

## THE BALKANS TODAY: The EU and the Region

Dimitrios Triantaphyllou\*

### *Abstract*

*The challenges that face the Balkans today are relatively benign compared to those that confronted the region a decade ago. Regional cooperation is ongoing and the democratic process is taking hold. Nevertheless, the region's transition is not yet complete and there is a compelling need for further efforts. Especially when America's gradual retreat from Europe is taken into consideration, the need for the EU to manage this transition is evident. In this regard, it can be said that the Balkans present the principal testing ground of the EU's CFSP and the ESDP. This paper tries to focus on some of the challenges that face the region and offers ways for the international community, particularly the EU, to deal with them effectively.*

The Balkans are a two edged challenge for the European Union. On the one hand, they represent Europe's backyard and therefore, the need for Europe to manage them is imperative; on the other hand, the Balkans are the principal testing ground of Europe's CFSP and evolving ESDP. Simultaneously, for the states of the Balkans, the EU represents the only viable option if the region is to escape its recent past and its retarded development. In other words, the stakes are high for all parties concerned. The successful symbiosis between the European Union and the Balkans will assure that the region's challenges will be met if realistic policy options where both the EU and the region come out on top are implemented.

Defining the context, both regional and international, in assessing the Balkans today is important if one is to have a clear and balanced evaluation of developments in the region. A number of givens exist on the ground and in terms of action by the international community towards the region. At the

\* Senior Research Fellow, European Union Institute for Security Studies

same time, many unknown variables are also present. It is the relationship between facts and challenges that shape the Balkans' present and future direction.

### What are the facts?

1. The vertebral column of peace in the Balkans comes in the form of three international accords – the Dayton accords that put an end to the war in Bosnia in 1995; the Rambouillet negotiations and UNSCR 1244 that determined the future of Kosovo in 1999; and the Ohrid Agreement of August 2001 that put an end to interethnic conflict in FYROM. The Belgrade Agreement of March 2002 aimed at defining the transformation of FR Yugoslavia into Serbia and Montenegro can also be considered part of the region's architecture though its viability is still uncertain.
2. Also, three factors that contributed to or fuelled violence for over a decade have been removed. These are:
  - The era of nationalist troublemakers in Croatia and Serbia has come to an end. Not only have these leaders gone but their political infrastructure has been crumbling as well.
  - The potential for further violent disintegration appears to be containable in that by early 2002, no state or splinter nation in the Balkans was in a position to engage in any prolonged warfare.
  - The divisions between the Europeans and the US over policy in the region have largely evaporated.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence, one can say that there are relatively few problems in the Balkans today. These include the question of Kosovo's final status; dealing with war criminals and the fight against organised crime. None are insurmountable given proper attention although their potential for destabilisation of the region is great and merits close monitoring.

The current political landscape is also relatively straightforward. Enlargement is on the agenda for all Balkan states although it is more evident for some than others. The conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of 12-13 December 2002 clearly state that "the objective is to welcome Bulgaria and Romania as members of the European Union in 2007" and that the accession of Bulgaria and Romania is part of "the

inclusive and irreversible enlargement process" of the Union.<sup>2</sup> For the other Balkan countries, the Copenhagen European Council "reaffirms the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans in the Stabilisation and Association Process...and underlines its determination to support their efforts to move closer to the EU."<sup>3</sup> The Greek Presidency of the EU during the first half of 2003 plans to organise a Summit on 21 June between EU Member States and countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process to reinforce this point. The Italian presidency that is to follow assures continuity with the Greek Presidency with regard to a focus on the Balkans over the whole of 2003.

The year 2003 also brings with it some new challenges that will or could have an impact on the Balkans. The first has to do with gradual US disengagement and its implications for the region and the European Union, which will have to step up its efforts and presence diplomatically and militarily as the real powerbroker in the region. Secondly, enlargement could sidetrack the EU as it will begin looking inwards to integrate its newcomers rather than address its new peripheries (the left outs in the case of the Balkans). Thirdly, the anti-immigration mood in Europe as reflected in many polls in many EU member states might reinforce the sentiment shared by many Serbs and Albanians that they are not welcomed. Finally, the cultivation of partition agendas both within and outside the region could be potentially destabilising. The latest example comes after the Bosnia polls of September 2002, interpreted by many (especially in the West) as the failure of Dayton and the need to radically revise it.

