

STUDY

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Countering hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case



Policy Department for External Relations
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WORKSHOP

Countering hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case

ABSTRACT

The aim of the workshop, held on 26 February 2018, was to assess and discuss the EU's approach to hybrid threats in its neighbourhood using the Western Balkans as a case study, in the context of the extensive use of propaganda by Russia and its meddling into several elections and in the aftermath of the 2014 events in Ukraine and the Russian annexation of Crimea. The first speaker, Jean-Jacques Patry, presented the concept of hybrid threat at various levels and the EU approach and measures to tackle it, particularly in the Western Balkans. The second speaker, Nicolas Mazzucchi, delivered a presentation on Russia's declining influence in the Western Balkans (on behalf of Isabelle Facon, who authored the briefing but could not attend the workshop) and added some of his own analysis on energy and cyber issues. The presentations were followed by a debate with members of the Security and Defence Committee of the European Parliament.

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Table of contents

PART I: Workshop report and discussions	5
Programme of the Workshop	7
Biographical summaries of the speakers and the contributors to this report	8
1 Hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans countries	9
2 Russian influence in the Balkan area	10
3 Questions and answers	12
Annex I: Presentation slides by J.J. Patry	17
Annex II: Presentation slides by N. Mazzucchi	25
PART II: Hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans case	27
Introduction	28
1 Hybridity: Definitions and features	29
1.1 Coping with unfamiliar ways of warfare now becoming 'normal'	29
1.2 EU interpretation: Strengthening resilience of state members and societies	30
1.3 Preliminary conclusion: Hybrid threat is helpful to prepare a comprehensive self-defence posture in a highly confrontational environment	32
2 The EU perception of hybrid threats in the Western Balkans Countries	32
2.1 Clashes of influence between regional powers are perceived by EU as hybrid threats jeopardising the enlargement process	32
2.2 Hybrid threats unveil antagonistic models of societies for the future of the Western Balkans	34

2.3	Preliminary conclusions: A two-track strategy ahead of us; promoting values of tolerant societies and providing technical assistance to local Authorities facing hybrid threats	34
	Conclusion	35
	PART III: Russia's multifaceted and opportunistic influence in the Western Balkans	36
	Introduction	37
1	Russia is motivated	38
2	The leverage that Russia, the 'disruptive power', does have	38
3	The leverage that Russia does not really have	41
	Conclusion	44

PART I:

Workshop report and discussions

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Programme of the Workshop

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT



For the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)

WORKSHOP

Countering hybrid threats

Monday, 26 February 2018

Brussels, **Paul-Henri Spaak building, Room P5B001**

17.00-18.30h

PROGRAMME

17.00-17.05 Welcome and introductory remarks by

- **Ms Anna FOTYGA**, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)

17.05-17.45 Countering Hybrid Threats, the EU and the Western Balkans case

- **Dr Jean-Jacques PATRY**, Senior Research Fellow at the Paris-based 'Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique' (FRS); Chief Analyst of the 'Knowledge Center' of the French Reaction Corps (French army, Lille);
- **Dr Nicolas MAZZUCCHI**, Research Fellow at the Paris-based 'Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique' (FRS), in charge of cyber strategy, energy and primary goods issues;

17.45-18.25 Q&A

18.25-18.30 Concluding remarks by

- **Ms Anna FOTYGA**, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)

Biographical summaries of the speakers and the contributors to this report

Jean-Jacques PATRY is a senior research fellow in the *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*. He is now 'program manager on Army-2035' and Chief Analyst of the Knowledge center of the French Reaction Corp (French Army – Lille). He has been appointed as a Political Advisor of the Deputy Commander of the Stabilization Force (NATO-SFOR) in BiH (2001-2002); He holds a Ph.D. in administrative law and political sciences from the Sorbonne University (1993). He is also a professor of international relations and strategy at the *Centre d'étude diplomatique et stratégique* (School of Advanced International Studies) in Paris and the Director of the Master 2 *Geopolitics and international security* (Catholic University of Paris). He was a Visiting Scholar in 1994–95 at *John M. Olin Center for Strategic Studies* (Harvard University) under the supervision of Pr. Samuel Huntington.

Nicolas MAZZUCCHI is research fellow at the *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*. He is in charge of cyberstrategy, energy and primary goods issues. He was previously senior analyst and head of section within the French MoD in charge of energy and technological foresight analysis. He holds a Ph.D. in Economic geography from Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne University (2015). He is also professor of international relations, energy geo-economics and cyberstrategy at the *Enseignement Militaire Supérieur Spécialisé et Technique* (EMSST) of the French army, Ecole Polytechnique and Sciences Po Paris. He is the author of *Gagner les cyberconflits* (2015) and *Energy, resources, technologies et enjeux de pouvoir* (2017). Dr. Mazzucchi is also foresight advisor for Futuribles International and Auditor of the 25th session of the Ecole de Guerre.

Isabelle FACON is a Senior Research Fellow at *Fondation pour la Recherche stratégique*, Isabelle Facon is a specialist on Russian security and defense policies. She has been working extensively on Russian military affairs, the military reform process, defense industry issues and the evolution of civil-military relations. She has also devoted a lot of research to the study of Russia's foreign policy. Isabelle Facon spent her academic time at *Université Paris IV-Sorbonne*. She also spent one year at Oxford University, as an *Associate Member* of *Saint Antony's College*. Isabelle Facon has been a Senior Lecturer at *Ecole polytechnique* (Geopolitics of Eurasia Seminar) since 2008. She has also been contributing, since 2003, to two Masters at *Institut Catholique de Paris* (Social and Economic Sciences Faculty, courses on International Security and International Security Organizations). She is a member of the Editorial Board of the French monthly *Revue de Défense nationale*, of the Scientific council of the review *Questions internationales*, and of the on-line review [Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies](#). She is also a member of the French Association of Internationalists ([Association des Internationalistes](#)).

1 Hybrid threats: EU and the Western Balkans countries

Hybridity is a buzzword in the field of international relations and security. However, it has been introduced in NATO and EU member states' doctrinal corpus to depict new threats and challenges. The EU uses the concept to deal with difficulties created by the local influence of non-EU powers (Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) in the enlargement process of the Western Balkans countries.

Hybridity is a complex issue, coming from the military expertise. It has been conceived and used by Western military establishments to cope with an array of non-conventional ways of practising warfare, and with skilful enemies aiming at avoiding lethal military retaliations. The concept emerged from the US experience in Iraq and from the Israeli experience in Lebanon. It has been adopted by the US in 2010 and by NATO immediately after the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014.

However, hybridity remains confusing. Scholars and practitioners in the defence and security field have many different meanings in mind, considering their own agenda and concerns. Briefly, hybridity could be interpreted as:

- At the political level: an option for a state or a powerful non-state entity willing to challenge the international order by force;
- At the strategic level: a combination of direct / indirect strategies, including all possible domains (economy, diplomacy) and available information technologies (cyber);
- At the operational level: the use of attrition strategy both by conventional and non-conventional capabilities including Anti-Access/Area Denial, G-RAMM and weapons of mass destruction;
- At the tactical level: a combination of irregular courses of action with conventional and non-conventional means (terrorism).

Altogether, hybrid threats can provide a powerful leverage to enemies or adversaries opposing digitized Western regular forces, with limited risks of escalation. NATO member states have therefore updated most of their doctrinal corpus to meet these new realities of conflict zones.

In the EU's close neighbourhood, EU member states facing the consequences of the Ukrainian war or the migrant crisis are increasingly concerned for their own security. In close coordination with NATO, the European Commission therefore proposed, in a Joint communication in 2016, to introduce the issue within the institutional European network. A common definition is advanced for establishing a shared comprehension of a complex domain: '...the concept aims to capture the mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare...'. The Commission also recommends:

- A whole-of-government approach;
- A coordinated response at EU level by using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity, mutual assistance;
- And 22 actions.

A yearly review is organised to assess common progress in the considered actions in terms of improvement of resilience of states and societies facing hybrid threats. After almost two years of practice, hybridity is now confirmed as a major concern for an EU framework devoted to assist governmental Authorities in:

- Identifying vulnerabilities;

- Finding technical solutions;
- Synchronizing responses in a comprehensive approach.

This could bring EU member states and institutions to significantly increase their understanding of hybrid threats and improve the resilience of civilian societies to address them properly.

In the case of Western Balkans countries, hybridity seems to be deeply rooted in 'segmented' societies broken by the former-Yugoslavia civil war and the split between states opposed by antagonistic goals. Indeed, all of the six countries in the region – Albania, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia – have territorial disputes. Civil societies face a number of daunting challenges: a somewhat difficult democratisation process; slow economic development; large scale movements of migration; and criminal disorders. Political strives are common concerning rights of minorities or pending political status quo. Two decades of peace transition have not been enough to develop confidence and trust between local actors. Actually, the EU seems to have lost part of its influential role in the region, both under the pressure of other priorities among its member states and due to the sharp competition in ideas and values with non-EU states such as Russia, Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Taking all these dimensions into consideration means hybrid threats could now jeopardize the EU enlargement process in the region.

The enlargement project can hardly be achieved only with economic means. Perceptions and narratives of communities' history are almost as important to try to move things and people forward as to drag them backward. Disputes and arguments are focusing on alternative political models to the EU liberal way. The values of national-religious Russian and Turkish models are disseminated among local supportive communities (Serb for Russia and Albanian for Turkey) and the Saudi theocratic model is inspirational for some remote Islamist minorities in Kosovo and BiH.

Putting in place a strategy which uses means considered as hybrid is a two-way street. The EU has vested interests in a stable Western Balkans region. With all available means the EU has the capacity to develop a two-track strategy. One track is based on helping to improve the resilience of civil societies with deep and lasting actions on education, local empowerment at the grassroots level to develop tolerance and peace. The second track is more sensitive and consists in assisting the governments eager to follow the EU path when experiencing hybrid threats. The technical expertise of EU member states and institutions could therefore be delivered to help them.

2 Russian influence in the Balkan area

I am going to summarize the key points of the work of Isabelle Facon on the presence and influence of Russia in the Balkan area¹. I will complete this vision with my own work on energy and cyber issues.

Russian nationalist experts regret that Russia is slowly losing influence in the Balkan area. In the last Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, the Western Balkans is not even mentioned. In the West on the contrary, observers tend to believe that Russia is currently setting up well-articulated actions and protocols to undermine European interests in the region. Some believe that the coup attempt of 2016 in Montenegro was supported by Russia. Experts are wondering about the real nature of the Russian humanitarian centre in the town of Nis. In this context, it is important to look carefully at and to assess as objectively as possible Russia's intentions as well as its strengths and weaknesses in the region.

Encouraged by its historical resent about the 1999 Kosovo crisis, Moscow is incentivized to challenge European supremacy in the region, or at least to show it can challenge this influence. The transition to a

¹ Isabelle Facon, Russia's multifaceted and opportunistic influence in the Western Balkans, February 2018

post-western society in Russia pushes it to exert its influence, since Balkan countries have always been at the heart of this region.

Various Russian federal agencies are in charge of promoting an 'objective image of Russia' in the Western Balkans like in other regions of the world. Sputnik is now present in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These countries show sympathy towards the Russian stance. This is especially true in Serbia, due to what Serbia considers as an unfair treatment following the Yugoslavia war.

For Russia in the energy sector, the Balkan countries represent only 1% of its exports. The Western Balkans are therefore not an economically strategic region for Moscow.

Russian direct investments (FDIs) in the region are very weak compared to European ones, which represent up to 70-80 %. Russian FDIs are way less important than those (less than 10% in average) and concentrated in a few countries such as Serbia or entities (Republika Srpska). But other countries are now becoming important players in terms of FDIs, for example Turkey in Albania and Kosovo, those being supplemented by local Turkey-Albania economic forums for investment on a regular basis.

