

FROM NEO-BALKANIZATION TO EUROPEANIZATION: INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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ABSTRACT

The wars in former Yugoslavia carried the Balkans into a new historical stage in which integration with Western institutions started to be perceived as an ultimate goal of the region's governments. On the other side of the fence, the European Union (EU) chose to take advantage of the changes in the region to eliminate some trans-border security problems, which the ethno-political conflicts there exposed. The EU has promoted regional cooperation and institutional change for the sake of its-own geopolitical re-assertion after the collapse of ideological *status quo* in the region. Its EU's eastward enlargement enhanced hopes and expectations among the Western Balkan states and peoples suffering from the wreckage brought by the fall of Communism and the socio-political and economic devastation caused by the Yugoslav war of dissolution at the end of the 20th century. In this context, this paper will aim to evaluate the EU's policies toward the Western Balkans after the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Neo-Balkanization, Western Balkans, EU Integration, Institutional Change, Regional Cooperation.

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YENİ BALKANLAŞMA'DAN AVRUPALILAŞMA'YA: BATI BALKANLAR'DA KURUMSAL DEĞİŞİM VE BÖLGESEL İŞBİRLİĞİ

ÖZET

Eski Yugoslavya'daki savaşlar Balkanlar'ı Batı kurumlarıyla bütünleşmenin bölgesel hükümetlerce nihai amaç olarak görülmeye başlandığı yeni bir tarihi sürece taşıdı. Diğer taraftan, Avrupa Birliği bölgede ideolojik *statükonun* çöküşünün ardından kendi jeopolitiğini yeniden tesis etmek adına etno-politik çatışmaların ortaya çıkardığı bazı sınır-ötesi güvenlik problemlerini bölgesel işbirliği ve kurumsal değişimi teşvik ederek ortadan kaldırma yolunu seçti. Buna bağlı olarak, AB'nin doğuya doğru genişlemesi 20. yüzyılın sonundaki komünizmin çöküşü ve Yugoslavya'nın ayrışma savaşının yol açtığı sosyo-politik ve ekonomik tahribatın enkazında Batı Balkan devletleri ve halkları arasında ümit ve beklentileri arttırdı. Bu bağlamda, bu yazı AB'nin Yugoslavya'nın dağılması sonrasında Batı Balkanlar'a dönük politikalarını değerlendirmeye çalışacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Balkanlaşma, Batı Balkanlar, AB Entegrasyonu, Kurumsal Değişim, Bölgesel İşbirliği.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War, coming simultaneously with the dissolutions of former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia changed the nature of world politics and opened a new era in the history of humanity in the last decade of the 20th century. Unfortunately, this era once again brought catastrophe and tragedy to the Balkans, where ethno-religious conflicts, political disorder and discontent have constituted historical peculiarities of the region for centuries.

Undoubtedly, the war in former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was the eruption of those centuries-old ethno-religious antagonism and discontents. From the rule of the erstwhile Ottoman and Habsburg Empires to that of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), the history of the Balkan Peninsula- or what is now often called South-eastern Europe¹-

¹ The terms "Balkans" and "Southeastern Europe" have been used interchangeably since the late 19th century, but the usage of Southeastern Europe is much more connected with the rebirth of geography in the European political map after the fall of Yugoslavia. Maria Todorova notes the etymology of the term "Balkans" with its Greek and Turco-Persian

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was seemingly sacrificed to this inexorable negative path dependency, namely called with a political science term: *Balkanization*.² In other words, the whole of 20th century Balkan History is defined by the emergence and strengthening of Balkan national self-identities connected to the conflicts surrounding the decline and fall of multi-ethnic Ottoman and Habsburg Empires prior to and after the First World War. Referencing this phenomenon, the term *Balkanization* has been used to describe more generally traumatic violence-producing ethnic conflicts of new state formations that occur as a result of imperial and/or federal disintegrations.³ Thus, the term is used to define fragmentation into mutually hostile entities and conflicts between them as the opposite of integration process and has been one of the most negative paradigms in international relations since the First World War onwards.⁴

With respect to this long-term history of inter-ethnic antagonism, the painful disintegration of SFRY can be regarded as a political *dejavu* which recalls early 20th century *Balkanization*. For that reason, one might

origins and stresses the peripheral mountainous character of the area between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Todorova mentions that the term “Southeastern Europe” was a coinage of the German geographer Theobald Fischer who proposed that the name of the Balkan Peninsula should be replaced by the term of “*Südosteuropa*” on the eve of the Berlin Congress (1878). See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York 2009, pp. 1-37; On the other hand, the term “Balkans” refers to Ottoman oriental past with the elements of Orthodox and Islamic cultures, ethno-symbolic nationalities along intra-regional borders and underdeveloped feudal structures (et al.) which differentiate the basin from the Western Europe. On the other hand, the term “Southeastern Europe” stresses the Western orientation of the area, achieved mainly through Austria-Hungarian and German influences, pays homage more to Catholicism together with Orthodoxy, and implies elements of modernization in the European periphery. In this regard, the term may stand for a more dynamic concept of development and integration of the whole region into the European Union. See, Nada Švob-Dokic, “Balkans versus Southeastern Europe” in Nada Švob-Đokic (ed.), *Redefining Cultural Identities: Southeastern Europe*, Culturelink Joint Publications Series No. 4, Institute for International Relations, Zagreb 2001, pp. 37-38.

