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Research Article

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# The Politics of Euro-Balkan Police Cooperation in the 2000s

Olga Kantokoski\*

This article examines the political dynamics of Euro-Balkan police cooperation in the context of recent Balkan history. In the existing scholarship, the process of the 'externalisation' of EU-wide law enforcement cooperation outside the Union's geographic frontiers is widely considered to be a 'functional-instrumental' response to the menace of organised crime. Scholars believe that the functional rationale has been a primary driver behind the Union's endeavours to extend its governance of internal security to the EU's core strategic neighbourhood of the Western Balkans. Perceived in EU political discourse as a 'stronghold' of organised crime, in the 2000s this region acted as a major site for the Union's counter-crime initiatives. However, more detailed examination of the EU's internal security collaboration in the Western Balkan region against the contrasting dynamics of organised crime reveals that Euro-Balkan cooperative initiatives were not functionally-, but rather politically-driven *par excellence*. In this article, the crucial period of 1999/2000-2010, when collaboration on internal security issues with the Western Balkan partners assumed major significance for the EU, is examined as an example of how political factors have been major triggers of the Union's anti-crime police cooperation with its Balkan neighbourhood.

**Keywords:** European Union, Western Balkans, organised crime, police cooperation

## The external dimension of the EU's internal security in theoretical context

The external dimension of the EU's justice and home affairs (ED-JHA) collaboration has been a flourishing field of scientific research since the 2000s. This was the decade when the EU's previous relative inactivity in the JHA domain gave way to a rapid internationalisation of its internal security programme. While "securitisation" and the "blurring of the internal-external security divide"<sup>1</sup> have been useful concepts to provide an explanation for the general phenomenon of the ED-JHA, scholars advanced *mainly* 'functional-

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<sup>1</sup> Lutterbeck, Derek. 2005. Blurring the Dividing Line: The Convergence of Internal and External Security in Western Europe. *European Security* 14(2), 231-53.

instrumental' arguments to explain the growing police cooperation in the Union's neighbourhood during the 2000s. In particular, scholars considered the menace of organised crime a major trigger of the EU's external law enforcement initiatives. The existing literature acknowledges the influence of the EU's foreign political concerns on the EU CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy; part of the EU's second pillar's competence before entry into force of the EU Lisbon Treaty) semi-military police and rule of law missions, the major functions of which, alongside subsidiary tasks of tackling organised crime, included crisis-management and local police reform in the recipient countries.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the activities of the Union's specialised JHA agencies such as Europol and CEPOL (in the pre-Lisbon era, they were part of the EU's third pillar), which tackle international organised crime as their core mandate, have been characterised as functional *par excellence* in the existing ED-JHA literature.

According to scholars, the instrumental requirements of security provision were a *primary* enabler of the external side of the EU's internal security and determined both the pace of development and specific parameters of the Union's collaboration on respective issues with its neighbourhood. Specifically, scholars put forward the threat of organised crime as a main trigger of the extension of the EU's 'governance' of internal security into the Western Balkans in the 2000s. Given the region's problematic position on the cross-roads of major criminal flows and its dire socio-political and economic situation after the protracted warfare in the post-Yugoslav space, leading scholars in the field such as Monar,<sup>3</sup> Wolff *et al.*,<sup>4</sup> and Trauner<sup>5</sup> argued that a crucial incentive for the 'extra-territorialisation' of the EU JHA since the end of the 1990s has been the need to curb the tide of organised and serious crime stemming from Southeastern Europe.

These scholarly arguments followed the logic of a previous broader line of research on the EU's Eastern enlargement of 1993-2003, according to which the threat of organised crime was a principal factor behind the 'JHA export' to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Thus, according to Mitsilegas *et al.*, the key logic of transferring JHA standards to CEE in the pre-accession context was both the Union's and member states' strong interest in including the acceding CEE states in their efforts to safeguard internal security on the wider European continent.<sup>6</sup> Although formally framed as part of the Union's politics of enlargement, the JHA's externalisation to CEE, according to scholars, was primarily aimed at the solution of functional tasks of preventing the risk of

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<sup>2</sup> Ioannides, Isabelle and Gemma Collantes-Celador. 2011. The Internal–External Security Nexus and EU Police/Rule of Law Missions in the Western Balkans. *Conflict, Security & Development* 11(4), 415-45; Ryan, Barry J. 2009. The EU's Emergent Security-First Agenda: Securing Albania and Montenegro. *Security Dialogue* 40(3), 311-31.

<sup>3</sup> Monar, Jorg. 2008. *Justice and Home Affairs: Security Sector Reform Measures as Instruments of EU Internal Security Objectives*, in *The European Union and Security Sector Reform*, edited by Spence, David and Philipp Fluri. London: John Harper Publishing.

<sup>4</sup> Wolff, Sarah / Wichmann, Nicole and Gregory Mounier. 2009. The External Dimension of Justice and Home Affairs: A Different Security Agenda for the EU? *Journal of European Integration* 31(1), 9-23.

<sup>5</sup> Trauner, Florian. 2011. *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: EU Justice and Home Affairs in Croatia and Macedonia*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Mitsilegas, Valsamis / Monar, Jorg and Wyn Rees. 2003. *The European Union and Internal Security: Guardian of the People?* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

instability related to organised crime<sup>7</sup>. Practically, the functional logic of curbing organised crime in CEE and thus preventing the spill-over of insecurity to the EU materialised in such pre-accession practices as the transfer of the Union's JHA *acquis* to the region and practical cooperation between Europol and CEPOL with the relevant competent authorities in the CEE countries.

Yet, no detailed arguments supporting the claim of the predominantly 'functionally-driven' nature of the ED-JHA have been provided so far in the existing scholarship. As regards CEE, even though some scholars tentatively assumed that crime was only a marginal factor in the EU's pre-accession process in this region,<sup>8</sup> this assumption has never been tested and proven on the basis of analysis that would distinguish between the actual impact of both political and functional factors on the evolution of the EU's cooperative police practices there. As concerns the Western Balkans, while such influential bodies as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Council of Europe (COE), among others, have produced numerous reports on Western Balkan-related organised crime trends in the 2000s, the respective findings have not been integrated sufficiently enough into the ED-JHA literature. Deriving from factual analysis quantifying the actual threat of the Balkan-related organised crime to the EU, this article purports to evaluate the role of the 'functional' *vis-à-vis* the 'political' rationale in the EU's police collaboration in its Southeastern borderlands. The analysis demonstrates that the external orientation of the Union's police cooperation in the Western Balkans in the 2000s was politically-driven, with the respective practices reflecting and responding primarily to the evolution of the Union's power-political concerns in this region, rather than the actual dynamics of organised crime.

To support this argument, the article examines Euro-Balkan cooperative police initiatives in the context of the evolution of major forms of organised crime that are typically associated with the Balkans: trafficking in drugs, trafficking in human beings (THB), and small arms and light weapons (SALW). In addition to a critical review of the existing scholarly literature, the article derives its data from interviews with former Europol directors and analytical reports by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the COE, the UNODC, and documents of the EU institutions.

