THE BALKANS: THREATS TO PEACE AND STABILITY

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 17, 2017

Serial No. 115–47

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/ or http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

25–456PDF WASHINGTON : 2017

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Publishing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
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THE BALKANS: THREATS TO PEACE AND STABILITY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 17, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:00 p.m., in room 2200 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dana Rohrabacher (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I call to order this hearing of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats. Today's topic is, The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability.

After the ranking member and I each take our 5 minutes to make opening remarks, each member present will have the opportunity to make an opening statement for themselves. We will, then, proceed with our first of two panels.

Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record.

Building peaceful, democratic, and stable states in the Balkans has been an issue that has been close to me for many years. As I know, it has also been close to several of our friends here. Especially I hope that the ranking member might stop in, Mr. Engel, who has also been involved in the Balkans for such a long time.

I am pleased to be holding this hearing and thankful that we have an official from the State Department to take part in the hearing. As we are now at the start of a new Congress and the start of a new administration, this is an ideal time for us to reflect on the situation in the region and to recommit ourselves to playing a positive role in that part of the world.

While the Western Balkan nations have achieved some major steps forward over these last two decades, including the independence of Kosovo, much remains to be done. Issues of governance, political development, corruption, judicial independence, media freedom, economic security, xenophobia, and reconciliation between democratic players in that region.

Today witnesses will get into specific details of the challenges and opportunities that exist in the region. But several points to appear very clear to me.

First, while European integration provides a framework or goal for the Balkan nations, that has proven to be an insufficient motive to inspire or compel political decisionmakers in the Balkans to do the right thing in far too many cases. Leadership from the United

States remains absolutely essential. Obviously, Brussels can't hack it on their own.

Second, we should remain committed to our shared values and hold the governments of the region accountable to the standards they profess. Perhaps we have been too tolerant of democratic backsliding and authoritarian politicians dressed up as democrats.

Third, at a time when foreign assistance and development aid accounts are set for reduction, they will be reduced, we need to rethink our points of influence and how we engage in that region. As an example, I will remind the panel that I have put forward a plan for a mutual land swap or, what would be more likely, a border change between Serbia and Kosovo as part of a process of normalizing relations.

If the Serb community in northern Kosovo wishes to be governed by Belgrade, they have every right and we should acknowledge it. This is the same principle that led us to support Albanian Kosovars in their desire for self-determination. Border adjustments are not just a magic bullet, but forcing populations to live in outdated borders or borders that are imposed upon them is a poor use of limited diplomatic resources.

To help the subcommittee work through current issues and find creative solutions, we have an excellent panel of experts today. But, first, we will be hearing testimony from the State Department, and certain activities of the State Department and USAID in the region have been subject to some controversy with allegations of impropriety being lodged, especially those allegations that are actually presented by several United States Senators. We look forward to the answers on those topics that have been brought up.

So, Ranking Member Meeks, I will yield to you for your opening statement, and anyone else after that who would like to have a short opening statement.

Mr. Meeks?

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing to provide us with a timely update on the Western Balkans region. With the EU understandably consumed by domestic politics, we must not forget the importance and delicate state of progress in the Balkans. It is an opportunity to examine the tough issues and the potential for advancement for a region that is struggling to move beyond its history, outside influence, and difficult social and economic factors.

I am especially pleased to have Mr. Yee from the administration with us today. As I have stressed throughout my tenure on the Foreign Affairs Committee, the work that our diplomats do in the field to advance American interests under difficult circumstances is undervalued. And I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your service and let you know that there is bipartisan concern. Thank you collectively for what you have done, but there is bipartisan concern about the administration's planned budget cuts to the State Department.

I am not saying because I am worried about your job, Mr. Yee. We think your job is okay. But I am saying this today because I am worried about America's place in the world and what a rudderless Balkan region would mean.

The administration has not given our diplomats the tools or the human resources to do the daily diplomatic work in the Balkans. Without the appointees needed to direct the ship, the aforementioned vacuum will grow.

Into this space comes the Kremlin which exploits the troubles on the ground. Young political actors and fragile institutions are pressured by corruption, a dismayed population, and other temptation. In some cases, it is the Slavic culture ties which the Kremlin plays. Economically speaking, easy money talks. Corrupt Russian money has brought up critical infrastructure, flooded the airways with this information, and hung a cloud over democracy and transparency. "We are all corrupt," the Kremlin narrative goes, and the West is made out not to be any different.

History has proven that democracy requires hard work, attention, and investment from leadership. In Ukraine, for example, groundwork has been laid for reform, but with President Poroshenko at the top, who is reluctant to divest from his business, the work is easily undermined.

Unfortunately for us, as of late, here in the United States we have a leader who attacks the press, threatens our independent judicial system, which undermines our democracies, demands loyalty to him over country, and who refuses to have transparency with reference to his economics. It is immensely more difficult to encourage reforms when our very institutions are threatened here in the United States.

Today European politicians are growing skeptical toward enlargement. America, one can argue, is turning inwards. And with respect to the Balkans and this autopilot approach, it is damaging. It is up to Congress to support healthy democratic, economic, and peaceful progress on the ground.

The United States has invested billions of dollars and many lives in order to ensure peace and prosperity in the region. I hope that in today's hearing we can examine the broader U.S. interest in the region, integration into western institutions. Croatia, and soon Montenegro, provide proof that the European Peace Project is alive and still very attractive in the region. Macedonia, we learned of encouraging news, as a government may soon be formed that will work to protect the rights of all minorities.

Nevertheless, there are pockets of trouble on a microscale that are bubbling to the surface. Government boycotts in Albania, Kremlin-supported coup and assassination attempts in Montenegro, and worries by ethnic groups are just a few of the current events that threaten to derail peace in the region.

Governments there, as well as important civil society actors and members of the press, should know that we are concerned with the state of affairs after this hearing. We look forward to following up on what is discussed at this hearing.

The Kremlin's work to destabilize the situation is not going unnoticed, but I fear if we willfully ignore or are welcomed by some, there will be dangerous consequences for the region as well as the United States of America.

So, I look forward to hearing and having a constructive discussion where we can explore what Congress can offer and do to help, because the Balkans are very important in the global world order

and to the United States of America. We cannot—we cannot—take our eyes off the prize of working with and in the Balkans.

And I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Congressman Cicilline?

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member Meeks, for holding this hearing today. And thank you to our witnesses for being with us today.

I just returned this past week from a very useful and informative Judiciary Committee trip to the Balkans where we visited Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia, and Kosovo. What really struck me at the time was the central importance to each of these countries that the U.S. continue to support their democracies and their deep gratitude for America's strong presence in the region, and the danger of any retreat from our participation or engagement in the region, as Congressman Meeks just outlined.

But there remain serious challenges to good governance, to judicial reform, to serious economic development, and to efforts to ream out corruption. And I was reminded during the trip of the famous words of Winston Churchill who once said, "The Balkans produce more history than they can consume."

But what was very clear to me was that, after many years of war and turmoil and change, the Balkans have found a fragile peace. And I strongly believe it is in the best national security interest of the United States to continue to support reform, development, reconciliation, and maintaining the peace in the Balkans, and that this is not a time for us to retreat in any way, but to continue to understand the importance of this region, the importance of our partnership with our allies in this region, and the danger of creating space for others with less virtuous objectives.

And so, I very much look forward to our hearing today, and I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

Our first witness is Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Hoyt Yee. He was appointed to his current post in the Bureau of Europe and Eurasia in September 2013. He is a career Foreign Service Officer and previously stationed in Montenegro, Greece, and, most recently, as the Deputy Chief of mission in Croatia.

In the past, he served as Director for European Affairs on the National Security Council, and before that, he worked at NATO headquarters as Deputy Director of the private office to the Secretary General.

So, Mr. Secretary, if you could give us 5 minutes' worth of your thoughts and, then, we will give you some questions in return.

STATEMENT OF MR. HOYT BRIAN YEE, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Meeks, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the situation in the Western Balkans. Over the years, Congress, and in particular this subcommittee, have played an important role in working with the countries of the region and in shaping an environment that advances U.S. interests, and we welcome very much this partnership.

Mr. Chairman, although the Balkans no longer dominate international headlines as they once did, the region still faces enormous challenges that, left unaddressed, pose a threat to U.S. interests in Europe. Ethnic tensions throughout the Balkans are once again on the rise.

The recent violence in Macedonia underscores the severity of its political problems. As progress in the Serbia-Kosovo dialog stalls, stability in the Balkans will remain vulnerable. And without needed structural reform, Bosnia is at risk of becoming a failed state.

Across the region, nationalism is growing and domestic political rhetoric is increasingly divisive. From teargas in Kosovo's Parliament to challenges from the Republic Srpska, to the authority of Bosnia's Constitutional Court, nationalist politicians are openly testing democratic norms and institutions.

Compounding the trouble, lackluster economic growth has failed to deliver the standards to which people in the Western Balkans have aspired. In no small part, this is due to significant public corruption and endemic weaknesses in the rule of law. Even more alarming, a small number of those who do not or cannot leave are increasingly vulnerable to the twisted message of violent extremism, ISIS and other violent groups are finding success in recruiting fighters and supporters from the Balkans.

Finally, Russia is increasingly working to undermine progress in the Balkans. From a bold attempt to undermine the government in Podgorica, to more subtle support for secessionist rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia seeks to thwart advancement toward NATO and EU membership wherever it can.

Since the end of the wars in the 1990s, we and our European allies have incentivized the necessary political and economic reforms and reconciliation with neighbors by linking these actions to eventual membership in the European Union and NATO. Those linkages have been powerful and effective, but there is reason to be concerned that they are losing their drawing power, as the prospects for further expansion appear to dim.

It is clear that we cannot take for granted stability and democracy in the Balkans. The risk of renewed conflict is on the rise and the forces against democracy are growing. Left unattended, the problems of the region will fester and generate conflicts that will almost inevitably draw us in. However, with active engagement, we can keep this region on the Euro-Atlantic path and manage the challenges without a disproportionate expenditure of resources.

Recent history has repeatedly shown us there is no substitute for active U.S. leadership in the Balkans and strong partnership with the European Union. Our work in the Balkans helps make Americans safer as the countries of the region have partnered with us more effectively to fight terrorism and extremism and are becoming net contributors to international peace and stability operations rather than the subjects of them.

On April 21, the United States ratified the accession protocol for Montenegro to join NATO. Montenegro's entry into NATO on June 5th will be the result of years of reforms completed with assistance from the United States and other partners. Montenegro's experience provides a clear example that structural reform strengthens a country's economy and democracy, allowing it to become a better

and stronger security partner and, ultimately, a force for regional stability.

When it comes to tracking and disrupting terrorist activity, we continue to have strong, willing partners throughout the Balkans, and they need our support. Excellent regional cooperation with Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo broke up an attempted terrorist attack against an Albania-Israel football match in Shkoder last November.

These countries in the Balkans can help us, however, only if they are politically stable and the region is peaceful. We continue to work toward that end, but more needs to be done.

We have also developed a multifaceted approach to push back against Russian malign influence. Our focus on anti-corruption and rule-of-law reforms in the region forms the backbone of our strategy.

Increased government transparency and accountability counters Russia's efforts to exploit corrupt practices to make countries more vulnerable to Russian pressure. We are supporting independent media and investigative journalists through small grants and training, and we are sending American experts to the region to speak with opinion leaders.

In order to reduce vulnerabilities, we are promoting energy security, including through diversification. We are also using our military assistance programs to counteract Russian malign influence by fortifying the human capital of militaries of the region and presenting options that allow countries to move away from overdependence on Russian military equipment.

Mr. Chairman, looking ahead, we have much work to do, but also much to build on. I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify before this committee. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Yee follows:]

Testimony by Deputy Assistant Secretary Hoyt Yee
U.S. Department of State
before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
May 17, 2017

Intro

Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss the current situation in the Western Balkans. I plan to address both the significant outstanding challenges to peace and security in the region as well as our achievements. Over the years, Congress and this Subcommittee have played an important role in working with the countries of the region and shaping an environment that advances U.S. interests. We welcome this partnership.

Challenges

Mr. Chairman, although the Balkans no longer dominate international headlines as they once did, the region still faces enormous challenges that, left unaddressed, pose a threat to U.S. interests in Europe. Ethnic tensions throughout the Balkans are once again on the rise. The recent violence in Macedonia underscores the severity of its political problems. As progress in the Serbia-Kosovo Dialogue stalls, stability in the Balkans will remain vulnerable.. And without needed structural reform, Bosnia is at risk of becoming a failed state. A lack of opportunity, due to corruption and disenfranchisement, drives young people to seek better economic opportunities abroad; in the past two years alone, over 80,000 people have left Bosnia to seek opportunities elsewhere. In an effort to gain popular support without tackling the real challenges facing their country, Bosnian politicians of all ethnicities revert to nationalistic rhetoric, testing the boundaries of the Dayton Peace Accords. The political dysfunction is so great, in fact, that Bosnia was unable to complete the simple IMF prior actions necessary to receive a tranche of money worth €75 million.

As Senator McCain recently wrote, "We ignore this region at our own peril."

Across the region, nationalism is growing, and domestic political rhetoric is increasingly divisive. From tear gas in Kosovo's Parliament to Milorad Dodik's challenge to the authority of Bosnia's Constitutional Court, nationalist politicians are increasingly open in their testing of democratic norms and institutions.

Compounding the trouble, **lackluster economic growth** has failed to deliver the living standards to which people in the Western Balkans have aspired. In no small part, this is due to significant

public corruption and endemic weaknesses in the rule of law. Slow growth and massive youth unemployment, in turn, are destroying young people's faith in the future of their countries and leading them to emigrate elsewhere.

Even more alarming, a small number of those who do not or cannot leave are increasingly vulnerable to the twisted message of **violent extremism**. ISIS and other violent groups are finding success in recruiting fighters and supporters from the Balkans, often using slick recruiting efforts in local languages and on social media. As converts to extremism return home from the battlefield or are radicalized in place, Balkan governments worry that they will see a surge in violence, intolerance, and extremism in the region – and perhaps see it exported north and west.

Finally, **Russia** is increasingly working to undermine progress in the Balkans. From a bold attempt to undermine the government in Podgorica, to more subtle support for secessionist rhetoric in Bosnia and opposition to Kosovo's integration into the family of nations, Russia seeks to thwart advancement towards NATO and EU membership wherever it can. Moscow uses propaganda and fake news to sow distrust and confusion and undermine the position of pro-Western political leaders. Russia's dominance of the natural gas market in the Balkans leaves the region vulnerable to exploitation. Without alternate energy sources and a more diversified energy infrastructure, Russia will continue to hold this powerful lever.

Since the end of the wars in the 1990s, we and our European allies have incentivized the necessary political and economic reforms and reconciliation with neighbors by linking these actions to eventual membership in the European Union and NATO. Those linkages have been powerful and effective, but there is reason to be concerned that they are losing their drawing power as the prospects for further expansion appear to dim.

It is clear that we cannot take for granted stability and democracy in the Balkans. The risk of renewed conflict is on the rise and the forces against democracy are growing. Left unattended, the problems of the region will fester and generate conflicts that will almost inevitably draw us in. However, with active engagement, we can keep this region on the Euro-Atlantic path and manage the challenges without a disproportionate expenditure of resources.

Progress

Recent history has repeatedly shown us that there is no substitute for active U.S. leadership in the Balkans and strong partnership with the European Union. In the immediate aftermath of the wars of the 1990s, our investment enabled the new states of the Western Balkans to establish themselves as peaceful democratic states committed to a European future. This transition helped make Americans safer as the countries of the region, with a shared commitment to European integration, have partnered with us more effectively to fight terrorism and extremism, and to be net contributors to international peace and stability operations rather than subjects of them.

On April 21, the United States ratified the accession protocol for **Montenegro** to join NATO. Montenegro's entry into NATO will be the result of years of reforms, completed with assistance from the United States. Secretary Tillerson stated that Montenegro's entry into NATO is "strongly in the interests of the United States," and the White House included actions to support Montenegro's accession to NATO as one of the notable accomplishments of President Trump's first 100 days. Montenegro's experience provides a clear example that structural reform strengthens a country's economy and democracy, allowing it to become a better and stronger security partner and ultimately a force for regional stability. Its accession will demonstrate that the door to NATO remains open for those countries that desire membership and can meet the standards of the world's premier alliance.

Continuing on the subject of security, when it comes to tracking and disrupting **terrorist** activity, we continue to have strong, willing partners throughout the Balkans – and they need our support. Excellent regional cooperation with Macedonia, Albania, and Kosovo broke up an attempted terrorist attack against an Albania-Israel football match in Shkoder last November, leading to the arrest of 23 suspects across three countries. Kosovo is improving its capacity to manage and rehabilitate returned foreign terrorist fighters and CT offenders, curb the radicalization of general population inmates, and reduce the risk of extremist recidivism. And it is worth noting that all countries in the Western Balkans have adopted strong anti-terrorism legislation, and all are contributors to the Defeat-ISIS coalition. These countries can only help us if they are politically stable and the region is peaceful. We continue to work towards that end, but more needs to be done.

Additionally, we have developed a multi-faceted approach to push back against the Russian malign influence. Our focus on anti-corruption and rule of law reforms in the region forms the backbone of our strategy. Increased government transparency and accountability counters Russia's efforts to export corrupt practices that make countries more vulnerable to Russian pressure. To combat Russia's wide-spread propaganda machine, we are amplifying our messages, correcting false statements, and engaging decision makers. We are also supporting independent media and investigative journalists through small grants and training, and are sending American experts to the region to speak with opinion leaders. In order to reduce vulnerabilities, we are promoting energy security and diversity projects and policies. Currently, the western Balkans are entirely dependent on Russia for natural gas. By supporting projects such as the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, the Krk Island Liquid Natural Gas terminal, and the Bulgaria-Serbia Interconnector, we will enable Balkan countries to import gas from multiple sources, cutting off a powerful source of Russian leverage.

We are also using our military assistance programs to counteract Russian malign influence by fortifying the human capital of militaries of the region and presenting options that allow countries to move away from over-dependence on Russian military equipment. Through the International Military and Education Training (IMET) program we are equipping the next generation of military leaders in the region with the skills they need not only to succeed, but also

to uphold democratic ideals and withstand outside pressure that might countermand their chain of command. Our military cooperation programs give the militaries of the region the opportunity to break away from their dependence on Russia and use U.S. military equipment, weakening one of the traditional levers of Russian power.

U.S. diplomacy has strongly supported the EU-led **Serbia-Kosovo** Dialogue. The process remains indispensable to regional stability and it is in the national interests of both Serbia and Kosovo to resolve their open issues through normalization of relations that will advance their countries on their respective European paths.

In **Albania,** with our support, the parliament last July passed constitutional amendments on judicial reform intended to dramatically strengthen the rule of law and deal with deeply rooted corruption. As a direct result of these reform efforts, on November 9, the European Commission recommended the opening of EU accession negotiations with Albania, contingent upon the full implementation of key judicial reform laws.

In **Macedonia**, at the invitation of the four largest political parties in the country, the United States, together with the EU, helped forge an agreement to create conditions to hold credible parliamentary elections last December. After a significant delay, the new parliamentary majority elected a Speaker of Parliament. This is an important step towards government formation and we will work with the new Speaker to support democracy and to help Macedonia move forward on its European path. We have called on Macedonian authorities to fully and promptly investigate the attacks on MPs that took place following the Speaker's election and to bring those who are responsible to justice.

In **Bosnia,** redundant, overlapping and competing political institutions and processes are deeply dysfunctional, and we are working with leaders there and with our European partners to encourage much-needed political reforms before the 2018 election. These reforms, when implemented, will create a more stable and functional Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the meantime, we will continue working with partners to address the symptoms of dysfunction, such as rampant corruption, organized crime, and extremism. We will increasingly hold leaders accountable for actions that harm U.S. interests. Our intervention with OFAC sanctions against RS President Dodik sent a clear and effective message that we will not watch idly while politicians endanger the stability of the country and region through ethno-nationalistic secessionist activities that undermine the Dayton Peace Accords.

And finally, in **Croatia**, we continue to work with the government to develop new energy facilities to contribute to energy diversity and security for the Balkans and for Europe more broadly.

Conclusion

While there have been some real successes, the challenges to U.S. interests are serious and growing. The region as a whole is economically weak and politically unstable. Without our and European assistance and our focused attention on necessary reforms, there is a real risk of rising tensions sparking conflict. We can reduce this risk by maintaining our commitment to the Balkans. This means supporting strong anti-corruption programs to strengthen rule of law so that citizens can hold leaders responsible for their actions. It means standing alongside these countries as they fight against terrorism and extremism. We will also need to support governments' efforts to meet the requirements for joining the EU and NATO. Qualifying for membership in these institutions requires extensive structural reforms that create the building blocks for strong and stable societies. Finally, to help these states build resilience against Russia's campaign, we need to continue our work to support energy diversity and security in the Balkans.

Our engagement, working in parallel with our European allies, can help overcome these challenges and create conditions conducive to a strong, stable and prosperous Balkan peninsula. Stability in the Balkans makes the world safer for Americans by creating reliable partners in counter-terrorism and regional security. Prosperity in the Balkans supports American trade and investment and contributes -- albeit modestly -- to job creation back home. There are of course other regions in the world that require our time, attention, and resources. It is in our interests however to make the necessary effort to help the Balkans evolve from a net consumer to a net producer of security and prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you very much. I have a few questions for you and, then, we will let Mr. Meeks proceed as well.

Let me just ask, right now, how would you rate the peace? The basic issues that brought us into the Balkans into the first place with Kosovo and Serbia. Is that a peace that is holding? What are you expecting from that? Are you optimistic or are you pessimistic, or what is your take on that peace?

Mr. YEE. Mr. Chairman, I am optimistic about the prospects for reconciliation and peace, peaceful relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Since 2013, these two countries have been working to normalize their relations through a process facilitated by the European Union with strong U.S. support. And while the progress has been slow and at times painful, we believe it is headed in the right direction. There have been a number of agreements reached by both governments which a few years ago, back before 2013, many of us would have thought to be, if not impossible, extremely difficult.

So, there is agreement now on an agenda of items that were concluded or reached agreement in August 2015. They are now in the process of implementing such agreements as the relations between the Kosovo-Serb population with the rest of the country, and the elimination of parallel institutions. So, there is no longer a Serb set of institutions and a Kosovo Government set of institutions. There will be only one set.

That is not to say that it will be easy to implement these agreements or that the relations will be always smooth. I am certain there will still be more areas of disagreement and a lot of hard work going forward, but the important element that makes me optimistic is that the European Union and the United States Government remain committed to helping these countries, along with other partners, to implement what they have already agreed and to go further to find a long-lasting solution.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, you mentioned about the European Union and the role it plays, but the European Union seems to be, from a distance, seems to be actually not in a situation where its power and influence is actually increasing. It looks like from a distance that it is even disintegrating back home. What is your prediction in terms of the European Union's weakening and how that will impact on the Balkans?

Mr. YEE. Mr. Chairman, I would agree that the incentive of EU membership, the drawing power of the prospect for many countries in the Western Balkan to join the European Union has weakened in recent years, for many of the reasons you mentioned.

However, what is important for both Kosovo and Serbia is that, as they make progress on the reforms that they are being asked to make in order to become more compatible with EU standards, as they make progress, they are given positive feedback from the EU and from us. And it is still the case for Kosovo, in particular, but also for Serbia, that if Kosovo will take the steps necessary, it will gain further—rewards is too strong a word, but reinforcement from the EU that they are on the right path.

The example I would use, Mr. Chairman, is on the border demarcation agreement with Montenegro that Kosovo signed several years ago, which now needs to be ratified by its Assembly. The Eu-

ropean Union has assured Kosovo that, if the Assembly of Kosovo adopts this agreement, ratifies the agreement, the people of Kosovo will, then, get what every other citizen of Europe has, which is visa-free travel. And that is an important step forward. That is still a real possibility.

So far, it has not been the European Union withdrawing that possibility. It has been Kosovo not willing, not able to take that step. As long as these incentives are still valid, still exist, we and the European Union can still help them make these reforms.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So, it would be a positive influence. One of the things that we have heard, and we have this letter from several United States Senators, is that George Soros, who many of us believe holds beliefs that are contrary to what our country, what America is all about, anyway, that he has actually been very involved in the Balkans and, also, very involved in the Balkans in cooperation with various American programs. What programs has we been working with George Soros on? And is that a good thing?

Mr. YEE. Mr. Chairman, first, as a general statement, I want to say that recent stories, accusations about the Open Society Institute and Mr. Soros himself playing an outsized role in the Balkans are greatly exaggerated. And what I want to make clear to this subcommittee, this committee, is that the efforts by the United States Government, by the European Union, are their own. In other words, we are not under the influence of any one person, any one institution, not Mr. Soros or anyone else.

Rather, it is the other way around; that individuals and NGOs and other organizations are supporting what the European Union and the United States Government have been promoting in terms of advancing the types of reforms, whether it is rule of law, fighting corruption, strengthening free media, strengthening an independent judiciary, strengthening civil society. All these efforts are efforts that are led primarily by the international community, by the EU and U.S.

Where we have seen support from Open Society over the years, many years in the Balkans, has been particularly in the area of strengthening civil society, of citizens and citizen-led groups to become contributors to stability, contributors to the reforms that we believe also are important.

So, there has been some cooperation. There has been both from the EU and there has been from the United States some support to Open Society over the years in promotion of certain projects, but at a much smaller level than many people would be led to believe by some of the narrative that is circulating now about this disproportionate influence by Mr. Soros.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So, you are confirming for us that, indeed, there has been cooperation with George Soros' projects, but they have been exaggerated in terms of the influence that Mr. Soros' organizations have had?

Mr. YEE. Yes, that is correct.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Meeks, you may proceed.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

And, Mr. Secretary, again, welcome.

Now let me ask—and I think you touched on this in your remarks—that the Kremlin exploits weaknesses in the region. We

know that when we have ethnic tensions and economic malaise and high unemployment, lack of transparency, lack of a free press, and even a stalled progress toward the EU, that that leaves a lot of space for the Kremlin to act.

