

CONFRONTING THE FUTURE. THE BALKANS. A SYSTEMATIC, COMPARATIVE RETROSPECTION

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Abstract: The Land of the Southern Slavs situated in the Old Mountains Peninsula has been scarred on several levels. Grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during the 90', have left a daunting bequeathment for this region's future generations. Durable peace and spearhead advancement cannot be achieved if cohesive cooperation is not implemented first. This represents a matter of great importance in a fragmented part of the world, where the new states emerged out of the former Yugoslavia, have encountered numerous hardships in their trials of becoming democratic, sovereign states. After 2000, we have witnessed how the democratic process has recommenced in most of these countries; they have started to rebuild the foundations of their fragile institutions, enhancing therefore, their security and stability. The wars are over but an undercurrent of violence hangs heavy in the air. The region's profile is bleak - a mixture of weak states and international protectorates, where Europe has stationed almost half of its deployable forces. Economic growth in these territories is low or non-existent; unemployment is high; corruption is pervasive; and the public is pessimistic and distrustful towards its nascent democratic institutions.

Furthermore, bringing the perpetrators of war crimes to justice has represented above all, a moral victory and retribution through means of strengthened legal processes.

Firstly, the Balkan burden has accumulated numerous and often oxymoronical connotations, sometimes patronizing, sometimes wistful, but often disparaging. The goal of the international community, of NATO and of the European Union ought to be the stabilization of the region in a way that is self-sustaining and does not require direct intervention by NATO-led forces and international civilian officials. Nowadays, it is widely considered that the issues have been answered and solutions have been given (i.e. the Ahtisaari Plan). Secondly, as Wim van Meurs, senior analyst at the Center for Applied Policy Research, in Munich, theorized, we have to ask the following question: Is the Europeanization of the Balkans, a concrete strategy or just a placebo? Based on the answer and on the numerous EU agendas, the dilemma of conditionality and the strategic deficits of Europe stand out with particular clarity.

Keywords: Balkans, NATO, human security, rule of law mechanisms, organized crime, Balkan integration.

"If the Balkans hadn't existed, they would have been invented."

Count Hermann

Keyserling

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When Dr. Wendy Bracewell, Director of the Centre for South-East European Studies, delivered the final note of the conference on "Balkan Security: Visions of the Future?" which took place at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in 2000, she said "the main aim of that conference was communication" and an audience tired but also stimulated by so much talking readily nodded in agreement¹.

For any project that might stand a chance of being feasible and that might produce the expected results, it is of the most critical importance for the parts to come to a consensus. It has been agreed upon, that matters related to historical correctness have been a can of worms and that, in the 21st century, they represent somewhat an anachronistic concept. This is though, a standard point of view. It is logical, solely based on the damage control dogma and the fault it bears is that one way or another, it ignores the subjects and simplifies the issue. It is time, we put the past away, it is time we learned from the scars and bullet holes, it is time for rest. The only aspect we have to bear in mind is that we must be certain of the newly restored peace foundations. Kosovo has proven to be a considerably complex case-study of conflict resolution that appears to confirm the view that nowadays winning the peace is a much more demanding and multidimensional task than winning the war².

Security is an ambiguous and ambivalent term. It is a common practice to analyze it from political, economical, social and environmental point of views alongside the usual military concerns. Director of the Centre for South-East European Studies, Dr Peter Siani-Davies, at the "Balkan Security: Visions of the Future" Conference, pointed out that thinking of security in such terms does raise particular problems, continuing *not only has the link between the new theoretical modeling and actual security needs on the ground in a specific region, seldom been fully explored but in the process the boundaries of what constitutes a security issue have become blurred, with concepts such as societal and economic security proving elusive to grasp. And if we cannot understand what security is, then, how can we know what measures we need to take to ensure that it is fostered?*³.