One third of companies in Montenegro have ties with Russia. This has not prevented Montenegro from joining NATO. Moreover regarding the language, Russia does not appear to benefit from a de facto asset since few people speak Russian in the region. Considering hybrid threats, Moscow could not really use Russian-written websites to spread its influence and propaganda. Russia appears to act opportunistically in the Balkan region, nagging at EU initiatives without providing a real alternative.

It is important to emphasize the energy dimension: apart from Slovenia, Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, most countries have stabilized or diminished their imports from Russia. Azerbaijan has become a new exporter to Europe and its presence in national gas mix could develop according to the gas pipelines programs related to Azerbaijan national company SOCAR.

The current gas architecture in the Balkan region depends on Russia. It has been built to supply those countries with Russian gas and remains oriented towards Russian sources. The EU is currently working on the system of pipelines to provide gas supplies from other sources than Russia. The double system made of Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) running from Azerbaijan to Turkey and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) from Turkey to Italy through Greece and Albania is part of this European Southern Corridor. With the TAP – having a 10 Bcm annual capacity which is quite small – Europe by 'entering' the Balkan area could be able to provide gas to the whole Balkan region. The TAP is going to be completed by a new pipeline, the Ionian Adriatic Pipeline (IAP) from Albania to Croatia, which could supply a large number of countries (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia). IAP is an even smaller pipeline (5 Bcm) but important enough for the countries' needs.

The idea of the IAP pipeline was born from the TAP pipeline. The Balkans are still favouring other extra-European actors such as Turkey (TAP) because it is a transit country for Azerbaijani gas. IAP includes the Azerbaijani company Socar as a founding member, as well as in TANAP and TAP. Turkey and Azerbaijan have therefore increased their influence through commercial implantation.

In terms of cyber influence, Russia is not strongly present in the Balkan region. Analysing the audience of the most important Russian websites in the Balkan countries, reveals that are not very popular. The sole country where they are really present is Montenegro with V Kontakte, the Russian social network, ranking 11th in national popularity.

It is also possible to estimate that some Balkan countries have a good cyber-resilience: Croatia for example is actually ranked 41 in the Global cybersecurity index of the ITU², which is a good performance. Of course,

² Annual document that measures the states cybersecurity readiness in analyzing their policies and organizations dedicated to this issue.

certain countries are low in this ranking (Bosnia and Herzegovina) but the whole region cannot be considered particularly weak.

3 Questions and answers

Mr Arnaud DANJEAN, Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats):

Thank you madam president. Thank you for your contributions, I have found them interesting and well-documented. I do not have a particular question, but rather a few remarks. Regarding hybrid and hybridity, I believe you summed up the current debate well, and all the caution necessary when using these words. I do not really like the term 'hybrid threats', it is misleading and catch-all, and there is an undeniable fashion effect. It has an undeniable marketing appeal, enables many conferences, it feels like we revolutionized the military doctrine and beyond. I do not see anything new, it is a new word describing an old reality. The combination of factors, between strategic and tactic is not new, all of this is not new. As a matter of fact you were right to use the Balkans as an example, as the Balkan wars with Milosevic were perfectly hybrid. So maybe it did not have the complexity of today's means of communication, but the mix of propaganda, proxies, direct intervention, diplomatic and military relationships, that was already there at the time. So the first occurrence of hybridity was already in Yugoslavia during the 80's and 90's. So nothing is new under the sun, and all the concepts thrown at us are making me laugh.

About the current situation, I feel that the analysis made by Mrs Facon, though well-informed, seems to be too rational when we actually can observe a process based a lot on propaganda, narratives, influence, and not so much based on facts and figures. Regarding energy, you are right when you say the Russian influence is not heavily pronounced. You are right, but this is not what is at stakes here, although it marginally comes into play. But when you control a company like Nis, which remains one of Serbia's main job provider. It provides a considerable social leverage, a considerable leverage inside political structures. The number of Serbian political personnel more or less sustained by Nis, whether through their family or other, more or less opaque slush funds, is a considerable leverage, regardless of the amount of oil you import. When you say some ramifications make us more autonomous from Russia, I would say yes but no, since existing intermediaries, other countries' companies are also subject to Russian influence, whether it is Hungary, Moldavia, or other which do not seem dependant on Russia such as Croatia. Actually, contrary to widespread belief, Russian influence in Croatia is considerable, even if it is a bit counter-intuitive. The Croatian political leaders are worried about it, because they see oligarchs, intermediaries, companies from third party countries, which trace back to Moscow or are in any case under Moscow's influence. So there is raw data, and beyond that the discrete, diluted influence, which is nonetheless considerable.

The same idea can be applied to what you said about the media, cyber influence, and websites: if you go to Montenegro today, okay you won't go on Russian websites, but there is no need to! Half the press is under control of oligarchs or people linked to old and never dismantled networks, which are themselves fed by Moscow with funds and information. Because the big problem in the Balkans today is they remember, and we do not. These networks possess a memory we do not have in Europe. I have many colleagues saying, about the resolutions for these countries, 'there has been no cleansing in these countries'. A country has indeed exploded, but its underlying opaque networks were never, ever dismantled. And opaque Yugoslavian networks were really something. And so these networks still exist somewhere in one form or another, and we have no memory of this in the west! European Union personnel working in Serbia or Kosovo or Bosnia don't know the history of these places. For them, the history of Kosovo begins maybe in March 1999 as NATO intervention begins. No one knows what happened in Kosovo during the 80's or the 90's, without further going back. But in the countries in the region, memory is there. They have seen us coming and going for three decades, having an interest in them. But they keep their initial goals, their interest which remain the same and are not necessarily compatible with ours. So

when I hear today that we are going to help these countries, help them develop their capacity, teach them, we don't fully grasp the extent with which the notion of resiliency covers different realities for us and them. So I would not say that I am pessimistic today, but a little more sceptic on our capability to influence events in the region. We talk about Russia, saying they have no strategy, that they are opportunistic, a word we use extensively and for different applications: in Syria they have no strategy and are opportunistic, in the Balkan region it has no strategy... So Russia has no strategy but massively progresses everywhere, in a well-coordinated fashion within its government apparatus. So maybe it is very opportunistic, but I have a feeling we use this expression to hide our own lack of strategy. Except telling them they have a European perspective, we are not a game-changer for these countries anymore. The transformational capacity of the European Union has dramatically plummeted for twenty years. We should question ourselves over this situation. The European Commission sorts of does it, it has published a strategy for the Balkan, although I do not see the political will and proper 'strategy' into this. There are many small initiatives, which are okay in and of themselves, but the addition of which does not constitute a strategy. So when we say Russians do not have a strategy, in the current scheme I think they have more of a strategy than we do. And I believe Turkey has a more substantial strategy than we do. And I believe China has more than we do. Russians are not the only ones in this region. I think we are losing the Balkans, but we are losing them because of ingenuity and lack of memory, and by projecting onto them a rationality, including in your study of the phenomenon, which is not the same as projected by regional leaders.

Ms Claire MOODY, Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats:

Thank you, and I'm following on from my colleague Mr Danjean's points which were very well made, the first one being about the definition and putting a label on what is essentially a very old strategy and an on-going strategy. There have been networks in this area and we are universally very well aware of the kind of historic networks. Since, there have been printing presses and a variation of communication strategies on that side of things. But the label probably does help us because it focuses attention, and it corrals action and attention well, and brings activities together to look at this.

The second point I was going to make followed on from Mr Patry's looking at the two tracks strategy and the first point he made under that about resilience meaning promoting values. When we look at how we could have a better strategy in relation to the Western Balkans, part of that surely must mean effectively promoting our values. We have as well to live by and within the EU too, but actually I'm not sure actually that we are doing that well enough nor that we are following through on that in a way that we should.

I think as well, Mr Mazzucchi, that when you brought in the energy factors, that also referred back to a point that Mr Patry was making in terms of the other actors, none of the options that you brought up under that 'brought-in' new actors don't already have a history and an involvement in the area too. Therefore I'm not sure how optimistic we can be on that front in terms of how changing the scenarios that we are dealing with. But thank you for the presentations, they were indeed very interesting.

Chair of the Sub-committee on defence and security: Ms Anna FOTYGA:

I'd like to ask something about Serbia. I had some problems fully understanding that we need to bring this country as close to the EU as possible and look for integration with the EU as soon as possible, yet in terms of defence and security there are really disturbing issues of cooperation with Moscow including joint exercises with Russia and Belorussia, proceeding Zapad.

On the other hand, Serbia is very active on Western peacekeeping, and has proven to be a reliable partner. Serbia has a framework agreement with EDA. How to balance these things, how to eradicate this will to cooperate with Moscow in these areas which are difficult for us and Russia's very aggressive policies?

Nicolas MAZZUCCHI:

I am not a specialist of the Balkans area. In my point of view, and it is very personal, I think that Serbia is trying to use Russia as a point to gain power inside the Balkan area. And the balance of Serbia between the EU and Russia is trying to maintain some kind of strategic influence over the other countries in the Balkan. For example, in the energy sector, Serbia is used as the transit country for Russian gas towards other countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina for example in the whole area.

For the moment Serbia is seeing Russia as some kind of an older brother that could help the country to keep running and keep being the most important country in this region. The problem is that Serbia is seeing the European Union as some kind of dilution of its own influence over the area. And for Serbia, the European Union could try to change the narrative, to lower this idea that Serbia will not be the former power it has been. In my view it will lead them to be one of the countries in the region, and not the most important one. And it is my understanding that Russia helps Serbia in this old orientation of Serbia. Mr Danjean talked about the weight of history, but in this case it is the remains of history, so my opinion would be to alter the narrative of the EU.

Chair of the Sub-committee on defence and security: Ms Anna FOTYGA:

Well, gentlemen thanks to reflect to questions. So now, final remarks in the same sequence.

Jean-Jacques PATRY:

I agree with the point made about the definition of the concept. Which is really confusing and therefore must be used carefully. Considering the prospects of a EU strategy with the Western Balkans, I am not sure that we are doing well enough.

Nicolas MAZZUCCHI:

Speaking about energy issues, my point was to show that the Russian presence was not strengthening, on the contrary. Russia used Serbia as a proxy to control oil and gas supplies in the Balkan region but the projects to create alternative ways of supply are countering this unique system through Serbia.

Some countries like Croatia or Slovenia are changing their path towards other suppliers for crude oil and gas, even if Russia remains an important partner in refined oil products due to its capacities in refining. Moreover, all the Balkans countries signed the ECSEE treaty to enter the Energy community of Europe and are, technically, supposed to implement the Energy-Climate packages of the Union. So the Balkans countries are more and more interested in building large shares of renewable – with or without success – and they have to conclude contracts with European or Turkish companies, not Russian. This change in the electric mix of most of the Balkans countries is made without Russia as Moscow cannot provide technical expertise in renewable assets.

The current situation is, in my view and regarding both energy and cyber, the competition between the influences of several countries, not only Russia. Of course, Russia remains an important actor, but Turkey or even Azerbaijan in gas are also being more and more active in certain countries (Albania and Kosovo).

The global idea is that an alternative – or several alternative – way exists for the countries willing to go out of Russian influence.

Final remarks:

Jean-Jacques PATRY:

I would like to add two things: First, there must be a misunderstanding about the way I expressed myself in English. What I call a two-track strategy is contained in documents of various institutions of the European

Union. With some complexity of addressing and organising it, but this is certainly what is being officially recommended in documents of various European institutions. It is being put forward, but it is late. Secondly, there can be hybrid threats only if there is a conflict. For Ukraine, yes. For Iraq, yes. For Syria, Yemen, yes. For the Balkans, no. There is no war in the Balkans right now, and nobody today suggests lighting the fuse once again.

