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96<sup>th</sup> ROSE-ROTH SEMINAR

SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRANSITION AND  
DEVELOPMENT (ESCTD)

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## **SEMINAR REPORT**

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**THE WESTERN BALKANS:  
PAST MISPERCEPTIONS, CURRENT  
CHALLENGES AND FUTURE ENDEAVOURS**

**LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA**

**7-9 NOVEMBER 2017**

1. The European Union and the United States cannot take the positive evolution of Western Balkan democracy for granted: the risk of backsliding is ever present. There are many worrying signs that a kind of vacuum has been created in the region that is being filled by forces with a decidedly anti-democratic and anti-Western agenda.
2. This was a central message emerging from a NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) Rose-Roth Seminar entitled *The Western Balkans: Past Misperceptions, Current Challenges and Future Endeavours* hosted by the Slovenian Parliament in Ljubljana on 7-9 November 2017.
3. **Jasna Murgel**, Head of the Slovenian delegation to the NATO PA, welcomed the participants and noted that this was the second Rose-Roth seminar to be hosted in her country. She stated that Slovenia has long supported the enlargement of NATO to the Western Balkans and noted that the recent accession of Montenegro is particularly welcome. She suggested that the Euro-Atlantic enlargement process cannot be complete until the region achieves full respect for human rights and the rule of law. Trust, cooperation and mutual assistance are all needed to achieve this and to thwart an array of complex challenges including emerging threats to security, outside intervention, mass migration and radicalism. She cited a litany of multilateral structures, including the Berlin Process and micro-regional endeavours, which are specifically designed to facilitate the peaceful and democratic transformation of the region. She warned, however, that the Western Balkans would suffer if the EU lost momentum. The EU has a proven track record in fostering European peace and reconciliation and must remain focused on achieving these ends in the region.
4. **Paolo Alli**, President of the NATO PA, told participants that the seminar had been structured to draw lessons from the past, take stock of the present and look to the future. He noted how transformative membership in organisations like the EU and NATO can be; joining these institutions should help build a foundation for stability and growth. He also suggested that the status quo should not be confused with stability precisely because profound change is needed.
5. **Dusan Reljic**, Head of the Brussels Office of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, gave the keynote address at the seminar which focused on failing transition, fading security and how optimism might be restored in the Western Balkans. He noted that the lynchpin for peace and transition in the region has been to share the EU system of institutions, values and practices and help embed the region in Euro-Atlantic cooperation with a perspective of EU and NATO membership for those countries of the region seeking it. The ultimate goal has been to foster convergence and build lasting peace in the region. The stakes were high for the EU as success on this front could reinforce the EU legitimacy as a key international actor.
6. **Mr Reljic**, like several other speakers, noted how profound the economic crisis that began in 2008 has been for the Western Balkans. GDP levels have not yet returned to pre-crisis levels and in some countries the level is lower than in 1991. This is extremely worrying. To manage the crisis, countries in the region have taken on foreign loans and the region collectively holds a debt approaching USD100 billion. If interest rates rise this could precipitate a serious crisis similar in impact to that which transpired in Greece. These countries also have to cope with the legacy of war, incomplete transition, corruption and the reckless behaviour of some political, religious, intellectual and economic leaders. Youth unemployment is very high and many have no prospects of work in the future.
7. More worrying still is that current growth rates are not sufficient to close the economic gap with Europe. One study said that even if EU growth were to stagnate over the next two decades and the Western Balkans were to grow at a 6% rate, only in 2035 would the region catch up with the EU average. Closing the gap, however, is essential to stabilisation. One analyst recently said that the best advice he could offer to young people was to emigrate from the country, and there is indeed a

high readiness to do so. For example, 200 000 people have left Croatia in recent years and are now living in Western Europe.

8. The EU and NATO are no longer seen as universal remedies for the region and roughly a third of the population of the Western Balkans say that EU membership is not likely in their lifetime. Optimism in the EU itself is waning and enlargement fatigue has been one consequence. The region is also confronted with the problem of other outside actors. US, Russian and Turkish policies have changed in the region and some of these changes are fomenting uncertainty and new tensions.

