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THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A PEACE-BUILDER IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

Abstract

After the Cold War, the Western Balkan countries have become an important so-called "laboratory for the EU", able to exert its EU crises management and transformative power. Through restoring stability in the region, overcoming ethno–territorial and inter–ethnic conflicts, improving regional cooperation, consolidating democracy, building democratic institutions and promoting market economy, EU's goal was to make war unthinkable in this region. The term peace-building is often attributed to Johan Galtung[1], who in his book, 'Three approaches to peace: peace-keeping, peace-making, and peace-building', argued that 'peace has a structure different from, perhaps over and above, peacekeeping and ad hoc peacemaking (…). More specifically, structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur'. This paper will try to explore whether, how and to what extent, the EU has contributed as a peace-builder in the Western Balkans, using crises management operations and mission and enlargement policy. Also, this paper aims to explore how the international community has aided the nations of the Western Balkans in creating peace and building democratic institutions. First, the paper will analyze the role of several police and military missions in creating peace, and then it will looks towards the process of EU integration, following the year 2007, and how the EU process has partially lost its track subsequent to the swift and un-merited accession of Bulgaria and Romania. Second, the paper contains the opinion as to how NATO and the European Union should shape their policies towards the Western Balkans in the near future.

Key words: European Union, NATO, Western Balkans, Peace Building, Democratization

I. The essence of the term peace-building

The term peace-building emerged in the early 1990s, when the then United Nations Secretary – General Boutros Boutros-Ghali[2], **defined peace-building as 'an action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflicts'.** Ghali suggested that peace-building could be achieved through: disarming the parties in the conflicts and restoration of order, destruction of armies, protection of human rights, monitoring elections, reforming/strengthening governmental institutions and political participation. In addition, Ghali underlined **the importance of preventive diplomacy to ease the tensions between the parties before any resultant conflict, which might lead to the preventive deployment of UN forces.**

Since then, following the definition of peace-building given by Ghali, a series of reports by International Organisations such as: *An Agenda for Development* (1994), *An Agenda for*

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[1] See: Johan Galtung, 'Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Peacebuilding' in Johan Galtung (ed), *Peace, War and Defense: Essays in Peace Research* (Vol. II, Copenhagen 1976), p. 297-298.
[2] See: Boutros-Ghali, An Agenda for Democratization, A 51/761, United Nations, New York, 1996.

Democratisation (1996), the *UNDP Report on Human Security* (1994), and *An Inventory of Post-Conflict Peace-Building Activities* (1996) **enriched the concept of peace-building** by stressing the link between security and development.

For example, in 2000, the *Report of the Panel on the United Peace Operations* (known as the Brahimi Report)[3] pointed out that 'effective peace-building is, in effect, a hybrid of political and development activities targeted at the sources of conflict'. In the same vein, an **OECD report defines conflict prevention and peace-building as 'projects, programmes, policies, strategies or other interventions that adopt goals and objectives aimed at preventing conflict or building peace'**.[4] In summary, all these reports suggest that effective peace-building requires sound projects and programs that prevent further escalation of the conflicts by promoting the reconciliation of the actors in conflicts and creating favorable conditions for durable peace and good governance.

In the Western Balkans, **EU has deployed 6 missions in total**, which vary in aim, type and size. EU operations deployed in the Western Balkans are: EUPM, EUFOR/Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH); CONCORDIA/Macedonia, EUPAT and EUPOL Proxima in Macedonia, and EULEX in Kosovo which is the most ambitious mission aiming to monitor, mentor and advise Kosovo authorities to establish the rule of law while retaining limited executive powers. Considering the high number of the mission deployed in the Western Balkans, one could question whether CSDP crises management has been successful. In general, each mission deployed has achieved a different degree of success both in terms of mission implementation and contribution to post conflict stabilization of the country due to EU commitment and internal challenges of Western Balkan countries.

Peace-building has become a central activity of the EU and of its agencies. Peace-building elements can be seen in a variety of policies, such as activities under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework and the process of enlargement. During the last decade in the Western Balkans, the EU has been involved in through disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance, conflict prevention and peace-keeping missions, as well as tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation.

