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

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I. Introduction

During the past month, four priority issues have come to the fore in the Balkans: First, the ongoing struggle against terrorism, which requires continuous education on the topic and international cooperation of unprecedented proportions. The US State Department Annual Report on Terrorism (2004) and the Council of Europe (EU) Convention on Terrorism, which was proposed for signature this month, confirmed the urgency of the issue for Bulgaria (in a tragic way) and for Romania (with a more positive outcome).

Second, the pending issue of Kosovo reminds the regional and the broader international community that much remains to be achieved in the Western Balkans. The discussion centers on the UN standards that have not yet been fulfilled by the Kosovar Albanians, and on the expected future status for Kosovo. An agreement between Belgrade and Pristina is expected to make the work of the international community easier.

Third, the possibility of the Balkans countries joining NATO and the EU is a challenge for those institutions as well. EU-US cooperation on the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Balkans is the factual driving political force behind the historic changes in Southeastern Europe over the last decade, and it is hoped that the Transatlantic cooperation will contribute to an eventual successful conclusion of these processes. Fourth, Balkan states and politicians have become strongly involved in the EU and NATO with the support of the US.

Issues remain in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina that have sufficient potential to destabilize, the processes of modernization and Euro-Atlantic integration of the whole region, albeit temporarily and on a limited scale.

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

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

a. Political Violence

1) US State Department Report on Terrorism. The US Department of State on 27 April released its Country Reports on Terrorism 2004. The report states that the struggle against political violence movements remains formidable, despite improved domestic security measures, the military invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and deepening counter-terrorism cooperation. According to the Country

Reports “the slaughter of hundreds of innocents in the Beslan school, in the commuter trains in Madrid, on a Philippines ferry, and in a Sinai resort proved again that the struggle against terrorism is far from over. Over the long run, the spread of democracy and economic and social reform, sustained and encouraged by the United States and others, should promote political, economic and social conditions inhospitable to terrorist exploitation. For now, however, the tasks confronting the United States and its partners in the struggle against terrorism remain formidable.”¹

2) The Council of Europe (CE) on Terrorism. The process of signing the Convention for Fighting Terrorism began on 16 May in Warsaw at the Summit meeting of the CE. Recruitment and training of suicide terrorists and instigation of extremism would be qualified as crimes by the Convention. Out of 46 member countries, 21 signed the Convention in Warsaw, and it was expected that many others would join the document soon after implementing the required national legal procedures. The Convention for Fighting Terrorism includes a clause for the protection and compensation of the victims of terrorist acts.

b. PCR in Iraq

1) Bulgaria. Ten Bulgarian members of the occupation force have lost their lives in Iraq. On 5 May, the Bulgarian parliament decided to reduce the country’s troops in Iraq from 500 to 400 soldiers. The mandate of the contingent was prolonged till 31 December 2005. After that deadline, Bulgarian officials will consult with the allies in the ‘coalition of the willing’ as to the format of furthering the participation in the reconstruction of Iraq. On 6 May, the US State Department stated that Bulgaria was a staunch supporter of the US occupation of Iraq.

2) Romania. On 22 May, Romanian officials announced that the three Romanian journalists kidnapped by Iraqi terrorists on 28 March this year had been released. They returned to Bucharest on a Romanian military plane on 23 May. The fourth kidnapped person – a US citizen of Iraqi origin who had organized the Romanian journalists’ trip, has also been freed, but remained in Baghdad for interrogation by the US and Iraqi authorities. Romanian officials denied that a ransom had been paid to the kidnapers, claiming that Romanian Muslims and a Saudi Arabian religious authority had lobbied for the release of the journalists. However, there have been reports in the

¹ <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/45425.htm>

Romanian media of that an unknown amount of cash was paid for the release of the journalists.

c. PCR in Afghanistan: Bulgaria. On 12 May, Bulgarian military officials announced that Bulgaria would take on new responsibilities in Afghanistan as part of the NATO operation in 2006. Bulgaria will be the 'lead nation' charged with the protection of the Kabul airport for four months. Around 60 to 70 Bulgarian experts will be responsible for the command, oversight, and control of the airport and air traffic. Other duties, mainly force protection by about 300 soldiers, will most probably be shared by other NATO nations, with an eventual Bulgarian participation.

2. Post-Conflict Developments in the Western Balkans: Kosovo

Kosovo is among the top issues on the international agenda of 2005. The review of the implementation of the UN standards will lead to a consideration of the status of the entity. On 20 May, the president of Serbia, Boris Tadic, turned down a proposal to meet the president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova, in a third European country, as this could be interpreted as indirect international legal recognition of the 'state status' of this Serbian province. Daniel Serwer, a senior expert at the US Institute of Peace (USIP), testified on 18 May before the US House of Representatives Committee of International Relations on the topic of "Kosovo – Current and Future Status" (see in more details:

http://www.usip.org/aboutus/congress/testimony/2005/0518_serwer.html).

Ambassador Serwer underlined that while the final status of Kosovo – membership in the EU – was relatively clear, the issue is "how it will get there" and "whether or not it will get there in one piece, or in two."

