JOURNAL *of* EUROPEAN *and* AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES
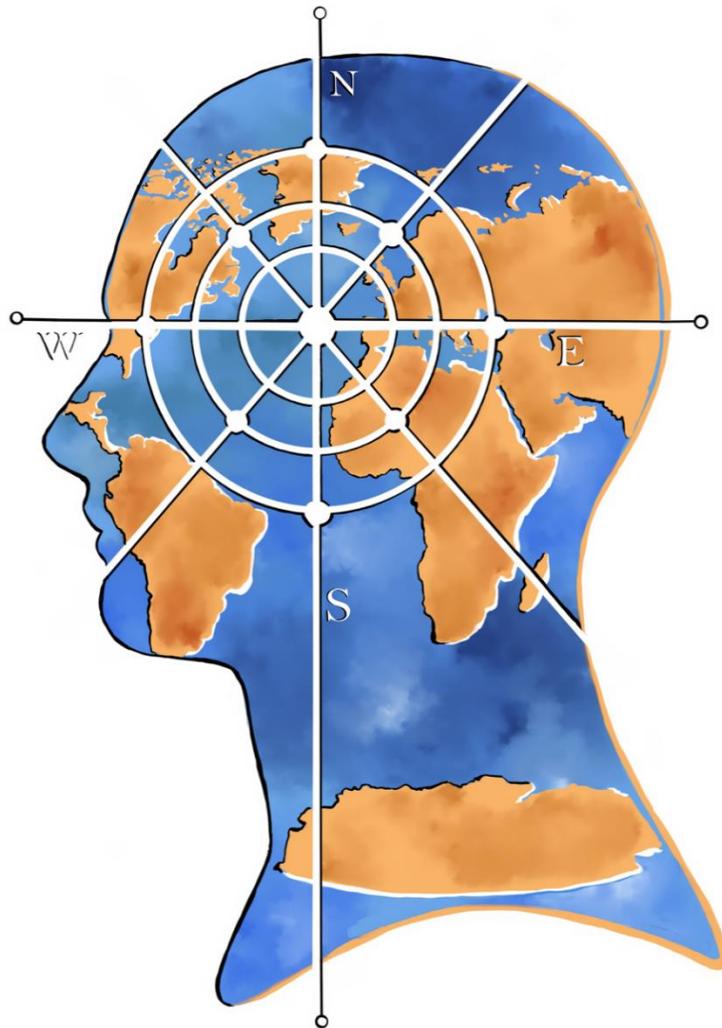
AN INTERNATIONAL PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

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Mission and Scope

The *Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies* (*JEAIS*, formerly the *Journal of Mediterranean and Balkan Intelligence —JMBI*) is published by the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS) under the editorial direction of the Department of Security and Intelligence Studies at Coastal Carolina University. It is an international academic-led scholarly publication that focuses on the field of intelligence and related areas of study and practice, such as terrorism and counterterrorism, domestic and international security, geopolitics, and international relations. The journal's rationale is driven by the global nature of security challenges, where we are called more than ever to communicate and work collaboratively to solve our common problems. Thus, the *JEAIS* aspires to promote an international dialogue between diverse perspectives and experiences, based on original research on the broader European and American practice and study of intelligence. The *JEAIS* is an all-inclusive academic platform that allows accomplished and emerging scholars and practitioners from both the public and private sectors to share their knowledge, ideas and approach to intelligence studies. By crafting each journal issue through a rigorous and highly selective screening process of potential contributors, and an exhaustive review process, the *JEAIS* adheres to its mission, which is three-fold: (a) to provide an equal opportunity for academics and practitioners of intelligence to discuss and challenge established and emerging ideas; (b) to address existent knowledge gaps by advancing new knowledge; and (c) to shape the evolution of intelligence scholarship beyond traditional communities of research.

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Editor's Note

Jonathan Smith

Chair and Professor, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Coastal Carolina University

Welcome to the December 2023 *Journal of European and American Intelligence Studies* issue. As with past issues, I believe it serves as a vibrant forum for disseminating and discussing groundbreaking research in intelligence studies. It provides a diverse array of studies that expand our understanding of security issues in our discipline. In this issue, we proudly present a collection of manuscripts representing the cutting edge of intelligence and security studies research. These articles cover contemporary and emerging security threats and the institutional responses to these challenges.

Our first article by Tuzuner and Cinoglu considers the issue of signaling in civil conflict using the case of Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). This case reveals the underutilization of theories on signaling in this area of study. It also highlights the significant complexity that is involved in civil conflict as actors seek to communicate with multiple audiences simultaneously. The analysis by Tuzuner and Cinoglu identifies the need for more research that employs the literature on signaling to understand the dynamics of civil conflict between state actors and insurgent groups.

Singh, Vig, and Kaunert provide an insightful exploration of the complexities of preparing, preventing, and responding to pandemics and bioterrorism in contemporary times. Drawing on both historical and contemporary challenges, the authors reveal the range of legal and sociological issues that complicate this endeavor. To overcome these challenges, they identify the need for enhanced global cooperation, data harmonization, and timely communication in addressing this challenge. They also highlight the critical role of health security intelligence in addressing the challenges of pandemics and bioterrorism, particularly from non-state actors. Lastly, the authors explore the ethical considerations in shaping a comprehensive strategy to address this threat is also explored.

In assessing the state of European Union (EU) accession by states in the Western Balkans, Nomikos and Delli analyze the range of internal and external security challenges that complicate this endeavor. Beyond their analysis of the internal social, economic, and political factors that challenge the goal of these states to join the EU, they also highlight the internal and geopolitical drivers that explain the behavior of the EU in this process. Ultimately, their analysis stresses the importance of institutions in the Western Balkan

states and the need for the EU to promote both democratization and security in this critical region of the world.

Kanellopoulos and Ioannidis explore the importance of counterintelligence practices in supporting national security. Specifically, they consider the significance of allocating resources for developing intelligence operational cultures to support the protection of a country's economy. This requires a complex relationship between counterintelligence professionals and leaders in government, the private sector, and academia. The authors ultimately conclude that most states have a need to further foster this culture of collaboration between these entities to protect the national interest. They also consider the endemic challenges that counterintelligence activities represent to civil liberties in democratic societies. Kanellopoulos and Ioannidis find that ultimate success in the area lies in the balance between national security interests and protecting core principles of liberal democracies.

