
Republic of Macedonia as a Transit Country for the Illegal Trafficking in the “Balkan Route”

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Purpose:

This study aims to give an empirical overview of the illegal trafficking with human beings, drugs and weapons in the Republic of Macedonia and its involvement in the transnational crime within the “Balkan Route”.

Design/Methods/Approach:

A qualitative-quantitative approach will be used, using analysis of the current scientific literature, academic publications and scientific papers from this area, and statistical methods using statistical analysis and interpretations of data on committed crimes and the perpetrators of illegal trafficking (with national and international elements).

Findings:

The scope and structure of this crime in the Republic of Macedonia and its international character will be seen through empirical data and discussions.

Research Limitations/Implications:

Difficulties in the study of the transit position of the Republic of Macedonia within the “Balkan Route” especially in terms of illegal trafficking, are related to limitations in revealing the dark figure in this type of crime. Our research is largely based on existing scientific expertise and expert estimates and prognosis.

Practical Implications:

The practical aim here is to enable the prevention of the transnational illegal trafficking in the Republic of Macedonia as a transit country and its exclusion from the “Balkan Route”.

Originality/Value:

The conclusions which arise from this study should contribute to creating and updating of the national strategy and optimal measures in combating trafficking in Macedonia by law enforcement agencies, thereby preventing the transit of criminality from the Middle East, through Macedonian territory into the Western countries.

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Keywords: illegal trafficking, “Balkan Route”, Republic of Macedonia, transit

Republika Makedonija kot tranzitna država za nezakonito trgovanje po "balkanski poti"

Namen prispevka:

Namen prispevka je podati empirični pregled nezakonitega trgovanja z ljudmi, drogami in orožjem v Republiki Makedoniji in njeno vključenost v transnacionalno kriminaliteto znotraj "balkanske poti".

Metode:

Uporabili smo kvalitativno-kvantitativni pristop – analize trenutne znanstvene literature, akademskih objav in znanstvenih prispevkov s tega področja ter statistične analize in interpretacije podatkov storjenih kaznivih dejanj in storilcev nezakonitega trgovanja (z narodnimi in mednarodnimi elementi).

Ugotovitve:

Skozi empirične podatke in razpravo smo prikazali področje in strukturo tovrstne kriminalitete v Republiki Makedoniji ter njeno mednarodno vpetost.

Omejitve/uporabnost raziskave:

Težave tranzicijskega umeščanja Republike Makedonije znotraj "balkanske poti" v zvezi z nezakonitim trgovanjem so povezane predvsem z omejitvami razkrivanja temne plati tovrstne kriminalitete. Raziskava se v večji meri naslanja na obstoječe znanstvene ugotovitve in ocene ter napovedi strokovnjakov.

Praktična uporabnost:

Praktični cilj je omogočiti preprečitev transnacionalnega nezakonitega trgovanja v Republiki Makedoniji kot tranzitni državi in njeno izključitev iz "balkanske poti".

Izvirnost/pomembnost prispevka:

Zaključki, ki izhajajo iz te študije, naj bi pripomogli k izoblikovanju in posodobitvi nacionalne strategije in optimalnih meril v boju zoper trgovanja z blagom v Makedoniji, s čimer naj bi preprečevali tranzit kriminalitete s Srednjega Vzhoda preko makedonskega ozemlja v zahodne države.

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Ključne besede: nezakonito trgovanje, "balkanska pot", Republika Makedonija, tranzit

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Today's world is characterized by rapid and dynamic changes that bring new and often unpredictable risks and hazards to the security of nation-states. Although the danger of classical military threats in the long run is not expected, non-military threats are diverse and increasing in intensity over space and time. The trend of globalization in the world, despite the advantages, brings threats caused mostly by widening the gap between the rich and the poor as well as the internationalization of certain hazards, the most extreme of which are international terrorism and organized crime. In addition, there is an expansion of illegal migration and trafficking in drugs, weapons, people and strategic materials. Also, an increased

threat is coming from the use of weapons of mass destruction which is prohibited by international law.

