



RESEARCH PAPER

No. 133

JULY

2009

COMBATING TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME: SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE COLLECTIVE APPROACHES

This paper was originally published as a chapter in
Bilten Slovenske Vojske (SLOVENIA MINISTRY OF DEFENSE),
September 2008

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**COMBATING TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME:
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Florina Cristiana (Cris) Matei

Introduction

The end of the Cold War triggered an inexorable bloom of democracy and freedom in a multifarious and perilous security environment. Post-Cold War security challenges and threats no longer come from organized, hierarchical state actors, but rather from non-state, easily adaptable, network-centric groups and organizations (such as terrorist, organized crime (OC), money laundering and human trafficking groups), which have progressively succeeded in altering the traditional geographic borders between countries, as well as between domestic and foreign threats. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the terrorist attacks in the US (2001), Turkey (2003), Spain (2004) and London (2005), etc. have clearly illustrated how instability and war involving failing states, on the one hand, or specific ideologies and religious convictions of small groups of people (yet very well prepared and organized), on the other hand, can impact the peace and security of an entire region or continent.

These developments have prompted governments and nations to investigate the dynamics of networked decision-making and adopt a more network-like behavior in order to better understand and tackle terrorism and organized crime networks.¹ In addition, nations have deepened cooperation with countries with common and shared security goals by establishing “interagency cooperation” tools and mechanisms, developing and consolidating “partnerships”, and joining various “collective/cooperative security” organizations and alliances.

South Eastern Europe (SEE) is no stranger to terrorism and organized crime. These menaces, along with poverty, political instability, corruption, isolation of minorities, pandemic

disease, natural disasters and others, shape the spectrum of security threats to the South Eastern European region. In their search for effective responses, nations have gradually developed an array of bilateral, subregional and regional cooperation mechanisms and/or joined existing international cooperative organizations and alliances. One question remains: with all these instruments in place, has SEE shifted from the “Powder Keg of Europe” to a stable, terrorism- and organized crime-free region? This paper investigates South Eastern Europe’s developments with regard to combating terrorism and organized crime cooperation.

Collective Approaches to Combating Terrorism and Organized Crime Cooperation in South Eastern Europe

The need for cooperation: terrorism and organized crime in the region

South Eastern Europe is not a major haven for terrorism, as compared to other regions. On the one hand, there are a relatively small number of Muslim immigrants, and the Muslim minorities are integrated in SEE states (e.g. in Romania and Bulgaria). On the other hand, support for terrorism of the largest indigenous Muslim groups in the Balkans is lukewarm, due to these groups’ more secular philosophy as compared to Muslims elsewhere; they consider themselves Europeans and fear that terrorism would stain their name in Europe, ban them from traveling there and hinder their countries’ efforts toward EU and/or NATO membership. Moreover, the crackdown on Islamic militants by the main Middle East sources of terrorists (e.g. Saudi Arabia) has also reduced the threat of terrorism in the Balkans.²

Nevertheless, since 1989, SEE has been fertile ground for organized crime and, to a certain extent, terrorism. There are several reasons for this. First is the communist breakdown (and regime change) in the region, which has placed SEE countries on different economic, political and societal levels. Precarious and dysfunctional state institutions, weak law enforcement organizations, political instability, corruption and poverty have fueled terrorist and organized crime groups’ activities.³ In addition, a merger between organized crime and terrorism has been noticed lately due to diminished state sponsorship from the Soviet Union and its satellites, coupled with the post-9/11 decreased terrorism backing by various Arab-world states. These changes have constrained terrorist groups to find financial and material support from other sources, including organized crime. In SEE, it has been reported that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was involved in heroin trafficking as a way to raise money for its operations conducted during the Kosovo conflict.⁴ Globalization has also contributed to expanded terrorist and criminal opportunities, as well as to a convergence between organized