II. The EU enlargement policy as a tool for peace-building in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkan countries started soon after 2000 to overcome the painful consequences of their civil wars and to catch up after their 'lost decade'. In this new mood, they greeted the possibility of working their way into European integration. **They opened up towards incorporating democratic norms into their policies and, for the most part, welcomed foreign democracy assistance as part of the fulfillment of the membership conditionality package**. They started to learn practical lessons from their more fortunate transitional neighbours, who also developed new democracy aid programs within their developmental assistance programs.[5]

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[3] See: General Assembly Security Council, 'Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects' (21 August 2000) <http://www.unrol.org/files/brahimi%20report%20peacekeeping.pdf> accessed 1 August 2014 para 44. 14 OECD, 'Guidance on evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities' <http://www.oecd.org/dac

[4] See: OECD, 'Guidance on evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities' <http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/dcdndep/39774573.pdf> accessed 1 September 2014, 16.

[5] See: C J Smith, 'Conflicts in the Balkans and Possibility of a European Union Common Foreign and Security Policy' [1996] *International Relations* 1.

Enlargement policies have creating the conditions necessary for durable peace, security and stability in the region through socio-economic recovery and development, political and institutional reforms, cooperation and integration between countries.**Through enlargement policy, EU has pushed this region towards political and institutional reform, economic reforms and regional cooperation**. Several new private and public mechanisms, including projects like the **Balkan Trust for Democracy, the European Fund for the Balkans and the Regional Cooperation Council**, were established in the Balkans and run by people from the region, to facilitate European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Aid to projects supporting civic participation, respect for human and minority rights, good governance and intra-regional and European cooperation significantly accelerated modernization and Europeanization in the Western Balkans.

From the breakup of Yugoslavia, until today, it is safe to argue that the Euro-Atlantic community, and its inclusive model of political-security cooperation, within a formalized security community model, has won most of its battles, lost some, and is on the path to bring long-lasting peace to a region that once stood as a global synonym for instability. Today, most of the nations of the Western Balkans are integrated in either the EU or NATO, while those that are not, are at this very moment knocking on both the EU's and NATO's doors. The pre-accession processes set forth by both organizations provided clear visions for the nations of this region, and established paths for democratization, and the building of institutions and the rule of law. Undeniably, there is, of course, more to be done, and most nations of the Western Balkans face daily issues pertaining to democracy, freedom of the media, capacity of institutions, free speech, and so forth. Yet, we cannot deny that most member states of the EU and NATO also face such issues, and no one nation is a pure example of the reputable values of the EU and NATO.

Today, most states of the Western Balkans can proudly state that rather than being absorbers of peace, they are now exporters, and providers of it, in nations facing conflicts. For example, Macedonia was, and remains, one of the largest per capita supporters of the NATO led Mission in Afghanistan.

Further in the paper it will be analyzed the role of police and military missions of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans, and the systematic approach used to solve security issues in the past. Also, it will be analyzed the integration process within the EU, post-2007, after the un-merited accession of Bulgaria and NATO. By combining these two variables, and analyzing such previous experiences, the paper will attempt to provide a map as to how NATO and the EU should finalize the accession of the Western Balkans, and how successful their policies have been towards this region.

III. Military and police missions of NATO and the EU in the Western Balkans: Building a road for success

The military conflict in the former Yugoslavia which began in the early 90's, during the past century, was a worrisome period for NATO, the EU, and especially the United States, which was a key regional actor during that period. Time has shown that this conflict presented one of the most serious challenges for the process of political-security cooperation since the Second World War.

In the summer of 1991, after an almost decade long process of national decay, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia disintegrated through the declarations of independence, and the secession of Slovenia and Croatia, which were soon followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Macedonia. As a result of the breakup of Yugoslavia, a very dangerous and violent conflict erupted. The initial momentum for this conflict was given in August of 1991

and January of 1992 when ethnic Serbs from Croatia, aided by official Belgrade and JNA (the Yugoslav National Army) initiated an open clash with the Croatian state. This conflict came to an end after three and a half years, and in this period the Serb forces controlled more than a fourth of the territory of Croatia, while the war officially ended in 1995[6].

