



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

# BALKAN AND BLACK SEA PERSPECTIVES 2022

SUPPORTING  
THE TRANSITION



# BALKAN AND BLACK SEA PERSPECTIVES 2022

## SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION

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Conference organised by  
*the NATO Defense College Foundation*

in co-operation with  
*the NATO Public Diplomacy Division,  
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International  
Cooperation and the NATO Defense College*

Special thanks to  
*Philip Morris International*

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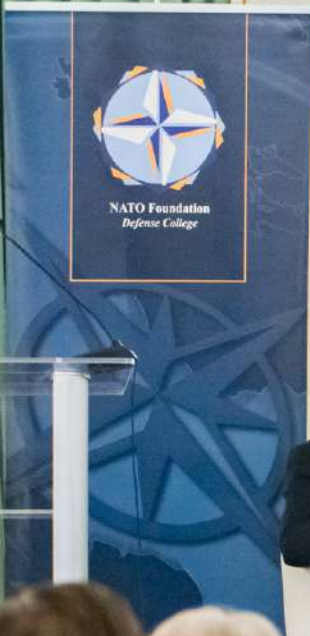
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Balkan and Black Sea Perspectives 2022. Supporting the transition, Rome, 7 December 2022.

# BALKAN and BLACK-SEA PERSPECTIVES 2022

December 7



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ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO

*President, NATO Defense College Foundation,  
Rome*



## FOREWORD

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This conference is dedicated to the Balkan and the Black Sea perspectives and we are not new in debating these issues in our annual conference. We are proud of the consistency of our focus on this region since many years, because it is part of our “Strategic Balkans” project. It is an endeavour born out of the will to create positive networks in the area, backed by dedicated research dossiers and by a monthly journal on the Balkans dating back to 2017. We are speaking of the Balkans and the Black Sea, in other words of the whole South Eastern Europe. To answer the question, on why we have worked so much in this direction, is simple. The region has always been crucial for European security, at the crossroads of many interests and ambitions. Be it local nationalism, or being an objective of various external factors, including Russia. The region shares also common problems, ranging from fragile economies, to embattled democracies, to illegal trafficking and environmental damages.

These facts and events, unfortunately, do not belong just to history and in this period South Eastern Europe is more important than ever. We wish to accompany it from fragmentation to inclusion, from instability to security, modern government and rule of law.

In conclusion the Balkan and Black Sea region should become part of the Euro-Atlantic community. I underline that NATO and the European Union have been working hand in hand according to their added value and in the same direction, the one of inclusion. The good news is that this intent is agreed on both sides of the Atlantic. For its part, NATO remains in Kosovo with its ongoing operation Kosovo Force (KFOR), while the aim remains the same: to project security.

The European Union is now engaged in a renewed effort to facilitate the process of full integration. If we look at the overall scenario, the Russian aggression and the ensuing war in Ukraine, have added a certain sense of urgency in favour of this region since it has to be stable and remain able, facing old and new challenges. Local problems continue to be relevant beyond their borders. Serbia and Kosovo

face unsolved disputes, Bosnia-Herzegovina remains a fragile state, the economic and demographic situations are a source of concern.

After having said that, the Foundation is addressing in this conference's debate a number of relevant issues that are sometimes overlooked. As always, our purpose is to promote a friendly discussion aimed at helping to find good solutions, to encourage the actors to continue in their efforts, keeping the issue at the centre of strategic discussions on real priorities for the international community and hence for the Euro-Atlantic community.

As usual, we give a priority to voices coming from the region; there is no substitute for that. It is almost 12 years that we do so and also here we are proud to welcome a large number of speakers and moderators with un-paralleled experience. We are happy that they have accepted our invitation and we think that Rome is a natural, appropriate and privileged place to discuss about the region. As in our tradition, the spirit of the event is to promote an informed debate, at a scientific level and with reciprocal respect, and we are encouraged by the fact that the area in this period is clearly seen as an international priority, part of a 360° security approach.

You see from the programme that we are touching upon crucial issues like democracy, grey areas, the aspiration to reforms, the final inclusion in the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance. All this is certainly not new, but events show how it remains important not just along the shores of the Black Sea, but also those of the Mediterranean.

I conclude thanking first of all our entire staff for its enthusiasm and very good work. The preparation of such a conference requires a lot of detailed attention and dedication. Special thanks to those who have helped us for this event: Philips Morris International, The NATO Public Diplomacy Division, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the NATO Defense College.

After having served at the Italian Embassy in Washington DC and as Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Italy in Prague, Ambassador **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo** worked as Head of the External Relations Office of the EEC from 1981 to 1986. In the following years, his career focused on Europe and Space Policy. In 1997 he was appointed Diplomatic Counsellor of the Minister of Defence Beniamino Andreatta, then of his successors Carlo Scognamiglio and Sergio Mattarella. In 2000, Minuto-Rizzo held the position of Italian Ambassador to the Western European Union and to the Political and Security Committee of the EU, of which he was among the founding members. He was Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance between 2001 and 2007. His mandate was mostly carried out in the strategic-political industrial area and in the relations with sensitive countries such as those in the Gulf and the Southern Mediterranean. He is the author of the books: *The road to Kabul* (Il Mulino-Arel, 2009); *A political journey without maps. Diversity and future in the Greater Middle East* (Rubbettino, 2013); and *NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership* (New Academia Publishing, 2018).

PASQUALE TERRACCIANO

*Director General, Public and Cultural Diplomacy,  
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Cooperation, Rome*



## OPENING REMARKS

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The Balkan and the Black Sea region is experiencing a relevant degree of political uncertainty and insecurity which has a direct impact on the European countries and their international organizations, namely NATO and the European Union. This uncertainty is caused by a wide range of ongoing political and social dynamics that makes the regional context more complex and consequently less predictable. This is not good news in foreign policy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a severe disruptive event that has multi-dimensional implications, including the importance of the maritime dimension in the ongoing great power competition. As a strategic bridge between Russia and the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea and the Balkans play a key role.

The slow progress in regional integration, the existence of pervasive transnational criminal networks, and the tensions that can undermine democratic regimes are additional relevant issues that deserve attention. The three topics of this conference will discuss three interconnected key issues that can shape the future of the region and its ties to other European countries. Regional integration seems to be swimming in troubled waters, if not drowning. On the other hand, attempts to promote economic integration among Western Balkan countries, such as those made through the “Open Balkan” Initiative,<sup>1</sup> have not yet achieved the expected outcomes, and the integration process of the Western Balkans into the EU is at a crossroad.

The enlargement process is advancing at a slow and uneven pace generating frustration in the candidate countries, but some different political initiatives, such

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<sup>1</sup> The “Open Balkan” Initiative is a regional cooperation initiative that involves Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania. It has as its explicit goal the establishment of a common political-economic zone aiming at implementing the Four Fundamental Freedoms of the EU (the free movement of people, goods, capital, and services).

as the recent “European Political Community”,<sup>2</sup> support the enlargement process. The lack of European political interests and activism in the region is risky since other assertive players such as China and Russia can quickly replace our influence. Political integration has the potential to be a stabilising element but implementation requires a good level of domestic security and good governance. In other words, the persistence of illicit trade and criminal networks has a direct impact on the democratic functioning of the countries which, in turn, is essential to ensure stability and support any political cooperation or integration initiative.

