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SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN POST-CONFLICT WESTERN BALKANS: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

SSR	Security Sector Reform
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
JNA	Yugoslav People's Army
UDBA	State Security Service (Yugoslavia)
VOS	Military Intelligence Service (Yugoslavia)
OHR	Office of the High Representative
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
MAP	Membership Action Plan
PfP	Partnership for Peace
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
SBS	State Border Service (Bosnia)
SDB	State Security Service (Serbia)
BIA	Security Intelligence Agency (Serbia)
VBA	Military Intelligence Agency (Serbia)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement
SPO	Special Prosecutor's Office
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DRC	Defence Reform Commission
PRC	Police Restructuring Commission
SNSD	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats
SAP	Stabilisation and Association Process
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration
MoD	Ministry of Defence
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KPC	Kosovo Protection Corps
EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
KFOR	Kosovo Force

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Western Balkan countries became a centrepiece for international efforts in post-conflict reconstruction and state-building. Among the areas of intervention has been security sector reform (SSR), a foundational element for establishing stability, accountability, and democracy in the region. SSR in the Western Balkans has aimed to disassemble the legacy of authoritarian rule, rebuild security institutions, and instill a framework for governance that respects human rights and promotes the rule of law. The success of these reforms is widely considered essential to both the consolidation of democracy within these states and the stability of Europe as a whole.

Each of the Western Balkan countries mentioned in this work, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo*, has a unique SSR journey shaped by its historical context, socio-political dynamics, and the involvement of international actors. Although Croatia is geographically part of the Western Balkans, it is generally excluded from this group in studies of SSR due to its earlier accession to the European Union in 2013 and the completion of its post-conflict reconstruction phase.[1] This research examines the SSR processes in the remaining Western Balkan countries, focusing on how each has responded to the challenges of reforming and professionalising its security institutions.

Academic literature on SSR in the Western Balkans is mostly focused on the important role of international actors on security reforms across the region. However, the complexities of SSR remain inadequately addressed, often reduced to simplified narratives of compliance with Western norms. This easily overlooks the unique, delicate challenges each state faces in balancing external influences with local political realities. In particular, Kosovo's unique status as a partially recognised state, Serbia's historical connections to the former Yugoslavia, and the ethnically fragmented society of Bosnia and Herzegovina each present distinct obstacles that affect SSR outcomes. Consequently, a gap persists in the literature regarding the impact of SSR on long-term stability, democratic governance, and regional security, as well as the fact that existing comparative politics literature is seemingly outdated or prone to simple characterisation.

[1] European Commission. *Croatia and the EU. European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations*. Accessed October 2, 2024. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/croatia_en.

In light of these gaps, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of SSR across the mentioned Western Balkan countries, examining the extent to which reforms have addressed issues of accountability, transparency, and human rights.

In this context, accountability will be referred to as the obligation of security institutions to act in the public interest and be answerable to legal, political, and civil oversight mechanisms to prevent abuse of power. Transparency is the practice of making information about security policies, decisions, and actions accessible to the public, allowing for informed citizen engagement and oversight. Security Sector Reform is defined as the process of transforming a state's security institutions, such as the military, police, and intelligence services, toward democratic governance and adherence to the rule of law, with the aim to increase both security and justice for citizens.

Through evaluating the influence of both internal factors and international actors, this research aims to offer a clearer picture of SSR's role in promoting democratic stability and strengthening security governance. Guided by theoretical frameworks from Francis Fukuyama and Roland Paris, this study critically assesses the balance between international support and local ownership in the reform process. Above all, it emphasises the importance of SSR in advancing democratic norms, arguing that reforms must not only meet international standards but also align with the region's complex social and political contexts to achieve sustainable security governance.

This study draws on a diverse body of literature, including both English and Serbian-language sources, to analyse the SSR processes in the Western Balkans. English-language materials provide a broad theoretical foundation, encompassing international perspectives on SSR, democratic governance, and regional stability. Serbian-language sources include national policy documents, legal analyses, local law journals, and reports from government and civil society organisations within the Western Balkans. This multilingual approach allows for a deeper understanding of the region's SSR challenges from both international and local viewpoints, though it may introduce limitations due to potential bias in regional sources.

While English and Serbian resources form the core of the reference literature, perspectives from additional languages (such as Bosnian, Macedonian, and Albanian) are indirectly cited from these references to maintain accuracy in interpretation. The study's scope is focused on

SSR developments in the Western Balkans from the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s to the present, with emphasis on post-conflict reforms aimed at establishing accountability, transparency, and human rights within security institutions. Earlier historical influences, such as Yugoslavia's governance structures prior to its dissolution, are referenced selectively to contextualise the unique SSR trajectories of each country.

The study is structured as follows: Chapter I provides a historical overview of Yugoslavia, its governance structures, and the factors leading to its collapse, laying the groundwork for understanding the challenges faced by post-conflict Western Balkan countries in establishing stable security sectors. Chapter II shifts the focus to broader challenges in post-conflict reconstruction, discussing the complexities of building functional state institutions and the lessons learnt from global post-conflict settings that serve as a framework for the SSR challenges in the Western Balkans.

Chapter III contextualises SSR in the Western Balkans, analysing the specific socio-political dynamics and ethnic divisions within the region, along with the influential roles of international actors like the EU and NATO. It highlights how regional security concerns and European integration efforts shape SSR across these states.

Subsequent chapters examine individual countries: Chapter IV delves into Albania's unique SSR journey, from dismantling authoritarian structures to addressing challenges revealed by the 1997 crisis. Chapter V analyses Bosnia and Herzegovina's SSR efforts within a deeply divided society, focusing on how international oversight and ethnic complexities impact reform. Chapter VI covers North Macedonia's SSR progression, highlighting ethnic integration challenges and the role of international actors. Chapter VII explores SSR in Serbia and Montenegro, looking at shared historical trajectories and individual paths post-independence. Finally, Chapter VIII provides a focused analysis of Kosovo, discussing the impact of international supervision on SSR and the challenges posed by its contested status.

Each chapter explores how SSR addresses issues of accountability, transparency, and human rights within these contexts, with a concluding analysis on SSR's overall role in consolidating democratic norms across the region.

CHAPTER I. YUGOSLAVIA: GOVERNANCE, SECURITY, AND DISINTEGRATION

In order to understand the Western Balkan countries and their SSR today, it is essential to revisit the collapse of Yugoslavia. The disintegration of the socialist federation in the early 1990s triggered a series of violent conflicts and exposed deep-rooted weaknesses in the governance and security structures that had held the state together. Following the First World War, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established in 1918 through the union of the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs with the Kingdom of Serbia, gaining international recognition in July 1922 at the Conference of Ambassadors in Paris.[2] In 1929, under King Alexander I, the state was rechristened to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia[3] an experiment with the willingness to unify diverse national identities under one central authority.

This newly formed state, built on the idea of unification of various ethnic and national groups under a single governance structure, faced multiple challenges from the very beginning. Issues of national identity, governance, and security quickly resurfaced, creating fractures that would later contribute to the inevitable disintegration of the country. These developments laid the groundwork for the conflicts that unfolded in the 1990s, later shaping the security and political landscape of the Western Balkan countries.

The rise and fall of Yugoslavia is crucial in understanding the post-conflict SSR in the Balkan region. The governance structures and security apparatus of this period left a complex legacy, with challenges in maintaining unity, accountability, and effective governance. Today, the aftermath of Yugoslavia's collapse continues to influence the security institutions in the successor states, and the reforms undertaken have had to address these issues. The analysis of these reforms and their impact on accountability, transparency, and human rights, is essential to understanding their role in the consolidation of democratic norms across the region.

1.1 The rebirth and legacy of Tito's Yugoslavia

In 1946, after multiple post-war tensions, Yugoslavia was re-established as a united socialist federation under the leadership of the Josip Broz Tito. The term *former Yugoslavia* that we use

[2] Bojka Đukanović, *Historical Dictionary of Montenegro* (Montenegro: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023), 400-410.
[3] Dejan Đokić, *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2003), 149-153.

today commonly refers to the *Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (SFRY), which existed from 1946 until its dissolution on June 25, 1991. Under the SFRY Constitution, Art. 2 from 1974, this includes six republics that constituted the federation, "the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, the Socialist Republic of Serbia, as well as the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo, which were part of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, the Socialist Republic of Croatia and the Socialist Republic of Montenegro."[4]

Unlike the earlier interwar kingdom, Tito's Yugoslavia placed significant emphasis on recognising the national sentiments, linguistic entitlements, and cultural rights of nearly all its populace. The Constitution categorised these groups into two primary divisions: the "nations" (*narodi*), comprising Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and (from 1971) Muslims; and the "nationalities" (*narodnosti*), encompassing Albanians, Hungarians, Turks, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Romanians, Ruthenes/Ukrainians, Czechs, and Italians.[5] Accordingly, all "members of nationalities have, in accordance with the constitution and the law, the right to use their language and script in exercising their rights and duties, as well as in proceedings before state bodies and organisations exercising public authority."[6]

Tito's rallying cry of *Brotherhood and Unity*[7] reflected his effort to promote coexistence among Yugoslavia's diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions. This was enshrined in the constitutional framework of 1974, which further solidified Yugoslavia's identity as a federal state. The Constitution, as for the communist part, also highlighted the principles of self-management and self-government. According to Art. 88 of the Constitution, "the working class and all working people are the bearers of authority and management of other social affairs. The working class and all working people exercise authority and manage other social affairs organised into organisations of associated labour and other self-managed organisations and

[4] Transl. by author from the original Serbian text of the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, *Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (1974), accessed July 10 2024, https://www.yuhistorija.com/serbian/doc/Ustav_SFRJ_iz_1974.pdf.

[5] Elliot Short, *Building a Multiethnic Military in Post-Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 2018), 33-37.

[6] *Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (1974).

[7] Tito wanted to create a unified socialist state that could withstand external pressures and internal divisions. The motto *Братство и Јединство* (*Brotherhood and Unity*) embodied his vision of promoting cooperation among Yugoslavia's diverse ethnic groups, becoming central to its national identity under his leadership.

communities, as well as class and other socio-political and social organisations."[8] From 1950 to 1954, the self-governing mechanism underwent significant changes, marking the beginning of decentralisation. This allowed for greater local autonomy, especially in economic matters, while federal oversight diminished.[9]

Yugoslavia's decentralised system aimed to harmonise the diverse interests of its constituent republics by promoting a collaborative approach to governance. However, while decentralisation empowered local authorities, it also fragmented central control, a dynamic that would later prove destabilising.

Tito's Yugoslavia became a leader in non-alignment during the Cold War, balancing relations between the East and West. In a 1951 speech in Belgrade, Tito confirmed Yugoslavia's independent path, stating that:

> *"In the West there are voices that say that Yugoslavia is in danger and that an attack against Yugoslavia would imply the grave threat of a wider conflict. This does us no harm; on the contrary, since it is a question of our security and since it diminishes the possibility of anyone deciding to attack."*[10]

This unique and specific position allowed the nation to make and decide on its own course, free from the ideological constraints that divided much of Europe.

The Yugoslav model of socialism, often referred to as *Titoism*, presented an alternative vision of governance. While rooted in Leninist principles of democratic centralism, Titoism adapted socialism to Yugoslavia's multi-ethnic context with the motto "national in form, socialist in content."[11] This unique governance model not only emphasised the Communist Party's central authority but also accommodated diverse ethnic identities within the republics.

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[8] *Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (1974).

[9] Bernard Chavance, Charles Hauss, and Mark Selden, *The Transformation of Communist Systems: Economic Reform Since the 1950s* (Routledge, 2020), 132-135.

[10] Josip Broz Tito, speech, February 16, 1951, in *Documents on International Affairs 1951* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 379-386.

[11] Dejan Guzina. *The Self-Destruction of Yugoslavia*. (Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 27, no. 1/2 2000), 21-27.

While Tito's unique model of socialist federalism maintained Yugoslavia's unity for decades, this balance relied heavily on the institutions that were focused on enforcing national security and stability. It is to these institutions that we will analyse now.

1.2 The security sector in Yugoslavia

The security sector of Yugoslavia was a complex apparatus integral to the governance and stability of this socialist federation. Consisting of various interconnected entities, it played an important role in safeguarding the interests of the state and maintaining order. Understanding the structure and functioning of the security sector provides us with important insight into the governance dynamics during the era of the SFRY and sets the stage for analysing how these institutions shaped the post-conflict SSR of Western Balkan states today.

The SFRY's security sector included several key components, each with unique roles and responsibilities that reflected the broader governance model of centralised control and ethnic diversity. These components were:

1.2.1 The Yugoslav People's Army (JNA)

Founded in 1945 under Josip Broz Tito's leadership, the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) appeared as the successor to the partisan forces that had fought Axis powers. It represented a consolidation of various armed groups into a unified military institution.[12] Richard Clinton Herrick described JNA as "a function of the defence needs of a medium-sized state and the political needs of a communist regime attempting to unite a multi-ethnic society."[13] Elliot Short also said that "alongside Yugoslav territorial defence forces, JNA was credited with making Yugoslavia is a secure and stable state, 'an invincible bastion for every aggressor' an 'armed fortress, and a 'veritable hornets' nest for any enemy force."[14]

The JNA's primary objective was to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Yugoslavia. As a multi-ethnic federation with six republics and several autonomous regions, Yugoslavia faced both internal and external threats to its unity:

[12] Mihailo Crnobrnja, *The Yugoslav Drama* (London: IB Tauris, 2nd edition, 1996), 120-123.
[13] Richard Clinton Herrick, quoted in Thomas-Durell Young, *Anatomy of Post-Communist European Defence Institutions: The Mirage of Military Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 26-28.
[14] Elliot Short, *Building a Multiethnic Military in Post-Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 69.

> *"The operational army continues to be regarded as the backbone, the principle component of national defence. It alone is capable, in terms of its weapons, technical equipment, power, mobility, organisation, and trained cadres, to wage regular frontal battles, in all forms of operations."*[15]

The JNA's primary focus was to ensure the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Yugoslavia. As a multi-ethnic federation with six republics and several autonomous regions, Yugoslavia faced both internal and external threats to its unity. The JNA's conscription-based military drew personnel from all ethnic groups across the republics, aiming to represent the military force of the Yugoslav proletariat and uphold revolutionary principles that rejected ideologies like nationalism. As a result, the military structure did not align with organising based on nationality. Tito reaffirmed this stance in the aftermath of the Croatian Crisis in 1971, criticising Croatian separatists who advocated for a Croatian army:

> *"Little by little to take the army in their own, Croatian hands... they will have to wait a long time for this. I believe that the Sava will first have to start running upstream toward the Triglav before that happens."*[16]

This approach was intended to show a sense of national unity and loyalty to the federal government. Under Art. 242 and 243 of the SFRY Constitution, "the composition of the officer corps and appointments to higher command and managerial positions in the Yugoslav People's Army, the principle of proportional representation of republics and autonomous provinces is applied" and "in the armed forces of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in accordance with the Constitution of the SFRY, equality of languages and scripts of the peoples and nationalities of Yugoslavia is ensured."[17]

In reality, the situation was different. Despite these intentions, the centralisation of the JNA under Belgrade's control and its predominantly Serbian officer corps contributed to growing resentment in non-Serb republics.

This centralised structure became increasingly problematic in the 1980s and 1990s, as nationalist sentiments and demands for autonomy from constituent republics rose. The JNA's

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[15] Jovan Radovanovic, *The Operational Army: The Yugoslav Concept of General People's Defence* (Belgrade: Međunarodna Politika, 1970), 271.
[16] *Borba* (Belgrade, 1971), quoted in Milivojević, *The Political Role of the Yugoslav People's Army in Contemporary Yugoslavia*, 21, accessed from CIA-RDP86T00608R000600170003-6.pdf.
[17] *Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije* (1974).

role as a defender of federal unity placed it at odds with these separatist movements, ultimately undermining its effectiveness as a unifying force. As we will explore later in the text, the JNA's struggles to balance its multi-ethnic composition and centralised command structure contributed to the growing instability that would fracture Yugoslavia, leaving a lasting impact on post-conflict SSR.

1.2.2 The State Security Service (UDBA)

Another critical component of Yugoslavia's security apparatus was the *State Security Service (SDB)*, commonly referred to as UDBA. Often described as the state's political police force, UDBA was the primary intelligence and security agency of the SFRY, established as the successor to the Department for People's Protection (OZNA) in 1946. UDBA's operations were highly centralised, with all activities, both domestic and abroad, organised, directed, and controlled by the State Secretariat of Internal Affairs. [18]

UDBA was structured on the principles of centralism and vertical accountability.[19] Its activities ranged from counterintelligence operations aimed at detecting foreign threats to internal surveillance, including monitoring political dissidents and those deemed threats to the socialist system. As an operational counterintelligence service, UDBA held executive powers, conducting surveillance and investigations against individuals accused of crimes against the state, such as economic offences or political opposition. Its scope extended beyond Yugoslavia's borders, with efforts directed at monitoring emigre groups critical of the regime.

However, UDBA's methods were often characterised by a lack of transparency and accountability, leading to widespread violations of civil liberties. One notorious example was the assassination of Croatian dissident Stjepan Đureković in 1983. Đureković became a vocal critic of the regime after fleeing to West Germany. UDBA orchestrated his abduction, torture, and murder, an operation that caused international outrage and strained relations between Yugoslavia and West Germany[20.]

[18] Sergej Flere and Rudi Klanjšek, *The Rise and Fall of Socialist Yugoslavia: Elite Nationalism and the Collapse of a Federation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 99-110
[19] Janez Juhant and Bojan Žalec, *From Culture of Fear to Society of Trust* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013), 171.
[20] Marko Lopušina, *Ubij bližnjeg svog*, (Lulu Press, Incorporated, 2019). trans. by author, 413-415.

These repressive actions by UDBA created a legacy of distrust in state security institutions. In the post-Yugoslav era, SSR would have to contend with the legacy of UDBA's lack of accountability, particularly in rebuilding institutions that were expected to operate transparently and respect human rights.

1.2.3 The Military Intelligence Service (VOS)

Established in 1942 by Tito, the Military Intelligence Service (VOS) was tasked with supporting partisan intelligence efforts during Second World War. As part of the JNA, its primary objective was to safeguard the military and party interests, counter any internal threats within the armed forces, and protect against external espionage. During the Cold War, VOS monitored espionage activities by foreign agents seeking to infiltrate Yugoslavia's military infrastructure.[21] Moreover, it carried out intelligence activities to collect data on possible threats to national security, both within the country and abroad.

Despite its intelligence-gathering role, VOS was often criticised for its involvement in political repression. Like UDBA, it engaged in surveillance of political dissidents, journalists, and activists advocating for democratic reforms. Accusations of human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests and detention without trial, undermined the legitimacy of VOS, particularly in the 1980s as calls for greater political freedoms intensified. These practices would later complicate efforts to reform security institutions in the post-conflict Balkans, where establishing accountable and democratic security services became a key priority.

1.2.4 Public Security Services

In addition to these military and intelligence agencies, Yugoslavia's public security services operated at both the republican and municipal levels. These entities were responsible for maintaining public order, enforcing laws, and addressing general security concerns. However, much like the other branches of the security sector, they were heavily politicised and operated in close collaboration with UDBA and VOS. Their primary function was often to ensure compliance with state ideology and suppress political opposition through surveillance, censorship, and the use of force.[22]

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[21] Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford University Press, 1st ed., 2002), 96-98.

[22] Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Yugoslavia and Political Assassinations: The History and Legacy of Tito's Campaign Against the Emigrés* (IB Tauris & Co Ltd, 2020), 21-25.

Public security services were instrumental in maintaining the regime's stability, but their repressive tactics, particularly during periods of political unrest, further alienated segments of the population. This legacy of heavy-handed policing contributed to the challenges faced in transitioning these institutions into democratic frameworks during the post-conflict reform process.

The security sector of the SFRY was tightly controlled by the central government, with Tito having significant influence over its operations. His leadership, followed by a pragmatic approach to governance, ensured that almost all security entities operated under his direct rule. However, this centralised control masked tensions within the multi-ethnic federation. The challenge of managing diverse national identities within a unified security framework became even more difficult after Tito's death in 1980.

Without Tito's stabilising presence, nationalist movements gained momentum, and demands for greater autonomy from the republics quickly began to surface. The security sector, once seen as the guardian of Yugoslav unity, became part of the growing fragmentation of the state. As the institutions responsible for maintaining order fractured along ethnic lines, they lost their ability to hold the political and social unrest that threatened the federation's cohesion.

The breakdown of Yugoslavia was driven by several factors that eroded both governance and security across the republics. As the central government weakened, these factors not only destabilised the state but also profoundly affected the post-conflict SSR efforts in the Western Balkans. Table 1.1 outlines the primary contributing factors to Yugoslavia's collapse and their direct impacts on governance and security institutions, shedding light on the long-lasting challenges SSR faced in the region.

As Table illustrates, Yugoslavia's collapse resulted from an interplay of governance and security failures, each reinforcing the other. These issues have left a lasting legacy on the post-conflict SSR efforts in the region, as the new states not only needed to rebuild their political systems but also to restore legitimacy and trust in their security sectors. This erosion of centralised control was the beginning of Yugoslavia's disintegration, leading to violent conflict and the eventual fragmentation of the state. The next section will examine how these long-

lasting tensions, once held in check by Tito's leadership, erupted in the early 1990s and paved the way for the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Table 1.1: Factors contributing to Yugoslavia's collapse and their impact on governance and security

Factors contributing to Yugoslavia's collapse	Impact on governance	Impact on security	Legacy in post-conflict SSR
National identity conflicts (e.g., ethnic divisions)	Eroded central authority; rise of nationalist movements	Security forces split along ethnic lines, undermining unity	Security sector reforms had to address ethnic distrust
Political fragmentation (e.g., varying degrees of pluralism)	Slovenia and Croatia pushed for democratic reforms, while Serbia sought centralisation	JNA's role as protector of unity weakened by divergent political paths	Fragmented political authority complicated SSR
Economic disparities (e.g., richer vs. poorer republics)	Increased tensions between republics; resentment over economic inequalities	Economically weaker republics had less control over security sector resources	Economic instability created additional challenges for reforming security institutions
Security sector fragmentation (e.g., centralisation under Belgrade)	Loss of legitimacy and control over non-Serb republics	JNA's command structure weakened as ethnic divisions increased	Reforms had to address deep mistrust of central authority and security forces
Role of the JNA	Initially a unifying force, but later seen as an instrument of Serbian dominance	The JNA's failure to remain a neutral force exacerbated conflicts	SSR needed to build trust in military forces post-conflict

1.3 The collapse of Yugoslavia: From unity to fragmentation

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was not a sudden and unexpected collapse but the culmination of long-standing tensions that had been carefully suppressed under Tito's rule. After his death, these tensions, rooted in ethnic, political, and economic disparities, became impossible to contain. The very security institutions that had been designed to enforce unity began to fragment along ethnic lines, mirroring the divisions within the republics.

Growing structural, political, and ideological differences between the republics played a major part in Yugoslavia's collapse. For decades, Tito's leadership had kept these differences in check, but by 1991, they had reached a breaking point. The republics experienced vastly

different levels of economic development, with Slovenia and Croatia being more industrialised compared to the less developed regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Kosovo.[23] This economic disparity fuelled internal resentment and long-lasting perceptions of inequality, as wealthier republics felt constantly burdened by the need to subsidise poorer ones, while the less developed regions felt marginalised and constantly exploited.

The republics also demonstrated varying degrees of political pluralism and openness to democratic reforms. Some, like Slovenia and Croatia, were more open to political pluralism and sought greater autonomy through democratic reforms.[24] These republics pushed for multi-party systems and free elections, mirroring the wave of democratisation that was sweeping across Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. In contrast, Serbia, under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, adopted a more authoritarian and nationalist stance, advocating for a centralised federal structure.[25] Milošević and his allies wanted to maintain centralised control, promoting nationalism as a way to secure their political power.

These different political trajectories created significant tensions among the republics. Efforts by Slovenia and Croatia to gain greater political autonomy were met with resistance from Serbia and other proponents of centralisation. The federal government struggled to manage these conflicting aspirations, leading to political deadlock and growing discontent.[26] Political leaders increasingly exploited ethnic divisions for personal and political gain, eroding the spirit of unity that had once held Yugoslavia together.

