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**Open Balkan Initiative in the context of Serbian Foreign Policy**

**Western Balkans Relations and Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explains the Open Balkan Initiative as a generally helpful regional project where complete legitimacy and participation should be essential for regional development and European transition. This thesis aims to understand the complex Serbian foreign policy and historical relations with neighboring countries in the context of the Open Balkan Initiative. This work considers Serbia's national interests, territorial integrity (Kosovo challenge), protection of Serbian people in the region, and relations with the EU, Russia and the U.S., and China. Furthermore, specific parts of Serbia's bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, and Albania indicate the future development of the Western Balkans region through the “Open Balkan.” In this paper, a SWOT analysis of the Open Balkans initiative was performed, in order to look at the various internal and external factors that influence the development of this project. The study concludes by identifying governments that are politically and democratically ready and mature for regional cooperation, weaknesses of the movement, and what should be the ultimate benefit of the participants and their citizens as well as the EU with the Open Balkan as complete, united, and coherent.

**Keywords: “Open Balkan” initiative, Serbian foreign policy, Western Balkans, European Regionalization (EU)**

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# 1 Introduction

The “Open Balkan” initiative, founded in 2019 as a new regional initiative, is still in discussion and debate. This paper will serve for future readers to better understand the current general political situation in the Western Balkans led by Serbia. The research period is determined by the most significant changing in the Serbian political and economic system from 2000 until 2020, as it points out the minimum period of retrospection. The period of very turbulent Serbian politics, in general, is necessary for understanding Serbian foreign policy as the main topic of work for analysis of the initiative, “Open Balkan.” Serbia, as the most dominant economy with the most potent political influence and different foreign policy than other states in Western Balkans, should be analyzed with specific attention. The work will use “mixed methods” in the chapter on research and discussion, including qualitative data analysis of a particular issue in the field and synthesis of existing and new data based on the literature with different opinions based on which one's own opinion as well.

The first period under examination is related to the disintegration of the Milosevic regime from 2000 until 2012. The second period relates to the Serbian Progressive Party from 2012 until 2021. Concluded as one of the main political challenges and problems in Serbian foreign politics, Kosovo functioned as a separate part. The scope of the topic includes Western Balkans countries, Serbia (including Kosovo as a partly independent state), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania.

Chapter four will be about the bilateral evolution from 2000 until 2021 between Serbia and the other states in the Western Balkans. This chapter will answer specific problems between Serbia and other states and the solution to overcome this bilateral misunderstanding. Serbian foreign policy research will provide a basis for working on the main topic of Open Balkan and answer whether this initiative is sustainable and whether the rest states will join and build complete legitimacy and potential for this initiative for cooperation. This work will answer whether regional cooperation in the Western Balkans is necessary and our final goals. First, it provides peace, develops the economy, integrates developing nations and states, and creates a typical atmosphere without nationalism as a lousy phenomenon prejudicial for all. The focus will be on the most dominant power, Serbia, as the leader in the initiative. The research will also be about

how Serbia will protect its minority people in neighboring countries, keep their identity and culture, and parallel these demanding challenges for Serbian diplomacy to make the right decision in balancing West and East. How long will the Serbian European strategy course be possible because of Russia and China's rising influence in recent years in Serbia? How much would be complicated? Open Balkan initiative development because of good relations with Russia and Serbia and what in this relation will be disadvantaged knowing brutal isolation of Russian economy and politics. This research aims to show the directions and challenges of Serbian foreign policy in the Balkans, the advantages and disadvantages of the Open Balkan initiative, and their perspective. The research will not include the technical implementation of the Open Balkan policy and its results because it is too early but political issues. Financial benefits, bilateral relations of Serbia with the rest country, and, most important, changing specific Balkans stereotypes and building a peaceful, friendly atmosphere.

## **2 Foreign Policy of Serbia**

Serbia is a landlocked country in Southeast Europe, which means it is east to west and west to east. That describes its history and location, which still represents the country's foreign policy. As a small Balkans country, Serbia does not play an essential role in international politics, especially during the years to which the research refers, between 2000 and 2022. So said, Serbia, in this period, was trying to connect with the world after many years of isolation (1991-2000). With a population of 7 million residents and almost the same out of the country. Serbia, by size in Europe, is a middle-range country. To quote Professor Harry Papapanagos (2020), “In the world of the economy as in politics, at the end of the day, size matters.”

### **2.1 Introduction**

Serbia, a small European country, has to implement a “wise foreign policy” protecting its people, territory, and other national interests. The Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito influenced Serbian foreign policy as one of the most prominent historical figures in general, whose cult of personality made a balance between West and East, between the USA and the Soviet Union, with some strange charisma that gave some results in that period. The Non-alignment Movement, an international organization ideologically created by the Indian Prime Minister Nehru, was first established in Belgrade in 1961, with a central role played by the Yugoslav leader Tito. This movement is still the most significant international project born in Yugoslavia. Its importance is crucial in Serbian foreign policy. After the death of Tito in 1980 in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia lost a key figure and a prominent diplomat who had the power to balance and lead the country.

By April 1992, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), with about 24 million population, split up into five countries. The 1990s were the most challenging period for Serbian foreign policy. On top of that, during this period, NATO bombed Serbia. The Military Technical Agreement, also known as the Kumanovo Agreement, was signed between the International Security Force (KFOR) and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia on June 9, 1999, in Kumanovo, after 78 days of brutal bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It marked the end of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. The

consequences of the war were enormous and tragic in every aspect of society, economy, and politics. The NATO aggression violated international law because the decision to bomb the FRY was decided for the first time in history without the approval of the UN Security Council. That war dramatically influenced the Serbian political landscape, and its consequences are present today. The agreement terminated NATO's airstrikes on the FRY. On June 10, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1244, welcoming the acceptance by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of the principles of a political solution to the Kosovo crisis, including an immediate end to violence and a rapid withdrawal of its military, police, and paramilitary forces. The Resolution, adopted by a vote of 14 in favor and none against, with one abstention (China), provided for the Security Council's decision to deploy international civil and security presences in Kosovo under United Nations auspices. The economic position of Serbia became very precarious because of the destruction resulting from the bombing and the refusal of the international community to rebuild Serbia. At the same time, Slobodan Milosevic served as the President of FRY and Serbia later (1991-2000). Unfortunately, this period largely determined and complicated the diplomatic relations of Serbia with the rest of the world, especially with NATO members. After 1999 NATO aggression showed adverse effects in the economic, ecological, and health fields of expertise. Direct and indirect damage from the 1999 aggression is estimated at 30 billion dollars, but the long-term environmental and human health damage reaches 300 billion dollars. The global character of the effects of the 1999 NATO aggression brought the fundamental injustice of a military attack on a sovereign state has caused unexpected global political consequences.<sup>1</sup>

## **2.2 After the fall of the Milosevic regime (October 2000 – 2012)**

A general election was held on September 24, 2000, and unexpectedly, the DOS coalition led by Koštunica received 52.54% of the vote. It led to an open conflict between the opposition and the government. The fall of the Milosevic regime came on October 5, 2000, in Belgrade. His removal was essential and became the first step in transforming Serbia into a more democratic state. The socialist system and the centrally planned economy were still active after the breakup of Yugoslavia in June 1991. However, Yugoslavia chose a new government with democratic

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<sup>1</sup> NATO aggression on FR Yugoslavia: 20 years later | Institute of International Politics and Economics (bg.ac.rs)



values, directions, and politics. Capitalism and democracy won, and FRY set on its European way by joining International Organisations on November 1, 2000.<sup>2</sup>

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia became a member of the United Nations (November 1) and the United Nations Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, November 10). Furthermore, it became a regional member of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (October 26) and participated in the summits of these organizations.

Serbia restored diplomatic relations with France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the countries with which their relationships were interrupted due to the beginning of the bombing on March 25, 1999. "On November 24, 2000, at the EU summit in Biarritz (France), the President of Yugoslavia, Vojislav Kostunica, was a special guest. Moreover, the Prime Ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia were also present. They all got an offer to join the EU for the first time. The EU called this group of independent states the Western Balkans states. At the Summit, the EU promised to do everything in its power to assist Yugoslavia and help it return to democracy, Europe, and the European family. After this Summit, all of these countries rapidly built diplomatic relations, representing a tremendous diplomatic win after the war in Yugoslavia. The changes in Yugoslavia were not the result of any conspiracy but the people's will - said the Prime Minister of France, Lionel Jospin. The EU promised Yugoslavia aid of 200 million euros because of the complicated social situation after the war. French President Jacques Chirac said that Serbs stood up to defend values "such as democracy"<sup>3</sup> and won their victory first with a ballot box and then peacefully on the street.

In the initial post-Milosevic era, Zoran Djindjic became the most critical person in Serbian democracy. He was among the most prominent opposition leaders of the Milosevic regime, the founder of the Democratic Party, and the Mayor of Belgrade. Djindjic was a Serbian politician

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<sup>2</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, Marko Lj. Dašić, International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation, Belgrade 2020, page 170

<sup>3</sup> Allan Little and Laura Silber, Yugoslavia: The Death of Nation, TV Books, New York, 1996, pp. 31–373. i Dragan Đukanović and Dejan Gajić, "Determining the Status of Kosovo within the Post-Yugoslav Context", Review of International Affairs, Vol. LVII, No. 1127–1128, Belgrade, July–December 2007, pp. 21–25.

who was the Prime Minister of Serbia from 2001 until his assassination in 2003. It was a tragic and significant loss for Serbia and its foreign policy. He received his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Konstanz in Germany. As a neo-liberal and European-orientated politician, he historically had the best relationship with the German chancellor and his office. From the beginning the new government reestablished the network of multilateral relations (economic, judicial, security, cultural, political, and sports). Later on, the EU lifted the oil embargo and put the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the list of countries participating in the programs of pre-accession assistance (CARDS).<sup>4</sup> Renewed membership in the International Monetary Fund was the priority. As a result, Serbia got financial help for the post-conflict war, which was very important for the Serbian economy during this period. Therefore, after the rounding of the statehood process, the Republic of Serbia, as a Western Balkans, a Danube, and partly a Central European country, faced off the necessity of defining its position in the Region of Southeast Europe, Europe, and the world.<sup>5</sup> It was determined that Serbia's foreign policy position was unrealistic due to irreconcilable differences between the government and opposition. It is essential, moreover, to note that certain political factors and the dominant part of the public in Serbia still do not realize that the country now finds itself in a very different position than the status of regional hegemon. It is evident from the conflicts in the 1990s that resulted in the dissolution of the former Yugoslav Federation (in the Republic of Slovenia, Republic of Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina).<sup>6</sup>

After the fall of the socialist system, which had a long tradition in this region, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic, defined a new course for Serbian foreign policy. It included a reliable way to become a European Union member state, revitalizing relations with the USA, improving ties with traditional partner Russia, and renewing relationships with many countries worldwide, especially after the NATO aggression of 1999 and

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<sup>4</sup> „Декларација ЕУ о укидању санкција“, Б92, 09/10/2000, доступно на: [https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2000&mm=10&dd=9&nav\\_category=1&nav\\_id=13560&start=-9](https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2000&mm=10&dd=9&nav_category=1&nav_id=13560&start=-9), приступљено: 14/09/2020.

<sup>5</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 206

<sup>6</sup> Allan Little and Laura Silber, *Yugoslavia: The Death of Nation*, TV Books, New York, 1996, pp. 31–373. i Dragan Đukanović and Dejan Gajić, “Determining the Status of Kosovo within the Post-Yugoslav Context “, *Review of International Affairs*, Vol. LVII, No. 1127–1128, Belgrade, July–December 2007, pp. 21–25.

the Kosovo war.<sup>7</sup> Very controversial, dynamic, and the most prominent reformer of Serbian society, he set the goal for the ministry of foreign affairs to join the EU. Only those who are willing to sacrifice their well-being can claim that we belong to the generation that saved Serbia: we brought about the new politics.<sup>8</sup> As a German scholar, Zoran Djindjic was very sure and enthusiastic to bring Serbia closer to becoming an EU member as quickly as possible. After October 5, 2000, membership in the European Union became the leading target of the Democratic Party. As a result, Serbia became part of the Stabilization Process and Accession in November 2000. At the session of Government of the Republic of Serbia held on 17 June 2005, the National Strategy of Serbia for the Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union was adopted. Post 2000, relations between Serbia and the European Union became burdened with at least three problems.<sup>9</sup> The first was the lack of full cooperation with the International criminal tribunal, in The Hague, for war crimes committed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which involved the extradition of those indicted by the court. Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic signed a cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal after many protests against it. Noncooperation would have meant a loss of at least 100 million dollars to the International Monetary Fund, the standby arrangements, the Paris Club, The Council of Europe, and everything that affected European integration.<sup>10</sup> The second problem in relations with the EU is the harmonization of legislation with the EU, as we would have become a member of the European Community in 10 years at the latest. President of Serbia Vojislav Kostunica was against it. Still, Djindjic took responsibility for signing this agreement, with enormous pressure from western elites to do it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Filip Ejdus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession*, 2020, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>8</sup> Part of Zoran Djindjic's speech held at Democratic party's Assembly, 02.02.1995. (source <https://www.zorandjindjic.org/eng/speeches/>)

<sup>9</sup> Orentlicher, Diane, 'Coerced Cooperation: Serbia's Relationship with the ICTY', *Some Kind of Justice: The ICTY's Impact in Bosnia and Serbia* (New York, 2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Apr. 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190882273.003.0003>, accessed 19 Nov. 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Reč je o generalu Ratku Mladiću, ratnom komandantu Vojske Republike Srpske (1992–95) i nekadašnjem lideru Srba i Hrvatskoj Goranu Hadžiću (1991–1995).

<sup>11</sup> „Експозе др Зорана Ђинђића у Скуптини Србије“, Влада Републике Србије, Београд, 24. јануар 2001, доступно на: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/344243/ekspoze-dr-zorana-djindjica-uskupstini-srbije.php>, приступљено: 08/09/2020, и „Експозе Зорана Живковића, мандатара за састав нове Владе Републике Србије“, Влада Републике Србије, Београд, 18. март 2003, доступно на: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/344261/ekspoze-zorana-zivkovica-mandatara-za-sastav-nove-vlade-republike-srbije>.

In 2002, a historic meeting took place in Kranj between Serbian President Vojislav Kostunica and Croatian President Stjepan Mesic, but many questions remained unanswered. A few weeks later, the Slovenian Prime Minister also visited Belgrade and re-established bilateral relations with Serbia. Many post-war, legally unsolved problems, asking for responsibility for the violence, were in front of diplomats for ex-Yugoslav countries, including Serbia and Montenegro.

The foreign policy of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro<sup>12</sup> give results. The two parts of the Union had different external strategic approaches, which was more of an internal political question about the country's future. "Serbia did not have the right political actions to stop one more separation from its brother country and nation in every aspect"<sup>13</sup>. Still, on the other side, we had a political elite of Montenegro that wanted and fight for independence and worked on it smartly and constantly. However, after 2003 and the tragic-assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic, the tendency for separation was rising. Montenegrin leader Milo Djukanovic was the key person when it came to the split. His wish was to separate from Serbia, as it was a federation. Montenegro was a separate republic of ex-Yugoslavia; therefore, they had the right to restore the independence that they lost in 1918. Montenegrin government restored the country's independence - they were never a part of Serbia, but just under Serb occupation in 1918. Later, they were one of the six federal republics of ex-Yugoslavia. Milo Djukanovic's goal and plan for Montenegro were apparent; this was a referendum on May 26, 2006. It was a very debated referendum where citizens voted (55,5%) for independence. Even the EU representative informed Montenegro that if it got independence, it would start its EU reforms from the beginning.<sup>14</sup> In the next chapter, this work details the new Yugoslav countries and their relationship with Serbia, especially the relationship between these two countries.<sup>15</sup>

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php, приступљено: 08/09/2020

<sup>12</sup> In 2003, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was reconstituted and re-named as a State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This union effectively ended following Montenegro's formal declaration of independence on 3 June 2006 and Serbia's on 5 June 2006.

<sup>13</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, Marko Lj. Dašić, International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation, Belgrade 2020, page 187

<sup>14</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/montenegro\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/montenegro_en)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/eem/0521-referendum-on-the-independence-of-montenegro-a-round-up-one-week-before-the-vote>

Adopting the Lisbon Treaty was another objective obstacle to the path of Serbia. The Treaty affected the workings of the European Union. It has had significant implications for how it functions through its governance and decision-making provisions and how the Union develops. The Lisbon Treaty was designed to provide a strong foundation for the future of the European Union and had three principal aims: “more efficiency in the decision-making process; more democracy through a greater role for the European Parliament and national parliaments; and increased coherence externally”. Also, most of the countries of the Western Balkans are towards the Union. The third significant problem relates to a kind of fatigue of the European Union since the enlargement of May 1, 2004, when ten new members were admitted as member states, but also since the accession of Bulgaria and Romania on January 1, 2007. For the first time in 20 years, the number of Serbs opposed to joining the European Union outnumbered those who wanted to join. That's according to a newly published study. A poll conducted by Ipsos found that 44% of him opposed membership and 35% were in favor of it. But Vucic said those who believed Serbia deserved to be part of the European Union should continue on the European path. We must fight for a worthy road to Europe.<sup>16</sup>

The most intensive Serbian international diplomatic work after the Milosevic regime was the Hague Tribunal for the Yugoslavian war crimes. The Hague Tribunal played a crucial role in catalyzing the creation of Serbia's war crimes chamber and the position of war crimes prosecutor. Once this happened, the Tribunal Prosecutor seized the opportunity, devoting substantial attention to capacity-building initiatives. As a result, the record of Serbia's war crimes institutions is decidedly mixed, as this chapter elucidates. Nevertheless, Serbia has further prosecuted wartime atrocities than would have been without the Tribunal.<sup>17</sup> In Serbian society, very understandably, the Tribunal is remembered bitterly even today, just 22 years after the war. There were two political options: from one side, it is a patriotic direction against the Tribunal, and the other side shows a populist direction against the Tribunal.

