

# NATO Contribution to Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans



# Basic Data on Western Balkans Countries

	Albania	BiH	Croatia	Kosovo	Macedonia	Montenegro	Serbia	Slovenia
Territory (km <sup>2</sup> )	28,748	51,197	56,594	10,887	25,713	13,812	77,477	20,273
Population	3,038,594	3,861,912	4,313,707	1,883,018	2,100,025	644,578	7,143,921	1,978,029
GDP (billion USD)	34.210	42.530	94.240	18.490	30.130	10.610	101.500	66.130
GDP per capita (PPP) (USD)–('16)	11,900	11,000	22,400	10,000.	14,500	17,000	14,200	32,000
GDP growth (2016) (%)	3.4	3.0	1.9	4.1	2.2	5.1	2.5	2..3
Rank in CPI (Transparency International of 176 countries)	83–86	83-86	55–56	95–100	90-94	64-68	72-74	31-34
Armed Forces Personnel (active) (2014)	14,250	10,500	14,506	4,500	8,000	2,080	40,000	7,600

# NATO in Action: Belgrade 1999



# Open Issues – The Big Picture

- The Western Balkans is fragmented. Different problems, levels and performances.
- Pro-western orientation coexists with „alternative” views.
- One external player has increased its effort to drive wedges in the Western Balkans.
- The pulling power of the West has weakened

# Main Issues that Affect the Alliance

- In time sequence:
  - Russian revanchism and geopolitical expansion,
  - U.S. policy under President Trump,
  - BREXIT.

# Russian Revanchism and Geopolitical Expansion

- Russia's claims were for quite some time confined to its role in the post-Soviet space.
- It has been identified as a sphere of its privileged interest. (sovereignty?)
- No NATO accession (2008).
- No „flirt” with the West (2014).

# Russian Revanchism and Geopolitical Expansion (2)

- Russia has advanced its claims, as far as the level of loyalty it requests from its „post-Soviet” partners.
- Russia has returned to international politics more assertively beyond its self-defined sphere of influence.
- In the Western Balkans a somewhat unsettled area geopolitical and geostrategic contest has (re-)started.

# The Means of Russian „Revenge”

- Part of a grand strategy:
  - gaining economic influence (investment, buy-outs),
  - armaments and equipment procurement,
  - camouflaged methods (Montenegro – 2016)
  - communication (RT Serbian news, Sputnik),
  - support to political agendas (Kosovo...),
  - support to „like-minded” politicians.



# The Serb-Russian Train Does Not Arrive to Mitrovica



# The Belgrade – Mitrovica Train from Inside



# Living on western indecisiveness and mistakes

- „would not care that much” whether Ukraine were admitted to NATO (Donald Trump)
- „You might want NATO ... But it is not going to happen.” (Prime minister of Georgia)
- Enlargement „is embedded in Article 10 of the Washington Treaty which says that NATO's door will remain open for additional new European members. So in policy terms it won't go away and we won't set it aside, but in practical terms I don't think there's much promise for the next several years anyway” .  
(then U.S. NATO ambassador Douglas Lute)

# NATO's (slow) expansion

- Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009), Montenegro (2017)
- Interest in some other states: BiH, Macedonia/FYROM, Kosovo (?)
- Do small members matter for the performance of the alliance?

# Montenegro's Accession

- Strong Russian objection, trying to destabilize the country.
- Claim: Referendum (Maria Zakharova...)
- Fait accompli...

## Montenegro's Accession (2)

- U.S. Senate: 97:2
- + „Montenegro is trying to do everything Putin hates, where you actually can vote for your own leaders.” (Lindsay Graham)
- „add another country to the welfare wagon of NATO”. (Rand Paul)

# The Trump Factor and the U.S. Administration

- The administration tries its best to compensate for the President and it is partly successful.
- Volatility and unpredictability...
- NATO „... was obsolete, because it was designed many, many years ago. Number two the countries aren't paying what they're supposed to pay... It's obsolete because it wasn't taking care of terror.” (Donald Trump, 15 Jan.)

# Compensation

„The United States is resolved, as we were at NATO’s founding and in every hour since, to live by the principle that an attack on one of us is an attack on us all.” (Michael Pence)

„There may be some skepticism here, too, given some of the headlines, but you heard the president convey a direct a necessary message.” (Herbert R. McMaster)



## and the Democrats...

... „all we needed was for the commander in chief to say it, and he didn't say it" an omission that „from that day forward ... [means] the Atlantic community was less safe, and less together". (Strobe Talbott)

# Obsession with Defence Spending

- Wales 2014: Good guidance, if threat/risk level stays high.
- „We are not increasing our defense spending in order to do President Trump a favor... We are doing exactly what we promised at the summit in Wales.” (SG Jens Stoltenberg)
- other allies „owe vast sums of money” to the US... (Donald Trump)

# Conclusions

- Not the strategic considerations dominate the agenda, yet.
- Will NATO generally and the U.S. administration specifically tilt in that direction remains to be seen.