western Balkans, it is as yet unclear how the Serbian and Montenegrin elements of the former Yugoslav state union will evolve. Getting to terms with the past necessarily requires handing over of the war criminals to the ICTY in The Hague – a task that is either not implemented at all, or only unenthusiastically by the authorities of Serbia and Montenegro. The same issue– cooperation with the ICTY – remains unresolved as far as Croatia is concerned, and the EU has decided to postpone the launch of accession negotiations with Zagreb until General Ante Gotovina, a national hero to most Croats and

a suspected war criminal to the international community, is handed over to the prosecution in The Hague.

Europe and the US again displayed solidarity in their desire to integrate the Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic security space on the terms set before, during, and after the wars in former Yugoslavia, and in their determination not to give in to pressure from the Bosniak, Albanian, Serbian, or Croatian sides. More problems, tensions, and even crises can be expected before the Western Balkans region decisively embarks on a path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The EU integration process has never been an easy one on the Balkans, and a more sustained effort coupled with persistence on the part of local and external actors can still lead to a successful result. The need for monitoring, analysis, and assessment has not lessened because of the progress achieved in the last years.

Experiences gained on the Balkan are already proving useful to the international community in contingencies elsewhere.

However, earlier concerns about the disparity between the eastern and western parts of the Balkan Peninsula have already become acute, and additional efforts and creativity will be needed to prevent this imbalance from becoming a source of tension.

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

### **1. Terrorism and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (PCR) in Iraq and Afghanistan**

#### **a. Terrorism**

**1) Meeting of Intelligence Experts.** A meeting of intelligence experts from six states – the US, Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, and Bulgaria – was convened from 26-27 February in Varna, Bulgaria. The meeting discussed problems of terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism, and other security threats. A special focus of the meeting was the exchange of views on Kosovo, Macedonia, and Chechnya. A second meeting will be convened in November in the Bulgarian mountain resort of Borovets to deal with economic crime and corruption.

**2) Bulgarian Intelligence on Security Threats.** On 10 March, the Bulgarian Association of Retired Intelligence Servicemen and Servicewomen organized a conference on “The Challenges to Bulgarian Intelligence”. The director of the National Intelligence Service,

General Kircho Kirov, told participants that the country's intelligence services regarded Muslim radicalism as a primary security threat. Any link between organized criminal groups and political violence movements was especially problematic due to the potential danger of trafficking in nuclear weapons and materials. General Kirov claimed that this danger was "real". The big problem in the region was Kosovo, said the intelligence chief, adding that it had been contained.

**3) Anniversary of Madrid Terrorist Attacks.** (1) On 11 March, an International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism, and Security was convened in Madrid in commemoration of the victims of terrorism in the Spanish capital a year ago and across the world. The summit was organized by the Club of Madrid, an independent organization dedicated to strengthening democracy around the world. Its members include nearly 50 former heads of state. The conference concluded that the threat of terrorism could be fought by extending democracy and freedom, but would also require the hard work of law enforcement. The fight against terrorism was a struggle over values, the conference found. This fight, however, must be waged in consistence with the rule of law, since how the struggle is waged is a reflection of an attitude towards individual rights and liberties – the ultimate foundations of enduring democracies, the conference attendees said. (2) On 30 March, German media quoted sources in the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) intelligence service as saying that the alleged leader of al-Qaida in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had been planning attacks in Europe, possibly with chemical weapons.

**4) EU on Terrorism.** On 10 March EU Parliament listed the radical Lebanese Hizbollah party as a "terrorist organization". The non-binding resolution asked the respective EU governments to put Hizbollah on their terrorist blacklists. In a similar move in 2003, the Palestinian Hamas organization had also been listed as a "terrorist" group. Hizbollah is backed by Iran, and the US and Israel have long insisted that the EU undertake this step. The only chance for Hizbollah's survival would be if it continued to exist only as a political organization, it is hoped.