The centralisation that had worked under Tito's leadership became indefensible after his death, as republics demanded greater autonomy. As Miloš Bokić describes, the system failed to adapt, and "nationalistic individuals succeeded in linking the dissatisfaction of the people with

[23] Milica Uvalić, *What Happened to the Yugoslav Economic Model?* in *The Legacy of Yugoslavia: Politics, Economics and Society in the Modern Balkans*, (London: I.B. Tauris, June 11, 2020), 169-173.
[24] Mladen Lazić and Laslo Sekelj, *Privatisation in Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro)*, Europe-Asia Studies 49, no. 6 (September 1997) 1057-1070, https://www.jstor.org/stable/153347.
[25] Agneza Bozic-Roberson, *Words before the War: Milosevic's Use of Mass Media and Rhetoric to Provoke Ethnopolitical Conflict in Former Yugoslavia*, East European Quarterly 38, no. 4 (Winter 2004), University of Colorado at Boulder.
[26] Andrés Rodríguez-Pose and Marko Stermšek, *The Economics of Secession: Analysing the Economic Impact of the Collapse of the Former Yugoslavia*, Territory, Politics, Governance 3, no. 1 (2015), 73–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2014.965729.

national differences and historical resentments."[27] This growing nationalism, which replaced Tito's ideology of Brotherhood and Unity, further eroded efforts to maintain a unified state.

The decline of communist influence across Eastern Europe, combined with the Soviet Union's move towards dissolution in the late 1980s, also encouraged nationalist movements within Yugoslavia.[28] As republics began to reject the central authority of Belgrade, the federal structure of Yugoslavia, already weakened by economic and political divisions, began to crumble.[29]

As a result of these factors, the republics were unable to agree on a workable decentralised model that could balance regional autonomy with federal unity. The first cracks appeared in 1991, when Slovenia and Croatia declared independence. The federal government's attempts to suppress these secessionist movements quickly escalated into armed conflict. The ensuing war devastated Bosnia and Herzegovina, creating deep-seated fear and hatred that scarred the collective memory of the region.[30] Ethnic tensions erupted into a full-blown humanitarian crisis. The right to life, liberty, and security were compromised as civilians became targets in the brutal ethnic conflicts.

The role of security forces in these conflicts, particularly the JNA and other paramilitary groups, further discredited the security sector. Rather than acting as protectors of the people, these forces often became instruments of nationalist violence. The disintegration of Yugoslavia not only fractured the state but also destroyed the legitimacy of its security institutions, creating a profound challenge for post-conflict SSR.

International organisations struggled to respond adequately to the scale of human suffering. Crowded refugee camps, testimonies of survivors, and the silent ruins of once-thriving

[27] Miloš Bokić, *The Dissolution of Yugoslavia: Nationalistic Project of a Big and Strong Country or Just a Failed Experiment*, PhD dissertation, University of Vienna, available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2258084.
[28] Aleksandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism in a Multinational State* (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2000), 100-106, 121.
[29] Mark Kramer, *The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 1)*, Journal of Cold War Studies 5, no. 4 (September 2003): 178–180, https://doi.org/10.1162/152039703322483783.
[30] Kristina Roepstorff, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Beyond the Decolonisation Process* (London: Routledge, 2017). 18-19.

communities became grim reminders of the human cost of Yugoslavia's violent collapse. These events left deep scars, both physically and psychologically, and set the stage for the challenges that post-conflict reforms would face.

The SSR that followed in the post-conflict Western Balkans must contend not only with the technical aspects of rebuilding institutions but also with the deep-seated trauma and historical grievances that persist in the region. Ethno-nationalistic divisions ingrained during the violent breakup of Yugoslavia continue to influence the dynamics of contemporary security structures to this day. Rebuilding these institutions requires not just technical fixes but also a process of reconciliation, where trust is rebuilt across ethnic lines and human rights are safeguarded.

As Western Balkan countries try to incorporate democratic norms through SSR, it becomes essential to understand also the historical roots of ethnic tensions and the role that security forces played in perpetuating violence. SSR in this context is not just about restructuring institutions but also about healing the wounds of the past and creating a new foundation for trust and accountability.

The suspension of Yugoslavia's once-integrated armed forces left a deep mark on the region's security landscape. Miloš Bokić captures the gravity of this period, stating that "Yugoslav political elites were guilty because they allowed nationalist sentiments to substitute for political arguments. When emotions overpowered reason, the only logical outcome was the breakdown of Yugoslavia, followed by immense human suffering and destruction."[31]

The post-Yugoslav era witnessed the revival of long-suppressed ethnic and nationalistic identities. The conflicts that erupted during the dissolution left deep psychological traumas and shattered societal trust, complicating the task of establishing stable and accountable security institutions in the region today. As a result, the SSR that followed has had to contend not only with technical restructuring but with healing the profound wounds left by years of conflict.

The Western Balkans now face the difficult challenge of incorporating democratic norms into security forces that were once instruments of repression. The path toward reform is not simply about re-establishing functional institutions but also requires addressing the underlying

[31] Bokić, *Yugoslavia – Nationalistic Project*, 10–12.

divisions and mistrust that continue to fragment societies. SSR in the Western Balkan countries thus presents a unique test: it must reconstruct not only the mechanics of governance but also rebuild the foundations of trust, accountability, and human rights.

In Chapter II, we will explore the broader challenges of post-conflict reconstruction, both in the Balkans and globally, to better understand the strategies needed to overcome these obstacles. By examining how countries transition from conflict to peace, we can begin to see how SSR fits into the larger framework of rebuilding war-torn societies, restoring governance, and promoting sustainable peace.

CHAPTER II. OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

As the Western Balkan countries raised from the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, the region faced the difficult task of rebuilding fractured societies, restoring governance, and addressing the ethnic tensions that had driven years of conflict. The SSR became central to these efforts, as the region wanted to transform institutions that were often complicit in the violence into accountable entities that could safeguard peace.

However, post-conflict reconstruction is far more than just technical reforms or rebuilding infrastructure. It is a complex, multi-dimensional process that involves healing the psychological and social scars left by war, while also tackling economic recovery and promoting inclusive political systems. The challenges are additionally magnified by the need to balance local ownership with international support, navigate cultural sensitivities, and avoid the common pitfalls that have plagued post-conflict efforts in many parts of the world.

This Chapter explores the multifaceted nature of post-conflict reconstruction, mentioning the Western Balkan countries, but also drawing on global examples from places like Rwanda and Sierra Leone. It highlights the critical importance of understanding local contexts, integrating the perspectives of various stakeholders, and addressing not just the immediate aftermath of conflict but the long-term foundations for sustainable peace.

2.1 Challenges and strategies for sustainable peace

Post-conflict reconstruction is a delicate and often very difficult process, involving the rebuilding of fractured societies, devastated infrastructure, and weakened security institutions. The transition from war to peace is not linear and is often full of challenges. For both national governments and international actors, the main focus during conflict is on providing humanitarian aid, such as food, shelter, and medical care.[32] However, once peace agreements are signed or violence subsides, the focus shifts toward the long and complex process of reconstructing a sustainable, functioning state.

[32] Silvia Hidalgo and Augusto López-Claros, *Humanitarian Response Index 2007: Measuring Commitment to Best Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 55-57.

This shift from emergency relief to long-term development, often referred to as the *transition phase* of post-conflict reconstruction, is critical for creating the foundations for peace and economic recovery. At this stage, international agencies, bilateral partners, and national governments must collaborate to allocate funds and resources to rebuild societies torn apart by war. Yet, this transition is rarely straightforward, as emergency relief efforts, rehabilitation, and development assistance frequently overlap, creating confusion and inefficiency.[33]

The aftermath of prolonged conflict leaves behind more than just physical destruction. Societies are often deeply scarred by ethnic and social fragmentation, which undermines the trust necessary to rebuild cohesive governance structures. Restoring trust among divided groups and creating inclusive political processes are critical, yet difficult, first steps in post-conflict societies. Miloš Bokić argues that these deep-seated divisions can persist long after a peace agreement, especially when efforts fail to account for the root causes of conflict and the historical role of the state in perpetuating inequality.[34]

According to Nikolaos Tzifakis,[35] post-conflict reconstruction is "a complex, holistic, and multidimensional process" that simultaneously addresses military, political, economic, and social dimensions. In many post-conflict settings, including Bosnia and Kosovo, state institutions were either complicit in the conflict or were too weakened to function effectively. This results in dysfunctional judicial systems and security forces that struggle to maintain order and protect human rights.

Furthermore, the legacy of conflict often penetrates every aspect of society, slowering efforts to establish a foundation for lasting peace and prosperity. Societal wounds, such as trauma, displacement, and loss, coexist with physical destruction, complicating the path to recovery. Economic infrastructures often lie in ruins, requiring different strategies for rebuilding and revitalising economies to ensure livelihoods and reduce poverty.[36] Education systems may be

[33] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (Paris: OECD, 2001), 23-24.
[34] Bokić, *Yugoslavia – Nationalistic Project*, 10–12.
[35] Nikolaos Tzifakis, *Post-Conflict Economic Reconstruction*, Princeton University (Princeton, NJ: Program on Science and Global Security, 2023), accessed July 16, 2024, https://pesd.princeton.edu/node/586.
[36] Paul Jackson and Gareth Wall, eds., Post-conflict Reconstruction and Local Government (London: Routledge, 2021), 53–76.

disrupted, leaving a generation without adequate learning opportunities and further embedding cycles of poverty and violence.

SSR appears as a critical component of the broader reconstruction agenda for these countries. Effective reform seeks to rebuild and restructure security institutions to uphold principles of accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights. However, the path toward achieving these objectives is full of challenges, ranging from fixed corruption and lack of institutional capacity to deep-seated ethnic tensions and external interference.[37] Understanding the local context, historical grievances, and power dynamics is essential for navigating these challenges effectively.

Stakeholder perspectives reinforce this emphasis on local ownership and the dangers of overly externalised interventions. As highlighted in the USIP report, Norbert Mao, a parliamentary leader from Uganda, argues that in the emergency phase of reconstruction, international actors should "do it for us", while during the transition phase, they should "do it with us", and in development, "do it through us."[38] This sentiment echoes the need for an integrated and locally-driven approach, one that balances international support with national ownership.

2.1.1 Pitfalls in post-conflict reconstruction

While post-conflict reconstruction has for a goal to rebuild nations, it is often faced with significant challenges. These pitfalls, if not addressed, can affect the long-term peace and stability that reconstruction efforts seek to achieve. A critical factor contributing to these failures is the failure to consider the conflict-specific dynamics of the society undergoing reconstruction. As noted by Sakalasuriya, Haigh, and Amaratunga, post-conflict interventions that fail to account for the local political, economic, or ethnic complexities may inadvertently "create new conflicts as much as prevent them."[39] For instance, PCR interventions that treat all regions or communities equally without recognising historical or ethnic grievances can reignite tensions.

[37] Judy Smith-Hohn, *Rebuilding the Security Sector in Post-Conflict Societies: Perceptions from Urban Liberia and Sierra Leone* (Geneva: DCAF, 2010), 50–52.
[38] United States Institute of Peace. *Post-Conflict Governance and Security: The Role of Stakeholders in Reconstruction Efforts*. (Washington, D.C.: USIP, 2010), 127.
[39] Minoli Sakalasuriya, Richard Haigh, and Dilanthi Amaratunga, *Consequences of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: A Review of* Literature (Sri Lanka: University of Huddersfield, 2019), 153-157.

Another significant pitfall is the unequal distribution of reconstruction resources, which can increase social and ethnic divisions rather than healing them. The inequitable allocation of resources to specific regions or communities can encourage "horizontal inequalities" that fuel resentment. In many cases, wealthier or politically influential areas receive the majority of infrastructure development, leaving marginalised communities without basic services, which only deepens existing grievances.[40] This mismanagement can ultimately undermine the entire reconstruction effort by perpetuating the very conditions that led to conflict in the first place.

Additionally, the centralisation of authority during post-conflict reconstruction is another problem. While centralisation can streamline decision-making and ensure efficient resource distribution, it often alienates local communities by side-lining their needs and limiting their participation in the rebuilding process. Centralised governance can also stifle local knowledge, preventing context-specific solutions that are critical for lasting peace and stability.[41] Empowering local actors is essential for the success of reconstruction efforts, as they are more likely to understand the nuances of community needs and relationships.

One of the more troubling issues is the exploitation of post-conflict reconstruction efforts by local elites. In many post-conflict settings, those with political or military power may seize control of the resources and opportunities generated by PCR projects, increasing inequality and undermining efforts to build inclusive governance. Dominant groups may monopolise control over key industries, land, or economic initiatives, preventing marginalised populations from accessing the benefits of reconstruction.[42]

Another often overlooked pitfall is environmental degradation, which can occur as a result of poorly planned reconstruction activities. Infrastructure development, while crucial for economic recovery, may lead to significant environmental damage, such as oil discharges, deforestation, or water contamination, causing long-term negative effects on communities and ecosystems.[43] The environmental consequences of reconstruction can further destabilise the affected regions by diminishing natural resources essential to livelihoods and survival.

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

Acknowledging and mitigating these pitfalls is essential to ensure the success of post-conflict reconstruction. As the international community and local governments engage in PCR, understanding the local context, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, decentralising authority, preventing elite capture, and considering environmental impacts will all be crucial to avoid increasing tensions and undermining peace efforts.

2.1.2 A holistic approach to overcoming challenges

A key to overcoming the complexities of post-conflict reconstruction is the adoption of a holistic approach that integrates various societal, political, and economic dimensions. The legacy of conflict affects nearly all facets of life, making it crucial to address the root causes of conflict and to create environments conducive to sustainable peace. A narrow focus on only one aspect, such as security, without attention to other critical factors like governance, social cohesion, or economic infrastructure can result in a relapse into conflict.

As noted in existing research, post-conflict reconstruction should aim at transforming the failed state into a stable and functional entity. This transformation should involve addressing political, economic, social, and cultural aspects while considering the post-crisis issues of political economy, security, gender, and justice.[44] Moreover, investing in large-scale reconstruction to rebuild destroyed infrastructure is vital for restoring economic functionality and improving trade, but it must also be aligned with a comprehensive strategy for sustainable peace.[45]

One of the most significant challenges is ensuring that PCR interventions are not counterproductive, which can happen when they inadvertently create new divisions, especially through unequal economic distribution. In post-conflict societies, imbalances in the benefits of reconstruction can exacerbate existing ethnic or social divisions, leading to renewed tensions.[46] Thus, in any PCR intervention, equal resource distribution and the integration of local knowledge are critical to avoid re-igniting the root causes of conflict.[47]

Understanding the local context is important, because it ensures that reconstruction efforts are aligned with the community's needs, values, and realities. A failure to do so may result in the

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

imposition of inappropriate models of governance and development, such as the wholesale adoption of neoliberal policies or foreign notions of democracy, which might not be well-suited to the specific post-conflict environment.48 In this regard, participation from marginalised groups, such as women and youth, is very important. Their inclusion not only supports social cohesion but also strengthens the legitimacy and sustainability of peace.[49]

By ensuring that post-conflict reconstruction includes a balanced approach to rebuilding both soft and hard infrastructures, and by emphasising community participation and local ownership, it is possible to lay the groundwork for long-term recovery. This holistic strategy, which addresses both economic and social dimensions of post-conflict recovery, offers the best chance of preventing a return to violence and ensuring sustainable development.[50]

2.2 Phases of post-conflict reconstruction

In 2002, the *Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework* was developed by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA). This framework outlines three stages of activities between the cessation of violent conflict and the return to normalcy: initial response, transformation, and fostering sustainability. While these phases often overlap and may vary in implementation, they provide crucial guidelines for prioritising actions in the transition from war to peace. The framework highlights the importance of integrating local stakeholders and addressing not only immediate needs but also long-term recovery plans. It provides a set of goals for each phase, ranging from emergency relief efforts to the establishment of sustainable governance.[51]

2.2.1 Initial response

The first stage, according to the framework, is the initial response stage. It begins immediately after the end of armed conflict and focuses on providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring security, and stabilising the country. This includes the distribution of food, clean water, shelter, and medical care to prevent further loss of life and alleviate suffering. Establishing stability during this phase is essential, as affected areas are often chaotic and insecure.[52]

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and Association of the United States Army (AUSA), *Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2002), 2-9, bit.ly/CSIS-framework.
[52] Ibid.

Military interventions are frequently necessary to restore order and safeguard civilians. The framework highlights that the initial response phase is often characterised by military operations aimed at restoring basic security and supporting emergency services. These interventions may also include disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programs for former combatants to prevent the resumption of violence.[53] For instance, the deployment of peacekeeping forces is an important step in stabilising regions affected by prolonged conflicts, as seen during the Rwandan Genocide, where the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) worked to secure humanitarian aid and support the return of displaced persons.[54]

Evaluations of humanitarian needs and security assessments are also key components during this phase, ensuring efficient resource allocation and targeting vulnerable populations. Without these assessments, efforts risk becoming fragmented and inefficient, thus prolonging the instability. Coordinating relief among international organisations, NGOs, and local authorities is critical for maximising the impact of the humanitarian response and avoiding duplication of efforts.[55]

2.2.2 Transformation or transition phase

The second phase, often referred to as the transformation or transition phase, is a shift from emergency relief to more extensive development and reconstruction efforts. According to the framework, this period is characterised by restoring governance, rebuilding the economy, and developing functional social services, such as education and healthcare.[56] The framework specifies that a critical task during this phase is the reestablishment of the rule of law and the formation of accountable governance structures. Judicial systems and law enforcement agencies are particularly crucial in ensuring long-term peace and must be rebuilt to function effectively and fairly. For example, corruption must be addressed head-on in this phase to build public trust in government institutions.[57]

[53] Ibid.
[54] Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), p.105-108, https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol11/iss2/15.
[55] CSIS and AUSA, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction Task Framework*, 11-19.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

In post-conflict countries, rebuilding physical infrastructure like roads, bridges, schools, and hospitals is essential to restarting economic activities and supporting the recovery process. The World Bank and other international financial institutions often play an important role in this process, providing financial aid and technical assistance to jumpstart economies.[58] Additionally, the World Bank's Post-Conflict Fund has been instrumental in assisting countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone in rebuilding essential services and supporting economic recovery after years of war.[59]

Truth and reconciliation commissions, as seen in South Africa and Sierra Leone, are also often part of the transformation phase. These commissions provide platforms for victims and perpetrators to share their experiences, helping to address past cruelty and encourage justice and healing. In Sierra Leone, this approach was critical in addressing the post-conflict trauma and setting the stage for national reconciliation.[60]

> *"A Truth and Reconciliation Commission shall be established to address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, and get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation."*[61]

2.2.3 Fostering sustainability

The final phase of post-conflict reconstruction focuses on ensuring that progress made during the earlier stages is maintained and that the country can move forward sustainably. During this phase, international military forces typically withdraw, handing over full control to national actors. However, this must be done gradually to avoid creating security vacuums. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the UN's successful withdrawal was eased by the ability of national forces to take over security responsibilities after years of external support.[62]

In Liberia, economic recovery was prioritised during the promotion of sustainability phase, with the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) having a

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] United States Institute of Peace, *Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone*, July 7, 1999, accessed August 1, 2024, https://bit.ly/45YaF1K.
[62] Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2005: Sierra Leone*, accessed August 1, 2024, https://bit.ly/3QkZnhh.

critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability in resource management. By focusing on building sustainable governance structures and transparent institutions, Liberia was able to attract foreign investment and lay the groundwork for long-term stability.[63]

In Rwanda, the establishment of the Gacaca court system also demonstrates the importance of community-led justice mechanisms in promoting social cohesion and ensuring accountability for injustice committed during conflicts. These courts had an important role in rebuilding Rwanda's social cohesion after the 1994 genocide.[64]

From everything mentioned, we can see that the process of post-conflict reconstruction is full of challenges, requiring a delicate balance between immediate humanitarian needs and long-term development goals. Chapter II explored the complexities of rebuilding societies that have been torn apart by war, focusing on both the immediate challenges of restoring order and the longer-term task of creating sustainable peace. From the initial response to fostering sustainability, each phase of reconstruction requires understanding of the local context, historical grievances, and socio-political dynamics that shape the post-conflict environment.

The key to successful reconstruction lies in adopting a holistic approach that integrates political, economic, and social reforms while ensuring the meaningful participation of local actors. Without this, efforts risk falling into common pitfalls, such as unequal resource distribution, centralised governance that separates local populations, or the exploitation of reconstruction by elites. Global examples like Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia illustrate that post-conflict societies must also navigate the psychological scars of war, balancing justice, reconciliation, and the rebuilding of trust between communities.

SSR, as discussed, is a crucial element within this process, transforming state institutions from instruments of conflict into pillars of peace and accountability. While SSR forms a cornerstone of rebuilding governance and trust, it is part of a larger puzzle of post-conflict recovery, which includes economic revitalisation, re-establishment of governance, and fostering social cohesion.

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Charles Jalloh and Ilias Bantekas, *The Gacaca Courts, Post-Genocide Justice and Reconciliation in Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 346-347.

As we move forward to focus on the Western Balkans, SSR becomes a particularly relevant aspect due to the legacy of ethnic fragmentation and the political struggles that followed the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The lessons from global post-conflict contexts provided us with the valuable framework for understanding how SSR and other reconstruction efforts take shape in this region, where post-conflict realities intertwine with aspirations for European integration. The next Chapter will explore these regional realities in depth, drawing on the broader themes discussed here to highlight the specific challenges the Western Balkans face in their path to sustainable peace and development.

CHAPTER III. GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL REALITIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

As previously discussed, transitioning from conflict to peace is a multifaceted and challenging process that involves immediate humanitarian aid, long-term socio-economic recovery, and broad SSR. While these challenges are globally recognised, their manifestations and the strategies to address them vary significantly across different regions due to distinct socio-political dynamics, historical grievances, and cultural factors that shape reconstruction efforts. In this context, the global framework of SSR and post-conflict recovery discussed in Chapter II offers important insights into understanding regional-specific applications, particularly in the Western Balkans.

The Western Balkan region, with its history of ethnic conflicts, political fragmentation, and socio-economic instability, presents a unique case study for exploring the complexities of post-conflict reconstruction. The legacy of the Yugoslav wars and the efforts to rebuild and stabilise the region highlight the specific challenges and opportunities related to SSR. As discussed by state-building theorists like Francis Fukuyama, the reconstruction of state institutions, particularly the security apparatus, is central to the broader state-building efforts required to achieve stability in post-conflict settings.[65] Fukuyama further elaborates that weak states are often at the core of global instability due to their limited governance capacity and the absence of effective public administration systems.[66] His theory highlights the need for strong state institutions to manage post conflict environments successfully.[67] Additionally, peacebuilding scholars such as Roland Paris emphasise the importance of integrating liberal governance frameworks, including accountable and transparent security institutions, as foundational for lasting peace. Paris' approach, particularly his *institutionalisation before liberalisation* model, suggests that rushing the introduction of democratic practices without first building strong, accountable institutions can lead to further instability.[68] This is crucial for the Western Balkan countries, where fragile state structures require robust, transparent SSR to prevent a relapse into conflict and to promote sustainable democratic governance.

[65] Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 17.
[66] Ibid., 91-93.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6-7.

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s triggered a series of violent conflicts across the Balkan region, resulting in massive human suffering, economic devastation, and the breakdown of almost all state institutions. The aftermath of these conflicts needed continuous international interventions, specifically when it came to peacekeeping, state-building, and the reform of security institutions, with varying degrees of success. By examining the post-war reconstruction efforts in the Balkan countries, this Chapter analyses how SSR serves as a critical element in ensuring long-term peace and stability in a region still grappling with the legacies of war and ethnic division.

According to the United Nations SSR, "armed forces, and police, border guards are essential for sustaining peace. They stabilise, protect, and provide relief. But when poorly regulated, unaccountable, or sourced for political gain, the security sector becomes a liability instead of a force for good…"[69] SSR, as defined by the OECD, involves transforming the security sector/system so that it aligns with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, thus contributing to a well-functioning security framework.[70] In the Western Balkans, SSR not only addresses immediate post-conflict stabilisation but is also important in promoting and supporting state legitimacy, democratic governance, and regional stability, as theorised by both state-building and peacebuilding scholars.