Therefore, I say that if the intellectual and doctrinal concept and tools are useful to counter the various faces of hybridity are necessary in the frame of NATO, this is very problematic in the frame of the EU. The first one is to consider the entire environment as a conflict environment, in a zone already subject to great tensions. Insisting on hybrid threats in the Balkans fuels the argument of neighbouring leaders willing to reinvigorate local feuds. Due to its nature, the European Union should have the goal of reducing these tensions rather than fuelling them. Technically, thinking about the Balkans in terms of hybrid threats consists in rebuilding local fortresses, some using EU countries as their allies, some other Turkey, some other Russia, some other external powers. It is a dangerous game.

Finally my last comment is that, if we want to play the game of hybrid threats, we need guts. Because what transpires from these very short debates is that we are no longer dealing with economic development problems.

Besides, EU arguments date back in 1990s rhetoric when EU values and economic success appeared overwhelming. But who are our competitors in the Balkans today? Turkey? They are not a third world country. Russia? Not a third world country. Saudi Arabia? Not a third world country. By comparison, Russia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia do present a model of economic development based on different values which are absolutely incompatible with our own.

So I will conclude that, if we want to keep parts of the Balkans -because you will never have the Balkans, they have never been Europeans- we will have to engage in an ideological fight to the death, like during the cold war. These are very different instruments, and that is actually hybridity. Hybridity is a game with two players, and we too have values and interests to defend, that we judge as necessary to defend in parts of the Balkans, or even in all the Balkans. In that case, we should get to it.

Thank you madam president for your patience, ladies and gentlemen for assisting to our presentation, and it is with pleasure and a tinge of regret that I leave the floor to you, because it was for me a very enriching personal experience.

Chair of the Sub-committee on defence and security: Ms Anna FOTYGA,

Thank you very much. Mister Mazzucchi?

Nicolas MAZZUCCHI:

Thank you Madam president. Just a few elements to answer to your remarks on the energy sector: yes, I am not saying that Russian influence has ceased in the energy sector. On the contrary. What I am trying to explain is that the system appears to be translating. We went from a system in the Western Balkans, the former Yugoslavian system in gas transmission from Russia used to be the only crossing through Serbia. It was the only system in the region. What happened? For a few years, thanks to the European Union, with the treaty on the Community of Energy, the southern corridor, the European policy created an alternative. These alternatives are between the European Union and non-EU members, or to other fuel sources as exemplified by the European Southern corridor to Azerbaijan today. This does not cancel what existed previously: Nis is a company owned by Gazprom Neft, and it holds considerable power in the economic architecture of Serbia. I do not say otherwise. What I say is Nis does have considerable power, but that power may be counterbalanced. All the countries in the region, although for some it appears to be more

wishful thinking than actual action, every country in the region declared ambitions to create renewable energy supplies. All these systems are created through European companies.

On the cyber domain, what do we see about telecom providers? Almost all systems in these countries have been liberalized, and we see European internet providers coming to the market. There is no important Russian internet provider either in the region as all the Internet providers and mobile companies have been privatized and belong to European companies or Balkan nationals. The point is that in energy supplies or access to the information through the Web, alternatives exist; there is no unique system anymore. We are not dealing with the former system, which was the Cold War system through which everything was forced to pass. Now, elements are in place to allow the influence of the European Union to reach the Balkans, but also incidentally to allow the influence of other actors to reach them: Turkey, China, Azerbaijan, which had a huge influence policy towards these countries a few years back when oil prices were very high. It is therefore possible these actors have the capacity to influence the Balkans. As my colleague was saying, Hybrid Threats are first and foremost influence and counter-influence capabilities. It does not mean to consider that one exists while the other does not, but that there are going to be channels. In case something happens, channels exist, at the same time in one direction, but also in the other.

Thank you very much.

Annex I: Presentation slides by J.J. Patry

FONDATION pour la RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE

European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Security and Defence

**Hybrid Threats:
EU and the Western
Balkans Case**

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Warning!!!



The view expressed is those of the author and does not reflect any French official position!

Summary

1. What is hybridity?
2. EU adaptation to hybrid threats;
3. Implementation in the Western Balkans Case;
4. Conclusion.

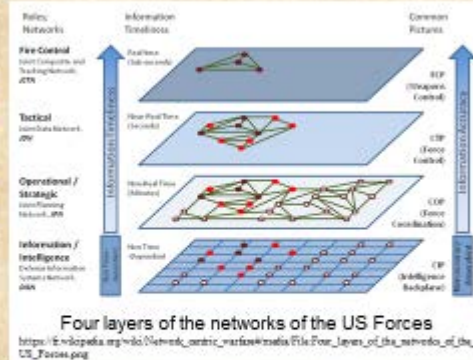
1. – What is Hybridity?



The Dominant High-Tech Western Type of Warfare in the Late 20th

Network Centric Warfare: Main Features.

1. Seamless networks of sensors and effectors operated by joint organizations ;
2. Combination of digitized information technologies (PGM, GPS);
3. Effect-based operations both kinetic and non-kinetic;
4. Overwhelming use of aerospace power...

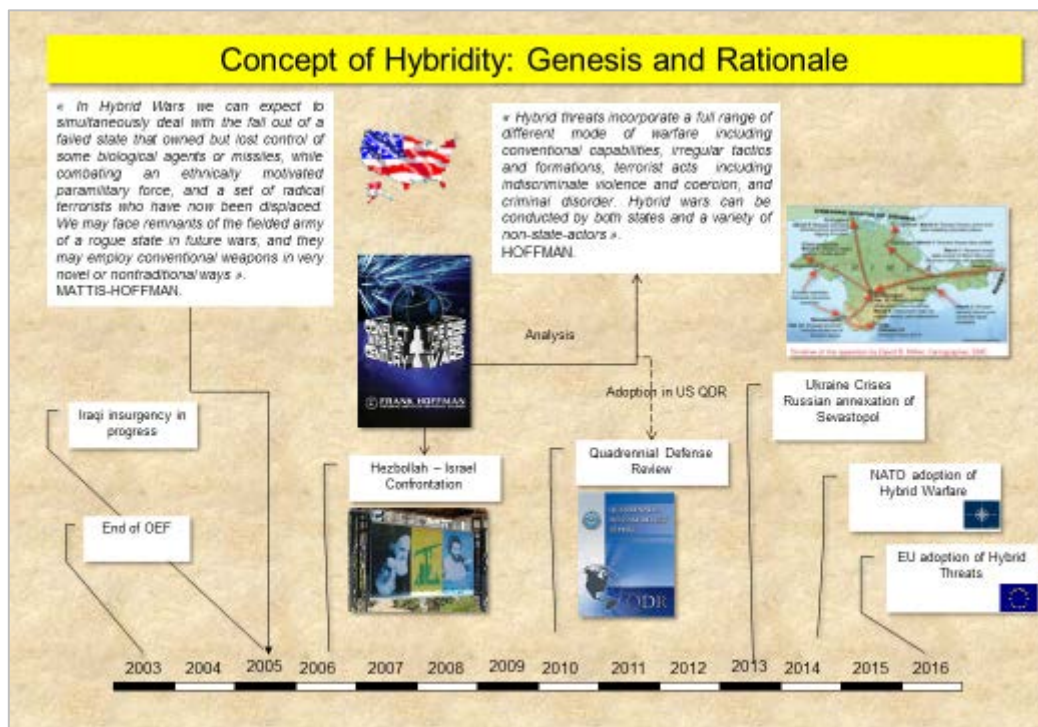


Conclusion: Very effective type of warfare against military organizations (regular armed forces) offering hundreds of High Value Targets (HVT) to detect and hit as High Pay-Off Targets (HPT).

A True Challenge!

How to fight a powerful adversary without exposing ourselves to lethal consequences?





Food for Thoughts

Hybrid warfare is the new buzzword depicting an old reality: The return to total warfare in international arena.

1. At the political level: Option of a state or a powerful non-state entity to challenge the international status-quo order by force;
2. At the strategic level: Combination of direct / indirect strategy including all possible domains (economy, diplomacy) and nowadays available information technologies (cyber);
3. At the operational level: The use of attrition strategy both by conventional and non-conventional capabilities including A2/AD, G-RAMM and weapons of mass destruction;
4. At the tactical level: Combination of irregular courses of action with conventional and non-conventional means (terrorism).

The purpose: creating a lasting effect of asymmetry on ends, ways and means when opposing digitized and powerful enemy regular forces.

2. – European Union and Hybridity?



The 2016 Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats



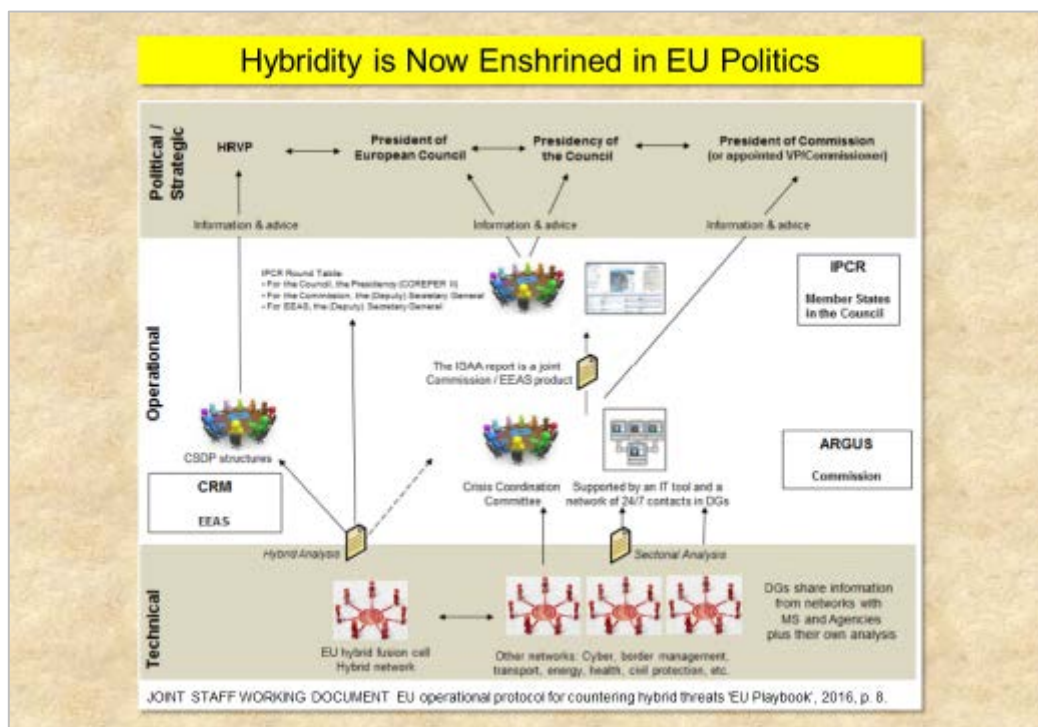
Key points:

Definition of a hybrid Threat:

- “...the concept aims to capture the mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare...”

Recommendations:

- A **whole-of-government approach**;
- A **coordinated response** at EU level by using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity, mutual assistance;
- 22 Actions.**



Food for Thoughts

Hybridity is confirmed as a major concern for EU:
The European framework is devoted.

1. To assist governmental Authorities in:

- Identifying **vulnerabilities**;
- Finding technical solutions;
- Synchronizing in responses in a **comprehensive approach**.

2. To increase resilience of civilian societies.

3. In close cooperation with NATO.

3. – Hybridity in the Case of the Western Balkans Countries.



Hybrid Threats and WBCs?



A volatile environment:

Threats to territorial integrity:

- Border claims and territorial disputes;
- Political strives on minorities rights;

Risks of intrastate political strives:

- **Influence of non-EU states (Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia);**
- **Competitive visions for the future of the WB area.**

Challenges to civilian societies:

- Democratisation process;
- Economic development;
- Migrations (Balkans' dwellers to Western countries; Middle-East foreign migrations to Western countries);
- Criminal activities.

Conclusion: Hybrid threats could jeopardise the enlargement process.