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<sup>7</sup> Wolff, Sarah / Wichmann, Nicole and Gregory Mounier. 2010. *The External Dimension of Justice and Home Affairs: A Different Security Agenda for the EU?*, in *The External Dimension of Justice and Home Affairs: A Different Security Agenda for the European Union?*, edited by Wolff, Sarah / Wichmann, Nicole and Gregory Mounier. London and New York: Routledge, 11; Mounier, Gregory. 2010. *Civilian Crisis-management and the External dimension of JHA: Inceptive, Functional and Institutional Similarities*, in *The External Dimension of Justice and Home Affairs: A Different Security Agenda for the European Union?*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, as S. Lavenex noted, "the perception of new security threats at the EU's Eastern borders acted more as an additional source of justification than as a causal determinant of JHA cooperation" (Lavenex, Sandra. 2005. *Governance in an Enlarging 'Area of Freedom, Security and Justice'*, in *The European Union in the Wake of Eastern Enlargement. Institutional and Policy-making challenges*, edited by Verdun, Amy and Osvald Croci. Manchester: University Press, 121).

## The dynamics of Western Balkan organised crime in the 2000s

### *Trafficking in narcotics*

While drug traffic is an old problem for the Western Balkans, it is only in the 1990s that the region emerged and acted as a major trans-European corridor for the transit of psychotropic drugs – mainly heroin and herbal cannabis – to Western Europe. However, beginning in the early 2000s, the situation regarding the Balkan heroin traffic changed. According to Jürgen Storbeck, Europol's director in 1999-2005, although the Western Balkans continued to act as a major route for the passage of illicit narcotics to the EU in the 2000s, the overall role of the traditional Balkan drug route considerably diminished in significance in comparison to the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> While drugs from the Balkans continued to penetrate to the lucrative Western European markets in the 2000s, this happened in much smaller quantities than in the 1990s and police registered a downward trend in the incidents of drug crime in Europe during that period.

The declining significance of the Balkan-related drug trafficking in the EU is particularly visible in the category of the heroin trade. The 2000s were characterised by the decreased intra-EU consumption of heroin, which is one of the indicators pointing to the diminishing role of a major Balkan corridor for heroin traffic.<sup>10</sup> Storbeck explains the declining heroin consumption among European consumers with reference to the rising popularity of both synthetic opiates from the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and the Baltic countries and Latin American cocaine; these two drug categories outpaced heroin in overall consumption.<sup>11</sup> The decline in heroin seizures in Europe is another indicator suggesting a tendency towards the diminishing of the Balkans role in the trans-European heroin trade. In 2000-2005, the overall heroin seizures in both Western and Central Europe had generally declined by 30%,<sup>12</sup> and in 2005-2010, a downward trend in the seized amounts of heroin was also reported by the UNODC<sup>13</sup> as typical for most Western Balkan countries.<sup>14</sup>

These reduction trends were both due to the general improvement of the regional security situation after the termination of major conflicts and the post-2006 reorientation of the paths of traffic in the Balkans from the Northern route (Serbia – Bosnia and Herzegovina [BiH] – Croatia – Western Europe) eastwards to Bulgaria and Romania (due to their entry into the Union and hence less

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<sup>9</sup> I3.

<sup>10</sup> One of reasons behind this was a general decline of the total area of opium poppy cultivation: worldwide, by mid-2005, the estimated area of illicit opium poppy cultivation decreased by 22% (European Commission and Council of Europe. 2006. *Situation Report on Organized and Economic Crime in South-Eastern Europe*. Strasbourg, September 2006, 28). This trend correlates with an overall decline in heroin seizures observed in the late 2000s along the whole stretch of the longer 'Balkan route', with the single exception of Iran, as reported by the UNODC (UNODC. 2012. *World Drug Report 2012*. Vienna: UNODC, 30).

<sup>11</sup> I3.

<sup>12</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*. Vienna: UNODC, 60.

<sup>13</sup> UNODC. 2011. *Drug Situation Analysis Report. South-Eastern Europe*. UNODC; EMCDDA/Europol. 2016. *EU Drug Market Report. Strategic Overview*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union (accessed: 15 September 2021), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Except Kosovo, where the trend was on a slight increase during that time (UNODC. 2011. *Drug Situation Analysis Report. South-Eastern Europe*).

rigorous border checks than in the case of the traditional route; these two countries were increasingly responsible for the continuing heroin interceptions in the EU after 2005).<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the transit of heroin along the Southern sub-branch (Bulgaria – Macedonia/Kosovo – Albania – Italy) diminished dramatically in the 2000s.<sup>16</sup>

The reduced arrests of native Western Balkan traffickers in the large European consumer markets is another indicator pointing to the declining role of the Western Balkan criminal hub in the 2000s. Balkan criminal cartels, especially Albanians, were no longer active in the European heroin trade in the 2000s to the extent they used to be in the 1990s,<sup>17</sup> when they controlled up to a 70% (or even larger) share of the heroin trade in key destination markets in Europe.<sup>18</sup> In 2000-2008, by contrast, indigenous Balkan nationalities made up a minority of arrestees in Germany, one of major heroin markets in Europe, compared with Germans (39%), Turks (19%), and other (unidentified) nationals (17%). The overall proportion of the Balkan nationalities (mainly Albanians and Serbs, but also “other Balkan nationalities”, possibly also from the Eastern Balkans) arrested in Germany for heroin-related incidents in the 2000s did not exceed 12%, only fourth place if compared to other organised criminal groups (OCGs), if defined by their ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> The same situation is observed in other European countries – the Netherlands, Italy,<sup>20</sup> Switzerland,<sup>21</sup> the UK,<sup>22</sup> and Greece – where the number of Albanians/ex-Yugoslavs arrested for heroin dealings was on a decline in the 2000s.<sup>23</sup>

A downward tendency was also typical of the illicit traffic of the Balkan-linked cannabis. In the 2000s, cannabis production fell in the Western Balkans, according to Max-Peter Ratzel, Europol's director in 2005-2009.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the overall consumption of cannabis in most EU countries in the 2000s (namely, the 2003-2008 period) showed a “strong decline”.<sup>25</sup> In the 1990s, Albania was at the forefront of the Balkan-related growth of cannabis and its derivatives and the continuous traffic of this drug to Western Europe. According to Storbeck, this country turned into the major cannabis production site in the whole of the Southeastern European region.<sup>26</sup> It was responsible for a significant portion of the slightly less than two million kilograms of herbal cannabis that was seized

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<sup>15</sup> UNODC. 2011. *Drug Situation Analysis Report. South-Eastern Europe*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> This was due to the large-scale anti-drug initiatives that Italian and Albanian police authorities jointly undertook in the early 2000s (I1). The development (especially by the late 2000s) of alternative maritime routes through Africa and some Gulf States as staging posts for heroin trafficking towards European markets (UNODC. 2013. *World Drug Report 2013*. Vienna: UNODC, 22) also explains why the problem of the indigenous Western Balkan threat in the category of heroin crime diminished considerably for the Union in the 2000s.

<sup>17</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 66.

<sup>18</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 10-13.

<sup>19</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 69-70; UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*. Vienna: UNODC, 58.

<sup>20</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 66-67; Council of the European Union. 2011. *Regional Report on Western Balkans*. Council document 5583/11, 21 January 2011, 6.

<sup>21</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*, 58.

<sup>23</sup> UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*, 70.

<sup>24</sup> I2.