Our last article in this issue is a long-term analysis of the security and human rights impacts of the U.S. War on Terrorism. Scrutinizing the records across four presidential administrations, Sinha finds that the U.S. approach to this new security challenge may have, counterintuitively, sustained the threat of terrorism by fostering negative sentiments in immigrant and non-western communities. Sinha explores how the United States' interpretation of human rights in this period was malleable to suit its immediate security interests. The author also notes how the evolution of U.S. security policy from a largely militaristic approach to a more civilian-based approach is a hopeful sign for U.S. counterterrorism policy and may be a more effective strategy in addressing the new threat of terrorism in the twenty-first century.

As we delve into the pages of this journal, let us appreciate the considerable efforts of our contributors and peer reviewers, who have worked tirelessly to uphold the standards of excellence and academic integrity that our journal is known for. It is my hope that this edition will not only serve as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners alike but also inspire future research that continues to expand the horizons of our understanding.

In conclusion, the *JEAIS* editorial team is grateful to our authors for adding their informed voices to yet another insightful issue of this publication. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the reviewers and editorial staff for their invaluable efforts in bringing this edition to fruition. I believe the efforts of both of these groups serve as a testament to the vibrancy and relevance of the study of intelligence and security issues. I look forward to the continued scholarly exploration in this journal that is so essential for advancing our scholarly understanding, as well as informed policy-making, in this domain.

As always, the *JEAIS* editorial team would welcome our readers' comments, suggestions, and criticism regarding our content. Thank you for your continued support.

Accession and Enlargement: The Security Issues Facing the Integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union

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Abstract

The ongoing changes on the international geopolitical chessboard have shifted the attention of academia and the EU towards the accession procedure of the Western Balkans (WB) to the EU. The structural problems of these states extending the rule of law, stemming from the creation of these states after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, have posed obstacles to their integration into the EU. The enlargement process focuses on aligning the EU law with the aspirant states' national law, especially concerning fundamental rights, the rule of law, and security. In this case, the WB appears to still face many problems in these sectors, being one of the biggest hubs in the world for the development of organized crime. Terrorism has also been one of the main concerns of the area, and given its latest connection with cyberspace, the need for reforms is real. Although efforts have been made, the aspirant states are not ready yet to access the EU. The paper will study the efforts of select WB states in the sector of security, more specifically, the cases of human, arms, and drug trafficking, as well as human smuggling and terrorism. It will also examine the EU's contribution to each of these areas. Therefore, it will answer whether these states are ready to be accessed, considering the significant security issues that must be tackled.

Transnational Security and Organized Crime

Discussions regarding the enlargement of the European Union (EU) to the Western Balkans (WB) region have been ongoing for more than two decades among the EU member states and institutions. It is crucial to highlight that the term 'WB' refers to Balkan Peninsula states seeking EU membership, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. This paper compares the accession process of post-Communist states to the WB's integration process into the EU. This comparison aims to enhance the understanding of integration politics and 'Enlargement fatigue', the phenomenon that emerged after the Lisbon Treaty's signing.[1] The EU's strict conditionality procedure closely monitors the integration progress of these states. Turkey is excluded from this analysis because it is not a part of the Western Balkans, and its regression on the rule of law has halted the accession process.

The EU's political agenda regarding the integration of the WB region has been impacted by the Russia-Ukraine war, which has altered the geopolitical landscape. The potential threat to the EU's Eastern borders has highlighted the importance of integrating the WB countries into the EU. Nonetheless, given these countries' issues, the accession process is complex and challenging. More specifically, being created after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, they are characterized by weak institutions, a high level of corruption, ethnic disputes, financial problems, organized crime, and terrorism. Concerns have also been raised concerning the influence of Russia on these former communist states and the implications their relationship with Russia could have if they were fully accessible to the EU.

This paper focuses on the accession procedure from a security perspective, emphasizing the significant problems the WB region faces as an obstacle to EU integration. It is important to clarify that this analysis is being made from a European security perspective. It focuses on the security challenges that could prohibit the EU accession process and the security challenges that stem from Russia's influential role in the WB. In this case, the EU is distinguished from NATO, as they serve different but complementary roles in the security sector. More specifically, the EU adopts a more comprehensive approach to security to address the root causes of conflicts and establish stability in the Western Balkans while emphasizing economic development, political stability, and social cohesion. On the other hand, NATO primarily focuses on military defense and collective security.

Furthermore, the EU strongly emphasizes conflict prevention and resolution through diplomacy, mediation, and promoting political dialogue among regional actors. Its capacity to engage in diplomatic efforts and soft power tools, such as economic incentives and political

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[1] Enlargement fatigue refers to the phenomenon that occurred after the EU's expansion in the early 2000s when some of the EU member states and citizens became tired of the continuous process of accepting new member states. The EU's enlargement process requires significant political, economic, and social changes in the candidate countries, which can be challenging for both the EU and the candidate countries. As a result, some of the EU member states and citizens were disappointed with this further enlargement, leading to a slowdown in the process and increased examination of candidate countries' progress towards meeting the EU's accession criteria.

conditionality, can complement NATO's more traditional military deterrence in the region. In addition, the EU has a strong track record of offering a path to membership through the accession process. Accession to the Union is seen as a powerful opportunity for the WB region to implement political, economic, and institutional improvements, which can enhance stability, prosperity, and security. Thus, the EU's integration process includes broader criteria and requirements, leading to deeper political and societal transformation. Finally, the EU conducts civilian and crisis management missions in various regions, including the WB. These missions address issues such as the rule of law, police training, and border management. While NATO also has crisis management capabilities, the EU's civilian missions can complement them.

For this reason, organized crime in the Balkan Peninsula is analyzed, in addition to human, drug, and arms trafficking. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of terrorism and radicalization but also the rise of foreign fighters who join terrorist organizations in the Middle East. The radicalization and recruitment of these potential terrorists are facilitated through the extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and cyberspace.[2] The internal conditions in each state are explained, as well as the response of the EU concerning the matter. The main point of this article is to question whether the stalemate in the accession process created due to the failure of the harmonization of the EU acquis with the national law can be easily overcome or whether these issues in the security sector will continue to block the whole procedure.

