NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AS A MAIN SECURITY THREAT TO THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Some of the biggest challenges states in the Western Balkans are facing since the end of the Cold War are non-traditional security threats. Although recent studies have argued that "history has returned" and that traditional security threats have come back to become core challenges for states, authors of this paper argue that due to geopolitical, political, economic and cultural factors, the states in the region suffer more from non-traditional or "soft security" rather than "hard security" threats. In this paper, the authors are focused on two of such threats: organized crime and terrorism. The region of the Western Balkans is quite vague and imprecise as a concept, and for the purpose of this paper, we use the term to refer to the former Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia and Croatia and including Albania. Two methodological approaches are used: discourse analysis and semi-structured interviews. The paper consists of three parts. The first part deals with the theoretical and conceptual change of security in the Western Balkans by focusing on key security challenges which the states are facing. In the second part, the paper identifies main contemporary threats, focusing on two most

significant threats: transnational organized crime and terrorism. In the third part, the paper analyses alternative approaches that these states can use to overcome these security threats.

Keywords
International, regional and national security, security challenges, terrorism, transnational organized crime.

1. INTRODUCTION

Security is a very complicated and multidimensional concept at the same time. Scholars argue that the notion of security in itself includes military security, adding to this the political, economic, social and environmental security (Buzan 1991). Hence, from this perspective derive two viewpoints on security which polarize it in "hard" and "soft" security. If "hard" security indicates a priori military security (strong power), then "soft" security involves political and economic threats towards a state (Moustakis 2004). There are scholars who within the category of "soft" security classify other challenges which involve, but without being limited to, extreme poverty, inequality, infectious diseases, interethnic conflicts, illegal immigration, international organized crime etc. (Rincón, Ramos and Estévez 2006).

The aim of this paper is to analyse security challenges with which Western Balkan countries are faced in the context of regional security which as a subsystem of international security. Thus, the article raises the hypotheses that non-traditional security issues are the main concern and the biggest threat that countries of the Western Balkan are facing.

There are two methodological approaches used in this paper. The first one is discourse analysis, which focuses on the analysis of text and context of a subject. For this study were analysed academic books, journals, reports, statistical data, official documents (laws and strategies) etc. The other methodological approach is semi-structured interview. In total there were 10 interviews conducted with policy makers, members form the academia, independent analysts and members

of civil society. In this context, interviewees were selected intentionally in order to represent relevant sectors which, in one way or another, address issues related to national and international security. Interviews were conducted during the second part of year 2016 (August-November). Results and findings derived from the interviews were distributed according to the context of the arguments required throughout the paper, and are not focused within a particular section or chapter.

Structurally the paper consists of three main parts. The first part deals with the theoretical transformation of the concept of security in the Western Balkans. The second part the paper is focused on two main challenges with which these states are faced. Whereas the third part analyses alternative approaches for these countries in order to cope with security challenges by focusing on regional cooperation as an antidote to security threats for these countries.

2. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY & SECURITY CHALLENGES TO THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

The concept of international security in the 21st century has changed significantly, in theory as well as in practice. Consequently, non-state actors and threats have become key factors for contemporary security issues in general and for the security of Western Balkan countries in particular. Contemporary scholars of this field have found that new security threats do not target only states – in Westphalian sense of the word – but they also target particular individuals and societies (Krahmann 2005). Unconventional threats are mainly caused by non-state actors and as such seek to attack the fragility of security systems of these states. Therefore, states with fragile state mechanisms are potential targets for the international and regional threats (Selimi 2016).

After the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia the potential for any other large-scale conflict in the region is minimized significantly (Stojarova 2007). Taking into the consideration the fact that a considerable number of NATO military forces, with various missions such as KFOR in Kosovo, operate in the

region, it is difficult to imagine a potential conflict between these countries. For this reason it is considered that non-military challenges are more numerous and more threating too (Vukadinovic 2000). Hence, states that emerged from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia – and not just those – are seriously challenged by the so-called non-traditional security challenges and threats. Immigration and refugees, terrorism, weapons, drugs and human trafficking, distribution of organized crime and corruption are part of those that in security studies are known as non-traditional security challenges (Agir 2009).