So, my question to you is, what do you think are the Kremlin's goal in the region, in your humble opinion?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member, for that question. It would be difficult to predict or to read the mind of Vladimir Putin, but I can say that it seems to us that the efforts most recently in the Balkans by Russia tend to be aimed at increasing the influence of Russia, tend to be to discourage the countries of the Western Balkans from advancing toward the West, Western institutions, whether it's the European Union or NATO. It tends to be as much as possible to create greater dependency of these countries on Russia as opposed to on the West.

So, there does not, in my view, appear to be a kind of grand strategy; rather, an opportunistic approach at how to weaken certain governments that may be favorably disposed toward the West, to help governments become, if possible, more dependent or more friendly toward Russia. And, of course, there is a commercial motivation behind a lot of what Russia does as well. For example, in the energy area, to increase the dependence of Europe, including the Balkans, on Russian sources of hydrocarbons.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you. Well, let me ask the opposite question, too. We have a new administration here in the United States. So, what would you say in our engagement, what is new in the United States engagement? Is it something new? Is it the same as in the past administration? Are there any differences or any changes in our goals? That is why I am delighted to have you here, because we are trying to figure that out. Unless we have individuals like yourself, we don't have anyone to ask. So, I am trying to figure out what are our goals or the administration's goals and whether they have changed? Are they different? If they are different from the prior administration, what are they? And please give me an answer to that.

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Meeks, for that question. U.S. policy in the Balkans, for good reason I believe, has been consistent over the last several administrations, going back at least two decades, where I believe all of the administrations, the United States administrations, have focused on protecting and advancing U.S. interests in the Balkans, a very volatile area, an area where there has been considerable instability.

Our interests are supported by the sorts of efforts that you mentioned, sir, in your opening statement, as well as the chairman, that it is very important for the United States that the region be peaceful, it be secure, it be stable; that elements, sources of instability, whether it is corruption or malign influence from Russia, are dealt with firmly and swiftly. We believe that continues to be the interest of the United States, to continue helping the region advance toward integration with the rest of Europe, to stronger institutions, to closer partnerships with the United States, helping us in areas such as fighting terrorism, dealing effectively with mass migration flows, and, also, reinforcing operations or exercises by NATO.

So, I think the consistency in our policy is based on the consistency of American interests in——

Mr. MEEKS. Because I am, you know, concerned because our President has said different things about NATO—once it was irrelevant; maybe it is relevant again—different things about the EU. And when I have talked to some of our allies, they are confused also. That is why I am concerned.

Our President has said he knows more than any of our State Department, our intelligence folks, or anything of that nature, and that he was going to review and change everything because, even though two or three past administrations, Democratic and Republican, he says they all are wrong; that no one is smarter than he.

And so, I want to be sure that we are staying on the same path and there has not been any indication or any order to change the direction, because I think the region is interested in wanting to be secure as to what the United States is doing because too many places folks don't know. And you are telling us that you are going to stay the course.

All right. I think we are going to do another round, right?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. If you would like.

Mr. Cicilline?

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Secretary Yee.

I want to just follow up on Mr. Meeks' last set of questions. Have you had discussions with Secretary Tillerson directly about the administration's strategy toward the Balkans? And can you share with us, if you have, how our thinking about the Balkans relates to our strategy in the larger region?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, sir, for that question. I have not discussed directly with Secretary Tillerson our strategy in the Balkans. However, I can assure you that much of what I have described in my testimony has been thoroughly circulated and vetted, reviewed by the senior levels of the State Department. And we have, of course, kept Secretary Tillerson informed of our activities, of our plans, and particularly since the Secretary has participated in meetings with NATO allies, that he had to decide whether to sign or not to sign the Protocols of Accession of Montenegro for NATO membership, and also to advise the President, that he is well aware of the importance of the region. I believe as we have more time, we will be able to——

Mr. CICILLINE. Okay. I understand that. I just wanted to be sure that there was—it would be helpful to know if the Secretary of State has actually discussed directly with you kind of the administration's strategy about this area and the region. I take it the answer is no.

The same thing, I just want to follow up on Mr. Rohrabacher's question. The reference to the Soros Foundation was actually made on our trip as well. Of course, it turns out it is a very modest participation, and it is through a competitive grant process.

I want to just ask you whether or not there is any difference in your mind in the work that is supported by the Soros Foundation and the National Endowment for Democracy or the International Republican Institute, those agencies that are doing work on governance, judicial reform, rule of law, strengthening civil society. Is there any difference?

Mr. YEE. Is there any difference? Sorry, sir. Is there any difference between the approach before in the last administration——

Mr. CICILLINE. So, the work that is being done by the Soros Foundation in those areas, aren't those the same kinds of things that are happening with the National Endowment for Democracy and the Republican Institute?

Mr. YEE. Yes. Yes, thank you for that question. Yes, absolutely. The type of work that we support, the U.S. Government supports or the European Union is supporting through implementing partners which are selected according to open and transparent criteria, includes a wide range of organizations, including those that you mentioned, sir.

The Soros Institute, Open Society Institute, actually makes up a very small percentage of the assistance programs that are supported by the U.S. Government and also by the European Union, as far as I know. The types of criteria that the nongovernmental organizations, including the Open Society, need to meet are consistent across the board throughout the Balkans.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Also, would you just tell us a little bit about what your assessment is? There have been proposals of very substantial cuts to foreign assistance to the Balkans and how that might impact the U.S.-Balkan relationships, and what are the both short-term and long-term national security interests of the United States, if the level of cuts that have been proposed by this administration, what the impact would be?

Mr. YEE. Thank you for the question, sir. The State Department is confident that it will be able to carry out the foreign policy priorities set by this administration within the budget blueprint that has been put forward by the administration.

Mr. CICILLINE. With a 37-percent cut in foreign assistance?

Mr. YEE. We will, as always, sir, make the absolute best——

Mr. CICILLINE. Well, I guess the question isn't whether you make the best. Will it have an adverse impact on the work we are doing in the region, the partnerships that we are building with these governments to promote transparency, rule of law, judicial reform, good governance, and to combat the growth of extremism? Because if it is not having any impact on it, we maybe shouldn't spend any money there. I mean, that is clearly not the case. So, are you saying that a proposed reduction of 37 percent will not have an adverse impact on the work we are doing and the long-term national security interest of the United States?

Mr. YEE. Well, sir, I will make two points on that. First, of course, there is an impact. If we spend less or we spend more, there is an impact, because our implementation of programs based on U.S. assistance we do believe has an impact. So, there will be.

But the question on whether——

Mr. CICILLINE. And it will be a negative impact? When there is a nearly 40-percent cut, that would not advance the national security interest of the United States, in your opinion?

Mr. YEE. Well, sir, I would say we would have to see what the impact is going to be, based on our prioritization and our focus that will be a necessity after we receive the budget from the Congress.

Mr. CICILLINE. But you are not suggesting we are going to have greater influence and be a better partner in the region if we spend 40-percent less resources devoted to the work?

Mr. YEE. Well, sir, I would make this point: That U.S. leadership and the impact of American diplomacy is, of course, reliant in great part on our assistance, but it is by no means the only means in which we have an influence on the region. Much of what we are doing today in places like Macedonia and Albania is not dependent on the amount of dollars that we put into our programs. So, again, we, of course, consider these programs to be very helpful.

What is important is that these countries, the populations, the citizens, the parties understand that the U.S. is committed, is willing to demonstrate the leadership necessary in order to help them solve problems, some of which, of course, do require resources, but some require leadership and a willingness to stand up to authoritarian leaders, corrupt leaders, organized crime, narcotics traffickers. Many of these efforts depend on U.S. leadership.

Mr. CICILLINE. And resources?

Mr. YEE. And resources.

Mr. CICILLINE. Okay. But I just want to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by welcoming Ambassador Faber who is here, who I had the pleasure of meeting in Albania, and I want to welcome her to the hearing room.

And I will yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. At the request of Mr. Meeks, we will have a second round.

Let me just ask right off the bat here, what you are describing is, of course, that the United States is deeply involved. When you have a democratic election in countries like this, does that mean that we are trying to superimpose what we believe would be the best government in a democratic process? Are we telling people that their democratic process is important, but here is what you should be doing because that is our opinion? Isn't that what these Soros operations are all about?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that question. We are absolutely not imposing our will or our preferences for one party or one policy.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But we are interfering, are we not?

Mr. YEE. I would not——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You wouldn't say that giving money that goes into helping one party organize this group of people or that group of people, even though it is not on election day, that that is not interfering with them?

Mr. YEE. I would say it is not, sir. It is not going, all the assistance does not go to one party or one group of citizens. It is distributed in a way that is nonpartisan, that is supportive of civil society or other sectors of society.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, if nonpartisan is an idea that one party believes in a set of ideas and it just happens to be that we are helping those ideas, promoting those concepts through whatever nonprofits that we have there, then that isn't considered helping the party that is advocating exactly those things and hurting the party that is advocating in another direction? That seems to be interference.

In Macedonia, we have some pictures up here, and I will find out exactly what they are about. But a majority was elected in Macedonia, and the reports that we have are that our Ambassador actually encouraged a situation in which the Macedonian Government, rather than having it the majority, the party that won the majority take over, we have been encouraging obstructionism and some kind of coalitions to try to make sure that the party that won didn't actually take power. Is that an accurate assessment?

Mr. YEE. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the question. No, it is not an accurate description.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay.

Mr. YEE. Actually, quite the opposite took place. Let me begin with the first part, just to make clear on interference. There is no question that the United States is assertive in defending U.S. interests we believe should be accepted by countries that want to be partners with us. And this is important to mention, that Macedonia wants to join NATO. Macedonia wants to join the European Union, and Albania also wants to join the European Union.

We, as partners, are trying to help them meet the standards necessary to achieve that goal. So, when, for example, we advocate for rule of law, when we advocate for judicial independence, when we advocate for human rights, it is not always popular to the government in power. But we believe, as partners and as potential allies, it is important to make clear and to help them implement reforms that will advance what we believe is a shared interest. But, if the government does not want to support rule of law, does not want to support human rights, it is their sovereign right to do so. It is still our obligation to make clear what our priorities are.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. As long as the government is representative of an election process, they are the real government, whoever.

Mr. YEE. Absolutely.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We believe the majority of people will decide who is the government. And if we are there undermining that, for whatever reason, we want the government to go the opposite direction, we are interfering with people's right to choose their government.

And we have Mr. Meeks who is very concerned about any influence the Russians might have. Okay. They have their national interests; we have our national interests. But perhaps it is better for us. I mean, the result that I see in Macedonia. I used some not totally accurate words when someone asked me about it that got quoted all over the world. But they don't have, and I shouldn't have said a country, they don't have a government. And they don't have a government because there has been people there from the outside, I believe, who are convincing people not to either respect the majority or, No. 2, not to make the compromises that are necessary for democratic government to work.

And if we are down there watching out for our interests, and we have decided that that is tied to social goals that may or may not be what the people there believe in, we are interfering with that system to the point that it is totally broken down. And you don't have—correct me if I am wrong—the government right now, they still do not have a functioning government in Macedonia. Am I wrong?

Mr. YEE. There is an interim government, sir, to answer your question.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. An interim government, right?

Mr. YEE. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay.

Mr. YEE. But, to answer your question, in Macedonia the elections did result in a situation in which no one party had a majority. And therefore, it was incumbent among the parties to form a coalition that would have the majority of seats in Parliament, so the government could be formed.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Was it a majority of the vote or a majority of the people elected in the Parliament?

Mr. YEE. It was proportionally. So, it was essentially the same; that the party——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So, no party won a majority?

Mr. YEE. No party won a majority. However, there was a coalition of members of Parliament that did represent a majority that is supposed to receive under normal European democratic norms a mandate from the President of the country to form a government. And up until today, up until today, the President has been withholding that mandate from the majority. And we have been advocating very strongly, sir, for the President to observe the constitution, observe European democratic norms, along with their European partners.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So, we have been suggesting that the President send that letter and make that recognition? Is that it?

Mr. YEE. That he allow the formation of a government, not one party or the other, but to give the mandate to the majority. This is the basic democratic principle. And today he did that. So, we have advanced beyond the next step out of this crisis.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It seems to me that this has been going on for a while now, and it is only a little country. And we do have, as you say, a lot of influence in that part of the world. Quite frankly, I think that we have screwed it up, and I will leave it with that.

Mr. Meeks?

Mr. MEEKS. I will just say, you know, we always talk about the United States being a leader and try to protect and make sure that there are human rights. So, we are not trying to force a government to do something, but I think that if we see human right violations are wrong, we should challenge the countries on their human rights. When we see there is not freedom of the press, we should challenge the government on whether or not there is freedom of the press. When we see that there is corruption, we should challenge the government on those corrupt issues, and not just look away and say that is the will of the people. Because, clearly, when you have certain leaders, the will of the people is not heard because of the will of the leader and they prevent the people when you suppress freedom of the press, when you suppress humanitarian rights, when you use certain tactics. And I think that that is still a very good role for the United States of America to play.

The fact of the matter is we talk about Russian influence. You know, I want to challenge them. I think that the President of the United States, when he had the Foreign Minister in the White House, as opposed to talking about secrets that we had, he should

have been questioning Russia on human rights, on freedom of the press, on various things. And we shouldn't want to be like them. I think that we set the standard, and we should be the ones that are moving forward in that regard.

A couple of quick questions. You said in your testimony that of secession rhetoric in Bosnia, you said it was being leveraged by the Kremlin. How so?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Meeks, for that question. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly in the Republic Srpska, there is a strong interest and efforts by Russia to maintain and increase its influence with the Government of the Republic Srpska, both through financial means and also political means.

Where we have seen the malign influence in Russia, in particular, has been in encouraging, words of encouragement, what we are aware of in public at least, and we can only imagine in private, encouragement by the Russian Federation of the secessionist plans and movement by certain politicians to break away from Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would be in violation of the Dayton Accords, which we believe would be tremendously destabilizing and would undo many years of hard work in stabilizing Bosnia-Herzegovina and bringing it toward the European Union and, if it decides, to NATO as well.

So, our efforts in the Republic Srpska and Bosnia in general are to strengthen institutions, which will make it more difficult for Russia or other external factors who wish to maintain a malign influence, including by strengthening rule of law, by strengthening the free media, and strengthening the judiciary, independence of the judiciary, so they are not able——

Mr. MEEKS. Let me ask another question. And I don't know, maybe they are doing good things. Maybe they are checking human rights, et cetera. But, back in 2012, the Russians and the Serbian Government established the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center, I think it was in Nis. And that was founded in order to provide humanitarian emergency response in Serbia and other Balkan states.

How do you assess that arrangement and the activities that are going or working with the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in Serbia?

Mr. YEE. Thank you for that question, Mr. Meeks. We believe it is very important to be vigilant in general about all Russian moves in the region, since we have seen recent moves by Russia which are undermining the interests of the countries in the Western Balkans and, also, of the United States, we believe, most recently and most dramatically, in Montenegro, where the Russian Government attempted to undermine the elections and the government itself in Montenegro.

It is very important to be vigilant. I think we have some questions about why Russia is trying to set up a "humanitarian center" in Nis and why it is seeking special status for this facility. We don't believe the intentions are pure. And so, we are advising Serbia to ask the hard questions, to ask Serbia why it needs this facility and why it needs to have a special status, and what it is going to do that it can't already do from Belgrade or from existing facilities.

Mr. MEEKS. Let me make one last question. Well, actually, it is a statement, but you might want to answer it. It is piggybacking off of Mr. Cicilline. Because you spent much of your testimony on incentives driving countries in the region toward better behavior. But now, if we have these severe budget cuts, aren't you going to gut the very incentives which could help countries move forward? Because a lot of the incentives, you know, it takes personnel. Personnel cost money as well as other things. And you won't be able to maintain with a 40-percent cut personnel as well as other areas. And so, therefore, a lot of the incentives that we have been giving out, with a 40-percent budget cut, where even a general said that, if you cut the State Department, we are going to just spend the same money in bullets, but isn't that contrary? Wouldn't we be losing out on those incentives to move forward?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. There is no doubt, as Mr. Cicilline also made clear, that the resources that are used in providing assistance to countries of the Western Balkans is important and has had a positive impact. And whether we spend more or less, there will be an impact.

The point I want to make in terms of the incentives for the region is that the assistance, in terms of the financial assistance in particular, is not the most important driver. The most important drivers are the types of reforms these countries need to make. It is the help, political help especially, these countries need to make these reforms.

So, for example, a lot of the countries in the region actually are led by people who do not want to see the country join the European Union or to move forward, because they are invested in the status quo, invested in systems that allow them to exploit state-run enterprises, to maintain control over all the instruments of power in their countries.

So, it is somewhat of a paradoxical situation in which we are trying to convince the governments, which tell us that they want to join the European Union, that they need to make substantial changes in their political system, in the way of doing business. And these, of course, do—these processes, these reforms are assisted by our programs. But the most vital element is the political will necessary by the leaders in these countries to move forward to make these changes.

Mr. MEEKS. I am out of time. I just want to thank you again for your service. I always think that those who work for the State Department are underappreciated. I think that the budget proposal to the State Department shows that underappreciation. And I know you have got to stand there and take the grate here, but it has not gone unnoticed about the service that the men and women of the State Department do on an everyday basis. When we travel and we go see what is happening on the ground, and we see how you serve our country, you know, I salute every person that is in the military, but I also salute every person that is in the State Department because I see members of the State Department putting their lives on the line.

And just as we need to increase, and they are looking at ways to increase the defense budget to some degree, we need to make sure that we do the same thing with our State Department, at the

very least maintain it, because your job and your work is something that is of tremendous service to the United States of America, and I thank you for it.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you, Mr. Meeks.

And now, Mr. Cicilline?

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin just to respond a little bit to the chairman's suggestion that our foreign policy should be indifferent to values, that there is something wrong with supporting an effort in a country where there is a particular party that is supporting one set of ideas versus another.

Because if you imagine that there were one political party that was supporting free press, judicial integrity, good governments, the respect for human rights, free and fair elections, and there was another entity that was supporting repression of human rights, judicial corruption, corruption in the election system, violation of human rights, our foreign policy ought to reflect our values as a country. We are not indifferent to those things. We have to a conclusion as a country that we will promote peace and stability around the world and the long-term national security interest of the United States by encouraging things like respect for human rights, honest elections, good governance, judicial integrity, free press.

And the notion that we sort of should be indifferent to that would mean we wouldn't have any foreign policy that reflected our values as a country. And so, I think in the Balkans it is particularly important to reject the notion that it doesn't matter which of those values are being reflected, because it does matter.

And I think on the issue of Macedonia, I heard from our Ambassador directly about the efforts to encourage the constitutional application of the mandate and the forming of a government. I am delighted that happened today.

But that is exactly the role the United States should play: Respect for rule of law, respect for fair elections, and to support the governments and the countries that are doing that work. So, I think it is important to push back on this notion of indifference in our foreign policy. I think it is exactly, sadly, what we have heard from the Secretary of State a little bit, and I think it is a very dangerous direction. So, I am happy to hear that you understand the importance of that.

One thing that we heard from everyone that we met with in the Balkans was how important EU accession and NATO membership was. And I just want to hear from you, Mr. Secretary, about how you think those objectives play in the kind of long-term national security interests of the United States, the deep interest in all of the Balkan countries to be part of the EU and to be part of NATO.

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline, for those remarks and also the question. Fortunately, the Western Balkans still believe very strongly in American leadership; still believe very strongly in the importance and value of joining the European Union and joining NATO.

The facts speak for themselves, that countries that are in NATO, in the European Union, are more prosperous. They are more stable.

They have better futures for their young people. And so, it continues to be a draw.

And as Chairman Rohrabacher mentioned, as the prospect for joining those institutions weakens, the motivating force we have in part weakens. So, we need to continue, I think, to keep these processes moving forward, both so we can encourage the European Union to continue the European Project, but also to keep NATO's open door open. That has been tremendously important in helping Montenegro, Albania, and Croatia motivate themselves and their populations to take some difficult reform steps.

And if I could just make one short comment on the issue of values, the Secretary of State, Vice President Pence, and Secretary Mattis have all made clear to their staffs that values do matter; that human dignity, respect for human rights, for justice, rule of law, and democracy are all the important ingredients that bind us and Europe together. So, I think there is high-level support, although it may not have been articulated directly with respect to the Balkans. I believe that our leadership has made clear that the values do matter and that we should be fighting for them.

Mr. CICILLINE. And my last question, Mr. Secretary, is, if the United States were to pull back in a significant way from our engagement in the Balkans, do you believe that we would see a greater likelihood of this spread of extremism and a rise in terrorism and, if so, in which countries do you think the risk is greatest?

Mr. YEE. I believe it is—thank you for the question, sir—I believe it is a risk if the West turns its back, or appears to be turning its back, on the Western Balkans. They will, the countries of the Western Balkans will look for other options. They will look to either Russia or China or other powers that are providing alternatives to the first option, which is the West for most of these countries.

So, I think it is absolutely crucial that we continue to help them make the reforms needed, including the areas you mentioned of fighting extremism, of providing jobs for young people who otherwise will turn to less appropriate uses of their time and energies. If we don't do this, then I think we can fear that things will deteriorate, not only with respect to violence and extremism and terrorism, but with regards to the economy, which, if not improved, will lead to mass migration outside of the region into Europe, but also to the United States. And if brain drain increases in that region, the problems of these countries will only get worse.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

And, Mr. Chairman, I would just ask to associate myself with the remarks of Mr. Meeks with respect to our men and women in the Foreign Service. I am always in awe of the tremendous service of the men and women who serve our country all over the world, sometimes in very dangerous places. And this was no exception on my trip to the Balkans. We have extraordinary professionals that have dedicated their lives to representing our country and the interests of the United States, and they do it with tremendous dedication and make us all very proud, and that includes you. So, thank you for your service. And we will do all we can to protect resources for the important work that you do.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would like to now welcome the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Engel, who has had decades' long interest in this region. I know because we came in together and we are both very active since day one, and a man who I deeply respect. And I am very happy that he stopped in and joined us at this hearing today.

You are recognized, Mr. Engel.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for those kind words. We have worked together for a long, long time.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge the Ambassador of Albania to the United States, my friend Floreta Faber. She is here. I want to recognize her and thank her for coming.

Of course, I want to welcome Deputy Assistant Secretary Hoyt Yee who works so hard and so long. Hoyt, it is always good to see you, and I am grateful for working so closely with you through the years. And thank you for your service. I agree with Mr. Cicilline about how we are in awe of people in the Foreign Service that work so hard on what I consider a shoestring and do such wonderful work.

So, if we take away a message, one message, from today's hearing, it is that our work in the Balkans is not over. The project that began in the 1990s with the breakup of the former Yugoslavia still requires active engagement by the United States and by our allies in Europe.

First, the good news: There has been real progress in the Balkans. Two countries, Slovenia and Croatia, have joined the EU. Three, Slovenia, Croatia, and Albania, have entered NATO, and a fourth, Montenegro, is on the way. That is good.

Since the brutal wars of the 1990s, peace and democracy have, indeed, been the norm in the region, but all is not well. The democracies established with each country's independence are now fraying on the edges. Press freedoms are narrowing in Serbia. Macedonia has not yet been able to form a government, although today I hear there is real progress. And Albania's opposition Democratic Party is refusing to take part in next month's parliamentary vote. Kosovo's elections next month, spurred by a parliamentary no-confidence motion, seem relatively normal in comparison. But Kosovo's troubles remain right around the corner, as Serbia remains unwilling to normalize relations and recognize its neighbor, Kosovo.

On top of the regional concerns, Vladimir Putin has added Balkan countries to the list of targets with his contention and undermining confidence in democracy. The Kremlin attempted a coup in Montenegro which, fortunately, failed. It is selling advanced weapons to Serbia, including MiG-29s and T-72 tanks. And it is getting involved in Macedonia's domestic politics, aiming to prevent the resolution to the governing crisis in Skopje.

So, Hoyt, I am glad you are here to help us understand what is going on and what the United States is doing to get the region moving forward again.

I would like to make a few points. First, President Trump's State Department and foreign assistance budgets will devastate America's ability to promote our interests and protect our security. This is as true in the Balkans as it is anywhere else. Since the wars of

the 1990s, we have invested billions in the Balkans, and we have made progress. It would be foolhardy at best to squander that investment simply to further an ideological drive to make deep cuts throughout the government.

Secondly, I was taken aback at the initial United States opposition to Kosovo's plans to form an army. If our recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign and independent democracy means anything, it means we must stand by Pristina when it pursues policies well within the bounds of what is accepted for any other normal country. And saying Kosovo's development of a military should take place gradually just doesn't cut it anymore. Kosovo is in its tenth year of independence. We are past gradual; we are now approaching glacial. Rather, let's help the Kosovars consult with their domestic constituencies, their neighbors, and the international community, so that can formally establish their nonthreatening defensive force.

Once again, Mr. Chairman, our work is not done in the Balkans, as you well know. We need to keep the region on the path toward democracy and the rule of law. We need to continue to integrate the countries in the North American community, and we need to ensure that Europe's soft underbelly does not become a low-hanging fruit ripe for Putin's picking.

This means that the United States must step up our engagement in the region and support each nation as it continues its path forward. Anything less will risk bringing further instability and difficulties back to a region that deserves a real chance of freedom and prosperity.

So, I guess I will just ask you to comment on anything I said or might say. And I also want to ask you about the name of Macedonia with Greece, so problems there. Have there been any changes of authority in terms of the name for Macedonia?

Mr. YEE. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member, for your statement and your questions. I agree largely with everything you have said, sir, with one possible clarification I wanted to make about Kosovo and its military. We do, in fact, support Kosovo's aspirations to create an army. We have agreed with Kosovo since 2011 on a strategy, the security sector strategy review that includes a number of steps that Kosovo will undertake before it transforms its security force into an army. That strategy includes having onboard all the parties in the country and the government also, including the minority Serbs.

The Kosovars have agreed that, for reasons of stability, it would be much better to have all of the different peoples in the country supportive of this step before it happens. So, what we are asking for is for Kosovo to follow the strategy that we have laid out and agreed together, that Kosovo honors its commitments to its partners because, after all, Kosovo, while it is a sovereign country, also has the presence of a NATO-led peacekeeping force, KFOR, which expects Kosovo to meet its commitments.

