Strategic Communications Capability Building in the Western Balkans

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Abstract

The strengthening of strategic communication capabilities in the states of the Western Balkans is of crucial importance for the strengthening of regional and European security. The Western Balkans StratCom Game, executed by The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, with the support of the Austrian Ministry of Defence, has sought to identify the course of action and provide recommendations for the further strengthening of capabilities in the states of the Western Balkans[1], vis a vis regional and international stability and security.

This paper describes the results of the Western Balkans StratCom Game.
In this context, experts from the states of the Western Balkans, the European External Action Service and the Austrian Ministry of Defence convened in Skopje, the Republic of North Macedonia on the occasion of the expert workshop the Western Balkans StratCom Game, in October 2019.

The Western Balkans StratCom Game was utilized in the process of conducting an in-depth analysis of the political, economic, religious, vulnerabilities, cultural and security vulnerabilities that the states of the Western Balkans are facing, identified the types of action as well as the level on which the actions are to be taken.

This HCSS paper describes the how the Western Balkans StratCom Game was executed, and it elaborates on the processes of decision making and prioritization in the game. It shows that the states of the Western Balkans have the capacity to recognize the vulnerabilities they are facing, foster regional discussion and potentially cooperate with international and multinational actors in the processes of tailoring a course of action to prevent, counter or react to said vulnerabilities. It additionally provides a set of concrete conclusions and recommendations focussing on a concrete course for further action.

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[1] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The designation to Kosovo is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Contents

Introduction

The use of Strategic Communications (StratCom) is of paramount importance in the process of countering external interference and strengthening social and societal stability and resilience in the states of the Western Balkans.

The Government of Austria has indicated the importance of strengthening the stability of the states of the Western Balkans as a thematic priority. The Austrian Foreign Policy on the Western Balkans seeks to support the transformation of the Western Balkans into a zone of stability, and further contribute to the full European integration of the region.

The Western Balkans are currently at a turning point in the processes of alignment on the geopolitical chess board. The processes of transition as well as the instabilities in the region have made the states in the Western Balkans a fruitful ground for exerting influences in multiple spheres by both state and non-state actors. On the other hand, all the states partake in accession talks (Serbia) or are actively seeking to begin accession talks with the European Union (North Macedonia, Albania), or are full members of NATO (Albania, Montenegro) or are pending accession (North Macedonia). Therefore, regional stability is of crucial importance for the maintenance of regional peace, stability and security.

Why Strategic Communications?

Strategic Communications can be used as an instrument for the purposes of strengthening resilience, both in the Western Balkans, through active communication about EU policies towards the states in the Western Balkans, but also a holistic approach towards the entire region, individually and collectively, as well as in the European Union itself, through the provision of accurate and correct information about the developments in the Region.

On the 30th and 31st of October 2019, governmental and institutional experts in the sphere of Strategic Communications from the Western Balkans, representatives of the Austrian Ministry of Defence and the European External Action Service (EEAS) convened in Skopje, North Macedonia, at the occasion of the expert workshop executing the Western Balkans StratCom Game. The game was sponsored by the Austrian Ministry of Defence and designed and organised by *The Hagu*e Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) with support of the staff of the EEAS StratCom Western Balkans.

The participants of the Western Balkans StratCom Game conducted an in-depth analysis of their current StratCom capabilities, and identified which capabilities require (further) strengthening. Moreover, a set of concrete recommendations was devised for both the participants and their constituencies.

What is a Serious Strategic Game?

The decision to utilize a Serious Strategic Game, a table-top exercise, for the purposes of identifying StratCom capabilities was based on multiple factors. Firstly, the nature of the game itself: the game is a method of interaction which supports strategic conversations on needs and ambitions through a structured discussion. Secondly, it can help identify current and prospective capabilities, prioritize said capabilities and lastly, it can help identify a further course of action, through lessons learned, transfer of knowledge and expertise.

Aim & objective of the Western Balkans StratCom Game

The specific objective of the Western Balkans StratCom game was to contribute to regional stability, awareness raising and resilience capacity building vis-à-vis the European Union and the increased presence and potentially destabilizing foreign influences of China, Russia, Turkey and the Gulf States in the Western Balkans. The game further facilitated the analysis of the available and required additional capabilities to address, prevent, contain and reduce such influences.

The overall goals of the StratCom capability game were:
- Fostering strategic conversations on needs and ambitions in the sphere of strategic communications
- Identifying current and new capabilities vis a vis the identified vulnerabilities
- Prioritizing of the capabilities
- Fostering discussion on the lessons learned and identified knowledge
- What Stratcom capabilities need to be built or enhanced

As such, the Game provides and answer as to (i) the needs for more effective strategic communications in line with the identified vulnerabilities and provides for (ii) the prioritization and tailoring of the process to achieve strategic objectives.

Firstly, the methodology of the StratCom game is laid out. Then, in accordance with the pre-defined research questions it; (I) identifies the challenge that surround the processes of effective strategic communications on state, regional and international level; (II) analyses vulnerabilities that the states in the region are facing, (III) assesses StratCom capabilities which can be used to respond to such vulnerabilities and (IV) identifies which capabilities can be used on which level and which additional capabilities are to be developed in the future.

The final section of this paper contains the conclusions of the game and provides recommendations for a further course of action.