A Two-Track Strategy in the Disputed Realm of Ideas

Copenhagen Plus Criteria

Resilience means promoting values of tolerant societies:

- Strengthening education, training, empowerment at grassroots level.
- Promoting European values and ideas through all available means.

Conclusion: Hybrid strategies are two-way streets. EU could be a competent and resourceful gamer in global competition over the Western Balkans Future.

Resilience means providing technical assistance on request to WBCs Authorities facing hybrid threats:

- Identification of vulnerabilities;
- Providing technical expertise.



Nagging Questions?



Ask my Friend:
Psycho-Gopher!

Annex II: Presentation slides by N. Mazzucchi

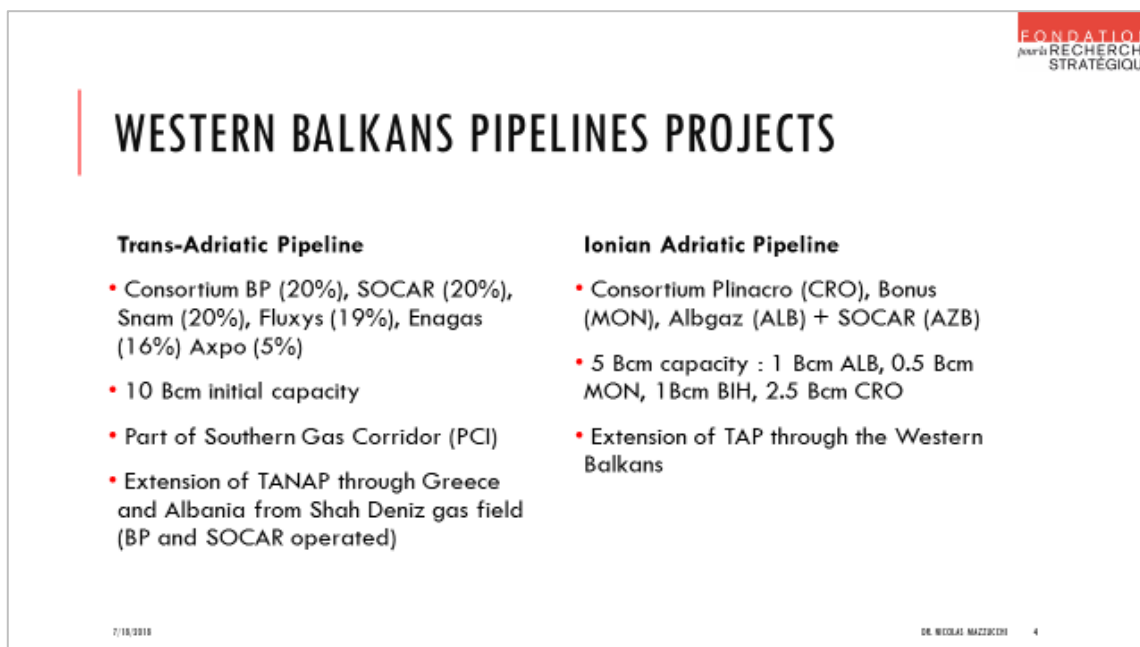
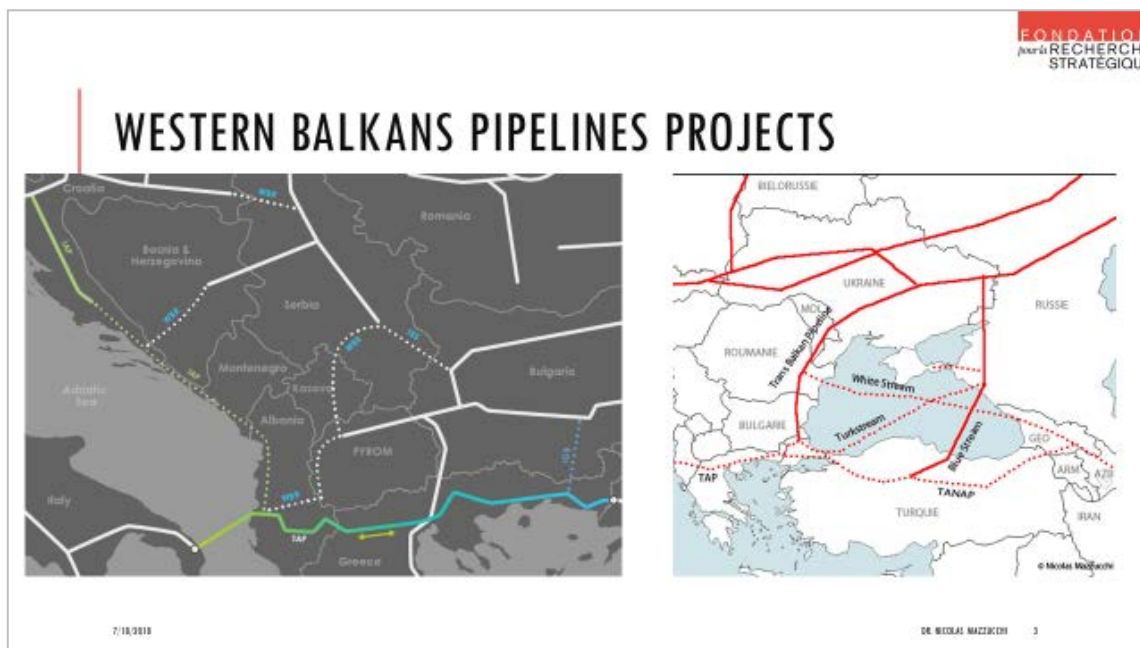


OIL AND GAS DEPENDENCY TO RUSSIA (%)

Country	Oil (crude)	Gas	Evolution
Albania	0	0	→
Bosnia and Herzegovina	100	100	↗
Croatia	10	0	↘
FYROM	0	100	→
Kosovo	0	0	→
Montenegro	0	0	↘
Serbia	63	100	↗
Slovenia	0	98	↗

7/10/2019

DR. NICOLA MAZZUCCHI 2



PART II:

Hybrid threats:

EU and the Western Balkans case³

³ By Dr Jean-Jacques PATRY

Introduction

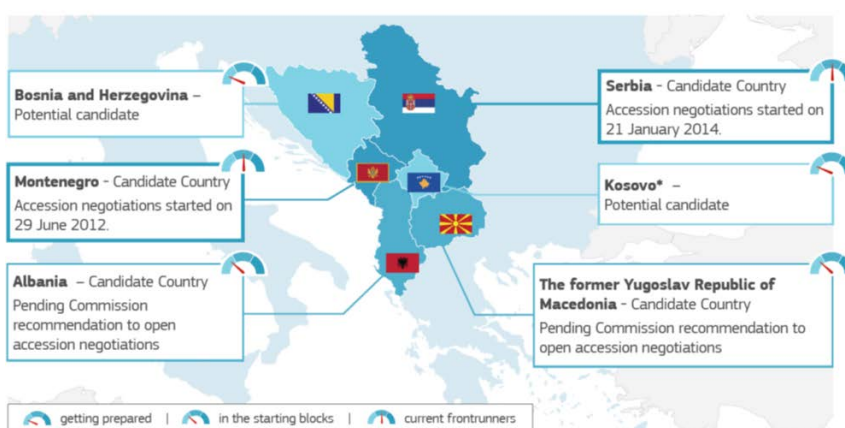
In the wake of the Russian annexation of Sevastopol, the combination of disguised military pressure and non-conventional means (cyber/information operations and war by proxies in the Donbass region) raised concerns among the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) countries about a new and lasting challenge to their own defence. After all, what happened in Ukraine could take place the Baltic area, the 'Southern flank' of NATO, or in the Western Balkans Countries (WBCs).

Simultaneously the migrant crisis, the expansion of organised crime and terrorism revealed internal fragility and vulnerabilities in many European countries. A new security framework emerged calling for a quick adaptation of public policies both internally and collectively. Hybridity served therefore as a catch-all concept to label these uncharted security gaps and find solutions. Hybrid wars and hybrid threats have reached a critical dimension in the strategic debate on peace and security in Europe ever since. NATO has then developed a full-fledged set of measures to deal with this new kind of challenges⁴ in addition to the reassertion of the alliance defence priority (the Wales and Warsaw summits). In the meantime, the European Commission released a joint communication opening the way to discussion and an action plan⁵. Finally, both institutions decided to cooperate more closely⁶.

At first glance, the issue of the Western Balkans Countries (WBCs) stability seems to illustrate all the aspects of 'hybridity'. The region is still recovering from the Former Yugoslavia civil war. Economic difficulties are draining most of the countries of their young population. The political perspectives look bleak with few progress made on the respect of minority rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia. Distrust between communities seems to be reinvigorated by influential foreign countries historically linked to the region (Russia and Turkey). Last but not least, the shadow of terrorism, going along with criminal activities is spotted again in the region. Actually, WBCs seem to rise two critical issues:

- **In terms of security** four are NATO members (Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia) and three (Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina) are not involved. Most of them share territorial disputes;
- **Uncertainty regarding perspectives of EU enlargement.** Croatia and Slovenia are full members, Montenegro and Serbia are candidate countries with ongoing negotiations since 2012 and 2014, Albania and Republic of Macedonia are recognised as candidate countries but negotiations have not yet started, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are only 'potential candidates' for the moment.

PROSPECTIVE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



Source: *Western Balkans enlargement: Common destination, State of the Union 2017*, 2 p., p. 1.

⁴ Jens Stoltenberg, *The Secretary General Report*, NATO, 2015, 123 p.

⁵ *Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union response*, Joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 6.4.2016 JOIN(2016) 18 final, 18 p.

⁶ 'EU-NATO hybrid threat center launched in Finland', DW, October 3, 2017 - <http://www.dw.com/en/eu-nato-hybrid-threat-center-launched-in-finland/a-40784773>

EU has identified 'hybrid threats' in the WBCs as a factor impeding the overall enlargement process. Some are linked to domestic politics concerning poor achievement of democratic progress required as key conditions to be admitted as a full member; Others are related to ideological and political interferences of major non-EU powers aiming at imposing their own agenda in the region (Russia/Serbia/Northern BiH and Kosovo/Montenegro, Turkey/Albania-BiH-Kosovo).

Therefore, how the EU interpretation of 'hybrid threats' devoted to improve self-defence could be of help for advancing the enlargement process of non-EU state members facing domestic tensions and challenges?

1 Hybridity: Definitions and features

1.1 Coping with unfamiliar ways of warfare now becoming 'normal'

Hybridity emerged, as a concept of warfare⁷, in the wake of the US experience in Iraq (2005) and Hezbollah/Israeli war of 2006. It gained full attention of NATO military establishment after the 2013 Russian dismemberment of Ukraine. The purpose of the concept is twofold:

- First depicting non-state fighting entities engaging the US armed forces in Iraq (or Israeli Defence Forces in Lebanon) with an array of mixed irregular courses of action, conventional capabilities (including long range missiles and drones) and information operations. The challenge is therefore to adapt conventional forces to match this peculiar combination and reset conditions for prevailing at the tactical level;
- Second; Recognising a threatening behaviour of a state orchestrating a territorial aggression against another state with a full set of military means disguised behind the screen of civil disturbance led by proxies (i.e. the Ukrainian civil war).

In both cases, definitions and features of hybridity highlight the **components of a comprehensive strategy** orchestrated by a state or a non-state entity to wear down regular forces without taking risk of heavy military retaliations. In 2010, the concept is officially endorsed in the *US Quadrennial Defence Review* and quite simultaneously in the *NATO Strategic Concept*.

Frank Hoffman in his seminal book of 2007 wrote: *'Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different mode of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. Hybrid wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state-actors'*⁸.