For the analysis of these points and sectors, data has been primarily gained from regional and country-specific reports on the accession process and organized crime/human trafficking in the WB from the EU and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Some statistics were also taken from the Global Initiative, while information was gained from academic articles to better understand the subject. In general, most statistics concerning WB stopped before the global COVID-19 pandemic, and there is a lack of literature concerning human trafficking in the WB from this perspective.

EU Accession Process

The accession process to the EU is a difficult and long procedure. As far as the WB is concerned, this began in the 1990s with the dissolution of Yugoslavia. However, before analyzing the accession progress of the WB and the security issues that arise, it is important to thoroughly explain this procedure.

During the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the focus of the EU was on the accession of the post-communist states. For the assessment of a state to this sui generis organization, according to article 49 of the Treaty on the EU, the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria was deemed necessary.[3] These criteria cover the EU's political, economic, and legislative perspectives,

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[2]Eleni Kapsokoli, "Cyber-Jihad in the Western Balkans," *National Security and the Future* 22, no. 3 (December 22, 2021): 37–58, https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.22.3.5.

[3] "Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria)," Publications Office of the European Union, *EUR-Lex*, European Union, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html

ensuring the stability of democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights, and minority protection. In the economic sector, a functioning market economy able to withstand competitive pressure and market forces seems to be the requirement. The third criterion refers to the "ability of the aspirant state to take on obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards, and policies that make up the body of EU law and the adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union".

To meet these conditions, the EU provided financial aid to these states through "aid packages", the Phare Programme, and Association Agreements.[4] The negotiations started with the launch of a coherent strategy in 1997 and the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) in 1999. Some extra criteria, known as "Copenhagen-plus", were also set.[5] In contrast to the general directions of the Copenhagen criteria, these were more specific, addressing these states' problems, including re-establishing regional and bilateral political and economic cooperation and respecting the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context, cooperation with the ICTY in the Hague and provisions for the return of refugees were deemed necessary.

Having concluded the negotiations in 2004, the EU had a considerable enlargement.[6] With eight post-communist states (e.g., Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia) ending the division of Europe. At the same time, in 2007, two countries from the Balkan area were accessed: Bulgaria and Romania. Because of the failure to ratify the constitutional treaty from the referendums in France and the Netherlands and the huge financial crisis of 2007-2008, the dilemma of "widening and deepening," otherwise known as "rebordering" and "debordering" resurfaced.

The term 'widening' suggests that further integration can be achieved through enlargement. Thus, the EU should focus on its external borders and the states wishing to join the EU. On the other hand, 'deepening' contrasts this idea, suggesting that only further cooperation of the states already in the EU and the delegation of powers from the member states to the European Institutions can lead to an "ever closer" union. A rise in Eurosceptic ideas can also be observed in the same period.

Considering the political climate of this period, the accession process was significantly slowed down with the addition of more criteria for the member states wishing to join the EU. Prior to this, the accession process is the Stabilization and Association process, a policy for the WB to be granted EU membership through a partnership that stabilizes the region and establishes a

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[4] "Briefing No. 33: The PHARE Programme and the enlargement of the European Union," European Parliament, European Union, published December 04, 1998, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/33a1_en.htm.
[5] Milenko Petrovic, "The Different Values and Norms or the Different Conditions? Revisiting the Causes of Postponed EU Accession of the Western Balkans States", (PowerPoint Presentation for Athens Institute for Education and Research,2015), https://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/items/ff013dcf-81f1-428d-b8bf-a28dda1b6319.
[6] "History of the European Union 2000-2009," European Union, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/2000-09_en.

free-trade area.[7] This partnership is based on contractual relationships (bilateral Stabilization and Association agreements), trade relations (autonomous trade measures), and good neighborly relations (regional cooperation council that aids facing challenges such as energy shortages, pollution, transport infrastructure, cross-border criminal activities, etc.). To implement this whole "state transformation", financial assistance is also provided through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance – IPAEN. The Stabilization and Accession Council (SAC) monitors the whole procedure.

The countries involved in the SAP are considered potential candidates for the EU. The process that needs to be followed for a country to access the EU starts with the aspirant state, which applies to the Council expressing his desire to become a member of the EU, and then the Council asks the Commission for its opinion. After that, the Commission submits an opinion.[8] If the EU Commission's opinion favors, the European Council may grant the country candidate status unanimously. The third criterion is divided into 35 chapters, then negotiated in clusters. However, the EU Commission grants a "screening" report before negotiations start.[9] The screening covers all the sectors of the EU law, and its purpose is to indicate the alignment of the EU law with the aspirant state and the progress needed to be made in these sectors.[10]

As far as the clusters are concerned, the first known as "fundamentals" refers to sectors that are vital for the functioning of the EU, including the Judiciary and fundamental rights, Justice, Freedom and Security in the EU, the Public Procurement, General Statistics, the Financial control, the Economic Criteria, the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, and the Public Administration Reform.[11] Furthermore, the second cluster refers to the legislation concerning the function of the internal market (free movement of goods, free movement for workers, right of establishment and freedom to provide services, free movement of capital, company law, intellectual property law, competition policy, financial services, consumer and health protection). In contrast, the third cluster covers "Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth" (information society and media, taxation, economic and monetary policy, social policy and employment, enterprise and industrial policy, science and research, education and culture, and customs unions).

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[7] "Stabilisation and Association Process," Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *European Commission*, European Union, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process_en

[8] "Potential Candidates," Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *European Commission*, European Union, accessed 13 June 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/potential-candidates_en

[9] Dr Ioanna Mpantouna. "Negotiations of the Accession Process." (Course Presentation and course handout for Negotiations of the Accession Process, University Of Piraeus, Piraeus, received March 2023)

[10] While negotiations on a cluster are open, each chapter is negotiated individually. The cluster about fundamentals is the first to be opened and the last to be closed.

[11] While negotiations on a cluster are open, each chapter is negotiated individually. The cluster about fundamentals is the first to be opened and the last to be closed.

