



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

JOINT 94th ROSE ROTH AND GSM SEMINAR

REPORT

**THE WESTERN BALKANS: TRANSITION
CHALLENGES, EUROPEAN ASPIRATIONS AND
LINKS TO THE MENA REGION**

SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

21-23 MARCH 2017

I. INTRODUCTION: THE REGION IN PROFILE

1. From 21–23 March 2017, parliamentarians from NATO PA Member, Associate, and Mediterranean Associate countries as well as parliamentary observers gathered in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the 94th Rose Roth Seminar. The meeting entitled “The Western Balkans: Transition Challenges, European Aspirations and Links to the MENA Region” was a joint seminar with members of the NATO PA’s Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group and was the fourth Rose-Roth Seminar held in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2. Several Western Balkan countries are in the midst of a serious political and economic crisis which is complicating their relations with the European Union (EU) and NATO. But there are problems in the West which have spilled over into the region. The financial crisis, the rise of populist and even anti-democratic political movements in the West, uncertainty about US foreign policy priorities in the wake of Presidential election, Brexit and an EU identity crisis and its moratorium on enlargement all have had adverse implications for the region. While the prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration remains the primary impetus for reform, the EU is in the midst of an “identity crisis” which, in the eyes of many in the region, seems to have made prospects for accession more remote, thereby opening up opportunities for nationalist and sectarian movements to block reform, undermine accession efforts and reignite long-standing tensions throughout the region. These tensions were made very apparent during Federica Mogherini’s recent visit to the region.

3. In his keynote address **Florian BIEBER**, a Professor for Southeast European Studies, provided an overview of the situation in the region. He too stressed that the international system is burdened with crisis including the rise of populism, the migration and refugee crisis, Brexit and worrying political developments in some western democracies. He said that for too long there has been an assumption that there is no alternative to a liberal democratic future for the region. While this is certainly the most desirable outcome, it is not necessarily the most likely. It is important therefore to consider other possibilities.

4. One notion that has some currency but that is also extremely dangerous is the idea of changing borders. Bieber suggested that to move in that direction would be to invite tragedy. But he also cautioned that serious thought is required on how to go about building an enduring peace in the region. The region has made no recent progress in building democracy, and in many ways is slipping backwards. Media freedoms are eroding, good governance is proving elusive and the region is failing to converge with the rest of Europe in terms of socio-economic development. Confidence in parliaments is eroding and the party system is suspect. Citizens are now be tempted by the siren calls of authoritarian strong men who exploit a reigning crisis of confidence. There are elements of this in the West as well, but at least the West enjoys stronger democratic institutions which adds a degree of resilience that the Western Balkans do not enjoy.

5. Many expected that the prospect of EU membership would help correct these deficiencies, but that promise has grown more elusive. Mr Bieber argued that the EU has a central role to play in establishing core standards of governance in the region. It should not compromise on these standards for countries aspiring to membership. The level of economic cooperation that would accompany accession requires aspirant countries to meet very high governance standards. This is fundamental to the institutions and this is why the Western Balkans are being held to this high standard. Still, he argued, more could be done to anchor the region to the EU even when parts of the region are still not formally part of the Union.

6. Membership will likely continue to elude the Western Balkan candidate countries over the near term. The critical challenge, Bieber said, is to put the construction of democracy back at the centre of the discussion. There has been a tendency to short change democratic achievement for the sake of smaller gains in other areas. Democracy and good governance are key to positive change in the region and this should be the focus of regional and international actors. Bieber restated that there are no viable alternatives to liberal democracy and EU membership for the Western Balkans, and

said that this should remain the operative assumption of key actors both inside and outside the region. Other alternatives are there but they are not good alternatives.

II. THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

7. The challenges confronted by Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrate how these worrying trends are playing out. Florian Bieber noted that the country has lived through three phases since the end of the war. From the signing of the Dayton Accords until 2000 the country was simply engaged in implementing those agreements and overcoming a range of blockages that were impeding the functioning of the state. From 2000 to 2006, the level of support from the international community was high and reforms were implemented. Since then, the situation has been fraught with setbacks that have only worsened as the EU and NATO have focused elsewhere. **Mladen IVANIC**, President, Bosnia and Herzegovina Presidency, noted that his country has made progress toward eventual EU as well as NATO membership but lamented that problems arise as soon as leaders focus on the past. When the past is brought up, each community revives a sense of victimhood and suffering, which makes progress difficult.

