

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS FROM PANDEMICS TO WAR IN UKRAINE

POST CONFERENCE REPORT



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Challenges and Lessons from Pandemics to War in Ukraine - POST CONFERENCE REPORT

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Introduction

The 7th Regional (Jumbo) Security Coordination Conference titled ***Security Cooperation in the Western Balkans - Challenges and Lessons from Pandemics to War in Ukraine*** was held in Rome on 17 and 18 November 2022, in a hybrid format which allowed participants to join both in-person and online. The event was co-organised by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), International Relations Service of the Office for the Coordination and Planning of Police Forces of the Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the government of Italy, at the premises of the Police Institute of Advanced Studies in Rome.

The event convened 49 speakers from 14 different economies, and more than 100 participants and security practitioners from the Western Balkan economies, Italy, and other European Union (EU) member states, as well as representatives of the EU Commission, Frontex, IOM, IISG, MAARI, GI, and other relevant regional and international organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and law enforcement agencies.

The main objective of the conference was to map out, assess, and explore prevalent security challenges facing both the Western Balkans region and the EU in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine. Particular attention was given to sharing good practices and taking stock of lessons learned from participating stakeholders in tackling common transnational challenges. The ultimate goal of the conference was to streamline and strengthen security cooperation and coordination in the Western Balkans at the political, strategic,

and operational levels between all relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organisations and initiatives.

The opening session of the 7th Regional Security Coordination Conference was inaugurated by Prefect Mr. Stefano Gambacurta, Deputy Director General of Public Security in charge of the coordination and planning activity; following him, Ms. Majlinda Bregu, the RCC Secretary General, welcomed the participants to the conference. Lastly, Mr. Vincenzo Celeste, the General Director for Europe and International Trade Policy on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, also extended his welcome to the participants, marking the beginning of the event.

The agenda was divided into technical panels chaired by the Director of International Relations Service, Dirigente Superiore of the State Police, Ms. Eufemia Esposito and by the Head of Political Department of the Regional Cooperation Council, Ambassador Amer Kapetanović, together with five moderators and field experts. The five thematic sessions discussed during the two-day conference were as follows: Session 1: Critical events management: Energy Security in the Western Balkans; Session 2: Radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism; Session 3: Transnational organised crime in the international crisis scenarios; Session 4: Cooperation, achievements, and challenges in the fight against irregular migration in the Western Balkans; and Session 5: Cybercrime: Protection of critical infrastructures.



RCC hosts 7th Annual Jumbo Security Conference in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, at the Police Institute of Advanced Studies (Scuola Superiore di Polizia) in Rome (Photo: RCC/Mario Sayadi)

This report provides a summary of the conference discussions, key points made by the participants during the thematic sessions, as well as some observations and preliminary recommendations on how future iterations

of the Jumbo Security Conference could be fine-tuned to better respond to the needs and organisational goals of participating stakeholders and achieve the strategic objectives of the organisers.

Opening Session

The opening session of the 7th Regional Security Coordination Conference was inaugurated by the Deputy Director General of Public Security in charge of the coordination and planning activity, Prefect Stefano Gambacurta.

In his opening address, Mr. Gambacurta highlighted the importance of intensive and profitable two-day event that offered to the Italian and foreign participants a common basis of knowledge and analysis tools, useful to develop the already advanced cooperation in security matters between Italy and the Western Balkans.

This was an opportunity to reiterate the willingness of Italy and the Western Balkans to be a mutual point of reference to define security processes aimed at achieving stability and legality in that area through a unified and structured vision of tools and reference models to be implemented in order to reach common results.

The participation of the Italian law enforcement team in the five thematic sessions was a source of great pride for Italy. The group, which included some of the most important experts in the Police Forces, was able to showcase Italian expertise in security matters. The Italian and foreign presentations provided an opportunity for professional growth and inspiration to develop new responses to the continuous challenges posed by modern society, which helped affirm and confirm the profound relationship between Italy, the Western Balkans, and the European institutions.

Both Italy and the Western Balkans recognized the importance of mutual commitment in addressing issues concerning international police cooperation. This commitment was firmly focused on criminal severe phenomena such as those deriving from the pervasiveness of transnational organized crime, irregular migration, terrorism, and hybrid threats linked, in particular, to the web.

The pandemic crisis and the following Russian-Ukrainian war worsened these phenomena, leading to a strong criminal development over the last two years. The international police community must commit to improving the quality of its response by developing increasingly more skills to act on a preventative and investigative level effectively. This should be done while complying with domestic regulations and international obligations and by laying the foundations for know-how and experience-sharing culture to further enhance police cooperation between law enforcement systems.



Photo: Direttore Generale, Prefetto Stefano Gambacurta (Photo: Polizia di Stato)

The RCC Secretary General, Ms. Majlinda Bregu, opened the session by welcoming the participants to the Seventh Regional (Jumbo) Security Coordination Conference, an annual forum that since its first iteration in 2016 has grown into a recognised brand in regional security cooperation in the Western Balkans that exemplifies RCC’s continuous commitment to fostering collective and effective responses to the most current and emerging security threats.

Ms. Bregu expressed appreciation to the Italian Government, especially the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for their constant attention to shared security threats. “We rejoice in the fact that the Annual Jumbo Security Conference, thanks also to your support, is increasingly focusing the attention of regional and international security actors in our region and is also helping to establish crucial links

for coordination and streamlining of security cooperation efforts,” she stated.

The Secretary General emphasised that the EU and the Western Balkans share many evolving borderless security threats, from radicalisation, violent extremism, and return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters to irregular migration, organised crime, corruption, disinformation, and cyber-attacks. According to Ms. Bregu, such joint challenges in the face of the Russian aggression in Ukraine “have made clear the crucial role of the Western Balkans in maintaining peace and stability of Europe’s eastern borders”.

Regarding the challenge of irregular entries in Europe, Ms. Bregu stated that the Western Balkans route has become the number one preferred route for smuggling irregular migrants into the EU, drawing attention to the large profits made by migrant-smuggling

criminal groups operating in the region. According to her, the overall number of irregular arrivals to the EU through the Western

Balkans route in 2022 increased three times compared to the previous year.