Not long after the reforms, the first democratic Prime Minister, Dr. Zoran Djindjic, was murdered by assassination on March 12, 2003, during a working day in front of the Serbian

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/22/for-first-time-a-majority-of-serbs-are-against-joining-the-eu-poll>

<sup>17</sup> Orentlicher, Diane, 2018, 'War Crimes Prosecutions in Serbia', *Some Kind of Justice: The ICTY's Impact in Bosnia and Serbia* (New York,), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190882273.003.0010>.

Government in Belgrade. It was a tragic moment for Serbian politics, society, and international relations. After many years of sanctions, the western world respected and supported Djindjic's reforms and his work to bring Serbia back to the open world. Not long before his murder, Djindjic started an intense fight against organized crime in Serbia, which cost him his life. His charisma, abilities, and power to change Serbia were recognized in the society as well by European organizations. Serbia's most influential diplomat and politician who connected with western political elites was the only right strategic option at that time. To attract investors, Djindjic had the vision to present to Bill Gates Serbia as a center of information technology for the Balkans.

In the middle of 2003, excluding the external sanctions, the USA had all the conditions to have the highest bilateral diplomatic relations with Serbia, which was very important for Serbia at the time. Ivkovic, vice president of the Democratic Party, who became the Prime Minister, achieved significant foreign policy successes. Coalition DOS was formed on January 10, 2000, with the primary and most dominant political parties, the Democratic Party (DS) of Zoran Djindjic and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) of Vojislav Kostunica. On March 3, 2004, Vojislav Kostunica became Prime Minister until 2008. In 2004, Kostunica visited the Russian Federation, one year after President of Russia Vladimir Putin visited Serbia, the first time a Russian Prime Minister had visited Serbia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Identical diplomatic activities were also noted in relations with the French Republic, with the visit of Jacques Chirac to Belgrade. Then there was a meeting with the Prime Ministers of the Republic of China. Serbia implemented popular international diplomacy, especially with geographically distant countries. Relations also with neighboring countries were in the process of reformulation. The exception was the Republic of Montenegro. Serbia and Montenegro were recognized as separate states. On June 3, 2006, Montenegro declared independence from the UN, and Serbia on June 5, 2006. Montenegro was accepted as an independent state on June 8, 2006. So, from 2006, the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro were sovereign states with borders that we have today, with Kosovo by Resolution 1244 and the autonomous province of Vojvodina.

The President of Serbia from 2004 until 2012 was the new leader of the Democratic Party, Boris Tadic. He had an important role in Serbian diplomacy during this period. The EU road remained

the primary goal, but the Kosovo issue became increasingly problematic. He hoped that no one would offer some trade-off on (Serbia's) future status in the European Union for (recognizing) Kosovo's independence. That would have been a disaster, an indecent proposal, not the European spirit and way of thinking. It is also vital to mention Vuk Jeremic, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs (2007 to 2012). He became President of the United Nations General Assembly from September 2012 to September 2013. His presidency in the UN was the highest diplomatic success for someone from Serbia and an excellent opportunity to return and recover Serbia's international relations worldwide.<sup>18</sup>

In December 2007, the Serbian Parliament adopted the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, and Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia. Attachment 6 of the Resolution first points to the illegal nature of the bombing of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, without a previous decision of the United Nations Security Council.<sup>19</sup> “The Annex XI Comprehensive emphasizes proposal for resolving the status of Kosovo. “Over the past nine years (from 2000 until 2009), it is obvious to see differences between the strategic turns of official Serbia concerning the great powers. Namely, until 2005 it was evident that the most crucial goal of the authorities in Belgrade was consolidation and improving relations with the United States and membership in the European Union and NATO. Our country is now taking so steady a course as to show by what road it will pass to destruction, to wit: by the consolidation of power first, and then corruption, its necessary consequence. However, over the past few years after 2005, there have been strategic turns towards official Moscow due to numerous problems related to resolving the status of Kosovo and new energy investments and projects.”<sup>20</sup>

During the enlargement of the Central European Free Trade Agreement zone (CEFTA arrangement 2006), Serbia also participated in the work of the Process Cooperation in Southeast Europe, the Initiative for Cooperation in Southeast Europe, the Black Sea Economic

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<sup>18</sup> „Rezolucija Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije o zaštiti suvereniteta, teritorijalnog integriteta i ustavnog poretka Republike Srbije“, Narodna skupština Republike Srbije, Beograd, 25. decembar 2007, tačka 6.

<sup>19</sup> „Sveobuhvatni predlog za rešenje statusa Kosova“, Beč, 26. mart 2007, član 14. i Aneks XI – Međunarodno vojno prisustvo.

<sup>20</sup> Intervju ministra spoljnih poslova Republike Srbije Vuka Jeremića – „I Evropa se približava Moskvi“ u nedeljniku NIN (razgovor vodio Gorislav Papić), Beograd, broj 3025, 18. decembar 2008, str. 21–23

Cooperation, the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, the Danube cooperation, the Central European Initiative, the International Commission for the River Basin Sava and the Energy Community of Southeast Europe.<sup>21</sup> From 2001 to 2009, 83 Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army members completed various forms of education and training in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Also, 13 officers, one non-commissioned officer, and four students finished studying and training in the NATO base in Ojai, USA. As time went by, critical cooperation with NATO became important, not just for the army but for the economy of Serbia, and so to the financial help of more than 500 million dollars.<sup>23</sup> A relationship shows that Serbian diplomacy didn't stick to stereotypes about "NATO aggression" and "old" enemies. *"When considering states' position in federal and international relations, the most important thing is that there is a predictability of their actions within the framework of bilateral and multilateral relations at the regional and global levels... Therefore, adopting a foreign policy strategy is essential for defining the goals and tasks of state activities at the external level. The proclaimed foreign policy strategy must be long-term or at least timed by the country's entry into the broader integrations required to coordinate the foreign policy course. In that sense, Serbia must have its own at this moment. Serbia is key for stability and peace in the region, as well as the engine of European integration of all six Western Balkans countries. It defines its foreign policy strategy regarding membership in the European Union. After integration into the organization, its activities should be "limited" by instruments and framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Defense and security policy."*<sup>24</sup>

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia the Government and the President of the Republic are responsible for formulating foreign policy. Within the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with other state bodies, formulates and implements foreign policy. However, in a broader external context, the country's politics are currently managed by two different ministries: the Kosovo and Metohija Ministry and the

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<sup>21</sup> "Information on Regional Initiatives", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Serbia, Directorate for Regional Initiatives, Belgrade, September 2007

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of defence, 2010, White Paper on Defence of the Republic of Serbia.

<sup>23</sup> RPT-With Russia as an ally, Serbia edges towards NATO | Reuters

<sup>24</sup><https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/2022-serbia-strengthening-of-foreign-policy-and-affirmation-of-international-status/5065>



Diaspora Ministry.<sup>25</sup> International cultural happenings, historical memories, non-government organizations, science projects, municipality relations, and city partnerships play also a significant role in foreign policy. The essential diplomatic reference is the economy; if profitable deals, trades, or investments exist, diplomacy is more critical.<sup>26</sup> *“Bilateral visits to the United States, China, the Russian Federation, intensive diplomatic activities at the United Nations... an endless list of foreign policy activity is overshadowed by Kosovo and Metohija talks. Unfortunately, without success. The overall normative framework for determining and implementing foreign policy became ineffective before the Assembly of Provisional institutions of Self-Government in Pristina announced a unilateral proclamation of independence. It introduced this event, essentially directing Serbia's foreign policy activities into a new era.”*<sup>27</sup> At a session of the Committee for Foreign Affairs held in April 2011, Minister Jeremic underlined as priorities the European integration process, the defense of sovereignty and integrity of the country by diplomatic means, regional cooperation and economic diplomacy, as well as stating that the country's foreign policy rests on four pillars – the EU, the US, China, and Russia. Stating that China is the future economic giant, which had become evident during the global economic crisis, the President listed that country as one of the four pillars. It was underlined, however, that EU membership is an unchangeable goal. The EU, US, China and Russia, as foreign policy priorities or pillars, cannot be considered as equal, primarily because of the basis on which relations with these entities/countries rest. Relations with the EU are not bilateral; they imply the process of Serbia's integration into the EU through structural reforms based on the values the EU is founded upon. The goal of this relation, therefore, is a specific “Europeanization” of Serbia, i.e. its essential transformation into a country capable of assuming all rights and obligations stemming from EU membership. Bilateral relations, such as Serbia has with the US, China, and Russia, imply equal connections between two subjects of the same rank. Europeanization is a profound issue that impact both domestic and foreign policies of the member states, quasi-member states, candidate states, neighbour states and other states of the

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Dragan ĐUKANOVIĆ Ivona LAĐEVAC, PRIORITIES OF FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, June 2009, Conclusion, page 360

<sup>26</sup> Filip Ejdus, Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession, 2020, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>27</sup> Dr. Dragan ĐUKANOVIĆ Ivona LAĐEVAC, PRIORITIES OF FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, June 2009, Conclusion, page 359

world. There are two important logics in the realm of the Europeanization process, namely the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness. According to the logic of consequences, Europeanization process proceeds through the manipulation of incentives and changes, of cost-benefit calculations in the third countries. In other words, there is interest calculation and consideration whether the cost of non-executing of the EU rules and norms outweighs the execution of them or not. The theories of realism, neorealism or neoliberalism in the international relations literature may be assessed as the product of the logic of consequences. On the other hand, the logic of appropriateness assumes that Europeanization is an effect of the perceived authority and legitimacy of the EU, its model of governance, or its norms and rule. In the case of logic of appropriateness, the normative and moral consideration and intersubjective understandings is more important than the material benefits which reflects the results of the cost-benefit calculations. The testing of Europeanization thesis in the case of Kosovo offers much added value to this debate. What are the limits, for example, of the EU's ability to inspire, orchestrate and 'police' Europeanization in post-conflict societies under conditions of weak statehood and incomplete sovereignty? How does conditionality – the cornerstone of the EU's enlargement strategy – work in societies where the discourse on 'Europe' does not have unconditionally positive connotations and where the process of state-building is shared with other international actors?<sup>28</sup> The new Serbian government had faced a serious problem after the overturning of the Milosevic in October 2000. There are two important points in the Serbian politics, first the reluctance of the president Kostunica to extradite Milosevic, culminated in suspension of the all the financial aids of the EU and USA, for the reconstruction of the Serbia, and on the other hand, this disagreement between the Djindjic and Kostunica created a domestic political conflict. It is important to emphasize that both Kostunica and Djindjic rejected the investigation on war crimes, as indicated above Djindjic was in favor of putting Milosevic on trial on issues concerning abuses of power and he also advocated a domestic trial rather than the ICTY.<sup>29</sup> Serbian elites displayed strong ideological reluctance to Europeanize, because these elites

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<sup>28</sup> Papadimitriou, D., D., U., Petrov, P., & Greicevci, L. (2007). To Build a State: Europeanization, EU Actorness and state building in Kosovo. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 12(2). <http://www.kluwerlawonline.com/toc.php?area=Journals&mode=bypub&level=6&values=Journals%7E%7EEuropean+Foreign+Affairs+Review%7EVolume+12+%282007%29%7E>

<sup>29</sup> Caner Övsan ÇAKAŞ, 2019, THE CONCEPT OF EUROPEANIZATION AND BALKAN COUNTRIES: SERBIA, BULGARIA AND ROMANIA EXAMPLES, *The Journal of Social Sciences Academmm* 2(1), 22-45.

and most of the Serbian public had believed a narrative that Europe had a significant role in the Yugoslav breakup and wars that ensued, in the other words, there was a great suspicion in the minds of Serbians in the field of reliability of the European Union, they considered that the EU sacrificed the Yugoslavia for its interests by supporting the independence of the former Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and the most dramatically and recently Kosovo and Montenegro.<sup>30</sup> The other obstacle of Europeanization in Serbia was the presence of the old Milosevic regime's members with the military, police, secret service and public service. If one takes into consideration the structure of elite groups and the balance of power among them, it is obvious that the political circumstances in Serbia was not eligible for effective Europeanization”<sup>31</sup>.

The following foreign policy period from 2008 to 2012 was necessary to respond promptly to the challenge identified at the First Ambassadors' Conference. Kosovo and Serbia still have many conflicts. For Pristina, the negotiation aimed at winning Serb endorsement of the Ahtisaari plan – the framework devised originally by Martti Ahtisaari, the former UN special envoy – that set in place the Kosovo's internal structure and statehood. For Belgrade, the talks concerned revising or modifying agreements that it considered flawed or unacceptable, like the Ahtisaari plan. The gulf between the two expanded during years of little immediate contact and fractious domestic politics.<sup>32</sup> Then started the recent period in the struggle for territorial integrity strongly dependent on Euro-Atlantic integration. The marathon started, and diplomacy began for the southern Serbian province, Kosovo, and Metohija. On February 21, 2008, following Kosovo's declaration of independence, Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica made an emotional speech in Belgrade, which included the following: *“Dear citizens of Serbia, Serbia! What is Kosovo? Where is Kosovo? Whose Kosovo? Is there anyone among us who is not from Kosovo? Is there anyone among us who thinks Kosovo does not belong to us? Kosovo belongs to the Serbian people. That is how it has been forever. That is how it is going to be forever. There is no force, threat, or punishment big and hideous enough for any Serb, at any time to say anything different, but Kosovo is Serbia! Never will anyone hear from us that the Patriarchate of Pec does not belong*

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<sup>30</sup> Elmira Babamusta, Political Trust in Kosovo: Exploring Cultural and Institutional Dynamics, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.isac-fund.org/download/From\\_four\\_pillars\\_of\\_foreign\\_policy\\_to\\_european\\_integration.pdf](https://www.isac-fund.org/download/From_four_pillars_of_foreign_policy_to_european_integration.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> „Тадић: Не одустајемо ни од Косова, ни од ЕУ“, Бета, 26/07/2010, доступно на: [http://www.mfa.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b270710\\_s.html](http://www.mfa.rs/Srpski/Bilteni/Srpski/b270710_s.html)

*to us, that Visoki Decani and Gracanica are not ours! The place where we were born is not ours, our state, our church, and everything that makes us what we are today! If we as Serbs renounce Serbian hood, our origin, our Kosovo, our ancestors, and our history-then, who are we Serbs? What is our name then?"*<sup>33</sup> Then, on February 25, 2008, Kostunica demanded that the United States rescind its recognition of Kosovo," warning that there would be no stability until the take state."<sup>34</sup> is annulled.

President Boris Tadic, with his new mandate, kept the EU perspective but also signed strategic partnerships with Italy, France, and China. Diplomatic relations with the USA, as the only superpower, were frozen. It was straightforward to understand that the USA supported Kosovo's independence, next to some of the most powerful EU countries. At the same time, Russian influence and investments were rising in Serbia and the highest foreign diplomatic relations, which were, until this period, more connected to traditional and historic ties as the same ex-socialist and Orthodox countries. Serbia found its foreign policy between the EU perspective and defending its sovereign territorial integrity. The Serbian government continued its goal of joining the EU even after the unilateral independence of Kosovo, which was understandable, having in mind no better perspective at this time. Leaving the EU perspective would have meant isolation in the most critical EU market. During the 2008-2012 world economic crisis, the Kosovo issue created additional problems for Serbia's foreign policy. President Boris Tadic and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Vuk Jeremic, had to make many complex foreign policy decisions. Jeremic was 32 years old during his minister mandate, and many of them were surprised at how he would deal with complex diplomatic cases, such as The Hague cooperation, then Kosovo independence, and all this during a global economic crisis. Since 2004, Jeremic has led the foreign policy team of the President of Serbia. *"Following Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, Jeremic began campaigning against... (Kosovo's) integration into the international community. In his five years in office, Jeremic boarded 1,000 flights and*

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<sup>33</sup> „The Promise is Given, Kosovo is Serbia as Long as We Live” Tanjug via *Serbian Orthodox Church*. 21 February 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Kirka, Danica (26 February 2008). *Putin's Likely Successor, Pledging Support for Serbia, Signs Pipeline Deal*". *The Washington Post*. Associated Press. p. A11

visited over 100 countries, remarking that he knew 90% of the world's foreign ministers.”<sup>35</sup> His statement about Kosovo was that Serbia would not use military force to retake Kosovo but would resort to dialogue and diplomacy to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also argued that Kosovo has every right to wide-ranging autonomy but that the Serbian government would never accept full-fledged independence, which is still the case today. In December 2009, the European Union lifted visa restrictions on Serbia due to EU reforms. Vuk Jeremic became the first Serbian citizen to enter the EU without a visa when he crossed the Hungarian border on December 19, 2009. As we have mentioned, the extradition of ex-Yugoslav generals from the war during the 1990s became a primary condition of the EU. During Jeremic's mandate, the most wanted, General Ratko Mladic, was arrested and extradited to The Hague Tribunal. In the media, these were significant steps forward for the EU, but from the patriotic political front of Serbia, cooperation with Hague was considered a “betrayal.” Serbia officially received candidate status from The European Union on March 1, 2012.