Security has been interpreted narrowly for far too long: either as security of territory... or as safeguarding national interests... or as global security from the looming scare of atomic holocaust. Ten years ago to this date, the Global

¹ Conference *Balkan Security: Visions of the Future?* summary, Dr. Wendy Bracewell commentary, at CSEES, UCL, 16 and 17 June 2000, held at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, accessed: November, 23, 2009, at: <http://194.66.92.239/balksec.htm>.

² Ioannis Natsis (2006), *U.N. in Kosovo: 1999-2005 An assessment of international administration* - Postgraduate Notes, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), accessed: November, 18, 2009, p. 45, at: <http://www.eliamep.gr/old-site/eliamep-old/eliamep/www.eliamep.gr/eliamep/files/PNO6.02.pdf>.

³ Conference *Balkan Security: Visions of the Future?* Summary, Dr Peter Siani-Davies address, *ibidem*.

Environmental Change and Human Security⁴ (GECHS)⁵ Science Plan, explained the concept of human security as *something that is achieved when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate, or adapt the threats to their human, environmental, and social rights; have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options; and actively participate in pursuing these options. In other words, human security is a variable condition where people and communities have the capacity to manage stresses to their needs, rights, and values*⁶.

It represents protecting vital freedoms. It means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations, building on their strengths and aspirations. It also means creating systems that give people the building blocks of survival, dignity and livelihood⁷. To do this, it offers two general strategies: protection and empowerment. Protection shields people from dangers. Empowerment enables people to develop their potential and become full participants in decision-making⁸.

⁴ Widespread and pervasive insecurities stemming from diversities such as conflict, poverty, infectious diseases, and human rights violations threaten the survival and dignity of millions of people today. Furthermore, globalization has deeply transformed relationship between and within states. Money, goods, information, and people move fast across and within borders. In response to these challenges, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called upon the world community to advance the twin goals of "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear". As a contribution to this effort, the Commission on Human Security (CHS) was established with the initiative of the Government of Japan.

⁵ Global Environmental Change and Human Security (GECHS) Science Plan: The goal of GECHS is to conduct research into, and promote a recognition of, environmental change as an issue of equity, sustainability, and human security; accessed: November, 20, 2009, at: <http://www.gechs.org/human-security/>.

⁶ *Human Security* definition given at GECHS Science Plan, 1999 is a core project of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP). The main goal of the GECHS project is to advance interdisciplinary, international research and policy efforts in the area of human security and environmental change. The GECHS project promotes collaborative and participatory research, and encourages new methodological approaches.); accessed November 20, 2009, at: <http://www.gechs.org/aviso/07/>.

⁷ Sadako Ogata, Commission's report, Graz, Austria. 8 May 2003: "If security is to be protected, conflict prevented, human rights respected and poverty eradicated, we require urgently a new consensus on security. This is a shared responsibility. Human security provides an impetus for all countries, whether developed or developing, to review existing security, economic, development and social policies. Creating genuine respect for people's safety, livelihood and dignity should be the overall objective of these policies. Equally important is to overcome the existing compartmentalization of policies and programmes along institutional divisions of work – along security, development and assistance lines. This requires a fundamental rethinking of current institutional arrangements and policies. Integration rather than fragmentation should be the catch phrase.", site accessed November, 25, 2009, at: <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/newsandevents/graz.html>

⁸ Report of the UN Commission on Human Security, 2003, accessed November 20, 2009, at: <http://www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/index.html>.

In order to exemplify this, we shall look upon the process of police reform in Serbia. It has registered numerous positive developments, i.e.: the implementation of the fight against organized crime (formal and practice), the Multi-Ethnic Project and the Community Policing Project; the successful process of de-militarization (it is expected that only the ranks will be abrogated); the number of female police officers has rapidly increased and is still on the rise; numerous trainings and courses (aimed to train and specialize officers about specific knowledge) have been organized; the public information program has been improved and adapted to the citizens' needs; the police is better equipped than before with a tendency toward further amelioration. Unfortunately, we can also identify drawbacks and concerns. The legislation process still is in its very beginning; almost nothing of great importance has been achieved (the Organized Crime Law is full of shortcomings, the Criminal Procedure Law has been modified continuously without success); the systems of internal and external control of police (as it is anticipated in the Draft Police Law) do not function properly⁹.