RCC Secretary General Majlinda Bregu at the opening of the 7th Annual Jumbo Security Conference on 17 November in Rome (Photo: RCC/Mario Sayadi)

The Secretary General also discussed the importance of assessing public perception on security matters periodically and shared the latest data from RCC's special edition on perceptions of the public in the Western Balkans concerning security situation. The data, according to her, clearly capture public concern over the adverse effects of the war in Ukraine on food and gas security and the economy in general. Moreover, the data also reflect a perceived threat to the broader security and political stability of the region by the war in Ukraine, and particular concern over the increase in the flow of fake news, disinformation, and propaganda activities. On the positive side, the survey revealed a very

high level of agreement among respondents on the importance of increasing security cooperation with the EU and NATO, as well as regional cooperation in order to foster economic resilience against the negative consequences of the war.

Lastly, Ms. Bregu highlighted the big step forward made by the Western Balkan economies in signing three RCC-facilitated mobility agreements under the Common Regional Market Action Plan. She concluded by saying: "Let this serve as an impetus at a critical moment in time to which we need to dedicate drive and commitment as never before".



On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international cooperation, Mr. Vincenzo Celeste, General Director for Europe and International Trade Policy, welcomed all participants to the seventh edition of the Regional Jumbo Security Conference.

He emphasised that the Jumbo security conference gives an important opportunity to discuss the main security challenges and develop together new strategies for addressing them.

“Security is indeed a cornerstone of Italy’s partnership with the region. Over the years, we have developed fruitful cooperation with all economies, thanks to a wide range of bilateral agreements.

Our cooperation has achieved concrete results in the fight against organised crime and illicit trafficking. It has created an extensive operational network and enabled joint activities, including training and investigations, and the exchange of know-how and information.

A specific aspect of the Italian methodology in developing our cooperation has always been the regional approach, in connection also with the European perspective of the Western Balkans”, he said.

Mr. Celeste accentuates and supports the Regional Cooperation Council’s pivotal role in strengthening regional cooperation and integration, thus contributing to promoting peace, stability, and economic prosperity.

“We deeply appreciate the fruitful cooperation established between Italy and RCC and its focus on the security sector, as demonstrated by today’s conference.”

Concrete progress in the fight against corruption and organised crime is a top priority for candidate economies and potential

candidates on their European path. The revised methodology on enlargement approved by the EU in 2020 regards this progress as a key element for the integration process.

“In alignment with the EU standards, the Western Balkans can count on Italy’s full support and unconditional availability. Italy has always considered the European integration process of the Western Balkans as a matter of national security and a top EU priority. The conflict in Ukraine calls for an acceleration of this process”, concluded Mr. Celeste.

Overview of Thematic Session 1 - Critical events management: Energy Security in the Western Balkans

Chair/Moderator: **Ms. Engjellushe MORINA**, Senior policy fellow, Wider Europe Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations

Panellists:

Mr. Lorenzo SABATUCCI, Chief Commissioner of the State Police

Mr. Massimo PLANERA, Lieutenant Colonel of the Carabinieri

Ms. Nadežda KOKOTOVIC, Director, Brussels Energy Club

Mr. Ionut PURICA, Professor at UHB, Executive Director of the Advisory Center for Energy and Environment (online)

Ms. Nevena ŠEKARIĆ STOJANOVIC, Research Associate, Institute of International Politics and Economics (online)

The panel of the first thematic session included a diverse range of representatives of government agencies, independent policy platforms, academic institutes, and researchers in order to provide a broad perspective on issues centring on energy security and critical event management. In addressing the sensitive issue of energy crisis as a direct result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the presenters agreed on the need to define common, effective, and efficient strategies aimed at filling the gap created by extraordinary events that are usually exploited by organised crime. Regarding the security approach, the presenters identified three conceptual strategies: “green”, meaning that it is necessary to be more sensitive towards climate change

and its impact on security; “smart”, namely implementing policies intended to ensure energy security and the stability of economies, and last, “innovative.”

The panellists agreed that the region is currently facing two major challenges: the global energy transition and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine. Both challenges present critical problems and require systematic thinking and cross-cutting measures as well as intensified regional cooperation. Concerns raised included: the absence of adequate human, technical and financial capacities; low level of interinstitutional coordination; and unclear strategic priorities.

The panellists also discussed the importance of access to data for a thorough assessment of the impact of extreme events on critical infrastructure. Similarly, it is important to devise methods for prevention, mitigation, and adaptation in order to enhance resilience. Identifying vulnerabilities, for example the critical nodes in the electrical grid, and designing an enhanced protection plan for these nodes is essential against terrorist acts. Also, the power market may be used as a weapon against the economy. Therefore, preventive measures such as temporary price controls in the power market should be foreseen for a critical period.

The system should not work against itself technically or commercially. Models are needed for the potential evolution scenarios including crisis situations, and the assessment of costs of security of the system which are not internalised in the prices. One recommendation called for law enforcement organisations to develop and implement risk scenarios modelling capabilities to improve reaction time in cases of extreme events.

Various events may impact the critical grids



Overview of Thematic Session 2 - Radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism

Chair/Moderator: **Mr. Lucio PIFFERI**, Dirigente Superiore of the State Police - Central Directorate of Preventive Police

Panellists:

Mr. Arturo VARRIALE, Primo Dirigente of the State Police

Mr. Marco ROSI, Carabinieri Colonel

Mr. Sergio GIZZI, Lieutenant Colonel of Guardia di Finanza

Mr. Adrian SHTUNI, CEO / Principal Consultant, Shtuni Consulting, LLC

Ms. Sheelagh BRADY, International expert in the areas of terrorism, CVE, organised crime, and rule of law

CT-P/CVE Coordinators from the Western Balkans:

Mr. Denion MEIDANI, Director, CVE Coordination Center, Albania

Mr. Mevsud ĆUPRIJA, Senior Advisor for Organised Crime in the Division for Combating Terrorism, Organised Crime and Drug Trafficking, Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mr. Mensur HOTI, Director, Department of Public Safety, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo*

