European Policy Centre

**Good cops, bad mobs?
EU policies to fight trans-national
organised crime in the Western Balkans**

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When the Cologne European Council declared – in June 1999, in the wake of the Kosovo war – that the countries in the Western Balkans were all "potential" European Union members, observers thought that the long and winding road to future accession would soon be open to the whole region, after the bloody decade of the "wars of Yugoslav succession".

We are not there yet though. Sure, Slovenia is now a fully-fledged partner; Croatia has just started accession negotiations; a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) has been signed with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which has also formally applied for EU membership; and another one is being negotiated with Albania. Talks to this end are even set to start shortly with Serbia-Montenegro. And many indicted war criminals have been brought (or have rendered themselves) to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague.

Apart from Kosovo, whose uncertain final status represents an additional element of instability in the region, only Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) – most notably Republika Srpska – seems still mired in the legacy of the past, be it for the persistent failure to arrest former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and his army chief Zlatko Mladic, or for the problems that have affected the approval of the police reform suggested by the EU, which have made it difficult to start SAA negotiations before the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. BiH is also the country where the EU is most actively engaged in peace building, with civilian (EUPM) as well as military (EUFOR-Althea) operations, plus substantial economic and administrative assistance.

The fact that law enforcement and police reform remain so difficult to implement is also due to the intrusiveness and pervasiveness of organised crime in the region – and beyond. Different criminal networks compete and cooperate across regional borders, and penetrate expatriate communities inside the EU as well. As a result, the 'image' of the Western Balkans among European citizens today is as much negatively affected by such phenomena as it has been by inter-ethnic violence on the ground in the past decade. Addressing the issue of trans-national organised crime has thus become a multiple challenge for the Union: one of effective police cooperation inside the EU borders, and one of effective peace building outside of them, in Europe's "backyard". The first line of security – rather than defence – lies abroad.

This Issue Paper written by Lucia Montanaro-Jankovski, now Assistant Programme Coordinator at the EPC, stems from the discussions held in the Task Force on the Western Balkans established in March 2005 within the EPC Integrated Working Programme 'Enlargement and Neighbourhood Europe', run in cooperation with the King Baudouin Foundation.

The paper examines all the different facets of the problem, and assesses the overall EU response to the numerous challenges posed by trans-national organised crime in (and from) South-Eastern Europe. It clearly advocates a more comprehensive and more coherent approach on the part of the Union. It also encourages the EU to be more forceful in earmarking appropriate policy targets and more compelling in demanding compliance; namely, adequate translation of principles and guidelines into practice.

Only by doing so, it is argued, will the EU be able effectively to tackle criminal networks at home and abroad, while also improving the overall 'image' of the Western Balkan countries – and, therefore, their chances of joining the Union in the future.

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EU policies to fight trans-national organised crime in the Western Balkans

By Lucia Montanaro-Jankovski

Introduction

This Issue Paper addresses a series of security threats posed by trans-national organised crime in the Western Balkans.

Organised crime is having a detrimental impact on the development, stability and security of the Balkans. It is corroding the regulatory apparatus, and is a major obstacle to legal, political and economic reforms. Ten years after the Dayton Agreements and six years after the Kosovo war, the region is still unstable. The existence of grey zones in the post-Yugoslav space, with blurred responsibilities for the rule of law, transparent borders, displaced persons, unreturned refugees, and a population living in dire social and economical conditions without tangible prospects, combined with frustrated paramilitary formations and corrupt high-level officials linked with organised crime – particularly in Albania and Montenegro – are creating fertile ground for radical Islamic organisations, organised crime and the rekindling of past conflicts.

A number of overarching issues threaten European security, particularly trans-border organised crime; international terrorism; ethnic and religious conflicts; and trafficking in people, drugs and arms – all of which thrive in an environment of political ambiguity and economic deterioration. The proliferation of non-viable states, which are in danger of becoming increasingly grey zones of terrorism, organised crime and instability, is as threatening as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Securing stability in the Balkans, which is plagued with criminal networks, is therefore a major challenge for the European Union. Success is not only crucial for European security interests, but also would serve as a model for elsewhere.[1] The EU Security Strategy, *"A Secure Europe in a Better World"*, endorsed by the European Council in December 2003, notes that Europe is a prime target for organised crime, and lists it as one of five "key threats" to the EU.[2] The EU Security Strategy considers that "restoring good government to the Balkans, fostering democracy and enabling the authorities there to tackle organised crime is one of the most effective ways of dealing with organised crime within the EU".[3] The Union has accordingly adopted an integrated and regional approach to the fight against organised crime in the Balkans; however, this strategy still lacks both an effective system of operation and practice, and a targeted approach for each specific form of trafficking.

This Issue Paper analyses how crime structures created during the Balkan wars of the 1990s have survived and flourished in the post-conflict situations, why they are growing and how they function. It then evaluates the current EU strategy for fighting organised crime.

Unresolved status issues in the Western Balkans

Across south-eastern Europe, security and stability continue to be undermined by unresolved status issues regarding the future political configuration of Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Criminal networks profit greatly from this confusion.

The very structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, since the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, has generated ethnic and territorial risk-prone relations. The continuing insecurity in the region was illustrated by the violence against ethnic Serbs which erupted in March 2004 in Kosovo, when hundreds of ethnic Albanians killed 19 people, set fire to buildings (destroying 730 Serb homes and 29 places of worship) and drove a further 4,000 Serbs from their homes.

Clearly, Kosovo's security is closely interconnected with that of its neighbours: the political landscape remains volatile and unstable. Although a major conflict in the Western Balkans is improbable in the foreseeable future, the potential for inter-ethnic tensions and confrontation persists, as does the risk of spill-over effects in areas such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYROM or parts of Serbia - particularly Bujanovic, Presevo and Medvedja.

However, the desire for eventual membership to the EU is a common denominator for all the Balkan countries and is providing an incentive to develop modern and effective legislation, and to reform and stabilise the political environment. Possible integration into the EU is also subject to the requirement to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and this entails taking responsibility for the past acts of war, which in turn facilitates new beginnings.

