

## **Integration and Crime in the Balkans**

**By Xhavit Shala**

“Quite often in the 90s Brussels<sup>1</sup> stood by as the Balkans were burning.<sup>2</sup> We should not allow this to happen again,” Olli Rehn, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, said in an editorial published in the Financial Times on April 2. The article was both a protest and warning issued in the wake of the EU Council of Minister’s decision to freeze any further enlargement. The decision of the Foreign Ministers of March 23,<sup>3</sup> on freezing any further enlargement until the EU Constitution would be approved was a bad message issued at a worst time for the countries of the Western Balkans.

This decision, however, was to be expected. The EU promise made at Thessalonica in 2003 was immediately put into question in the summer of 2005, when the referendum on the EU constitution failed. A foretaste of the recent decision had been announced in December of 2005 when the Foreign Affaires Commission of the European Parliament talked about replacing the EU accession mechanism with a new instrument.<sup>4</sup> The new instrument would have replaced the current SAA and pre accession agreements and would serve to keep the aspirant countries at the doorsteps of the EU for indefinite period of time.

The EU perspective is the main factor that pushes the reform agenda in the Western Balkans. The EU promise played an important role in cooling down the nationalist passions in the region. It also helped ensure respect for human rights and increased the security and the spirit of cooperation in the region. It is this perspective that is forcing countries in the region to hand over to the Hague tribunal the individuals charged for war crimes. To keep this perspective alive for his people, Ramush Haradinaj, though he fought alongside the NATO forces, handed himself over to The Hague. The policy of

---

<sup>1</sup> These articles may be quoted in any form up to and inclusive of five hundred (500) words without express written permission of the author, providing the text does not amount to a complete article. When used in keeping with such condition, the notice of copyright must appear on the title or copyright page or opening screen of the work.

<sup>2</sup> The article was published in the daily "Standard" April 13, 2006.  
<http://www.acnss.com/html/studime/2ballkani.htm>

<sup>3</sup>The EU will take a long brake (on enlargement) now that it admitted Bulgaria and Rumania. This decision was taken in a session of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affaires that took place last night in the context of the summit of the EU head of states in Brussels. The ministers have taken a decision to freeze any further EU enlargement until the approval of the Constitution or any other document that brings reforms in the current structures of the Union. The EU ministers also raised concerns about the Union absorbing capacity. Following the discussions, the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn reminded the EU member state of their EU promise to the Balkans. (BRUSSELS 24 Mars 2006-Makfax/Balkanweb)

<sup>4</sup> On March 16, 2006, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel suggested that the aspirant countries could be offered a privileged partnership, rather than membership.

conditions followed by the EU has played an important role in the intensification of the fight against trafficking and organized crime in the countries of the region.

Putting this perspective into question on the argument that the EU lacks “absorbing capacity,”<sup>5</sup> would strengthen the forces of war in the Balkans and would make the region more attractive to Islamic extremism. The instability created by such developments would push the Balkans into conflict<sup>6</sup> and create an environment where illegal trafficking and organized crime would flourish. “Destabilization would cost the EU more than the price of European perspective,” the former German Chancellor, Schroeder, said, shortly after the failure of the referendum on the EU Constitution.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike some EU countries, the US has never put in question the European perspective of the Western Balkans and they are pushing the EU to remain committed. Concerned by the recent hesitations coming from Brussels, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Nicholas Burns, said the following a few days ago: “we think that Europe should make clear to these states that their future will be in the European Union. We should give the same type of signal about NATO.”<sup>8</sup> According to Burns, a Europe whole and at peace has been the continued US strategy since the Cold War.

In spite of the current debates in the EU, Albania, Kosova and other responsible countries in the region must remain committed to the path of reform and maintain faith in the European future of their countries. When having to pick between the destabilization of the Balkans and its European future, Western Europe will most certainly choose to make this trouble region part of the EU. Otherwise, as the former British Minister for Europe, Denis MacShane, says, “the Balkans will either be Europeanized or we will face the risk of Europe becoming Balkanized.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> The statement issued from the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the countries of the EU and the Western Balkans included the condition of the “absorbing capacity” as a precondition for the future accession of the aspirant Western Balkans countries. On March 17, the European Parliament passed a resolution that underlined that the “absorbing capacity” remains a condition for the admission of new countries in the EU.

<sup>6</sup> In an interview for Reuters, the EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, expressed his concern about the impact that the new enlargement rules would put on the delicate balance of the Balkans. “It would be greatly irresponsible to neglect our commitments to the Balkans at a time when we were able to bring stability to one of the least stabilized areas of Europe,” he said. In spite of his statement, the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs continued their discussions over the absorbing capacity under the further support provided by a resolution of the European parliament.

<sup>7</sup> The statement of the German Chancellor Schroeder following the meeting with Macedonian Prime Minister Vlado Bockovski, June 8, 2005 (Macedonian Government Web site, A1 TV - 08/06/05; Macedonian Government Web site, A1 TV, Telma TV, Vecer - 09/06/05;)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.lobi.com.mk/?ItemID=5169C824245109449FFBF8C1CB7D3D6C>

<sup>9</sup> Interview of Dr. Mac Shane given to BBC Albanian language journalist Diana Kola, aired on March 22, 2006