Mr. Slobodan KOVAČEVIĆ, State Secretary, Ministry of Interior, Montenegro

Mr. Xheladin AJVAZI, Deputy National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism, North Macedonia

The speakers in this thematic session discussed how the armed conflicts in Syria and Ukraine have attracted a large number of Western Balkans foreign fighters. Hundreds are known to have gone to fight in Ukraine and over a thousand have travelled to Syria and Iraq either to join terrorist organisations or to live in territories under their control. The speakers agreed that this phenomenon will have long-term security implications for the

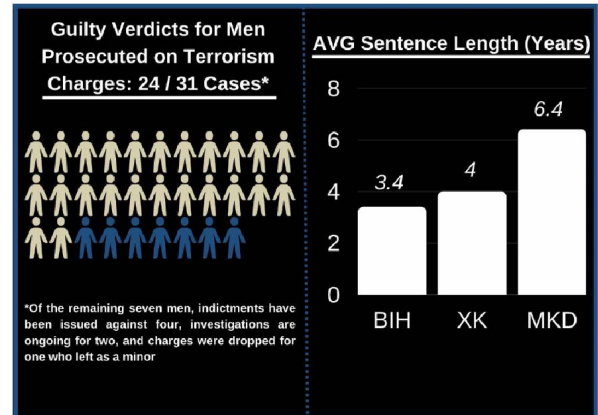
* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

region and beyond, especially as the fighters and their family members return home often traumatised and further radicalised. Based on the relatively short prison sentences handed down so far, most repatriated foreign fighters will be released between 2023 and 2025. The risks associated with their return and re-entry into society could be gradually mitigated by significantly boosting resources, staffing, and capacity-building support for the implementation of evidence-based systems of risk assessment, prison-based disengagement programmes, and post-incarceration rehabilitation and reintegration services across the region.

Clearly, the modestly resourced Western Balkan economies will need continued support for handling the needs and risks associated with returnees, especially after the socio-economic shocks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine that have strained their resources. The panellists concluded that under such adverse circumstances, closer regional cooperation becomes less of a choice and more of an imperative. By implication, the role of RCC will continue to be of vital importance for fostering trust among regional partners and galvanising genuine cooperation that can amplify the positive impact of each economies' efforts in countering common transitional threats.

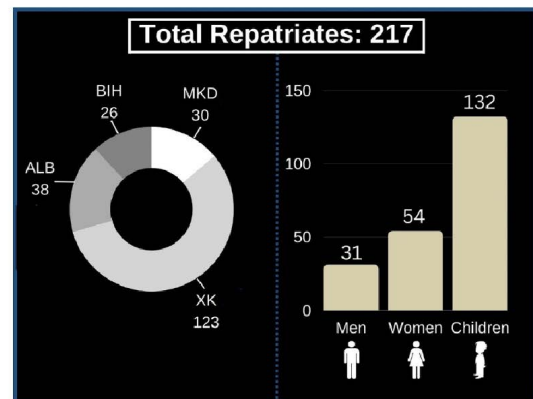
CT-P/CVE Coordinators provided updates on their respective economies' progress in strengthening the domestic framework for CT and P/CVE and reintegrating returnees from conflict zones. They emphasised the need for continued cooperation with international partners.

3. Western Balkans Prosecution and Sentencing Trends for Male Individuals Repatriated from Syria



shuni

3. Repatriated Western Balkans Foreign Fighters and Family Members



shuni

Overview of Thematic Session 3 - Transnational organised crime in the international crisis scenarios

Chair/Moderator: **Mr. Renzo NISI**, Brigadier General of Guardia di Finanza – Head of the 3rd Unit of the Anti-Mafia Investigative Directorate (D.I.A.)

Panellists:

Mr. Carlo VERDIGLIONE, Dirigente Superiore of State Police

Mr. Alessandro CAVALLI, Colonel of Guardia di Finanza

Mr. Giorgio GRASSO, Vice Questore Aggiunto of the State Police

Mr. Federico ZEPPONI, Lieutenant Colonel of the Carabinieri Corps

Mr. Massimo SELENATI, Lieutenant Colonel of Guardia di Finanza

Mr. Agron SOJATI, Head of Integrative internal Security Governance (IISG) Secretariat

Mr. Ruggero SCATURRO, Analyst, GI-TOC Observatory for South-Eastern Europe

The speakers of the thematic session on transnational organised crime highlighted the changing dynamics in the main areas of interest such as trafficking in narcotic drugs, weapons and human beings. Some of the main challenges identified included the increasing use of migratory routes for illicit trafficking; emerging of the so-called Southern Route with regard to drug trafficking from Africa to the region of the Western Balkans; and, finally, the alarming new market of methamphetamine and, in particular, the illegal use of its precursor, ephedrine.

One of the panellists discussed the dynamics of drug trafficking following the evolution of

geopolitical situation, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic starting from 2019, Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, and the start of war in Ukraine in 2022. Another panellist focused on the phenomenon of money laundering by Western Balkans criminal organisations in Italy and the economies of origin. He emphasised that organised crime groups involved in money laundering activities often run lucrative businesses mainly related to the trafficking of large quantities of cocaine from South America. Some observed money laundering techniques included purchase of real estate, commercial activities, accommodation

Impact of the war in Ukraine on OC in the Western Balkans

- **Russian money comes to the Balkans** (golden passport or citizenship for investment schemes, money laundering, crime-as-a-service expertise)
- **Sanctions busting** (conduit for the trafficking of luxury goods, alcohol and cigarettes, fuel)
- **Trafficking** (human trafficking and smuggling, weapons)
- **Increase of migrants from Middle East and North Africa passing through the Balkans**
- **Paramilitaries**



facilities in both the Balkans and Italy, as well as the use of video lottery and gaming accounts.

The representative of the Internal Security Governance (IISG) Secretariat hosted by the RCC, provided a comprehensive presentation on the governing structure and mission of the Secretariat focusing on improving collective efficiency by mapping the needs and coordinating responses concerning security threats in the Western Balkans in the three pillars of counter terrorism, organised crime, and border security. He also discussed the

methodology and the outcome of the needs mapping effort, resulting in the identification of 959 needs across the three pillars.