However, the main challenge which every Western Balkan country is facing is dealing with their internal state consolidation. This can be done only if the political, economic and social transition that has started decades ago had been successfully overcome. In fact this transition has terminated to make significant progress as a consequence of their powerlessness to put out of the public life the dangerous and brutal phenomenon of state corruption of all forms and modalities. Corruption is the "disease" of states and societies in the Western Balkans, because it does not allow progress and development in economic, social, political or even cultural domain (Smakiqi 2016). Lack of rule of law, weak institutions and state progress creates a constant socio-political erosion and is also the most serious threat that Western Balkan countries may face (Collins 2015).

Combining state weaknesses and internal threats creates a unique challenge for security of these states. This is very distinct because it comes more from internal threats than from external threats. The states' inability to provide peaceful environment, rule of law and order creates a gloomy setting where every component of society competes to protect and ensure its wellbeing. This creates an internal situation that resembles to the neorealist interpretation of structural anarchy where groups create insecurity for the rest of system and at the same time try to improve their security as well (Waltz 1979). This kind of situation created within states in international relations is known as "security dilemma" (Mingst 2003). While, taking into the consideration the fact that this can occur within a particular state also, this is defined as "insecurity dilemma". In other words, this term implies main threats to a country that originates more from a domestic sphere than the external one (Collins 2015).

Before continuing further it is important to provide some important statistical data about the Western Balkan countries which are related to population number, GDP per capita, military spending etc. It should be made clear that, as regard to this paper, when we talk about Western Balkan countries these are states which we are referred to: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia (FYROM), Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. Thus, this paper includes states that were part of the former Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia, Croatia and including Albania (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

All these states, except Albania, gained their independence through a painful process which passed through war and can be summed up with the phrase "the dissolution of Yugoslavia". This process started in the 90's and, as a result of it, all these states started their state-building process in more than the last two decades. Kosovo is the youngest state that emerged from this process and currently is undergoing the process of international recognition and trying to become member of relevant international organizations with the aim of consolidating its subjectivity in the international arena. These states, due to the fact that have different political cultures, have reached a different level of democratic and economic development. Some still are facing the challenges of fragility of their state institutions, while issues of political identity, ethnic conflicts, organized crime, corruption, border controls and other threats still possess the potential to generate instability across the region (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

In more than the last two decades the entire region had been facing military conflicts and other types of destabilization. Their ability to handle properly and to overcome both national and regional challenges, will demonstrate their level of democratic consolidation through an incremental but steady process (Mayer, et al. 2003).

The Western Balkan countries are a relatively heterogeneous group in terms of their progress in the area of democratic consolidation, economic development and strengthening of the rule of law within their societies. Their goal, in the not-too-distant future, is to be part of the European Union. This idea is the main driving force for the implementation of necessary reforms (which are in most of the cases conditioned by the EU) in political, economic and social domain. In fact

EU membership is seen as a solution to all these countries and as an organization/institution that represents a significant value system where these states intend to adhere (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014) In contrary, failure to make the EU accession a real option potentially could create the so called the "security vacuum" in the region (Reka 2018).

Regarding the post-conflict stabilization processes and the move towards Euro-Atlantic integration, external actors have played (and will continue to play) a very important role by providing shelter for them despite both categories of threats – those that are part of "strong" security and those who are part of "soft" security. NATO in the region is mainly focused on strong security – dealing mainly with military issues. Whereas, the European Union is engaged with what are known as "soft" security issues which are included within the framework of integration process towards this political structure (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014). Thus, from 1999 onwards, "strong" security challenges in the region have been replaced by the "soft" security challenges.