So, in other words, if Kosovo is going to take any step that will possibly affect the conditions for the NATO-led peacekeeping force or for security in general, these steps need to be coordinated in advance. And when we did make clear to the Kosovars that we thought they needed to return the strategy was when it appeared

a couple of months ago that Kosovo was going to proceed with the formation of an army outside of the framework of the agreement that it had agreed with us and with other NATO partners.

So, we do support formation of an army, but it should be in accordance with the strategy that we have already agreed with them, and it should be done in a way that does not upset the security situation, which might lead to a weakening of support from NATO allies for the Kosovo security force, the KFOR, the peacekeeping force led by NATO.

And, in general, on Russia, I just want to add again what I mentioned earlier, sir; that we believe it is very important to stand up to Russian malign influence and we are engaged in many different efforts to strengthen the ability of all the countries in the Western Balkans to resist illegal or ill-intended efforts by Russia to increase its influence, including in Kosovo, including in Albania, in places which have traditionally been, more or less, thought to be immune from this kind of influence. And now, we are beginning to see where it could, in fact, be coming into play.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, if you would just indulge me, I would like to ask one more question, and say that I am deeply concerned with the lack of justice for murders and crimes committed by the Government of Serbia during and after the Kosovo war. There have been no charges brought against anyone for the murders of the three American citizens, the Bytyqi brothers, despite widespread understanding of who was behind them.

On January 31st of this year, the respected Humanitarian Law Center of Belgrade released a dossier called "The Cover-up of Evidence of Crimes During the War in Kosovo: The Concealment of Bodies Operation." This report described mass graves in Serbia containing the bodies of 941 Kosovo Albanians, mainly civilians killed outside combat situations in Kosovo during 1999.

According to the report, "The evidence corroborated the decision to conceal evidence of crimes committed was planned as early as March 1999 at the highest level of the Serbian Government." And on top of this, Belgrade has not brought to justice those responsible for attacking and setting fire to the U.S. Embassy in 2008. I want to know when Belgrade will face facts and bring to justice the people, including high officials in its government, who are behind these very serious crimes. The murder and mass burial of almost 1,000 incident civilians is a crime against humanity, but the perpetrators have since gone unpunished.

At the same time, the European Union has looked the other way and has been willing to proceed with Serbia's accession process. This has to stop and stop now. Until Serbia brings those who have committed these crimes to justice, the EU should not move ahead with Belgrade's accession and the United States should think twice before advancing our relations with Serbia.

I also think that Serbia should stop throwing roadblocks in Kosovo's way and Kosovo's attempt to join the European Union. If both of them are to join the European Union—and I have no objection to that ultimately—then I think that each should help the other join the Union, not resist and make it almost impossible by throwing up roadblocks.

So, I would like, Mr. Chairman, to ask unanimous consent to put in the record HLC's one-page summary of the dossier I just mentioned.

And I thank you for your indulgence.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you, and thank you very much for your years of services on this issue and your focus all of these years. And I don't think it is due to the fact that you have massive numbers of Serbian or Kosovar residents in your district. I have got to feel it is just from your heart and representing a truly principled position, which I may disagree with certain things about.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, we have disagreed on a number of things, Mr. Chairman, through the years, but I think mostly we have agreed.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Let me just note that my positions were mentioned in several testimonies. And as a matter of courtesy, I will yield myself some time to respond.

First of all, and again, I would hope, and what my disagreement with Eliot is, that we close the books on that war and Serbia starts cooperating with Kosovo. And bringing up who killed who 35 years ago or 30 years ago is going to harmful to bringing about that cooperation. So, I would recommend both sides just drop it, close the book, realize bad things were done, and try to form a better relationship.

In terms of our influence, let me note that several times what we have heard here today is how we must be concerned about Russia's, we have to stand up to Russia's trying to increase its influence. What is that all about? I mean, this is Russia phobiaism, Russia phobia. They are no longer the Soviet Union. They are a major power. They have every right to try to expand their influence by influencing people in various parts of the world, as we do, and we are all over the map in these things, and we have our military all over the world trying to do that through the military even.

And, yes, Russia has every right to try to become an influential force, especially on countries that border Russia. What is going on? I mean, we went up to the Baltics, and after hearing the words "Russian military aggression" in the Baltics over and over and over again for a year, I went up there and we had a hearing. And there was no Russian military aggression in the Baltics. I mean, not once have their troops gone into one of these countries.

And, yes, we actually put more troops on their borders than they actually put inside their own country next to these countries. So, again, I think this idea that we are now treating Russia the same way we did during the Soviet Union is harmful to peace and undermines our ability to get things done and promote peace in the world.

One last thing about this whole thing about Macedonia and Soros and these other things. Here is where we disagree. No, if a country decides they have political parties based on their social norms, whether it is—yes, they have a right to have a political party and say, "No, we are not going to," and I'm not stepping on, trying to attack anybody here or anything. Just we have a right to determine what we consider to be acceptable in our national parade. Okay?

And I know we have had problems with that. What I see is that you have Christian groups in these countries. Soros and his gang

don't like the Christian groups. They don't like family groups, people who have more traditional, conservative principles. And I am not saying those principles are right. I am just saying the people of these various countries have the right to do that without interference from us, without us shipping in money to try to help them organize politically to get the guys who are on the other side of those social norms.

And finally, let me just say that, when we are talking about what really is the motive going on here, who is seeking influence about what, Mr. Secretary or Deputy Secretary, what we are going to call you today, my read of this is that what we have here is the same sort of thing that we have seen with the EU elsewhere, like what they did in Ukraine. It is a power grab by suggesting any country who wants to get into the EU has to do this, has to jump through hoops.

The attempt at control isn't Russia. The attempt at control is that we are backing up the EU's demand for control in this part of the world. And that is what their goal is. And unfortunately for these folks, I would say that the EU is not proving to be as viable as it presents itself. I think the EU is going down, and instead, it is using its leverage based on us to try to get these new governments down in the Balkans, to get them to toe the line, the line that they create for that European market as they see it.

This is German bankers, basically, telling the Balkans what to do. And I am sorry, I see that far differently than the Russians—as far more of a detriment to freedom than I do that the Russians are trying to gain influence on this or that legislature or this or that leader in that part of the world.

However, I will, as a courtesy, give you 1 minute to refute it. And then, we are going to our next one.

Mr. CICILLINE. I just was going to ask unanimous consent that Secretary Yee may have an opportunity to respond, so that it is clear to anyone who is watching that what you have just articulated is not the policy of the United States.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You've got it. You've got it. [Laughter.]

Mr. CICILLINE. So, maybe Secretary Yee could clarify that.

I think it is important. I have traveled with the chairman, and we have had this lively discussion before. But I think, since we have an administration official here, responding to the administration's view of that would be useful.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You know, I learned this about Macedonia, too. You don't want anyone to determine that they think you are talking for the United States Government. I am not even talking for our new President.

Mr. CICILLINE. Well, nor originally the members present today. [Laughter.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. Mr. Secretary?

Mr. YEE. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline, too.

Very briefly, I just want to say I agree with the chairman that sovereign countries should have the right to decide. And this is perhaps where we disagree, sir; that it is an assessment of the United States Government that countries like Macedonia and Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other members of the Western Balkans,

want to join the European Union, want to join the West. They want to join NATO.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes.

Mr. YEE. In order to do that, there are certain standards they need to meet: Rule of law, respect for human rights, respect for a free media, freedom of the speech.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. How about economic policies? They also demand?

Mr. YEE. Also, economic, certain economic standards.

So, what we are doing is helping them to achieve their goal. We are not telling them that they must join NATO or they must join the European Union, but they must meet certain standards if they do want to advance.

Russia is fundamentally against what these countries are trying to do. That is the difference. We are trying to help these countries join the West. Russia is trying to hold them back.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Secretary. We appreciate you coming here.

And let me just note that we will be having a codel to the Balkans this summer. And we are all invited to go, and we hope maybe even to see you there, or at least get a briefing before we go. And we are going.

So, we are watching this situation very closely. And it seems to me that what we had for so long, over the years all we have heard is, "the Baltics," "the Baltics," again, the military aggression in the Baltics. And we didn't hear anything about the Balkans. And the Baltics, as we find out, in terms of Russia, it is a locked door. They are not going through the Baltics. But the Balkans seem to be a broken door. And whichever way people are going to go in and out right now, it will be determined by what we do as a nation and what we can do to help those people there have a more efficient, effective, and free government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

We will now call on the second panel.

[Recess.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The hearing is called to order.

We are grateful that we have a fine panel of witnesses. I would ask the witnesses, if they could, to provide 5 minutes' worth of oral testimony. Anything you want to put in the record will be put into the record. But 5 minutes, and that will give our panel, our committee members here, a chance to go into a dialog about the points that you have made in your 5-minute remarks.

So, first, I will introduce all of them, and they will start with Mr. Bardos after that.

Gordon Bardos is president of the South-east European Research and Consulting. It is a political risk analysis firm specializing in Southeastern Europe. He previously served as director for the Association for the Study of Nationalities and as a linguist for NATO-led stabilization forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Joseph DioGuardi, no? I should know that after all our years. I have been mispronouncing it every time I have seen him for the last 30 years. A former Member of Congress, a member of this committee, and while in office and later as a prominent Albanian-American leader, he has worked tirelessly to focus the attention of

the American Government on the Balkans. He is responsible for helping bring about the first congressional hearing on Kosovo in 1987. Today he is president of the Albanian American Civic League.

And finally, Mr. Daniel Serwer, who is an academic director of conflict management at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is also a scholar in the Middle East Institute. Previously, he was a minister/counselor at the Department of State, serving as U.S. Special Envoy and Coordinator for the Bosnian Federation.

So, we have some people who have got experience on the ground and a great deal of knowledge to share. And we appreciate you joining us.

Dr. Bardos, you may proceed.

STATEMENT OF GORDON N. BARDOS, PH.D., PRESIDENT, SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN RESEARCH AND CONSULTING

Mr. BARDOS. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to share some thoughts with you on the current situation in Southeastern Europe. I will focus my remarks on four issues: The current crisis of Balkan democracies, the dangers inherent in opening a Balkan front in the new Cold War, the need to improve the economies of the Balkan states, and the challenge of confronting Islamist terrorist groups in Southeastern Europe.

Just in the 2 weeks since this hearing was scheduled, two Balkan Governments have essentially fallen. And overall, as one European diplomat has noted, two states in the Western Balkans are on the verge of disintegration and three are in deep political crisis.

International democracy monitoring organizations such as Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, all agree that democratization in the region has either stalled or backslided over the past 10 years.

I was going to do a glance around the region, but I think Secretary Yee already did that. So, there is no need for that. I will concentrate on something else.

In the midst of all of these troubles, most people's attention is focused on what Russia is doing in the Balkans. I want to argue that this obsession with Russia and the Balkans is as misguided and potentially as detrimental as the discussion about WMDs in Iraq was, because turning the Balkans into another front in the new Cold War will sacrifice democracy in the region for yet another generation.

By almost any measure, military, diplomatic, and economic, the U.S. and the EU have achieved dominant positions in Southeastern Europe. To give just two examples, and more provided in my written testimony, every country in Southeastern Europe is currently a member of NATO or a member of the Partnership for Peace Program. Russia currently has formalized military alliances with none of the countries in the region.

In 2015, Serbia conducted two military exercises with Russia. In the same year, Serbia conducted 22 military exercises with NATO.

To sum up my argument, I would use a sports analogy. In the game with the Russians in the Balkans we are leading by 78 to 13.

Some people think we need to keep on running up the score. I would argue that it would be better for us to call this game and start preparing for the challenges posed by next week's opponent.

Viewed in this context, the challenge presented by next week's opponent is going to be stabilizing and strengthening the Balkans' failing democratic institutions and resuscitating the region's stagnant economies. To put the economic situation in the Balkans in some perspective, the states in the region have gone through an economic depression that has lasted far longer and cut far deeper than anything the United States experienced in the 1920s.

In 2015, Serbia's GDP was still 25 percent below what it was in 1989. According to the World Bank, Bosnia currently has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world. And, of course, the Greek debt crisis is still far from over. Unfortunately, promoting the Balkans' democratic and economic development will be impossible if the region becomes yet another front in the new Cold War.

Finally, we need to address a serious problem in the region that I believe is getting insufficient attention, the growth and spread of Islamist extremist movements. Thanks in part to the work of Saudi, Qatari, Iranian, and other groups, a militant form of Islam has been steadily encroaching on the region's traditionally more mild traditions. Albania, Bosnia, and Kosovo are estimated to have produced more jihad volunteers per capita than any other countries in Europe. The importance of the Balkans in the international jihadi movement is also evident from the frequency with which a Balkan connection can be made to almost every terrorist incident in Europe.

The Balkans also play an important role in the European terrorist threat matrix as a source of armaments. Thanks to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and Albania's near meltdown in 1997-1998, jihadis can obtain practically whatever weapons they might want in Southeastern Europe's black market arms bazaars. What should be of particular concern is the degree to which Balkan militant islamists can or have established ties with Southeastern Europe's flourishing organized crime networks, which are amply skilled in human trafficking and drug and weapons smuggling.

Indeed, given the current state of the Balkans, it would not be difficult to put together all of the elements needed to make everyone's nightmare scenario, terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons, come true. At least three times over the past 5 years the FBI has helped to thwart efforts to sell nuclear and radioactive material in Moldova. We have been lucky so far, but the combination of weapons-grade uranium on the black market and apoplectic terror groups with known ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons should be a loud wakeup call to everyone concerned.

To deal with all these problems, we need to make several adjustments to our policy toward the region. First, we need to align our political ambitions and political projects more closely to the region's political culture and political tradition. Far too often over the past 20 years, we have been engaged in political and social experimentation that simply will not work in the Balkan environment.

Second, we need to start entertaining the possibility that the stability-versus-democracy tradeoff might be a false dichotomy. A strong argument could be made that leaders and groups that be-

lieve they enjoy Washington's favor or believe they know how to manipulate American policymakers will increasingly press their advantages against both domestic and foreign opponents, resulting in less democracy internally and more aggressive policies externally.

Third, we need to spend less of our diplomatic time and energy on micromanaging states and more on organizing a coordinated and coherent approach to the region by major powers such as Turkey, Russia, and, of course, the EU. Whether we care to admit it in the current political atmosphere, each of these actors will be needed in promoting stability and peace in the Balkans over the coming years.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for inviting me to share some thoughts with you on the situation in the Balkans, with you and the committee. I have discussed all of these matters in more detail in my written testimony, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bardos follows:]

Gordon N. Bardos, Ph.D.

Southeast European Research & Consulting, LLC

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

May 17, 2017

The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to share some thoughts with you on the current situation in southeastern Europe. I will focus my remarks on four issues—the current crisis of Balkan democracies; the dangers inherent in opening a Balkan front in the New Cold War; the need to improve the economies of the Balkan states; and the challenge of confronting Islamist terrorist groups in southeastern Europe.

A Region in Turmoil—The Weimar Era in Balkan Democracy

At this point it is fair to say that most Balkan countries are in a phase similar to the Weimar years in Germany in the 1920s and 30s, insofar as we are dealing with a collection of countries with weak democratic institutions, depressed economics, and high levels of popular dissatisfaction.

The evidence that progress on building democratic institutions and advancing political rights and civil liberties in the region either came to a halt or regressed over the past decade is substantial. The Economist Intelligence Unit's *Democracy Index 2016*, for instance, shows that of the nine countries in southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia), only one (Bulgaria) showed any improvement, one (Albania) showed no improvement, and the remaining seven all regressed in terms of their democratic development.[1] Other democracy monitoring organizations, such as Freedom House and the Bertelsman Transformation Index have similarly shown significant democratic backsliding in the Balkans since 2008.

As one European diplomat with significant Balkan experience, the Slovak foreign minister Miroslav Lajcak, recently summed up the situation in southeastern Europe, two states in the Western Balkans are on the verge of disintegration and three are in deep political crisis.[2] A glance around the region fully bears out this point.

- In **Bosnia & Herzegovina**, just a few days ago the chairman of the Council of Minister's admitted that there is no longer a governing majority in parliament, the divided city of Mostar has been unable to hold elections since 2010, Bosnian authorities have been unable or unwilling to implement the European Court of Human Rights Sejdic-Finci decision since 2009, and some 80 decisions of the Bosnian Constitutional Court have not been implemented, as was most notably in evidence by last year's refusal of RS officials to cancel a referendum on their entity's holiday

[1] See *Democracy Index 2016: Revenge of the "deplorables* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017), 5.
[2] See Elvir Bucalo, "EU okrenula leđa zapadnom Balkanu," *Voice of America*, 6 March 2017, at http://www.glasamerike.net/a/eu-okrenula-ledja-zapadnom-balkanu/3751849.html

ordered by that institution. One of the country's two entities, the Federation of BiH, exists in name only, and Bosnian Croats are increasingly raising demands to establish their own entity. Given the fact that 2018 will be an election year in Bosnia there is little chance that there will be any significant political breakthroughs there for the foreseeable future.

- For the past two years **Macedonia** has been undergoing a deep legitimacy crisis, triggered by revelations that the government had been illegally wiretapping up to 20,000 individuals in the country. New parliamentary elections held in December 2016 were inconclusive, with the current president being unwilling to give a mandate to form a new government to the leader of the largest opposition party. One recent analysis noted that Macedonia "does not have a government, it does not have a parliament, it does not have mayors, nor municipal governments, but above all—it does not have a way out [of this crisis]."[3] Since 1994—i.e., during the Clinton Administration--no progress has been made on resolving the Macedonian name dispute between Athens and Skopje, which has blocked Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration efforts.
- In **Kosovo**, in just the past week the government has fallen, and a prominent journalist, Arbana Xharra, was the victim of a "savage beating" in front of her apartment. In 2016 sessions of the Kosovo parliament were frequently disrupted by protesters throwing tear-gas canisters in the assembly, the five-year old EU-sponsored Kosovo-Serbia normalization talks have essentially collapsed, the Kosovo parliament is unable to pass a border demarcation agreement supported by the U.S. and the EU, and Kosovo remains unrecognized by five EU states, two members of the U.N. Security Council, and other major powers such as Brazil, India, Israel , Nigeria, and South Africa.
- **Montenegro**'s democratic evolution (or lack thereof) is evident in the fact that the same political party has been in power since 1945, and the same individual has been either president or prime minister for most of the past quarter century. In 2015, an international anti-corruption NGO named Milo Djukanović "Person of the Year in Organized Crime." As the award announcement noted, "Nobody outside of Putin has run a state that relies so heavily on corruption, organized crime and dirty politics. It is truly and thoroughly rotten to the core."[4]
- **Serbia**'s democratic backsliding is evident across a number of dimensions. Serbia last month held probably its most questionable presidential elections since the fall of Milosević. According to one analysis, current Serbian prime minister Aleksandar Vučić's presidential bid received 58 percent of election programming time, and if one included reporting on his activities as prime minister, he received 92 percent of Serbian national TV's political programming.[5] Indeed, one of Serbia's most prominent and respected journalist has said that in many ways there was more freedom of the press under Milosevic than there is now,[6] and civil society activists report increasing levels of intimidation. Police intimidation of opponents was another aspect of the elections; for instance, former Serbian foreign minister Vuk Jeremic was summoned for a police interrogation within twenty-four hours of his return to Serbia to begin his electoral campaign, and his wife (earlier one

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[3] See Tomas Braj, "Bez izlaza u Makedoniji," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 March 2017, at http://www.dw.com/sr/bez-izlaza-u-makedoniji/a-37879185

[4] See "2015 Man of the Year in Organized Crime: Milo Djukanović," Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, at https://www.occrp.org/personoftheyear/2015/

[5] See Srđan Cvijić, "EU the biggest loser in Serbia's elections," *Politico.eu*, 5 April 2017, at http://www.politico.eu/article/aleksandar-vucic-eu-the-biggest-loser-in-serbia-elections-eu-the-biggest-loser-in-serbias-elections/

[6] Personal communication with the author, December 2015.

of the country's most popular newscaster) was slandered by one of Vucic's surrogates and accused of being the leader of Serbia's narco-mafia.

Even states in the region which are both members of the EU and NATO are wobbly. In **Croatia** in 2016, one government collapsed within nine months of taking office, and just a few weeks ago the country narrowly avoided having yet another government collapse. In the first few months of 2017 **Romania** experienced its largest public demonstrations since the fall of Ceaucescu. **Greece** is still in crisis debt crisis has yet to be resolved, which threatens not only Greece but the financial stability of the EU itself. In sum, by any measure southeastern Europe is in deep crisis.

The Danger of Creating a Balkan Front in the New Cold War

In this environment, the region's fragile democratic politics cannot afford any additional stresses and strains. Yet that is precisely what risks happening if the Balkans become another front in the new Cold War between Moscow and Washington. In his recent book Robert Legvold has described the numerous "opportunity costs" of the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West.[7] To add to his list, the opportunity cost of pursuing Cold War in the Balkans could well be sacrificing the democratization of southeastern Europe for yet another generation.

To make this point more clearly, I would like to suggest a comparison with a mistake the U.S. foreign policy establishment made some 15 years ago when it came to Iraq. In 2002-2003, American policy was not responding to what Saddam Hussein's regime was *really* doing, or to its real capabilities. It was responding to highly-questionable allegations, assumptions and rumors about the existence of WMD's in Iraq and Hussein's supposed ties to Al Qaeda. Just as happened back then, we are exaggerating and overinflating some issues at the expense of focusing on what is really happening. As regards the current situation in southeastern Europe, I would argue that U.S. policy is not responding to how influential Russia *really* is in the region. We are responding and reacting to superficial analysis and dubious journalism being produced in the current unhealthy media and political environment that has engulfed Washington and other western capitals.

Thus, a flood of ominous news stories has begun to detail Moscow's growing influence in the Balkans, alleged signs of which can be seen in the visit of a Cossack folklore troop to Bosnia (supposedly analogous to the "little green men" that took over Crimea),[8] a Russian motorcycle gang visiting Podgorica,[9] and the graffiti on a kitschy Russian-built train car scheduled to travel from Belgrade to Mitrovica.

Yet as any detailed analysis reveals, the EU and NATO—the main instrument of U.S. power in Europe—have achieved dominant positions in the Balkans.

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[7] See Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 53-54.
[8] See Christo Grozev, "The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part 1," 4 March 2017, at https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/04/kremlins-balkan-gambit-part/
[9] See Andrew Higgins, "Finger Pointed at Russians in Alleged Coup Plot in Montenegro," *The New York Times*, 26 November 2017.

Militarily, Russia has had little influence in southeastern Europe over the past two decades. Putin withdrew Russian peacekeeping forces from Bosnia and Kosovo back in 2003, and in December 2014 Putin cancelled what was supposed to be the grand instrument of Russian geo-strategic and geo-economic power in the Balkans, the South Stream Pipeline Project.

By way of comparison, over this time frame NATO has essentially locked up southeastern Europe. Since 2004 Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Romania and Slovenia have joined NATO, Macedonia is a candidate country, and Bosnia and Serbia are members of NATO's Partnership for Peace Program. The latter two have also concluded Status-of-Forces Agreements (SOFA) with NATO which give alliance personnel immunity from prosecution on their territory. Russia currently has no formalized military alliances with any of the countries in southeastern Europe. Indeed, as *The Economist* sarcastically noted, when Moscow threatened to cancel joint military projects with Montenegro if the latter joined NATO, "the Montenegrins were baffled, because there are none."[10] What is widely cited as a Russian spy base near the Serbian city of Niš reportedly has a full-time staff of five Russian nationals; by way of comparison, the largest U.S. military base built since the Vietnam War is just across the border in Kosovo. Moreover, the Russians in Niš have not been given the same status provided for by Serbia's SOFA with NATO.[11]

While Serbia's recent purchase of MIG-29 fighter jets from Moscow made headlines, this again misses the more important overall point; as defense analyst John Cappello has noted, Serbia's "relations with the Euro-Atlantic alliance have never been stronger . . . the vast majority of its international defense cooperation is with NATO and the West."[12] For example, in 2015 Serbia held two joint military exercises with Russia; in the same year Serbia carried out twenty-two military exercises with NATO.[13] On a recent visit to Belgrade in April 2017, Senator John McCain himself claimed that the U.S. is Serbia's most important defense partner, with the two countries engaging in 90 joint activities a year.[14]

Diplomatically, the U.S. and the EU also enjoy a dominant position. The official foreign policy goal of every country in the Western Balkans is to join the European Union, not to join the Eurasian Economic Union. In keeping with this, most states in the region have aligned their foreign policies with those of Washington and Brussels. Even Serbia, which has refused to join the sanctions regime against Moscow, has also refused to recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

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[10] "In the Balkans, NATO has outmuscled Russia," *The Economist*, 11 December 2015 at http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21683967-montenegros-accession-fills-one-few-remaining-gaps-western-alliance

[11] See Dusan Stojanovic, "Inside Russian "spy base' in the Balkans," *Associated Press* (Dateline Nis, Serbia), 6 October 2016, at http://bigstory.ap.org/article/03f70a64ec5b48bbb1c2f56bdea9255e/inside-russian-spy-base-balkans

[12] See Cappello, "Russian Information Operations in the Western Balkans," *RealClearDefense.com*, 2 February 2017, at http://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/02/02/russian_information_operations_in_the_western_balkans_110732.html

[13] Figures according to Sergey Belous, "How long will Belgrade seesaw between NATO and Russia?", *Oriental Review*, 23 April 2016, at http://orientalreview.org/2016/04/23/how-long-will-belgrade-seesaw-between-nato-and-russia/

[14] See "Vučić i Mekejn o regionalnom miru, saradnji I zajedničkim akcijama," *Politika* (Belgrade), 10 April 2017, at http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/378089/Vucic-i-Mekejn-o-regionalnom-miru-saradnji-i-zajednickim-akcijama

Where diplomatic differences exist, it is more constructive and healthier for the overall U.S.—Russia relationship for us to recognize that there can be legitimate differences of opinion on some problems rather than trivializing a serious problem international issue and dismissing everything as "Russian meddling." The Kosovo issue is a prime example. Moscow's refusal to recognize Kosovo is frequently ascribed to a desire to cause problems for the West in the Balkans.[15] But the reality is much more serious and complex. Georgia and Ukraine, for instance, similarly refuse to recognize Kosovo, and it is difficult to see why they would be following Russia's lead on this. Moreover, five EU members, as well as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, and other states representing 60-70% of the world's population also refuse to recognize Kosovo. Clearly, any serious understanding of global politics has to recognize that divisions within the international community over Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence are not caused by "Russian obstructionism"; rather, they are driven by the very considerable implications the Kosovo case has for any multiethnic state facing an actual or potential secessionist movement.

