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

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I. Introduction

EU-US relations continue to have a powerful positive impact on the progress of the security situation and the process of Europeanization in the Balkans. On 6 April, Nicholas Burns, the new US under secretary of state, outlined the US view on the Transatlantic agenda at Chatham House in London in his first major policy speech after leaving his post of US Ambassador to NATO. The bottom line of the new US position was that partnership with Europe provided greater success than was possible to achieve without it. NATO continued to be the most important "Transatlantic bridge", Burns said. The preparedness of the alliance to meet the new challenges of extremist violence, weapons proliferation, and difficult peacekeeping missions "far from NATO's home in Europe" was a major US focus.¹ Burns said US-European cooperation was crucial for UN reform, including restructuring the UN Security Council, and for creating a Peace-Building Commission aimed to improve the UN's post-conflict peace-building capabilities. Another pressing challenge for US-EU relations was the stated goal of helping the people of the Middle East to achieve peace, freedom, and prosperity. Iraq remained a central US concern, and Burns asked rhetorically whether it was not for the European states to "opt in" to help the Iraqi government and contribute troops and funds to "keep the peace in Baghdad". Another joint US-European concern was reversing Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Burns named 'peace and stability in the Balkans' as a further important goal of joint EU-US diplomatic efforts, as well as improving relations with Russia, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Asia and Africa.

Students of Balkan security and region-building issues noted that the problems of Southeastern Europe were no longer among the highest priorities of the EU or the US, but were included among future joint tasks. After the first two waves of application of the 'differentiated accession' approach to the EU and NATO enlargement, new steps and practical formulae are to be applied to both complete the 'unfinished business' in the Western Balkans and to further 'Europeanize' the region by bringing in more and new members in the EU and NATO.

Bulgaria and Romania signed their EU accession treaties on 25 April. After more than a year in which the individual EU members are expected to ratify the accession, the two Balkan states would fill the geopolitical gap between Hungary and Greece and

¹ For the US State Department summary of Burns' remarks, cited here, see: <http://chennai.usconsulate.gov/wwwhpr050411.html>

further solidify the 'arc of stability' in Southeastern Europe beginning on 1 January 2007. A new dynamism is expected in the EU and NATO accession processes in the months to come, with the final goal of integrating the whole region into NATO and the EU.

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

1. Extremism and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (PCR) in Iraq and Afghanistan

a. Extremism

1) UN on Extremism.² On 13 April, the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus the text of the International Treaty for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, which makes it a crime for terrorists to possess or threaten to use nuclear weapons. The Treaty will be open for signature on 14 September and will go into effect after 22 nations have ratified it. The convention will provide a legal basis for international cooperation in the investigation, prosecution, and extradition of those who commit terrorist acts involving radioactive material or a nuclear device. The Treaty is a serious signal the international community will not tolerate those who threaten to commit terrorist acts involving radioactive material or nuclear devices. The Treaty is the first counter-terrorism convention adopted by the UN General Assembly since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. It also strengthens the legal framework, consisting of 12 conventions and protocols, of fighting terrorism. States that are parties to the Treaty are required to change their national laws to make those acts punishable by appropriate penalties, which take into account the grave nature of such offences. The adoption of the Treaty meant also that such terrorist acts could not be justified by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, religious or other similar nature. According to the Treaty in the aftermath of an event the radioactive material is to be handled in accordance with the IAEA safeguards. The drafting of the Treaty began in 1996 at the initiative of Russia.

2) Germany. On 14 April, the German police started a nation-wide operation against Islamic extremists. The police searched 30 living compounds, offices, and mosques in an operation against extremists suspected of money laundering and tax evasion. The Munich prosecution gave the order for the police operation.

² The following section is based on a 13 April 2005 article by Washington File UN Correspondent Judy Aita. The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. See: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/terror558.html>

3) Bulgaria. A conference on “Regional Police Cooperation in the Environment of Globalization of Terrorism” was convened on 14 April in Sofia. Apart from Balkan participants, representatives of the US FBI, the Secret Service, and other security agencies took part in the forum. The conference agreed that Muslim extremism and the high level of organized crime in the Balkans contributed to a favorable environment for the formation of local terrorist cells.