Finally, the representative of the Global Initiative against transnational organised crime focused on the impact of the war in Ukraine in the Western Balkans, emphasising the flow of Russian money to the region through the citizenship for investment schemes also known as “golden passport” schemes, money laundering, crime-as-a-service expertise, etc.

Overview of Thematic Session 4 - Cooperation, achievements, and challenges in the fight against irregular migration in the Western Balkans

Chair/Moderator: **Mr. Luigi IANDOLI**, Dirigente Superiore of the State Police– Central Directorate of Immigration and Border Police

Panellists:

Mr. Gabriele GAINELLI, Colonel of the Carabinieri Corps - Presentation by the Central Directorate of Criminal Police

Mr. Pawel SLIWINSKI, Team Leader Western Balkans and Turkey, FRONTEX

Mr. Besfort LAMALLARI, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Interior of Albania

Mr. Mirsad BUZAR, Deputy Director of The Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA), Bosnia nad Hercegovina

Ms. Donatella BRADIC, Sub-Regional Programme Coordinator, International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Ms. Neli RASOVIC, MARRI Participant Representative for Montenegro

Mr. Erwann TOR, Regional Technical Advisor "Fight against Human Trafficking in Southeastern Europe", Permanent Mission of France to the UN and IO in Vienna (online)

This panel discussed the sizeable increase in irregular migratory flows through the Balkan route registered in 2022, the umpteenth consequence of the war in Ukraine that continues to challenge the resilience of reception systems, as well as of border and migration management systems of

the Western Balkans. Panellists converged on the need for increased cooperation between economies of origin, transit, and destination of flows, with a view to building an integrated and responsible approach for the management of this common challenge.

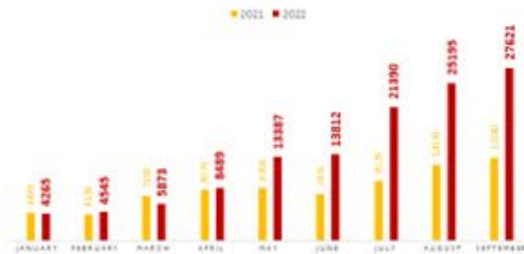
MIXED MIGRATION FLOW IN THE WESTERN BALKANS : 2018 – 2022

ARRIVALS OVERVIEW IN THE WB (2018-2021)

COUNTRY/AREA	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albania	1,627	3,067	3,628	150
Bosnia and Herzegovina	24,067	29,196	16,150	15,740
Montenegro	4,645	8,695	3,007	3,336
North Macedonia	3,132	19,716	37,937	17,919
Serbia	8,827	17,611	39,648	63,535
Kosovo SCR 1244*	594	2,038	3,001	1,487
TOTAL	42,892	80,323	103,371	102,167

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

TOTAL ARRIVALS IN THE WB 2021 vs. 2022



124,577
migrants recorded until
September 2022

SNAPSHOT OF THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE POPULATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE IN THE WB**

COUNTRY/AREA OF ARRIVAL	ENTRY	ESTIMATED PRESENCE
Albania	26,536	2,622
Bosnia and Herzegovina	40,715	231
Montenegro	74,782	7,067
North Macedonia	23,418	6,031
Serbia	111,362	2,278
Kosovo*	602	12
TOTAL	277,415	18,241

** Data refer to 14 October 2022

- * References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
- ** The map is for illustrative purposes only. Representations and the use of boundaries and geographical names on this map do not imply any judgment on the legal status of a territory, nor official recognition or acceptance of these boundaries by DTM.
- The different shade of blue indicates the greater/lower presence of Ukrainian refugees in the WB.
- The data sources for each country differ, including national authorities, the Red Cross and the media.
- The table covers the cumulative data on Ukrainians' arrivals as of February 24, 2022. Therefore, the data must be considered an estimate as they could contain a double count given the mobility of individuals who could be registered in more points in the region.



Main regions (oblasts) of origin of Ukrainian refugees currently residing in Montenegro and North Macedonia, based on the rapid assessment

One panellist presented the Italian approach regarding police cooperation on immigration issues within the Schengen Area, focusing on the importance and effectiveness of the Schengen Information System (SIS). This system was set up to ensure internal security in Schengen states, making up for the absence of internal border controls. It is a large-scale information system that enables law enforcement, migration, and judicial

authorities to generate, share, and access reports on missing persons, individuals wanted in relation to criminal investigations or foreign nationals not authorised to access or reside in the Schengen area. The SIS is therefore one of the pillars of police cooperation framework and, at the same time, contributes to a large extent to the protection of external borders of the Schengen area.

The IOM panellist discussed the mixed migration flows, current stock, and reception capacities in the region with a particular focus on protection concerns and key findings on the needs of Ukrainian refugees. She also discussed the organisation's Flow Monitoring Surveys, part of the Displacement Tracking Matrix. The surveys allow for the collection of more reliable information on profiles, transit routes, and vulnerabilities of migrants transiting the region.

Other panellists discussed the need for sustainable migration governance in the Western Balkans, the potential benefits to the region from migration in the areas where workforce is needed, and the importance of applying gender perspectives in border management activities.

Overview of Thematic Session 5 - Cybercrime: Protection of critical infrastructures

Chair/Moderator: **Mr. Ivano GABRIELLI**, Primo Dirigente of the State Police - Central Directorate of Traffic, Railway, Communications Police and State Police Special Units – Postal Police Service

Panellists:

Mr. Riccardo CROCE, Vice Questore Aggiunto of the State Police

Mr. Metodi HADJI-JANEV, PhD –Military Academy - Skopje

Ms. Irina RIZMAL, Manager, Cybersecurity & Privacy, Risk Assurance Solutions, PricewaterhouseCoopers d.o.o.