In a strategy paper commissioned for the conference “The Search for Stability in the Balkans,” which took place in Vienna in April 2006, Drs. Iris Kempe and Kurt Klotzle, from the Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research and Analysis, argued that the Balkans region is characterized by numerous common hazards and provocations, including fragile statehood, a shared history of violent conflict, unconsolidated democratization and economic underdevelopment. Given the acute geopolitical position of the region as direct neighbor to the EU, and NATO, instability here can have significant ramifications for domestic, regional, and international security. Therefore external actors have developed different policies for this region¹⁰.

The Western Balkans are on a path toward European integration, even though the plan and timetable are still quite elusive. The European Union has introduced the European Neighborhood Policy as a means to prevent new dividing lines within Europe; the policy is directed toward all non-candidate countries in the Black Sea, although its scope is primarily bilateral rather than regional in nature. Russia, has yet to develop an attractive policy to advocate cooperation in its immediate neighborhood, while it pursues a strategy that combines personalized networks and economic pressure¹¹.

⁹ Dragan Paunovic, *Police Reform in Serbia*, at Academic Network South East Europe, p.86, accessed: November, 20, 2009, at: http://www.akademischesnetzwerk-soe.net/.../Polizei-Workshop_Protokoll_21-7-04.pdf.

¹⁰ Iris Kempe, Kurt Klotzle, *The Balkans and the Black Sea Region: Problems, Potentials, and Policy Options*, Bertelsmann Group for Policy Research, CAP Policy Analysis, p.4, accessed: November, 21, 2009, at: http://www.harvard-bssp.org/static/files/314/balkans_Black%20Sea.pdf.

¹¹ Democratization and Security in Central and Eastern Europe and the Post-Soviet States Conference, October 2009, Panel III: Democracy and Security in the Western Balkans,

Given the internal challenges and external linkages of the Balkans region, strategic trajectories have been conceived. Given the diverse and often taunting interests of the various actors involved, *business as usual* may be the most likely policy outcome. This carries with it numerous risks, however. A more proactive policy that seeks to shape, rather than simply react to, events in the region would involve enhanced engagement, including a clearly formulated plan and timetable for the accession of Western Balkan states into the EU (i.e. European Neighborhood Policy)¹². It is tantalizing to ponder upon the idea of integration of all states of the region in NATO, and preferably in the European Union as well as the key to lasting stability in the Western Balkans. Indeed, in their quest for stability and abundance, all these states seek a NATO connection and aspire to EU accession¹³. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Mitja Žagar¹⁴, from the Institute for Ethnic Studies, in Ljubljana, states that regional reconciliation is declared an important element of “normalization” in “postconflict societies”¹⁵. However, this apparently well-thought statement is in need of some illustration and elucidation – possibly also rethinking of concepts, policies and strategies.

Founder of the Eastern European Department (1986) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, Janusz Bugajski states in a recent study, entitled *Facing The Future: The Balkans To The Year 2010*, that since the collapse of communist Europe, the “Balkans” had once again captured the headlines in the American and West European media and the attention of foreign policy makers. The concept of “Balkanisation”, following the disintegration of the Soviet Bloc and the collapse of the communist Yugoslav federation, had again entered the security vocabulary¹⁶.

It had come to represent, much as it did at the beginning of this century, a debilitating chaos of conflict and instability that no outside power could control and no local power could evidently escape. The crisis in the Balkans had seriously tested NATO’s cohesion during its evolution from a system of collective defense to a structure of pan- European security. The Kosovo problem had a direct impact on two questions that are vital to long-term

Bianca Jinga, *A Comment on Democracy and Security in the Western Balkans*, pp. 59-61, accessed November 20, 2009, at:

http://www.dgap.org/midcom.../2009_umschl_nfc_prag_www.pdf

¹² I. Kempe, K. Klotzle, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Mitja Žagar is Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Institute for Ethnic Studies and at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana;