By understanding the unique socio-political context of the Western Balkans, we have broader insights into SSR in other post-conflict settings. In this Chapter, we will explore the critical challenges and opportunities of SSR in the region, focusing on the role it plays in addressing the legacy of conflict, promoting regional stability, and supporting the broader goals of European integration.

3.1 SSR in the Western Balkan countries

Western Balkan countries face unique challenges when it comes to SSR compared to other transitional democracies in Central Europe. These societies, transitioning from state socialism and authoritarian regimes, are also dealing with the legacies of recent armed conflicts that occurred in the 1990s. According to Fukuyama, weak states often struggle to exercise control

[69] United Nations, *Security Sector Reform*, accessed August 1, 2024, https://www.un.org/ssr/.
[70] Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Security Sector Governance and Reform*, accessed October 1, 2024, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/b/75275.pdf.

over basic functions like security provision due to fragmented institutions and limited governance capacity.[71] This reality is evident in the Western Balkans, where the security sectors are often fragmented, underdeveloped, overly politicised, and structured along ethnic or religious lines.[72]

Non-state armed groups, such as paramilitary organisations, private military companies, criminal networks, and guerrilla movements, sometimes operate alongside state security structures, which are further weakened by a high percentage of corruption. Issues like refugee return, resettlement, and property restitution remain unresolved in many areas. Ethnic tensions, psychological scars from war, and nationalist sentiments continue to still impact communities. The recent resurgence of nationalist parties and the ongoing violence in Kosovo show the fragility of peace in the region.

SSR in the Western Balkan countries must therefore be analysed alongside post-conflict stabilisation efforts. International peacekeeping forces remain present in many parts of the region, including international police forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia. International administrations also maintain significant control over security in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, limiting the ability of local authorities to fully exercise their control.[73] The success of SSR in the region depends on transferring security responsibilities to local entities, part of a broader shift from international to national control. However, this process is complicated by new security threats, such as the unresolved status of Kosovo, which remains a UN protectorate since 1999, and growing regional instability.

According to Roland Paris' theory, the rush to introduce democratic practices without first building strong institutions can easily shake already existing instability.[74] In the Western Balkans, this is evident in the challenges of SSR, where weak institutions struggle to manage ethnic divisions and economic challenges. Paris' approach suggests that establishing strong security institutions is critical before broader political reforms are introduced. Ethnic

[71] Fukuyama, *State-Building*, 15-17.
[72] SIPRI Yearbook 2004: *Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 250-252.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*, 6-7.

representation in the security sector is one such challenge, as ethnic tensions and distrust of state institutions remain strong.

The legacy of conflict complicates SSR further. Ethnic divisions and tensions render ethnic representation and control of the security apparatus critical concerns, in contrast to other regions in Central Europe. War-related economic losses and the region's dependence on international aid have obstructed long-term social and economic development, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. As Marina Caparini notes, Bosnia and Herzegovina received $4.5 billion in aid in the first two years after the conflict, the highest per capita aid since the Second World War.[75] However, this aid dependency created risks of waste and corruption, increasing political instability, extremism, and illegal activities, including human trafficking. Similarly, Kosovo, which received nearly $2 billion in aid between 2000 and 2002, is now experiencing a decline in international support, further straining its fragile economy.[76]

All Western Balkan countries experience the phenomenon of weak states due to governance issues rooted in the former Yugoslavia, their inexperience as new states, and the damage caused by conflict. These vulnerabilities have made them susceptible to international crime, including drug trafficking, smuggling of dangerous materials, illegal migrant transit, terrorist infiltration, and trafficking of women and children.[77] The state's authority is further weakened by parallel power structures and widespread corruption. International initiatives, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), have also increased pressure on security administrations, leading to tensions with local governments and communities.

The Balkan region faces major challenges in implementing new defence and security strategies, particularly those focused on regional security cooperation. Doctrine changes and structural reforms within the region's armed forces are urgently needed. One significant difficulty is the reduction and reform of overextended military and paramilitary forces, which heavily depend on effective DDR policies for former combatants.[78] This need for modernisation explains the consistently high military expenditures across the region.

[75] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 250-252.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Obi N.I. Ebbe and Dilip K. Das, eds., *Global Trafficking in Women and Children* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 27–28.
[78] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 252-253.

Implementing democratic oversight, transparency, and accountability within the armed forces requires adapting legislative frameworks, national security policies, and changing civilian and military leadership perspectives. The establishment of civilian oversight mechanisms, such as parliamentary committees and independent bodies tasked with monitoring military and police activities, is crucial. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms varies significantly across the region. While some countries have made progress, others still struggle with a lack of political will and interest. International organisations have provided crucial support, introducing standards and practices that emphasise accountability through regular audits, transparent reporting, and mechanisms for correction to ensure compliance with the law and respect for human rights.

Transparency within security institutions is another critical issue addressed by SSR in the Western Balkans. During and after the conflicts, the lack of transparency in security forces has been a significant barrier to building public trust. Reforms have focused on increasing transparency through measures such as the publication of defence budgets, transparent procurement processes, and open recruitment practices. The establishment of public information offices within security institutions and the integration of information technology are also aimed at promoting transparency, giving the public and the media access to information about the operations of security forces, and promoting a culture of openness and trust.

A key focus of SSR in the Western Balkans is the protection of human rights. Historically, security forces in the region have been implicated in serious human rights abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings. As such, reforms have concentrated on aligning the conduct of security forces with international human rights standards. Training programs on human rights and the rule of law have been widely implemented with the support of international organisations. The establishment of human rights units within security institutions and the appointment of human rights advisors have been critical steps in ensuring that security operations do not violate individual rights. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms are important in holding security forces accountable for human rights violations.

Despite these reforms, the question persists: Are these changes substantive, or are they merely happening on paper?

While military reform has understandably received significant attention, the Western Balkans experience shows that military strength is only one facet of security. Other security institutions, such as police forces, are also important in ensuring the safety of individuals and societies during peacetime.

Police reform in the Western Balkan countries continues to grapple with the dual legacies of state socialism and recent armed conflicts. Under Tito, the police was a tool for state security and population control, becoming a militarised force closely tied to state security services. With the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, police forces across the region became involved in violent conflicts, leading to a significant expansion in both numbers and armament. The rapid growth of police forces resulted in a decline in professionalism, as recruitment standards were lowered and training requirements were bypassed.

International actors have recognised police reform as a critical component of SSR in the Western Balkan region. However, challenges remain, including the persistence of organised crime networks that use the region as a transit corridor.[79] Scandals have frequently exposed the deep ties between political authorities, law enforcement agencies, and criminal organisations. Weak national legislation, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and insufficient regional cooperation further complicate reform efforts. The region also lacks the structures and networks necessary for coordinated action on transnational issues, such as joint border management and collaboration between police and judicial bodies.[80]

There is an absence of regionally linked information systems compatible with the 1990 Schengen Convention that could apply joint criminal investigations and data sharing.[81] Addressing police reform also needs broader criminal justice system reforms. Establishing and enforcing the rule of law relies on an independent and unbiased judiciary and the administrative capacity to enforce judgments.[82]

[79] Ibid.
[80] *Common Challenges in Security Reforms in the Western Balkans*, Smart Balkans Project, accessed October 1, 2024, https://bit.ly/3QiGoaT.
[81] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 320-328.
[82] Arolda Elbasani, ed., *European Integration and Transformation in the Western Balkans: Europeanisation or Business as Usual?* (London: Routledge, 2014), 109-111.

Border control is another significant challenge. Agencies responsible for securing international borders, many of which were newly established following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, frequently suffer from inefficiency, lack of proper equipment, and corruption.[83] Border control services in the countries of the Western Balkan vary in development, with most countries still far from meeting EU standards. The EU has supported these efforts through its police mission in North Macedonia, assisting in building a non-military border police. NATO forces continue to protect high-risk border areas in the region.[84]

The success of SSR in addressing accountability, transparency, and human rights directly contributes to strengthening democratic norms in the Western Balkans. By promoting a security sector that operates under democratic control and respects the rule of law, reforms help to stabilise post-conflict societies and build public trust in state institutions. Integrating democratic principles into the security sector also supports a broader culture of democracy, where the protection of human rights and the rule of law are seen as fundamental societal values. This is crucial for the Western Balkan countries, where ethnic tensions and political instability continue to threaten peace and development.

Before examining how individual countries in the region have addressed issues of accountability, transparency, and human rights within their security institutions through SSR, it is also important to analyse the role of the international community in the Western Balkans.

3.2 Role of international peacekeeping forces

Considering complex historical narratives, the Western Balkans have been subject to significant external pressures for reform and post-conflict normalisation. A key driver in this process has been the conditional offer of integration into key Western institutions, with the biggest focus on the European Union and NATO. Both institutions have big roles in reshaping the security sectors of these countries, contributing to the state-building efforts discussed in previous sections.

Fukuyama emphasises the importance of strengthening state institutions as a precursor to achieving stability. In weak post-conflict states, the security apparatus often struggles to

[83] Alice Hills, *Border Security in the Balkans: Europe Gatekeepers* (London: Routledge, 2017), 12-16.
[84] Wayne C. Thompson, *Nordic, Central, and Southeastern Europe 2022–2023* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022), 530-533.

operate effectively, needing external intervention to fill these gaps85. And, as Paris's theory explains, building robust institutions should happen before the introduction of liberal democratic practices.[86] Both theories focus on the critical importance of international involvement in shaping and reinforcing state structures in fragile contexts like the Western Balkan countries.

3.2.1 The European Union

The European Union, through the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), enabled Western Balkan countries to negotiate Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs). These agreements offer trade access and other connections to the EU, contingent on fulfilling certain political and economic criteria, marking a significant step toward regional integration.[87] According to the European Commission, the SAP is "the European Union's policy towards the Western Balkans, established with the goal of eventual EU membership. Western Balkan countries are involved in a progressive partnership with a view to stabilising the region and establishing a free-trade area. The SAP sets out common political and economic goals, although progress evaluation is based on countries' own merits."[88]

The EU's approach aligns with Paris's model, as the SAP emphasises institution-building before broad political liberalisation. By promoting the transformation of police forces into public services through mechanisms such as the 2001 Code of Police Ethics, the SAP supports the institutional foundation necessary for sustainable liberal democratic reforms. This approach reflects the belief that rushing democratic processes without first addressing the structural issues, such as the lack of accountability and transparency in security institutions, can lead to instability.

The SAAs have been signed with all Western Balkan countries, starting with North Macedonia in April 2001, followed by Albania in June 2006, Montenegro in October 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 2008, Serbia in April 2008, and Kosovo*[89] in October 2015. Regarding Kosovo, the SAA stands as an exclusive agreement with the EU, eliminating the necessity for

[85] Fukuyama*, State-Building*, 15-17.
[86] Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*, 6-11.
[87] Elton Tota, *EU Enlargement and Its Impact to the Western Balkans* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2019), 41–44.
[88] *Stabilisation and Association Process*, EUR-Lex, accessed October 1, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process.html.
[89] *Kosovo is a disputed territory. Its independence is recognised by some states but not by others.

Member States' ratification (notably, five Member States withhold recognition of Kosovo's independence). The trade and trade-related components of SAAs are enclosed within temporary agreements, which typically come into effect post-signing, as trade falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the EU.[90]

The SAP also carefully inspects SSR within the EU's purview. From upholding the rule of law and judicial independence to ensuring democratic oversight of armed forces and implementing anti-corruption measures, the SAP provides thorough evaluations aimed at strengthening legal and institutional frameworks.[91] This reflects Fukuyama's theory that robust state institutions are essential to curbing corruption and building capacity for governance.[92] Furthermore, SAP's focus on policing, border control, migration management, and asylum regimes aligns with the need for comprehensive SSR that addresses the multifaceted challenges of post-conflict societies.

Another method through which the EU operates in the Western Balkan countries is the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which focuses on supporting reforms across the region, including vital aspects of SSR. Since its establishment in 2007, IPA has provided financial and technical assistance to EU member states, helping them implement political, economic, and security-related reforms.[93] This approach focuses on building institutions, consistent with Paris's model. IPA II (2014-2020) introduced a more strategic focus on sector reforms, including security, and implemented mechanisms to measure progress and compliance with EU standards.

The EU's strategy for the Western Balkans, established in 2018, highlights the desire to broaden and intensify dialogues on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), increasing involvement in EU missions and operations. Countries negotiating EU accession, such as Montenegro and Serbia, and other Balkan countries, are required to progressively align with the CFSP, reflecting their

[90] Elton Tota, *Eu Enlargement*, 42-46.
[91] Anastasios G. Karasavvoglou, *The Economies of the Balkan and Eastern Europe Countries in the Changed World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 23-28, https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-4438-2689-1-sample.pdf
[92] Fukuyama, *State-Building*, 21-26.
[93] Robert Pickard, *Funding the Architectural Heritage: A Guide to Policies and Examples* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2009), 71-74.

commitment to integration into broader European frameworks.[94] This regional approach to SSR highlights the centrality of building institutional capacities before advancing to broader governance reforms.

3.2.2 NATO's role and influence

Simultaneously, NATO's involvement in the Balkan region has been equally significant, offering an alternative avenue for countries working on their security sectors. By focusing on rebuilding and modernising the security apparatus of Western Balkan countries, NATO seeks to support state resilience against internal and external threats.

NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept acknowledges the Western Balkans' strategic relevance and reaffirms the Alliance's commitment to supporting the region's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. NATO emphasises the importance of addressing distinct threats and boosting resilience against malign third-party interference and coercion.[95] The area's vulnerabilities, including influence operations and transnational organised crime, are key concerns that NATO addresses through increased capability development and regional partnerships.

One of NATO's key mechanisms for engagement with Western Balkan countries is the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The MAP is a framework for NATO members to implement reforms and meet membership criteria.[96] Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia actively participated in MAP processes before becoming NATO members, applying reforms in areas such as defence policy, military capabilities, and civil-military relations. Through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, NATO has smoothed the cooperation on SSR, providing assistance and training to strengthen the region's security institutions.[97]

While NATO's role has been crucial, its military involvement, particularly during the Kosovo conflict, continues to leave lasting scars on the region. Rebuilding trust in the wake of NATO's

[94] European External Action Service, *Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in the Western Balkans*, accessed October 2, 2024, https://shorturl.at/fvyH4.
[95] NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, accessed October 2, 2024, https://shorturl.at/fimP3.
[96] Wilhelm N Germann and Timothy Edmunds, eds., Towards Security Sector Reform in Post-Cold War Europe: A Framework for Assessment (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003), 143-144.
[97] Niall Mulchinock, NATO and the Western Balkans: From Neutral Spectator to Proactive Peacemaker, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 45-46.

bombings has been a significant challenge, though NATO's focus on preventing security vacuums and supporting regional stability remains strong.

Additionally, NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) have increased international support for SSR. The cooperation between NATO and the EU, under the 2003 agreement, further highlights the division of labour where NATO focuses on military and defence reform while the EU takes the lead in governance and police reforms.

Despite the significant progress achieved through these international efforts, the countries of Western Balkan still face challenges in SSR, such as ethnic tensions, organised crime, and political instability. Both the EU and NATO have demonstrated long-term commitment to supporting SSR in the region, but continued success will depend on the region's ability to build strong, accountable institutions before liberalisation. The integration of democratic principles into the security apparatus is essential for promoting lasting stability, preventing the resurgence of conflict, and supporting integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Furthermore, the rush to establish democratic elections and open markets before the solidification of functional institutions, such as a working legal framework or independent security forces, can lead to instability. This has been evidenced in the region, where premature liberalisation without effective institutional controls has, at times, worsened political corruption and deepened ethnic divisions. The success of SSR in the Western Balkan countries thus requires more than international oversight. It demands that local governments commit to the institutionalisation of transparent, accountable, and democratic governance frameworks within their security sectors.

International actors did have an important role in shaping the security sector of the Western Balkans. However, SSR is not solely a technical reform process but a deeply political one, with local actors often leveraging international assistance to further their own interests. The presence of international peacekeeping forces, while critical in maintaining order, must be carefully managed to avoid promoting dependency on external support, as has been the case in regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where international involvement remains extensive decades after the conflict, about which we will discuss further after.

In the next Chapters, we will conduct a detailed analysis of the Western Balkan countries, beginning with Albania, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, and Kosovo*, to evaluate how SSR has progressed within each context. This will allow us to address the broader implications for the region's stability and democratic governance. The focus will remain on the countries traditionally grouped under the Western Balkans, excluding Croatia, which is now an EU member state.

Although Croatia was once part of the broader Yugoslav region and experienced similar post-conflict challenges, its inclusion in the European Union in 2013 sets it apart in terms of political and institutional frameworks. The integration process has significantly transformed its SSR trajectory, aligning it more closely with EU norms and leaving the current dynamics of SSR in Croatia beyond the scope of this analysis. By focusing on non-EU Western Balkan countries, this study tries to provide a more coherent picture of SSR's successes and remaining challenges, particularly in promoting transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights across the region.

Each of the below mentioned countries offers a unique picture when it comes to the successes and remaining challenges of SSR, allowing for a comparative study that highlights the complexities of post-conflict governance and security reform.

CHAPTER IV. ALBANIA

As we move from the general challenges of SSR across the Western Balkan countries, the case of Albania provides a unique lens to understand the complexities of post-communist state-building and SSR in a country that had decades of isolation and autocratic rule. Although it was not part of the war in the 1990's, under Enver Hoxha, Albania was one of the most repressive and isolated states in Europe, with a heavily politicised security apparatus. As the collapse of the communist rule came, Albania faced the difficult task of taking apart the old authoritarian security structures and changing them for democratic norms, transparency, and accountability within its security sector.

Albania's SSR journey has been influenced by a combination of internal challenges and external pressures, both of which became significant for reform as Albania wanted to align itself with Western standards. The 1997 crisis that came with the collapse of pyramid schemes and the consequences of it exposed deep weaknesses in Albania's security sector and affected the SSR process that followed.

In this Chapter, we will explore Albania's journey towards SSR, from its early struggles to dismantle authoritarian structures to the reforms driven by its ambitions to join NATO and the European Union. As we progress through this analysis, the crucial role of international actors in shaping Albania's SSR will be discussed in depth, highlighting how their involvement addressed the gaps exposed by the 1997 crisis and drove the country toward integration into some of the Western institutions.

4.1 The legacy of Communist rule

Albania's transition from an authoritarian, communist regime to a democratic society has been one of the most complex and challenging of any post-communist country in Eastern Europe. From 1944 to 1985, Albania was under the harsh, isolationist rule of Enver Hoxha, whose regime was characterised by political repression, economic isolation, and the militarisation of nearly all aspects of public life. During this period, the state's security apparatus, including the *Sigurimi* (State Security Service), the army, and the police, became key instruments of regime control, ensuring absolute loyalty to the Communist Party and suppressing any form of dissent through fear and coercion.

These institutions were heavily politicised and lacked any type of transparency, accountability, or respect for human rights. They functioned as a tool of repression, engaging in widespread surveillance, intimidation, and persecution of political opponents, creating a climate of fear that persisted even after the fall of the regime. As the communist system began to collapse in 1991, these security institutions presented one of the greatest obstacles to Albania's democratic transition. Their deeply ingrained practices, personnel loyal to the old regime, and resistance to reform made it difficult for the weak democratic government to establish control over the security sector. [98]

To make this transition easier, international actors such as the EU and NATO focused on shaping the reforms Albania would later adopt. In particular, Albania's bid for NATO membership and its willingness to join the European Union placed high pressure on the government to address the problematic authoritarian structures in its security sector. Both the EU's SAP and NATO's MAP were crucial in pushing Albania to align its security sector with international democratic norms and standards.[99]

However, efforts to reform the security apparatus were further complicated by Albania's army, which under Hoxha had been designed primarily as a tool for internal control rather than national defence. This is visible with the militarisation of society, such as the establishment of bunkers and fortifications, which reflected a paranoid approach to defence. As it was noted in the SIPRI Yearbook, these fortifications not only drained Albania's resources but also established a mindset of internal repression rather than external threat management.[100] The army's role during Hoxha's rule was not just defensive but also wanted to keep the population under control. Reforming this system required a complete renewal of military doctrine, the professionalisation of the armed forces, and the introduction of democratic control mechanisms to ensure that the military would not be used as a tool for political manipulation.

[98] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Security Reform Issues in Albania: Vol. 1* (Tirana: IDM, 2009), 23-24, accessed October 1, 2024. https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SECURITY-REFORM-ISSUES-IN-ALBANIA-_Vol-1_2009.pdf.
[99] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 414-420.
[100] Ibid.

4.1.1 Impact of the Sigurimi on Albania's security sector

The Sigurimi, as Albania's secret police under Hoxha's regime, had a very important role in suppressing dissent and maintaining the regime's grip on power through fear and control. It developed a big network of informants and managed widespread surveillance, leading to the persecution of tens of thousands of Albanians. This institution's practices left deep scars on Albanian society, and its legacy was a significant challenge to SSR during the post-communist transition.[101]

After the collapse of the regime, the dissolution of the Sigurimi in 1991 was intended to signal a break from the past, but its influence stayed strong within the new democratic structures for many years after. Many former Sigurimi officials were absorbed into the state's evolving security apparatus, slowing down efforts for reform.[102] As Alban Dafa noted, the problem of personnel retention, along with an institutional culture of secrecy and authoritarianism, delayed attempts to implement transparency and civilian oversight within Albania's security sector.[103]

This infiltration by former Sigurimi officers not only extended a culture of distrust but also promoted significant public scepticism toward Albania's new security institutions. The Albanian public, long subjected to repression, remained wary of the new institutions' capacity for reform, fearing that the same authoritarian practices would continue under a different name.[104] Addressing this mistrust required not only personnel changes but also the development of new legal frameworks and mechanisms for civilian oversight of the security sector.[105]

Despite the official dismantling of the Sigurimi, it took years for Albania's security institutions to fully break free from the authoritarian practices that had characterised the country for decades. This legacy shows the depth of Albania's SSR challenges and the importance of both

[101] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Security Reform Issues in Albania*, 24-28.
[102] Enika Abazi, Aldo Bumci, Enri Hide, and Albert Rakipi, *Security Sector Reform in Albania* (Initiative for Peacebuilding [IfP]: Security Cluster, 2009), 18-20, https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01238710/document.
[103] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Un-Democratic Control of the Albanian Armed Forces*, (Tirana: IDM, 2021), 14, https://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Un-Democratic-Control-of-the-Albanian-Armed-Forces.pdf.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Abazi et al., *Security Sector Reform in Albania*, 31-33.

external support and internal political will in transforming a system so deeply rooted in repression.

4.1.2 Post-communist challenges in SSR

The fall of communism in Albania in 1991 drastically changed the country's political and security landscape. However, the abrupt nature of the regime's collapse, together with the absence of a clear plan for transitioning to democratic governance, created significant challenges for SSR. The dissolution of the Sigurimi left a power vacuum in the security sector, while the Albanian army and police were ill-prepared to function in a democratic environment.[106] The country lacked a clear roadmap for reform, leaving Albania vulnerable to internal and external pressures.

One of the major challenges was the lack of professionalisation within these security institutions. The Albanian army and police that were used as instruments of internal repression under the communist regime were not ready to take on the responsibilities of a democratic society. SIPRI's research highlights that the army was large, poorly trained, and ill-equipped for the demands of a post-communist state. Moreover, it lacked any coherent doctrine aligned with the principles of national security rather than regime survival.[107]

Because of this situation, it was very visible that the EU and NATO had an important role in pressuring Albania to adopt and apply reforms that aligned with Western democratic principles. However, these efforts were again met with internal resistance, as many within the security sector saw such reforms as a direct threat to their power and influence. This tension between external pressures for reform and internal unwillingness to change was a defining feature of Albania's SSR process during this period.[108]

As Albania faced these early reform challenges, the need for external support became evident, setting the stage for deeper involvement from NATO and the EU, which will eventually lead the country towards more comprehensive reforms.

[106] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Security Reform Issues in Albania*, 24-28.
[107] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 414-420.
[108] Ibid.

4.2 Early SSR post-communism

After the fall of communism in 1991, Albania started to work on a challenging process of SSR to transition from a repressive regime to a democratic state. The efforts for SSR were driven both by internal pressures for change and external demands from international organisations. The key focus areas of this reform included the establishment of civilian oversight mechanisms, the professionalisation of the military and police forces, and the development of legal frameworks to support transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.