The EU-Western Balkans summit in Thessaloniki, on 21ˢᵗ June 2003, reaffirmed that the Balkans' future lies within the EU. The states of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYROM, and Serbia and Montenegro are at different stages in their relations with the Union. Croatia and FYROM have each signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, which obliges them to begin harmonising their domestic laws and regulations with the body of EU law. Croatia has been given the status of accession country. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbia and Montenegro, are part of the stabilisation and association process, in which assistance is being directed at preparing these countries for closer association with the Union. Meanwhile, the European Commission's feasibility study on Serbia and Montenegro recently gave a positive evaluation of the situation.

Kosovo

The unresolved status of Kosovo is a major obstacle to peace and stability in the region. Kosovo is an international protectorate with provisional self-government where numerous fundamental democratic and security issues

have not yet been sufficiently addressed. Implementation of the Standards for Kosovo, the roadmap for reform agreed by all the parties, is stagnating, even though it had been agreed that this would be a crucial step prior to resolving the final status issue.

Consequently, the status quo is no longer tenable. Violent confrontations between Albanians and Serbs following a decision on the final status issue remain a probability. If the chosen solution is autonomy, there is a risk that Albanians in Kosovo will resort to paramilitary formations which could attack ethnic Serbs and the international community. If, on the other hand, independence is achieved, ethnic Serbs may equally resort to violence. This would destabilise the present Serbian government – boosting the popularity of radicals – as well as stimulating secession demands in, for example, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM, Sandjak. A balanced comprise must be found.

At present, all the parties are waiting for the report of the Special Representative on Kosovo, Mr. Kai Eide, which is due to be presented to the United Nations Security Council this autumn. On the basis of this, the UN Secretary General, the UN Security Council, the Contact Group and the parties concerned will start negotiations, and an agreement on the final status of Kosovo should emerge at the end of 2006.

Progress on reform in Kosovo remains very limited and is obviously also hindered by weak administrative capacity. The crucial substantial and sustainable return of displaced persons to Kosovo is being hampered by unfavourable socio-economic conditions and the precarious security situation. The Provisional Institutions of Self Government have demonstrated an inadequate reaction to the violent events of March 2004. Their continuing failure to condemn violence and the provisions allowing the return of displaced persons raise concern. However, the promulgation of the new criminal procedure code is a clear achievement.[4]

Serbia & Montenegro (SCG)

Serbia and Montenegro have still not resolved the question of their unity or separation, with the EU playing the role of mediator on constitutional disputes between the two sides. Montenegro is planning to organise a referendum on independence in the spring of 2006, once the Belgrade Agreement of 2002 has expired. However, the Montenegrin authorities do not seem willing to follow internationally recognised election standards by allowing Montenegrins living in Serbia to vote. Given the large percentage of Montenegrins within the population of Serbia and their generally favourable attitude towards unification, their participation would have a significant impact on the result.

However, the referendum may not take place at all if Serbia agrees to Montenegro's proposal for a union of two independent and internationally recognised states, although Serbia might need to wait for a clearer picture of Kosovo's future status before responding to this initiative. The two issues are clearly linked. Moreover, resolute progress in Serbia and Montenegro in

sectors such as military reform and regional cooperation has been noted, although reform of the police and judiciary remains much slower.

Macedonia

The independence of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has been recognised, but disputes remain; mainly with Greece and Cyprus over its denomination, and with Kosovo's authorities over its borders. The political situation is stable, and concrete efforts have been made to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Numerous measures have also been introduced within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement which indicate a desire to accelerate EU-orientated reforms.[5] But there remain serious problems concerning the judiciary, corruption and public administration.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

BiH has been independent since 1992 and has had a new constitution since 1995, which was included in the Dayton Agreements. It has two administrative divisions: the Bosniak/Croat federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Bosnian Serb-led Republika Srpska. The Brcko district in north-eastern Bosnia remains under international supervision.

Most of the borders have been de-limited, apart from some small sections still under dispute with Croatia and with Serbia and Montenegro. BiH is governed by a rotating Chairman of the Presidency, presently Mr. Ivo Miro Jovic. However, the High Representative (currently Paddy Ashdown) established by the Dayton Agreements, continues to play a key role in BiH, even if it is not officially an international protectorate. Paddy Ashdown even sacked the previous Chairman of the Presidency, Dragan Covic, on 29 March 2005. The EU is in the process of taking over the Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzogovina (SFOR). Progress in state-level reform in BiH has been insufficient; and there is a need for more effective governance, public administration and human rights provisions.[6]

Police and parallel sectors

Police forces in the Balkans are the most important element in fighting organised crime directly at the grass-roots level, but political and financial interests make them flawed. Multiple police forces are a major obstacle to progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina - there are three forces (Bosniak, Croat and Serb) which do not cooperate sufficiently, particularly the Serbian force.[7] Organised criminal elements profit from this fragmented police structure by crossing jurisdictions, thus hampering investigations. Efficient policing is vital for BiH to become a functioning state and a pre-condition for negotiations with the Union. During a recent crisis over the police forces in BiH, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska rejected the latest proposal for police reform. The EU's Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn responded by declaring that the negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement would be delayed.[8]

Since the Balkan wars, private security companies – some of which are strongly associated with criminal elements and extreme nationalist politics – have often acted as competitors to the police forces in south-east Europe. The situation is particularly critical in Serbia because of the lack of regulation of the security market, but is a problem in Kosovo and Croatia as well. This private security sector has expanded to a level where the number of private security company employees now exceeds police personnel. Furthermore, in societies like BiH, Macedonia and Kosovo, these private companies are divided by ethnic affiliations.[9]

I. The nature of trans-national organised crime

1.1 Organised crime characteristics

Organised crime neither starts nor ends in the Balkans. However, the region is not simply a link in the chain of global crime. The ideal geopolitical location of the Balkans has made them a crucial crossroads for criminal networks spanning the four continents of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Since the 1990s, south-east Europe has emerged as the major gateway to Europe for the organised smuggling of goods as well the trafficking of women and girls for the sex industry.

The United Nations Convention Against Trans-National Organised Crime, which was adopted in November 2000 and entered into force in September 2003, provides a definition of organised crime. Art.1 stipulates that an "organised criminal group shall mean a structuring group of three or more persons existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing, one or more serious crimes or offences established pursuant to this Convention, in order to obtain, directly, or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit".

