

102nd ROSE-ROTH SEMINAR REPORT

JOINT WITH
ECONOMICS AND SECURITY
COMMITTEE

EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION OF
THE WESTERN BALKANS:
PROTRACTED CHALLENGES, NEW
REALITIES AND FUTURE
PERSPECTIVES

Pristina
8-10 October 2022

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INTRODUCTION

1. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) held its 102nd Rose-Roth Seminar in Pristina from 8 to 10 October 2022 entitled “Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Western Balkans: Protracted Challenges, New Realities and Future Perspectives”.
2. During the three-day seminar, local officials, diplomats, local and international experts, military officers, and NATO and EU officials addressed the security, political and economic situation in Kosovo, the impact of Russia’s war against Ukraine on the Western Balkans, the region’s Euro-Atlantic integration and ongoing security and political challenges for the Western Balkans. They also discussed challenges to the rule of law and the fight against corruption, as well as the contribution of women and young people to building regional peace and security.
3. The seminar was organised in cooperation with the Assembly of Kosovo with the generous support of the Swiss Government and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). It brought together 45 parliamentarians from 17 Allied and partner countries. The primary objectives of Rose-Roth seminars are to promote exchange and mutual understanding among legislators from Allies and partners and to assist partner parliaments in developing tools for effective and democratic oversight over defence and security.
4. In line with Assembly policy and practice, the seminar was held in a status-neutral format.

I. KOSOVO AND THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT CREATED BY RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

5. In a video address to the seminar, NATO PA President **Gerald E. Connolly (United States)** stressed the strategic importance of the Western Balkans for NATO’s security. He reiterated that Western Balkan countries and Euro-Atlantic nations must work together toward overcoming the challenges facing the region while countering the destabilising influence of autocratic powers such as Russia and China.
6. Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine is having sweeping implications for European security, including the Western Balkans. In her remarks, Kosovo President **Vjosa Osmani-Sadriu** acknowledged the threats posed by Russia to the security and stability of the region, as well as more broadly to democratic values. NATO in turn continued to play an indispensable stabilising role in the region. Ms Osmani-Sadriu noted that 80% of the public supports the presence of the NATO-led KFOR in the country even 23 years after it was initially deployed there to secure the peace.
7. The Speaker of the Assembly of Kosovo, **Glauk Konjufca**, stressed the crucial geopolitical moment in which the Rose-Roth Seminar is held. He stated that the world entered a dangerous new era on the 24th of February; Russia’s unprovoked aggression against Ukraine represents a paradigm shift, pitching autocracies against democracies. The Speaker noted that Kosovo remains committed to continuing close cooperation with NATO which contributes to the safety, security, and freedom of movement of Kosovars. He noted that the government in Pristina is embarking upon reforms that he hopes will ultimately allow Kosovo to join NATO.
8. In his remarks to the participants, Prime Minister **Albin Kurti** also highlighted the challenge posed by autocracies to democratic values. He indicated that Kosovo’s intention is to accede to Euro-Atlantic institutions including NATO and the EU. “We have no alternative but to integrate into NATO and the European Union”, Mr Kurti noted. He said his government is now aiming to invest 2% of GDP in defence and fully align Kosovo Security Forces to NATO standards. The government is also pushing hard for EU visa liberalisation, membership in the Council of Europe and participation

in NATO's Partnership for Peace programme. Mr Kurti told the delegates that Kosovo now sees itself as a security provider and has, for example, provided support to Ukraine.

9. In his address, Ambassador of Switzerland **Thomas Kolly**, expressed Switzerland's support, over the years, for exchanges among parliamentarians in the framework of the Rose-Roth seminars which also engage policy makers and parliamentarians from partner countries. He suggested that Russia's war on Ukraine has made discussions on international rules, core values, and security concerns a critical aspect of building European security. He added that the promotion of peace and stability in the Western Balkans remains one of Switzerland's most important foreign policy priorities. He suggested that the Swiss government and society can contribute to building peace and security through a range of socio-economic and infrastructure programmes, support for the rule of law, participation in the fight against corruption and organised crime, promotion of dialogue and reconciliation among communities, including efforts to encourage normalisation between Pristina and Belgrade.