4) Romania. On 22 April, the kidnapers who had taken three Romania journalists as hostages on 28 March threatened to kill them unless the Romanian government pulled out its troops from Iraq within four days. The alleged Iraqi militant group “The Squadrons of Muad bin Djebel”, which reportedly was holding the journalists, called on the Romanian people to exert pressure on the government for withdrawing the country’s contingent of 800 soldiers from Iraq.

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

1) Assessment of the State of Iraqi Security Forces. The Multinational Force for Iraq issued a report on 11 April concerning the situation in Iraq and the state of the country’s security forces. In less than a year³, the Iraqi regular army has developed from one battalion to a force comprising 27 operational battalions. Together with the Intervention Force and the National Guard it has a total number of 80 combat battalions. The Iraqi Navy became operational with 100-foot patrol craft, 34 small vessels and a naval infantry regiment recently completing training. Iraq’s Air Force has three operational squadrons and one additional squadron was established in early February. They have nine reconnaissance aircraft, a helicopter squadron, and three C-130 transport aircraft. Iraq’s Special Operations Forces now include a superb Counter-terrorist Forces and a Commando Battalion, each of which has conducted dozens of successful operations. Iraq’s 1st Mechanized Battalion became operational in mid-January, along with a tank company and a transportation battalion. Iraq’s two Military Academies reopened in October 2004 and each graduated a pilot course of new lieutenants – 91 total, in early January. The Iraqi Police Service has over 55,000 trained and equipped police officers. Since last summer 29,000 new police officers have been trained. 12,000 of them were from the former police who underwent 3-week transition course training. More than 35,000 additional police are on duty and

³ The following section quotes from a fact sheet issued by the US delegation to the UN on 11 April 2005 regarding the state of Iraqi security forces: Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, at: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/iraq171.html>

scheduled for training. Five basic police academies are operational, producing every two months 3,500 new police officers. Several other regional academies are under construction. There is one Mechanized Police Brigade with fifty BTR-94 wheeled armored vehicles. One additional Mechanized Police battalion is in training. 9 Police Commando battalions are operational. Three more will start working soon. Iraq's National Police Emergency Response Unit is now operational and it has conducted operations in Baghdad, Falluja, and Mosul. Iraq's First Special Border Force Battalion is operating on the Syrian border in Western Anbar Province. Two others have recently completed their training and are also deployed.

The number of Iraq's security forces in April already surpassed the number of US forces in Iraq.

Iraq must not lose its political momentum in drafting the constitution and carrying out the next round of democratic elections. The goal of the occupation forces remains the transfer of full responsibility for the security of Iraq to the Iraqi security forces.

2) Bulgaria. On 21 April, the Iraqi 'Islamic Army of Iraq' claimed responsibility for the downing of a helicopter with 11 people on board with a Russian-made 'Strela' missile 30 kilometers north of Baghdad in the direction of Tikrit. All on board were killed, including the three Bulgarian pilots of the Mi-8 helicopter – Lyubomir Kostov (43), Georgy Naidenov (50), and Stoyan Anchev (50). With these casualties, the number of Bulgarian soldiers and civilians killed in Iraq since 2003 reached 14.

c. PCR in Afghanistan. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Qalat and Kandahar in Afghanistan on 13 April.⁴ The security situation in the troubled Southeastern region was improving. US forces were training Afghan troops and helping in the reconstruction efforts and civil affairs projects in an area near the Pakistan border. Drugs trafficking remained a major problem. During the visit Afghan President Hamid Karzai pressed for a formal, long-term security partnership with the United States. The Afghan President pointed to the link between the growing stability and the economic reconstruction and the strengthening of the country's administration. Security strategic relationship and a sustainable economic relationship, and political relationship were indispensable for Afghanistan to defend itself and continue its progress.