The stability of a country is of particular importance for the strengthening of individual and collective consciousness of the existence and importance of the state, and its ability to improve the life quality of citizens. The achievement of stability in a society provides for the legal and democratic functioning of the state and other institutions in a society that fully respects national and international law in order to successfully achieve the shaping and functioning of civil society, maintaining respect for the rule of law and actually operating the state in accordance with the law. The state is obliged to facilitate the smooth operation of all institutions in society through the defense establishment and preservation of security. Only then can it effectively avoid the consequences of destructive activity that might happen if the state were not functioning properly.

With the disintegration of the former socialist bloc, countries and regions were confronted with conditions of social destruction and unstable democratic structures and institutions. These conditions include the rise of extreme nationalism, ethnic, racial and other prejudices and xenophobia, which are manifested in increasing hatred and use of violence, and as a consequence, have damaged the social infrastructure and produced many casualties.

Forms and activities related to international terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration, trafficking in drugs, weapons, people, strategic materials and dual use, and consequences of the use of means of mass destruction fall into the risks and hazards to the security of the Republic of Macedonia listed in the National Concept for Security and Defense of the Republic of Macedonia. Threats and hazards to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Macedonia usually come from well-armed and organized criminal groups, mainly from Kosovo, where they are provided with logistics and other support for terrorist and other activities. So it is very often stressed that resolving the Kosovo issue is a key stability factor for the Republic of Macedonia.

2 THE BALKAN ROUTE

Organised crime is changing and becoming increasingly diverse in its methods, group structures, and impact on society. A new criminal landscape is emerging, marked increasingly by highly mobile and flexible groups operating in multiple jurisdictions and criminal sectors, and aided, in particular, by widespread, illicit use of the Internet (Europol, 2011: 8). The three main sectors of organized crime activities – trafficking in drugs, human beings, and weapons – are intertwined, and all three are deeply embedded in the pervasive culture of corruption in the Balkan region. Unhindered by ethnic prejudices, political differences, and lengthily bureaucratic procedures, organized crime groups cooperate on the regional and international level much more efficiently than the governments and international organizations which are trying to suppress them. And although organized crime in the Western Balkans is by now widely recognized as the main threat against

stability in the region and in Europe, there is no comprehensive strategy to address the problem, neither locally, nor in the EU (Anastasijevic, 2006: 13).

According to Interpol (Interpol, 2012), people-smuggling networks change their methods in response to legislative and law enforcement activities, this flexibility being necessary for their survival. Flexibility is thus one of the main characteristics of transportation and the choice of transport routes. This means that the routes used by people-smugglers may sometimes be simple and direct, at other times circuitous. The time between departure and arrival may vary from some days to several months or even years. Smuggling is carried out by land, air or sea. Some examples of routes frequently used for people smuggling include migrants from the Asian region mainly using the route via Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to Russia and from there, via Ukraine, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, to western European countries or even further to the United States and Canada. At the same time, the Balkan Route from Asian countries via Iran and Turkey and from there, via the Balkan states, to Western Europe is used for the smuggling of migrants as well as other kinds of illegal goods such as drugs, and firearms.

The Balkans have always been an attractive region for organized crime groups. Criminal gangs coming from mutually hostile ethnic populations cooperate without regard to officially declared animosity and ethnic origin. The idea of Yugoslavian unity and cooperation embodied in the motto Brotherhood and Unity, was paradoxically only maintained in organized crime activities (Stojarová, 2007: 112).

The so called “Balkan Route” has been used for illicit trafficking since the seventh century as it is the shortest road from the East to Western Europe. The route starts in Afghanistan via Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Once it reaches Croatia and Slovenia, it leads further to Western European countries (Porobic, 2010: 4). The Balkan Route (Foster, 2012) has long been infamous as a passage along which illegal goods and immigrants are smuggled into Western Europe. It has been known mainly for the drug trafficking that occurs along this passage, most notably the smuggling of heroin from the largest producer – Afghanistan – to its’ greatest market; Western Europe. This has been and still is a conduit for trafficking in arms and smuggling of goods and illegal immigrants. More recently there has been another kind of trafficking taking place here; the trafficking in human beings. Smuggling immigrants, or so called illegal migration, is immigration across national borders in such a way that threatens the immigration laws of the destination country. According to this definition, illegal immigrants are foreigners who illegally crossed the border of the target country by land, water or air, or foreigners who legally entered the territory of the country, but stayed longer than the residence specified in their visa for staying and/or work in that country. On the other hand, human trafficking is a modern phenomenon that threatens a range of human rights and freedoms, and can be realized by different motives: trafficking for prostitution, forced labor, trafficking in human organs or trafficking of children.

