

Security challenges in the Balkans

-Event Concept-

The Balkans have been generally considered the powder keg of Europe. Throughout history, the area has been often one of the most intense geopolitical battlegrounds. As the international system is becoming less and less secure, the states in the Balkans have to make sure that the numerous existing security challenges can be tackled in the future. While the spark of war seems to fade away in Eastern Ukraine, the Balkans have taken once again their upfront position in European geopolitics. Crimea set numerous threats to the evolution of the Balkans, despite the fact that the two areas are separated by the Black Sea.

In the quest to reach the West, the migrants have opened many “unfinished business” in the Balkans. The unique mixture of people in the area regenerated the long-lasting problem of self-perception and perception of ‘the other’. Who, what and how poses a threat to the Balkans in 2016 and which are the interests of the major actors in the area? As the migration crisis highlighted not only the EU limitations, Russia’s fragmented dialogue, Turkish internal dissonance and NATO soft response, where does the future take the Balkan states?

The Balkans comprise a large number of states with various interests. While several countries are EU members of the EU, some have recently submitted their EU membership application. While some countries are NATO members and another one will join the Alliance at the 2016 Summit, the opinion in some countries is highly divided regarding NATO. Russia is another hot subject on the agenda, as the Balkans have been a region of major interest for the Russian decision makers through the history. After the wars in ex-Yugoslavia, Turkey has again increased its presence in the area. In the recent years, the Balkans have become a distinct interest of the Asian investors, China and the Gulf countries being on the vanguard of this process.

The regional forum ‘Security challenges in the Balkans’ aims to bring into attention of regional experts, decision makers, economic agents and academic institutions the necessity to find the right means to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the region. The two most dynamic regions of Europe – the Balkan region and the Black Sea area – have gone through a test of endurance in the recent years. The annexation of Crimea depicted the fact that many “black swans” may deteriorate de security in the Balkans. The states in the region have to fight each day, not in a conventional manner, but a daily struggle to maintain peace in a tormented area.

With an eye on the future and keeping in mind the amount of progress and achievements done so far, the conference has a distinct aim of contributing to the energy security solutions in the Balkans. The many plans drafted during the years to bring gas from Russia or Middle East have almost all included the Balkans as a route to the Western Europe. The region might become also a hub for the energy market and the several regional initiatives regarding inter-connection still have to prove their value.

Security in the Balkans is widely needed and scarcely ensured. Numerous severe tensions pose at great risk the peace in the area and in Europe. In a very tense environment, a little spark is needed to ignite the fragile settlement of peace. Ethnical conflict outbursts, geopolitical clashes, terrorism fostering and threats, weak governance, economic painful measures and the constant demand for reform show that many troubles can be detected already in the future of the Balkan security environment. In such a context, the role of the civil society has become crucial. Not only for supporting the states in accessing financial instruments to ensure their growth, but also to contribute to the strengthening the state administrations in the Balkans, the civil society has to step in and foster the bridge between the people in the area.

The Balkans have ceased to be an appendix of Europe. Located between the European geopolitical tectonic plates and faced with too many security risks and challenges, the Balkans show that they are one of the strategic points of the continent in terms of security. Stability in this region is a prerequisite for peace in Europe.



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