The only way to break this vicious circle is to rely on the more active involvement of the main international organizations operating in the area, namely NATO and the EU, together with the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Sometimes these multilateral actors could do better, perhaps with more coordination efforts, but I believe that it exists an underlying commonality of interests and values among them. If successfully managed, a similar coordinated action could result in efficient burden sharing.

However, for this path to work efficiently two essential conditions must be met. The first one is a strong and coordinated political will of the member states within the organizations involved, meaning a serious availability to engage in negotiations and search for viable compromises. The second one, a constant and frank dialogue among all the countries in the region, particularly through multilateral forums. In other words: more diplomacy is needed.

In this regard, Italy will continue to ensure its contribution and efforts to strengthen political dialogue and cooperation in the area. As recently stated by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Tajani, during his visit to Serbia on last 22 November, Italy wants to be a protagonist and an actor of peace in the Balkans. In the following months, we will work to offer new venues of discussion between the representatives of the governments and the civil society members. The listening to and involvement of non-state actors is another important action that we cannot leave to other countries and their propaganda. For this reason, we are planning to convene in Rome a major dialogue conference between governments and experts from civil society.

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<sup>2</sup> Proposed by the French President on 9 May 2022, the European Political Community aims at strengthening cohesion, cooperation and dialogue between all countries on the European continent.

Ambassador **Pasquale Terracciano** is the Director General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA). He entered the diplomatic career in 1981 and in 1982 he was Second Secretary at the Directorate-General for Personnel of the MFA. Later on, in 1985 he was appointed Consul at the Consulate General in Rio de Janeiro, six years later he served as Counsellor at the Permanent Representation to NATO in Brussels, and then as Counsellor at the Directorate of Economic Affairs of the MFA. In 1996 he was Counsellor at the Italian Embassy in London and Deputy Executive Director for Italy at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In 2001 Ambassador Terracciano was appointed Deputy Head of Cabinet of the MFA and in 2006 Italian Ambassador to Spain. In 2011 he served as Diplomatic Advisor to the President of the Council of Ministers and as his Personal Representative/Sherpa for the G8 and G20. In 2013 he served as Italian Ambassador in London and in 2018 in Moscow.





ALESSANDRO POLITI  
*Director, NATO Defense College Foundation,  
Rome*



## POLITICAL SUMMARY

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One year after the ominous war declaration it is remarkable to see how, through the speakers, the whole region shows deep continuity characteristic amidst obvious changes.

The most notable change happened the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 with the failed Russian Blitzkrieg in Ukraine. On the one hand, the unexpected resistance of Kiev represented a strategic defeat for Putin, on the other, all the countries of the Black Sea mobilised either their national resources to minimise the political, economic and strategic impact of the war, or received prompt NATO support to shore up their conventional deterrence.

Quite interestingly the Balkans benefited, among the inevitable tensions (be they supported or not by Russian interference and hybrid operations), from a new sense of urgency in Brussels to seriously move forward the integration process. For the time being, the European Union (EU) has overcome the past five-year moratorium and major countries started to put concrete proposals to accelerate the strategic dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia and to pressure their local partners.

Nevertheless, these ominous and momentous changes are overarching strong continuities, compounded by the need to curtail the negative consequences of war: the viability and sustainability of regional economies; the demographic decline and youth emigration often due to bad governance; the urgency to recover from the pandemic-induced depression; the need to diversify energy sources, especially the more polluting and monopolistic ones; the threat by organised crime; the importance of a stable, realistic and balanced relationship with big powers.

Membership in Europe continues clearly to be a complex, engaging and prolonged affair, lasting at least a decade in the best circumstances and with a concentrated effort by national elites or becoming a never-ending waiting process, as it has happened with some prospective members. The fact that in several countries, including the biggest ones, democracy has actually regressed obviously does not help, whatever

the political orientations in Brussels may be.

Entering NATO is a rather more straightforward affair (it took two years for Montenegro between the official invitation in 2015 and the effective accession in 2017), but in many cases there are nine-ten years collaboration periods in the Partnership for Peace, if not more as in the case of Northern Macedonia (25 years).

That said, the elephant in the room is, against all appearances, the EU enlargement itself. Again, all contentious points are the same since a decade and their importance has been accrued by the recent Brexit. First, reform of the decision-making mechanisms of the EU (majority or unanimity?); it seems that this may become an indispensable hurdle to be overcome before any other enlargement. Second, power distribution according to population (e.g., West Balkans are less populous than Ukraine), with direct consequences on the European Parliament and on the geographic balance within the Union. Third, funds distribution, especially regarding the agricultural sector.

All this can be either further slowed down by two important factors: the objective rise of European responsibilities and burdens to guarantee conventional deterrence along the borders of NATO much more than in the past; and the need to respond to a creeping de-globalisation based on economic protectionism.

**Alessandro Politi** is Director of the NATO Defense College Foundation. A specialist in political and strategic affairs, he has worked with different top decision makers in Italy and abroad both in public institutions and private companies. He teaches geopolitics, geo-economics and intelligence at the Italian MFA-affiliated SIOI School.

STEFANO GIANTIN

*Western Balkans Chief Analyst*  
NDCF

ALESSANDRO POLITI

*Director*  
NDCF

## BACKGROUND POLICY PAPER

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The Balkan and Black Sea region (BBS) is a region that already before the war in Ukraine was united by a continuum of internal political, social and economic problems and by its vulnerability to external factors be they connected to the dynamics of an enduring globalisation or to the influence/interference of important regional and global actors.

The ongoing aggression against Ukraine and the attention given to military developments risk to obscure an important positive development by the friends of the region. Namely, the Crimean crisis and the invasion of Ukraine have woken up the transatlantic community from the past *laissez-faire* and spurred it to realise that keeping whole regions in a provisional limbo was a very dangerous practice. This has now come to an end and requires practical solutions in the near and medium term.

Concretely the European Union has recently decided to start membership talks with Albania and North Macedonia in July 2022, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is hoping to obtain EU candidate country status in December. For now, Kosovo is only considered a potential candidate to join the EU. Serbia and Montenegro are already candidate countries, but have to close a number of critical chapters since more than ten years. The possible visa restriction lifting for citizens of the Institutions in Kosovo regarding the Schengen area is also envisaged by January 2023. Sarajevo accession to NATO is still blocked by internal dissension, while Serbia has decided to continue its neutral status in the dealings with the Alliance.

The Black Sea offers apparently a simpler picture: all countries are NATO Partners or Allies, Russia except, but four out of seven are not members of the Alliance. The war has also here been a tragic catalyst for change starting from Kyiv. The end of the hostilities notwithstanding, the whole region needs a multifaceted resilience recovery approach that can be carried out in parallel and independently from the implementation of possible membership promises within NATO or the EU.

The Western Balkans subregion is facing old and new challenges that could potentially exacerbate existing instability. In the past months, no concrete steps towards European Union integration were observed in several key countries in the area, where weak democracies appear to be increasingly vulnerable to external influences. Furthermore, concerns are growing over a looming energy and economic crisis, an indirect consequence of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. And a slew of other unresolved issues could also destabilise the region.

