

LSE SU Albanian Society public lecture

“Security of Small Countries in Western Balkans – Perceptions and Perspectives”

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by saying how pleased I am to have been invited by the LSE Albanian Students Union to give a talk this evening on a topic so important for every country. I am very proud for such a vibrant and energetic LSE Albanian Students Union. I wish to congratulate you for the excellent initiative to organize an Albanian week this week. I wish to thank also Mr Partosh for his moderation of this lecture and the kind words he said about me. Before I start, let me also say that, in my capacity as Ambassador, my “freedom of speech” on a topic like this is limited. So I would be manoeuvring within what a former Soviet politician used to call, “limited sovereignty” space. I therefore wish to say from the outset that this contribution represents only my personal views and not necessarily those of my government.

As one would guess from the title of my topic, this presentation would normally cover a very broad picture. As you may know, security and security building is a multidimensional process. It ranges from purely politico-military issues, to democratic institution building, human dimension issues, to economic and environmental issues, etc. It seems unlikely that one could

embrace all these dimensions of security in one presentation. I would, therefore, try to deal succinctly with certain main aspects of the security perceptions and perspectives of small states, specifically in the Balkans, their decisions thereof, and some of their relationships to the current European environment, the way I see it, in particular only less than two months before Albanian becomes a full member of NATO at the NATO Summit early next April.

Let me first say that the security risks facing today's Europe are different from wars that threatened national integrity and sovereignty in the past. Hence, the question arises: would belonging to a military alliance strengthen security? What this may refer to could be a number of issues, as I briefly mentioned earlier, in addition to those that are purely military, ranging from civil or ethnic conflict, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, uncontrolled and illicit migration, organized crime, economic underdevelopment, money laundering, drug trafficking, transnational terrorism, etc. The search for security in any country, in particular small ones, is, therefore, primarily a matter of deterring and, if necessary, defending not only against foreign coercion, attack and invasion through the maintenance of adequate military defenses, but also reducing the risk of, and managing and eliminating, exactly these issues I just mentioned.

A general view of the security environment in Europe today points to a number of considerations. The first and, perhaps, somewhat under-appreciated advantage, of the current situation in Europe today is that the European environment offers small states a setting in which their traditional security fears and anxieties are significantly reduced. There is a widespread absence of a direct military threat to almost all the small states on the continent. Lack of states with opposing regimes and lack of a system-wide threat is a source of great relief and enhances the physical security of the small state.

Secondly, the norms that now prevail in the European setting are in opposition to any notion of the application of military force to settle disputes between and/or among countries. This setting is not confrontational in nature.

It is now safer and easier for small states to act in a milieu where confrontation and traditional military measures of power are not prominent components in the conduct of relations between states. It would however be only ideal to suggest that there are no strains to this institutional setting, or that this reduction in threat is uniform.

Thirdly, multilateral institutions that continue to exercise governance over political and security affairs in Europe offer small states multiple opportunities for membership and participation in a wide variety of forums. They offer a wide range of outlets for foreign policy activism in a multilateral setting and the exertion of so-called traditional small-state roles. Participation in these forums enables small states to pursue a key foreign policy goal: the proverbial “*seat at the table*”, or “*voice at the table*”, in regional affairs as a formal equal with attendant expectations of some degree of influence. In addition, membership enables them to concentrate their limited foreign policy assets in a few nodes of regional decision-making importance. (Some small states have been less fortunate in this respect. Some have been given full or almost full access into defence/security institutions, some others continue to have no access into these institutions that have been available to small states in the West long ago.)

Fourthly, while the positive aspects of the security environment are notable, there is still reason for small states in Europe, and not only small states for that matter, not to feel entirely comfortable or content with their security environment. Small states across the continent do not hold the same judgments or perceptions of their new security environment. In different regions of the continent there are varying security anxieties and priorities. To illustrate this, suffice to have a look at the concerns and priorities of the Baltic states and those of the Balkan states, before the Baltic states joined NATO and, indeed, after joining NATO. (However, it is possible to identify general interests all small states share with respect to the security environment in Europe.