crime and terrorist activities.⁵ Second is the prolonged conflict in some countries of the former Yugoslavia and/or Soviet Union. This has allowed a proliferation of mafia-like politically motivated structures in the region.⁶ Third is the extensive military activity in the Black Sea region during the Cold War, which increased opportunities for illegal arms trafficking, which then led to the creation of private armies and paramilitary forces by various secessionist movements in the region.⁷ Fourth is the Muslim presence in SEE: Muslims and/or Arabs who studied in some SEE countries during communist times (as was the case of Romania) and remained in Europe after the fall of communism, and/or Islamic warriors and representatives of different humanitarian relief organizations who arrived from Arab countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Syria and Algeria) during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.⁸ All of the above factors provided opportunities for Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups to infiltrate SEE (especially the Western Balkans), even though, as previously mentioned, Osama Bin Laden's call for jihad does not appeal to all Muslims in the region.⁹ Furthermore, various terrorist groups and organizations attempted to recruit so-called "white Muslims" from the Balkans (which potentially generated a "white al-Qaeda" network, operating from Western to South Eastern Europe), as their physical appearance "fits" better in Europe than the look of Middle Easterners.¹⁰ Fifth is the United States military presence in some SEE countries (i.e. Romania and Bulgaria), which could become indirect terrorist targets. Last, an envisaged relocation¹¹ of terrorists currently concentrated in Iraq to the Balkan region and *vice versa* could entail a crescendo of terrorism and organized crime activities in the region.

Cooperative initiatives and mechanisms

These developments have stimulated cooperation and coordination among the countries in SEE to strengthen freedom, democracy and security in the region. Fighting the region's security threats in general, and terrorism and organized crime in particular, has encompassed strengthened diplomatic, political and military relations between SEE countries, improved intelligence sharing, and intensive cross-border police and judicial cooperation. Cooperation ranges from meetings of political and military leaders in the region to common education and training with regard to combating and preventing terrorism and organized crime, and concerted actions of regional public prosecutors, intelligence and law enforcement officials aimed at securing their borders, arresting or expelling terrorist and/or organized crime suspects, eliminating organizations linked with terrorism and organized crime, freezing or confiscating the

assets of people and groups suspected of terrorist financing, and the like. Cooperation has also included SEE countries fighting the war on terrorism together with their allies and partners.

The prospect of NATO and EU membership (a status desired by the majority of former communist countries in Europe as a proof of their democratic maturity and advanced security capabilities), coupled with the two organizations' membership requirements and incentives, have accelerated SEE regional cooperation endeavors. After 1989, both NATO and the EU focused on expanding Europe's zone of peace and stability, by opening their doors to new members and assisting both aspirant and non-candidate countries to consolidate their democracies and increase their security capabilities through various programs, partnerships and/or membership requirements aimed at post-conflict reconstruction and development, reform of security and defense institutions, and bringing SEE countries closer to the West.¹² Through these programs, the two organizations have forced the hands of candidate countries to strengthen bilateral and trilateral relations, consolidate relations with their neighbors and participate in a series of regional and subregional cooperative security organizations. In other words, regional and subregional cooperation has been a prerequisite for integration in the two organizations.

Bilateral and trilateral cooperation

SEE nations have signed a series of bilateral treaties and established various trilateral cooperation initiatives, each with specific objectives based on shared interests and security preoccupations (ranging from agriculture, education and transportation to customs, defense, extradition, and countering terrorism and organized crime). The bilateral non-aggression and non-territorial claims treaties¹³ between Romania and Hungary (1997) and Bulgaria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (1999) were signed as a desire on both sides to halt past misunderstandings and mistrust, and speed up bilateral cooperation, yet the countries also hoped to get extra credit for NATO and EU membership. The trilateral Romania-Bulgaria-Turkey treaty has focused on combating organized crime but was reinforced by the common incentive of European integration of all its members, as well as by Bulgaria and Romania's common pursuit of NATO membership. Likewise, the trilateral Romania-Bulgaria-Greece treaty has not only been a mechanism of cooperation among the three countries on fighting organized crime, but it also provided an opportunity for Romania and Bulgaria to enjoy Greece's support for their candidacy in NATO.¹⁴

