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NATO Parliamentary Assembly

88TH ROSE-ROTH SEMINAR

REPORT

SERBIA, THE WESTERN BALKANS, AND THE EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

BELGRADE, SERBIA

31 MARCH-2 APRIL 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's 88th Rose Roth Seminar "Serbia, the Western Balkans, and the Euro-Atlantic Community" was organised in cooperation with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on 31 March – 2 April 2015. Over 200 participants came together to discuss Euro-Atlantic integration and democratic consolidation in the Western Balkans, including some 80 members of parliament from 23 NATO member states and partners.

2. The participants tackled a broad range of issues, including Serbia's EU accession process and cooperation with NATO; regional cooperation; the fight against corruption and organised crime in the Western Balkans; as well as the dialogue taking place in Brussels between Belgrade and Pristina. The lawmakers had frank and open discussions among themselves and with senior Serbian officials, including the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ivica Dacic, Interior Minister Nebojsa Stefanovic and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Igor Becic, international representatives, and independent experts. Jean-Daniel Ruch, the Ambassador of Switzerland to Serbia, welcomed participants on behalf of the Swiss government which co-sponsors the Rose-Roth seminar programme.

A. SERBIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE EU AND NATO; CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE OSCE

3. Following the opening remarks by **Dragan Sormaz**, Head of the Serbian Delegation to the NATO PA, the participants of the seminar were addressed by **Ivica Dacic**, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. Describing Serbia's foreign policy priorities, Mr Dacic stressed that "Serbia is not trying to sit on two chairs. It sits on its own chair". He underlined that Serbia had firmly chosen the path of European integration. There is a wide consensus on this issue in the society, and it is important to use this historic chance for Serbia. The signals coming from the **EU** are encouraging, Mr Dacic said. The EU is the medicine required to heal the wounds of this region, and it should be made clear that talks about enlargement fatigue have no basis. While membership negotiations can proceed rapidly, Mr Dacic urged the EU to send a signal that the chapter relating to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue would not become an unsurmountable obstacle, negating the closure of other negotiation chapters.

4. Belgrade's traditionally warm, cooperative relations with Russia and its military non-alignment do not contradict Serbia's strategic choice to become a reliable, responsible, and predictable partner in the Euro-Atlantic area, Mr Dacic pointed out. He noted that Serbia has a much more developed military cooperation with the West than with Russia. Dragan Sormaz also stressed that the EU is by far Serbia's largest trading partner, whereas the trade with Russia is very limited. Speakers and participants praised Serbia's substantial contribution to EU and UN-led peacekeeping missions. Serbia currently participates in seven UN and four EU missions, and it intends to continue this level of participation in the future, despite limited financial resources.

5. As EU membership negotiations proceed, Serbia will have to progressively align its foreign policy with that of the EU, several speakers pointed out, including the Head of the EU delegation to Serbia, Ambassador **Michael Davenport**, and the seminar's keynote speaker, **Ivan Vejvoda** of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Mr Vejvoda also called on Germany to demonstrate leadership in promoting further EU integration as means of bringing peace and prosperity to this region.

6. Serbian officials and parliamentarians stressed Serbia's commitment to further improve and expand cooperation with **NATO**, particularly in the framework of the recently adopted Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Ambassador **Miomir Udovicki**, Head of the Mission of the Republic of Serbia to NATO, noted that Serbia is an increasingly credible partner of NATO. Serbian officials also re-affirmed Serbia's support for NATO membership of its neighbours in the Western Balkans. State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence **Zoran Djordjevic** said that Serbia

expects IPAP to contribute to the further improvement of Serbia's defence sector and to increase the level of interoperability of the Serbian military in joint missions.

7. Mr Djordjevic also mentioned other areas of cooperation, including engagement in NATO's new training initiative CFI as well as cooperation in military education and the destruction of surplus ammunitions. Serbia's defence budget constitutes about 1.5% of the country's GDP.