In the spring of 2012, new elections were getting ready. In Belgrade, massive protests took place against the government and the Democratic Party, with the priority focusing on Serbia's foreign relations instead of on internal problems and the election campaign.

### **2.3 Under the Serbian Progressive Party (2012-2021)**

The most significant political change in the Serbian political scene happened on May 6, 2012, in the parliamentary elections. After 12 years, the Democratic Party lost its position. They offered a pro-European program, with traditionally good relations with Russia and the direction of modern right” politics: Progress is impossible without change and those who cannot change their minds, cannot change anything.<sup>36</sup> *“First... in the parliamentary elections, the percentage of votes who exercised their right to vote was -3,912,904, 50,36% of the total number enrolled (7,770,013). Compared to the previous parliamentary elections (2008), the turnout of citizens was lower by about 9%. By the way, in the period after October 5, 2000, when... democracy was achieved in Serbia, it was reversal - the percentage of participation in the republican parliamentary*

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<sup>35</sup> *“Vuk jeremic is standing for the presidency of the UN General Assembly”* The Economist. 7 June 2012. Retrieved 28 April 2016.

<sup>36</sup> George Bernard Shaw

elections was moving like this: 2000-57,73%; 2003-58,75%; 2007-60,62% and 2008-58,69%.<sup>37</sup> Explaining this phenomenon, citizens got tired of politics and the transition period until 2012. “The 'Coalition for Serbia' won a relatively large number of votes in the May elections, headed by Tomislav Nikolic, President of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), with 24,01%. It was followed by the Coalition 'Choice for a Better life' (Boris Tadic) with 22,07%, the Coalition of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), United Pensioners Party (PUPS), and United Serbia (JS) with 14,54%, the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)- Vojislav Kostunica (acting independently) with 7%, Coalition “Preokret” (Cedomir Jovanovic) with 6,67% and Coalition United Regions of Serbia (URS, from their leader Mladjan Dinkic) with 5,51%.<sup>38</sup>

A coalition of two main political parties, SNS and SPS, formed the government, and after 12 years of leading, the Democratic Party became the opposition. SNS was founded in 2008 as a split from the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS, their leader Vojislav Seselj). “The culmination of a decade-long conflict within the SRS between the party's moderate and hardline wings, the SNS has European direction and neoliberal policies.”<sup>39</sup> The Presidential Election went into the second round on May 20, 2012, and surprisingly, Tomislav Nikolic won with 50,21% of the votes, while Boris Tadic won 47,15%. Voter turnout was drastically lower (46,25%) than in the second round of the 2008 presidential election (68,14%). With Tomislav Nikolic as the new President of the Republic of Serbia, a coalition government was established with SNS and SPS as the main parties. Ivica Dacic, leader of SPS, became the Prime Minister, while Aleksandar Vucic became Deputy Prime Minister. Minister of Foreign Affairs became Ivan Mrkic, a non-political personality with extensive experience in many diplomatic missions. The oath taken by the Prime Minister Ivica Dacic and the Ministers was. “*I swear allegiance to the Republic of Serbia. I undertake to respect Constitution and the law, to perform the duty of a member of the Government conscientiously, responsibly, and devotedly, and to be committed to preserving Kosovo and Metohija within the Republic of Serbia*”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Opšti izbori u Srbiji 2012, korak napred ili status qua ante? Prof. dr Vladimir Goati Institut za društvene nauke, Beograd, page 74

<sup>38</sup> Opšti izbori u Srbiji 2012, korak napred ili status qua ante? Prof. dr Vladimir Goati Institut za društvene nauke, Beograd, page 74 and 75.

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, 2005, Zoran Đinđić: za demokratsku Srbiju u Evropi, Jena : Glaux, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> [РТС: Србија добила Владу \(xn--p1acc.xn--90a3ac\)](#)

Global trends and political changes were also noticed in the 2012 elections, especially in the rise of populism.<sup>41</sup> Populism is one of the manifestations of Serb nationalism that persists as the only ideology, now in the hands of Aleksandar Vučić. He is a populist politician. When the immense power of decision is in the hands of one person (leader), foreign policy decision significantly depend upon personal affinity.<sup>42</sup> The testimony of the first Minister of Foreign Affairs after the election change confirmed that Serbia continuing its balancing act in its foreign policy: *“The priorities of Serbian diplomacy in 2013 were the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, approaching the EU and developing relations with Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and other international partners.”*<sup>43</sup> In the speech of Prime Minister Ivica Dacic, there were continuing reforms with the EU, the question of solving Kosovo's future, and regional cooperation. Also, it focused on internal economic and fiscal reforms and stability of finance which was nondurable. We could notice demographic problems in the speech: EU, Russia, China, and the USA. After 13 months, the Prime Minister started negotiations for an EU membership, and dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina transferred from a technical to a political level.<sup>44</sup>

SNS won the next election in 2014 with 48,3%, then SPS with 13,5%, Democratic Party (DS) Dragan Djilas with 6,04%, and Social Democratic Party (SDP) Boris Tadic with his coalition 5,71%. Finally, “Aleksandar Vucic, as the new President of the most powerful party, SNS, became the Prime Minister and built a coalition with SPS. In the discourse, Vucic said that the new government would focus on *“telling the truth about the Kosovo problems and the EU integration”* and that “the truth” would finally be the priority of the new government. Telling the truth would produce a true partnership between Serbia and the citizens that would help them understand the country's actual situation. It concludes that “an honest and genuine partnership keeps its colors the same. Natural gold never rusts. If a partnership is excellent and golden, it will be unbreakable. Not even time can destroy its shine.”<sup>45</sup> He mentioned that the country has

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<sup>41</sup> John Updike (2013). “Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism“, p.77, Random House

<sup>42</sup> Institucionalizacija partijskog sistema i konsolidacija demokratije Prof. dr Slaviša Orlović Univerzitet u Beogradu, Fakultet političkih nauka, page 89

<sup>43</sup> Приоритети спољне политике остају непромењени“, Влада Републике Србије, 02/01/2013, доступно на: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/182565/prioriteti-spoljne-politike-ostaju-nepromenjani.php>

<sup>44</sup> „Експозе председника Владе Републике Србије Александра Вучића“, op. cit

<sup>45</sup> Kassem,S. 2011. Rise Up and Salute the Sun: The Writings of Suzy Kassem, Awakened Press.

regained its international credibility and is trusted abroad. In addition to normalizing relations with Pristina, the beginning of EU membership negotiations has improved relations in the region and reinforced the assumption that will be done as promised.<sup>46</sup>

Not long after this speech, Aleksandar Vucic 2016 showed the most complete and very long speech in which external policy took a more critical place than previously. Serbia had to stay on the EU path to build stronger relations with strategic partners like Russia, China, the USA, and main EU partners Germany, Italy, and France. In March 2012 Serbia was granted EU candidate status. The EU perspective and closing the chapters looked more realistic than previously, hoping they could be closed by 2018. He talked about actual problems, challenges, and chances to improve Serbia. This time, the Kosovo problem was fundamental: *“Resolutions of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on basic principles advocates for political talks with the interim institutions of self-government in Kosovo and Metohija, which alludes to achieving a mutually acceptable solution for Kosovo and Metohija. It affected accelerated integration of the entire Western Balkans region into the European Union”*.<sup>47</sup> By December 2021, 22 out of 35 chapters had been opened (including all chapters under cluster 1 on the fundamentals of the process and cluster 4 on Green agenda).<sup>48</sup>

The most important international actors, from the UN Security Council, OSCE members, to the EU, Russia, Ukraine and other countries, were very positive about the performance of the Serbian chairmanship in the OSCE in 2015.”<sup>49</sup> We also have to notice the excellent performance of ex-Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremic and President of the UN from 2012 until 2013. He pointed out an actual situation with Serbia and Kosovo and presented Serbia as an open country. An interesting case with his candidacy for the UN presidency was that the new

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<sup>46</sup> Иван Р. Димитријевић, Милан Липовац, „Национални интереси Републике Србије: анализа експозеа мандатара владе од 2007. до 2017. године“, ор. cit., стр. 86.

<sup>47</sup> „Резолуција Народне скупштине Републике Србије о основним принципима за политичке разговоре са привременим институцијама самоуправе на Косову и Метохији“ Службени гласник Републике Србије 04/2013, доступно на:  
[https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/rezolucija\\_narodne\\_skupstine\\_republike\\_srbije\\_o\\_osnovnim\\_principima.html](https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/rezolucija_narodne_skupstine_republike_srbije_o_osnovnim_principima.html),  
приступљено: 29/10/2020

<sup>48</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/serbia_en)

<sup>49</sup> „Дачић: Међународни положај Србије знатно побољшан“, Влада Републике Србије, 29/12/2015, доступно  
на: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/255577/medjunarodni-polozaj-srbije-znatno-poboljsan.php>, приступљено:  
31/10/2020.



government supported him even though he became the opposition, and Serbia showed unity and dedication to work for the international interest of Serbia.

After 2012, China's influence rose across Serbian society. Polls show all age groups, urban and rural and regardless of gender, hold a positive view of the country. That is largely thanks to the political relationship between China and Serbia, which has helped make China Serbia's largest trading partner.<sup>50</sup> Also, we can notice that China has not recognized Kosovo as an independent state and has kept a veto in the UN, like Russia. Bilateral diplomatic relations reached the highest level between Belgrade and Beijing, with the latter supporting Serbia in international diplomacy and its economic development. *“First, it is about the role of Serbia in the economic and diplomatic initiative under China under the auspices of the Belt and Road, in the format of Process 17+1 as part of regional China's accession to Central and Eastern Europe. It should remember that Serbia was also a country that signed a strategic partnership with China in 2009. Therefore, it does not surprise the Republic's position on the Serbian aspiration to become a reliable partner of China in Europe. Mutual visits at the highest level from 2013 to the end of the observed period strengthened the signed partnership. Joint statements such as those from 2013 between the two presidents launched numerous infrastructural projects that sought to materialize the established legal framework of cooperation.”*<sup>51</sup>

China became Serbia's most important trade partner in Asia. In January-October 2021, the trade volume amounted to 3.59 billion euros, of which exports from the Republic of Serbia amounted to 653.63 million euros and imports from China 2.937 billion euros. The President of China, Xi Jinping, visited Serbia from June 17 to 19, 2016. It was the first visit of the Chinese President to Serbia after 30 years when the Chinese Government signed the Joint Statement of the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China. It was essential for improving relations with China to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership.

Historically, culturally and religiously close to the Slavic Orthodox states of the Balkans Peninsula, Russia has a close relationship with Serbia. During the wars in former Yugoslavia in

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<sup>50</sup> <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-serbia/>

<sup>51</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 206

the 1990s, Russian governments and political forces recalled this geopolitical solidarity, their support for Belgrade eventually provoking a serious crisis in their relations with the West during the Kosovo war. When Kosovo declared its independence in 2008, Russia refused to recognize the sovereignty of this former province of Serbia. It remains in this position. In 2013, Moscow and Belgrade signed a “strategic partnership” that includes military cooperation and intelligence sharing.<sup>52</sup> *“In April 2013, Serbia gained observer status in the Parliamentary to the Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while in the same period (2014), it approved the opening of the Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Center in Nis. Furthermore, it intensified the number of joint military exercises with the armed forces of the Russian Federation. In circumstances of proclaimed military neutrality (2007) and strategic partnership with Russia (2013), foreign policy diversification has seemingly overcome the strict stance of the past-proclaimed principles. It was especially evident during the return visits of government officials, who were in our time-limited research subject most often from 2012 to 2018. Eventually, selected visits of the President of the Russian Federation in the 21st century only nourished the dispersive foreign politics increasingly relying on 'traditional friendship with the Russian Federation.’”*<sup>53</sup> Strategic energy investment in the petrol industry in Serbia with the Russian Gazprom company has also been significant. Russian gas transport route via Turkey to Serbia was one of the diplomatic but also friendly deals. Also, we should mention the export of the Serbian car, Fiat 500L, to the Russian market without customs and tax payment. Predictions are that in 2023, this South Stream will be ready for work. Russian military aid in weapons is intensive too. The Serbian Army received the most significant donations from the Russian Federation, six MiG-29 planes, thirty T-72MS tanks, and twenty BRDM-2MS armored reconnaissance vehicles, as the Serbian ambassador in Moscow, Miroslav Lazanski, pointed out.

Serbia has been wandering about in terms of both foreign policy and security for over 30 years now.<sup>54</sup> Officials say Serbia supports Ukraine's territorial sovereignty and integrity, but it only

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<sup>52</sup> <https://en.desk-russie.eu/2022/07/16/the-serbia-russia-alliance.html>

<sup>53</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 207

<sup>54</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 215

joined in on the condemnation of Russia at multilateral forums. Ultimately, if a foreign policy shift does come after the elections, the question is what its effects on democracy and media freedom in Serbia would be. It is normal to implement three concepts democracy, sovereignty and security which have been strongly interrelated in a European context for centuries. Unfortunately, role of different persons, bodies and entities leads to undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and for benefitting from Russian decision-makers responsible for the annexation of Crimea or the destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> The most marked characteristic of Serbia's past decade's foreign policy posture has been its tightrope walk between Brussels and Moscow. Throughout the 1990s, the United States and its European allies instituted a robust sanctions regime against Serbia, ranging from travel bans to crippling economic, financial, and trade sanctions. These propelled the country into economic free fall and black fall marketeering. With few exceptions, Russia, in its attempts to stay an active player in European affairs, actively criticized sanctions against its embattled Slavic brother at the United Nations and other international bodies. Moreover, Moscow vehemently opposed NATO's intervention in Kosovo as a dangerous precedent for violating state sovereignty based on humanitarian concerns. Russia's diplomatic support later expanded greater business access to the Serbian market. Russian petroleum interests in Serbia are highly significant, outweighing its closest competitors. In 2008, Russian Gazprom became a majority owner of Serbia's national petroleum company, NIS, giving Russian natural gas and petroleum interests a strong foothold in the highly energy-dependent Balkan market. Aside from Gazprom's expanding commercial network in Bosnia, Romania, and Bulgaria, Serbia will become the leading arm of the South Stream pipeline project. In the face of growing instability in Ukraine, which has been the traditional route of Russian gas and oil transport to Europe, South Stream envisions shifting Russian natural gas supply lines through the Black Sea. Furthermore, it takes Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary into the lucrative Western European markets. Austria, Italy, and Germany top the list of energy-hungry buyers in the EU, all of which have adopted less fiery language on Russia's recent behavior. A parallel development emerged as Russian diplomatic and business interests solidified in Serbia: the hopes for EU membership. Milošević's dramatic

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/08/25/declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-on-the-alignment-of-certain-countries-concerning-restrictive-measures-in-respect-of-actions-undermining-or-threatening-the-territorial-integrity-sovereignty-and-independence-of-ukra/>

departure in 2000 led to a profound reshuffling in Serbia's party political landscape, which included many stakeholders that embraced an EU perspective. Despite Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, all current prominent political actors, nationalists alike, agree that Serbia's future lies in the Union. In 2010, Brussels ratified Serbia's first step to EU membership, the Stabilization, and Association Process (SAA), culminating in the official start of membership negotiations at the beginning of 2014. Recent elections in March, which brought into power a center-right government under the once-nationalist Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNP), saw a further strengthening in pro-EU campaign rhetoric from all candidates. As the EU and the United States have imposed economic sanctions against Russia, Serbia is placed in an increasingly difficult position. Should Belgrade refuse to support sanctions against Russia and thereby jeopardize accession to the EU? Or should it hitch itself to EU foreign policy as other countries from the region have? At the moment, Vučić, when not quiet on the issue of Russian sanctions, has called for the European Union and the United States to respect its traditional ties with Russia graciously. Russia, for its part, has not indicated to Serbia what penalties it could incur should it defect from Moscow's economic and diplomatic partnership. Belgrade has cited its own experience at the hands of crippling sanctions, which wreaked more havoc in the broader populace than on removing the Milošević regime. It is still very much early days in Serbia's EU accession process, and, as a result, Brussels is less bothered by Serbia's respect for its foreign policy constraints. However, does Serbia as a member of the European Union, necessarily threaten Russian interests? Does Belgrade need to decide one way or the other? Quite the opposite—Russia could gain a key inside player in Brussels, something it does not currently have, except for some nominal support from Cyprus. With Serbia as a diplomatic conduit, Russia could project more influence on European foreign policy. For example, it could have its concerns over the possibility of EU expansion to Ukraine or Georgia articulated by an agent that “speaks the language of Brussels.” Moreover, Serbia could, *and vice versa*, benefit Brussels by having a partner that enjoys privileged access to the Duma. The crisis in Ukraine has exposed the fact that, after twenty years of independence, Kyiv is becoming an increasingly hostile and unstable partner for Russia's petroleum transport interests. Hence, circumnavigating political unrest in Ukraine via the Balkans with a critical route through Serbia not only strengthens Belgrade's geo-strategic position, it deepens the necessity for both to

cooperate. EU membership may be the more considerable tradeoff on the horizon, but it does not have to be.<sup>56</sup>