The main quarrel remains the Serbia-Kosovo relations, which were rekindled by the latest car-plate dispute between Belgrade and Pristina, triggering one of the worst political crises in years. The dispute over license plates is actually about Kosovo's sovereignty, which the Serbian authorities have never recognised after the 1999 conflict. Even though France and Germany stepped in recently to help resolve the issue through a plan that was not well received in Serbia, there are still scarce hopes. Belgrade and Pristina are becoming increasingly conflictual, and the EU-fostered dialogue, as it seems, is completely stalled at the moment. Nationalism and self-serving myopic policies are unfortunately frequent even among younger and apparently more modern decision makers.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, the second most fragile part of the region, remains divided between a Serb entity and a Muslim-Croat federation, with a weak federal government connecting the two. The most recent elections did not result in dramatic changes, with elites made of the nationalist political leaders – as well as secessionist in the case of the Serb representatives – exploiting, as usual, the current crisis to stay in power. Furthermore, a host of regional countries and external powers, like China and Russia, are harnessing Bosnia's weaknesses to strengthen their influence over the country. Even if the EU grants the country a candidate status, as recommended by the Commission, dysfunction will most probably be a persistent plague.

As mentioned, NATO expansion has been more successful than EU integration. Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro are currently members of the Alliance and Serbia's neutrality poses more problems to Belgrade through its de facto ambiguous and at arms-length relationship, than to the EU or the Alliance.

Meanwhile, the region's demographic collapse continues, and an increasing number of professionals and educated young people is heading towards Western Europe in search for better opportunities. Moreover, although the EU is promising help to cope with the energy crisis, Moscow remains a key supplier for the entire region. Time will tell if the EU and NATO follow up will be kept up and implemented.

The Black Sea subregion has firstly a serious economic sustainability problem, connected to the upcoming global economic crisis, its own demographic collapse and brain drain, the fragility of emerging economies, persistent corruption and organised crime infiltrations. Some countries enjoy the advantages of EU membership, while

others have a simply unsustainable debt or are facing fiscal, monetary and economic crises.

The war of course has seriously exacerbated the problems in the whole BBS region and particularly in the Black Sea area. It is clearly too early to speak about a “Marshall plan”, but in the meantime elements of comprehensive policies are needed - along with aggressive global cooperation on vaccination, debt, and climate - to promote in time a green, resilient and inclusive recovery. Clearly debt stock reductions may ease the output losses associated with debt distress more than debt service relief, but the drawback is that donors, already stressed by the hard landing and long-term economic crises, will have much less money to invest in direct reconstruction, especially if corruption is a serious problem.

Evidently, whatever the military outcome of current operations, there is the need to get out of a dangerous escalation spiral, avoid a further frozen conflict and begin to structure a realistic and open-ended agreement between the belligerents, safeguarding the tenets of a rule-based continental security and stability and allowing Ukraine to restore in time all its elements guaranteed by the Budapest Protocol of 1994.

Deterrence and dialogue, the winning elements of NATO during the long Cold War, will have to be backed by sustainable defence investments and serious political negotiations, neutralising dangerous revanchism strains among negotiating parties.

This requires a clear recognition that, in addition to Russia and Ukraine, the EU, NATO, Turkey and the US have a distinct interest, legitimacy and possibly converging role in shaping a post-war regional order.

What future  
perspectives for  
the path towards  
Euro-Atlantic  
integration?

What is the link  
between inclusion  
and stability?



TÊTE DE BOEUF  
OSSEKOP

INCOURS REETART  
BALKAN TRAFIK!

SESSION I

# REGIONAL INTEGRATION PERSPECTIVES

View of the mural "It is only with the heart that one can see well", by Rikardo Druškić.  
Source: [www.audiovisual.ec.europa.eu](http://www.audiovisual.ec.europa.eu)





SOLOMON PASSY

President, Atlantic Club of Bulgaria,  
Sofia



## THE OPEN DOOR POLICY HAS BEEN UPHELD: WHAT ARE POSSIBLE OPTIONS?

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Before delving into the main topic of this conversation, I would like to briefly discuss three significant events that have occurred since the last NATO Defense College Foundation conference dedicated to the Balkans and the Black Sea, in 2021.<sup>1</sup> First of all, the new role that Italy has assumed in NATO security arrangements, especially in Bulgaria. My congratulations and gratitude to Italy for its leadership.

Second, the parallels between the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Hitler and Stalin's invasion of Poland in 1939. I could not have imagined that it was possible.

The third and last point on my list is the recent news that represents a true acknowledgement of the current situation on a worldwide scale: Ukrainian President Zelenskiy was named Person of the Year by Time Magazine.<sup>2</sup>

Let us now turn our attention to the main topic of this panel: inclusion. The concept of inclusion was brought up in our discussion since it is considered relevant in removing root causes of instability in the region. According to my assessment, three main roots can be listed: Russia, China, and especially populism, which goes hand in hand with propaganda. Nowadays, populism and propaganda are the two biggest enemies of democracy. This has essentially not changed since Socrates was sentenced to death because of showing deficiencies in democracy.

What is our greatest asset? Our unity is our strength and our division is our weakness. The first aim of our enemy is to divide us. *Divide et Impera* has been a working slogan for centuries, if not millennia. Therefore, our first aim is moving the world forward, rather than backward. Our first goal is to unite behind NATO,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.natofoundation.org/black-sea-and-balkan-perspectives/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2022-volodymyr-zelensky/>

the EU and all of its institutions, including the Eurozone and the Schengen Area, with which Bulgaria has some challenges to overcome. However, given the existing realities, we require working solutions, and concrete, practical measures.

Cohesion between NATO and the EU, in my opinion, is crucial and this is much more likely and pertinent after Sweden and Finland are candidates to join the Alliance. In the EU, we currently need a rule establishing that new members can only join if they also join NATO. The Alliance should be advantaged for EU membership and this applies to countries such as North Macedonia, Albania, and Montenegro.

To conclude, before proposing concrete solutions for Georgia, Ukraine, Kosovo, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is important to identify our main issues with Russia and China. The Kremlin represents the immediate threat — the one which takes our immediate attention but occupies it permanently. However, this does not permit us, the West, to focus on the long term strategic threats. The major problem with China is that we do not know China and China is not in a hurry. China is the only country that can build a road today, that will not be used until 100 years. This is a strategy for which Europe is unprepared. Our thinking is four years ahead until the next elections, while China's thinking is possibly four centuries ahead until it conquers the world. For this reason, I am convinced that we must provide the next generation with a clear perspective about the biggest challenges they will face and how to address them.

Dr **Solomon Passy** is a Bulgarian scientist, statesman and innovator with a significant career in a variety of fields. As an MP in the Grand National Assembly in 1990, Dr Passy was co-author of the new Bulgarian Constitution of 1991 and a sponsor of the draft bill for abolishing the death penalty. He paved the way for Bulgaria's membership both in NATO and the EU, and, as Foreign Minister, he signed Bulgaria's Accession Treaties to both organisations. He held a number of institutional and international posts: Minister of the Foreign Affairs (2001-2005); Chairman of the UN Security Council (2002-2003); OSCE Chairman in Office (2004); twice Chairman of Parliamentary Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees and a member of the Parliament (1990-1991, 2001-2009). Dr Passy holds a PhD in Mathematical Logic & Computer Sciences with still cited publications in world leading journals. Today he is a frequent commentator on international affairs, defence and security. He is currently President of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, which he founded in 1991.