Methodology

The Western Balkans StratCom game focused on the processes of building successful, effective and tangible Strategic Communications, with actionable outputs. The serious game methodology is based on an exercise used to establish which capabilities are already available, and which capabilities are required.

The Western Balkans StratCom Game is a serious board game. It has been developed by HCSS, and it is based on serious gaming methodology.

For the purposes of decision making, policy makers need an analytical method that provides for the anticipation of different types of intervention, whilst accounting for the (pre-existing) capabilities, the different levels of action and engagement and the complexities of geopolitics. As such, serious gaming creates a risk-free environment, in which policy makers and engaged stakeholders can put forward their assumptions and opinions, test the responses to those assumptions and receive *ex ante* evaluation on the proposed course of action.

Serious gaming is used to structure strategic discussions on different topics and actual, real-life challenges. Through serious gaming, the participants are introduced to strategic capability thinking. Additionally, the method facilitates strategic discussions on what capabilities their organizations possess or what capabilities their organizations are lacking; and it supports the sharing of know-how on capability building, and thereby facilitating network development.

In addition to identifying (promising) new capabilities, the utilization of strategic gaming and its methods are useful in the process of awareness raising and deepening the understanding of the knowledge of participants as to which issues are at stake, and how such issues could be resolved. Serious gaming has proven to be particularly useful in the processes of generating policy relevant insights.

The basis for the Western Balkans StratCom Game has been the game which was played in Vienna in the summer of 2018. Initially, HCSS had conducted a literature review and developed the initial game framework together with a preliminary list of 140 StratCom capabilities, 42 of which had made it into the capability cards.

For the purposes of the Western Balkans StratCom Game, the initial 140 capabilities were revisited, and in accordance with recent developments in the spheres of geopolitics and security and drawing from the experience of the game played in 2018, the capability cards have been redesigned. A total number of 42 capability cards have been selected to be used and played in the game (consult Appendix I for the full list of Capability Cards). Besides the 42 cards, the participants were provided with empty cards which were to be used in the case the participants wanted to address a capability which was not within the provided deck.
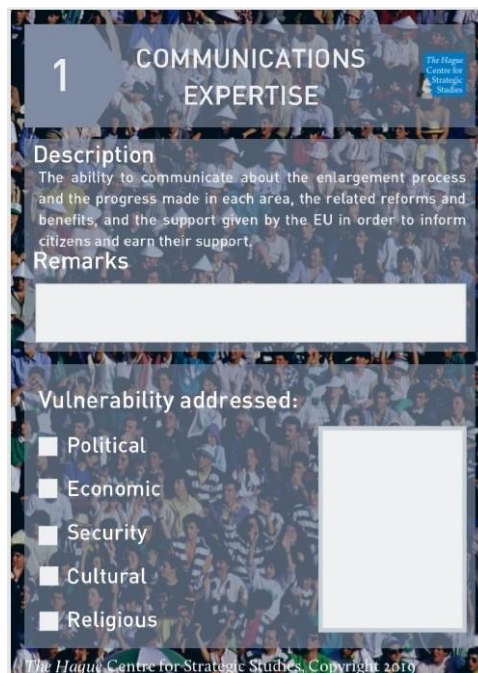
Image I: The anatomy of a Capability Card

What is a Capability?

The syntax of a capability description as used in the game is: "the ability to […] do something […] with an intended effect." For example, of a StratCom capability: The ability to strengthen public broadcasting in order to create a trusted communications medium.

The Capability Cards have the following fields:
Number of the Card – indicating the order of the Card in the deck of Capability Cards.

Title – the name of the Card, corresponding with the subject matter of the capability that the Card addresses. Broadly, the cards can fall in one of the following categories: Assessment, Preparation & Planning, Outreach, CIV-MIL, and Western Balkans & EU.

Description – description of the Capability that the Card addresses. The description of the Capability Card always begins with "*The ability to [...]*". All the capabilities addressed serve some type of a strategic communications' broader goals, namely: exposing disinformation, improving media literacy, media education and media environment, improving the EU profile within the states of the Western Balkans and the image of the Western Balkans in the Union.

Remark Field – the Remark field is introduced so that the participants can add their comments and suggestions to the description of the card, thereby making it more specific or more general, or omitting certain wording from the description.

Vulnerability Addressed – The following vulnerability areas have been selected for the cards: political, economic, security, cultural and religious. The 5 areas of vulnerability have been addressed based on a careful analysis of the DIEMEL (diplomatic, informational, economic/financial military and legal) instruments, as well as the so-called MPESIIP factors (military, economic, political/governance, social, infrastructure, information and physical environments). These typologies have been considered with the intention to support effect-based planning, in which a course of action is considered together with its potential impacts on the operational environment.

Levels of availability of capabilities
The three levels of availability of capabilities indicate at which level, which actor shall take an action: individual, collective or international/multinational level.

Individual level: The individual level is comprised of each of the states from the Western Balkans Region, meaning that the action should be undertaken on state level (or lower). Individual level actions include national policies, national defence actions, actions undertaken by government representatives, plans of actions implemented by ministries etc. A lower individual level may indicate that a particular course of action shall be undertaken by an entity or an actor which is not part of the central government, but rather a regional representative or body from within a particular state, or actions undertaken on lower level of territorial units (regions, provinces, units of self-governance such as municipalities.