This Convention constitutes the main international legal framework for combating organised crime, its purpose being to promote cooperation to prevent and fight trans-national organised crime more effectively. In order to combat criminal activities which are commonly used to support trans-national organised crime, it establishes four specific crimes (Art.5: participation in organised criminal groups; Art.6: money laundering; Art.8: corruption; and Art.23: obstruction of justice, with protocols establishing additional crimes involving trafficking in people, the smuggling of migrants, and the illicit manufacture and smuggling of fire-arms.

Weak states are characterised by ethnic conflict or terrorist activity. States which have imploded or disintegrated provide a particularly fertile ground for the growth of organised crime. The low level of effectiveness and legitimacy of the Balkan states means that trafficking organisations can operate with a high degree of impunity. The wars and subsequent sanctions and embargo imposed on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia led to the proliferation of organised crime, the development of a regional smuggling network, and the rise of a grey economy and black market. One example of criminals taking advantage of

international embargoes which unwittingly create illegal markets is that of Arkan, the Serbian paramilitary leader and member of the Yugoslav Communist party, who was wanted for armed robberies in the Netherlands and Sweden and has since been killed. According to the UN War Crimes Tribunal, Arkan gained control of gasoline during the war in Bosnia and became rich as a result.

The cessation of conflict can also lead to an upsurge in organised crime as former combatants (insurgents or military) use their expertise in violence to pursue criminal activities. The end of the war in Bosnia was associated with the spread of organised crime from the Balkans into central and western Europe. These Balkan criminal groups have been particularly active and violent in Austria and the Netherlands.

Such increases in criminal activities result from the collapse of central authority and the criminal justice system. War crimes and organised crimes are sometimes perpetrated by the same people. In addition, separatist factions often resort to criminal behaviour to fund their political struggle, as was the case with the Kosovo Liberation Army's involvement in heroin trafficking. Trans-national criminal organisations (TCOs) tend to operate from a safe home base characterised by weak government, economic dislocation and social upheaval. TCOs not only take control of the domestic economy of certain states, but also operate in a variety of host states where there are lucrative markets and ethnic networks.[10]

Balkan societies are plagued by organised crime and endemic corruption bequeathed by the wars of the 1990s. The Macedonian economy is highly criminalised (the conflict in 2001 was linked to organised crime disputes). In Macedonia, these groups have used nationalism as a means to mobilise support when they feel their business interests in drug trafficking are being threatened.

Criminal groups benefit from the continuing uncertainty in the region. They have proven "ready to jeopardise peace in order to maintain the relatively lawless environment in which they thrive".[11] This was vividly demonstrated when Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic dared to begin reforming the law-enforcement architecture in order to combat organised crime, corruption and the grey economy. This cost him his life.[12] Following his assassination in March 2003, his successor Zoran Zivkovic took up the challenge and launched "Operation Sabre", which successfully dismantled numerous criminal networks. However, they continue to proliferate.

1.2 The criminal environment and its deep roots

The number of organised crime groups originating from the former Soviet Union and from Eastern Europe is expanding. The widespread criminality in Russia has extended throughout Europe. Moreover, in these trans-national operations, Russian groups are also forming alliances with other organised criminal gangs, collaborating, for example, with the Italian mafias in the trafficking of counterfeit dollars, arms and migrants. The centre for their collaboration in arms smuggling is in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Furthermore, organised crime is frequently interwoven into the political structures in the Balkan countries, and certain transitional effects are becoming structural. This is particularly so in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the effects of war have become institutionalised in social dislocation and the legitimisation of criminal organisations. The tight links between politics and smuggling, and the vast informal economy, have, in turn, created a socio-economic formation which is not conducive to a normalisation of political relations, democratisation and economic reform. The foundations of organised crime have therefore become more difficult to uproot.

Kosovo too is a harbour and major springboard for organised crime in the region. Given that some Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) funding was procured through organised crime, and bearing in mind the strong continuity between the former KLA and part of the current Kosovar political and executive establishment, there is some concern as to how organised crime will develop in Kosovo when it is no longer a United Nations protectorate with 25,000 NATO soldiers and 4,000 UN police officers.

1.3 The 'state of play' in Balkan criminal networks

In an ever-widening international setting, organised criminal activities are becoming more complex. The current trend is for a loose network of collaboration between different criminal groups – even inter-ethnic collaboration – rather than rivalry. There is also a tendency to move away from single types of criminal activity and diversify into multi-crime activities.[13] The disintegration of Yugoslavia has further increased the criminality in the Balkans. Organised crime groups from the Balkans are now prominent in the majority of EU countries.[14]

Ethnic Albanian organised crime groups

The wars in former Yugoslavia strengthened Albanian organised crime groups not only as a result of their interconnection with politics and the financial aid and impunity they benefited from, but also because, prior to the wars, 75% of all heroin destined to Europe went through Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. The 1992-95 wars redirected the heroin trade through the mountainous regions around Presevo and Macedonia into Kosovo, where Albanian organised crime groups had control. The flood of cheap weapons into Kosovo following the 1997 political crisis in Albania also stimulated the development of ethnic Albanian organised crime groups.

No other organised crime group in the Balkan region has prospered as much as that of the ethnic Albanians. Their worldwide expansion since the 1990s has been facilitated by their diaspora. Albania is still the most graphic example of the merger between politics and crime. Ethnic Albanian groups are hierarchical, disciplined and extremely violent. Tony White, of the United Nations Drug Control Programme, believes that ethnic Albanian gangs gained a foothold in illicit trade through violence. White says "they are willing to use violence more than any other group. They have confronted the established

order throughout Europe and pushed back the Lebanese, Pakistani and Italian cartels."

Albanian organised crime groups are considered an increasing threat to EU Member States.[15] Both Scandinavian countries and the German federal police affirm that Kosovo Albanians import 80% of Europe's heroin. They are also very prominent in Italy, Greece, Austria and Switzerland. Furthermore, Albanians are engaged in large-scale trafficking along the Balkan route (from Turkey to FYROM, Kosovo and Albania to Western Europe). Initially a heroin trafficking route, this has grown and become a more complex network for the trafficking of arms, drugs and people. Links are created between different activities, such as obliging migrants to carry drugs as part of the payment for their journey. Albanian organised crime groups also control criminal activities in Albania, Kosovo and FYROM, and are forming alliances with other such groups to conduct their trans-national operations: they collaborate with Turkish organised crime groups and together they dominate the heroin trade. The Albanian-Medellin connection (joint Colombian cartel) also operates in conjunction with the Sacra Corona Unita (Italian mafia).