The speed with which the Kosovar Albanians can realize, accept, and assimilate the UN standards for Kosovo is, unfortunately, incompatible with the faster rate of EU enlargement. There remains a risk not just that the province could disintegrate into two pieces, but also that the entity's progress could be stunted and its people disadvantaged due to the late EU accession. Ethnic tolerance and reconciliation still remain to be learned and practiced by everybody in Kosovo (as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia). On 13 May, Serbian President Boris Tadic told the Bulgarian press that Belgrade's formula for solving the issue remained: "less than independence and more than autonomy". According to him, Serbia is seeking a "European" solution for Kosovo by which the national interests would be protected,

alongside with the protection of the interests of the ethnic Albanians living in the province.

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

Serbia and Montenegro. On 9 May, domestic media quoted the Montenegrin Minister of European Integration and Foreign Economic Relations Gordana Djurovic as saying that the referendum on the independence of Montenegro would be held ahead of the conclusion of the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between Belgrade and the EU. Montenegrin Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic's government hopes to conclude the negotiations for membership in the EU by mid-2006. On 14 March 2002, Serbia and Montenegro agreed formally that they would decide in the spring of 2005 whether to continue their co-existence as a state union or to become two independent states.

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

1. Bilateral Relations.

a. Turkey-Bulgaria. On 3 May, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov visited Ankara and met with Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer. They discussed possibilities for cooperation on Turkey's preparation for EU accession talks. The Bulgarian president said Sofia would be able to provide expert support for Turkey's negotiations with the EU. The two presidents agreed to try to rationalize the formats of the trilateral meetings involving Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey and Greece, respectively, into one quadrilateral meeting. Sezer and Parvanov expressed their approval of the increase in trade between the two countries in 2004 by almost 40 per cent, reaching a total volume of €1.4 billion.

b. Greece- Macedonia. On 4 May, Greek Foreign Minister Petros Moliviatis sent a proposal to Macedonian Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski for reaching an agreement on the name of the country. Greece insists on referring to its neighbor as "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". The latest proposal by Athens was that name preferred by Macedonia – "The Republic of Macedonia" - be written officially in Cyrillic letters. Skopje has not yet responded to the proposal.

c. Macedonia-Bulgaria. The justice ministers of the two countries, Meri Mladenovska-Georgievska and Anton Stankov, met on 16 May in Skopje and concluded a Memorandum of Legal and Judicial Cooperation between the ministries

of the two states. Mladenovska-Georgievska said the Bulgarian experience in adapting the legal and judicial systems to EU membership would be of special significance for Macedonia.

d. Bulgaria-Greece. On 19-20 May, Greek Minister of Public Order Giorgos Vulgarakis visited Sofia and held bilateral talks with Bulgarian Interior Minister Georgi Petkanov and with other officials. The intensive bilateral exchange of the two countries requires a higher level of police support and cooperation. The two ministers discussed a broad package of measures for fighting organized crime. Cooperation in the fight against illegal trafficking of drugs, human beings, and human organs, illegal migration, forgery of travel documents and money as well as in training and exchange of experience and information were among the issues discussed.

e. Bulgaria-Serbia and Montenegro. On 25 May the Bulgarian authorities announced that the first-ever joint military exercise of Bulgarian and Serbian troops would be held on 5-7 July at Slivnitsa, Bulgaria. During the exercise, codenamed 'Partnership and Trust', the troops will train counter-terrorist operations. Two mechanized squads from each side will participate in the exercise. The Serbian soldiers will come unarmed and will be given Bulgarian weapons. The psychological and political significance of this exercise is powerful – 120 years ago, in 1885, the young Bulgarian army of the newly liberated state defeated a Serbian invasion from the west while the Bulgarian forces were defending themselves from Turkey in the southeast of the country. The troops of Austro-Hungary stopped the Bulgarians' march to Belgrade. Ever since, animosity has been kept alive in the recent history of the two countries and the Balkan region. The joint Euro-Atlantic future of the two countries and peoples offers a new perspective for healing the old wounds and stabilizing the center of the peninsula on a long-term basis.

2. Multilateral Relations

a. Macedonia-Bulgaria-Albania. A trilateral meeting of the defense ministers of Macedonia (Yordan Manasievsky), Bulgaria (Nikolai Svinarov), and Albania (Pandeli Maiko) was convened from 17-18 May in Ohrid, Macedonia. The chiefs of the General Staffs of the armed forces of the three countries also participated in the meeting. The meeting of the ministers of defense confirmed Bulgaria's decision to lobby for the memberships of Macedonia and Albania in NATO. There are indications

that Skopje and Tirana might receive an invitation for NATO membership in 2006. The lobbying efforts by Bulgaria will take the form of intensified dialog and cooperation in the military field. The military leaders of the three countries represented at the meeting also discussed ways of strengthening the air defenses of Albania and Macedonia. The defense ministers of Bulgaria and Albania signed a bilateral treaty of military cooperation between their respective ministries.

b. The former Yugoslav republics and their shared gold reserves. It was announced on 9 May that the constituent republics of former Yugoslavia – Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia – had agreed at a meeting in Skopje on how to distribute the gold reserves of the former federation among them. The reserves amount to 8.5 tons of gold (worth US\$110 million) and are deposited in Swiss and French banks. Under the deal, Serbia and Montenegro will receive 35 per cent, Croatia 23 per cent, Slovenia 16 per cent, Bosnia and Herzegovina 15.5 per cent, and Macedonia 7.5 per cent. The initial agreement was reached on 29 June 2001. Other bank deposits will be discussed at later meetings of bank officials of the already independent states. Currency reserves worth US\$500 million have disappeared during the regime of Slobodan Milosevic.