8. **Sefik DZAFEROVIC**, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, indicated that his country had signed a Stabilisation and Association agreement with the EU in 2016 which had been confirmed by the presidency and both houses of parliament. There is an agreed declaration on the reforms needed to join the EU and the country is moving towards adoption of the EU Acquis, which is something that has been endorsed by the entities as well.

III. NATO MEMBERSHIP

9. **Nikola LOVRINOVIC**, Head of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the NATO PA, discussed Bosnia and Herzegovina's important relationship with NATO and said that cooperation has been very constructive. This is a country where differences were once settled by force; fortunately, this is no longer the case. But he acknowledged that some in the country oppose NATO membership. Sefik Dzaferovic also noted that his country has strategic interest in joining NATO but remarked that a societal consensus has yet to be achieved, particularly as NATO is not popular in Republika Srpska. He added that the country is lagging behind in registering immobile military property to the Ministry of Defence. Doing so is a precondition for the extension of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) from NATO. Bosnia is also allocating less than 1% of its GNP to defence, and much of this is spent on personnel. Greater defence outlays will eventually be required. According to Mladen Ivanic, there are many demands on state funds including money allocated to support and house displaced persons.

10. **Josip BRKIC**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the NATO Coordination Team of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Council of Ministers, also outlined the history of his country's partnership with NATO. In Tallinn, as many other speakers pointed out, Bosnia and Herzegovina had been told that it could begin a MAP if it were able to successfully register all immobile defence properties. The country has not managed to do this and so has not been offered a MAP. The country has, however, participated in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme and is engaged in the Planning and Review Process (PARP) which aims to promote the development of forces and capabilities by partners that are best able to cooperate alongside NATO Allies in crisis response operations and other activities to promote security and stability. NATO has also provided critical demining support, assistance in developing a defence review and support for the transition of military personnel. According to Mr Brkic, the most important benefits of the relationship with NATO include the adoption of critical governance standards, deeper respect for the rule of law, defence reform, budget management, human resources development, crisis management, emergency planning, and public diplomacy development. Participating in ISAF and Resolute Support has also helped the country's military develop its operational capacity, he said. He also noted that deepening relations with the EU and NATO was mutually reinforcing as both advance very similar kinds of reforms. He

mentioned a number of EU initiatives that are helping Bosnia and Herzegovina develop methods for introducing greater transparency in governance and for fighting corruption and organized crime.

11. Ambassador **Ján PŠENICA**, the Slovak Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggested that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made steady progress in its relations with NATO, having joined the Partnership for Peace, agreed on a crucial and helpful partnership programme and participated in the planning and review process. The country has achieved a great deal simply in developing a single integrated army with one chain of command. Minister of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina **Marina PENDES** noted that this integrated military has participated in international peace operations and performed its tasks very well. Pendes told delegates that the Defence Review will help define the additional steps her county must take to build modern, well-equipped, and interoperable forces. She also said she envisioned a day when all the countries of the region were fully integrated into NATO and the EU.

12. Brig. Gen. **Giselle M. WILZ**, NATO Commander in Bosnia and Herzegovina, stressed that NATO's main priority is to help Bosnia and Herzegovina develop sustainable and effective security structures. She also noted that the pending comprehensive Defence Review will help ensure that the country has modern flexible forces capable of addressing legitimate security concerns. She emphasised that there is no way to circumnavigate the property registration issue. From NATO's perspective, it represents an important political test for the country. Unfortunately, after seven years, that process is blocked and has become highly politicised. But improvements in other areas are evident. Bosnia and Herzegovina now has several multi-ethnic military units that are certified to NATO standards.

13. Although there are technical and legal reasons for delays in military property registration, in essence, the issue has become highly politicised, and no properties have been registered in Republika Srpska. **Nedeljko CUBRILOVIC**, President of the Parliament of the Republika Srpska, noted that the people of the Republika Srpska simply oppose the goal of NATO membership. Mladen Ivanic, elected from the Republika Srpska, observed that the real problem is that some of the steps linked to achieving a Membership Action Plan touch upon the most intractable problems in society. Military property registration issues are now before the courts and the problem is both political and technical, he added, and will not likely be solved over the coming decade. He suggested that Bosnia and Herzegovina "should seek membership in NATO provided all Balkan countries join", which is not a likely scenario in the foreseeable future.