Organised crime groups in former Yugoslav countries

The Yugoslav organised crime connection runs through Serbia and Montenegro, FYROM and Greece, or through Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. The criminal clans in the post Yugoslav states are closely intertwined with the police and secret services, the judiciary and high-ranking politicians.

Criminal groups have been blamed for the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic. Fire-arms trafficked from the former Yugoslav space are often stolen from military warehouses. Serbian organised crime groups (the main ones being the Surcin group and the Zemun clan) have been increasingly engaged in the production of synthetic drugs and the trafficking of human beings. Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian groups are involved in the theft and trafficking of motor vehicles, with Croatian groups also involved in the illicit trafficking of arms.

Exchanging drugs for arms is also prevalent in the Balkan region in different organised crime networks, with several examples in Croatia. However, money-laundering is the main illicit activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has become a major cross-roads for criminal groups because of its primarily cash-base and unregulated economy, weak law enforcement and endemic corruption. There are also links between organised crime and indicted war criminals.

2. Links between terrorism and organised crime

Terrorism, organised crime and paramilitary formations are all interconnected in the Balkans. Organised crime is both a primary source of funding for terrorism and a means of conversion from post political-military activities. Many similarities between these two groups – terrorists and organised

criminals – can be found in their activities in the Balkans, although terrorists differ in their ideological or religious aims. However, since the September 11th 2001 attacks on the US, the main international focus has been on combating terrorism rather than organised crime.

Defining and differentiating terrorists as opposed to freedom fighters continues to create grave problems, making it more difficult to produce coherent policies. As things stand, there are 13 conventions and protocols on counter-terrorism. Negotiations to establish a Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism will take place over the next few months within the framework of the United Nations 60th session of the General Assembly.[16]

Each time there has been a major terrorist attack in the West – in the US on September 11th 2001, in Madrid in March 2004 and the London bombings in July 2005 – there have been firm pledges by EU Member States to reinforce counter-terrorism measures. However, the lack of a substantial EU budget for this, as well as structural and coordination problems between the Council of Ministers and the European Commission, are clearly hampering progress. The link between organised crime and terrorism also needs to be given sufficient attention, as illustrated by the fact that the Madrid bombings were financed by drug trafficking.

The collapse of the USSR and the wars in Yugoslavia acted as catalysts for the rapid re-Islamisation of the Muslim communities in the Balkans. The recruitment and indoctrination of new followers has not only taken place in the predominantly Muslim zones of Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia, but also in non-Muslim states; terrorist organisations like Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hizbollah are known to be acting on Romanian soil. The Bosnian war attracted many radical Islamic organisations from Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. There are still concerns about the aspirations of a broad Islamist Albanian secessionist or expansionist movement between Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sandzak, Kosovo, parts of Macedonia and Albania.

The political and criminal nexus in the Balkans has been illustrated by the National Liberation Army (NLA) in Macedonia, and in particular by the KLA. There is no single definition of what the KLA is. Although the organisation's active role in drug trafficking has been proven, it did not need to resort to terrorist means because, from the very beginning of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, it has benefited from the sympathy of the international community.[17] Training camps for the KLA were detected by intelligence services in Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Germany, Turkey and Afghanistan.[18] The KLA was also found to be very active in the trafficking of both heroin and human beings in collaboration with the PKK (Workers Party from Kurdistan). A Congressional statement from the American intelligence services, dated December 2001, proved the existence of Al Qaeda support for Muslim fighters in Kosovo and Bosnia. The question now is how many radical Islamic terrorists remained in the region.

II. Current exploitation of the porous EU security shield

The Balkan countries are characterised by permeable borders and a porous security shield, which are currently being reformed. The enlargement of the area of freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capitals facilitates organised crime activities. However, the protective shield around these open European borders is being progressively reinforced by joint national and EU efforts, and particularly by the CARDS programme (Community Assistance for Reconstruction Development and Stabilisation). In the meantime, the main activities undertaken by organised groups in the Balkans which are profiting from the still-weak national, regional and European security shield are the trafficking of human beings, drugs and arms.

1. Trafficking in Human Beings

International trafficking in human beings is controlled by criminal organisations, particularly by Serbian and Albanian groups. It is trans-national in character; an illegal trade which can be characterised by "low risks and high profits". The *modus operandi* of the gangs controlling this activity is intimidation and/or corruption.

The fall of communism fuelled the trafficking in human beings because of the newly-opened borders and dire economic conditions. But there have also been several reports that it has increased in post-war former Yugoslavia to provide prostitution services to international soldiers and NATO, UN, EU and NGO workers.[19] The kidnapping, torture and sexual abuse of women and children – sometimes with the collaboration of the police – is common, particularly in Serbia and Kosovo.[20] The victims of this trafficking are mainly Moldavian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Serbian or gypsies.

Until recently, one of the fundamental problems in tackling the trafficking of human beings has been the lack of international consensus on the definitions of trafficking, smuggling and illegal migration, resulting in confusion and an inability to address the issues appropriately.

The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women And Children – signed in November 2000 – provides a definition in Article 3, which states that the trafficking of human beings is "the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a person by use of threat, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or giving or receiving payments to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".

Trafficking in human beings has been defined by a European Commission report as a violation of the trafficked person's will, right of self-determination and human dignity.[21] It is not primarily an issue of illegal migration, and needs to be addressed as a serious crime and human rights violation – trafficking in

human beings concerns primarily the protection of individual people and the smuggling of migrants concerns primarily the protection of the state. The purpose of smuggling is the illegal crossing of borders, whereas the aim of trafficking is the exploitation of the trafficked person: a person who is trafficked is considered a victim.

Human trafficking is based on the treatment of human beings as private property and commodities, depriving them of the possibility of using their constitutionally guaranteed rights. The main legal frameworks for combating it are the UN trafficking protocol 2000; the Brussels declaration of the 20th September 2002 on 'preventing and combating trafficking in human beings'; and the Council Framework Decision, 2002/629/JHA, 19 July 2002 on combating trafficking in human beings. Trafficked women and children are traditionally used in the sex and domestic labour sectors, which are less likely to be regulated and more likely to be infiltrated by traffickers.