Mr. Ian BROWN, Senior Cyber Advisor in our Bureau of Cyber Diplomacy at the U.S. Department of State (online)

Mr. Olivier BUCHBINDER, Coordinator of the French Centre of Expertise on Security in South-Eastern Europe

CSIRT representatives from the WB

Mr. Rexhion QAFA, Head of Cybersecurity Incident Management Unit

Ms. Sabina BARAKOVIC, Expert Adviser, Sector for IT and Telecommunication Systems, Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina (online)

Mr. Aleksandar ACEV, Head of National Centre for Computer Incident Response MKD-CIRT

Mr. Goran TOMKOVIC, CSIRT, National Security Authority, Montenegro

The panellists of the final thematic session discussed cyber threats and the pressing need for the adoption of integrated strategies aimed at countering increasingly technologically advanced and transnational attacks. They also acknowledged the need to build public/private synergies and partnerships. A kind of comprehensive response to the challenge that is founded in cooperation between law enforcement agencies but is reinforced by collaboration with the private sector and

the academic and research world in terms of capacity building, early-warning, and information sharing. Considering that the EU must also play its part in maintaining a positive and proactive approach towards Western Balkan economies, regional experts highlighted the pressing need to harmonise domestic regulatory frameworks, share experiences and good practices, train personnel, and set in place interconnected databases for efficient info-investigative

exchanges and joint operational activities across the region.

The representative of the French Centre of Expertise on Security in South-Eastern Europe discussed the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C), a regional project led by the Directorate for Security and Defence Cooperation within the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. This important cybersecurity capacity building project aims to boost cyber culture through education and awareness raising, strengthen operational and response capacities and promote regional and international cooperation.

Another panellist presented the findings of the PwC’s report on emerging cyber threats in the Western Balkans, according to which the cybersecurity threats faced by region’s economies generally mirror global threats. Ongoing increases in digital activity, accelerated by the global pandemic, have led to greater numbers of incident reports received by authorities. Cyber-attacks have become more sophisticated, with better tailoring of malicious content to local languages and context. The presentation concluded with recommendations for boosting cyber resilience through efforts aligned with capacity building activities foreseen to be implemented by WB3C.

Anticipated trends in the Western Balkans (pt.1)

WB economy	Anticipated trends	Identified needs
Albania	Digitalisation-related risks Identity-based attacks	Cybersecurity education Sectoral capacity-building Better information sharing
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Digitalisation-related risks Attacks on digital services	Cybersecurity framework Update of existing legislation Awareness raising Cybersecurity education More regional cooperation
Kosovo*	Digitalisation-related risks	Sectoral capacity-building Public-private partnerships Awareness raising

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

PwC

Anticipated trends in the Western Balkans (pt.2)

WB economy	Anticipated trends	Identified needs
Montenegro	Digitalisation-related risks Increase in attacks on SMEs Continued growth of cybercrime	Greater engagement of international partners Capacity development Cybersecurity education Public-private partnerships
North Macedonia	Rise in attacks on critical infrastructure Digitalisation-related risks Increase in ransomware Continued capacity challenges	Stronger regional cooperation Awareness raising Sectoral capacity-building
Serbia	Need for outsourcing specific cybersecurity functions Growing sophistication of attacks Digitalisation-related risks Continued domination of cybercrime	Better information sharing Sectoral capacity-building Public-private partnerships Digital literacy and awareness raising

PwC

Cybersecurity Ecosystem Report, Western Balkans: Emerging Cyber Threats, 2022, PwC.

Closing Remarks and Conference Conclusions

Following the two days of presentations, exchange of views, and networking the closing remarks were delivered by Mr. Amer Kapetanović, Head of RCC Political Department, Mr. Andrea Casone, Director of the Adriatic and Balkans Unit - General Directorate for the European Union - MoFA, and Dirigente Superiore of the State Police Ms. Eufemia Esposito, Director of the International Relations Service - Office for Coordination and Planning of Police Forces-Department of Public Security, Ministry of Interior.

Ms. Eufemia Esposito expressed her special thanks to all foreign and Italian moderators and panellists who contributed to the thematic sessions with great professionalism and competence, and peculiarities that are far from being taken for granted. Moreover, this event saw once again the representatives of the economies involved as the undisputed protagonists of the two intensive and fruitful days of work.

In particular, Ms. Esposito went over the highlights of the conference and reiterated the importance of establishing common, effective and efficient strategies designed to bridge the gap created by extraordinary events, such as the pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian war, that constitute the main flaws in the political, economic and social scenarios of the international arena, where organised crime infiltrates, deriving its greatest profits.

Hence, there is a need for a security approach aimed at defining the three new conceptual strategies: “green”, i.e. the need to be more sensitive to climate change and its impact on security; “smart”, i.e. the need to put in place targeted actions designed to guarantee a sound energy security and the stability of economies, and - last, but not least - “innovative”.

The analysis of individual panels resulted in an interactive and lively exchange of experience and new collaboration ideas.

The session devoted to radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism registered many convergence insights, mainly with regard to prevention and countering radicalisation. Speakers agreed that the present terrorist threats have been exacerbated by the Russian-Ukrainian war and the pandemic which contributed – each in its own way – to speeding up the need to take appropriate measures for the protection of our security systems by developing integrated programmes between various institutions, in cooperation with the various jurisdictions.

Against this background, also in the field of organised crime fluctuating dynamics have been highlighted in the main areas of interest such as drug trafficking, trafficking in weapons and human smuggling. The main challenges include the increasing use of migration routes for illicit trafficking purposes,

emergence of the so-called Southern Route for drug trafficking from Africa to the Balkan economies, and the new concerning methamphetamine market, in particular the illegal use of their precursor, ephedrine.

With regard to cooperation, challenges and goals in the fight against illegal migration in the Western Balkan economies, the considerable increase registered this year in irregular migration flows was highlighted, as well as the umpteenth consequence of the war in Ukraine that continues to strain the resilience of Western Balkans' reception, border and immigration management systems. Converging positions were registered on an increasingly close cooperation between origin, transit and destination economies, in view of a shared and responsible approach to the common challenges that EU member states and Western Balkans partners have to face.

The cyber threat too requires the adoption of strategies designed to counter attacks that are more and more technologically sophisticated and transnational. In connection to this, all relevant experts recognised the need to start synergies and create public/private partnerships, a form of collaboration starting with police cooperation but also trying to establish links with the private sector and the academic research environment in terms of capacity building, early warning and information sharing. In this regard, considering that the European Union too must play its part in maintaining a positive and proactive approach to Western Balkan economies, regional experts stated that there was an urgent need to harmonise their legal frameworks, share experiences and good practices, train personnel and set up interconnected databases that may speed up exchanges of information about investigations and facilitate joint operational activities.