The Ukrainian civil war engrained the idea deep into NATO and EU that hybrid threats are becoming common challenges to security. What stunned most observers was the Russian ability to craft up a comprehensive strategy with dazzling effects in the field (quick annexation of the Crimea region and spreading of civil war in Donbass) based on a cunning combination of several mutually supported lines of operations⁹:

- Low-level of use of force: local militias organised, trained and equipped with paramilitary capabilities and strengthened by deployment of special and regular forces in covert operations;

⁷ Frank Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century; The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007, 72 p.

⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹ Franklin D. Kramer, Lauren M. Speranza, *Meeting the Russian Hybrid Challenge: A Comprehensive Strategic Framework*, Atlantic Council, May 2017, 30 p.

- Cyber strategy; encompassing attacks of governmental key nodes and civilian infrastructures;
- Economic and political coercion and subversion in the targeted country and its allies;
- Information warfare entailing a set of coordinated information activities for different audiences (local Ukrainian secessionists, Russian national population, Russian speaking minorities abroad, neighbouring states, NATO and EU...).

Therefore, NATO nations started a quick review of what seemed to become new likely ways of warfare with potential effects first on the Baltic area¹⁰; Secondly in the 'Southern Flank' of the Alliance as highlighted in the Secretary general report of 2015.

NATO definitions of hybridity¹¹.

Hybrid Warfare: '*...the synchronized use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects...*'.

Hybrid threats: '*...a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures...*'¹².

For NATO, the technical problem of hybridity lies in possible gaps in collective security caused by a set of aggressive measures short of war directed at one of its member. The issue is therefore to induce military changes in collective defence and prepare member states to better identify their own vulnerabilities. Consequently, almost all NATO centres of excellence adopted hybridity as a new dimension directly or indirectly affecting operations. Moreover, the meaning of what was first described as a way of non-conventional warfare depicts now a wide variety of threats, risks and challenges depending of the observer's agenda or concerns¹³.

What military experts tell us about recognizing a hybrid threat?

According to MCDC¹⁴, hybrid threats is the '*synchronized use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects*'. Three conclusions are drawn for identifying and preventing the full effects hybridity on target:

- Hybrid operator activates a set of tools usually in military, political, economic, civilian, informational domains;
- They are used in a synchronised way at a vulnerability of the targeted victim or to create one;
- Each tool is cautiously orchestrated in a discreet manner to stay unnoticed as long as possible and avoid arousing attention of the victim. Once detected, the outcomes are already done.

The recommendation is therefore to establish **a solid methodology to investigate its own vulnerabilities and early detect possible low-level attacks.**

1.2 EU interpretation: Strengthening resilience of state members and societies

Compared to NATO focusing on restoring deterrence against hard threats, EU has a much broader spectrum of non-military responsibilities in mind. Hybridity came of age in EU with growing concerns over

¹⁰ Andrew Radin, Hybrid Warfare in the Baltic: Threats and Potential Responses, Rand Corporation, 2017, 47 p.

¹¹ Jens Stoltenberg, *The Secretary General Report, NATO*, 2015, 123 p, p. 10.

¹² Ibid. p. 6.

¹³ Patryk Pawlak, *Countering hybrid threats: EU-NATO cooperation*, Briefing 17, EPRS, 12 p. See the NATO adaptation p. 47

¹⁴ Dr Patrick J. Cullen, *Understanding Hybrid Warfare*, MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project, January 2017, 32 p., p. 8.

Russian behaviour in the European neighbourhood but also under the pressure experienced by members states exposed to the terrorist threat, the migrant crises and related organised crime activities.

The **Joint communication of 2016** draws the general framework of hybridity as relevant for EU institutions and opened the way to discussions and action plan.

EU definition of hybridity¹⁵:

'...the concept aims to capture the mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and unconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare...'

The document recognised the critical importance of hybrid threats 'to national security and defence ... the primary responsibility lies with Member States...' and suggests a whole-of-government approach. However, a 'coordinated response at EU level by using EU policies and instruments, to build on European solidarity, mutual assistance...' is also recommended through the implementation of 22 proposed actions. The ultimate goal aims at strengthening 'resilience' of both targeted states and societies on four building blocks:

- **Raising awareness between members** by exchange of information and coordination of EU actions in the strategic communication fields;
- **Building resilience** of European societies in strengthening key infrastructures (energy, transport, space), protection of financial systems, public health, and supporting efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalism;
- **Preventing, responding to crisis and recovering** by 'defining effective procedures to follow, but also by examining the applicability and practical implications of the Solidarity Clause (Article 222 TFEU)⁵⁶ and the mutual defence clause (Art. 42(7) TEU), in case a wide-ranging and serious hybrid attack occurs';
- **Stepping up the cooperation between the EU and NATO** as well as other partner organisations, 'in a joint effort to counter hybrid threats, while respecting the principles of inclusiveness and autonomy of each organisation's decision-making process.'

A yearly assessment process is established to follow the implementation of the 22 actions¹⁶ in the long run. In 2016, a playbook has been released to set information exchange procedures between the EU institutions and the new organisms in charge of dealing specifically with hybrid threats. Namely; The *Inter-Service Group on countering hybrid threats* (ISG-HT) in charge of monitoring progress of the 22 actions within a framework of comprehensive approach; And the *EU Hybrid Fusion Cell* within the *EU Intelligence and Situation Centre* (EU INT Cen) of the European External Action Service (EEAS)¹⁷.

¹⁵ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union response*, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 6.4.2016 JOIN(2016) 18 final, 18 p., p. 2.

¹⁶ See the first assessment report of the Joint Framework in: *Implementation of the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats - a European Union response*, Joint report to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 9.7.2017 JOIN(2017) 30 final, 18 p.

¹⁷ *EU operational protocol for countering hybrid threats: 'EU Playbook'*, Joint staff working document, Brussels, 5.7.2016 SWD(2016) 227 final, 10, p.

1.3 Preliminary conclusion: Hybrid threat is helpful to prepare a comprehensive self-defence posture in a highly confrontational environment

Since 2016, the Western Countries have clearly understood the added value of hybridity as an adjunct to traditional security and defence stovepipe architecture. The answer implies a **defensive posture planned and conducted through a comprehensive strategy** to identify vulnerabilities, detect low-visible attacks, elaborate countermeasures thwarting the effects of the threats alone or with the support of close allies sharing similar concerns. That could work for EU state members getting caught or fearing a direct or an indirect confrontation with a powerful neighbour such as Russia. Is it still relevant in the case of the Western Balkans area?

2 The EU perception of hybrid threats in the Western Balkans Countries

Considering the case of the Western Balkans Countries, the concept of hybrid threats has been retained by EU to portray difficult conditions met by the enlargement process. The framework of adhesion has been set out as early as 2003 in the European Council summit in Thessaloniki. But the slow process recorded for achievement of the Copenhagen Plus criteria for membership and the lack of political stamina to keep up the pace led President Juncker to suggest to postpone any enlargement initiative before the end of the incumbent Commission.

Reminder of conditions set for EU enlargement towards WBCs by 2025?

To be admitted as full EU members, the WBCs must fulfill the Copenhagen Plus criteria¹⁸;

- ‘...stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- A functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU;
- The ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union...’.

2.1 Clashes of influence between regional powers are perceived by EU as hybrid threats jeopardising the enlargement process

The adhesion agenda is again back on track with the support of the European states in the ‘Berlin Process’ (2014). Growing concerns in the region convinced the Commission and states to reassert the EU objective of adhesion by 2025 in a strengthened strategy now under development. However, EU no longer enjoys an exclusive position in the dialog with the WBCs. As reported in a European Council on Foreign Relations paper, ‘*With Europe distracted, Russia and Turkey are increasing their influence in the Balkans...*’¹⁹. Saudi Arabia and the Arabic Gulf States are also committing assets, money and influence on local sympathisers. This ‘game of throne’-like scenario in the Balkans is viewed by EU as a clash of old-fashioned way of practising geopolitics²⁰ and a direct threat to stability and prosperity in the region. The table below

¹⁸ *Western Balkans enlargement: Common destination*, State of the Union 2017, 2 p., p. 2.

¹⁹ Francisco de Borja Lasheras, Vessela Tcherneva, Fredrik Wesslau, *Return of instability: How migration and great power politics threaten the Western Balkans*, Brief Policy, March 2016, 16 p.

²⁰ Georgi Gotev, ‘Mogherini to debrief EU leaders on external threats to Western Balkans’, *Euractiv*, 6 march 2017 -

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/mogherini-to-debrief-eu-leaders-on-external-threats-to-western-balkans/>

proposes a synthesis of 'state initiatives' allegedly setting a collision course with the EU enlargement purpose. Amber slots depict a true risk of territorial secession with likely spill over effects in the neighbouring areas; Light blue slots highlight risks of domestic ethnic clashes.

STATE INITIATIVES	ENDS	WAYS	MEANS
Russian alleged intentions ²¹	Republic of Serbia in Russian sphere of influence.	Impeding EU enlargement or delaying adhesion process.	Economic dependence (gas deliveries 100% needs).
			Political influence by sponsorship of information agencies (Sputnik since 2014). Cultural ties.
		Opposing NATO integration.	Military procurement and weapons. Combined military exercises and training centres. 15-years defence treaty signed in 2013. Observer in Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) since 2013.
	Republic of Kosovo kept as a hot spot.	Keeping Northern Kosovo under influence of Republic of Serbia and opposing any Albanese influence.	Help keeping the issue unanswered.
	Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina kept under threat of nationalist irredentism.	Impeding EU enlargement or delaying the adhesion process by keeping Republika Srpska ready for secession.	Support of conservative Serbian nationalist movement. Pending threat of self-determination for independence and annexation to Serbia. Cultural and information sponsorship.
	Republic of FYR Macedonia kept as a 'client' state	EU enlargement already put in jeopardy by the ongoing 'naming' dispute with Greece. Keeping a sharp political division between pro-Western and pro-Russian parties.	Propaganda and economic pressure against the incumbent government.
	Republic of Montenegro kept as a 'client' state	Government of Montenegro complained about a Russian attempt to make a coup in late 2016 to derail NATO integration of 2017.	Economic investments in tourism, banking system.
			Political pressure on the incumbent government with banning of Montenegrin products in Russia and hostile propaganda. Slight majority of Montenegrin public opinion against the NATO integration.
STATE INITIATIVES	ENDS	WAYS	MEANS
Turkey alleged intentions ²²	Republic of Albania: Restoring historical ties in the former Ottoman region with help of	Soft power influence by culture and education dedicated to Moslem communities.	Moderate economic assistance with direct investments by TIKa development agency.

²¹ Martin Russell, *Russia in the Western Balkans*, At a glance, EPRS, July 2017, 2 p., p. 1.

²² Philippe Perchoc, *Turkey's influence in the Western Balkans*, At a glance, EPRS, July 2017, 2 p.

	Albanese and Moslem communities.		
	Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Keeping a 'united' BiH	Soft power influence by close contacts with Moslem local elite.	Economic assistance in health, education and culture. Promotion of grass-roots initiatives among Moslem communities.
	Republic of Kosovo²³: Keeping a 'united' RoK	Soft power influence by close contacts with Moslem local elite.	Economic assistance in health, agriculture, education and culture. Promotion of grass-roots initiatives among Moslem communities.
STATE INITIATIVES	ENDS	WAYS	MEANS
Saudi Arabia alleged intentions ²⁴	Expansion of Wahabi interpretation of Islam among Moslem communities. Ideologic competition with Western values and other Islamic nationalist-based models. Main focus on Republic of BiH and Kosovo.	Investments of education, health, family assistance under <u>conditions of changing social behaviours</u> .	Network of madrassas and building of new Mosques. Networks of 'humanitarian' NGO's.

