

“KEBAB DIPLOMACY” JEOPARDIZES BALKAN REGIONAL STABILITY AND EUROPEAN SECURITY MODEL

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It was quite obvious and more than expected. Burgas, the fourth-largest city in Bulgaria and an important industrial, transport and tourist center in the Black Sea, became the place of an outrageous terrorist incident when five Israeli tourists were killed by unidentified suicide bomber, whose roots are suspected to come from Hezbollah or Al Qaeda Islamist groups. It was the second attempt against Israeli targets the last month but the first was successfully deterred in Cypriot ground by the Cypriot Intelligence Service when a supposed member of Lebanese militant group Hezbollah was trying to strike on Israeli citizens. The incident gives a chance for further reflections on co-existence between Islam and the European Security Model.

Burgas' terrorist incident was the latest brutal attack against western targets in the Balkan Peninsula, a fast-growing Islamist territory, where Wahhabism - an austere brand of Sunni Islam promoted by radical fighters who aim at causing bloodshed to western hubs as well as to serve their domestic flag-waving visions – is getting more dominant. Radical Islam emerged in Bosnia & Herzegovina during the 1992-1995 Yugoslavian war, when Islamist fighters from Middle East provided military training and direct martial aid to Muslim Bosnians (Bosniaks). Since then, numerous training camps sprang up all over peninsula raising concerns that the region will become the breeding ground for terrorism with easy access to Western Europe or the U.S. Albania, FYROM, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia & Herzegovina are in the middle of the storm upheaving their potential European integration. The EU feels a disturbing thorn into its Achilles' heel which tends to jar its already unsound economic disharmony.

Bulgaria had not witnessed a terrorist attack since the Turkish mid-80's bombing against the communist regime however, as Klemens Von Metternich used to say, “stability is not immobility” and requires perpetual vigilance as well as qualitative progress on maximum-security issues. The increasing Islamist population under governmental

incapability of ameliorating institutional services and corruption constitute a harmful combination which terrifies national security. Prime Minister Boyko Borisov is called upon to balance on a perilous tightrope which has been stretched by himself and even the worst, he is blindfolded. On the one side, there is the so called “Kebab Diplomacy” and on the other side a smart wink to the West.

By saying “kebab diplomacy” we mean the Borisov’s policy to seduce the more Muslims he could possibly attract into Bulgaria. In a bid to make business and maintain favorable treatment from any possible side, Borisov puts an extra strength to boost ties with the Arab world by giving them open-handed benefits. This is the reason that “*anyone can see a kebab store in every corner*”, he unseemly said on a 2011 statement. However, the coin has two sides and the policy has sensibly led to multiple implications. The rise of radical Islamist cells was inevitable due to the fact that external actors lay on the corner to exploit the vacuum or internal forces are seeking for room to dynamite the area. “*According to US estimations, among the 20.000 Muslim students in Bulgarian universities a number of 2-3% believe in Wahhabism and usually operate as apostles of radical Islamism*” Alex Alexiev, President at Balkan Center for Black Sea Studies, mentioned in a recent interview. *Moreover, a serious piece of the puzzle is given by a Bulgarian government commission in 2010, which concluded that drug trafficking across the country is a significant profit for the Lebanese Hezbollah.*ⁱ ***This essentially enhances the fears for an organized Islamist network that is fed by external sources.***

As far as the wink to the west, we can focus on two pillars. The first deals with the Bulgarian European membership and the unstopped way to European reconciliation. The more Bulgaria is following the shared common values about political stability, respect of human rights, economic reforms towards more market economy and fight against common European threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime, the more stable becomes, giving Europe a secure south eastern border. The second pillar is focused on Bulgarian relationship with the USA and Israel. After the events of September 11, 2001, Bulgaria identified itself as a close ally of the United States and has maintained close diplomatic relations with Israel. Furthermore, it sent a contingent of troops to both Iraq and Afghanistan to demonstrate solidarity with the United States’ war on terror. It has also become an increasingly popular tourist destination for Israelis, especially since relations between Israel and its former ally Turkey cooled. Some 140.000 Israelis visited Bulgaria in 2011, while roughly 8,000 Bulgarians visited Israel last year. According to official sources, the number of Bulgarian tourists in Israel increased by 11%, during the first half of 2012.ⁱⁱ