10. In his keynote address, **Dimitar Bechev**, a Lecturer at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and a Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Europe, argued that the countries of the Western Balkans need to reinforce societal resilience in the face of Russian aggression and the fallout from its war on Ukraine including rising energy prices. Even if most of the region, outside of Serbia, is not directly dependent on Russia for energy, the countries of the region remain far too reliant on carbon-based fuels and ageing infrastructure, which leaves them vulnerable as the winter months approach. The challenge lies in managing an energy transition during a deep crisis in energy supplies arising out of Russia's war in Ukraine.

11. Mr Bechev noted that Russia is now on its back foot because of serious setbacks in its military campaign but this has not mitigated its destabilising propaganda campaign in the Western Balkans. Russia is seeking to exploit weak spots and societal cleavages to foster uncertainty and instability where it can, but it lacked a proper strategy in the Western Balkans, Mr Bechev argued – a view challenged by several participants.

12. Mr Bechev stressed that both the EU and NATO have particularly important roles to play, not simply in providing a fact-based counter narrative to Russian disinformation, but also in offering a more compelling institutional, economic and security alternative to Russia's bleak ethno-nationalist and anti-Western vision.

II. NATO'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE AND STABILITY IN KOSOVO AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN KOSOVO

13. NATO continues to actively support security and stability in the Western Balkans region, particularly through KFOR.

14. **Alexander Aviøs Aalmo**, the Deputy Chief Political Advisor at NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) described the critical work of that force in providing a safe and secure environment and ensuring the protection of the rights of all communities in Kosovo in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. He stressed that the current security situation remains relatively calm despite inter-communal tensions. He noted that KFOR has worked to de-escalate tensions linked to the license plates issue, a matter that has yet to be resolved. Noting that UNSCR 1244 remains in place until the Security Council decides otherwise, he cautioned that, as the KSF develops, there is a risk that its mandate will come into friction with KFOR.

15. Brigadier General **Joachim Hoppe**, Director of the NATO Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT), presented the scope, structure, and current focus of NALT and its work in capacity-building, education and training coordination. He told members that NALT is currently working with Kosovo Security Forces (KSF) on restructuring the Civil Structure for Oversight of the KSF, budget planning and execution, enhancing bilateral cooperation and increasing transparency.

16. Minister of Defence **Armend Mehaj** discussed the planned transition of the KSF, which is due to be completed in 2028. As part of the modernisation process, the Ministry of Defence and KSF have implemented a Comprehensive Transition Plan to increase the readiness and interoperability of the KSF with NATO forces. The KSF benefits from the close cooperation with the NALT as well as the support of individual NATO Allies. For instance, Kosovo for the first time served as a host for the Defender Europe 2021 joint multilateral exercise, led by the US-Army, the Minister noted.

17. **Anton Quni**, a member of the Assembly of Kosovo's Committee for Security Issues and Defence, discussed parliamentary oversight over security institutions. He stressed that the Assembly of Kosovo bears responsibility for scrutinizing the security sector and the budgets that finance it. Mr Quni described 12 steps the Assembly of Kosovo has undertaken to enhance its capacity to exercise democratic control over the security sector, including the approval and implementation of a new National Security Strategy.

18. **Mentor Vrajolli**, Director of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, noted that the representation of non-majority ethnic community in Kosovo police and security force is low (15%-17% within Police, and 6%-7% in KSF). The problem is also apparent within the staff of the Ministry of Defence. He indicated that the integration of Kosovo Serbs in the security organisations remains a challenge.

19. During the seminar, participants had an opportunity to visit the Kosovo Security Forces Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and KFOR-Camp Bondsteel. At TRADOC, NATO PA lawmakers learned about ongoing reforms of the Kosovo Security Forces which aim to bring these forces up to NATO standards, increase readiness and enhance interoperability with NATO. NATO allies work closely with the KSF and have supported both training and structural reforms that better align it with standards in NATO countries. KFOR in turn works to ensure that responsibilities remain clearly delineated between it and those of the KSF. KFOR continues to work to foster a safe and secure environment throughout Kosovo based on UNSCR 1244 (1999).

