

## THE BALKANS AND EUROPE'S SECURITY CHALLENGES

Sharing a number of problems and security challenges with the rest of Europe, the Balkans have been long a distinct region in several respects. The name itself, introduced by German geographers in the XVIIIth century and derived from a Turkish word *Balkan* (mountain), testifies to the lasting impact of up to five centuries of Ottoman rule. This name, initially used for European possessions of the Ottoman Empire survived after the Ottoman officialdom vanished from most of the area and has since been applied to the entire semi-peninsula. As the terms Balkans and balkanization acquired in the XXth century negative connotations, a value neutral and largely geographically overlapping term South Eastern Europe has become used in international discourse related to the region.<sup>1</sup>

### The historic background

There has been long a tangible interconnection between geopolitical developments in the Euro-Atlantic area and regional security in South Eastern Europe (SEE). On one hand the shifts in power relations among major extra-regional powers have influenced a (in)balance between conflict and cooperation within the region. Some real or potential threats to SEE security endanger also other parts of Europe as well as. In addition during the last two decades SEE itself has been a notable source of insecurity spilling over to other parts of the continent. Two features of SEE as region stand out – its extraordinary multifaceted heterogeneity and the high sensitivity of the elites to external influences. These are main reasons why SEE has never become a coherent region in cultural, political and economic senses, clearly lacking its own center of gravity. In these respects SEE has differed very appreciably from other European regions. Not incidentally the geopolitical fault-line stretching from SEE

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper South Eastern Europe consists of the Balkans (which extend from Moldova to Greece and Cyprus), Croatia and Slovenia. It excludes Ukraine and the Southern part of European Russia.

eastward, all the way to the Pacific was branded by Zbigniew Brzezinski the “Euroasian Balkans”.<sup>2</sup>

The geopolitical instability in SEE has had deep historical roots. SEE overlaps partly with the Eastern Mediterranean, Central Eastern Europe and the Black Sea regions. For two millennia SEE has been at the cross-roads of East-West and North-South migrations of population, as well as of invasions and conquests by extra-regional powers. The region inhabited by ancestors of today’s Greeks, Albanians, Romanians, Dalmatians et. al. has been conquered by the Romans and by 395 AB divided by Emperors Diocletian and Theodosius into the Western and Eastern Roman Empires. This border between the two along the Drina River is to-day still relevant in social, ethnic, religious and political terms. Later migrations to and through the area by the Slavs, Avars, Huns, Visigoths, Turks, Jews, Armenians, Circassians et. al. have created its very distinct and colourful features. The central part of SEE – the Balkans has represented a unique and culturally, linguistically and religion-wise the most heterogonous mixture of peoples and ethnic minorities in Europe. The ethnic and religious heterogeneity of population increased under Ottoman rule and has remained high in the Balkans in spite of several waves of subsequent ethnic cleansing and genocide.

This multifaceted heterogeneity and the post-Ottoman authorities’ deliberately divisive policies had provided fertile ground for perennial intercommunal tensions and conflicts. The degeneration, weakening and finally recession of Ottoman rule, coinciding with the rise of nationalism in all Balkan lands in the XIXth centuriy freed this supressed conflict potential. With regional upheavals, local, rebellions, revolutions, *coups d’etat* and wars the Balkans had gained the distinction as the most volatile part of the European continent. Since the assassination in 1831 of the first elected head of liberated Greece, Count Ioannis Kapodistriyas, the Balkans have become and remained for more than a century also one of the most virulent hotbeds

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<sup>2</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, Baril Books, 1997, pp. 7-25.

of politically motivated terrorism. The tally of its prominent victims included a score of kings, princes, prime ministers, interior ministers, governors, generals, deputies and other officials and politicians, in practically all Balkan states. By the end of Ottoman dominance in the region, the Balkans had become an object of competition among major continental powers and Europe's "powder keg". In 1908 the Ottoman Empire finally ceded Bosnia to Austro-Hungary and by 1913 lost most of its European possessions. Only about a year later, Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand von Habsburg was assassinated in June 1914 in Sarajevo. The Ottoman ingredient was still clearly discernible in the igniting of a regional crisis which provoked the outbreak of the First World War. The Balkans became then one of its bloody theatres.