Though human trafficking has been taking place for many years now, it is only recently that the issue has come into the forefront as one of the greatest crimes against humanity that we face today. We are only just beginning to understand

the sheer magnitude of this crime in the number of lives that it affects and the multi-layered criminal hierarchy involved that makes human trafficking possible. This can be seen especially along the Balkan Route as much of the corruption among all levels of society that has long allowed the passage of illegal goods and the smuggling of immigrants also enables traffickers to bring their victims into Western Europe. This also makes those countries along the route vulnerable to becoming source countries; being a main area targeted by traffickers as a source of victims to be forced into this form of slavery. The war against human trafficking has sparked many initiatives to treat the victims and prevent this crime, but the only way these initiatives can ever be effective in a specific region is if they are implemented properly by those in power and throughout the levels of society untouched by the rampant corruption that has long allowed this and other crimes to prosper along the Balkan Route.

The original Route passes from Afghanistan through Pakistan/Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, the Republic of Macedonia or Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, and into Italy and Western Europe (Figure 1). This has long been known as a transit zone for the transport of many illegal products, the most recognizable of which being the transport of drugs, but also including trafficking in weapons and the smuggling of legal goods such as cigarettes and oil products in order to avoid taxation, and the transport of humans in the form of smuggling illegal immigrants and the transport of victims of human trafficking.

Drug trafficking has been the greatest problem and primary source of income for organized crime along the Balkan Route for years. The majority of Afghan heroin trafficked into Western and Central Europe comes through the Balkan Route (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2011: 7). Of the 75–80 tons of heroin trafficked to Western and Central Europe in 2009, some 60 tons were estimated to have been originated from countries of South Eastern Europe (via the Balkan Route). Heroin is trafficked into Western and Central Europe by land, sea and air. The Balkan Route dominates land and sea shipments. Once heroin enters Turkey, most of it is trafficked to Istanbul and then onwards to the borders with Bulgaria and Greece. Heroin is often stretched and cut with adulterants, then re-packaged in the Balkan region and then sent to the West and Central Europe (more information of this in United Nations, 2010).

This also suggests that the movement of cocaine is mainly controlled by large organized crime groups proficient in the trafficking of large quantities of drugs through the Balkans to the more lucrative markets in the west. The Serbian government cited Croatian ports as a main conduit for the entrance of cocaine into the region. In its *European Union Cocaine Situation Report 2007*, Europol indicates that the Balkan Route is being increasingly used both ways, as cocaine is trafficked from Western European countries such as Spain into Central and Southern Europe. Additionally, cannabis and synthetic drugs are produced in the region and trafficked along the Balkan Route to Western Europe, though there is also a local market for these substances. The movement of synthetic drugs and their precursors can also be seen in this area, a movement that also appears to be two-way, suggested by seizures within the Balkans of synthetic drugs originating from sources as remote

as Mexico and South East Asia, according to the report “Crime and its Impact on the Balkans”, by United Nations Office for Drugs and Crimes (Foster, 2012).

Figure 1:
The Balkan
and Northern
Routes



The drug trafficking Balkan Route still plays a central role in Europe (Balkan security agenda, 2012). There is the Balkan Route of heroin transit from Afghanistan, via Turkey, the Balkans, Italy and Austria to Western Europe, but another route is also gaining in importance, the minister added. South American cocaine is being transported from Dutch and Belgian ports to Southeast Europe via the Balkan Route. The EU project on combating drug trafficking in the Balkans and the bilateral cooperation between Austria and Serbia, as well as those between other countries, should hinder drug traffic in the Balkan region, as vulnerable ground, because of the many conflicts that occurred in the recent past, so Balkan countries have still under-built capacity to combat illegal trade. Only transnational cooperation with full trust, the fast exchange of information and decisive action can lead to success.