### **The mid to long term challenges**

Over the longer term, the challenges therefore are manageable given careful planning, appropriate commitment and political will. Five major challenges stand out, in particular for the European Union as it attempts to integrate the region. These include:

1. Addressing the unresolved status issues, in particular Kosovo's status and the Albanian question or factor, which emanates from the fact that Kosovo's final status is still unresolved.
2. Managing the European perspective for the region is another major challenge. There is a disconnection between the perspective of accession and its distant reality. That is to say, the prospect of EU membership is a very enticing "carrot" but it is also quite distant.

3. Related to the above, coping with the heterogeneity of the region both in terms of relations with the European Union and NATO is crucial.
4. The European Union contributing more effectively to addressing the crucial problems of the region and, thereby maintaining Balkan stability (in particular, in the Western Balkans).
5. Finally, diminishing resources as the post-conflict international missions to reconstruct and stabilise the Balkans are drawing to a close, the international community's lacking attention span due to the absence of serious ethnic conflict and the gradual but certain US disengagement need to be assessed by the countries of the region and the European Union in order to avoid any unpleasant surprises in the future.

### **An assessment of recent developments**

Nevertheless, there are clear signs that trouble could be brewing if developments and challenges are not carefully assessed and no appropriate responses both by the international community and the states of the region are implemented. The results of the South East Europe Public Agenda Survey released on 21 March 2002 are telling. Across the region the three issues most consistently identified by the survey as causes of public concern are unemployment, corruption and crime.<sup>4</sup> The recent elections in the region in the fall of 2002 are indicative of these concerns. While with this round of elections, we had for the first time free and fair elections across the region; the protest vote is growing. It is governing the political process in the Balkans. The reformist momentum has suffered a serious setback as the reformists do not have a strong and well-articulated public majority and no genuine new reform leader has emerged. An anti-elite vote is growing across the region. I will particularly focus on the case study of the Bosnian elections to illustrate their implication on Bosnia's and the region's immediate future while Kosovo will not be dealt with, as its recent electoral evolution has been relatively calmer than that of its neighbours.

- **Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>5</sup>**

The 5 October 2002 elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina demonstrate how divided the international community is with regard to the viability of that

country and the continued implementation of the Dayton Accords. The controversy launched by an interesting revisionist article by William Pfaff restarted for the umpteenth time the debate over the future of Bosnia. Yet all is not that grim (nor that bright for that matter) to the point that alarmism should carry the day.

A first reading of the election results (together with the results of the Serbian elections) could suggest the perseverance of ethnic and political divisions to the detriment of more "pro-western" reform candidates but appearances can be deceiving. The election campaign was unlike previous campaigns in that it was not marred by violence. Also, unlike the four preceding elections held since 1996, these were the first elections organised exclusively by the Bosnians (with discreet assistance from the international community, of course). As for the election results, Javier Solana, the European Union's Security Chief, put it best when he said that these elections "represent a vote of frustration" and "the expression of disappointment at the lack of change, not a vote for the past". Likewise, Paddy Ashdown, the international community's head honcho in Bosnia-Herzegovina stressed that the result was a protest vote or "a protest non-vote" against the reformers that had been in power over the last two years rather than "a return to the nationalism of 10 years ago."

Are Solana and Ashdown putting on a brave face in the midst of a deteriorating political and ethnic situation? The low turnout (55,54%) and the weak participation on the part of intellectuals, youth, and certain segments of the refugees and internally displaced persons might have contributed to the victory of the nationalist parties. With 40 percent unemployment, an average monthly salary of 150-200 euros, growing poverty, persistent fraud and corruption, the discontent of those wanting more reforms was clearly felt. As a consequence, sectarian voting benefited. Other factors include the mixed record of the international community on the issue of refugee returns (for example, Republika Srpska is almost exclusively Serb today whereas before the war approximately the same number of Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks lived there) and its inability to arrest Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic. The two aforementioned factors also had a say in justifying the preference for national homogeneities among the voters.

This, of course, comes about at a time when the country is in the midst of uncertain economic reforms, decreasing international aid, and lagging foreign investment. On the plus side, the country no longer poses a threat to

its neighbours, the concept and practice of "ownership" of the political and economic process has taken hold, as has the process of regional cooperation. Also the campaign focus was on concerns over the economy, the nationalist parties have moved away from some of their more debatable leaders and positions, and some ethnic diversity has reappeared (some refugee returns, after all, are better than none). Amidst this bittersweet reality, where do we go from here?

