



Policy Recommendations
of the
Joint Workshop of the PFP Consortium Study Group
Regional Stability in South East Europe
and the
Albanian Institute for International Studies¹

by Adela Halo²

“Desecuritization through Integration: A State Functionality Perspective”

The Conceptual Framework:

The impetus for this workshop springs out of the application of securitization/desecuritization theory to the state of affairs in the Western Balkans. *Securitization* and *desecuritization* are two relatively recent terms in security studies, mainly associated with the Copenhagen school of thought in this area. Securitization refers to the process by which issues between two or more units, typically states, leave the sphere of normal bargaining and escalate to the realm of emergency. Desecuritization, on the other hand, refers to the opposite process, by which relations between two units break from the typical dynamics of a security dilemma and normalize by entering a political and bargaining mode.

The fall of communism and the wars following the dissolution of Yugoslavia saw the securitization of relations between and within states in the Balkans in the political, economic, military, and social sectors. This has indeed been the nature of relations between states as well as between significant social groups within states in the Balkans for many years, where “the other” has been perceived as a threat to one’s own well-being or survival. Securitized relations can be clearly seen to be in effect at peak moments of security dilemmas between two units, where every single accumulation of power by one unit is perceived as an equal decline in the power of the other—in other words, a zero-sum game.

The breakdown of order and stability in the region presented a threat to the stability of its immediate neighbors. Therefore, much international activity since has been concerned with stabilizing relations between and within states and communities in the region. The main desecuritizing actors in the Balkans after the initial U.S.-led military and peacekeeping operations

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have been the EU and NATO. Their approach (more pronounced in the case of the EU) has been that of holding out the conditional prospect of the benefits of the peace, stability, and prosperity that are to be gained through EU membership by committing the countries to reform their systems of governance and economy in line with democratic principles.

The project of EU integration is precisely a method of sustainable desecuritization. In order to prevent the re-emergence of the securitization dynamic between states that had led to the devastations of the First and Second World Wars, states progressively combined together in joint management and decision-making mechanisms in key sectors, such as coal and steel. The progressive expansion of areas of cooperation has now created an institutional architecture and a political culture that guarantees against the eruption of violence in the EU.

A similar logic drives the EU's approach to the Western Balkans. Integration of the region in the EU will anchor the countries within a virtuous circle of democratic stability and development. The path towards EU membership passes through two key steps. The first is state-building towards the democratic model of governance that guarantees a system of checks and balances between the state's different branches. The second is a process of regional reconciliation and cooperation through the establishment of dialogue and mechanisms that channel the resolution of disputes along regional institutional lines and consensus-building, and that serve to bring to each country a level of prosperity that they would not be able to achieve individually.

The process of state-building essentially demands the enhancement of state functionality, understood as the capacity of the state to provide basic political public goods for citizens such as free and fair elections, order and security, the rule of law, access to justice, etc. This part of the EU's conditional approach resembles the stance taken toward the Central and Eastern European states after the fall of communism. The demands on countries of the Western Balkans, however, are higher given the region's particular condition as both post-communism *and* post-war. While in the case of the CEE countries, integration equalled democratization, in the case of the Western Balkans it involves desecuritization as well, or what is commonly referred to as stabilization. So, in the case of the Western Balkans, apart from requirements in terms of democratic governance and market economy, there are also key requirements in the areas of neighborly relations and regional cooperation, inter- and intrastate reconciliation, cooperation with the ICTY, return of refugees, respect for ethnic and minority rights, etc.

The combination of enhancing state functionality and regional cooperation aims at establishing reliable mechanisms at a state and regional level that will hinder the perpetuation of securitization dynamics and the typical curtailment of democratic procedures, rights and standards by states to employ extraordinary measures to address securitized issues.

The workshop sought to untangle the interplay of recent security and integration processes with state functionality at the core of the analysis. Thus, analysis focused on the relationship between recent developments (Kosovo independence, NATO enlargement, EU-Western Balkans relations, regional and domestic integration, and the world economic and financial crisis) and the degree of state functionality of the respective state. The recommendations that resulted address the roles of the EU, NATO, and regional states in desecuritization/stabilization.

Regional State of Affairs

The security landscape of the Western Balkans has been significantly altered by the emergence of the new state of Kosovo and the process of NATO enlargement, as well as developments related to the larger project of EU integration that is now underway in countries in the region.

Kosovo. The independence of Kosovo has fortunately not spurred the violence that was feared. All states of the region (except Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) have recognised Kosovo, and diplomatic relations have been established. However, Kosovo's participation in regional activities is often strained if not boycotted by Serbia, which remains determined to oppose Kosovo's independence and is using all diplomatic means to do so. Serbia has brought the issue of the legality of Kosovo's independence to the International Court of Justice, which has started processing the case. In the meantime, parallel structures continue to operate in Kosovo, and the new state continues not to have control of all of its territory. The biggest concern and challenge remains the general weakness of the state, often exacerbated by a complex system of international and domestic lines of authority.