Other diplomatic moves by Moscow that are allegedly intended to destabilize the Balkans have been seen in Russia's rhetorical support for the Bosnian Serbs' plan to hold a referendum on the judiciary,[16] although most Americans would also take issue with a legal system in which three foreigners sat on the Supreme Court, an Islamist party controlled the attorney-general's office, and legal practices such as the retroactive application of laws were in effect. Similarly, a recent *Stratfor* analysis decried Moscow's support for the Bosnian Serbs' decision to hold a referendum over a holiday,[17] yet it missed the most important development in months—that it was precisely in Moscow on March 2nd of this year, after meeting with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, that Bosnian Serb president Dodik walked back earlier plans to hold an independence referendum. Indeed, the most important point to be made is that (at least as far as this author knows) since 1995 Russian officials have consistently and unequivocally voiced their support from Bosnia's territorial integrity.

Economically, Russia also has a weak position in the Balkans. Neighbors, EU countries and Turkey easily account for 70-80 percent of the Western Balkan countries' foreign trade (and China is increasingly becoming an important trading and investment partner as well). As a recent *Financial Times* editorial noted, "As a source of trade, aid and investment, the EU dwarfs Russia. For all the Russian cultural links, migration flows from the Balkans are almost entirely to the rest of Europe."[18] The one exception here comes in terms of the region's energy dependence, with Russian gas and other energy products providing well over half of each country's supply. Russia has made some high-profile economic acquisitions in the region, such as buying Serbia's *Naftna Industrija Srbije*, oil refineries in Bosnia, Montenegro's largest industrial concern, etc., but the experience of the past few years has shown that these economic investments only have a limited capacity to sway political and strategic priorities in any major way. Consider the following: Russian individuals and businesses account for 22 percent of the tourist arrivals in Montenegro, Russians own almost one third of all businesses in Montenegro, 40 percent of the

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[15] See Bernd Riegert, "EU looks to contain Russian influence in the Balkans," *Deutsche Welle*, 10 March 2017, at http://www.dw.com/en/eu-looks-to-contain-russian-influence-in-the-balkans/a-37891857

[16] James Lyon, "Is War About to Break Out in the Balkans?" *Foreign Policy*, 26 October 2015, at http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/26/war-break-out-balkans-bosnia-republika-srpska-dayton/

[17] See "Russia Stirs the Hornet's Nest," *Stratfor.com*, 28 March 2017, at https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-stirs-hornets-nest

[18] See "Europe and the US face a challenge in the Balkans," *The Financial Times*, 10 March 2017, at https://www.ft.com/content/ce3bd714-058a-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9.

country's real estate, and Russia has provided one third of the foreign direct investment in Montenegro.[19] Yet despite this significant Russian economic position in and control of Montenegro's economy, it was still unable to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO.

It has also been claimed that Moscow's increasingly malign influence in the Balkans has been the fact that many Balkan media outlets have begun running stories by Russian media outlets such as *RT* and *Sputnik*,[20] yet Balkan media also routinely run articles by *Agence France Presse*, *Al Jazeera*, the *BBC*, *Deutsche Welle* and *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Europe*.

In sum, viewed from the military, diplomatic and economic perspectives, Russia can hardly be seen as posing a dangerous threat to Western interests in the Western Balkans. Nevertheless, the inflated and overblown accounts of "Russian meddling" in the Balkans are having very significant—and detrimental—policy consequences. In what has become known as the "stability versus democracy tradeoff," U.S. and European support for democratic institutions and the rule of law are being consistently sacrificed for the sake of legitimizing authoritarian leaders who have learned that by simply expressing a few platitudes about democracy and human rights, and by declaring themselves to be opponents of Russian advances in the Balkans, Washington will give them a free pass to crack down on the political opposition, independent media, engage in large-scale corruption, etc. As one scholar has aptly described this process,

> A new generation of autocrats has been taking over the region, sometimes with the direct complicity of overzealous American policymakers and distracted EU officials . . . Both U.S. and EU policymakers have been willing to turn a blind eye to corruption, which plagues the region's governments, and have either downplayed or ignored the creeping rise of autocratic rulers . . . [who] are well-coached in telling Western diplomats what they want to hear, while blatantly undermining democratic principles and the rule of law at home . . . U.S. and EU policymakers need to ask themselves if oligarchs, autocrats and kleptocrats, who happen to be pro-Western, are any better than Putin—or helpful for the West's long-term interests in the region.[21]

Evidence of this dynamic is frequently on display. The most well-known at this point is the claim of an alleged Russian plot to overthrow the Montenegrin government in October 2016. Yet any serious examination suggests that the alleged plot is either a complete hoax, or at most an amateurish exercise by a group more akin to the yahoo militiamen who occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016 than a serious covert operation.

If we do not get wise to this game and continue to view southeastern Europe as yet another front in the New Cold War, and our overarching goal remains "keeping Putin out of the Balkans," we may well be sacrificing Balkan democracy and regional stability for another generation. Leaders and groups that

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[19] See Leonid Bershidsky, "Why NATO Wants Montenegro (Not for Its Military Might)," *Bloomberg.com*, 1 May 2017, at https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-05-01/why-nato-wants-montenegro-not-for-its-military-might

[20] Jaroslaw Wiśniewski, "Russia has a years long plot to influence Balkan politics. The U.S. can learn a lot from it." *The Washington Post*, 19 September 2016, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/19/heres-how-russias-trying-to-sway-opinion-in-serbia-and-the-balkans/?utm_term=.6827a556c4e8

[21] See Besnik Pula, "The Budding Autocrats of the Balkans," *Foreign Policy*, 15 April 2016, at http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/15/the-budding-autocrats-of-the-balkans-serbia-macedonia-montenegro/

believe they enjoy Washington's favor—or believe they know how to manipulate American policymakers—will increasingly press their advantages against both domestic and foreign opponents, resulting in less democracy internally and more aggressive policies externally.[22] Meanwhile, leaders and groups that do not enjoy Washington's favor will increasingly feel the need to turn to Russia (or in the not-too-distant future China) for some modicum of support. The result will be a self-fulfilling logic in which the Balkan states are *impelled* into more and more hostile, divided camps. Taken to the most dangerous extreme, this could result in the kinds of proxy wars we are witnessing in Syria and Ukraine.

Consequently, a far more prudent and beneficial strategy, as Thomas Graham has recently argued regarding the overall European context, would be to bring Russia on board in developing what has widespread acceptance as a new, legitimate political and security order in southeastern Europe in the post-post-Cold War era. In other words, we should be striving to make Russia part of the solution in the Balkans rather than insisting that it is the source of the problem. With regard to the stability versus democracy tradeoff, as Graham has also argued, the Russian challenge in Europe and throughout the Balkans will be best met by addressing the internal problems countries have with their democratic institutions and economies.[23]

Balkan security specialist Dimitar Bechev has argued along the same lines. In Bechev's proposed strategy of "calling Russia's bluff" in the Balkans, he notes that,

> EU members have turned a blind eye to the less appetizing aspects of Balkan politics . . . if there is trouble brewing in the Balkans, it has more to do with the perverse effects of the "stability" provided by incumbent governments than with the risk of all-out conflict. Combined with the weakening pull of the EU and the United States' relative disengagement, democratic decay and insufficient economic growth add up to a general state of stagnation . . . [The West] should take a look at what has gone wrong in the domestic politics of post-Yugoslav states and apply pressure on leaders to take seriously the rule of law, media freedom, and independent civil society.[24]

Reviving Balkan Economies

One of the most important reasons to avert turning the Balkans into another front in the New Cold War is to avoid the political instability that will inevitably drive away the foreign investment needed to revive the Balkan economies. Indeed, stabilizing southeastern Europe will be impossible unless we are able to reverse the horrible economic decline these countries have confronted since the 1990s, when the destruction of war, the international sanctions regime which effected the entire region, and the difficulties

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[22] For an example of this as it pertains to Kosovo, see Enver Hoxhaj, "Kosovo Feels Russia's Heavy Hand, via Serbia," *The New York Times*, 13 April 2017, at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/opinion/kosovo-feels-russias-heavy-hand-via-serbia.html?_r=0. For a Montenegrin example, see Dusan Stojanovic, "Montenegrin leader: Russia wants to destroy the EU," *The Associated Press* (dateline Podgorica), 14 March 2017, at https://www.apnews.com/7b98aaca166b4b77ab0145aa91916ab3/AP-Interview:-Montenegro-leader:-Russia-wants-to-destroy-EU.

[23] See Thomas E. Graham, "Toward a New Equilibrium in U.S.-Russian Relations," *The National Interest*, 1 February 2017, at http://nationalinterest.org/feature/toward-new-equilibrium-us-russian-relations-19281

[24] See Dimitar Bechev, "The West Needs to Call Russia's Bluff in the Balkans," 23 February 2017, at http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-west-needs-to-call-russia-s-bluff-in-the-balkans.

inherent in the transition to a market economy caused most of the countries in southeastern Europe to go into an economic decline which lasted far longer and has been deeper than anything Americans experienced during the Great Depression in the 1920's and 1930s.

To make matters worse, many of the Western Balkan countries had barely begun to recover from the decline of the 1990s when the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 and the Greek debt crisis sent them reeling again. The migrant crisis of 2015-2016 provided yet another shock to the region; indeed, in December 2015 Angela Merkel even claimed that war could break out in the Balkans if Europe did not handle the migrant crisis properly.[25]

A few examples of the bleak state of the Balkan economies provide a disturbing picture of the scale of the problem. In 2015, Serbia's GDP was still 25% below what it had been in 1989.[26] Bosnia & Herzegovina reportedly has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world—over 67 percent in 2016.[27] Kosovo is similarly reported to have a youth unemployment rate of over 60 percent, and in just two months (December 2015—January 2016), some 50,000 people fled Kosovo.[28] All of the states in southeastern Europe are literally bleeding medical doctors, engineers, and other professionals, as these groups—the very spark plugs any society needs to promote economic growth—emigrate for better employment and financial opportunities.

Clearly, maintaining political stability in southeastern Europe will be impossible without stabilizing and improving the region's dire economic situation. Unfortunately, doing so will require an international commitment to reviving the Balkan economies even greater than was provided in the 1990s. By 2003, Bosnia had received more financial assistance per capita than was allocated to any country in Europe under the Marshall Plan,[29] and as of 2006, NATO countries had devoted 50 times more money to Kosovo per capita than to their efforts in Afghanistan.[30]

The scale of the economic challenge we face in the Balkans is therefore clearly immense. But it will nevertheless be cheaper than the economic costs we would face if the region again devolved into violence.

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[25] Adam Withnall, "Refugee influx could spark 'military conflict' in Balkans, Angela Merkel warns," *The Independent* (UK), 3 November 2015, at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-influx-could-spark-military-conflict-in-balkans-angela-merkel-warns-a6719521.html#gallery

[26] According to Milojko Arsić, "Long-term consequences of the collapse of the Serbian economy during the 1990s: the dynamics of potential GDP in the period between 1989 and 2015," *Quarterly Monitor* 44 (January-March 2016), at: http://pescanik.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/spot44.pdf

[27] See the statistics on world youth unemployment rates compiled by the World Bank, available at: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS

[28] All information according to Harriet Alexander, "Exodus from Kosovo: Why Thousands Have Left the Balkans," *The Telegraph* (London), 21 February 2015, at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/kosovo/11426805/Exodus-from-Kosovo-Why-thousands-have-left-the-Balkans.html, accessed on 12 January 2017 at 11:11am EST.

[29] Mehmet Ugur, "Regional Public Goods or Philanthropy? A Critical Assessment of the EU-Balkans Economic Relations," *UNU/CRIS Occasional Papers* (0-2003/1), available at: http://64.233.169.104/search?q=cache:5J4VW6jtrKMJ:www.cris.unu.edu/admin/documents/mehmet%2520ugur%2520occasional%2520paper%2520final.pdf+Bosnia+Marshall+Plan+per+capita&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=25&gl=us&client=firefox-a, 17.

[30] Iain King and Whit Mason, *Peace at Any Price: How the World Failed Kosovo* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 21.

Confronting the Islamist Extremist Threat in the Balkans

Finally, one of the most serious threats confronting the Balkans (and, indeed, Europe as a whole) is the growth and spread of indigenous Islamist militant movements.

The importance of the Balkans in the international jihadi movement is evident from the frequency with which a Balkan connection can be made to almost every terrorist incident in Europe. Consider, for instance, the following: Anis Amri, the perpetrator of the December 2016 Berlin Christmas Market massacre, had been a roommate of Boban Simeonovic, a Serbian-German extremist well-known in Germany's jihadist circles. Among the individuals who have transited through or set up shop in southeastern Europe have been Abdelilah Himich, the suspected ISIS mastermind of the November 2015 Paris and the March 2016 Brussels attacks.[31] The man who took credit for the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Nasser bin Ali Ansi, was a veteran of the Bosnian jihad in the 1990s and subsequently became a leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Mourad Hamyd (a brother-in-law of *Charlie Hebdo* attacker Cherif Kouachi), was arrested on the Turkish-Bulgarian border after making his way through the Balkans from Paris, apparently on his way to the Islamic State. The ringleader of the later November 2015 Paris atrocities, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, directed preparatory work for the attacks from Athens, and Salah Abdeslam, Ahmad al Muhammad (an alias) and one other suicide-bomber used the migrant's Balkan route to get to France. Atatűrk Airport attack mastermind Akhmad Chatayev had been arrested in Bulgaria in 2011, and Ansbach suicide-bomber Mohammed Daleel had lived in Bulgaria in 2013. Mirsad Bektašević, a Serbian-Swedish terrorist involved in a 2005 plot to launch suicide-bombing attacks against western embassies in Sarajevo, was arrested in Greece en route to the Islamic State in January 2016.[32]

Indigenous Balkan extremists have been plotting attacks of their own, and developing their own ISIS-recruiting networks. In December 2015, Italian and Kosovo police discovered a group of four Kosovars (some with reported links to Syria) planning to kill Pope Francis.[33] In November 2016, 19 individuals were arrested in Kosovo after the discovery of a plot to carry out a series of "synchronized terrorist attacks" in Albania and Kosovo, tied to coincide with a World Cup qualifying match played in Elbasan, Albania, in which the Israeli and Albanian national teams were to play. There were indications that in addition to attacking the Israeli national team, the conspirators were also planning on attacking a number

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[31] See Sebastian Rotella, "U.S. Identifies ISIS Planner in Attacks on Europe," *ProPublica*, 22 November 2016 (https://www.propublica.org/article/us-identifies-isis-planner-in-attacks-on-europe).

[32] For more information on these individuals and their activities, see, for instance, Mariya Theresheva, "Bulgaria to Send Terror Suspect to France," *BalkanInsight*, 17 August 2016 (http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bulgaria-to-extradite-charlie-hebdo-attacker-s-relative-to-france-08-16-2016); Chris Morris, "Paris attacker's escape from Athens," *BBC News*, 8 December 2015, (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35045849); "2015 Paris Terror Attacks Fast Facts," *CNN.com*, 13 April 2016 (http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/08/europe/2015-paris-terror-attacks-fast-facts/);Mariya Theresheva, "Fraud Left Ansbach Bomber Homeless in Bulgaria," *BalkanInsight*, 27 July 2016, (http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/fraud-left-ansbach-bomber-homeless-in-bulgaria-07-27-2016);Mariya Theresheva, "Bulgaria Freed Alleged Istanbul Terrorist Mastermind," *BalkanInsight*, 1 July 2016 (http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/alleged-istanbul-attack-ringleader-released-by-a-court-in-bulgaria-07-01-2016).

[33] See Steve Robson, "'Jihadist plot to kill Pope Francis' thwarted as police arrest four Kosovans with links to Italy," *The Mirror* (UK), 3 December 2015 at http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/jihadist-plot-kill-pope-francis-6947979

of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries across Kosovo.[34] In January 2017, 800 Austrian police launched raids in Vienna and Graz against a Balkan-based Islamist network linked to Ebu Tejma, an extremist cleric from the Sandžak involved in the recruitment of over 150 ISIS volunteers.[35] In March 2017, Italian police arrested three individuals from Kosovo plotting to blow up the Rialto Bridge in Venice. One of the individuals had been to Syria, and the group had studied ISIS instructional videos intended to train people in bombmaking techniques and how to stab people.[36]

Apart from being the natural gateway and thoroughfare for jihadis intent on attacking Europe, the Balkans have also become a significant source of manpower for the Islamic State and/or the Al Nusra Front. Official estimates suggest that approximately 1000 individuals from the Balkans have joined the Syrian and Iraqi jihads,[37] and it is widely believed that Albania, Bosnia and Kosovo have provided more jihad volunteers per capita than any other countries in Europe.[38] Several dozen individuals from Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and other Balkan states have also become jihad volunteers.[39]

Comparing these numbers with extremist mobilization in the EU reveals the worrying levels to which militant Islamism has grown in southeastern Europe. The Soufan Group, for instance, has estimated that western European (i.e., EU countries) with a total population of some 510 million people, have provided some 5000+ jihad volunteers.[40] By way of comparison, the western Balkan states (i.e., Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) with a combined population of some 20 million, have provided some 1000, which suggests that western Balkan countries are generating four-to five-times more jihad volunteers per capita than EU states.

Analysts across the region, however, suggest that the real number of Balkan jihad volunteers could be significantly higher than official figures. Some estimates claim that Kosovo alone may have provided as

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[34] See "Kosovo Arrests 19 ISIS-Linked Suspects Planning Attack on Israeli Soccer Team," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 November 2017, at http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Sports/Kosovo-arrests-19-ISIS-linked-suspects-planning-attack-on-Israeli-soccer-team-472842

[35] See Eleanor Rose, "Austria Cracks Jihadist Network Linked to Balkans," *BalkanInsight*, 26 January 2017, at http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/several-balkan-jihadists-detained-in-large-scale-terror-raids-01-26-2017-1

[36] See Elisabeta Povoledo, "3 Are Held on Suspicion of Plot to Bomb Rialto Bridge in Venice," *The New York Times*, 30 March 2017, at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/world/europe/rialto-bridge-venice-arrests.html?_r=0, accessed on 31 March 2017 at 10:00am EST; Nick Squires, "Italian police break up alleged jihadist cell that planned to attack Venice's Rialto Bridge," *The Telegraph* (UK), 30 March 2017, at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/30/italian-police-break-alleged-jihadist-cell-planned-attack-venices/

[37] Adrian Shtuni claims "more than 1000" individuals from the Balkans have gone to Syria and Iraq; see Shtuni, "Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report* 397 (December 2016), 2. Vlado Azinović estimates 950 individuals from the Balkans have joined the jihads in Syria and Iraq. Snježana Pavić, "STRUČNJAK ZA TERORIZAM U RAZGOVORU ZA JUTARNJI OTKRIVA 'U Siriji i Iraku bori se i šest Hrvata, 70 ljudi iz Bosne i Hercegovine već je tamo poginulo'," *Jutarnji list* (Zagreb), 27 December 2016 (http://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/strucnjak-za-terorizam-u-razgovoru-za-jutarnji-otkriva-u-siriji-i-iraku-bori-se-i-sest-hrvata-70-ljudi-iz-bosne-i-hercegovine-vec-je-tamo-poginulo/5437275/)

[38] See the estimates by Thomas Hegghammer as cited by Frank Gardner, "Europe Could Feel the Backlash from Jihadist Conflicts," *BBC News* (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25155188). See also the infographic entitled "Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 29 January 2015, at http://www.rferl.org/content/infographics/infographics/26584940.html

[39] Predrag Tomović, "Vehabije na Balkanu su izmanipulisane," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 1 June 2013 (http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/vehabije-na-balkanu-izmanipulisane/25003930.html).

[40] *Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq* (The Soufan Group, December 2015).

many as 1000 ISIS recruits,[41] and Albanian security specialist Ilir Kulla has suggested that the number of jihad volunteers from the region could be "in the thousands" if one includes individuals from the Balkan diaspora.[42] Aida Skorupan, a Montenegrin journalist tracking the Islamist extremist movement in her country, believes the number of Montenegrin jihad volunteers is significantly higher than the estimate of thirty or so individuals usually used.[43]

Unfortunately, these numbers are only the tip of the extremist iceberg in southeastern Europe. As security specialist Adrian Shtuni has noted, the Balkan jihad volunteers going off to Syria and Iraq constitute "merely a fraction of an extensive network of like-minded militants, supporters, and enablers who not only openly share the same ideology, but are also actively engaged in its dissemination and recruitment efforts through physical and virtual social networks."[44]

Although hard data on the actual size of the Balkan militant Islamist movement is difficult to come by, one indicator of the pool of individuals psychologically and politically predisposed to ISIS' message and activities can be seen in the results of the Pew Research Center's 2012 survey of Muslim public opinion around the world.[45] Although in general the Balkan Muslim populations can be seen as the most moderate and tolerant Muslim societies in the world, nevertheless a cluster of questions within the survey provided disturbing evidence of the progress of radicalization within the Balkans. Thus, in response to questions on the desirability of imposing sharia law, on support for suicide bombing and other forms of violence, on support for public whippings and cutting off the hands of alleged thieves, on stoning accused adulterers to death, on imposing the death penalty for apostasy, and on the moral acceptability of polygamy ----- some 400,000 people across Albania, Bosnia and Kosovo expressed their support for all of these things. In the Sandžak, a May 2016 survey found that twenty percent of those interviewed believe that the use of violence is legitimate to defend one's religion, eleven percent believe it is acceptable to go to a foreign country to wage war, and over 35% claimed that there were individuals or groups in their area who express extremist positions.[46] Such numbers suggest that some five- to ten-percent of the Balkans' Muslim populations have become radicalized. Although not all of these people should be considered active threats, they do, to paraphrase Mao Zedong, provide the proverbial sea terrorists swim in.

The Balkans also play an important role in the European terrorist threat matrix as a source of armaments. Thanks to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and Albania's near-meltdown in 1997-98, jihadis

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[41] David Phillips, "Islamism in Kosovo," *The World Post*, 21 December 2015 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/islamism-in-kosovo_b_8855128.html).
[42] Kamil Arli, "Albanian Expert: Turkey Waypoint for Balkan Jihadists," *Today's Zaman*, 19 July 2014 (http://www.todayszaman.com/interviews_albanian-expert-turkey-waypoint-for-balkan-jihadists_353477.html).
[43] See Aida Skorupan's comments as cited by Petar Komnenić, "Crnogorske vlasti najavile reakciju nakon vijesti RSE o odlasku na strana ratišta," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 18 September 2014 (http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/dobrovoljci-iz-crne-gore-u-isiriji-i-iraku-vlast-reagovala-nakon-vijesti-rse/26592466.html); Dejan Peruničić, "ANB drži na oku džihadiste iz Crne Gore," *Vijesti*, 20 September 2014 (http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/anb-drzi-na-oku-dzihadiste-iz-crne-gore-796626); Samir Kajošević, "U ISIL otišlo tri puta više državljana Crne Gore," *Vijesti*, (no date given, but appears to be September 2014) (http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/u-isil-otislo-tri-puta-vise-drzavljana-crne-gore-843389); Dusica Tomovic, "Montenegro to Keep Track of ISIS Threat," *BalkanInsight*, 21 July 2015 (http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/montenegro-on-guard-after-isis-threats).
[44] Shtuni, "Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo," p. 2.
[45] See *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics & Society* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2013).
[46] See the survey conducted by Prof. Dr. Vladimir Ilić, *Stavovi Mladih u Sandžaku: Koliko Su Mladi Otvoreni Prema Islamskom Ekstremizmu* (Beograd: Helsinški Odbor za Ljudska Prava u Srbiji, May 2016).

can obtain practically whatever weapons they might want in southeastern Europe's black market arms bazaars. A rocket launcher and ammunition used in the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in January 2015 were manufactured in the Balkans, and guns used in the attack on the Bataclan Theater in November 2015 were AK-47s produced by Zastava of Serbia. Guns and ammunition used in the March 2016 Brussels attacks have also been traced to the former Yugoslavia, and Balkan arms smugglers have in some of these cases been implicated in helping the terrorists obtain their weapons.[47] In July 2016, an Albanian couple was arrested on suspicion of providing weapons to Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, the "ISIS soldier" who killed 84 people in a truck attack along Nice's seaside promenade.[48] There is also cause for concern due to the fact that the hundreds of foreign jihadis who remained in Bosnia after the war were never forced to give up their weapons.[49] Balkan weapons and ammunition go in the other direction as well. Armament Research Services (ARES) has found that 17% of the ammunition used by ISIS in parts of Iraq come from the Balkans.[50]

What should be of particular concern to western intelligence and security organizations, as security analyst Ebi Spahiu has warned, is the degree to which Balkan militant Islamists can (or have) established ties with southeastern Europe's flourishing organized crime networks, which are amply skilled in human trafficking, and drugs and weapons smuggling.[51] Indeed, given the current state of the Balkans it would not be difficult to put together all of the elements needed to make everyone's nightmare scenario—Islamist terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons—come true. At least three times over the past five years, the FBI has helped to thwart efforts to sell nuclear and radioactive material in Moldova.[52] We have been lucky so far, but the combination of weapons-grade uranium on the black market, organized crime groups skilled in smuggling, weak, unprotected borders, and terror groups with known ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons should be a loud wake-up call to everyone concerned.