Collective Western Balkans level: The collective level is comprised of all 6 states, jointly, in the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The collective level thereby implies that there shall be a joint, coordinated effort on which certain types of action should be undertaken. Actions undertaken on the collective level can be undertaken through formal and informal networks, through coordinated diplomatic efforts, and through regional bodies and councils, to name a few. Actions on the collective level usually require the consent of all states.

International/multinational level: The international/multinational level is comprised of the Western Balkans, as well as a plethora of regional and international organizations. On the international/multinational level, action can be undertaken with the facilitation of a third state or the collective level entity or an organization, such as NATO and/or the European Union. Other organizations, such as the Organization for Safety and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe as well as the United Nations could also facilitate certain action on the international level.

Types of action

The three types of action to be undertaken are: preventive, reactive and proactive.

- **Preventive actions:** Capabilities aimed at improving and enhancing societal resilience and one own's narrative.
- **Proactive actions:** Capabilities aimed at proactively shaping the information domain.
- **Reactive actions:** capabilities aimed at improving and enhancing societal resilience and one own's narrative.

The Participants in the game clustered capability cards and prioritized and linked the cards to specific levels. Support by the HCSS team of moderators and analysts was provided in this process, next to local assistants whose role was to provide support to the HCSS moderators and StratCom experts. An important feature of the local support team was the knowledge of all regional languages (Albanian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian), which came in useful in the processes of overcoming any language barriers.

Three tables played

Representatives of all the states, as well as the EEAS were invited to participate in the game. In total, 26 representatives of the governments of the states in the Western Balkans, together with 3 representatives of EEAS, 6 representatives of the Austrian MoD were present and actively partook in the Game.

The participants were divided into three groups, with 12-15 representatives present at each table, accounting for fair and equitable representation of all the Western Balkans' states on each table. Additionally, EEAS and the Austrian Ministry of Defence had a representative at all the tables.

The invitation and selection process

The selection process of participants was through nominations through multiple channels. The Austrian Ministry of Defence provided contacts and so did the EEAS. The Embassies of the Kingdom of The Netherlands in the states of the Western Balkans were also contacted to provide contact points, as well as the Embassies of the states in the Netherlands, and so did the most active participants from the 2018 edition of the game. Additionally, an "internal" reference mechanism was established, whereby individuals who were nominated and agreed to partake, could nominate individuals from their institution or country.

The invited individuals were well-established, mid to senior career professionals working for Governmental and State institutions in the sphere of Strategic Communications or driving forces in the field. Participation of individuals who work in the sphere of hybrid threats and warfare was also encouraged. The focal institutions were the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Government, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information Technology and/or Information Society, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of EU integration, Special Committees such as Counter-Terrorism committees and relevant government agencies. (See Appendix II for the full Participant's Profile).

Institutional experts participating in the game were drawn from the Western Balkans Task Force, established in 2017 within the Strategic Communications Division of the EEAS, with the aim to enhance overall EU communication efforts in the region, focusing on priority audiences and addressing misperceptions and information gaps.[1]

Analysis of challenges & possibilities

The Chatham House Rules, whereby the information disclosed during a meeting can be reported without attribution to the source of information, was upheld in the processes of production of this paper.

The analysis below is pertinent to all three tables combined. It was produced by summarizing the key takeaways from all three tables and identifying common themes and trends. It is sorted in categories to help keep overview and catalogue the various insights.

Category: Awareness & Necessity

The need for improving the (strategic) communication capabilities, vis a vis the European Union accession processes, but also cooperation with China, Russia, Turkey and Iran.

When it comes to the latter, the relationship fostered between the states of the Western Balkans and the above-mentioned countries is in multiple sectors. Earlier HCSS research regarding this matter illustrated that Chinese influence is predominantly exerted through economic partnerships in the public infrastructure sector, mostly through projects part of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiatives in multiple countries, including North Macedonia and Montenegro. On another hand, Russia has amongst others strong presence in the oil and gas sectors across the Western Balkans and has strong military and defence cooperation with Serbia. Turkey, a country whose relationship with the region spans since the Ottoman Empire, is fostering relationships through education, religion and the service sector, mostly in healthcare, but also has a stable flow of trade with the Region.
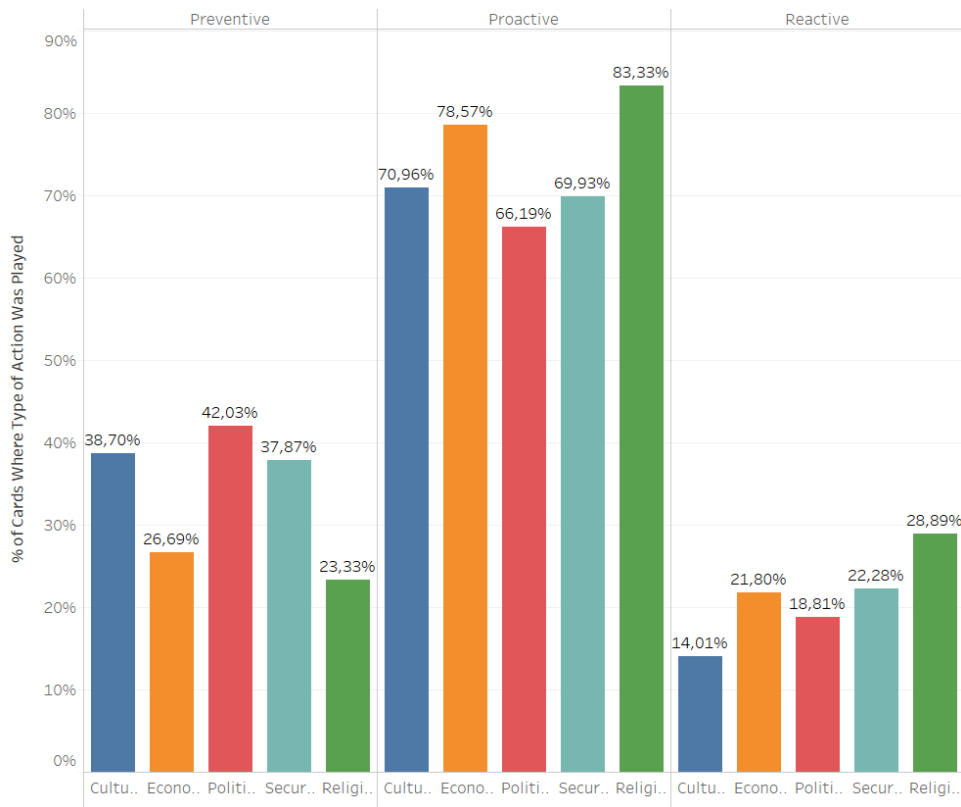
Table 2: Types of vulnerabilities played per type of action required