Despite the differences, which mainly are related to intensity, the perception of the main challenges and threats for the Western Balkan countries are roughly similar to each other (Gyarmati and Stancic 2007). Most of these countries have their own national security strategies (even though entitled differently) where they clearly define what are the security challenges, according to them, starting with national level, regional and continuing with global or international level. Thus, Macedonia (FYROM) in its document titled: "The Concept of National Security and Defense of Macedonia" specifies that its main national threats are: terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration, corruption, trafficking of human beings, drugs, weapons and people. On the other hand, the "Strategy for National Security for Montenegro" lists almost the same challenges with which they have to deal such as: drugs and arms smuggling, illegal migration, trafficking of human beings, etc. (Agir 2009). Whereas, regarding the "National Strategy of the Republic of Albania", there threats are divided into internal and external threats. In external challenges are included: nationalism and ethnic conflicts, terrorism, organized crimes, illegal trafficking, global environmental pollution, diseases etc. (The National Security of The Republic of Albania n.d.). Kosovo, as the newest country of the Western Balkans, in 2014 has developed the

document "Analysis of the Strategic Security Sector Review of the Republic of Kosovo". This document, like most of the documents of the countries in the region, makes the division between national, regional and global security challenges. Types of challenges specified in this document, compared with similar documents in other regional countries, have significant similarities and focus on: organized crime and corruption, trafficking, terrorism, etc. (Qeveria e Republikës së Kosovës 2014). If these strategies are analysed carefully one can easily conclude that the greatest number of threats facing these countries comes from the non-traditional security sector, or what is known in security studies as "soft" security. This is an indicator of the weakness of the institutional consolidation of these states, which have, as a result, the output that in political science is known as the "weak sates"

What is considered threatening by state institutions through documents and strategies, and what is perceived as a threat to security by citizens, not always overlaps. In a survey conducted by the Center for Security Studies of Kosovo, the perception of Kosovo citizens regarding the external threats that could affect Kosovo's national security was analysed.

According to the perception of citizens, the main external threat that challenges Kosovo's security in 2015-2016 is the so-called Islamic State which in the media discourse is known as ISIS. So, obviously it is seen that 76% of respondents consider this terrorist organization as the main danger to their security. It is considered that one of the factors that may influence this perception is the fact that media reports about the war in Syria showed a considerable number of citizens from the Western Balkans in general and Kosovo who become part of this organization. Another risk, in the framework of global developments which are related to the war in Syria, the terrorist brutality and the consequences that this process has, are also refugees for Syria and other countries. Respectively, 45% of respondents declared that Syria's refugees could be a potential risk, whereas 57% of them said that conflicts in Syria and Iraq could also be a potential risk for Kosovo society.

On the other hand, 63% of respondents believed that the global economic crisis or different epidemics and viruses could pose a potential risk for them. This is related to the low economic development in Kosovo and with the perception of

the inability of Kosovo institutions to respond to any eventual epidemiological crisis, taking into account the weak potentials in health sector. The most important element of this research is the fact that the neighboring state, Serbia, is considered as one of the potential threats (66%) for Kosovo ranked second right after ISIS. Whereas, 12% of respondents considered that Serbia is considered to be a threat only to some extent and 22% of respondents do not perceive it as a threat at all (Qendra Kosovare për Studime të Sigurisë 2015).

3.   THE   TRANSNATIONAL   CHARACTER   OF   THE ORGANIZED CRIME IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The growth and distribution of organized crime is one of the most important security challenges with which Western Balkan countries are faced. The end of armed conflicts and the beginning of transition from a communist system to democracy, not forgetting the economic sanctions of the 1990's that destroyed economies of countries and their trade routes, in the post-conflict context, a more favourable environment for the organized crime is created. Consequently, the phenomenon of organized crime can be considered to be a consequence of post-communist transition rather than being endemic (Agir 2009). However, at this point, it should be emphasized that the catalyst of this process are also the contextual social factors as well as the problem of state weaknesses. Organized crime in this region find space for manoeuvre mainly in activities such as: trafficking (of people, drugs and weapons), economic crime, money laundering, etc. (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

Organized crime in the Western Balkans does not consider state borders. In addition, crime has no ethnic, religious, or any other potential belonging. On the contrary, differences of this nature do not prevent criminal groups from cooperating with other groups that probably come from a state and ethnicity that until 20-25 years ago have been in conflict and fought brutally with each other (Agir 2009). The most surprising thing regarding the organized crime in the Balkans is its transnational character, by bringing together various "mafia"

structures from across the region without taking into the consideration their nationality (Glenny 2008), ethnicity, religious or other identity background.