² See, Robert W. Pringe, “Balkanization”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed on: <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/50323/Balkanization>, (6.11.2014).

³ Carl-Ulrik Schierup and Aleksandra Ålund, “Neo-Balkanization and Ethnic Cleansing in the Balkans”, *Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3, August 1995, pp. 39-40; Also for the making of the term ‘Balkanization’ through the fall of Ottoman Empire in the region, see, Clemens Hoffmann, “Balkanization of Ottoman Rule: Pre-modern Origins of Modern International System in Southeastern Europe”, *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 43 (4): 2008, pp. 373-396.

⁴ Tom Gallagher, *Outcast Europe, The Balkans, 1789-1989: From the Ottomans to Milošević*, Routledge, London and New York 2001, p. 2.

say the fall of former Yugoslavia was the second period of Balkanization in the region. This conflict-producing nation-building process undeniably changed the European geographic and ideological maps again by the advent of the new century. Since Yugoslavia was totally dissolved, seven new independent states have emerged so far from the wreckage of the Titoist federation. These are Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Macedonia,⁵ Montenegro and finally Kosovo.⁶

For the European Union (EU), the collapse of Yugoslavia has signalled a new historical era during which Europe had to integrate a new coterminous geography into the European political map. But the problem was somewhat difficult to tackle, since formal and informal institutions and cultures in the Balkans are different than those of the European heartland. The EU first dealt with the issue as being a security problem after the Dayton Accord was forcibly implemented and established peace in Bosnia in 1995, and particularly when the Kosovo crisis erupted in 1998. Secondly, the EU perceived the power vacuum- created by the collapse of Titoist Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union- as a historical opportunity that would allow it to regain its supremacy in the Eastern realm.

Within the light of aforementioned historicity and conceptualization of the relevant geopolitical issues, this paper in its first part will have an introductory macro glance on the central features of the Yugoslav war of dissolution. As part of this analysis, I will briefly discuss the origins of the process of neo-Balkanization by emphasising mainly the relevant domestic factors at play in the SFRY at the time. Because the Balkans have experienced periods of harsh nationalist disintegration twice, first in the

⁵ I consider the use of the term 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' with regard to the country, Macedonia, unnecessary. It only serves to remind to the people the negative legacy of the country's Yugoslav past. So, though there is uncertainty (or a primarily Greek reservation) about using the name in the international arena, I nevertheless will use the name 'Macedonia', as the Macedonians themselves have been using to refer their country, instead of the titular conception 'FYROM'.

⁶ Although Serbia has never recognized Kosovo as an independent state, the International Court of Justice has decided that the declaration of independence by Kosovo was not a violation of international law. See: "Press Release: Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo: Advisory Opinion", *International Court of Justice*, 22 July 2010. Accessed on: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/16012.pdf?PHPSESSID=b0b24a6135eaf2347d5b0a0badec77ff>. Since then, more than a hundred (almost 108) UN member countries have recognized Kosovo as an independent state despite the opposition of Serbia and Russia.

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beginning and second at the end of the same century, - to which historians, political scientists and the area specialists called “Balkanization” as we have drawn attention above. Without further understanding the historical background it would be wrong to focus on the EU-Western Balkans integration policies.

The second and the fundamental part of this paper, however, will be devoted to European integration of the Western Balkans in the new millennium. The notions of institutional change and regional cooperation which the EU has been imposing upon the post-Yugoslav governments will be evaluated within the paradigm of Europeanization of the region. Departing from an institutionalist point of view, I shall briefly deal with these questions in this second part of the paper: In which ways, the EU policies toward the Western Balkans have been implemented during the post-communist transitional era? And, to what extent, could the EU have succeeded to cope with the problems created by the Yugoslav war of dissolution in the region?