On another hand, an issue arises out of the perception and image of the Western Balkans in Europe as well. EU Member States lack knowledge of the tangible contributions of the Western Balkans States to EU led initiatives, including but not limited to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions. The spotlight in reporting is primarily given to corruption scandals, organized crime and political malversations. This, paired with the slow progress in reforms, predominantly in the chapter of rule of law[2] is amongst the primary reasons as to why the EU Member States are hesitant to include the states of the Western Balkans in the Union.

Category: Legitimacy & Transparency

In the context of legal protection, in the state of the Western Balkans, there seems to be a significant gap between the de jure and de facto application of the law. Preventive legal mechanisms stem from an ability to create the infrastructure that facilitates and promotes the effective mechanism of law enforcement and strengthens the rule of law at the national level. Overall, the sentiment of lack of safety and protection discourages citizens in the Western Balkans from engaging in open dialogue, or even taking up civic initiatives.

There is a lack a free and adequate flow of information between organizations within a government, which can leave certain ministries and departments exposed to isolation and misuse by outside threats. Having a strategically coherent and well-orchestrated system of governance in place can help not only prevent such malicious attacks, but also react to them in times of crisis.

There is a need to build an infrastructure that enables to build a discourse – with more radical governmental transparency – that facilitates the all information is publicized and citizens can monitor the discourse of the government.

This capability was also deemed necessary in the states of the Western Balkans, mostly due to frequent inefficient or completely stagnant organs of governance using lack of effective communication as a pretext for being dysfunctional.

The importance of a well-executed Whole of Government Approach is also relevant in that it lowers the costs of functioning and maintenance of that system, particularly when such efforts are deemed proactive. It also facilitates movement of information to the Collective level, and ultimately to the EU at the international level.

Category: Coordination & Leadership

On the matter of strategic planning and the Whole-of-Government approach, the importance of a consistent and coherent communication strategy, and aligned aims within the various governmental institutions has been emphasized.

Although the consensus is that the primary responsibility lays within the governments of the Western Balkans' states in the processes of developing and maintaining strategic communications, as well as providing timely, accurate and unified information, the reality is different. The domestic communications efforts have not always bore fruitful results and have not delivered unified messages across the board. Consequently, individuals, entities and institutions in the Western Balkans have lacked awareness of the extent of EU support and continue to perceive the accession process as 'highly technical' and 'difficult to understand'.[3] Across the EU, there is general scepticism towards future enlargement.[4]

Recent events, such as the decision of the European Council at the end of October not to begin accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania[5] further perpetrates the notion of Euroscepticism in the Region

Overall, the participants concluded that most forms of strategic communication mandate require a mixture of a proactive and preventive response, while reactive responses should ideally be minimized or even avoided altogether. However,

realistically, such measures are most often utilized reactively, rather than preventively or proactively. Similarly, while the participants recognized the utility of categorizing their responses topically, they also acknowledged that many of their responses encompassed all five topical areas (political, economic, security, cultural, and religious). Nonetheless, most of their responses intersected at least partially with the political and security realm, and less so with the remaining three fields.

Category: Balanced narrative

For the European Union, crafting a clear, concise and precise narrative about the accomplishments of the EU in the Western Balkans, but also vice versa, the progress of the Western Balkans States made in different areas is crucial.

In this context, providing accurate, honest, and accessible data about the abilities of the EU economy to support the Region over a long period of time is also beneficial in rectifying the claim that other actors have the funds to do the same.

