

THE COMPLEX OF SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: PROCESSES AND ISSUES

Abstract. After the wars came to an end following Yugoslavia's dissolution, the Western Balkans (WB) embarked upon a path of transition and reform which for various political, security, economic and other reasons is still continuing today. Based on a broader analysis of the security framework in the region, this paper identifies the main transformative processes and analyses their elements and implications, which constitute the complex security in the WB. We assess the situation at the level of individual countries and extrapolate the findings for the whole region and Europe. With a view to evaluating the region's dynamics and underlying issues that correlate with and mutually impact on each other, we divide the transformation period into three processes: stabilisation with state-building, democratisation with institution-building, and Euro-Atlantic integration. Western Balkans security has been becoming ever more complex in the past 25 years due to these unfinished processes together with unresolved past issues arising from inter-related and mutually reinforcing political, socio-economic and ethno-national elements. Moreover, new-old security challenges have emerged that are further complicating the state of security. Instead of making progress with the democratic transition and the integration path, the various elements' interaction seems to place the region at risk of destabilisation and stalled progress coupled with the fact that not all requirements for stability have so far been met. The analysis concludes that the security framework is becoming increasingly complex and aggravated, in turn affecting the whole region's functioning and development and thus the entire Continent's stability and prosperity.

Keywords: Western Balkans, security, complexity, stabilisation, transformation, transition, Euro-Atlantic integration

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Introduction

The vision of a Europe 'whole, free and at peace' has been a fundamental idea of European and transatlantic agendas which both include the Western Balkans (WB) region as an integral part of Europe and the European enlargement process. In light of the changing geopolitical and security environment, particularly in Europe and its neighbourhood, new challenges have emerged and new relations have been established. More than 100 years since the beginning of WW1, which started in the core of the WB, over 70 years since the end of WW2, more than 25 years since the Yugoslavia's disintegration and more than 20 years following the Srebrenica massacre and Dayton Accords, which brought an end to the bloodshed, it is time to take a fresh look at the WB as Europe's neuralgic spot and evaluate the security situation in the region.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia followed by the Balkan wars of the 1990s created a need for transformations so as to pacify the region historically known as a 'powder keg'. The signing of the Dayton Agreements meant the WB could embark on such transformative processes, most of which are interconnected and parallel, without any clear beginning or end (Jano, 2008). The WB countries were challenged by having to establish their own identity and statehood, often based on a multi-ethnic society. After 25 years of international intervention focused on stabilisation, political and economic liberalisation and transformation for most of the WB region, this puzzle is further complicated by the complex nature of the processes themselves, which affect each other, and by emergence of new phenomena. The WB is still undergoing multiple fundamental reforms which for mostly political, security, historical and cultural (ethnic) reasons have been delayed. The goal of Euro-Atlantic integration remains to be achieved, even though the international community had firmly believed that the EU's and NATO's power of attraction would be sufficient for triggering political transition and economic reform in the WB. Yet, the intertwined and unfinished processes, (new) challenges and regional dynamics, together with international actors' insufficient understanding of their root causes, and the WB political elites' lacking will to resolve them are adding to complex security situation, thereby hindering the Western Balkans' progress in completing its European chapter. This risks destabilisation, renewed confrontation, a further delay in reforms and economic development, thus challenging the transformative processes.

These are coupled with new challenges (e.g. recovery from the financial and economic crisis, mass migration, terrorism, radicalisation and extremism also imported by foreign fighters from WB countries on their return from Syria and Ukraine where they fought on opposite sides,

nationalist outages in commemorations of past events, even sports) which not only represent security threats, but also endanger the legitimacy of nation states.

This paper will try to answer the research question that is based on the hypothesis that numerous old-new security challenges hold implications for stability and complicate the security of the WB. It will argue that complex security of the WB brings security risks for regional and European security. The purpose is twofold. First, to identify which elements within the transformative processes make this security complex, and to analyse why they pose a problem for individual WB countries, the region and Europe as a whole. These elements will be classified in indicators (political, socio-economic, ethno-national) to facilitate an evaluation of the situation in key areas within individual WB countries and reveal correlations between them. This will serve as a basis for extrapolating a comprehensive assessment of the entire WB region's security. The second aim is to draw conclusions based on a broader analysis of the security framework in the WB region and try to determine how this complex security can be mitigated, and transformed as a functional component conducive to the region's progress.

Our hypothesis is that security in the region is highly complex and subject to developments within the transformative processes. While individual WB countries and the whole region are known for their complex security, the aggravation of such security through the continuing instability of certain WB countries is closely correlated with the insecure and complex regional security environment and this serves to remind that both security and development are prerequisites for irreversible transition, political reforms and economic development (*cf.* Stern and Öjendal, 2010). The objective is to establish how certain elements within the ongoing processes in the WB add to the growing complexity of the region's security and its potential destabilisation.

The methodological framework is based on two complementary methods: a detailed analysis of the primary and secondary sources, literature and analysis of empirical data¹ of the main indicators to evaluate the state of both the countries and the entire region over the last 25 years within the key transformative processes. Reviewing processes and issues, we will also look at the region's historical background for an insight into past causal connections and the legacy of the historical identity, political, security, economic and cultural (ethnic) aspects. A heuristic model will be applied to assess the general state of security in the WB. In our analysis of the phenomena (indicators) within the uncertain global environment and complex processes,

¹ For this purpose, we use legal documents, publications and official EU and NATO progress reports, including assessments of reform implementation together with the outstanding issues in accession for Euro-Atlantic integrations. For a review of the performance on the key indicators, we use analyses, relevant statistical figures, indices and data.

this model will help us conduct research based on multi-criteria issue analysis of statistical data, scales interpretation and evaluation using algorithms.²

This article's relevance lies in the analysis which will help answer the research question of whether the WB countries are functional and efficient states, stable and sufficiently reformed, safe and secure to be eligible for the Euro-Atlantic integration, or whether they are fragile, descending into instability or even non-functional. Exploring and evaluating the complexity of processes and issues that occur with coincidence and overlap often comes at the expense of an over-simplified understanding of the region (Jano, 2008). The complexity has rarely been addressed comprehensively and analytically, taking the multiple inextricably linked developments and issues into account, along with their implications for various fields of political science. Our attempt to accomplish all of the above will potentially bring added research value to this paper.