The second major conflict, erupted and began in April of 1992 in Sarajevo, where once again the ethnic Serbs from Bosnia, aided by Belgrade and the Yugoslav Army, were put in an open-scale conflict with the weakly equipped forces of the Bosnian Muslim population, who were fighting in the name of the newly independent and internationally recognized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the middle of 1992 until the summer of 1995 the Serbs controlled almost seventy percent of the territory of the Republic, but after a joint Muslim-Croat offensive, aided by NATO forces in the autumn of that year, their stronghold was limited to around fifty percent of the territory. This situation lead towards finding a mutually acceptable agreement for a comprehensive ceasefire, and in November of 1995 the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed[7].

The efforts expended by the United Nations and the EU in finding a solution to the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina were largely ignored, with all arranged ceasefires being ignore, ethnic cleansing being widespread, and civilians to a large part being massacred, while villages and cities were fully destroyed. The Dayton Peace Agreement was signed as a result of serious American pressure towards the prevention of further conflicts and so that the highly decentralized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then composed of the Muslim-Croatian Federation and the Republic of Srpska could survive. From today's perspective, the Dayton Agreement can be seen as an attempt by the United States and European forces for a higher level of manifestation of the Bosnian identity between the citizens of Bosnia[8].

Regardless of the various interpretations of this process, the signing of the Dayton Agreement without a doubt was a beginning to the end of one of the most violent, deeply controversial, political, diplomatic and military conflicts in contemporary Europe, as we know it. During this period, the relatively successful mission of the United Nations (UNPROFOR) was replaced by the first Mission of the international military forces (see NATO) lead by American troops. With the official deployment of 24,000 American forces on December 2nd, 1995 (the official handover from the United Nations to NATO was on December 20th, 1995) began one of the most atypical military peace missions of the United States, which was first named Joint Endeavor, only to be replaced by Joint Guard on December 20th, 1996, and Joint Force on June 20th, 1998.

Faced with a potential collapse of the peace agreement if IFOR was removed, on November 25th, 1996, US President Bill Clinton promised to keep troops on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina until June of 1998, as part of the NATO stabilizing forces deployment (SFOR). SFOR accounted for around 25,000 troops, of which 7,500 were American. Later, on December 18th, 1997, President Clinton announced his willingness to have American military forces take part in the peace forces deployment in Bosnia even after the mandate of SFOR ends in June of 1998, essentially keeping US forces on the ground in the struggling Balkan nation until the objective peace aims were not implemented[9].

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[6] See: Gabriel Topor, *Nationalism and Violent Ethnic Conflict: A Theoretical Framework*, The Transformation of 1989-1999: Triumph or Tragedy?. ECEI, Columbia University, edited by John S. Micgiel, 2000, p. 23.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See more on this issue: Daniel Coders, *Community and Partition in Bosnia: Communitarianism's Flawed Apology for the Division of a Multi-National State*, The Transformation of 1989-1999: Triumph or Tragedy?. ECEI, Columbia University, edited by John S. Micgiel, 2000, p. 8.

[9] See more on this issue: Bowman, S.R., Kim, J., Woehrel, S., 1998, *Bosnia Stabilization Force (SFOR) and U.S. Policy*. CRS Report for Congress, Congress Research Service, The Library of Congress, 97-475F.

A higher level of engagement by the European Union was first noticed and initiated in June of 2004, when the Union through the Mission Altea took over the role of being the key peace broker in the Balkans in the process of attempting to establish absolute and effectual peace and the realization of all aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement. In this context, the aim of the EU Mission was, and continues to be to speed up the process of European integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Stabilization and Association Process.

With UN Security Council Resolution 1575/2004 from November 22, 2004[10] preconditions were created for the EU Altea Mission to take over SFOR's responsibilities, citing the NATO Istanbul Summit Communiqué from June 28th, 2004, which concluded that the SFOR operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be finalized by the end of 2004. At the same time, referring to UN Security Council Resolution 1551/2004, it was established that from December of 2004 the European Union would beginning its mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that it would take into consideration the letters sent by the EU and NATO to the Security Council on November 29th, 2004, which referred to how these organizations would collaborate with Bosnia and Herzegovina, accepting that EUFOR would have the main stabilizing role from the military perspective of the Peace agreement[11].