<sup>25</sup> UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*, 198.

<sup>26</sup> I3.

in 1998 in Western Europe.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, Albania's role in the supply of cannabis to European consumers considerably declined in the 2000s.<sup>28</sup> This declining role of Albanian cannabis is particularly visible in the cases of Greece and Italy – the two countries that most Albanian-produced herbal cannabis and its derivatives is traditionally intended for. In the 2000s, police authorities reported a substantial decline in the overall seizures of Albanian cannabis in these countries, along with reduced arrests of Albanian OCGs that were previously responsible for drug-trade offences in Italy.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Trade and traffic in human beings***

Similar to the illicit trade in drugs, the Western Balkan-related THB was also showing downward tendencies throughout the whole of the 2000s. The cessation of the Balkan cycle of wars and the improvement of regional security environment resulted in a substantial decrease in the number of THB-related incidents both in the Western Balkans and within the EU. According to Storbeck, despite still acting as a transit route for illegal immigrants in the 2000s, the Western Balkans *de facto* ceased to act as a major region of origin for THB crime.<sup>30</sup> This trend is typical for the two most wide-spread categories of the Balkan-linked THB: smuggling of migrants and the trafficking of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

While the Balkan-linked smuggling of migrants reached its height in the 1990s, the influx of illicit refugees from the region to the EU had already diminished radically in 2001/02, and this downward trend continued well into the subsequent years of the decade. Statistically, the number of migration-related apprehensions in the region decreased from over 40,000 persons in 2000 to less than 20,000 in 2006.<sup>31</sup> This reduction was a consequence of the end of an almost decade-long period of warfare, with its massive displacement of populations. The reduction was also due to numerous counter-THB initiatives that were undertaken in the early 2000s jointly by the Balkan authorities<sup>32</sup> and international solicitors present in the region, alongside various social projects targeting the root causes of THB crime. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, many former escapees started to return from Western Europe to their home countries in the region.<sup>33</sup>

The same trend of reduction is typical of the traffic in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution. While in the 1990s this category of trafficked persons constituted the largest sub-category of all Balkan-linked THB crimes in the EU,

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<sup>27</sup> I3; UNODC. 2000. *World Drug Report 2000*. United Nations, 170.

<sup>28</sup> With Morocco continuing to act as a main supplier of herbal cannabis to the EU. UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*; UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 63-64.

<sup>29</sup> Council of the European Union. 2011. *Regional Report on Western Balkans*. Council document 5583/11, 21 January 2011, 7.

<sup>30</sup> I3.

<sup>31</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Such as a series of 'Mirage' operations that was conducted in 2002-2004 by the Bucharest-based SECI/SELEC Center (UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 76).

<sup>33</sup> Blitz, Brad. 2006. *New Beginnings? Refugee Returns and post-Conflict Integration in the Former Yugoslavia*, in *War and Change in the Balkans. Nationalism, Conflict and Cooperation*, edited by Blitz, Brad. Cambridge University Press, 261.

in the 2000s, by contrast, police in all Balkan countries reported a considerable improvement of the situation concerning THB-related crimes. In the 1990s, a considerable increase in the sex market in the Balkans (and the ‘spill-over’ of relevant organised crime to the adjacent EU countries) was linked to the extensive presence of international personnel, including peace-keepers, in the sites of former conflict. As soon as international troops withdrew from the region (after 2001-2002), a radical decrease in women trafficked both to and from the Western Balkans was registered.<sup>34</sup> In 2006 and 2007, the COE documented that human traffic for the vice industry in Southeastern Europe had already been on a continuous decline for several years by that time, including a particularly notorious Albania-related THB.<sup>35</sup> This disappearance of favourable conditions for the vice industry in the Balkans had a positive effect on the intra-European situation with THB crime.

The decrease of detectable incidents of criminalised THB in the main EU destination countries additionally confirms the reduction in the broader phenomenon of Balkan-related THB (i.e. both migrant-smuggling and sex-traffic categories). According to Storbeck, Western Balkan criminal groups were “no longer major masters of the THB crime in Europe in the 2000s”.<sup>36</sup> Instead, the Western Balkan-related THB in the Union (in terms of both the victim and perpetrator categories) was almost completely overtaken by two Eastern Balkan nationalities: Romanians and Bulgarians. By contrast, the presence of indigenous Western Balkan nationalities was small if compared with these two national groups. Even though in the 2000s victims from the Western Balkans (mainly Albanians, Bosnians and Serbs) were still present among those detected by police in the EU in connection with THB crime, this happened far less frequently if compared to their Eastern Balkan counterparts.<sup>37</sup>

The situation with the THB problem in Italy and Greece, two traditional destination sites for Balkan-linked human smuggling, confirms the considerable decline of the indigenous Western Balkan nationalities (first of all Albanians) in THB crime. While in the 1990s, Albanians made up about 40% of female victims in Italy,<sup>38</sup> in 2000-2003, their proportion among all victims of human traffic detected in this country was 24%, and in 2003-2007, the figure stood at around 14%.<sup>39</sup> The same picture is typical of Greece, which in the 1990s was both a major destination country for Albanian victims of THB, and a primary site for the operation of Albanian traffickers.<sup>40</sup> In the 2000s, victims from Romania, Bulgaria, Russia, and Ukraine took over the previously dominant groups of

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<sup>34</sup> Limanowska, Barbara. 2005. *Trafficking in Human Beings in South Eastern Europe*. UNDP (accessed: 21 January 2021).

<sup>35</sup> European Commission/Council of Europe. 2006. *Situation Report on Organized and Economic Crime in South-Eastern Europe*. Strasbourg, September 2006 (accessed: 15 September 2021), 41; European Commission/Council of Europe. 2007. *Update of the 2006 Situation Report on Organized and Economic Crime in South-Eastern Europe*. Strasbourg, June 2007 (accessed: 15 September 2021), 24.

<sup>36</sup> I3.

<sup>37</sup> UNODC. 2012. *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2012*, 58; UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*.

<sup>38</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 79.

<sup>39</sup> UNODC. 2010. *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*. Vienna: UNODC, 50.

<sup>40</sup> Papanicolaou, Georgios. 2008. The Sex Industry, Human Trafficking and the Global Prohibition Regime: A Cautionary Tale from Greece. *Trends in Organized crime*, 11(4).

indigenous Western Balkan nationalities in Greece. Overall, Western Balkan nationalities constituted only a minuscule share of the total pool of all persons trafficked in the relevant period in the EU.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, statistical data available for the perpetrators of THB crime provides extra evidence for the previously endemic Balkan human smuggling giving way to an overall decline in Europe in the 2000s. In most EU countries, including Italy, Greece, Germany, the UK, France, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands, indigenous Western Balkan nationalities were outpaced by Romanians and Bulgarians as both facilitators and perpetrators of THB-related criminal acts.<sup>42</sup>

In short, the incidence of Western Balkan-related THB crime markedly declined both in the region itself and in the previously-affected Union countries in the 2000s, which is evident from the decreased flows of illicit refugees to the EU's territory after the end of the conflicts, the declining intra-regional vice industry, and the occupation of the European THB market by the Bulgarian and Romanian nationalities. As the international community present in the region, together with the Balkan governments, took a firm grip on the THB crime, even by 2004 the SEE region was classified by UNICEF as "the most advanced in the world when it comes to a coordinated, regional approach to the issue of trafficking and the development of governmental responses".<sup>43</sup>

### ***Illegal smuggling of small arms and light weapons***

While in the 1990s the Balkans had become notorious for their production and export of illicit weapons to Western Europe, in the 2000s, by contrast, the SALW traffic from this region in the EU's direction showed a considerable decline.<sup>44</sup> Police data shows that in the 2000s, the number of criminal cases related to the Balkan-linked arms trade was virtually negligible in the EU,<sup>45</sup> with SALW-related criminality becoming one of least visible aspects of organised crime associated with this region. This was due to the fact that large organisations dealing with the illicit arms traffic on a regular basis had disappeared in the region by the early 2000s.<sup>46</sup> By mid-2005, the situation improved further, and the European Commission/COE did not even mention Balkan SALW traffic as a problem for the EU.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Papanicolaou, *The Sex Industry, Human Trafficking and the Global Prohibition Regime: A Cautionary Tale from Greece*, 391-396.