In the theoretical outline, key international relations theories and international security studies will be applied to explain general principles underlying relevant concepts and processes, helping to understand the dynamics and relations between them. This will give a comprehensive view of the elements contributing to the complex security in the WB and shed light on multiple reasons for the region's present state. It has been noted that regional security and regional cooperation are two of the most important preconditions for peace and prosperity in the WB.³ As the security of each state interacts with the security of others, security is strongly interdependent within the region (Buzan and Wæver, 2003), pointing to the regional dimension's importance in understanding the security in the wider region.

The *state* remains the key actor in international relations and a subject of security analysis.⁴ Despite failing to acknowledge the comprehensive nature of security with its economic, social and other dimensions, *neorealism* provides a logical insight by explaining concepts and inherent relations between states and subjects relevant for understanding the historical background, processes and issues in the WB.⁵ While *structural realism* is

² See Kremljak, Z. (2007): *A heuristic model of development of capabilities*. AARMS LOGISTICS Vol. 6, No. 4 (2007) 705–720. In the method of uncertainty estimation, each problem involving uncertainty and consecutive appearing risk is divided into identified categories and factors of uncertainty.

³ See Ejodus, F. (2011): *Towards the Western Balkans Security Community 2.0. Analysis*. Belgrade: Faculty of Political Science.

⁴ According to neorealists, cooperation among states is hindered by relative gains and concerns about cheating, and hence "international institutions have minimal influence on state behaviour, and thus hold little promise for promoting stability in the post-Cold War world" (Mearsheimer, 1994–5). Also see Mearsheimer, J. J. (2003): *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton.

⁵ As the Copenhagen School places special emphasis on the social aspects of security, we complement our theoretical framework by widening the security concept into other security-related sectors. Expanding the theory from traditional materialist security studies including unconventional sectors to spot different

applicable in explaining continuity, *systemic theory* cannot predict change as any alteration to the structure must occur on a sub-systemic level (within the units themselves, looking into the domestic dynamics of states). Thus, a combination of domestic-level and system-level theories and insights will be used to explain the causes of the internal dynamics of units, such as ethno-nationalist tendencies. However, in this aspect we will move beyond the narrow neorealist perception of security in the sense that it does not include its other dimensions, and depart from a more holistic approach.⁶

According to McFaul (2002: 2015), the dynamics of a complex transformation cannot be fully grasped without using multiple approaches or paradigms as there is “no single theory of transition which has been universally recognized”. For Buzan (1991), security is not only survival but also includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of coexistence. As the concept became more multifaceted and complex, he offered a broader framework of security that is more holistic and based on levels (individual, state and international) and sectors (political, military, economic, societal and environmental). Separately, these cannot adequately address the issues of security as each is intricately and complexly linked with the next, forming a web which must be untangled to understand each concept individually to see how it affects the others (*ibid.*). This comprehensive approach and understanding of contemporary national security through broader security, covering all the security dimensions within which each sector has its own security dimension, will serve as a focal tool in decomposing individual elements of the complex security in the WB (*cf.* Stone, 2009).⁷

Today ‘security’ as a political value has no independent meaning and may be related to individual or societal value systems (Brauch, 2011: 63). Following the end of the Cold War, the processes of globalisation and the gradual transition necessitated a reconceptualisation of security. According to *social constructivists* in international relations, ‘security’ is conceived as an outcome of a process of socio-political interaction where social values and norms, collective identities and cultural traditions are essential (Adler, 1997; Fearon/Wendt, 2002; Risse, 2003; Wendt, 1992, 1999, cited in Brauch, 2011: 61). From a *realist* view, *objective* security is achieved when the dangers posed by manifold threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks are avoided,

aspects, relations and dynamics with the Eurocentric approach in a given context is considered an advantage rather than a limitation.

⁶ We kept the neorealist understanding of the state as a referent object of security as a state matter applying to both the on-going transformative processes, including the Euro-Atlantic integration with aspects in international relations, and foreign and security policy where it refers to the state (national) realm. See Grizold, A. (2001): *Varnostna paradigma v mednarodnih odnosih*, In: Luard, E., *Človek, država in vojna*. Ljubljana: FDV.

⁷ Also see Buzan, B. (1991): *New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-first Century*, *International Affairs*, 67 (3), pp. 432–433.

prevented, managed, coped with, mitigated and adapted to by individuals, societal groups, the state or regional or global international organisations. From a *social constructivist* approach, security is achieved once the perception and fears of security 'threats', 'challenges', 'vulnerabilities' and 'risks' are allayed and overcome (ibid.). Since 1990, new debates have emerged between *traditional approaches*, *critical security studies*, and *constructivist approaches*, which have contributed to the widening, deepening and sectorialisation of security.

The term 'South East Europe' (SEE) is generally used to emphasise the traditional situation of countries in the SEE region, focusing on the Balkan core and its near neighbourhood. In this paper, the term 'Western Balkans (WB)' is used, which the EU coined for practical reasons in the Presidency Conclusions adopted at the Vienna European Council (European Council, 1998). It designates those Balkan countries which are still not part of the EU, but are at different stages of EU accession. Presently, it comprises the Western Balkan six: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia, Kosovo⁸, Montenegro⁹ and Serbia with our addition of Croatia.¹⁰

In the aftermath of the war, the new WB countries initially had to address the consequences of the war and engage in the peace process and reconciliation, instead of directly embarking on a path of democratic and economic development. Soon, the growing economic, political, security and cultural inter-dependence had an impact on the autonomy and functional capacities of the states, and thus the ongoing transformation processes.

Analysis: processes, indicators and their security implications

For research purposes, we divided the post-Dayton period up into three key transformative processes¹¹: stabilisation and state-building; democratisation and institution-building, and accession to Euro-Atlantic integrations.

⁸ Kosovo is not a member of the UN, hence the addition 'Under UN SC Resolution 1244'.

⁹ At the time, Montenegro was part of Serbia, but afterwards gained its independence in 2006.

¹⁰ Even if after its accession to the EU in 2013 Croatia is no longer politically considered part of the WB, it will be addressed as such due to its past and present role, unresolved issues and its effect on the situation in the region.