¹⁵ Mitja Žagar, *The Future EU South-Eastern Enlargement, at the National Centre for Research on Europe*, September 2007, pp. 1-3, accessed: November, 22, 2009, at:

http://www.europe.canterbury.ac.nz/news/2007_news/SloveniaFlyer.pdf

¹⁶ Archive of the European Integration: *Facing the Future: The Balkans to the Year 2010* by Janusz Bugajski, pp. 5-7, accessed: November, 22, 2009, at:

http://www.zei.de/download/zei_dp/dp_c86_bugajski.pdf

stability in the Balkans: the future of the Balkan states and the development of pan-Albanianism¹⁷.

The war in Kosovo had both an immediate and a longer-term impact on the NATO Alliance. In the short term, it challenged the commitment and effectiveness of NATO leaders in ensuring security beyond Alliance borders. In the long term, ongoing Balkan conflicts (in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia-Montenegro, and Macedonia) tested NATO's cohesiveness and purpose. If we direct our attention towards the divided Bosnia-Herzegovina, we will observe that since the signing of the Dayton accords in the fall of 1995, Bosnia-Herzegovina has displayed uneven progress toward unification and multi-ethnic pluralism¹⁸.

Nationalist forces and vested political and economic interests among all three ethnic groups have continued to obstruct the full implementation of the international agreement. The maintenance of a sizeable NATO presence was deemed essential to keep the peace and to apply political pressure on the feuding political leaders. Even though some moderate politicians were strengthened by the international community, nationalist leaders have continued to dominate, especially at local levels in the Serb entity and the Croat majority areas inside the Bosnian Federation¹⁹.

In the '90, the debate revolved around issues of nationhood and national interest, ethnic minorities and the right of self-determination²⁰. By 1992, a retrogression had become noticeable, because of the following factors: Yugoslavia had disintegrated and the danger of a spill-over war was ever-present; the democratization and liberalization path in the ex-communist countries from the Balkans had been slower and aroused negative international reactions; economic aid from Western Europe and especially from the European Union, was not sufficient to boost the East European economies. In addition, the "occidental" economies in the region, like those of Greece and Turkey seemed deficient and ineffective in helping significantly the neighboring economies²¹. On the other hand, after 1990, Balkan trade had and has been energized. After a period of significant decline (1980-1988) the economies of Balkan countries tried to delve into new markets and the new possibilities of liberalization of the economy²².

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Tom Gallagher, *"The Balkans in the New Millenium"*, Publishing House Humanitas, București, 2005, p. 113.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 114-116.

²⁰ Haralambos Kondonis, "Prospects for Balkan cooperation after the disintegration of Yugoslavia", *East European Quarterly*, Fall, 1998, p.22 accessed: November, 22, 2009, at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7063/is_n3_v32/ai_n28723284/.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*, p.26.

Undoubtedly, that since the '90s, the United States and the international community have achieved substantial achievements in the Balkans. The wars have ended. The countries of the region are undertaking political and economic reforms and aligning their foreign policies toward Euro-Atlantic institutions. U.S. officials have stated that ensuring the stability of the Balkans is an important part of a U.S. vital interest in securing a Europe whole, free, and at peace. For more than thirteen years, the United States has provided significant aid and troop deployments to the Balkans in support of this goal. Both aid amounts and the U.S. troop commitments have declined as the region has stabilized and more pressing U.S. foreign policy priorities have emerged. At the same time, the European Union has increased its role, with the finality of extending EU membership to the countries of the region²³.

Observers notice that the United States has political credibility in the region, particularly among Bosniaks and Albanians, which the Europeans may lack. In this regard, some analysts indicate that greater U.S. diplomatic engagement is needed to re-energize constitutional reforms in Bosnia, which have dwindled since 2006. The region may have a higher strategic profile established on the U.S. use of military bases in Romania and Bulgaria, which could be advantageous for U.S. operations in the Middle East. Persistent U.S. attention may also be needed to annihilate possible terrorist networks in the region²⁴.