Though it is important for the EU to convey what it has and what it can offer to the states of the Western Balkans (both financially and in terms of values and benefits), it was noted as equally important for the Western Balkans' states to promote and pose themselves as equal aspiring member states, not just minor players requesting assistance. The importance of having a joint unified front of efforts and narrative in terms of StratCom education and political messages towards the Western Balkans states was also emphasized, albeit with a caveat: namely, that a joint unified effort may be the "least common denominator" rather than a strong unified approach.
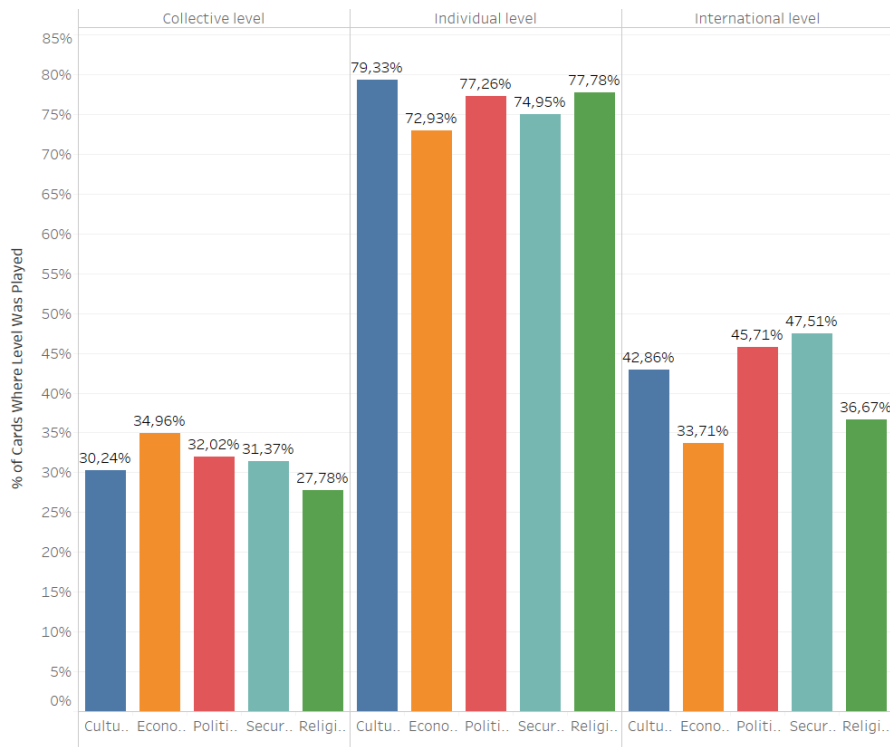
Table 2: Types of vulnerabilities played per individual, collective and international/multinational level.

Category: Capability development & Independent quality enhancement

More attention (on all three levels, individual, collective and international) needs to be channelled in the process of fostering media literacy and strengthening civic and democratic values and principles.

There is a high urgency for processes of strengthening the democratic infrastructure and fostering democratic discourse, in two areas in particular: (i) election campaigning and voting processes and (ii) rule of law reform. There is a need for action for proactive development in the sphere, ensuring that civic values, responsibilities and rights are protected. The emphasis of the discussion on these processes has focused primarily on news-reporting and individual legal protection for citizens.

In the context of news-reporting, in the journalistic platforms in the region are largely depicted as a struggle of ideologies with a high need for the development of journalistic ethos. However, education plays a pivotal role in the development of a widespread commitment to journalistic ethos in that most participants felt that task fell upon the citizens.

Cultural 79,33%	Religious 77,78%	Political 77,26%	Security 47,51%	Political 45,71%	Economic 34,96%	Political 32,02%
			Cultural 42,86%	Religious 36,67%	Security 31,37%	Cultural 30,24%
Security 74,95%	Economic 72,93%		Economic 33,71%		Religious 27,78%	

Level
- Individual level
- International level
- Collective level
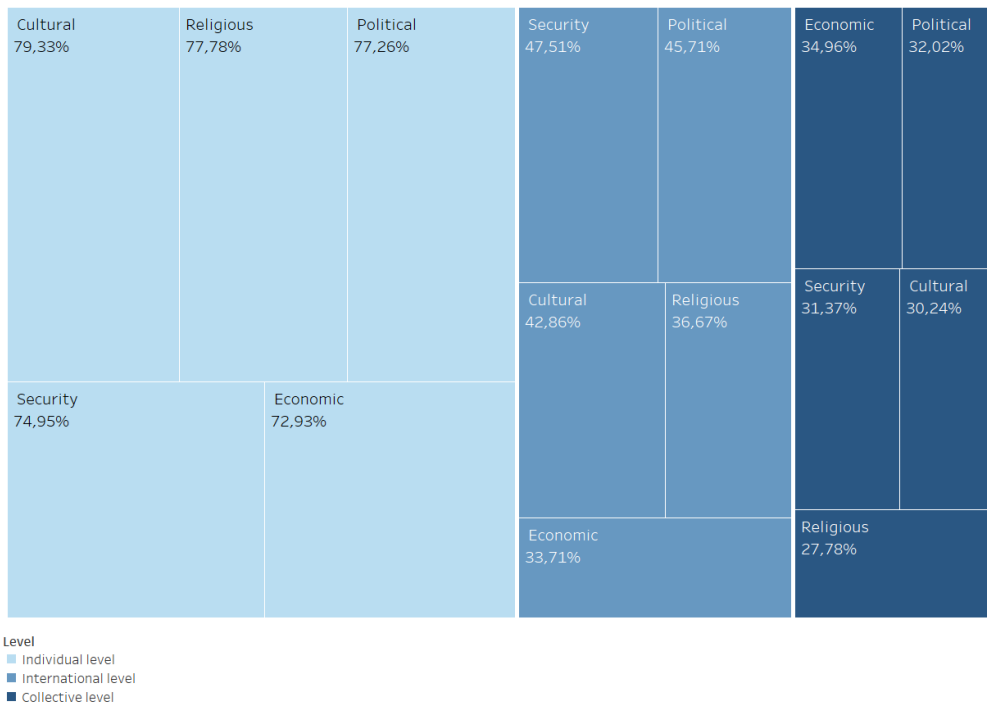
Table 1: Types of vulnerabilities played per individual, collective or international/multinational level.