¹¹ The three identified key processes are part of the overarching transformative process of the transition, which has to be secured to allow progress in accession to the EU as a final objective. Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that this is the case when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government as a direct result of a free popular vote. Since the end of the war, there are indications of a positive evolution which has already changed the image of the WB region and diminished some of its former contradictions. Regional initiatives also significantly contribute to the process of creating a safer and more benevolent European region. In the WB, international actors have been engaged in all three processes: stabilisation and state-building, assistance in democratic transition and institution-building, and support in accession to Euro-Atlantic integrations, albeit to different extents and in various ways. Activities, stages and sectors of their involvement depend on their mission, capabilities and interests.

These processes are vital for understanding and explaining the functioning of a stable democratic state on its transition path (Jano, 2008), and for corroborating the complexity of security in the WB with its underlying issues and dynamics reflecting the present state.

The Balkan core is characterised by a transitional nature. Transition as the interval between the dissolution of an old regime and installation of a new one (Kopecky and Mudde, 2000) is conceptualised as the transformation towards a pluralist democracy and a market economy. In a political sense, this means a transition from authoritarian rule to a fully pluralist, parliamentary democratic system.¹² Fundamental reforms and new legal-administrative practices had to be introduced to break off with the institutional legacies of socialism. Although some degree of democracy and economic reforms had already started in the early 1990s with the weakening authoritarian rule, it is argued that the WB experienced transition later than some Central European (CEE) countries.¹³ In evaluating the performance of the political transition, the emphasis is on the formal aspects of democracy with the introduction of free and fair elections. In the economic sphere, the focus is on liberalisation, stabilisation and privatisation. At the outset of the transition, politically speaking the WB countries were only considered to be 'partially free' compared to the CEE countries while, from the economic transition aspect, the gap was even more profound. Such developments explain the delayed transition in the WB (Gligorov, Holzner and Landesmann, 2003).

Nationhood as a necessary condition of a liberal democratic welfare state has been missing in political theory (Canovan, 1996; Kuzio, 2001). Therefore, the proper sequencing of a transition should first be state- and nation-building, second establishing a market economy and, finally, a democracy.¹⁴

Despite the size of the task suggesting the need for a comprehensive and long-term approach, mostly short-term priorities have shaped international involvement.

¹² *Such transformations first require the creation of new institutions to separate the state from party control, and abandon a centrally planned (socialist) economic model to a capitalist market economy creating a single economic space, promoting growth and employment. From the social aspect, it is about social reform towards a welfare state, social cohesion, an inclusive social protection system, a sustainable pension system, based on the promotion of social policy coordination in various fields including social inclusion, employment and health.*

¹³ *In his evaluation of the transition, Rupnik paints "a picture of successes in CEE off set by setbacks in WB". See Rupnik, J. (2000): Eastern Europe: The International Context. Journal of Democracy, 11 (2), pp. 115-129.*

¹⁴ *As many post-communist states inherited weak states and institutions, a third element called attention to the assumption that the transition is a regime-based double transition of democratisation and marketisation, stateness. Triple transition is seen as sufficient to understand post-communist transitions and may even include nationality issues. Stateness and nationality were until recently ignored as non-factors in earlier transitions. Further separation of the national and stateness issues, a quadruple transition framework, is more suitable for post-communist states as it separately addresses stateness and nationhood*

In immature states where new nations emerge from the ruins of a multinational state, nationalism often becomes ethnic. In some WB countries, democratisation in the early stages often encouraged elites feeling under threat to utilise ethnic nationalism and keep their states institutionally weak and manipulative (Snyder, 2000). Roeder (1999) argues that a stable democracy has only been achieved in those post-communist countries that have solved their nation-ness problem. In the absence of a legitimising ideology for political and socio-economic reform, the transition process fails to mobilise society and can be derailed by ethnic nationalism. National identity, unity, political and socio-economic factors are inextricably linked in the transition process and should thus be addressed in a comprehensive way, assessed separately, in a quadruple manner.¹⁵

Stabilisation and state-building, mostly driven externally, were underway prior and parallel to as well as simultaneously with the democratisation¹⁶. It is problematic and often too narrow as the complexity of the process stems from its sectoral nature, distinguishing among political, social and economic dimensions, and numerous actors and activities at multiple levels (Kumar, 1997) entailing different phases with short-term effects and long-term efforts which require coordination and cohesion. The success of the stabilisation of war-torn societies depends on assessment tools and reliable measures not overlooking the drivers of conflict and instability. The main barrier to measuring progress is political, whereas claims of success may be mere political spin. Core outcomes of stabilisation include governance and participation, security, justice and the rule of law, social and economic well-being (Cohen, 2006). Rooted in nationalism, the lack of inter-ethnic engagement hindered the region's reconstruction which was aggravated by the link between informal practices and corruption¹⁷, manifested in many areas with impacts on national culture, history, the political system and the

because they influence the success of democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Also see Offe, C. (1991): Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe. Social Research, 58 (4), pp. 865–881.

¹⁵ *Although they obviously contribute to conflict and play a crucial role in the functioning of the state, the ethno-national elements are poorly studied. Coleman and Lawson-Remer (2013) suggest: socio-economic exclusion/inclusion, economic policies, civil society and media, legal system and rule of law, government structure and division of power, education and demography.*

¹⁶ *Stabilisation entails international actors' short-term efforts to end hostilities and consolidate peace. The World Bank also describes reconstruction as actions undertaken by international or national actors to support economic and social dimensions. Stabilisation and reconstruction include complex activities in addressing numerous and differing requirements, while the complex nature of the tasks and coordination questions its efficiency and positive long-term impact on peace, stability and development. See Colletta, N. J., Samuelsson Schjörlien, J. and Berts, H. (2008): Interim Stabilization Balancing Security and Development in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding. Sandöverken: Folke Bernadotte Academy.*

¹⁷ *Transition processes include the constitutional aspect of democratic transitions and links between democratisation, the rule of law and transitional justice.*

transition. The appearance of new WB countries coincided with the emergence of a new political class, lacking experience to steer and enact the necessary reforms, develop state structures, manage the consequences of the conflict and ensure democratic development. However, much has been accomplished in the last 25 years, also with the support and incentives of international organisations (EU, UN, NATO etc.) and individual countries (the USA and EU member states).