Turkey's role as destabilizing actor

When Erdogan's government came into power in 2002, an ambitious vision of Neo-Ottomanism is gradually structured in order to revive the lost Ottoman Empire's glory which, at its peak, controlled the Balkans, most of the modern-day Middle East, and most of North Africa. Erdogan found at Ahmet Davutoglu's face, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the person who will build on this far-reaching plan by strengthening Islamic "soft power", in a first level to the Mediterranean Basin and the Balkan Peninsula. Towards this policy, AKP Party tries to protect Turkish interests through the use of state-sponsored NGO's, charity foundations and religious organizations which act as an underground Islamic "Tunnel Boring Machines". The deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations supports the fears for further Turkish implication in the case of Burgas. Organizations such as the "Milli Gorus", the "Internationale Humanitäre Hilfsorganisation" (IHH Germany), "The Union of NGOs of the Islamic World" (UNIW) and the "Humanitarian Relief Foundation" are some examples of the secretive Turkish expansionism which stretches its tentacles all over Europe. These organizations have their headquarters in the most European developed countries and they are likely connected with attacks in the Balkan region. According to U.S. officials, the U.S. embassy in Sarajevo and U.S. military bases in Bosnia were subject to several terrorist threats after September 11, 2001. Particularly, in October's 2011 incident in Sarajevo, in which a gunman and a police officer were wounded but no one died, was the latest in a series of incidents in Eastern Europe involving Wahhabis. The interesting thing is that the terrorist had spent many years to Austria as diaspora communities in the Austrian capital Vienna have played a significant role in the development of radical Islamist networks in the Balkans.ⁱⁱⁱ

European Security Model

Of course, we cannot conclude that Bulgarian-western relations can be harmed but there is a great possibility to deregulate or even better, speaking about common security values, Europe should likely take Bulgaria to task on basic institutional holes. It is quite precarious and unsettling for the European Union and for the Trans-Atlantic coalition when a partner country, located in a stormy region, dedicates just one single sentence on international terrorism as a national security threat on the government's 44-page annual national security report. This is a governmental recklessness which proved catastrophic and could possibly trigger the European regional stability by giving the "innings" to extremist groups to act in other Balkan countries. Albania, FYROM, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia & Herzegovina are struggling for a potential European

candidacy and integration but they face plenty of problems. Nevertheless, what comes straight on mind is the reflection that, if Bulgaria, a European country, faces such problems, what could anyone expect from Albania, FYROM Bosnia and Kosovo whose Islamist population is more radical and more well-disposed towards secessionist tensions. European Union is working on diminishing these threats providing the European Security Model as guidance for successful internal horizontal and vertical security in a coordinated cooperation with national security policies of the Member States and external forces. It also tries to ameliorate potential candidate's profile through bilateral Action Plans and Stabilization & Association Agreements based on European values. Responses to these challenges include,

- analysis of future situations and scenarios: **threat anticipation**
- **adequate response**: planning, programming and handling the consequences
- **effectiveness in the field**: the work of agencies, institutions and bodies (Europol, Eurojust, Frontex)

We should ensure that Member States share intelligence in time to prevent crime and bring offenders to justice. Anticipation and prevention operates far better than suppression but in some occasions you must suffer to improve. In this case, there is no room for experiments. The great Cypriot example and its recent instant reaction in cooperation with Mossad^{iv} on the suspected strike against Israeli citizens paves the way to *the south eastern Europe to learn how a well-organized intelligence service must protect its national interests and secure a turbulent European border; the most obstreperous.*

Endnotes:

ⁱ Matthew Levitt, (2012). Did Hezbollah Do It?, The Washington Institute, [online], July 18, 2012, available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/did-hezbollah-do-it>

ⁱⁱ James Wither, (2012). How Bulgaria became a terrorist target, CNN World, [online], July 19th, 2012, available at: http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/07/19/how-bulgaria-became-a-terrorist-target/?hpt=wo_r1

ⁱⁱⁱ Daria Sito-Sucic, (2012). Bosnia charges three with attack on U.S. embassy, Reuters, [online], Apr 23, 2012, available at: <http://goo.gl/D5eIV>

^{iv} Joseph Fitsanakis, (2012). Mossad 'helped arrest' alleged Hezbollah operative in Cyprus, Intelnews, [online], July 16, 2012, available at: <http://intelnews.org/2012/07/16/01-1037/>