4.2.1 Initial legal framework and institutional changes

One of the first steps taken in Albania's post-communist SSR was the establishment of a legal framework that would allow for democratic control over the security sector. In 1991, the Law on the Control of the Armed Forces was introduced, one of the first steps in Albania's transition. The goal was to subordinate the military to civilian authority and to set the foundations for creating a security sector with respect to democratic norms.[109]

The implementation of this law, however, faced challenges from the beginning. The principle of democratic control, as it formally became part of the legal structure, often clashed with existing political realities. Early reforms, while significant on paper, struggled to be applied in reality due to the persistence of authoritarian structures within both the military and political institutions. As Dafa outlines in his study, "the democratic control of the armed forces was formally integrated in the post-communist defence policymaking process, but its substantive implementation lagged behind".[110] This was particularly evident in the hesitation of political leaders to fully support parliamentary bodies to exercise oversight over defence matters. For example, parliamentary oversight committees often lack the necessary expertise and institutional support to carry out their functions effectively.[111]

The reform process also faced the centralisation of defence policymaking within the executive branch. As observed in post-communist Albania, defence policy decisions were frequently made by the president or prime minister without any type of parliamentary deliberation, eroding

[109] Abazi et al., *Security Sector Reform in Albania*, 25-26.
[110] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Un-Democratic Control of the Albanian Armed Forces*, 15.
[111] Ibid.

the broader goals of democratic accountability. The Council of Ministers also issued decisions regarding military reforms, often bypassing legislative scrutiny.[112]

One significant weakness in the legal framework was the limited capacity of the parliamentary committees responsible for overseeing the military. These committees, such as the Committee on National Security, had the mandate to oversee defence policy, approve military budgets, and supervise the activities of the armed forces. However, these functions were often limited by a lack of expertise and resources within the committees themselves. Furthermore, as noted in a 2021 report on the democratic control of the armed forces, "the defence oversight architecture in Albania remained weak, with parliamentary committees largely functioning as rubber-stamp bodies for executive decisions".[113]

Table 4.2: Key indicators of SSR in Albania before and after reforms

Indicator	Before reforms (pre-1990s)	After reforms (post-1990s)
Transparency	Highly secretive security institutions, limited public access to information	Gradual increase in transparency with legislative changes (e.g., Law on Control of armed forces), though still limited
Military accountability	Army heavily politicised, used as a tool for regime control rather than national defence	NATO-driven reforms promoting professionalisation and civilian oversight
Civilian oversight	No effective civilian oversight; military largely autonomous under Communist rule	Establishment of parliamentary committees for oversight, although initially weak
Human rights adherence	Security forces regularly engaged in repression, political persecution by Sigurimi	Implementation of training programs for police and military on human rights, but challenges persist (e.g., 1997 crisis)
Police professionalisation	Police used primarily for regime protection, low professionalism	Reforms aimed at transforming police into a civilian service focused on public safety

The introduction of the Ombudsman's Office in 1999 was another big step towards the reform at increasing accountability within the security sector. The Ombudsman's role was to provide

[112] Ibid., 10.
[113] Ibid., 12.

an independent mechanism for investigating complaints of misconduct within the security services, including the military and police. This office investigated abuses of power and promoted transparency, although its capacity was often limited by political interference and insufficient resources.

4.2.2 Professionalising the army and police

The professionalisation of Albania's army and police forces was a key component of the country's SSR process. Under the communist regime, the military had been a conscript-based force used primarily for regime protection, rather than national defence. In the post-communist era, the need to transform the military into a professional, capable force quickly became evident.[114] As Francis Fukuyama argues, weak state institutions often contribute to global instability, and building robust institutions is critical to ensuring stability in post-conflict environments.[115] This is directly applicable to Albania, where the weakness of the state was exposed in the early stages of SSR, needing comprehensive reforms to strengthen the governance capacity of security institutions.

Efforts to downsize and modernise the army included the demobilisation of excess personnel, the introduction of new training programs, and the acquisition of modern equipment. These reforms were supported by NATO through IPP and MAP initiatives, which set specific benchmarks for Albania's military reforms.[116] Albania's cooperation with NATO had a big effect on pushing these reforms, as the country really wanted to align its military with Western standards and eventually gain membership in the alliance.[117]

Similarly, the police force was under significant reforms, wanting to apply professionalism and accountability. The post-communist reforms focused on transforming the police into a service-orientated institution focused on public safety and respect for human rights. Recruitment standards were raised, and new training programs were implemented to instill a culture of transparency and accountability.[118]

[114] Abazi et al., *Security Sector Reform in Albania*, 17-19.
[115] Fukuyama, *State-Building*, 15-17.
[116] Ibid., 32.
[117] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 112-115.
[118] Abazi et al., Security Sector Reform in Albania, 19-22.

The SSR Albania initiated in the early 1990s visibly laid the foundation for the country's transition from an authoritarian state to a democratic society. These efforts were significant but did not fully address the challenges posed by decades of totalitarian rule. As Albania was still struggling with its newfound democracy, it was soon also faced with a crisis that exposed the fragility of its security sector and highlighted the urgent need for deeper reforms. This came in 1997.

4.3 Impact of the 1997 crisis on SSR

The 1997 crisis in Albania, triggered by the collapse of pyramid schemes, was one of the most important moments when it comes to countries' SSR processes. The schemes left thousands of Albanians financially devastated when they collapsed. This economic crisis quickly spiralled into political and social unrest, with protests happening in major cities such as Vlorë, Tiranë, and Lushnje. The protests soon turned violent, with demonstrators targeting state institutions, including the offices of the ruling Democratic Party in Vlorë. These developments highlighted issues within Albania's security apparatus that was unable to maintain public order during these escalations.[119]

The breakdown of Albania's security forces during the crisis revealed the extent to which the country's SSR had failed to address serious institutional weaknesses. Despite early legislative reforms that worked on civilian oversight and professionalising the military and police, the security sector remained politicised and deeply ineffective. Roland Paris' theory is particularly relevant here, as the premature liberalisation of democratic processes without first building strong institutions contributed to Albania's instability. In Albania's case, the early focus on political reforms overlooked the need for a foundational restructuring of security forces, leading to the events of 1997 that exposed the fragility of the state's SSR efforts. The failure of the National Intelligence Service (SHIK) and the Albanian Armed Forces to control the situation demonstrated the lack of coordination and professionalism within the security apparatus. The situation was additionally inflamed by the appointment of SHIK Director Bashkim Gazidede as the commanding officer of the military response, bypassing traditional military command structures and fragmenting the chain of command.[120]

[119] Abazi et al., *Security Sector Reform in Albania*, 25-27.
[120] Elda Nasho Ah-Pine, *Albanian Integration into the UE: Security, Europeanisation, Democratisation* (Grenoble: IEP, 2011), 25-26.
https://shs.hal.science/file/index/docid/696370/filename/Albanian_integration_into_the_UE.pdf

The events of 1997 revealed not only the military's inability to respond to internal unrest but also the mistrust between the armed forces, political leadership, and the general public. Many of the soldiers left their positions, the General Staff was in disorder, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) lacked the capacity to manage the unfolding crisis. The military's failure to restore order shows again the persistence of authoritarian-era practices within Albania's security sector and the need for a more thorough restructuring of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies. [121]

4.3.1 The aftermath and push for further reform

In the aftermath of the 1997 crisis, Albania was forced to confront structural weaknesses within its security sector. The disintegration of law and order during the crisis, combined with the military's failure to respond effectively, highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive SSR. The crisis became a turning point, leading to increased involvement of NATO, which began offering technical assistance to Albania's reform efforts.[122]

In July 1997, Albania joined IPP, which was a free pass for NATO to help the country in areas such as strategic planning, defence budgeting, and military training.[123] This external support was crucial in pushing Albania toward more professional and accountable security sector governance. The program focused on creating new defence and security legislation, reforming command structures, and reducing political interference in military operations.

The reforms that were opened through the IPP focused on Albania's broader ambitions to join NATO. This process was formalised with the signing of the MAP in 1999. Under MAP, Albania committed to a series of specific reforms with the goal to modernise its military, ensure democratic control over the armed forces, and align its security policies with NATO standards.[124] These reforms included downsizing the military, increasing training programs, and updating equipment to meet NATO's operational requirements.

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[121] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Un-Democratic Control of the Albanian Armed Forces*, 22.
[122] Ibid., 85.
[123] NATO, *PfP Cell Overview*, NATO Structure, accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.nato.int/structur/ds/wwweodastt/PfPCell.htm.
[124] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Un-Democratic Control of the Albanian Armed Forces*, 21-25.

Despite the progress made, challenges remained. Albania's security sector, while benefiting from international assistance, still struggled with internal issues such as corruption, lack of parliamentary oversight, and the persistence of authoritarian-era practices within the military. As part of the broader SSR efforts, Albania's government introduced several measures focused on increasing parliamentary control over defence matters, though these efforts were often obstructed by political interests.[125]

Ultimately, while the 1997 crisis was a reminder of Albania's institutional weaknesses, it also provided the driving force for deeper reforms that would significantly shape the country's path toward NATO and EU integration. The lessons learnt from the crisis were important in shaping the security policies that would eventually allow Albania to become a NATO member in 2009, the biggest countries' step forward in its SSR journey.[126]

4.4 Albania's NATO and EU aspirations as drivers of SSR

Albania's aspirations to join NATO and the European Union have been critical drivers of its SSR. Both organisations provided external pressure, resources, and clear conditions for the reformation of Albania's security institutions. These aspirations forced the Albanian government to apply reforms after the crisis in professionalising its military, improving transparency, and adopting democratic norms within its security sector.

4.4.1 NATO

Albania's desire to join NATO was one of the key motivators for the transformation of its armed forces and broader security sector. Following the crisis, which revealed the structural weaknesses of Albania's security apparatus, the country recognised that significant reforms were necessary so they could align its military with Western standards. NATO's MAP was instrumental in pushing Albania toward modernising its military to meet NATO's stringent operational and interoperability requirements.[127]

The MAP framework showed a new path for Albania's military reforms, mostly focusing on the professionalisation of the armed forces. One of the goals was to reduce the size of the

[125] Abazi et al., *Security Sector Reform in Albania*, 32.
[126] Institute for Democracy and Mediation, *Un-Democratic Control of the Albanian Armed Forces*, 21-25.
[127] Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF*), The Impact of Security Sector Governance in Fragile States*, 2021, 25-28, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/brief34-eng.pdf.

conscription-based military in favour of a smaller, professional, and highly trained force. This shift not only wanted to improve operational efficiency but also to integrate Albania's military into the broader NATO structure, allowing for participation in joint operations and missions. NATO's support was important in providing technical assistance and setting benchmarks for Albania's military reform, which included improving military education and logistics.

NATO encouraged Albania to reduce its military personnel and focus on quality over quantity. The restructuring of the Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) included the creation of a professional Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) corps and the modernisation of military training programs. The 'Skenderbej' Military Academy helped in this transformation, training a new generation of military leaders who would operate under the principles of civilian oversight and respect for democratic norms.[128]

However, while NATO-driven reforms were largely successful in professionalising the military, challenges remained. Public resistance to the downsizing of the military was significant, particularly in a country where unemployment was high and the military was seen as a secure form of employment.[129] Furthermore, fiscal constraints limited the Albanian government's ability to fully implement NATO's standards, as significant investments were needed to modernise military equipment and infrastructure. Despite these challenges, Albania's accession to NATO in 2009 was a major milestone in its SSR journey, showing the country's commitment to democratic governance and military transparency.

4.4.2 EU integration and SSR goals

In parallel to its NATO aspirations, Albania's road towards European Union membership had a big impact on its SSR. The EU, through SAP, set forth strict conditions related to SSR, including increasing democratic control, promoting the rule of law, and combating corruption.[130] These conditions were designed to ensure that Albania's security institutions operated within a framework of transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights.

[128] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 135-138.
[129] European Commission, *Stabilisation and Association Report for Albania*, EU Progress Reports on Albania, 2007, 32.
[130] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 90-93.

One of the most significant areas of EU influence was in the establishment of civilian oversight mechanisms. Under pressure from the EU, Albania reformed its MoD and other key security institutions to ensure that the military, police, and intelligence services were subject to parliamentary oversight. This was a critical step in disassembling the legacy of the communist era. The EU's insistence on democratic control over the security sector had a goal to free Albania from its authoritarian past, requiring radical reforms to support a culture of accountability within its security institutions.

Moreover, the EU's focus on combating corruption in Albania's police and judiciary was another significant driver of reform. Corruption within the security sector had long been a barrier to effective SSR, affecting public trust and the development of transparent governance structures. The EU provided technical and financial assistance to combat corruption, although progress was often slow due to political interests that resisted change.[131] Efforts to introduce anti-corruption measures in the security sector were met with resistance, particularly from those who benefitted from the existing, opaque structures.[132]

A critical aspect of the EU's SSR agenda was its emphasis on human rights. Albania was required to implement reforms that safeguarded individual rights within its security forces, including the police and military. However, the persistence of corruption and weak accountability mechanisms meant that human rights abuses occasionally went unchecked. One notable example is the Gërdec explosion in 2008, where the mishandling of ammunition storage led to a catastrophic explosion that killed 26 people. The incident showed serious flaws in Albania's oversight mechanisms and highlighted the need for stronger accountability measures within its defence and security sectors.[133]

The EU's insistence on judicial reforms aimed at ensuring that security forces could be held accountable for their actions also faced significant resistance. The judiciary in Albania has long been plagued by corruption, and while efforts have been made to reform the system, progress

[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 90-93.

has been slow. The EU's ongoing support in this area shows the importance of aligning Albania's security sector with broader European standards of governance and rule of law.[134]

4.5 Continuing challenges and areas for improvement

Despite the significant progress made in Albania's SSR over the past two decades, several challenges persist, particularly in the areas of corruption, political instability, and the establishment of strong accountability mechanisms. While Albania's aspirations for NATO and EU membership forced important reforms, the country continues to struggle with deeply rooted issues that affect the full realisation of SSR goals.

4.5.1 Corruption and political instability

Corruption remains one of the most critical and persistent challenges in Albania's SSR process. Despite reforms that were applied with the goal of increasing transparency and accountability, corruption has permeated many aspects of Albania's security and political institutions, affecting trust in the rule of law and obstructing efforts to professionalise the security sector.[135] As noted in SIPRI's analysis, corruption within the procurement process of military equipment, as well as in the police force, has delayed reforms and weakened Albania's ability to develop an effective security sector that meets international standards.[136]

Political instability is another point in prolonging these issues. The overlapping interests of political elites and their influence over security institutions create a situation where reforms are often superficial, and accountability is limited. The lack of political will to tackle corruption head-on has obstructed the establishment of transparent processes within the MoD and the Ministry of Interior, where decisions related to military and police reforms are frequently made without sufficient oversight or scrutiny. The politicisation of security institutions remains a significant obstacle, as military and police appointments are often influenced by political affiliations rather than meritocratic principles.

The collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997, followed by crisis, highlighted the vulnerability of Albania's security sector to corruption and political instability. The failure of the security

[134] European Union, *European Parliament Resolution on the Stabilisation and Association Process for Albania, Official Journal of the European Union*, C 305E/159, December 13, 2006, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2006:305E:0159:0162:EN.
[135] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 90-93.
[136] Ibid.

forces to maintain order during the crisis was not only due to structural weaknesses but also because of the deep-rooted corruption that had left the military and police ill-equipped to respond to the situation. Despite international assistance wanting to address these issues, corruption continues to slow down Albania's progress in SSR, particularly in the implementation of reforms that require long-term commitment and structural changes.

The persistence of corruption within the security sector has also impacted Albania's EU accession process. The EU has identified corruption as a major obstacle to Albania's membership, repeatedly emphasising the need for stronger anti-corruption measures within its security forces. Although Albania has made steps in creating anti-corruption frameworks, the implementation of these measures remains inconsistent, and political interference often prevents effective prosecution of high-level officials involved in corrupt practices.

4.5.2 Accountability and civilian oversight

One of the core components of Albania's SSR agenda has been the establishment of mechanisms for civilian oversight and accountability within its security institutions. However, despite legislative reforms aimed at increasing transparency, the reality on the ground often falls short of these goals. The lack of civilian oversight remains a significant challenge, as many of the institutions responsible for overseeing the military and police lack the expertise, resources, or independence needed to function effectively.

A key example of this is the Gërdec explosion in 2008, which exposed serious flaws in Albania's accountability mechanisms. The investigation into the incident revealed not only widespread corruption but also a significant failure of civilian oversight institutions, as those responsible were not held accountable. This event showed the need for stronger regulatory frameworks and independent oversight mechanisms to ensure that security forces operate within the bounds of the law and with respect for human rights.

Efforts to establish civilian oversight have been further obstructed by political interference and a lack of independence among oversight bodies. Parliamentary committees tasked with monitoring the activities of the security sector often lack the necessary authority or expertise to effectively carry out their functions, and their recommendations are frequently ignored by the executive branch. As a result, Albania's security sector remains vulnerable to abuses of power and lacks the necessary checks and balances to ensure accountability and transparency.

Albania’s path to SSR has been full of challenges, from the deeply fixed legacy of its authoritarian past to the pressures of modernising its institutions in line with NATO and EU standards. While significant changes have been made Albania continues to face critical obstacles in fully realising its SSR goals.

Corruption, political instability, and weak civilian oversight mechanisms remain persistent issues that affect Albania’s security forces. Despite these challenges, Albania’s journey toward NATO membership in 2009 and its ongoing EU accession process have provided important incentives for further reform. However, the sustainability of these reforms will depend on Albania’s ability to address the structural issues that continue to affect its security institutions.

As Albania moves forward, the lessons learnt from its SSR process offer valuable insights for other post-communist states undergoing similar transitions. The role of international actors, the importance of political will, and the need for deep-rooted institutional changes remain key factors in shaping the success of SSR efforts. Albania's experience highlights the complex and often protracted nature of SSR, but it also shows the transformative potential of sustained external support and internal commitment to democratic governance.

CHAPTER V. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The process of SSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina to this day faces a very complex challenge that was the consequence of the country's violent disintegration in the 1990s and the aftermath of ethnic fragmentation. Following the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Bosnia was left with a much divided political landscape, with ethnically based institutions dominating its governance structures, including the security sector. The reform of Bosnia's security institutions was therefore not only a question of technical modernisation but also a critical component of the country's long-term stability and democratic development. However, even to this day, the path to SSR wasn't without difficulties, mostly due to the persistent tensions between local ownership and international influence.

The involvement of international actors has been a defining feature of SSR in Bosnia. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO had the biggest impact on the reform process. These actors were important in setting the agenda and providing the financial and technical support necessary for reform. However, while international pressure has led to significant advancements, especially in defence and intelligence reforms, there have been ongoing concerns about the legitimacy and sustainability of reforms that lack substantial local ownership. Scholar Slobodan Perdan highlighted that without strong domestic buy-in, reforms may struggle to be fully integrated into Bosnia's political and institutional fabric, leaving the long-term impact of SSR in question.[137]

Nevertheless, Bosnia and Herzegovina did manage to make notable progress in restructuring its security sector. Defence reforms, including the demobilisation of former combatants and the establishment of unified armed forces, stand out as one of the big successes. These reforms, driven by the Defence Reform Commission and supported by NATO, helped Bosnia to join the PfP in 2006. However, the challenges in reforming other sectors, particularly the police, have proven more resistant to change. The highly decentralised nature of Bosnia's police forces, together with political interference and ethnic divisions, has slowed efforts to create a modern, efficient, and accountable policing system.

[137] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage, in Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform*, ed. Timothy Donais (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2008), 254–256, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/LocalOwnershipandSSR1.pdf.

This Chapter will explore the major elements of SSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on key areas such as defence, intelligence, border control, and police reform. Each section will mention the progress made, the role of international actors, and the persistent challenges Bosnia faces in achieving accountability, transparency, and respect for human rights within its security institutions. Furthermore, this Chapter will examine the tension between internationally driven reforms and the local ownership dilemma, evaluating the extent to which externally pushed reforms can be effective in a post-conflict, divided society like Bosnia and Herzegovina.

5.1 Post-Dayton SSR: Challenges and progress

The Dayton Peace Accords of 1995 brought a new and very complex political framework for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), trying to freeze the conflict along ethno-territorial lines. While the agreement succeeded in ending active hostilities, it also left BiH with fragmented and parallel security institutions. SSR in BiH has been one of the most critical yet difficult aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. This section explores the progress and challenges in key areas of SSR, including defence reform, police restructuring, and judicial reform, focusing on international involvement and local ownership of the reform process.

5.1.1 Defence reform: Fragmented armed forces to unified state military

The post-Dayton Bosnia and Herzegovina's army was an example of the extreme fragmentation, with the presence of two separate and ethnically divided military forces: the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dominated mainly by Bosniaks and Croats, and the Army of Republika Srpska, controlled by Bosnian Serbs. This division reflected the broader political fragmentation of the state, with each entity maintaining its own defence structure, eroding deeper state-level command and control, and impeding effective military oversight.[138]

One of the main parts of the Dayton Peace Accords was to address this by outlining provisions for the separation and reduction of armed forces, but the arrangements that came in reality left the country with parallel chains of command, severely limiting the capacity of BiH to develop a unified national defence system. The challenges of fragmented armed forces were not

[138] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later and the Security Landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Human Security Centre, December 11, 2023, http://www.hscentre.org/europe/dayton-accords-28-years-later-security-landscape-bosnia-herzegovina/

operational but deeply political, as the entities' military structures were a direct legacy of the war and thus highly resistant to any type of integration.[139]

Efforts to unify the military began in 2003 with the establishment of the Defence Reform Commission (DRC), which was tasked with creating a state-level military structure under one unified command. This process was mainly pushed by NATO, which saw the unification of BiH's military as essential for the country's long-term stability and eventual integration into Euro-Atlantic security structures.[140] One of the goals of the DRC was to make Bosnia eligible for NATO's PfP program, which at the time required the creation of a unified state-level defence force.

The DRC's efforts did pay off at the end, with the significant reforms by 2006, when the presidency of BiH decided to establish a fully professional military, eliminating conscription and unifying the two entity-based armies into a single national military structure, the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH).[141] This unified force operated under a single chain of command, with the MoD overseeing all military operations at the state level. The unification of the armed forces was a landmark achievement in Bosnia's post-conflict reconstruction and a first step towards the country's inclusion in NATO's PfP.[142]

Based on this, we can easily say that NATO had a big impact on BiH's defence reforms, providing not only the political push but also the technical and financial support necessary for this process.[143] As early as 1995, NATO had been involved in stabilising the post-war environment through its Implementation Force (IFOR) and later the Stabilisation Force (SFOR), both of which were tasked with maintaining peace and overseeing the demobilisation and reduction of armed forces in Bosnia. NATO's involvement was then officially formalised in 2006 when Bosnia joined the PfP, signalling the success of its defence reforms and its commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration.[144]

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[139] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 254.
[140] Timothy Donais, *The Political Economy of Peacebuilding in Post-Dayton Bosnia*, Kindle ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 83.
[141] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 265.
[142] NATO, *NATO's Role in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, NATO, accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49127.htm.
[143] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[144] Ibid.

Oliver Hegglin highlights the role of NATO in ensuring Bosnia's path toward a secure and stable defence structure, noting that this assistance has been instrumental in creating a unified command and control structure compatible with NATO standards.[145] Moreover, NATO's Defence Capacity Building package, introduced in 2023, continues to support Bosnia's security sector by addressing new challenges such as cyber-defence and counterterrorism, further putting the armed forces' position as one of the strongest multi-ethnic institutions in the country.[146]

A significant aspect of the defence reforms has also been the improvement in parliamentary oversight and accountability within the armed forces. Prior to the reforms, the armed forces operated with little transparency, and there was limited civilian control over military affairs. The reforms introduced a state-level MoD, which was responsible for overseeing military operations and ensuring compliance with state laws and international obligations.[147] This shift represented a significant step forward in terms of democratic control over the military and the transparency of military operations.[148]

However, challenges remain, particularly in terms of transferring military property from the entities to the state. The legacy of the DPA continues to pose obstacles to complete integration, with some political actors in Republika Srpska still resistant to state control over military assets.[149]

Despite these challenges, the unification of Bosnia's armed forces stands as one of the most successful aspects of SSR, providing a model for other areas of SSR. It has not only increased the country's defence capabilities but also further encouraged greater political cohesion by creating one of the few truly multi-ethnic institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 268.
[148] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 258.
[149] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*

5.1.2 Intelligence reform: Politicised agencies and integration efforts

Following the end of the Bosnian War, one of the most challenging sectors of SSR in BiH was intelligence reform. Intelligence services in post-Dayton Bosnia were highly politicised, with each of the two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, maintaining totally separate intelligence agencies. These agencies were not only fragmented along ethnic lines but were also implicated in spying on political rivals, international actors, and even their own citizens. Moreover, many intelligence operatives were linked to organised crime, which affected both the security of the state and public trust in these institutions.[150]

This was a legacy of the war years, during which the intelligence agencies of the two entities operated largely autonomously and were deeply rooted in the political conflicts between the different ethnic groups. The fragmentation of the intelligence apparatus along entity lines further increased the problem, as the agencies were often used to advance the political agendas of the governing elites rather than to protect the security of the state or its citizens.[151] As noted in Hegglin's analysis of Bosnia's security landscape, the fragmented nature of the intelligence services was a significant threat to both internal stability and Bosnia's path toward Euro-Atlantic integration.[152] The agencies' involvement in criminal activity, together with their failure to apply the democratic standards, created significant barriers to reform.