The transition from authoritarianism to democracy is difficult and leaves many countries with the democratic promise being held hostage to political infighting and power grabs by elites, or trapped in downward spirals of poverty and unemployment (Coleman and Lawson-Remer, 2013). *Democratisation*¹⁸ itself is influenced by various factors, including economic development, history, and civil society. However, stable democracies not only require sound economies and high per capita incomes, but also consensus on core values and beliefs through which the community is united. The relationship between civil society and national identity lies at the heart of the transition process in the post-communist states.¹⁹ The greater the degree of cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism in the immature state, the more complex the democratic transition will be (Dahl, cited in Kuzio, 2001). Therefore, in a complex environment entailing the simultaneous introduction of political and socio-economic reforms often within a multi-nation state, institution-building presupposes a state composed of civic and ethno-cultural factors.

Geographical proximity, cultural identity and economic ties make security and stability in the WB particularly important for Europe and Euro-Atlantic integrations. The WB countries have committed themselves to their Euro-Atlantic path, which is based on conditions, shared values and standards to be accomplished through political and economic reforms in line with the EU *acquis*. The shift of focus from stabilisation to integration provided important advantages over the previous conflict management policies. Reform conditionality based on the short-term cost/benefit calculations in which EU aspirant states respond to EU incentives and the long-term redefinition of the interests and identities of domestic players are the two biggest elements of EU influence in the WB (Coppitiers et al., 2004). This was a viable pattern in recent accessions to the EU and NATO, emphasising security

¹⁸ *Democratisation is understood here as the process of democratic transition. We distinguish between democratisation and liberalisation: whereas the first entails the latter, it is a broader and more political concept. See Linz, J. J. (1993): State-building and Nation-building. European Review, 1, pp. 355–69.*

¹⁹ *This includes a sense of national identity, mutual trust and solidarity as a precondition for achieving common political aims, such as social justice and democracy. The disintegration of multinational states leads to the proliferation of multiple identities which are not conducive to national integration and civil society, especially in a socio-economic crisis. See Miller, cited in Kuzio, 2001.*

as the precondition for successful integration. Implementation of the policy framework requires further efforts in fulfilling the political, economic and legal requirements of the Copenhagen criteria which, once accomplished, denote the end-state of the democratic transition. In the case of the WB, one may speak of *integration or a pre-accession process* since the current transformations are the effects of preparing for accession. In this member-state building process, the WB countries are undergoing changes. The issue of questioning the region's Europeanisation capacity has become ever more complex as the EU conditionality is growing. This reveals the lack of internal drive for reforms, which need local ownership to become sustainable and efficient, instead of being viewed as having to be delivered for membership. Despite all the uncertainties and challenges, it is vital that these processes become irreversible.²⁰ The WB could thus leave behind the 'Balkanisation' era and pursue the final phase of the transition to a democracy and a market economy parallel to clear prospects of EU integration.

Within these three fundamental processes, key indicators were identified to facilitate an evaluation of the political, socio-economic situation and assess individual WB countries' and regional security implications against them. As *indicators* across the comprehensive spectrum within the processes, we observed the following: a) the rule of law (judicial systems, corruption, organised crime, terrorism and radicalisation); b) fundamental rights (respect of human rights (violations, discrimination), freedom of expression and media); c) migration; d) the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform; e) the economic and social situation (GDP, social equality, unemployment rate); and f) regional cooperation (neighbourly relations, bilateral issues). The analysis focused on measuring processes to show where the WB countries stand in implementing key political and economic reforms, and what needs to be done to address the remaining issues. Methodologically, these three processes were analysed for the period of the last 25 years, ever since the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The findings for the individual countries were then used to make a generalisation by extrapolating them to assess the situation of the whole WB region: what has been achieved and where it is going.

²⁰ Similarly, NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP), launched in 1999, helps countries aspiring to NATO membership in preparations tailored to their needs. Participants in the MAP based on reform progress are Macedonia, BiH and Montenegro. The latter is soon to become a full member. MAP countries need to fulfil criteria which cover political, economic, defence, resource, security and legal aspects through a focused feedback mechanism on countries' reform progress, including advice and assessments on the basis of progress reports. The main drivers of NATO membership are security assurances, solidarity and collective defence of members on the basis of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. See Official NATO website. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm [Accessed 24 March 2014].

Limitations encountered include the difficulty of deciding where or when one process ends and another begins. Due to their complex nature, it is difficult to strictly distinguish between the processes. Hence, for analytical reasons we examined them on a single timeline and by evaluating the same set of indicators in all processes. On this basis, we measured the progress within these processes by analysing respective groups of indicators, also taking into account that not all data was available, due to the later emergence of some countries, such as Montenegro which gained sovereignty in 2006 or Kosovo in 2008. Another potential limitation lies in the process of collecting statistical data on the individual indicators and their values from different sources, which are based on different methodologies – the reason being the non-existence of a comprehensive study reviewing all the relevant indicators we identified as being pivotal to our analysis. We attempted to overcome this issue by using standardisation methods or a heuristic model. The latter could also be applied in the case of unmeasurable indicators, e.g. financial crisis, migration, terrorism, Brexit etc., which describe processes and phenomena with security implications but cannot be observed and measured in the analysis. Since they also have an effect on the state of security and its complexity, intervening variables were introduced to assess the impact of this important segment and explain causal links between other indicators or variables. Aiming for a comprehensive review of all relevant indicators, we are aware that defence and military aspects would add important insights in broader security complexity in the WB. However, we had to limit ourselves to those which have the most immediate relation to the processes and effects on security in peacetime period of evaluation. Further, relevant data is of classified nature within the Euro-Atlantic integrations which collect them in the most methodologically eligible way. Instead, we included contextual overview of security-defence systems and cooperation of the WB countries in this field.

WB countries were identified as potential candidates for EU membership in 2003 at the European Council in Thessaloniki. The EU insists that a credible enlargement process is the key to transformation and stability in the WB, and encourages partners to demonstrate ownership of the reforms while reaffirming support for the European perspective of the WB. The enlargement policy continues to deliver results and reforms are moving forward in most countries, albeit at different speeds (European Commission, 2016), and in accordance with fair conditionality and the principle of own merits, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members.