Usually developing countries may be particularly vulnerable toward penetration of transnational organized crime. The involvement of transnational organized crime in states is increasing leading to further weakening of governance in many of them. In countries with weak governing capacities the corrupted officials become "blind" and avoid to react towards actives of the groups who deal with organized crime. Organized crime networks interfere with the political processes in different ways. This is often achieved through direct bribery, creation of illegal economies, infiltration into the financial and security sectors through compulsion or corruption and positioning themselves as an alternative *vis-a-vis* governance and government. These networks very often can threaten stability and harm free markets by building alliances with political leaders, financial institutions, law enforcement agencies, and intelligence & security agencies. The penetration of elements of organized crime in government has undermined the rule of law, judicial systems, free press, the process of building democratic institutions and transparency (Hasani 2016) in many Western Balkan countries.

A traditional channel for smuggling between east and west is the WB, which has become an ideal environment for cultivating and extending transnational organized crime. Weak institutions in many WB states have enabled organized crime groups to take control of the major drug and trafficking routes of people and markets of Western Europe. The region has become a new entry point for Latin American cocaine, a source of synthetic drugs, and a transit region for chemical heroine precursors which is to be used in the Caucasus and Afghanistan. Inadequate and insufficient border controls and the ease of obtaining passports enable the transit of criminals in Western Europe. Cooperation between the United States and the European Union, as well as bilateral cooperation with the countries of the region to promote and boost the process of building sustainable legal institutions, support the economic progress and good governance in the Western Balkans, will be the key targets for eliminating the environment which supports the transnational organized crime (Hasani 2016).

It should be clear that only states with vital and consolidated state mechanisms that do not undermine the rights of its citizens, which have internal stability and constitutional democracy are considered as "strong states" and, as a result, are the main "producers" of security and not only "consumers" of it. The fragility of state mechanisms is the key factor of instability and international insecurity in the contemporary world. In fact, the lack of a functional state for its citizens is one of the most insecure conditions of modern life (Collins 2015).

In addition to organized crime, corruption is perceived as an endemic problem in the region as well. In a study conducted by Transparency International, the annual corruption report, from 183 countries part of the study, Western Balkan countries occupy places somewhere in the middle of the table. The best positions in this study have Croatia and Montenegro which are ranked in the 66th place. Whereas, the country with the lowest rank from these states is Kosovo which takes the 112th place, thus being considered the most corrupt country in the region.

4. TERRORISM AS A SECURITY CHALLENGE

Terrorism can easily find a profoundly fertile ground in national and ethnic conflicts and animosities, especially when combined with a not very distant conflicting past. Many scholars consider that the threat of terrorism in the Western Balkans emerge largely from the consequences of the war in Bosnia and the fact that as a result of this war radical Islam has achieved to penetrate into Bosnia and other Western Balkan countries. In particular, it is considered that after September 11, 2001 there were serious concerns regarding the eventual infiltration in the countries of the region of international terrorism groups (Collins 2015).

Terrorism represent the main challenge for the Western Balkan countries. Many citizens from the countries in the region today are part of terrorist organizations that mainly operate in Syria and Iraq. Since 2012, an estimated 403 individuals travelled from Kosovo to the conflicts in

Syria and Iraq as members of terrorist organizations. Out of this, 255 are men, known as foreign fighters, and the rest are women and children (Perteshi 2018, 9). Kosovo has undertaken all steps to reduce the number of volunteers going to Syria and Iraq. Since 2016, no case of Kosovo citizens travelling to Syria and Iraq as part of any terrorist organization was reported (Perteshi 2018, 8). In addition to the cooperation with the countries of the region with the aim of preventing and combating elements that encourage participation of Kosovo's citizens in foreign wars, Kosovo has taken concrete legal and political steps in this regard. As one of the first steps undertaken by the Kosovo institutions was to issue a law aiming to punish citizens who go and join these organizations and become part of wars outside the Kosovo. In addition, they have developed a document entitled: "Strategy against Violent Extremism" in order not only to fight but also to enable to certain categories the necessary information and awareness in order to prevent and reintegrate in society persons pretend to become part of these terrorist organizations (Krasniqi 2016).