Management of the independence of Kosovo, and of its post-independence stage has put the EU to the test. While it is indeed the EU (through its EULEX mission) that has taken the lead in assisting stabilization and state-building in Kosovo, while also carrying a degree of executive powers, the Union has not wholly endorsed the emergence of the new state, as some of its member states have not recognised Kosovo. This divided stance on the status of Kosovo erodes the EU's credibility and effectiveness in the state-building process. Overall, the series of competing sources of authority in Kosovo serves to create more disunity and ineffective governance than democratic consolidation.

NATO's Presence. The effects of NATO's presence in the region are mixed. As its military presence has progressively decreased, mainly due to the closing of the SFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, NATO has pursued other paths and employed various mechanisms to engage the region. In fact, even in Kosovo, where NATO continues to have an important military presence, forces have decreased to about 10,000 and they will progressively do so in the future. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the closing of the SFOR mission in 2004 and the hand-over to the EU-led EUFOR mission, NATO continues to play an important role through the NATO Sarajevo Headquarters as a supporter of the EU mission on issues of planning, logistics, and command, within the framework of the Berlin Plus package agreements that govern EU-NATO cooperation. The mandate of the current form of NATO presence in Bosnia, the NATO Sarajevo Headquarters, is to assist in the adoption and implementation of defense reforms, helping Bosnia toward eventual NATO accession.

In April 2009, Albania and Croatia became NATO members with full rights. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was also meant to join the Alliance in this round, but its accession remains subject to the resolution of the name dispute with Greece. Montenegro has applied for and received NATO's Membership Action Plan. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also applied, and continues to await an invitation to join MAP. Making this step sooner rather than later is important to sustain the credibility of the country's Euro-Atlantic future, as well as to sustain the security investments that have been made over the past fifteen years.

Serbia has joined the Partnership for Peace, NATO's program of practical bilateral relations that enables the establishment of tailored cooperation between an individual country and NATO. Though Serbia has thus far refrained from following the same membership path as its neighbors, cooperation with NATO has intensified, and the country is expected to soon open its mission in NATO. Apart from cooperation in defense and security, the formal basis of the PfP entails mutual commitments "to preserve democratic societies; to maintain the principles of international law; to fulfil obligations under the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act and international disarmament and arms control agreements; to refrain from the threat or use of force against other states; to respect existing

borders; and to settle disputes peacefully.”³ Such a basis for cooperation is not insignificant. On the contrary, the presence of political will and formal mechanisms to strengthen adherence to the same principles paves the way for sustainable peace and stability in the region.

EU Integration. Since the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, which firmly established the Stabilization and Association process as the EU policy framework for the integration of the region into the Union, the EU has generally maintained in both rhetoric and action its commitment to the region’s future as part of the EU. Official statements during all of these years, the progress of the SAP in many countries, the continued provision of financial and technical assistance, visa facilitation and liberalization, as well as the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty have all served to reiterate that commitment.

All countries of the region have the prospect of EU integration, have the political will to pursue that objective and are intensively working towards it. However, they are all at different stages and different combinations of the various aspects of the process towards membership. Gaining a comparative view in assessing these countries’ progress is often difficult due to each country’s particular conditions and challenges.

Croatia is a candidate country, and accession negotiations have continued since 2005. In addition to the Copenhagen criteria that are applicable to all countries aspiring to EU membership, Croatia was also subject to the additional requirement of cooperation with the ICTY. It was in fact only after Croatia was found to be fully cooperating with the ICTY that Croatia’s integration process picked up pace. Accession negotiations were once more held back due to Croatia’s border dispute with Slovenia. After positive moves to resolve the dispute bilaterally, Croatia is now reaching the end of accession negotiations. In terms of visas, which are one of the main conditionality tools of the EU, Croatia still has no visa regime.⁴

FYROM is also a candidate country, as of 2005, but accession negotiations are still to be opened. The three-year-long pending opening [Author: wouldn’t it be 5 years?] of accession negotiations, just FYROM’s process toward NATO membership, indicates how progress towards integration in Euro-Atlantic structures remains tied to the bilateral name dispute with Greece. The continued impasse on this issue threatens the sustainability of the progress FYROM has made thus far. In the meantime, FYROM has enjoyed visa liberalization for its citizens as of December 2009, providing some balance to the other deadlocks, which are unjustified in terms of FYROM’s preparedness.

Albania’s SAA with the Union entered into force in April 2009, at the same time at which the country became a NATO member with full rights, together with Croatia. Albania applied for EU membership that same month, but it later failed to be included in the first wave of visa liberalization in the region. Missing this first round of liberalization created a spirit of competitiveness in the region, seeing Albania intensify its efforts to meet the Roadmap benchmarks in hopes of being granted liberalization in the course of 2010. Response to the membership application as well as progress in terms of visa liberalization risks being negatively affected by the political deadlock in the country since the elections of 28 June 2009. The conduct of elections was eventually assessed as meeting most international standards set by the OSCE, but the biggest opposition party, which won 66 out of 140 parliamentary seats, has contested the results. The opposition has, in fact, been maintaining a boycott of Parliament, stalling the progress of many key reforms.

³ See http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm

⁴ Croatia has long had special agreements with three neighboring Schengen states: Italy, Slovenia, and Hungary.