AHMET EVIN

*Founding Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Professor Emeritus, Sabanci University, Istanbul*

## INCLUSION VS FRAGMENTING DYNAMICS

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The Western Balkans, surrounded by European Union member states, remain a gaping hole in Europe's map. Although the conditions for Western Balkans' inclusion have been formulated as early as April 1997,<sup>1</sup> and although the Western Balkan countries' eligibility for EU membership was reaffirmed in 1999,<sup>2</sup> very little progress has been made toward the region's integration into the EU. This was due in part to other serious challenges complicating the EU agenda, and today only three Western Balkan countries (Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia) are NATO members, while none have achieved EU membership.

However, the slow progress of the Western Balkans towards EU membership is also due to ethnic, political, and cultural divisions in the region, as well as within most of the region's countries. Dimitar Bechev, an acute observer of the region, said last summer "the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU has stalled due to issues within the Union as well as in the region itself".<sup>3</sup>

I believe that the deep cleavages that characterise the region have been a more important factor in preventing the region's convergence with the European entity than the Union's lack of adequate attention to the Western Balkans. The region has strong centrifugal dynamics that substantially detract from a sense of coherence; perhaps, more importantly, from a sense of shared geography among the varied groups living there. These centrifugal dynamics reinforce ethnic, linguistic, confessional and cultural fragmentation. The division of Bosnia-Herzegovina into

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7738-1997-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-western-balkans-towards-common-future\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-and-western-balkans-towards-common-future_en)

<sup>3</sup> <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2022/06/20/what-has-stopped-eu-enlargement-in-western-balkans-pub-87348>

two entities is a case in point where one entity, the Republika Srpska, remains hostile not only to its immediate neighbour but to the EU and transatlantic structures as well.

What stands in the way of cosmopolitan convergence also prevents a consensus across the region to pursue EU membership in a rigorous, collective way. On the contrary, the centrifugal dynamics distributed across the region make it easy for external factors to step in and create clientelist dependencies. China, for example, by means of making strategic investments which it can well afford; Russia by using its historical and cultural links to the region, particularly through the Orthodox church; and even Turkey by claiming the erstwhile Ottoman territories as the common ancestral homeland, not only of the Bosnian Muslims but of Serbs and Albanians, as well.

Politically, I think that the Russian penetration of the Balkans has been the most destructive among all the external influences since it is motivated by the sole objective of preventing the EU enlargement into the region. Given the sweeping changes that we are witnessing in global geopolitics, one is compelled to ask whether there have not been any changes taking place or, at least, anticipated in the Balkans.

Is the region likely to move faster towards a Euro-Atlantic inclusion since Russia's invasion of Ukraine? My quick answer to this question is possibly yes, but let me draw your attention to three points concerning Western Balkans in the new geopolitics of the West.

First, Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, as well as the violence of its destructive attacks on the civilian population there, have created a new border in Europe, one that separates the Russian Federation and its close ally, Belarus, from the rest of the continent. That division itself already demarcates a common European area in contradistinction to the Russian Federation, and thus points to a cultural convergence in the European area based on the similarity of preferences. This cannot be compared to rigorous forms of political integration, but it points to a community of interests that form the basis of alliances and other forms of convergence. The fact that none of the Western Balkan countries raised any objection to the European Council's declaration, issued the 22<sup>nd</sup> June this year,<sup>4</sup> to grant Ukraine candidate status is one case in point.

However, old habits die hard. The region's centrifugal dynamics, as well as the sharp differences among the Balkan states, are likely to persist. The fact that Bulgaria, a NATO member, has been standing in the way of two other NATO member states (Albania and North Macedonia) by slowing down their EU membership progress is another case in point.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57442/2022-06-2324-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>

Finally, regardless of an improved Euro-Atlantic affinity, that may be in the making (especially with Biden's transatlantic policies), EU membership prospects for the region are not likely to improve quickly. While the European Council called "for the acceleration of the accession process" of the region in yesterday's Tirana Declaration,<sup>5</sup> it nevertheless strongly emphasised that the accession process would be contingent on "credible reforms" ... and rigorous conditionality". That statement harbingers a long and arduous journey.

Dr **Ahmet Evin** is currently Professor Emeritus at the Sabancı University in Istanbul, where he is also Founding Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, a Jean Monnet Chair, as well as a Senior Scholar and a Board Member of the Istanbul Policy Center. With a PhD from the Columbia University, Dr Evin previously taught at New York University; Harvard University; University of Pennsylvania (where he also served as Director of the Middle East Center); University of Hamburg; Bilkent and Hacettepe Universities in Ankara (being Head of Department of Political Science in the latter). He has authored or edited over 10 volumes on politics, culture, and development, and his research interests include theories of the State and elites; Turkish political development; democracy and civil society. He currently works on foreign policy issues related to the European enlargement, its significance for Turkey and the region as well as its effect on Transatlantic relations.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60568/tirana-declaration-en.pdf>



BRUNO LÉTÉ

*Senior fellow, Security and Defense, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Brussels*



## AN INCLUSION JUMPSTART AND THE DIFFERENT PATHS IN THE REGION

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Time after time, both the European Union and NATO enlargements have contributed to peace and stability in Europe, and they are not to blame for the current war on the continent. This must be emphasised because today's toxic narration frequently tells us the opposite. I am based in Brussels, so perhaps I can share some of the perspectives that are emerging there, as well as some of the calculations that are currently being made on Place Schuman.

My attention is focused on the EU, because, in my opinion, NATO has done a good job in managing expectations when it comes to enlargement, whereas the EU has not. In terms of enlargement, I believe the EU is back on track. President Juncker's suspension of enlargement is over, and it is clear that von der Leyen's team is attempting to engage once more. However, there is more to be said. The EU has frequently claimed that enlargement is stalled because candidate states fail to meet EU expectations, or they blame Russia or China, but it is important to recognise that some of the major obstacles to enlargement are also located in Brussels itself. In this regard, three main challenges must be addressed: politics, power, and money.

First and foremost, a political debate is emerging in Brussels about whether or not the EU will still be governable if more member states join. In this scenario, three camps of countries come up.

The first camp contends that before enlargement, the EU must undergo reform, which includes amending or changing the Treaty. The main point here is that unanimity should be weakened in favour of qualified majority voting, particularly in domains such as foreign policy or taxation. Germany, as well as the European Commission, are pushing for this.

The second camp is represented by those countries that are opposed to change the Treaty and argue that enlargement can occur without reforming the EU. This viewpoint is most prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Nordic countries. They claim that, by weakening the unanimity vote, several countries would be dissatisfied, and the EU would risk to speak no longer with one voice.

The third camp consists of countries in the middle, assuming that reforms are still possible without a Treaty change, and that enlargement can proceed in this regard. This is, for example, France's position, among others. According to my opinion, no EU enlargement will occur until internal issues have not been solved.