III. NEXT STEPS FOR THE REGION IN THE EU INTEGRATION PROCESS AND STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW AND COMBATTING CORRUPTION

20. Several speakers indicated that while most of the countries of the Western Balkans aspire to full integration within the Euro-Atlantic community, continued reforms are essential to galvanise this process. Renewed European focus on the Western Balkans has now begun to reinvigorate the EU integration process. During discussions on the next steps for the EU enlargement, **Anna Carin Platon**, Head of Political, European Integration, Press and Information section at the European Union Office in Kosovo, argued that the European Union is not complete without the Western Balkans. Candidates and prospective candidate countries have much work to do. Essential political, economic and judiciary reforms must be undertaken if this process is to move forward, Platon suggested.

21. For its part, Kosovo is making progress in addressing structural problems which, besides status issues, had previously impeded its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. It is telling that in 2021 Pristina moved up 17 places in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, noted **Besnik Bislimi**, First Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration, Development and Dialogue. Participants learned that reforms in Kosovo have been implemented across a range of policy areas including justice, security, economic, environmental and education policy. While these reforms move Kosovo closer to its goal of Euro-Atlantic integration, they also have great value in themselves, Anna Carin Platon observed. At the same time, Mr Bislimi expressed scepticism about the current state of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, noting that no meeting had been held since 18 August and arguing that Belgrade and Pristina were not closer to normalisation today than they were in 2011. He and Mr Mehaj pointed to the geographical distribution of Serbian army and gendarmerie forces as further evidence of current challenges.

22. Minister of Justice **Albulena Haxhiu** stated that Pristina's goal is to have an independent and functional judicial system. As such, a series of rule of law reforms were initiated, aimed at improving the justice system and combating both organised crime and corruption. Ms Haxhiu confirmed that the government has developed these reforms in coordination with the Venice Commission and intense efforts have been undertaken to ensure respect for international human rights law.

23. **Hubert Van Eck Koster**, Chief of Case Monitoring Unit at the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) welcomed progress in implementing judicial reform but noted persistent shortcomings and challenges of the rule of law in Kosovo. He pointed to the need for more structured judicial procedures and guidelines aimed at fostering more efficient and productive hearings and trials.

IV. SHORING UP THE RECOVERY AND FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH: THE REGION'S ECONOMIC SITUATION AFTER COVID-19

24. During her presentation, Economy Minister **Artane Rizvanolli** argued that energy is fundamental to national security and development. She described Pristina's plans to increase the use of renewable energy sources and lower carbon emissions. Kosovo confronts both economic and energy challenges, Ms Rizvanolli admitted, but authorities are working on a series of measures (blanket subsidies, scheme for energy efficiency) to provide assistance for the most vulnerable groups for the upcoming winter. Ms Rizvanolli indicated that the lack of reserve capacity and over-reliance on fossil fuels remain a challenge. Pristina is currently undertaking the first steps in integrating the Energy Strategy (not yet adopted) and aspires to decarbonise the energy sector by 2030. There are also concerns that modernising the energy grid might create new vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks. Kosovo has accordingly adopted a law on cybersecurity and has intensified efforts to raise awareness of vulnerabilities to cyber-attacks launched against both the private and public sectors.

25. **Besart Myderrizi**, a Country Economist at the World Bank Office in Kosovo, suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic related recession had struck the Western Balkan economies in an asymmetrical fashion. While Serbia had a minor recession, Montenegro suffered a 10% fall in GDP. This has also shaped the pattern of economic recovery with some countries returning to pre-pandemic growth levels more swiftly than others. The combination of rising inflation, value chain disruption, higher food and energy prices and green transition are putting a serious pressure on the Western Balkans.

26. **Umur Gökçe**, a Senior Policy Analyst at the OECD stressed that reform in the Western Balkans is essential for the region's countries to develop a higher level of competitiveness. More effort is needed to build economic resilience and governments need to focus on improving institutional capacity, Efforts are needed to sharpen energy, digital and climate policies to attract investors and galvanize growth, Mr. Gökçe indicated.

V. WESTERN BALKANS SECURITY AND STABILITY: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

27. Several speakers described persistent political challenges to advancing the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Tensions between the two have only mounted since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. There is a sense in Pristina that the Serbian government has tied itself more tightly to the Putin regime, which has an interest in destabilising the region to distract attention from its war of aggression against Ukraine.