9. **Milan Brglez**, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, discussed his country's historical links to the Western Balkans and its long-held aspirations for EU membership. In the early years of independence, EU membership was his country's highest priority, but now that Slovenia is a full member it feels compelled once again to engage itself in the Western Balkans. Slovenia sees itself as an advocate for the region and a champion of its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, which will be vital for the region and critical to Slovenia's own security and economic interests. The problems are important as the region is permeated by intolerance, nationalism and a legacy of war. Mr Brglez suggested that the accession process is helping to restore the rule of law and democratic practices to the region. Slovenia is also a strong proponent of an Open Door policy for NATO membership and welcomes the recent accession of Montenegro to the Alliance.

10. **Andreja Katic**, Slovenian Minister of Defence, also linked Slovenia's security to developments in the Western Balkans. She pointed out the need for more constructive dialogue within Western Balkan societies to better cope with a range of challenges including nationalism and the influx of refugees. But it is also critical for Europe to engage more deeply in the region, she added. The Western Balkans need the prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration as an incentive for domestic reform and reconciliation.

11. She also discussed Slovenia's contributions to several NATO missions including the Kosovo Force (KFOR) which has become the largest of Slovenia's external deployments. Slovenia is still significantly below the NATO defence spending target of 2% of GDP. She noted that the years of spending reductions are over and Slovenia is now increasing its defence outlays. But achieving the 2% figure will not happen overnight and public support for this effort must be built. Slovenia does not welcome the notion of Kosovo developing a military force, she said, adding that if Kosovo wants to achieve full independence it will have to develop an inclusive approach to minority communities and lay the foundations for building a social consensus. She also welcomed recent political developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\* and added that the international community should respond with positive initiatives to this important set of political changes. The Minister also stressed the importance of a joint European response to the migration crisis.

12. **Paul Michele Giacomelli**, the Italian Foreign Ministry's Special Envoy to the Western Balkans, provided an Italian perspective on developments in the region. He indicated that Italy sees NATO as a critical player in building stability in the region and that reform in the region is closely linked to Euro-Atlantic engagement. He discussed a recent EU-Western Balkan Summit in Trieste, which has had a number of practical outcomes including a new package on transport, energy and cyber connectivity. The goal here is to establish networks that will help bind the region closer to the EU. The summit also dealt with measures to fight corruption, support small and medium-sized businesses and engage civil society and young people in public life. This has coincided with new signals from the EU Commission that the door for accession is reopening.

13. Mr Giacomelli noted that Italy has 550 personnel deployed with KFOR and is also participating in EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He expressed concern that the defeat of Daesh on the battlefields of the Middle East could trigger a migration of fighters into Europe and noted that the

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\* Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

Western Balkans could be vulnerable to this reentry. All of these problems, he suggested, have to be addressed in a broad fashion.

14. **Wolfgang Petritsch**, former EU Representative for Kosovo, sought to frame the problems of the region into a wider context. He noted that although Austria is not a member of NATO, it is very committed to the stabilising role NATO is playing in the region and participates actively in the Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC). For Austria, the Western Balkans are a top foreign policy concern and a large diaspora of people from the region are living in Austria. In many respects Vienna is partly a Western Balkan city. Stability in the region is thus of critical importance to Austria and it hopes to see the region fully integrated into the EU. The consolidation of peace and the Berlin Process are critical to achieving this end. Austria is also participating in NATO missions in the region.

15. The security profile of the Western Balkans has changed considerably; some countries of the region have positioned themselves to be security providers and not merely security consumers. However, this process is still unfolding. The region continues to confront problems including weak states, border disputes, foreign meddling, and a myriad of economic challenges including an ongoing brain drain and a fundamental lack of resilience. Austria supports the EU's Rule of Law Initiative in Kosovo and the conflict prevention center in Zagreb. Austria was also affected by the refugee crisis, and this only reinforced its sense that developments in the Western Balkans are closely linked to its own security.