1. The Genesis of Neo-Balkanization in The Former Yugoslavia

The fragmentation of Yugoslavia has already been described above as being a political reminder of previous conflicts, where a new Balkanization process tore apart South Slav nationalities in the events following the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. Yet, the bloody results of the so-called ‘Yugoslav Civil War’ were not a *fait accompli* process. Rather they occurred in front of the eyes of the international community, which only grasped the severity of the war crimes committed by Bosnian-Serb paramilitary militias with the help of Yugoslav People’s Army (JNA) when it turned into a bloody massacre and/or act of genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995.⁷

The genesis of neo-Balkanization in the SFRY therefore can be analysed within the scope of a school of thought in modern historiography

⁷ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ruled that the Army of Republica Srpska committed genocide against Bosniak men, but its verdict on the acts on women, children and elderly people was massacre in Srebrenica in 1995. See: the UN, “International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia Since 1991”, IT-98-33-A, The Hague, 19 April 2004, accessible on: <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/krstic/acjug/en/krs-aj040419e.pdf>.

which fashioned the way to take into consideration of historical events in their long term duration (*la longue durée*).⁸ According to the French *L'école des Annales*' Braudelian point of view, one might say that the dissolution of Yugoslavia by its very nature was not accidental, rather it was the culmination of the same old patterns of the ethno-symbolic revolutionary nationalism of the interbellum years (Serbian *Chetniks* vs. Croatian *Ustashes*)⁹ together with decaying adherence to internationalism of the Marxist ideology during the post-Tito Yugoslavia.

Firstly then, according to this view, the fragmentation of Yugoslavia should be seen as the gradual outcome of attempts at decentralization increases to the right to self-determination for Yugoslavia's constituent nations, brought about in particular by the 1963 and 1974 SFRY Constitutions. With these efforts and changes, the Yugoslav nationalities paved the way for declaring their own independent states at a time when the Titoist 'crystal ball' was broken in the *fin de siècle*. These attempts virtually changed Yugoslavia from being a constitutionally communist state to into a constitutional nationalist one.¹⁰

In this vein, one could easily understand that how the pretentious construction of Illyrianic idea of Yugoslavism of the days of yore has been replaced by the ambitious attempts to achieve the historical idea of a 'Greater Serbia' in the course of time in the SFRY. Indeed, from the very beginning, most Croatian and Slovene intellectuals perceived Yugoslavism as a threat to their own national identity, and this ideology often seemed to

⁸ See for methodology of historiography of the Annales School, Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-89*, Stanford Univ. Press, California 1990, pp. 32-64.

⁹ Ethnic nationalism(s) in the former Yugoslavia was not a new phenomenon. Rather the SFRY was a forced compromise of Serbian and Croat nationalism brought about with the help of authoritarian Marxism under Marshall Tito. Thus, the transition from nationalism to ethnic cleansing proved to be very easy and short in the country. During the Second World War, both Serbian royalist nationalist group, the Chetniks, and the members of Croatian revolutionary movement, the Ustashes, used ethnic cleansing and genocidal methods against each other and other ethno-religious groups, such as Bosniaks, Jews and Gypsies in order to 'purify' Yugoslavia in favor of their ethnic dominance. See, Damir Mirkovic, "Ethnic Conflict and Genocide: Reflections on Ethnic Cleansing in the Former Yugoslavia", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 548, November 1996, pp. 191-199. See also Aleksandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism and War in the Balkans*, St. Martin Press, USA 2000, pp. 37-40

¹⁰ John R. Lampe, "The Failure of the Yugoslav National Idea", *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 46, No. 1/2, June 1994, pp. 84-87.

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them as being a euphemistic term for Serbian hegemony. Therefore they mainly dismissed it as being a mask for Serbian political and cultural domination.¹¹

However, worsening economic conditions, especially during the 1980s, also started to undermine gradually legitimacy of the communist state apparatus in the whole federation.¹² With the lack of economic security, the Yugoslav fusion was sacrificed to the *Geist*, namely the then spirit of time, which was increasing nationalism. Hence, recruitment of nationalism to replace communism through the invention of tradition as an elite construction after the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 should be considered as the last step in the break-up of Yugoslavia.

It might be said that resuscitation of the ages-old Serbian nationalism in the 1980s also triggered other nationalisms and reproduced the same old patterns of ethnic antagonism which had been somewhat suppressed after the foundation of SFRY in 1945. In brief, ethnic antagonism grew in the post-Tito era and it took on numerous forms, both within the political institutions and in direct face-to-face disputes among inhabitants and groups in the SFRY.¹³

Serbian discontent, in particular, with the 1974 constitutional changes had been expressed by the *Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences* in a "Memorandum" in 1986, which recommended that Serbs defend their own national interests *vis-à-vis* the other growing national movements in Yugoslavia. Hence, these developments were given meaning among the Serbian public with the campaign of Slobodan Milosevic, who pursued the restoration of Serbian power through confiscating the two autonomous regions of Kosovo and Vojvodina in favor of Serbia in the SFRY.¹⁴ Therefore, when Milosevic delivered his nationalistic rhetoric on the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Polje War in June 1989, almost nothing remained of the socio-political unity of the South Slav peoples who had already been

¹¹ Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism and War in the Balkans*, p. 62.

¹² Pavković, *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

¹³ Sergej Flere, "Explaining Ethnic Antagonism in Yugoslavia", *European Sociological Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Dec. 1991, p. 183.