When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Serbia – already an EU candidate at that point – acted similarly. It refused to recognize Russia's aggression or impose sanctions on the country while explaining that it respected Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity as a friendly country that had not recognized Kosovo's independence. Having signed the historic Brussels Agreement in 2013 on normalizing relations with Kosovo, Serbia has started negotiations with the EU. However, when Russia annexed Crimea and helped the rebel forces in Donbas, Serbia found itself in a political rift with the EU, refusing to comply with restrictive measures and stressing that it would do so when EU accession was imminent. Furthermore, the Ukrainian crisis opened the way for Serbia to be perceived as a country that, although a candidate for membership, does not address the interests of the Union, hence the interpretation that it could potentially be a "Russian Trojan horse" within the EU. These interpretations gained momentum, especially after the Russian aggression on Ukraine. However, the situation is somewhat more complex than it seems at first glance. Serbian-Russian relations are very complex, and so far, they have been dictated by the Kosovo dynamics, matters related to energy, security aspects, and public opinion. Not having a "compromise solution" for Kosovo, which would be acceptable to citizens, with the perspective of EU membership growing ever more remote, primarily due to the low popularity of enlargement in some member states, the government has balanced its policy towards Moscow. Russia has undoubtedly been a great support to Serbia in international bodies in preventing Kosovo's accession to international organizations, as well as in the process of having certain states withdraw their recognition of Kosovo's independence. However, on the other hand, Russia has used the "Kosovo precedent" several times to justify its actions, justifying the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the annexation of Crimea, and the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk. Undoubtedly, Russian support for Serbia is essentially unprincipled and focused on achieving its realpolitik goals in a geopolitical context. Belgrade is well aware of this fact, as evidenced by the substantial distancing from Russia at a time when there was a possibility that Serbia's goal of reaching a "compromise solution" would be achieved with US support under

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<sup>56</sup> <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/06/serbia-russia-and-effects-of-ukraine-crisis/>

Donald Trump. Namely, Serbia signed the so-called Washington agreement in September 2020 at the White House, which was reached without the involvement of Moscow, and which even compromised the relations between Serbia and China. Therefore, there are potential opportunities for weakening ties with Moscow if a "compromise solution for Kosovo" is reached. It is also suggested by the pro-government tabloids and television campaign in which they accused the "Russian deep state" of organizing civil protests in early July 2020, which erupted due to the ad hoc implementation of measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with Biden's victory, the prospects for reaching such an agreement under the auspices of the United States faded, and Serbia moved closer to Moscow again.<sup>57</sup>

The best example of arbitration and the application of Serbia's foreign policy was during its chairmanship of the OSCE. Serbia's political class has never been known for modesty. Belgrade saw a unique chance to set up a conference celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act to brush up on the country's tarnished foreign policy image. It was hoped that such a conference might enable the presidents of Russia and the US, Vladimir Putin, and Barack Obama, to get closer to a solution to the Ukraine crisis. Those hopes were linked to the particulars of Serbia's current situation. On one side, Belgrade is an EU accession candidate and officially champions a clear pro-European political course. Then again, the leaders of the Balkan country have endeavored to strengthen their traditionally close ties to Russia - the reason Belgrade chose not to support the EU's sanctions against Russia. This dual position could be Serbia's asset in the Ukraine crisis. "*Having good relations with everybody helps - Belgrade [is able] to play the role of an honest mediator*".<sup>58</sup> Serbia has had the status of an impartial arbitrator, which proved good. In it, we may find another chance to promote Serbia as a stable country with a standard foreign policy. Serbia has been exempted in the region as a militarily neutral country. Its nonaligned foreign policy is specific compared to other countries.<sup>59</sup>

In order to survive and adjust to international circumstances, small states must lead their foreign policy prudently and wisely and establish partnerships with other powers. Because of their importance in world politics, but also due to their importance for Serbia's interests, such as

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<sup>57</sup> <https://rs.boell.org/en/2022/03/25/serbias-position-context-war-ukraine-reasons-and-perspectives>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/serbia-a-new-mediator-in-the-ukraine-conflict/a-18165680>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.arbitrationassociation.org/en/arbitration-in-serbia/>

preserving Kosovo, and Serbia's aim to become part of the developed West by joining the EU, the following four powers – the EU, the US, Russia, and China have been proclaimed the four pillars in Serbia's foreign policy. Serbia has oriented towards the EU and set EU integration as its official foreign policy goal. However, the lack of the EU's interest in the region and reduced interest in enlargement due to its internal problems allowed Russia and China to make inroads into the region, pursuing their interests. For the time being, Serbia's political elite has calculated that, in the absence of a clear EU membership perspective, balancing between these four actors is the most beneficial to Serbia. Besides the Kosovo question, and to show to the EU that it is not the only significant actor in Serbia, balancing has been led by Serbia also because of gains in its economy and domestic politics. However, the question is when Serbia will be able to lead this policy and how much it benefits Serbia's interests.<sup>60</sup> The aim is to promote Serbia as a neutral, peaceful, small but stable Balkans state, which protects its national interests and builds good diplomatic and economic relations with all global powers. *“The military neutrality of Serbia was proclaimed, except in the political discourse in Resolutions of the National Assembly the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and of the Constitutional Order of the Republic of Serbia, on December 26, 2007. Until this day, they maintained the belief that it was a consequence of historical circumstances and the political attitude of Serbia. Thus it has better international relations prospects for realizing its national interest.”*<sup>61</sup> Neutrality means that Serbia does not take part in armed conflict. However, that does not prevent Serbia from carrying out humanitarian work in war and conflict situations. Military forms of cooperation were established with NATO and the CSTO after the proclamation of military neutrality.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, “Serbia has been a participant in the Partnership for Peace program for fourteen years, it has a status CSTO observer, active Humanitarian Center of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia federation in Nis. “It provokes conflicting reactions from the NATO

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<sup>60</sup> Kapetanovic, Aleksandra, The principle of four pillars in Serbia's foreign policy. analyzing Serbia's balancing act - to what extent is it feasible?, 2020, <http://dspace.lib.uom.gr/handle/2159/25255>

<sup>61</sup> „Србија је једина војно неутрална земља на Балкану“, Политика, 19/10/2019, доступно на: <http://www.politika.co.rs/scc/clanak/439951/Srbija-je-jedina-vojno-neutralna-zemlja-na-Balkanu>, приступљено: 29/08/2020, О досадашњој хронологији односа Србије и НАТО видети детаљно у: Игор Новаковић, Марко Савковић, „Србија и НАТО Партнерство за мир“, *op. cit.*, стр. 60-74

<sup>62</sup> The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)<sup>[3]</sup> is an intergovernmental military alliance in Eurasia consisting of six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan.

community, diplomatic representation and communication with NATO in Brussels and Belgrade, and dozens of military exercises conducted with NATO and Russian armed forces.”<sup>63</sup> In line with that, “the general perception of Serbia's military activities is in favor with NATO partners, as in 2019... 13 joint exercises took place with NATO and only 4 with Russia.”<sup>64</sup> If we wonder how Serbia will join the EU without NATO membership, we should answer that Serbia will accept the security and defense obligations arising from the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>65</sup> Then the question for Serbia will be, what should be left of its proclaimed military neutrality? Some countries today with military neutrality inside the European Union, such as Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta, and Sweden, so why not Serbia?

“Military neutrality led to interpret neutrality as a political move that fulfilled its purpose of a revanchist move for Kosovo's independence and the security of Russia's continued support for any further NATO enlargement.<sup>66</sup> Serbia tries to find a balance and red line between the EU enlargement, USA diplomacy, Russian energy and military support, and China's investments. Until now, Serbian foreign diplomacy is looking risky but is giving good results. *“Paradoxically, relationships with great powers determine the course of Serbian foreign policy. Serbia-Russia and Serbia-USA led a kind of struggle across mediators, whether they were contained in the attempts to resolve the issue of Kosovo and Metohija. It was all about the potential membership of Serbia in NATO.”*<sup>67</sup> Believing that Serbia was ineffective, it strategically managed some of its relations with the great powers already. Even occasionally applied strategies resulted of circumstances, adjustments, and attempts to get out of an unenviable and complicated position.

As a candidate country for the European Union, Serbia has a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU and trade agreements with Russia, China, Turkey, and other countries.

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<sup>63</sup> „Српска војна сарадња у 2019: 13 вежби са НАТО и 4 са Русијом“, <https://www.balkansec.net/post/sa-kim-je-srbija-vojno-saradivala-u2019-13-vezbi-sa-nato-i-cetiri-sa-rusijom>, приступљено: 22/09/2020

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.arbitrationassociation.org/en/arbitration-in-serbia/>

<sup>65</sup> The Treaty of Lisbon is an international agreement that amends the two treaties which form the constitutional basis of the European Union (EU). The Treaty of Lisbon expresses the three fundamental principles of democratic equality, representative democracy and participatory democracy.

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.isac-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/From\\_four\\_pillars\\_of\\_foreign\\_policy\\_to\\_european\\_integration.pdf](https://www.isac-fund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/From_four_pillars_of_foreign_policy_to_european_integration.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 217



Serbian diplomacy with Aleksandar Vucic is going well, and one of the leading indicators is the number of foreign direct investments in the Serbian economy. Another important factor why Serbia is attractive is cheap working power compared to the European Union standards and a large number of educated and trained labor force workers. "After the session of the Social and Economic Council (SES), the Minister of Finance in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Sinisa Mali, said that the minimum labor price in 2022 will be 35,012 dinars (300euros). It was an increase of 9,5 percent, with an increase in non-taxable income from 18,300 to 19,300 dinars (165euros). Also, with the reduction of the contribution at the expense of the employers for the PIO fund of 0,5 percent."<sup>68</sup> He noted that the Serbian economy is growing despite the pandemic and the most significant economic crisis ever. In the first half of this year, the growth rate of our GDP is 7.6 percent.<sup>69</sup> We expect results for the third and fourth quarters, but we can already say that the growth at the end of the year will be at least 6.5 percent. With the reduction of our GDP due to the coronavirus pandemic last year from minus one percent, with the results this year, we will end up as one of the three best countries in Europe. He said it confirms the responsible economic policy pursued by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Mali also explained that Serbia had 2.1 billion euros in foreign direct investments in the first seven months. This influx is not declining despite the coronavirus pandemic; we also have confirmation that our employment is growing.

On the other hand, Serbia has maintained macroeconomic stability, as the share of public debt in GDP is currently 55.5 percent, which is far from the level prescribed by Maastricht. The average salary (gross) calculated for December 2021 was 102,196 dinars (875 euros), while the average wage without taxes and contributions (net) was 74,629 dinars (640 euros), by the Republic Bureau of Statistics of Serbia. Back on the direct foreign investments closely connected and a result of Serbian foreign policy, a major reason why Serbia is so attractive to foreigners as a Western Balkans country is its low labor wages. "From 2011 to 2020, FDI inflows to Serbia cumulatively amounted to 24.7 billion euros in the last ten years. It was the largest investment from the Netherlands (4.2 billion euros), Austria (2.6 billion euros), The Russian Federation (2.2

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<sup>68</sup><https://mfin.gov.rs/sr/aktivnosti-1/mali-u-2022-godini-veca-minimalna-zarada-za-94-odsto-i-dodatno-rasterecenjeposlodavaca-1>

<sup>69</sup><https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/>

billion euros), China, Hong Kong, Taiwan (2.1 billion euros), and Luxembourg (1.9 billion euros). After a record inflow of FDI to Serbia in 2019 of 3.8 billion euros (8.3% of gross domestic product), a significant inflow of FDI to Serbia continued throughout 2020, with a constant increase in interest of foreign investors, in investments, in export-oriented companies of Serbia, even during the pandemic, the result primarily achieved and preserved full macroeconomic, financial and fiscal stability. According to the balance of payments for 2020, FDI inflows to Serbia amounted to 3,014.2 million euros, which was more than enough to cover the current account deficit (146,5%). Most FDI to Serbia in 2020 came from the Netherlands (705.5 million euros), Slovenia (483.3 million euros, from buying a Commercial Bank mostly), China, including Hong Kong (478.9 million euros), Germany (331.9 million euros), Austria (153.4 million euros) and the United Kingdom (106.4 million euros)."<sup>70</sup> Serbia is the leader in the Western Balkans region concerning foreign direct investments (with about 70% of total assets in the area). Results stem from foreign policy, suitable inside economic fiscal and political reforms, a good business environment, and a stable political situation in which potential investors believe. Aleksandar Vucic, in his mandate, had plenty of big infrastructure projects in the energy, highways, railway, and banking sector, which also brought FDI and good diplomatic relations with China, Russia, the EU, and the USA. Serbian authorities are very proud that since 2014, 320 km of highways have been built. Most finance credits and construction companies are from China, Russia, the EU, the USA, Turkey, and Azerbaijan. Fast railway Belgrade-Budapest is under construction by Chinese companies, connecting two of the biggest and most important cities, Belgrade and Novi Sad, by fast train, which will reach this destination of 75km in just 30min with a max speed of 200km/h. This project was born by China's initiative One Road One Belt, which has to connect Piraeus Harbor in Athens with Belgrade and Budapest by fast railway. President Vucic said he remembers trains in Serbia with a maximum speed of 26km/h. Now we have a train with a 200km/h symbol of the new Serbia. He also announced a fast march towards Nis, Dimitrovgrad (Sofia), Pristina (Kosovo), and the reconstruction of the traditional railway Belgrade-Bar (Montenegro). International diplomacy of Serbia found a challenging position because balancing west, and east is a question of time until when the will is possible, especially

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<sup>70</sup>Official website of National Bank of Serbia, data, <https://www.nbs.rs/sr/scripts/showcontent/index.html?id=16886&konverzija=no>

knowing that the western collective is totally against Russia and Serbia is just between them. What should be the plan for the international moves of Serbia and how Minister Selakovic did his job during his mandate will be very important for Serbian global status. Nevertheless, if Serbian policy followed Russia, total isolation from the EU and USA would be logical and tragical for the Serbian economy and politics. *According to the Constitution of Serbia, the Government determines and conducts the policy of Serbia, both internal and external. At the same time, the President of the Republic represents Serbia in the country and abroad. Therefore, we currently have a situation where the President, under his constitutional competencies, has a more significant influence on foreign policy than before, which is now being formalized with this law.*<sup>71</sup>

The following text analyzes whether the pandemic showed the success of Serbia's policy of relying on China and Russia, how Aleksandar Vucic distributed vaccines across the region, and what the effect was. It was a chance to do something extraordinary. Serbia received the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on December 22, 2020, followed by the Sputnik V vaccine, then the Sinopharm vaccine on January 16, 2021, and the AstraZeneca vaccine on February 21, 2021. In the early stages, Serbia had all types of vaccines in good quantity, compared with other Western Balkans countries that did not get enough vaccines. It enabled the Serbian President to play an essential role as a leader in the Balkans. Serbia's government decided to send a donation of vaccines to neighboring countries (North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro) and so many in Europe and the world (Czech Republic, Namibia). This gesture was tremendous and eased the tensions in the region. To share our vaccines means it is right. It is good for all of the countries where vaccination becomes possible. And it is good for all of us. This battle against COVID-19 is global. But it is a battle we are fighting together and not against each other.<sup>72</sup> Western Balkans are of geostrategic interest between two powers-The United States and Russia. It is an American sphere of interest, but the Russians want to send a message to America, "we are still here, and we are not giving up. "Vucic uses this situation and tries to play the card of equidistance between the two forces or maybe four. Serbia wants to say that it is a neutral country in the EU but primarily focuses on the best national interest. EU has recognized it, and

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<sup>71</sup> <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-zakon-ministarstvo-spoljnih-poslova/31524407.html>

<sup>72</sup> Emmanuel Macron, President of France

the question is how long we can maintain it. China and Russia decided to help Serbia during the pandemic and enable it to procure many vaccines. Serbian media spectacularly presented China's aid to Serbia and China, which built a stronger relationship between the two nations. Russia, after China, also helped Serbia (with fewer quantities). The reason why Russia supported Serbia was more political and China more for economic reasons. China as a new strategic partner in Serbia, sees a reliable partner in the Balkans, what high diplomacy in recent years of these two countries. In July 2021, Prime Minister of Serbia Ana Brnabic confirmed with China's Sinopharm the production of vaccines in Serbia, and a memorandum was signed. In September, a factory was established in Belgrade, and expectations are that it will start working in 2023. After the first plane for aid from China landed in Belgrade, Sem Fabrizi, EU ambassador, promised Serbia an aid package worth 7.5 million euros. The European Commission approved the amount of 12 million euros, with donations coming from the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF). After this, in June 2021, Serbia borrowed 200 million euros from the European Investment Bank to help small and medium-sized enterprises recover from Covid 19 Pandemic and political restrictions.