As previously stated, the second obstacle to overcome is power. Some member states affirm that when a new member joins, the power distribution changes. In other words, the more members the EU counts, the less influence they have over internal processes (seat redistribution in the European Parliament, for example). Occasionally, in Brussels, we hear that the impact is less relevant for a smaller country like Albania, due to its 3 million population. Ukraine, on the other hand, is a massive country with a population of 40 million people. In this case, redistributing seats in the European Parliament would represent a major exercise. In this respect, some Western European countries have expressed concerns about a shift in power gravitation towards Eastern Europe, a significant loss of seats in the Parliament and a new Warsaw-Kyiv axis development, which would seriously diminish the power and influence of the Berlin-Paris one. The fact that both Berlin and Paris are in favour of some reforms before enlarging, is a testimony that they do share this concern.

The last obstacle to be mentioned is money. In the current economic conjuncture, many states claim that enlargement is simply too expensive. The EU has always been divided between net contributors and net receivers, as far as the budget is concerned. It is precisely those net contributors who express concern about further enlargement because they are concerned that they may need to contribute even more, if a new member joins.

Another factor to consider is how EU funds are distributed. Let's consider, for instance, the agricultural sector which has the largest EU budget, at around 365 billion euros, in the multiannual financial framework. Currently, France is the country that benefits the most from agricultural budget money (about 63 billion). If Ukraine, whose economy is largely based on agriculture, joins the EU, the budget would have to be recalculated, and it is very likely that France would receive less money.

What I told above provides an overview of the challenges facing the EU Brussels bubble when it comes to enlargement, but I would like to end on a positive note by mentioning two points that will likely encourage Europeans to enlarge.



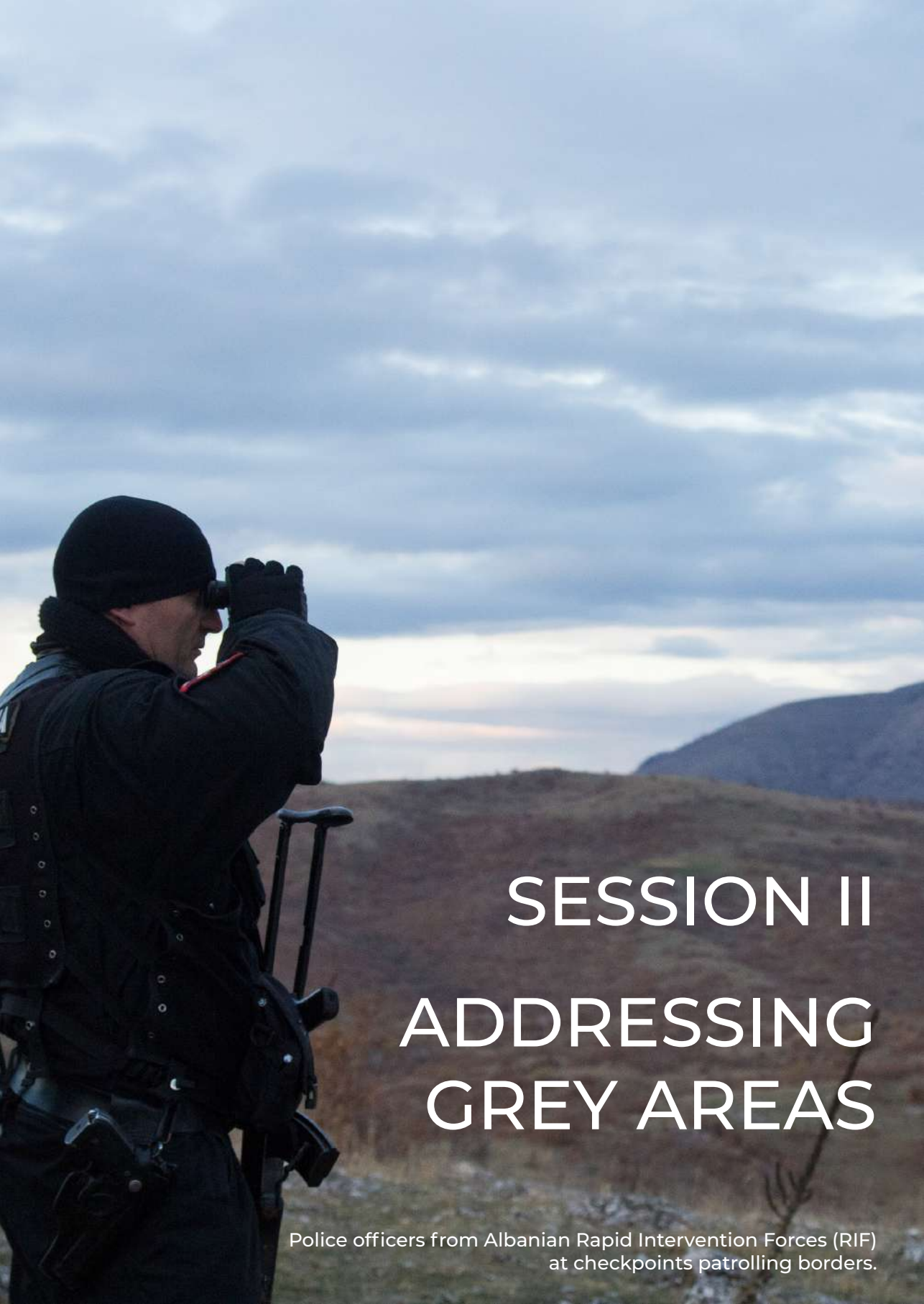
First of all, security. Due to the Russian expansionism and the gradual infiltration of Chinese influence, security and stability can no longer be taken for granted. It is now more critical than ever before to build a community of well-governed EU states to preserve peace on the continent. The EU recognises that enlargement will contribute to maintaining peace and stability, but I believe it is critical that NATO actively re-engages in the Balkans and Eastern Europe, offering defence, assistance and other guarantees to the most vulnerable countries in the region, as it has been done by the United States.

Lastly, I believe that there is a shift in the world economic order. The EU is currently under intense pressure to join countries such as China and the United States in this new game of economic self-interest and protectionism. The EU is slowly but firmly abandoning its ideal of free trade, a tool that has been used to economically integrate countries without necessarily giving them the status of member states. That is increasingly difficult to sustain as the world's big powers are battling for new markets while introducing protectionist bilateral trade agreements. In this regard, enlargement, of course, would be a way to secure new markets in the EU neighbourhood before they become too dependent on China, the United States, or even Russia.

**Bruno Lété** currently serves as a Senior Fellow at The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) in Brussels. He provides analysis and advice on trends in geopolitics and on international affairs, focusing primarily on NATO, transatlantic defence cooperation, developments in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, and cybersecurity. In 2010, Mr Lété joined the European Union Delegation to the United States in Washington DC, where he supported the political, security, and development section and focused on US foreign policy and EU-US relations. He started his career in 2007 as a Programme Associate for the GMF, where he developed the institute's signature policy conferences such as the Brussels Forum.

What are the security challenges and weaknesses in the regional governance?

How can international actors contribute in fighting organised crime?



# SESSION II

# ADDRESSING

# GREY AREAS

Police officers from Albanian Rapid Intervention Forces (RIF)  
at checkpoints patrolling borders.