¹⁴ James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War*, Columbia University Press, New York 1997, pp. 16-17.

forced to live together in a communist melting pot after the Second World War.¹⁵

Following the sudden collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and, thereby the end of Cold War and bipolar world politics, such an international environment might be said to have curtailed the developments in the former Yugoslavia and disabled an immediate involvement of the then international community into the Yugoslav crisis more difficult. Undoubtedly in these conditions, the break-up of Yugoslavia seemed unavoidable and would not be able to be prevented. This is because, the SFRY, from the very beginning, was an ill-fated construction and a reluctant unity borne from the post-war settlement and held together under the iron fist and charismatic leadership of Marshall Tito.¹⁶

However, if we make a counterfactual assessment retrospectively, the disintegration of former Yugoslavia could have been managed in a more peaceful way and furthermore the Bosnian disaster could have been obviated by the then international community, including the United Nations (UN), the European Community (EC, or the EU later on), as well as the United States (US) and the Russian Federation (RF).¹⁷

¹⁵ One prevalent explanation for the unavoidably demise of the Yugoslav state is that it never succeeded in constituting itself as a political community and a nation-state whose identity conceptually and structurally transcended the various nations that it comprised. Moreover, the Yugoslav state would eventually usurped by the largest ethnic group inside, namely the Serbs, to serve its own national interests by the very beginning. See, Vesna Pestic, "Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of Yugoslav Crisis", *The United States Institute of Peace, Peaceworks* No. 8, April, Washington 1996, p. 5.

¹⁶ Dawa Norbu, "The Serbian Hegemony, Ethnic Heterogeneity and Yugoslav Break-up", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 14, April 3-9 1999, p. 834.

¹⁷ For the negative roles of the then international community in the Yugoslav war of dissolution, see, Richard Ullman, *The World and Yugoslavia's War*, Council of Foreign Relations Press, New York 1996; Alex N. Dragnich, "From Unity to Disarray: The West's Yugoslav Policy", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 12, Number 3, Summer 2001, pp. 47-56; Robert M. Hayden, "Yugoslavia's Collapse: National Suicide with Foreign Assistance", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 27, Jul. 4, 1992, pp. 1377-1382; Ed Vulliamy, "Bosnia: The Crime of Appeasement", *International Affairs*, Vol. 74, No.1, January 1998, pp. 73-9; Mike Bowker, "The Wars in Yugoslavia: Russia and the International Community", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 7, November 1998, pp. 1245-126; Marc Weller, "The International Response to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 86, No. 3, July 1992, pp. 569-607.

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Arguably, one can also say that there was no international community at that time in the way we understand the meaning of the concept today. James Gow frequently emphasizes this fact and he identifies four fundamentals of bad timing, poor judgment, lack of cohesion and the absence of will to implement policies involving the use of armed force during the Yugoslav crisis, all of which might be attributed to the lack of a true international community and proper international diplomacy.¹⁸

Seemingly, the last decade of the 20th century was a period of turmoil in world politics and all major world powers had been following to their own agendas when the sudden, if not unexpected, collapse of Yugoslavia occurred. As is well-known, the US was fighting in the Gulf War and Iraq to open the gate for a 'new world order' while Russia was striving for a smooth disintegration of the USSR in the era of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. The EC troika's primary focus was, however, on its transformation into the EU in order to materialize a continental supra-national state when ferocious ethnic conflicts once more Balkanized Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.¹⁹

2. From Balkans to Southeastern Europe: European Integration and Institutional Change in the Western Balkans

Apparently, the former Yugoslavia (SFRY) was harshly crumbled due to the competing interests of ethnic nationalism(s) inside and factional great power politics in the international relations. Following the sudden fall of Communism in the region, a process of neo-Balkanization once again overturned the regional security complex and political stability in the early 1990s. In this chaotic atmosphere European integration of the newly independent post-Yugoslav republics in the Western Balkans became an emergent issue for both the prospective stabilization and reconciliation of

¹⁸ Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will*, pp. 4-9.

¹⁹ The references given in the footnote 16 are valid here, too. I have also expressed the international dimension of the Yugoslav crisis in a recent web article: "The Dissolution of Former Yugoslavia: An Appeasement of Serbian Nationalism by the International Community", *Academic Perspective*, 13 September 2014, accessible on: <http://en.akademikperspektif.com/2014/09/13/dissolution-former-yugoslavia/>, (23.11.2014).

the region, as well as for the EU's own geopolitical future connected with the unification euphoria that followed the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.²⁰

Needless to say that, the painful disintegration of the SFRY taught Europe a lot, and led the EU to form a *Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)*, the lack of which had caused the failure of European diplomacy during the bloody ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia. However, the EU was able to involve itself in the Kosovo crisis in the post-Dayton Yugoslavia when the Europeans gave up the 'wait and see' strategy and adopted a more proactive and pre-emptive stance towards the post-communist conflicts in the region. In other words, the EU's willingness to take responsibility after a bitter experience- witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina between the years of 1992-95, signalled the advent of a new era in which the process of Europeanization of the Balkan states and societies had commenced in the European Affairs. In this sense, the Balkans have acquired a renewed significance in the EU's policy debates especially after the big bang enlargement of May 2004 together with the opening of Turkey's membership negotiations in 2005 despite the constitutional fiascos in France and the Netherlands in the same year.²¹