28. **Lulzim Peci**, Executive Director of Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), noted that while there had been progress towards the political and institutional integration of Kosovo Serbs, social integration lagged behind. He also contrasted the situation in the south of

Kosovo, where Kosovo Serbs were fairly well integrated, and that in the north. He argued that a comprehensive normalisation agreement with Belgrade could only be reached if the EU's role evolved from facilitation to mediation.

29. **Marko Prelec**, a Consulting Senior Analyst at the International Crisis Group, stressed the need to revitalise political and societal dialogue throughout the Western Balkans and argued that the region's European integration project ultimately hinges on reconciliation between Pristina and Belgrade as well as among the communities residing in Bosnia-Herzegovina. He argued that Russia cannot be permitted to veto Kosovo's Euro-Atlantic integration ambitions, adding, however, that as long as five EU countries do not recognise Kosovo's independence, the path to full integration is blocked.

30. **Adnan Cerimagic**, a Senior Policy Analyst at the European Stability Initiative (Berlin) mentioned that Bosnia and Herzegovina confronts two major threats: challenges to its constitutional and institutional architecture, and isolation from the EU. The transatlantic community can help domestic institutions respond to these threats by consolidating the achievements made since 1995, fostering inter-ethnic reconciliation and building stable and resilient institutions.

31. **Donika Gërvalla**, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora, expressed concerns about Russia-Serbia relations and external interference in domestic affairs. She said that the Kremlin sees Kosovo through the lens of its illegal intervention in Ukraine. Kosovo's aspirations for freedom and democracy are, by their nature, understood in Russia as a threat to its authoritarian ambitions.

32. **Mark Galeotti**, Director of Mayak Intelligence, noted that Russia still has numerous options for horizontal escalation and will seek to "weaponize everything". "Both NATO and the EU should accordingly respond with urgency and recalibrate their own approach to the region", he concluded. Dr Galeotti claimed that Russia sees Ukraine as a proxy war with the West and this has a myriad of implications for the Western Balkans. He noted that Russian influence operations in the Western Balkans identify and exploit existing fault lines within society and seek to radicalise those harbouring grievances.

33. 71% of Serbians hold a positive image of Russia, according to **Sonia Biserko**, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. She noted that Russia cultivates public support in Serbia through the Orthodox Church and the broader cultural space, while capitalising on the local frustrations with the EU and persistent anti-NATO sentiment.

VI. THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN BUILDING STABLE, DEMOCRATIC, MULTI-ETHNIC, AND PEACEFUL SOCIETIES AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO REGIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

34. **Ambassador Michael Davenport**, Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, stressed that the OSCE mission has been focused on building human and community rights, support for civil society, and election assistance. He suggested that young people have a fundamental role to play in Kosovo's development. Roughly 53% of Kosovars are under 27 years old. "This means there is a huge potential for young people to contribute to enhancing mutual respect and contributing to reconciliation and sustainable peace", the Ambassador suggested. He said that the authorities need to amplify the voice of young people while promoting mutual understanding, collective efforts to tackle social, economic, and environmental challenges.

35. **Dušan Radaković**, the Executive Director of Advocacy Centre for Democratic Culture, mentioned that visa liberalisation with the EU would foster greater economic, societal, and educational opportunities although it could also trigger emigration and lead to a loss of talent. This

means that the government in Pristina needs to redouble efforts to create more opportunities for the young generation.

36. In addition to the role of young people in building stable, multi-ethnic, and peaceful societies, the lawmakers heard about the direct relationship between women's participation in formal peace processes and the achievement of long-term peace agreements. Gender inclusive peace-making leads to gender inclusive peace building, according to **Vlora Nushi**, head of the UN Women Kosovo Office. Amplifying women's voices at the national and regional levels along with assuring gender inclusive peace agreements are essential to the success of peace efforts and achieving regional stability.

37. **Major General Irfete Spahiu**, Inspector General of the Kosovo Security Force, detailed efforts to raise the number of women in the KSF. "In today's Kosovo, women are integrated in all parts and activities of the Kosovo Service Forces and represent 11,3% of armed forces", she declared.