The conclusion was that China was at the right time ready to help and get a diplomatic win while the EU had internal challenges during the pandemic crisis. In aid were not just vaccines but also respirators, face masks, and other medical help against the virus. *"Serbia, during that period, expanded its medical program by building new Covid hospitals. Generally, the pandemic did not take many lives. However, it kept the economy very well, showing that Serbia had the best growth rate in the EU during the pandemic. It established the state as a Western Balkans leader with true partners worldwide ready to help in hard times. Remember that many people have died for their beliefs; it is expected. Real courage is in living and suffering for what you believe."*<sup>73</sup> Serbia was also ready to help other states where Serbian people live.<sup>74</sup>

The 21st century is a period of great economic migration in search of a better life. In the 21st century, the heroes will be the people who will improve the quality of life, fight poverty and introduce more sustainability.<sup>75</sup> In this regard, foreign policy will aim to preserve its people worldwide, especially for poor and small countries. One of these countries is Serbia, which has

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<sup>73</sup> Christopher Paolini, USA writer.

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/5eda65dd-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5eda65dd-en>

<sup>75</sup> Bertrand Piccard is a Swiss explorer, psychiatrist and environmentalist.

had extensive migrations in modern history. Already during Yugoslav times, and specifically since 1963, Serbs (as other Yugoslavs) were allowed to freely travel abroad, including migrating from the country. It then continued with NATO aggression on Serbia (1999), but also with a challenging period of transition economy until today. For Serbian diplomacy, keeping the diaspora connected with the home country has to be a key strategy. Cooperation between the Serbian diaspora and the Republic of Serbia is not expressed in its full potential because it is limited to a one-sided financial and cultural concept. For the Serbian diaspora to reach its full potential, it must expand the existing ideas. It is necessary to set the accent on 1. Better and more comprehensive elements of statistical indicators of immigration; 2. A different approach to the economic draft budget of the Republic of Serbia, which would go beyond the current framework, short-term assistance from the diaspora in the form of remittances; 3. The security issue of citizens of the Republic of Serbia is wholly left to the states in which they currently exist, which is insufficient; 4. The cultural component is represented, but unfortunately, through unilateral efforts mainly by the diaspora, while the home country is primarily reserved. The fundamental problem is in the cooperation of these two sides of one state. If this cooperation remains at the level it is at now. "The question is whether the second generation in the diaspora will empathize with the country of their origin."<sup>76</sup>

The last data analysis of "losing" Serbian citizens for economic reasons (employment) is from 2011. "According to the 2011 census, a large number of citizens of the Republic of Serbia sought work in the following countries: Austria (70,488), Germany (55,999), Switzerland (41,008), France (20,231), Sweden (10,231), Benelux (6,231), other EU countries (52,673), USA (13,504), Canada (6,222), Australia (3,760), other non-European countries (5,073), and ex Yugoslav republics (19,624)."<sup>77</sup> In total, 242,283 emigrants left Serbia only in 2011, a number equal to the second biggest city in Serbia, Novi Sad. That fact is tragic for one nation in every aspect, economic, cultural, and political aspect of existence. Yes, this is a huge global problem in poor undeveloped countries such as Serbia. However, the right foreign policy, which is related to new

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<sup>76</sup> P. Ćujić, M. (2021). Serbian Diaspora between Dissolution and Unity . *CULTURE OF POLIS - Journal for Nurturing of Democratic Political Culture*, 18(46), 73–86. Abstract, <https://doi.org/10.51738/Kpolisa2021.18.3r.1.05>

<sup>77</sup> P. Ćujić, M. (2021). Serbian Diaspora between Dissolution and Unity . *CULTURE OF POLIS - Journal for Nurturing of Democratic Political Culture*, 18(46), 76, <https://doi.org/10.51738/Kpolisa2021.18.3r.1.05>

reforms of Serbian diplomatic strategy, focusing on their people abroad and how to back them in the country, should reduce the negative trend of Serbian emigration. "In October 2021, it was noted that the number of Serbs in the diaspora decreased by 92,000 citizens compared to last year. The positive return trend of our people from abroad is evident in the young and highly educated age, whose return was accelerated with good business opportunities in Serbia and the pandemic situation."<sup>78</sup> Aleksandar Jakovljevic from the Circular Migration Program "Point of Return," founded on the eve of the Covid Pandemic 19, told Tanjug that most people return from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and notes the trend of countries such as Australia, Canada, and the USA. The result is an excellent success for Serbian politics and diplomacy, with emigration focus as the primary external problem in mind. The government also created a new social package for pushing up natality, providing financial help for young couples. The intellectual potential of the numerous Serbian diasporas is enormous. The estimated number of the Serbian diaspora is about 3.5 million people. Out of that, about 1.5 million are Serbian citizens, and many people have dual citizenship. Professor Grecic mainly researches the Serbian creative intelligentsia's number, structure, and quality in the diaspora. According to the results of Professor Jovan Filipovic, it includes nearly 7,000 doctors of science. Most of them work and live in the USA (39%), followed by Canada (15%), the United Kingdom (10%), and Germany (7%). Also, the most considerable number work at universities (40%) and business companies (44%). The author investigates the causes and consequences of the "brain drain" during the last three decades, emphasizing that Serbia currently has no power to retain or attract its runaway elite.<sup>79</sup>

Serbian strategic foreign policy is getting membership to the European Union as a European country geographically, historically, and culturally. It is because of the slowdown and challenge of the process itself. Precisely during these periods of stagnation, we can notice the use of a diversification strategy within the broader construction of an intelligent external approach to Serbian policy. On the other side, the EU was implementing a conditionality policy for all Western Balkans countries, but Serbia was leading in this number of conditions.

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<sup>78</sup> Politika journal at 8.2.2022, [Sve više povratnika iz dijaspore, naročito mladih iz Kanade, Amerike, Australije \(www.politika.rs\)](http://www.politika.rs)

<sup>79</sup> Professor Vladimir Grečić, PhD, Serbian Creative Intelligence in the Diaspora, Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 2019, 350 pp.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic expected fast opening negotiations of the first Chapter.<sup>80</sup> Four main foreign policy pillars of Serbia remain imperative, politics of diversification which the EU administration in Brussels did not look comfortable with, and reacting on tolerance of Serbia.

Strategic highest-level partnership agreements with China in 2009 and Russia in 2013 have given stability and are an alternative to the EU course on Serbian external politics. This partnership secured the position of Serbia in UN voting power<sup>81</sup>, which was very important, especially for the Kosovo case. Bilateral relations with Germany started with Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in a meeting in Berlin in 2001 with Gerhard Schroder. After 2012, there were numerous mutual meetings between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Serbian Prime Minister from 2017 and the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic. Germany, the most prominent political and economic player in Europe, is the most important for Serbian external politics and economics as the leading trade partner of Serbia. Germany, France, and Italy are the top trade partners and important political factors for Serbia in their EU way. From January 1 to June 30, 2021, the European Union (EU) issued 45 foreign policy papers and a declaration asking the candidate and partner countries to comply. Serbia's harmonization rate with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) amounted to 53%. Since Pristina unilaterally declared independence in 2008, Serbs have improved relations with many countries that do not recognize Kosovo, especially Russia and China, which are members of the UN Security Council. "On the other hand, Bilateral Screening for Chapter 31 emphasizes that Serbia has developed significant economic relations in the past period, primarily with the Russian Federation, and the possible introduction of restrictive measures against Moscow harmed the Serbian economy."<sup>82</sup>

The biggest challenge we could also find in capture 31. The accurate indicator of the end of the EU's "patience" for Serbia's diversified foreign policy can be negotiating chapter 31, which implies the gradual harmonization of the foreign policy of Serbia and the Common Foreign

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<sup>80</sup><https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-12-16/european-union-opens-first-chapters-negotiations-serbia>

<sup>81</sup> As example, Serbia votes against Russian proposal in the UN.

<sup>82</sup> Analysis of Serbia's harmonization with foreign policy declarations and measures of the European Union during 2021. - Semi-Annual Report, Authors: Igor Novaković, Nathan Albahari, Jovana Bogosavljević, Tamara Kitić, July 2021 Belgrade, by CFSP

Security and Defense Policy of the EU. "The trend of distancing it does not seem that Serbia will meet criteria set in this domain in the long run sustainable."<sup>83</sup>

The President of the United States of America (2017-2021), Donald Trump, was presented in Serbian media as the final chance to strategically change US diplomacy with Serbia and solve the Kosovo problem in favor of the Serbian interest. Donald Trump stated that Serbia and Kosovo had now "committed to an economic normalization", calling the agreement "historic" and a "major breakthrough" after years of failed negotiations. Just to remind, Kosovo and Serbia signed an agreement on economic, energy and political issues.

The diplomatic team has a strategy for Kosovo with the help of EU administration. His movement of ending a war in the far east and focusing on internal American problems but also on the Balkans region and wish to show America is still the world leader positively affected the Serbian elites. Some of the political commentators said that this was just part of the pre-election campaign and marketing moves of Donald Trump. Richard Grenell, the actual US Ambassador in Germany, in October 2019, became a special envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina talks. On September 4, 2020, The President of the USA, Donald Trump, and Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, met at the White House. They have signed economic agreements between Belgrade and Pristina. Vucic and the Prime Minister of the Provisional Institutions of Kosovo, Avdulah Hoti, signed and agreed on financial agreements in the presence of Trump. After this meeting, the President of Serbia met with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. It was a significant improvement in the diplomatic relations between the USA and Serbia. The Washington agreement will bring many benefits, like the highway Pristina-Nis, the railway Pristina-Nis, and the study of mutual using Gazivode lake (which is 30% Serbian territory and 70% part of North Serbian municipality in Kosovo. It is essential to strategic resource joint stopping in one-year period of the campaign of recognition and withdrawal recognition independence of Kosovo. "The final goal is divided into several objectives: investment in small and medium enterprises; energetic efficiency; 5G setting up network system; exchange information for missing persons in war 1999; mutual recognition

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<sup>83</sup> Анализу досадашње усаглашености спољне политике Србије са Заједничком спољном, безбедносном и одбрамбеном политиком ЕУ видети у: Драган Ђукановић, „Усаглашавање држава Западног Балкана са Заједничком спољном и безбедносном политиком ЕУ – између нормативног, декларативног и стварног“, Годишњак Факултета политичких наука, вол. 8, бр. 12, 2014, стр. 9-40; Стеван Недељковић, Мила Крстић, „Поглавље 31: постепено (не)усклађивање“, *op. cit.*



of diploma certificates; moving embassy in Jerusalem to Serbia and Kosovo mutual recognition of Israel; dialogue on relation Belgrade-Pristina with EU representatives; the abolition or withholding of the 100% tax on the import of Serbian goods; and finally Mini Shengen initiative, where people and goods will move freely in the Western Balkans area.”<sup>84</sup> All these agreements are helpful for both sides, and we are still monitoring the implementation process. Opening the USA office fund for development was also part of the agreement. All financial and bureaucratic construction of these agreements will work with this office in Belgrade. We have to notice that after the mutual recognition of Israel and Kosovo, Serbia changed its decision about moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Israel decided to recognize Kosovo under US pressure. It is important to note that it was done within an agreement Serbia and Kosovo had signed with the United States, not Israel. Washington's agreement with the Trump administration is a significant step forward in the diplomacy between the USA and Serbia after many years of not-so-friendly relations. It's good that the USA is willing to help the EU administration back its importance in Balkans and try to find the right solution for both sides in the Kosovo case.<sup>85</sup>

Like the rest of the World, Russian aggression towards Ukraine took the Western Balkan countries by surprise. The new geopolitical reality in which Europe woke up on February 24 inevitably has and will continue to create enormous political and economic implications for the Western Balkan region that remains stuck in the European Union's waiting room for decades.<sup>86</sup> The inability to progress in their efforts to join the Union due to the state capture performed by domestic authoritarian elites and the fading credibility of the EU's promise to enlarge have led countries and citizens of the region to look for alternatives, among others, to Russia. In a context where Russian aggression towards Ukraine threatens to unravel into a wider conflict between the East and West, it becomes evident that the Balkans, and particularly countries that have not become parts of NATO, such as Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, could potentially become a new crisis area in which superpowers would fight for their sphere of influence.<sup>87</sup> Russia's war in Ukraine leaves Serbia stuck between a rock and a hard place. Serbs have opened

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<sup>84</sup> <https://www.asil.org/insights/volume/25/issue/4/washington-agreement-between-kosovo-and-serbia>

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Hami Aksoy, new Ambassador of Turkey in Belgrade, Publish at 14 July, 2021, web portal [www.naslov.rs](http://www.naslov.rs) [Ambasador Turske u Beogradu Hami Aksoy: “Odnosi Turske i Srbije su najbolji u istoriji“](https://www.naslov.rs/ambasador-turske-u-beogradu-hami-aksoy-odnosi-turske-i-srbije-su-najbolji-u-istoriji) | Naslov

<sup>86</sup> <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-far-right-russia-sanctions/31884417.html>

<sup>87</sup> <https://biepag.eu/blog/western-balkans-reactions-and-implications-of-the-russian-aggression-of-ukraine/>

their doors to the Ukrainian brethren and condemned the violence in Ukraine, but painful memories of 1999 have made them wary of supporting sanctions. The sound of air raid sirens in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities sent shivers down the spines of Serbs old enough to remember the same ominous sound they heard so many times for 78 days in 1999 when NATO planes bombed cities of what was then still Yugoslavia to end Slobodan Milosevic's military campaign in Kosovo.<sup>88</sup> The Serbian position was neutral; they did not suspend Russia, as they were the only country not to have imposed sanctions against Serbia in the 1990s. From the beginning of the war, Serbia respected the total sovereignty of the Ukraine territory as independence. Ukraine also did not recognize Kosovo as an independent nation, so Serbia just appreciated Ukraine. All NATO members and all EU countries condemn attacks of aggression, except Serbia. Finally, on March 3, 2022, in Serbia, the UN condemned Russia for aggression in Ukraine. Fears that UN could expel Russia, which would allow for a change in UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which guarantees Kosovo's territorial affiliation with Serbia. "They plan to debate the expulsion of Russia from the UN based on Article 6 of the UN Charter, after which there is open pressure on China to change Resolution 1244, after which we would no longer have a legal basis to invoke preservation of territorial integrity"-said Vucic.<sup>89</sup> A very challenging upcoming period has come for Serbian diplomacy. As a result, most powerful countries will take new positions. Serbia would have a fast process of entrance into the EU and NATO or will turn back to them and build stronger relations based on Russian and Chinese policy and economy. The EU realizes that the Western Balkans region should be protected (fast membership) from Eurasian impact, which is what European elites are speaking about these days.

An analysis of EU sanctions on Belarus, including their cyclical nature, suggests that they have been most effective when their objective is limited and achievable. The release of political prisoners, cosmetic reforms to the Electoral Code, and the partial solution to the migration crisis are the most prominent examples of concessions made by the Belarusian authorities following the imposition of sanctions. Overly ambitious sanctions objectives limit the EU's room for maneuver and bargaining. Bringing to justice those responsible for forced disappearances and

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<sup>88</sup><https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/03/russia-s-war-in-ukraine-leaves-serbia-stuck-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place>

<sup>89</sup> [Slobodna Dalmacija - Srbija glasala za rezoluciju UN-a i osudila napad na Ukrajinu: 'Imamo paradajza i jabuka, a mlijeko u prahu je sada kao respirator', kazao je Vučić](#)

human rights violations or holding new free and fair elections are unacceptable demands for the Belarusian regime because they endanger its survival as it relies on the law-enforcement institutions.<sup>90</sup> Serbia had continued its policy since 2020, in the first months of 2021, when it did not comply with the EU's restrictive measures based on the decision Council no. 642 but supported political declarations which did not contain restrictive ones more. Apart from Russia, the only “European” topic of the EU declarations with which Serbia did not align is Belarus. The situation with these is strange. Serbia did not align with the six declarations that were revisions or extensions of restrictive measures introduced initially with the EU Council’s decision no. 624, as with restrictive measures against Russia, went beyond targeted and became punitive. However, Serbia aligned with the first amendment with the sanctions published on January 12th, following the alignment from December of the previous year. Then Serbia ignored the four declarations that extended the restrictive measures to align with the declaration published on April 22nd concerning additional sectoral measures targeting the Belarusian financial and road transport sectors. These measures should mean that Serbia is aligned with all the previous extensions and additions. Furthermore, it again did not align with the two declarations published on June 10th. It looks like Serbia is trying to “play two fiddles” and send messages to Brussels and Moscow/Minsk that it is measuring its steps.<sup>91</sup>

It was Council Decision to strengthen restrictive measures on Belarus by introducing a ban on the overflight of EU airspace and access to EU airports of Belarusian carriers of all kinds. Consequently, Serbia did not comply with the two orders from January and March, which included adding new persons and entities to the list and renewing. Serbia joined the political condemnation and the expanded scope of sanctions, which included bans on landings and overflights over the Serbian territory of Belarusian planes. However, Serbia is with Belarus and recently received two MiG-29 aircraft (the last from a donation from Belarus). This donation was probably why in 2019, Serbia stopped complying with restrictive EU measures. Also, it was from 2012-2019. “The restrictive measures endangered the good relations between Belarus and Serbia because immediately after the harmonization of the declarations, the Serbian and

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<sup>90</sup> <https://www.gmfus.org/news/designing-sanctions-lessons-eu-restrictive-measures-against-belarus>

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.isac-fund.org/en/news/an-analysis-of-serbias-alignment-with-the-european-unions-foreign-policy-declarations-and-measures-semi-annual-review-for-2022>

Belarusian defense ministers met in Moscow to discuss cooperation between the two countries.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> [Stefanović razgovarao u Moskvi sa ministrom odbrane Belorusije o saradnji - Društvo - Dnevni list Danas](#)

### **3 The Kosovo issue in Serbian foreign policy following Kosovo's declaration of independence**

What represents Kosovo to Serbia and what to Albania? The simple answer should be that for Serbia it represents its history, Serbian minority, legally sovereign territory, Serbian autonomous south province, and Serbian spirit. What Kosovo means for Albania is their present and future, the immense majority of Albanian citizens in Kosovo, the question of existence, the project of great Albania, and the project of USA and EU elites. The main question is why the USA and EU supported Albanians. When this started, what was the motive, and what was the point? Many Serb politicians saw it as the main reason for keeping the USA, the grand Albanian lobby during the 90s and after in the White House, while Serbia was full of internal problems to protect the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>93</sup> In the Serbian south part, Kosovo, Tito led the country and gave high autonomy in 1974 with almost the same rights as the rest six Republics. During the Milosevic regime in 1989, Milosevic broke the freedom of independence to Kosovo, protests slowly started, and problems arose with nationalistic and separatist motives from the Albanian majority.