Montenegro: in December 2011, the accession process was launched with a view to opening up negotiations. The negotiations started in 2012 and have since progressed. The parliamentary elections of October 2016

were conducted under a revised legal framework and in a more participatory and transparent manner, characterised by general respect for fundamental freedoms. On the reform agenda, the legal framework in the rule of law area is largely complete and the institutional set up is in place. A new Anti-Corruption Agency was established and the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office has been enabled. The rule of law system needs to deliver more results. Progress in this area, demonstrated by tangible results notably in fighting corruption and organised crime, as well as prosecutions and convictions, will continue to determine the pace of the accession negotiations overall. Actions must be continued to pursue the public administration reform and strengthen the independence of institutions. Progress in the area of freedom of expression and media has to be ensured. Regarding economic aspects, Montenegro's fiscal position has deteriorated and increasing public debt levels challenge its fiscal sustainability. As a matter of priority, Montenegro needs to restrain its current spending and improve its revenue collection. It should also reduce disincentives to work, develop human capital and a competitive export-oriented industry. It continues to play a positive role in further developing regional cooperation, advancing good neighbourly relations and consistently cooperating on foreign policy issues. In December 2015, Montenegro was invited to join NATO.²¹

Serbia: In March 2012, Serbia was granted EU candidate status and opened the first negotiation chapters in December 2015. Following early national elections in April, the new Serbian government programme included EU accession as a priority goal. Serbia has taken major steps towards this aim, leading to the first four chapters being opened. The pace of negotiations will depend in particular on progress with the rule of law and the normalisation of its relations with Kosovo so that both can continue on their respective European paths. Serbia needs to deepen its engagement in the dialogue with Kosovo, including the implementation of all agreements. It should intensify its reform efforts and focus on effective implementation of the judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime. To guarantee the unhindered exercise of the freedom of expression and media, shortcomings in this area need to be urgently addressed. Particular attention needs to be paid to the full respect of fundamental rights, including protection of the most vulnerable groups and the non-discriminatory treatment of national minorities throughout Serbia. Effective implementation of the relevant strategic documents is needed.

²¹ See *European Commission (2016): Montenegro 2016 Report*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_montenegro.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

Progress has been achieved in the public administration reform, which should be continued together with further progress on the independence of democratic institutions. Economic reforms are producing results and need to continue to develop a functioning market economy and improve the business environment, with the emphasis on restructuring state-owned enterprises. Serbia's leading role in the region is instrumental in improving regional ties and preserving stability. Serbia is constructively engaged in regional cooperation and is encouraged to continue its sustained efforts to strengthen good neighbourly relations. Serbia has been affected by the migration crisis and played an active and constructive role in cooperating with its neighbours to manage migration flows. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) remains essential. Serbia should progressively align itself with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.²²

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: In December 2005, it was granted EU candidate status and in October 2009 the opening of accession negotiations was recommended. This has become conditional on continued full implementation of the Pržino agreement and substantial progress in implementing the 'urgent reform priorities'. The last year has been one of continuing political crisis. Concerns about state capture affecting the functioning of democratic institutions and key areas of society persist. Early parliamentary elections took place in the spirit of widespread public mistrust in both institutions and the political establishment. Trust should be restored as the political crisis continues the formation of new government is hindered because the country continues to suffer from a divisive political environment, polarisation and a lack of culture of compromise, with backsliding in important areas, e.g. the functioning of the judiciary, which should be allowed to function independently. The efforts of the Special Prosecutor to establish legal accountability must be supported and Parliament must establish political responsibility for the wiretaps and their content. Substantial progress is needed on concrete implementation of the reforms to address systemic rule of law issues, including in relation to breaches of fundamental rights, judicial independence, media freedom, elections, corruption and politicisation of state institutions. The new government needs to urgently address overdue reforms to return the country to its European path. Civil society has played a constructive role in democratic processes. Macroeconomic stability should be preserved and the public deficit should be more

²² See *European Commission (2016): Serbia 2016 Report*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_serbia.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

rigorously controlled. Transparency and implementation of public expenditure need improvement. Building upon recent progress in implementing confidence-building measures with Greece, decisive steps are required to solve the 'name issue'. The country has been affected by the migration crisis and cooperated with neighbouring countries and the EU in managing migration flows. Good inter-ethnic relations remain important and the overdue review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement must be completed soon. Recent positive steps in the context of the Pržino Agreement provide an opportunity for political leaders to overcome the long-standing crisis and address systemic issues. In this context, there is a will to extend the recommendation to open accession negotiations with Macedonia.²³

Albania: In June 2014, it was awarded EU candidate status. It is recommended to consider opening accession negotiations with Albania, subject to credible and tangible progress in implementation of the judicial reform. Albania has continued to make steady progress towards fulfilling all of the key priorities for opening the accession negotiations. Pivotal constitutional amendments were unanimously adopted in July 2016, launching a comprehensive reform process of the judicial system, which remains key to the rule of law and could also be transformative for other areas. This will include an in-depth re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors. A positive trend is noted in establishing a solid track record of pro-active investigations, prosecutions and final convictions in the fight against corruption and organised crime where Albania needs to achieve tangible and sustainable results. A low level of convictions for organised crime offences, including in money laundering and human trafficking cases, remains to be addressed. Progress is noted in fighting radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. There is a need for effective legislative and policy measures to reinforce the protection of human rights and anti-discrimination policies, including the equal treatment of all minorities and efficient implementation of property rights. Public administration reform is being implemented consistently. Fundamental rights continue to be broadly respected in the country. Albania should carry on with the reforms aimed at increasing competitiveness and addressing the informal economy, further improve the business and investment environment and vigorously pursue fiscal consolidation. Constructive dialogue between the government and the opposition on reforms remains crucial to advance the reform agenda to the benefit of the citizens, and bring the country closer to the EU. It will also be particularly relevant to finalise the electoral reform.