Conclusions

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[47] "Serbia makes its biggest arms haul in 16 years," *BBC News*, 16 November 2016 (http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37998805), Lindita Arapi, "The Balkan route to Western Europe for Yugoslavia guns," *Deutsche Welle*, 5 November 2015 (http://www.dw.com/en/the-balkan-route-to-western-europe-for-yugoslavia-guns/a-18896280); Adrian Schutuni, "The Balkans: An Often Overlooked Hotbed for ISIS Recruitment," *NPR Weekend Edition Saturday*, 28 May 2016 (http://www.npr.org/2016/05/28/479824670/the-balkans-an-often-overlooked-hotbed-for-isis-recruitment); Gordon N. Bardos, "Charlie Hebdo: The Balkan Connection," *World Affairs*, 4 February 2015 (http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/gordon-n-bardos/charlie-hebdo-balkan-connection).

[48] Susannah Cullinane and Margot Haddad, "2 arrested in connection with Nice attack," *CNN.com*, 17 July 2016 (http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/17/europe/france-attack-on-nice-arrests/).

[49] Ljudmila Cvetkovic, Marija Arnautovic, and Vlado Azinovic, "Reakcije na hapšenje vehabija u Novom Pazaru," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 19 March 2007 (http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/698868.html).

[50] "The Balkan arms trade: Ask not from whom the AK-47s flow," *The Economist*, 16 April 2016 (http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21697019-answer-often-serbia-croatia-or-bulgaria-ask-not-whom-ak-47s-flow).

[51] Ebi Spahiu, "Militant Islamists, Organized Crime, and the Balkan Diaspora in Europe," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor* 13 (2 December 2015) (https://jamestown.org/program/militant-islamists-organized-crime-and-the-balkan-diaspora-in-europe/).

[52] Kathy Gilsinan, "Why Moldova Might Be the Scariest Place on Earth," *The Atlantic*, 8 October 2015 (http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/moldova-nuclear-weapons-isis/409456/); Evan Perez, Michael Martinez and Cosmin Stan, "FBI helped thwart nuclear smuggling plot in Moldova," *CNN.com*, 8 October 2015 (http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/07/politics/fbi-helped-thwart-nuclear-smuggling-plot-in-moldova/).

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you once again for inviting me to share some thoughts with you on the current situation in southeastern Europe. I apologize for providing such a bleak assessment, but empirical and political reality is such as it is. Nevertheless, there are steps the U.S. can take to try to stabilize the situation.

First, we need to take every step possible to maintain political and strategic stability. This requires us to work with major powers such as Russia and Turkey, alongside EU and NATO countries, to exert pressure on all regional actors to act responsibly, and to foster a security environment in which local politics can play out peacefully. U.S. diplomatic time and energy in this situation is best served by engaging other major powers into legitimizing and enforcing a new political and security order in the Balkans. The history and experience of the past two decades has shown that attempts to micro-manage the political affairs of individual countries are ineffective, and frequently counter-productive. Far too often, our political projects and political ambitions in the region have not aligned with the reality of the region's political culture and traditions.

Above all, we must strive to avoid turning southeastern Europe into another front in the New Cold War. In the current political and media climate, this will not be easy. Yet I would draw on one historical example to show the necessity of this even in the lowest points of the relationship between the United States and Russia. In the early 1980s, even in the midst of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the imposition of martial law in Poland, one of the great American statesmen of the 20th century, W. Averell Harriman, was urging President Reagan to continue to pursue nuclear arms control agreements with the Soviets because the stakes for all of humanity in the U.S.-Soviet relationship were simply too high. In this spirit, we need a balanced, informed, and dispassionate analysis of what is really happening in southeastern Europe. As Harriman himself put it, "To base policy on ignorance and illusion is very dangerous. Policy should be based on knowledge and understanding."

Second, apart from maintaining political stability, the U.S. must lead an effort to revive the Balkan economies. Absent an improvement in southeastern Europe's dire economic situation, it will be impossible to sustain political stability in the region.

Third, we need to shut down the threat posed by the spread of Islamist terror networks in the region. Inattention to this problem has given these groups the operational space and time needed for them to grow, and to use the region as a recruiting ground and launching platform for attacks around the world. Individuals involved in the attack on the USS Cole, the 9/11 attacks, the Madrid Train bombings of 2004, the Istanbul attacks of 2003, and countless other attacks had all operated in the Balkans in the 1990s. If we had been paying attention and taken action back then, there is a good likelihood that Al Qaeda would never have become the global threat it eventually turned out to be.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, thank you very much.
Joe?

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI, FOUNDING PRESIDENT, ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE (FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS)

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We were here 2 years ago. You had a wonderful hearing, and it was mainly on Kosovo and Macedonia.

And you can see the photo all the way to the—it is being blocked by the fellow from Voice of—excuse me. The chair, could you move, please?

There is Mr. Ziadin Sela with you 2 years ago being greeted after the hearing up there, surrounding by his family and friends from where he was the mayor of Struga. He was announcing that he was now going to embark on an impossible task of reforming, politically reforming, the state of Macedonia.

Two years later it was Ziadin Sela and his party that was able to meet the qualifications of the mandate. And under the constitution, as bad as that constitution was, and other European law naturally, he had to be given by President Ivanov the right to form a government after the ruling party, under the strongman Mr. Gruevski, was not able to.

So, you were right in your comments before. He was able to get a coalition of parliamentarians, Slav and Albanian, to be a majority and form the government.

When he was supposed to form the government on September 27th, look at the result. There he is in a hospital bed. Right below you will see his face bloody. He is being pulled out by a thug.

And just to show you how big these Slav thugs that were hired by Mr. Gruevski, take a look at this right here, the guy with the beard. He is one of them.

That was the beginning of the melee. What happened on the 27th was Gruevski's attempt to be sure that there would be no reforms, that there would be no new government, because he knows how high his crimes are and he is afraid to be prosecuted and put in jail. So, he must keep control.

So, what you heard today is like we heard from Mr. Milosevic so many times when we were able to get hearings here. The day of the hearing they released prisoners. They did this; they did that.

So, just today, because our Civic League has advertised this, has told the world that this hearing was going to be really important for Macedonia—and in this room I daresay that 90 percent of the participants are ethnic Albanians from Macedonia whose families are still there suffering. They came one from Alaska, many from Chicago, two from Iowa. They are here because they wanted to show you their concern, just the way the Kosovars did many times when we had those hearings.

But look at this. Now he is being pulled out here. Look at the blood on his face. He was given up for dead. Now the only reason he is in that hospital bed is that there was a security guard, the only Albanian hired by the Macedonian Government, to show you the economic discrimination in this country. That Albanian security guard realized that he was not dead; he was still breathing. They

walked away from him. He took him and put him in a room, hid him until the place cleared out. Then, he was delivered by an ambulance or an armored car to the hospital.

Ziadin couldn't come here. He wanted to be here, but I was naive in thinking he could. He has had so many concussions. If you look at the picture, you are not just seeing dry blood; you are seeing pummeling, constant fists to the face and to the head. They were there to kill him.

They advertised this weeks and weeks in advance, that this man was an enemy of the state. It reminds me of what Milosevic called me, an enemy of the state. They called him an enemy of the people. This is a signal to UDBA or the security forces to eliminate that person, and that is what they tried to do on September the 27th.

They went 2½ hours. They put the uniformed police outside. They only came in after 2½ hours when they thought they had beat up everybody and killed Ziadin, only to find out that he was put in the hospital, resuscitated.

His doctor, Arben Taravari—Arben, stand up for just a minute—is right here. He flew in. He is a neurosurgeon. He had operations, but for 1 day he said, "I have to come here and at least take Ziadin's place and let people know that this man is going to come back to reform the government."

So, what do you make of today? This is not going to continue. Whatever Ivanov did, it is not going to last. It is too dangerous for Gruevski to have a new government.

You have to remember, Mr. Chairman, 20,000 audiotapes were made public by the Slav opposition of Mr. Gruevski, Mr. Zaev, whose party now—I think it is LSDM—is in coalition with the party of Ziadin Sela.

He is not going to allow that coalition to go forward because he knows everything has been publicized. The only answer to Gruevski to those wiretaps was, "Where did they come from, some foreign thing?" He won't deny them.

And you can't believe what some of these wiretaps say. And also, I mean, what they say are things like, "Those Albanians that we set up in this Monster case." And you know what? They have long jail sentences. They couldn't adequately defend themselves. They were set up. They were not even guilty, but now they are in long prison sentences.

You have Knova when they set up this phony operation and called it the Albanians from Kosova coming into military action. They were actually hired by Slavs to do that for an excuse to go further in their opposition or their repression of the Albanian people.

Where did this all start? You said that the country of Yugoslavia disappeared, disintegrated in 1991-1992. Somehow the Government of Macedonia slipped in with no opposition as an independent state in 1992 with an old-type constitution under the former Yugoslavia. And when they formed the state, it clearly says this is a state for Macedonian Slavs. They don't mention Albanians. They don't mention Bulgarians. And by the way, there is no majority in this state. One-third Bulgarian, one-third Albanian, and one-third Macedonian Slav. That is the kind of state it is.

But the Albanians have practically no rights whatsoever. Five percent or less of the Serbs in northern Kosovo have much greater rights, including language rights, than probably 40 percent of the country or let's say at least 35 percent of the country in Macedonia. So, what is here for Albanians?

We should have had a solution to this 16 years ago to stop the violent conflict between the Albanians in Macedonia and the Slavs. We guaranteed with Europe something called the Oher/Ohrid Agreement. Sixteen years have passed by and things have only gotten worse because Gruevski, like a racketeer, the way he is, he coopted the junior Albanian Party that came into office, and nothing has been done.

So, one of the recommendations I am going to make to you is that we have to go forward with the State Department, the U.S. taking a much more active role in a framework to implement the rights of the Ohrid Agreement. We must get that constitution changed so that it codifies the fact that you have at least two major ethnic groups in this state that need equal rights, because there is nothing like equal rights.

You talk about the economic discrimination and the political corruption against the Albanian people. It is monstrous, and just economic discrimination. Many jobs are given out in the government. If you have 33 percent and they were supposed to get up to 25 or 30 percent on the Albanian side, they haven't put 10; it is around 7 percent, no jobs. The unemployment rate must be just like what is going on in Bosnia right now, the highest in Europe.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Joe, you have——

Mr. DIOGUARDI. May I put on the record—I have just summarized by comments. I want to read my full testimony on the record in writing.

I would like to, then, put the interview by the person who saved Ziadin Sela, the Albanian security guard. I had it translated from Albanian to English.

I want to put in some of the photos you haven't seen, because when he was here 2 years ago he also met with Senator McCain. And hopefully, that will be done by the doctor before he goes back.

And I want to put on the record this statement that I put on the record in 1991 when Chairman Pell was the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and in 1998 when Senator Biden was. It is the expulsion of the Albanians by Vaso Cubrilovic, 1937. This paper is the modus operandi of the Slavs and the Serbs. They wanted to get rid of all Albanians. I have quoted it in my testimony. I want to put the entire document on the record, so you can see they are not going to give up on this.

And two articles, sir, one from Mr. Foray, one of the——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Joe, without objection, all that will be put into the record.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But you did twice as much as everybody else.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Thank you. I appreciate it.

[The prepared statement of Mr. DioGuardi follows:]

Statement of Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi
President, Albanian American Civic League

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats

"The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability"

May 17, 2017

The events surrounding the brutal attack on Ziadin Sela as the leader for political reform in Macedonia

On April 27, 2017, Talat Xhaferi was elected as the Speaker of the Parliament of Macedonia. Those who supported the election of the new Speaker, the first Albanian to be elected to this position, were brutally attacked by deputies of the VMRO-DPMNE ruling party and their paid thugs and paramilitaries in an attempt to strike fear and terror in the minds and hearts of those bent on reforming the corrupt Macedonian government headed by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who has led the government like a criminal enterprise for the past fifteen years. He has totally controlled every part of the Macedonian government, including the courts, through bribes, patronage, and mafia-like zeal and tactics.

For months, in advance of the horrific attack on April 27, Ziadin Sela, the Mayor of Struga and the head of The Movement for Reforms of the Democratic Party of Albanians, LR-PDSH (who was in coalition with Zoran Zaev, the head of the ethnic Macedonia LSDM Party and in opposition to the VMRO-LPMNE) was the target of an extensive propaganda campaign marking him as "an enemy of the people," who should be eliminated. The result was a truly shocking and brutal attack on Sela, in particular, by masked special police forces, who were allowed by the Macedonian government uniformed police to attack the Members of Parliament for more than two hours without any intervention by police who were present on the scene. Ziadin Sela was

repeatedly hit in the head, knocked unconscious, and was presumed dead by the attackers, when he was pulled out of the melee with severe wounds by colleagues who then resuscitated him with medical help. (This can be clearly seen in the bloody photos of Sela on April 27 that I have enlarged for this hearing.) Mr. Chairman, using such terrible planned violence to instill fear and trembling to achieve political goals should quality the VMRO-DPMNE party for listing as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department, as has been done for other political groups promoting terror.

The VMRO-DPMNE party led by Nikola Gruesvsky represents a violent anti-Albanian movement in Macedonia.

The VMRO-DPMNE led by Nikola Gruevsky is clearly a violent anti-Albanian political party, which has many convicted criminals as members, including Members of Parliament who were convicted of serious crimes, such as Jovan Tarculovski who in 2005 was sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for war crimes against one hundred Albanians during the armed conflict of 2001 between ethnic Albanians and the security forces of the Macedonian government. Tarculovski is now a member of parliament for the VMRO.

The current political crisis and economic chaos in Macedonia has very negatively affected the daily life of the large Albanian population, which is already subject to extremely high unemployment, especially among the youth. It is obvious that economic discrimination against Albanians is being used as an institutionalized instrument of ethnic cleansing of Albanians, much like the late Serbian dictator and indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic used in Kosova from 1989 to 1999, until the United States led NATO to bomb Serbia and brought Milosevic to justice

in the Hague International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia. Milosevic was charged with "crimes against humanity"—crimes that are now being repeated by virulent Slavic racism

and chauvinism under Nikola Gruevski's direction today.

Looking at the deteriorating economic and political environment in Macedonia during the last fifteen years after the "Ohrid/Oher Agreement" was signed to settle the serious military conflict between the ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians, it becomes clear that the roots of the current conflict are primarily political, not ethnic. The current crisis is a struggle for power and financial resources by VMRO-DPMNE and Nikola Gruevsky, who refuse to peacefully transfer power to the Zaev/LSDM-led coalition, who were trying to form a new government on April 27 under a mandate legally allowed to them after putting together a majority coalition of MPs in accordance with the Constitution of Macedonia. The VMRO party's real concern is the fear of criminal charges that its leadership, including Prime Minister Gruevsky and the head of his Secret Services, will probably face once they are out of power.

The potential of Russian involvement in Macedonia

This raises a real possibility of Russian involvement in Macedonia since Gruevsky will welcome any Russian support to turn an internal political crisis into an interethnic conflict with regional implications since Macedonia is bordered by Albania and by Kosova, Greece, and Serbia. And, there is a real danger that Russia will use the vulnerable position of Gruevsky and VMRO to push for a full-scale ethnic conflict in order to strengthen its role in the Balkans. This possibility should be enough of an incentive for the United States and the European Union to respond to the chaotic events of April 27 as quickly as possible. Serbia has already signaled that it is preparing for the worst in Macedonia and will intervene to protect its national security. In

such a scenario, Russia can exploit interethnic hostilities to expand its regional influence by offering support to Macedonia and even to Serbia.

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The Oher/Ohrid Agreement is compromised by Skopje 2014

VMRO's anti-Albanian rhetoric and ethnic exclusivity for ethnic Macedonians was made very clear in the creation by the Macedonian government of the Skopje 2014 pageant and construction of museums, government buildings, and monuments of historical figures from the region, while completely expunging Albanian identity from all literature, architecture, and symbols. VMRO-DPMNE did this, even though Albanians were the largest group or majority in Skopje from the 1800s until 1992, until many immigrated to Tirana,, the capital city of Albania, after the fall of communism in Albania. Skopje 2014 is the most serious violation of the Oher/Ohrid Agreement, and it was made possible through the subordination to VMRO-DPMNE of its Albanian coalition partner, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), led by Ali Ahmeti, along with the silence and complacency of the United States and the European Union.

The roots of Albanian racism in Macedonia can be found in the Former Yugoslavia

On March 7, 1937 an internal domestic policy memorandum was presented in Belgrade by Dr. Vaso Cubrilovic, the mentor of brutal Interior Minister Aleksandar Rankovic and war criminal Slobodan Milosevic. The memorandum, entitled "The Expulsion of the Albanians, made ethnic cleansing and even genocide an "allowable" strategy to fulfill "the mass removal of the Albanians from their triangle" [Kosova, Macedonia, and Montenegro] as "the only effective course for us."

On page 5, of the 19-page memorandum, which I am submitting for the Record, Cubrilovic states that, "The Albanians cannot be repulsed by means of gradual colonization alone;…the

only way and the only means to cope with them is the brute force of an organized state, in which we have always been superior to them." And on page 7, "the mode of removal" is spelled out as

follows: "The mass removal of the Albanians...is the only effective course for us...to bring about the relocation of a whole population.... The first prerequisite is the creation of a suitable psychosis.... Therefore...we must win over their clergy and men of influence, through money or threats to support the relocation of the Albanians..., [and] agitators to advance this removal must be found.... Another means would be coercion by the state apparatus...so as to make staying intolerable for the Albanians.... We should distribute weapons to our colonists.... **There remains one more means, which Serbia employed with great practical effect after 1878, that is, by secretly burning down Albanian villages and city quarters [emphasis mine].**

As someone who has been actively following the events leading to the disintegration of the Former Yugoslavia since 1986, as a US Congressman. and since 1989 as an advocate for Albanian human, political, and civil rights in the Balkans, it is clearer than ever to me since the events of April 27, 2017, that Nikola Gruevsky is following the racist, chauvinistic path of now deceased indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic, which, if not stopped, will only lead to more interethnic tension and political violence in Macedonia, with dire legal consequences for all who, like Gruevsky, follow Milosevic's disastrous road that ultimately led to his death in a prison cell in The Hague and his worst fear, the independence of Kosova.

Recommendations

1) The United States cannot wait any longer for the European Union to resolve the political crisis in Macedonia, for the reasons given in this testimony, and must take a leading role now before Macedonia devolves into chaos and the political, financial, and humanitarian

cost of cleaning up the mess of a regional conflict becomes too much for the United States to bear.

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2) An immediate step to take should be the active commitment of the United States to the full implementation of the now fifteen-year-old "Oher/Ohrid Agreement" to ensure equal rights for the Albanian people of Macedonia. To accomplish this, the US Congress should establish an Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) Implementation Council. The lack of such a mechanism is one of the reasons that the VMRO-DPMNE was able to control the leadership of DUI, the junior Albanian partner in their coalition.
3) The United States should call for codification of ethnic equality between Albanians and Macedonians in the Constitution because the current Constitution (1991) contains outdated post-Yugoslav provision that perpetrate a second-class, discriminatory status for Albanians in the Macedonia.
4) The shocking April 27, 2017, attack on the Macedonia parliament by special police forces was enabled by uniformed police forces, who allowed it to go on for almost three hours without intervention. As a result of this and the refusal of President Ivanov to hand over the mandate to the proposed coalition of the SDSM, led by Zoran Zaev, with the ethnic Albanian parties (resulting in 67 MPs out of a total of 120) to form a new government, the United States and the European Union should immediately call for sanctions against Macedonia.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Serwer?

STATEMENT OF DANIEL SERWER, PH.D., ACADEMIC DIRECTOR OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT, SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Mr. SERWER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Meeks. With permission, I would like to submit a written statement for the record and use a few minutes for just three key points.

First, the countries of the region made remarkable progress in the 10 years or so after the NATO intervention in Bosnia in 1995. But in the last 10 years, these past 10 years, the U.S. effort to pass the baton of leadership to the European Union has allowed slippage in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, and Macedonia. There are now risks of instability that could trigger a regionwide convulsion. That would reflect badly on America's global leadership role, unravel three peace agreements, and cost us far more than conflict prevention.

Second, those who say ethnic partition through rearrangement of borders would be a viable solution are playing with matches near a powder keg. Moves in that direction would lead to violence, including ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and even genocide.

It happened in the 1990s and it could happen again. Mono-ethnic states cannot be achieved without a massive and expensive peacekeeping deployment. Ethnic partition would not only be violent, it would also generate a new flood of refugees and creation of Islamic mini-states in parts of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Serbia proper.

This was the main reason we refused to move borders in the 1990s. Americans should be even more concerned about it today.

The Islamic state and al-Qaeda have had more success recruiting in the Balkans than many of us thought possible, given the pro-Western and pro-American attitudes of most Muslims in the region. Reducing Balkan Muslims to rump mono-ethnic states would radicalize many more.

Damage would not be limited to the Balkans. Russia would welcome ethnic partition because it would validate Moscow's destructive irredentist behavior in South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria, Crimea, and Donbass, as well as give Moscow a stronger foothold in the region. It would also leave a geographic gap in NATO and the EU that we have long hoped would be filled with friends and allies.

My third point is this: I see no serious alternative in the Balkans to the political and economic reforms required for each of the countries of the region to be eligible for NATO and EU membership. All want to join the EU, which, unfortunately, will not be able to begin admitting them until 2020 at the earliest. That leaves NATO membership as the vital carrot for reform except in Serbia. We need to do more to enable Balkan countries that want to do so to join the alliance, as Montenegro is doing right now.

Let me summarize what this really means. In Macedonia it means Europe and the U.S. need to tell Greece it will be invited to join NATO once it reestablishes transparent and accountable democratic governance.

In Kosovo it means ensuring Pristina develops an army designed for international peacekeeping that poses no threats to Serbs. For that, Serbia will need to accept Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity by allowing U.N. membership.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, NATO members should tell Republic Srpska secession will gain no Western recognition or aid for it or any country it joins, including from the IMF and the World Bank.

These and other suggestions in my written testimony would put the region back on track and prevent the peace agreements of the 1990s and 2001 from unraveling. So, too, would ensuring that Balkan countries have access to energy supplies from countries other than Russia: Natural gas from Azerbaijan, LNG from the U.S., or eventually Mediterranean gas from Cyprus or Israel.

Mr. Chairman, I have just outlined a substantial list of diplomatic tasks. If the administration commits to them, implementation might require an American Special Envoy. But a policy should come first, one based on maintaining current borders, preventing ethnic partition, and pushing hard for NATO and EU membership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Serwer follows:]

Preventing the Unraveling of the Balkans Peace Agreements

Testimony

By

Daniel Serwer

Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Hearing on The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability

House International Relations Committee

Subcommittee on Europe, Asia and Emerging Threats

May 17, 2017

Introduction

Recent news from the Balkans is alarming: demonstrator-initiated violence inside the Macedonian parliament, an attempted coup in Montenegro, harsh words between Serbia and Kosovo, a declared intention to hold an independence referendum in Bosnia's Republika Srpska. Fears of renewed violence are in the air. Is the Balkans returning to the now dimly recalled but brutal wars of the 1990s?

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the Balkans region suffered the violent breakup of former Yugoslavia, including wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. In 1995, the United States led a NATO air intervention against Bosnian Serb forces and subsequent diplomatic negotiations at Dayton, Ohio that ended the more than three-year Bosnian war. After unsuccessful negotiations concerning Kosovo, NATO intervened again, this time against Serbia in 1999. In Macedonia, U.S. troops joined a successful UN preventive deployment in the early 1990s, and the U.S. and EU in tandem conducted, with NATO backing, a successful diplomatic negotiation to end an Albanian uprising in 2001.

This was the unipolar moment: Russia was weak, Europe operating on its own had failed, NATO was looking for its future role, the U.S. was strong and committed to defend what it regarded as universal human rights violated all too blatantly with ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and even genocide in the Balkans.

A decade or more of substantial progress in the Yugoslav successor states followed each of these interventions, due in part to explicit international community guidance and ample support. The EU in 2003 pledged "unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries" and has backed the promise with major funding and extensive technical assistance. Slovenia entered the EU in 2004, Croatia in 2011. Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia are candidate countries currently negotiating membership, which will not occur before 2020 and perhaps not before 2025. Slovenia, Croatia, and Albania are NATO members. Montenegro soon will be.

The West-ward march of the Balkans has however now stalled, especially in Bosnia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo. Bosnia finds itself handicapped with a power-sharing constitution Americans wrote to end its war; it now prevents functional and efficient governance, while the leader of its "Serb entity" (Republika Srpska) is threatening an independence referendum that would infuriate the country's majority Bosniak Muslim population. Macedonia is suffering a profound years-long political crisis that has revealed gross abuses of power and aggravated interethnic tensions. Serbia is drifting away from its EU ambition towards Moscow's political and military orbit. Kosovo, still living under a regime of limited sovereignty, has both internal problems with its Serb population as well as issues with Belgrade. Kosovo's youthful population is proving vulnerable to extremist recruitment and pan-Albanian appeals inconsistent with the bargain Pristina made with the West at independence: it would not be able to join any other country.

External factors have greatly aggravated these problems. The United States has sought over the past decade to lower its commitments in the Balkans and pass the baton to Europe, which has greater interests in the Balkans and far stronger leverage to encourage political and economic reform in the region. But Brussels is distracted. The long recession in Europe following the global financial crisis of 2008, the Greek financial crisis that ensued, the flood of Middle Eastern migrants into Europe through the Balkans beginning in 2015, and the Brexit referendum in 2016 have soured EU attitudes on enlargement. EU credibility has diminished dramatically, as has its leverage over Balkan politicians who

see imminent threats to their hold on power from the reforms required for membership but no near-term prospect of joining the EU.

At the same time, Russia has greatly increased "hybrid warfare" efforts in the region, seeking to disrupt progress towards NATO and the EU. Moscow is especially active among more ethnically nationalist Orthodox Christians in Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Montenegro. It has established a logistics facility in Serbia in the guise of humanitarian center, it sponsored a coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016, it finances anti-NATO and anti-EU politicians and protests throughout the Balkans, it has armed and trained nationalist paramilitaries, and it has greatly increased its Russia Today and Sputnik propaganda efforts throughout the region. The results are palpable: interethnic tension has increased, especially in Macedonia and Bosnia, and Serbia is drifting away from its European ambitions. Russia could seek to repeat its successes in creating puppet secessionist regimes in Crimea and Donbas in Bosnia's Republika Srpska, northern Kosovo, or even northern Montenegro.