Figures available for other EU countries for the indicated time-span also confirm a strikingly low presence of Western Balkan victims of THB (UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*).

<sup>42</sup> UNODC. 2010. *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, 48; UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 77-78, 122.

<sup>43</sup> Limanowska, *Trafficking in Human Beings in South Eastern Europe*, 93.

<sup>44</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 84; Anastasijevic, Dejan. 2006. *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*. Austria: HUMSEC, 10; I3.

<sup>45</sup> Hajdinjak, Marco. 2002. *Smuggling in Southeast Europe. The Yugoslav Wars and the Development of Regional Criminal Networks in the Balkans*. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Council of Europe. 2002. *Organised crime situation report 2001*. PC-S-CO (2002) 6 E. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 37.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission / Council of Europe, *Update of the 2006 Situation Report on Organized and Economic Crime in South-Eastern Europe*.

Thus, as regards the pre-2005 period, the SEESAC already mentioned in 2003 that “high levels of weapons are not present in the area of Southern Adriatic region [*Croatia, BiH, Montenegro*] any more”. According to the SEESAC, “except for a few seizures in border check points, smuggling small arms and ammunition does not play a major role, simply because there is no profitable market in Croatia, BiH and Montenegro”.<sup>48</sup> In its 2006 survey on Croatia, the SEESAC pointed to a relative saturation of the Croatian market and the little domestic demand for firearms from abroad. According to the SEESAC, “there is no evidence of high-volume, state-facilitated trafficking” and “the majority of interceptions [can be] classified as ‘ant’ traffic”.<sup>49</sup> As regards Kosovo, the SEESAC pointed to improved border controls and a more advanced law enforcement collaboration as major factors contributing to the diminished external SALW traffic: “it is unlikely that SALW have been transited through Kosovo in large numbers in recent years”.<sup>50</sup> Concerning Montenegro, SEESAC mentioned that “weapon transfers in and out of Montenegro [...] have severely declined since 2000” and that “arms trafficking seems to have lost its profitability in the Republic”.<sup>51</sup> The same argument continued in 2005 concerning Serbia: “A combination of an improvement in the security environment, a reduction in ethnic conflict, weakened demand owing probably to market saturation and an increase in law enforcement capacity has contributed to a decrease in trafficking levels, as witnessed by a decrease in border interception”.<sup>52</sup>

Concerning the post-2005 period, several indicators confirm the Western Balkans’ decreasing role in the European market of illicit SALW. The decline in both domestic SALW production and external weapons’ traffic towards the EU was due to the success of major weapon collection programmes that were administered by all regional governments in the Balkans beginning in the early 2000s, with assistance from the international community.<sup>53</sup> To address the problem with illicit SALW circulation, the governments put into effect such measures as the criminalisation of illegal possession and the use of SALW, international pressure on the Serbian government,<sup>54</sup> and amnesties in exchange for the voluntary SALW surrender by the local population.<sup>55</sup> By 2007, if compared to many countries in Western Europe, the Western Balkans already had a far lower number of SALW per capita and quite low rates of arms-related violence (which are insignificant even by the EU standards).<sup>56</sup> Altogether, there

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<sup>48</sup> SEESAC. 2003. *Cross-border Trafficking in South Eastern Europe – Assessing Trafficking Activities in the Southern Adriatic Region*. SEESAC.

<sup>49</sup> SEESAC. 2006. *SALW Survey of Croatia*. SEESAC.

<sup>50</sup> SEESAC. 2006. *SALW Survey of Kosovo*. SEESAC.

<sup>51</sup> SEESAC. 2004. *‘A house isn’t a home without a gun’. SALW Survey. Republic of Montenegro*. SEESAC.

<sup>52</sup> UNDP. 2005. *Living with the Legacy. SALW Survey – Republic of Serbia*. UNDP.

<sup>53</sup> Thus, the total amount of various types of SALW collected in 2000-2008 was 238,739 items (Prezelj, Iztok. 2010. *The Small Arms and Light Weapons Problem in the Western Balkans*, in *Transnational Terrorism, Organized Crime and Peace-Building. Human Security in the Western Balkans*, edited by Benedek, Wolfgang / Daase, Christopher / Duyne, Petrus, van and Dimitrijevi Vojin. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 220).

<sup>54</sup> Serbia was the major producer and exporter of SALW in the 1990s (Anastasijevic, *Organized Crime in the Western Balkans*, 157).

<sup>55</sup> Prezelj, *The Small Arms and Light Weapons Problem in the Western Balkans*, 225.

<sup>56</sup> UNODC. 2008. *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans and Affected Countries*, 83; UNODC. 2010. *World Drug Report*, 130.

was a decline in SALW traffic internally in the Balkans and a significant reduction in the frequency of Balkan-related SALW crimes in the EU in the 2000s.<sup>57</sup>

To summarise, as an aggregate result of the normalisation of the regional security environment after the disorderly 1990s, the diminished domestic production of arms, market saturation, and major weapon collection programmes implemented by regional governments, Western Balkan-linked SALW crime in Europe considerably decreased in the 2000s.

## **The political dynamics of Euro-Balkan police cooperation**

### ***The 2000-2005 period***

As evident from the previous analysis, the scope and incidence of Western Balkan-linked organised crime in the EU was on a continuous decline throughout the 2000s, as a result of the cessation of the wars in the region and the concomitant instability. It would be therefore natural to expect the EU to have limited interest in the Balkan organised crime problem in that decade. Surprisingly enough, the Union considerably intensified its collaboration on these matters with the region, with the number of practical Euro-Balkan anti-crime initiatives seeing a continuous increase, especially in the post-2005 period. This growing trend towards police collaboration is attributable to a radical change in the EU's political position concerning the Balkans. While previously the EU saw the region as “irremediably alien”, after 1999/2000 the Union's vision of its relationships with the region transformed into one of an “interlocked future between the two areas”.<sup>58</sup>

The Kosovo crisis of March 1998-June 1999 was a major event that prompted the EU to recognise the Balkan domestic security situation as an integral part of its own security and to embrace police cooperation as part of its foreign policy in this region. Kosovo revealed the profound strategic miscalculations of the EU's previous policy line in the Balkans, including serious drawbacks of the regional system of collective security that the Union had attempted to construct in the 1990s through its diplomatic demarches, chronic dependency on the U.S. presence in the region, and the failure of the post-Dayton region-building strategies to achieve their proclaimed stabilisation objectives.<sup>59</sup> As a result, the Union decided to opt for a *proactive, comprehensive, and longer-term* conflict-prevention and integration strategy towards the Western Balkans that would

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<sup>57</sup> Prezelj, *The Small Arms and Light Weapons Problem in the Western Balkans*; Spapens, Toine. 2007. Trafficking in Illicit Firearms for Criminal Purposes within the European Union. *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 15(3), 367.