16. **Andrej Logar**, Slovenian State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened his remarks by suggesting that enlargement fatigue was never slated to be a permanent feature of the EU's approach to the Western Balkans. Indeed, the EU appears to have transcended that impulse and increasingly shows itself ready to fulfill its promise to the region. He too discussed the plethora of new structural initiatives designed to tie the region more closely to the EU. The real challenges, he said, lie in achieving reconciliation and in bolstering the rule of law, human rights, and media freedom. It is important to tailor the approach to each country and to create closer ties with each of these countries depending on their progress in these areas. He indicated that there is now an expectation that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania will move on to a faster track for accession, and that the EU needs to prepare itself to move more quickly and should begin to scrutinise the existing legislation of all candidate countries. In short, the region needs constant EU attention to maintain the momentum for reform and progress.

17. **Maciej Popowski**, Deputy Director General for Europe, pointed to the recent speech by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in which he clearly noted that the enlargement process will continue. This should inspire countries like Serbia and Montenegro to work toward the goal of accession. He also cited the recent Trieste Summit as an indication of Europe's goal of more deeply linking the Western Balkans to the rest of Europe through tangible infrastructure projects. It is important for the region to construct an integrated regional market since this too would help prepare it for the rigors of accession. He noted that European values, including strong positions against corruption, must be fully respected for the process of enlargement to move forward. He also pointed out that the region's economic growth is too slow and that this would delay the process of convergence. Youth unemployment is a particularly grave concern as it is leading to a region-wide brain drain. Economic reforms are needed to counteract these trends. The speaker emphasised the relationship between security and economic development and noted that NATO and the EU are working well together in the region. The EU is, for example, supporting NATO's Building Integrity programme.

18. **Kurt Bassuener** suggested that the broad security situation in the Western Balkans has been influenced by disparate phenomena including wars in Syria and Iraq, mass migration, and Russia's disruptive, anti-liberal policies. All of these factors have exposed the region's ongoing security vulnerabilities. Russia, he noted, has shifted its role in the wake of the war in Ukraine from that of an opportunistic spoiler to one engaged in active disruption of positive change. China has also begun to raise its profile in the Western Balkans, he commented, and he pointed out that Beijing prefers to

deal with strongmen leaders rather than with liberal democratic societies. Mr Bassuener suggested that the security situation in the Western Balkans remains highly tenuous and he noted that ongoing border disputes partly reflect a failure on Europe's part to push for the resolution of these matters. He suggested that EU needs to be far more demanding on matters like borders before they admit other countries to the EU.

19. He also asserted that the West is sending mixed messages. The United States appears to be in retreat, the United Kingdom is consumed by Brexit, and the EU confronts an identity crisis. How the EU redefines itself in the wake of Brexit will have important implications for the Western Balkans. The lack of Western unity has opened doors for Russian meddling, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is particularly vulnerable. Turkey also appears to be changing its views of the West, while relations among the states of the region itself are fraught with tensions, although there are important diplomatic efforts to contain them. More worrying still is the problem of poor governance and corruption, which has been facilitated by Western tolerance of these practices. Other outside actors like China and Russia never address such matters or, in Russia's case, openly encourage these vices. The region would be well served by a far higher degree of transparency and accountability.

20. **Pedrag Jurekovic** noted that despite numerous problems, there have been some successes in the Western Balkans. There is readiness on the part of regional actors to resolve certain outstanding tensions through dialogue and not through violence. NATO and the EU have played a critical role in this regard. There was a credible integration strategy to guide these countries toward Europe in the broad sense of the term. The problem is that since 2008 the EU has found it increasingly difficult to maintain its focus on the region and the dialogue has become more focused on technical standards than on values. This has undermined EU credibility in the region. Today the region waits in a kind of limbo while the geopolitical situation in Europe worsens. Russia and even China are now posing challenges to the status quo.