Regional Cooperation

NATO

Nine SEE countries are members or partners of (and two others got the invitation letter in April 2008 to join) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which, since the end of the Cold War (and in particular after the attacks of 11 September 2001) has strived to enhance its collective counter-terrorism capabilities. NATO has been approaching terrorism as an international security problem, which requires a more comprehensive approach and response to include collective political, economic and law enforcement measures, as well as military engagement. In other words, terrorism has become an enduring mission of the Alliance. In 2001, within 24 hours of the terrorist attack in the US, NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time ever. In 2002, NATO adopted several measures and initiatives on combating terrorism: a Civil-Emergency-Planning Action Plan (to assist national authorities strengthen their civil preparedness), enhanced intelligence sharing, better crisis-response measures and increased cooperation with its Partners (within the framework of the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism). It has a military concept for defense against terrorism which sets out four categories of possible military activity by NATO (anti-terrorism, consequence management, counter-terrorism and military cooperation). In all, 26 NATO countries have contributed to the war on terror by their involvement in Afghanistan.¹⁵

European Union (EU)

Eight SEE states are members of the European Union, which has also channeled its efforts to develop collective counter-terrorism and organized crime tools. With regard to terrorism, in 2001 the EU adopted an anti-terrorism plan aimed at strengthening international consensus and efforts to combat terrorism (to include terrorism financing and recruiting), augmenting EU anti-terrorism capabilities, protecting international transport and enhancing border security, as well as encouraging third countries' counter-terrorism efforts. Later, the EU approved a regulation on freezing funds and banning terrorism funding and support, followed by a framework decision on the definition and penalty for terrorism in 2002. All these counter-terrorism measures are applicable to the EU fight against organized crime as well (e.g. the discussion about the harmonization of criminal sanctions and the freezing of assets could also be extended to OC).¹⁶ In addition, the EU Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (2000) and the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) are aimed at enhancing cooperation on countering organized crime.¹⁷

Among other efforts, the most relevant EU cooperative endeavors include the EAW, EUROPOL, EUROJUST, JITs and the Office of the Counter-terrorism Coordinator. The European Arrest Warrant (EAW) was adopted in 2002 to deepen cooperation of EU members' judiciary systems by facilitating extradition throughout the EU states.¹⁸ The European Union Law Enforcement Organisation, known as the European Police Office (EUROPOL), was established in 1992 to increase the effectiveness of EU law enforcement organizations' cooperation in preventing and countering terrorism and international organized crime (i.e. through information and intelligence sharing, support for operations, strategic reports (e.g. threat assessments) and crime analyses, and harmonization of investigative techniques within EU Member States. The Counter Terrorism Unit has recently been reactivated within EUROPOL.¹⁹ The Network of National Experts on Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) was established in 2005 to ensure cooperation of EU countries' investigation teams with regard to terrorism and organized crime.²⁰ The European Union Judicial Cooperation (EUROJUST) is the first-ever permanent network of judicial authorities, established in 2002 to deepen cooperation on criminal justice cases throughout the EU.²¹ The Office of the Counter-terrorism Coordinator in the Council of the European Union was established in 2004 to provide a more integrated approach to the fight against terrorism and better coordination between various EU policies.²²

OSCE

Created in 1975, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is the world's largest regional security organization, with 56 participating countries from Europe, Central Asia and America. It represents both a political cooperation forum (for issues ranging from early warning and conflict prevention, to crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction) and an operative mechanism (through its unique network of field missions). Interagency cooperation on combating terrorism and organized crime has been a high priority of the OSCE; to this end, the OSCE has organized numerous meetings, conferences and roundtables aimed at enhancing cooperation between police, prosecutors and judges in organized crime investigations, as well as harmonization of legislation among its member states. It has also been a supporter and contributor to global anti-terrorism efforts.²³

Subregional organizations

The Central European Initiative (CEI)

The Central European Initiative (CEI) is an intergovernmental cooperation forum established in 1989 to assist its Central European member countries in fulfilling EU membership requirements. After the inclusion of South Eastern and Eastern European countries in the late 1990s, the CEI agenda changed to include cross-border cooperation in combating terrorism and organized crime. Currently, the CEI comprises 18 countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine).²⁴ The CEI's activities have involved regular meetings aimed at exchanging and sharing information and experience, assessing lessons learned from past experiences and providing comparative surveys on regional security threats.²⁵