14. **Sifet PODZIC**, Chairman of the Joint Committee for Security and Defence of Bosnia, also cited the apparent differences among the communities on NATO membership, adding that the structure of the state tends to reinforce these differences. He said that the Ministry of Defence also confronts problems with public procurement and with personnel matters. Many are leaving the military because salaries are too low. The equipment, he added, is obsolete and more needs to be done to make the military effective without upsetting ethnic concerns.

15. **Ankica TOMIĆ**, Head of Department for International Cooperation and European Integration in the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussed the ongoing effort to incorporate the structures of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. There is an ongoing effort to employ women in the country's police forces and for women to be featured prominently in the country's peace support missions in both South Sudan and Cyprus. The effort to achieve gender mainstreaming extends from the Ministry of Defence to community based initiatives including specific focused efforts in five municipalities. Despite these efforts there are many barriers to gender mainstreaming including the fact that very few government ministers in the country are women. The government is cooperating in this initiative with NATO, the OSCE, UNDP and UN Women.

16. **Miloš ŠOLAJA**, the Director of the Centre for International Relations in Banja Luka, said that it was important to understand that NATO is "not the only game in town" and that Russia and, to a lesser extent, China exercise influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Turkey is also an important player. He noted that for decades Yugoslavia enjoyed good relations with NATO but that NATO's

engagement in the wars of the 1990s had altered the perceptions of many citizens. The first NATO military operations ever conducted were against the forces of Republika Srpska and this is well remembered in the region. He noted that the Dayton Peace agreement set the stage for reconciliation and that a great many compromises were made to build peace and lay down the foundations for a state. An integrated military was slowly forged between 2003 and 2008 and this effort included a range of successful reforms.

17. This sense of optimism, however, was lost in 2009 when the country applied for MAP. The Republika Srpska has not embraced MAP and the public there is strongly opposed to eventual membership. The global financial crisis also injected tremendous uncertainty into the situation, and since then, Russia's presence in the region has been on the rise. Russia is playing a central role in Republika Srpska's energy industry, and this is changing the politics there. Russia has appealed to the sense of grievance among ethnic Serbs and, for example, vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution that would have condemned the 1995 Srebrenica massacre as an act of genocide. Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have become even more divisive to the point where Banja Luka opposed using the national army to celebrate the national holiday. The current political crisis in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Pristina's recent claim that it wants to establish a national army are further polarising the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of this represents a threat to stability and democracy.

18. Serbia is another country with an ambiguous relationship with NATO. It both cooperates with NATO while showing no interest in accession. **Milos POPOVIC** from the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy suggested that poor economic prospects have left many vulnerable to demagoguery and misinformation. Young people cannot travel and have no understanding either of NATO or the EU. He noted that those between the ages of 30 and 39 have a different perspective and are more pro-Western in orientation. Popovic noted that based on recently polling, only 9% of Serbian people would vote for NATO membership and most Serbs are satisfied with the current state of relations between their country and Russia. Roughly one third of the Serbian population supports the idea of cooperating with NATO, most Serbs prefer that the country remain neutral. Twenty-three percent of Serbs would like to enter a genuine political alliance with Russia while 48% say the current status quo is preferable. Many believe that good relations with Russia could facilitate greater investment in the country. Only 4% of Serbs see Russian influence in a negative light. The paradox, he noted, is that few Serbian parents would think of sending their children to study in Russia. They see the West as a much-preferred destination, which suggests a high degree of ambiguity towards the United States.

19. Serbia has conducted military exercises with Russia and purchased Russian military hardware including MiG fighters. Serbia also refrained from adopting sanctions against Russia after its annexation of Crimea. One participant pointed out that if Serbia is indeed intent on establishing a close military relationship with Russia, this would make it very difficult to consider their candidacy for EU membership.

20. **Savo KENTERA**, President of the Atlantic Council of Montenegro, said that it is not easy to educate people in the region about the benefits of NATO as stereotypes from the Cold War and the 1990s persist. Many recall NATO's bombing campaign against both Serbia and Serbian militia groups. Still there has been a patient effort in Montenegro to explain what NATO is and how it can foster stability. This has helped raise public support for membership to roughly 50% of the population. Russia has put forward a very different narrative of an aggressive expansionist NATO and this seems to have some resonance. Recently, Russia began asserting itself first through investments but then in more nefarious ways, according to Mr Kentera. He suggested that there is evidence of Russian involvement in a recent failed coup attempt, which makes it very difficult to see them either as a long-term partner for the region or a force for stability. They are very focused now on preventing Montenegro from acceding to NATO and have no compunction about destabilising the country to that end, he argued.