The Balkan Route is mainly used for transit and, to some extent, stockpiling and repackaging of Afghan heroin on its way to Western and Central Europe. The Balkan Route is also used, in the reverse direction, for trafficking of synthetic drugs and of precursor chemicals required for the production of heroin (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2011: 4).

The conflict in the Balkans created a large market for the traffic in weapons, though this market had dwindled in more recent years. During the cold war, Bulgaria was a main source for firearms and was used extensively to traffic arms during this period, as were many of the other countries in the Balkan region. In the years following several countries of the region were involved in supplying firearms for the surrounding conflict – Croatia is considered to have been the main source of weapons for the IRA – and even today some of this activity continues. This reflects the trend found throughout the Balkans – trafficking in firearms has continued to diminish in recent years, though still maintains a presence among organized crime in the region.

Various other goods are trafficked frequently through the Balkans in the interest of avoiding taxation and customs. The trade in cigarettes is another black market that flourished during the times of conflict – being a common method of funding war efforts in Croatia and several other Balkan countries – and continues to maintain a large presence in the region. This form of smuggling is often done through crime groups or with the consent of a legal manufacturer, as seen in the plan undertaken by the Rovinj tobacco industry in which they attempted the ‘recycle’ cigarettes by legally exporting them to Bosnia and Herzegovina and bringing them back to Croatia for resale as though they originated from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Illegal imports of other commodities are also to be found within this region; according to the last mentioned UNODC report, “Croatia is believed to be the source of more than US\$ 700 million in illegal exports annually” (Foster, 2012).

The transit (Porobic, 2010: 4) towards the western European market is advantageous as the border patrolling capacities are weak, the borders are yet to be reinforced and international and regional police cooperation is poor.

3 FACTORS THAT GENERATE ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Once organized trafficking finds a suitable ground within a country or region, it grows rapidly and presents a risk for strategic stability and the future of the country. Once it is established, the network traffic associates itself with other existing criminal organizations that hold other spheres of influence in the criminal market, such as terrorism, human, drugs and arms trafficking (Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 2003).

When it comes to matters affecting security and democratization in transitional democracies, they take a central place in organized crime and corruption. Numerous experts have recognized the growing link between different types of trafficking and organized crime. Even in situations where criminal groups are not directly responsible for trafficking abroad they often provide and protect operations. The inclusion of “Mafia” dramatically increases the danger and challenges for those who are willing to get caught in the grips of trafficking, but also increases the price you have to pay, and the price to be paid by society if these practice are allowed to continue.

The second important issue concerning security is trafficking in post-conflict areas. Political, social and economic dislocation, as previously stated, supplemented by numerous international presences helped in Bosnia and Herzegovina to create conditions where illegal trafficking flourishes. Kosovo is a similar danger and challenge. Several member states and NGOs in order not to “repeat Bosnia” urged the OSCE, as part of his wider role in the Stability Pact, to confront human trafficking in Kosovo (Organization for Security and Cooperation and Europe, 1999: 33).

The issue of trafficking takes enormous proportions in the area of Southeast Europe (Balkans). Among the reasons that the Balkans is a reference case of human trafficking is a progression from a state of conflict, through the post-conflict situation and now the transition in these countries toward democracy (Netkova, 2004).

The following factors have been identified as the most common causes of the illegal trafficking in Southeast Europe (Miloshevska, 2007: 3–4):

1. The transition to a free market economy
2. Opening of borders
3. Development of the “black market”
4. The wars in former Yugoslavia

Human, drugs and arms trafficking are an extremely important phenomenon and it should particularly be taken into account, since it has the potential to undermine and destroy the democratization process, the value system of the state and the concept of human rights, to undermine efforts to reform the institutions to encourage corruption and threats to the peace process and strengthening the rule of law and the smooth functioning of state law.