²³ See European Commission (2016): *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

Albania's constructive engagement in regional cooperation and ensuring good neighbourly relations remain essential.²⁴

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): The Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) entered into force in June 2015. In February 2016, BiH submitted its application to join the EU and awaits an opinion on this. BiH has delivered on the priorities stemming from its reform process, particularly on the reform agenda. Significant EU-oriented reform efforts need to be sustained in order to address the deeply rooted structural problems that have been holding BiH's development controlled, including in socio-economic terms. Strengthening the rule of law and public administration in line with EU standards on all levels of government, and further improving cooperation between all levels remains a priority. The adopted coordination mechanism on EU matters needs to be implemented to enable the country to face the challenges of the EU integration process, including with regard to the adoption of the necessary country-wide strategies. BiH's EU prospects lie in a single, united and sovereign country. The implementation of the Sejdić-Finci ruling will contribute to establishing a democratic and well-functioning society where the equality of Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and all citizens of BiH is guaranteed, in line with the legislation on anti-discrimination and the EU *acquis*. All BiH authorities should increase their focus on sustainable reforms and overcome the divisive rhetoric rooted in the past, and actively promote reconciliation. It is regrettable that the unlawful entity-level referendum on the Republika Srpska Day was held. BiH should pursue socio-economic reforms while also concentrating on the rule of law reforms, including strengthening the independence and impartiality, accountability, professionalism and efficiency of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime, the fight against radicalisation and terrorism, and the public administration reform. The lack of progress in the freedom of expression and media is noted, and BiH is expected to intensify its efforts to address this issue. More effort is also needed in the area of environmental protection. The EU continues to deploy considerable resources in BiH within the Common Foreign and Security Policy framework and the EUFOR/Althea mission which continues to be present focusing on capacity-building and training, while retaining the means to contribute to the country's deterrence capacity. The EU remains committed to strengthening the rule of law in BiH also through the reinforced EU Special Representative Office and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance.²⁵

²⁴ See European Commission (2016): *Albania 2016 Report*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_albania.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

²⁵ See European Commission (2016): *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2016 Report*. Available at: <https://>

Kosovo: The SAA entered into force in April 2016, providing a comprehensive framework for closer political and economic relations between the EU and Kosovo. Kosovo has taken major steps in fulfilling the visa liberalisation criteria, allowing the visa requirement be lifted provided that Kosovo ratifies the border/boundary agreement with Montenegro and further strengthens its track record in the fight against organised crime and corruption. Steps are taken to increase the prosecution and investigation of the number of high-level corruption and organised crime cases. Further progress in strengthening the track record of convictions is needed. Parliamentary work has been adversely affected by fundamental obstruction by different political parties. Political actors need to overcome the protracted political stalemate and address numerous reform challenges regarding the rule of law, including judicial independence, and structural socio-economic reforms addressing the high level of unemployment. A European reform agenda has been developed to assist the necessary implementation of the SAA. Greater efforts are needed to build a consensus across the political spectrum to advance this agenda. Progress is noted in fighting radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, but efforts should continue. Kosovo met its remaining international obligations by establishing the Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecution Office to investigate international crimes committed in the Kosovo conflict. Regarding the public administration reform, merit-based recruitment, promotions and dismissals based on objective criteria need to be implemented, particularly in the case of independent institutions and agencies to ensure independent functioning and effective management. The promotion and protection of human rights throughout Kosovo should be pursued, including the full protection of cultural and religious heritage. The inclusion and protection of minorities, including a safe environment and their property rights should be addressed, along with the strengthening of social cohesion. Economic reforms should be used for growth and employment. In the field of energy, Kosovo needs to rehabilitate the Kosovo A power plant, the biggest source of pollution in the WB. The EU contributes to stability in Kosovo through the Special representative in Kosovo and EULEX rule of law mission. Kosovo needs to deepen its dialogue with Serbia, including the implementation of all agreements so that Kosovo and Serbia can continue on their respective European paths.²⁶ Progress in the normalisation of relations with Serbia is an essential principle of the SAA and underpins the development of relations and cooperation between the EU and Kosovo.

ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_bosnia_and_herzegovina.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

²⁶ See European Commission (2016): *Kosovo 2016 Report*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_kosovo.pdf (20. 12. 2016).

Croatia, an EU member state since 2013, is facing multiple challenges, among which the Commission's progress report stresses the need to improve its economic performance.²⁷ It is experiencing excessive macro-economic imbalances in public finances and taxation; pensions and health; labour market and wage-setting; public administration; state-owned enterprises; services and justice system; insolvency and the financial sector. It is vital to address vulnerabilities linked to high public, corporate and external debt in the context of high unemployment. Limited progress is observed in expenditure and taxation policies, public debt management, pension reform and in tackling the financial risks in healthcare. Progress in the reform of the social protection system and employment policies remains limited, including in the public administration and public governance reform, and in improving the justice system. On the political front, a broader time perspective reveals that the true issues Croatia is facing are not only economic, but far more complex and related to the system of values of the political and economic elites. They have to renounce the old patterns of conduct, i.e. clientelism, corruption, negative selection in public administration etc. Hence Croatia's bottom rating on the EU Justice Scoreboard²⁸ in the efficiency and independence of the judiciary while, according to RAND Europe²⁹ study, it is the third most corrupt EU member state. Non-prosecution of veterans from the Yugoslav war reveals a lack of will to convict war crimes on the former SFRY territory and thus questions the respect of an independent judiciary and the rule of law. Unfavourable demographic trends coupled with the emigration of youth reflect the lack of perspective in the country, which is descending into chauvinism, intolerance and xenophobia towards different minorities. In regional cooperation, Croatia is deepening instead of settling open issues with its neighbours, e.g. the unresolved border issues with all of its neighbouring countries and the lack of will to do so. The election campaign led to deteriorated relations with Serbia, which is experiencing blockades on opening negotiation chapters with the EU. Serbo-Croat cooperation on migration is going well as it is in their mutual interest. However, Serbia still poses a security threat to Croatia, as reflected in the 'arms race'³⁰ and

²⁷ *European Commission (2016): final Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2016 national reform programme of Croatia and delivering a Council opinion on the 2016 convergence programme of Croatia. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu/countries/pdf/report2016/croatia_en.pdf; http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/eu/countries/croatia_en.htm (19. 12. 2016).*

²⁸ *EU Justice Scoreboard (2016): http://ec.europa.eu/justice/effective-justice/files/justice_scoreboard_2016_en.pdf (20. 12. 2016).*

²⁹ *RAND Organization Europe (2016): The Cost of Non-Europe in the Area of Organised Crime and Corruption, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/579319/EPRS_STU%282016%29579319_EN.pdf (20. 12. 2016).*

³⁰ *See Milketic, S. (2016): Defence Expert Plays Down Croatia-Serbia 'Arms Race'. Available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-serbia-arms-race-far-from-reality-12-29-2016> (23. 1. 2017).*

Serbia's close ties with Russia while Croatia as a NATO ally is cooperating closely with the USA in the military realm.