21. Russia is of particular concern. Until 2007 it did not appear overly focused on the region. This changed after a number of governments recognised Kosovo and even more so after the Russian invasion of Crimea. Russia has since intensified its efforts to counter Western policies in the region. This is not to say that Russia does not have legitimate interests in the Western Balkans. But its focus on nurturing extremist nationalist movements guided by a revisionist agenda is indeed worrisome. It has played a particularly destabilising role in the Republika Srpska, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro. Russia's support for Milorad Dodic, the President of Republika Srpska, and his policies of intransigence are clearly guided by its ambition to counter NATO wherever it can. It tried to do the same in Montenegro but clearly suffered a setback when that country joined the Alliance. Russia continues to work to polarise Montenegro and to support extremists, some of whom were allegedly involved in a failed coup. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Russians strongly criticised Western efforts to mediate between the country's political factions and claimed that the West was only supporting Albanian interests. This theme has been picked up in other countries in the region and has fueled all manner of conspiracy theories.

22. Russia is also playing a role in Serbia. Although it is working with NATO and maintains its objective of eventual EU membership, Serbia presents this ambition more as a technical-economic imperative than as a goal driven by democratic values. The Serbian press completely ignores any discussion of values in its reporting about the EU while the government's cooperation with NATO is almost never discussed. This feeds public misunderstanding of government policy and of the role that Western values play in animating these two organisations. Russia offers no viable alternative for the region, but undermines both reconciliation and the development of positive relations with the West. Mr Jurekovic suggested that it would be important for the EU to stress liberal democratic values in its interaction with all of these countries as this is the key to positive change. There is a real problem when 50% of Serbs see Russia as a friend of their country but only 2% see Germany

as such—particularly as Germany is a far more important economic partner for Serbia than Russia will ever be.

23. **Jasmin Mujanovic**, Fellow at the East West Institute, suggested that one of Bosnia and Herzegovina's enduring problems is that the constitution is more of a peace treaty than a legal framework for a rules-based constitutional order. He added that the country is not a failing state but rather a fractured authoritarian state beset by tensions along sectarian lines. Each fragment is administered like a patriarchal fiefdom.

24. One of the problems of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been its failure to renew its leadership. The governing elite exploit sectarian fears to maintain its hold on power and over economic assets. Nationalism has provided an ideological cover for authoritarianism and is used to divert attention away from asset seizures and self-dealing. The leading governing groups, Mr Mujanovic said, are not avatars of their national projects, they themselves are the projects and they derive their power and sustenance from their capture of the state. This creates a symbiotic relationship among elites across the sectarian divide, as nationalist elites essentially share an identical view of power and how it is to be administered. This conception of power is not democratic. He suggested that political groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina are more akin to crime syndicates than Western political parties. They are led by a handful of individuals, each operating a kind of cult of personality. The system is closed and not at all transparent and politics is largely a process of patriarchal distribution. The primary fear of the political elite is losing access to public monies, while voters are driven by the potential for patronage awards. There is no free market to speak of and cronyism and corruption are the foundations of wealth distribution. The political groups peddle licenses and jobs. The only semi-functional sectors are the one that are not dependent on this system: small high technology firms and parts of the tourist sector. Corruption has become so rampant, he added that international lending institutions are no longer providing substantial capital and so the political groups are now relying on predatory local banks which are highly vulnerable to default. They are also appealing to Russia and China for support. This house of cards will inevitably collapse, as the model is simply unsustainable. Avenues must therefore be opened up for new political actors with a more positive agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina, he concluded.

25. **Erwan Fouéré**, Associate Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for European Studies, opened his remarks by noting that the Western Balkans are back on the international agenda after several years in which the region had been taken for granted. There was a false assumption that democratic reform in the region was inevitable, but this was overly optimistic. More active international engagement is essential to galvanise this process. Federica Mogherini's recent visit to the region was long overdue and it represented an important moment as it clarified the problem of backsliding and the mistaken prioritising of stability over the rule of law and democratic accountability. Europe's quest for stability, in other words, came at the price of democratic reform. This has actually left the region less stable.