## **b. Post-Conflict Reconstruction (PCR) in Iraq**

**1) Bulgaria in Iraq.** (1) On 4 March, a Bulgarian soldier was killed in Iraq by “friendly fire“ from US guards near al-Diwaniya. The initial investigation of the eighth death of a soldier from the Bulgarian occupation forces showed that gunfire by the Bulgarian troops was mistaken for a nighttime attack by US soldiers, who returned fire and killed the soldier. The report exonerated the US troops involved of any wrongdoing. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld extended their condolences and apologies to the Bulgarian government, the people of Bulgaria, and the relatives of the soldier. The incident caused public outrage at what appeared to be an attempted cover-up on the part of the General Staff of the armed forces of Bulgaria. Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov said that there had been “serious flaws in the operational co-operation among the coalition partners”, according to Bulgarian media sources. On 26 March, it was disclosed that Bulgarian commanders in Iraq also carried some responsibility for the tragic incident. (2) The killing of the eighth Bulgarian serviceman triggered a public and parliamentary debate about ending the Bulgarian participation in the occupation of Iraq. The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff announced plans to pull out the troops by the end of the year, and presented them to the Council of Ministers. Parvanov urged the parliament, which dissolves in less than two months ahead of the regular elections, to decide on the Bulgarian military presence in Iraq. After consultations with US government officials, Foreign Minister Solomon Passy said that Bulgaria would not be in a hurry to decide on this issue under the pressure of the upcoming elections, and confirmed that the country would continue to be a reliable and predictable ally to the US and Iraq.

**2) Occupation Forces in Iraq.** On 16 March, Italy announced it would begin reducing and gradual withdrawing its contingent of 3’300 soldiers by the end of 2005. Poland decided to withdraw its 1’600 forces by the end of this year. Ukraine will recall its 1’600-strong contingent by the end of October. The Netherlands will pull out their 800 troops by the end of April. Australia and the UK are expected to send even more soldiers to Iraq to fill the gaps left by these allies. Albania and Macedonia will keep their companies in Iraq.

**3) Romania in Iraq.** (1) On 28 March, Romanian President Traian Basescu visited the 800-strong Romanian contingent in Iraq. Bucharest intends to increase the number of its

troops by 100, and said it did not have an end date for the presence of its soldiers in Iraq. Among the Romanian population, 55 per cent oppose the continued deployment of the troops to Iraq. (2) Three Romanian journalists – Mari-Jan Ion, Sorin Miskoc, and Edward Ohanessian – were kidnapped in Baghdad on 28 March on their return from an interview with Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. The Romanian authorities have established a crisis centre to handle the situation.

## **2. Post-Conflict Developments in the Western Balkans**

**a. Macedonia.** Local mayoral elections were convened on 13 March in Skopje and other parts of Macedonia. They were the first polls since the end of ethnic hostilities in 2001. The elections gave a larger share of power to the Albanian minority, in accordance with the Ohrid Peace Agreement of 2001. Voter turnout was about 55 per cent. Holding municipal elections was one of the last requirements of the Ohrid Peace Agreement and a significant step in the political regulation of ethnic tensions between Macedonians and Albanians. The stability in this country continues to be fragile, and after two postponements of the municipal elections, the 13 March vote was seen as a successful one, with only few incidents during the voting process. International observers said the municipal elections had met most of the OSCE and Council of Europe standards, but came up short on guaranteeing universal and equal suffrage and the secrecy of the ballot.<sup>1</sup> The second round of polling was held on 27 March in some 60 municipalities. In Skopje, the election results were not made official until 30 March, when the ruling coalition's candidate Hristo Penov conceded that he had lost to opposition candidate Trifon Kostovsky. Though the opposition won the mayor's post in the capital, the ruling coalition won more than 50 per cent of the mayoral seats throughout the country.

**b. Kosovo.** (1) On 8 March, Britain deployed another 500 soldiers to augment its contingent in Kosovo. One hundred US riot policemen reinforced the US contingent. An undisclosed number of French Legionnaires were sent to strengthen the French forces in Kosovo. (2) On 8 March Kosovo's prime minister, Ramush Haradinaj, decided to resign from his post and to report voluntarily to the ICTY in The Hague. "Haradinaj was