2. Post-Conflict Developments in the Western Balkans

⁴ The following section is based on a press release from the website of US embassy in the UK, at: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/afghn137.html>

a. Macedonia. In an effort to achieve a breakthrough in the issue of the official name of Macedonia, and to resolve an issue that constitutes a major tension in the bilateral Greek-Macedonian relations, the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for the solution of the bilateral dispute, Mathew Nimitz, suggested a compromise with the support of the US and the EU: "The Republic of Macedonia – Skopje". While Greece was ready to accept this proposal, Macedonia flatly rejected it, insisting on using its constitutional name: 'The Republic of Macedonia'. The US, Russia, and China have recognized the constitutional name of the republic. Bulgaria was the first to recognize the new state under its constitutional name in January 1992.

b. Kosovo. On 12 April, NATO sources confirmed that Kosovo remained the main NATO mission in the Western Balkans with more than 17,000 troops. A formula of "rationalization and regionalization" was under discussion in Brussels. Its aim would be to reduce troops in the region while providing efficient security guarantees. Discussions on Kosovo took on a concrete shape this month due to the upcoming review of how UN standards have been met to approach a longer-term solution about the status of the province. What has become clearer to analysts and decision-makers was that the pre-1999 status was impossible; that full independence of Kosovo is not realistic for now; that 'stabilization' is contingent on the level of readiness of the province, its people, and its government to exist in a multilateral formal context (UN and EU) while gradually turning into an integral component of an enlarging EU. The presence of KFOR in Kosovo would be continued proportionally to such readiness. Events such as the killing of the brother of former Kosovo prime minister Ramush Haradinaj on 15 April in the western part of the province are not contributing to hastening the day of the province's autonomy. Observers and analysts believe this act was aimed at creating tensions and complicating the solution of the 'status' issue. Criminal groups among the Albanians and Serbian extremists all over the broader Western Balkan region are still interested in maintaining a tense situation in Kosovo.

c. Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 19 April, ISN Security Watch reported in detail about an incident involving the first contingent of Bosnian-Serb army recruits who were required to swear loyalty to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and who refused demonstratively to do so, while insulting the national anthem, at the swearing-in ceremony on 17 April.⁵ The recruits only swore loyalty to Republika Srpska. Friends

⁵ <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=11128>

and relatives applauded this violation of the Federation's laws. The defense minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina ordered full investigation of the incident and promised measures against the organizers. The incident was, most probably, well-prepared in order to send the signal that the unification into one federal army was not possible – a major indication that the processes of separation of Republika Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina were not speculative. Reconciliation has not yet gained solid roots in Bosnian society, and a future for the country within NATO and the EU may be postponed indefinitely. Republika Srpska and its leaders could potentially become a highly isolated entity within an increasingly united Europe. It is worth mentioning that the developments in Republika Srpska continue to reflect developments in Serbia, where the level of cooperation with the ICTY is deficient, and where political, judicial, and police reforms remain to be implemented.

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

Bulgaria. Opinion polls taken less than two months before the regular parliamentary elections showed that the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the main opposition party, was ahead, with prospects of election results that would give it the opportunity to shape a coalition government with a centrist liberal party – the National Movement Simeon the Second (NMSS) and/or the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). There are chances of an absolute BSP majority, but the leadership of the party would prefer a coalition government even under that scenario for the election results. The NMSS has been the only ruling party in Bulgaria for the last 15 years, and gained in popularity in the last months of its government – however, not to such an extent that would allow it to be winner in the upcoming elections. There are expectations that the fragmented right-wing opposition parties may be able to improve their election performance, but the NMSS could use its popularity after signing the Accession Treaty to the EU on 25 April this year and the integration of the country into NATO in March 2004 to attract votes from the right-leaning electorate.

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

Bilateral Relations

1. Bulgaria-Serbia and Montenegro. (1) Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov visited Serbia and Montenegro from 5-6 April and met with Serbian President Boris Tadic, as well as President Philip Vujanovic and Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic of Montenegro. The Bulgarian and Montenegrin interior ministers, Georgi Petkanov and

Dragan Jurovic, signed an agreement for cooperation in the fight against terrorism, organized crime, illegal drugs trafficking, illegal migration, and other crimes. The three presidents confirmed the spirit of solidarity in relations between their countries.

(2) Serbian President Boris Tadic visited Sofia on 7 April and met with Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov. The Serbian president thanked him for Bulgaria's assistance in reforming the Serbian defense establishment and in the preparation of the country for joining NATO's PfP program. The upcoming start of negotiations of Serbia and Montenegro with the EU on signing a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) would give an additional opportunity for fruitful cooperation in preparing Belgrade and Podgorica for future EU membership. The two presidents planned a few more bilateral meetings by the end of 2005.