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- Maintenance of territorial sovereignty and claim to be acting as independent, sovereign entities;
- Establishment of security guarantees (NATO's famous Article V);
- Maintenance of widespread adherence to non-confrontational and non-violent norms;
- Prevention of the spread of existing ethnic-religious conflict, if any;
- Prevention of the growth of domestic separatist or irredentist sentiments;
- Maintenance of patterns of co-operation and the operation of multilateral political, security and economic institutions and inclusion of these institutions in the consultative process.

We in the Balkans seem to share exactly these values and interests, no more and no less than others.}

Some small states, generally those in Europe's southeast, have been led to feel and believe for years that they are less secure than some others. Following the decisions of NATO 10 years ago to include a group of new member states, and another group a few years later, has actually changed the equation, hence the security perception and perspective. But the ones "left out" in the same region, cannot but feel sort of alienated, despite arguments to the contrary. They would feel caught in a form of "*strategic limbo*", continuing to rely on "negative security" in the absence of NATO and EU membership.

It is a fact that for small countries, regional or local foreign policy activity has some advantages. It ensures examination of issues of shared importance that organisations with broader membership are unable or unwilling to do. It can assist in the management of immediate and pressing regional or local problems. Examples are the Nordic Council, the four plus five initiative – Italy, Spain, Portugal and France joining in a forum with Arab Magreb Union, the Barcelona process, now the Mediterranean Summit, to manage political, economic and immigration issues, the Alpen-Adria Community, the Central European Initiative, etc. Their impact, however, should not be overestimated nor underestimated. Important as these forums may truly be, for small

countries, they cannot, by and large, satisfy the central security concerns of small states. Why?

Initially, Western Europe had hoped that membership in what was then the CSCE (now OSCE), and later in the NACC, the PfP Program, the “associate partnership” with the WEU, and other regional forums, would be a sufficient level of engagement in *lieu* of full NATO and EU membership. These mechanisms clearly have not proven satisfactory for many states. The OSCE for example, provides an important diplomatic forum for consultation and negotiations on a daily basis, which sees the US sitting at the same table with its European allies and the Russian Federation, the Trans-Caucasus, Central Asia, etc., but little else. It is not and will not be able to provide an adequate security assurance to states in jeopardy, if that would be the case, as has been the case. OSCE’s stocks have therefore fallen in Central South East European capitals, despite efforts a few years ago to invigorate it by embarking on an institutional development and reform process that was believed would strengthen its organization and establish new opportunities for risk identification, reduction and avoidance, crisis management and, eventually, some sort of peacekeeping. But this did not go too far. On the other hand, efforts to expand the EU have been successful but have also encountered no small political and other obstacles. We are witness today that this is a reality in concrete terms. But, as it has been demonstrated, these obstacles have not been insurmountable if and when there has been political will.

It is important to recall at this juncture last year’s NATO decision, after so many years of working to secure it, to invite, Albania and Croatia to join, and leave some other Western Balkan country, for the time being, out of NATO membership, while continuing to hear that the doors of NATO are open.

Some other countries, where “neutrality” is still a constitutional matter, may think differently and ask: is the security situation today different or more threatening than in the past, say, 60 years? Is a nuclear shield needed for protection in the present situation? How would joining NATO affect neutrality

and/or our neighbours? Does being grouped with those longing for external security guarantees sound good or not, etc.? To me, the end of blocs has clearly long since lifted confrontation with regard to which a country needed to be neutral. The lessons learned from our history teach, for example, the Albanians not to ask these questions. The policy to join NATO in Albania has enjoyed an unwavering political and popular support across the board, in a way that may have not been seen among other aspirants, sometimes not even among NATO member states themselves. NATO has witnessed that the efforts and the hope for inclusion have not risen and fallen with the political climate in the countries of the region. They have been and, for the foreseeable future, will continue to be uniformly supportive.

A small state on the periphery may, however, find itself confronting traditional and new security concerns. It goes without saying, therefore, that small states find an integrative environment indeed appealing. If the position of a small state would be safe and protected by (any) institution(s), why are most small states seeking membership, or shelter, primarily under the shield of NATO?