Apart from the emphasis on the support of the governing forces of Bosnia to the EU forces and the continued NATO presence, as the legal succesors of SFOR, the UN SC Resolution welcomed the aim of the EU to begin its military operation on December of 2004. The SC at the same time authorized member states, through collaboration with the EU, to establish the multi-national stabilizing forces (EUFOR) within the next twelve months.

What occurred, above all, with the establishment of the EUFOR "Altea" Mission is the coordination of activities with the UN (through the SC Resolutions) and NATO (through a a usage of their operational capabilities), and further on a synchronization of interests within the EU itself, which as an end result brought a harmonization of the joint engagement of the EU member-states through the European Security and Defense Policy, under the framework of which the activities of the Police Mission were included.

Quickly after the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, the international community lead by the member-states of the EU on the 13th of December, 1995, promoted the Process for Stabilization and Association. It was at first treated as part of the Royaumont Process, and in 1996 was reformulated into a Regional approach, and in 1997 became effectively present through the Process for collaboration with South-Eastern Europe. From the middle of 1999 all of the mentioned complementary processes, for the most part, integrated into the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, and thus represented a serious attempt towards preventive action and deterrence of further crisis.

The mentioned activities of the international community, mainly created within an EU context, represent exceptionally serious attempts towards developing regional initiatives, collaboration and projects aimed to influence dialogue, faith and tolerance in the region, as well as to act in a preventive manner in the path towards a successful avoidance of further military and diplomatic conflicts.

On June 12th, 1999 NATO established the KFOR Operation in Kosovo (Joint Guardian) with the aim of implementing the Peace agreement signed by Serbia, and conducting the activities of de-militarization and transformation of the Kosovo Independence Army (UCK). The KFOR mission established a military presence, stopped the revival of conflicts, and verified and applied the conditions for the further responsibilities of UCK. Further on, this mission established security conditions for a return of displaced persons, giving them immediate

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[10] United Nations Security Council, Resolution S/RES 1575 (2004), 22 November 2004.
[11] Ibid

assistance and providing for aid related to basic living conditions. The mission itself also established an initial basis for a civil administration and other non-military functions until the arrival of competent international organizations. Further on, it also controlled the boarders between Yugoslavia (at that time), and the Republic of Macedonia. On April 28th, 2005 KFOR became part of a Balkan wide-operation called OPLAN 10501 JOINT ENTERPRISE[12].

The KFOR operation was successful in stopping a further escalation between Yugoslavia and Kosovo, and for the most part can be credited in a positive manner, as it, at least, temporarily lowered existing tensions in the region. On the other hand, the NATO Mission was not successful in handling the rise of criminal activities and their transfer outside of the boarders of Kosovo, which was one of the main precursors for the security crisis in Macedonia in 2001.

The repeal of the UN UNPREDEP Mission in 1998 (caused through a Chinese veto in the UN Security Council, as a result of Macedonia's recognition of Taiwan), the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia and Kosovo in 1999 which produced a huge wave of migrants, and the signing of the Agreement for demarcation of borders between Macedonia and Yugoslavia (January 23rd, 2001) further complicated the security circumstances in the Balkan region, specifically in Macedonia. As a result of the uncontrolled, and uncontrollable, spillover of numerous criminal activities from Kosovo, the political leadership and security forces of Macedonia were in 2001 faced with a direct terrorist threat and an organized resistance caused by the non-legitimated military structures of the so called military political structure of ONA. This structure encouraged by its fractional military success on the field in the middle of 2001, with the aid and intervention of the international community (through its role of mediator) brought forward numerous desires for changes to the constitutional and political system of the state, which in the most part were related to the allocation of specific rights to the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia. After the signing of the internationally brokered Ohrid Framework Agreement, the constitutional nature of Macedonia was changed, and to this day it is being applied.

With the intent of preventing further incidents after the signing of the Framework Agreement, the President of the Republic of Macedonia, Boris Trajkovski, requested the establishing of a NATO Mission in Macedonia, which was called "Essential Harvest"[13], which officially began its mandate on August 27th, 2001 with its role being, within a thirty day period, to have 3,500 NATO troops disarm the ethnic Albanian groups and destroy their weapons, so that the peace process could truly be set in motion. At the same time, the European Union opened a Monitoring Mission[14] which had the task of observing the political-security situation in Macedonia, outstanding border issues, the inter-ethnic relationship, the return of displaced persons to their homes, as well as the process of building good-faith relations between the entities involved in the conflict.