Following this is the fourth cluster, "Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity" (environment and climate change, Trans-European networks, energy, transport policy). This cluster has some connection with the fifth cluster, "Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion" (agriculture and rural development, food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy, fisheries, regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, and financial and budgetary provisions). The last cluster refers to the External Relations (external relations, foreign security, and defense policy of the EU) to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

During the aspirant state's reform attempts are designed to comply with the European standards. If the member state decides that all requirements have been met, in conjunction with a recommendation from the Commission, the Council decides by unanimous vote whether to open new negotiation chapters. The EU Commission may recommend 'provisionally closing' a chapter whenever progress is judged satisfactory. In this case, completing all chapters will signify the finalization of the negotiations. Then, it is the Commission's turn to give its opinion on whether the country is ready to become a member state. All member states must decide unanimously through the Council to end the accession process and sign the Accession Treaty. Finally, each member state's ratification of the Accession Treaty is required, and only after its approval will the country officially become a member of the EU.

Member states are not as open as before towards accessing states from the WB to the EU, expressing "enlargement fatigue". After the Lisbon Treaty, only one state, Croatia, joined the EU in 2013. The WB, in contrast to the post-communist countries previously accessed, was facing significant problems in the areas of security and the rule of law, being one of the centers for organized crime generally, including human trafficking and smuggling, drugs trafficking, corruption, and terrorist activities.[12] In addition, although Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia are mentioned as "WB," these countries do not always share the same views. They have territorial and ethnic disputes, and some of these disputes involve Croatia. Their way towards their accession started in 1999 with the SAP, and from 2016, all the countries had active Association Agreements with the EU. Albania and North Macedonia have been granted candidate status, and accession negotiations started in July 2022. These two states are treated jointly.[13]

There was a stalemate in commencing the negotiations due to identity, history, and language differences between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) acquired candidate country status by the European Council in December 2022 because of the Russian aggression. However, BiH has a delicate political system and a self-governing district (Brčko),

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[12] Module 1 Key Issues: Defining Organized Crime." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, April 2018. https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/organized-crime/module-1/key-issues/defining-organized-crime.html.
[13] André de Munter, "The Western Balkans," Fact Sheets on the European Union, European Parliament, European Union, April 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans.

which makes harmonizing the national law with the European law extremely difficult.[14] Montenegro obtained candidate country status in December 2010, and negotiations have been underway since 2012. While all the chapters have been opened, only three seem to have been provisionally closed, and the process has been stalled due to political turmoil and instability. Similarly, the European Council granted Serbia candidate country status in 2012, and negotiations opened two years later in 2014.

Until now, 22 out of 35 negotiating chapters have been opened, and only two chapters have been provisionally closed. Finally, Kosovo is the only Western Balkan country that has not acquired candidate country status. Its accession to the EU remains closely linked to the EU-facilitated high-level dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, which aims to normalize their relations through a legally binding comprehensive agreement. The view of the EU on these countries has slowly been changing, not only due to their progress in the implementation of European law but also due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The revisionist vision of Russia has changed the climate of the geopolitical environment, creating insecurity among the EU members and Institutions and calling for a change of policy towards the WB. Understanding the complications of Russia's further expansion into the Eastern neighbors of the EU, the focus has shifted towards the accession of these Balkan states.

The regional security issues and the rule of law, as have already been mentioned, seem to be the most significant benchmarks concerning the enlargement of the EU. Furthermore, considering the "weak" institutions of these states, it is important to analyze these security problems individually and the process of resolving them from both the perspective of the WB and the EU.

In contrast to the function of traditional organized crime groups, Balkan groups appear to operate under ethnic associations and friendship ties.[15] They also appear to be more agile, organic, and project-based and are known for their abilities to use new technologies and expand their criminal market (via cyber-fraud). The Balkan structure of organized crime is based on three pillars: i) human trafficking; ii) weapon trafficking; and iii) drug trafficking.

The evolution of technology has introduced a new area of action for illegal activities: cyberspace. According to data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), these economic activities in the six countries represent a significant part of their gross domestic product. The economic crises, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the wars that followed, the intra-ethnic disputes, and the embargos created an environment that nurtured the demand for a plethora of illegal goods, transforming the WB into a hub for the development of illegal activities and the promotion of them through trans-national channels to the EU and Latin America.

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[14] The Encyclopædia of Britannica, "Bosnia and Herzegovina," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed June 2023, https://www.britannica.com/place/Bosnia-and-Herzegovina.
[15] Branislav Stanicek, *Cooperation in the fight against organized crime in the Western Balkans, European Parliament*, European Union, published December 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2021/698838/EPRS_ATA(2021)698838_EN.pdf

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are two different but interconnected issues that have become increasingly prevalent in today's world. Both involve the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and are often linked to organized crime and human rights violations. This part will analyze the definitions, causes, and consequences of human trafficking and migrant smuggling and the measures being taken to counter these crimes and mitigate their impact.

To begin with, human trafficking can be defined as an act of illegal recruitment, transferal, and trade of individuals by force, coercion, deception, and other means. This kind of exploitation can take various forms, such as labor trafficking, sexual exploitation, slavery, rape, and forced marriage.[16] According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), an estimated 15% of these victims are involved in forced labor (4.1 million people) in Europe and Central Asia, and an estimated 10% are in forced marriage (2.3 million people).[17]

On the other hand, migrant smuggling is the facilitation of the illegal entry or stay of a person in a country for financial or other material benefit. This phenomenon involves the use of fraudulent documents and illegal border crossings.[18] Migrant smuggling can be considered a response to restrictive immigration policies and the demand for cheap labor in destination countries.

The causes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling are complex and multifaceted. Poverty, lack of economic opportunities, political instability, and armed conflict are all factors that contribute to the vulnerability of individuals to trafficking and smuggling. Discrimination based on gender, race, and ethnicity also plays a role, as does the demand for cheap labor and sexual services in destination countries. In some cases, individuals may voluntarily migrate or be recruited for work, only to find themselves in situations of exploitation and abuse. The impact of human trafficking and migrant smuggling is severe and broad. Victims of trafficking and smuggling frequently undergo physical and psychological harm due to sexual and physical violence, forced drug use, and deprivation of food and water. Migrant smuggling can also lead to death and injury as individuals attempt to cross borders or travel in unsafe conditions. In addition, trafficking and smuggling fuel organized crime and corruption, undermine the rule of law, and contribute to social and economic inequalities.