The wars in the Middle East are also likely to affect the situation in the Balkans, where Islamic State and other recruitment of radicalized Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo has yielded small absolute numbers but relatively large percentages when compared with their Muslim populations, which otherwise are markedly pro-Western and specifically pro-American due to the 1990s interventions. Some Balkan extremists are now returning to the region, acting as charismatic magnets and propagators of extremist ideology that threatens the region's democratic evolution.

The Contingencies

Large scale, long-duration conflict of the kind the Balkans experienced in the 1990s is no longer likely, because none of the Balkan countries has sufficiently malign leadership, political support, or (except for Serbia) military capabilities to sustain such efforts. Instability and shorter, more decisive military clashes, possibly using Russian trained and equipped paramilitary forces at least nominally not under state control, are more likely. The consequences could include ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, challenges to existing state institutions, border changes, and further Muslim radicalization.

The main concern for the U.S. in the Balkans would be unraveling of the American-induced peace settlements in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. All of them were based on the proposition that internal boundaries might be upgraded to international borders but no borders would be moved to accommodate ethnic differences. The five republics that seceded from former Yugoslavia have the same international borders as they had when they were part of the Yugoslav Federation. Only Serbia has a different border, because of Kosovo's independence, which left the existing boundary between the autonomous province and Serbia proper in place but upgraded it to an international border. This border principle led to the formation of fragile states that were all expected with peace to transition to full-fledged democracy providing Western-style protection and rule of law to ethnic groups that happened to be numerical minorities.

While the sequence of events is unpredictable, events in any one of these still fragile states would likely precipitate problems in the other two. The region is interconnected: if Republika Srpska tries to leave Bosnia, Serbs in northern Kosovo will try to leave Kosovo and Albanians in southern Serbia will try to leave Serbia. If Macedonia is partitioned, its Albanians will want union with at least Kosovo if not also Albania and the Albanian-majority municipalities of southern Serbia, which would trigger partition of

Kosovo and of Bosnia. Moving borders to accommodate ethnic differences would thus open "Pandora's box," leading inevitably to ethnic cleansing aimed at moving everyone to the "right" side of the border.

In Bosnia, Republika Srpska's president has promised an independence referendum in 2018. While international recognition is unlikely, withdrawal of Serb participation in Bosnian state institutions would paralyze them, as they are based on ethnic power-sharing that requires not only numerical majorities for decisions, but separate concurrence of ethnic caucuses. An independence referendum could precipitate a Bosniak military move to seize the northeastern town of Brcko, which links the two "wings" of Republika Srpska and is vital to its survival. Serbia would then have to decide whether and how to intervene (as it did in the 1990s with only a thin veneer of deniability) to sustain Republika Srpska.

Albanian rioting against Serbs in Kosovo, much like what occurred in 2004, could precipitate Serbian military intervention to protect the Serb-majority municipalities of the north, perhaps even with NATO concurrence. Serb provocations—like the train with nationalist slogans painted on it that tried to enter Kosovo earlier this year—could trigger an Albanian effort to seize northern Kosovo. The likelihood of these contingencies will greatly increase once NATO, which will not stay forever, decides to leave.

In Macedonia, Albanian or Kosovar paramilitaries like those who rebelled in 2001 (and appeared suddenly again in 2015) might seek union with Kosovo or Albania, generating pressure to repress the rebellion or to allow Macedonian paramilitary forces to respond. Skopje is the center of gravity for both Albanians and Macedonians, as it is the largest city in the country for both ethnic groups. Rioting or paramilitary clashes there could generate pressure for broader military responses.

While Montenegro, soon to be a NATO member, may seem out of danger, Russian efforts to destabilize the new Alliance member will continue. Moscow has backed Serbs concentrated in northern Montenegro who were loyal to Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, resisted Montenegro's independence, and opposed NATO membership. Moscow is also courting Bosniak politicians in Montenegro, encouraging their contacts with the Chechnan leadership.

None of these contingencies could be readily contained to one or even two countries without a massive commitment of international troops and resources. Prevention is the only viable option.

Warning indicators

Balkan politics is already flashing warning of possible future violent instability. Nationalist leadership is dominant in most of the region. Hate speech is common in Balkans media. Even if most people are primarily concerned with jobs and the economy, extremist Serbs, Albanians, and Macedonians make no secret of their loathing for each other and their willingness to return to violence, sometimes organizing militias or hate groups for the purpose. Some display intentionally provocative symbols and parade ostentatiously. Even a recent claim that Serbian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Bosnian are dialects of the same language (a common view in the past) roused passionate nationalist objections. Anti-nationalists and human rights advocates are subjected to denunciation, harassment, petty violence, and worse.

In Bosnia, the president of Republika Srpska speaks openly of secession, while prominent Croats advocate a "third entity" that would revive the wartime para-state of Herzeg-Bosna, which aimed at eventual union with Croatia. Macedonia's political crisis is due in part to an Albanian political platform written in Tirana under the tutelage of the Prime Minister of Albania. It would require Albanian to be spoken throughout Macedonia, which is a practical and political impossibility. In Montenegro, the

Russian-sponsored coup attempt was the tip of the iceberg. Moscow is expending substantial resources supporting anti-NATO and anti-EU politicians there and elsewhere throughout the region. In Serbia, the President-elect who helped unveil the Montenegrin coup attempt and ran as a pro-EU candidate is hedging his bets by maintaining Belgrade's strong links to Moscow. In addition to the existing Russian facility near Nis, Moscow wants a training center in the northern province of Vojvodina. Relations between Serbia and Croatia are strained, with Belgrade buying more weapons from Russia to try to match Zagreb's enhanced NATO-compatible capabilities.

Additional warning indicators could include:

- Scheduling of an independence referendum in Republika Srpska
- More parading or exercises by armed paramilitaries of any ethnic group in any Balkan country
- Strengthening of pan-Albanian sentiment in Albania, Kosovo, or Macedonia
- Belgrade expanding cooperation with Russia
- Russian meddling in Balkan elections, especially in Montenegro and Macedonia
- Continued failure of Macedonia to form a new government
- Worsening of relations between Serbia and Croatia

Implications for U.S. interests

The Balkans are not a primary area of U.S. interests in the 2010s, but unraveling of the peace agreements there would nevertheless have a serious impact on U.S. interests, reflecting badly on its past achievements as well as its current global leadership role, and causing real harm to its interests in Europe and the Middle East.

The big losers in the Balkans would likely be Muslims, who already generate a disproportionate number of foreign fighters in the Middle East. Partition of Bosnia would create one or more non-viable Islamic republics, likely under Turkish or Iranian patronage. Already in the 1990s the U.S. was concerned about the possibility that such rump Islamic states would provide platforms for international terrorists. Concern should be much greater today. Partition of Kosovo would likely further radicalize some of its notably young, growing, and increasingly religious Albanian population, which is mostly Muslim, even if many Kosovars are no more than mildly observant.

Transnational organized crime already has a substantial foothold in the Balkans, where drugs, people, money, and weapons flow without any barriers among criminals of different ethnic groups. The states of the region have begun to implement serious law enforcement measures, as they all need to do to qualify for upgrades in their relationships with the EU. Instability in the region would dramatically reduce the restraints on organized crime and unleash a wave of trafficking that would be a major challenge to existing state structures as well as neighboring European allies of the U.S. Kleptocratic politicians throughout the Balkans would be enriched.

Russia is making major inroads in the Balkans, including through arms sales to Serbia. Instability in the Balkans would enable Russia to widen its foothold further among Christians, especially the Serb Orthodox, in the region. Moscow's influence would grow in Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Republika Srpska, while America's stock throughout the region would decline sharply. NATO, which still has troops in Kosovo and is regarded as a guarantor of Bosnia's territorial integrity (even though the troops there now are under EU command) would be exposed as a paper tiger. Moscow, which already

cites Kosovo's independence as a precedent for its behavior in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, would treat any future partitions in the Balkans as post-facto validation justifying Russian irredentism in Crimea, Donbas, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria.

In addition to the NATO members in the Balkans, the U.S. has close and productive military relationships with Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia, which cooperate respectively with the Ohio, Iowa and Vermont National Guard contingents. The Macedonian army has fought under U.S. command in Afghanistan. Kosovo has no army yet but its lightly armed Kosovo Security Force (KSF) is mostly U.S. and British trained. The Iowa National Guard will help with the process of upgrading the KSF to an effective, NATO-eligible army. The Ohio National Guard connection is a major contribution to U.S. efforts to overcome past conflict with Serbia.

The United States still has more than 600 troops in the Balkans (mainly Kosovo) as well as U.S. citizens who are likely to number in the thousands, including aid workers as well as dual nationals. Any instability could put both civilians and troops at risk. Violence in the Balkans also has the potential to spread to Croatia, Albania, Greece, and Bulgaria, which are all NATO members, in addition to causing refugee flows into the EU and eventually into the U.S., where there are already substantial communities of Balkan origins, especially in New York, Ohio, Missouri and elsewhere. Congress, which played a strong role in encouraging the U.S. interventions in the 1990s, would likely be concerned with any serious widespread instability in the Balkans.

Preventive options

Primary responsibility for preventing the worst in the Balkans belongs to the EU, which has stronger carrots and sticks as well as more immediate geopolitical, economic, and cultural interests in the Balkans. The Europeans have launched a Bosnian initiative aimed at political and economic (not constitutional) reform, but the conditionality on which its implementation depends has been erratic. Brussels has also sponsored a dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo that has yielded concrete results and initially a much-improved atmosphere between their capitals, but there too implementation has lagged and major problems, especially Serbia's block on Kosovo joining the UN, remain. The U.S. has given ample support to the EU in its so far unsuccessful efforts to resolve Macedonia's ongoing political crisis, which has left the country without an effective government for two years.

None of these EU efforts has proven sufficient to compensate for the declining lure of EU membership. The EU has already given away many of its carrots: all the non-member states in the Balkans have Stabilization and Association Agreements that provide market access and ample funding, most have visa waiver programs, and several have EU candidate status. NATO membership, which in the past has proven a stepping stone towards EU membership, is currently blocked for Bosnia (by its internal politics), Kosovo (because it has no army yet), Macedonia (by Greece, which claims Macedonia's name and wants Skopje to give it up), and Serbia (which has not opted to aim for NATO membership).

Future options include:

Accelerate NATO and EU membership. Washington and Brussels could either remove obstacles to faster progress in EU and NATO accession or find other ways of increasing their impact on Balkan behavior. Montenegro's impending NATO accession is an important signal to the region that the door is not slammed shut, and NATO should continue to use its Partnership for Peace and Membership Action Plans

to good effect. The U.S. could give more resources and visibility to its National Guard cooperation with Balkan states. The EU may want to create a new category of "associate" membership or something similar that brings Balkan candidate countries further inside the Union's decision-making process, without however the votes associated with full membership.

Develop and use better carrots and sticks. While the EU has exhausted many of its carrots, the U.S. has not. It could consider bilateral free trade agreements with Balkan countries as a reward for meeting NATO and EU requirements. Or Washington could encourage the non-EU Balkans countries to form a free trade area among themselves, which could then negotiate a free trade agreement with the U.S.

The U.S. Treasury has "designated" some Balkan individuals, blocking their access to the U.S. financial system and preventing them from traveling to the U.S. because of the obstacles they pose to peace, security, and democracy in the Balkans. While this may have little immediate practical impact, the symbolism is important and has seriously affected the political calculations of at least some of those so designated. The EU has not consistently followed suit. It is vital that the U.S. and Europe act jointly in the Balkans against recalcitrant Balkan political leaders and their cronies. It would be particularly useful to prevent those who finance them, often with the proceeds of corrupt behavior, from accessing the European banking system.

Beef up OSCE activities. The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe still maintains a substantial pro-democracy network in Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Macedonia. This network is vital to the free and fair conduct of elections. Its resources could be increased to ensure that it delivers the other democratization assistance that these countries require, particularly in the media space.

Improve relations among Balkan ethnic groups. In the more than 20 years since the end of the Bosnian war, little has been accomplished in improving people-to-people relations among ethnic groups in the Balkans. Transitional justice has focused on the activities of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which has been slow and unconvincing in its pursuit of criminal justice despite more than 100 convictions. The Balkans could establish an official, region-wide truth and reconciliation effort like that proposed by the Commission for Recom, a regional nongovernmental organization that has documented war crimes and other violations of human rights.

Enhanced U.S. diplomatic efforts. In several Balkan countries there are distinct issues that might be resolved through enhanced U.S. diplomatic efforts, which could require appointment of a special envoy responsible for mediating and resolving key hot spots in cooperation with the EU, in particular in Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia.

In Macedonia, the "name" controversy with Greece has caused a marked increase in ethnic tension between Albanians and Macedonians. U.S. pressure on both Greece and Macedonia to allow Macedonia into NATO as "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (as provided for in a 1995 Interim Agreement validated by the International Court of Justice in 2011) or as the Republic of Macedonia (its constitutional name) would require presidential-level engagement. Another possibility is to end the UN mediation effort, which has lasted more than 20 years and become unproductive, thus encouraging Athens and Skopje to deal directly with other on the issue.

In Bosnia, the U.S. needs to encourage the EU to be much stricter in requiring implementation of political and economic reforms. Washington could also encourage the Europeans to move their troops—now scattered in militarily insignificant numbers throughout Bosnia—to Brcko, signaling to both Serbs and Bosniaks that this center of gravity will not be allowed to fall to either. As Republika Srpska has let its plans for an independence referendum in 2018 be known, the U.S. and EU could prepare and publicize a vigorous planned response, including non-recognition and ineligibility of independent Republika Srpska, or any country it joins, for EU membership or loans from the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank.

In Kosovo, formation of the army required for NATO membership is stalled due to Serb opposition, which stems in part from Belgrade's concern about how the army might be used. The U.S. could help to resolve this quandary by urging Belgrade to accept Kosovo UN membership, in return for an army designed not for territorial defense but rather for deployment on international missions. Serbia has preferred to put off the question of acceptance of Kosovo's sovereignty until just before EU accession, but that is a mistake since all the bargaining power then will be on the EU's side, not Serbia's. The U.S. could consider threatening NATO withdrawal from Kosovo unless Belgrade permits Kosovo UN membership and both Belgrade and Pristina fully implement all their agreements.

In addition to these country-specific issues, enhanced U.S. diplomacy could focus on ensuring that the Balkans, parts of which are highly dependent on Russian natural gas imports, has alternative sources: Azeri, U.S. liquefied natural gas, or eventually Eastern Mediterranean gas from Cyprus or Israel.

Counter Russian troublemaking. The U.S. could use its influence with NATO members to block or hinder Russian air and ground access to the Balkans, especially to its "humanitarian" base in Serbia if that is used for nefarious purposes. It could also use a portion of democratization resources Congress is likely to make available to beef up U.S. broadcasting and social media efforts in the Balkans to offer a more positive image of the U.S., EU, and NATO.

Seek Russian cooperation in the Balkans. U.S./Russian relations are at a nadir. Cooperation in Syria or Ukraine seems unlikely, as Washington's and Moscow's interests there diverge sharply. The U.S. could seek to make the Balkans an experiment in cooperation with Russia, promising no further NATO expansion there if Moscow will stop its hybrid warfare efforts to destabilize the region and allow the states of the region to accede to the EU.

Arrange for ethno-territorial partition of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The U.S. and EU could conclude that state-building in the Balkans within existing borders is impossible and embark instead on an effort to negotiate ethno-territorial partition of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia, with the right of the resulting states to join neighboring states. This would require heavy diplomatic lifting on the part of the U.S. and likely also a deployment of thousands of U.S. and European troops to minimize the likelihood of associated violence. They would likely need to stay for that purpose for many more years, if not decades.

Mitigating options

The U.S. should be prepared

- to sponsor with Russia and EU members a UN Security Council resolution condemning any outbreak of large-scale violence in the Balkans and naming/shaming parties that have contributed to it.
- to convene an emergency meeting of the Peace Implementation Council for Bosnia, the body that oversees the Dayton agreements, and
- to redeploy some or all U.S. troops in Kosovo, and NATO troops from neighboring countries, to the north, to Brcko, to Skopje or any other location of instability to assist in reestablishing a safe and secure environment as well as warning off any perpetrators.

Recommendations

There is no viable alternative to Euroatlantic integration for the Balkans. The U.S. needs to act urgently to preserve peace and stability in the region, relying on the EU as the vital partner in the effort. Together they should

- Develop a new set of carrots and sticks for Balkans countries, including bilateral free trade agreements with the U.S., accelerated EU membership, and more effective European procedures for blocking indiviudals from traveling in the EU or utilizing its financial system.
- Jointly designate Balkan leaders who threaten democracy, peace and security.
- Try to develop with Russia an understanding that will reduce Moscow's meddling.
- Enunciate publicly a planned joint response to Republika Srpska's independence referendum.
- Establish a region-wide truth and reconciliation effort that would seek a common understanding of what happened during the conflicts of the 1990s as well as compensation for victims.
- Enhance OSCE democratization resources and activities.
- Consider redeployment of U.S. and EU troops to maximize their deterrent effect.

The U.S. should also appoint a special envoy for the Balkans who would seek to resolve, in close consultation with the Europeans, country-specific issues:

- In Bosnia, constitutional reform aimed at creating functional and effective governments at all levels, including a state (central) government capable of negotiating and fulfilling the requirements for NATO and EU membership.
- In Serbia, an end to the Russian veto on Kosovo UN membership.
- In Kosovo, creation of an army that poses no threat to anyone inside the country and is capable of substantial contributions to international, including UN and NATO, missions.
- In Macedonia, transparent and accountable governance as a prelude to NATO membership for The FYROM at the next NATO summit.
- For the region, natural gas and other energy networks that are economically viable and minimize dependence on Russia.

The special envoy would also seek to ensure high-level U.S. Government visits to all the Balkan countries, several of which have been neglected in recent years.

In addition, the U.S. needs to beef up its efforts to counter Russian hybrid warfare in the Balkans. This should entail a major commitment to Balkans media, including television, which would make it harder for Moscow to spread its propaganda, as well as willingness to block overflights into the Balkans by Russian aircraft. National Guard cooperation with Balkan countries should get increased resources and

visibility. Only by showing determination will Washington get from Moscow the type of cooperation that could be helpful: Moscow's willingness to drop its veto on Kosovo UN membership as well as an end to Russian meddling in Macedonia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Promising no expansion of NATO would be a mistake, as it would signal weakness and seriously disappoint Kosovo and Macedonia, radicalizing Albanians and Macedonians in counter-productive ways.

The fraying Balkans should not be allowed to unravel. The costs of preventing a reversion to violence in the region will be minimal compared to the costs of even minor instability, never mind a rearrangement of borders and state structures, which would require major U.S. diplomatic and military efforts. The U.S. should expect the EU to foot most of the bill for prevention, but renewed warfare could vastly raise the costs to the U.S. The time to act is now.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I think you get the Golden Cup for being right on time. Okay. [Laughter.]

I will start the questions and, then, we will move from there to Mr. Meeks.

Mr. Bardos, you have used for the first time the words that I know would eventually emerge, the words "the new Cold War." I don't know who wants it, but somebody wants war with Russia. And it is more than just a fear of Russia; somebody wants there to be a new Cold War.

I have spent a considerable part of my life trying to defeat the Soviet Union, both in the White House and in the field against Soviet troops, et cetera. And I started, anyway, when I was a teenager.

But the bottom line is that we don't want a Cold War; the American people don't want a Cold War. Yet, we have an unrelenting hostility that says that we have to watch out for even Russia's influence on a region. I see no reason why Russia shouldn't be able to sell energy to any country that it wants to or any country. I don't see that as a hostile act to the United States.

Let me just note, if we are going to solve this, we have got to move forward in a positive way rather than looking at this as some kind of we are going to do this, so just screw the Russians. That is not going to bring about a better world.

But we know something needs to be done in the Balkans because it is not working. And just like you said, Doctor, when the EU took over, basically, some of the major leadership from the United States, things started going haywire. And it has continued to go haywire for the last 10 years.

So, with that, why not make a different kind of approach. I think what is motivating us is there are some very powerful, monied interests in Europe that want to see the Balkans toeing the line that they dictate.

What about encouraging these countries to form a new Southern European Economic Union together? They can't call it Yugoslavia, but they can call it whatever else they want to call it. The bottom line is that, if you had open-borders type of free trade by these countries, it would be a tremendous benefit to them. So, instead of us pushing to try to get them to do whatever the German banks tell them to do in order to get into the EU, maybe we should be telling them, "Why don't you start working together and opening up trade between each other and tearing down these boundaries, economic boundaries?" What do you think about that? Please, 1 minute, we will start with Bardos. Start with Joe in the middle and, then, go to the right. Go ahead.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Okay. It is not going to work, Mr. Chairman. Let me tell you why. You have got such political corruption now in Albania, in Macedonia, in Kosovo, in Serbia. The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. The people are not being served by these governments.

I don't know what is going to happen after the elections in Kosovo and in Albania. Nobody agrees on anything, apparently. I think that it is time for the U.S. to realize that, by abandoning the Balkans to the European Union, we have failed. The Ohrid Agree-

ment was guaranteed by the U.S. and by the European Union. It did nothing. It is worse now than it was before.

So, how could we look at normal ways of thinking to create an economy in Southeast Europe?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Got it, Joe, but now tell us your 30-second answer of your plan.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. The plan—and I hate to see these cuts for the State Department; it doesn't make any sense—we need to be much more engaged than we are. We are fooling ourselves if——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What are we pushing for?

Mr. DIOGUARDI. For instance, get Ohrid back on. It was signed off, but let's have an "implementation framework" that we are monitoring very closely. Not saying, well, let the European Union do it and we will figure out what goes on later.

So, we have got to take baby steps. This is not going to be solved very fast. The racism that exists from the Slavs to the Albanians is so great because of the paper I just mentioned: "We have got to get rid of the Albanians at all costs." Basically, that is what this paper says.

And that is one of the reasons why Milosevic went to The Hague, because we brought him to The Hague and made sure that paper was put on the record, so that they knew Albanians could never coexist in Serbia and in Kosovo with this kind of thinking. And now, Gruevski is doing it in Macedonia.

So, I don't know what the answer is.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Well, let's go to the doctor who may know the answer.

Mr. SERWER. Mr. Chairman, I won't claim to know the answer. What I will tell you is that it is worth a look. I think we have not maximized the economic advantages of peace after——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And cooperation.

Mr. SERWER [continuing]. After 1995 and 2001.

These countries do have good access to European markets through their stabilization and association agreements. I think they have quite a bit of access to each other's markets as well. But that is a proposition that would have to be studied in some depth and with some care. And I, frankly, haven't seen such a study. Maybe, Gordon, you know.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you.

Dr. Bardos?

Mr. BARDOS. Well, it is a very commonsensical and logical idea. As a matter of fact, the current Serbian Prime Minister, soon to be President, Vucic, proposed something like that a few weeks ago, a kind of Balkan common market.

The problem with it, I think a lot of the problem with it right now is political. Emotions are still too raw among the different peoples in the region. Some people think that Serbia will wind up dominating such an arrangement and they don't want to see that happening. Some people think it might be like a recreation of the old Yugoslavia, and they don't want that, to see that happening.

I think there is something in place—and, unfortunately, I am not an economist, so I don't know this in great detail—there is something called CEFTA, the Central European Free Trade Association

or Agreements. I can't remember all the specifics of it. Something like that does exist.

I think a good step in this direction, though, would be to start promoting what might be politically possible, and to start promoting as many bilateral free trade agreements as possible, start opening up the markets that way.

So, maybe, obviously, it might not work between Serbian and Kosovo now or between Kosovo and Macedonia, but if you could see something, you could see trade freeing up considerably between Serbia and Bosnia, for instance, or between Croatia and Bosnia, and permutations like that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We know something has to happen. The bottom line is that you have people suffering there economically. You have young people who have no hope of jobs.

Mr. BARDOS. Right.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You have got people who are—when people lose hope, they turn to extremism. And the last thing we need, whether they are Christian extremists or whether they are Muslim extremists, we do not need them turning to their religion and becoming extremists and, then, joining in with others to commit acts of violence. And that is a real not only possibility; it has already been in your testimony. You mentioned that that is being seen now for not the first time, but it we are easing into a situation where that didn't exist, and now it is becoming a part of the reality of the Balkans.

So, we need to get moving. We need to be engaged. And I will have a very short closing statement, but Mr. Meeks has the floor now.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, again.

Interesting dialog. Let me just pick up where some are talking about. I know I will start with Dr. Serwer. In March 2017, this year, the leaders of Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia met. They all got together to, I guess, reignite this regional cooperation and reaffirm their shared interests in eventually joining the EU, if possible, and putting forward a plan for the Western Balkans. And I think they have planned another meeting sometime this year. I think it is July.

So, my question to you is, do we, the United States of America, should we have an interest in these meetings, in these meetings continuing? Are these meetings a positive step that may lead to something or toward mutual cooperation? And if you think it is, how do you think the United States should support such meetings?

Mr. SERWER. Mr. Meeks, I am under the impression that the United States has given ample support to these kinds of regional arrangements which exist among the Defense Ministers, among the Interior Ministers, and also for regional, economic and infrastructure cooperation. There is, however, very little progress on regional infrastructure. The EU has promised a lot of money, but hasn't really started the digging yet.

I am under the impression that we have provided a lot of diplomatic support to those efforts. We don't have the kind of bilateral assistance money that helps much in this game. We, frankly, have been out of the infrastructure game for the most part. We need to

see the World Bank, in particular, and the European Union pick up the bills for roads, for railroads, and for airports in the region.

I think it would have been better to have asked Mr. Yee, but I think he would say, "Look, we have been fully supportive of all the regional cooperative arrangements." And they are quite successful, I must say. These guys meet all the time.

Mr. MEEKS. Mr. Bardos, you mentioned that the new Serbian President talked about having a Western Balkans custom union or something of that nature. You mentioned that. Is that a good idea? Was that something that would help some of the economic instability in the region? Is that a step in the right direction? And what influence do you think that the new President of Serbia will have in the region?