Two camps stand out. The first suggests that the Dayton construct cannot continue to exist and borders need to be redrawn. The second professes the need to stay the course albeit by doing more. William Pfaff's "Time to concede defeat in Bosnia-Herzegovina"<sup>6</sup>, reminiscent of David Owen's op ed in *The Wall Street Journal* in March 2001<sup>7</sup>, reflects a fatalism, which is not without logic and a dose of realism. According to Pfaff, the time has come for the international community to cede defeat and acknowledge that Bosnia-Herzegovina "has, for all practical purposes, already been ethnically cleansed, and accepting the consequences, now may be the only way to terminate this part of the problem of Yugoslav succession." As a result, the partition of Bosnia anew is necessary if democratic values may better prosper there. The problem, of course, with this position is that it assumes that this is what the citizens of Bosnia want through a cursory assessment of the election results and without considering the regional implications. A redrawing of borders could finally bring to fruition the much debated and dreaded domino effect with Kosovars pressing for immediate independence and the ethnic groups in Macedonia opting for partition.

On the other hand, preserving Bosnia as is a non-starter. The existing dysfunctional political system and government structure maintains the country's ethnic division. How to make the system more workable at a time when the international community, too preoccupied with Iraq, is uninterested and international assistance is declining, places the onus on Paddy Ashdown and his team in Sarajevo. The dilemma is how to reinforce the presence of the international community (in terms of providing ideas and guidelines for urgent economic reforms lest parts of the country topple into crisis) without expecting miracles such as the arrest of Karadzic and Mladic anytime soon.

A way forward might be to finker with the laws that exist in order to undermine the nationalist parties. For example, the devolution of power to the municipalities might be a way to go. Reassessing the concept of "ownership" by tying it to a strategy of conditionality (whereby each

transfer of power to the locals could be linked to gaining their consensus for each possible legal alteration) could be another option. Needless to say, the constant recalibration of the strategic plan is a must.

The fact that the international military presence has been considerably downsized attests to the growing stability in the country. It also proves that even with lessening resources much is possible. While the American factor might become less relevant over time as the United States gradually disengages, the European Union's influence and interest is bound to grow as its first crisis management operation under ESDP is underway in Bosnia-Herzegovina starting since 1 January 2003 in the form of the EUPM (EU Police Mission). This development not only shows a commitment to rule of law reform in Bosnia on the part of the EU but also continued and sustained interest in assuring that peace implementation and stabilisation succeed in Bosnia-Herzegovina. That is to say, the stakes for success of its crisis management operation are so high for the EU that it cannot afford to fail. As a consequence, it will have no choice but to work closely with the Bosnian authorities and the High Representative thereby assuring that political and economic reforms do not go off-track.

In other words, the Bosnian elections have proven to be a wake up call to how much still needs to be done in the country. There are enough tell tale signs, though, from the local political forces and the international community that they are aware of the stakes and the need to work together. The nation-building experiment will stay on course notwithstanding required alterations because no other credible alternative can replace it.

#### • FYR Macedonia

The country is still fragile even after the 15 September parliamentary elections, which were the first since the brokering of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of August 2001. While democratic procedures were respected during the voting process (no fraud, no major incidents, no major escalation of ethnic conflict), corruption is still prevalent and the participation of Ali Ahmeti, the former KLA leader in the political process is still questioned by many Slavomacedonians. As a consequence the confidence of the public in public institutions (such as the parliament, the government and local authorities) is relatively low.<sup>8</sup> Given that a real redistribution of power on the Albanian side (the DPA's stranglehold on political and regional power) has yet to occur, it is still too early to suggest that stability and prosperity will come anytime soon in the country.<sup>9</sup> The forthcoming announcement of

last November's census results could lead to strategic boycotts by the Albanian parties to dispute the results if they are not to their liking. The Presidential elections in 2 years will be crucial as it is possible that hard-line nationalist SlavoMacedonian candidates could probably put partition on the electoral agenda.