Therefore, it might be said that the core of the EU's containment strategy with regard to the problems created by the breakup of Yugoslavia was to incorporate the post-communist Yugoslav geography into the continental Europe on the basis of the *acquis communautaire* of the Union.²² From then on, the EU deliberately launched the political concept of 'Western Balkans' to define not only the successor states of the SFRY (plus Albania, and excluding Slovenia), but also to aid in the integration of the region into the common European political house, whereby the whole of the Balkans (together with Bulgaria and Romania) now appeared on the European political map as part of terminus of 'South-Eastern Europe'.²³

²⁰ Leeda Demetropoulou, "Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe", *Southeast European Politics*, Vol. III, No. 2-3, November 2002, pp. 87-88.

²¹ Emilian Kavalski, "From the Western Balkans to the Greater Balkans Area: The External Conditioning of 'Awkward' and 'Integrated' States", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Volume 17, Number 3, Summer 2006, p. 86.

²² Florian Trauner, *The Europeanization of the Western Balkans: EU Justice and Home Affairs in Croatia and Macedonia*, Manchester University Press, U.K. 2011, pp. 4-6.

²³ Steven Blockmans, *Tough Love: The European Union's Relations with the Western Balkans*, T.M.C. Asser Press, The Hague 2007, pp. 12-13.

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Hence, one could argue that there was an ambitious effort displayed by European policy makers to erase the negative legacy of the Cold War and reunite the divided Europe of the post-war settlement. Considering the Western Balkans as part of this project, the EU first pursued a 'regional approach' which later constituted the main features of the formation of the "Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe" (converted into *Regional Cooperation Council* later in 2008) in April 1999 when the Kosovo conflict began to violate the delicate balance of the post-Dayton process. The Pact was hailed as 'a new Marshal Plan for the reconstruction of the region' by the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair to highlight its vital significance for both Europe and the basin.²⁴

Additionally, the EU pushed its endeavours to one step further and institutionalized its 'contractual' relations with the Western Balkans together with the inauguration of the *Stabilization and Association Process (SAP)* in the shadow of Kosovo crisis. The *SAP* constituted the main theme of EU-Western Balkans relations, through which the EU created regional cooperation and promoted institutional change in justice and home affairs of those post-communist transitional countries by giving them potential candidacy status in the Union.²⁵

In the following year, the EU also officially declared that it was considering membership bids of the Western Balkan countries in the Santa Maria da Feira Summit in Portugal. The EU from then on kept prospective membership perspective as for the Western Balkans in its political agenda and reiterated this possibility several times, most notably in the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, which was mainly dedicated to the political dialogue and regional cooperation between the EU and Western Balkans.

In brief, the EU imposed the "principle of conditionality" and embedded it via its contractual relations with the countries of the region in order to maintain the road to Europeanization of the Western Balkans. Following this agenda, the Stability Pact took responsibility and chaired three working tables considering (i) democratization and human rights, (ii) economic reconstruction, cooperation and development and (iii) security

²⁴ Trauner, *EU Justice and Home Affairs in Croatia and Macedonia*, p. 47.

²⁵ Christian Pippan, "The Rocky Road to Europe: The EU's Stabilisation and Association Process for the Western Balkans and the Principle of Conditionality", *European Foreign Affairs Review* 9, 2004, p. 219; Trauner, *Ibid.* p. 35; Blocksmans, *Ibid.*, p. 251.

issues. All of them functioned to monitor the improvements in the fulfilment of political (*Copenhagen*) and economic (*Maastricht*) conditionality imposed by the *Stabilization and Association Agreements* (SAA) and signed country by country.²⁶

In this context, we can also raise the main question posed by Friis and Murphy (2000): Why did the European diplomacy catapult its interests into the Western Balkans and present membership perspective to the region, while the EU had been already continuing the membership negotiations with the Central-Eastern European states (plus Romania and Bulgaria in the Eastern Balkans)? Friis and Murphy give four essential satisfactory answers to this question: i) the Kosovo crisis, ii) path dependency iii) policy framing and iv) the EU presidency.²⁷

From this point of view, one might say that the EU first took the Kosovo issue into consideration as being a new threat to European security when a massive refugee problem emerged along the fragile borders of Serbia, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia. Without doubt, the crisis in Kosovo had reminded many, most notably expressed frankly by the then German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, of the relatively weak role of the European Community in the Bosnian case.²⁸ Therefore, the crisis had the potential to undermine once again the EU's credibility in the international system, and hereby, the EU presidency led-by then Germany under Schröder-Fischer diarchy framed the Kosovo issue as a 'European one'.²⁹

Hence, European policy makers, immediately after the crisis escalated in Kosovo, improved an EU-developed strategy on the Western Balkans. In their paradigm, Europeanization of the area was perceived a *sine qua non* for stability, peace and reconciliation in the region. Thereby, European security would be able to be guaranteed in the long term. The EU's source of inspiration for this policy no doubt directly came from the examples of the Central-Eastern European transition countries' integration process. Such a path dependency also convinced the EU that pursuing a new

²⁶ Pippan, *Ibid.* pp. 227-29 and 233-38.