<sup>58</sup> Belloni, Roberto. 2009. European Integration and the Western Balkans: Lessons, Prospects and Obstacles. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 11(3), 317.

<sup>59</sup> According to Bechev, while the Royaumont Process was too narrowly focused thematically, the Regional Approach only reinforced the pre-existing differentiation among the participating Balkan countries (Bechev, Dimitar. 2006. Carrots, Sticks and Norms: the EU and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 8(1), 32).

Obviously, trade concessions and financial assistance on their own were insufficient to draw the Balkan states onto a path of sustainable transformation. (Elbasani, Arolda. 2008. The Stabilization and Association Process in the Balkans: Overloaded Agenda and Weak Incentives? *EUI Working Paper, SPS 2008/03* [accessed: 15 June 2020]).

eradicate the underlying roots of conflict. If previously the Union treated the region as separate from the 'European mainstream', in the late 1990s/early 2000s, a rhetorical shift occurred whereby the region ceased to be external to European civilisation and the Union started to increasingly treat it as its own. This EU strategic reorientation regarding the Balkans coincided with the Union's growing political aspiration at the time to "increase its influence in global affairs".<sup>60</sup>

The paradigmatic shift in the EU's political line concerning the region led to the growing securitisation of Balkan organised crime. While in the 1990s the EU paid little attention to regional organised crime, starting in the early 2000s the Western Balkans became increasingly presented in EU rhetoric as a 'gangsters' paradise', with such high-profile criminal cases as the assassination of Serbian prime minister Zoran Djindjic in 2003 by a network of paramilitaries linked to Balkan mafia circles<sup>61</sup> and the involvement of Montenegrin president Milo Dukanovic in the illicit contraband of cigarettes in 2002, becoming a matter of heated discussion in the political circles in Brussels. Institutionally, the EU's political shift regarding the Balkans materialised in the launch of the two new institutionalised political frameworks for the Union's relations with the region: the 'Stability Pact' and the 'Stabilisation and Association Process' (SAP).<sup>62</sup> Much in contrast to the Union's previous foreign policy initiatives (the Royaumont initiative and the Regional Approach), the phenomenon of indigenous Western Balkan organised crime was now acknowledged in the EU to be at the core of profoundly interdependent security problems in the region and officially police cooperation acquired an important status in both strategies.

At the same time, despite 'securitisation moves', during the initial post-Kosovo War period and well until the mid-2000s, the EU did not devise a coherent policy to tackle Balkan insecurity. The uncertainty about the exact scenario for the region was a major reason behind the EU's ambivalent stance towards the phenomenon of Balkan organised crime. Politically, the EU oscillated between the Stability Pact and the SAP, both of which followed radically different strategic logics. If the Stability Pact was intended to serve a basic post-Kosovo War stabilisation and 'conflict prevention' tool of the Balkans, the SAP was a policy of a comprehensive, step-by-step transformation of the region aiming at its eventual integration into the 'European mainstream'. As a result of the EU's uncertainty regarding the region, until 2003/2004 the Pact acted as a leading institutionalised avenue to coordinate the Union's relations with the Balkans and its principal vehicle to pursue anti-crime cooperation there. The SAP, by contrast, remained in a "dormant state" until the mid-2000s and very little, if

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<sup>60</sup> European Commission. 1997. *AGENDA 2000: For a Stronger and Wider Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

<sup>61</sup> Gadjanova, Elena. 2006. *The State of Local Democracy in the Western Balkans. A Study of Local Democratic Processes and Institutions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 188.

<sup>62</sup> The SAP was initiated by the European Commission in May and endorsed by the Council in June 1999, while the Stability Pact was adopted in June 1999 and officially inaugurated at the international summit in Sarajevo in July 1999 (European Commission. 1999. *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Stabilization and Association process for countries of South-Eastern Europe*, COM (99)235, 26 May 1999; Stability Pact. 1999. *Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe*. Cologne, 10 June 1999).

any, police work was carried through its mechanisms. It is only after the Pact's "political demise" in the mid-2000s and the accompanying political changes in the EU's position regarding the Balkans that the SAP-related police cooperation gathered full pace.

Both the aims and pragmatic content of the Balkan-oriented cooperative police projects that were launched under the aegis of the Pact and the SAP were reflective of the EU's power-political concerns in the Balkans. Thus, the Pact was specifically tailored to address larger security challenges in the region in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo War, or "to plot a route in response to the Kosovo War".<sup>63</sup> With its comprehensive membership (over 40 countries, including Balkan participants, and international organisations), the Pact focused on conflict prevention through the promotion of democratisation, peace, and regional partnership in the Balkans. Politically, the EU considered the Pact to be an ideal transitional solution until a more comprehensive integrative framework of the SAP gains momentum. In other words, by adopting the Pact as its chief initiative, the EU took a wait-and-see approach before making a more credible political solution regarding the future of its Balkan periphery.

The Pact was "put together in a hasty manner, very much under the pressure of circumstances [and it] reflected the EU's conviction that something must be done".<sup>64</sup> Due to the Union's ambivalent approach regarding the 'European perspective' of the Balkans, only a limited number of anti-crime initiatives were launched through the Pact's mechanisms during its functioning period. These were general anti-crime projects that were implemented by the 'JHA Working Table' (the 'Working Table III' [WTIII]), the Pact's main body responsible for JHA cooperation. In terms of both content and purpose, these projects were strongly reflective of the EU's preoccupation with the stabilisation and the post-war transformation of the regional security environment. In the words of Blockmans,<sup>65</sup> in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, there was a realisation that "any stable, long-term settlement in the Western Balkans [would] not be possible until all ethnic-territorial and constitutional disputes are resolved". This settlement was to be achieved through the establishment of fundamental structural conditions for pacification in the area.<sup>66</sup> Since insufficient regional interaction in the Balkans in the 1990s was one of reasons behind ethno-political conflicts, the EU considered strengthening cooperative ties among former rivals through enhanced interaction on internal security matters as a means of ensuring pacification and political consolidation of the war-torn region. For this reason, the Union especially encouraged the WTIII to advance anti-crime projects with a broader regional orientation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fakiolas, Efstathios and Nikolaos Tzafakis. 2008. Transformation or Accession? Reflecting on the EU's Strategy Towards the Western Balkans. *European Foreign Affairs Review* 13(3), 382.

<sup>64</sup> Bechev, *Carrots, Sticks and Norms: the EU and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe*, 34-36.