Tensions and conflicts between ethnic and religious communities, often marked by Ottoman legacy have punctuated the political history of the Balkans also throughout the XXth century. The bloodiest outbreaks of violence have taken the form of interstate and civil wars, partly coinciding with two continental wars and reflecting geopolitical shifts in relations between great powers and their respective alliances. The last wave of mass violence in the Balkans was stimulated by otherwise positive developments in the Euro-Atlantic area – the end of the "Cold War", the breakdown of Eastern European and of the Soviet communist regimes, the dissolution of the Warsaw pact (WTO) and the ensuing transition to towards liberal political systems and to market economies.

These developments contributed to the breakdown of communist Yugoslavia. Social tensions, economic difficulties and political unrest have very significantly contributed to an explosion of interethnic conflicts. Their severity have been further magnified by modern mass media and often exploited by ruthless politicians. The biggest number of victims during the wars of Yugoslav succession in 1990 – 1995 was caused by armed conflicts along the divide between the Muslims and Christians and related to interstate borders and administrative divisions inherited from the Ottomans. Most

notable among them have been Bosnia's Western and Northern borders - one of the oldest in Europe. They were fixed in 1699 by a peace treaty signed at Sremski Karlovci as the borders between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Prior to the proclamation of Bosnia & Herzegovina's independence in February 1992 these borders became contested and immediately afterwards were forcefully violated by Serbian and Montenegrin separatists, followed by Croatian separatists, all supported either by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or by the Republic of Croatia. Another former Ottoman border, this time with the Kingdom of Serbia, became in the late 1990's the venue of armed conflicts between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Albanian Kosovar separatists and NATO. After 2008 the somewhat modified border was central in a political conflict between the Republic of Serbia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosova/Kosovo.

Political instability accompanied by violence has already led since the 1970's to the lasting or temporary fragmentation on Cyprus, in Moldova, two Yugoslavias (SFRY, FRY) and subsequently in three ex-Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia). The process of "balkanization" doubled the total number of *de facto* existing states in South Eastern Europe from eight to sixteen. The Balkan wars in the 1990s produced at least 130 thousand estimated deaths, with the most tragic results in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo. In addition, they created two to three million refugees and displaced persons.

The Balkans have also won the distinction of the only region in Europe which has been the theatre of several UN peace-keeping missions and of the first NATO's "out-of-area" military intervention. In 1995, following unsuccessful attempts by UN, CSCE/OSCE and EEC/EU and only after considerable hesitation a coalition of Western powers decided to impose peace on the Western Balkans by force. By 2003, the end of armed violence was finally achieved and often superficial tranquillity established in Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. However the security in the region has been negatively affected by the still present underbrush of

political instability and by conflicts in the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Contemporary security challenges in and related to the Balkans**

Some developments elsewhere on or close to our continent have affected the region's security and *vice versa*. The tectonic geopolitical shifts in the early 1990s and the crisis of neutralism and nonalignment led to a radical political and military realignment as practically the entire region has become politically and economically oriented towards the West. The end of the NATO/Warsaw pact confrontation, political fragmentation and the lack of large-scale mineral, energy or other natural resources led to a very considerable decline of the region's geopolitical importance. The Balkans have ceased to be an object of overt contests for political and military domination by superpowers. The region has gained instead the international notoriety as a source of troubles and a costly nuisance. Although much less intense than during the "Cold War" the political rivalry between USA and the Russian Federation for influence in South Eastern Europe has been partly revived. One expression of this rivalry have been subsidized or gratis deliveries of US heavy weapons to Croatia and of Russian heavy arms to Serbia (combat jets, helicopters, multiple rocket throwers, howitzers, APCs, anti-aircraft rockets etc.). A brigade-size military outpost in Moldova, the Russian Navy in the Black Sea and a rotating squadron in the Eastern Mediterranean mark the considerably reduced Russian military presence in South Eastern Europe and its immediate vicinity, compared with the pre-1991 Soviet levels. The Russian Federation used to have two contingents of peace-keepers in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo but by 2003 withdrew both. The reincorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol in 2014 allowed the Russian Federation to substantially increase its defense and also, if needed, power projection capabilities near South Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

There are some US and Russian operational tactical nuclear weapons still present in or close to the Balkans. The US military presence has moderately increased due

largely to the volatility in the Near and Middle East. In addition to the USN Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean and the US Air Force's presence in Italy, Greece and Turkey the United States have built up a land base Bondsteel in Kosovo, acquired the rights to use military training and transit facilities in Romania and Bulgaria. The United States also placed at Deveselu in Romania a battery of Aegis antiballistic missiles as part of NATO's Theater Missile Defense presumably against potential threats from Iran. The Russian Federation views this development however very differently and as a strategic threat to it. Other foreign military units are present in the Balkans in the framework of two international stabilization missions, The NATO-led KFOR mission in Kosovo includes units from 30 countries, while European Union-led EUFOR in Bosnia & Herzegovina from 20 countries. Their total of about six thousand military personnel is up to ten times lower than was the strength of the NATO-led IFOR in Bosnia & Herzegovina in 1996.