The NATO Mission "Essential Harvest" was extended four times and lasted up until December 16th, 2002. Its activities represented a coordinated process between NATO, the EU, the UN and the OSCE, and the actions actively aided the measures of the EU and OSCE in the monitoring of the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and the process of returning the Macedonian police forces in areas which had previously been held by the ethnic-Albanian lead ONA.

To this date, the last active NATO Operation in the Republic of Macedonia was "Allied Harmony", which took over the role of "Essential Harvest". This NATO operation was a

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[12] See more on this topic: *NATO's Operations 1949-Present*. NATO Unclassified Documents 1949-2009, p.4.
[13] See: Operation Essential Harvest, NATO Index, 2001. <http://www.nato.int/fyrom/tfh/home/htm>
[14] See: 2001/682/CFSP: Council Decision of 30 August 2001 concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and Macedonia on the activities of the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Macedonia. Official Journal L 241, 11/09/2001 P. 0001-0001.

continuance of the Alliance's active support and international monitoring of Macedonia, with the crucial endeavor of helping the Government of Macedonia in stabilizing the peace process and creating a peaceful state of affairs in the nation.

During the EU Summit held in March, 2002, the Presidency Conclusions[15] highlighted that the Western Balkans remains vital for the stability and security of Europe, and recalled that the EU has the central role in the process of stabilization, reconciliation and reconstruction in Macedonia. In this context, the European Council expressed the European Union's availability to take responsibility, following elections in Macedonia and at the request of its Government, for an operation to follow that currently undertaken by NATO in Macedonia, on the understanding that the permanent arrangements on EU-NATO cooperation ("Berlin plus") would be in place by then. Further on, the European Council requested the relevant political and military bodies of the Council to develop as of now, in consultation with NATO, the options to enable the European Union to take the appropriate decisions. In its conclusions, the European Council stressed the importance of achieving permanent arrangements between the European Union and NATO at the earliest possible date. To this end, it also asked the Presidency together with the High Representative to make appropriate high-level contacts to ensure a positive outcome.

During the EU Summit in Copenhagen in December of 2002, and after an agreement was reached with NATO on the "Berlin Plus" Arrangement, in the Presidency Conclusions the Council confirmed the Union's readiness to take over the military operation in Macedonia as soon as possible in consultation with NATO, and invited the relevant bodies of the EU to finalize work on the overall approach to the operation, including development of military options and relevant plans[16].

The European Council Summit in Brussels in 2003 affirmed that the take-over by the EU of the military operation in Macedonia provides further tangible proof of its full commitment to the region. In particular, the Council welcomed the launch of the EU military operation in the Macedonia to follow the NATO operation "Allied Harmony" on 31 March 2003[17]. The EU Military Mission "Concordia" was supported by UN Security Council Resolution 1371 from September 26th, 2001, calling on the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1345 (also from 2001) and reaffirming the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia as well as all other nations in the region.

"Concordia" was established as an ample mechanism for collaboration between the EU and NATO with the fundamental goals of implementing the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the collection and transfer of illegal weapons, the establishment of a higher level of democratic capacity within Macedonia, as well as stabilizing the nation and the region in general.

The Mission itself represented a strong indicator of the available wide palate of mechanisms of the international community, which through the joint coordination of NATO, the EU, the UN and OSCE established a framework for operational preventive diplomacy. At the same time, for the first time since its existence the EU demonstrated its capability to build military capacities that could fully be put in the function of the Common Defense and Security Policy.

As a result of this successful mission, before its end, the Council of the EU and the governing authorities of the Republic of Macedonia jointly concluded that there is a necessity of

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[15] See more on this topic: European Union. Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 15th and 16th March 2002, SN 100/1/02 REV 1

[16] See more on this topic: European Union. Council of the European Union 12 and 13 December 2002, Copenhagen, III, European Security and Defense Policy, Doc. 15917/02, p. 7.