From another point of view, from a more philosophical approach, the present is highly unstable, that is something we can be certain of. It works like a tesseract between yesterday's qualms and apparent problems with no obvious solution in sight and tomorrow's mended expectations, promising prospects and a persistent, looming shadow of a doubt. For the better of twenty years, the notion of security and more precisely, our perception of what security should represent has been unequivocally at odds with certain parts of the Balkans. Let's take for example, Albania, where streets were divided between ethnic/ religious families. Or Kosovo, where in the name of freedom, security has been forsaken. The moral of the story is that one can be free without achieving a secure medium, without acknowledging how imperative peace should be.

Zygmunt Bauman²⁵, in the book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*²⁶, theorizes that those two notions – freedom and security, are mutually

²³ Steven Woehrel, *Future of the Balkans and U.S. Policy Concerns*, CRS Report for Congress, p. 3, accessed: November, 22, 2009, at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32136.pdf>.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 5-7.

²⁵ Zygmunt Bauman is Professor of Sociology, at the University of Leeds, UK and Warsaw.

²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Publisher Antet, București, 2000, p.12.

exclusive and that the compromise between them, might be complacent, but not necessarily satisfactory. Drawing upon the work of Levinas, Bauman (1998) argued that we should change our perception of the poor. The aim of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, that Bauman fully endorsed, was to go beyond the ethically neutral tradition of what a status quo should be. Levinas elaborated the conception of intersubjectivity, built upon a coming together of modern philosophy and Jewish thought²⁷. Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Manchester, UK, Shaun Best explained intersubjectivity as being drawn upon the Jewish concept of mitzvah (command) and the Torah's concern with the welfare of the "widow, the orphan, the stranger". The central theme of Levinas' philosophy is an understanding of the concept, which should be at the centre of our lives²⁸. *Understanding the other, understanding their suffering and powerlessness even when the other is a stranger is central to the conception of intersubjectivity. We have a responsibility for the other, and a duty to respect the difference of the other*, adds Shaun Best.

This aspect has been portrayed in the Balkan society. Ironically, as Balkan affairs specialist, James Pettifer notes, at the heart of the West European conundrum about Balkan asylum is the antithetical Western notion of the family, where what in Balkan society is seen as all important, binding and a vital practical virtue - family strength, homogeneity and fellowship - becomes a 'Mafia threat' when transmuted to an European Union country²⁹.

And as Wim van Meurs, senior analyst at the Center for Applied Policy Research, in Munich, theorized in a study that bears the same name, we have to ask the following question: Is the Europeanization of the Balkans, a concrete strategy or just a placebo³⁰? Moreso, what should this Europeanization consist of? Based on the answer and on the numerous EU agendas, the dilemma of conditionality and the strategic deficits of Europe stand out with particular clarity. In Thessaloniki, in June 2003, the European Union committed itself to integrating the countries from the region. The undercurrent of violence that hangs heavy in the air will persist in the current given parameters, and it will not be the only thing, that will bypass the safeguards of integration. It is obvious, in equal measures that failure and success lay in the emergent strategies.

²⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Publisher: Cornell University Press, New York, 1998, p.37.

²⁸ Shaun Best, *Zygmunt Bauman 'Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World' (Polity 2001) - A Review*, accessed: November, 26, 2009, at: <http://shaunbest.tripod.com/id5.html>.

²⁹ James Pettifer, *Balkan Asylum Seekers – Time for a New Approach?*, "Balkan Series", September, 2004, p.3, at Conflict Studies Research Centre, accessed: November, 26, 2009, at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=39225>.

³⁰ Dr. Wim van Meurs, *The Europeanisation of the Balkans: A Concrete Strategy or just a Placebo?*, September 2006, p.127, at International Relations and Security Network, Zurich, accessed: November, 21, 2009, at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=25185>.