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<sup>1</sup> US State Department press release, 14 March 2005: "Observers Say Macedonian Election Met Most Standards", at: <http://belgrade.usembassy.gov/current/050315.html>

indicted by the ICTY for alleged war crimes committed during the 1998-1999 armed conflict in Kosovo when he served as a senior commander in the Kosovo Liberation Army,” according to a US State Department press release.<sup>2</sup> US State Department speaker Richard Boucher “urged Kosovo to maintain peace and to continue to implement the “Standards for Kosovo” -- political, economic and security benchmarks that were outlined by the United Nations in 2002. A review of Kosovo’s progress toward fulfillment of the standards is scheduled for this year. ‘Violence will not be tolerated and will have negative consequences for the outcome of the review and for Kosovo's future,’ Boucher said. In a separate announcement, the U.N. secretary-general’s special representative for Kosovo, Søren Jessen-Petersen, called for calm following Haradinaj’s resignation. ‘A violent response will not help Kosovo. It will only serve the interests of those determined to block Kosovo’s way forward,’ said Jessen-Petersen.”<sup>3</sup>

Kosovo’s problems are tough, and the situation might escalate towards crisis this year. The lack of a visionary strategy on the part of Belgrade, the non-cooperative and confrontational attitude of the Albanian majority, and the ineffective dialog between Belgrade and Pristina are factors that have led to violence in the province. These factors may require an extended presence of KFOR and delay the emancipation of the troubled entity. Former prime minister Haradinaj pleaded not guilty to all 37 charges brought by ICTY chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte, namely 17 counts of crimes against humanity and 20 counts of violations of the laws or customs of war, including cruel treatment, murder and rape. (3) On 15 March, Kosovo’s President Ibrahim Rugova escaped unharmed from an assassination attempt in Pristina.<sup>4</sup> Rugova was traveling to a meeting with visiting EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana. A bomb in a roadside garbage can was detonated by remote control as the President’s motorcade was passing by. The UNMIK chief Søren Jessen-Petersen said in connection with the bombing that such bombings should be seen as attacks against the democratic institutions of Kosovo. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, also condemned the attack on the elected leader of Kosovo at such a

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<sup>2</sup> US State Department press release, “U.S. Welcomes Decision by Kosovo Prime Minister to Resign”, 8 March 2005, at: [http://www.usembassy.it/file2005\\_03/alia/a5030803.htm](http://www.usembassy.it/file2005_03/alia/a5030803.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> US State Dept press release on this incident (“U.S., International Groups Condemn Attack on Kosovo Leader”) available at: <http://belgrade.usembassy.gov/current/050316a.html>

sensitive time of the entity's development. This violent act can be seen as a message from extremist elements in Kosovo to Rugova to be careful in his talks with the EU high representative ahead of the international review of Kosovo's progress towards the UN Standards for Kosovo – a review that is expected to precede talks on the future status of the province. The Albanian National Army (ANA) has been accused of organizing the attack. (4) On 17 March, Serbia's Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica said on the occasion of the first anniversary of the anti-Serb riots in Kosovo that the minority Serb community was still not protected in the province. According to Kostunica, no talks can be held about the future of Kosovo until all 200'000 Serbian refugees have returned to their homes. Many of the displaced Serbs would not return to Kosovo if that would mean living in an entity decisively dominated by Albanians – a likely scenario if Kosovo becomes independent. Serbian President Boris Tadic believes that Kosovo will inevitably become autonomous, or win even more than autonomy status, but less than independence. Ideas of partitioning the province have also been discussed in leading Serbian circles in Belgrade. (5) On 21 March, the president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, nominated Bajram Kosumi to be the next prime minister after the resignation of former UCK leader Ramush Haradinaj and his surrender to the ICTY authorities in The Hague. The parliament in Pristina approved the nomination of 45 year-old Kosumi. Unlike other former UCK leaders who are now in high domestic political positions in Kosovo, he has no war experience.

**c. Bosnia and Herzegovina.** (1) The country is on the eve of its third attempt to meet NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) requirements. NATO will again consider Bosnia and Herzegovina's application in April. If rejected for the third time, Bosnia will have to scrap its bid for NATO membership for the time being. The EU's conditions for starting Association and Stabilization Agreement negotiations are similar. That is why the Bosnian Serb authorities have initiated a campaign for the arrest of war crimes suspects wanted by the UN ICTY in The Hague. The problem is that the ICTY cannot wait forever for the war criminals to be handed over. Accused war criminals Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic are still considered national heroes by many Serbs. (2) On 29 March, the high representative of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paddy Ashdown, sacked one of the members of the tripartite Presidency, the Croat Dragan



Covic, over corruption charges. The Bosnian prosecution had charged Covic and other Bosnian Croat officials and businessmen with different crimes in March this year, including customs evasion, abuse of office, and corruption. The crimes were allegedly committed by Covic in the period 2000-2003 when he was the country's finance minister. Covic received open support from officials in Zagreb. Croat officials called for limiting the power of the high representative.