IV. REFORMS IN THE REGION

21. Stalled reforms are apparent throughout the region and can be linked to domestic political turmoil. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the President is refusing to bestow a mandate on a coalition of parties that clearly constitute a majority despite warnings from the EU and NATO that this goes directly against the grain of good democratic governance. Government has effectively ground to a halt in the country. Meanwhile, in Montenegro the opposition is boycotting parliament. Relations between Belgrade and Pristina have grown increasingly tense with Kosovar authorities announcing that they now want to create a regular army, an idea that NATO has indicated will undermine cooperation with the Alliance. Serbia is refusing to cooperate with Kosovo on a range of matters and, according to **Marta SZPALA**, a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, neither the EU nor the United States have been sufficiently focused to help the parties overcome these disputes.

22. Although several speakers suggested that Russia should play a stabilising role in the Western Balkans along with the EU and the United States, it has instead fanned the flames of discontent with the aim of complicating the region's integration with the EU and NATO. Savo Kentera directly accused Russia of seeking to destabilise his country in order to derail its accession to NATO. Russia has also exploited the Kosovo issue to gain leverage in Serbia. It has used its investments strategically to maintain influence and is generally understood to be supporting anti-NATO and anti-EU parties and movements throughout the region.

23. **Khaldoun SINNO**, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, noted that the government needed to move away from the logic of Dayton and towards the logic of Brussels. He said that after social disturbances in 2015, all political factions in Bosnia and Herzegovina had committed to a European future for the country. The Federal and entity governments adopted an ambitious reform agenda which would accord more space to the private sector making it a critical agent of change. New labour, banking, pension and public sector reforms were adopted. All of this set the stage for the country's application for EU membership submitted in 2015. This is generally seen as a very positive step and now the country has begun to answer the highly-detailed questionnaires that mark the very beginning of the accession process. The simple act of answering these questions is itself a challenge for the state and demands dialogue and indeed, further reform.

24. Yet there are serious concerns about the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The country's leadership is often backwards looking, and during High Representative Federica Mogherini's recent visit to Sarajevo, she challenged leaders to adopt a more forward looking attitude. Sustained reform efforts are still required at all levels of government. The structure of governance is complicated but must be made to work, he said. In the discussion, he acknowledged Council President Juncker's statement that said that EU enlargement was unlikely in the short run but argued that this essentially represented a fair assessment of where candidate countries currently stand in term of their preparations as well as the need for the EU to revamp its own sense of purpose. He also noted that the EU has encouraged leaders of all the countries in the region to deepen their dialogue and find new ways to connect and collaborate.

25. **Srecko LATAL**, an Independent Political Analyst, however, argued that the situation is considerably worse than many care to admit, suggesting that the EU approach is not working. The Bosnian Presidency has not met for two months, he pointed out, and even its website is blocked. Ruling coalitions at entity and federal levels have fallen apart and government is only working in a few limited areas. Parliaments are blocked by groups refusing to appear and thus preventing quorums. He also said that the economy is in dire straits with the state spending more than it takes in. Pensions are not being paid and the internal debt level is rising. Many public companies do not pay taxes and contribute to social benefits. He noted that Republika Srpska is not responding to EU questionnaires. While ethnic tensions are an important part of the problem, so are political quarrels inside the country's ethnic blocs.

26. He noted that there is little direct dialogue among the political groups and that increasingly political communication is conducted through the media. The patronage system is extensive and is growing. This has only exacerbated administrative paralysis, Mr Latal noted. There is a tendency to blame the political class for this gridlock, but it also reflects a broader societal malaise. Bosnia and Herzegovina is slipping backwards and civil society has grown very weak. This is opening the door for a dangerous kind of politics. Centrifugal forces are growing more powerful, even if the people of the country have relearned how to live together. But citizens have become completely detached from politics in the country and no longer seem to care much about reform, according to Mr Latal. There is still hope for the country but it is fading, he argued.