Victims of trafficking

Trafficking is often related to poverty and low levels of development in origin countries, but it is also brought about by globalisation, unemployment, lack of opportunities, trade, migration policies, humanitarian and environmental disasters, and gender and ethnic discrimination. As organised crime flourishes in areas with a weak administrative and social infrastructure, anti-trafficking measures should be targeted on strengthening local and national capacities, democratic institution-building and the enhancement of the rule of law. These important preventive measures should be part of a comprehensive response to counter trafficking.

Until now, Member States' policies, including EU policy responses to trafficking, have tended to concentrate on measures in the area of crime control and migration policies, but much less on assistance and human rights protection for trafficked persons. They should be treated as victims of crime and not be detained, charged or prosecuted for the activities they became involved in as a consequence of their exploitation.

Trafficked people are taken into these networks by coercion, abuse and deceit and forced into sexual exploitation, slavery, forced labour and servitude. The gender aspect is a structural element of this type of trafficking; women and girls are the main victims. But there are specific risks for children and they are subject to a different legal status from adults. Fifty per cent of the victims of trafficking are reportedly below the age of 18 in south-east Europe.

Children suffer numerous types of exploitation, being engaged for labour exploitation; economical exploitation (various illicit activities such as pick pocketing, drug selling, begging); sexual exploitation (sexual abuse, child prostitution, child pornography); as domestic workers; child soldiers; child agricultural workers; and for illegal adoption; forced marriage and the removal of organs.[22] Children have specific needs and vulnerabilities, and specific consideration should be given to child victims and the social aspects of their plight, such as lack of access to schooling, abandonment, the protection of

street-children and the provision of information to families on children's rights. Children represent an increasingly vulnerable group and should be guaranteed special attention, protection and opportunities.

Prevention and repression of trafficking in human beings

The prevention and repression of trafficking in human beings should be designed in a non-static way in order to detect and study changes in the trends and patterns of trafficking, and there should be systematic risk assessment and measurement of the phenomenon. Strengthening the technical capacity of counter-trafficking institutions through training is an important form of prevention. It should be based on a human rights approach, raise awareness of anti-discrimination, be gender sensitive and underline the special needs of children. Special measures should be aimed at the prevention of child trafficking, and the abuse and exploitation of children. Appropriate education and training should be given to competent personnel. The target group for training should include not only law-enforcement officials, but also diplomatic staff, labour inspectors, judiciary personnel and international military forces.

Prevention is an issue both for countries of origin and countries of destination. The most effective strategy would be to take an integrated approach combining both repressive and empowering strategies (raising awareness, strengthening rights, and improving living and working conditions). The seizure of assets and anti-corruption measures are important, as are the decisive prosecution and punishment of traffickers. The Commission Experts Group considers that, in order to improve coordination mechanisms, a European anti-trafficking network built on national cooperative structures should be established, obviously respecting strict data protection protocols and regimes.

2. Trafficking in illicit goods

2.1 Pervasive and lucrative drug trafficking

Drug trafficking was used as a means to finance the former Yugoslav wars. As a result, there has been a vast increase and mutation in drug trafficking in and from the Balkans. The region has become a corridor for illicit trade; a major intersection for the activities of criminal clans. The Colombian cartels' main settlements in Europe are now in Albania. As Antonio Maria Costa, the executive director of the UN's Office of Drugs & Crime (UNODC), has said: "The Colombians once used Spain as their point of import (of cocaine) to Western Europe, but the shift to the Balkans should be taken as an important signal that the market itself is changing."

The Balkan region is ideal for drug trafficking and the penetration of western and eastern markets both because it is difficult for law-enforcement agencies to control and because of its location, which facilitates access to drug-user markets in Europe and in the Ukraine and Russia, where new pockets of wealth are growing. Organised crime groups infiltrated the Albanian diaspora extensively and profited from the movement abroad and the return of refugees to establish new criminal networks, which in turn increased Kosovo's role as a

platform for trafficking.[23] Kosovo is considered to be at risk of becoming a narco-state. Albanian organised crime groups not only traffic in their main trade – heroin – but also in cocaine, with their Colombian partners; and in cannabis, which is produced in Albania.

Whereas in Serbia drug traffickers mainly trade in heroin and synthetic drugs, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a transit point for marijuana and opiate trafficking routes to Western Europe. Criminal groups in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia of mixed ethnic composition (Albanian and Macedonian) make large cannabis shipments to western European markets. Certain chemical industries in FYROM which are no longer able to sell their products to former Yugoslavia have also switched to producing precursors of heroine which are then transported to Turkey, where mobile laboratories transform the opiates into heroin.

Moreover, there has been an explosion in the number of young drug users in Balkan countries – particularly in the Croatian-Muslim part of Bosnia and in Serbia-Montenegro, where it is estimated that 20% of the drugs are destined for the local population and the rest for export.

2.1.1 The EU's fight against drugs

Afghanistan remains the main heroin producer in the world. The EU is implementing a series of technical assistance programmes along the heroin route, thereby setting up a system of filters to intercept drug traffickers along the major routes between Afghanistan and Western Europe (via Central Asia, Caucasus, Turkey and the Balkans).

There are three TACIS (Technical Aid to CIS) drug action programmes in the Newly Independent States (NIS) region: CADAP (in Central Asia), SCAD (in the South Caucasus region), and BUMAD (Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova). These regional, coherent and coordinated approaches strengthen drug controls on land and sea borders and in airports, and, at the same time, help countries to cope with the vast increase in drug use and HIV/AIDS infection. Unfortunately, outside the NIS region there is no coherent and efficient regional drug action plan. The Balkans would greatly benefit from such a plan, if it were available.

In the Western Balkans, the EU's Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation programme (CARDS), which allocates substantial sums in the area of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), has not focused tackling specific problems such as drug trafficking, trafficking in human beings or terrorism.[24] It addresses JHA issues horizontally, aiming to enhance the capacities of law-enforcement or judicial institutions.