4 GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION OF MACEDONIA AS A MITIGATING FACTOR FOR THE ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING

The biggest paradox in the international war on drugs is connected to the Balkans and the explosion of terrorist activities in that troubled area. However, it relates less to drugs and arms and more to the major participants in this deadly game (The Centre for Peace in the Balkans, 2000). The Balkan region, as part of the European continent, has always played an important role in the events that had historical significance as the region and its surroundings, and in the world as a whole. The stormy history of the peoples living in these areas initiated myriad conflicts that often began on political grounds, and ended by military conflicts with huge casualties. Also, it is evident that most of the crisis ended with the mediation of the major world powers in the form of negotiation or through direct intervention with the use of various military and diplomatic relations. Over time and after the Second World War, the distribution of nations within the borders of the Balkans remained disproportionate in relation to the situation that prevailed before and during the war. Many people who previously inhabited a particular territory, following the schedule of the new limits, were fragmented and the adjustment processes were

misdirected so that some degree of dissatisfaction appears anywhere in the Balkans territory (Dimovski, Ilijevski, & Babanoski, 2012).

In the past decade the Balkans, more precisely the territory of the former Yugoslav Federation, was under constant threat of the emergence and development, and in some cases of flaring military situations, which only added to the political disagreements of the emerging countries of the former federation. Some indicators suggest, that in addition to accumulated hatreds of coexistence through the 50-year long influence of military conflict, almost all newly created states had external factors that created successive crises or interruptions. Examples of this are the arming of Croatian forces with weapons of Western countries, support of Albanian terrorist organizations and activities in Kosovo, and the crisis in Macedonia. However, the international community had probably foreseen the consequences of such developments. Thanks to the chaos that arose due to military conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, some terrorist organizations operating worldwide, found favorable ground for their development including training and training camps, and equipment branches, which were intentional and thrown early on the territories of the above countries (Dimovski, 2005). In this context we may mention the nationwide crisis which emerged in the Republic of Albania in 1997, when thanks to the people's disobedience, demonstrations and protests, some guerrilla or criminal factors failed to arm the uprising with light and medium conventional weapons, which mysteriously disappeared from the military and police warehouses and facilities of the military and police of the Republic of Albania. So, we can easily conclude that Macedonia is surrounded by conflict regions that represent an immediate danger to peace and stability in the country. The geopolitical content of political behavior of the immediate neighbors to the Macedonian state is expressed in a mixture of ethnic populations and discrepancies with the ethnic national state borders, resulting from the conflict of interests among greater powers for their presence, influence and control of the Balkans (Dimovski, 2007: 128).

The Balkan region remains very unstable in part due to the fact that almost all our immediate neighbors find themselves in a relatively small space within which to create large national states, such an idea for creation of Great Albania. It should also be noted that the extent of illicit activities that are inevitably associated with terrorism and its financing (illegal trafficking in drugs, weapons and humans) are the most developed near the northwestern boundary of the Republic of Macedonia – the borders with Albania and Kosovo.

The efforts of the Republic of Macedonia to permanently regulate contentious issues encountered resistance as a consequence of the past and constantly found some old, but the newly “acquired” motives about the “Macedonian issue” continues to hold “open” for some future manipulation and speculation related to the state's ambitions in terms of our country. For these reasons, recognition of the state border from the north is deferred. From the east, Bulgaria was among the first to recognize the statehood of the Republic of Macedonia, but not that Macedonians that in it. The southern neighbor is still having current issues with the name. Albania has recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name and its sovereignty and integrity, but the recognition of Macedonian statehood and