27. He also pointed to difficulties at the international level. US leverage in the Western Balkans is eroding, while Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia are increasingly active. This is exacerbating tensions in the region as national groups now have their external champions while the region's countries do not. Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to Mr Latal, may not be able to survive this kind of pressure as it is being pushed from inside and outside towards a break up. He said that the Bosniak leadership needs to understand these compelling risks and make key concessions to Croatian and Serbian communities in the interest of the long-term health of the state. The EU must also reengage in a constructive manner in the country, he argued.

28. **Denis ZVIZDIC**, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, also acknowledged that EU accession would never transpire if his country failed to implement difficult domestic reforms. Strengthening the rule of law and combatting crime and corruption, he said, have been priorities. He was more upbeat than previous speakers about the degree of political and economic reform that Bosnia and Herzegovina has undertaken and he pointed to growth rates currently approaching 3% and rising exports as signs of potential dynamism. He also noted that Bosnia has taken a hard line on foreign fighters and was the first country in the region to make participation in the war in Syria as a crime.

29. **Barisa COLAK**, Speaker, House of People of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, warned that Bosnia and Herzegovina was not working with sufficient alacrity to answer the EU questionnaires and the same can be said for meeting the criteria for MAP. He lamented the fact that the country's institutions are blocked. Reform has been held up for too long, he said, adding that it was time to change the electoral law. Failure on this front would prevent Bosnia and Herzegovina from joining the rest of Europe.

V. REGIONAL CHALLENGES

30. Marta Szpala opened her remarks by suggesting that the government of Serbia expends a great deal of energy working to prevent the recognition of Kosovo. There are myriad problems between Pristina and Belgrade including property ownership issues, border management and the position of ethnics Serbs in Kosovo who constitute roughly 10% of inhabitants there. These problems were supposed to be addressed through dialogue. Initially, there were some limited advances, but now the situation is blocked the government of Serbia has chosen not to meet with representatives in Pristina. There was no meeting between the two sides in 2016 and no new agreements have been made since 2014. Only four of 17 previously made agreements have been implemented completely, and another five have only been partly implemented. Meanwhile, the association of Serb majority municipalities has become a serious bone of contention.

31. The dialogue has stopped, in part, because there is a perception that the commitment of the EU and the US has eroded. The EU has lost leverage and the accession process has slowed. At the same time the recent refugee crisis ultimately strengthened the hand of Serbia in its talks with the EU, and reduced its incentives to make concessions. There have also been important internal challenges in both Serbia and Kosovo. The spring 2017 elections in Serbia and massive protest in Kosovo in 2016 have factored into the changing attitude toward dialogue. On a positive note, Szpala added, three quarters of Serbian society are in favour of dialogue. The problem is that the Serbian

government appears to be using Kosovo to strengthen its own hand in the international arena and Kosovar society is less supportive of dialogue with Serbia at this juncture. Forty-six percent of Kosovars believe that Serbia benefitted more than Kosovo from past dialogue and 78% have a negative view of the establishment of the Association of Serbian Majority Municipalities. This view inspired large protests in 2016 in Kosovo, which further undermined efforts to encourage greater integration.

32. Pristina is currently seeking UN membership and has taken unilateral action to resolve the Trepca Industrial complex dispute by nationalizing it. It also aspires to transform Kosovo's security forces into a full-fledged military, which is opposed both by Serbia and by NATO. There are also outstanding disputes about the registration of immovable property claimed by both Belgrade and Pristina and ongoing tensions over the bridge in Mitrovica. The detention of the former Prime Minister of Kosovo in France as a result of a Serbian arrest warrant has also generated tensions. Finally, a train decorated with the Serbian flag and phrase that "Kosovo is Serbia" entered into Kosovo recently and this too enflamed public passions.

33. Both sides are using these disputes for blatantly political purposes thus undermining cooperation and, according to Ms. Szpala, weakening the democratic impulse on both sides. She said that the EU is tolerating this and appears to be trading democracy for a fictitious dialogue that is doing nothing to reduce tension. In the discussion, she too noted that Russia is stoking tensions in the region. The Kremlin simply lacks the tools and means to foster reconciliation but it can create problems, and so, it exacerbates tensions in the Western Balkans to advance its own anti-Western agenda.

34. **Marko KMEZIC** from the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz said that the crisis in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is actually part of a decade-long trauma. He noted that recent elections marked an important change with two ethnic Albanian parties emerging as part of what should be a governing coalition. That the President has refused to seat that government is a reflection of profound cleavages in society. The current crisis is deeply troubling, Mr Kmezic said, and goes against standard democratic principles. The EU Commissioner for Enlargement has just communicated that blocking the formation of a government enjoying majority support was unacceptable.