The problem with Kosovo lay in the fact that “on both sides there were and still are actors prone to using violence to achieve their political aims or to stay in control; a majority of the Kosovo Albanians is undoubtedly in favour of independence and thus of creating a new international border between Kosovo and the FRY; and a majority of Serbs favours the *status quo* in Kosovo.”<sup>94</sup> Serbia finally had a strategy to answer every mostly unfair move from Pristina or Brussels, frequent in recent years. “*Serbia used several different individual strategies in foreign policy, conditioned by its international political position. Although they used them in an incomplete and ad hoc manner, we believe they were partly conditioned by limited capacities and incorrect assessment of those possessing foreign policy means. Serbia has been thinking*

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<sup>93</sup> Miroslav M. MITROVIĆ, Nenad N. PERIĆ, LOBIRANJE KAO STRATEŠKA KOMUNIKACIJA U PRAKSI - KRUNA SEPARATISTIČKOG POKRETA NA KOSOVU I METOHIJI, VOL. 32 BR. 58 (2022): БАШТИНА /, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5937/bastina32-40702>

<sup>94</sup> Isaković, Z. 1999. *Diplomacy and the Conflict in Kosovo — Notes on Threats and Fears*, Institute of International Politics and Economics.

*strategically about foreign policy, but it is in the implementation phase. There were delays, incomplete implementation, intermediate policies, and resistance to the legal shaping of segments of strategic thinking scattered among institutions and political systems. Occasional but also partial reactivity to new circumstances, the unpreparedness of public opinion for unfavorable foreign policy outcomes, and the constant need for internal political bargaining among key foreign policy actors only made it more difficult to summarize several individual foreign policy strategies tactics into a comprehensive strategy of Serbian foreign policy.”*<sup>95</sup> The purpose of NATO aggression in 1999 was to bring democracy to Serbia and restore absolute stability to the region. Also, after the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, known as a European reformer with a sense of time importance, Serbia does not show a more credible, dynamic, predictable, and political EU accession process. What is more critical to diplomacy is the size of the country, military power, the Kosovo challenge, and complicated regional relations, which all refer to barriers that threaten the success of the accession. Despite strategic ties with Russia and China, the Serbian integration process with the EU in the upcoming years will be very challenging for Serbian diplomacy. It was a good chance for broader diplomatic initiatives undertaken by Serbia within the UN in connection with the efforts for preserving territorial integrity and sovereignty, gaining support for the candidate for the position of Chairman of the UN General Assembly, and later for the work UN Secretary-General, successfully performing the role of chairman in numerous regional multilateral forums or ministerial conference organizations the Nonaligned Movement in 2011. Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs messaged the world *“that Serbian leading the OSCE should be an honest, objective and impartial mediator credible of all parties.”*<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states’ foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 208 and 209

<sup>96</sup> U tom smislu treba sagledati i tekuće predsedavanje Srbije OEBS. Iluzija je da ovaj položaj Srbiji u tekućim okolnostima u kojima se OEBS nalazi daje bilo kakvu moć. Beograd doduše može da pokuša da neformalno i ad hoc deluje na terenu, što u neku ruku i čini, ali bez izgleda da na duži rok suštinski utiče na rešavanje ukrajinske krize ili bilo koji drugi evropski bezbednosni problem, jer bi tako nešto bilo nemoguće bez podrške obeju ključnih sila. Podrška samo jedne automatski bi značila neprijateljstvo one druge. No, to ne znači da je predsedavanje OEBS bez značaja. Ono povećava ugled naše zemlje u evropskim i širim bezbednosnim okvirima i omogućava da se naš glas čuje, što je samo po sebi dobro, čak i ako taj glas niko ne posluša. Svako očekivanje koje bi bilo više od ovoga ne bi bilo utemeljeno, a Srbija najbolji nauk može da izvuče upravo iz iskustva Ukrajine, države koja je 2013. godinu započela preuzevši predsedavanje OEBS sa velikim ambicijama da ponovo ujedini Evropu u bezbedno□sti, a

Observers of Kosovo's transition process towards provisional self-government might have been overly optimistic when general elections were announced for the autumn of 2001. The creation of "Provisional Institutions of Self-Government" (PISGs) as defined in the Constitutional Framework of May 2001 represented a benchmark in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and was to mark the starting point of the third phase in UNMIK's institution-building process before the intricate issues surrounding the final status of the territory were to be addressed.<sup>97</sup> *"Insisting on respecting the normative framework established by UN Security Council Resolution 1244. It started right after consolidating the new government in Belgrade. It was only a few months of being in power necessary for successfully harmonizing positions with the UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) administration and adopting the first vital documents embodied in the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo."*<sup>98</sup> These documents brought adverse reactions to Serbian politics, and the process of going away from resolution 1244 had just started. Negotiations have been happening in Vienna since February 2006 until the Security Council session in March 2007. It imposed no following field diplomatic action under the supervision of Johan Verbeke and the Contact Group Three (EU, US, and Russia). *The action did not lead to convincing all stakeholders of the correctness, feasibility, and sustainability of the provisions of the Ahtisaari proposal.*<sup>99</sup> By rejecting the "Ahtisaari plan" as a whole, fulfilling the foreign policy goal of preserving territorial integrity, it entered a new, legal-diplomatic phase. How was Kosovo recognized?<sup>100</sup> They forgot about the territorial integrity of a state, as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which they had themselves adopted and supported. Why could it have been done there but not in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Why not? "For the next three years, it

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završila je sopstvenom razjedinošću i krizom koja i danas traje.“ Vladimir Trapara, „Slučaj OEBS kao test za Miršajmerovu teoriju međunarodnih institucija“, u: Mina Zirojević, Vesna Čorić (urs), Četrdeset godina od potpisivanja Helsinškog završnog akta: međunarodni tematski zbornik, Institut za uporedno pravo, Beograd, str. 343-353.

<sup>97</sup> <https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/02/Knoll.pdf>

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/kosovo-metohija/19944>

<sup>99</sup> Filip Ejodus, *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession*, 2020, Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>100</sup> Vladimir Putin, president of Russia.

will, just like at the end of the 20th century, return to the principal organs of the United Nations."

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In this period of diplomacy, the support of Russia in the UN were evident for the non-recognized Kosovo as an independent state. With this, Serbia kept sovereignty and territorial integrity in the UN organization. "That this is not just declarative support, confirmed the abandonment of the session of the Security Council of Vitaly Churkin, Russian Ambassador to the UN, March 19, 2007, at the moment reading the report of Joachim Rucker, then head of UNMIK administration."<sup>102</sup> Before the presentation of the Ahtisaari plan, the destiny of Kosovo would have been decided by exceptional cases. In the meeting held in 2006 in the USA between the government of Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Slobodan Samaradzic and Leon Cohen had a plan, next to the veto of Russia and China in the UN, to try to get support from other influential members. Surely today, the most important political instrument in the hands of the opposition is the presidential veto.<sup>103</sup>

Regarding Turkey's position on Kosovo and Metohija, it was impossible to deny that Turkey had been one of the strongest supporters of the independence of so-called Kosovo but had somewhat changed its approach in the last six years. However, the official approach has been much more balanced for the last few years. The Turkish policy has been reflecting a need for compromise, for a solution that would be acceptable to both sides. Turkey is ready to support Serbia and Kosovo in overcoming their challenges, hoping for a quick and durable solution, as the Balkans can no longer tolerate these problems. Even though Turkey and Serbia have no common border, both countries consider each other neighbors. Remarkable similarities are the result of centuries of living together. The number of young people from Serbia enrolling in Turkish language courses at the Yunus Emre Institute is growing daily. There is great interest in the Turkish

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<sup>101</sup> О активностима Републике Србије у Уједињеним нацијама у периоду од завршетка посредованих преговора под управљачким вођством Мартија Ахтисарија, до установљења олакшаног дијалога посредством Високог представника ЕУ за спољну политику и безбедност, видети детаљно у: Душко Димитријевић, Ивона Лађевац и Михајло Вучић, „Анализа предузетих активности у оквиру система УН у вези са решавањем питања Косова и Метохије“, Међународни проблеми, вол. LXIV, бр. 4, 2012, стр. 442-478. Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 227

<sup>102</sup> Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 230, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral

<sup>103</sup> Donald Franciszek Tusk is a Polish politician who was President of the European Council from 2014 to 2019.



language. Turkey is one of the favorite tourist destinations for Serbs. Tourists from Serbia like to spend their holidays in our country. Also, thanks to the visa-free regime, it is much easier for Turks to visit Serbia than any other European country. Such visits enable our people to get to know each other better.

How to evaluate the current relations between Turkey and Serbia regarding politics and economy? Our references are currently the best in history. Cooperation in almost all areas is progressing day by day. Of course, the efforts of our presidents have significantly contributed to that. They have paved the way for the development of our relations and shown political will, and we need to keep moving in that direction. Economy and trade are the driving force behind our links. Despite last year's pandemic, our bilateral trade was 1.5 billion dollars. This year, our goal is to increase that figure to 1.8 billion dollars. Our business people continue to invest in Serbia. Almost 1000 Turkish companies operate in Serbia, and 35 make large and medium investments. We invest in various sectors such as infrastructure, banking, textile, automotive, tourism, and agriculture. We continue to develop relations in the field of culture and humanitarian activities. In addition to investing in development, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency works to protect the common cultural heritage. Our goal is to continue to improve our relations in all areas. Can the idea of a Mini Schengen further strengthen ties between Serbia and Turkey and the entire Western Balkans region? Expanding the free trade agreement between our two countries influenced trade growth.

Trade increased by including the agricultural and service sectors in the agreement. The Mini Schengen initiative also envisions increasing connectivity, trade, and circulation between regional countries. These are comparative advantages for each of the members. Among the first are tourism, better use of existing capacity, and the imports for certain production chains, such as the automotive and food industries. People do not understand that politics is one thing, history and the past another, but the economy is the most important thing for most people.

In this regard, it will contribute to regional peace and stability and strengthen relations between the area's countries. The President of Turkey, Erdogan, and the President of Serbia, Vucic, have yearly meetings in their highest diplomatic agreement. They keep relations well and force the economy to grow, which is the only way to good political connections. The last official meeting

of the two Presidents was on January 18, 2022, in Ankara, and next to the economy's main political question was the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Trade potential with Turkey is considerable and political leaders are looking for more business meetings, new investments, and cooperation. Turkey is a strategic alternative diplomatic friend to Serbia.

A similar meeting took place in September 2007, when the results were the same, respecting resolution 1244 and keeping Serbian territory. Many countries tried to contact the Serbian diplomatic team to back recognition of independence, but without success. Surely, it was a failure, as independence is happiness. During the support of Russia, we noticed the purchase of 51% of the strategic national energy company NIS (Naftna Industrija Srbije). Russian Gazprom's biggest oil company opened a question: Is this a price that Serbia should pay for securing a veto against Kosovo in the UN from Russia? Vladimir Putin wisely used the case of Kosovo in the UN and other international organizations, about Georgia's secession in 2008, on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian Federation during this period was the primary protector for Serbia in the international arena, but also China. Security Council meetings gave strong support in protecting Serbian national interests. In Kosovo's case, the multilateralism of the United Nations implementation of the negotiation strategy is under the auspices of this universal international organization. But, there no multilateral system exists in which developed and developing countries sit together at par, except in the case of the World Trade Organization.<sup>104</sup> "After rejection of Ahtisaari plan, Serbia gave Russian support for his downfall in the UN Security Council. Still, also direct support for its implementation by the United States, the EU, and its most vital member states (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom). Not even the Security Council, because of the blockade due to narrowly conflicting interests, it was not a desirable destination to resolve the Kosovo-Metohija issue. Instead, it served to maintain the status quo and prepare for the next diplomatic steps. Especially after the unilaterally declared independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Pristina, in February 2008."<sup>105</sup> From the request for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the

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<sup>104</sup> Nirmala Sitharaman is an Indian economist and politician.

<sup>105</sup> Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 230, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral

unilateral legality act of Pristina, negotiations on the principles of engagement of the EULEX<sup>106</sup> mission, through an EU-agreed resolution submitted to the UN General Assembly, until its establishment a new format of a facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina under the auspices of EU representatives, Serbia has unequivocally approached the use of various aspects of the strategy negotiations. Its ability to, by building (voting) coalitions in the UN plenary body, reaches for results that seem hopeless in February 2008, confirmed the above assumptions.”<sup>107</sup>

Demographic data were not 100 percent correct, but in the 2011 census, Kosovo had a population of 1,739,825 inhabitants with 92,93% Albanians and 1,47% Serbs, but without Serbian municipalities in the north where the majority of Serbs live.<sup>108</sup> In 1999, in Kosovo had 2 million inhabitants (80% Albanians, 10% Serbs), in 1981, 1,584,441 inhabitants (77,4% Albanians, Serbs 18,4%), 1961, 963,988 inhabitants (67,2% Albanians, Serbs 23,6%), in 1953, 808,141 inhabitants (Albanians 64,9%, Serbs 23,5%), 1948, 727,820 inhabitants (68,5% Albanians, Serbs 23,6%). Very high natality to the Albanian citizens made a big difference in the number of citizens in Kosovo, which is easy to realize by looking at the previous data. Today about 95% of citizens in Kosovo are Muslims, while in North Kosovo, where the majority of Serbs live, 90% follow the Orthodox religion. A Kosovo Albanians that expects its biological survival from immigrants will not survive.<sup>109</sup> We have to notice war consequences and numerous Albanian provocations of Serbian citizens in Kosovo, which motivate Serbian people to move out of Kosovo. This trend has been active from the 90s until today when we have ethnic incidents every month. Kosovo's new particular police unit, "ROSU," is just one of the products supported by US and EU leaders, which brings much fear in the Serbian minority and instability in the region. Trade agreements for 100% tax on all Serbian goods in Kosovo territory are just one of the symbols of the "Kosovo" policy until the final win. In the first place, when it comes to the outcomes of the use of the negotiation strategy, it is the survival of the Kosovo-Metohija issue on the agenda of the UN Security Council through consideration of the Secretary-General's annual report on the work of UNMIK. It was uniquely influential in the comparative processes of

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<sup>106</sup> European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo

<sup>107</sup> Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 232, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral

<sup>108</sup> <https://ask.rks-gov.net/media/2129/estimation-of-kosovo-population-2011.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> Victor Orban, Hungarian politician and president of Hungary.

rejecting Ahtisaari's plan, one-sided declaring independence of the provisional institutions of self-government in Pristina, and attempting the establishment of the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and Metohija (EULEX) without consent.

Seeking the continuation of the mandate of the UN Mission in Kosovo and Metohija, the President of Serbia attended at a session of the UN Security Council on the occasion of the consideration of the UNSC quarterly report to “switching competencies of UNMIK to anybody without a decision of the UN Security Council.”<sup>110</sup> Just two weeks after this meeting, UNMIK changed into EULEX. Another diplomatic try of Serbian Diplomacy was to bring this entire case to work at the International Court of Justice. Consequences impose two legal possibilities, lawsuits against states that have recognized Kosovo as an independent state or a diplomatic initiative to seek an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. *“Intensive diplomatic preparations that resulted in even a Formal announcement. The states who voted for us, such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, China, Algeria, and Egypt, did not bow before the unrest caused by calls from the United States and the United Kingdom to withdraw from the proposal resolutions dropped. With a narrow majority of 77 votes in favor of the draft resolution, Serbia has successfully implemented the abovementioned elements of the foreign policy strategy negotiations.”*<sup>111</sup>

In 2011, the negotiation process between Belgrade-Pristina was revived, from technical negotiations to comprehensive normalization. For Belgrade, “comprehensive normalization” means “everything but recognition,” and Belgrade is willing to “recognize reality, but not independence.” For Pristina, “recognition is everything,” that normalization without recognition is inconceivable.<sup>112</sup> Since March 2011, there have been a number of other tracks that have not been directly related to the conversation itself. This has led to a lot of diplomatic upheaval.