An issue arises when it comes to funding of news-reporting in the Region, especially during political and electoral campaigns. Foreign support has been a proposed solution; however, it is highly controversial in a way that it points to the severe lack of independence and can be easily misused for the purposes of casting a certain political agenda or pushing a certain narrative.

The notion of education is of importance in the context of capacity building, but also building a free, fair and democratic society. Clouded public awareness, next to election interference were indicated amongst the crucial destabilisers for the entire region. There is a necessity for efforts in the form of voter education, social media awareness tools, campaigns and constructivism surrounding political agendas, as well as utilizing Civil Society Organizations and NGO platforms for the purposes of education and awareness raising, especially within the younger population. Trend tracking and debunking have also been mentioned, in terms of following the dissemination of fake news and propaganda.

The building of a StratCom knowledge base was recognized unanimously. In a similar vein, it was stressed that the majority of the Western Balkans' governments had already identified specific areas where they could contribute, but also benefit from building such a base.

Involving the private and civil sector were deemed as increasingly useful options in the context of building strategic planning and a whole of government approach. Their

contribution in the field of risk management and evidence-based approaches and analysis for the building of this capability are not to be neglected. However, the unwillingness of the private sector to cooperate with the government was highlighted as a potential obstacle here.

All participants agreed that conceptual exercises such as the executed game can be best utilized as a starting point for more in-depth trainings, preferably including specific practical scenarios. Here, the train-the-trainer approach was mentioned, as such an approach can be tremendously beneficial. Examples of the train-the-trainer approach were used, such as mentorship programs from the European Union, or partnering programs with Member States from the EU.

Conclusions

The most important objective of the game was to foster cooperation and open discussion on matters of common concern to all the participants. This proved to be true, and the most important catalyst of discussion throughout the game was the openness of the participants. Without exception, all of them seemed to have come to the Game with the intention of having a genuinely constructive dialogue about the capabilities, vulnerabilities, capacities and shortcomings in their respective organizations, as well as within the Western Balkans States individually.

According to the participants, the game facilitated increased awareness and understanding of StratCom. It helped to build trust among the delegates present, was instrumental in understanding each other's points of view and in identifying variations in the development and maturity of existing StratCom capabilities. The game thus facilitated a strategic discussion and yielded important insights for the further development of StratCom capabilities. The outcomes of the game and the content of the rich discussion between the participants fed into the recommendations for both the participants and their constituencies, regarding the development and implementation of a stronger set of StratCom capabilities to address vulnerabilities.

The vulnerabilities addressed were distributed rather equally over the individual, collaborative, international levels that were assessed. A slightly more emphasis was given for the international level in support of capability enhancement in the realm of political en security vulnerabilities.

Everybody welcomed the opportunity to professionally exchange thoughts, to open their minds and come to a deeper understanding of strategic communication.

It was commonly agreed that there is the need for a comprehensive (Whole of Government, WOG) approach to Stratcom and to address the further enhancement of resilience by furthering of capacity building.

The analysis showed that most emphasis on capability development requirement is for the individual states. The EU and its partners from the Western Balkans already possess many StratCom capabilities that help to expose foreign influence and increase media literacy of populations and policymakers. The strongest need to strengthen existing and develop new capabilities was identified at the individual, state level, with provided support by the European Union, if needed and deemed necessary. That EU is willing and able to support when asked for this support.

There was a common understanding that improving Stratcom starts with building the understanding (knowledge base) of what Stratcom is all about and building the capacity

(skills) to develop Stratcom capabilities. From that foundation it is possible to develop new abilities to design and execute Stratcom campaigns and use new technologies.
The capability that was prioritised the most was number 4: *Promoting the Western Balkans in the EU*, as the world doesn't see six states but rather one region.

During the game a lot of best practices were exchanged. All participants stipulated the need for further continuation of the approach experienced while executing the game. It was suggested to have practical scenario's, maybe even on a specific theme to be played via this gaming method.

When looking at the next step the group stressed the need to make this Stratcom workshop more than a onetime event and turn this into a regional program for strategic StratCom capability development.

Recommendations

The final part of the strategic gaming exercise was used to draft recommendations for the further enhancement of the capability portfolio of all levels with an emphasis on the states in the Western Balkans.
On the individual Western Balkans State level, it could be useful to design and execute a program that would provide for government training, real-time scenario training and capacity building. A state could also be mentored by an EU MS with recent similar experiences.