did not mean an end to its pretensions to the Macedonian's national territory. In this context we should mention the geographical distribution of the peacekeeping forces of the world community who were deployed on the territory of crisis spots in the republics of the former Yugoslav federation. The mandates of UNPROFOR, SFOR, KFOR and UNPREDEP represent a factor of stability, especially the mission in Macedonia, which had a task to keep the northern border to prevent spillover of the Kosovo conflict. After the Kosovo conflict began, started the preparations of conflict in Macedonia, and they were secretly supported by many criminal organizations that operated at the European and world level. However, with the completion of the mission of UNPREDEP, the northern Macedonian border remains open to a number of smuggling and criminal channels that are used to transfer drugs, weapons, people and other assets that terrorist groups in Kosovo were necessary (Dimovski, 2007: 134). After the suspension of actions in Kosovo, many armed groups started to plan, prepare and execute a lot of criminal activities in the territory around the northern borders of the Republic of Macedonia. Their motives were different and related to freedom criminal clans to operate freely in these areas and other incentives from the economic sphere realized through criminal activity. But later as official reasons were cited minority rights of the ethnic Albanian population, such as equality, anti-discrimination, right to study on their mother language, right to use their flag etc. It should be noted the fact that the northern border of the Republic of Macedonia was less guarded primarily due to the large number of inaccessible areas.

The discussion concludes that the geographical and strategic position of Macedonia is a danger and causes more terrorism to occur within the country. The reason for this is the fact that Macedonia is surrounded by countries where nationalism, extremism, radicalism and organized forms of crimes, especially illegal trafficking are highly developed. Those are countries which in a recent past were military hot spots, allowing to the organized criminal and terroristic groups suitable ground to function in this region. On the territory of the Balkan they have found a good logistical support, and the Balkan Route is another facilitating factor for financing and realizing of their ideological activities.

5 ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING AND TERRORISM

Different types of trafficking and exploitation have already become one of the main sources of financing of terrorism since the end of the last century. Taking the swing in states with severe and complex conditions, the deficit of jobs, unemployment, low income and low standard of living in certain strata of society, international terrorist and extremist organizations form networks of trafficking and their exploitation. They trade in women and children for prostitution and forced work for profit, and involvement of adults in their activities as mercenaries.

At this stage of development, globalization, internationalization of trafficking and exploitation for profit, it is an indisputable fact that humanity must confront and fight against phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, weapons and drugs. It is a real threat to the national security because in the new century, the

most transnational organized criminal groups are involved in different types of trafficking linked to international terrorist organizations and further hampering the work of state security services.

Trafficking and terrorism are associated with some parts of the world, especially in those areas where trafficking is particularly prevalent and is an important component of the illegal economy. In these particular regions may be involved and the Balkans, and parts of the former Soviet Union. According to estimates from the UN human trafficking is the third largest illegal "business" in the world that creates a profit of several billion per year, and therefore is an important source of financing for terrorist groups, providing 10–15% of their funds.

Terrorist organizations are heavily involved in trafficking, which often links them to criminal groups that operate in these areas. This trade comes in two predominant forms. To assist their own operations, terrorists pay to their foreign merchants to deliver one or more persons in a particular country. Terrorist organizations collect profits from lucrative transnational criminal activity of trafficking. Evidence for this, for instance, is the activity of the Liberian Tigers who were involved in trafficking of Sri Lanka. Also Partia Karkaren Kurdistan (PKK) was associated with trafficking, and Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups who traded with people from North Africa to Italy. Another very dangerous form of trafficking involves the recruitment and trafficking of men, women and children into slavery and exploitation of labour for providing funds later used to finance terrorist activities. For example, the Maoist rebels in Nepal fund their activities with longstanding trade with young girls taken from Nepal working in brothels in India.

The activities of human trafficking are affecting almost all countries of the world, classified as countries of origin, transit or destination, but the level of involvement by criminal organizations varies. Criminal groups involved in human trafficking may be ranked within a range from less to more transnational and organized. The connections between trafficking and terrorism are reflected in their common logistical support systems, such as planning, financing, realizing and concealment. In addition to providing financial resources, human trafficking may be one of the sources for providing money for terroristic acts. Also, human traffickers, through their professional skills and methods that used, may provide a mechanism for the movement of terrorists across borders worldwide. On the other hand, terrorists may provide protection to the human traffickers to do their job without any problems in the territory which is under their "control" (Dimovski, Ilijevski, & Babanoski, 2011: 510–511).