One important aspect of security in South Eastern Europe since the end of the "Cold War" has been a very considerable change at the levels of defense spending, military manpower, stocks of conventional weapons, arms production and exports. The wars of Yugoslav succession in 1991-1995 caused temporarily a great upswing in the total of mobilized forces of warring parties to about 530 thousand military personnel. This total exceeded about 2.6 times the pre-1990 level on the territory of the SFR Yugoslavia. In the process of liberal democratic transition all communist-ruled states reduced their defense spending, both for political and economic reasons. In Bosnia & Herzegovina the reductions were also mandated by relevant provisions of the Dayton peace agreements of 1995 and enforced subsequently under international supervision. The transition from universal conscription to professional armed force also contributed to the reductions of military manpower in the region. This applies not only to the two former WTO members (Romania and Bulgaria) but also to the former non-WTO states not included into the agreement on Conventional Force in Europe (CFE) – to Albania and to seven ex-Yugoslav states. In the latter, the drawdown resulted also in much lower inventories of heavy conventional weapons compared

with those in the 1980s in the defunct SFRY. Compared with the pre-1991 levels the reductions of active armed forces in the region has been roughly by a half while those of the reserves and heavy conventional weapons by up to two thirds or more. On the other hand, the two older NATO members (Turkey and Greece) have continued with substantially higher defense spending due, i. a., to the unresolved disputes over Cyprus and the airspace over the Aegean Sea. The failed military *coup* in Turkey in July 2016 certainly did not contribute positively to regional security.

There are in the region two self-proclaimed and *de facto* existing parastates whose legal status has been strongly contested – the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Republic of Transnistria in Moldova. The conflicts in and related to Ukraine, the civil wars in Syria and Iraq as well as internal developments in Turkey made more difficult resolutions of these problems. Since its proclamation of independence in 2008, the Republic of Kosovo has been recognized by a majority of UN member states, by three permanent members of the UN Security Council and 23 members of EU and NATO. However, it still lacks universal international recognition and full control over its borders, entire territory, air space and population. These unsettled situations undermine regional stability.

The underbrush of nationalism, intolerance and intercommunal hatred unfortunately still survives in the Balkans. Moreover, in some Balkan countries, the societies became more nationally and religiously segregated than they were a quarter century ago. This is particularly true of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. Moreover, there have been public threats and accusations of secessionist intentions levelled against some prominent politicians and public figures in the *Republika Srpska* in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and also in Sandzhak and Voivodina in Serbia. In September 2016 the authorities of the *Republika Srpska* organized a referendum on celebrating the day in 1992, when its secession from Bosnia and Herzegovina was proclaimed. In spite of the verdict by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia & Herzegovina declaring the referendum unconstitutional the proposal was overwhelmingly

approved by the voters. So the potential for interethnic conflicts and for further fragmentation in the ex-Yugoslav space might not have been fully exhausted. Moreover, among the six internationally recognized ex-Yugoslav states there remains a number of unresolved and very sensitive problems of succession, including contested segments of interstate borders on land, on the Danube and in the Adriatic Sea. Among them are notably segments of Croatia's borders with Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Slovenia.<sup>3</sup>

The security in the Balkans have been exposed to a number of other non-military challenges. Some of these have originated in the region itself, while some have been imported from or linked to similar phenomena in states outside the region. Since the end of the wars of Yugoslav secession and the separation of Kosovo from Serbia most of the Balkans have ceased to be a hotbed of political terrorism. There have been two exceptions – Bosnia & Herzegovina with several individual attacks and much more importantly the European part of Turkey. Terrorist attacks with numerous victims in Istanbul have reflected Turkey's failure to peacefully resolve the problem of the Kurds – its biggest national minority and its controversial relations with the "Islamic Caliphate" (ISIL). These two sources of terrorism have had only a limited impact on the security of the rest of Europe.