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[16] Konstantinos Apostolopoulos, "Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling: The Case of the South-Eastern European Sea-Borders," (Research Thesis, Research Institute for European and American Studies, February 11, 2012)pg. 14-17, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/139891/rieas157.pdf.

[17] "Forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking," International Labour Organization, updated September 2022, https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm

[18] Konstantinos Apostolopoulos, "Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling: The Case of the South-Eastern European Sea-Borders,"(Research Thesis, Research Institute for European and American Studies, February 11, 2012), pg. 21, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/139891/rieas157.pdf.

The WB region seems to be one of the central pathways for the movement of migrants and asylum seekers towards the North and the West. During this last decade, the surge of migrants was on the rise. Many European institutions could not take on the burden of all the migrant flows on their own, and this led to the migration crisis of 2015-2016. However, after the deal between Turkey and the EU was negotiated, more migrants started to use the Eastern Balkan and Eastern Borders routes.[19]

Two main migration flows have been traced in the WB: one that originates in the Balkans and is aimed at Western Europe. This route was mainly used by Albanian migrants and was organized by networks of Albanian smugglers. The other flow came from countries that faced significant internal problems, such as economic problems, civil war, uncertainty, and political instability in general. The states were largely located in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria), as well as the Middle East (Syria, Jordan, Iraq) and Western Asia (Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan).

The migrants were crossing international borders either via the sea or land. Some characteristic locations in the WB are i) the river at the border between Turkey and Greece (the Maritsa/Meriç/Evros River); ii) the river between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Drina); iii) the sea between Turkey and the Greek islands; iv) the lake between Albania and Montenegro (Lake Skadar/Scutari); v) Albania – Montenegro border along railway tracks (at the Bozhaj border).[20] Some people arrived without the help of smugglers, but most had come into contact with their smugglers and organized their journey from their country of origin.

According to data from the UNODC, the WB represents both an origin and a destination for trafficking in persons and involves mostly women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation. These countries have one of the biggest sex markets due to their links to most European Countries.

In Albania, convictions related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling, according to statistical data from the UNODC, accumulated to 1% each, respectively.[21] Two distinct smuggling routes have been detected: one originating in the country, where Albanian nationals attempt to migrate to destinations such as the United Kingdom. The other is being used by migrants from West Asia and North Africa as a transit route to Western Europe. There was a decline in the number of victims of trafficking of Albanian origin in 2020-2021.[22] In November 2021, the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2021–2023 was adopted. The

[19] "What is the EU-Turkey deal?," International Rescue Committee, March 18, 2022, https://www.rescue.org/eu/article/what-eu-turkey-deal.

[20] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[21] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 62-71, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf

[22] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Albania Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 38-50, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en

improved legislative framework for victims, including amendments to the Criminal Procedural Code, is yet to be implemented. The Ministry of Interior is the main actor in migration. The legal framework on migration is mostly aligned with the EU acquis. Albania has a readmission agreement with the EU, but draft readmission agreements sent to countries of origin have not been implemented yet. Reception capacities have increased in 2021, and the contingency plan has been updated to host the arrival of many migrants and asylum seekers. However, the Council of Ministers has not adopted it, and the staff to support the migration policy services are limited. Although the readmission agreement with the EU is functioning well, and the law on asylum is largely aligned with the EU acquis, the capacities of the Border and Migration Police to identify persons remain insufficient. Similarly, the Directorate for Asylum, Foreigners, and Citizenship function is unsatisfactory.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is neither known as a transit country nor does it have a lot of cases of migrant smuggling and human trafficking that have been observed. However, after the agreements between the EU and the Balkans states to control the borders, Bosnia and Herzegovina became the alternative to the traditional Balkan route. According to the UNODC, in 2017, there were more than 20,000 migrants.[23] The exploitation of people, in this case, was mainly for sexual exploitation and labor. While the legislation on migration and asylum is broadly in line with the EU acquis and the international standards, the legislation on trafficking in human beings needs to be further aligned, notably on sanctions.[24] A strategy for 2020-2023 is in place and being implemented. The principle of non-refoulement remains to be fully ensured, and a new strategy and action plan on migration and asylum for 2021-2025 should urgently be adopted. In addition to that, the services are understaffed and partly underequipped. There is no information exchange between the autonomous political entities and no political responsibility in each case.

In Montenegro, convictions of trafficking in person account for 2% of national criminal data, while convictions of smuggling of migrants were 4%.[25] In smuggling, Montenegro is mostly used as a transit country from Albania and Kosovo towards Bosnia and Herzegovina or Serbia en route to Europe. The legal framework of Montenegro on migration and asylum is largely aligned with the EU acquis, and the 2021-2025 strategy on migration and reintegration of returnees was adopted in September 2021.[26] Furthermore, in June 2022, Montenegro joined the

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[23] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 71-74, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[24] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Bosnia and Herzegovina Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 38-50, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2022_en.

[25] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 75-81, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[26] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Montenegro Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12. 2022), pg. 45-61, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/montenegro-report-2022_en.

European Migration Network (EMN) as a non-voting observer member. A cooperation roadmap with the European Asylum Support Office (now the EU Agency for Asylum) was signed in December 2021 to strengthen Montenegro's asylum system, including the status determination procedure and the reception conditions, and to develop contingency planning. The asylum procedure was facilitated and accelerated, and the cooperation with the NGOs was strengthened.