35. Inter-ethnic relations in the country have long been unstable, according to Kmezic and there is clearly a need for a new social pact among FYROM's divided communities. The problem is that most political parties continue to use ethno-nationalistic discourses to advance their interest. The country's progress depends on its capacity to move beyond this troubling pattern. Even the name dispute with Greece has been used to fuel internal disputes and this has become yet another source of stasis and political stalemate. Government is simply not addressing real problems.

36. **Ambassador Istvan GYARMATI**, President of the International Centre for Democratic Transition in Hungary, noted that the broad problem of EU fatigue has had a very adverse impact on the Western Balkans. This, and the apparent retreat of the EU and the United States, have created a vacuum which is now being filled by very unhelpful forces including Russia. Russia's role in the Western Balkans is particularly negative, he argued. He cited the recent sale of MiG 29's to Serbia, a weapon Serbia does not need and which now that it has it, could trigger a very unhelpful arms race. He argued that Turkey's role is also changing and said that it seems less intent than it was previously to counterbalance fundamentalist tendencies among some groups. The return of fighters from Syria and Iraq poses another set of risks and the collapse of the Islamic State could mean an even greater influx of radicalised individuals who represent a danger to stability.

VI. INSTABILITY IN THE MENA REGION AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

37. **Andrea MANCIULLI**, Head of the Italian Delegation to the NATO PA and Rapporteur of the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM), presented his Report: *The Terrorist Threat to Europe and the Balkans*. This report is the third in a series. The first report described the emergence of Daesh and the second explored its expansion in North Africa. This third report, the most important of the three, he argued, concerns the terrorist challenge in Europe and the Western Balkans.

38. Mr Manciuilli noted that in 1998 Al Qaeda (AQ) announced its program for a new international order that would eventually include the formation of a radical state achieved by attacking the status quo countries of the region. But this caliphate would only come later. AQ has never lost its nature as a clandestine elite organization that never undertook a state building operation. Daesh represents something very different. It has conducted asymmetric warfare to quickly establish a state serving as a homeland for its adherents. Daesh has developed a sophisticated communication strategy. Deploying a sophisticated cyber strategy, Daesh also forged a powerful message it delivered to a wider world of potential adherents and adversaries. This communication capacity poses a very serious challenge and the numbers of Daesh adherents far exceeds anything the AQ vanguard ever achieved. There are as many as 35 thousand Daesh adherents and they are much younger than AQ's militants. Many are low skilled and poorly educated even on matters pertaining to the Islamic faith. This is an army of fighters shaped by new media and viscerally attracted to violence.

39. Mr. Manciuilli introduced the notion of vacuums as a central structural feature of the Daesh phenomenon. Daesh seeks to fill political, social and geographic vacuums where states are weak or even absent. Not surprisingly, the group is flourishing in Yemen and Sudan, but also in European inner cities where young people are marginalised and feel abandoned by the societies in which they live. Western societies need to adopt a more proactive, long-term approach to this challenge. He noted that in Austria recently a 12-year-old was arrested and jailed because he had downloaded instructions on how to build an explosive device with a pressure cooker. Coping with this kind of challenge requires a very sophisticated, multi-layered, and preventive approach. He noted that Daesh has developed very sophisticated ways to communicate with young people and has even developed a video game to impart its values.

40. Another section of the report deals with migration and the problem of mounting xenophobia. The West needs to recognize the degree of suffering many of these migrants have undergone. Mass migration could trigger new social tensions and these must be properly managed. Mr Manciuilli suggested that national parliaments have a key role to play in developing sophisticated approaches to these highly complex problems. He said terrorists exploit differences and that greater unity is needed both within specific countries and internationally. Many countries have developed very effective strategies for coping with the terrorist challenge and there are lessons to be learned here as well. He cited Morocco as a country which has adopted a very proactive and effective approach to racialization. He also noted that the shadow economy of human, drug and armaments trafficking has become closely linked to the terrorist challenges and support for countries where these problems are rife will be essential to the broader struggle.

41. **Dragan MEKTIC**, Minister of Security for Bosnia and Herzegovina, discussed the terrorist challenge in his country and the efforts at prevention the state undertakes. There is zero tolerance for those who have committed acts of terrorism and these include carrying out violent acts, recruiting and financing. But a different approach is made for those who have not been engaged in these acts but who are nonetheless vulnerable to recruitment.