Prominent among other non-military challenges are organized crime and corruption, which have the potential of becoming the gravest threat to regional security. Following the breakdown of Yugoslavia and the wars of Yugoslav succession considerable illegal stocks of light arms and explosives remained in the region. They serve as an important source of supply on the European black market. Arms and ammunition of Yugoslav origin have been used by Islamist terrorists, i.a. in 2015 in the attacks in Paris. Organized crime in and from the Balkans, often in cooperation with other extraregional criminal organizations has been active in bank and post

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<sup>3</sup> Duško Dimitrijević. 2012. *Državne granice nakon sukcesije SFR Jugoslavije*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd.



office robberies, in various forms of smuggling and illegal trafficking, including in women and children, human organs, drugs, arms, counterfeit goods, tobacco products etc. It has been estimated that about three quarters of heroin (mostly from Afghanistan) and a considerable part of cocaine (from Latin America) enter Western Europe via the Balkans. The region has produced close to 900 foreign fighters in the ranks of the “Islamic Caliphate” in the Near East and about 150 foreign fighters in Eastern Ukraine.

In 2014 – 2015 the sovereignty of five South East European states and also of Hungary and Austria was violated and their security endangered by a huge wave of illegal migrants and refugees from the Near and Middle East. The unexpected wave created emergency situations on all borders along the “Balkan route” between Turkey and Germany. The stream of about 1.3 million migrants was managed by about a hundred criminal groups of traffickers in humans, many of whom have been active in smuggling of narcotics and arms. This operation was launched from the territory and with the full knowledge of state authorities of Turkey. The problem of several million displaced persons and refugees in that country was, to a large extent created by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the United States and Great Britain and by the subsequent policies of the US occupation authorities. The wave of refugees and migrants was encouraged by an invitation to Syrian refugees publicly announced by the German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. This otherwise commendable humanitarian gesture was not however accompanied or followed by the selection of asylum seekers in Turkey and by the provision of their air or sea transportation directly to Germany. The governments of the transit states by land were not requested and did not give their consent to the massive illegal crossing of their borders and were not warned ahead of time. Given the size of the wave other members of the Schengen system should have been, at least, consulted but they were not. The mass smuggling operation from the Turkish coast could not have been executed on such a high scale if Greece for years would not have ignored and failed to fulfil its obligation to guard the EU and Schengen external border.

Another source of human insecurity in the region is at least a million planted anti-tank and anti-personnel land mines left by the wars of Yugoslav secession. Although de-mining activities have been quite successful there are probably still several hundred thousand planted and unexploded mines in several areas of Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and Albania. There are also thousands dangerous remains of radioactive cluster bombs in rural Serbia – the results of NATO bombing in 1999. Another aspect of regional security has been related to the existing nuclear installations. There are today five operating nuclear power plants in the region and a small number of nuclear research reactors. Although all South Eastern European states adhere to the NPT regime, the problem of nuclear safety (including the disposal of nuclear waste) still exists.

Among real or potential non-military security threats which affect the Balkans one should mention also natural and ecological disasters and climate change. Parts of the region have suffered from devastating floods and forest fires. Another problem is the fragility of the region's energy security. The shares of imported oil are still higher and the already high dependence of the Balkans on imports of carbon fuels is likely to further increase.

Among touchy political issues in the Balkans one should mention some underprivileged ethnic minorities, particularly of the Romas, whose population has been fast growing, while the region as a whole has experienced a considerable demographic decline. This general trend has been due to a considerable economic regression and deindustrialization which resulted from the failure of economic model of autarchic industrialization in former communist-ruled Balkan states, transition to open market economies and also to Yugoslavia's breakdown. The closing down of numerous industrial plants and factories and the related decline of GNP p.c. have strongly increased unemployment and stimulated emigration to Western and Northern Europe, as well as to North America and Australia. Official data on unemployment

rates indicate very difficult social and political conditions in the region – from 45 percent in Kosovo, to up to 30 percent in Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia. Particularly worrying are still much higher unemployment rates of the young –about 50 percent in Serbia and Macedonia, 60 percent in Bosnia & Herzegovina and above 60 percent in Kosovo.<sup>4</sup> No wonder that the region has witnessed in 2014-2016 mass unrest, violent demonstrations and vandalism provoked by economic troubles and political dissatisfaction. These events took place in Albania, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Greece. Moreover, there is in the region about a million refugees and displaced persons.