Conclusion

In examining the comprehensive transformative processes using multiple research methods and approaches, issues and tendencies were identified which indicate the high complexity of security in the WB region and contribute to its delayed progress in the transition. Evaluation of the relevant indicators points to security implications in different areas. Due to many identified causes, factors, subjects and activities in various sectors and levels, including their interplay, it is impossible to study them separately or in isolation. Therefore, a degree of generalisation, if not simplification, is inevitable in the search for a synthetic argumentation concerning this complex security. However, based on the analysis of political, socio-economic and ethno-national indicators within the three processes, converging trends were recognised that characterise the entire region. They show that the WB remain a neuralgic spot of regional and European security also due to the synergetic effects and interactions of various elements within these processes in individual countries with the potential to destabilise not only their national situation but also impact regional security, the neighbourhood and all of Europe. Sometimes the symbiotic and often destructive dynamics of these elements within and among the WB countries call for more effective strategic and regional approaches.

In general, the long-term transformation effects of attaining political and socio-economic progress, even if unsteady or disrupted, correspond with the increase in stability, security, and the prospects for both the region and the Continent. The underlying core of the complex security in the WB region within the broader European and global context thus results from the mutual impact of the individual components that make up this complexity and could trigger a downward spiral of developments with a potentially destabilising effect on regional and international security. In order to help avoid this trend and contribute to its reversal towards a transformed functional region as part of the EU, the EU retains its focus on the 'fundamentals first' with no compromise on: respect for the rule of law and human rights, economic governance and public administration reform.³¹ Building an independent judiciary and functioning democratic institutions, fighting organised crime and corruption and protecting fundamental rights, as well

³¹ See European Commission (2016): Commissioner Hahn's speech at opening of NEAR/DEVCO Cooperation Days. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/2016/02/20160229_en.htm (11. 7. 2016). The enlargement package was adopted in November to provide an overarching strategy for the next 4 years, and introduces a strengthened methodology.

as addressing the shortcomings in economic governance and competitiveness, all are difficult processes that take time. This is why the EU Enlargement Strategy reiterates that no new countries will be ready to join the EU during the mandate of the current Commission. Fundamentals are a challenge for all enlargement countries, and often show that different countries face similar issues.

Setting up the general context of the complex security framework of the WB region, two key conclusions should be emphasised regarding the performance and focus of the stabilisation efforts on the WB countries' path to Euro-Atlantic integration. First, some WB countries have come a long way from crisis management to Europeanised protectorates (BIH, Kosovo), others through state-building to full EU and/or NATO membership (Croatia, Albania). However, neither protectorates, unfinished states, nor insufficiently democratised states can be integrated into the EU or NATO.

Second, compliance with the EU conditions as internal norms is considered a major achievement of the transition process and a step towards further development. The shift in perception of the EU's role, from supreme authority and an instant solution to inherited problems to a real partner, indicates progress. However, EU membership should be regarded as a means and not as a goal *per se*. The main challenges in the EU's approach to the WB and its achievements clearly show contrasts between the stated goals and their implementation. This is where the EU enlargement fatigue meets the WB 'accession fatigue', as reflected in the erosion of popular support for EU accession. The EU's renewed approach shows that the WB requires a reinvigoration of enlargement instead of copying the strategy applied in CEE. Yet, the still persistent disregard of the ethno-national drivers, fuelled by political class manipulations for their own interests, is strengthening due to the slow progress in economic development and the Euro-Atlantic integration. If latent inter-ethnic issues are not properly addressed with political and socio-economic mechanisms, and improved regional cooperation, the risks for stability and security in the region could rise.

In the synthesis of this paper, we can draw several conclusions based on the analysis. These point to the security implications of the unfinished transitional processes and the impact of various individual or combined indicators that were observed. They leave issues open and challenges outstanding, which each contribute their share to the complexity of security in the region. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen the focus on fundamental reforms early in the process, in particular on the rule of law, fundamental rights, economic development and competitiveness, and on the strengthening of democratic institutions and public administration reform. A solid track record of reform implementation, leading to tangible results, is to be established in all of these fields.

First, the rule of law is a fundamental value. Not only is it at the core of both the enlargement process and the SAA process, but it is also the foundation of a functional state. Important challenges persist in the judicial reform if it is to ensure an independent, impartial and efficient judiciary. In countries where this component is not properly in place and efficiently implemented, the incomplete institutional framework and lacking legislation enforcement mechanisms allow space not only for corruption and organised crime, but also for non-persecution and absent convictions. It also creates space for terrorism, which poses permanent security challenges for the whole region and the EU. Regional cooperation based on solid legal and operational measures and the exchange of information in the external dimension of counter-terrorism is crucial in the fight against foreign terrorist fighters, the financing of terrorism, the combat and prevention of radicalisation, reinforced border checks and illegal trafficking of firearms. In the context of the situation, especially in Syria, the fact that foreign fighters are returning to the EU and the WB will likely represent a security threat, especially in those WB countries where the weak or semi-functional institutional set up still fails to provide efficient measures. Further efforts are also needed in this respect to fight against organised crime, especially in the area of dismantling organised crime groups, tackling money laundering and illicit money flows. There is a strong need to continue handling domestic war crimes cases without discrimination, as well as addressing impunity and ensuring accountability, including through regional cooperation, full cooperation with and support for the work of the ICTY and the Specialist Chambers. Outstanding issues should be solved in line with international law and principles, including the Agreement on Succession Issues.