Mr. BARDOS. It is a very good. It is, as I said, very commonsensical, very logical, if it would reduce tariff barriers, make transporting goods easier, moving labor or capital, and so forth. It could be a spurt to economic development and activity in the region, and so forth.

But, again, the problem right now at this point is political. I think there is too much—as I said, the emotions are too raw right now. People are still very leery about anything that looks like recreating Yugoslavia. And there is also the fear that this might be, the Europeans might be offering this in place of European Union membership. So, that is what a lot of people in the region are afraid of, too; that, okay, the Europeans have given up on taking the Western Balkans into the EU. So, this is kind of our consolation prize. So, you are getting a little kind of political and emotional pushback because of that as well. But it is a very good idea.

Mr. MEEKS. Do you agree?

Mr. DIOGUARDI. When you mentioned Radovan Karadzic, you are talking about the people that were wounded by Slobodan Milosevic. The biggest racist you are ever going to find, what he did, he got convicted. Well, he died in a prison cell because he didn't take his heart medicine, but he was about to get convicted for war crimes and genocide against the Albanian people.

What did Radovan Karadzic say recently? They signaled that they will definitely come in to support Gruevski, the guy that did this. And what they want is in an ethno-ethnic name; they want an excuse. They want to see the Albanians out so badly that they want to see an ethno-ethnic. Even though it is a political conflict and an economic problem, they want it to be ethno-ethnic because that would throw Russia in, and then, Russia would probably support, obviously, the Serbs. And it would be, again, a war against the Albanians. So, we have got to be very careful here.

Mr. MEEKS. My last question. I see I am just about out of time, and I know we have got votes getting ready to come up.

My other concern is Bosnia and its current troubles with its ethnic minority population, of course, and the corruption and its relatively weak central government. How can we encourage others in the region, the regional actors to better cooperate and to support an independent Bosnia? I think that is real important. Is there something that we can do, is there a role that we can play to help make that happen? Dr. Serwer?

Mr. SERWER. Yes, in short, we should be encouraging Belgrade to do what it has any number of times said it would do, which is to be supportive of a sovereign and integral Bosnia. But much more is needed because we have in Republic Srpska somebody who has promised an independence referendum, who clearly is in violation of the Dayton Accords. We have designated him under our Treasury regulations. And we need to do more to ensure that he is not a dominant political force in Bosnia, if Bosnia is going to stay in one piece.

The way to do that in my view is to talk with the Europeans. I mean, the Europeans have to be worrying. When we designate somebody using the Treasury's powers, the Europeans, more often than not, do not follow suit. They use those tools much more sparingly than we do, and that has to do with politics inside the EU. We need to be getting them to follow suit. I think preventing Mr. Dodik himself and some of his people from traveling in and using the financial system of the European Union would be a very serious sanction.

So, I think Serbia is ready in many ways to do the right things, but it is Europe that hasn't done as much of the right things as I would like to see.

Frankly, Bosnia is a problem because of the constitution that we wrote for the country and that they wanted for the country. It is very hard to change that constitution, but I have no doubt but that we will be having problems with Bosnia until it at least has a clause in its constitution that says the central government has the authority, all the authority it needs, to negotiate and implement the rules of the European Union. That would be my simple solution in Bosnia.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, and I want to thank all of you for your testimony. I am simply out of time here, and I know that we have votes coming up and the chairman wants to do his closing remarks.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Remarks. There you are.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. I wanted to make a comment on that. Can I? Just one quick comment, please?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Oh, yes, sure, Joe.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. You can't trust Serbia. Mr. Dodik is taking his orders from Belgrade. Serbia wants at some point not only to have influence in Srpska, but to make it part of Serbia, the same thing that is going on in northern Kosovo.

And listen, Serbia still has not recognized Kosovo. They want to become part of the European Union. Part of that was good neighborliness. What good neighbors are Serbs to Kosovo and Albanians? They have gotten worse, not better. So, you have got to watch out for Serbia. They are the bad man in the neighborhood, and you are not going to get them to change anything because the issue is not "Greater Albania"; it is "Greater Serbia."

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, that was an interesting last bit of testimony: Watch out for Serbia.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Yes. Am I right? [Laughter.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well——

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Ask the Albanians. [Applause.]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. My theory is watch out for bad guys. Listen, there are good people in every one of those ethnic groups that you are talking about.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Right.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. There are good people——

Mr. DIOGUARDI. You're right.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. There are good people who are Serbs and there are good people who are Albanians. There are good Muslims. There are good Christians. And what we have to try to do, if there is going to be peace, is try to seek out the good people in all those communities and say it is about time we get moving. We have stagnated enough. We have 20 years of going nowhere because we are only concerned about the bad guys over there and there are all the bad guys.

The fact is that there are bad guys, as I say, in all of these countries, but there are good guys. And the good guys I think are capable of working together if the United States provides leadership. And we have to provide leadership with people knowing that we care about things like that. When you have people being beaten up, we care about that. And we have to be forceful and let people on the other side know that is unacceptable. And we also have to have some creative approaches.

Let me just say that this idea, I don't know, every time I have gone down to the Balkans, they seem to have the same concept: Let's get a part, we have got to get a part of the EU, and we have got to be part of NATO. Well, this is like, "I've really got to get to the Titanic before it sails." And, in fact, the Titanic has already sailed. "I'll pay you to put me on the Titanic. Get me a rowboat or get me a motorboat and get me on that ship."

The EU is the past and it is not working. If we can come up with some positive solutions and have some energy and some excitement about really economic coalitions that work—let's look back when things were really bad. And I can tell you, there were really bad guys in Germany in World War II, and we came along with the Marshall Plan. I have read about the Marshall Plan. Probably some of you, probably the doctor knows a lot more than me.

But the Marshall Plan, what did it do? What was the most important thing it did? It made sure that all of these inhibitors to trade between their countries, the European countries that had been at war with each other, they got rid of those impediments, and they encouraged people to economically cooperate. So, that is what made the European situation better in the first place.

None of that has been tried in the Balkans. I will tell you, Joe, if a lot of Serbs are bad, there were a lot of Germans that were bad at that time, and we made sure that we integrated them into a situation. And now, of course, they are calling the shots on the World Bank and a lot of other places.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. Mr. Chairman, you made a very good point. The people are good; it is the governments that are bad.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. All right.

Mr. DIOGUARDI. How do you deal with these corrupt governments? That is the problem.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, it is up to us to make sure that we are encouraging the good people, and I don't know, we do respect democracy. We do respect who gets elected and the rules of the game.

Let me just say this committee paid a lot of attention to the Baltics. And as I say, as we got in the Baltics, I did not find the Russian military aggression everybody was talking about.

And we have spent a lot of time in this committee going over Turkey, and Turkey has turned out to be the disaster that we thought it might be.

And this subcommittee has held numerous hearings with numerous ideas going into this. I can assure you that now we are going to be focusing on the Balkans to try to come up with ways that we can actually work with people there, the good people there in all of these countries, try to find some cooperation, some areas of cooperation, and make it happen.

So, with that said, you can count on us, this is just the second of a hearing series. We are going and there will be a codel, a major codel, just to the Balkans probably in August. We will visit these areas, and we would really be happy for any advice that any of you could give us as to who we would meet with there.

So, with that said, I want to thank the witnesses and thank Mr. Meeks. We had a good one again.

Mr. MEEKS. A good one again.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And this committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:16 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Chairman

May 10, 2017

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, May 17, 2017

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability

WITNESSES: Panel I
Mr. Hoyt Brian Yee
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Panel II
Gordon N. Bardos, Ph.D.
President
South East European Research and Consulting

The Honorable Joseph J. DioGuardi
Founding President
Albanian American Civic League
(Former Member of Congress)

Daniel Serwer, Ph.D.
Academic Director of Conflict Management
School of Advanced International Studies
Johns Hopkins University

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats* HEARING

Day *Wednesday* **Date** *May 17, 2017* **Room** *2200 Rayburn*

Starting Time *2:00 pm* **Ending Time** *4:16 pm*

Recesses *0* (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Rohrabacher

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☐

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING:

The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Meeks, Rep. Cicilline, Rep. Duncan, Rep. Sensenbrenner

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

Rep. Engel

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *4:16 pm*

Subcommittee Staff Associate

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Rep. Elliot Engel Submission for the Record

Humanitarian Law Center

31.01.2017.

Dossier: "The cover-up of evidence of crimes during the war in Kosovo: THE CONCEALMENT OF BODIES OPERATION"

Since 2001, mass graves containing the bodies of 941 Kosovo Albanians, mainly civilians killed outside combat situations in Kosovo during 1999, have been found on four locations in Serbia. 744 bodies of Kosovo Albanians have been discovered in Batajnica, on the outskirts of Belgrade, at least 61 in Petrovo Selo, and 84 at Lake Perućac. At least 52 bodies have been subsequently found in the mass grave at Rudnica.

The bodies found in mass graves belonged not only to males, but also to females and children. The cause of their deaths, in most cases, was a gunshot wound, mainly to the head, suggesting that the victims did not die in combat but as a result of execution-style killings outside situations of combat.

The analysed testimonies and witness statements could be divided into two groups: the first group comprises statements given by eyewitnesses and survivors of crimes; the second group, more numerous, comprises statements of insiders, mostly members of the police and workers of utility companies, who took part in the transportation and burial of the bodies. In addition to these, numerous police and military documents were also analysed, primarily those available through the ICTY database, but also some documents the Humanitarian Law Center acquired on its own, independently of the courts.

The evidence corroborated that the decision to conceal evidence of crimes committed was planned as early as March 1999 at the highest level of the government, and indicated that members of both departments of the Serbian MUP (State Security Department and Public Security Department) and the Yugoslav Army's departments in charge of "clearing up the terrain" were involved in it. Civilians and workers of municipal utility companies also took part in removing the corpses, and the machines and other equipment of these companies were also used for this purpose.

Now, sixteen years after the discovery of the mass graves in Batajnica, Petrovo Selo and at Lake Perućac, and more than three years after the discovery of the mass grave at Rudnica, all these

locations remain unmarked, without any sign to indicate that hundreds of bodies of men, women and children who had been killed in numerous mass crimes in Kosovo were buried in Serbia. The Humanitarian Law Center has launched an initiative to establish a memorial site at the Batajnica mass grave site. At the time of the publication of this Dossier, the online petition in support of the initiative has been signed by several hundred people.

No one has ever been held accountable before courts in Serbia for the large-scale operation of concealment of bodies of Kosovo Albanian victims in mass graves.

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Honorable Dana Rohrabacher, Chair
Honorable Gregory W. Meeks, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Foreign Affairs Committee
US House of Representatives

Hearing on The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability - May 17, 2017

BiH Electoral Law Changes Necessary Immediately For Summer Deadline - 2018 Elections

Dear Chairman Rohrabacher and Ranking Member Meeks:

The National Federation of Croatian American Cultural Foundation (NFCA) welcomes the opportunity to extend to you and the Subcommittee Members our grave concerns about the ongoing electoral law discriminating against the Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which will have tragic consequences in the 2018 elections if action is not take this summer to rectify and deal with the imminent political crisis that is looming.

We have also attached to the NFCA's hearings statement our September 20, 2016, letter to High Representative Valentin Inzko in Sarajevo. The question remains: Why does the High Representative thinks it is constitutionally proper and a wise political decision for non-Croats to elect the Croat Member of the tripartite Presidency of BiH?

Allow us to share with you a few details showing how the legitimate rights of the Bosnian Croats have been altered and depleted over the last 25 years using an ever-increasing and methodical set of discriminatory policies and constitutionally questionable procedure that clearly violate the spirit and the intent of the Dayton Peace Accord (DPA). It is a fact that amendments made to the electoral law by the Office of the High Representative over 15 years ago have allowed the election of a candidate to be the ostensible Croat member of the BiH Presidency without receiving a majority of Bosnian Croat electoral support. It must be stated that if there are not electoral reforms thus summer and the earlier amendment is not changed, then the legitimacy of these 2018 elections will again be called into question causing a new destabilizing problem for all of Southeast Europe.

The Bosnian Croat community and the BiH Croatian National Assembly will accept any solution allowing Croats to elect a legitimate representative to be the Croat Member of the Bosnian Presidency.

The BiH Constitutional Court on December 1, 2016, ruled that certain provisions of the electoral law were unconstitutional as they did not ensure the protection of the basic constitutional principles of equality and the right to legitimate representation of the Bosniak, Croat, and Serb peoples. It is

critical to emphasize that the current electoral law still provides unequal opportunities of political choice to the different constituent peoples of BiH, and, in this instance, is specifically targeted against the interests of the Croat community in clear violation of the DPA. The election of Zeljko Komisc in 2006 and 2010, for example, was in direct violation of the DPA since he relied solely on the support of the Bosniak community within the Federation. Such an outcome is simply not legitimate unless one were to degrade the rights guaranteed to all three constitutive peoples of BiH as stipulated by the DPA.

The EU's top foreign policy chief, Frederica Mogherini, at a meeting on April 6, 2017, acknowledged the need and the importance to implement changes to the BiH electoral laws. Croatian Foreign Minister Davor Ivo Stier at the same meeting distributed a non-paper that highlighted these electoral law changes and the significance of the "dual track approach" of potential EU and NATO membership to help steer necessary reforms along and within BiH.

Of course, a new "re-federalization" only within the Federation (without altering the DPA) that allowed Croats one or two "super-cantons" would solve the electoral law issue and resolve the issues raised by the Seydic-Finci decision of the European Court of Human Rights. In the Federation of BiH, one of the two DPA-designated entities within Bosnia, Croat parties still discuss and are advocates of this "federalization" of BiH that could be actualized without further ethnic divisions. This may also be the ideal time to consider a few Croat majority cantons in a federal union which has been long promoted by several prominent Croatians.

In closing, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to deal with one political crisis after another. With no end in sight, BiH has assumed the character of a traditional frozen state. With unemployment rates off the charts, Bosnia continues to perpetuate its bloated, dysfunctional federal government. There is clearly a need for greater and more focused political engagement on the part of both the European Union and the US with its NATO members. We all know the ultimate objective is to provide the political impetus to all the constituent peoples and all citizens to embrace the more functional European and Euro-Atlantic path to political and economic stability. There must be much greater vigilance and focused cooperation between the EU, the US, and the NATO member states to better ensure the functionality, stability, and the opportunity for BiH to fulfill all its responsibilities. And that is to become a full participating member of all Euro-Atlantic multilateral institutions. This goal must include a guarantee of institutional equality for Bosnian Croats, starting with the 2018 electoral law reforms and within the Mostar area electoral unit.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the NFCA's review of a complex but important matter facing BiH and the other new nation-states of the Western Balkans. I copy of my letter to the High Representative is attached for inclusion in the hearing record. If we may provide additional information to the Subcommittee on these important issues, please contact our Washington Public Affairs Director Joe Foley on (301) 294-0937.

Sincerely,

Steven J. Rukavina, President
National Federation of Croatian Americans

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELIOT L. ENGEL, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation
PO Box 78152, Washington DC 20013

September 20, 2016

High Representative Valentin Inzko
Office of the High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Emerika Bluma 1
71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dear Honorable High Representative Inzko:

The National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation (NFCA) wishes to add its support to the recent letter sent by the Croat Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dragan Covic, to the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC). The NFCA believes this to be the ideal time for the PIC Steering Board to seriously address the systemic problem of inequality and the inferior position held by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and within its entity Federation of BiH, which has diminished the multinational character, sustainability, security and stability for the entire region.

Both the Washington Agreement and the Dayton Peace Accord (DPA) guaranteed full equality for all three constituent peoples of BiH, and yet the BH Croats have seen their legitimate rights deprived and altered over the past twenty-five years. There has clearly been a drift and growing methodical inequality and constitutional flaws which have been deepened by the legislative, constitutional and procedural interventions of the Office of High Representative (OHR) in conjunction with Bosniak political elites. This ongoing trend seriously undermines the constitutive position of Croats within the country. This has enabled Bosniak political decision-makers to override the political rights of the Croats, unimpeded by power-sharing checks and balances and thus, against the will of the legitimate political representatives of the Croat people in BiH.

The NFCA believes that all key players are in agreement that the institutional guarantees of Croats must be preserved in order that they truly remain a constituent people within the Federation and in BiH as a whole. The Croat presence and participation in BiH institutional settings is necessary to ensure that BiH remains a viable, multi-ethnic society which increases the viability of the BiH Presidency and Government. This commitment should clearly be of interest to both the EU and the United States, as we could otherwise be facing the potential of the emergence of a state and society in the heart of Europe which gravitates toward non-Western autocratic, non-democratic states.

National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation
PO Box 78152, Washington DC 20013

The Croats of BiH need reaffirmed empowerment and enhanced co-decision capacities in Federation BiH. We believe that if certain electoral law changes do not happen and the Croats remain excluded from meaningful participation and fair decision-making in shared institutions on the Federal level, then instability in the country will only increase. While no demand is currently being made for the establishment of a third Croat-majority federal entity, we wish you to keep in mind that such an option is one which is a legitimate one. This may be the ideal time to consider a few Croat majority cantons in a federal union that has long been advocated by several prominent BH Croats.

There are five specific examples in President Covic's letter that clearly state and expose the flaws within the constitutional framework of BiH and the Federation of BiH:

1. The illegitimate means in which Bosniaks and other non-Croats can elect the Croat-designated Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (even in a scenario where all Croats voted to support one candidate, an entirely unlikely prospect).

2. Institutional amendments to the Constitution of the Federation of BiH and BiH election law that deprive or diminish the rights of Croats guaranteed and safeguarded within the House of People, Government and other key institutions and bodies within the Federation of BiH. It is unacceptable that the Constitution of BiH can be changed without the consent of BH Croat political representatives, as is the growing disregard for the principles of parity and consensus in higher administrative and political levels.

3. Newly dictated amendments that solidify power with Bosniak representatives at the expense of Croats, placing Croats in an inferior position and allowing Bosniaks within the Federation of BiH to make decisions without the input and participation of BH Croats.

4. An increasing list of institutional changes that directly harm and affect the equal distribution of taxes, including appointments to the Public Broadcasting System, ministries and within areas of several canton-related sovereignty, all of which clearly favor Bosniak political representatives.

5. The inability of Croats to fully exercise their cultural and linguistic autonomy within BiH, given that they have been intentionally deprived of the right to have a radio station and TV channel in the Croatian language focused on the specific needs of Croats in BiH. Such rights are accessible to national minorities within many EU countries, while they have been denied to a constituent people of BiH.

National Federation of Croatian Americans Cultural Foundation
PO Box 78152, Washington DC 20013

The path to a more secure, stable and consolidated BiH as a successful nation-state is the empowerment of Croats and seriously dealing with their grievances. It is our hope that the PIC Steering Board will re-affirm and establish the necessary power-sharing principles that embody and guarantee the equality of constituent peoples as set forth in the DPA and the Washington Agreement.

We firmly believe this is necessary for the vitality of constitutionalism and the rule of law in BiH, as well as to ensure that BiH retains a European perspective and the means for constructive participation in the largest union of states and peoples. BH Croats (who are also citizens of the EU) and their political leadership have displayed a great level of maturity and have proven that they are firmly dedicated to lead the rest of the country toward such a future.

Lastly, we look to the United States and the PIC to step up and fulfill their responsibilities to re-establish the institutional freedom and equality of BH Croats so that they can maximize their ambitions for their country. These necessary goals must be accomplished so that BiH can become a full participating member of all Euro-Atlantic institutions, a goal which will benefit all peoples and citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sincerely,

Steven Rukavina, President

National Federation of Croatian Americans

Cultural Foundation

sjrukavina@gmail.com

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI, FOUNDING PRESIDENT, ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE (FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS)

Thinking ahead for Europe

The Macedonian Crisis – A failure of EU conflict management?

Friday, 5 May 2017

In the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, there is a chapter devoted to "An Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises". It sets out a 'multi-dimensional' approach through the use of all available policies and instruments aimed at 'conflict prevention, management and resolution'. The difficulty of transforming such lofty aspirations into reality couldn't be more evident than in the ongoing and deepening crisis in Macedonia – an EU candidate country in the heart of the Western Balkans.

The eruption of violence on April 27th was a tragedy waiting to happen. The Parliament building was stormed by an angry mob, which proceeded to viciously attack several MPs from the main opposition Social Democratic Union for Integration (SDSM) party, injuring many, including the party's leader Zoran Zaev. The attack was preceded by weeks of deep tensions following the early elections that took place in December. It was also the latest in a series of crises and violent incidents that have marked the past years of the government led by the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) party under its leader and former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, in power since 2006. Under his leadership the government has pursued an ethno-nationalist and populist agenda resulting in one of the worst reform records in the Western Balkan region.

Following the December elections, in which VMRO-DPMNE obtained the most Parliamentary seats (51 as opposed to 49 for the SDSM), Nikola Gruevski attempted to form a new coalition government with its erstwhile partner, the main ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration party (DUI) (which obtained 10 seats). These negotiations broke down at the end of January, however, when Gruevski and his party refused to accept DUI's proposal for the continuation of the mandate of the Special Prosecutor appointed in 2015 under an EU-brokered agreement to investigate the wiretapping scandal that had revealed shocking examples of corruption at the highest levels of government.

Subsequently, the SDSM succeeded in putting forward a proposed coalition with the ethnic Albanian parties with a sufficient majority of 67 MPs (out of a total of 120) to form a new government. However, President Ivanov, closely aligned to the ruling party and no doubt acting under its instructions, refused (and continues to refuse) to hand over the mandate to the proposed coalition, claiming that to do so would endanger the unity of the country. He was referring in particular to the Platform adopted in January by the ethnic Albanian parties, which set out a number of

aspirations for the ethnic Albanian community (which according to the 2002 census represents some 25% of the Macedonian population of 2 million).

The leader of the VMRO-DPMNE, fearful of losing power, claimed that the proposals put forward by the ethnic Albanian parties would result in "federalisation" and eventually the break-up of Macedonia as a unified country, even though such a concept was not part of the proposals and despite the fact that he himself had raised no objections when these proposals were raised in his negotiations with the DUI.

With all the parties concerned having made clear that the preservation of the unity and identity of Macedonia was an objective that united the entire country, it became clear that Gruevski's strategy was to wave the red flag of inter-ethnic tensions in order to discredit the proposed coalition. In so doing, he called on the citizens to take to the streets to "defend the country", and accused his political opponents of treason. Many of those who stormed the Parliament on April 27th are known to be friends, supporters and even family members of the ruling party.

Further violence cannot be excluded as the country awaits the response from the President to the formal notification sent to him of the election of the new Speaker. According to the constitution, he has 10 days from the date of notification within which to hand over the mandate to form a government to whichever party or coalition commands a majority in Parliament. The new majority then has 20 days to agree on a new cabinet which is then put to a vote in the Parliament. Mr Gruevski has already announced that his party does not recognise the new Speaker as duly elected. A boycott of Parliament by his party, which would surely exacerbate the tensions, cannot be excluded.

The origins of this most recent crisis can be traced to the revelation in January 2015 of a vast wiretapping operation providing evidence of alleged corruption by government ministers and senior officials from the ruling party. This was followed in early May of that year by an outbreak of violence in the northern city of Kumanovo, which resulted in the death of eight police officers and 12 others, in a security operation that has yet to be properly investigated. A succession of mediation efforts in June 2015 and again in July of 2016, led by Commissioner Johannes Hahn together with a delegation from the European Parliament (composed of the current and previous Rapporteurs for Macedonia plus a member of the EPP, of which the VMRO-DPMNE is a member), resulted in a number of agreements, signed by all four main political parties. They provided inter alia for the appointment of a Special Prosecutor to investigate the wiretapping scandal, electoral reforms to be followed by early elections and the implementation of a list of reforms contained in a report adopted by a senior expert group mandated by the Commission to investigate the wiretapping scandal and related rule of law issues.

Despite these agreements, the ruling party did everything possible to delay implementation of the reforms and to hinder the work of the Special Prosecutor. These delays provoked renewed inter-party tensions. As if this wasn't enough, the President issued in April 2016 a blanket pardon to the 56 senior government and ruling party officials, including the former Prime Minister himself, who had been placed under investigation by the Special Prosecutor. The objective was clear: to deliver a mortal blow to the work of the Special Prosecutor.

Recent experience in Macedonia has shown that the lack of any enforcement mechanism deployed by the EU to ensure a serious follow-up of all the commitments contained in these successive mediated agreements is a major factor in their ineffectiveness. In the same vein, the messages coming from the EU have not always been consistent. At times, the EU has given the impression that its highest priority was stability, particularly during the refugee crisis, and that rule of law issues would eventually sort themselves out. This was particularly the case with Commissioner Hahn's statement following his visit in January 2016, which seemed to prioritise a strong and stable government to better address the flow of refugees coming across the Western Balkans, with Macedonia being a major entry point. This, despite the fact that the country was still in the throes of the political crisis resulting from the wiretapping revelations.

When the President of the Council Donald Tusk visited on April 4th of this year, the main focus of his remarks following his meeting with President Ivanov was the importance of Macedonia's cooperation with migration and

border controls. His reference to the political crisis was limited to calling on the President to "find a solution based on democratic principles, decency and common sense". He did not repeat or make any reference to the statement made by HR Federica Mogherini during her visit on March 2nd, when she directly called on President Ivanov to reverse his decision and, even quoting the Constitution, to "entrust the mandate to a candidate belonging to the party which has the majority in the Assembly". This message was fortunately repeated by Hahn during his own visit on March 21st.

All of this has given the impression of a weak and uncoordinated EU conflict-resolution machinery. It has contributed to an increased sense of impunity by the ruling party, which continues to ignore all the recommendations for reforms set out in the successive Commission's country reports, and in the senior expert group report mentioned above. It continues to deploy its vast propaganda machinery abroad using its membership of the EPP to justify its behaviour and legitimacy in the Macedonian political environment.

The stance of the European Peoples Party is also beyond comprehension. It continues to protect a party whose leader and senior officials are under investigation for serious criminal offences. Both the Austrian and Hungarian Foreign Ministers have gone even further, and attended election rallies of the ruling party prior to the December elections. The EPP continues to defend the indefensible, even after the violence of April 27th.