- **Serbia**

Two failed rounds of presidential elections in Serbia (29 September and 8 December) could jeopardise its political institutions and bring the reform process to a halt. The personification of the political confrontation between two of Milosevic's political heirs, Vojislav Kostunica and Zoran Djindjic, is not a good omen. The reform momentum has been lost, as the young and urban population did not vote and the reformers have split. The pro-western constituency is limited to a third of the population. The alternative to reforms is nationalist leadership personified by Vojislav Seselj who managed a million votes in the last election doing well in regions such as Vojvodina. This could imply that the disintegration of the country is not yet over. Unless legislative reforms that "clarify the mandates of the political institutions, regulate the inter-institutional exchanges, optimise the internal institutional procedures and rationalise the election rules" are introduced, Serbia's institutions will not be able to withstand further political manipulations.<sup>10</sup> Given that no bloc in the Serbian parliament can count on a stable majority, the deadlock of the reform process is bound to continue at the expense of Serbia's stability.

- **Montenegro**

While the 20 October parliamentary elections brought an absolute majority for the Democratic List for a European Movement of President Djukanovic, his decision to switch jobs to the premiership made the speaker of parliament the frontrunner in the presidential poll of 22 December. As in the case of Serbia, a boycott of the elections by Djukanovic's foes led to the invalidation of the elections due to low voter turnout. The impact is largely economic given "the prospect of at least one and probably two more elections, which are likely to make a severe dent in the meagre budget of this impoverished Balkan nation."<sup>11</sup> Yet one cannot help wonder of the impact of the electoral deadlocks both in Serbia and Montenegro on the negotiations on the constitutional charter of the new state of Serbia and Montenegro. As late as mid-January 2003, a number of points remain unresolved as well, including legislation on implementing the document and

the mechanism for electing deputies to the joint parliament as well as how to reframe relations with international financial institutions.

- **Albania**

Albania has been relatively quiet throughout 2002 given the EU-enforced cooperation agreement between the ruling socialists and the main opposition Democratic Party some time in the spring. The deal was reached "after prolonged EU pressure on Albania to clean up its act as a condition for beginning negotiations for entry into a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, SAA."<sup>12</sup> The election of Alfred Moisiu to the presidency in June 2002 was the most visible outcome of this deal as the mandate given to the Commission by the General Affairs Council in October 2002 "to open negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Albania."<sup>13</sup> How long the deal will stand is debatable given the defeat of a Democratic Party candidate in a parliamentary by-election in December 2002 leading Sali Berisha, the opposition leader to accuse the Socialists of foul play.<sup>14</sup>

### **Issues to address**

Consequently, a number of questions stemming from the series of challenges, developments, and policy options presented throughout this paper, need to be considered. The list of questions that follows is not exhaustive but it is indicative of those that need to be posed as policy is being formulated for the Balkans of tomorrow.

- **Do we need to think in terms of an exit strategy?**

There is a necessity to address the crisis of political representation and to avert a culture of dependency. This might imply more involvement in the short term based on the prospect of an exit strategy over the long term.<sup>15</sup> More involvement implies a more hands-on approach by the European Union, NATO and the OSCE in dismantling lawless power structures and institutionalising the rule of law across the region.<sup>16</sup>

- **Is the international community an obstacle as it refuses to address status issues?**

The constant deferment of Kosovo's final status affects stability in FYR Macedonia. As long as the West avoids addressing the Kosovo issue, "ethnic Albanian insurgents in Kosovo and in Macedonia are likely to exploit the instability in Macedonia for their nationalist agenda."<sup>17</sup> While the tendency in Western capitals and in Belgrade is for a go-slow approach as the assessment is that it is too early for any decision about Kosovo's future political status, Kosovar politicians insist on independence.<sup>18</sup> These divergences do not preclude the need for a process on final status negotiations to begin. The reasons for this need include the desire by many in Washington to free up resources to other parts of the world (Iraq, etc.) given the conventional wisdom that a settlement on Kosovo will be difficult without an active US role. Also, Kosovo's final status is the next order of business for UNMIK as mandated by UNSC Resolution 1244. The question of Kosovo's status could come up soon as a consequence of the next electoral cycles (in particular around 2004, when Kosovo will hold its second province-wide elections and FYROM will hold its presidential elections where status and borders could be part of the campaign rhetoric.) It suggests the definition of a clear process lest the international community does not fall behind the curve, i.e. the need to be proactive.