2. Greece-Bulgaria. On 11 April the presidents of Greece and Bulgaria, Karolos Papoulias and Georgi Parvanov, met in Thessaloniki, in northern Greece. They confirmed the long-term and traditionally cordial friendship between the two countries and encouraged the ongoing bilateral economic and infrastructure projects. The Bulgarian guest expressed his hope that the Greek parliament would ratify the Accession Treaty of Bulgaria to the EU with priority and on an expedient basis.

3. Macedonia-Bulgaria. (1) On 19 April, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport Nikolai Vassilev visited Skopje and met with Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski and President Branko Crvenkovski. The leaders of the two countries discussed opportunities of increasing Bulgarian investments in the economy of the neighboring state, especially tourism. The main reason why bilateral trade between the two countries remains at an inadequate level of only US\$300 million in 2004 is the neglected railroad infrastructure between the two countries. (2) On 27 April, Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski visited Bulgaria and met with Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov. The two leaders discussed issues of bilateral cooperation on Macedonia's path to EU membership. Bulgaria is very much studied as a model-case for Macedonia in its preparation for membership in the EU. The two presidents opened a Macedonian Cultural Center in downtown Sofia.

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

1. Bulgaria – Serbia and Montenegro. On 8 April, the ministers of energy of Bulgaria and of Serbia and Montenegro, Miroslav Sevlievsky and Radomir Naumov, signed a joint governmental memorandum of understanding on the project of building

a gas pipeline between the town of Dupnitsa (in Bulgaria) and the Serbian towns of Dimitrovgrad and Nis. It will be 250km long (105km of which will traverse Bulgarian territory). In five years, the pipeline may be functional. Serbia, however, needs to settle old debts with the Russian giant Gazprom before embarking on the new project.

2. USTDA-Romania. The US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) announced on 11 April its support for projects totaling US\$419,953 aimed at increasing information technology capabilities in Romania, mainly the “transparency and efficiency of the national government”, according to USTDA Director Thelma J. Askey⁶. USTDA awarded for another project US\$173,987 grant to the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Rural Development. Its aim would be to develop modern national forestry and agriculture cadastre systems, utilizing the same Geographic Information System (GIS) technology for each cadastre. “The deployment of cadastre systems is essential in the Romanian Government’s efforts to rehabilitate irrigation systems; monitor and control contaminated soils, elaborate on soil protection policies, and manage and conserve forests,” the USTDA statement concludes.⁷

3. Russia-Bulgaria-Greece. Russian Minister of Industry and Energy Viktor Hristenko, Bulgarian Minister of Construction and Regional Development Valentin Tserovsky, and Greek Minister of Development Dimitrios Siuphas signed a memorandum in Sofia on 12 April and declared the political support for the project of constructing an oil pipeline from Burgas on the Bulgarian Black Sea shore to Alexandroupolis on the Greek Aegean coast. The aim of the project is to by-pass the Bosphorus straits for the transportation of oil to the world markets. The annual capacity would be 35 million tons of oil and it could reach 50 million tons. The cost of the project is US\$700 million. It will be covered by private investments. In late 2004, the governments of Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria signed a similar document for the construction of an oil pipeline connecting Burgas (Bulgaria), Skopje (Macedonia), and Vlora (Albania).

4. USTDA – Bulgaria. On 15 April, “the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) awarded a \$291,340 grant to the Bulgarian State Agency Civil Protection to fund a feasibility study on the establishment of an integrated emergency management

⁶ USTDA press release from US State Department, <http://usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2005/Apr/11-367414.html>

⁷ Ibid.

system (IEMS) in Bulgaria. The grant responds to the dedication of the Bulgarian Government to improving its ability to coordinate emergency response activities at the local, regional, and national levels.”⁸ “As Bulgaria plans to join the EU it is imperative for the country to be able to handle man-made and natural disasters in a timely manner and to coordinate its response with neighbouring countries,” the press release concludes.⁹

5. Macedonia-Bulgaria-Albania. On 18 April, Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Nikolay Vassilev and Macedonian Minister of Transport and Communication Dzemali Mehasi agreed on establishing a direct airline link between Sofia and Skopje, with an extension to Tirana. The flights will be initially twice a week, but will gradually grow in number.