Montenegro is also a potential candidate country that filed its application for membership in December 2008. After having filled out and handed in the extensive Commission's Questionnaire, it still awaits a positive opinion on its application. Montenegro has also benefitted from visa liberalization since December 2009.

Serbia's SAA with the Union has been signed following its positive moves towards cooperation with the ICTY, and the ratification process is expected to begin soon. Serbia has also been granted visa liberalization, has applied for membership, and awaits the Commission's Questionnaire. Serbia has the potential to move rapidly toward EU integration, but its progress remains conditioned by full cooperation with the ICTY.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also signed an SAA with the EU and is likely to file an application for membership soon. Bosnia and Herzegovina was not part of the first visa liberalization proposal, but is working to qualify for it in the course of 2010. The credibility of Bosnia's EU future must be maintained through concrete steps.

Kosovo is a rather different case from its neighbors, due to its particular circumstances outlined above. The EU has reiterated its commitment to Kosovo's future in the Union and has attempted to follow a multilayered approach to setting the country on the EU integration path, despite member states' disagreements over Kosovo's status. In fact, the visa dialogue has been opened with Kosovo as a step to bring Kosovo in with its neighbors towards the EU and to provide concrete incentives for progress.

Global Economic Crisis. The global economic and financial crisis is far from being a negligible factor in the region. The effects of the crisis began to be felt in the Western Balkans later than in other parts of the world. Economic downfall is a known factor in security concerns; thus, the region's already precarious economic standing holds the potential of morphing into a security issue. The reallocation of resources that the crisis has imposed at the EU, NATO, and national level, its effects on the region's trade volume, investment and domestic development are affecting the political sphere as well as the focus on state building. The effects of the world economic crisis in state functionality can no longer be ignored in the regional security and development analysis.

Conclusions

The only long-term, sustainable solution of desecuritization in the Western Balkans remains integration based on deep reforms that seek to strengthen democracy, rule of law and state functionality, and market economies. The EU's conditionality approach—offering the prospect of membership (attractive to all countries of the region) as an incentive for necessary reforms—has often been accompanied by inconsistencies, however. For instance, the perception has remained that Romania and Bulgaria were “smuggled” into the EU, rather than gaining membership based on merit. Also, Croatia's accession negotiations suffered because of a bilateral dispute with Slovenia, and FYROM's accession negotiations continue to await resolution of the bilateral name dispute with Greece. Such cases may serve to hamper the effectiveness of the EU's conditionality approach by highlighting the political considerations behind membership.

Another issue that weakens the EU's ability to sustain transformative processes towards stable democracies and market economies is the management of financial assistance. Various aspects of assistance—amounts of aid, timeframes for projects, funding priorities, checks on implementation, sustainability and assistance conditions—do not correspond to needs and realities. Especially as the financial crisis hits the region, adequate funding in key development areas is needed. Very often, the duration of projects with ambitious aims (such as fighting

corruption) is too short to realistically make an impact. Funding priorities sometimes do not correspond to pressing needs in the countries. In other cases, such as assistance for professional technical public administration, the funds used to raise capacities are not conditioned upon public administration stability.

Persisting low levels of local ownership hamper the progress of integration projects and democratization of the countries of the Western Balkans. Donor-driven agendas of civil society, assistance overlap and ineffectiveness, and low awareness of the benefits and responsibilities of meeting EU and/or NATO requirements for the countries and societies themselves continue to significant degrees despite steps to address them. The political use of “integration” as an excuse for purposes of domestic legitimacy certainly exacerbates the situation. Low levels of local ownership of the integration projects is a region-wide concern, evidencing itself clearly in the still low intensity of regional initiatives for cooperation in security, economic, transport, cultural, and other spheres. Very often, the rationale bringing regional representatives together is fulfilment of the EU’s requirement of “regional cooperation,” rather than the substantial exploration of cooperation avenues based on the tangible interests of each country, such as economic development and trade integration.

Recommendations

- The EU especially ought to take note of the perceptions of double standards in the region if it is to maintain the credibility, resonance, and effectiveness of its normative approach. The record of politically and security driven EU accession needs to be balanced by the practice of rewarding membership to nations in the region based on their merits. States’ progress towards integration should follow in practice the rhetoric of individual merits. Visa liberalization for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the fast and concrete progress of the visa dialogue with Kosovo are crucial in that respect.
- EU assistance programs need to be more responsive to key needs on the ground.
- The risks that the global economic and financial crisis pose to stability and progress in the region needs to be taken into account in funding amounts and priorities.
- Management of financial assistance needs to be reformed in order to address current ineffectiveness, overlap, and lack of implementation controls and sustainability guarantees.
- State-building, stabilization, and association work in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo need to take note of the structural and systemic impact on democratic governance of the incoherent and competing international presence(s) in these countries.
- Countries of the region need to intensify cooperation and establish sustainable mechanisms and structures of regional political dialogue to drive a cooperation agenda based on issues of common interest and benefit, in particular transport and trade.
- All actors—the EU, NATO, governments, and civil societies—need to enhance their efforts to raise awareness of the situations that might predictably arise post-membership, so as to minimize the negative effects of unrealistic expectations.