Ms. Esposito underlined how Western Balkan economies have always represented the "hinge" between East and West, being part of Europe and, in the future, of the European Union.

In light of the above, increased commitment is needed in order to maintain a long-standing privileged cooperation relationship that has allowed to carry out, over the last few years, significant operational and training activities, as well as to develop important projects, including: providing support to Serbia in fulfilling the obligations referred to under Chapter 24 of the Treaty of Accession to the European Union concerning the issues of freedom, security and justice; providing support to Montenegro in the EU accession process through the review of its legal system and mechanisms to counter corruption and organised crime; and the regional Project I.P.A. 2019 designed to improve the operational standards of police and judicial institutions of Western Balkan economies -, which is based on three pillars and includes a number of activities, such as supporting investigations into transnational organised crime, initiatives to set up an Operations Room equipped with interoperability systems, actions designed to extend the use of SIENA, EUROPOL's Secure Information Exchange Network application, the extension of new generation services and applications promoted by INTERPOL; programmes for developing skills and competences with a view to drafting a regional threat assessment report; and supporting the proactive participation of Balkan police forces in the EU Policy Cycle in the context of E.M.P.A.C.T..

We need to make our societies increasingly effective and resilient to any kind of threat and, in order to achieve this objective, we must create a system based on awareness, sharing and competence. In effect, good progress has been made over the years since

the first edition of the Security Coordination Conference, which a long time ago appeared for the first time on the international scene, with great humility but, at the same time, with ambitious prospects for development.

As a closing remark, Ms. Esposito underlined the importance of responsibility that

law enforcement members have to the entire world, which is characterised by unequivocal and indispensable factors such as professionalism, knowledge and synergy. It is only by making these three factors work together in a coherent system that we can make our societies a safer place.



Closing remarks ceremony: from the left: **Mr. Amer KAPETANOVIC**, Head of RCC Political Department; **Mr. Ivano GABRIELLI**, Primo Dirigente of the State Police; **Ms. Eufemia ESPOSITO**, Dirigente Superiore of the State Police, Director of the International Relation Service - Office for Coordination and Planning of Police Forces - Department of Public Security, Ministry of Interior of Italy; **Mr. Andrea CASCONE**, Director of the Adriatic and Balkans Unit - General Directorate for the European Union – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy (Photo: RCC/ Nataša Mitrović)

After congratulating the speakers for their excellent presentations and the participants for their invaluable contributions Mr. Kapetanović shared that while he was very pleased with the outcome of the conference, he realised that two days was probably not enough to sufficiently cover the five complex

topics explored during the event. He added that the amount of information shared, and insights gained during the two days of the conference would probably take weeks to fully process, which in his view was indicative of two things:

“a) the relevance of our collective efforts against the backdrop of an ever-growing number of traditional and unconventional or hybrid security challenges, and

b) the necessity to continue adjusting this format and approach so that we retain our focus and increase our impact”.



RCC Head of Political Department Mr. Amer Kapetanović at the closing session of the 7th Annual Jumbo Security Conference on 18 November in Rome (Photo: RCC/Mario Sayadi)

In Mr. Kapetanović’s assessment the 7th JSC once again proved to be an important venue for taking stock of the various security initiatives and processes contributing to security cooperation. The exchanges during the conference underlined the necessity to promote a comprehensive approach of regional cooperation, involving all relevant actors and ongoing regional initiatives as the Common Regional Market, intending to facilitate integration of the entire region to the EU. As such, security cooperation is one of

the pillars of this approach. He concluded by asking all participants to stay engaged with RCC and contribute to improving this platform with comments, suggestions, and proactive participation.

At the very end, Mr. Andrea Cascone thanked the organisers and participants and underlined the Italian commitment to continue to work with RCC for the next edition of the Jumbo Security Conference. The co-chairs of the conference also thanked the participants and

confirmed the need to reinforce the interactions and improve the synergies between these processes, which are complementary, in the framework of a common cooperative security order. They also reiterated on behalf of their respective institutions the commitment of the Italian government to fully support this perspective.

The participants thanked RCC and the representatives of the Italian government

for organising JSC as a comprehensive and insightful security forum and called on RCC to continue facilitating the Annual Security Conference, as an important and all-inclusive security platform for dialogue and cooperation between law enforcement institutions from the Western Balkans, relevant international organisations, and agencies in the EU member states and beyond.



7th Annual Jumbo Security Conference organised by the RCC in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and held 17-18 November 2022 (Photo: RCC/Mario Sayadi)

Observations and Recommendations

The 7th Annual Jumbo Regional Security Coordination Conference once again proved to be a valuable forum for showcasing the achievements of important regional projects, discussing ongoing needs, and sharing good practices and lessons learned. The large number of presentations over two days revealed the plethora of dynamic security challenges and persistent transnational threats facing the Western Balkans. At the same time, they were a testimony to the unrelenting commitment of a large and diverse body of stakeholders dedicated to strengthening the security and resilience of the region by tackling challenges systematically, through meticulous planning and cooperation.

Nevertheless, one key takeaway from this year's conference is that as much as the generous quantity of presentations is important in appreciating the depth and nuance of approaches and projects, it is also important to give the audience time to digest the shared information and allot more space for discussion during the thematic sessions. In other words, there is a need to find the right balance between being comprehensive and targeted. With that in mind, below are some considerations that may help fine-tune future iterations of the conference:

- ♥ Streamline the number of presentations in proportion to the length of the conference, keeping in mind that the audience may get saturated if the flow of information is too intense.
- ♥ Take steps to coordinate with speakers in order to minimise potential overlap between presentations and therefore maximise the usefulness of each session. One way to do this is through calls for abstracts.
- ♥ Ensure that sufficient time is allotted for questions and answers after each presentation. An interactive session is more engaging and ultimately more useful to the attendees.
- ♥ Organise breakout sessions that are thematically focused and can allow participating experts to explore the subject of their particular interest in more depth. Some presentations (especially the technical ones) may be better suited for thematic breakout sessions.
- ♥ Generate more opportunities during the conference for building synergies. Sharing, listening, and networking is important but engaging in conceptualising common projects is the next step.
- ♥ Set up working groups that can continue to engage periodically, share good practices, and cooperate on a particular subject of expertise after the conference.
- ♥ Organise workshop components as part of the conference. The purpose would be to create a space for stakeholders

to not only identify and discuss issues but also generate practical solutions and create opportunities for continued engagement.

