

Defence Reform in Serbia and/or Montenegro:

Hampering Exceptionalism

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Any assessment of defence reform in the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006) and its current status in Serbia implies a difficult choice: to judge the achievements starting from an extremely low level in the 1990s, before Slobodan Milosevic's departure from power on 5 October 2000, or according to general standards of good governance criteria, rule of law, transparency, accountability, domestic ownership, democratic parliamentary control, and regional integrations. The choice is not merely an issue of half-full or half-empty glass, but involves complex legacy and a long list of exceptions when compared with other post-communist states, which should be addressed in a comprehensive way, in a synergy of domestic and international actors, and under circumstances which are not yet favourable.

The lack of prioritization of security sector reform by all key political actors in the first years after the fall of Milosevic's regime, the Kosovo issue, and problems in the co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) have hampered the reform in the entire period 2000-2006.

The aftermaths of the event on 5 October 2000 suggest that "the police and Army's non-intervention in the regime change was bought with the promise of a 'soft' approach to military and police reform by the new government". The approach was too soft, even compared with similar packed transitions: for almost two years there were no substantial changes within the defence and security apparatus.

Although brokered via strong involvement of the European Union (EU), the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (March 2003 – June 2006) did not have constitutional mechanism for security sector reform, and defence reform was conducted in three different political, security and

economical spaces: Republic of Serbia, Republic of Montenegro, and the third, more virtual one: the State Union (in theory including Kosovo as well). The Army of Serbia and Montenegro was the only institution which existed in all three spaces and depended on each of them in different ways: on Serbia when it came to conscripts and funding, on Montenegro to provide at least some legitimacy, and on Kosovo in terms of security threats. There were evident differences between Belgrade and Podgorica even on the level of concepts of the Army reform, with Montenegro positioning itself as a threats-free society. Although polls imply that there was no big difference between public opinion in Serbia and in Montenegro, the elite in the smaller republic had a different perception of security threats and integration.

Governing circles in Montenegro did not consider Kosovo as a security problem, and by distancing itself from Serbia as of 1997, they managed to ignore the issue of their own involvement in wars in the 1990s, and co-operation with the ICTY. Furthermore, the agreement about a possible referendum on independence in 2006 produced a sense of temporality, and Montenegro's government was reluctant to engage in introducing a legislative framework in that area because any discussion of the Army's future involved making a clear assumption about the future status of the Union itself.

Currently, there is substantial interest in the reform within the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff of Serbia, downsizing and reorganisation of the Army are underway, and the Ministry of Finance gave up its plan to cut the defence budget from 2.4 to 1.9% of GDP. Bilateral (USA, Norway, Romania etc.) and regional co-operation is improving, and a new mechanism for NATO-Serbia co-operation, Defence Reform Group, provides an important source of expertise. However, the issues of Kosovo and Gen. Mladic, and prolonged lack of prioritization of defence reform, additionally complicated by the absence of clear power division between the President and Prime Minister, proved for further delays.

The National Security Council does not work, and several different drafts of the National Security Strategy are under preparation, without

the co-operation of all institutions with stakes in that area. Serbia is independent as of June 2006, but no law related to defence has been yet officially submitted to the Parliament, and most likely will not be by the end of 2006 nor in early 2007 (keeping in mind the Constitutional referendum on 28-29 October, followed by the elections at all levels). The Ministerial Instruction, issued by the Ministry of Defence and endorsed by the Government annually, still serves as the only document for the promotion of changes.

Furthermore, the parliament has been silent, with MPs elected on party tickets and with no motive to specialize and to raise any issue, let alone to control the security sector. There are very few independent figures both willing and authoritative enough to ignite sound discussion on the pressing issues related to defence reforms. Hence, defence reform is mostly present in polarized terms (pro or against NATO and US, for a big conscript army or small professional army, as imposed for outside or domestically owned), without substantial discussion on costs and benefits, trade-offs, and basic features of security sector reform: rule of law, transparency, accountability, sustainability, co-operation and integration.