- **Whither the Balkans without the US? How is this viewed in the region? Is the EU able to fill both the security and diplomatic gaps? In other words, can the European Union "hack the Balkans?"**<sup>19</sup>

The verdict is still out. Though, as stated above, the potential for further destabilisation has greatly diminished, the issues of underdevelopment, combating organised crime and corruption, lack of rule of law, persist. While the EU is not properly equipped to deal with the most pressing issues, it needs to acquire the appropriate tools if "it is to consolidate and build on the achievements of the past few years".<sup>20</sup> It is true that the EU is slowly acquiring these tools as the launching of the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia-Herzegovina testifies. The EUPM is the first civilian crisis management operation under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The 16 December 2002 agreement between the European Union and NATO on the establishment of permanent relations between the two organisations clears the way for the EU to replace NATO in FYR Macedonia

sometime in 2003 and for the Union to explore the possibilities for an EU military role in Bosnia-Herzegovina to replace NATO's SFOR mission at a later date.<sup>21</sup> The Copenhagen European Council of 12-13 December was clear in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

But, evidently, more is needed by the EU to ensure the region's stability. According to Gerald Knaus and Marcus Knox, three dynamics are at play: "The first is the inevitable but painful adjustment to the end of reconstruction aid, which has kept Bosnia and Kosovo afloat in the post-conflict period. The second is a deepening employment crisis caused by the collapse of the old socialist industries. The third is the growing disenchantment of citizens with the faltering democratic process itself."<sup>23</sup> In order to cope with these, the EU might need to spread its commitment to economic and social cohesion to the Western Balkans as well. This commitment not only implies a requisite amount of political will (which is lacking) but a restructuring of current Commission structures.<sup>24</sup>

One way to assure its commitment is for greater interventionism in the region. According to Robert Cooper, some sort of post-modern imperialism or "imperialism of neighbours" is necessary.<sup>25</sup> Though this notion challenges the idea of sovereignty as we know it and could be considered as anathema to the region and its elites, it, nevertheless, merits consideration. After all, this has been the essence of the EU's involvement in the Balkans over the last decade. In Cooper's words, "Instability in your neighbourhood poses threats which no state can ignore. Misgovernment, ethnic violence and crime in the Balkans pose a threat to Europe. The response has been to create something like a voluntary UN protectorate in Bosnia and Kosovo. It is no surprise that in both cases the High Representative is European. Europe provides most of the aid that keeps Bosnia and Kosovo running and most of the soldiers (though the US presence is an indispensable stabilising factor). In a further unprecedented move, the EU has offered unilateral free-market access to all countries of the former Yugoslavia for all products including most agricultural produce. It is not just soldiers that come from the international community; it is police, judges, prison officers, central bankers and others. Elections are organised and monitored by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Local police..."<sup>26</sup> There is a case to

be made for more of this sort of micro-management and involvement to deal with the unfinished business in the region.

Another approach suggested by Alexandros Yannis and Wim van Meurs is the need to adopt an enlargement agenda for South-eastern Europe. This would "signify the progressive and balanced shift of the position of the international community and the local leadership: from stabilisation to enlargement; from international micro-management of the region to macro-management with greater local responsibilities; and from an international institutional proliferation to an integral institutional framework."<sup>27</sup>

It is evident from the above that policy proposals as to how to address the next stage of the Balkan's integration in Europe are not lacking.

- **Should case-by-case membership serve as the example to be followed in the future?**

Apart from the commitments to Bulgaria and Romania, no other country in the region is close to even begin accession negotiations except maybe for Croatia whose cause seems to be gaining momentum. Though the argument for Croatia is justifiable on the grounds that it is ready for accession negotiations, it should not be held back by the other countries of the Western Balkans that are lagging behind in their integration process. For the European Union, the logic for beginning negotiations with Croatia is to demonstrate its commitment to enlargement of the region and that individual country progress does pay. In other words, speeding up Croatia's accession might be a powerful positive signal and incentive to the rest that EU membership is a very real possibility.

- **How to reconcile the different speeds?**

The Balkans today is home to a number of differing or varying relationships with the European Union. While Bulgaria and Romania are candidates for EU accession (with relatively well defined accession dates); FYR Macedonia and Croatia have signed Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA); Albania is to begin negotiations with the Commission for an SAA while Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina are only SAA candidates.<sup>28</sup>

Also the issue of where Kosovo fits in the EU's future accession process, in that membership applies to sovereign states, not to territories with undefined status, is still to be defined. This issue came to the fore recently with the concern of how to proceed with the application of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). Likewise for NATO, the same multiple relationships apply with Bulgaria and Romania having been invited to become NATO members in the Prague Summit of November 2002 while Albania, FYR Macedonia, and Croatia are only PfP and EAPC members. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro aspire to join.