The 2015 US State Department report states that the Western Balkan states have shown significant decisiveness in their fight against terrorism, but poor administrative capacities, corruption and ineffective coordination have shedding their efforts considerably. This report highlights the donation of weapons that Albania has provided to Kurdish forces in northern Iraq. This was considered as a sign of support from Albania in the fight against the Islamic State. The report commends Albania's legal efforts to properly and timely address the problem of Albanians traveling to Syria to fight, as well as adopting the national strategy for combating violent extremism (US State Department Report: Country Reports on Terrorism 2015).

As regard to the Bosnia and Herzegovina, the report sees as a very serious problem the fact that a considerable number of citizens from this country have travelled to Syria and Iraq in order to join terrorist groups. However, according to the Report, in 2015 B&H was the first country in the region to develop and approve a comprehensive strategy to prevent and combat terrorism (US State Department Report: Country Reports on Terrorism 2015).

The engagement of Kosovo's institutions to arrest and convict suspects of illegal activities that help terrorism has been considered as a positive action by the

Report. However, it has been emphasized that despite this readiness, Kosovo institutions have very limited capacities, lack of resources and of experience in dealing with cases of terrorism (US State Department Report: Country Reports on Terrorism 2015).

The indictment that the state of Macedonia has filed for 37 people and the arrest of 17 of them based on the recently introduced law on foreign terrorist fighters is considered a "counter-terrorist effort". This state within the report is labelled as "a highly enthusiastic partner for the fight against terrorism both at regional and international level", even though the Greece's unwillingness to recognize Macedonia's name significantly limits their abilities to participate in full capacity at relevant multilateral forums where, among other things, security issues are discussed (US State Department Report: Country Reports on Terrorism 2015).

Serbia has been criticized for the lack of a national strategy against terrorism and also for the lack of state-funded infrastructure and programs to combat violent extremism. Regarding the regional border security, Serbia's cooperation with Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania has been seen as positive and solid. But partnership with Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina is seen as complex and – to some extent – problematic. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, related to Kosovo, the independence of which Serbia still does not recognize, cooperation on security issues between Kosovo and Serbia is inexistent (US State Department Report: Country Reports on Terrorism 2015).

5. REGIONAL COOPERATION AS A RESPONSE TO SECURITY THREATS

The limited capacities of these states and their institutions on one hand and ineffective public administration in another hand significantly affects the capacities of states to effectively address important issues such as economic, political and particularly issues related to security. For this reason it is considered that regional cooperation, especially in the field of security and in particular in the justice and domestic affairs sector, is a necessary and

indispensable criterion. Regional co-operation is understood as a very important prerequisite for establishing stability, security and long-term peace in the Western Balkans region and at the same time it is seen as the best "cure" to properly "heal" potential regional conflicts in the future (Elbasani 2008). In addition to improving the security component, it is considered that regional cooperation also implies numerous economic benefits. Today's measurement of a country's success is based on its ability to integrate into the international system and gain access to a large market at various levels starting from the sub-regional, regional level and continuing to a global level (Bechev 2006).

At the theoretical level, regional co-operation is understood as a collective intergovernmental act of three or more states that evolves in a geographic area (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014). Usually modalities of this cooperation can be of different dimensions forms and depths and can include, but without being limited to, other aspects such as free trade, common rules, joint projects, institutional arrangements and procedures of decision-making, joint responses to potential threats and issues that are mainly of political character (Bechev 2006). There are a number of regional organizations or initiatives in the Western Balkans. Participation and engagement in these initiatives/organizations has become a necessary condition for access to the European Union (Regional Cooperation Council 2016).