[17] See more on this topic. European Union. Presidency Conclusions, Council of the European Union 20 and 21 March 2003, Brussels, Western Balkans, Doc. 8410/03, p. 36.

further involvement of the international community in organizing a new mission for crisis management (advisory mission). Its established role was primarily a responsibility for aiding the processes of consolidating the rule of law, the practical implementation of police reforms and the fight against organized crime, the creation of a border police as part of the EU's wider effort of promoting integrated border management, the renewal of public faith in institutions and the establishment of a higher level of cooperation and collaboration with bordering states. In this milieu, the Council of the EU, on the 29th of September 2003, adopted the Joint action for establishing the European Police Mission (EUPOL "Proxima") with its planned beginning being December 15th, 2003, lasting for fourteen months until December of 2004[18]. At the same time, with another decision the Council named a Head of this new police mission.

With the endeavor to permanently establish security, peace and collaboration in Macedonia as well as considering the need for finalizing all initialized projects, the Council of the EU, on November 22nd 2004, adopted a new Decision and granted a continuance for "Proxima" for another year.

On the basis of the analysis of the previously considered facts and details, it can be concluded that the conducted military and peace missions in Macedonia were successful and aided the attempt towards a swift implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the establishing of control of state authorities over the entire territory of the nation, the reforms of police activities, the return of intra-national faith and security, the fight against organized crime. Also, it should be noted that these missions were also a further stepping stone in stimulating advancement within the Process of Stabilization and Association with the European Union, with the end result of providing support for Macedonia towards it achieving Candidate status for EU membership.

The brought up achievements embody sound proof in favor of the argument that preventive action of the international community can only be successful if there is the existence of a coordinated and complementary approach in the decision-making process and the conduct of activities, regardless of the number of entities and subjects which are involved in such a process and their often converging interests. This thriving example in Macedonia of preventive action and conflict prevention is final proof that the sustainability of peace, stability and prosperity is a recipe which can exclusively be effectualized through reliable engagement, and the strong partnership and conviction of all involved and relevant entities within the international community.

IV. EU Enlargement after 2007: Why did Europe become rigid towards the Western Balkans?

The Stabilisation and Association Process[19] highlighted the regional cooperation as a precondition for accession in order to overcome inter-regional and ethnic problems of the Western Balkans especially for the successor countries of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. All Stabilisation and Association Agreements signed by Western Balkan countries and EU and Member states *ex parte* **contain clauses on the commitment to enter or continue good neighborly relations with the other countries of the region.** Seeking to 'promote a ring of well

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[18] See: European Union. Council Joint Action 2003/681/CSFPon the European Union Police Mission in Macedonia (EUPOL "Proxima"). Official Journal of the European Union, L249/66, Setpember 29th, 2003.
[19] See: Pippan, Christian (2004): 'The Rocky Road to Europe: The EU's Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans and the Principle of Conditionality. European Foreign Affairs Review, 9.

governed countries to the East of the European Union', EU has become the primary peace-builder enterprises in the region.

At the moment, the Western Balkan countries are at different stages of integration, democratization process and economic development. **Croatia became the 28th member of the Union**; **Montenegro and Serbia have begun the accession negotiations; Albania has become a candidate country since June 2014, and it is waiting to open accession negotiations; and the Republic of Macedonia has been granted the candidate status since 2005 but has been blocked by Greece due to the name dispute.** 12 years later after the Thessaloniki Summit (2003), where the EU leaders declared that the future of the Western Balkans would be within Europe, many hoped that the transformative power that EU applied successfully in Central Eastern and European Countries would be appropriated for the Western Balkans as well. The promise of membership was thought to provide necessary impetus for the Europeanisation of the Balkans. But, experience has shown that nothing is so simple in the Western Balkans.

On the one hand, the enlargement fatigue, euro - crises and increase of euro-scepticism against enlargement seems to have put Western Balkans in the 'waiting room'. On the other hand, the internal problems of these countries such as: contested statehood; lack of political will to have consensus on domestic reforms; economic problems; increasing nationalism and the name dispute between the Macedonia and Greece have diluted the role of EU as a transformative power. **The EU role as a peace-builder in the Western Balkan countries is an on-going and demanding process** which depends on the transformation of the region moving from stabilisation towards integration. To achieve this ambitious aim, **EU has followed a dual track approach: 1. deployment of CSDP crises management and 2. enlargement policy. The combination of this dual track approach has worked very promising in the Western Balkans, aiming to transform the region in three aspects.**

Firstly, EU has contributed to the stabilisation of the region through civilian and military operations by preventing future conflicts between ethnic groups; disarmament of the military groups and populations; reforming the security sector; assisting the police sector in fighting against organised crime etc. This contribution should be seen as a long term project to achieve democratic governance. In addition, the Pristina and Belgrade Agreement brokered by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, scored a success in shaping security in the Western Balkans.