Second, freedom of expression and media remains a particularly serious concern that must be addressed in a determined and effective way as a matter of priority. Inclusive political dialogue remains key to the proper functioning of democratic institutions and further progress on the public administration reform is needed, including depoliticisation. A stronger role for civil society organisations is crucial. The protection of fundamental rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, the non-discriminatory treatment of national minorities and tackling the discrimination of vulnerable groups is imperative in anti-radicalisation efforts. These should be coupled with a sound socio-economic situation, a high level of social inclusion and equality, and positive prospects not only for the elites but for the grassroots level and youth. The Economic Reform Programmes to gradually improve economic criteria are conducive to sustainable economic development. Economic reforms and the strengthening of the rule of law produce mutually reinforcing benefits. Further efforts are required to address major structural challenges and improve economic governance, competitiveness,

the business environment, the investment climate, growth and job creation to ensure a better future.

Third, recent phenomena with security implications, e.g. mass migrations, have contributed to the rise of illegal trafficking and thus become a stable source of income for traffickers. This has multiple negative effects for stability and security in the region, including the connection with terrorism and the return of foreign fighters. Therefore, further actions are needed to ensure administrative and enforcement capacity in WB countries on the Balkan migration route to combat the smuggling of migrants. In this view and in general, better regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential elements not only of the EU integration and the SAA Process, but also for regional security. In its absence, the vacuum in cooperation is being filled by other actors with particular interests, resulting in disruptive effects which strengthen the destabilising vectors and weaken integrational agendas. However, there are some positive developments in WB regional cooperation, especially constructive coordination in managing the migration flow and progress on connectivity within the region and with the EU, including on efforts to increase coherence among the different regional initiatives. Inclusive regional cooperation also encourages further efforts to overcome legacies of the past and foster reconciliation, including by promoting a climate of tolerance.

Fourth, based on the assessment of the indicators, this all shows that in the last 25 years the processes of stabilisation, democratisation and the perspective of integration have gradually brought about greater security, stability and prosperity in the WB. Nevertheless, internal and external phenomena brought by globalisation, such as the financial and economic crisis, migration, terrorism and radicalisation have negatively impacted not only the relations among the WB countries, but also aggravated the complexity of security in the region, which is not stable. Further, despite the outside impression that potential destabilisation and security concerns may not be such a likely scenario, a seemingly insignificant trigger event may take the region back to the situation when foreign security intervention is necessary, and prove that the international community is unable to learn from past experience.

The internal and overall political situation and relations between the countries of WB remain sensitive. The countries left in a vacuum are likely to descend into instability. While on the outside the situation may seem stable, the actual circumstances are extremely fragile. Deteriorating neighbourly relations, migration issues and constant terrorist attack threats only add to this. Another worrying element is the growing presence and interference by powerful (global) actors and their agendas in the region, which are not necessarily in line with the WB's Euro-Atlantic agenda. This is why a

continuous proactive approach from the side of the EU is needed. Hence, the EU's strategic interest is that the enlargement process has no alternative. However, the EU is lacking in a strategic approach to the region. It may be that a comprehensive picture and assessments show that the enlargement itself cannot be based on the package approach as the countries are making progress on the reforms at different speeds. The EU's motivation for the WB countries to join the EU lies in geographical proximity, support for progress and stability, while their integration is an important mechanism of the sustained reform process, institution-building and promoting EU norms and standards. Regional initiatives hold great potential in terms of improving relations. Regional cooperation should be continuously promoted, while the EU and its member states must remain actively engaged in the region.

Fifth, progress on the negotiations path must be dynamic. This is important for *Montenegro* and *Serbia*, as well as for other countries waiting to start the negotiations. *Albania* is awaiting the timeline regarding the discussion about the recommendation for opening the negotiations subject to credible and tangible progress in its implementation of the judicial reform. There is a strategic need to resolve the crisis in *Macedonia*. The EU needs to push the country towards progress. The most important issue presently is to stabilise the political situation after the recent elections, form the government and pursue reforms. Discussion on progress must be ensured, while the Pržino agreement's implementation, especially the work and mandate of the special prosecutor, should not be neglected. A push forward has been made by *BiH*. The momentum should be kept up, while awaiting the *avis*. After the referendum and local elections, it is important to insist on the rule of law, including respect for Constitutional Court decisions while appropriate legal proceedings should follow. Regarding *Kosovo*, visa liberalisation and full implementation of the SAA with a focus on the socio-economic agenda will be important steps. At the same time, there is no doubt Kosovo must fulfil its obligations (ratification of the border agreement with Montenegro, Dialogue Belgrade-Pristina). The latter may be heading into an impasse if there is no high-level engagement from the EU, which should be more active because its role is to mediate, even if results do not emerge immediately.

Sixth, the process of WB stabilisation and transformation is clearly not yet accomplished. In this sense, the Euro-Atlantic integration of the WB remains unfinished, leaving security and stability in Europe challenged. With the support of the international community, based on credible reform programmes and their implementation by the WB countries, they must do their share and assume responsibility for stability. Each country's shift from the role of a security consumer to a security provider is crucial for the region's lasting peace, prosperity and sustainable development. The Euro-Atlantic perspective means not only EU and NATO membership, but

primarily the application of both *models*. As the best possible template for transition, according to Rupnik (2010) they allow the applicant country in the shortest time ever to build stable democratic institutions and a functioning market economy based on structural reforms, backed by assistance and balanced leverage. However, the reforms within the integration process should be perceived as a country's own internal state-building and not as an externally imposed accession requirement to complete the transformation. Maintaining peace and stability in the region along with incentives for the WB countries to hold on to the reform dynamic and continue resolving their open bilateral issues thus remains the centrepiece of the recent international initiatives for the region. Evidently, the region has made substantial progress on stabilisation, good neighbourly relations, and modernisation of the government, society and economy.³² However, if the growing security complexity of the WB is not mitigated by progress on the region's integration to the EU, the latter could succumb in the fatigue while facing a rethink of its engagement with the WB region, thus leaving the transition and reunification processes unfinished – as the weakest link in Europe's stability and security.

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³² See *Final Declaration of the conference on the Western Balkans in Berlin, 28 August 2014*. Available at: https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_1E5FFCD93D2ADF799424D7172E83601D/EN/Europa/WestlicherBalkan/AktuelleArtikel/140828-Abschlusserkl_Konf_Westl_Balkan.html?nn=474202 (31. 8. 2014).

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