Brdo Process

The Brdo Process is a CT and OC cooperation forum initiated in 2001 at Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia, by a number of countries from Central and Eastern Europe (Austria, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovenia and Turkey). Representatives of the institutions with attributions in the field of combating terrorism from Brdo member countries have convened yearly to address current security challenges to the region and find common ways to tackle them.²⁶

South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP)

The South East European Cooperation Process was created in 1996 to strengthen subregional security cooperation (i.e. cooperation in justice and home affairs, trans-border cooperation, as well as cooperation in combating organized crime, illicit traffic in drugs and guns, and terrorism). It comprises Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, FYROM, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Turkey, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (February 2001), with Croatia and Moldova as observers.²⁷ In 2004, the SEECP set up a Consultation Group for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption.²⁸

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (also known as the Marshall Plan of SEE) is a forum of cooperation of over 40 countries and organizations from SEE, created in 1999 on the

initiative of the EU, more or less as a regional cooperation “prerequisite” for every candidate country to the EU. Security cooperation is ensured by Working Table III (with two Sub-Tables: Security and Defense, and Justice and Home Affairs). The Working Table’s achievements in fighting organized crime include the Stability Pact’s Initiative against Organized Crime (SPOC) and the Police Forum (PF).²⁹ The Pact has been criticized for its slow pace and inadequate funding, especially because it lacked its own funding, but its value in fostering regional cooperation cannot be denied.³⁰ In 2007 the Stability Pact became the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), a regionally owned cooperative organization.³¹

Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI)

The Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) was established in 1995 to strengthen Euro-Atlantic cooperation among its 13 participant states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey and Montenegro).³²

Within the SECI, a Regional Center for Combating Trans-Border Criminality was created in 2000 in Bucharest, Romania, to strengthen law enforcement and counter cross-border crime cooperation (i.e. fighting drugs, arms, human trafficking and illegal immigration). Besides the 13 member states, the SECI Center has 15 observer states (Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, France Georgia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom and United States of America) and 2 permanent advisors (ICPO-Interpol and the World Customs Organization). The Center has seven working groups, focusing on human trafficking, illegal migration, illicit drugs, stolen vehicles, smuggling, customs crimes, financial crime and cybercrime, as well as on ensuring the safety of sea containers.³³ The SECI Center conducts, organizes and participates in joint education and training activities and regular meetings to strengthen combating organized crime and terrorism cooperation.³⁴ Among the most recent exercises, it is worth mentioning the 2007 Black Sea Regional Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Counterproliferation Exercise, organized by the US Defense Threat Reduction Agency and FBI, with participants from Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania and the SECI Center. The simulation exercise increased cooperation among participants as concerns testing, command and control, communication, intelligence sharing as well as operational capabilities with regard to weapons of mass destruction counter-proliferation.³⁵ In addition, every six months the Center’s experts provide decision makers with specific strategic analyses and reports on drug trafficking, cigarette smuggling, human trafficking and illegal immigration in South Eastern Europe.³⁶ But

the SECI's activity goes far beyond meetings and exercises. The SECI is a real operational center of cooperation, which has been very effective and successful in its anti-crime efforts during its eight years of existence, working closely with INTERPOL, WCO and other organizations. Successful SECI operations include the following: in 2002, Operation "Mirage", carried out with the participation of both SECI and non-SECI member states (e.g. Ukraine, Serbia and Montenegro³⁷), which resulted in the identification and elimination of a huge number of transnational human trafficking networks;³⁸ in 2003, the SECI played a significant role in the arrest in Montenegro of the Macedonian sex-trade king, Leka;³⁹ in 2006, Operation "Torino", conducted by Italian and Romanian authorities and supported by the SECI, which resulted in the arrest of 32 Albanian and Romanian human traffickers in both Italy and Romania;⁴⁰ in 2006, the SECI's joint investigation with Romania and Serbia and Montenegro, targeting cigarette smuggling between the two countries, which resulted in 11 arrests in Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as the seizure of considerable quantities of cigarettes and other goods;⁴¹ in 2007, Operation "Ring", a drug trafficking operation conducted by a Turkish OC network (operating both in Romania and Turkey, with The Netherlands as destination country for drug sale), which resulted in the apprehension of 14 persons simultaneously in Romania and Turkey;⁴² and, in 2008, Operation "Pigeon", which resulted in the apprehension of 24 smugglers who were part of two networks operating on the Moldova – Ukraine – Romania – Hungary – Italy route.⁴³

Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

Established in 1992, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) was the first full-fledged regional cooperation organization in the Black Sea region, comprising all six Black Sea riparian states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine), as well as five neighboring countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece and Moldova). In regards to organized crime and terrorism, the BSEC countries signed an agreement on Cooperation in Combating Crime (including organized crime) in 1998 and an additional protocol in 2004.⁴⁴

Black Sea Naval Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR)

The Black Sea Naval Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) is a multinational naval force comprising the six Black Sea countries (Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia) aimed at reducing illicit activity on the Black Sea through international cooperation. It has been activated for maritime emergencies (e.g. search and rescue operations, humanitarian needs, counter maritime terrorism, clearing sea mines, etc).⁴⁵

Border Defense Initiative (BDI)

The Border Defense Initiative (BDI), also known as the “Black Sea Border Security Initiative”, is a cooperative endeavor of the Black Sea riparian countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), launched in 2004. Under the auspices of the BDI, member countries are conducting various simulation exercises to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), strengthen border control and share intelligence on illicit WMD-related activities in the region.⁴⁶

Analysis of Cooperation

Admittedly, the existence of such a great number of cooperation instruments is proof of the SEE countries’ common security concerns and willingness to work together to tackle them. However, this may also be a challenge to effective cooperation. Not only are some cooperation initiatives redundant, but they ultimately seem to become more symbolic than real (in that they either lack the appropriate management and/or support to be effective, or hold meetings only for the sake of more meetings).⁴⁷ For example, there are three cooperation initiatives involving the Black Sea countries, all of them concerned with combating terrorism and/or organized crime. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was more symbolic than effective due to “inadequate authority, confused priority setting and less than spectacular management”.⁴⁸ The SEECP, although considered for a long time the only regionally led and owned initiative, did not go beyond conducting frequent meetings of heads of state and government, and releasing declarations that had no close follow-up; this brought into question the effectiveness of the Process, especially considering that influential organized crime groups are still operating in the region.⁴⁹ In addition, many regional initiatives have pursued immediate problem solving or quick-fix solutions to various security issues, rather than long-term security goals for the region, which made regional cooperation a “good intention” with no substantial results.⁵⁰ Moreover, SEE has more diplomatic *versus* operative collective tools; even if diplomatic efforts are valuable in strengthening regional relations they may not be as effective in CT and CO as specific regional centers of CT and/or CO experts. The SECI and EUROPOL may be effective with regard to OC but not necessarily CT.

While, in general, all SEE countries have acknowledged the need for a concerted response to terrorism and organized crime, national interests and security concerns have prevailed over cooperation. As a consequence, cooperation in the realm of intelligence, home affairs and justice has been challenging: countries have been reticent to share national information with regard to countering organized crime and terrorism, hesitant to create an