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<sup>110</sup> „Савет безбедности УН о приликама на Косову“, DW, 22/04/2008, доступно на: <https://www.dw.com/sr/savetbezbednosti-un-o-prilikama-na-kosovu/a-3282919>, приступљено: 11/10/2020. <sup>70</sup> Милош Хрњаз, „Србија и употреба правосудног решавања међународних спорова од 1914. до 2015. године: век неуспеха“, у: Весна Кнежевић-Предић (ур.), Политички идентитет Србије у глобалном и регионалном контексту, Универзитет у Београду – Факултет политичких наука, Београд, 2015, стр.

<sup>111</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 231

<sup>112</sup> <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/13820.pdf>

However, facilitated dialogue has continued nonetheless. It is about numerous attempts of temporary institutions of self-government, the authorities in Pristina, to become members of specific international organizations to reach a higher degree of state legitimacy. The task they are the holders of power in Serbia on these challenges has given in a way to prevent all such activities by building voting coalitions.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) are still the prominent organizations that Kosovo wants to join in the international arena. Serbia has successfully prevented representatives of the authorities in Pristina from reaching the status of a member of INTERPOL with an official candidacy. They tried to do it in 2010 and four more times from 2015 to 2018. After an international meeting in Dubai, Serbia again stopped confirming Kosovo in multinational organizations by voting for their coalition in the UN arena. Minister of Foreign Affairs pointed out that the tactics were wrong from Pristina representatives led to an undesirable outcome because *"through when they wanted to Interpol, that is how they passed," then the President of Serbia pointed out that "the world is not anymore unipolar."* In a multipolar world, this space multiplies. Therefore, there is nostalgia for a multipolar world.<sup>113</sup> After failing to receive a majority of votes for membership, Interpol did not accept Kosovo as a member.<sup>114</sup> Trying to establish Kosovo's legality as a state sends a wrong message to the world and reflects on the issue of regional relations and responsibility to the Western partners and international community to achieve some results.

A similar situation is with relations between Kosovo with UNESCO. Kosovo is ineligible for membership in UNESCO for many reasons. One of the most important is because the request for its membership is a serious breach of international law, the Charter of UNESCO, the legally binding UN Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), and the Charter of the UN. Article 25 says, "The Members of the UN agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council following the present Charter." Currently, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has not yet responded to Kosovo's request to remove four

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<sup>113</sup> Eduardo Hughes Galeano was a Uruguayan journalist,

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kosovo-fails-to-become-member-of-interpol/1316480>

Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) buildings from the list of endangered monuments. One more proof of why this issue is polarizing the membership of UNESCO. Our past helps strengthen our future.

The new American President, Donald Trump, and his administration have tried to change foreign policy in Balkans. Special envoy for Kosovo, Matthew Palmer, an old diplomat, came intending to back dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and find a solution for both sides. The transition of American expectations from Serbia reached the highest level in October 2018. For Palmer, talking about issues such as the exchange of territories is irrelevant and disruptive. “We must dedicate ourselves to what needs to be done for the participants in the negotiations to progress toward a comprehensive agreement that would end the dispute once and for all.”<sup>115</sup> American diplomats publicly state for the first time what a comprehensive agreement means normalization of relations. However, instead of achieving substantial effects in this ecstasy, he presents (unrealistic) expectations. The reason is that "there was a stalemate in the dialogue due to the introduction of restrictive economic measures in Pristina towards goods originating from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina." <sup>116</sup> Neither of us won. However, both of us lost—moreover, worse still, that unshakable feeling that nothing was ever really finished.<sup>117</sup>

After one year of frozen dialogue, the EU had lost its authority on Kosovo representatives. Finally, President Trump moved in and showed diplomatic innovation and desire for activism in August 2019, with Palmer's appointment to perform the duties of Special Representative USA for the Western Balkans. The meeting also contributed to the preservation of such claims by the US Secretary of State and the President of Serbia immediately before Palmer's appointment at the Bled Strategic Forum. Over the years, Kosovo has seen its share of disappointments regarding the EU integration process. Politics was a repetition of previously known attitudes based on the official policies of the countries it represents. They pushed Mathew Palmer from the public eye and brought the US Ambassador, Richard Grendel. Grendel's first meetings with the highest authorities in Serbia provided answers: Economic cooperation and development are the

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<sup>115</sup> <https://xk.usembassy.gov/special-representative-for-the-western-balkans-matthew-palmer/>

<sup>116</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 239

<sup>117</sup> Ranata Suzuki is a poet and quote writer.

basis for achieving lasting peace. Expressing the message of the President of the USA, Grendel also spoke about the investment help from the White House for infrastructure, jobs, a railway line between Belgrade and Pristina, and abolishing taxes. We can notice that some days before he visited Belgrade, the German airline Lufthansa introduced an airline link between Belgrade and Pristina.<sup>118</sup> *"Grendel's pragmatism, despite its sluggishness in achieving concrete results, noticeably took up space in changing the approach for resolving the Kosovo-Metohija questions. At the very beginning, the emphasized economic dimension of the conversation is slowly becoming the main topic that suppressed sensitive issues of a political, historical, and identity nature, imbued with the intense emotions of those in whose name the conversations are being conducted."*<sup>119</sup> Finally, political elites were satisfied because there was no significant political disagreement, which led to the economy. The meeting in the USA with Trump was canceled on June 27 and delayed for September 2020 due to invitations to prominent political figures from Pristina sent from the prosecution of the Special Court in Hague. Dilemma is if the President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, will support and implement this agreement of the previous administration. As a well-known secret, the USA, with its western partners in the EU led by Germany, is a founder of the independent Kosovo state. How the Ukrainian crisis will affect the status of Kosovo is a hot topic these days and very important for Kosovo Albanians and Serbian citizens. Serbia, next to Russia, has UN protection with China who will always veto every wrong decision about Kosovo for the Serbian interest. Serbian diplomacy is in a challenging period with much pressure that can produce tremendous political and economic consequences, which is terrible for Serbian development. Serbian diplomacy should be brilliant and determined to get their genuine strategic interest in Kosovo. Ukraine crisis opens the question of whether Kosovo should become a member of NATO, bearing in mind that the Washington agreement from September 2021 protects any activities about recognizing and withdrawing Kosovo for both sides until September 2022. Serbian President said that in this case, if Kosovo authorities did not respect the Washington agreement, Serbia would surprise them with already withdrawn recognition from some states. The result is not to worry when

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<sup>118</sup> Dominic Mckenzie Cummings is a British political strategist.

<sup>119</sup> UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE Marko Lj. Dašić International political position as a determinant of small states' foreign policy: case study of the Republic of Serbia between 2000 and 2018 Doctoral Dissertation Belgrade, 2020, page 241.

someone is not recognized but strive to be worthy of recognition. So, Vucic is calling on the responsibility of Kosovo authorities and respecting international multilateral agreements. The Serbian government's firm stance about the no recognition option and EU reforms for enlargement are clear political stances, not just actual political parties but also all opposition political options. After the election in Serbia on April 3, even if we have a new government, Kosovo will stay the same. This Kosovo is part of Serbia. Finally, political elites were satisfied because there was no significant political disagreement, which led to the economy, which is most important. The meeting in the USA with Trump was canceled on June 27 and delayed for September 2020 due to invitations to prominent political figures from Pristina sent from the prosecution of the Special Court in Hague. We will testify if the President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, will support and implement this agreement of the previous administration. As a well-known secret, the USA, with its western partners in the EU led by Germany, is a founder of the independent Kosovo state. Serbian President said that in this case, if Kosovo authorities did not respect the agreement, Serbia would surprise them with already withdrawn recognition from some states. The imposition is not to worry when someone is not recognized but strive to be worthy of recognition.<sup>120</sup> So, Vucic is calling on the responsibility of Kosovo authorities and respecting international multilateral agreements. The Serbian government's firm stance about the no recognition option and EU reforms for enlargement are clear political stances, not just actual political parties but also all opposition political options. After the election in Serbia on April 3, even if we have a new government, Kosovo will stay the same. This Kosovo is part of Serbia.

On the other hand, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who was reelected and had a new mandate during the general elections in Belgrade, Serbia, 3 April 2022, has in mind that the game of Kosovo is all about waiting for the right moment. His mandate aims not to strike first to gain dominance over an opponent but to wait and hit at the right moment<sup>121</sup>. It means the best possible option for Serbia, the US, and the EU, will guarantee the implementation of future agreements. For example, the Association of Serb Municipalities made an agreement in Brussels in 2013 that has yet to be realized. It is just one of the agreements that Serbia is waiting for and

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<sup>120</sup> Abraham Lincoln, American lawyer and statesman

<sup>121</sup> Guo Guangchang is a Chinese businessman and investor.



one of the lessons that Serbia will learn. One of the things that should be promising is that NATO aggression against Serbia is spoken more openly today in every international meeting.

Countries that recognize Kosovo as part of Serbia are Spain, Greece, Romania, Slovakia, and Cyprus as five member states next to immense pressure from EU leaders to remember they still keep their policy on keeping Kosovo as Serbian territorial integrity. Russia condemns the USA for undermining Serbia's territorial integrity. The culture of undermining sends signals of disrespect. This approach not only saps motivation and undermines teamwork but also lowers the motivation to work extra hours anticipating what can go wrong. Kosovo has been recognized as an independent state from 101 states until today. On the other side, as part of Serbia, Kosovo is recognized by the rest of the world. The truth about "Kosovo" is getting louder daily, giving more chances for Serbian interest. The unipolar world is losing its power. It is an opportunity for Serbia to regain control of its southern province through better lobbying, which was missing all these years, and intelligent foreign diplomatic missions worldwide. The Western world should be more aware of its mistake in creating the state of Kosovo and the new geopolitical situation. We should expect a unique solution that the USA or EU leaders will offer to Serbia as acceptable for the Serbian national interest and the newly formed state of Kosovo. In supporting Kosovo, there was a reason for unrest in the Balkans, which could be a battlefield of great powers with catastrophic consequences for the whole world, especially the Western Balkans region. At the time of writing, the war in Ukraine inspires many nationalists in the Balkans as one of the solutions for resolving the issue of Kosovo (for example, sharing the territory of Kosovo between Serbia and Kosovo representatives). Kosovo, together with Albania and North Macedonia – are following the Euroatlantic line, condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and joining Western sanctions against Moscow. Together, these three nations have 7 million people.<sup>122</sup> Serbia is the key to preserving peace in the Balkans. As the central message of the Ukrainian crisis, a diplomatic solution to the status of Kosovo is needed to prevent possible conflict in the region and further development of the area through European integration. Russian influence in the Balkans is primarily present in Serbia, but did the EU understand this as a problem after the Ukraine crisis? We have to see what they will offer and how they will look for

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<sup>122</sup> Russia's war in Ukraine sharpens Balkan divisions – GIS Reports (gi <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/russia-ukraine-balkans/> <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/russia-ukraine-balkans/sreportsonline.com>)

a new negotiation between Belgrade and Pristina. In front of the recent economic crisis after the Ukraine war and the world sanctions on Russia, the case of Kosovo will be essential for US and EU leaders. What should they prepare as a solution for the final agreement of both sides, or is the case of Kosovo still the biggest problem that will stop the Western Balkans region in their complete reform and development into modern European states?

## **4 Serbian policy in the Western Balkans (October 2000 – 2021); Evolution of bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania**

On the topic of Serbian policy in the Western Balkans there is little professional literature. The reason for less experienced literature is that it was a very transitional and challenging period for global Serbian foreign policy in the last 35 years. Also, the Serbian internal political and economic situation gave little more space for strategic foreign policy in the Western Balkans region.

On November 24, 2000, EU summit in Biarritz (France), the President of SR Yugoslavia, Vojislav Kostunica, was a special guest, and there were Prime Ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, as well as the minister of the foreign policy of Slovenia. All of them got an offer to join the EU for the first time, and the first EU called this group of independent states a Western Balkans region. Slovenia joined the European Union on May 1, 2004, and after nine years, Croatia joined the European Union on July 1, 2013. Group of Western Balkans states include: Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania. Next to these states, the independent state of Kosovo is also part of the Western Balkans state countries. As the only country in this region, Serbia should have foreign policy and strategy to reach its national interest and protect nearly two million Serbs who live in the rest of the Western Balkans states.

### **4.1 Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The General framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, better known as the Dayton Peace Agreement, is an agreement signed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, ending the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995). To better understand the political situation and constitution of The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have to start with the Dayton Peace Agreement and notice some essential historical data from this period. After the second massacre in Sarajevo, allegedly carried out by Serbian artillery on August 28, 1995, NATO started military aggression against the Republic of Srpska. The airstrikes lasted until September 14. Two weeks later, in New York, Presidents of Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia

signed a document on the basic principles of the future peace agreement. The agreement divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into two parts: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51% of the territory of the former Federal Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the Republic of Srpska (49% of the territory of the former Federal Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Peace conference held in Hague, lasted from November 1 to 21, 1995, a twenty-day process of the agreement. The main participants were the President of the Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, the President of the Presidency of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegovic, the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tudjman, US representatives Warren M. Christopher (US Secretary of State from 1993 to January 1997), negotiator Richard Holbrooke and General Wesley Clark.

The agreement was officially signed in Paris on December 14. The Federal Republic of the Yugoslavia Assembly ratified the agreement on November 21, 2002. However, the Dayton accords were greeted with great disappointment among Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the war's end, NATO destroyed the Republic of Srpska's command positions by bombing from the air and logistically supporting the Croat-Muslim offensive on Bosnian Krajina, significantly supporting the Croat-Muslim offensive Bosnian Krajina reducing the territory under Serbian control. At the Wright Peterson US military base, Milosevic handed over Sarajevo's Serb-populated peripheral municipalities, as well as the continuity of Republic Srpska's territory near Brcko, which was left for subsequent arbitration. It has been speculated that they lost about 20 % of the region due to conflicts between the military and civilian leadership, specifically Republic Srpska's first President, Radovan Karadzic, and their military commander Ratko Mladic." From today's perspective, many political analysts said that in Dayton, ignoring the Republic Srpska leadership, Milosevic handed over Sarajevo to Izetbegovic over a glass of whiskey to allegedly relieve Serbia of international pressure and promoted himself as a factor of peace in the Balkans.<sup>123</sup> Dayton was celebrated in Sarajevo as a victory from the Bosniak side, which was on the verge of capitulation only a few months before NATO air military intervention in Republic Srpska.

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<sup>123</sup> [https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2020&mm=07&dd=31&nav\\_id=109036](https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2020&mm=07&dd=31&nav_id=109036)

Today Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises a three-member rotating Presidency: Milorad Dodik, Sefik Dzaferovic, and Zeljko Komsic in today's composition. Prime Minister is Zoran Tegeltija, Minister of Foreign Affairs is Bisera Turkovic. Serbia established bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina on December 15, 2000. *"There is a relatively intensive political dialogue between the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina and respect for the Dayton political framework are among the most vital interests of Serbia since we want to see this closest neighbor as a prosperous and stable partner for cooperation. The dialogue with the Republic Srpska entity is intensive and takes place at all levels: There are numerous joint projects, an agreement on a celebration of important historical dates for the Serbian people, and a significant segment is Serbia's financial donations to the Republic Srpska. One of the most important political activities in the bilateral relations between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first joint session of the government of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo on November 4, 2015."*<sup>124</sup>

Some of the bilateral meetings brought benefits to the citizens, strengthened bilateral relations, and signed essential agreements. The Republic of Serbia has signed agreements with Bosnia and Herzegovina (agreements, memoranda of understanding, protocols, joint statements), a total of 69. Dayton Agreement has signed 25 deals with the entity of Republic Srpska (and memoranda of cooperation). In addition, it has one memorandum of understanding with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The five key agreements are (in chronological order): Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection between FR Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed: 18.12.2001.

- Agreement on the Establishment of Special Parallel Relations between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, signed: September 26, 2006;
- Agreement between the Republic of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina on mutual representation and provision of consular protection and services in third countries 14.3.2012;

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<sup>124</sup> Антић, Чедомир; Кеџмановић, Ненад (2016). *Историја Републике Српске*. Београд: Недељник.