Adopt a Whole of Government (WoG) StratCom capability planning process. To meet the stated StratCom objectives, a planning process could be in place that focuses on the development of capabilities.

The design a narrative that overcomes splits and fractions would help creating effective positive Stratcom and each nation needs to design a process to get there. The EU might support in the designing of these steps. States could also use non-state actors, historians, cultural sectors etc. as well as new technologies.

On the regional Western Balkans level such a program could focus at aspects like train-the-trainers, knowledge development in an expert Centre, thematic in-depth scenario-training, building the regional network, information exchange and deconfliction of fake news.

The Western Balkans' States could look for synergies when defining, prioritising and conducting their communication activities around specific themes. Such synergies can be created around issues and problems that some Member States already tackle, such as the promotion of independent media.

Appendix I Capability cards

No.	Title	Intervention
1	**Communications Expertise**	The ability to communicate about the enlargement process and the progress made in each area, the related reforms and benefits, and the support given by the EU in order to inform the citizens and earn their support.
2	**Narrative Formulation**	The ability to draft, coordinate and deliver a compelling and coherent narrative in order to inform and engage target audiences (especially media) with correct information on the EU, its policies and values.
3	**Communicating EU Financial Assistance**	The ability to communicate the extent of EU financial assistance in order to ensure domestic support for reforms and their implementation.
4	**Promoting the WB6 within the EU**	The ability to engage in public diplomacy and enhance the general public's knowledge of the WB6, including shared interests and existing partnerships, as well as the different stages of the enlargement process, in order to increase support for EU enlargement among EU Member States.
5	**WB6 contribution to EU Security and External Policies**	The ability to inform audiences in EU Member States about the participation of Western Balkans Partners in EU-led initiatives and CSDP missions in order to raise awareness and promote their contributions to the EU's security and external policies.
6	**Strategic Planning**	The ability to set communications priorities based on proper audience insight, allocate resources, and strengthen operations in order to enable coordinated and quick decision-making processes
7	**Whole of Government Approach**	The ability to adopt a whole-of-government approach, comprising all the relevant actors in the fields of defence, foreign affairs and domestic affairs, in order to enable a coordinated and quick decision-making process.
8	**Campaigning Engagement**	The ability to deliver an organized sequence of communication actions on specific issues, based on the narrative and key messages, in order to achieve measurable and clear outcomes in a defined period of time
9	**Networks Engagement**	The ability to build sustainable alliances with key stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, third partners, and multipliers in order to amplify the message and share content.
10	**Internal Communications**	The ability to inform and engage all staff, motivate them to work towards common goal in a supportive working environment, encourage peer-to-peer sharing, and strengthen project collaboration in order to deliver public policies most effectively
11	**Crisis Communications**	The ability to anticipate crises that may affect government reputation or delivery of public policies and to prepare appropriate contingency

		plans, including setting up the crisis communications team, developing statements, monitoring the developments and post-crisis assessment in order to respond effectively.
12	**Social Media Expertise**	The ability to actively participate in online conversations, including via social media platforms for campaigns as well as listening, educational and awareness-raising tools, in order to achieve more meaningful direct interaction with the populations and engage citizens more effectively.
13	**Digital Diplomacy**	The ability to conduct public diplomacy online, using digital information and communications technologies as well as social media in order to communicate and project a government's image to both national and international publics.
14	**Exchange of Expertise and Best Practices**	The ability to exchange expertise and best practices, success stories and lessons learned on StratCom between the EU Members States and WB partners, as well as among the WB partners themselves, in order to avoid making the same mistakes or repeating the same behaviors.
15	**Cooperation and Coordination on Communication**	The ability to cooperate and coordinate on EU communications through the pooling of resources, joint campaigns and events in order to maximize their impact and scope within existing networks and institutional frameworks.
16	**Analysis of the perceptions on the EU and the Enlargement Processes in the WB6**	The ability to access accurate, reliable and up-to-date data on citizens' perceptions of the EU and the accession process (i.e. level of support, perceived benefits and/or negative impact in different fields) in order to develop a better understanding of the general level of awareness.
17	**Analysis of the perceptions on the WB and the enlargement process in the EU**	The ability to access accurate, reliable and up-to-date data on citizens' perceptions of the EU enlargement process and the WB6 (knowledge and opinions about the partners, state of the enlargement process, etc.) in order to develop a better understanding of the general level of awareness
18	**Support to Independent and Professional Reporting**	The ability to enhance the skills of and provide support to independent and professional journalism and civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as to provide communications support to the media community and other civil society actors active in the field of freedom of expression and media freedom in the WB6, in order to develop objective reporting and fact checking.
19	**Strengthening Public Broadcasting**	The ability to support the strengthening of the independence of public broadcasting in order to create a trusted communications medium.
20	**Private Sector Expertise**	The ability to use private sector expertise in crafting strategic messages in order to engage specific groups in society more effectively.
21	**Online and Offline Monitoring**	The ability to monitor the flow of fake news/disinformation, identify