### Other Issues to be Addressed

- Are there alternatives to EU membership? EU membership is both a solution (a magnetic pole) and a problem (used as an alibi by today's elite).
- Can there be successful democratisation and reform without previously achieving state consolidation?
- Can the local elite be trusted with the implementation of the European project? The issue of "ownership" is at play here.
- Is there a "Plan B"? Do we need one?
- What impact does the interpretation of developments from the outside have on the region?
- How to reverse the trend of half measures? Has the international community (and the EU in particular) done as much as it could have done for and in the region?

### The way forward

- **An integrated EU strategy** with the objective of integrating the countries of South-eastern Europe into the European Union should be the future point of reference. The mitigating factors include regional instability; lack of adequate and efficient state structures; pending status questions such as the status of Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia; organised crime concerns predicated on aid-dependent economies; and the consequences of a big bang enlargement on the region given the factor of enlargement fatigue.

Under these conditions, the interplay between the EU and the countries of the region is vital. One crucial element would be to "prioritise the priorities" by demanding key reforms in terms of rule

of law elements (courts, judges, legal codes, criminal procedures, etc.) both in the various international community "protectorates" and the sovereign states of the region.

Another factor is the necessity to stress "differentiation" in that EU accession is not perceived regionally but that each country accedes on its own merit. Though, "differentiation" via the enlargement process and the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) is the approach Brussels is pursuing, the fact is that the states of the Western Balkans have yet to be convinced that they are part of the EU's enlargement strategy, in spite of the Copenhagen Summit declarations.

Finally, one question that remains hard to answer is to what extent the prospect of EU membership hinders or helps the reform process in the countries of SEE. Since enlargement is a moving target under which, hence, reforms cannot be anchored, more realistic forms of linkages need to be defined. For example, this could come in the form of a realistic or achievable credible strategic plan and timetable for integration and/or the engagement both within the EU and the national institutions of candidate countries (Bulgaria and Romania), SAP partners (FYROM and Croatia), and the remaining states of the Western Balkans. This will also help explain the need for institutional reform as a priority. In other words, the avoidance of euro-scepticism due to the longevity of the enlargement process needs to be tackled sooner rather than later.

- **The development of functional democracies** becomes all the more pressing given the importance of a transfer of responsibilities to the region's elite and the European Union as the United States disengages. While there are more democracies than sovereign states in the Balkans today, political change has been slow in coming given the top-down nature of the political systems which are elite driven. In other words, in the triptych "state-political society-civil society", the "political society" segment needs to be reformed in order to address the structural faults in SEE societies.

In parallel, the way the international community perceives and deals with SEE societies also needs to be addressed. In particular, the case of the former Yugoslav space is telling given that it functions on a series of brokered agreements (Dayton, UNSC Resolution 1244, the

Ohrid Agreement, the Belgrade Accord) which have all stopped wars but whose implementation is incomplete as security remains precarious for a variety of reasons ranging from the election of nationalist politicians, pending status questions, anachronistic political systems, lack of progress in the establishment of rule of law. These factors, in turn, impede the development of functional democracies, which is a *sine qua non* condition for the stabilisation, and normalisation of the region.

- The importance of **regional cooperation** needs to be repeatedly stressed. In view of the fact that "regional ownership" has caught the imagination both of the region's elite and the European Union, the general sentiment is that solutions to the problems of the region should emanate from the countries of the region. Regional cooperation contributes to the process of regional ownership as it empowers the locals to invest in institutionalised multilateral regional cooperation mechanisms which function in a complementary manner to the European integration process of the Balkan countries.

The emergence of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) as the genuine Balkan cooperation process marks a turning point as recognised in a number of General Affairs Councils. The emphasis now is on getting the process in conjunction with the Stability Pact to focus on tackling a number of horizontal issues such as the promotion of transport and energy infrastructure projects, battling organised crime and illicit trafficking, and ensuring the return of refugees and internally displaced persons among others. The principal problem seems to be a lack of sufficient instruments in assuring that the regional cooperation process is successful and the representation of Kosovo in view of the fact that only sovereign states take part in it.