### **South Eastern Europe and the international community**

The international record of dealing with the sources of instability and insecurity in South Eastern Europe has highlighted the complexity of its problems which defy quick unidimensional solutions. The links between the region's security and the security in other parts of Europe have been also underestimated. The protracted political conflicts on Cyprus, in Moldova, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia as well as between Macedonia and Greece, Serbia and Kosovo and elsewhere have testified to the elites' low ability to find pragmatic solutions through compromise and mutual accommodation and to assure regional stability. The efforts to infuse from outside cooperation with and among the region's states have resulted since the 1990s in a extensive web of international organizations, exclusively or mostly Western in origin. This web has included the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, CEFTA, SECI, NATO's Partnership for Peace, South East Europe Initiative, Regional Cooperation Council, *et. al.* Since 2008, the net of EU stabilization and association agreements has been extended to cover the entire region, except Kosovo.

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<sup>4</sup> Jovan Teokarević, 2016, *Spoljnopolitičke sveske: Zapadni Balkan između geografije i geopolitike*, FUNDACIJA FRIDRIH EBERT, Beograd, pp. 10.

These agreements have served as steps in bringing closer to and eventually admitting all remaining Balkan states into the ranks of EU members. Croatia and Albania entered NATO in 2009. In December 2015 Montenegro received NATO's invitation to join the Alliance, which provoked sharp political tensions in the country. In 2013, Croatia entered EU, while Turkey, after a very long waiting period became an official candidate and started pre-accession negotiations which were for some time stalled due largely to the Cyprus problem. Serbia and Montenegro entered the groups of candidates in 2012, while Macedonia's candidacy (both to EU and NATO) remains in limbo due to Greece's veto over Macedonia's name. Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and also Kosovo (within the context of UN Security Council Resolution no. 1244/99) remain potential future candidates.

The implementation of the EU Thessaloniki promise to embrace in its ranks the entire Balkans has been however delayed due to internal difficulties of and the crisis in the European Union and to the enlargement fatigue among its old members. The process of EU and NATO enlargement has been widely viewed as the best hope for the progress of regional security in the Balkans. A note of caution would be however in order. The promised inclusion of the entire region into the European Union is not around the corner. Even if and when it happens it would be security-wise insufficient. The record shows that inspite simultaneous membership of both states in the European Union it took Great Britain and Ireland more than three decades to reach a symbolic reconciliation and to conclude the compromise Good Friday Agreement on Ulster. However, intercommunal tensions still persist in Ulster while Brexit makes questionable its full implementation. After a similarly long simultaneous membership in EU and NATO the conflict between Great Britain and Spain over Gibraltar remains unresolved. Sixty years of two countries' membership in NATO have not stopped the arms race between two other members – Greece and Turkey and did not bring closer a resolution of the Cyprus problem. The admission of the Republic of Cyprus in EU also did not advance its resolution and perhaps made it more difficult. Today, more than 60 years since the country's joining NATO and the European

Communities the relations between the two main national communities in Belgium are worse than they have ever been. Etc, etc.

The present security situation in the region is certainly better than it was at the turn of the century, not to speak of 1914, 1941, 1971, 1981 or 1991. This improvement was due to a number of developments. The extra-regional sources of conflict in, over or about the Balkans have been reduced. The era of wars of religion, of ideology and of redrawing state borders in the Balkans seems to be over. Most countries in the region have undergone radical transformation of their political orders. Instead of authoritarian and, among them also totalitarian regimes of the late 1980s the region is composed today, in various degrees, of democratic political systems. And democracies generally do not fight wars among themselves. Moreover, the considerable demilitarization in most Balkan states has greatly reduced their warfighting capabilities. In order to break with the negative pattern of the last 150 years the Balkan elites needed to show much wiser and more responsible behaviour than their predecessors did. The Balkan elites have hopefully learned from the negative experience of the last two decades and of its harmful consequences. Unlike in 1990-1991 the hottest potential trouble spots in the Western Balkans are today under international surveillance in the form, i. a., of foreign troops, civilian controllers and two *de facto* protectorates in Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo. In addition, the countries of the region are recipients of considerable financial assistance and developmental loans. There is also a web of the above-mentioned regional cooperation schemes, including those in security and defense matters. Compared with the early 1990s the relations between the ex-Yugoslav states have generally improved. The Balkan and other South East European states themselves contribute today their peacekeepers to a number of international stabilization and observation missions in Europe, the Mediterranean, Transcaucasia, Near and Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **The Balkans and some actual or potential threats to European security**