The EU Drug Strategy for 2005-2012 has a dual objective: to protect public health, by preventing and reducing drug use, which is a major health and social risk; and to offer a high level of security, by taking action to combat drug production, cross-border trafficking and the diversion of precursors, as well as intensifying action to prevent drug-related crime. Amongst other measures, this

is done by enhancing cooperation between police, customs and judicial authorities in preventing and combating drug trafficking.[25] The integrated, multi-disciplinary and balanced approach of combining 'demand and supply' reduction is the basis of the EU's strategy. The Balkan countries need a regional approach specifically designed to tackle the drug phenomenon.

2.1.2 Priorities

Drug policies should focus on cooperation on both the strategic and crime-prevention levels, enhancing operational activities in the field of drugs, cross-border trafficking and criminal networks engaged in these activities and other related serious crimes. Many instruments and frameworks have been established to combat the drug-crime phenomenon: Europol, Eurojust, the Financial Intelligence Unit, Joint Investigation Teams, the European Arrest Warrant, and the confiscation of assets measures. The priorities should be as follows:

- The confiscation of assets and focusing on the link between drug trafficking and terrorism;
- Preventing and punishing the import and export of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances;
- Enhancing cooperation in law enforcement, criminal investigation and forensic science;
- Intensifying law-enforcement efforts directed at non-EU countries, especially producer countries and regions along trafficking routes;
- Special efforts in candidate and potential candidate countries to work with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Europol and Eurojust.

The fight against drug trafficking needs to be addressed in a trans-national and trans-regional context. It is vital to monitor the drug-crime phenomenon on a constant basis and to conduct regular operational analyses, to allow for rapid and effective adaptation of policies and programmes in light of developments. Adapting policies to changing circumstances – such as changes in the drugs, routes, markets or criminal networks – is vital.

2.2 The proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and its destabilising impact

The accumulation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) continue to threaten international security and human safety as well as socio-economic development. The availability, accumulation and trafficking of massive quantities of conventional arms are a very dangerous phenomenon. The geopolitical location of the Western Balkans is problematic, as it is close to several countries responsible for the proliferation of small arms, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

These days, arms flow particularly from Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, where stocks of weapons are sold cheaply. Today's conflicts involve not only governments, but also terrorists, rebels, militias, tribes, rebels, clans, tribes,

ethnic groups, religious groups, criminals and mercenaries. These players emerge from weak governments and divided societies; and use small arms. The illicit proliferation of arms and ammunition threatens the stability of conflict-prone regions and increases civil violence, as evidenced by the Albanian arms flow to Kosovo in the mid-1990s, which was a result of the looting of police and army arsenals in Albania. This was a clear example of how the availability of arms has a destabilising effect, as this influx of weapons stimulated the Kosovo conflict. Furthermore, the presence of small arms and light weapons in post-conflict areas often prevents lasting peace and reconstruction as the weapons further destabilise an already unstable situation.[26]

Indeed, when the government of Albania collapsed in the onset of the political crisis in 1997, ordinary people raided the country's arms depots, releasing 500,000 to 600,000 weapons. The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) estimates that 200,000 looted weapons were acquired for the interests of "Greater Albania" in both Macedonia and Kosovo; the rest were acquired by mafia groups for illegal gun trafficking or resulted in a general arming and criminalisation of society.[27]

Prior to and during the Yugoslav wars, Albanian organised crime groups bought light weapons in Switzerland – where they sold drugs – for use in the insurrection against the Serbs.[28] But after the influx of SALW in the mid-1990s from Albania, the arms traffic from Switzerland was no longer necessary. The overflow of arms also allowed a new collaboration between the Albanian criminal clans from Kosovo and the Italian Mafia group, Sacra Corona Unita from Puglia, to whom they sold the arms, as the KLA wanted more modern and sophisticated arms to fight the Serbs instead of old Albanian weapons. When the wars ended, the trade changed: the Albanians concentrated on drug trafficking, selling drugs in exchange for arms from the Italian mafias.

This is an example of the mutability and flexibility of organised crime. Clearly any strategy for fighting against it needs to be able to keep up to date with these changes and quickly adapt in order to fight them efficiently.

In post-conflict areas, paramilitary formations often switch to organised crime, as happened, for example, in the former Yugoslavia. This is helped by a chaotic environment, the absence of the rule of law, and the proliferation and uncontrolled spread of SALW. Indeed, after the Kosovo conflict, different Albanian brigades linked to the KLA, either in southern Serbia or in FYROM, managed to retain much of their arms and ammunition stockpiles left over from the Kosovo campaign. Such weapons are not only in the hands of organised crime groups and political formations. Many ordinary people in Kosovo also have arms in their homes, clearly increasing the risk of future violence. Although there have been efforts to collect and destroy SALW and strengthen export controls, their accumulation and misuse remain a major destabilising factor in the region.

The EU is striving to combat the problems caused by the uncontrolled spread of SALW, thus contributing to the prevention of future conflicts.[29] There are

EU projects for the destruction of SALW in both Albania and in Serbia and Montenegro. However, the average EU budget to deal with small arms and light weapons is €2-3 million – a very small sum in comparison to the priority given to WMD projects. A joint action plan is needed to tackle the small-arms problem comparable to that for anti-personal mines, and a small-arms strategy is vital to reduce the flow and circulation of arms. Furthermore, weapons need to be better controlled, registered and kept in safe storage. Finally, the EU's SALW strategies are limited in the Balkans, as they do not benefit from a framework such as that of the Cotounou Agreements, which relate only to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

2.3 Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, biological or chemical) and the risk of WMD being trafficked through, or to, non-state entities – be they terrorists or organised crime gangs – is one of the major dangers in today's world. This is why enormous efforts have been made to counter this by both the United Nations, in the framework of the UN Security Council resolution 1540, and the EU, through pilot projects and making a WMD clause compulsory in all agreements with third countries.

There has not been much trafficking of WMD in the Balkans, although there have been some cases and risks noted, mainly in Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. In the context of controlling WMD, the EU programmes in the Balkans set out to strengthen border security and management, enhance the effectiveness of export-control enforcement and facilitate cross border cooperation A number of countries in the Western Balkans lacked a legal basis for controlling the export of dual-use items.[30] However progress is being made on this. In Serbia, for example, a law governing the foreign trade in military equipment and the dual use of goods has been in force since March 31st 2005.

In the framework of the EU's PHARE/TACIS programme, many measures have been implemented to combat illicit trafficking and the criminal use of nuclear and radioactive material (NRM). These include the provision of updated systems of detection, categorisation and identification, and improvements in the analytical capabilities of local institutions and the training of customs officers.