One of the first and most important milestones in Bosnia's intelligence reform was the creation of the Intelligence and Security Agency (OSA) in 2004. The OSA was designed to unify the separate intelligence agencies of the two entities into a single, state-level agency responsible for gathering and analysing intelligence on threats to Bosnia's national security.[153]

This new agency was tasked with collecting intelligence on terrorism, organised crime, and other threats to national security, and it was given a mandate to cooperate with NATO and the EU.[154] One of the key goals of the reform was to ensure that the OSA operated under civilian oversight and that its activities were subject to parliamentary review, in this way increasing

[150] Ibid.
[151] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 265.
[152] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[153] Slobodan Perdan*, Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 255.
[154] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 266.

accountability and transparency in the intelligence sector.[155] The creation of the OSA also reflected the broader goal of consolidating Bosnia's security institutions at the state level, as part of the country's ongoing efforts to join NATO's PfP and eventually gain full membership in the EU.[156]

In general, international actors were instrumental in driving intelligence reform in Bosnia.[157] Both organisations recognised very early on that the fragmented and politicised nature of the intelligence services was a significant obstacle to Bosnia's long-term stability. NATO, in particular, made intelligence reform a key condition for Bosnia's participation in the PfP, and the EU made similar demands as part of its SAA negotiations with Bosnia.[158] Their insistence on creating a unified, state-level intelligence agency was driven mostly by concerns about terrorism, organised crime, and the potential for renewed ethnic conflict.[159] The EU also made intelligence reform a central part of its broader efforts to promote the rule of law and human rights in Bosnia, recognising that an accountable and professional intelligence service was essential for protecting individual rights and ensuring public trust in the security sector.[160]

On the other side, despite the progress made with the creation of the OSA, significant concerns remain about the respect for human rights within Bosnia's intelligence services. While the OSA operates under civilian oversight and is subject to parliamentary review, there are still reports of abuses of power, including surveillance of political opponents and violations of privacy rights.[161] These issues reflect broader challenges in Bosnia's post-Dayton political landscape, where ethnic divisions and political instability continue to obstruct the effectiveness of almost all state institutions.[162]

As noted by Hegglin, while Bosnia's intelligence services did improve transparency and accountability, the legacy of political interference and corruption remains a significant obstacle to further reform.[163] The ongoing political conflict between the entities, particularly the

[155] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[156] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, p.267.
[157] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 256.
[158] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 269.
[159] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[160] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 258.
[161] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[162] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 271.
[163] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*

secessionist rhetoric from Republika Srpska, also threatens to undermine the gains made in intelligence reform. Moreover, while the OSA has improved its cooperation with international partners, particularly in areas such as counterterrorism and organised crime, it still faces significant challenges in ensuring that its operations fully comply with international human rights standards.[164]

5.1.3 Border control and customs reforms

The State Border Service (SBS) was established in 2000 with the goal to reform Bosnia's border management and customs services. Following the Dayton Peace Accords, border management was an area of serious concern, especially given the country's complex internal divisions and porous borders. The SBS was established as a state-level institution and had a task to oversee the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a responsibility that was previously seriously fragmented among the entities. The creation of the SBS was a critical step for unification of the country's border control under a single command structure, addressing many of the vulnerabilities that Bosnia has had since the end of the war.[165]

One of the first challenges addressed by the SBS was cross-border crime, which mostly included the smuggling of goods, arms, and human trafficking. The war and its aftermath had left Bosnia's borders largely unregulated, providing opportunities for organised crime networks to easily flourish.[166] To combat these issues, the SBS was given the authority to coordinate with international agencies, as well as with neighbouring countries, to improve security at border crossings. These international partnerships were essential in building the capacity of the SBS to respond to border-related crime. Moreover, reforms focused on increasing the technical capabilities of border security personnel, including improved training and the adoption of new technologies for countries' border surveillance.[167]

However, despite the progress made in establishing the SBS and reforming border controls, corruption within the customs services remained a persistent issue, even to this day. The fragmentation of Bosnia's political system allowed local actors in Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to retain significant influence over customs operations,

[164] Ibid.
[165] Timothy Donais, *The Political Economy of Peacebuilding*, 83-87.
[166] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*
[167] Ibid.

leading to varying levels of compliance with state policies.[168] The EU and NATO provided a vital contribution in pressuring Bosnia to implement anti-corruption measures as part of its broader SSR agenda. These reforms had as a goal to increase transparency and reduce opportunities for corruption by centralising customs operations at the state level and introducing stricter oversight mechanisms.

While some improvements were made, challenges in ensuring full transparency and accountability persist. The widespread perception of corruption in the customs and border management sectors deeply eroded public confidence in these institutions. Nevertheless, the establishment of the SBS and the accompanying reforms in customs operations represent important steps toward improving Bosnia and Herzegovina's ability to manage its borders effectively and combat organised crime. Continued international support and domestic commitment will be necessary to further these reforms and ensure their sustainability in the long term.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made notable strides in its post-Dayton SSR, particularly in the areas of defence, intelligence, and border control. The unification of the armed forces represents one of the most significant achievements, establishing a truly multi-ethnic institution that serves as a model for future reforms. Intelligence reform, although more challenging due to the legacy of politicisation and corruption, has seen progress through the creation of a state-level intelligence and security agency, though human rights concerns remain. Border control and customs reforms, including the establishment of the State Border Service, have improved Bosnia's capacity to manage its borders and combat cross-border crime, though corruption still poses a significant challenge.

Despite these advances, the reform process in Bosnia remains incomplete, with issues of political interference, fragmentation, and lack of accountability continuing to impede full integration and modernisation of key institutions. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the area of police reform, where fragmented police forces and outdated management structures continue to obstruct effective law enforcement.

[168] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 153.

5.2 Police reform: A persisting challenge

Bosnia and Herzegovina's police forces, like its military and intelligence services, were deeply fragmented along ethnic and territorial lines following the Dayton Accords. However, unlike the military and intelligence reforms, police restructuring has faced even greater obstacles, with limited success in achieving any type of meaningful change. Police reform in BiH because of this remains one of the most challenging aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. The Dayton Peace Accords created a fragmented policing system, with multiple, decentralised law enforcement agencies operating across cantons and entities. These agencies not only operate with outdated management and equipment but are also deeply affected by political interference and corruption. The decentralisation of policing has made it difficult to establish a coherent national security framework capable of effectively addressing organised crime, human trafficking, and other serious security issues.[169]

5.2.1 Fragmentation and lack of modernisation

Following the Dayton Peace Accords, policing in BiH was decentralised into 13 different autonomous police agencies, spread across the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which was further divided into 10 cantonal forces) and Republika Srpska, as well as the Brčko District. Each agency operates independently, with its own budget, command structure, and procedures, leading to a lack of coordination between the different police forces.[170] This fragmentation has limited the ability of law enforcement to respond to cross-entity crime, particularly organised crime and human trafficking, where rapid, coordinated responses are critical.[171]

The decentralised nature of the policing system also affects accountability and transparency. The fragmentation, combined with limited central oversight, creates opportunities for political actors to exert influence over police operations and appointments. In many cantons, local politicians play a direct role in appointing police chiefs, which has resulted in policing that often serves political interests rather than the needs of public safety. This political interference

[169] Trevor Findlay, *The Use of Force in UN Peace Operations* (Waterloo, ON: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2010), p.7, https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/cigi_pb_42.pdf.
[170] Ibid., 9-10.
[171] International Crisis Group, *Bosnia's Future*, Security Council Report, July 10, 2014, 12, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Bosnia%20ICG%20Report.pdf

has made it difficult to implement reforms that could modernise police forces and address critical security issues.

The structural issues in BiH's policing system are compounded by a lack of modern equipment and training. Many police forces operate with outdated equipment, and officers often receive inadequate training to handle modern security challenges. For instance, the absence of a national police database limits information sharing between police agencies, making it difficult to track organised crime networks or respond to inter-entity crimes. Moreover, the rural cantons are particularly underfunded, limiting their ability to respond effectively to local security threats, while better-funded urban forces still face significant challenges due to the lack of inter-cantonal cooperation.

5.2.2 The police restructuring commission and international pressure

One of the most significant attempts to reform Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented police forces was the establishment of the Police Restructuring Commission (PRC) in 2004. The commission was created under the auspices of the OHR and was heavily supported by the European Union, which saw police reform as a crucial precondition for Bosnia's further progress toward EU integration. The mandate of the PRC was to propose a unified police structure for Bosnia and Herzegovina, aiming to centralise police authority at the state level to improve coordination and address the severe fragmentation of policing.

The PRC was tasked with addressing the problems of police fragmentation, political interference, and the lack of modern equipment and training. Its goal was to create a system where police forces would operate free from political control and coordinate effectively across entity lines. But, despite these ambitious goals, the PRC faced significant political resistance, particularly from Republika Srpska, which feared that police centralisation would erode its autonomy.[172]

During this period also the Mostar Declaration was signed in 2005, where political leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina's main ethnic groups expressed their support for the principles of police reform, including the establishment of state-level policing structures. However, again,

[172] International Crisis Group, *Bosnia's Stalled Police Reform: No Progress without Political Consensus*, Europe Report No. 129, 2008, 10-14.

political opposition, particularly from Bosnian Serb leaders, continued to block meaningful progress. The Republika Srpska government was particularly resistant to the transfer of policing powers to the state, viewing it as a threat to the autonomy guaranteed under the Dayton Agreement.

The political stalemate continued until 2008, when a compromise was finally reached, leading to the adoption of new police laws. These laws established several new state-level police bodies tasked with coordinating policing efforts across the country. However, while the creation of these bodies represented some progress, the reform fell short of the PRC's original vision of fully integrated police forces. The new laws allowed the entities to retain substantial control over their own police forces, and many of the coordination mechanisms envisioned by the PRC were never fully implemented. As a result, Bosnia's police forces remain highly fragmented, with limited coordination between the various cantonal and entity-level forces.

Political interference also continues to be a major challenge. Despite the reforms, local politicians still have significant influence over police appointments and operations, particularly when we talk about Republika Srpska, where political leaders have repeatedly resisted attempts to centralise police authority.[173] This ongoing political interference constantly bloks the effectiveness of the reforms, limiting progress in areas such as organised crime and human trafficking, where inter-entity cooperation is more than needed. And while the EU and OHR played an important role in pushing for police reform, their influence has waned in recent years as political resistance to further reforms has hardened. The EU continues to emphasise police reform as a critical component of Bosnia's path toward EU membership, but without stronger political will from domestic actors, the prospects for further progress remain limited.[174]

Despite the efforts of both domestic and international actors, police reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains one of the most contentious and incomplete aspects of SSR. The fragmented nature of the policing system, combined with political interference and resistance from Republika Srpska, has prevented the establishment of a fully integrated and modernised police force. While the creation of new state-level police bodies represented some progress, the

[173] International Crisis Group, *Bosnia's Stalled Police Reform*, 12-16.
[174] European Commission, *Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023 Report*, SWD(2023) 691 final, November 8, 2023, 27, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_691%20Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20report.pdf.

limited coordination between the various cantonal and entity-level forces continues to slow down Bosnia's ability to combat all types of organised crime and ensure public safety.

Moreover, the political nature of police appointments and operations has hampered efforts to introduce the necessary reforms. The Mostar Declaration and subsequent debates on police reform laws highlight how deep rooted political interests are in maintaining the status quo, particularly in Republika Srpska, where any attempts to centralise authority have been met with strong opposition. This resistance highlights the broader challenge faced by international actors: how to implement meaningful reform in a country where local ownership is often overshadowed by ethnic and political divisions?

The difficulties encountered in police reform are not isolated incidents but rather symptomatic of a larger issue that has defined Bosnia's SSR journey, which is the delicate balance between international influence and local ownership. While international actors have been driving key reforms, their efforts have frequently clashed with local political dynamics, particularly from Republika Srpska, where leaders like Milorad Dodik have been outspoken in their opposition to certain reforms. This resistance to international influence, especially in politically sensitive areas such as police reform, raises critical questions about the sustainability of SSR in Bosnia when driven predominantly by external actors. It is within this tension that we must examine the broader role of the international community in shaping Bosnia's post-conflict reconstruction and the challenges that arise when local ownership is side lined.

5.3 International influence vs. local ownership in SSR

The international community has been deeply involved in shaping Bosnia and Herzegovina's SSR process from the outset. Following the Dayton Peace Accords, international actors had very important roles in establishing the framework for post-conflict reconstruction. This international support was critical, given the country's deep ethnic divisions and fragmented political landscape. However, as Bosnia's experience has shown, the reliance on international actors to drive reforms has created a persistent tension between external pressure and the need for local ownership of the process.

Local ownership is widely recognised as essential for the long-term sustainability of SSR. Without local engagement and buy-in, reforms can struggle to take root and may fail to address the political dynamics that shape the country's security landscape. In Bosnia's case, the

complex relationship between international actors and local political leaders, especially those in Republika Srpska, has often delayed the full implementation of SSR. While international actors have achieved successes in areas like defence reform and intelligence restructuring, other areas, such as police reform, have faced more significant obstacles due to local resistance.

This section will examine the role of the international community in shaping Bosnia's SSR, exploring the successes, challenges, and the ongoing tension between international influence and local ownership.

5.3.1 The role of the international community in SSR of Bosnia

As mentioned before, the international community had a big impact on BiH, especially when it comes to countries' SSR since the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995. The efforts of key actors were critical in shaping the reform process in the post-conflict landscape of Bosnia. Without the direct involvement of these international bodies, it is unlikely that the significant changes made in defence, intelligence, and border control reforms would have been possible.

One of the most important achievements of the international community was in the area of defence reform. NATO, through SFOR and DRC united Bosnia's fragmented military forces into a state-level, professional military structure. This process quickly culminated in the creation of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2006, an achievement that would not have been possible without NATO's persistent pressure and technical support. NATO's involvement was essential in the demobilisation of warring factions and the integration of the ethnically divided armies of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. The success of these reforms enabled Bosnia to join NATO's PfP program, signalling a major step towards integration. The reforms also introduced vital elements of democratic control, such as civilian oversight through the newly established MoD. Without NATO's intervention, the unification of the military and the stabilisation of Bosnia's defence sector that followed would likely have faltered.[175]

Intelligence reform was another critical area where the international community played a decisive role. These agencies were often involved in illicit activities, including spying on

[175] Oliver Hegglin, *Dayton Accords: 28 Years Later.*

political rivals and international actors. The creation of OSA in 2004 was largely supported and pushed by international pressure, particularly from NATO and the EU, which made intelligence reform a condition for Bosnia's progress toward European integration. The OSA was designed to bring Bosnia's intelligence services under centralised civilian control, ensuring transparency and accountability. This reform had a big effect in reducing the potential for ethnic-based intelligence operations and in encouraging greater trust between Bosnia and its international partners.[176]

The European Union has also been instrumental in shaping SSR in Bosnia, particularly through SAP. Progress in SSR was established as a key criterion for Bosnia's potential EU membership. The EU also supported the reform of judicial institutions and the police sector, both of which faced significant challenges due to political interference and fragmentation.[177]

Although the success was visible, the heavy involvement of the international community has not been without challenges. One of the main criticisms is that many reforms have been externally driven, with limited local ownership within the country. This has raised concerns about the sustainability of reforms, particularly in politically sensitive areas like police reform. Slobodan Perdan argues that without genuine domestic engagement, externally imposed reforms may lack the legitimacy needed for long-term success.[178] In particular, the international community's push for police centralisation faced considerable resistance from local political elites, who viewed it as a threat to the autonomy of the entities. The reforms achieved under international organisations have laid the foundation for a more stable and accountable security sector, but their long-term success will depend on the extent to which local actors can take ownership and continue the process independently.

5.3.2 Resistance to international influence

Although international actors had a serious mission and effect in Bosnia's SSR, their influence has not always been welcomed by local political elites, particularly in Republika Srpska. While international pressure helped drive forward key reforms in defence and intelligence, the push

[176] Ibid.
[177] Office of the High Representative, *29th Report of the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Secretary-General of the United Nations*, April 14, 2006, https://shorturl.at/MTfUs
[178] Slobodan Perdan, Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage, 256-258.

for police reform faced resistance from local leaders, with Milorad Dodik, the President of Republika Srpska, as one of the most vocal opponents. Dodik's opposition to police centralisation is a prime example of the broader resistance to international influence, which drastically affected the SSR process within the country.

Dodik, a powerful figure in Republika Srpska, consistently framed police centralisation as a direct threat to the entity's autonomy. His resistance culminated in his refusal to accept reforms proposed by the PRC, which aimed to centralise Bosnia's fragmented police forces under state-level control.

Roland Paris' theory provides a critical lens for understanding Bosnia's SSR. Paris argues that in post-conflict societies, building robust institutions must precede political liberalisation. In Bosnia, the international community's push for rapid liberalisation, without fully ensuring that effective, accountable institutions were in place, exacerbated the ethnic and political fragmentation. The failed attempt to centralise police forces, for instance, can be seen as a result of liberalisation efforts outpacing institutional development, leading to resistance from Republika Srpska's leadership, notably Milorad Dodik.

Additionally, Francis Fukuyama's theory on the necessity of state-building supports the argument that Bosnia's weak state structures hindered the effectiveness of SSR. Fukuyama stresses that strong, accountable state institutions are essential for maintaining post-conflict stability. In Bosnia, the fragmented security structures, along with the lack of deep political commitment to reforms, highlight the limitations of external-driven SSR when the state itself lacks capacity and ownership of reforms.

The Mostar Declaration of 2005, signed by political leaders from all major ethnic groups, initially signalled a commitment to reform. However, Dodik and his political allies in Republika Srpska quickly backtracked, arguing that such reforms would erode the entity's constitutional rights under the Dayton Peace Accords.[179]

Dodik's opposition went beyond simple disagreement over policy. He used the issue of police reform as a point to strengthen Republika Srpska's political identity, frequently invoking the

[179] Oliver Hegglin, *The Dayton Accords 28 Years Later.*

Dayton Accords as a legal shield against what he perceived as international overreach. His defiance not only stalled police reforms but also exacerbated ethnic and political tensions within Bosnia, further complicating the SSR process.[180] This resistance highlights a central issue within Bosnia's post-conflict reconstruction: the difficulty of balancing international intervention with local political realities, especially in regions where political leaders view reforms as a threat to their power.

Other political actors in Republika Srpska, including the ruling Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), aligned themselves with Dodik's position, ensuring that the entity remained a barrier to international efforts at reform. Dodik's rhetoric often painted international actors as intruders attempting to strip Republika Srpska of its autonomy. By appealing to nationalist sentiments and stoking fears of centralisation, Dodik successfully gained support within his constituency, making police reform one of the most contentious issues in Bosnia's SSR process.

This resistance was not limited only to police reform. Dodik and his political allies also opposed reforms in other areas, such as judicial restructuring and intelligence centralisation, where they saw international involvement as an infringement on Republika Srpska's sovereignty. These tensions had then broader implications for Bosnia's political climate, contributing to a deepening sense of division between Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.[181] The international community's efforts to implement reforms have often been met with accusations of bias, further polarising the political landscape.

The resistance to international influence in SSR has, in many ways, become symbolic of the broader political struggles within Bosnia. The power dynamics between the entities, combined with the complex constitutional framework established by the Dayton Accords, have made it difficult for reforms to take root without facing significant local opposition. In the case of Republika Srpska, this opposition has been particularly strong, with political leaders framing SSR as part of a broader effort to erode the entity's autonomy.

[180] Office of the High Representative, *29th Report of the High Representative for the Implementation of the Peace Agreement on Bosnia and Herzegovina*
[181] Slobodan Perdan, *Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage*, 256-258.

Despite the setbacks, international actors have continued to push for reforms, particularly in areas like police centralisation, which they view as essential for Bosnia's long-term stability and EU integration. However, the lack of local ownership in these reform processes delayed progress, leading to a situation where reforms are either stalled or implemented in a piecemeal fashion, without the full commitment of local political elites.

This dynamic of resistance highlights the delicate balance that international actors must strike when engaging in post-conflict reconstruction. While external guidance and pressure are often necessary to drive reforms in deeply divided societies, such as Bosnia, these efforts must be carefully calibrated to avoid alienating local actors, whose cooperation is essential for the long-term success and sustainability of SSR.[182]

Table 5.3: Key indicators of SSR in Bosnia before and after reforms

Indicator	Before reforms (Pre-Dayton Accords)	After reforms (Post-Dayton Accords)
Transparency	Ethnic divisions and parallel security structures, lack of transparency	Unified armed forces, increased transparency under international oversight, though issues remain
Military accountability	Ethnically divided forces, no civilian oversight	Unified state-controlled military, NATO oversight and accountability mechanisms
Civilian oversight	Virtually no civilian oversight; military under ethnic political control	Establishment of parliamentary oversight, although civilian oversight remains limited in practice
Human rights adherence	Numerous human rights abuses during the war by military and police forces	Introduction of human rights training, but implementation remains inconsistent
Police professionalisation	Fragmented police forces involved in ethnic violence	Reformed, unified police force under international supervision, gradual professionalisation

5.3.3 Sustainability of SSR without local ownership

The sustainability of SSR in Bosnia and Herzegovina has long been a subject of debate. While external pressure from the OHR, NATO, and the EU has been crucial in pushing through much-

[182] Oliver Hegglin, *The Dayton Accords 28 Years Later.*

needed reforms, the lack of genuine local ownership raises critical questions about the long-term success of these efforts. The reliance on international actors has helped to establish institutions and frameworks for security governance, but the absence of deep domestic engagement and buy-in has created a legitimacy gap that threatens the sustainability of the reform process.

One of the primary challenges facing SSR in Bosnia is the perception that reforms are imposed from above, with little input from local actors. This dynamic has been particularly evident in areas like police and judicial reform, where international actors set the agenda and enforced compliance through conditionality, often without securing genuine commitment from local political elites.[183] While this approach has succeeded in implementing structural reforms, it has also led to a disconnect between the reforms themselves and the political realities on the ground. As a result, many of the reforms remain fragile, with the risk that they may unravel if international oversight diminishes.[184]

This legitimacy gap is further compounded by the complex political landscape in Bosnia, where ethnic divisions and competing political interests make it difficult to achieve consensus on key issues. In Republika Srpska, Milorad Dodik's opposition to reforms has stoked nationalist sentiments and further alienated local actors from the reform process. As noted earlier, this resistance is not just a challenge to SSR but also a reflection of the broader political fragmentation that characterises Bosnia's post-Dayton governance.

The lack of local ownership also has broader implications for democratisation. While international actors have succeeded in establishing some of the formal institutions of democratic governance, the deeper processes of building trust, accountability, and transparency have been delayed by the limited involvement of local stakeholders. In many cases, reforms have been seen as externally imposed, which has affected public confidence in the new institutions and created a sense of dependency on international actors. This dependency is particularly problematic in the context of Bosnia's EU integration process, where genuine political commitment and local leadership are essential for further progress.

[183] Oliver Hegglin, *The Dayton Accords 28 Years Later.*
[184] Slobodan Perdan, Bosnia: SSR under International Tutelage, 260.