As noted earlier, the Balkans for a long time have used to differ in one important respect from the rest of Europe and also from the Near East. Only in the Balkans and Transcaucasia there are today (four) European states whose believers are mostly Muslims. In Albania the Muslims constitute about 80 percent while in Kosovo about 90 percent of the total population. In one more Balkan country the Muslims make a 60 percent majority in the entire state and a still stronger majority in its biggest entity called the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina. It is not accidental that the sharpest intercommunal clashes in the Balkans in the XXth century have taken place along the Muslim-Christian divide in ethnically mixed areas. The bloodiest conflicts during the wars of Yugoslav succession in 1990s occurred in areas where the mixes of ethnic, religious and cultural communities changed most under Ottoman rule. In the rest of Europe, the opponents in practically all religiously colored intercommunal and interstate conflicts for centuries had belonged on both sides to Christian denominations (Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox). The Near East has experienced some sharp conflicts between the Muslims and the Christians (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt). However the bloodiest confrontations with, by far the biggest number of victims have involved as opponents the Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

In the last five decades, the difference between the Balkans and Western Europe in religious coloration of existing or potential intercommunal conflicts has greatly diminished. It was due to the mass influx to Western Europe of Muslim migrants, mainly from North Africa, the Near and Middle East and also the Balkans. With new migrants crossing the Mediterranean the total number of Muslims in Western Europe is approaching twenty million having exceeded almost three-fold the corresponding number in the Balkans. The populations of Germany, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland and Netherlands contain today Muslims at levels between five and ten percent of the total. Moreover, the intercommunal conflict potential along the Muslim – Christian divide has been enhanced by urban concentrations of Muslims, their marginalized social and political status, below-the-average income, lower education

level and higher unemployment rates, particularly among the young. The influence of Islamic fundamentalism, the growth of domesticized Jihadism in some Western European states among the second or third generation of Muslim migrants and their connections with international Islamist terrorism has increased this conflict potential. It is estimated that the out of 27.000 to 31.000 volunteers to the “Islamic Caliphate” in December 2015 about 5.000 came from Western Europe, primarily from France, UK, Germany and Belgium. This contingent exceeded roughly five-fold the corresponding number of volunteers from the Balkans. And so will be probably with the number of returnees. This threat to the security of some European states was brutally displayed in terrorist attacks in Madrid, London, Paris, Brussels, Nice, in several German towns and elsewhere. Arson and attacks on Muslim migrants in Germany and the growth of anti-Islamic extremism in several Western European countries have confirmed the potency of this challenge. So far no state has tried to act as an external protector of Muslim minorities in Europe, with an exception of Turkey on Cyprus.

Among Muslim migrants in Western Europe there is a sizeable, hundred thousands-strong minority of Shiites from Iran, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere. In the areas of their urban concentration there is thus a potential for Shiite – Sunni intercommunal conflicts. Since the 1960s-1970s there have been also other imported intercommunal cleavages in Western Europe. The cleavage between the Muslim Arabs and the Jews, largely brought from Algeria and Palestine, has expressed itself in numerous terrorist attacks against the Jews, including on the Israeli sportsmen at the Olympic games in Munich, as well as the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, attacks on Judaic schools and Jewish shops, particularly in France. Another cleavage is between the Turks and the Kurds, who count altogether over five million persons. It has already produced some low-level violence in Germany and might well further escalate if the primary conflict in Turkey itself reaches the level of an outright civil war.

While a good part of Western Europe has become thus, in some respect “balkanized”, former Eastern Europe has been largely spared of this phenomenon. This has been due to very different and restrictive demographic and immigration policies pursued since 1945 by its communist regimes and also by subsequent post-communist governments. The four states of the Visegrad group have openly and actively resisted the pressure of migration from the Near East and opposed the policy adopted by the German federal government and the tardive measures proposed by the European Commission.

The residual Ottoman legacy, supplemented and partly modified by the impact of post-Ottoman rule has remained an important to notable ingredient in intercommunal and interstate tensions and conflicts in the Balkans also in the XXth century. The Muslim – Christian divide still remains troublesome in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and on Cyprus. This hidden conflict potential still exists but its importance as a threat to European security has been greatly reduced. Since the end of the “Cold War”, the Balkans ceased to be one of Europe’s “powder kegs”. Following the termination of wars of Yugoslav succession the Balkans are also not anymore a hotbed of European terrorism. One of the main challenges to Europe’s security in the form of Islam-related terrorism comes today primarily from Western Europe and not from the Balkans. The imposition and maintenance of two international protectorates in the Balkans have assured the results of regional pacification. All this provides good reasons for moderately optimistic expectation that the Balkans will eventually become a region of democracy, prosperity and stability, enhancing and not diminishing the security on and around the European continent.