6 CONCLUSION

Organized crime has long plagued the Balkan region, having gained a foothold during communism and civil conflict; it remains today the greatest source of deprivation in the region. Facilitated by corruption, the Balkan Route has turned the region into not only a transit zone for trafficking of drugs, arms, and smuggling, but it has paved the way for fellow humans to be forced into modern day slavery,

and has made the citizens of these countries, especially the young women, more vulnerable to being forced into bondage and sexual slavery. Many important endeavours have been undertaken to help victims of human trafficking that involve the re-orientation of victims back into society and the provision of physical and mental health care. Providing them with alternate job skills and follow up services once they are re-established in society are critical services that need to continue for the victims. But this crime needs to be stopped before there are victims; this is why coordinated efforts to educate at risk demographics to the threat of human trafficking are important, as it will decrease their potential to be tricked into this slavery.

Over the last few decades, international policy established sufficient influence on the Balkan region in order to prevent a possible change of borders through military conventional methods. The Republic of Macedonia, as an ethnic and territory of the Macedonian people, throughout its history has been and still is exposed to various political games and other geopolitical manipulations, which have in the past and today have a significant impact on the viability and safety of the Macedonian people. The efforts of the Republic of Macedonia (which since its independence until today develop good neighborly relations, which has shown through numerous examples), to permanently regulate contentious issues encountered resistance as a consequence of the past and constantly found some old, but the newly “acquired” motives about the “Macedonian issue” continues to hold “open” for some future manipulation and speculation related to the state’s ambitions in terms of our country. For these reasons, recognition of the state border from the north long time was deferred. From the east, Bulgaria was among the first to recognize the statehood of the Republic of Macedonia, but not that Macedonians that live in it. The southern neighbor is still having current issues with the name. Albania has recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name and its sovereignty and integrity, but the recognition of Macedonian statehood and did not mean an end to its pretensions to the Macedonian’s national territory.

With the disintegration of the former socialist bloc, countries and regions emerged in present social destruction and unstable democratic structures and institutions. These are, above all, extreme nationalism, ethnic, racial and other prejudices and xenophobia, which are manifested to the limits of hatred and use of violence, which in the past crossed in military conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, and as a consequence may have wrecked infrastructure and many casualties. The emerging political situation in the proclamation and recognition of the independence of Kosovo has amended the current conditions in this area. Organized crime groups are deeply embedded in social and political trends in this region that using the Balkan route, raised it as a profitable smuggling business. Human trafficking, drugs and weapons, along with money laundering are the most common sources of financing of the terrorist organizations in the region. All of these factors are destabilizing to peace building and the peace process in many post-conflict areas, in particular contribute for Kosovo to become a suitable ground for expansion of all forms of terrorism by terrorist groups.

The consequences arising from the security-political situation in the Balkans depend on the geo-strategic position of the Republic of Macedonia, often referred

to as the equilibrium factor for security in the region. Macedonia has an important geo-strategic and political situation in the Balkans and is a factor for maintaining the security balance. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Macedonia was visibly and consistently emphasized in the unresolved national question of the Albanian minority, which together with the Kosovo Albanians and Albanians from South Serbia demanded their national rights. Unconditional requirements for the realization of national interests culminated in military action over Serbia in 1999 and in Macedonia the military conflict in 2001. Its ending was the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of August 13, 2001, after which the integration of Macedonia's Albanian minority in the social and political life began.

Forms and activities related to international terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration, trafficking in drugs, weapons, people, strategic materials and dual use, and consequences of the use of means of mass destruction fall into the risks and hazards to the security of the Republic of Macedonia listed in the National Concept for Security and Defense of the Republic of Macedonia. Threats and hazards to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Macedonia usually come from well-armed and organized criminal groups, mainly from Kosovo, where they are provided with logistics and other support to certain terrorist and other activities.

It is necessary to establish an efficient system of cooperation and coordination at the international level, which necessarily entails a need for assistance and support of the international community, both in terms of training of professional staff through education and exchange of experiences at home and abroad, and in the form of financial assistance in terms of creating conditions for building adequate institutional capacity or databases for easier communication and information exchange for successful fight against illegal trafficking.

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