²⁷ Lykke Friis and Anna Murphy, "Turbo-Charged Negotiations: the EU and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 7:5, 2000, p. 767.

²⁸ Tom Gallagher, *The Balkans in the New Millennium: In the Shadow of War and Peace*, Routledge, London and New York 2005, p. 49.

²⁹ Friis and Murphy, *Ibid.* pp. 777-780.

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type of relationship responding to the particular needs of the Western Balkans was deemed necessary and unavoidable.³⁰

Seemingly, maintaining security still remains the strongest argument on developing EU-Western Balkans relations in the scope of the SAP. Supposedly, the Balkans emerged as a destabilizing region for Europe after the Yugoslav dissolution, so both the EU and local authorities had to minimize the side effects of trans-border problems caused by the ethnic conflicts and political demarcations.³¹ In particular, intra-border smuggling and trafficking of arms, people and drugs, illegal migration and refugees from the region to the heart of Europe together with wide-spread corruption, bribery, nepotism, organized crime, economic backwardness and violations of human and minority rights in justice and home affairs were the main concerns that the EU wanted to tackle via cooperation with the Western Balkan governments. Therefore, the region constituted a major source of so-called 'soft-security' threats for the EU when the traditional Balkan smuggling route was revitalised as a transit corridor for illegal immigrants and all kind of goods onto their way into Europe.³²

For this reason, the EU first initiated an "integrated border management" mechanism to check border security effectively and control trade facilities through stressing the significance of regional collaboration and international cooperation with respect to the borders of Western Balkan countries.³³ Secondly, the EU worked in a close cooperation with the NATO, OSCE and the Stability Pact in order to augment border security through the establishment of police forces, demilitarization and demining of the borders. All these endeavours were institutionalized later in the *Ohrid Border Process* in May 2003 when the parties agreed on the EU's integrated border management principle, promotion of further stabilization through the

³⁰ Blocksmans, *Ibid.*, p. 254; Friis and Murphy, *Ibid.*, p. 778.

³¹ George Dorel Popa and Karina Paulina Marczuk, "Trafficking in Human Beings in the Post-Communist States of the Balkan Area", *Human Security Journal*, Vol. 6, Spring 2008, pp. 79-80.

³² Florian Trauner, "The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: Deconstructing the EU's routes of influence in Justice and Home Affairs", A research paper presented to the ECPR Fourth Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, Riga, September 25-27, 2008, p. 2, accessible on: <http://www.jhubc.it/ecpr-riga/virtualpaperroom/059.pdf>, (10.11.2014).

³³ Trauner, *The Europeanization of the Western Balkans: EU Justice and Home Affairs in Croatia and Macedonia*, pp. 27-28.

rule of law, and advice and support on more military issues regarding border security and insecurities.³⁴

By analysing all these EU policies regarding the Western Balkans, we can ask the question here of how those policies added a value to the EU's leverage in the region? One answer is that, the EU, needless to say, used the soft power of membership incentives as a 'carrot and stick' diplomacy over the region to both eliminate security problems that emerged after the Yugoslav crumble and erase the negative legacy of communist state apparatus in the Balkans.³⁵

This approach led to the regional governments getting some remarkable financial aid and technical assistance under the *Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS)* of the SAA. Thus, firstly, one could say that a gradual institutional change in justice and home affairs has been promoted in the course of time. In addition to this, sometimes through shock therapy with respect to market mechanisms, some trade liberalization has been achieved and commercial facilities have been created as part of the economic transition strengthening ties between the EU and the Western Balkans.³⁶ In this regard, regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries, largely thanks to the EU's SAP through which conditionality has been persistently imposed upon the politics of the regional governments, pushed the nature of post-communist transitional Balkan politics into being more 'European' way.

With regards to the situation as it stands at present, Slovenia was added in the 'big bang enlargement' of 1 May 2004 to the Union, whereas Romania and Bulgaria achieved this in 2007, though the principle of conditionality is still questionable regarding their post-communist transitions.³⁷ Meanwhile in the Western Balkans, Croatia became a member

³⁴ Trauner, *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁵ See Pippan, *Ibid.*, pp. 221-228.

³⁶ Pippan, *Ibid.*, pp. 230-233.

³⁷ The transition paradigm is hotly debated topic in transitology literature since legal and constitutional backlashes have appeared after some of the post-communist countries received full EU membership. Therefore, more recent assumptions in transition literature indicate the death of the concept of the transition paradigm and fashioned gradual institutional transformations. See, Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2002, pp. 15-17; Jordan Gans-Morse, "Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, (2004, 20/ 4), pp. 340-44.