8. Ambassador **Roksanda Nincic**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted that given Serbia's complicated history of relations with NATO, much emphasis is put on improving public outreach with regard to NATO. There is still a need to demystify NATO and explain to the public that Serbia can stay neutral and still pursue constructive cooperation with the Alliance. Ambassador **Jan Varso**, representing Slovakia's (and NATO Contact Point) embassy in Belgrade, noted that in terms of mentality Serbia is a member of the Euro-Atlantic civilisation and shares the same values of pluralistic democracy, market economy and human rights. Ambassador **Stelian Stoian**, Permanent Representative of Romania to NATO, pointed out that it is well known that there are sensitive issues within the NATO-Serbia relationship, but with political will, both sides can build a win-win relationship. He also stressed that Euro-Atlantic integration in the Balkans would serve as a catalyst for changing the pattern of interactions in the region from confrontation to dialogue, and praised the NATO membership of Croatia and Albania as an example of a success story.

9. **Jelena Milic** from the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies also urged Serbian authorities to better explain the benefits of IPAP to the Serbian population. Also, she noted that Serbian society should more openly and comprehensively discuss sensitive issues of the past, such as mistakes made by Belgrade in Kosovo prior to NATO's intervention. She said that her organisation supports Serbia's membership in the Alliance.

10. **Marko Savkovic**, Program Director of the Belgrade Security Forum, urged Serbian authorities to conduct a proper foreign policy review and to broadly include civil society and expert community in this process.

11. Serbia's international role has become very prominent as the country took over the chairmanship of the OSCE in January 2015. In this capacity, Serbia considers the situation in and around **Ukraine** to be a priority, as it poses a serious threat to the stability of the region and beyond, and noted that Serbia is determined to act as an honest broker in the peace process. The Deputy Prime Minister stressed that Serbia fully supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and believes that a peaceful solution can be found for the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Belgrade made it clear it will not join EU's restrictive measures against Russia.

12. **Savo Kentera**, President of the Atlantic Council of Montenegro, stressed that **Montenegro** is determined to join both the EU and NATO. Montenegro joined the EU in placing sanctions against Russia, although it was not required to do so. He admitted that a part of the Montenegrin population prefers their country to stay neutral, but Mr Kentera argued that only NATO membership can provide sustainable stability for his country.

B. REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE BALKANS

13. According to Deputy Prime Minister Dacic, Serbia has become a stabilizing factor in the region. It will continue efforts to build trust, and promote **reconciliation and regional cooperation** in the Balkans. Unfortunately, the region is not well known for cooperation; it is famous for conflicts, Mr Dacic said. There is a lot of irrationality in the Balkans. He also underscored the importance of respecting territorial integrity in the region: unilateral secession would open Pandora's box, he said.

14. Nevertheless with time, regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is becoming more pragmatic and less emotionally charged, focusing on improving economic conditions for the

population. EU integration remains the principal incentive for cooperation, but the process is increasingly Balkan-led, the participants of the seminar heard. Keynote speaker Vejvoda stressed that Serbia has proven its commitment to cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). **Dimitar Bechev** from the European Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science noted that the economy is replacing security as the main theme of regional cooperation. The Balkan countries seek investments and interconnectivity with other markets; the EU is no longer the sole economic actor in the region – Russia, Turkey and China are increasingly active.

15. **Energy** represents a particularly promising area for regional cooperation. **Janez Kopac**, Director of Energy Community, described the role of the organisation as a tool to reintegrate South-eastern Europe into a wider European space. Created after the wars that shook the Balkans, the Energy Community serves as a platform to extend the EU internal energy market to South East Europe and beyond, on the basis of a legally binding framework. The principal instrument to achieve this aim is the adoption of EU's legislation in energy and related areas. To date, some 25 laws have been incorporated into the Energy Community's legal framework, covering gas, electricity, security of supply, renewables, oil, energy efficiency, environment, competition and statistics. The Energy Community also has a solidarity clause designed to help its members in the case of energy disruptions. Interestingly, the EU speaks with one voice within the Energy Community. The most acute problems for the Balkan countries include: the delay in implementing the so-called Third Package, the absence of a definition of vulnerable customers, the existence of regulated prices, and insufficient transparency of regional gas and electricity markets.

16. **Julian Popov** from the European Climate Foundation suggested that the Balkan countries should study the example of Ukraine and increase to a large extent their energy resilience through better energy efficiency and the establishment of an integrated energy market. Ukraine is one of the most energy inefficient countries in Europe and its government spends a lot of money on energy subsidies. This situation has made Ukraine more vulnerable to external pressures, and has weakened the country's resilience to external challenges such as the annexation of Crimea, Mr Popov argued. The Balkans should not repeat such mistakes and should instead increase its cooperation and investments in energy efficiency, provide more support for the development of hydro and other renewable resources, and the establish a genuine regional energy market, he said.