2.2 Hybrid threats unveil antagonistic models of societies for the future of the Western Balkans

Even though debated²⁵ all the above-mentioned arguments highlight sharp competing visions for the future of the region far beyond the issue of establishing spheres of influence: The Western liberal model proposed by EU; The nationalist-religious model of Russia and Turkey; and the theocratic model of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, a clash of values and ideologies will very likely open the field to indirect confrontation short of war through hybrid instruments; Propaganda campaigns in local elections, the use of grey networks of organised crime for corruption of spawn elites, or simply a lack of adequate competencies of Authorities. For the EU institutions, it means that a successful enlargement process will not depend only on acquiescence of the Copenhagen Plus criteria. The coming process should be backed by increased initiatives on education, information campaign and assistance to grass-roots organisations since **the spreading of ideas is almost as critical as the prospect of future economic prosperity to everyone.**

2.3 Preliminary conclusions: A two-track strategy ahead of us; promoting values of tolerant societies and providing technical assistance to local Authorities facing hybrid threats

The future of the Western Balkans is far from being settled. It will remain a long-term commitment event after the full achievement of the adhesion process at best in 2025. The EU vision has yet to be exposed with the release of the comprehensive strategy for the Western Balkans in February 2018. Nevertheless, a two-track strategy is already underway based on combinations of instruments devoted to promotion of resilience of societies according to proposition of the EEAS *Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's*

²³ David L. Phillips, 'Turkey's Islamist Agenda in Kosovo', *Huffington Post*, March 2017 - https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-l-phillips/turkeys-islamist-agenda-i_b_8891634.html

²⁴ Velina Lilyanova, *Saudi Arabia in the Western Balkans*, At a glance, November 2017, 2 p.

²⁵ Judey Dimpsey, *Judy Asks: Does the EU Really Care About the Western Balkans?*, Carnegie Europe, 3 May 2017 - <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/69846>

*external action*²⁶; And the technical assistance to Governments requesting help when facing hybrid threats. To this regard Action 18 '**...build partners' capacities and strengthen their resilience to hybrid threats**' gave birth to a Pilot Project risk survey with Republic of Moldova '*to help identify the country's key vulnerabilities and ensure that EU assistance targets specifically those areas*'²⁷. This experience should be replicated in favour of local partners in technical domains (cyber warfare, strategic communication, identification of critical vulnerabilities...).

But beware of possible backlashes. The 'good-old days' of implementation of political and economic liberal order in the Western Balkans in the name of universalist values are gone. These values cherished among many European societies are at best seriously questioned and will be probably strongly opposed. A strong willingness to lead a fierce competition for ideas and a pretty good collective ability for collective action are required to make them prevail, if possible!

Conclusion

Nothing is written in the highly competitive and volatile environment of the Western Balkans, either the successful EU enlargement project for the candidate states, or the establishment of spheres of influence between regional powers trying to promote their own model of society in the region. Conversely, hybridity can be considered as a sure way to confront opposing geopolitical agendas. Understanding hybridity is therefore a prerequisite to protect oneself but also to play this game to. After all competition is not war, EU also defends an agenda for the region and has enough resources and knowledge to push it forward. Is it smart and motivated enough to do it...!

²⁶ *A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action*, joint communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Brussels, 7.6.2017 JOIN(2017) 21 final, 24 p., p. 4.

²⁷ *Implementation of the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats - a European Union response*, Op. Cit., p. 15.

PART III:

Russia's multifaceted and opportunistic influence in the Western Balkans²⁸

²⁸ By Isabelle FACON

Introduction

Russian nationalist-minded experts regret that 'Russia is losing the Balkans', and that Moscow is 'losing the initiative there'²⁹. A look at the latest version of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (November 2016) does indeed create an impression that the Western Balkans are not a key item on Moscow's diplomatic agenda: the region is not mentioned in the 'Regional Foreign Policy Priorities of the Russian Federation' (Latin America is). It seems obvious that Moscow has no intention whatsoever to contribute to the conflict resolution and stability promotion effort of the international community in the region, from which it withdrew its peacekeepers in 2003. Russia has practically no military cooperation with countries in the region, except Serbia since 2015³⁰.

In Western countries, however, the perspective is quite different. Many observers believe that Russia might be prepared to fuel potential sources of conflict and deliberately and to undermine, by any means, Western interests in an already quite fragile region. Far from sharing the idea that Russia has retreated from the Western Balkans, many concur with the opinion of a correspondent of Radio Liberty in the Balkans that Russian 'support for anti-Western conservative forces and propaganda ... enhances interethnic intolerance, increases levels of distrust between stakeholders involved in post-war reconstruction and reforms'³¹. The alarm of the international community about the revitalization of Russia's influence in the Western Balkans was strengthened by the attempted *coup* in Montenegro by pro-Russian Serb nationalists during the fall 2016 parliamentary elections, which allegedly was supported by 'organs of the Russian state'³², with the supposed aim of preventing the country from joining NATO. East Stratcom taskforce, the EU's anti-propaganda unit, has recently established a Western Balkans branch. In late 2017, it was announced that the US Secretaries of Defense and State were compiling a report analyzing security cooperation between Russia and Western Balkan countries³³. Western leaders keep a particularly vigilant eye on Russian relations with Serbia which, as the largest country in the region and due to the presence of Serbian minorities in several countries, is seen as a key to its future stability. Among other things, they are concerned that the 'Humanitarian Training Center' established in 2012 in the city of Nis might be or become a disguised intelligence spot to spy on Western interests in the region. And indeed Serbia is the country in the region with which Russia has the densest and the most diversified relations. It signed a declaration on strategic partnership with Moscow in 2013, opened widely its energy sector to Russian investment, has refused to join EU sanctions against Russia, and has developed ties with the Eurasian Economic Union. In addition, some observers say that coordination between Russia and Turkey is growing in the Western Balkans and believe this is aimed at reducing the EU's influence and margins for maneuver³⁴.

In a context where Western observers, in (unintentional) concert with various Russian 'agents', tend to exaggerate the scope and efficiency of Russia's influence policies (in the Western Balkans like in many other places), measuring objectively the depth and pro-activeness of Russian deeds in the Western Balkans as well as their real regional impact is a methodological challenge. The numerous articles and analyses now available on this subject are full of such adverbs as 'allegedly', 'apparently', 'reportedly'; many hypotheses are not supported by concrete evidence. One may say that this in itself points to the type of 'hybrid tactics'

²⁹ Oleg Bondarenko, 'Rossiya teryaet Balkany' [Russia is losing the Balkans], *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 14 December 2017.

³⁰ Russian and Serbian forces, together with Belarusian counterparts, have held *Slavic Brotherhood* drills on a yearly basis since 2015. Over the same period, Russia sold Serbia 4 transport helicopters Mi-8/Mi-17, and donated second-hand equipment: 30 reconnaissance AVs (BRDM-2), 30 T-72B tanks, and 6 MiG-29 aircraft (SIPRI Arms Transfers Database). In April 2017 Serbia took part in drills with the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). In 2013 Belgrade obtained an observer status in the Parliamentary Assembly of the CSTO.

³¹ Julia Petrovskaya, 'Russia's Kosovo Fixation', *Intersection*, 30 October 2017.

³² According to a special prosecutor in Podgorica overseeing the investigation (Milan Nic, 'Balkan Troubles', *Berlin Policy Journal*, 31 March 2017).

³³ Maja Zivanovic, 'US to Analyse Russia's Links to Balkan States', www.balkaninsight.com, 26 December 2017.

³⁴ Ivan Krastev, 'EU Goes Back to the Future in the Balkans', *Financial Times*, 15 March 2017.

that Russia has been using in the region – use of intelligence agents, covert influence strategies, co-optation of local players, etc. In such an uncertain environment, a reality-based assessment is required if one wants to counter efficiently Russian corrosive policies when they do exist and really contradict the West's – in particular the European Union's – goals and interests in the Western Balkans.

1 Russia is motivated

Undeniably, Russia has goals in the Western Balkans, which it sees as a place where it can take a revenge for what it interprets as the West's constant efforts at undermining its international standing and security since the end of the Cold war, and a place where it can find evidence that corroborates its thesis that the world is entering a post-Western moment.

A key item here is Kosovo. Russia, it seems, 'has not forgiven NATO for [the 1999] military campaign, which was a turning point in Moscow's perception of the West as a partner'³⁵. That is why Moscow has done all it could to hinder Kosovo's moves towards independence and complicate its integration as a full member of the international community. Serbia has appreciated this as useful support (just like it appreciated Russia's vetoing a UNSC resolution qualifying the Srebrenica massacre as genocide, in 2015). Russia also wants to 'punish' the European Union for its alleged 'geopolitical designs' in the neighborhood it shares with the EU and which it sees as its 'sphere of privileged influence' (to quote President Dmitriy Medvedev, 2008). Considering that the EU has turned into a competitor there, Russia is determined to become a challenger to Brussels in its backyard, or at least to do everything possible to create the impression it has become one. In other words, Moscow is quite eager to make life more difficult for Brussels as the Western Balkan countries' progress towards EU accession is already quite complex.

As viewed from Moscow, the idea that the international order is entering a post-Western phase goes hand in hand with the recognition by the international community of Russia's revival as a great power – far from the weakened regional power that president Obama once mocked³⁶. This goal requires that Russia shows an ability to project its influence and interests far from its borders, and particularly to return to places where it used to be a major player. One should add to this the willingness of the regime in Moscow to distribute rents to its domestic clients when convenient – be it Russian Railways or key personalities in big energy companies. In the Western Balkans like in many other regions, this constitutes an extra motivation for Moscow to develop ties and influence with local elites.

This set of quite important motivations and goals has led Russia to look for opportunities to get more leverage in the Western Balkans.

2 The leverage that Russia, the 'disruptive power'³⁷, does have

The Western Balkans constitute quite a welcoming ground for Russian soft power efforts and propaganda, the aim of which is both to enhance Russia's image as an influential player and when possible to undermine its rivals' leverage. For that, Moscow has a toolkit which has been developing unevenly throughout the region.

³⁵ Maxim Samorukov, 'Russia's Tactics in the Western Balkans', <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/74612>, 3 November 2017.

³⁶ 'The Economist Interviews Barack Obama, The President on Dealing with Russia', 2 August 2014, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2014/08/economist-interviews-barack-obama-2>.

³⁷ Expression taken from Spyros Ekonomides, Director of the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics, quoted in 'Russia in the Balkans', Conference report (rapporteur: Dimitar Bechev, LSEE), LSEE Research on South Eastern Europe & SEESOX South Eastern European Studies at Oxford, 13 March 2015, p. 6.

Western Balkan countries are host to some of the Russian state-sponsored agencies that are in charge of promoting Russia's culture abroad. Rossotrudnichestvo, a federal agency operating under the jurisdiction of the Russian MFA and in charge of, among other things, the 'promotion abroad of an objective image of contemporary Russia'³⁸, has been present in Albania, Croatia, Slovenia since 2011, Montenegro and Serbia since 2013, and Macedonia since 2016. Leaked intelligence materials have suggested that representatives of this agency have worked with Russian intelligence in an effort to sow discord in Macedonia and put a brake to this country's *rapprochement* with the West³⁹. The Russkiy Mir foundation has been working in Macedonia and Serbia since 2009, Montenegro since 2010, Slovenia since 2011, and Republika Srpska since 2012⁴⁰. The Orthodox Church also plays some role in Russia's communications and influence strategy in the region⁴¹. All these players have been instrumental in the effort aimed at promoting the idea of 'pan-Slavic', Orthodox identity in host countries.

In 2014, Sputnik, which has a reputation for spreading Kremlin-backed propaganda, launched a Serbian-language service, including a digital radio station, and, as stressed by a European Parliament (EP) report, Russia 'sponsors Serbian-language media, both online and in print, that reach out to audiences across former Yugoslavia'⁴². The same report mentions the presence of a 'growing network of organisations ranging from governmental agencies to government-sponsored NGOs, civic associations, student groups, and political movements or parties', apparently primarily in Serbia⁴³. This EP paper also refers to the ties between Russian political actors and certain political parties (*also see below*). Of course, assessing the depth of these entities' influence activities and the scope of their real political and societal impact represents a methodological challenge. However, their very presence in the Western Balkans points to Russia's interest in getting a sense of what is going on there and, when deemed possible and/or necessary, to try and shape some perceptions or some situations.