A model action plan describing the essential measures to be taken in relation to the seizure of nuclear or radioactive material has been created. It provides a generic approach for handling detection, on-site intervention, categorisation, forensic analysis, source attribution and prevention. To coordinate the actions of different authorities after a seizure, there is a handbook for the national 'Response to Illicit Trafficking of Nuclear Material' (RITNUM), adapted to the country-specific conditions and combined with a short course. This handbook was first developed in Ukraine and then implemented in several other countries, including Bulgaria and Romania.

Bio-security is of the utmost importance. Combating the threat of nuclear or radiological material getting into the hands of organised criminal or terrorist

groups is obviously crucial. However, these materials are costly, require certain expertise and technical installations, and are more difficult to transport. Biological arms, on the other hand, are low cost, less controlled, and could have very deadly and rapid effects. It is therefore important to reinforce the security of biological laboratories and combat, with a specific approach, the trafficking of biological material.

III. Weaknesses of EU strategies, policies and programmes on organised crime

The struggle against organised crime suffers primarily from the fact that the EU priority has been global terrorism. Furthermore, EU mechanisms in the Western Balkans are designed to address various objectives and the fight against organised crime originating from – or linked to – the Western Balkans is only one of them and is not always given the highest priority. The assistance offered in the framework of the CARDS programme focuses largely on capacity- and institution-building. There is also a real deficit in coordination amongst the various players and perhaps still insufficient financial aid to combat these vast and pervasive international criminal networks operating on our doorstep. There is a clear determination to fight organised crime, but the measures are diluted in uncoordinated efforts.

3.1 The fight against organised crime

The EU has undertaken a number of key technical assistance activities in order to fight trans-national organised crime. EU relations with the countries of the Western Balkans are set in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), within which the Union provides assistance in institution-strengthening and capacity-building. The CARDS programmes function on both national and regional levels, reforming legislation and encouraging cooperation between law-enforcement and judicial authorities. Police-assistance missions such as PAMECA or customs and fiscal assistance such as CAFAO in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro and FYROM, tackle organised crime. There are smaller projects on border crime and corruption.

Workshops on the fight against organised crime will be organised in each country by the Technical Assistance Information Exchange (TAIEX) programme, covering a range of topics such as financial crime, corruption, trafficking and anti-money laundering measures. The priorities in this area are projects to help upgrade the operational means available to the police (intelligence-led policing, investigative capacity); enhancing regional police cooperation in combating serious crime; border management (the training of customs officers, provision of information systems, enhanced cooperation in clamping down on smuggling and the trafficking of drugs, weapons or human beings); and judicial reform (the computerisation of courts, and training of judges and prosecutors in areas such as organised crime).

In addition, there are the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) mechanisms. The Union has established Special Representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in FYROM. These representatives can influence local bodies and operations in the field of organised crime. However, the EU Special Representative/High Representative in BiH has played a more significant role in this fight. Two police missions have been deployed in this framework in FYROM and BiH, plus a military operation (EUFOR) conducted in BiH comprising 7,000 soldiers. They have access to information about organised crime, but have neither sufficient reporting mechanisms nor sufficient exchange with other EU instruments fighting organised crime.

The EU's political strategies and programmes to fight organised crime in the Balkans, through intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation, are significant but lack sufficient operational mechanisms, resulting in a lack of implementation of these policies in the field. However, progress is crucial on countering the security threats posed by organised crime in the Balkan countries to the EU, including the outbreak of new wars in the region, the high death toll as a result of heroin consumption, WMD, and the trafficking of arms and women.

The EU's Police Chief's Task Force, Liaison Officers and Joint Investigation Teams have had little involvement to date in the fight against organised crime in the region. Moreover, Europol and Eurojust do not have the legal base necessary to cooperate fully in the Western Balkan countries. Therefore, for the next couple of years, it will be more effective – and certainly more realistic – for the EU to support existing regional police cooperation, particularly SECI (the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative Centre for fighting trans-border crime), while progressively developing Europol as a partner for the Western Balkan region. The three main instruments for fighting organised crime in the region are SPOC (the Stability Pact's Initiative to Fight Organised Crime), created in Sofia on 5 October 2000; SPAI (the Stability Pact's Anti Corruption Initiative); and, last but not least, SECI (Southern European Cooperative Initiative), which is based in Bucharest and serves as a focal point for coordinating all national activities.

On the one hand, the EU's objective is to upgrade national capacities and intra-regional cooperation, and to support the "hot pursuit" and arrest of criminals who cross country borders. On the other hand, the EU's goal is to bring regional mechanisms into compliance with Union standards, such as those on protection of personal data and compatibility with Europol. The EU also needs to support the creation and strengthening of national structures in the Balkans to fight organised crime with which Europol can cooperate in the future. The Serbian Ministry of the Interior established one such structure in 2001 – an anti-organised crime directorate.

Another important aim in tackling organised crime is to rid society of a culture of corruption. Endemic corruption on all levels makes it easier for organised crime groups to protect their interests and prosper. Customs officials are particularly susceptible to corrupt behaviour because they have direct discretionary access to tangible wealth, while being very poorly paid. The

criminals' intermediaries bribe customs officers to turn a blind eye to their illicit trafficking. There are several reasons for this corrupt behaviour in the Balkans besides low salaries: ineffective penal policies, poor human resources management systems, the almost unchecked power of customs officials, and rigid trade policies and commercial protectionism in parallel with growth in the volume of trade.[31]

3.2 The EU approach: uncoordinated and compartmentalised

The major weakness of the Union's fight against crime is that it is disorganised. There is a lack of effective communication between the EU missions. In addition to the shortfalls in the domestic capacity to fight organised crime in each of the Balkan countries, the EU instruments are not used to their full potential either individually or in a coordinated and concerted manner.

The EU has a number of tools available in the region, such as the different police and customs missions managed either by the European Commission or the Council. Member States also have various agencies in place, including different types of liaison officers – immigration/customs/police. However, these different mechanisms, developed to implement different policies, operate under different chains of command. There is limited coordination at all levels: on the ground in the region, between EU capitals, between EU institutions and EU capitals, and within the EU institutions in Brussels. Improved coordination is needed in EU institutions between external action and Justice and Home Affairs, between the different players working on the same sectors of organised crime, and between the sectors and the regions. The current lack of coordination not only limits the effectiveness of the Union's approach, but also projects a sense of confusion and lack of coherence to the countries of the region and other international players.[32] Concrete efforts therefore need to be made to ensure systematic communication between all the key players to achieve their common goal of dismantling organised crime networks.