In recent years, the issue of rogue states has gained increasing significance on the international security agenda, as frail states are considered a breeding ground for security risks such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, violent conflict, and pandemic diseases. The core mechanisms of states encompass the assurance of external and internal security, productive governance, and basic standards of social and economic welfare. Fragile states are those that are unable or unwilling to exercise control over their territories, guarantee the security of their citizens, establish effective institutions for political participation and the rule of law, and provide essential public goods such as education, health care, and basic foundations for economic growth. In light of this description, it is clear that some of the states in the Balkans region can be characterized as fragile to a greater or lesser degree³¹.

Also, in regards to exerting control over Kosovo, it is and doubtless will remain a difficult issue, all the more so because not all NATO allies are convinced of the wisdom of recognizing its declaration of independence. In the short run, lancing the boil in Kosovo will produce new tensions, not only between Serbs and Kosovars but also between Serbia and many NATO countries. But the current status quo is untenable, to date, uncertainty over Kosovo's ultimate status has bred and kept alive ethnic disputes throughout the region. Constructing a new state in Kosovo and focusing the will of Kosovars on genuine internal reform rather than striving to attain authentic long term independence will need a long-term commitment³².

Another main aspect that should be of particular interest is that of social-cultural security, more so, in a multidimensional world where the main approach is not a holistic one.

In this case, Pettifer also observes that strong local family units have flourished as a popular self-defense mechanism against the inadequacy of the state and recurrent enmities with neighboring communities – this aspect being a recurrent motif for the Balkan society, in all historical periods. In countries which have been through serious disorder and war in the 1990s like Albania, Serbia and Croatia, this natural tendency has been strengthened, so that, for instance, in Albania there has been a considerable revival of interest in the '*Kanun*', the medieval code of customary law used to regulate disputes between families³³.

On this note, a study conducted by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in March 2008, finalized with a report entitled *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, goes on to show that a total of 720,000 Albanians

³¹ I. Kempe, K. Klotzle, *op. cit.*, p.10.

³² Daniel N. Nelson, „Kosovo Futures, Western Dilemmas”, *The International Spectator*, February 2002, at Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), p.12, accessed: November, 22, 2009, at: <http://www.iai.it/pdf/articles/nelson.pdf>

³³ J. Pettifer, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

are estimated to have emigrated between 1989 and 2001, the vast majority to Italy and Greece. The number of Albanians permanently or temporarily resident in Greece, Italy, the US and Germany was estimated, in 2001, at 438,000, 173,000, 45,000 and 12,000 respectively. In 2005, the Ministry of Interior of Greece placed the number at 362,472³⁴.

Moreover, in the Western Balkans, the possibility of European integration has served to gratefully diminish security risks, yet some of states continue to suffer from weak indigenous institutions that lack the capacity to manage essential political, economic, and social functions, while potentially critical domestic and regional ethnic tensions dwell just below the surface. Throughout the region, improper rule of law mechanisms allow corruption and organized crime to develop and flourish. In short, most of the states in the Balkans region are transitional where political and economic transformations – and in some cases fundamental questions of national security – still remain unresolved and incomplete³⁵.

Seen from another perspective, however, the glass may be nearer to half full. The region has made progress towards the establishment of democratic and market-oriented institutions, and their prospects for inclusion in Euro-Atlantic institutions have increased. Apart from unsettled statehood issues concerning Montenegro and Kosovo, the Western Balkans have – at varying speeds – continued to solidify state structures and shift their attention toward fulfilling the criteria for EU membership³⁶.

At this far extreme, the report issued by the UNODC, in March, 29, 2008, clearly states how the Balkans have become a low-crime region after the turmoil of conflict and violence that resulted from the process of post-communist transition and the break-up of Yugoslavia. Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa said that *the vicious circle of political instability leading to crime, and vice versa that plagued the Balkans in the 1990s has been broken*³⁷.

Surprisingly, “*Crime and Its Impact on the Balkans*“ also shows that, in general, levels of crime against people and property (like homicide, robbery, rape, burglary, and assault) are lower than in Western Europe, and the number of murders is falling throughout the region. This positive trend has been particularly noticeable in the past few years. Even the number of Balkan nationals being held in Western European prisons has gone down³⁸.