In North Macedonia, the situation changed dramatically. The percentages are rising significantly for both human trafficking (5%) and migrant smuggling (18%).[27] This is because one of the main pathways for migrants is from Greece to the Western European countries through North Macedonia and then Serbia. That said, human trafficking seemed to be on the decline in 2018. Concerning its process of fighting these issues, the legal framework mostly aligns with EU standards.[28] The main actor in the migration sector is the Ministry of the Interior. In December 2021, a new Resolution on Migration Policy and its Action Plan (2021-2025) was adopted, in which the country's strategic directions and measures are defined. However, the migration management strategy for integrating refugees and foreigners has not been adopted due to a lack of political will. Furthermore, the contingency plan to manage large migratory flows needs to be completed and has yet to be adopted. On the other hand, the readmission agreement with the EU is being implemented satisfactorily, and the Law on International and Temporary Protection is significantly aligned with the EU acquis, and relevant by-laws have been set. A critical gap can be noticed in the detention of people engaged in irregular movement since the current legislation does not provide any alternatives to detention, and there is no assurance of the protection of rights, as guaranteed by the law.

Serbia, similar to North Macedonia, poses one of the main transit countries, constituting the Balkan route for most migration flows heading to the EU because of its borders with Hungary. Human smuggling convictions reached 18%, and trafficking in persons was limited mostly to nationals that were exploited for sexual reasons and labor.[29] In 2021, there were no convictions for human trafficking. In the field of migration, both the Ministry of the Interior and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration are responsible for the management of flows. The response plan for managing mixed migration was updated in July 2021, and its legal framework

[27] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 81-84, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring -OC-in-WB.pdf.
[28] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *North Macedonia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 37-47, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en
[29] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 85-96, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

is largely aligned with the EU acquis.[30] Adoption is still pending on the amendments to the Law on foreigners, and the Law on employment of foreigners is pending adoption. Serbia has been accused of pushbacks and expulsions, while more legislation on the asylum procedure needs to be adopted.

Finally, Kosovo has a high percentage of convictions for both human trafficking (12%) and migrant smuggling (20%).[31] It serves as an origin and transit country with three main routes identified by the UN: i) Kosovo- Serbia- Hungary; ii) Kosovo-Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina-Croatia-Hungary; iii) Kosovo-North Macedonia- Greece- Italy. The institutions responsible for migration are the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Border Police. The legal framework on migration and asylum largely aligns with the EU acquis.[32] In November 2021, the migration strategy and action plan 2021-2025 were adopted. There are some challenges, such as the lack of biometric equipment for registering migrants, the lack of readmission cooperation with most countries of origin, and the lack of institutional coordination.

Understanding the burden these countries must take on due to migration flows, the European Commission presented an EU action plan for the WB in December 2022.[33] This plan is built on several pillars: strengthening border management along the routes, enhancing and accelerating asylum procedures, and supporting reception capacity. In addition to that, fighting migrant smuggling, enhancing readmission cooperation and returns, and achieving visa policy alignment are some of the main points of the plan. It aims to enhance and strengthen cooperation between the EU and the aspirant countries in their attempt to align their national legislation with the EU standards. The funding of these programs stems from IPAIII, which for 2021-2022 reached a total value of €201.7 million. This has allowed for improved border management, joint missions, and deployments. For the safe return of the refugees, all the Western Balkan states, except for Kosovo, have signed readmission agreements. For the fight against migrant smuggling, measures were taken through the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), and a new partnership was launched in 2022 between the WB and the EU, which focuses on strengthening law enforcement and judicial cooperation and increasing the border management capacity.

As far as human trafficking is concerned, the EU adopted the 2011 anti-trafficking directive in 2021; an anti-trafficking strategy was launched that emphasizes: i) reducing the demand that

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[30] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Serbia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022) pg. 48-65.https://neighbourhood-enlargement. ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf.

[31] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 91-96, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[32] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, European Commission, *Kosovo Report 2022*, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 42-58, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf.

[33] "Western Balkans route," European Council, European Union, last modified August 30, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/western-balkans-route/.

fosters trafficking in the first place, including clarifying companies' responsibilities; ii) breaking the business model of traffickers, both online and offline, for example by working with tech firms to reduce access to platforms; iii) protecting, supporting and empowering victims, with a particular focus on women and children; and iv) increasing international cooperation, with more exchange of information with non-EU countries.[34] On 6 June 2023, the Council agreed to update the EU's anti-trafficking law to include child marriage and illegal adoption.[35]

Drugs and Arms Trafficking

This ecosystem of crime extends to other activities, such as drug and weapons trafficking. The attractiveness of this region nurtures the development of this kind of crime due to its proximity to the EU. The drug trafficking market seems to be the biggest market for organized crime, with the convictions related to it reaching 51%.[36] The WB route is mostly known for heroin trafficking from Afghanistan via Turkey and then from WB to the EU. More specifically from Bulgaria, the Balkan route seemed to extend into one of several sub-routes: Either through Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia; Romania and Hungary; North Macedonia and Albania to Italy and/or other countries in the WB such as Montenegro or Croatia; or North Macedonia, Kosovo and from there either to Albania or to Serbia for onward trafficking to Western Europe. In 2015, the total gross profit made by opiate traffickers in southeast Europe reached $1.7 billion per year.[37] Heroin is not only trafficked through the Balkans but it is also processed there. Cocaine is transited through and processed in Albania and Montenegro from Latin America, with shipments arriving mainly by containers to the ports of Durrës and Bar.[38] The packages are then moved through Kosovo, Serbia, and Bosnia and smuggled towards Central Europe. There is also evidence of cocaine processing in the region. Cannabis is also trafficked and produced on a larger scale, with Albania being the top producer in the region. Except for cannabis, a lot of synthetic drugs are also being produced in the WB.

On the other hand, firearms trafficking in the WB is mostly intra-regional. Although this activity is developed on a smaller scale, criminal groups mainly use these arms to enforce discipline,

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[34] "The EU's fight against organized crime," European Council, European Union, last modified July 05, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-fight-against-crime/.

[35] "Fighting human trafficking: Council agrees position for stronger rules," European Council, European Union, (09 June 2023), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/06/09/fighting-human-trafficking-council-agrees-position-for-stronger-rules/.

[36] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Nations, *Albania Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 45-51, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.

[37] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 45-51, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[38] Hotspots of Organized Crime in the Western Balkans: Local vulnerabilities in a regional context, The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, (Geneva, May 2019), pg. 2-7, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-13Jun1110-Web.pdf.

show their power to other groups, and protect their members. It is believed that even though embargos were imposed, the WB possessed a lot of firearms due to the military of Yugoslavia being one of the biggest and the attempts at building military capacities in the region after 1999.

