

EXPLORING THE LINKAGES OF BIODIVERSITY AND SECURITY - THE CASE OF THE ILLEGAL BIRD TRADE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

*Teresa Lappe-Osthege*¹

¹ Research Fellow, Biodiversity and Security (BIOSEC) Project
Department of Politics
University of Sheffield
Elmfield Building
Northumberland Road
Sheffield S10 2TU
United Kingdom
t.lappe-osthege@sheffield.ac.uk

This paper explores the linkages of biodiversity and security by examining the illegal bird trade in the Western Balkans. The EU has the highest rates of illegal trade in (live) birds in the world, with the EU15 accounting for approximately 77 percent of global imports of CITES-listed live birds. EU candidate countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania), but also EU Member States (most notably Romania and Bulgaria) function as source countries. While the majority of studies have so far focused on assessing the implications of the illegal killing on bird populations in the Western Balkans, the underlying socio-economic and political drivers sustaining the resulting trade of birds have merely received sparse attention. This project examines the nature of the illegal bird trade in South Eastern Europe and, by placing it in geopolitical context, assesses how the illegal bird trade affects security and political stability in both the Western Balkans and the EU. More specifically, the paper (a) explores the socio-economic and political interests that sustain demand and supply patterns of the illegal bird trade in and beyond the region; (b) analyses the manner in which different organisations respond to the illegal bird trade; and (c) examines how the illegal bird trade relates to other forms of crime. Thereby, the project seeks to shed light on the different political dimensions, both within EU Member States and EU candidate countries, that play a decisive role in sustaining a lucrative branch of the illegal wildlife trade that has arguably been overlooked by policy-makers and law enforcement alike.

Keywords: biodiversity; security; illegal bird trade; Western Balkans; EU.