integrated regional database on organized crime (which is highly desirable in order to facilitate access to records for all law enforcement agencies), and unable to establish robust cooperation capabilities among investigative magistrates.⁵¹ On the other hand, the SEE countries have had different tempos of development, institution-building, and European and Euro-Atlantic integration, thus a different pace of reform and transformation of security and judiciary institutions. They did not have compatible counter-terrorism and organized crime legislation, resources, capabilities, methods and equipment, of which organized crime networks have taken advantage, which has had a negative impact on the effectiveness of cooperation.⁵² The frequent meetings of regional and subregional organizations, experience sharing, education and training, and most importantly simulation exercises with regard to combating terrorism and organized crime, will ultimately deepen cooperation in the region. The SECI Center has proved promising as well. By bringing together law enforcement experts from various government branches of its members and observers, the SECI Center has successfully built effective regional enforcement networks, thus overcoming discrepancies and distrust between countries and/or between the same country's law enforcement agencies (i.e. between police and customs, a problem predominant in SEE).⁵³ On the other hand, as concerns legal and judiciary cooperation, the Stability Pact's 2003 Sarajevo Declaration aligned the judiciaries of SEE countries to the UN Convention against Organized Crime, whereby countries agreed to cooperate to: ensure the early and full implementation of the UN Convention and its three protocols; create the appropriate institutional setting and provide the required infrastructure for the enforcement of the required legislation by the UN Convention; establish bilateral agreements on extradition and mutual legal assistance; encourage interregional cooperation, especially among the respective judicial authorities and police forces; ensure that police, customs, judges and prosecutors are adequately trained to investigate, prosecute and sentence organized crime members; develop national and regional strategies to prevent organized crime; and other issues.⁵⁴ This Declaration was very important considering that a lack of compatible criminal legislation has been a serious drawback to cooperation. For example, although the SECI's intelligence sharing and joint police actions were crucial in the arrest in Montenegro of the Macedonian sex-trade king, Leka, his trial in Macedonia would not have been possible without a specific extradition agreement between Macedonia and Montenegro.⁵⁵ In addition, the South East European Prosecutors' Advisory Group (SEEPAG) was created in 2003 to facilitate judicial cooperation among Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Greece, Croatia, Moldova, Romania, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey, through swift information and evidence sharing in trans-border investigations, and assisting lawmakers in the region on various justice and law enforcement issues.⁵⁶

Larger organizations such as the European Union have also had problems cooperating, especially in the field of combating terrorism. Some EU countries do not see terrorism as a global threat, but rather a “bygone era of political violence indigenous to Europe in the 1970s”.⁵⁷ And, even if they viewed the Madrid terrorist attacks as the European version of 9/11, Spain’s terrorist attacks did not change some EU countries’ inertia toward a common counterterrorism strategy (including using military force to fight international terrorism).⁵⁸ This is one of the reasons why the European Union lacks a strong autonomous law-enforcement, intelligence and operational counter-terrorism authority.⁵⁹ EUROPOL for example may be the EU’s main law-enforcement mechanism, but it lacks an effective mandate for combating terrorism, as the EU Member States still hesitate to grant EUROPOL a serious counter-terrorism role.⁶⁰ On the other hand, according to researchers, the EU’s anti-terrorism plan lacks coherence with regard to countering terrorist financing and consequence management.⁶¹

Most likely, cross-organization interaction will make regional and subregional cooperation more effective. It is worth mentioning the incremental progress of cooperation and mutual assistance among the Stability Pact’s Initiative to Fight Organized Crime (SPOC), the Police Forum (PF), the SEECP, SEEPAG, the SE Police Chief Association (SEPCA)⁶² and the SECI Center.⁶³ NATO and the EU have also established security agreements (especially between NATO and EU Member States that are not Alliance members) to facilitate mutual intelligence and information sharing.⁶⁴ EUROPOL cooperates with a number of third countries and organizations, including the following SEE countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey.⁶⁵

The penetration of organized crime into security institutions throughout the SEE region has been a grave setback to effective operative regional and subregional CT and CO cooperation.⁶⁶ A telling example is the involvement of the Serbian Unit for Special Operations (also known as the Red Berets) in criminal gang activities, whose deputy commander, Zvezdan Jovanovic, assassinated Zoran Djindjic, Serbia’s prime minister between 2001–2003 in 2003.⁶⁷ After the assassination, the Serbian authorities started a comprehensive reform of the country’s security institutions, began a hunt for organized crime groups (and their connection to government collaborators) and strengthened cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which led to the apprehension of 4500 people and elimination of Serbia’s largest organized crime associations, including the criminal group behind Djindjic’s murder.⁶⁸ Corruption at all government levels is a common problem in SEE, and, when involving border and/or customs police, it becomes a regional security threat, as it fuels illegal trafficking in goods, persons and terrorist materials at border crossings. A successful cooperative attempt

to address this challenge was, among other efforts, the SECI Trade and Transportation Program's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by nine of its member states, to foster trade and reduce corruption and smuggling at border crossings.⁶⁹ Bilateral cooperation has also been effective with regard to countering organized crime.