Secondly, the prospect of membership has induced necessary impetus for Western Balkan countries to build and consolidate democratic institutions committed to promoting the rule of law; protection of minority groups; enhancing reforms on respecting human rights; market economy and state liberalisation and adjustment of legal systems in compliance with EU legislation.

Thirdly, such a dual approach has promoted a culture of justice, tolerance and reconciliation between different ethnic groups.

The stabilization of the political and security conditions in the nations of the Western Balkans had a positive effect and stimulated the process of the Accession partnership with the aspirant states for EU membership, as the central pillar of the pre-accession strategy and a key instrument in its intensification. A more rigid approach was established by towards the Balkans after Bulgaria and Romania became EU member-states, as a result of the fact that it became crystal clear that these two nations were not fully prepared for membership only after their accession was finalized. Perception combined with worries related to security issues and unsolved problems in the Balkans, as well as considering the post-Lisbon developments within the EU and the difficult economic climate, created a negative snowball effect for the Western

Balkans, and in turn the EU's focus and methods became, as mentioned, much more rigid when referring to conditions for membership.[20]

The obtained experience of the EU in the process of accession of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe shows that even though democracy building should be a result of internal political processes, nevertheless foreign actors can play a role in support systematic transformation.[21] At a time when the Enlargement policy is hanging on by the threads and fighting to live on and be effective, it is crucial to establish fundamental positions in the context of EU-Western Balkan relations. After the Croatian accession in 2013 there is a concrete and perceived risk that accession will slow down, especially if the relations between Serbia and Kosovo continue to live under the shadows of tension, regardless of the opening of accession negotiations between Serbia and the EU. If the tempo slows down, overshadowed by economic and political crises within the EU, Europe risks "losing" the Balkans, once again, through nationalism, violence as well as further defects of agreed borders, and in this context it could lose its leverage to other actors which might not share similar views and values, such as the Union[22].

In the future, NATO and the EU must work on developing more active diplomacy in the internal political dynamic of aspirant states, so that their integration processes could become further effective. Non-functional parliaments and the disregard of democratic practices in national political arenas in the region is dangerous for the political prosperity of the Western Balkans and their European integration, and as so the EU and NATO cannot portray political neutrality when such open issues exist in certain aspirant states. Political tensions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia have already raised the issue of how the EU's inefficacy for integration has allowed for the creation and further development of underlying issues within these states.

The European Union has an obligation to put more attention on the development of democratic processes, and to not only give attention to the end result. This means: more attention to the quality and transparency of legal mechanisms and their implementation. To achieve these goals, the EU must promote the role of NGO's and request that they be involved in policy-making processes. It is necessary to encourage a higher level of collaboration between governments, parliaments, civil society and interest groups. In a parallel process, the EU must take proactive and specific steps towards building public support and belief in the project of European integration. Europe itself has the primary responsibility towards the process of democratization and peace-building as to this point it has done much. When most of the nations of the Western Balkans are clearly on the right path, and getting ready to knock on Europe's door, on the basis of a standardized and merit-based approach created by the EU, the door must be kept wide open.

V. Conclusion

In today's world, the threats facing democratic societies are complex and real. Genuine solutions require a comprehensive approach and close cooperation across borders and across sectors. Within a global security environment, challenges for small states are even bigger. International organizations are the natural environment where such states find it easier to

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[20] See: Rosa, R., Stratulat, C., 2001. *Enlargment to the Balkans: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. European Policy Center. p. 1.
[21] See: Pridham, Geoffrey (2008). Securing Fragile Democracies in the Balkans: the European Dimension. Romanian Journal of European Affairs 8(2): p. 56-70.
[22] See more: Balfour, R., Stratulat, C., 2011. *The Democratic Transformations of the Balkans*. European Policy Center, EPIC Issue Paper no. 66, p. 2.

function within this context. Therefore, openness for coalitions and alliances can help to adopt an active role and to change self-perception of small state.