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

**1. Albania.** The principal political parties of Albania reached an agreement on 28 February on redrawing the country's 100 electoral districts. The representatives of the OSCE and the Council of Europe in Tirana welcomed the agreement. The OSCE Presence had mediated in the last phase of the talks trying to achieve a consensus solution. The political parties in Albania have long delayed a decision on this issue.

**2. Serbia and Montenegro.** On 7 March, the former chief of the Yugoslav General Staff, General Momcilo Perisic, voluntarily surrendered to the authorities in The Hague. He is expected to be charged with crimes committed in the period 1993-1995 in Croatia and Bosnia.

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

#### **1. Bilateral Relations.**

**a. Macedonia-Bulgaria.** On 10 March, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov visited Skopje and met with his Macedonian counterpart Branko Crvenkovski. The Bulgarian president opened a Bulgarian Cultural Center – one month after the parliament in Skopje had ratified an older bilateral agreement on establishing cultural centers in the respective neighboring countries. A similar centre will be reciprocally opened in Sofia in May.

**b. Greece-Macedonia.** On 14 March, Greek air traffic controllers refused the airplane of Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski permission to cross Greek airspace. The Macedonian prime minister was traveling to Turkey, but due to the markings on the airplane (the

abbreviation of 'Macedonian Air Transport', MAT), the Greek officials declined the request for free passage through Greek airspace. Greece recognizes its northwestern neighbor as 'The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' (FYRO Macedonia).

**c. Bulgaria-Romania.** (1) At the end of March, Romanian Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu visited Bulgaria and met with his Bulgarian counterpart, Defense Minister Nikolai Svinarov. The two ministers discussed the security of the US military bases that will be established on the territories of the two countries by the end of the year. (2) On 31 March, the prime ministers of the two countries, Simeon Coburgotski and Kalin Taricanu, met briefly in Sofia. They discussed bilateral relations ahead of the upcoming accession to the EU and agreed to mutually treat the citizens of their countries as EU citizens until the final ratification of the accession treaties, when this rule would be confirmed by the acting EU acquis.

## **2. Regional Cooperation: a Regional Summit in Skopje**

A regional summit was convened on 11 March in Skopje in the context of the Regional Process of Stability and Cooperation in Southeastern Europe and the EU-led Stability Pact for the area. Ideas discussed included a free trade zone in the Balkans; giving higher priority to infrastructure projects; building a regional energy market; and scientific and technological exchange in the region.

## **V. The Process of Differentiated Integration of Southeastern Europe in EU and NATO**

### **1. EU**

**a. EU-Croatia.** On 10 March, the EU censured Croatia for failing to arrest General Ante Gotovina, who is wanted by the ICTY in The Hague. On 16 March, the EU foreign ministers decided to postpone the start of accession negotiations with Croatia. Gotovina is accused by the ICTY of having committed atrocities against Serb civilians in 1995 when the Croatian army recaptured territory that had been seized by Croatian Serbs. Some 150 Serb civilians were killed and 150'000 expelled. The accession talks were to have begun on 17 March if the Croatian government had been able to convince the ICTY chief prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, that it was cooperating sincerely with the tribunal. On 9 March, Del Ponte told the EU that Zagreb had not fully cooperated.

The Croatian leaders did not hide their disappointment. Still, the fact that this perceived 'war hero' is still at large continues to be an obstacle for the progress of the country towards EU membership.

The US government sided with the EU authorities. On 10 March its representatives stated that continuing Croatian cooperation with the ICTY was vital, in particular the need to locate and arrest fugitive General Gotovina. The only way to demonstrate Croatia's intention to follow through on this issue would be "actually turning him over to the ICTY", US diplomat Bruce Connuck told the OSCE on 10 March.<sup>5</sup>

The EU's foreign ministers assured Croatia that accession talks could be started later this year. The decision for the start of the negotiations could be taken immediately after the war crimes suspect had been handed over to the ICTY, they said.