³⁴ *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries. Report* conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), p. 45, accessed: November, 23, 2009, at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan_study.pdf.

³⁵ I. Kempe, K. Klotzle, *op. cit.*, p 8.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

³⁷ *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and affected countries*, p. 5

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

The UNODC report also attributes the lower levels of crime in the region to a number of specific local factors. Greater regional stability and democracy have put an end to war profiteering. Assistance from the international community, particularly the EU, has helped place the region on the path to a speedy recovery. Closer integration with the rest of Europe has opened borders and reduced the lure of illicit trans-frontier trade. Organized crime is also receding as a major threat. The smuggling of drugs, guns and human beings through the region is in decline, although the Balkans remain the premier transit zone for heroin destined for Western Europe (about 100 tons each year). "*While serious problems remain, the region is departing from an era when demagogues, secret police and thugs profited from sanctions-busting and smuggling*", said Mr. Costa³⁹.

If South East Europe does not fit the profile of a high crime area and does not, according to the crime statistics, have a particularly serious crime problem, why have crime issues figured so prominently in discussions of the region in the past? The issue that makes headlines in South East Europe is *organized crime*, and in particular the role that groups from South East Europe have played in organized crime in West Europe⁴⁰.

*The Western Balkans and support to their preparation for future integration into European structures and ultimate membership into the Union is a high priority for the EU. The Balkans will be an integral part of a unified Europe*⁴¹. This is an excerpt from the Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans, jointly adopted back in 2003 by the European Summit and the Heads of State and Governments of the Balkan countries.

Last year, in April, his Excellency, the former Ambassador of Greece to the United States, Alexandros P. Mallias, at the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Conference, entitled *Completing America's Mission in the Balkans*, mentioned that Greece had important strategic interests at stake in the Balkans: *Stability of the region represented a national security issue. As the oldest member of both EU and NATO in South East Europe, Greece realized the merits of membership in those Organizations at an early stage. Nonetheless, at that time, it was cut from the mainland, from EU's and NATO's geographic space. In the early '90s, the then twelve EU member-states saw twelve different trees and missed the forest*⁴².

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

⁴¹ EU-Western Balkans Thessaloniki Summit, *The Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans: Moving towards European integration*, 16 June 2003, accessed: November, 24, 2009, at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/how_does_a_country_join_the_eu/sap/thessaloniki_agenda_en.htm.

⁴² Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Conference: *Completing America's Mission in the Balkans*, from the Ambassador Alexandros P. Mallias' Remarks, accessed: November, 23, 2009, at: http://www.mfa.gr/Templates/embassyContentWithoutListTemplate_en-US.aspx.

Since then, Europe has rightly recognized two things. Firstly, that the Western Balkans lie within the heart of the European mainland itself, and therefore constitute a European challenge. Secondly, the EU came to terms with its own true potential. It emerged as a soft-power. It offered a tangible perspective to the countries of the region; a new vision towards EU membership, while creating the mechanisms to generate and monitor the necessary reforms, criteria and conditions, the fulfillment of which would eventually lead to membership⁴³.

In conclusion, the future of the Western Balkans is about: choice. The governments, leaders and the political elite of the countries in the region have a choice: between the past and the future; unilateralism and multilateralism; unilateral decisions and consensus-based ones; ethnic or national agendas and European ones; anachronistic policies and future-oriented ones; inclusion and isolation; renaming airports and highways after Alexander the Great or following his example by cutting the Gordian Knot; not with the sword, but through diplomacy and mutually acceptable solutions for existing differences⁴⁴.

Only through this act of will, a new paradigm can be implemented, that of building adequate security. Clearly, one of the main problems, that has deterred the Allied Forces from securing a peace inclined status quo, can be attributed either to the inability or the impossibility of fully comprehending what motivates these people aside from their secular fanaticism and ethnic-religious obsessions. As the Rosetta Stone represented the key to deciphering the hieroglyphs, so will finding a medium of communication and awareness, be the trump card towards attaining security in the Balkans.

⁴³ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem.*