3. Regional Relations

a. South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). A regular summit meeting of the SEECP was convened on 12 May in Bucharest. This is one of the most vibrant bottom-up regional approaches to modernization and progress in Southeastern Europe. The state and government leaders agreed that the various initiatives for the region need better coordination, especially with SEECP and the Pact for Stability of Southeastern Europe. An improved regional infrastructure – transport, energy and telecommunications, was a fundamental prerequisite for the acceleration of the economic progress of the region and the individual countries. The leaders of the Balkan states confirmed this truism of Southeastern European region building-up.

b. SEECP on Cultural Corridors in Southeastern Europe. A meeting of the presidents of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, and Turkey was convened from 20-21 May in Varna, on the Bulgarian Black Sea shore, at the initiative of Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov and with the participation of the General Director of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, as well as the Secretary-General of the CE, Terry Davis, the ministers of culture of the Balkan countries, and other experts. In direct dialog, the leaders of the countries from the

region discussed possibilities of cultural tourism along common Balkan routes. The concepts of 'region building' and of constructing a 'regional security community' in the Balkans, as developed for more than a decade by ISIS, among others, are becoming reality. There are some indications that a turning point may have been reached in regional relations, such as the agreement to embark on joint projects along common 'cultural corridors' covering the historical heritage and territories of different countries. These offer both economic opportunities and chances for psychological healing, including reconciliation and re-consideration of stereotypes and negative images. Such common undertakings constitute a radical break with the past experience of hatred and wars.

V. The Process of Differentiated Integration of Southeastern Europe in EU and NATO: EU–Bulgaria

On 12 May, the Bulgarian parliament officially ratified the Accession Treaty to the European Union. 231 Members of Parliament (MPs) voted in favor of the ratification, one was against it, and two abstained. Five MPs were absent. The EU memberships of Bulgaria and Romania are critically received in certain EU countries, especially in Germany. The leader of the opposition Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Germany, Angela Merkel, insisted on 2 May that the accession treaty with the two countries would have to be reconsidered. Doubts surrounding the upcoming the referenda results in France and the Netherlands do not promise easy times for the newly acceding EU members Bulgaria and Romania. The entry date on 1 January 2007 has assumed a programmatic meaning for the two states and their economies and societies.

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

1. US-Bulgaria. Bilateral Bulgarian-US talks on the establishment of US military bases on Bulgarian territory were held in Sofia from 16-17 May. The final text of the treaty should be drafted in the first week of June this year. It is expected that the US military bases will be ready by the end of 2005. During the negotiations, Bulgaria confirmed that it would not provide immunity from war crimes prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to US soldiers. Although the US had requested that Sofia pledge not to hand over US soldiers to the ICC, Washington did not insist.

Bulgaria joined the Rome Statute of the ICC in 1998 and ratified it in 2002. At the same time, Bulgaria refused the US request that Sofia sign an exemption from the ICC Statute for US soldiers. Washington subsequently froze its military support for Sofia to the tune of US\$20 million. After Bulgaria joined NATO in 2004, this support was provided again.

2. US-Greece. On 20 May, US President George Bush met with Greek Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis at the White House. The Greek leader said the fact that this was his second meeting with Bush within a year reflected the excellent bilateral relations between the two countries. Bush noted the important strategic partnership of the two states in spreading “freedom and peace”.

3. US-Southeastern Europe. In a programmatic speech on 19 May at the Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington, DC, US Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns outlined the US vision for “a final and decisive international effort to help the people of Southeastern Europe put war behind them forever, find peace, and find a future home in NATO and the European Union”.² Burns said a process would be launched in 2005 to determine the future status of Kosovo. He also discussed the political and economic reform efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as the EU and NATO presence there, and the need to bring the remaining war crimes indictees in the region before the Hague Tribunal.

VII. Conclusions

The promise of the future in the Balkans today cannot be compared to the situation in any other post-conflict rehabilitation situation worldwide. NATO and EU integration would complete the healing process for the last conflicts in the region. The last remaining steps will, however, be the most difficult. Analyzing and assessing the developments in Southeastern Europe remains, for the time being, a question of political responsibility and of the effectiveness of the political effort exerted in the last decade. The lessons learned in the Balkans can help with an understanding of other issues in the Black Sea-Caspian Sea region and the broader Middle East.

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² For Burns’ quote and subsequent remarks, see <http://www.state.gov/p/2005/46548.htm>

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