<sup>65</sup> Blockmans, Steven. 2007. *Tough Love: The European Union's Relations with the Western Balkans*. Brussels (accessed: 3 March 2017), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Greco, Ettore. 2004. *South-Eastern Europe. The Expanding EU Role*, in *European Union Foreign and Security Policy. Towards a Neighbourhood Strategy*, edited by Dannreuther, Roland. London and New York: Routledge, 66.

<sup>67</sup> The projects motivated by this overarching strategic rationale were given priority by the Pact's participants over more pragmatically-oriented anti-crime projects. The 'Stolen Vehicle Crime Project'

The political objective of ensuring peace among the Pact's Balkan participants and thus eliminating the ground for potential future conflicts in the region was at the core of two overarching initiatives with a wider thematic focus on crime-fighting that the WTIII implemented during its functioning period (2000-2005). These were the 'Initiative to Fight Organised Crime' (SPOC) and the 'Police Forum Initiative' (PFI). These so-called 'umbrella' initiatives (i.e. encompassing several smaller sub-projects) were exemplary of the EU's strategic aims regarding the Balkans in the post-Kosovo War phase. For example, at the core of several SPOC sub-projects was the EU's political ambition to create a "regional security partnership"<sup>68</sup> among the Pact's participants. The sub-project on a draft regional police cooperation convention based on the pre-Schengen standards of policing is an example of such EU ambitions. Since the lack of strategic coordination among the countries of the region was one of the reasons behind the Kosovo conflict, this sub-project was especially motivated by the goal of enhancing regional interdependence in the internal security area among the Balkan former rivals.

To accomplish this objective, the WTIII initiated strategic discussions among international actors present in the Balkans on the all-regional problems of soft security. At the time of writing the draft convention, regional security practitioners, including legal and academic experts, police and customs officers, border guards, and representatives of criminal intelligence services convened to devise a holistic anti-crime strategy for the whole of the Balkan area.<sup>69</sup> The WTIII encouraged an open informal dialogue among actors in a dense institutional environment to 'bind' regional security concerns together and thereby to provide a remedy against potential future conflicts. Since these experts represented different branches of the security sector, their dialogue was essential for creating the so-called "integrated security complex"<sup>70</sup> in the region and thus for ensuring an even stronger all-regional anchorage of national security concerns among the participants. Politically, therefore, the WTIII acted as a form of 'preventive diplomacy' in the Balkans, as by encouraging networking among various actors it simultaneously contributed to reducing the potential for misunderstanding among diverse ethnic groups.

Other WTIII sub-projects also worked towards the implementation of the EU's post-Kosovo power-political objectives. Thus, the goal of the PFI (implemented in 2001-2006) was to contribute to the 'good governance' and rule of law building in the beneficiary Balkan states. For local police representatives, the PFI organized specialised training modules, such as 'Policing in Multicultural Society' and 'Police Ethics', with an aim to upgrade normative standards of regional law enforcement to the 'ethically superior' European policing standards.

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was one of few exceptions (Busek, Erhard and Björn Kühne. (eds.). 2010. *From Stabilization to Integration. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe*. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 572).

<sup>68</sup> Attina, Fulvio. 2005. Regional Security Partnership: The Concept, Model, Practice and a Preliminary Comparative Scheme. *Jean Monnet Working Papers in Comparative and International Politics* 58, 1-24 (accessed: 20 March 2020).

<sup>69</sup> Muenchow, Sebastian. 2003. *Some Reflections on the Stability Pact Initiative to Fight Organized Crime. 6th Workshop of the Study Group "Regional Stability in South East Europe"*, 1 May 2003, 125-41 (accessed: 5 January 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Mocnik, Mitja. 2008. *Balancing Political and Practical Interests. The SECI Center, in Combating International Crime. The Longer Arm of the Law*, edited by Steven Brown. London and New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 91.

Since violent police malpractice, including participation in the ‘cleansing’ of ethnic minorities, was one of the major causes behind the Balkan ethno-political conflicts, these training modules contributed to the EU's fundamental political objective of eliminating the root causes of the potential future conflicts in the fragile post-Kosovo War regional environment through fostering democratic policing practices in the region.

In sum, in the early 2000s, the EU's collaborative police efforts in the Western Balkans were mainly anchored in the institutional framework of the Stability Pact and were reflective of the Union's overarching political aspiration to ensure the ‘structural rehabilitation’ of the regional security environment. Yet, the number of pragmatic police initiatives undertaken by the Pact's WTIII was negligible and in terms of practical effects the results were not impressive. This is because politically, despite recognising the importance of anti-crime cooperation in the Balkans, the Union still at that time considered practical law enforcement to be of minor significance, especially in comparison with large-scale infrastructure and economic projects. With most financing intended for the WTII (economic issues) and the WTI (democracy and human rights), the WTIII remained considerably under-financed.<sup>71</sup> As the Union did not invest too much political interest in the Pact, by 2003/2004 the Pact moved to the side-lines of Euro-Balkan policy process, with its programmes losing much of their initial appeal for both the Union and the Balkan participants.

With the gradual marginalisation of the Stability Pact as a channel for the Union's policy initiatives in the Balkans, the SAP acquired the status of principal institutional framework for the Union's involvement in the region on police matters. Unlike the Pact, with its vague political perspectives,<sup>72</sup> the SAP offered its Balkan participants the promise of membership of the EU.<sup>73</sup> The SAP was a *comprehensive* political framework for the Western Balkans' association with the EU, with the latter capitalising on its “structural dominance” over the Balkan aspirants, including the promise of access to its decision-making and resources, to realise its power objectives in the region. At the SAP's core was the policy of conditionality rooted in the system of incentives and rewards and accompanied by a step-by-step process of the Balkan applicants' approximation with the Union. The main conditionality instruments that the EU used to attain the aspirant states' compliance with its requirements in the sphere of law enforcement were bilateral contractual agreements – the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), the European Partnerships, the Accession Partnerships, and the new assistance programme: the Community Assistance

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<sup>71</sup> Bechev, Dimitar. 2011. *Constructing South-Eastern Europe. The Politics of Balkan Regional Cooperation*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 122.

A fundamental contradiction between the Pact's ambitious goals and the relatively small resources at its disposal was one of the reasons for its eventual collapse. See Greco, Ettore. 2004. *South-Eastern Europe. The Expanding EU Role*, in *European Union Foreign and Security Policy. Towards a Neighbourhood Strategy*, edited by Dannreuther, Roland. London and New York: Routledge, 67.

<sup>72</sup> The only rhetorical commitment on part of the Pact's stakeholders was to ensure “firm European anchorage to the region” (Stability Pact. 1999. *Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe*, Cologne, 10 June 1999).

<sup>73</sup> The SAP was a ‘quasi-accession’ rather than full-fledged association framework. Given the enormity and systemic character of problems plaguing the Balkans, the accession date was made dependent on the Balkan countries' individual progress in complying with the EU-defined accession requirements (Bechev, *Carrots, Sticks and Norms: the EU and Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe*, 42).

for Reconstruction, Development, and Stabilization (CARDS). The provision of financial and other benefits to the Balkan aspirants depended on their successful performance in the JHA area, including their success in fighting organised crime by means of enhanced police cooperation.