	of Disinformation	trends, narratives and motivations, and track misperceptions in order to address them with factual information and positive narratives.
22	**Vulnerability Assessment**	The ability to conduct a vulnerability assessment in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of key security, political and legal WB6 agencies with regard to disinformation, propaganda and influence operations.
24	**(New) Technology Usage**	The ability to understand the implications and make effective use of new technologies (including algorithms, big data and artificial intelligence) as tools to gain audience insight, monitor disinformation and promote positive narratives
24	**Target Audience Identification**	The ability to identify the target audience clearly, taking into account all potential consumers of messaging (intended and unintended supporters, adversaries and neutrals) in order to shape their attitudes and behaviours in a persuasive way.
25	**Understanding of behavioural and attitudinal dynamics**	The ability to organize surveys and polls in order to develop a better understanding of how societies absorb conspiracy theories, fake news and extremist ideas, and the extent to which societal segments are vulnerable to such efforts
26	**Research & Analysis**	The ability to conduct country-specific risk and resilience research and analysis in order to dissect the problem(s), the audience(s) and the message(s); to address fragility and foster resilience in specific countries; and to gain advance warning.
27	**Public Awareness, debate and debunking**	The ability to tackle the spread of disinformation by engaging in debate, as well as clearly and swiftly stating when false and extremist arguments are being used, in order to raise the awareness of such efforts among the general public, media outlets, and decision makers.
28	**Media Relations**	The ability to inform media with accurate and timely information in order to help them drive fact-based storytelling.
29	**Multilingual Media Content**	The ability to provide media content in national (or minority) languages in order to strengthen the reach and effectiveness of communications campaigns aimed at particular target audiences.
30	**Media literacy, education and training**	The ability to introduce and popularize media literacy and training programs (also within civic education courses) in order to increase the general level of education and awareness, with the aim of enabling young people in particular, but also civil servants, journalists and the general population, to identify fake news and disinformation and to fact-check stories
31	**Stratcom training and education**	The ability to provide public sector communicators and relevant staff with StratCom training and education in order to improve their strategic communications capabilities.
32	**Specialized Personnel**	The ability to train and recruit staff that is 'fit for purpose' (e.g. communication experts) in order to customize communications

		strategies for specific topics and target audiences.
33	**StratCom Mindset**	The ability to integrate strategic communications into a government's operational thinking, security and foreign policy in order to adequately reflect the importance and potential benefits of strategic communications.
34	**Political military cyber campaign coordination**	The ability to strengthen the links between political and military command to provide real time analysis.
35	**Internal Communications**	The ability to involve the entire spectrum of military employees (within a mission, organization, etc.) in the development of narratives in order to ensure their support, thereby securing ownership of a narrative so it can be multiplied to the external audiences.
36	**Changing Hostile Actor Behaviour**	The ability of governments to conduct StratCom campaigns to change initial preferences or strategies of hackers or other hostile actors.
37	**Close intelligence sharing**	The ability to develop close intelligence-sharing relationships among EU Member States in order to obtain information – and to share such information when it serves a country's interests – about disinformation, propaganda, ideological and political radicalization, as well as pressing social issues, such as human trafficking.
38	**Psychological Operations**	The ability to carry out psychological operations using methods of communication and other means directed towards approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour that affect the achievement of political and military objectives
39	**Covert Influence Campaigns**	The ability to plan, support and execute covert influence campaigns targeted at the foreign information domain, specific foreign individuals and/or masses in order to deter and prevent hostile activities as well as to spread one's message to various audiences.
40	**Adequate Legal protection**	The ability to provide adequate (legal) protection for journalists, civil society actors and whistle-blowers in order to empower civil society to play a stronger role in national StratCom efforts.
41	**Common Perceptions Development**	The ability to offer assistance and to engage in discussions that may result in the development of common perceptions, if not fully agreed norms, in order to avoid escalation from occurring.
42	**Prevention of Election Interference**	The ability to protect voting infrastructure, engage the private sector, and develop new laws addressing cyber interference in political processes in order to prevent outside interference in national electoral processes.

Appendix II Profile of the participants

Individuals working for Governmental/State institutions in the sphere of Strategic Communications or driving forces in the field. Individuals who work in the sphere of hybrid threats and warfare are also highly encouraged to participate.

Seniority: well established, mid to senior career professionals.

Focus institutions/ministries/agencies: Prime Minister's Office, Central Government, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information Technology and/or Information Society, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of EU Integrations, Special Committees such as Committees on Counterterrorism.

Individuals who have a good command and understanding of the English language and can communicate in English.

Endnotes

[1] Maksimovic, Marina. "EU Officials Warn of 'underestimating' Russian Propaganda in Balkans*." Deutsche Welle*, November 14, 2017. http://www.dw.com/en/eu-officials-warn-of-underestimating-russian-propaganda-in-balkans/a-41371020.

[2] Manuela Zlateva, "EU Enlargement – Challenges for Public Communication" (SEECOM and DG NEAR round table, Brussels, 2017), http://www.kas.de/wf/en/33.48474/.

[3] ibid.

[4] Kantar Public Brussels, "The Views of Europeans on the European Union's Priorities," Fieldwork Survey, Standard Eurobarometer (Brussels: European Commission, March 2018), file:///H:/Downloads/eb89_first_en.pdf.

[5] European Parliament, Press Release "Failure to open accession talks with Albania and Noth Macedonia is a Mistake" (Brussels, European Parliament, October 2019) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191021IPR64717/failure-to-open-accession-talks-with-albania-and-north-macedonia-is-a-mistake