In some countries – especially Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (RS) – opinion polls show a positive attitude towards Russia. In addition, these two countries and Macedonia have refused to support EU sanctions against Russia. It is difficult to tell how much such phenomena are attributable to Moscow's influence and communications strategy since Russia undeniably enjoys real sympathy in the region, more particularly in Serbia and amongst Serbian minorities throughout the region. The positive attitude towards Russia in the region is connected to themes of both old and recent history that transcend the 'ambiguous legacy of the [common] past'⁴⁴ (Slavic-Orthodox brotherhood, dislike of NATO, disillusionment with the EU...). In Serbia and among Serbian minorities, there is a strong feeling that in the 1990s, Russia was the only major power that supported them in front of the West, seen as partial and aggressive. Obviously, 'the rhetoric of brotherly ties coupled with a shared sense of victimhood bolsters Russia's moves and initiatives'⁴⁵. In Serbia, in particular, many people are satisfied by the Kremlin's discourse on, in substance,

³⁸ <http://rs.gov.ru/en/about>

³⁹ Luke Harding, Audrey Belford, Saska Cvetkovska, 'Russia Actively Stoking Discord in Macedonia since 2008, Intel Files Say', *The Guardian*, 4 June 2017.

⁴⁰ Léo-Paul Jacob, 'The Chessboard of Big Power Plays: Russia's Strategy in the Western Balkans', *Notes de la FRS*, Paris, 2018 (forthcoming).

⁴¹ Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 'EU Strategic Communications with a View to Counteracting Propaganda', 2016, p. 12.

⁴² 'EU Strategic Communications with a View to Counteracting Propaganda', p. 11 and following.

⁴³ For more details, see 'EU Strategic Communications with a View to Counteracting Propaganda', p. 12. In Macedonia, the Russian embassy has supported the creation of 'friendship associations', and a Russian cultural centre was opened in Skopje in January 2016 (there are more than 100 such centers throughout the world).

⁴⁴ To quote the expression by Dimitar Bechev, who explored this historical ambiguity in his book *Rival Power. Russia in Southeast Europe* (Yale University Press, 2017). He explains that '[b]oth Russia and the bulk of Balkan countries privilege the moments of convergence over conflict' (p. 11), which tends to outshine the fact that 'the link between Russia and the Balkans was never as organic, unbreakable or intimate as many authors and commentators seem to believe' (p. 13).

⁴⁵ 'Russia in the Balkans', p. 3.

the humiliation and unfair treatment that Serbia has had to face since the fallout of the former Yugoslavia. Moscow has also been very demonstrative in showing support to the Republika Srpska and its president Milorad Dodik.

Russia's popularity with this part of the public opinion in the Western Balkans is also partly due to Moscow's self-presentation as a protector of conservative, traditional societal and family values, but also to the restoration of its military power⁴⁶. All this can, in certain circumstances, convert into pressure on local political decision-makers and politicians, which have to demonstrate that they devote the necessary efforts to the development of good relations with Russia⁴⁷. Although Moscow's line in the Balkans since the 1990s has been primarily motivated by contemporary stakes, emphasizing the rhetoric about the natural friendship between Slavic, Orthodox peoples is a way among others for the Kremlin to amplify the narrative that Russia is back in the Western Balkans. In addition, for the Kremlin, this discourse is politically rewarding given the popularity of such slogans in the Russian public opinion. The problem is that putting this theme forward is not conducive to stemming ethnic tensions throughout the region, especially in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

With such a background, Russia's media and 'agents of influence' do not find it too difficult to get a 'welcoming audience' for anti-Western narratives that are already present in the public opinion and local media⁴⁸. Disillusionment with Western players is indeed something the Russians can play on. 'Many Serbs, Albanians, Macedonians and Bosnians are skeptical not only about the future of their countries in Europe, but about the future of the EU itself', a Bulgarian scholar emphasizes⁴⁹. Russia has not created such 'EU fatigue' in the Western Balkans: many Western experts deplore that in recent years, 'the EU's policy toward the states of the Western Balkans... has been one of benign neglect, to say the least'⁵⁰. However, just like it has used to its benefit the perception in the Middle East that Western policies have been largely inconsistent in recent years, Moscow has shown an interest in exploiting, even exacerbating when possible, the declining power of attraction of the EU in the Western Balkans. That is why it did not hesitate, all through the political crisis in Macedonia, to try and discredit the EU by accusing Brussels – both in official declarations and through its media working in the Balkans – of trying to encourage secession of a part of Macedonia for the sake of the formation of a 'Greater Albania'⁵¹. Russia has also spared no effort to put the blame on the EU for the cancellation of the South Stream gas pipeline project, which the Western Balkan elite saw as an important economic opportunity (jobs, transit fees)⁵². Resentment towards NATO is quite widespread among Serbian minorities in Western Balkan countries as many still see the trans-Atlantic Alliance as an anti-Serbian organisation. Russia (officials, media) has consistently encouraged this vision (which they share anyway), trying to inflate the notion that Serbian minorities face risks linked to their country's accession to NATO⁵³.

⁴⁶ See 'EU Goes Back to the Future in the Balkans'.

⁴⁷ A Reuters paper reporting on the work of the Studio B station (one of Belgrade's biggest radio stations) that broadcasts both Sputnik (since 2014) and Radio Free Europe (since 2003) mentions the 'political balancing act that the Serbian government has to strike between the EU membership course' and the 'affection felt by many Serbs for fellow Orthodox Russia' (Matt Robinson, 'On Serbian Airwaves, a Battle for Heart of Balkans', Reuters, 3 May 2017).

⁴⁸ 'Russia's Tactics in the Western Balkans'.

⁴⁹ 'EU Goes Back to the Future in the Balkans'.

⁵⁰ Judy Dempsey, 'The Western Balkans Are Becoming Russia's New Playground', <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/57301?lang=en>, 24 November 2014.

⁵¹ 'Balkan Troubles'.

⁵² This has not prevented 'disappointment [in the region] with the way Russia abandoned the South Stream project and turned towards Turkey as the new hub for the Russian pipelines' (Othon Anastasakis, 'Russia, South East Europe and the 'Geopolitics of Opportunism'', *Clingendael Spectator*, vol. 71, n°4, 2017). This is especially true, in all likelihood, of Serbia, which undersold NIS to Russia in exchange for its inclusion in the South Stream project (see below).

⁵³ 'Russia's Kosovo Fixation'.

Does all that mean that Russia might go as far as to support destabilizing actions in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo by playing with radically-minded forces among Serbs and Serbian minorities and to deliberately challenge the stability there⁵⁴? Should such situations occur, it would be important to be able to detect whether such actions are a masterplan driven by the Kremlin or whether they are 'free' initiatives by Russian individuals and entities of the kind observed in Donbass, where not only Russian troops and official agents operate but also 'mercenaries' acting on their own behalf for ideological reasons (and, admittedly, encouraged by state-sponsored propaganda). A Carnegie scholar reflects on this possibility: 'The romanticism of Orthodox-Slavic brotherhood is still popular amongst Russian nationalists, which makes possible the participation of Russian citizens in Balkan conflicts. Such initiatives can meet sympathy in or even receive support from such or such state structure' in Moscow⁵⁵. It will be interesting to check the veracity of reports that mercenaries, trained in the Russian 'humanitarian center' in NIS, are helping to establish a paramilitary unit loyal to Milorad Dodik – a piece of information apparently confirmed by the Bosnian Security minister⁵⁶. In the case of the September 2016 referendum in Republika Sprska, it was difficult not to interpret Vladimir Putin's welcoming Dodik in Moscow a few days before the event, widely condemned internationally, as a political gesture encouraging Dodik's moves, which many saw (and still see) as a direct challenge to the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

What can be said for sure is that the outlook of a number of local situations in the Western Balkans – dysfunctional democracies, political and inter-ethnic tension, corruption, crime networks, clientelism... – constitutes the kind of environment where Russian so-called 'hybrid tactics' thrive. Russia is certainly more at ease than the EU with the pattern of informal and opaque games of influences and corrupt schemes that remain quite widespread in many Western Balkan countries. Here too, Moscow is not the producer of this state of affairs, but it can only be pleased with these phenomena if they carry the potential to put a brake to these countries' EU or NATO accession and, as a minimum, to make Brussels uncomfortable with this accession prospect.

As noted by many experts, another indirect asset for Russia is the local elites' inclination to use the 'Russia card' in order to make the EU pay more attention to them or be less demanding in terms of reforms or of progress on governance and democratization. This too allows Russia to devote only limited political and financial investment to its 'Western Balkans project' since local leaders are inclined to instrumentalise the Russia-West tension to their own benefit – by overstressing Russia's attractiveness or, alternatively, Russia-related risks (in all cases, exaggerating its sway).

3 The leverage that Russia does not really have

Russia's investments in the energy sector (which constitute the bulk of Russian regional investments) of a number of countries of the Western Balkans has fed the image of Russia as a major player in the region, which is quite natural given the Russian government's tendency to use energy as political leverage⁵⁷. Russian energy companies started to invest in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the late 1990s. They took advantage of the privatization plans that were implemented by then, working to get a position of strength by being present both as owners of assets, partners in joint ventures, and developers of new infrastructure. Lukoil, which in 2003 acquired 79 % of the shares of Beopetrol, owns a network of petrol stations in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Zarubezhneft bought (without a tender) Bosanski Brod and Modric oil refineries in the Republika Sprska, the Modrica motor oil plant, and the local

⁵⁴ See, for example, Vincent L. Morelli, 'The Balkans and Russia', CRS Insight, 31 January 2018.

⁵⁵ Maxim Samorukov, 'Illuziya blizosti: Ambitsii i vozmozhnosti Rossii na zapadnykh Balkanakh' [The illusion of Proximity: Russia's Ambitions and Possibilities in the Western Balkans], Moscow Carnegie Center, December 2017, p. 2.

⁵⁶ Julian Borger, 'Russian-Trained Mercenaries Back Bosnia's Serb Separatists', *The Guardian*, 12 January 2018.

⁵⁷ For figures on the Western Balkan countries (uneven) dependence on Russian energy, see 'The Chessboard of Big Power Plays: Russia's Strategy in the Western Balkans', Annexes 2 and 3.

retailer Nestro Petrol. So far, however, similar plans in Croatia have failed to materialize. The most impressive success was, in 2008, Gazprom Neft's acquisition of 51 % of NIS, the Serbian gas and oil monopoly – which occurred without a tender.

Russia's relative influence in the energy sector, which gained a lot of visibility thanks to the controversies around the South Stream project (expected to increase Russian energy exports to the region), has obscured the fact that its relations with Western Balkan countries are generally characterized by little economic substance. Of course, there has been progress on this score (trade was multiplied by 5 between 2001 and 2014⁵⁸) but from a low, since Russian positions in the region receded abruptly during the 1990s. Starting in 2000, Russia's foreign policy started to 'economize'. The goal was to diversify international economic relations, and the country worked to restore its economic presence in the Western Balkans just like it did in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, etc. In 2014, on average, Russia accounted for 7.6 % of the Western Balkan countries' foreign trade, and these countries accounted for 1 % of Russia's foreign trade⁵⁹. Serbia is by far Russia's main trade partner in the region – more than 2/3; Bosnia and Herzegovina representing more than 1/4. But this has to be compared with the EU's share in the region's trade – more than 64 % in 2014⁶⁰. Russian experts assess that trade can intensify with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (primarily RS) and Macedonia in the future, due, among other things, to opportunities created by the embargo that Russia imposed as a reply to EU sanctions; they exclude such prospects with Albania and Montenegro⁶¹.