42. Mr Mektic noted that 225 citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have fought in Iraq or Syria and 46 have so far returned to the country. Fifty were killed in fighting and 115 are still in the Middle East. A number of Bosnians engaged in the fighting were living in other European countries prior to their departure. The 46 returnees are currently in the process of criminal proceedings, with 20 having been found guilty of crimes. Leaving to fight in Syria and Iraq is punishable in Bosnia and

Herzegovina with a prison sentence of up to five years. In 2016 and 2017, no Bosnians left to fight in Syria or Iraq so progress is apparent.

43. Deradicalisation has been a key priority. Some of those who have radicalised live in concentrated communities and this has provided the state with opportunities to reach out and build a counter narrative. It is helpful that the Islamic community in the country has a recognised head of the community and an organisational structure. The leadership has strongly condemned violent extremism. Countries like France do not benefit from a similar structure and now must cope with radicalised young people. Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the global anti-terrorist coalition and has been very actively engaged in it work, with a particular focus on the departure of foreign fighters and the prevention of terrorist financing.

44. **Valery PERRY**, a Senior Associate at the Democratization Policy Council, discussed a series of case studies she has conducted on how countries are coping with violent extremism and what the driving forces are behind radicalism, the phenomenon of foreign fighters and funding for these groups. One important conclusion is that those working on counter-terrorism are often not engaged with those working on prevention. Many countries put the stress on countering terrorism rather than prevention but this constitutes a missed opportunity. Ms Perry discussed a strong cities initiative to build greater resilience in cities and suggested that this represents a very potent approach to prevention.

45. There is often a lack of understanding about how to best cope with foreign fighters. In parts of the Western Balkans, there is no effective policy for social reintegration or an understanding of how best to cope with the families of these fighters—something that is key to preventing further radicalisation. Ms Perry also noted that prison radicalisation has been a critical problem and one that needs to be addressed systematically in many countries. Social exclusion, marginalisation, problems of identity and the lack of agency, particularly among minority communities, feed into the problem and all must therefore be addressed in any successful preventive approach. Ms Perry suggested that more efforts are needed to explore what it means to develop resilient communities and how to develop policies toward that end.

46. **Vlado AZINOVIC**, a Professor of Political Science at the University of Sarajevo, noted that the Western Balkans has not suffered from terrorist attacks even if it has a reputation as having become a recruiting zone for ISIS. He suggested that both law enforcement and the intelligence community have done well in preventing attacks, but he added that complacency is dangerous. He linked radicalisation to poor governance and a lack of political accountability as well as inter-ethnic tensions and frozen conflicts in the region. This can help explain why the region has sent a relatively large number of fighters to ISIS. But the numbers have slowed due to the intensive efforts to stop the outflow and cope with the sources of the problem. The intensification of fighting in Syria, territorial setbacks for ISIS, and the shrinking pool of potential fighters may also be part of the explanation. He concluded by suggesting that those working on deradicalisation, including a number of NGO's, should be basing their methods and goals on proven research and data. Improvisation on such an explosive issue is not wise, he warned.

VII. THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

47. **Srdjan CVIJIC**, a Senior Policy Analyst on EU External Relations at the Open Society European Policy Institute, spoke on the Immigration Crisis in The Western Balkans. He suggested that the 2015 influx of refugees and migrants into the Western Balkans had imparted several important lessons. When the external Schengen border is compromised, the borders of the Western Balkan states effectively become Europe's external borders and Western Balkan states become guardians of these borders. Moreover, Mr Cvijic argued, when states in the region lag too far behind their European neighbours in terms of economic development and democratic standards, more of their citizens are inclined to migrate to Europe. In effect, the events of 2015 constituted a double migration crisis.

48. The sources of the migration crisis in the region have been both external and internal. The external dimension is linked to wars in Syria, Iraq, and protracted instability and conflict in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In 2015, the UNHCR registered 856,000 arrivals by sea to Greece, a four-fold increase from 2014 when there were 219,000 arrivals. The internal dimension has involved citizens of the Western Balkans fleeing from poverty and corruption at home. In this case, the numbers surged in 2015 as Western Balkans citizens essentially 'tagged onto' the wave of refugees transiting through the region. In 2015, 66,000 left for Western Europe from Albania and Kosovo. These numbers placed the two countries among the top five countries of origin of asylum-seekers in the EU for 2015, just behind Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In Germany, Albanian and Kosovar applicants in 2015 came in second only to Syria.