**b. EU-Bulgaria.** (1) On 18 March, EU Commissioner on Enlargement Olli Rehn visited Sofia. He spoke to the Bulgarian parliament and clearly warned the MPs that the EU would trigger the "safety clause" and postpone the country's membership unless Bulgaria implemented necessary judicial reforms. (2) On 30 March, the EU Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee reported to the plenary session that Bulgaria was ready to join the EU as a full member. According to the rapporteur, Jeffrey van Orden, Sofia has met the required political and economic requirements. The report, however, insists on further continuation of the reform in the judicial system as a key indicator of the country's readiness to join the EU. Bulgaria and Romania are expected to sign the EU Accession Treaty on 25 April and to join the EU on 1 January 2007 after completing the required reforms.

## **2. NATO**

### **a. Proposal for a NATO Fund for International Missions**

The Bulgarian and Latvian presidents, Georgi Parvanov and Vaira Vike-Freiberga, agreed on 21 March in Riga that NATO needed a joint fund to support alliance members taking part in international missions. NATO out-of-area missions would mean a long-term engagement for the member states, and the two countries will elaborate a more detailed position after consultations between the respective Ministries of Defense.

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<sup>5</sup> US State Dept press release, "Croatian Cooperation on War Crimes Tribunal Is Vital, U.S. Says", at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Mar/16-864436.html>

### **b. First Anniversary of NATO Membership**

On 29 March 2004, seven countries in Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe became NATO members. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer acknowledged the contribution that these countries had made to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region. The seven countries – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria – are now fully integrated into the alliance.

## **VI. The Influence of Other External Factors on the Region: National Great Powers and International Institutions – US**

**1. US-Bulgaria.** (1) On 10 March, General James Jones, NATO SACEUR and commander-in-chief of the US forces in Europe, told US Congress that the US was ready to start negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania over stationing US troops in military bases there. The US brigade would number 3'000-5'000 soldiers plus additional logistics forces. The US personnel would use ports, airfields, and buildings. Jones said he did not expect problems during the negotiations. On 14 March, Bulgarian Defense Minister Nikolai Svinarov visited Washington, DC for pre-negotiation talks on the issue of the military bases. (2) In mid-March, the chief secretary of the Bulgarian Interior Ministry, Lieutenant-General Boyko Borisov visited the US. During his 10-day visit he met with US intelligence and security leaders – including FBI Director Robert Muller, US Under Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security Joseph Morton, Deputy Director of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Michael Brown, and others. A high level of trust and cooperation has reportedly been established between Bulgarian and US security professionals. (3) On 23-29 March, Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy visited the US and met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other US government officials. Among the issues discussed during the visit were Bulgaria's military participation in the occupation of Iraq, visa issues, and the coordination of diplomatic efforts between the two countries and the EU for the release of the Bulgarian doctors arrested in Libya, among others. (4) US Under Secretary of State Robert Zoellick visited Sofia from 30-31 March. He met with the president, the prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, and other officials. The two sides discussed a broad spectrum of bilateral and international issues.

**2. US-Turkey.** Criticism of the US has gathered momentum in Turkey since the US invasion of Iraq, and because the new status of the Kurds in Northern Iraq and other changes in Iraq have complicated the Kurdish issue from a Turkish perspective. The arrest of Turkish Special Forces soldiers in Northern Iraq by US troops added to the tension. Political rhetoric by US officials directed against the government of Syria met with waves of indignation and public criticism in Turkey, historically a close US ally. The US Ambassador to Turkey, Erik Edelman, resigned on 21 March after months of sustained criticism from the Turkish press . US officials have publicly attempted to link the flourishing of the Iraqi insurgency with Turkey’s refusal to allow US forces to invade Iraq from the north in the spring of 2003.

**3. US-Greece.** US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Greek Foreign Minister Petros Molyviatis on 24 March in Washington, DC. They discussed Balkan issues, particularly Kosovo, the Mediterranean, and Cyprus. Rice described Kosovo as an area that was ripe for cooperation between Greece and the US as well as other members of NATO. The Greek foreign minister shared the contribution Greece could make in the efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and to provide support for the Iraqi people and their newly elected transitional government. Condoleezza Rice said bilateral relations with Greece were ‘outstanding’.

## VII. Conclusions

The Balkan region again showed signs in March of improving stability, and hinted at the ability to export stability elsewhere. These trends may be significant in the short- to mid-term.

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