- ♥ Develop event Key Performance Indicators (KPI). The KPIs are the best way to track and measure the event's success.

- ♥ Develop a post-event survey. These attendee surveys can help understand what worked well, identify areas for improvement, and solicit recommendations.

- ♥ Identify Top Performing Topics (TPT). This can be done via the post-event survey, namely by asking the participants to rate the presentations.

Annex I- Highlights of the special edition of Balkan Barometer on the war in Ukraine

The impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is being felt throughout the world, including in the Western Balkans. The region has experienced security challenges, an influx of refugees, issues with energy and food security, cyberattacks, and strained relations with other economies as a result of the war.

The RCC is working to understand these issues and develop strategies to address them in order to better prepare for any potential socio-economic and security challenges that may arise in the future.

RCC has conducted a survey, simultaneously with the Jumbo 2022 conference, to assess the impact of the war in Ukraine on various security and policy areas, including energy, economy, cyber security, and disinformation. Some of the findings of this survey will be included in this post-conference Jumbo report as a way to provide context and understanding of the effects of the war in Ukraine in the Western Balkans.

1. PUBLIC OPINION Highlights

66% of WB citizens agree that the war in Ukraine poses a risk to their economy; 30% of

them think there is a great deal of risk, whereas 36% consider the war to be a fair amount of risk. On the other hand, 31% of people are not worried much or at all about the risk that the war possesses.

Serbia is leading when it comes to concerns about the war in Ukraine. In total, 78% of people think that the war in Ukraine poses a great deal or fair amount of risk.

Kosovo* follows with 75%, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is in third place in terms of the concerns with 69%. At the other end, there are citizens of North Macedonia - 44% of whom are not worried.

When asked about the most worrisome effect the war in Ukraine has on their economy, the citizens think the following:

What is the most worrisome effect of the war in Ukraine on your economy	
Economic downturn	77%
Food and gas security	63%
Security of their economy	35%
Inflow of refugees	23%
Deepening social and political divisions	21%
EU accession process	14%

In all the WB economies, three concerns coincide: **Economic downturn; Food and gas security; Security of their economy**, except in Serbia where 41% of citizens perceive the **inflow of refugees** as one of the three significant worrisome effects.

The region is divided over whether the **war in Ukraine can cause instabilities or even war in one of the WB economies**: 45% think it can cause instabilities, while 48% not. Citizens of Kosovo* are the most worried (51%), while citizens of North Macedonia are the least worried (58%).

WB citizens are not very hopeful about the security resilience of their economies in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine:

- ♥ The majority of them (50%) think it will remain the same;
- ♥ One third of them (35%) think it will worsen;
- ♥ Only a handful (9%) think it will improve.

The most optimistic are Kosovars (15%) and Montenegrins (10%), while the most pessimistic are Albanians (46%) and Serbians (41%).

Overall, respondents from the Western Balkans are more satisfied with the way their authorities have reacted to the war in Ukraine - **48% versus 43%**.

Respondents from North Macedonia (67%) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (66%) were the least satisfied, while respondents from Kosovo* (69%) and Serbia (60%) were among the most satisfied.

The WB citizens are **divided over boosting military spending as an answer to the war in Ukraine** – 40% consider their government should boost military spending, while 48% think otherwise.

Albania leads the YES group as overwhelming majority of Albanian citizens (63%) deem important for their government to boost military spending. However, as many as 69% of respondents from North Macedonia do not see the need to arm themselves additionally.

That the war in Ukraine shows the need for greater security cooperation with the EU and NATO agree 70% of WB respondents, while 24% of citizens disagree.

Albania and Kosovo* lead with 89% each to see closer cooperation with the EU and NATO. On the other side of spectrum is **Serbia** with only 34% of citizens thinking it necessary and 54% considering it not relevant.

83% of WB citizens believe that the **regional cooperation can contribute to better economic resilience of the region's economies** in responding to negative consequences of the war in Ukraine. Only 11% think that regional cooperation does not

serve its cause. Seen at the level of individual economies, this sentiment is almost equal among all.

The majority of WB respondents (**61%**) hold that the war in Ukraine is none of their business and their economies should not intervene, while one third (35%) disagree with such statement. Respondents from North Macedonia (85%) lead the way in this thinking, while the biggest advocates of interference in “Ukraine’s problems” are respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina: almost half of them (49%).

Almost majority of WB citizens are in favour of their economies joining sanctions against Russia (48%), while nearly the same number (45%) does not approve it.

Kosovars again lead with 84% approving joining the sanctions in opposition to their Serbian counterparts that overwhelmingly (77%) disapprove joining the sanctions. It is interesting that as many as 71% of respondents from North Macedonia believe that economic sanctions should not be imposed on Russia.

The region is firm in their opinion **not to provide weapons to the Ukrainian military** in response to the current situation in Ukraine (**67%**), while 24% of them are in favour.

With respect to this question, Serbia (87%) and North Macedonia (81%) are the most decisive in their opinion not to provide weapons to the Ukrainian military. The majority of Albanians (56%) support this idea, while in second place are respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (27%).

The war in Ukraine has far reaching impacts on daily lives of citizens which is demonstrated by citizens agreeing that shortage of energy supply and rising food prices significantly

impact their purchasing power (92%). This is not true for only 6% of citizens.

85% of WB citizens agree that shortage of energy supply and rising food prices have a significant impact on security and political instability in their economies. 13% disagree.