49. Today, largely as a consequence of the EU-Turkey deal, the situation along the Balkan route is relatively stable. As of March 2017, data shows a total number of arrivals to Greece at approximately 3,400, which is almost 60 times less than at the beginning of March last year. Daily arrivals to Greece currently oscillate between 0 and 24 – rarely going over 200. Many migrants are currently stuck in Greece and Serbia. Greece currently hosts over 60,000 refugees and migrants (14,640 refugees in Protection of Civilians (POC) sites on the Islands and 47,950 refugees on POC sites on the mainland as of January 2017). As very few want to stay in Greece, several hundred per day manage to cross into Macedonia and from there to Serbia. As a result, there are approximately 7,800 people currently stranded in Serbia. Of these, 84% are in 17 heated government shelters and the remainder are sleeping rough mostly in Belgrade city centre or on the border with Hungary. UNHCR has counted approximately 800 squatting in the city centre (mostly Afghan and Pakistani men), with many refusing to move to government shelters.

50. Since the construction of a fence on the Hungarian border in October 2015, dozens are able to scale that fence each. It is not yet evident whether new measures taken by the Hungarian parliament to detain asylum seekers will trigger a bottleneck in Serbia or Greece. Asylum, however, is not being extended in large numbers to Balkan citizens and processing these particular cases is generally very quick. Even those who have a reason to fear persecution at home are generally not protected, accordingly to Mr Cvijic. In Germany today, only 0.3% of those granted asylum are from the Balkans. The comparable figure for Syrians is 96%.

51. In 2015, for a brief moment, the refugee crisis put the Western Balkans back on Europe's political map. Many hoped that this would galvanize Europe to look at the region afresh and renew the political commitment to increase support and help move the region closer to accession. Sadly, Mr. Cvijic noted, this has failed to transpire. The refugee crisis did not become a catalyst for a renewed EU political commitment to the region. The 2003 Thessaloniki promise is fading into oblivion, he argued. The European Commission's "White Paper on the Future of Europe" published 1 March 2017, for example, did not once mention enlargement. It is far more focused on the closure of the Western Balkan migration route. The EU seems increasingly inclined to horse trade democracy for stability and is closing its eyes to the authoritarian tendencies of local leaders and sometimes even actively supporting the local strongmen regardless of democratic backsliding in these countries.

52. EU passivity might therefore be the most consequential external driver of Western Balkan fragility. But there are other negative links as well according to Mr Cvijic. The financial, economic and debt crisis that began 2008 had more serious consequences in the periphery of the Union than in the centre. Western Balkan countries only returned to pre-crisis GDP levels in 2016. The Western Balkan countries are often considered as similar to other non-member countries, but this is misleading. Eighty-five percent of their trade is with the EU and is, in relative terms, 12 times more extensive than is Russia's trade with the EU. What happens to Germany and Italy in economic terms has a very significant impact on the Western Balkans.

53. Mr Cvijic concluded by arguing that the EU's strong focus on stability has undermined its transformative leverage in the region. This, in turn, has allowed other geopolitical actors to increase their influence. He suggested that Russian influence in the Western Balkans in particular is proving harmful as it lacks a constructive agenda and is primarily focused on derailing both NATO and EU aspirations of Western Balkan countries. Mr Cvijic said full stability is not possible in the region without EU membership. He also noted that even the hint of American withdrawal from the Western Balkans could have very negative consequences.

54. **Aram Mohammed ALI**, Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives of Iraq, noted that despite the dire economic situation and difficult legacy of the old regime, Iraqis have been able to face up to the challenge of the Daesh terrorist organisation. He expressed his hope that Daesh will soon be expelled from Iraq. Nevertheless, Daesh's presence in northern Iraq did bring havoc to the country and forced millions to flee from their homes. Mr Ali stressed that without the international community's assistance, Iraq will not be able to tackle the immense challenge of supporting internally displaced persons. Deputy speaker of the Iraqi parliament also stressed that the international community needs to start thinking about the post-Daesh stage and help rebuild and stabilise the Middle East region. He noted that Iraq needs assistance in strengthening its institutions, fighting corruption, and building consensual and inclusive democracy.