The persons convicted for drug-related crimes reached 65%, while for firearms trafficking, it is only 1%.[39] Albania is known for its cultivation of cannabis, as well as drug trafficking in general. She serves as a transit country for heroin and cocaine and is the main provider of cannabis to the EU. For firearms trafficking, there is a lack of exchange of information. Therefore, the whole procedure is not facilitated.[40] The main bodies in the fight against drug trafficking are the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection/Institute of Public Health. The Strategy against Organized Crime was adopted in December 2020, and two years later, the Action Plan for 2022 was adopted. Albania has no specific national drug strategy.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is known for its unstable political situation, which could explain the high level of convictions for firearms trafficking (76%) and drug trafficking (17%) from 2012 through 2017.[41] Similar to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina are cannabis producers. The legal framework concerning drug production and trafficking is only partly in line with the EU acquis, and even though there is a strategy on drugs, there is no action plan to implement it.[42]

Transnational organized criminal groups are active in Montenegro's territory, mainly engaging in the trafficking of cocaine from Latin America to Europe, notorious for violent inter-gang wars and responsible for extensive violence in the region. Convictions for drug trafficking reached 23%, and for firearms trafficking, 4%.[43] Cannabis and cocaine are produced in Montenegro but in very small quantities. The relevant EU Action Plan remains insufficient on firearms, and many amendments are needed to the legal framework. On drugs, neither Montenegro's legal framework nor the national drug information system fully meet EU standards.[44]

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[39] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 62-71, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.
[40] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Albania Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 38-50. https://neighbourhood-enlargement. ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.
[41] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 71-74. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring - OC-in-WB.pdf.
[42] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Bosnia and Herzegovina Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022*)*, pg. 38-50. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2022_en.
[43] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 75-81. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.
[44] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Montenegro Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 45-61. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec. europa.eu/montenegro-report-2022_en.

Convictions on drug-related crimes accumulated to 12% in North Macedonia.[45] It is a small-level producer of cannabis herb, but it is important to mention that through a licensing process, cannabis can also be produced for medical reasons. North Macedonia mostly serves as a transit country for heroin. A national drugs observatory (NDO) has existed since 2007 as a part of the Ministry of Health, and the National Drug Strategy 2021-2025 and the Action Plan 2021 - 2023 were adopted in July 2021. However, the action of the NDO is limited, and it is understaffed.[46]

In Serbia, the situation is quite similar, with convictions for drug production and trafficking reaching 17% and firearms trafficking 5%.[47] There is no distinction concerning these crimes in Serbia's criminal law, and these activities are generally considered on the rise. Serbia is mainly a country of transit for weapons trafficking because of the very low prices for firearms in the region, particularly in comparison to Western Europe. The strategy for small arms and light weapons control (2019-2024) is being implemented. As far as drugs are concerned, the Serbian National Drug Observatory is fully staffed and operational.[48]

Drug smuggling is one of the most prominent illegal activities in Kosovo, which contributes to the trafficking of opioids and heroin from Afghanistan. Alongside drug trafficking, arms trafficking is rampant in the region due to the existence of abandoned military depots. Kosovo is implementing its strategy through the Law on the Legalization and Surrender of Weapons, Ammunition, and Explosive Devices, while in drug production and trafficking, the legislation is not considered to be up to date.[49]

It can be noticed that in this area, there is a more prominent distinction between the EU legislation and the national legislation. In most cases, Brussels's effect can be detected when the state accepts the EU regulation or changes its legislation to comply with the EU standards. This poses the alternative for the member states to avoid drafting complex technical legislation from scratch while also giving them a chance to exploit the benefits that come from the compliance of WB legislation with the EU standards. However, this is not always effective. Considering the difficulties these countries face and the fact that some states have separate entities and districts (like in BiH), the effectiveness is questionable.

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[45] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*,(Vienna, 2020), pg. 81-84. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[46] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *North Macedonia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, pg. 37-47. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en

[47] UNODC Crime Research Section, "Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, (Vienna, 2020), pg. 85-96, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/OC/Measuring-OC-in-WB.pdf.

[48] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Serbia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 48-65. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf.

[49] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Kosovo Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 42-58. , https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf.

The gap needs to be covered to tackle this huge business. In December 2020, the Council approved the EU Drugs SrStrategy, focusing on drug supply/demand reduction and addressing drug-related harm.[50] According to the EU, this can be done via international cooperation, research, innovation, foresight, coordination, governance, and implementation. An action plan with more than 80 measures was adopted to better implement the strategy, and the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction assisted. On firearms trafficking, a new action plan was adopted, and the FRONTEX made a handbook with priorities.

Terrorism and Radicalization

The WB region has been fragile due to political instability and ethnic disputes. According to Europol, "The EU was particularly concerned about the spread of religiously motivated as well as ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism and violent extremism in the region".[51] The concerns of the EU increased after the migration flows that surged in the area from Muslim countries. Some of the migrants were extremists who had the EU as their destination. Another concerning fact was the "contribution" of foreign fighters from the WB states to the Syrian civil war. Taking into consideration the domestic Muslim population, this percentage was extremely high.

Furthermore, the fact that most of these countries have significant Muslim populations makes them an easier target for radicalization theories. According to academia, the process of radicalization has been facilitated using cyberspace. Additionally, a new threat has risen, "cyberterrorism." Cyberterrorism is used by terrorist organizations such as ISIS for recruitment, radicalization, operational planning, training, propaganda, communication, free expression, funding, and online matching.[52]

The harmonization of Albania's national legal framework with the EU law against terrorism has been advanced. Ten cases of terrorist offenses and financing of terrorism were referred to the Special Prosecution Office and the judicial district prosecution offices in 2021. However, there were no court convictions. To date, it is estimated that around 35 to 45 Albanian nationals remain in Syria. While progress is being made, Albania should better exploit the Europol European Counterterrorism Centre's services and take measures to address prison radicalization.[53] Bosnia and Herzegovina's anti-terrorism legislation aligns with the EU acquis and international law.[54] However, there is a need for the adoption of a new strategy.

[50] "EU drugs policy," European Council, European Union, last modified June 27, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-drugs-policy/.