NATO has changed since the Cold War and it seems the process of change is still going on. Membership has expanded through inclusion of new states rather than enlargement. I underline here the importance of semantics! Special relations have been established with the Russian Federation through the NATO-Russia Council. Nuclear deterrence, as a public good, does not seem to define any more the basic nature of NATO, but it still is a vitally important element. This remarkably cohesive alliance and collective defense organization has gradually developed into a tool for broad security co-operation and stability. Having said all this, let us be frank about it - all countries that have yearned and/or are yearning to join NATO do so primarily because of the military security guarantees, i.e., in other simplistic cold war mentality rhetoric, because of the guarantees given under Article V of the Washington Treaty. I do not know therefore whether they realise they are going to join the new not the old NATO! In addition, they apply for membership in both NATO

and the EU as, essentially, a guarantee against internal instability and against reversal to undemocratic rule. Their internal systems will, once in NATO, be definitely anchored in a solid group of democratic nations that share the same characteristic values: very similar or the same consolidated democratic pluralism and political stabilities, a growing free market economy, similar or identical economic ties and stabilities, the same integrated military doctrines and structures, and the same military technologies. Therefore, small states know only well that most traditional small-state security concerns would be present and dealt with in a defence system such as that of NATO. They also know that an institution, like NATO, with its inclusive membership, would permit small states to be involved in defense and security decision-making, including about these countries themselves. A collective defense and security future provides, in principle and practice, also a measure of physical security. It ultimately locks the small countries into a multilateral arrangement together with the big powers. It allows for small-state input and participation in the system and reduces certain concerns that may attend an integrative Europe.

So that time is gone when potential new member states from the East believed that even a political link with NATO would be enough to underpin their security! NATO membership for many, including Albania, is not only a desired goal but a real fundamental political orientation.

Small states take reassurance from the continued presence of the US in the European Security equation. The US shows few or no signs of terminating its participation in the security affairs of Europe. This is a very positive development for all and in particular for small states, although it seems that there are certain other priorities now which give the impression that there seem to be reduced interest on the part of the USA. Not only does the US anchor the NATO, which continues to be the key security institution in Europe, but the presence of the US, as an outside force, adds an additional dimension of stability to the European environment. With NATO pre-eminent, though sometimes not untroubled, the small states are likely to feel much more secure in it and with a continued US presence, as long as it will be seen to contribute

to existing stability of all security institutions in Europe. It is a fact, however, that small member states, old and new, have never seriously hampered NATO and/or US security interests, nor will they ever likely do so in the future.

In order to understand the conditions under which some small European states in the East, through the evolutionary development of the PfP and MAP, have already been invited to join NATO, one has to consider both political and economic factors. Politically, the democratic institutional and maturity of these countries, their economic system and performance, the nature of US commitment to Europe, the future of defense co-operation within the EU, the role of nuclear weapons in Europe and the relations between the West and Russia have basically been fully clarified and underpinned in completely new foundations. Economically, to become members of NATO, states in transition have theoretically to be integrated or locked in an integration process with the EU. Progress of candidates or potential candidates towards this end has not been uniform, though not dramatically different, between those already invited to join and those left out. Although meeting the standards seems to have been the outspoken principal criterion, essentially it has been the political criterion that has counted more in the decision-making process in that regard. The previous mantra that in the evolving pattern of security integration in the West, NATO membership was practically impossible without prior membership to the WEU, which was not possible without a membership in the EU, is no longer valid today. Candidate states that are still on the “waiting list” would simply ask: why are we left out? Why a “black hole” in a new NATO enlarged environment? If a neighboring state is not regarded as a partner in co-operation, and as “one of us”, the outcome would be distancing ourselves from the neighbour(s).

Overall, a new political infrastructure of institutions, rules and commitments has emerged that is clearly in the interests in particular of small states. In it, NATO has clearly been the most tangible element in the continent-wide institutional infrastructure underpinning decisions and actions to avoid

and manage crisis in Europe, backed by full political legitimacy and muscle while avoiding escalation of certain underlying political and military frictions. NATO remains a permanent fixture on the post Cold War political landscape, retaining an efficacy and capability that the other international institutions have proved woefully incapable of emulating. It has become a much more politico-defence-security body, engaging in dispute resolution, peace-keeping and even dispensing economic and technical advice to its former Warsaw Pact adversaries. NATO will be Europe's trouble-shooter a long way well into this century.

We Albanians, like probably others in the region, have feelings of respect and gratitude towards NATO that seems to be much more profound than among some NATO members themselves with regard to what this Organization is all about and what it can do. Lasting security can ultimately be created only with common structures that cover all participants, built upon inclusion and ever closer co-operation.