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

1. EU-Serbia and Montenegro. On 12 April, the European Commission (EC) agreed to launch Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro, in a first significant step on the road to EU membership. The EC believes that Serbia and Montenegro have made sufficient progress in reforming along EU standards to start SAA talks. Serbia and Montenegro still has a long way to go before implementing all the required EU legislation, which could take years. The EC hopes to win the approval of the EU Parliament, so that talks could start in December this year. Brussels is hopeful that Belgrade will embark upon more effective cooperation with the ICTY in The Hague before the negotiations start.

2. EU – Bulgaria, Romania. (1) The EU Parliament recommended on 13 April to the governments of the member states that Bulgaria and Romania be allowed to join the EU in 2007. This was the last formal step before the leaders of the two Southeastern European countries signed their EU Accession Treaties on 25 April in Luxembourg, which was at the time holding the rotating EU Presidency. The resolution of the Parliament indicated the amount of effort required of the two states to get ready for effective membership, mainly by completing the reform of their judicial systems. Between 25 April 2005 and 1 January 2007, all parliaments of the EU member states

⁸ USTDA press release, posted by the US embassy in Bulgaria:
http://www.usembassy.bg/embassy/ustda_05.html

⁹ Ibid.

are expected to ratify the respective Accession Treaties. That period will also be their last opportunity to complete the remaining portion of the reforms. (2) The Slovenian Parliament on 22 April approved the planned accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU on 1 January 2007. This procedure was implemented ahead of the signing of the Accession Treaties of the two Balkan states on 25 April in Luxembourg. The Slovenian members of parliament underlined how important the integration of the two countries would be for the stability and the progress of the whole Balkan region. (3) The presidents and the prime ministers of Bulgaria and Romania signed the Accession Treaties of their countries to the EU on 25 April in Luxembourg. Official representatives of each of the 25 EU member states signed the treaties. Much work remains to be done, and it is hoped that it will be finished by 1 January 2007. There were various celebrations of this occasion in Bulgaria and Romania.

3. EU Enlargement in Southeastern Europe: Analysis. The signing of Accession Treaties with Bulgaria and Romania, the decision of the EC to launch talks on a Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia and Montenegro by the end of the year, the postponement of Croatia's accession negotiations last month, and Turkey's preparations to start accession talks with the EU in October this year are all clear and strong signals indicating the EU's firm determination to involve all of the Balkans countries in the process of European integration. There were clear warnings to the forerunners Bulgaria and Romania that their applications would falter halfway unless the two countries completed their administrative and judicial reforms. Croatia has already received a warning that Zagreb needs to deliver on a series of issues before embarking on a course towards accession negotiations and to come to terms with the war past of the 1990s. Both Serbia and Montenegro and Turkey should expect similarly intensive treatment, which originates in the determination of Brussels to integrate these countries in the EU too. There are reasons to expect better performances by the Balkan countries, where the process of modernization has been delayed for reasons that have to do with the societies, economies, and state institutions in the region, and with the expectations of the citizens of the present 25 EU nations. The leaders of the societies and states of the Balkan countries have a good understanding of the legitimate concerns of the citizens of the EU. The leaders of Bulgaria and Romania have mobilized the societies and institutions of their respective countries in a purposeful effort to improve the quality of the states that are to join the EU. Similar motivations and processes are developing in the societies and institutions

of Croatia, Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course, the level of preparedness for the decisive step of formal membership is different in the individual countries.

As European integration is an interactive process, the way it is viewed by the individual EU members is monitored very carefully and sensitively by the would-be members from the Balkans. The referenda on the EU Constitution, as well as debates and public opinion in the 25 EU member states are carefully followed and discussed. The hope of the staunchest supporters of EU integration and enlargement from the Balkans is that each of the 25 members and the citizens of the respective countries would be responsible enough to understand that the evolving history of the continent is in their hands, and would know how to deal with it.

VII. Conclusions

April was a very significant month for the EU destiny of the Balkans. Stabilization, democratization, and development continued to have an equally significant impact on the success of the enlargement of the EU to include Southeastern Europe.

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