Yet, if the strategic agenda of police cooperation under the SAP was subjected to the EU's overarching political aim to integrate the region into the 'European mainstream', the SAP's practical anti-crime agenda left much to be desired, at least until the mid-2000s. Again, this was a result of the confluence of several political circumstances. Firstly, as earlier mentioned, the SAP assumed a dominant political role in the region only in the mid-2000s. Before that, the preponderant role of the Stability Pact, which accorded little attention to the JHA issues, prevented police cooperation from developing its full potential. Secondly, in 2000-2005, the EU was preoccupied with resolving the remaining constitutional problems of Yugoslavia's disintegration (in BiH, between Serbia and Montenegro, and between Serbia and Kosovo), the applicant countries' progress in democratic reform, refugee return, and compliance with obligations stemming from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Thirdly, the EU was preoccupied (until mid-2004) with its preparations for the eastward enlargement, while still lacking "a coherent expression of its [strategic] aims in SEE".<sup>74</sup> Therefore, until the mid-2000s, police cooperation continued to remain of secondary importance for the EU, as compared to the afore-mentioned larger political priorities. Hence, despite its proclamations, the EU conducted almost no police collaboration with the Balkans,<sup>75</sup> or in the best case subordinated cooperation on these matters to its paramount political objective of ensuring the rehabilitation of the fragile post-Kosovo War regional environment through security sector reform.<sup>76</sup> Only after the completion of the big bang enlargement project in 2004 and the Union's eventual offer of a *credible* accession perspective to the Balkan applicants did joint police activities intensify.

### ***Post-2005 period***

In short, while before the mid-2000s the EU was preoccupied with outlining the strategic contours of its anti-crime cooperation in the Balkans, as well as with other major questions of pan-regional security, the practical dimension of Euro-

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<sup>74</sup> Chandler, David. 2007. EU Statebuilding: Securing the Liberal Peace through EU Enlargement. *Global Society* 21(4), 604.

<sup>75</sup> During the SAP's early functioning phase, police cooperation was conducted in the Balkans by individual EU member states (both via the traditional Interpol channels and by liaison officers of the EU's member states stationed in the interior ministries of the Balkan countries [12], through the U.S.-sponsored 'SECI Center', and also through regional security forums such as the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (launched by Italy in 1998).

<sup>76</sup> As a result of the EU's ineffective engagement with internal security matters in the Balkans, the 2004 report of the EU's Friends of the Presidency identified serious setbacks with the EU-guided crime-control strategies in the Balkans and an overall rhetoric-implementation gap: the EU's approach regarding Balkan organised crime remained "uncoordinated and compartmentalised" (Council of the European Union. 2006. *Action Oriented Paper on Improving Cooperation, on Organized Crime, Corruption, Illegal Immigration and Counter-terrorism, between the EU, Western Balkans and Relevant ENP Countries*. Council document 9272/06, 12 May 2006).

Balkan police cooperation was *de facto* inactive. After 2005, by contrast, Euro-Balkan police cooperation with an operational focus grew considerably. This intensification of the Euro-Balkan police initiatives cannot be linked back to the respective dynamics of organised crime, because crime continued to display a downward tendency, with the number of detectable criminal incidents falling in all three major organised crime categories throughout the whole post-2005 period both in the Balkan region and within the EU itself. Instead, the acceleration of joint police activities was due to political shifts that occurred in this sub-phase. These included, firstly, the completion of the ‘big bang’ enlargement project and the SAP obtaining the status of the leading EU foreign policy initiative in the region. With the Pact’s demise and the withdrawal of some international donors from the region, the Union took an almost unilateral lead in organising cooperative JHA projects in the Balkans. The paradigmatic shift “from stabilisation towards integration” in Euro-Balkan relations<sup>77</sup> in late 2004 found its expression in the 2005 Strategy on the External Dimension of JHA, which not only turned internal security cooperation into a clear foreign policy objective for the EU, but also demanded that it “enhance appropriate operational cooperation [...] with priority countries [...] in South-Eastern Europe”.<sup>78</sup> Another important politics-related factor explaining the acceleration of the Euro-Balkan police cooperation was the enhancement of the SAP conditionality regime through so-called ‘sectoral conditionality’. This consisted of intermediate short-term rewards such as the liberalisation of the visa regime that the Union proposed to Western Balkan countries<sup>79</sup> in exchange for their progress in police cooperation.

The EU’s new political consensus on Balkan policy<sup>80</sup> led to a considerable intensification of the practical Euro-Balkan police collaboration from 2005-onwards, despite the decline of organised crime trends. Specifically, this intensification is evident in the growing degree of criminal intelligence and data exchange, operational cross-border investigations and training exercises, and inter-organisational staff exchanges. The regularity and density of professional police interaction between the Union’s police agencies, Europol and the European Police College (CEPOL), and the respective agencies in the Balkans also grew significantly post-2005.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Gordon, Claire. 2009. The Stabilization and Association Process in the Western Balkans: An Effective Instrument of Post-conflict Management? *Ethnopolitics* 8(3-4), 328.

<sup>78</sup> Council of the European Union. 2005. *A Strategy for the External Dimension of JHA: Global Freedom, Security and Justice*. Council document 15446/05, 6 December 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Renner, Stephan and Florian Trauner. 2009. Creeping EU Membership in South-east Europe: The Dynamics of EU Rule Transfer to the Western Balkans. *Journal of European Integration* 31(4), 449-465.

<sup>80</sup> Margaras, Vasilis. 2009. *The EU in the Western Balkans: Setting the Foundations of a Cohesive Strategy?* In *Neighbourhood Challenge. The European Union and Its Neighbours*, edited by Balamir-Coskun, Bezen and Birgul Dimirtas-Coskun. Boca Raton, FL: Universal Publishers, 33.

<sup>81</sup> 12.

Thus, following the EU's political call for stronger police contacts with the Balkans, from the mid-2000s the region turned into a priority geographical area for Europol. Europol adopted its Second Enlargement Strategy (or 'Western Balkan Enlargement Project'<sup>82</sup>; 2006-2008/10), in which Balkan countries were designated a major target for its international cooperation and assistance. The signing of contractual agreements<sup>83</sup> led to strengthened contacts between Europol and the Balkan countries at an inter-agency level, with Balkan liaison officers being placed in Europol's premises in The Hague. In addition, the National Contact Bureaus (NCBs) for liaison with Europol were established in the interior ministries of the participating Balkan states. In January 2010, a new unit dealing specifically with Western Balkan crime was set up in Europol, together with a separate database and a computer programme for running ongoing investigations in the region.<sup>84</sup>

Contacts at a personal level were also intensified during various meetings between Europol's experts and Western Balkan police officials, as well as with liaison officers of the EU member states present in the region. Europol's specialised threat assessment on Ethnic Albanian Crime Networks ('Project Copper') became a tangible output of these meetings. In addition, a whole series of Analytical Work Files (AWFs) dedicated specifically to Balkan crime was taken into operation in the second half of the 2000s.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Europol's involvement in the region was stepped up through expanded professional contacts with specialised Southeastern European regional crime-fighting bodies such as the 'SECI/SELEC Centre'.<sup>86</sup> Finally, the first comprehensive risk assessment report on the phenomenon of Balkan organised crime ('Organised Crime Threat Assessment for South-Eastern Europe') was released by Europol in 2008 as a concrete practical output of the joint collaboration between the Agency and the SELEC.