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state as of 1 June 2013, but the EU has only opened negotiation talks with Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia as candidate states.

Accordingly, the EU also made numerous advances in order to integrate the region with itself and became an irrevocable political goal for the region's governments, most particularly in ethnically divided and discontent countries like Macedonia, where the prospect of EU membership has been considered as the only source of political unity in the debris of shadowy past.³⁸ Possibly, this outlook might be by the other ethnically heterogeneous republics, such as Bosnia and Kosovo, as well. On the other hand, the EU accessions in the region also created an environment of peace building and reconciliation in which the belligerents of the Yugoslav ethnic wars were able to improve political dialogue and mutual understandings mainly due to a compulsory EU-push. Máire Braniff specifically notes this point of view and she reaches the conclusion that European integration was the most important driving force behind conflict transformation and reconciliation in the domestic politics of Croatia and Serbia considering the wartime criminals and nationalist antagonisms in these countries.³⁹

Nonetheless, some observers also approach to the issue somewhat sceptically in the case of Serbia, where domestic politics is still influenced by the nationalist nostalgia and the failure of the idea of Greater Serbia.⁴⁰ From the assassination of Zoran Djindjic in 2003 to the declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008, recent developments in Serbian politics might be said to be very undulant. But it might also be said that Serbian authorities, foremost President Boris Tadić engaged in the Serbian talks with the EU quite enthusiastically and shown his willingness to collaborate with the *International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia* regarding the capture and return of the wartime criminals including the prominent figures of the Srebrenica genocide and known as "butchers of Bosnia" like Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic.

³⁸ Jessica Giandomenico, "Path Dependency in EU Enlargement: Macedonia's Candidate Status from a Historical Institutionalist Perspective", *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 14, 2009, p. 90.

³⁹ Máire Braniff, *Integrating the Balkans: Conflict Resolution and the Impact of EU Expansion*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York 2011, pp. 172-83.

⁴⁰ James C. O'Brien, "Brussels: Next Capital of the Balkans?", *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 29, Number 3, Summer 2006, p. 78.

In the current situation, Serbian domestic politics continue to be fed by a ‘sense of injury’, particularly after the international recognition of Kosovo as an independent state.⁴¹ But the main issue here is not Serbian domestic politics, rather the EU’s capacity and eagerness to engage crisis management. Taking account of this, the EU ought to maintain its carrot approach with respect to the Serbian bid to join to the Union in the years to come. Most probably, a rapprochement between Serbia and Kosovo would prove the success of the EU’s Western Balkans policies. Yet, the possibility of a Serbian backlash should not also be kept away from the Union’s strategic calculations, either.

On the other side of the coin, there are also some problems and limitations which undermine the EU’s leverage and capacity for conflict management and its stabilizing role in the Western Balkans. Those are mainly related to the war-torn countries of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.⁴² Together with Albania, the aforementioned countries still keep their potential candidate status in the EU’s political agenda. But those countries, most notably Kosovo- consisting almost 90 percent of ethnic Albanians- constitute the most fragile and vulnerable parts of the Balkan puzzle for both the EU and the region.

A divergence here to briefly discuss the Kosovo problem would be convenient to assist in comprehending the pessimist approach to the conundrum in the Western Balkans. At the moment, the independence of Kosovo seems to be complicated by the EU’s blueprint over the South-western Balkans, where ethnic trans-border and interstate issues are still the source of EU woes. Therefore, as much as the status and/or the future of Kosovo remains blurry, the Kosovo crisis cannot be considered as having ended and it will continue to challenge stability, security and political order in the region. That is to say, as Misha Glenny properly stated, the EU, one way or another, will have ‘responsibility for a chronically dysfunctional’

⁴¹ Ted Galen Carpenter, “A New Era of Turbulence in the Balkans?”, *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Volume 19, Number 3, Summer 2008, pp. 6-14.

⁴² Bosnia and Kosovo are the only two members of the EU enlargement zone that have never tried to apply for EU membership, given that both are too far from complying with the required minimum standards. But besides lacking basic capacities, these two potential candidates share another common feature: both are limited, to different degrees, in their national sovereignty. See, Wolfgang Koeth, “Bosnia, Kosovo and the EU: Is Accession Possible without Full Sovereignty?”, *EIPA*, Maastricht 2012, p. 31, accessed on: http://www.eipa.eu/files/repository/eipascope/20120710143924_WKO_Eipascope2012.pdf, (5.11.2014).