[51] Anastasiia Kudlenko, "The Western Balkan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTi) and the Capability of the EU as a Counter-Terrorism Actor," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 27, no. 4 (August 12, 2019): 503–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2019.1652148.

[52] Eleni Kapsokoli, "Cyber-Jihad in the Western Balkans," *National Security and the Future* 22, no. 3 (December 22, 2021): 37–58, https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.22.3.5

[53] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Albania Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2020), pg. 38-50. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/albania-report-2022_en.

[54] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Bosnia and Herzegovina Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 38-50, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2022_en.

Since 2012, in North Macedonia, 143 citizens have left for conflict zones, of whom 69 reportedly have returned and 38 have been killed.[55] In 2021, no departures to the conflict zones were noted in the last two years. North Macedonia's national counterterrorism and violent extremism coordinator has developed a legal framework broadly aligned with the EU acquis and international anti-terrorism instruments. There is also a national strategy and an action plan for countering terrorism.

Montenegro has largely aligned its legal framework on terrorism with the EU acquis.[56] The threats of terrorism and violent extremism remained relatively low in the country, and no new departures or returns were observed to and from foreign battlefields in 2021. There has been a high level of cooperation between Montenegro, Europol, and Eurojust.

For Serbia, further efforts are needed to align with the EU acquis on firearms.[57] However, in 2021, there were no convictions on terrorism offenses, and it must be mentioned that Serbia is considered one of the most reliable cooperation partners for Europol and Eurojust.

In Kosovo, the Minister of Internal Affairs is responsible for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against terrorism. Kosovo's legal framework has not yet been fully aligned with the EU acquis on anti-terrorism. At the same time, a strategy and action plan to combat terrorism has been adopted in line with the EU's counterterror strategy. However, the presence of Salafist ideology and ethnonational movements has not been suppressed. Since the start of the civil war in Syria in 2012, 253 Kosovo citizens have returned, while 82 remain in the Middle East.[58]

In December 2020, the EU adopted a counterterror agenda, one of the key points of the Security Union Strategy. The EU's action on the WB is through the RAN project that aims to prevent radicalization.[59] This project contributes to implementing the key objectives of the Joint Action Plan. These are a robust framework for countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, effective prevention and countering of violent extremism, effective information exchange and operational cooperation, building a capacity to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, and strengthening the protection of citizens and infrastructures. There seems to be a need to address more threats that surface from cyberspace, given the utility it has for terrorist groups. Specifically, how to prevent the use of cyberspace for radicalization and recruitment.

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[55] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *North Macedonia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 37-47 https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec. europa.eu/north-macedonia-report-2022_en.

[56] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Montenegro Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 45-61. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec. europa.eu/montenegro-report-2022_en.

[57] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Serbia Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 48-65. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec. europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Serbia%20Report%202022.pdf.

[58] Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, *Kosovo Report 2022*, European Commission, European Union, (Brussels, October 12, 2022), pg. 42-58. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec. europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/Kosovo%20Report%202022.pdf.

[59] "RAN in the Western Balkans," European Commission, European Union, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/ networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/ran-western-balkans_en.

Russia's Role Concerning the Western Balkans

Since the start of the latest installment in the Russo-Ukrainian War in February of 2022, the EU has expressed insecurities and concerns concerning the stability of the Balkan region and the safety of its Eastern borders. This development in the eastern neighborhood highlighted the significance of the WB's accession process. More specifically, the EU wants to independently expand its influence in this area. This is why the procedure is complex and long. The EU wants to ensure that it is not exposed to threats from the East. However, this trend does not apply to the accession of Ukraine, where the accession procedure seems to be moving rapidly.

The EU has adopted a clear stance against Russia. It has severed ties with Russia, including business and energy. Despite Russia's wrongdoings, most of the Balkan states remain virtually unchanged. For example, the Serbian company NIS is still partly controlled by Gazprom, and the country has not joined in sanctioning Russia for war crimes. Another prominent example of the Russian presence in the WB is the influx of pro-Russian propaganda. In Montenegro, the recently elected centrist political coalition Europe Now (PES!) includes both pro-Serb and pro-Russian sentiments. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the impact of this propaganda in promoting the secession efforts of the *Republika Srpska* is well known. Russia especially instrumentalizes the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Serbian Orthodox Church to foster a sense of "brotherhood."

Generally, Russia's policy extends to the larger Balkan Peninsula, including the aspirant EU member states. Through its propaganda and indirect involvement, Russia intensifies the intra-ethnic and religious differences between the states and their entities, leading to the deterioration of relations between these states. Russia, through its proxies, is trying to "block" the accession of these states to the EU, fueling tensions to play a mediating role if there is an armed conflict. Russia would then have the upper hand in the negotiations, holding leverage over the EU and its goals in the area. The EU is invested in transforming the rule of law of these states to ensure its security and to avoid any involvement of Russia in its politics and decision-making.

Conclusion

As can be seen, the road toward the accession is slow and steady for most WB cases. Considering that the fundamentals are most important, the WB should invest in their institutions by making reforms that will eventually allow them to join the EU. The EU seems to understand the threats and difficulties that these states face.

Therefore, at GLOBSEC'S 2023 Bratislava Forum, the President of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) introduced a new initiative for the WB. In her speech, she addressed the need for the EU to take on this responsibility and, thus, declared the extension of some offers of the EU's function towards the WB (subject to some conditions). That includes the single market (e-commerce and cybersecurity), creating a common regional market, and a

general increase in pre-accession funding. This comes as no surprise, considering the recent developments on the battlefield and the general transition towards a multipolar system. The EU does not want to leave its borders unattended, which can be promoted by integrating the WB.

For that to happen, the EU must provide democratic standards for these states and ensure that their problems will not extend to other EU member states, thus emphasizing the rule of law and strict conditionality. The EU's enlargement fatigue can be explained by the crises it had to resolve concerning states that did not fully meet the accession criteria in the past. Thus, the EU wants to avoid an incomplete integration that would make it vulnerable to internal and external crises. This explains the focus on 'deepening' instead of 'widening'. It would be beneficial to study the role of the WB further as a security provider for the EU and the unconventional development of organized crime through cyberspace.

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