A similar expansion of work contacts also occurred in the area of police training between CEPOL and educational police institutions in the Balkans. Post-2005, CEPOL started organising regular conferences and seminars with the involvement of law enforcement experts and senior police leaders from the Balkans. Since 2006, contacts between the candidate Balkan countries and CEPOL's experts increased through their participation in the strategic deliberations of CEPOL's External Relations Working Group. Since 2007, CEPOL started hosting individual seminars for the Balkan SAP applicants, and since 2008 pan-regional awareness conferences and seminars for representatives of the police training institutions of the regional countries started to convene in

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<sup>82</sup> Council of the European Union. 2009. *Europol Work Programme 2010*. Council document 13788/09, 2 October 2009.

<sup>83</sup> The first cooperation agreement on personal data exchange was signed in 2006 with Croatia, the SAP's frontrunner. In the second half of the 2000s, Albania, BiH, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia all signed and ratified cooperation agreements on strategic information exchange with Europol, including technical data and police expertise (Europol. 2009. *Europol Experiences of Cooperation in the Western Balkans*. Speech by László Salgó, Europol Assistance Director. Europol, The Hague).

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Justice of Republic of Serbia. 2010. *Counter-measures in the Balkans against Organised Crime and Corruption. Report of the High-level Roundtable*. Brussels: Friends of Europe, 13.

<sup>85</sup> For example, the 'PHOENIX' AWF 07-038 on Balkan-related human trafficking (Europol. 2009. *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the Association of Third Parties to Europol's AWFs*. File no. 3300-381. Europol: The Hague).

<sup>86</sup> Council of the European Union. 2008. *Draft roadmap for the development of relations between Europol and the SECI Center/SELEC*. Council document 14305/2/08, 6 November 2008.

a regular format. During the same period, the ‘Comprehensive Operational Strategic Policing’ (COSPOL) group on Western Balkan organised crime was created within CEPOL, with Italy and the UK as the main coordinators.<sup>87</sup> The signing of cooperation agreements and work arrangements with the educational centres of regional states (with Croatia in 2010) led to the enhancement of professional work contacts on both sides.

In this phase, the EU also started to actively support the bilateral activities of its member states already present in the region. Thus, it encouraged the representatives of the Commission, Council Secretariat, and Europol responsible for contacts with the Balkans to render stronger support to the liaison officers’ network in the Balkans.<sup>88</sup> As a result, a considerable expansion of police contacts at both pan-regional level among all Western Balkan countries and bilateral (cross-border) levels took place in the post-2005 phase. The acceleration of cross-border police interaction among police authorities in the region also occurred after the adoption by the Balkan governments of the Schengen standards for operational police collaboration, which was one of the EU’s conditionality requirements under the SAP. The Schengen *acquis* became part of the domestic legislation of the Balkan states through their adoption in 2006 of the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe.<sup>89</sup> The Convention became the first multilateral agreement concluded between the Southeastern European countries on sensitive internal security matters.<sup>90</sup> Following the adoption of the Convention, cross-border police interaction made significant advances in the Balkans within the time-span of just a few years.<sup>91</sup>

As an aggregate result of these endeavours, in 2010, the EU-Western Balkan Ministerial JHA Forum stated that cooperative police activities at a sub-regional level in the Balkans demonstrated considerable growth in the second half of the 2000s.<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

The aim of this article was to test the validity of the argument on the ‘functionally-driven’ nature of the external dimension of the EU’s police cooperation. To test this proposition, and using the case of the Western Balkans,

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<sup>87</sup> European Police College. 2007. *Work Programme 2008* (accessed: 16 January 2021).

<sup>88</sup> Council of the European Union. 2008. *Strengthening of the EU Lead Nations Liaison Officers network in the Western Balkans*. Council document 6750/2/08, 23 April 2008.

<sup>89</sup> The Convention became the first “multi-jurisdictional cooperation arrangement” (Hufnagel, Saskia. 2010. The Fear of Insignificance: New Perspectives on Harmonising Police Cooperation in Europe and Australia. *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 6(2), 170) providing for a common denominator for cross-border police contacts in the Balkans on such matters as the practical conduct of investigations, mutual secondment of liaison officers, hot pursuit, cross-border surveillance, monitored deliveries, covert cross-border operations, joint investigation teams, threat analysis, exchange of expertise, and transmission of DNA-profiles.

<sup>90</sup> PCC-SEE. 2011. *PCC-SEE 2006-2011*. Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe Secretariat, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Most bilateral and multilateral treaties on police cooperation among Western Balkan states were signed only after 2005, within the PCC-SEE framework (PCC-SEE. 2011. *PCC-SEE 2006-2011*).

<sup>92</sup> Biscevic, Hido. 2010. *Working Together in Strengthening EU Perspectives: The Role of the RCC* (accessed: 18 June 2020).

the article analysed the dynamics of Euro-Balkan police cooperation from a decade-long perspective. The analysis has demonstrated that in the 2000s a progressive decline in the Balkan-linked organised crime occurred in Europe, which was one of the immediate consequences of the cessation of a series of conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia. In the 2000s, Balkan-related organised crime in its three most typical forms – trafficking in drugs, human beings, and SALW – exhibited continuous downward dynamics both in the Balkan region and in the EU. Despite the receding threat of organised crime, joint Euro-Balkan police collaboration significantly intensified in this decade. As criminal dynamics did not coincide temporally with the dynamics of Euro-Balkan law enforcement, the functional factor cannot be held directly accountable for the joint police ventures.

Instead, as the analysis has shown, the major inducement for the externalisation of the EU's police collaboration in the Balkans in the 2000s came from an array of several politics-related factors. In aggregate, these were different manifestations of an overarching power-political factor linked to the EU's growing interest in enhancing its strategic presence in its geographical Balkan neighbourhood. The 1999 Kosovo crisis became a 'critical juncture' that prompted the Union to reconsider its previous passive policy approach regarding Balkan internal security and to embark on a proactive and integrative policy regarding this region, which now included police cooperation as its part. After the Kosovo crisis, Euro-Balkan police cooperation received a strong boost from two overarching EU foreign policy frameworks in the region: the Stability Pact and the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Given the EU's initial uncertainty concerning the political future of the region, cooperative Euro-Balkan law enforcement schemes in the early 2000s developed mainly under the aegis of the Pact, with their content being strongly informed by its political rationale of ensuring the basic post-conflict stabilisation of the regional security environment. Due to the high political priority that the EU attached to these overarching goals of pan-regional stabilisation, in this period there was almost no systematic police cooperation and practical cooperative processes in the field developed ineffectively. The Union's preoccupation with the challenge of eastward enlargement (until the mid-2000s), alongside other politics-related factors, also prevented it from engaging more actively in the Balkans. The resolution of the remaining territorial issues in the region, the completion of the 'big bang' enlargement project, and the strengthening of the SAP's conditionality regime through sectoral policy rewards for the Balkan applicants marked a strategic reorientation in the EU's Balkan policy from stabilisation to integration. This resulted in a considerable intensification of pragmatic Euro-Balkan cooperative police efforts, which is evident in the increased contacts between the EU's police agencies – Europol and CEPOL – and the respective authorities on the Balkan side, as well as the blossoming of multilateral actions at the pan-regional police level in the Balkans.

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