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small country from now on in the basin.⁴³ However, the EU has already shouldered such a responsibility formally by agreeing with the government of Kosovo on the “conditional independence” drawn up by the *Ahtisaari Plan*, as Elizabeth Pond clearly pointed out: “*The heart of this plan, laid down in more than 90 percent of its provisions, consisted of protection of minority (Serb) rights, overproportional minority seats in parliament, and other positive political discrimination, all to be guaranteed by EU supervision*”.⁴⁴

For the sake of assuming this responsibility then, the EU also put into force the *Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo*- dubbed as the *EULEX* - in order to consolidate the new-born state of Kosovo’s legal infrastructure. According to its strategic program, EULEX intended to achieve the following six priorities when forming institutions and establishing the rule of law in Kosovo: i) progress towards sustainability, ii) progress towards accountability, iii) multi-ethnic organization, iv) freedom from political interference, v) recognized standards, and vi) European best practices. These aims, Labinot Greiçevci emphasizes, have been established to move towards the long term goal of Kosovo’s potential accession into the EU.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the same author also indicates that the failures of EULEX initiatives in the three areas of customs, police and justice, especially in the northern Serbian-populated border areas like Mitrovica, cripple the EU’s mission and limit the effectiveness of EULEX. He assertively calls this the “handicapped actorness” of the EU in Kosovo.⁴⁶ Therefore, we might say that the problems reflected by the local people(s) and authorities with regard to the question of “Does anyone have a plan”, posed by Lode Desmet in his 2006 documentary⁴⁷, still come to the fore in post-independent Kosovar politics, and the EU has to deal with these problems and take action as soon as possible.

⁴³Misha Glenny, “You Broke It, You Own It”, *Prospect*, 27 April 2008, accessed on: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/youbrokeityouownit/>, p. 16, (5.11.2014).

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Pond, “The EU’s Test in Kosovo”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 31, Number 4, Autumn 2008, p. 99.

⁴⁵ Labinot Greiçevci, “EU Actorness in International Affairs: The Case of EULEX Mission in Kosovo”, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, September 2011, p. 297.

⁴⁶ Greiçevci, *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.

⁴⁷ Lode Desmet, “Does Anyone Have a Plan?”, a documentary film produced for *Balkan Investigative Reporting Network*, Albania/Bosnia-Herzegovina/Serbia, 2006.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can precisely talk about a fully-fledged EU-engagement towards the post-communist conflicts in the Balkans from the NATO bombing of Belgrade in May 1999 to the independence of Kosovo in February 2008 and its aftermath. During this period, the EU developed a constructive approach towards the post-Yugoslav geography and chose the path of European integration of the region by imposing the principle of conditionality upon the regional governments and polities. In this way, both the Union and the countries of the region made some remarkable progress. Arguably, the most important step was the inauguration of the Stabilization and Association Process (the SAP) of the EU regarding the reconstruction of the Western Balkans.

So far, only Croatia has received full membership, and for the other western Balkan states their EU-favourable perspectives often meant a geopolitical shift towards the Western realm. Nevertheless, all countries in the area have entered into a quite tedious, but irreversible path of transition, from which both sides, namely the EU and the region's governments, should benefit within a win-win strategy in the long term. In this regard, it might be said that the Western Balkans can be Europeanized with the help of exogenous underpinnings of the EU's conditionality and institutional change. For this purpose, the regional decision-makers need to show more enthusiasm about will of reform management and further regional cooperation which necessitate abandoning the practices of the past, so becoming more 'behaviourally Europeanized' in their policy-making processes.⁴⁸

For the Western Balkan countries, however, as Christian Pippan (2004) phrased it, full membership in the EU is a 'rocky road' in which a systemic change concerning the previous formal and informal institutions would not be expected to happen overnight. Moreover, the issue of membership is nowadays not only related to the fulfilment of conditionality, but is also much more dependent on the EU's capacity for integration and the readiness of the European public. The Dutch and French vetoes of the EU Constitution in 2005 and Irish vetoing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008,

⁴⁸ Tamara Radovanovik, "From 'Balkanization' to 'Europeanization' of the Western Balkan countries", *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 2/4, April 2002, pp. 211; Demetropoulou, "Europe and the Balkans:...", *Ibid.*, p. 88.

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together within the negative atmosphere of the present Euro-zone crisis since then, have already been interpreted as ‘no more enlargements’ around European policy circles and public opinions.

Last, but not the least, all efforts made by the EU and the Euro-Atlantic Alliance (NATO) have been perceived as a ‘Western intrigue’ in what was once a ‘backyard’ region under a re-assertive Russian Foreign Policy formed by the Putin-Medvedev diarchy at a time when the recent political and military crisis in Georgia and Ukraine had already created a standoff between the parties. In this context, there is no doubt that the Kosovo problem was and is still one of the hardest tests which the European diplomacy will have to overcome in order to put a definitive end to the Balkan crisis in the post-Yugoslav era. In brief, the Kosovo conundrum will serve as a litmus test for the EU in the new millennium, because the Western Balkans in general and Kosovo in particular still have their own historical peculiarities, and ethno-political splits still continue to be the sources of discontent and fear among the peoples and governments of the region.

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