26. Mr Fouéré suggested that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's descent into authoritarianism is instructive. Fortunately, the new government led by Zoran Zaev has introduced positive change, and an atmosphere of freedom and transparency is replacing the previous climate of intimidation and fear. After years of oppression, civil society mobilised to challenge the authoritarian regime that Nikola Gruevski had put in place, and the country now has an opportunity to construct more democratic institutions. Judicial reform will be particularly important and the challenges are serious. The decentralised Ohrid Framework which helped resolve armed conflict in 2001 remains valid in a multiethnic society aspiring to construct a coherent democracy. Education reform is also critical, particularly as the policy of maintaining ethnically divided schools has only cemented divisions and fueled mistrust. Previous government purges were also driven by an impulse for retribution, and this must also be avoided for the sake of reconciliation, he argued. A broad

approach to building confidence in state institutions is essential. In this new and positive political climate, it may finally prove possible to address the name issue with Greece.

27. **Djordje Popovic**, Programme Coordinator at the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFPE), discussed the situation in Serbia and its aspirations for EU membership. He indicated that Serbia has had official candidate status since 2012 and entered into an Association agreement in 2013. Accession negotiations began in January 2014, ten chapters are currently open and more are likely to be opened by the end of the year. He suggested that opening chapters can be a way to hasten the reform process. Serbia has implemented several important economic reforms, but it also faces a range of challenges. Corruption remains a serious problem, he emphasised, adding that the track record for investigation into this kind of crime is not at all impressive. Serbia has still not adopted a law on the establishment of an anti-corruption agency, although this is expected to happen soon. Parliament has passed several laws governing the police and the Ministry of Interior has been reorganised, but according to Mr Popovic Serbia has not made sufficient progress in the areas of inclusivity, transparency and oversight of the executive branch. Too often laws are adopted under urgent procedures, which limits public debate and can undermine the quality of the laws that are adopted.

28. Reform in Serbia has also been hampered by constant elections. Judicial reform is essential but progress on this front has been very slow. There are also problems with the press. Journalists are not in good graces with political elites and can be subject to threats and even violence. The press constantly attacks the EU and NATO, which undermines Serbian identification with the Euro-Atlantic community. This only sows public misunderstanding and creates a fundamental disconnect between government policy and public understanding of that policy.

29. Serbia's foreign policy postures often run against those of Europe as a whole. It has refused to join in EU declarations on Russia's violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. This could prove problematic when the chapter on foreign affairs opens up. Currently, Serbia is significantly at odds with the rest of Europe on several fundamental points. On the other hand, although it is not often discussed publicly, Serbia actually cooperates closely with NATO and NATO member states and is far more active with NATO than it is with Russia. This is welcome as Serbia is a key security player in the region and has much to offer in terms of building greater stability. But it needs to align itself more closely with the EU on a range of issues and practices. Kosovo has become a challenge in this regard and the problem is linked to many other issues. Pristina's intransigence is hardly helping. Perhaps even more important is that a broader societal dialogue is needed to build peace and stability. The problem, Mr Popovic suggested, is that elites both in Belgrade and Pristina are shaping the relationship and they do not always appear dedicated to finding genuine solutions to a range of outstanding problems.

30. **Jan Braathu**, the head of the OSCE mission in Kosovo, provided an overview of the mission's work. The OSCE established a permanent presence in Kosovo in 1992 as part of a strategy to prevent conflict. That particular mission did not last long when the government of Yugoslavia refused to continue a key memorandum of understanding. Yugoslavia was subsequently suspended from the OSCE. In 1998 at a moment of serious tensions, the OSCE established a verification mission to monitor violations of a peace agreement, but that mission was also short-lived due to the deteriorating security situation in Kosovo. The current mission followed from UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The head of the OSCE mission is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Institution Building. The mandate has been to support democracy building efforts including backing for NGO's, political parties, the free media and the police. The mission employs 503 staffers of whom 116 are international and represents the largest OSCE field mission in the Balkans and the second largest of all after the mission in Ukraine.