MĂDĂLINA MOCAN

*Fellow, Aspen Institute Romania,  
Bucharest*



## STEMMING ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING: THE INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

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Many countries in South Eastern Europe are facing major issues in combating trafficking, and these phenomena, especially trafficking in persons, sometimes can be used as a scapegoat to allow or deny regional or international perspectives to a country. According to a mainstream approach, during the last couple of years Romania has been not only an origin country for trafficking in persons but more and more a transiting and destination one. This new role of Romania is something to be taken into account, as well as a new approach from which we can learn, by taking our regional partners as example, such as Italy, given the more prominent role it is assuming in the Balkan region.

The few aspects I want to tackle are related to the main topic of our conversation: the importance of good governance. When it comes to combating important phenomena, such as trafficking in persons, there is a recurrent element in the stories of survivors and of those working in the field: the lack of trust in political authorities and institutions. This is something we see across the region, although it does not happen necessarily everywhere. Many of those who have been exploited, either smuggled or trafficked from or through Romania to the Western part of Europe, have stated that they have trusted those wearing uniforms more in that part of the world than in ours, for various reasons.

Regarding grey areas, I would like to say that they occur offline as well as online. When we talk about defending human rights, we also refer to the presence of online exploitation in various forms, whether it is “traditional” exploitation, in terms of actually recruiting and grooming while using social platforms, or with the help of, or support of, new tools such as cryptocurrency, which is more intricate and difficult to follow.

Despite or in addition to all of this, I believe that there is one thing worth noting. The last few years have also witnessed an increased cooperation in the region. It is bilateral cooperation, i.e., Italy's interest in combating human trafficking in countries such as Romania; but it is obviously also international and European cooperation with the implementation of mechanisms and instruments aimed at monitoring each country's progress in combating trafficking and exploitation.

To conclude, a unified approach to fight against the trafficking is required, as well as improved statistics and legislation. The more united we are as a Union, the better our chances are to actually fight these illegal networks.

**Mădălina Mocan** is currently a Researcher affiliated with the Center for the Study of Democracy, PhD candidate in Political Sciences at Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, and Associate Teaching Assistant in political theory. She has previously served as Executive Director of the Ratiu Center for Democracy in Romania. Ms Mocan is a graduate of Babes Bolyai University, Faculty of Political Sciences, where she obtained an MA degree in "Management of Political Organizations". She has an academic and civic interest in human rights, applied ethics as well as in political participation, and she consults with several national and international initiatives aiming at understanding and combating human trafficking while also developing an interest for inclusive forms of social innovation. She is an alumna of the Aspen Institute Romania Young Leaders program (2009), German Marshall Transatlantic Fellow (2014) and serves as a board member of Tech Soup Romania.



SEM FABRIZI

*Former EU Ambassador to Serbia,  
Rome*

## THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE IN THE REGION

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My perspective will be related to my on-the-ground experience since I have been in Serbia for four years as European Union Ambassador. Before getting into the specific topic, I would like to go back to what has been already unfolded in the previous panel. Looking at the main actors (EU, NATO, OSCE and the UN), it is fair to say that the EU has a main role in the Western Balkans, but certainly, there is still much work that can be done together with the other three actors.

Enlargement is back on track again. To understand enlargement, we need to have in mind two important elements: a political element and a policy one. The political one seems to be back on track; there is a focus on it, a political consideration of what it entails. On the other hand, the policy one shows interesting progress, because making reforms means shaping them through appropriate policies under the right political steering. This aspect cannot be underestimated or left alone.

Evidently, enlargement cannot happen in a vacuum. I am not here to defend the EU but I believe it is critical to mention the difficult decade that we had in the EU, starting with the financial crisis, illegal migration, Brexit and the pandemic, but also due to external factors. Indeed, it is clear that the Russian aggression has raised several bells in a number of capitals, and Western Balkans can come back to the fore not just as a policy exercise but as a political exercise, as a long-term geostrategic investment for the EU. Furthermore, of course, the security track has become predominant again after the Russian aggression. Europe needs stability and when the world around us is unstable, the EU suffers enormously. Europe needs stability, especially on its borders: this is why we continue to work in parallel on rule of law, good governance and prosperity.

Looking at the Tirana Declaration,<sup>1</sup> a 33-paragraphs short and to-the-point

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/60568/tirana-declaration-en.pdf>

document, we can see an acceleration in the accession process, a stronger strategic orientation more than ever and the gradual integration of those regions before enlargement. In other words, we are going towards a better narrative within the EU.

Last point, grey areas exist everywhere, but, as long as the European Union keeps them on the radar, we will solve the issue. If we look at the above-mentioned Declaration, 9 out of 33 paragraphs are dedicated to security and critical issues such as illegal migration, counter-terrorism, money laundering, illegal trafficking, and so on. We must have the instruments to recognise and address these issues with a common purpose.

**Sem Fabrizi** is Minister Plenipotentiary at the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFA). From 2017 to 2021 he was EU Ambassador to Serbia and, from 2013 to 2017, EU Ambassador to Australia. Previously, Minister Fabrizi served in Brussels as international affairs adviser to the President of the European Council, and in Rome in the diplomatic office of the President of the Council of Ministers. In his early career, he worked in Rome at the General Secretariat of the MFA, at the Italian Representations to the EU in Brussels and the UN in Geneva, as well as in Beijing at the Italian Embassy. Minister Fabrizi is an Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.



ANA ĐURNIĆ

*Public Policy Researcher, Institut Alternativa,  
Podgorica*



## STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACIES AGAINST GREY THREATS

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I would like to begin by saying that, despite the foreign influences that we regularly observe and experience in Montenegro, the only constant in the country is NATO membership and its EU integration process. This goal is undeniably important to the country, but when it comes to all of these processes, we must eventually consider how to reform the country for the country and its citizens, rather than for fending any of the influences or for catching any opportunities for cooperation and networking.

We have seen the fulfilling of EU's technical requests, concerning the integration process, but none of these processes is truly reforming the country from the inside, and citizens are not reaping the benefits of these reforms. Furthermore, I believe we have seen many examples of so-called technical reforms being implemented when necessary, demonstrating that the country can reform when forced to do so, without any true dedication to reforms in terms of continuity of the reforms themselves.

For many years we have seen that the country is ready to make technical improvements when compelled to do so by the European Union, but without any follow-up that would allow reforms to be fully implemented. Another good example is NATO membership, because Montenegro has been reforming its security sector in order to join NATO, but we have seen backsliding in terms of transparency, openness and reform implementation, as well as country's integrity, since there was no proper follow-up in monitoring the country after membership.

As a result, we should begin to consider integration processes as a mean rather than a goal in order to implement reforms for the sake of citizens and taxpayers. Only then integration will come as a reward, as a final result. However, this has not been the case for many years.

Montenegro, for example, has been named the Western Balkans' frontrunner in the EU integration process, and we truly are in terms of technical reforms

implementation. We have an anti-corruption agency, for example, which was also one requirement of the EU negotiation process, but it has had little success in combating corruption. Moreover, confidential procurement and non-transparent public spending remain issues of concern.

As a consequence, we should adopt a new approach that considers all of these processes, including integration, as a mean of reforming our country, using the funds, technical and expert support, and any other means available to us. These reforms must, also, be monitored over time, even after the country joins organizations like NATO and, later, the European Union.