The EU's approach to fighting organised crime in the Western Balkans also lacks oversight. There is no continuous and clear overarching Union strategy. The EU has made important efforts to help the Balkan countries fight organised crime, both within the context of the SAP and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). However, the CARDS programme is far too general: assistance should be given, for instance, to strengthening the police in Bosnia; to making the judiciary in Croatia more effective; and to transforming the customs services in Albania. However, despite progress in this area, serious weaknesses remain in the Balkan countries' institutional capacity to fight organised crime. Despite immense efforts to reform legislation in Balkan countries to create a more efficient legal framework, there is a lack of implementation of the new legislation, either because of a lack of resources or lack of understanding.

3.3 Recommendations for tackling organised crime

The battle against organised crime in south-east Europe gives "the impression of being driven by politics and policy choices, it is devoid of the conceptualisation of the deeper causes of crime".[33] The policies do not deal sufficiently with one of the main causes of crime – poverty – and are neither adapted nor modulated to the way such crime develops; nor are they aimed at the consequences of organised crime.

To be efficient, these three aspects need to be closely analysed and the programmes and assistance adapted accordingly. Furthermore, a prospective analysis needs to be carried out to ensure that policies are not solely reactive but are also are more accurately targeted. Thus in Europe today, if we are to understand and therefore control organised crime, we must consider its multi-dimensional nature as a highly mutable and sophisticated, social, cultural, political, economical and trans-national phenomenon.

Effective anticipation of criminal developments requires an effective knowledge base and good use of warning indicators and intelligence that is both timely and actionable. However, past strategies employed to counter organised crime have been mainly reactive. It is important to anticipate the following dynamics of organised crime:

- The level and scope of organised crime within the countries concerned;
- The level of organised crime crossing borders;
- The political-criminal nexus;
- Changes in the pattern of criminal activities (new illicit market niches, rise and fall of criminal organisations);
- Organised crime strategies to infiltrate government and businesses.

Other measures which need to be taken include:

- Increased prioritisation of the threat posed by organised crime, with increased budgetary and human resources;
- A clear oversight of objectives and the level of progress in reaching them;
- The exchange and more effective mobilisation of crucial criminal information collected by national and regional instruments;
- Increased coordination between the different players, both within the European institutions, in the region and between different regions;
- Targeted approaches for the main categories of illicit trade (trafficking in human beings, in drugs and in arms);
- The redeployment of more EU and Member States personnel already present in the Western Balkans to work on investigating criminal structures and activities, the exchange of criminal information and the development of capacities in targeting specific areas of organised crime.

This first basic stage of EU assistance in strengthening local investigative, prosecutorial and judicial capacities needs to continue. However, it is now time to start taking, in parallel, a more courageous and specialised approach to combating organised crime by providing the financial and human means for

this strategy, by training and equipping law-enforcement agencies adequately, and by targeting each type of serious criminal activity (with expert investigation, detection and analysis). What are often lacking are effective mechanisms and resources to move from strategy to implementation.

The EU regional programme in the Balkans adds value to bilateral approaches, which would otherwise result in uneven responses. However, for optimum effect, there should be a greater variety of general and specific programmes. For example, specific systems such as the RITNUM handbook on the illicit trafficking of nuclear material has proven to be very useful. In addition, the EU fight against organised crime is challenged by the eternal dichotomy between the limits of EU institutional rules and procedures, and political substance.

Conclusion

The Western Balkan countries are still suffering from the legacy of the Yugoslav conflicts and the region remains an unstable post-conflict zone. Their capacity to recover and rebuild is being hampered by unresolved status issues, the stagnating economy and political uncertainty, all of which are plagued by organised crime. The criminalisation of Balkan societies has adverse implications for the functioning of the economy, and the integrity and legitimacy of the State. Thus, the priority is to resolve the status of Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, FYROM and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which is essential to be able to fight organised crime. Furthermore, an effective public awareness campaign on the negative effects of organised crime may lead to a groundswell of public pressure on governments to combat the very thing that is threatening a peaceful future.

Balkan stability is essential for European security. Since the regime changes in Croatia and Serbia, a clearer will to fight organised crime has been demonstrated. The prospect of becoming members of the EU in the future is the driving force behind efforts to rid them of their grey uncontrolled zones and practices.

The EU's focus in combating organised crime and its activities has been mainly through Justice and Home Affairs (i.e. through the police, justice and customs). However, the nature of trans-national organised crime in the Western Balkans implies that in order to combat this major threat to public health, security and development efficiently, the European strategy needs to be multi-disciplinary and trans-pillar. There is equally a need for a pro-active integrated approach, combined with specific expertise to fight each aspect of organised criminal activities to attain optimum efficiency. Different officials need to be trained in each specific field (whether the trafficking of human beings, drugs, SALW or WMD) so that they can investigate, detect and analyse illicit goods, thereby erecting effective barriers to these detrimental criminal activities.

The trafficking of people and illicit goods must be combated on a regional level, by enhancing the sharing of information and cooperation between

law-enforcement officials. However, action on the regional level is not sufficient. Trafficking is a truly global phenomenon and, therefore, in order to obtain optimum effect there needs to be cooperation at every stage of the chain: from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Russia, Caucasus, Turkey, the Balkans and into the EU. Within the framework of the neighbourhood policy, increased coordination is needed between EU bodies to combat different types of trafficking from the Caucasus to the Union.

The underlying cause of the persistent growth in organised crime lies in the high rates of unemployment and stagnant legitimate economies in the region. In addition to advancing the Balkan countries' integration into the Union, EU policies need to foster economic development by supporting local government, business and societal structures. By so doing, legitimate economic prospects and opportunities can curtail the magnetic pull of criminal activities.

Organised crime is one of the major obstacles in the reconstruction of post-war Balkan societies, and the EU has shown good will and determination in fighting it. However, there is a need for effective, concerted efforts to enable those working on the ground to obtain tangible results with more targeted measures.

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Endnotes

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