Moreover, the heavy reliance on international actors has led to a situation where Bosnia's political elites often defer responsibility for difficult reforms to the international community rather than taking ownership of the process themselves. This dynamic is evident in the way that local politicians frequently resist or obstruct reforms, knowing that the international community will continue to push for compliance. As a result, reforms are often implemented in a piecemeal fashion without the necessary political will to ensure their long-term success.

In the broader context of SSR, the absence of local ownership raises serious concerns about the sustainability of reforms. While international actors can provide the necessary support and guidance in the short term, the long-term success of SSR depends on the ability of local actors to take responsibility for their own governance. Without meaningful local engagement and commitment, the institutions established through international intervention may lack the resilience to withstand future political crises or challenges.

While the role of international actors has been essential in driving Bosnia's SSR, the lack of local ownership remains a critical barrier to the sustainability of these reforms. The legitimacy gap created by the perception of externally imposed reforms did obstruct the deeper processes of democratisation and accountability. For SSR to be truly sustainable, Bosnia's political elites must take ownership of the process and commit to the difficult task of building a self-sustaining system of governance that is capable of managing the country's complex political and security challenges. Until this happens, the reforms implemented under international pressure will remain fragile, and Bosnia's long-term stability will continue to depend on the involvement of external actors.

5.4 Lessons from Bosnia's SSR experience

The experience of SSR in BiH presents both valuable lessons and ongoing challenges for SSR in deeply divided societies. The international community's involvement did bring changes and push for the reformation, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Dayton Peace Accords. However, this process was not without significant obstacles, particularly in terms of local resistance and the sustainability of externally driven reforms.

5.4.1 Key achievements

One of the most notable achievements of Bosnia's SSR has been the unification of its fragmented military forces into a single, state-level Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This process, driven largely by NATO's influence through DRC demonstrated that external pressure, when combined with technical and financial support, could lead to significant reforms, even in the face of complex ethnic and political divisions. The creation of a professional and multi-ethnic military structure provided a model for future reforms and laid the groundwork for Bosnia's eventual participation in NATO's PfP.

Similarly, intelligence reform was another critical success, with the establishment of the OSA under international pressure. By uniting the fragmented and politicised intelligence services into a centralised, state-level institution, Bosnia was able to improve transparency and accountability, increasing in this way trust with international partners. These reforms demonstrated that international actors could successfully navigate the political complexities of post-conflict governance to build more accountable security institutions.

5.4.2 Ongoing challenges

Despite these achievements, Bosnia's SSR still remains incomplete. The police reform process, in particular, has faced significant challenges due to political fragmentation and resistance from Republika Srpska. The refusal of local political elites, particularly Milorad Dodik and his allies, to accept the centralisation of police forces heavily obstructed progress in this critical area of security reform. The persistence of a decentralised and fragmented policing system, combined with political interference, slowed efforts to create an efficient and accountable police force capable of addressing organised crime, human trafficking, and cross-entity crime.

The issue of corruption, particularly within customs and border management, remains another significant challenge. While the establishment of the SBS did help in improving border security, the perception of corruption continues to erode public confidence in these institutions. Without stronger efforts to tackle corruption and ensure full transparency, the gains made in border and customs reforms risk being undone.

5.4.3 Balancing international and local perspectives

The experience of SSR in Bosnia highlights the delicate balance between international intervention and local ownership. International actors were instrumental in pushing through critical reforms, particularly in the areas of defence and intelligence. However, the lack of local buy-in has often delayed the full implementation and sustainability of these reforms. The police reform process is a clear example of how international pressure can clash with local political

realities, resulting in stalled reforms and ongoing tensions between entities like Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This tension between international influence and local ownership has also had implications for accountability and human rights. While defence and intelligence reforms, driven by NATO and the EU, introduced greater transparency and civilian oversight, the resistance to police reform has left this sector vulnerable to political interference and human rights abuses. The fragmented nature of Bosnia's police forces has made it difficult to establish a cohesive national security framework that protects the rights of all citizens, highlighting the challenges of implementing meaningful reform in a divided society.

5.4.4 Future challenges and sustainability

As Bosnia continues its path toward Euro-Atlantic integration, several key challenges remain. The sustainability of SSR depends not only on continued international support but also on the willingness of local actors to take ownership of the reform process. Without greater domestic engagement and political will, the reforms achieved thus far will remain fragile, and Bosnia risks slipping back into political instability.

To achieve truly sustainable and locally owned reforms, Bosnia's political elites must move beyond ethnic and political divisions and embrace the democratic norms promoted through the SSR process. This includes addressing issues of accountability, transparency, and human rights across all sectors of the security apparatus, particularly in the police and judiciary. The future of Bosnia's security sector will depend on its ability to build trust in these institutions, both among its citizens and its international partners.

Bosnia's experience with SSR provides important lessons for post-conflict reconstruction in other divided societies. While international actors can play a crucial role in shaping reform processes, the sustainability of these reforms ultimately depends on the willingness of local actors to take responsibility for their own governance. Bosnia's path forward will require not only continued international support but also a renewed commitment from its political leaders to embrace the principles of democratic governance and security sector accountability that underpin the SSR process.

CHAPTER VI. NORTH MACEDONIA

The SSR process in North Macedonia was deeply influenced by the nation's transition to independence following the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991. After gaining sovereignty, the new state faced new challenges, including balancing democratic consolidation with managing ethnic tensions. Ethnic conflict between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority erupted in 2001, exposing significant weaknesses in North Macedonia's security institutions, particularly in the police and military, whose capacities were limited in managing internal conflict and maintaining national security. The 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was one of the first steps towards establishing a roadmap for peace and reconciliation through reforms that had for a goal to integrate ethnic Albanians into state institutions and decentralising power. These reforms were instrumental not only for promoting ethnic reconciliation but also for advancing democratic governance by ensuring civilian oversight, transparency, and accountability within security institutions, key components of SSR aimed at integrating democratic norms.

The international community had a big impact on SSR in North Macedonia too. NATO, the EU, and the OSCE provided technical assistance, policy guidance, and political pressure, helping to frame SSR as a process deeply rooted in transparency and accountability. These reforms, as Bakreski points out, were designed to ensure the security sector operated within democratic norms, safeguarding human rights while responding to new security challenges and national security needs.[185] The overall goal of reforms was to professionalise security forces, increase cooperation between state actors, and address issues such as the politicisation of security institutions.[186]

In the following sections, we will explore how SSR not only addressed ethnic inclusion but also pushed further for democratic values in North Macedonia's security institutions, with international actors shaping much of the reform agenda.

[185] Oliver Bakreski, *Security Sector Reform in the Republic of Macedonia*, Security Dialogues 6, no. 1 (2015). 223-231.
[186] Ibid.

6.1 Post-Ohrid SSR: Challenges and progress

The OFA, signed in 2001, was the beginning of North Macedonia's efforts to stabilise the country after the ethnic conflict. The agreement set the foundation for broad-reaching reforms, wanting to integrate the ethnic Albanian minority into the state apparatus and in this way decentralise governance and reform the whole security sector to ensure it adhered to principles of transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight. The SSR process became essential in promoting ethnic reconciliation while at the same time promoting the conditions necessary for democratic consolidation. However, the path to reform wasn't without challenges, as Macedonia was faced with ethnic divisions, political resistance, and the practical difficulties of transforming its security institutions.

6.1.1 Defence reform: From fragmentation to professionalisation

North Macedonia's defence reform process following the 2001 conflict focused on moving from a fragmented, ethnically homogeneous force to a professional, multi-ethnic military capable of meeting international standards. At the time of the ethnic conflict, the Macedonian military was ill-equipped to handle internal strife, with a lack of professionalism and serious ethnic imbalances within its ranks. These weaknesses were exposed during the conflict, leading to a realisation that intense reforms were necessary to ensure both military effectiveness and democratic accountability of the country.

Under the guidance of NATO, North Macedonia took a series of reforms, wanting to modernise its military and prepare it for eventual integration into NATO's structures. These reforms included professionalising the armed forces, improving military training, and ensuring that ethnic minorities, particularly Albanians in this situation, were better represented in the military. By applying the principles of civilian oversight into the military structure, NATO's involvement helped North Macedonia to create a more transparent and accountable defence sector, which was a key requirement for its NATO accession.[187]

North Macedonia's path to NATO membership, which was eventually achieved in 2020, was a significant milestone in its SSR journey. NATO membership not only validated the reforms that had been made but also provided a platform for even further professionalisation of the armed forces. However, while the military has become more inclusive and professional,

[187] Ibid.

ongoing ethnic tensions within the armed forces highlight that the integration process is far from complete. Efforts to build trust among ethnic groups within the military, particularly between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians, have seen progress but remain a sensitive issue to this day.[188]

One of the challenges faced in the defence reform process has been how to keep the balance between modernisation and financial constraints. As Bakreski notes, the reform process, while necessary, has been costly for a country with limited resources.[189] Despite this, North Macedonia has managed to align its military with NATO standards, although questions remain about the long-term sustainability of these reforms, particularly in the face of political changes and budgetary pressures.

6.1.2 Police reform: Ethnic tensions and decentralisation

The reform of the police forces has been an even more challenging aspect of Macedonia's SSR process, largely due to the deeply embedded ethnic divisions that characterised the security sector prior to 2001. Before the conflict, the police were predominantly made up of ethnic Macedonians, which led to widespread mistrust among ethnic Albanians that often saw the police as instruments of repression rather than protectors of public order within the country. The OFA also wanted to address these concerns by mandating the decentralisation of police forces and increasing the representation of ethnic minorities within the police.

In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, police reforms were implemented with the support of international actors, which oversaw the process of decentralisation of policing responsibilities to local municipalities and ensuring greater representation of ethnic Albanians within the force. These reforms were intended to build trust between the police and ethnic minority communities and promote community policing as a means of supporting cooperation between the police and local populations.[190]

However, as one would expect, the implementation of these reforms has faced significant challenges. While ethnic Albanian representation in the police force has increased, ethnic divisions within the police remain. In some regions, the police are still perceived as being

[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.

dominated by ethnic Macedonians, leading to ongoing tensions between communities. Moreover, the decentralisation of police forces has created new challenges in terms of maintaining accountability and ensuring consistent standards of policing across the country. In some cases, local elites have even resisted reforms, seeing decentralisation as a threat to their control over local police forces, which has further complicated efforts to implement meaningful changes.[191]

Because of this facing situation, the international community, with the OSCE leading the way, has continued to play a key role in monitoring the progress of police reforms and pushing for greater transparency and accountability within the force. However, as Bakreski notes, progress has been uneven, and the police force continues to struggle with issues of corruption, politicisation, and lack of public trust within the country.[192] Efforts to promote transparency and improve the relationship between the police and local communities are ongoing, but significant work remains to be done to ensure that the reforms lead to a truly accountable and professional police force.

6.1.3 Judicial and intelligence reform: Dealing with political influence

The reform of the judiciary and intelligence services has been a particularly sensitive issue in North Macedonia's SSR process. Both institutions have long been viewed as being subject to political influence, with widespread allegations of corruption and a lack of transparency, and in this way eroding public confidence in their ability to act impartially. In the intelligence sector, a lack of coordination between the various agencies has further delayed efforts to establish effective oversight and accountability.

One of the key reforms in the judicial sector has been the establishment of the Special Prosecutor's Office (SPO), tasked with investigating high-level corruption and political crimes. The creation of the SPO was a response to public dissatisfaction with the judiciary's inability to hold powerful political elites accountable for their actions. The SPO has made significant strides in addressing corruption within the judiciary, although its work has been met with strong resistance from some political elites, who saw it as an attack on their power.[193]

[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.

In the intelligence sector, reform efforts have focused on improving coordination and oversight, as the intelligence community in North Macedonia has long operated with minimal accountability. As Bakreski points out, the lack of civilian oversight over the intelligence services has been one of the key challenges in reforming the sector.[194] Efforts to bring the intelligence services in line with democratic standards have been slow, with political interference continuing to undermine progress.

Despite these challenges, international actors have pushed for judicial and intelligence reforms as part of North Macedonia's EU accession process. The EU's focus on judicial independence and anti-corruption measures has been instrumental in driving reforms, although the extent to which these reforms will be sustained in the long term remains uncertain, particularly given the ongoing political influence over the judiciary and intelligence services.[195]

6.2 The role of the international community in SSR

As in most of Balkan countries, the SSR in North Macedonia was significantly influenced by the involvement of international organisations, particularly NATO, the EU, and the OSCE. These organisations provided the critical technical, financial, and political support needed to advance the reforms, ensuring that the security sector followed and was up to date with international norms of accountability, transparency, and democratic governance. Their involvement was especially necessary due to the fragile nature of North Macedonia's post-conflict security apparatus, which required both internal restructuring and external validation.

6.2.1 NATO, EU, OSCE

NATO's role in North Macedonia's SSR is widely regarded as one of the most influential when it comes to the international involvement for reform. NATO's involvement began in the early stages of North Macedonia's defence reforms, where the alliance offered technical assistance and set benchmarks for the country's military reforms. Central to NATO's approach was the professionalisation of the armed forces, moving away from the ethnically homogeneous and under-resourced military structures of the past toward a more multi-ethnic, professional, and accountable military force.[196] The reforms pushed by NATO mostly focused on civilian control

[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.

of the military, requiring the defence sector to operate under democratic principles with transparent decision-making processes and increased parliamentary oversight.[197]

NATO's involvement was not limited to technical military reforms. The alliance also used the incentive of NATO membership as leverage to push for broader democratic reforms. NATO's conditionality tied North Macedonia's military reforms to its potential accession to the alliance, pushing the country to adopt NATO standards in defence, intelligence, and governance. The culmination of this process was North Macedonia's official NATO membership in 2020, which validated the progress made in reforming its military to meet the alliance's standards.[198] However, challenges remain, as continued efforts are needed to further integrate ethnic minorities into the armed forces and ensure long-term sustainability of the reforms.

The OSCE's role in SSR on the other side was particularly focused on police reform and ensuring that ethnic Albanians were included in the state's security apparatus, as mandated by OFA. The OSCE focused on promoting community policing, which aimed to bridge the gap between security forces and ethnic minority communities.[199] The OSCE's involvement was essential in overseeing the decentralisation of police forces, a key component of SSR that had a goal to reduce central control and allow local municipalities more authority over policing. By decentralising the police, the OSCE hoped to improve local accountability and also support greater cooperation between police forces and local ethnic communities. Despite these efforts, the decentralisation process has faced resistance, particularly in rural areas where ethnic tensions remain high and political elites continue to exert influence over local security forces.[200]

The EU has arguably played the most important role in North Macedonia's SSR, providing both financial resources and political pressure to drive reforms across the security sector, with a particular focus on the judiciary. The EU's engagement in judicial reforms was closely linked to North Macedonia's EU accession process, where reforms to promote judicial independence, anti-corruption, and the rule of law were considered prerequisites for progress toward EU membership.[201]

[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.

As part of its broader push for democratic governance, the EU has been deeply involved in reforming North Macedonia's judiciary to align it with European standards of impartiality and transparency. The judiciary in North Macedonia has historically been subject to political interference, with allegations of corruption and favouritism undermining public trust in the legal system. The EU's involvement has included financial support for judicial training programs as well as the establishment of institutions like the SPO. The SPO, established in 2015, became a symbol of the EU's push for judicial reform in North Macedonia, representing a shift toward a more independent judiciary.

However, the SPO has faced significant political resistance, particularly from powerful elites who view its investigations as threats to their entrenched interests.[202] The EU has continued to emphasise the importance of judicial reforms in its EU accession negotiations with North Macedonia, but the pace of reform has often been slowed by political challenges, including the name dispute with Greece, which delayed progress in the country's broader reform agenda.[203] However, the EU's efforts have been critical in pushing North Macedonia toward a more transparent and accountable judiciary, with a focus on combating corruption and ensuring that the judiciary operates independently from political influence.

6.4 Sustainability of SSR without local ownership

One of the key challenges in evaluating the long-term sustainability of SSR in North Macedonia is the degree to which local ownership has been achieved. Much like Bosnia, North Macedonia's SSR process has been heavily driven by external factors, as we mentioned, with significant pressure applied to implement reforms aligned with international standards. However, while these reforms have been crucial in stabilising the country and aligning it with Euro-Atlantic institutions, the question remains whether they will be sustainable in the absence of deep local engagement and ownership of the reform process.

6.4.1 Reflection on the long-term sustainability of reforms

In North Macedonia, the reliance on international actors to drive SSR, particularly in the defence and policing sectors, has raised concerns about the sustainability of these reforms in

[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

the long run. Although NATO and the EU had a big impact on the reform agenda, they often used conditionality tied to North Macedonia's NATO membership and EU accession as leverage to push through difficult reforms.[204] While this strategy has been effective in the short term, there is a risk that the reforms may not last if local political elites and institutions do not fully internalise the importance of democratic governance and civilian oversight.

Much of the SSR process in North Macedonia has been characterised by external pressure, with international actors guiding the reform agenda and providing the necessary resources to implement changes.[205] This has led to significant progress in areas such as military professionalisation and ethnic integration within the security forces, yet the extent to which these reforms have been fully embraced by local actors remains questionable. Without local ownership, there is a danger that these reforms could unravel or stall if international pressure diminishes, especially in the context of shifting political landscapes.

6.4.2 Impact of external pressure without sufficient local ownership on the credibility of reforms

The experience of North Macedonia closely mirrors that of Bosnia in terms of the challenges posed by the lack of local ownership. In Bosnia, as noted in Chapter V, the heavy reliance on international actors has created a legitimacy gap, where reforms are seen as externally imposed rather than genuinely driven by local political will. In both countries, this dynamic has led to a disconnect between the reform agenda and local political realities, where reforms are often viewed with scepticism by local actors and the wider public.

In North Macedonia, this legitimacy gap has also been evident in the policing and judicial sectors, where international actors have pushed for reforms aimed at promoting accountability and transparency, yet local elites have often resisted full implementation.[206] In particular, the judicial reforms driven by the EU as part of North Macedonia's accession process have faced significant political resistance, with some political elites perceiving these reforms as threatening their interests. As a result, the pace of reform has been slower than anticipated, and the sustainability of these changes remains uncertain.[207]

[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

The broader challenge lies in ensuring that local actors take responsibility for the success and continuation of these reforms. As seen in Bosnia, without genuine local commitment, reforms implemented under international pressure risk being undermined by political inertia or nationalist sentiments. In North Macedonia, there is a similar risk that political elites may fail to fully embrace the reform process, particularly in areas where national identity or sovereignty is perceived to be at stake, as was the case during the name change referendum.

Roland Paris' theory suggests that the challenges Macedonia faced in SSR were partly due to premature reforms that prioritised liberalisation over institutional strength. The rapid push for police and judicial reforms, without fully established local institutions, contributed to the ongoing tensions, especially with ethnic integration.

Table 6.4: Key indicators of SSR in North Macedonia before and after reforms

Indicator	Before reforms (Pre-2001 conflict)	After reforms (Post-2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement)
Transparency	Ethnic divisions, lack of transparency in military and police institutions	Increased transparency with international oversight, though challenges persist
Military accountability	Military dominated by ethnic Macedonians, no civilian oversight	Reforms introduced to diversify the military, NATO oversight and civilian control established
Civilian oversight	Virtually no civilian oversight; political elites exerted control over security forces	Parliamentary oversight established, though still limited in practice
Human rights adherence	Reports of ethnic discrimination and abuses by security forces	Human rights training introduced, though full adherence remains inconsistent
Police professionalisation	Police forces deeply involved in ethnic violence, fragmented along ethnic lines	Reformed, professionalised police force with international assistance, though tensions remain

Similarly, Francis Fukuyama's focus on state capacity is relevant here. The success of SSR in Macedonia has been limited by weak state institutions, which were unable to fully support or

internalise these reforms. Without strong local ownership, external pressures often outpaced the development of necessary governance structures.

6.5 Lessons from North Macedonia's SSR

The SSR process in North Macedonia offers valuable lessons about the complex dynamics of post-conflict state-building, particularly in the context of ethnic reconciliation, democratic governance, and the role of international actors. North Macedonia's SSR journey, driven by a combination of internal reforms and external pressure from international actors, has achieved significant milestones in terms of military professionalisation, ethnic integration, and police and judicial reform. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring the long-term sustainability of these reforms without continued external involvement.

6.5.1 Key achievements and challenges in the reform process

One of the most notable achievements of North Macedonia's SSR has been the integration of ethnic minorities, particularly ethnic Albanians, into the country's security forces. This was a central goal of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, especially when it comes to the post-2001 SSR agenda. Through the combined efforts of international actors and local stakeholders, North Macedonia has made considerable progress in building a multi-ethnic military and police force, which has been essential in stabilising the country and reducing the risk of ethnic conflict.[208] The reforms in the military, largely guided by NATO standards, have helped create a professionalised armed force that is more inclusive and aligned with international democratic norms.

At the same time, police reform, while making significant strides in terms of ethnic inclusion, continues to face challenges, particularly regarding local accountability and the decentralisation of the police forces. Despite international pressure, the relationship between the police and local communities, particularly in ethnically mixed areas, remains fraught with tension. This has raised concerns about the long-term effectiveness of police reforms, especially in regions where local elites resist change.

In the judicial sector, the creation of the SPO has been a major achievement, symbolising the EU's push for anti-corruption measures and judicial independence. However, as seen in other

[208] Ibid.

areas of SSR, political resistance from elites has slowed the pace of reform, and the long-term sustainability of judicial reforms remains uncertain. While the EU has been instrumental in driving these changes, it will ultimately depend on local actors to sustain these reforms in the absence of external pressure.

6.5.2 The role of ethnic integration in SSR and its impact on stability

Ethnic integration has been one of the most significant aspects of North Macedonia's SSR, with the Ohrid Framework Agreement serving as the foundation for these efforts. The inclusion of ethnic Albanians in the military and police forces has not only enhanced the legitimacy of the security sector but also contributed to the broader stabilisation of the country. By ensuring that ethnic minorities are represented in security institutions, North Macedonia has addressed one of the key grievances that fuelled the 2001 conflict, reducing the risk of future ethnic tensions. However, the process of ethnic integration is not without its challenges. In some cases, the integration of ethnic minorities has been perceived as being imposed from above, leading to concerns about whether these reforms have fully achieved local buy-in. Additionally, while ethnic representation in the security sector has improved, other factors, such as political corruption and regional disparities, continue to pose risks to long-term stability.

6.5.3 Balancing international involvement and local ownership

The experience of North Macedonia highlights the delicate balance between international involvement and local ownership in the SSR process. International actors have played an indispensable role in pushing for reforms, providing both technical support and political leverage. Without their involvement, many of the reforms that have been achieved would not have been possible.

However, as demonstrated in previous sections, the reliance on external actors has created a potential legitimacy gap, where reforms are perceived as being externally imposed rather than domestically driven. This dynamic, seen most clearly in the judiciary and policing sectors, raises concerns about the sustainability of these reforms in the long term. For SSR to be truly successful, local political elites and institutions must take full ownership of the reform process, ensuring that reforms are not only implemented but also internalised by the broader political and security establishment.

One of the key lessons from North Macedonia's SSR experience is the importance of local ownership in ensuring the credibility and sustainability of reforms. While international pressure can serve as an important catalyst for reform, genuine local commitment is essential for these reforms to take root and be resilient in the face of political changes or crises. In the absence of strong local ownership, there is a risk that the progress made in SSR could be reversed if international involvement diminishes.

6.5.4 Future prospects for North Macedonia's SSR

Looking ahead, the sustainability of North Macedonia's SSR will depend on the ability of local actors to continue the reform process without relying on external pressure. While NATO membership has provided a framework for ongoing defence reforms, and the EU accession process remains a powerful incentive for further judicial and police reforms, it is ultimately up to North Macedonia's political elites to ensure that these reforms are not only maintained but deepened.

The country's SSR experience demonstrates that international involvement is necessary but not sufficient for sustainable reform. Moving forward, North Macedonia's SSR will need to be supported by local political will, ensuring that the progress made in ethnic integration, democratic governance, and accountability is embedded within the country's political and institutional framework. If North Macedonia can achieve this balance, its SSR efforts could serve as a model for other post-conflict states navigating the challenges of democratic consolidation and security sector transformation.

CHAPTER VII. SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

The SSR process in Serbia and Montenegro is tightly connected to the history of the region, following the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent conflicts that followed. As two of the republics that remained united under the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro until its dissolution in 2006, both countries faced challenges in transforming their security institutions, which had been associated with authoritarian control, political manipulation, and repression under the regime of Slobodan Milošević.