31. Mr Braathu stated that Kosovo remains highly fragile and is burdened by political gridlock. There is, however, a degree of social stability despite this political fragility. The snap parliamentary elections of 11 June 2017, which were conducted without serious problems, produced a government

backed by a small majority. The cabinet has shown itself to be proactive and there are signs that some degree of trust is emerging. The establishment of Serb majority municipalities and the border with Montenegro are two outstanding issues that need to be resolved. The government of Kosovo has called for international arbitration on the border dispute with Montenegro, but Montenegro's position is that this border issue is settled and cannot be reopened. There is also a degree of dissatisfaction among Kosovo Albanians regarding Serb-established institutions. Kosovo has participated in local elections and this too is a good sign, as is President Hashim Thaci's support for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission which is also supported by the Serbian Orthodox Church. A framework for such a Commission is now under development. Mr Braathu suggested that the international community needs to remain focused on encouraging dialogue and compromise between Pristina and Belgrade and with the various communities in Kosovo itself. Parliamentarians have a key role to play in this regard.

32. **Dunja Mijatovic**, former OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, argued that the right of the media to report and to communicate what it learns is fundamental to democracy and needs to be preserved. This is all the more important in the current environment in which the media is under siege not only in the Western Balkans but even in the West. The media, however, confronts particularly acute problems in the region. Attacks on journalist, for example, are common and are often not investigated. Court systems have shown themselves to be particularly inadequate in such cases. Public service broadcasting serves only those in power and not the broader public. Ms Muatovic noted that there is a strong gap between the laws supporting media freedoms and actual practice.

33. **Dejan Vercic**, head of the Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, discussed the phenomenon of "fake news" and its consequences. He argued that the proliferation of untrue news items poses a challenge to the foundation of open democracies. Respect for expertise and facts as such appears to be eroding. There is the risk that nothing will be seen as true, which will open the floodgates for misinformation. Democracies will not work when untruths are common in the national media. A vigorous and sustained effort is needed to "vaccinate" open societies against the problem of fake news.

34. **Frederick Fooy**, Chief Analyst in the Operational Support Branch of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence (STRATCOM), noted that this topic is of critical importance to the Alliance particularly in the face of Russia's efforts to diffuse fake news and to interfere in the domestic politics of allied countries. The assault on the credibility of traditional sources of trusted news has opened up new avenues for Russia to exercise influence. The Kremlin, he argued, has an impressive toolbox that can deceive large constituencies of voters. In this manner, they have positioned themselves to shape the cognitive domain to their advantage. The benefits to Russia are that these tools are cost effective, they have unlimited range and they are deniable. The Russians are deploying a large cultural apparatus including "troll factories" to exercise influence. They are also supporting those who repeat Russian-inspired anti-American and Euro-sceptic narratives. Their preferred narrative tends to depict NATO as a tool of American power and as an aggressive and militarist organisation. The Russians also use highly divisive language and racist imagery to further its ends and it encourages separatist movements everywhere from Gotland to Texas. In the Baltics, Russian trolls consistently describe the United States and NATO as occupiers and they work assiduously to undermine support for NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the region. It also conducts information campaigns that suggest that Europe is facing imminent collapse and that the country is riddled with no-go zones as a result of migration. Russian trolls also push a myth that Europe is declining because of its secularism and tolerance. They cast authoritarian regimes as strong, patriotic and healthy.

35. Open societies need to build resilience against this kind of information warfare and this demands a capacity to identify the process and counter it. Regional and international cooperation is also needed to help share information and coordinate responses. Vulnerability assessments and shared lessons can be very helpful. In democratic societies, fake news must be countered with facts



and research-based knowledge. This is not counter-propaganda as such but is better characterised as defusing facts and communicating values, both of which are needed in informed and open democracies. Governments need to train not only government workers but also civil society representatives and students to better understand the challenges of fake news and information warfare and to best identify successful means to counter these false narratives.