### A parting word

Obviously, all is not gloomy in the region. Regional cooperation is ongoing, especially in the field of major infrastructure transportation projects, and the democratic process is gradually taking hold. This paper has tried to focus on some of the challenges rather than outline the region's positive trends while acknowledging that these challenges, though serious and pressing, are relatively benign to those facing the region and the international community

a decade ago. The positive trends that characterise the region since the end of violent ethnic conflict have contributed significantly in this context. As a consequence, the Balkans of today might even be considered as relatively "boring" and inconsequential as the potential of structural destabilisation is practically unimaginable. But as the devil lies in the details, it is in the interest of the European Union and the countries of the region to structure the region's transition carefully so that its integration becomes a reality. Much still needs to be done. Let the region's transformation, therefore, proceed at full steam.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 2001/2002*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 150-151.

<sup>2</sup> "Presidency Conclusions," Copenhagen European Council, 12 and 13 December 2002, paragraphs 13-17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 23.

<sup>4</sup> South East Europe (SEE) Public Agenda Survey, an opinion survey released by South East Europe Democracy Support (SEEDS), a network of regional survey organizations and think tanks supported by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), March 2002, <http://www.idea.int>.

<sup>5</sup> This section draws heavily from Dinitrios Triantaphyllou, "Deciphering the Bosnian Elections," *CEPS Europa South-East Monitor*, Issue 39, October 2002.

<sup>6</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 10 October 2002.

<sup>7</sup> David Owen, "To Secure Balkan Peace, Redraw the Map", *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 March 2001.

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting analysis of the elections in FYR Macedonia see Gergana Noutcheva, "The Macedonian Elections: Prospects for a Democratic Future?", *CEPS Europa South-East Monitor*, Issue 38, September 2002.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Brenda Pearson, "Putting Peace into Practice – Can Macedonia's New Government Meet the Challenge?", *USIP Special Report 96*, November 2002, pp 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> Gergana Noutcheva, "Serbia's Failed Elections: Weak Institutions, Strong Personalities, and Infant Democracy", *CEPS Europa South-East Monitor*, Issue 39, October 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Nedjeljko Rudovic, "Montenegrius count cost of democracy," *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, No. 393, 23 December 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Edmond Harizaj, "Berisha Ditches Cooperation Deal," *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, No. 397, 13 January 2003.

<sup>13</sup> EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, 21 October 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Edmond Harizaj, "Berisha Ditches Cooperation Deal."

<sup>15</sup> A new report by the Council on Foreign Relations calls for the ending of an international military and administrative presence in the Balkans by 2010 provided that a number of conditions are met. These include a curb on organised crime, the ability of refugees to return safely home, and education reform among others. See [http://www.cfr.org/pdf/Balkans\\_TF.pdf](http://www.cfr.org/pdf/Balkans_TF.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> See Michael Dziedzic, Laura Rowen, and Phil Williams, "Lawless Rule Versus Rule of Law in the Balkans", *USIP Special Report 97*, December 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Brenda Pearson, "Putting Peace into Practice – Can Macedonia's New Government Meet the Challenge?", p.1.

<sup>18</sup> In a televised interview on 27 December 2002, President Ibrahim Rugova called on the international community to recognize the independence of Kosovo, saying this would contribute to the region's peace and stability.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Morton Abramowitz and Heather Hurlburt, "Can the EU Hack the Balkans? A Proving Ground for Brussels," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2002, pp. 2-7.

<sup>20</sup> Gerald Knaus and Marcus Knox, "Maintaining Balkan Stability", *IWPR's Balkan Crisis Report*, No. 383, 18 November 2002.

<sup>21</sup> See remarks by Javier Solana on the start of the European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brussels, 27 December 2002. <http://ue.eu.int/pressdata/EN/declarations/74013.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Presidency Conclusions," Copenhagen European Council, 12 and 13 December 2002, paragraphs 27-30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Gerald Knaus and Marcus Knox, "Maintaining Balkan Stability". Also see European Stability Initiative, "Western Balkans 2004: Assistance, cohesion and the new boundaries of Europe", 3 November 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Cooper, "The new liberal imperialism", *The Observer*, 7 April 2002.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Wim van Meurs and Alexandros Yannis, "The European Union and the Balkans: From Stabilisation Process to Southeastern Enlargement - Strategy Recommendations", Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, September 2002.

<sup>38</sup> FYR Macedonia signed a SAA on 9 April 2001. Croatia signed an SAA on 29 October 2001.