In the years leading up to the breakup of the State Union, the security institutions of both countries were heavily centralised and intertwined with the political ambitions of the ruling elites. The security forces were used as tools of internal control and external conflict, particularly during the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. This period left a legacy of mistrust between the state, its security forces, and the public, making reform efforts both urgent and difficult.

After the fall of Milošević in 2000, both Serbia and Montenegro began a slow process of democratisation, with SSR as an important element for their transition to democratic governance. However, the shared political structures and centralised nature of the State Union meant that many of the challenges facing their security institutions were intertwined. Police forces, military apparatus, and intelligence services in both republics were deeply politicised, and organised crime had infiltrated key sectors of the state.

The dissolution of the State Union in 2006 automatically affected the SSR process for both countries. With newfound independence, Montenegro focused on NATO membership and closer alignment with European institutions, while Serbia wanted to balance its nationalist political pressures with its aspirations for European integration. This Chapter examines how the two countries addressed the pressing need for accountability, transparency, and human rights within their security institutions and how these reforms contributed (or failed to contribute) to the consolidation of democratic norms in the post-conflict period.

By analysing the shared and also different aspects of Serbia and Montenegro's SSR processes, we can better understand the complexities of reforming security institutions in the post-conflict Western Balkans. The Chapter will explore the specific challenges faced by each country, the

role of international actors, and the extent to which these reforms have led to meaningful improvements in governance, human rights protections, and the rule of law.

7.1 Pre-2006: The shared security context of Serbia and Montenegro

In understanding the pre-2006 shared security context of Serbia and Montenegro, Francis Fukuyama's theory on state strength provides a valuable perspective. Fukuyama emphasises that effective governance and stability require strong, autonomous state institutions free from elite capture and political manipulation. In the case of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, the security sector was deeply politicised, influenced by authoritarian rule under Slobodan Milošević, and marked by weaknesses that would later need comprehensive reforms. The absence of robust, independent security institutions in both Serbia and Montenegro not only contributed to instability but also made an environment where security agencies became tools of political influence rather than pillars of public trust. This background created long-term vulnerabilities in SSR processes after independence, as both nations faced the challenge of depoliticising and professionalising their security sectors.

The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, which lasted from 1992 to 2006, presents a very turbulent political period with authoritarian rule and the remnants of the Yugoslav state security apparatus. During this period, both Serbia and Montenegro were deeply affected by the authoritarian policies of Slobodan Milošević, who had influence over both republics. The security institutions in both countries were heavily militarised and used as tools of internal repression and regional conflicts.

Although Montenegro was part of the State Union, it began to distance itself politically from Belgrade in the late 1990s, particularly during the Kosovo conflict. Nevertheless, both republics faced similar challenges, including the legacy of the JNA and the role of security forces in maintaining internal control during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

7.1.1 The Milošević Era (1989–2000)

The period from 1989 to 2000 under Slobodan Milošević is often characterised by authoritarianism, nationalism, and conflict. Milošević, who rose to power in 1987 as the head of the Serbian Communist Party, skilfully manipulated nationalist sentiments to consolidate his political authority. By 1989, he had positioned himself as the dominant figure in Yugoslav politics, with ambitions to expand Serbian influence across the region.

For this, he relied heavily on the security sector, like the military, police, and intelligence services, to keep control over Serbia and also gain influence across the broader Yugoslav federation. These institutions were, because of this, deeply politicised, with key leaders loyal to Milošević and his nationalist agenda. In this era, the security apparatus became a tool of internal repression, used to suppress opposition, control the media, and silence dissent, both in Serbia and in Montenegro.

The JNA, initially a federal military force meant to protect the integrity of the SFRY, gradually transformed into an extension of Serbian power under Milošević. The JNA had the biggest effect when it comes to conflicts that accompanied the breakup of Yugoslavia. While nominally serving all republics of Yugoslavia, by the early 1990s, the JNA had effectively become the military arm of Milošević's regime, representing Serbian interests. As the Yugoslav republics declared independence, the JNA intervened militarily in an attempt to preserve the federation, but it soon became clear that it was primarily serving to expand Serbian territorial control.

In Montenegro, although part of the State Union with Serbia, the role of the security sector was more subtle. Montenegro's leaders, particularly Milo Đukanović, initially aligned themselves with Milošević, but by the late 1990s, they began to distance themselves, mostly during the Kosovo conflict. Despite this, Montenegrin security forces remained integrated with the broader Yugoslav military structure, and Montenegrin units participated in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia under the command of the JNA.

In addition to the military, the police forces, particularly in Serbia, were also militarised. The Ministry of the Interior (MUP) established specialised units, such as the Red Berets (JSO), which operated as paramilitary forces, conducting operations both domestically and abroad. These units were implicated in significant human rights abuses, including political assassinations, targeting of ethnic minorities, and suppression of opposition. In Montenegro, although less militarised, the police were similarly used as tools of political repression, ensuring the regime’s stability during the turbulent 1990s.

The State Security Service, which we mentioned in the previous Chapters, was another critical element of the Milošević regime. The SDB was responsible for internal security and the suppression of political dissent. It operated as a powerful entity within the state, with wide-

ranging powers to monitor, detain, and eliminate political opponents. The agency was also involved in organising paramilitary groups and supporting their operations in the wars across the former Yugoslavia. The SDB's activities extended into Montenegro, where it monitored political developments and ensured loyalty to the regime. One of the most infamous operations conducted by the SDB was its role in the assassination of political opponents and journalists critical of the regime. The killings of Slavko Ćuruvija, a prominent journalist, and the attempted assassination of Vuk Drašković, an opposition leader, showed the extent to which the security services were willing to go to maintain Milošević's grip on power.

By the late 1990s, however, cracks began to appear in the relationship between Serbia and Montenegro. Milo Đukanović, Montenegro's president, started to distance himself from Milošević's policies, particularly during the Kosovo conflict, when Montenegro adopted a more neutral stance and did not support Milošević's military strategy. This was the beginning of Montenegro's gradual separation from the Serbian-dominated security structure, leading to the dissolution of the State Union in 2006 and the establishment of an independent Montenegrin security apparatus.

The aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, which saw NATO intervention and the eventual downfall of Milošević in 2000, opened a new chapter for both Serbia and Montenegro. The security forces, which had been central to maintaining Milošević's power, became increasingly discredited. Both republics faced significant challenges in reforming these institutions in the years that followed, as they wanted to transition from authoritarianism to democracy and rebuild trust in the security sector.

7.2 Post-2006 Serbia: Reforms, achievements, and challenges

After the dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, Serbia started its path of reforms aimed at aligning with European Union standards and addressing the remnants of the authoritarian security structures that had dominated the previous decades. While these reforms were crucial for democratisation and international integration, they were also fraught with challenges, particularly in the areas of police and military reform, where interests and political influence of previous rule resisted change.

This section will focus on the key reforms undertaken by Serbia in the post-2006 period, highlighting both the achievements and the persistent obstacles.

7.2.1 Police reform

The reform of Serbia's police forces was one of the most significant and challenging aspects of the country's SSR. The introduction of the 2005 Police Law came with the effort to depoliticise the police and bring the institution in line with democratic standards. Prior to 2005, the police had been heavily politicised, with deep connections to the ruling political elites, particularly during the Milošević era, when the police were often used to suppress dissent and protect the regime's interests.

The 2005 Police Law came with the willingness to modernise the police force by introducing several key reforms. One of the primary goals was to increase accountability within the police force. This was achieved through the establishment of internal and external oversight mechanisms, including the creation of an Internal Control Department within the MUP, who were tasked with investigating allegations of police misconduct. At the same time, external oversight was strengthened through the involvement of parliamentary committees and civil society organisations, which were given the mandate to monitor police activities and ensure greater transparency.

Another crucial aspect of the reform was the introduction of community policing, a model aimed at improving relations between the police and the public. Under the community policing framework, the focus shifted from a reactive police force to one that focused on crime prevention and public engagement. This shift was essential for restoring public trust in the police, which had been severely eroded during the 1990s due to the widespread perception of the police as agents of state repression.

However, despite these efforts, corruption and the influence of organised crime remained significant challenges. The MUP faced numerous difficulties in addressing corruption within the police force, as many high-ranking officials continued to have connections with organised crime networks even to this day. The legacy of political interference also persisted, with frequent reports of police officials being appointed based on political loyalty rather than merit. These issues were compounded by the slow pace of judicial reforms, which heavily affected the prosecution of corrupt police officials.

7.2.2 Military reforms

In the wake of the dissolution of the State Union in 2006, Serbia's military also underwent restructuring as part of the broader efforts to align with NATO and other Euro-Atlantic institutions. Although Serbia declared military neutrality in 2007,[209] the country continued to pursue a partnership with NATO under the PfP program, which provided a framework for cooperation and professionalisation of the armed forces.

The post-2006 military reforms focused on downsizing the armed forces, reducing the size of the military to a more manageable and professional force. This involved significant demobilisation of conscripts and the transition to a professional volunteer army. The professionalisation of the military was a critical step in aligning with NATO standards, as it emphasised the need for a smaller, more efficient force capable of participating in international peacekeeping missions and other cooperative security initiatives.

One of the most important aspects of military reform was the introduction of civilian oversight over the armed forces. The MoD, led by civilian leadership, took over the responsibility of managing the military, ensuring that the armed forces were accountable to democratic institutions rather than political elites. This transition was reinforced by the creation of parliamentary committees tasked with overseeing defence spending, military operations, and overall security strategy.

Despite these achievements, the reform process faced significant obstacles. One of the major challenges was the nationalist resistance to military downsizing and international cooperation, particularly with NATO. Nationalist political factions and elements within the military expressed opposition to reforms they perceived as a threat to Serbia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in the wake of Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008.[210] The tensions surrounding Kosovo complicated Serbia’s relationship with NATO, as many saw cooperation with the alliance as tacit approval of Kosovo’s independence.

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[209] *Serbian Law on Public Peace and Order, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, no. 51/92, 53/93, 67/93, 48/94, 101/05, and 85/05, translated by author, accessed October 2, 2024, http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2007_12/t12_0196.htm.

[210] International Crisis Group, *Kosovo's Independence: Towards a Real Solution?* Europe Report No. 188, Pristina/Brussels, 2008, accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/125409/8009_Kosovo_Independence.pdf.

In addition, while civilian oversight was established, the military's historical ties to political elites and nationalist groups meant that genuine independence from political interference was slow to develop. High-ranking military officials who had served under the Milošević regime often resisted reforms, and the legacy of the JNA continued to influence military culture and structure.

7.2.3 Intelligence and judicial reform

Post-2006, Serbia's intelligence services underwent significant reforms with the goal to address the lack of transparency, rampant politicisation, and corruption that had plagued the sector during the Milošević era. The two principal intelligence agencies, the BIA (*Bezbednosno-informativna agencija*), or Security Intelligence Agency, and the VBA (*Vojno-bezbednosna agencija*), or Military Intelligence Agency, were at the centre of these reform efforts.

The BIA, which evolved from the SDB, had been closely associated with political repression, surveillance of opposition figures, and organised crime under Milošević's rule. Reforms wanted to depoliticise the agency, increase transparency, and implement civilian oversight mechanisms to ensure its accountability. A key element of this reform was the introduction of parliamentary oversight, which allowed elected representatives to monitor the activities of the intelligence services and investigate abuses of power.

In addition to parliamentary oversight, the reform process wanted to professionalise the intelligence services by separating them from direct political control. The VBA, Serbia's military intelligence agency, also underwent restructuring as part of the country's broader efforts to align its security institutions with NATO standards under the PfP program. Although Serbia declared military neutrality, the reform of military intelligence was geared towards improving professionalism, transparency, and coordination with international actors.

Despite these efforts, intelligence reforms were met with resistance from political and security elites, many of whom had benefitted from the previous system of political manipulation and lack of accountability. The transition from a politically controlled intelligence system to one governed by the rule of law was slow and with challenges. Allegations of corruption and political interference within the intelligence community persisted, highlighting the difficulties Serbia faced in fully transforming its security sector.

Alongside intelligence reform, the judiciary became a focal point for broader institutional reforms in post-2006 Serbia. The judiciary had also been highly politicised during the 1990s, with judges and prosecutors often aligned with the regime's interests. Post-2006 reforms aimed at depoliticising the judiciary, strengthening judicial independence, and aligning the legal system with European Union standards. These efforts were driven by Serbia's ambitions for EU integration, with judicial reforms being a key requirement for progress in accession talks.

One of the most pressing issues Serbia faced when it came to judicial reform was its cooperation with the ICTY. The ICTY had been established to prosecute war crimes committed during the Yugoslav Wars, and Serbia's cooperation with the tribunal was essential for its international rehabilitation and EU integration. However, many within the Serbian political establishment were resistant to full cooperation with the ICTY, particularly regarding the extradition of high-profile war crimes suspects such as Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić.

Despite internal resistance, Serbia was pressured by the international community, particularly the EU, to extradite these suspects and fully cooperate with the ICTY. In 2011, after years of delays and political manoeuvring, Serbia extradited Ratko Mladić, one of the most wanted war criminals, showing the country's willingness for cooperation with international justice.[211]

The international community pushed Serbia toward judicial reforms, emphasising the need for an independent judiciary and full accountability for war crimes. The EU closely monitored Serbia's progress in these areas, linking judicial reform and cooperation with the ICTY to Serbia's EU candidacy. While significant progress has been made, challenges remain, particularly in the areas of judicial independence, corruption, and the influence of nationalist forces resistant to full cooperation with international justice.

Paris's theory offers a critical lens through which to view externally driven reforms. Serbia's efforts to align with EU accession requirements and NATO's PfP entailed significant SSR undertakings. However, these changes were often pressured by international demands for rapid political liberalisation rather than grounded in fully established institutional structures.

[211] International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), *Ratko Mladić Case: Key Information & Timeline,* accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.icty.org/en/cases/ratko-mladic-case-key-information-timeline.

According to Paris's model, liberalisation without prior institutional strength can undermine the stability and functionality of reforms, as seen in Serbia's struggles with political interference and organised crime within the police and judiciary. The push for swift reforms without adequate institutional capacity led to only partial success, leaving security institutions vulnerable to political influence despite formal progress in alignment with EU standards.

7.3 Post-2006 Montenegro: NATO, professionalisation, and corruption

The dissolution of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006 brought Montenegro independent statehood and the subsequent restructuring of its security institutions. As a newly independent nation, Montenegro prioritised the professionalisation of its military and was looking forward to aligning its security policies with NATO standards as part of its broader strategy for Euro-Atlantic integration. The military reforms undertaken by Montenegro were aimed at increasing the effectiveness, transparency, and civilian control of its armed forces while also addressing the issues of corruption that had historically obstructed governance.

7.3.1 Military and NATO alignment

Upon gaining independence in 2006, Montenegro made the strategic decision to pursue NATO membership as a key component of its national security policy. This move was seen as a way to ensure national security, promote regional stability, and align with Western defence structures. Montenegro's path to NATO membership culminated in 2017 when it officially became a full member of the alliance, making one of the biggest achievements in the country's post-independence security reforms.[212]

One of the key areas of reform was the professionalisation of the military. Prior to independence, Montenegro's military forces were part of the larger Yugoslav and later Serbia and Montenegro defence apparatus, which was characterised by political control, outdated structures, and a lack of modernisation. Post-2006, Montenegro undertook broad efforts to transform its military into a smaller, professional force aligned with NATO standards. This involved downsising the armed forces, improving training and equipment, and introducing modern defence doctrines.

[212] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), *NATO Secretary General Welcomes Ratification of Accession Protocol for Montenegro*, accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_144647.htm.

Civilian control over the military was the most important part of Montenegro's military reforms. The establishment of civilian oversight mechanisms aimed to ensure that the military would be subject to democratic governance, a key criterion for NATO membership. Montenegro's efforts included the creation of a MoD with civilian leadership and the implementation of laws that increased transparency in military operations and budgeting.

The defence governance reforms focused on ensuring accountability within the military structure. This was achieved through the adoption of NATO's PfP program guidelines, which emphasised the importance of democratic oversight and civilian control of the military. In addition to institutional reforms, Montenegro's armed forces participated in various NATO-led missions and joint exercises, further strengthening the professional capabilities of its military.[213]

And while Montenegro made significant strides in professionalising its military and aligning with NATO, the reform process was not without challenges. Corruption remained a persistent issue, particularly in the procurement processes and overall governance of the defence sector. The Montenegrin government faced criticism from both domestic and international actors regarding the lack of transparency in defence spending and the influence of political elites on the military structure.

Nonetheless, Montenegro's successful accession to NATO in 2017 represented a major milestone in its post-independence security reforms. The country's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration and the professionalisation of its military have been seen as important steps in ensuring regional stability and aligning Montenegro's defence policies with broader Western security objectives. The establishment of civilian control over the military and the adoption of modern defence governance practices have been critical in supporting greater accountability and transparency within Montenegro's security sector.

7.3.2 Police reform

After gaining independence in 2006, Montenegro brought a series of reforms to strengthen its police force, which had long been associated with political interference, corruption, and ties to

[213] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Relations with Montenegro (Archived), accessed October 2, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49736.htm.

organised crime. The police reforms were part of the broader SSR efforts to professionalise security institutions and ensure that they follow European Union and NATO standards. The reforms were also driven by the need to build public trust in the police, which had been eroded by years of political manipulation and human rights abuses.

One of the central goals of Montenegro's police reforms was to reduce the widespread corruption that had infiltrated the security forces during the Yugoslav era and under the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The country's police forces had been highly politicised, with officers often aligned with ruling elites. This resulted in abuse of power, involvement in criminal activities, and a lack of accountability. Following independence, efforts were made to introduce transparency in police operations, particularly in the areas of recruitment, promotion, and procurement.

As part of the reform efforts, the Montenegrin government established mechanisms for internal oversight within the police force for investigating and addressing cases of corruption.[214] This included the creation of an internal affairs department tasked with monitoring police conduct and investigating instances of abuse of power or involvement in criminal activities. Furthermore, external civilian oversight mechanisms were introduced to ensure that police actions were subject to public scrutiny and accountability.

Another important aspect of the police reform was the professionalisation of the force. This involved improving training programs for officers, ensuring that the police force followed the international standards for law enforcement, and increasing community policing initiatives. By supporting closer cooperation between the police and the local communities, the government hoped to improve public trust in the police and create a more responsive law enforcement system.

Although the progress made in reducing corruption and improving transparency, Montenegro's police reform efforts faced significant challenges, particularly in the areas of organised crime and political interference. The Western Balkans has long been a hotspot for organised criminal

[214] Council of Europe, Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), *Fifth Evaluation Round: Preventing Corruption and Promoting Integrity in Central Governments (Top Executive Functions) and Law Enforcement Agencies – Evaluation Report*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020), rm.coe.int/fifth-evaluation-round-preventing-corruption-and-promoting-integrity-i/1680a8a106.

networks involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other illicit activities. These networks often maintained close ties with political elites and corrupt officials, making it difficult to fully reform the police and security services.

Organised crime remains to this day a serious problem in Montenegro, with criminal organisations often infiltrating the security apparatus. Efforts to combat organised crime have been pushed off by the continued involvement of certain political figures in these criminal networks, as well as the weakness of judicial institutions. The police, while undergoing reforms, have at times been unable to act independently of political influence, particularly when it comes to investigating high-profile cases involving political or business elites.

Political interference also continues to undermine the effectiveness of police reforms. While Montenegro focuses on work toward democratisation and European integration, the ruling political party has maintained significant control over key institutions, including the police. This has raised concerns about the ability of the police to operate without political pressure and has limited the extent to which genuine independence can be achieved within the force.

The strong ties between political elites and organised crime continue to present significant obstacles to full reform. Nevertheless, Montenegro's efforts to align its police force with EU and NATO standards remain a priority, particularly as the country advances its bid for EU membership. The future of police reform in Montenegro will depend on the country's ability to strengthen judicial institutions, further professionalise the security forces, and eliminate the deep-rooted political influence that continues to obstruct the effectiveness of law enforcement.

7.3.3 Judicial and intelligence reforms

Historically, Montenegro's judiciary had been subject to significant political interference, with many judges and prosecutors tied to ruling elites. Because of this, the reforms focused on depoliticisation of the judiciary, increase of judicial independence, and establishment of independent oversight mechanisms that could monitor and evaluate judicial conduct.

A key component of these reforms was the establishment of the Judicial Council, which was tasked with ensuring that the appointment, promotion, and dismissal of judges adhered to

transparent and merit-based criteria.[215] The Judicial Council was designed to operate independently from the executive branch, thereby reducing the potential for political manipulation. Additionally, the Constitutional Court of Montenegro played a significant role in overseeing the legality of laws and government actions, helping to ensure that judicial processes remained consistent with democratic norms.

One of the critical areas of reform was addressing the corruption that had long plagued Montenegro's judicial system. Corruption within the judiciary, combined with weak enforcement of the rule of law, had undermined public trust in the justice system. In response, the government introduced anti-corruption measures, wanting to increase transparency and hold corrupt officials accountable. The creation of specialised anti-corruption units within the judiciary was a major step toward improving the accountability of judges and prosecutors.

Despite these efforts, challenges remained. The independence of the judiciary was still questioned by many within Montenegro, as political elites continued to exert influence over certain judicial appointments. The European Commission's progress reports on Montenegro's EU accession highlighted the need for continued reforms to strengthen judicial independence and ensure the effective implementation of anti-corruption measures.[216]

In parallel with judicial reforms, Montenegro also undertook significant efforts to restructure its intelligence services post-2006. The National Security Agency (ANB), which succeeded the intelligence apparatus that had operated during the Yugoslav and Serbia and Montenegro periods, was a central focus of these reforms. Historically, the intelligence services had been used as tools of political repression and were connected with the ruling elite, with little transparency or accountability.

Reforms aimed to depoliticise the ANB and reduce the influence of political elites over intelligence operations. This included the introduction of parliamentary oversight, which allowed the Montenegrin Parliament to monitor the activities of the intelligence services and

[215] European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), *Montenegro – Draft Amendments to the Law on the Judicial Council and Judges*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2023), https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2023)016-e.
[216] European Commission, *Montenegro 2023 Report*, SWD(2023) 694 final, (Brussels: European Commission, 2023), 5-6, 20-22, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/e09b27af-427a-440b-a47a-ed5254aec169_en?filename=SWD_2023_694%20Montenegro%20report.pdf.

ensure that they operated within the confines of the law. The Council for Civilian Control of Security Forces was also established as an independent body tasked with investigating abuses of power within the intelligence services.

Another important aspect of the intelligence reform process was the professionalisation of the intelligence workforce. Intelligence officers underwent new training programs designed to align the ANB's operations with NATO standards, as Montenegro wanted to integrate its security structures into Euro-Atlantic defence frameworks. The ANB also increased cooperation with international intelligence agencies.

However, the intelligence reform process faced resistance from political interests. Many of the officials who had benefitted from the previous system of political patronage within the intelligence services were reluctant to relinquish control. While parliamentary oversight mechanisms were introduced, the actual independence of the intelligence services remained a topic of debate, with ongoing concerns about the influence of political elites over key appointments and decisions.

Despite these challenges, the restructuring of Montenegro's intelligence services represented a significant step forward in the country's efforts to create a more transparent and accountable security sector. By aligning with NATO standards and improving civilian oversight, Montenegro's showed the willingness to work on the broader SSR agenda.

7.4 Resistance and ownership of reforms in both countries

SSR in both Serbia and Montenegro has been heavily shaped by external pressures, particularly from the European Union and NATO. However, the success of these reforms has often been delayed and affected by internal resistance from political elites and their interests. In this section, we explore the internal resistance to SSR in both of the countries, particularly in the police and intelligence sectors, and draw comparisons with Bosnia and Macedonia regarding the sustainability of reforms that are driven externally without genuine local ownership.

7.4.1 Internal resistance in Serbia

In Serbia, political elites have long resisted SSR, especially in the areas of police and intelligence reform. This resistance is rooted in the authoritarian legacy of the Milošević era, during which the security services were used as tools of political control. Following

Milošević's ousting in 2000, Serbia started from the bottom, working on a process of democratic transition and SSR, but many of the key figures within the police and intelligence services had strong ties to the previous regime and were resistant to change.