36. **Ioannis Armakolas**, Assistant Professor at the University of Macedonia in Thessaloniki, spoke on the challenge of migration in the Western Balkans. He opened his remarks by suggesting that the mixed migration crisis of 2015-2016 will have a far-reaching impact on the region and on Europe. In that period roughly one million people entered Greece. The very poor response to this massive influx of migrants both in Greece and in Europe represented a failure of policy and imagination. EU solidarity broke down and the EU itself was hampered by the intransigent position taken by some EU countries towards accepting migrants. This resulted in unilateral responses that ultimately proved insufficient. The crisis was exacerbated by weakened trust in German leadership, particularly among some of the new member countries.

37. The migration crisis had a different resonance in the Western Balkans. EU funding was made available to help the countries in the region cope with the crisis. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the migration phenomenon became a crisis of government and opposition and not one of migration per se. Mr Gruevski, the then Prime Minister of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, sought to leverage the crisis to buttress his increasingly tenuous political situation.

38. The countries of the region felt as if this was someone else's problem, as so many of the migrants wanted to travel to Germany and other European countries. This gave them the luxury of appearing generous without worrying about long-term burdens. But it is worth noting that one quarter of those applying for asylum in Europe were from the region. In any case, the countries of the region were helping to mitigate instability in Europe and to provide at least temporary solutions to the crisis at hand. Nationalist populist rhetoric emerged more in EU countries than in the region in response to the crisis. Compared to the Visegrad countries and Austria, the region's response seemed calm. At the same time, Europe underwent a significant remilitarisation of its borders, which was carried out outside of multilateral frameworks.

39. The paradox that emerged out of this mixed migration crisis is that the more profoundly challenging migration crises are, the more pan-European solutions are needed. The crisis has demonstrated that the Western Balkans are a missing piece of Europe's security puzzle and that they need to be part of the planning process. Finally, the crisis has pointed to several worrying ideological shifts that are breaking taboos and could have long term implications for Europe.

40. **Vedran Dzihic**, Senior Researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIIP) and Lecturer at the University of Vienna, added that the crisis has had a core and periphery dimension for Europe and that Europe needs to come to grips with this dynamic. It also has potential spillover effects on matters such as international criminal networks, which could strengthen if Europe does not find a long-term solution to the migration crisis. He added that barbed wire approaches will only increase criminality. The problem is that the crisis has closed borders even between countries like Denmark and Sweden, and this poses a serious challenge to European solidarity and integration. The crisis over migration has amplified enlargement fatigue and exacerbated the gap between powerful and weaker countries within the EU. It has also played into the hands of populist politicians and built networks among them. This is undermining the very spirit of liberalism.

41. Europe thus finds itself caught in various levels of crisis, with the old order dying out and the new order not yet apparent. There is a rising sense of skepticism about the future which both the economic and migration crises have triggered. Mr Dzihic suggested that this has fed a new politics of fear throughout the continent. This was very apparent most recently in the elections campaign in Austria where identity politics seems to have returned. Fences and walls are now touted as solutions to complex challenges and are being erected throughout the continent. This is reanimating the old

East-West divide, albeit in new ways. The problem has an ideological dimension, with several Eastern European governments and a number of parties seeking to construct illiberal democracies. There also appears to be a rising clash between appeals to national solidarity and international or universal solidarity. In the midst of this crisis, the EU lost a degree of leverage as its response to the migration crisis at times seemed driven by a sense of panic rather than a deliberative quest to find solutions. Afterwards, its approach was largely one of securitisation as recent border closings suggest. This too is a sign of revived power politics on the continent, which in the Western Balkans summons old ghosts that many had sought to bury. The instrumentalisation of identity and the appeal to authoritarian solutions seems to have accelerated in this environment.

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