There is an apparent need for **finding new shapes of establishing and maintaining new defense relations and cooperation within a defined security policy framework i.e. developed security communities.** For that purpose, multidimensional, political, expert and academic knowledge and experiences are necessary in order to deal with the new challenges. In this context, above all, having domestic support for international engagements is a key aspect in this area.

The involvement in Iraq and the 2003-2008 Iraqi Freedom Coalition, the NATO operations in Afghanistan, the NATO support in Libya or the role and mandate of France in Mali and the role that the EU member states have been playing in the region of South-Eastern Europe provides valid proof that taking joint courses of action is the right way in going forward. The SEE countries are facing similar, if not the same challenges and security issues as all other countries from the Euro – Atlantic region. These common challenges and problems require joint solutions and only together can they contribute in a more compact manner to peace, security and stability in the Region, Europe, and in broader terms. From a Balkan perspective and the integration of all SEE countries in the Euro – Atlantic community (NATO and the EU), **strong regional and bilateral cooperation are the best joint mechanisms for responding to the common challenges and serve as the greatest contribution to global peace and security.**

The process of Euro-Atlantic integration is the main driving force for prosperity in the Western Balkans, a motivation for stabilization and sustainable development of the countries of the region and an efficient tool for addressing security and stability challenges through democratic dialogue. It is necessary to affirm the importance and relevance of regional partnerships and regional cooperation, as a framework that contributes towards advancing security and stability, thus enabling countries to jointly build their shared future. **Western Balkan countries need to act together, regardless of the fact that each will be integrated based to the merit.** They share the opinion that improving, already strong, regional cooperation is among those priorities. In this context, it is necessary to reiterate that NATO and the EU need the region, but the Western Balkans also needs NATO and the EU. Security does not start and stop with the borders of certain country and the achievement of NATO standards are in a same manner country's accomplishments. Over a longer period of time, the countries of the Western Balkans have faced numerous challenges, starting from resolving constitutional issues to problems related to combating internal systematic problems with institutions.[23] **In the past years we have witnessed some positive movements towards the accession of the region into the European family. Croatia became a member of the EU, Montenegro is following the example of Croatia and conducting the association process with EU, Serbia started the negotiations and Albania and Kosovo are looking forward to improve status of their respective countries in relation with EU after successful election in Albania and Kosovo's agreement with Serbia**. On the other side, Bosnia and Herzegovina awaits restructuring of the federation in order to proceeds on the way to European integration while the Republic of Macedonia is faced with difficult negotiations with Greece on "the name issue" as an unfair precondition for NATO and EU membership. At this juncture, the EU and NATO must learn from their past, to create visible policies for their future. In this paper, past mistakes, as well as past positive experiences have been noted. **Generally, we can conclude that political-security cooperation in the Western Balkans has provided an excellent basis for the nations in this region to develop.** Incentives have worked, but they cannot be discontinued and/or impeded on the basis of internal political and economic issues within the Balkans. **The EU and NATO have the absorbing capacity to take in these nations, and they must be a true example of meritocracy: membership, and encouragements towards it, should be given exclusively and only considering the fulfillment of membership criteria**. In order to overcome problems that plagued the Western Balkans and to avoid another inter-ethnic conflict, EU needed to demonstrate a strong commitment to the region by offering the prospect of membership as a 'carrot', which for these countries meant to change the course towards fundamental democratic transformation, consolidating the rule of law, economic development and adjustment of domestic legal systems in compliance with the Community *acquis*. With these lessons in mind, EU leaders decided to follow a dual track approach towards the Western Balkans consisting in EU crises management and enlargement policy. Both these approaches can be considered as peace-building instruments because they provide necessary impetus for institution-building and durable peace. At this juncture, the EU and NATO must learn from their past, to create visible policies for their future. In this paper, past mistakes, as well as past positive experiences have been noted. Generally, we can conclude that political-security cooperation in the Western Balkans has provided an excellent basis for the nations in this region to develop. Incentives have worked, but they cannot be discontinued and/or impeded on the basis of internal political and economic issues within the Balkans.

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[23] See: Grabbe, Heather (2006). The EU's Transformative Power: Europeanization through conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

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