The police sector in Serbia, particularly the MUP, has been slow to embrace reforms focused on depoliticising the force and reducing corruption. Many senior police officials retained their positions after 2000, and efforts to introduce accountability and transparency were met with significant pushback. For instance, the introduction of the 2005 Police Law was a critical step toward depoliticising the police and introducing community policing practices, but its implementation has been inconsistent due to the resistance of deep-set political interests. Corruption and political interference remain persistent problems within the police, undermining public trust in the institution and limiting the effectiveness of SSR.

Similarly, Serbia's intelligence services, particularly the BIA and the VBA, have been difficult to reform. Many senior intelligence officials had close ties to political elites, and the services themselves were often used to protect these elites from accountability. Although reforms were introduced to increase parliamentary oversight and professionalise the intelligence sector, progress has been uneven. Allegations of political interference in intelligence operations and the surveillance of opposition figures have persisted, highlighting the challenges Serbia faces in achieving full reform.

The experience of Serbia in resisting SSR is not unique in the Western Balkans. Similar patterns of resistance can be seen in Bosnia and Macedonia, as we mentioned, where externally-driven reforms have often struggled to take root due to the lack of genuine local ownership.

In comparison to Bosnia and Macedonia, Serbia's experience with SSR highlights the importance of local ownership in the reform process. While external actors, particularly the EU, have been instrumental in pushing for reforms in Serbia, the reluctance of political elites to relinquish control over the security services has limited the depth and effectiveness of these reforms. Without genuine local ownership, SSR in Serbia, Bosnia, and Macedonia remains fragile and dependent on continued international involvement to ensure its sustainability

7.4.2 Montenegro's progress and challenges

Montenegro's journey to NATO membership was important in the countries' SSR process. NATO's emphasis on civilian control of the military, professionalisation, and the need for greater transparency and accountability pushed Montenegro to restructure its security institutions in line with Euro-Atlantic standards. The process began almost immediately after Montenegro's independence in 2006, with the goal of creating a security apparatus that was modern, efficient, and aligned with the principles of democratic governance.

Montenegro's membership in NATO significantly influenced its defence reforms, including the downsizing and professionalisation of its military. The country's small armed forces were transformed from a conscript-based model to a fully professional army. Civilian oversight mechanisms, such as the establishment of the MoD and the introduction of parliamentary oversight, became key features of these reforms, ensuring that the military would be subject to democratic governance.

Additionally, Montenegro's cooperation with NATO allowed the country to participate in joint military exercises and contribute to international peacekeeping missions. These engagements not only confirmed the professionalism of Montenegro's armed forces but also demonstrated the country's commitment to NATO's collective security principles. NATO membership also provided Montenegro with a security umbrella, which helped to stabilise the country and the wider Western Balkans region.

Despite these successes, Montenegro's path to NATO also exposed issues, particularly in relation to corruption and the lack of transparency in the security sector. Corruption has been a persistent problem in Montenegro, affecting not only the police and judiciary but also the defence sector. This has raised concerns about the sustainability of reforms and the true independence of the country's security institutions.

One of the primary challenges Montenegro faced was strong political influence over its security services. Even though NATO membership required reforms that included reducing political interference, the ruling political elites continued to exert significant control over key security institutions, particularly in areas related to defence procurement and budgeting. Allegations of

corruption in defence contracts and the lack of transparency in military spending have undermined public trust in the reform process.

Moreover, Montenegro's small size and close-knit political elite have made it difficult to fully eliminate the influence of patronage networks. The overlapping relationships between political leaders, business interests, and the security sector have deeply affected the development of truly independent oversight mechanisms. As a result, while NATO membership has driven some positive reforms, deep-rooted corruption and political interference continue to challenge the sustainability of these efforts.

We can say that in some way, Montenegro's reform process mirrors that of Macedonia in several key ways, particularly in terms of how external actors such as NATO and the EU affected the SSR process. In both countries, NATO membership (achieved in 2017 for Montenegro and 2020 for Macedonia) was a critical external motivator that pushed for reforms in areas such as military professionalisation, civilian control, and transparency in the defence sector.

Like in Macedonia, NATO's involvement in Montenegro wanted to align the country's security institutions with Euro-Atlantic standards. For both countries, the path to NATO membership required the implementation of key SSR measures, including reforms to the police, intelligence services, and judiciary, to ensure that these institutions operated under democratic oversight and were insulated from political manipulation.

However, both Montenegro and Macedonia have faced similar challenges in terms of corruption and political interference. In Macedonia, reforms introduced after the 2001 OFA were similarly influenced by external actors, but these reforms struggled to achieve long-term sustainability due to the lack of local ownership. Political elites in both countries have often used their influence over security institutions to maintain power, undermining the effectiveness of SSR and limiting the independence of these institutions.

And, while NATO membership had a significant effect on reforms in both Montenegro and Macedonia, the challenges of corruption, political influence, and the difficulty of ensuring local ownership over externally-driven reforms continue to pose significant obstacles. For both

countries, the future of SSR will depend on their ability to overcome these internal barriers and build truly independent and accountable security institutions.

Table 7.5: SSR in Serbia and Montenegro post-2006 independence

Indicator	Pre-2006 State Union	Post-2006 Serbia	Post-2006 Montenegro
Security context	Security forces heavily centralised, serving authoritarian interests.	Gradual depoliticisation of security forces with focus on EU accession.	Professionalisation of the military, aligning with NATO standards post-membership.
Military reforms	Legacy of Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), politicised and involved in conflicts.	Downsizing and professionalising forces with cooperation in NATO's PfP.	Transition to a fully professional military; NATO membership achieved in 2017.
Police reforms	Used for internal repression; high levels of political control.	Initiatives to counter political interference and improve training; slow implementation.	Enhanced transparency and anti-corruption measures within police.
Intelligence services	Centralised intelligence under state control, used to curb opposition.	Reforms aimed at civilian oversight but facing challenges from organised crime links.	Improvements in oversight mechanisms; transparency remains a challenge.
Judicial accountability	Minimal civilian oversight; judiciary lacked independence.	Some progress with EU-led judicial reforms but political interference persists.	Judicial reform influenced by NATO, though vulnerable to elite influence.
International influence	Minimal international involvement until 2000s.	EU conditionality for reforms; resistance due to nationalist pressures.	Strong NATO and EU influence post-independence; alignment with NATO standards.
Challenges	Organised crime influence; political interference in security.	Balancing EU aspirations with nationalist sentiments and organised crime infiltration.	Continued struggle against corruption and organised crime; reliance on EU support.

7.5 Lessons from Serbia and Montenegro's SSR

The SSR efforts in Serbia and Montenegro after 2006 provide valuable insights into the complexities of transitioning from post-conflict states with authoritarian legacies to more democratic systems aligned with European Union and NATO standards. Both countries faced

significant challenges in overhauling their security institutions, yet their paths change in important ways due to varying political dynamics, external influences, and internal resistance.

7.5.1 Key achievements in SSR

In both Serbia and Montenegro, significant progress was made in professionalising their military, police, and intelligence services, particularly as part of their broader efforts to align with NATO and EU standards. In Montenegro, NATO membership in 2017 was a major achievement that showed the country's commitment to reforming its security sector. Montenegro successfully introduced civilian oversight over the military and restructured its defence apparatus to ensure greater transparency and professionalism. The country also improved its police force, reducing political interference and introducing mechanisms to address corruption, although challenges remain in fully eliminating the influence of organised crime.

In Serbia, the introduction of the 2005 Police Law and additional efforts to depoliticise the police force showed countries willingness for accountability and transparency. Serbia also made strides in intelligence reform, particularly through the restructuring of the BIA and VBA, though political interference remains a persistent challenge. Serbia's cooperation with the ICTY, especially with the extradition of Ratko Mladić in 2011, was a significant moment in the country's SSR efforts and international engagement.

7.5.2 Challenges to democratic consolidation, accountability, and transparency

Despite these achievements, both Serbia and Montenegro have faced challenges in achieving full democratic consolidation. In Serbia, the legacy of authoritarianism and the strong influence of political elites have continued to undermine the reform process. The police and intelligence services have been slow to embrace full transparency, and allegations of corruption and political interference remain widespread. The judiciary has also struggled with depoliticisation, making it difficult to hold security officials accountable for abuses of power.

In Montenegro, while NATO membership added some reforms, particularly in the military, the country continues to grapple with corruption and the influence of organised crime within its security apparatus. The judicial system, despite reforms, remains vulnerable to political influence, and efforts to improve civilian oversight and accountability have been hampered by the enduring power of political elites. Both Serbia and Montenegro have encountered

difficulties in balancing external pressures from NATO and the EU with the internal realities of political resistance.

As both Serbia and Montenegro continue to pursue European integration, the success of their SSR efforts will play a critical role in determining their future stability and democratic development. For other Balkan states, the experiences of Serbia and Montenegro show the importance of balancing external guidance with internal political realities. Achieving meaningful reform in post-conflict settings requires a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the formal restructuring of security institutions but also the deeper political, social, and economic factors that shape these institutions.

Ultimately, the SSR efforts in Serbia and Montenegro demonstrate that while external actors like NATO and the EU can provide essential support, the sustainability of these reforms depends on the willingness of local political elites to embrace accountability, transparency, and democratic norms

CHAPTER VIII. THE QUESTION OF KOSOVO

Kosovo's SSR process offers a unique and complex case within the broader context of post-conflict Western Balkans. Despite Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008,[217] its status as a sovereign nation remains contentious, with over 100 United Nations member countries, including the United States and most of the European Union, recognising it as independent. However, key states, such as Serbia, Russia, and several EU countries, do not recognise Kosovo as a separate state, which has implications for its international legitimacy and the scope of SSR efforts.

Kosovo's journey towards establishing a functioning, transparent, and accountable security apparatus was shaped by its complex political history, ethnic divisions, and the heavy involvement of international actors. Following the 1999 NATO intervention and the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Kosovo's security sector was entirely rebuilt from the ground up. However, the process was neither straightforward nor free of challenges. The tension between international supervision and local ownership has remained central to the discourse on SSR in Kosovo.

This Chapter will explore the historical context of Kosovo's SSR, the roles played by NATO and the EU, the challenges posed by internal and external pressures, and the long-term sustainability of these reforms. The analysis will highlight how the international community has influenced Kosovo's security governance and how these efforts continue to shape the region's stability. As with other Western Balkan states, Kosovo's SSR reflects broader questions of sovereignty, accountability, and regional cooperation.

8.1 Historical overview of SSR in Kosovo

The history of Kosovo's SSR is deeply rooted in its turbulent political landscape. Following the 1999 NATO intervention, which led to the end of the Kosovo conflict, the United Nations established the UNMIK to oversee the administration and rebuilding of essential institutions. One of the key priorities of this mission was to address the security vacuum left by the conflict and the dissolution of Yugoslav authority over the region. This set the stage for an extensive

[217] International Crisis Group, *Kosovo's Independence: Towards a Real Solution?*

SSR process wanting to transform Kosovo's fragmented security landscape into a cohesive and professional sector.

One of the earliest steps in Kosovo's SSR involved the DDR of former Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters. Many of these individuals transitioned into the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), a civilian emergency response force that presented a precursor to the creation of Kosovo's future security institutions. Throughout this period, UNMIK, alongside NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), made sure to keep stability while laying the groundwork for the gradual transfer of authority to local institutions.

As Kosovo moved towards declaring independence in 2008, the SSR process shifted focus to building sustainable, locally governed security institutions. This included the establishment of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) and the reform of the police and judiciary, with significant international involvement. However, the path to reform was complicated by ongoing ethnic tensions, political instability, and differing visions for Kosovo's future within the broader Balkan region.

8.2 The Role of NATO and the EU in SSR

International actors heavily affected Kosovo's SSR. Following the conflict, NATO's KFOR was tasked with maintaining peace and security, ensuring a stable environment that would allow for political and institutional reforms. KFOR's presence was crucial in the early years of SSR, particularly as Kosovo lacked a coherent security framework and was heavily reliant on external military support. Through KFOR, NATO not only provided immediate security but also laid the foundations for a new security architecture by guiding the creation of local security forces, such as the KPC and later the KSF.

In addition to its military presence, NATO's long-term engagement with Kosovo has focused on professionalising and modernising its security sector. This partnership was further strengthened through NATO's PfP program, which provided technical and strategic assistance wanting to align Kosovo's security forces with Euro-Atlantic standards.[218] The goal of this partnership was not only to improve Kosovo's defence capabilities but also to integrate it into

[218] SIPRI Yearbook 2004, 322-346.

broader regional security frameworks, thus contributing to long-term stability in the Western Balkans.

The European Union also affected Kosovo's SSR through the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), which became the largest civilian mission ever launched under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). EULEX's primary mandate was to assist in building and monitoring the police, judiciary, and customs services in Kosovo, with a particular emphasis on fostering transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. According to Welch's assessment of Kosovo's SSR, the EU's efforts through EULEX were crucial in addressing governance challenges and helping to establish a functioning legal framework that could support broader security reforms.[219]

However, the involvement of international actors, while essential, also led to tensions regarding local ownership of the reform process. As Kosovo's security institutions developed under significant international supervision, questions emerged about the sustainability of these reforms without continued external involvement. Both NATO and the EU have emphasised the importance of transitioning to locally led governance structures, but the heavy international presence in Kosovo has often overshadowed domestic agency. This issue of local ownership remains one of the central challenges in Kosovo's SSR process, as discussed in the next section.

8.3 Challenges and tensions in Kosovo's SSR process

From the beginning, the SSR in Kosovo has faced numerous internal and external challenges. One of the most significant issues has been the tension between international involvement and local ownership. While NATO, the EU, and other international actors have provided critical support for Kosovo's SSR, this heavy reliance on external assistance has sometimes undermined local autonomy and decision-making. As Kosovo progressed towards independence in 2008, these tensions became more pronounced, particularly in the areas of police reform, judicial oversight, and military restructuring.

Internally, Kosovo's multi-ethnic composition posed another major challenge to SSR. Ethnic divisions, particularly between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, have complicated efforts to build

[219] Anthony Cleland Welch, *A Security Sector Review in Kosovo – A Holistic Approach to SSR* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2006), 43-50, https://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/10_wg13_global-concept_80_welch.pdf

a unified and professional security apparatus. The security institutions that came after the conflict were often perceived by minority groups, especially the Kosovo Serbs, as illegitimate or biased. This perception created mistrust, especially towards the newly formed KSF and the police. As Welch notes, efforts to build a cohesive and inclusive security sector were often hampered by these ethnic tensions, with both political and social divisions stalling reform efforts.[220]

Externally, Kosovo's contested international status has complicated its path towards SSR. While Kosovo declared independence in 2008, its sovereignty is not universally recognised, particularly by Serbia and several other countries. This lack of recognition has impeded its ability to participate fully in regional and international security frameworks. Despite the efforts of NATO and the EU to support SSR, Kosovo's geopolitical situation has often left it in a state of limbo, struggling to gain acceptance in the international community. This has affected not only its security apparatus but also its broader political and economic development.

In addition to these political and ethnic challenges, the legacy of the KLA continues to influence the SSR process. Many former KLA members transitioned into leadership positions within Kosovo's security institutions, particularly the KSF. While these individuals were instrumental in Kosovo's liberation struggle, their continued influence in the post-conflict security apparatus has raised concerns about the politicisation of the security sector. The challenge for SSR, therefore, has been to balance the legacy of the KLA with the need to build a modern, professional, and depoliticised security force that serves all of Kosovo's citizens.

These challenges have highlighted the difficulties of implementing SSR in a politically fragmented and ethnically divided society. The next section will explore how these tensions have impacted Kosovo's long-term security and regional stability.

8.4 SSR's impact on regional stability

Kosovo's SSR has not only shaped the internal security dynamics of the state but has also had a profound impact on the broader stability of the Western Balkans. Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the conflicts that came after, the Western Balkans region was left fragmented, with ethnic tensions, political instability, and unresolved territorial disputes.

[220] Ibid.

Kosovo's SSR, guided by international actors have been pivotal in stabilising the region, but not without challenges.

The reform of Kosovo's security apparatus has been viewed as a crucial element for long-term peace and regional cooperation. By establishing a modern, professional, and multi-ethnic security force, Kosovo has demonstrated its commitment to stability, which in turn has helped to mitigate some of the ethnic and political divisions that have long plagued the region. However, the contested status of Kosovo remains a significant source of tension. Countries continue to refuse recognition of Kosovo's independence, and this has affected deeply regional integration efforts.

As noted in the literature, Kosovo's SSR efforts have had a big effect on its neighbours, particularly in terms of improving cross-border security cooperation. The reform process, supported by NATO's KFOR and the EU's EULEX missions, has facilitated greater collaboration between Kosovo and other Western Balkan states on issues such as counterterrorism, organised crime, and border management.[221] These cooperative efforts have been essential in preventing the resurgence of violence and ensuring that the region remains on a trajectory towards European integration.

Despite these achievements, the road to regional stability remains fraught with challenges. Kosovo's strained relations with Serbia, unresolved issues concerning the status of Serb-majority municipalities in the north of the country, and the broader question of Kosovo's full integration into regional security structures continue to pose risks to stability. Additionally, as Kosovo seeks to align its security policies with Euro-Atlantic standards, it faces pressure to navigate these challenges while maintaining its fragile domestic political balance.

The international community continues to play a key role in supporting Kosovo's SSR efforts, but the long-term sustainability of these reforms will depend on Kosovo's ability to promote regional cooperation and gain full recognition from its neighbours. As Kosovo further develops its security capabilities, its role in maintaining regional peace will likely grow, making its SSR efforts critical to the broader stability of the Western Balkans.

[221] Ibid.

8.5 Local ownership and future sustainability of reforms

One of the central challenges in Kosovo's SSR process has been the tension between international supervision and the need for local ownership of reforms. While the involvement of NATO and EU was important for ensuring stability and guiding the creation of a functioning security sector, this external presence often overshadowed local initiatives and decision-making. As Kosovo moves towards consolidating its security institutions, the question of local ownership has become increasingly important for the long-term sustainability of these reforms.

The holistic approach to SSR in Kosovo, particularly the Internal Security Sector Review (ISSR) conducted in 2006, was an attempt to bridge the gap between international guidance and local involvement.[222] As noted by Welch, the ISSR sought to engage a broad range of local stakeholders, including political leaders, civil society organisations, and security personnel, to ensure that the reform process was not solely driven by external actors.[223] This inclusive approach helped lay the foundation for more sustainable reforms by supporting and promoting a sense of ownership among Kosovo's citizens and institutions.

However, despite these efforts, the international community has continued to play a dominant role in overseeing and implementing key aspects of Kosovo's SSR. The presence of EULEX, for instance, has been both a strength and a limitation. While EULEX has provided critical support in establishing the rule of law, its extensive involvement in judicial and police reforms has sometimes been perceived as undermining the legitimacy of local authorities. This has raised concerns about the ability of Kosovo's security institutions to function independently once international oversight is reduced or withdrawn.

Looking forward, the sustainability of Kosovo's SSR will depend on the successful transfer of responsibility from international actors to local institutions. This includes building the capacity of KSF, police, and judiciary to operate autonomously, while ensuring that these institutions remain accountable and transparent. The progress made so far suggests that Kosovo is on the right path, but the ongoing ethnic tensions and political divisions, particularly with the Serbian minority, could pose significant challenges to the full realisation of these reforms.

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[222] Kosovo Internal Security Sector Review, *Internal Security Sector Review Kosovo*, United Nations Development Programme, 2006, https://www.academia.edu/526009/Kosovo_Internal_Security_Sector_Review

[223] Anthony Cleland Welch, *A Security Sector Review in Kosovo*, 43-50.

The future of Kosovo's SSR will also be shaped by its broader political and regional context. As Kosovo continues to pursue Euro-Atlantic integration, it will need to navigate the delicate balance between international expectations and local realities. The ongoing support of NATO and the EU will likely remain essential in this process, but Kosovo's ability to sustain its reforms will ultimately depend on the strength of its domestic institutions and the extent to which local ownership is prioritised in the coming years.

8.6 Lessons from Kosovo's SSR

The SSR process in Kosovo offers valuable lessons for post-conflict state-building, particularly in regions with deep ethnic divisions and contested sovereignty. The involvement of international actors was important in creating a foundation for Kosovo's security institutions. These organisations provided critical guidance and oversight during the early stages of Kosovo's transition, ensuring that the security apparatus was built on principles of professionalism, accountability, and inclusivity. However, the long-term success of these reforms depends on the extent to which Kosovo can assert local ownership over its security institutions and ensure their sustainability in the absence of external supervision.

One of the key takeaways from Kosovo's SSR is the importance of balancing international involvement with local ownership. While external actors provided essential support in stabilising the country and initiating reforms, the risk of over-reliance on international supervision has significant challenges to the legitimacy and autonomy of Kosovo's security institutions. The gradual transfer of responsibility from international bodies like KFOR and EULEX to local entities such as the KSF will be critical to the sustainability of these reforms.

Another important lesson from Kosovo's SSR experience is the role of SSR in supporting regional stability. Kosovo's SSR have not only contributed to its internal stability but have also had broader implications for the Western Balkans. By integrating Kosovo into regional security frameworks and promoting cross-border cooperation, SSR has played a key role in preventing the resurgence of conflict in the region. However, unresolved issues, particularly the ongoing tensions with Serbia and the lack of universal recognition of Kosovo's independence, continue to pose risks to both Kosovo's security and the stability of the broader region.

Looking ahead, the future of Kosovo's SSR will depend on the strength of its domestic institutions, the continued support of international partners, and the country's ability to navigate its complex political and regional context. As Kosovo seeks to further align its security policies with Euro-Atlantic standards and pursue European integration, it will need to balance these aspirations with the realities of its domestic political landscape and the ongoing challenges posed by ethnic divisions.

Ultimately, Kosovo's SSR process demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of post-conflict security reform in a divided society. While significant progress has been made in building a professional and accountable security apparatus, the road ahead will require continued effort, both from Kosovo's leaders and its international partners, to ensure that these reforms are not only sustained but also adaptable to the changing political and security dynamics of the region.

CONCLUSION

The SSR processes across the Western Balkans reveal both the progress made in post-conflict reconstruction and the ongoing challenges in achieving transparent, accountable, and human rights-oriented security institutions. Through the cases of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo*, this study has shown that SSR is essential to consolidating democratic norms and supporting regional stability, yet each country's unique socio-political landscape and historical context have significantly influenced the pace and success of these reforms.

Generally, SSR dynamics in the Western Balkans are shaped by a combination of international and domestic challenges, including ethnic divisions, political instability, and organised crime. While the external frameworks provided by NATO's PfP and the EU's SAP have facilitated reform, local ownership and sustained political will are critical to SSR's success. Despite shared objectives, countries in the region display varying levels of commitment to SSR goals, and the comparative analysis highlights substantial differences in the degree of accountability, transparency, and adherence to human rights norms across each state.

In Albania, for instance, SSR has faced significant obstacles due to a history of authoritarianism and a culture of political patronage, while Kosovo's contested statehood has complicated its SSR journey, relying heavily on international supervision. Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its ethnically divided society, illustrates the complexities of reform within a deeply fragmented political landscape, where international oversight remains indispensable. North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia each offer distinct approaches, with varying levels of engagement in international standards and commitment to local reform.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge for advancing SSR in the Western Balkans. First, increased regional cooperation on anti-corruption efforts and intelligence sharing would strengthen transparency and accountability across the region. Collaborative initiatives could address transnational threats like organised crime, which frequently undermine security reforms. Additionally, promoting decentralisation as part of SSR efforts, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, could bring greater local ownership and reduce reliance on central governance structures, increasing resilience in the security sector.

Furthermore, a greater emphasis on community-oriented policing and local engagement in security policy-making could help bridge the gap between security institutions and citizens, building public trust and fostering a culture of accountability. Given the heavy reliance on international actors, Western Balkan countries must also prioritise developing sustainable local capacities within their security institutions, ensuring that reforms endure even if external support wanes.

Looking forward, it is clear that SSR in the Western Balkans requires a tailored approach that considers each state's distinct challenges and context. For SSR to contribute effectively to democratic consolidation, reforms must be pursued with genuine commitment to human rights, transparency, and public accountability. In sum, while significant progress has been made, the road to establishing truly democratic and resilient security institutions in the Western Balkans remains ongoing. With targeted regional cooperation and a focus on local empowerment, SSR can continue to improve stability and promote democratic values across this historically complex region.

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