Let me quickly mention the last aspect. The crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has come at the worst moment for Montenegro, because we are undergoing a difficult transition and suffering from political instability, as the country's ruling majority changed after 30 years. However, the country has taken a strong position on it and has undertaken measures, aligned with NATO and EU member states.

Unfortunately at this point, the public space has been occupied by daily politics, and it is extremely difficult to put on the agenda and carry out wider public policies, including the EU integration process and our internal reform processes.

**Ana Đurnić** is a Public Policy Researcher at Institut Alternativa, a think tank from Podgorica, Montenegro, since the beginning of 2015. She is primarily responsible for project coordination and research in the Public Finance Management – Public Procurement, as well as for accountability and prevention in the fight against corruption. She is closely monitoring the work of the Montenegrin Agency for Prevention of Corruption and is an author of numerous scientific reports and publications. Ms Đurnić was a member of the WeBER research team (Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform 2015-2018) and, since July 2018, is a member of the Government's Working Group for Negotiation Chapter 5 – Public Procurement. She participated in the TRAIN Programme 2017 (Think Tanks Providing Research and Advice through Interaction and Networking), which is supported by the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by the German Council on Foreign Relations.



What policies and resources can help consolidate fragile democracies?

How to promote human security and stability?



ВЛАДА НА РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА

SESSION II  
FRAGILE  
DEMOCRACIES

Republic of North Macedonia Government building, Skopje.



SLAVICA GRKOVSKA  
*Deputy Prime Minister in charge for Good  
Governance Policies, Skopje*



## SHIELDING AND CONSOLIDATING NEW DEMOCRACIES

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On the one hand, I am very privileged of having the opportunity to share my thoughts with you on such important issues, but on the other hand I am very sad because we are facing the worst security crisis since the end of the Cold War. Russia proved to us that peace cannot be taken for granted, and that the rules-based international order can, and is, being challenged. This happens because we are discussing not only how to deal with peace and war, but also how to preserve human rights - the fundamental democratic values - and keep them as social priorities.

Citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia may now understand the importance of being NATO members, despite Macedonia's decision to achieve that goal was not easy. Indeed, it has been a long-term political struggle. It is very easy to be a politician and say whatever the citizens want to hear, but it takes a strong courage to keep your country and region on track, to believe in democratic values, stability, prosperity, and in the future.

So today, when we talk about preserving stability, peace and security, their roots are in good governance policies, that must be implemented at a high level in all of our societies in the region. To achieve stability in the country, first we must gain citizens' trust, and then we must have institutions that citizens can rely on, a citizen-oriented public administration and a system resilient to corruption. If we have stable institutions that are transparent, efficient, professional and resilient to political influence, together with a fair judicial system, we can have a strong and resilient society to any other external influence, without room for nationalistic and populist politicians.

Looking back, I must admit that in the past five years, we have done a lot, because it is not easy for a captive state to move forward. Indeed, it is very easy to play a nationalistic card, but it is very difficult to recall it back. In this regard, one of my greatest disappointments is that the region has not learned the lesson from the war

in former Yugoslavia, namely that playing the nationalistic card is not a solution and that getting back on track afterwards is difficult.

The war in Ukraine is tragic but it may also represent a turning point, now that we are once again regarded as a number one priority region for the EU accession process. That is to say, unfortunately, that in the Balkans we need someone who keeps us on track in order to achieve something; otherwise, we have so many excuses, especially from those who do not want to leave their comfort zone and populist leaders of the political parties who will easily win elections and be in power.

In conclusion, playing the nationalistic card is detrimental to progress.

**Slavica Grkovska** is Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) in charge of Good Governance Policies in the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia since January 2022. From 2002 to 2011, she was Member of the Parliament and, during her term as an MP, she was President of the Commission on Education, Science and Sports; member of the Foreign Affairs Committee; and deputy member of the Committee on European Affairs. She also was Deputy President of the Joint Parliamentary Committee EU-Republic of Macedonia. In 2013 and 2014, she worked as Chief Administrative Director, additionally responsible for human resources and legal affairs, in the company for information technologies "EIN-SOF LLC". As of March 2015, Ms Grkovska worked as Human Resources Manager in the IT company "VOX Teneo Macedonia DOO", where she also served as Head of the Human Resources Department for Belgium, Indonesia and North Macedonia from 2018 to 2021. In the period between May 2021 until her appointment as DPM, she was the Chief Systemic Analyst in the Sector for Information Technology, department of informatics and telecommunications in the Ministry of the Interior.





ALBA ÇELA

*Executive Director, Albanian Institute  
for International Studies, Tirana*

## THE TOOLS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY

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I believe that connecting regions is critical, especially because we, from the Balkans, are frequently isolated in forums where we only speak among ourselves. Our panel is dedicated to fragile democracies, and I believe that democracy is fragile everywhere. There is no country in the world where democracy is not fragile right now. We can see this fragility even in the world's most established and consolidated democracies, which are the democracies we look at as examples. Due to their role, the retreat or decline of democratic standards in these countries is more frightening. Among many external threats and hits that have come to the European Union and the region, the current war is undermining our democracies, which represent the value we have to protect the most.

Yesterday, my country, Albania, hosted the EU-Western Balkans Summit.<sup>1</sup> For a country that had experienced dictatorship and was completely isolated from the rest of the world, this Summit was a powerful signal, a sound message that is being sent. It was also important for the health and vitality of democracy in the region, because it restores the feeling that now we all are on the same path, and are no longer stuck on a place where all the obstacles we had to overcome were not democratic. They were, instead, bilateral disputes and political vetoes.

The region's fragility can be attributed to its history of varying degrees of dictatorship too. However, it is our reaction to external threats that makes us vulnerable and fragile. When I talk about external influence, I am not just referring to countries like Russia and China.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2022/12/06/>

Last summer, Albania has experienced two massive cyberattacks from Iran. We hosted part of the Iran's political opposition in our country, attempting to fulfil our duty as a NATO member, which has been asked to shelter people fighting for their democracy, and this put us in a vulnerable position. These attacks hacked all of Albania's electronic services, that provided citizens with security, transparency, and access. All of this is at the heart of democracy and it is here that the EU must consider the kind of help it promises.

In the end, we realise that all the challenges that we face cannot be solved individually. Instead, we need more effective regional cooperation: there have been examples in the past showing that, when we work as a region, and also together with the EU, we can have positive stories to tell. I am aware that we are witnessing a critical situation and it is difficult to think about positive stories, but there are some.

Let's think about the investigative journalists in our region working together trying to increase transparency, and accountability, or the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)<sup>2</sup> and other mechanisms whose aim is to advance reconciliation and help young people. When regional actors come together, they can accomplish much more because they are more capable of overcoming obstacles at the national level. This is, precisely, where the European Union should also invest more, not only from a geostrategic standpoint, but also for the EU's own vitality.

To summarise, there is much more unexplored territory in the opportunities that we have between us, and the first aspect to consider is that we, as a country, have chosen democracy.

**Alba Çela's** main areas of research are: democratisation, political parties, national identity and European integration. She taught as an Associate Professor of political science and economics at two private universities in Tirana and was a recipient of the prestigious John Gunn scholarship at the University of Washington and Lee in Virginia. Additionally, Ms Çela participates as an independent expert in research, monitoring, evaluation and advocacy projects for several international donors and organisations such as OSFA, FES, BIRN etc. Her latest publication is entitled *Ghost political parties and the deformation of democracy: the case of Albania and the region*.

