

# **Defence Reform in South East Europe:**

## **A Comprehensive Overview**

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Sometimes when I think of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the former Yugoslavia, I think of the concept of Total National Defence (ONO I DSZ) – as the best way to illustrate the broad societal (political, economic and social) measures it encompasses. I say this because I think the initial and thus biggest mistake people make when looking at SSR is they think only of defence reform, especially those engaged outside Ministries of Defence. The most problematic is when the same is done by other agencies engaged in funding – and there I can point out the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and even until recently the European Union (EU). Funding is – unfortunately - an important element in this whole process, even though there is an effort to increase local ownership of the process. I guess it all depends on how we define local ownership – from the minimalist model of simple local support towards any particular initiative on one end of the spectrum to local finance and full implementation on the opposite side of this spectrum.

The closer the definition comes to the latter, I would argue, the more chance it has to fail as most lack the resources to implement any meaningful reform initiative, with only Croatia possibly having some very limited scope to move independently – but again with outside guidance, if nothing else (e.g. NATO or EU, as these are strategic objectives).

Having mentioned the EU, SSR is now on the agenda. Putting aside the difficulty in getting EU engagement within SSR along the traditional channels, more importantly there is a need not to invent hot water, to look at current efforts and not duplicate ongoing bilateral and multilateral efforts – which are plentiful. There is a general need for

The diagram demonstrates the interlocking nature of all the ISSR identified threats. According to the public consultations completed by the ISSR team, most citizens placed the moribund economic situation in Kosovo at the centre of all threats. Most see other identified threats as linked in some way to the poor economic conditions. This not only results in major fears based around job security, lack of job prospects, and generalised poverty, but also the indirect consequences such as increased crime and corruption. Furthermore, as the threats are interlocking the major priority, for the future Kosovo, will be to address the threats in a holistic way in order to diminish overall insecurity.

### **Methodology – Functional, Capabilities, Gap, and Developmental Needs Analysis**

The analysis regarding function, capabilities, gaps, and developmental needs of Kosovo's institutions contained in the ISSR report was drawn from a review of the data gathered through the threat and environmental analysis, completed in the first two stages of the project and extensive interviews and research conducted by teams of international and local ISSR research experts working in the Secretariat.<sup>1</sup> During these stages of the process the identified threats were directly assessed against the capacity of Kosovo's institutions to deal with them.

To complete the analysis, the research team began work on evaluating Kosovo's security institutions. Research teams identified relevant institutions across Kosovo at the local, regional, and territory-wide levels to be targeted for interviews and more detailed investigation. The ISSR researchers constructed a list of common themes and questions to serve as a basis for all interviews and data collection. The research teams also conducted an extensive security document review that included Kosovo and international institutional reports and official documents.

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<sup>1</sup> Kosovo experts working on the team were grounded in experience working with the PISG ministries as well as other organisations concerned with security issues. International experts also brought a wealth of governmental, non-governmental, academic and security organisation experience. Biographical material on ISSR staff is available at [www.issrkosovo.org](http://www.issrkosovo.org).

good coordination both within the EU and externally and the EU should make efforts to chip into these external ongoing processes, such as that offered by the South Eastern Europe Clearing House mechanism. As I noted already, there is a need to simplify the EU mechanism with regards to SSR, so that the whole body of actors engaged in the process, especially within the region, can contribute and add value.

This is where I want to move away from the international scene to the domestic or regional scene, by asking a fundamental question – one that possibly acts as a bridge between the region and the above mentioned international actors. The question is: how can one expect the countries in the region to move forward at a much faster pace when even the EU and NATO are moving so slowly – and moving in a not too convincing direction? I do not really want to answer this question apart from just proving a comment again in terms of definition: are the changes required in the Balkans just simple catching up and hence more speed is required or are they genuine reform efforts, along the lines of reforms being implemented in Western (NATO) countries?

Across all the countries in the region, one can observe similar trends, which are not that far apart from global trends. I would like to highlight the following:

- Professionalisation: both *all-volunteer forces and forces with higher standards*
- Changed functionality – *from territorial defence to new missions (capabilities)*
- Globalisation of missions – *interoperability (technological, but also political & economic)*
- Fall in popularity of armed forces – *not to be confused with trust*
- Diminished socialisation of armed forces – *as they become all-volunteer*

All these and some others provide a net result best defined as complex and fluid civil-military relations. This is best evident in the low interest and knowledge about the Armed Forces and military-security structures

in general – something that will become a major obstacle in several countries in terms of NATO and improving public relations (PR).

All countries in the region suffer from either positive or negative PR. In Croatia recent surveys show only some 30 percent support NATO while a similar number is undecided. In Serbia NATO is still not even talked about, but emphasis is on PfP. In Macedonia support for NATO stands at some 90 percent, which some might say is not a healthy number for a normal democratic society. This is a typical example of the local ownership issue – to what extent should NATO help these countries overcome the problem of adjusting PR to reasonable levels?