Russia has also a reputation of not being a generous and reliable financial partner. Promises of loans or investments have often remained idle, which is linked to both the instability of Russia's economic health, due to its excessive vulnerability to fluctuations in oil prices, and the fact that Moscow has simply not made the Western Balkans a major priority in its foreign policy agenda. The main recipients of Russian investments in the Western Balkans (1 % of all Russian foreign investment) are Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina (mainly RS)⁶². Even in Serbia, Russia's share in total FDI is quite limited (4.9 % in 2014, 4.6 % in 2015, 3.9 % in 2016 – vs 70-80 % for the EU)⁶³. It remains to be seen what impact EU sanctions and the cancellation of the South Stream project will have on Russian investments in the energy sectors of Western Balkan countries in a mid-term perspective⁶⁴. A number of commentators expect this impact to be negative for Russia's economic presence in the region.

⁵⁸ Mariya Maksakova, 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan na sovremennom etape: vozmozhnosti, riski i perspektivy' [Russia's Cooperation with Western Balkan Countries: Opportunities, Risks and Prospects], *Gorizonty ekonomiki*, n°3, vol. 29, 2016, p. 53.

⁵⁹ 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan...', p. 54.

⁶⁰ 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan...', p. 54, p. 55.

⁶¹ 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan...', p. 56.

⁶² 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan...', p. 57.

⁶³ 'Illuziya blizosti...', p. 9.

⁶⁴ 'Ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo Rossii s balkanskimi stranami' [Russia's Economic Cooperation with Balkan Countries], www.webeconomy.ru, undated, probably spring or summer 2014.

Main spheres of Russia-Western Balkans investment cooperation

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Macedonia	Serbia	Montenegro
Energy		+	+	+	
Metallurgy	+		+	+	+
Pharmaceutics			+	+	
Infrastructure		+		+	
Banking		+		+	
Tourism			+	+	+
Agriculture		+	+	+	

* potential cooperation

Source: Mariya Maksakova, 'Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i stran Zapadnykh Balkan na sovremennom etape: vozmozhnosti, riski i perspektivy' [Russia's cooperation with Western Balkan countries: opportunities, risks and prospects], *Gorizonty ekonomiki*, n°3, vol. 29, 2016, p. 58

Russia has not been an important player in post-conflict reconstruction either, which is not neutral in the fight for 'winning hearts and minds' in the region. Besides, Russia has not shown an inclination to forgive debts as generously as it has in other regions of the world. To sum it up, from the economic and financial point of view, the EU's leverage is much more significant than Russia's. In addition, Moscow now has to face other economic competitors – China⁶⁵, Turkey...

Finally, even where Moscow has managed to develop a more or less substantial economic presence, this has not necessarily translated into political leverage. The case of Montenegro exemplifies this. A third of all registered companies in Montenegro are linked to Russia, 25 % of tourists in the country are from Russia and up to 7,000 Russians are registered as permanent residents⁶⁶. This country nonetheless joined NATO in 2017, after voting the UN General Assembly resolution on Crimea and enforcing the EU's sanctions against Russia – which explains why, independently of where the truth is concerning the 2016 failed *coup* in Montenegro, Russia has put heavy pressure on Podgorica via the Orthodox Church, opposition parties, NGOs in recent years...⁶⁷ All these factors combined make it safe to consider that the idea that, in the Western Balkans, the societies share 'widespread perceptions that Russia is doing more for them' than the EU and other players⁶⁸ seems to be an exaggeration. This does not mean, however, that in certain occasions, Russia will not try to bribe local elites to create a more favorable environment for itself – what one scholar describes as Russia's 'collusion with rent-seeking elites in Balkan countries', especially if that coincides with the interests of important 'friends' of the Kremlin⁶⁹.

Even in the cultural dimension, Russia has no 'natural advantage' as, contrarily to what many believe, the Russian language 'is not widely read or spoken in the region'⁷⁰. And Albanian Foreign Minister is probably right when he claims that no special partnership or special treatment Russia might offer to Western Balkan

⁶⁵ See Branimir Vidmarovic, 'Kak Rossiya i Kitai boryutsya za rol' glavnogo neevropeytsa na Balkanakh' [How Russia and China Compete for the Role of the Main Non-European in the Balkans], Moscow Carnegie Center, 22 December 2017. The author emphasizes that not only does China offer more financial incentives to the countries of the region: it also 'does not tie economic cooperation to any political conditions', contrarily to Russia.

⁶⁶ 'Russia in the Balkans', p. 2, p. 8.

⁶⁷ 'Illuziya blizosti...', p. 18.

⁶⁸ 'Balkan Troubles'.

⁶⁹ 'Russia in the Balkans', p. 5.

⁷⁰ 'Russia in the Balkans', p. 3.

countries could change the fact that, in terms of development model, the EU remains 'much more attractive'⁷¹; as stressed before, this does not prevent Moscow's credo of defending conservative values from appealing to more or less significant quarters throughout Western Balkan political establishments and societies⁷².

Conclusion

There is no wide-ranging, articulated Russian strategy towards the Western Balkans, where it has been acting in an opportunistic manner. Russia has more urgent spots to deal with than the Western Balkans – upholding its positions in the former Soviet Union, which have been severely damaged by the Ukraine conflict, the new Middle East strategy, the rebalance of its foreign policy to Asia. Nonetheless, several important motivations have encouraged Moscow to develop its presence in this area, formerly a zone of its 'traditional influence' – the search for recognition of a great power status, playing revanchist games in the backyard of the EU and NATO, appealing to various quarters in the Russian domestic political game... In other words, Russia has shown and will continue to show vigilant opportunism, which allows it not to spend too much political energy and money to get a stronger profile there. It has also made it clear that it is not going to be a problem-solver in the region, but that occasionally it might be a troublemaker for the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans, which will enable Kremlin officials to point, once more, to the West's declining strength and leadership. From this perspective, Kosovo's Prime Minister Haradinaj might have a point when he says that '... Russia is only interested in keeping the region in crisis to be able to prove that the West, Europe and Washington are unable to solve it'⁷³.

More NATO enlargement is something that, clearly, cannot satisfy Russia. Even though it does not consider the Western Balkan countries' NATO membership as a direct security threat, it considers it is a political challenge. In 2016, the ruling party United Russia signed a cooperation declaration with representatives of parties from Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Macedonia advocating the creation of a militarily neutral territory in the Balkans including Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina⁷⁴. If the role of Russian state-supported actors behind the failed *coup* in Montenegro were confirmed, one may consider this as an attempt by Russia to reduce the appetite, among NATO members, for further waves of enlargement – in the Western Balkans maybe, in the former Soviet Union surely. The evolution of Moscow's line on Macedonia, another NATO candidate country where Russia has been accused of consistently feeding the political crisis, will inform about whether Russia wants to prevent further NATO enlargement or 'simply' put a brake on it and sow discord among NATO members on the future of the 'open doors policy'.

Regarding EU enlargement, all specialists of Russia's policy in the Balkans emphasize that Moscow is well aware that there is no alternative to the countries of the region joining the Union, and emphasize that the Kremlin has actually never objected to this. In addition, Russia has received more than enough signs that Moscow-friendly does not necessarily mean anti-EU: Serbian leaders, for example, have pursued the EU-accession strategic line since the fallout of the Milosevic regime. This is probably due to both Moscow's lack of consistent economic commitment to the area and to the fact that since it withdrew its troops from the region in 2003, it has shown no real interest in contributing to solving the security problems there (its potential for crisis management is clearly oriented towards Central Asia). Besides, Western Balkan leaders, in an environment where NATO has already quite strong positions, do not expect Russia to take on such a

⁷¹ Andrew Rettman, 'EU Outshines Russia in Western Balkans', euobserver.com, 5 December 2017.

⁷² Katarzyna Kaczmarek, Vincent Keating, 'Feared for all the Wrong Reasons? The Workings of Russia's Conservative Soft Power', www.opendemocracy.net, 22 June 2017.

⁷³ Anna Nemtsova, 'Why Kosovo Wants Trump's Help', *The Daily Beast*, 8 February 2018.

⁷⁴ The document also encouraged cooperation of these countries with the Eurasian Economic Union. For more details, see 'Putin's Party Signs 'Military Neutrality' Agreements with Balkan Parties', www.balkaninsight.com, 29 June 2016.

role. Even Serbia, the country which has developed a relatively more robust security and military cooperation with Moscow than other Balkan states, is aware that it has 'no other means to guarantee minimal security to Serbian minorities [throughout the region] but cooperation with NATO'⁷⁵. Finally, regional leaders are well aware that Moscow plays for its interests, not for theirs⁷⁶; they just try to take advantage of it.

More than preventing EU enlargement, Russia wants to make life more complicated for the Union and to send the message that by integrating these countries, they will have to import not only fragile countries, riled with ethnic tensions, unemployment and corruption, but also Russia's influence, thus its preferences on a number of scores and its *pouvoir de nuisance*. This, combined with the residual instability and poor governance of countries in the region, might make EU member states more reluctant to welcome them – no matter what is announced in official declarations and programmatic documents. In other words, Moscow will continue to be inclined to use any lever that shows that it has an ability to have an impact on its Western rivals' interests.

The Russian effort at enhancing its profile in the Western Balkans has been indirectly helped, to some extent, by the international reaction to what Moscow does there and by the endless speculations – and exaggerations – about its role. For example, constantly speaking of growing military ties between Russia and Serbia seems a bit of an overstatement – the military equipment Russia donated to Serbia is second-hand, the status that Serbia acquired as an observer at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization has absolutely no operational consequences, and Serbia's neutrality status owes more to strong anti-NATO feelings in the country than to allegiance to Moscow. Russo-Serbian exercises should not make forget that Belgrade takes part in more exercises with NATO and individual Western countries, and that Serbia-NATO cooperation in the PfP framework has grown increasingly substantial⁷⁷. But if one wants to make Russia's influence look more significant than it really is, Russia will only appreciate (and benefit by) the surplus of regional credibility it will get from it. It is certainly not a problem for Moscow that outside players feel a need to exaggerate its role as this satisfies its agenda of putting more pressure on Western actors in the region and of making its international role larger and more efficient than it really is. That is probably the right way to interpret Sputnik's or Russia Today's headlines about the strategy on 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' that the European Commission adopted on 6 February 2018 (more than as an expression of Russian anger at the EU's renewed interest for the region)⁷⁸.

In the Western Balkans, Russia is more opportunistic than strategically-oriented. The problem is that in the current context characterized by fledgling democracies and corrupt economies, there are plenty of opportunities for co-opting local elites and exploiting vulnerabilities, and that 'unlike its competitors, [Moscow is able to take] swift decisions and act flexibly'⁷⁹. More political will on the European side might help – not only in terms of tackling Russian challenges when there are, but also in terms of being committed to conceiving a realistic, consolidated project for the Western Balkans that takes objectively into account the specific problems they are associated with and the internal divisions on this score. The two goals, obviously, go hand in hand.

⁷⁵ 'Illuziya blizosti...', p. 6, p. 12.

⁷⁶ *Rival Power*, p. 8. Serbian leaders have probably understood that Russia de facto accepted Kosovo's independence when it chose to instrumentalise this issue to justify its own policy *vis-à-vis* Georgian separatist territories (it recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in 2008 and established military bases there to enforce the new *statu quo*) and Crimea.

⁷⁷ 'Illuziya blizosti...', p. 12. Serbia signed an IPAP with the Alliance in 2015, as well as, in 2016, a Status of Forces Agreement.

⁷⁸ See for example 'Shutting Russia Out? EU Seeks to Incorporate Balkans Starting with Serbia & Montenegro by 2025', www.rt.com, 7 February 2018; 'EU Reportedly Seeks to Expand Into Balkans to Counter Russian Influence', sputniknews.com, 2 February 2018.

⁷⁹ 'Russia in the Balkans', p. 2.

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