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<sup>2</sup> RYCO is an independent institutional mechanism, established by the Western Balkans 6 participants (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), with the goal of promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among the young people in the region through youth exchange programmes.

FRANCESCO MARTINO

*Analyst and Editor, Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso  
Transeuropa, Sofia*



## THE SOCIAL SUPPORT OF REGIONAL DEMOCRACIES

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It is a pleasure to discuss the social support base of democracies in the region. To be honest, when I first started thinking about it, I felt both glad and challenged, being this topic interesting but complex to address. For centuries, the best and brightest philosophers and social scientists have attempted to provide answers to the question concerning the structural factors that shape democratic societies, determining whether they are open or closed, tolerant or xenophobic.

So, in the limited time I have at my disposal, I will not try to measure myself with the greatest minds of humanity. I will try, humbly, to give some hints to sketch some possible interesting points that could give us a better perception of the current situation. It is not easy to talk about the region because, as the chair correctly pointed out, the countries in this area can be quite diverse.

When it comes to democracies in the region, there are some trends that can be identified and that help us understand in a broader way the bleak situation we are experiencing. The majority of these trends are long term, and, as a journalist, I frequently observe that they are not visible in the media and in public debate.

Demography is the first trend I would like to address. It provides us with a deeper understanding of societies' structure as well as with tools to address specific challenges.

From this point of view, I am referring to South Eastern Europe societies, that share an extremely difficult situation. Most countries are literally shrinking in terms of population, and Bulgaria is an example. The last census, carried out in 2021,<sup>1</sup> recorded approximately 6,5 million inhabitants, a 10% decrease from the previous one, done 10 years earlier in 2011, with nearly 7 million people. Not only is the population decreasing, but the population's structure is changing or becoming older,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://census2021.bg/>

making to some extent these societies less flexible and insecure.

The second trend to be examined is immigration, that is closely related to demography. Tens of thousands of people have left the region in recent decades, especially towards EU countries. This is yet another factor weakening societies and, as a consequence, democracies. We are witnessing the so-called “brain drain”.

Fortunately, this is not the full picture. We also have positive examples to share. For instance, as Osservatorio,<sup>2</sup> we recently carried out specific research on innovative enterprises in the region.<sup>3</sup> We found out that there are hints of Innovative Enterprises start-ups capable of creating clusters that offer highly skilled young people and these countries a real future perspective. Another concrete example is Serbia’s gaming industry, which has been growing despite, or perhaps, because of pandemics and is now able to provide opportunities to a small number of people.

Furthermore, the pandemic has had a significant impact on shaping Balkan societies in recent years.

The main issue with pandemic and democracy is how they shaped citizen’s relationship with authorities. In South Eastern Europe, this was frequently challenging due to the deep-rooted mistrust of large parts of societies towards their own authorities.

The last trend to be addressed is the growing request for better life conditions and cleaner environment in South Eastern European societies. From a democratic standpoint, this is significant because these social requests have increasingly taken on the characteristics of political requests. As a result, we have seen the birth of movements all over the region that are attempting to push for a better environment in order to live their future in the region. This is not to say that there are no challenges to overcome. To give just one example: people engaged in environmental protection issues do not feel sufficiently supported from the outside, and once again, the European Union is frequently blamed. Unfortunately, in the Balkans, even legitimate movements have shown the tendency to be hijacked by populist movements.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/aree/Balcani/Innovazione-nei-Balcani-occidentali-in-cerca-di-stelle-221451>

Before becoming a journalist and analyst, **Francesco Martino** worked in the field of international cooperation in Kosovo. He has been living and working in Bulgaria since 2005, where he has collaborated with various Italian and international media providers. Mr Martino holds a degree in Media Studies from the University of Trieste, and speaks Bulgarian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovene and Macedonian. Based in Sofia, he has been working for the Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso since 2006.



## BALKAN AND BLACK SEA PERSPECTIVES 2022 Supporting the Transition

*High-Level Conference organised by the NATO Defense College Foundation  
in co-operation with the NATO Public Diplomacy Division,  
the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation  
and the NATO Defense College*

Rome | Wednesday, the 7th of December 2022  
Venue: *Sala Verdi, Hotel Quirinale, Via Nazionale 7*

**14,30 – 15,00** *Opening Session*

- **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo**, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
- **Pasquale Terracciano**, Director General, Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Rome

**15,00 – 16,10**

### Session I Regional Integration Perspectives

*Inclusion is an essential component of Euro-Atlantic common security not only for allies and partners, but also in any sustainable security architecture counterparts. It is also very relevant in removing root causes of instability. A considerable array of instabilities requires to be dealt in an appropriate way, also because the current conflict has given new impetus to EU's enlargement agenda. Regional inclusion may have different speeds and constraints, but it is important to stabilise countries exposed to tensions and instabilities.*

Chair: **Ivan Vejvoda**, Permanent Fellow and Head of “Europe’s Futures”, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna

- **Solomon Passy**, President, Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, Sofia
- **Ahmet Evin**, Founding Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Professor Emeritus, Sabanci University, Istanbul
- **Bruno L  t  **, Senior Fellow, Security and Defense, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Brussels

*Q&A Session*

**16,10 – 16,30**      *Coffee Break*

**16,30 – 17,40**

## Session II

### Addressing Grey Areas

*In the coming years, international organizations like NATO, the EU, UN and OSCE could play a crucial role in reinforcing their overall projection especially in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Black Sea area. An important objective in order to avoid dangerous lapses, tackle illicit trade and transnational criminal networks. As witnessed during two decades, some countries show a decreasing integrity in governmental structures, influencing in turn political reforms and regional stability.*

Chair: **Harun Kar  i  **, Journalist and Political Analyst, Al Jazeera Balkans, Sarajevo

- **M  d  lina Mocan**, Fellow, Aspen Institute Romania, Bucharest
- **Sem Fabrizi**, former EU Ambassador to Serbia, Rome
- **Ana   urni  **, Public Policy Researcher, Institut Alternativa, Podgorica

*Q&A Session*

**17,40 – 18,00**      *Coffee Break*

18,00 – 19,10

### Session III

## Fragile Democracies

*The current scenario shows a worrying trend of internal crises in established democracies and a retreat of democratic regimes in different regions. Good governance, rule of law, transparent budgets and regulated economies are essential instruments to promote human security, well-being and strategic stability in the region. What policies should be adapted and what resources must be devoted to consolidating fragile democracies and enhancing their resilience?*

Chair: **Yannis-Alexis Zepos**, Former Ambassador and Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens

- **Slavica Grkovska**, Deputy Prime Minister in charge for Good Governance Policies, Skopje
- **Alba Çela**, Executive Director, Albanian Institute for International Studies, Tirana
- **Francesco Martino**, Analyst and Editor, Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa, Sofia

*Q&A Session*

19,10 – 19,15     *Concluding Remarks*







President of the European Council Charles Michel welcomes Montenegro's Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic ahead of a meeting at the European Council in Brussels, Belgium, 17 May 2022.