I would like to address two further observations from the whole region. One is the inability to implement or utilise self-initiative, which basically means that reform is still led TOP-DOWN. In other words it is still led NATO-down. While NATO is the benchmark institution, as all states aspire towards it, at least one question comes to mind - that of passive membership. Once admitted into NATO, and the EU for that matter, the ability of these countries to contribute as partners, apart from just providing the minimal troop contribution, is and will remain questionable. While the problem could be traced to weak institutions, it has also much to do with past tradition, work methodology and other deep-rooted problems that will take time to address. With regards to troop contributions, it is important to note that NATO does make a point of this – if you can't contribute (even in a token way, as do the Baltic States) you don't get in. Contributing is what membership is for, not membership for its own sake, is what NATO says.

As countries progress down the road towards NATO membership, they should increasingly realise how common their efforts should be. Currently, this is only conceptual and doctrinal – and it will move towards more operational matters. If policy will be slow to shift as it is for a variety of reasons (e.g. lack of political will, short term political objectives etc.) then the falling defence budgets will force this issue. I see defence economics entering the scene slowly, but surely. So the need to address common air patrolling, or common military education should

come not so much from Brussels, but by one simple mechanic – the domestic defence budget – i.e. general economic efficiency.

The second issue I would like to emphasise is that of the failure to implement lessons learned in all countries in the region, despite repeated statements to the contrary. I do not want to go into the details of this, as they might be addressed in the following presentations. I will only say that the inability to implement a proper methodology of learning from others costs time and money, a luxury none of the countries in South East Europe has. Nor, arguably have many other NATO members in Europe or North America.

SSR is about adapting, reforming or simply making sure domestic military-security structures are able to respond to the new security needs – so let's look at some current subjects without going into country detail.

Looking at military equipment, no country is even close to NATO interoperability and is still burdened with large stocks of outdated equipment with standardisation and unification only slowly entering the frame. There is little talk about regional programmes, especially in terms of procurement, which could utilise offsets and possibly employ the remnants of the former defence industry – thus contributing to the economy. There is even a lack of positive development at the national level. In this respect there is still a failure to realise that defence production is legitimate, as long as it is legal and within the international legal setting. Again, I would conclude, it is a lack of self-initiative and knowledge or expertise - if you wish, in these matters – that has in many cases led to the drastic deterioration of capacities and introduced new social issues. However, I don't want to talk too much about equipment *per se*, but place focus on the people – which are the most important if any reform is to materialise. In this respect two issues stand out:

At the 'people' level, there is the lack of adequate military educational models that are well integrated into career structures throughout the whole region. Downsizing efforts are largely negatively impacting positive retention of quality personnel, and professional criteria are still the exception rather than the norm in term of placements. There will be a

need for a regional approach and a new level of cost-efficient thinking to be introduced with regards to this very important – if not strategic – matter.

However, it is value judgements that are the biggest obstacle to reform of any kind. Still one can hear the terms THEM and US, as if we are talking about two completely different planets with completely opposed interests. There is still a perception of territorial threats, not realising that current security threats and challenges know no borders. What is going on in Afghanistan or Lebanon has more of a security impact on Serbia or Macedonia than it has on the UK (economic impact in terms of oil price increases is strategic).

Related to the value judgements is the lack of strategic vision or strategic management, related to what I was saying previously. There is still much ad hoc decision making with short-term objectives. Basically, standards are frequently compromised for tactical achievements. Strategic documents are only slowly entering the scene and are still not followed at the operational level. Decision-making is still very centralised and legalistic and is often at excessively high levels while at the same time there is a reluctance to delegate or accept responsibility – forming a vicious circle that will take time to eradicate.

SSR is also related to NATO and interoperability of forces, especially with regard to foreign deployments. All concerns mentioned so far are linked to this area, as all countries attempt not only to reform for the sake of domestic needs, but also to advance their foreign policy objectives. I have a concern that not too much thought is being given to this process and that countries are entering the process with too much optimism and lack of strategic vision – which will result in over-stretch or over-commitment. For the international community on the whole the prime objective in the region is stability and development – meaning that developing strong economies and reducing foreign dependence is still a running concern. Over-commitment and unrealistic planning does not help this process.

However, while I have been critical, that is not to say nothing has changed. Indeed, much has changed. The question is the extent or the qualification of that change. It all depends what the benchmark is. While the situation is radically better than it was 5 years ago, it is still far from where it should be. Possibly the benchmark I use is high, but it needs to be. Only in that way can one expect further progress, if one accepts that SSR is implemented top-down.

There is a tendency to attempt comparison among the countries – which is almost mission impossible, as there are far too many parameters to address. How does one judge between the level of parliamentary oversight that is minimal in Croatia to lack of modern communications equipment and English language, which is still being addressed in Serbia, for example? A box approach is hard to implement and is not recommended. Serbia is working its way backwards, while Croatia grew everything from scratch, while Macedonia and Montenegro face a similar situation placed mid-way between the two.