Compelling number of WB respondents (92%) deem necessary to introduce economic measures in their economy to limit the impact of rising energy and food prices on consumers and companies. On economy level, the only discrepancy is seen among the respondents of Kosovo*, 12% of whom believe that no new measures should be introduced in this respect.

73% of WB citizens agree that Western Balkans should reduce its dependency on Russian gas and oil as soon as possible. Respondents from Kosovo* lead this thinking (90%), while 32% of respondents from Serbia do not consider it a good idea.

Citizens are divided over paying more for fuel and gas because of sanctions against Russia being worthwhile to defend another sovereign country – 42% are in favour of paying more, whereas 49% are not. Moreover, the biggest gap in this matter is between Serbia (58% not paying more) and Kosovo* (62% would pay more).

Citizens’ awareness on sustainable energy solutions seems to pick up – **86% hold that the war in Ukraine made it more urgent for their economy to invest in renewable energy.**

Humanitarian aspect of the war in Ukraine is present in hearts and minds of WB citizens as the majority of them (66%) think it is necessary to introduce new welcoming measures for refugees fleeing the war. The most hospitable

respondents are from Albania, as many as 89% of them, followed by Kosovars (83%), and respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina (78%).

Compelling number of WB citizens **(78%) think that there has been an increase in the flow of various fake news, disinformation,**

semi-information, and propaganda activities related to the situation in Ukraine. 13% of them do not agree.

When asked who they think is a reliable source of information regarding the war in Ukraine, WB citizens responded:

Who do you consider to be reliable source of information regarding the war in Ukraine		
	Very reliable/ Reliable	Not very reliable / not reliable
Domestic media	31%	35%
International (Western) media	31%	36%
Foreign (non-Western) media	24%	38%
Social media	14%	54%
Digital media	14%	50%
Personal sources (family, friends)	30%	36%
Others (celebrities, influencers)	11%	62%

As for Domestic Media, respondents from Kosovo* trust them the most (65%), and respondents from Albania the least (54%).

International (Western) Media as a reliable source of information regarding the war in Ukraine have their largest audience in Kosovo* (65%) and are the least popular in Serbia (67% consider them unreliable).

Less than one third (28%) of citizens would support the departure of individual foreign fighters from their economy into a war zone in Ukraine. 65% would strongly oppose or oppose. On economy level, it is interesting that the majority of respondents from Albania (59%) and Kosovo* (58%) support the departure of their citizens to foreign battlefields, while even 86% of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina do not support it, which is not surprising considering the recent history of their citizens going to battlefields in Syria and Iraq.

In addition, 81% of respondents from Serbia also do not support the departure of their citizens to the battlefields in Ukraine.

The majority of WB citizens (57%) are worried about the possibility that their personal information can be stolen or misused due to the war in Ukraine bringing cybersecurity challenges to a new level of risk exposure.

On the other hand, more than one third of citizens (37%) are not worried or not worried at all that their personal information can be stolen or misused.

60% of WB citizens consider that Government e-services are more in danger from cyber-attacks after the war in Ukraine in comparison to the pre-war period. 26% of them think otherwise.

2. BUSINESS OPINION

Highlights

66% of WB businesses consider the war in Ukraine to pose a great deal and fair amount of risk. For 34% of them, it does not pose a risk. On economy level, business respondents from Serbia are the least worried (45%), while business respondents from Kosovo* are the most worried (79%)

When asked about the expectations for their revenue in the course of 2022 compared to previous year:

- ♥ 20% of them think it will improve
- ♥ 36% think it will stay the same
- ♥ 38% think it will deteriorate

The most optimistic business respondents are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as 29% of them expect their business revenues to improve.

The most frequent challenges faced by businesses during the war in Ukraine:

The most frequent challenges faced by businesses amidst war in Ukraine	
Financial and economic losses	61%
Supply chain disruptions	62%
Raw material shortages	55%
Increase in energy prices	84%
Shutting down of operations	33%
Late payments/currency issues	49%
Increase in costs for logistics and transport	78%
Increase in food prices	70%
Talent shortages and higher labour costs	63%

The majority of businesses (53%) say they are affected by sanctions adopted by the EU or other countries over the war. 45% of businesses state they are not affected. The most resistant businesses are from Serbia (79%), while the least resistant are from Kosovo* (71%).

When asked about the most efficient strategies for future energy supply, WB businesses consider the following:

The most efficient strategies for future energy supply	
Stronger reliance on renewable energy	72%
Increased use of coal power	19%
Increased use of nuclear power	11%
Diversification of gas supply sources and routes	29%
No need to change anything	8%

53% of WB businesses approve joining economic sanctions against Russia, whereas 45% of them disapprove. On economy level, **71% of business respondents from Kosovo*** support economic sanctions against Russia, while **79% of business respondents from Serbia think the complete opposite.**

50% of WB businesses consider that the war in Ukraine compromised the security of digital infrastructure in their economy, whereas 40% think it did not.

Only one third (34%) of WB businesses have suffered from an increased cyber activity in

their infrastructure/processes after the war in Ukraine. 63% of businesses report they have not experienced any of it.

Only 25% of WB businesses plan to invest more in cyber security after the war in Ukraine to ensure sustainability of their processes. 50% do not plan any such thing, whereas 22% are not sure.

WB businesses think that the following measures by their Government could mitigate the consequences and impact of the war on their economy at the following extent:

Measures to mitigate the consequences and impact of the war in Ukraine according to businesses	
State aid for gas	86%
Income tax exemptions for companies whose energy costs have risen more than 30%	89%
Tax support for investments in renewable energy sources	89%
Additional funds for digital and green transition	77%
Support in opening new export markets	87%
Support in substituting certain raw materials/semi-finished products from domestic sources or other markets	84%
Integration of refugees into the labour market	55%

When asked about the long-term implications of the war in Ukraine on their business operations at economy and regional level,

higher costs and **inflation** seem to be the most serious long-term implication of the war in Ukraine for WB businesses:

Long-term implications of the war in Ukraine on business operations	
Economic recovery	35%
Inflation	62%
Supply chain disruptions	44%
Increase of labour market costs	51%
Decline in investment/business confidence	33%
Decline in tourism	17%
Sources diversification	13%
Higher costs	62%



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