If the EU is really serious about its role in conflict resolution, it needs to back its words with action. A periodic visit by a Commissioner or MEP delegation with no effective follow-up will serve little purpose. The EU should deploy all the instruments it has at its disposal, including a threat of sanctions, if the mediated agreements are not implemented. Failure of the EU to resolve this ongoing crisis will send the worst possible message to the region where other 'Balkan strongmen' are watching closely.

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Crisis brewing in Macedonia

ope ndemocracy.net/opensecurity/roland-gjoni-shirley-cloyes-dioguardi/crisis-brewing-in-macedonia

Roland Gjoni and Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi SEPTEMBER 23, 2014

Events over the summer in Macedonia revealed just how fragile interethnic relationships remain. The EU and the US must address their responsibilities as guarantors of the country's peace accord.

With the world's attention focused on the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the catastrophes claiming lives every day in Ukraine and Gaza, Brussels and Washington are paying little attention to the unfolding crisis in Macedonia.

Renewed interethnic tensions were triggered by the recent verdict in the "Monstra case", which saw six ethnic Albanians sentenced to life imprisonment two years after they were arrested for the alleged murder of five ethnic-Macedonian fishermen. The fishermen had been found dead in April 2012. Shortly thereafter the minister of the interior, Gordana Jankulovska, had launched a large-scale police operation in Albanian-majority areas which culminated in the arrest of the six, whom she described as "terrorists heavily influenced and directed by fundamentalist Islamist ideology".

The accused were convicted after 46 court hearings, all in closed session, predominantly relying on the unsubstantiated claims of a protected witness. On 4 July 2014, thousands of ethnic Albanians took to the streets in Skopje, the capital, staging the largest and most violent demonstration since the armed conflict which ended in 2001 with an internationally mediated peace accord known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

Compounding minority resentment and distrust of Macedonian-run state institutions, police raided tens of Albanians homes in the suburbs, purportedly in pursuit of violent protesters. Ultimately six ethnic Albanians were sentenced for up to three years for participating in demonstrations opposing the Monstra verdict—a punishment most Albanians believed harsher than ethnic Macedonians would have received for similar offences.

While higher courts will be called on to address the questionable aspects of the Monstra trial, the widespread ethnic-Albanian responses—including peaceful protests held in Albania, Kosovo/a and other diaspora communities in Europe and the United States—are warning signs that interethnic reconciliation in Macedonia is unfinished business.

Over many years, the country has experienced a multitude of rifts that threaten its future as a sustainable, multiethnic democracy. More than any of these sporadic incidents, however, the waves of protests triggered by Monstra demonstrate that the conflict Ohrid was designed to address still festers.

Ohrid revisited

On 13 August 2001, the leading ethnic-Macedonian and ethnic-Albanian political parties, in the presence of western negotiators, signed the Ohrid agreement, which advanced a raft of constitutional and legal initiatives. These were designed to overcome a decade of discrimination against Albanians in the judicial system, pervasive police brutality, minimal Albanian representation in state and local institutions, restrictions on the use of the Albanian language and symbols in public institutions, and widespread poverty.

The West shares some of the blame for Macedonia's 13-year failure.

Several changes aimed at advancing equality for Albanians have since been adopted. Albanian representation in government and public administration has risen dramatically, from 7% to 29%; municipal boundaries have been redesigned to increase the number of Albanian-majority local-government units; the use of Albanian in state institutions and Albanian-majority municipalities is recognised by law; and Albanian-language education, from elementary to university level, receives state support.

The three-year deadline for implementation was not however met and reforms have often been slow, half-hearted and marred by continuous setbacks. The use of Albanian in state institutions is still neglected in practice, while display of Albanian national symbols has been found unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Central government continues to discriminate against majority-Albanian municipalities in budget allocation and grant distribution, often using lack of funds or legal technicalities as an excuse. Meanwhile, Albanian representation in the judiciary, as well as in senior positions in defence, security and special police units, remains minimal, allegedly due to lack of "capable", professionally-qualified candidates.

Drowning in distrust

The VMRO-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity, the ethnic-Macedonian party led by the prime minister, Nikola Gruevski, and the Democratic Union for Integration, the ethnic-Albanian junior partner in the ruling coalition led by the former paramilitary leader, Ali Ahmeti, dominate the country's political life. Both have played the nationalist card as the quickest way to secure the allegiance of members of their respective communities and consolidate their political support at the expense of their rivals. The VMRO-DPME and DUI have won every local and state-wide election in their respective camps for the past ten years.

The two parties squelch the opposition in both communities, pocket funds for themselves, suppress independent media and operate a corrupt judicial system. Both whip up nationalist rhetoric at home, while maintaining the façade of democracy abroad by holding elections and using language that will appeal to western officials and media. Instead of using the Ohrid agreement to develop a multiethnic society in Macedonia, the VMRO-DPME and DUI have been busy creating a binational oligarchy that is hard to dismantle: they have turned the agreement into an instrument for seizing state resources and expanding their patronage networks.

On the ethnic-Macedonian side, frustration with Greece for blocking entry to NATO and EU membership talks (Greece insists that recognising the name "Macedonia" would enable the country to exercise territorial claims over its northern province of that name) has made elites insecure. But the name issue may not be the primary source of their malaise: fearful of Albanian disloyalty, ethnic-Macedonian politicians appear to believe that reneging on a commitment to a multiethnic society and inventing a national identity devoid of Albanians and other minorities is the better path.

The VMRO-DPMNE leadership may be content to share the spoils of power with Albanian parties but it excludes any Albanian and non-Macedonian heritage from official identity. This goal is obvious in the controversial "Skopje 2014", an exclusively Macedonian-nationalist project led by Gruevski, which has turned the city into the *kitsch* capital of the world—littered with monuments purportedly inspired by ethnic-Macedonian glorious antiquity. This is a national strategy destined for failure.

Most ethnic Albanians feel unrepresented and the largely unemployed youth may become an easy target for political and religious extremists attempting to fill the leadership vacuum in Macedonia. Growing disillusionment with the failure of Albanian political parties to represent the community, coupled with the painfully slow implementation of Ohrid, is pushing some disenchanted Albanians toward radical options. While it is not yet clear how extensive is the encroachment of radical Islam into Albanian communities, it is gaining a foothold.

As never before, Macedonian politics are dysfunctional, exacerbated by unprecedented struggles within each of the communities. The largest Macedonian opposition party, the LSDM, has boycotted parliament since April and disagrees with the VMRO-DPME on virtually every important issue the country is facing. On the Albanian side, DUI and the DPA, led by Menduh Thaci, are also locked in unprincipled confrontation. Failing to represent a new vision for Albanians in Macedonia, they have alienated their constituents from identification with a state which continues to treat them as second-class citizens. This is stymieing any serious, unified effort to address the important issues concerning the rights of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and to shape a vision for their future.

The West shares some of the blame for Macedonia's 13-year failure. Even though the democratic backsliding and nationalist tensions have been widely documented by local and international NGOs, Brussels and Washington seem

to have forgotten that the Ohrid agreement was an internationally guaranteed peace plan to transform Macedonia into a functional state in the 21st century. It is fast becoming an illiberal democracy on the verge of falling apart.

The EU and the US must move quickly beyond the rhetoric of preserving stability, at the expense of consolidating democracy and interethnic equality. As guarantors of Ohrid, they must renew their commitment to its full implementation. The EU in particular must link Macedonia's prospect of membership to genuine improvements in the rule of law, an effective fight against government corruption and an end to the concentration of power in a few hands.

About the authors:

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Submission for the Record
Submitted by: Joe DioGuardi
Before the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
May 17, 2017

Interview of Albanian Security Guard on Violence in Macedonian Parliament

ORIGINAL IN ALBANIAN (TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH BELOW)

Original full video location of the primetime TV Show "200" transmitted on national TV Alsat-M:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01fC90hDr3Y

Clip of the witness interview from the original video above:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=0BzX7W6g_kM70b2RWOFo5YUJPS28

Nazim ("200" TV show host) : Dhe jemi rikthyer ne studio per te vazhduar me programin edhe nje here te ftuar jane Arben Taravari, sekretar i pergjithshem i Levizjes per Reforma, Ljupcho Nikollovski deputet dhe Natasha Stojanovska kolege gazetare. Por do te vijojme programin me intervisten e paralajmeruar. Me ate qe mund te thuhet se eshte njeriu qe ndoshta shpetoj Ziadin Selen. Emri i tij eshte Abdylfetah Alimi, punonjes i sigurise ne Parlamentin e Maqedonise. Intervisten e realizoj kolege Fatlume Dervishi. Propozoj te ndjekim materialin.

(Video fillon. Degjohen thirrje: "Ajde kurvi! Ajde!" Hajde kurva! Hajde!)

Fatlume: E Enjtja e kobshme e dhunes ne Kuvend nxori me lendime me serioze kreun e LRPDSH-se Ziadin Sela. Punonejsi i sigurimit te Kuvendit, Abdylfeta Alimi nga Orizarja e Kumanoves ne nje interviste per TV Alsat tregon momentet e tmerrit qe kaluan bashke me Ziadin Selen ne kohen kur ai e shpetoj nga duart e dhunuesve te cilet mbi te ishin duke ushtruar dhune brutale.

Abdylfetah: Ka qene moment shume i rende. Moment horror. Me ka ftu nje kolege thote "Feta, eja se e kane mbyt Selen!". Aty para kesaj kohe kam qene disa minuta i alivanos, mirepo fuqia e Zotit, me ka ndihmu Zoti, me ka dhene fuqi e kam vrapuar poshte se kam qene ne katin e pare. Aty kur kam shku te Klubi i Deputeteve e kam pa zotin Sela aty te shtrim te pergjakun edhe une kam mendu se eshte i vdeket. Edhe aty kam ra permbi trupin e zotit Sela e ne ato momente kam pa se eshte tu marre frymarrje. I kam venu doren e kam pa qe ka puls. Dy huligane kane qene aty u kam thane "Largonu se eshte i vdeket!" Ata kane mendu se eshte kry puna. Masandej vendosa ta nxjerri per dritare te mbrendshme te klubit qe jane aty, nga ane e mbrendshme. Se jane disa shkalle aty sigurisht qe i dini, te aluminit. Me shume mund, ishte i palevizshem. E mora keshtu ne shpine e kembet i shkojshin zhag. Ne zbraztiren e parlamentit poshte ka pas shume njerez atje. Kur hypa shkallet nalt dikush bertet atje se nuk eshte kry puna me Selen. Ne ato momente une zotni Seles i kam fol ne gjuhen maqedone te jem me i sigurt mos kerkoje dicka prej meje dhe mos na degjojne se jena tu fol Shqip. Eshte moment shume... per mua eshte me shekuj me te tregu qysh kena mberri deri te dhoma 334. Faktikisht te zyrja. Kemi hy te zyra 334 ne gjendje shume te rande ka qene. E kam shtri ne dysheme dhe me ka pyte "Kush je? Me kend jem?" Atehere i kam tregu se jam Fetai i sigurimit te Parlamentit. I erdhi nje shprese shume e madhe, shume e forte. Me tha: "Feta, jam ne Bese tande!" Ne ate moment i thash, iu drejtova: "Ziadin, nese me vrasin ma ban hallall!".

Fatlume: Abdylfetahu dhe Sela per disa ore me rradhe kane qendruar vetem. Nderkohe ne salle eshte paraqitur vetem motra medicinale e Kuvendit per t'i dhene infuzion. Per ata ka qene e frikshme per te mos i besojne me askujt per te treguar vendendodhjen.

Abdylfetah: Edhe filluan masanej telefonat. Njerzit te vijne te na ndihmojne. Interesoheshin familja. Familja e z.Ziadin. Familja ime. Shoke. Dashamire. Mirepo u pat humb besimi. U pat humb besimi edhe nuk kisha guxim ti tregoj askujt se ku jam. Mirepo nje rast me ka ndihmu shume tash e kuptoj. Dikuj i kam qit nje lajm se (Sela) eshte i kidnapu.

Fatlume: Kujt ja the kete?

Abdylfetah: I kam thone nje njeriu te sigurte qe te shperndahet kjo. Qe te mos e kerkoje me. Ajo mund te kete qene tri ore, kater ore, nuk e di. Nuk e di mo cka ka ndodh jashte asaj zyre. Zyres 334. Ajo ka qene... Dera e zyres ka qene jeta a vdekje per neve aty. Ne zyre ka pas edhe shume momente interesante. Ne nje moment, kisha pas cigare me vete. Edhe e kam kall nje cigare. Kryetarin e kisha ketu nder tavoline. Jeta interesante dikur i thash: "Zijadin, a po don cigare?" me tha "A ki cigare?" edhe ja dhash. Sikur ja jep gjysen e botes. Me ka ndihmu per disa momente qe nuk e kam leju z.Sela me tregu se ku jena. Ne nje moment aty ku e shihni i thash: "Nese me degjon une cka te thom, 99% dalim te gjalle prej ketu." Edhe e ka ba ate. Kontakt qe i kam fillu ti besoj ka qene Zylfi Adili. Masandej mu ka lajmeru qe punon ne pune te brendshme, njefar Xheki. Sigurisht ai do dale me emer e mbiemer. Non-stop mu kane lajmeru keta edhe shume te tjere. Mirepo besimin qe kam kriju, e kam kriju te keta instiktivisht. Zylfi Adili me ka tregu se ku gjindet. Ku gjindet me disa shoke mirepo ka qene e pamundshme ai te hy aty. Se aty mu dashten do djem police me qene. Keto i kam besu ketij djalit Xhekit. I kam thane "Mi cho kater deri me pese djem police. Tregoj se ku jam. Nese jane ne gjendje gjithcka me bo!" Mbas disa oreve ia kam dhan numrin e dhomes dhe i kane marre ata djem me nje mjek shqiptar ka qene edhe nje moter medicinale maqedone. Kane ardhe edhe i kane dhone ndihmen e para ata. Kane ardhe edhe masandej kur kane dale prej aty kam pa se Parlamenti eshte ne dore te policise. Ne kena zdryp poshte kryetarin per me e nxjerre jashte. Paraprakisht ia kam pas vesh nje bluze kryetarit me kapele.

Fatlume: As prezenca e policise per Abdylfetahun nuk ka qene bindese se z.Sela eshte ne duar te sigurta.

Abdylfetah: Kur jena ba gati per me e transferu prej Parlamenti deshim dalim nga ana e "vinar" qe i thomi aty. Mirepo kishte pas protestues e imi kthy e kena shtri prape ne 'hodnik' (koridor). Ne ate moment ka qene edhe ky Vladimir Gjorcevin e kam pa. Edhe i them "Me cka do ta choni?" se e bonem per me shku prej bodrumi aty ne garazhe. Me tha "Me ambulante". Thash "Me ambulante nuk e lejoj, vetem me autoblinde nese bini ateherel". Nuk isha i sigurte me ambulante. "Nese bini", thash, "autoblinde, po e lejoj te dale. Nese jo, qetu do te jes". Edhe e zbatoj ate urdher. Edhe ata djem kane qene non-stop me mu. Edhe mjeku. Mund te kisha harru shume sende pa i thone se ajo eshte histori me veti, ato 3-4 ore jane sa 3-4 shekuj. Ne cdo dy minuta me ka thirr emnin tem. "Feta, a je ketu?". Nuk i besojke ma askujt. Edhe ne spital nuk i besojke kerkujt derisa ka ardhe Krenar Lloga. Atij ja kam lane ne dore. Tha "Feta, mos u largo. Ma ke dhane Besen."

Fatlume: Pasojat e asaj nate Abdylfetahu i kujton akoma. Pamjet e tmerrit qe perjetoj edhe me tej vazhdojne ta shqetesojne.

Abdylfetah: Do te thote realisht po ju tregoj se ka 4 nate nuk kam fjet. Keto kater nate sigurisht qe kam vetem 2 ore gjume. Edhepse nuk du ta kujtoj. Edhepse nuk du ta kujtoj... cdo here kur i mbylli syte, te shkallet me rrin mendja. Edhe sot me duket se jam tuj hyp per shkallet. Shume e rande. Shume e rande... pak kush ka ne gjendje eshte shume e rande. Shume pak gjendje me pas eshte shume e rande. Kete pune e kena bo ne menyre pikesepari nga ana morale e kam bo. Eshte ajo edhe ajo mund te thone edhe Kombetare nuk e di une ato. Po ka ardhe edhe puna profesionale nga vete deshira e jone.

Abdulfetah Alimi, an Albanian security guard in the Macedonian Parliament, saved the life of Ziadina Sela. Below is an interview with him (translated into English) conducted on May 5, 2017, on "200,"a national TV program on the Alsat-M channel in Macedonia

Nazim: And we are back in studio to continue the program. One more time with me here are Arben Taravari, General Secretary of 'Levizja per Reforma' (Movement for Reforms, full political party name Levizja per Reforma Partia Demokratike Shqiptare), Ljupcho Nikollovski MP and Natasha Stojanovska colleague journalist. We will continue with the interview that we mentioned. We can now say that this may be the person who saved the life of Ziadin Sela. His name is Abdulfetah Alimi, security employee of the Parliament of Macedonia. The interviewer is my colleague Fatlume Dervishi. Let's see the material.

(Video starts. We can see several people carying the bloodied unconscious body of Ziadin Sela and hear: "Ajde kurvi! Ajde!" "Let's go whores! Let's go!")

Fatlume (journalist comment): That fatal Thursday of the violence in the Parliament the most hurt was the leader of LR-PDSH Ziadin Sela. Security worker of the Parliament, Abdylfeta Alimi from Orizari of Kumanovo in one interview for TV Alsat explains the moments of horror that he has experienced with Ziadin Sela at the time when he saves Sela from the hands of the thugs that were brutally beating him.

Abdylfetah (witness): It has been very difficult moment. Moment of horror. I was invited from one of my colleagues who said to me: "Feta, come because they have killed Sela!". Just before this I was unconscious and weak, but the force of God, God helped me, gave me strength and I ran downstairs because it was on the first floor. I went to the Club of Representatives and I saw Mr.Sela lying all bloodied and I thought he was dead. I leaned over his body and I noticed that he was still breathing. I touched his hand and noticed he still had pulse. Two thugs were watching over me and I told them: "Leave. He is dead!" They thought that they were done. After that I decided to get him (Sela) through the internal windows of the Club, which are on the inside. There are some stairs there as you know, the ones from aluminium. With a lot of effort, because he was unconscious and not moving. I carried him like this over my back and his feet were dragging. In the open space of Parliament there were a lot of people. When I climbed the stairs I heard someone yelling to the others that Sela was not done. During these moments I was talking to Mr.Sela only in Macedonian so that I can be a bit safer if he asks something from me and they hear us talk in Albanian. It was a moment... for me it was like centuries how I arrived to room 334. That was an office. Went inside office 334 and he was in very bad shape. I laid him on the floor and he asked me: "Who are you? Who am I with?" That's when I told him that I am Feta (short for his name Abdylfetah) from security of Parliament. Big hope arrived to him, very strong hope. He said to me: "Feta, I am in your Besa!" (Besa, Albanian trust). At that moment I told him: "Ziadin, please forgive me if they kill me!"

Fatlume (journalist comments): Abdylfetah and Sela for several hours were alone. In the meantime the nurse of the Parliament went in to give Sela an infusion. He (Abdylfetah) was still aftraid and not trusting anybody to give away their hidden location.

Abdylfetah (witness continues): And then the phone calls started. People wanted to come to help. Families were asking. Mr.Ziadin family. My family. Friends. Well-thinking people. But, the trust was lost. The trust was lost and I was afraid to tell anybody where am I. But now I understand that one moment helped me a lot. I told someone to say outside that (Sela) was kidnaped.

Fatlume (journalist asking): Who did you tell that?

Abdylfetah (witness responds): I told that to a trustworthy person to spread that around. So that they stop looking for him. This could have been three hours, four hours, I don't know. I didn't know what was going on outside that office. Office 334. That office was... The door of that office was death or life for us. Inside the office we also had interesting moments. At one moment, I noticed I had cigarettes with me. And I smoked one. I had the Leader (Sela is the leader of LR-PDSH) like this under the table. Life is interesting. I asked him: "Zijadin, do you want a cigarette?" he asked me "Do you have cigarettes?" so I gave him one. It was as if I gave him half the world. He also helped by not telling for a while where are we. At one point I told him: "If you listen to me, 99% we will get out alive." And he did it. The contacts I started trusting first was Zylfi Adili (he is in coalition Alliance for Albanians with Ziadin Sela, later confirms this in another TV show). Then I got a call from a guy we call Xheki ('Jackie', nickname of a worker at police who later confirms this). For sure he will come out with first name and last name about this. They were calling me non-stop and many others. But this trust that I created with these two, it was instincts. Zylfi Adili told me where he was. He told me where he was with several of his friends but it was impossible for them to get inside. So I needed them to send me some policemen. This is what I entrusted this guy Xheki/Jackie to do. I told him "Send me four or five policemen. I will tell you where I am. They need to be ready to do everything!" After hours I gave him the number of the office and these guys with an Albanian doctor were there and a Macedonian nurse. They arrived there and they provided first aid (to Sela). They arrived and then when we left from there I noticed that the Parliament was under the police control. We brought the leader (Sela) downstairs so that we can take him outside. Before that I dressed a hoodie on him.

Fatlume (journalist comment): The presence of police was still not enough for Abdylfetah that Sela is safe.

Abdylfetah (witness): When we got ready to transfer him from the Parliament we wanted to get out from the side "vinar" as we call it. But we noticed on that side there were still protesters outside so we went back in the hallway. With me at that point was and Vladimir Gjorcev (VMRO MP) who I saw. So I asked him: "How are you going to transport him?" because we started talking to get him through the basement garage. He said to me "With ambulance". I told him "With ambulance I am not going to let him, only with armored vehicle!" I wasn't feeling safe with ambulance. "If you bring", I said, "armored vehicle, I will let him get outside. If not, we are staying here!". He listened to me. All those guys stayed with me non-stop. The doctor too. I may have forgotten many things because this is long history, those 3-4 hours feel like 3-4 centuries to me. Every two minutes he (Sela) was calling my name. "Feta, are you here?". He didn't trust anybody else. In the hospital he didn't trust anybody until Krenar Lloga arrived. I left Sela to him. He (Sela) said: "Don't leave. You gave me your Besa".

Fatlume (journalist comment): Abdylfetah is still reliving the consequences from that night. He is still recalling those sights of horror and they still bother him.

Abdylfetah (witness): I am telling you that I have not slept for 4 nights. These 4 nights I may have like 2 hours sleep. Even though I don't want to remember. Even though I don't want to remember... each time I close my eyes, I think about those stairs. I feel like I am climbing those stairs. Very difficult. Very difficult... only few could understand, very difficult. Only few could understand how difficult. Very difficult. We did this thing first of all for moral reasons I did it. This could be also as they call it Patriotic, I don't know. It was both the professional obligation but from our own desire (to save/help him).

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE JOSEPH J. DIOGUARDI, FOUNDING PRESIDENT, ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE (FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS)

Note: "Albania's Prosecutor's Office, Judicial Reform, & the Role of US Ambassador Donald Lu in Tirana," submitted for the record by the Honorable Dana Rohrabacher, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, and chairman, Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats and "The Explusion of the Albanians," submitted for the record by the Honorable Joseph J. DioGuardi, founding president, Albanian American Civic League (former Member of Congress), are not reprinted here but may be accessed on the Internet with the following link: http://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=105978

Question for the Record

To: Assistant Deputy Secretary Yee

From: Rep. Dana Rohrabacher

In response to EE&ET Subcommittee Hearing entitled "The Bakans: Threats to Peace and Stability" on May 17, 2017

Deputy Assistant Secretary Yee, one of the topics of last week's hearing was economic development. We know that throughout the world, in post-conflict regions, a vibrant economy mitigates a return to conflict. In your recent discussions with PM Markovic you discussed the importance of foreign investment. I know you know of the Stratex Group as an American investor working in Montenegro, for example. How can the US government work with the Montenegrin and other governments in the region to foster private sector economic development?

[Note: Responses were not received to the previous questions prior to printing.]

Congressman Francis Rooney
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
"The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability"
Wednesday, May 10, 2017
Questions for the Record

For Mr. Hoyt Yee:
Letters regarding activities by the US Embassy and USAID mission in Skopje have been insufficiently answered by the State Department regarding funding to the Open Society Foundation – Macedonia which supported the SDSM.

- Is the Embassy and Ambassador engaged in the activities described by the letter and how can those be stopped?

- Does the State Department have any role in settling a Macedonian parliamentary dispute?

- Is recognizing the election of Talat Xhaferi – an ethnic Albanian – by the US Ambassador not effectively a ruling by the US in favor of the SDSM and DUI coalition?

For Dr. Daniel Serwer:
In an article you authored regarding the current situation you said, "I blame the Macedonians."

- Considering Zoran Zaev's blackmail of former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski's government, would you say that Mr. Zaev is also partly responsible for the current situation?

[Note: Responses were not received to the previous questions prior to printing.]

05/17/2017

House Committee on Foreign Affairs Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats Subcommittee hearing titled "The Balkans: Threats to Peace and Stability".

Question for the Record (QFR) submitted by Congressman Lee Zeldin (NY-01):

For Deputy Assistant Secretary Yee -

The Bytyqi case, which is the murder of three American citizens who were executed and dumped into a mass grave by Serbian special forces in 1999, is still unresolved. Serbian Prime Minister and President-elect Aleksandar Vucic promised former Vice President Biden, former Secretary of State Kerry, Members of this Committee, the surviving family members, and the American public, that he would personally see that these horrific murders would be resolved. Unfortunately nothing has happened. Additionally, a war crimes prosecution system was put into place by the Serbian government in 2003, and has been provided with substantial training and assistance by the U.S. government, yet has not produced effective results.

My questions are - What has the State Department done to date to sanction the behavior regarding the Serbian government's handling of the Bytyqi case? What leverage could the State Department use on Prime Minister Vucic and other Serbian officials to bring the Bytyqi case to closure? Could the U.S. government honorably support Serbia's advancement in its European Union accession process without it taking credible actions to resolve the Bytyqi murders?

[Note: Responses were not received to the previous questions prior to printing.]