Conclusion

Whether an act of free will or a condition imposed by NATO/EU membership requirements, the SEE countries are currently well connected through profuse cooperative mechanisms, ranging from bilateral agreements to regional organizations and alliances and subregional arrangements. One could argue that SEE has moved from the "Powder Keg of Europe" to a more stable and peaceful region. In a poll developed by the *Financial Times* in 2008 on the world's most peaceful countries in 2007, some SEE countries ranked high (Slovenia 16, Hungary 18, Romania 24, Bulgaria 57, Croatia 60, out of a total of 140 countries). The ranking took into account the countries' foreign policy and internal conduct, including the probability of terrorist acts and organized crime, internal conflict and political violence, good neighborly relations, participation in international military and peace operations, etc.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, some countries ranked high due to, among other reasons, regional cooperation.

But SEE is not a terrorism- and organized crime-free region. First, in the same poll, other SEE countries occupied low positions (Albania 79, Moldova 83, Serbia 85, Macedonia 87).⁷¹ In addition, no matter how alert and keen to cooperate the SEE countries are, terrorist and organized crime networks seem to be a step ahead of any regional joint efforts; according to a regional study, "despite the numerous efforts made to counter it, the international cooperation of law enforcement authorities could not keep up with the international cooperation of criminals, which was always a step ahead of the law."⁷² Therefore, while SEE countries' cooperative endeavors are praiseworthy, they need to continue to work together relentlessly and more effectively (especially at the operative level) to eradicate both terrorism and organized crime (and, in parallel, to speed up their security institutions' reform and transformation, and to remove OC infiltration from government). To date, the SECI Center for Combating Trans-border Crime has been very successful in combating terrorism and organized crime collectively and has even served as a model for other regions (e.g. GUAM Law Enforcement Center, the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Center located in Kazakhstan (CARICC), the Gulf Cooperation Council and a similar center in Colombia), or resulted in requests by other countries to join the organization (e.g. Belarus and Israel).⁷³ As Deputy Attorney General of the

United States of America, Mark Filip, appreciated: "The SECI Center is a unique institution in Europe, and it is doing a better job than any institution in the region."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it needs to strengthen its cooperation with other law enforcement and judicial cooperation mechanisms, such as EUROPOL, SEPCA, SEEPAG, etc. This will hopefully be achieved by the newly-established RCC, whose key objective is to augment the role of the SECI Center and make it "the" international law enforcement agency for South Eastern Europe and strengthen the SECI's collaboration with its counterparts".⁷⁵

Endnotes:

¹ Steve TSANG ed., 2007: Intelligence and Human Rights in the Era of Global Terrorism, Praeger Security International, 1–224. Yet, governments' becoming very effective network centric organizations is challenged by bureaucratic issues and parochial perspectives. It is difficult to "flatten" their decision-making processes to develop the speed and agility necessary to penetrate their terrorist adversaries. See Paul SHEMELLA: Interagency Coordination: The Other Side of CIMIC (Draft Paper).

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¹⁰ Bosnian authorities have provided mixed analyses: it is either a great danger or a potential threat due to insubstantial evidence. Steven WOEHREL, 2008: Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress (Order Code RL33012), 1–10. In 2006 three young men were detained in Bosnia (now pending trial) for an alleged plot of terrorist attacks on Western targets in Sarajevo. Authorities believed they were "White Muslims" recruited by Al Qaeda. Anes ALIC, 2006: Al-Qaeda's Recruitment Operations in the Balkans, *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol 4(12), 1–13.

¹¹ Steven WOEHREL, 2008: Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress (Order Code RL33012), 1–10.

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