To conclude this part, let me say that it is essentially for all the reasons mentioned above and others that those states outside NATO are principally small states, but not only, that want to leap to NATO membership. In order to promote their security interests most effectively, our countries seek to aggregate their voice and to integrate polities with those of NATO allies and EU partners. NATO would rarely find such a homogenous support and enthusiasm across the board of the political spectrum and the wide public opinion, such as, for example, in Albania and Kosova, for its actions, capabilities and achievements.

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Having said all the above, it seems appropriate to deal succinctly with certain other aspects, from an Albanian perspective, of what seems to have been haunting politicians and some capitals for quite some time until 17 February 2008, and some other even today. Some have considered the

Albanian question, and still continue to do so, as a potential source of fear and eventually one that may generate insecurity and instability.

The crux of the matter has been, in actual fact, not an approach to the pan-Albanian question in the Balkans, in general, but to the solution of the Kosova question, in particular. It is clear that it has not been nor is it in the interests of the majority of Albanians to have all the pieces together into one single unified ethnic Albanian state. What is more important is that it is impractical, unrealistic, unachievable and has to be dropped by others, just as it has been dropped by the Albanians themselves. A pan-Albanian approach leading to insecurity and instability is only a myth. This seems to have held power in the minds of nationalist idealists as myth rather than a reality or a viable political agenda.

Similarly, Albanians have never used violence to gain territory in their history. The opposite has been the case. In Kosova, which celebrated its first independent anniversary only two days ago, people want improvement and consolidation of the rule of law, democracy, harmonious coexistence in a multiethnic society, improvement of their living standards and opportunities and tangible progress towards their political future in NATO and the EU.

The uncertainty over Kosova's independence continues to make some neighbouring states uncomfortable. They have not yet recognized it. The international community's problem or concern has been to manage the process of dealing with Kosova's final status without destabilizing its neighbours. That is what has exactly happened!

Many critics predicted gloomily that the independence of Kosova would inevitable trigger fresh outbreaks of violence and ethnic cleansing, uncontrolled immigration, drug and people smuggling, a nasty upsurge of Serb nationalism in Serbia and perhaps a renewal of war and violence in the Balkans, etc. Happily none of this happened. The advocates of these scenarios were proven utterly wrong. Today Kosova is largely peaceful though poor. As for the dire

warnings that Kosova's independence would set a dangerous precedent for other restive regions, it was entirely predictable that Russians, e.g., would cite it as an example in their war with Georgia last August after which they hastily recognized the independence of two break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Osetia in Georgia. Nobody seriously believes that had Kosova not gone independent and recognized as such, Russia would not have gone to war with Georgia.

Yet, Kosova's position is incomparably stronger and better than before, it still is weak. It would get a big boost if the five EU members that have not yet recognized it - Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus - changed their minds, as a recent European Parliament resolution strongly recommends. These countries have their own misgivings about their own border regions or disputes. They know that they will have to recognize Kosova one day. Uncertainty about it and the idea of a long-term protectorate under UN, or about Kosova's return under Serb rule, or other negotiations about an issue that is closed and done with and can no longer be negotiated, would only keep alive hopes that the situation may be reversed, that all or part of Kosova may go again under Serb rule. This is what would bring about insecurity, instability, tension, economic stagnation, and so forth. The longer they postpone their decision to recognize Kosova, the more they help also to foster an impression of European disunity that is not good for Kosova and the rest of the Western Balkan countries, and Europe itself.

The best solution would be to put all the western Balkan countries securely on the path to EU membership. Only then can it be sure of a peaceful and happy future for all the Balkans and Europe itself. All our countries in the region identified as Western Balkans, have a declared common vision to European and trans-Atlantic integration. Indeed, there is growing and effective co-operation among our countries at all levels to that effect. We all aspire and are working to consolidate security, stability and peace in our respective countries and beyond our individual borders. A clear commitment and decision by all on Kosova's independence recognition would be the only way to translate

into life this common vision of our countries. Actually speeding up the European integration processes with these countries, as the glue to their future in lasting peace and prosperity will definitely make a major difference in bringing these countries to where they actually belong – the European institutions.

Thank you for your attention.