17. In terms of other aspects of regional cooperation in the Balkans, more needs to be done in areas such as law enforcement and intelligence cooperation, in particular when addressing cross-border **organised crime** and the problem of **radicalised citizens** of Balkan countries travelling to join the ranks of extremist groups in Syria and Iraq.

18. **Goran Svilanovic**, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), discussed the activities of RCC, which are a focal point for regional cooperation in South-eastern Europe. The key role of these activities is to generate and coordinate developmental projects in areas such as economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security cooperation and building human capital. Mr Svilanovic focused on cooperation on judicial and law enforcement issues and noted that information sharing on cross-border criminal activities in South-eastern Europe must be improved. He pointed out that valuable results have been achieved from projects designed to compare anti-corruption legislation in the countries of the region. RCC also came up with concrete suggestions as to how to assist judicial structures that are overloaded with cases such as through the promotion of mediation mechanisms.

19. **Aleksandar Djordjevic**, Director of Serbian Security Information Agency, noted that **jihadists** have been actively working in the Balkans for two decades and are particularly focused on indoctrinating and recruiting young people. Most recruits come from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (proper). Also, a significant number of extremists left the Balkans and currently reside in Western Europe, where they joined, or even became leaders of local extremist

organisations. According to Mr Djordjevic, Serbian authorities focus on prevention of extremism as well as tracking down individuals linked to jihadist networks. He admitted that more needs to be done to improve information exchange among relevant agencies and to engage all sectors of society.

20. **Sulejman Ugljanin**, President of the National Council of the Bosnian National Minority in Serbia, stressed that an overwhelming majority of the Bosnian population in Serbia condemns extremism. He guessed that the main reason behind this foreign fighter phenomenon is the influence from abroad. He said that the National Council of the Bosnian National Minority works with Bosnian families on a daily basis trying to protect them from these influences. Mr Ugljanin also urged Serbian authorities to do more to help Bosnian communities and to refrain from accusing the entire Muslim population in Serbia of sympathising with extremists.

21. **Esad Hecimovic**, Editor of OBN TV in Sarajevo, also noted that hundreds of foreign jihadists fought in the Bosnian war in the 1990s. When the wars in the Balkans ended, most violent jihadists left the region to fight elsewhere. However, since 2013, there is a new surge of foreign fighter-related activity in the Balkans. According to Mr Hecimovic, among the foreign fighters in the Middle East, about 300 people come from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia (proper) and another 300 from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Albania and Kosovo. These people are recruited by transnational networks of radical preachers. Fighters from the Balkans are usually older than other members of violent extremist organisations in the Middle East and many of them have previous military experience.

22. **Raffaello Pantucci**, Director of International Security Studies, RUSI, noted that there is no standard profile for foreign fighters, but the majority are young males, many of them are converts to Islam. There is also no single narrative; motivations range from a sense of injustice happening in the Middle East to the search of adventure and sexual partners. The foreign fighters phenomenon is also facilitated by the geographic proximity of the Middle East region as well as by the spread of the radical content on the Internet and social media. He urged the international community to do more to facilitate the resolution of the Syrian conflict, to improve intelligence cooperation and to focus on disrupting extremist networks.

23. Marko Savkovic from the Belgrade Security Forum also noted that a number of Serbs went to fight on the side of the separatists in eastern Ukraine, and argued that these people could cause problems upon their return.

C. BELGRADE-PRISTINA NORMALIZATION

24. Experts and politicians praised the renewed momentum in the **Belgrade-Pristina normalisation** talks. In particular, the recent meeting of regional ministers of foreign affairs and transport in Pristina, with the participation of relevant Serbian ministers, was applauded as a model for the future. Mr Vejvoda also underlined the importance of civil society dialogue and mentioned the recent meeting of Kosovo and Serbian civil society representatives at the Hotel Metropol Palace, Belgrade, as a very positive example.

25. Throughout the course of the seminar, the tone of exchanges between representatives of the Serbian parliament and government and the members of the Assembly of Kosovo was constructive and forward-looking. It was noted that the implementation of the 19 April 2013 milestone agreement has to be improved and accelerated, however, particularly in the areas of judiciary and local governance, the participants heard.