Cooperation takes place in many areas such as justice, strengthening the rule of law, consolidating democratic institutions, police co-operation and various security sectors. The main focus of the co-operation, as it can be understood, is mainly on matters known to be part of "soft" security such as corruption, cross-border crime, illegal trafficking, promotion of transparency in public administration etc. It should be noted that a significant number of initiatives have resulted successful, which has significantly improved good governance in these countries and at the same time has helped to create intergovernmental frameworks so that these countries face more effectively challenges (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

The most important organization which is considered as the "umbrella organization" for the Western Balkans with regard to regional cooperation is the Regional Cooperation Council. This institution was launched in 2008 and is the

successor of the Stability Pact for South East Europe1. RCC operates under the political leadership of the South-East European Cooperation Process – SEECP. During its period of operation, the RCC was consolidated as a well-defined institution and as a platform for leading and overseeing cooperation in Southeast Europe and also helped to establish and integrate regional cooperation mechanisms in the sector of security among the countries of the region (Regional Cooperation Council 2016).

Among the many areas covered by the RCC, the one most relevant to this study is what is related to cooperation in security sector issues such as justice and domestic affairs (Regional Cooperation Council 2016). The RCC has initiated the Regional Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast European Countries. It should be noted that in addition to this institution, there are also a number of other institutions and regional security initiatives.

The Southeast Europe Police Chiefs Association (SEPCA) brings together police chiefs of: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, BiH – the Republic of Srpska, R. Bulgaria, R. Croatia, R. Macedonia, R. Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and R. Serbia. It focused on rationalization of joint activities in order to establish an all-inclusive public security system and improve cross-border police co-operation. On the other hand, the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) was established in 2000 as an intergovernmental organization and as a regional platform to combine the efforts of governments against corruption, civil society and international organizations (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

These and many other initiatives that not mentioned here reflect the progress achieved in the Western Balkan countries in the field of regional cooperation. Successes seem even bigger if we recall the fact that not many years ago these countries were at war with each other. It is important to mention that all countries in the region participate in key initiatives. As a result, some very important concrete successes were achieved such as: integrated border management, cross-police cooperation to fight organized crime and corruption and cooperation in civil security (Samardžija and Šelo Šabić 2014).

6. CONCLUSIONS

During the 90's a major part of the Western Balkan countries were involved in war with each other in an interethnic conflict. There was the need for a strong political and military intervention, especially in the case of Kosovo, for the international community to stop the war and reach peace. Hence, there is a significant international presence of security mechanisms in the region. Therefore, the study concludes that the Western Balkan countries are currently not facing what is known as "strong security' but instead "soft security" issues including challenges, but not limited to immigration and refugee problems, terrorism, arms, drugs and human trafficking, the distribution of organized crime and corruption etc. Thus, the key threats to the Western Balkan countries are non-traditional security challenges.

Among the major threats within the group of non-traditional security challenges identified as more relevant in this paper are transnational organized crime and terrorism. Organized crime is mainly showed in activities such as trafficking (people, drugs and weapons), economic crime, money laundering etc. Regardless of the level of cooperation between the states, organized crime in the region does not recognize state borders. On the other hand, terrorism continues to remain a challenge for these states as well. A large number of citizens from this region, especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and even Albania, have participated in the Syrian war, being part of various terrorist organizations. On the other hand, all of these states, with the exception of Serbia, have taken concrete action in fighting this phenomenon. This has produced tangible results in the decline in the number of their citizens' participation in foreign wars.

Taking into the consideration the fact that in the contemporary era the challenges and security threats are transnational, the reaction against them should be joint and inter-state effort. The Western Balkan countries are faced with limited institutional capacities and ineffective governments. This fact impacts their potentials to confront security challenges as individual states. For this reason it is considered that regional cooperation, especially in the area of security and in particular in the justice and domestic affairs sector, is seen as a necessary condition to adequately respond to security threats.

Despite all the challenges identified and addressed in this paper, the study considers that the main security challenge faced by the Western Balkan countries is the fragility of their state institutions. The lack of a functional state for its citizens is one of the most insecure and unsafe condition of modern life. Therefore, the consolidation of the political system, rule of law and democracy is seen as the main counterweight to state insecurity for these countries.

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