26. Serbian representatives also stressed that they oppose the transformation of Kosovo's security forces into proper armed forces. Deputy Prime Minister Dacic warned that this might have

* Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

consequences for security in the region. He also recalled that NATO guaranteed that no Kosovo armed forces would be formed without the approval of NATO and KFOR. Serbian officials also feared that the reduction of KFOR could result in destabilisation and lead to a renewal of conflict among the local population. **Marko Djuric**, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, Republic of Serbia, noted that the clauses of the 19 April agreement regarding the formation of Serbian municipalities and the association of these municipalities have yet to be implemented. **Dusan Janjic** from the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Belgrade, regretted that the full implementation of the agreement was stalled in 2014, and many Kosovo Serbs felt insecure. However, the recent trilateral meeting between representatives in Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels might be a sign of a new, more constructive chapter in the normalization process, he said. He also urged Brussels to be more transparent vis-à-vis Serbian and Kosovo Albanian populations and to be more pro-active in ensuring the implementation of the 19 April 2013 agreement.

27. **Krenar Gashi** from the Centre for EU Studies, Ghent University, presented a perspective from Kosovo, and noted that the implementation of the 19 April agreement has been more successful than the critics predicted, mainly thanks to a growing degree of socialisation between local communities. He also said that it would be more helpful if Serbian representatives in the Kosovo government would be more independent from Belgrade and would genuinely represent Serbian communities in Kosovo. Mr Gashi also reaffirmed the determination of the Kosovo people and elites to pursue the path of European integration. At the same time, he challenged the notion that Serbia would be able to actually join the EU before the Kosovo status issue is resolved.

28. The Serbian participants strongly disagreed with the latter statement. They stressed that Serbia would never recognise Kosovo's independence in the same way that Ukraine and Georgia refuse to recognise the secession of Crimea or Abkhazia. They also suggested that Kosovo could join the EU faster as a part of Serbia.

D. SERBIA'S REFORM AGENDA

29. Deputy Prime Minister Dacic told delegates that the Serbian government is in the process of pursuing an ambitious reform agenda aimed at preparing the country for EU membership and improving living standards. Ambassador Davenport also noted that Serbia is a leading reformer in the region and that it displays enthusiasm and rigorousness in implementing economic reforms.

30. Serbia's Interior Minister **Nebojsa Stefanovic** stressed that the Serbian government has demonstrated its resolve and strong political will to fight corruption and organised crime, including in top echelons of Serbia's political and business elites. As a result, the influence of organised crime groups has been curbed and citizens feel safer, Mr Stefanovic said. In recent months, Serbia managed to achieve significant success disrupting and almost completely eradicating networks of tobacco smuggling, drug trafficking and illegal migration.

31. However, **Sonja Stojanovic-Gajic**, Director of the Belgrade Center for Security Policy, the oldest independent think tank in the Balkans dealing with security issues, noted that the current Serbian government relies too heavily on repressive law enforcement measures to combat organised crime and corruption. She suggested that more attention should be paid to preventive aspects in order for these achievements to be sustainable.

32. **Alberto Bin**, Director, Integration, Partnership and Cooperation, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO, discussed how the Euro-Atlantic institutions could support the reform process in the Balkans. One of the tools at NATO's disposal is the Building Integrity (BI) Programme, which has become one of NATO's most effective instruments to help Allies and partners prevent corruption in their defence and security sectors. In practical terms, NATO BI is about learning how to identify and reduce the risk of corruption via the integration of corruption-reducing strategies – the installation of transparent management and procurement processes, and an overall anchoring of transparency and accountability in the defence and security

sectors. BI is also demand driven and based on the assumption that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution in relation to individual nation’s defence sectors.

33. This tailored approach is applied towards the Balkan countries as well. These countries are very much involved in BI activities, Mr Bin said. He welcomed the publication of the BI Peer Review report on Serbia. In 2014, more than 50 people from Serbia participated in BI activities. Brigadier General **Slobodan Joksimovic**, Head of Strategic Planning Department at the Serbian Ministry of Defence, confirmed that MoD has achieved very positive results through the participation in the BI process. He outlined future activities in this area, including a focus on education, the implementation of anti-corruption laws and engaging civil society in the defence and security domain.

34. **Todor Tagarev**, Associate Senior Fellow, DCAF, discussed the prerequisites for efficient parliamentary oversight over defence and security, and urged the Serbian authorities to fully explore established best practices from other countries. DCAF publications and workshops are a very helpful tools in this respect, Mr Tagarev said.