- Protocol on Cooperation in Searching for missing persons between the government of the Republic of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina signed: 31.5.2016;
- Agreement between the government of the Republic of Serbia and the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina on cooperation in protection against natural and other disasters, signed: 13.12.2010.”<sup>125</sup>

Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the most important foreign trade partners in Serbia in bilateral economic relations, especially in the Western Balkans region, and bilateral trade is constantly growing. *"In 2019, the total exchange amounted to 1.96 billion euros (an increase of 8.4% compared to the year before), of which our exports to Bosnia and Herzegovina were 1.35 billion euros and imports 608 million euros. In 2019, Bosnia and Herzegovina was the third export destination for Serbia and the 5th most significant partner in total exchange direct investments from Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina amounted to 16.8 million euros during 2019 and in the first nine months of 2020, amounted to 10.8 million euros."*<sup>126</sup> We can conclude that between these countries, there exists solid economic dependence, followed by political relations. *"According to the 2013 census, a total of 1,170,342 people Serbs lived in Republic Srpska."*<sup>127</sup>, and this sovereign entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina became the most important part of Serbian foreign policy. The Republic of Srpska is the most important for Serbian foreign policy because this is the only one next to the Republic of Serbia. In this legal entity, most Serbs and the biggest group of Serbian people are from their mother country. Therefore, many people in Serbia are looking at the Republic of Srpska as part of Serbia, and other Yugo nostalgic people of Serbia realize that Srpska is only what from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia stayed for the Republic of Serbia as a legal legacy. It is believed to be a valid reason is that the "Republic of Srpska has eight representative offices abroad in Austria, Belgium, Greece, Israel, Germany, Russia, the USA, and Serbia."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> [Bosna i Hercegovina | Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova \(msp.gov.rs\)](http://Bosna%20i%20Hercegovina%20|%20Ministarstvo%20spoljnih%20poslova%20(msp.gov.rs))

<sup>126</sup> [Bosna i Hercegovina | Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova \(msp.gov.rs\)](http://Bosna%20i%20Hercegovina%20|%20Ministarstvo%20spoljnih%20poslova%20(msp.gov.rs))

<sup>127</sup> Врањеш, Рајко; et al. (2016). *Попис становништва, домаћинства и станова у Републици Српској 2013. Резултати пописа* (PDF). Бања Лука: Републички завод за статистику Републике Српске

<sup>128</sup> [Bosna i Hercegovina | Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova \(msp.gov.rs\)](http://Bosna%20i%20Hercegovina%20|%20Ministarstvo%20spoljnih%20poslova%20(msp.gov.rs))

Intensive relations with Republic Srpska and Serbia started in 2012, and the Serbian Progressive Party. Milorad Dodik, leader of Srpska, and Aleksandar Vucic in Serbia started to celebrate all meetings and happenings together, which are related to Serbian national interest and history and numerous memorials for Serbian victims. As we realize that more and more things have a global impact, we will get people increasingly wanting to escape a purely national interest.<sup>129</sup> They openly started speaking for possible unity as an answer to the protection of the Serbian national interest and their citizens. Serbian and Srpska's central foreign policies are the protection of Serbian citizens in these two territories and final unity as a solution for a better life for their citizens, prosperity, and political power in Western Balkans as the biggest country and nation. The resolution of the unity of Srpska and Serbia today is increasingly popular in many geopolitical conversations in the in Serbia and among Bosnian Serbs. The official state of the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic, said that Serbia respects the Dayton agreement and has no existing plan for the unity of these same nations. There is more power in unity than division.<sup>130</sup>

Nevertheless, the tendency of Serbian foreign policy with the Republic of Srpska and their leader Milorad Dodik tells us differently. Their public speeches, mainly at the moment, promote that Serbia and Srpska are the same nation with the same history and culture, and these are the facts. Therefore, who will first reform the unfunctional Bosnia and Herzegovina, Banja Luka-Sarajevo-Belgrade, or Washington-Brussels-Berlin? We may see soon, but the conclusion is that this reform is urgent for all entities inside Bosnia and Herzegovina and, in the end, for the European Union as a central strategic foreign policy destination for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **4.2 Montenegro**

Montenegro is a country with about 600,000 citizens, with the capital city of Podgorica. The relationship between Montenegro and Serbia has been a difficult one throughout their history. This is due to the fact that both countries were once part of the same Yugoslavia. Montenegro has always been a very independent country, while Serbia has struggled to maintain a strong

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Singer, professor of bioethics, with a background in philosophy.

<sup>130</sup> Emanuel Cleaver II (born October 26, 1944) is a United Methodist pastor and American politician

presence in the region. However, the two countries have managed to maintain a relatively strong bilateral relationship despite these challenges. Generally speaking, and to simplify, Serbian roots and the country's creation are starting in today's territory, Montenegro. Two different or same nations' answers could be found easily by facts that history can teach us. First separation as country Montenegro we can see, after falling under Ottoman rule, Montenegro regained de facto independence in 1697 under the Petrovic Njegos dynasty as a theocratic state before becoming a secular principality in 1852. The Great Powers gained de jure independence at the Berlin Congress in 1878 after the Montenegrin-Turkish war. In 1910 it became a kingdom. After the First World War, it became part of Yugoslavia.

From 1697 to 1852, Serbian Orthodox bishops governed Montenegro from the house of Petrovic-Njegos, who held the position of spiritual and national leaders. This period was necessary for Montenegro for the Serbian Orthodox church as a pillar for keeping Serbian identity and the Serbian nation in this territory. Backing shortly in critical historical moments for Montenegro's independence and relation with Serbia, we have to know that Serbia has a significant historical influence as a much older nation. Montenegrin most significant reformer, leader, and now Montenegrin legend, Petar II Petrović Njegos (1813-1851), was a Serbian Orthodox bishop of Montenegro and the head of Old Montenegro and Brda from 1830 to 1851. Njegos is one of the greatest Montenegrin poets and philosophers. He advocated the liberation and unification of all Serbs and was ready to renounce his secular authorities for unification with Serbia. Njegos was also the religious and temporal leader of the Serbian people in Montenegro, in which there was a strong national consciousness and patriarchal morality, as well as domestic anarchy, tribal jealousy, and blood revenge reigned. When he came to power, he immediately began to bring order and modernize society and the state.<sup>131</sup>

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro jointly proclaimed a federation. Civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men towards one another.<sup>132</sup> In its meaning, the period of federal states was turbulent for Serbia. New political and economic challenges, European integration, and still

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<sup>131</sup> <https://www.njegos.org/past/metrohist.htm>

<sup>132</sup> Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis,



problem with the post-war period and consequences were enough that Serbia lost focus on Montenegro's federal state and gave space for one more separation Montenegro. Motivated opposition led by Milo Djukanovic organized a referendum on the separation and independence of Montenegro. Following a referendum in May 2006, Montenegro regained its independence, and the community disbanded peacefully. It is interesting to notice that this referendum was popular with many scandals. The public debate before the referendum was long, and conditions for a referendum were different for the Serbian government and Montenegrin leaders. High EU representative for the EU's foreign policy, Javier Solana, represented Miroslav Lajcak as a European politician responsible for a referendum in Montenegro. Serbian Prime Minister Boris Tadic unexpectedly supported an EU representative for controlling a referendum. One of the controversial conditions was that all Montenegrin citizens with Serbian residential addresses would not have the right to vote. The number of these potential voters was about 260,000. Montenegro has voted for independence with a win of 55,5%. The number of citizens that voted was 230,711 citizens of Montenegro, and against was 44,5% represented 185,002 voters. So only 0,5% of voters, which is 2,099 votes, have brought independent Montenegro. One of the conditions for winning a referendum was more than 55% of the voters. Socialistic Democratic Party (SDP), in front of Milo Djukanovic, won independence. It was the second referendum for the independent status of the Republic of Montenegro since the first happened on 1st March 1992. The difficulty of accepting Montenegrin independence caused in 2006 for Belgrade. Worthing to say, Belgrade observed Montenegro's foreign policy positioning after restoring autonomy with special attention.<sup>133</sup>

Strategic foreign policy documents in Montenegro emphasize the tendency towards membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. At the level of regional relations, the complete consolidation and normalization of Montenegro's relations with neighboring countries, including Serbia, should be noted. Montenegro has also strengthened its strategic partnership with the United States and built quality bilateral relations with the European Union (Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy). The strengthened role of Montenegro in the foreign policy plan has been shown in its participation in the work of international organizations, especially within

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<sup>133</sup> <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/21001>

the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. International institutions ought to be, as the national ones in democratic countries, established by the peoples and for the peoples.<sup>134</sup>

Montenegro, in 2007, signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement, and three years later, in 2010, also became a candidate for membership in the Union. Finally, in mid-2012, the formal pre-accession negotiation process began. The imposition is that Montenegro has opened 24 chapters (out of a total of 35), which is a real possibility that it will end in the regional context as soon as possible. Eventually, differences should not separate us from each other, but rather diversity brings a collective strength that can benefit all of humanity.<sup>135</sup> Also, NATO membership was the apparent goal from 2006 for Montenegrin foreign policy, and Montenegro became a NATO official member in 2016.

Montenegro's relations with Serbia have been improving since 2012. Then the recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2008 from the Montenegro government, led by Milo Djukanovic, was catastrophic for the bilateral relationship between Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>136</sup> With that aim, the Serbian Progressive Party, led by Aleksandar Vucic in 2012, started to rebuild a good connection with "brother country" Montenegro and to protect Serbia's diaspora in Montenegro as one of the goals of Serbian foreign policy. Serbian parties in Montenegro as the Democratic Serbian Party, supported by the new government of Serbia, set up upcoming problems that should happen in Montenegro. The most significant turning point in this cooperation represents the Agreement on Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Government of Montenegro in the context of EU accession," ratified in 2014. In the framework of this document were indicated the priorities for cooperation in the European integration between Serbia and Montenegro and established certain forms of institutional affiliation through intensive political dialogue. At the same time, some areas of cooperation between Serbia and Montenegro in

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<sup>134</sup> Henri La Fontaine was a Belgian international lawyer and president of the International Peace Bureau.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Alan Aurthur was an American screenwriter, film director, and film producer.

<sup>136</sup> Herbert George Wells was an English writer.

economics, trade, harmonization of its national legislation within the European Union, and collaboration between judicial authorities pointed out."<sup>137</sup>

President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, has taken more anti-Serbian political decisions. One of his motives was taking complete control of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, under the power of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade. Not knowing the future of the Church is the most significant life motivator.<sup>138</sup> To control their legal use of land, which is located in the most exclusive places in the country, and create a new Montenegro Orthodox Church, which will be the main church in the country under the control of the Montenegro government. This political goal of Milo Djukanovic created hundreds of protests of ethnic Serbian and believers on the streets, spontaneously called Litije. Its purpose was to protect the Serbian church and finally to break down 30 years of Milo Djukanovic leading the country in the last parliamentary election. Highly recommend the documentary movie by Boris Malagurski, called "Montenegro-A Land Divided", very well describes Serbian and Montenegro's historical, cultural, and political relations and the peaceful protest movement. "Litije" helped the first political change of the new Montenegrin government. On August 1, 2020, the right-wing Democratic Front, Popular Movement, and Socialist People's Party agreed to form a pre-election opposition alliance under the name "For the Future of Montenegro" and some of the right-wing non-parliamentary subjects. University Professor Zdravo Krivokapić headed the joint electoral list for the parliamentary election in August 2020, and they won. A new government was established from a particular minister group of experts in each area and put in ambitious front goals. The start of a new phase for bilateral relations in Belgrade Podgorica happened in Belgrade when new Prime Minister Zdravko Krivokapic met Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic on November 3, 2021. At the meeting were a participant and President of the National Assembly of Serbia since 2020 and the leader of the second largest party in Serbia, the

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<sup>137</sup> Cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro in the European integration process, Dragan Đukanović, Politics / Political Sciences, EU-Legislation, Институт за међународну политику и привреду, page 15, year of published 2015.

<sup>138</sup> Vera Nazarian is an Armenian-Russian American writer of fantasy, science fiction and other "wonder fiction"

Socialistic party.<sup>139</sup> Respect for the state and the rights of people and minorities must be mutual. We will continue improving the cooperation and relations between the two countries.

The only way durable peace can be created by restoring economic activity and international trade worldwide.<sup>140</sup> They are keeping in mind that the Republic of Serbia is the first foreign trade partner of Montenegro in both exports and imports. Also, Serbia is the leading foreign trade partner of Montenegro in Trade between CEFTA countries. "*Trade in 2020 amounts to 751.55 million euros (exports 687.13 million euros, and imports 64.41 million euros). Regarding Serbian investments in Montenegro, estimated data shows the amount of approximately 400 million euros. Furthermore, legal or natural persons from Serbia registered over 1500 companies in Montenegro in October 2011. Later, the Serbian-Montenegrin Business Club was founded, bringing together 120 most substantial Serbian and Montenegrin companies.*"<sup>141</sup>

On April 28, 2022, Montenegro got a new Prime Minister, Dritan Abazovic. After a no-confidence vote, Montenegro President Milo Djukanovic nominated Abazovic as Prime Minister-designate for the new 43rd Montenegro government. The main strategic goal of Montenegro's foreign policy is full European Membership, no matter what the price is. On the other side main strategic plan of Serbian foreign policy with Montenegro is the protection of Serbian most significant minority in Montenegro, the Serbian church protection as well Serbian language, Culture, Protection of Serbian identity and Nationality in the brother country of Montenegro. The joint most significant infrastructure projects are the highway Belgrade-Podgorica under construction, the fast train Belgrade-Bar to have easy access to the Trade Port Bar in Montenegro as an essential point, and access to the sea for Serbia. Bilateral relations between these two countries and one nation" must be on a higher level as a typical and expected bilateral relation for citizens to live better. In June 2022, the new Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dritan Abazovic, had an official visit to Belgrade, surprising and positive, to rebuild the best possible relationship with Serbia, which was a historical moment after many years of closed and limited Montenegrin politics with Serbia. Many economic questions were opened as well as

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<sup>139</sup> Martin Luther King Jr was an American Baptist minister and activist,

<sup>140</sup> James Vincent Forrestal was the last Cabinet-level United States Secretary of the Navy and the first United States Secretary of Defense.

<sup>141</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/spoljna-politika/bilateralna-saradnja/crna-gora>

political ones. Open Balkan Initiative should be a key point of overcoming historical problems and keep going forward with economic cooperation and prosperity for the citizens of both countries. Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.<sup>142</sup>

### **4.3 North Macedonia**

As a young nation, North Macedonia is still being formed and is trying to present itself to the world as an old and indigenous people. "However, there is no direct connection between Macedonians from the time of Philip and Alexander of Macedonian and North Macedonians today. There may be a connection between the Slavs and the Illyrians who lived in that area (with the Greeks). Still, it is indisputable that in the Middle Ages, Slavs (Serbs and Bulgarians) lived in that area and that the majority were Serbs. It remained until the 19th and the first half of the 20th century.<sup>143</sup> Bulgaria was always occupied power in this territory. The Serbs liberated North Macedonia in the Balkans wars and created Yugoslavia, but Yugoslavia, led by the communists, made the North Macedonian nation.<sup>144</sup> For over a thousand years, the majority in that area were Greeks and Serbs. For centuries, the territory of Northern Macedonia belonged to the Serbs, and the Southern part of North Macedonia to the Greeks. That's how the churches are divided. In the east, along the border with Bulgaria, the majority were Bulgarians. In the west, Albanians became the majority. Today, Macedonia is practically a country of five nations. In addition to ethnic Macedonians, there are Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Albanians, the most numerous national minority. Today, Albanians entirely control a third of North Macedonia. Peace exists between the Albanians and the Macedonians, as the new government meets all the demands of the Albanians. It caused dissatisfaction among North Macedonian nationalists. The Albanians managed to create a state within the state of North Macedonia. For now, they are going only that because they have international support. The goal of Albanians from North Macedonia is separation from North Macedonia and to create with Albania a "Greater Albania."<sup>145</sup> There is no direct connection between ancient Macedonians and modern North

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<sup>142</sup> Henry Ford was an American industrialist, business magnate, founder of the Ford Motor Company, and chief developer of the assembly line technique of mass production.

<sup>143</sup> <https://www.panacomp.net/history-of-serbia/>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Macedonian-Question>

<sup>145</sup> <https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/scapegoat-greater-albania-amid-rising-tensions-macedonia/>

Macedonians of Slavic origin, while the indirect contact is between the Serbian people, the most prominent Slavic people in that area, since the appearance of the Slavs in history. They exist today as a nation created by the Yugoslavian communists that did not exist before the 20th century. Macedonians today are a nation but a young nation. The second meeting of AVNOJ held in 1943 in Jajce agreed that the new Yugoslavia would be built on a federative principle. The decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia preceded in March of the same year to form the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Macedonia, which laid the foundation for future authorities and national engineering. Mosa Pijade shaped this idea, who outlined the profile of the future nation.<sup>146</sup> It was the birth of today North Macedonia and the North Macedonian people as an independent nation and state unit, as well as the introduction of Macedonia into the family of South Slavic and European countries. North Macedonia gained independence in 1991 as one of the successor states of Yugoslavia. The status of Serbs has been better since 2001 when they were constitutionally recognized as a national minority. Serbia is the most historically related country with North Macedonia from 1991. The region's middle country of Orthodox countries is exactly North Macedonia, with Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece. As that is well located, North Macedonia has to connect all these nations to protect the nation and country of North Macedonia from aggressive politics from the Albanian still minority inside the country. The biggest victim of the engineering of the creation of the North Macedonian nation should be the North Macedonians.<sup>147</sup>

After the big vote in the UN General Assembly, North Macedonia recognized Kosovo as an independent state in 2008. If Albanians start anything in North Macedonia, the Macedonian government is afraid that USA and Nato will support Albanian extremists/separatists.

Through this political decision, they showed that their strategic orientation is not an understanding of the problems that Serbia is facing. North Macedonia was unfair to Serbia because Serbia recognized the Republic of Macedonia, even though it was contrary to its strategic choices, which is also friendship with Greece. Today is well known that this political

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<sup>146</sup> Livanios, Dimitris, 'Introduction', *The Macedonian Question: Britain and the Southern Balkans 1939-1949* , Oxford Historical Monographs, 2008, Oxford), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199237685.003.0001>,

<sup>147</sup> Kako je Titova Jugoslavija postala poligon za stvaranje novih naroda: Makedonci rodjeni u Drezdenu, Novosti.rs, Rade Dragovic, 30.6.2020

decision of North Macedonia to recognize Kosovo depended on EU conditions on the way to the integration of North Macedonia and, of course, the day stronger Albanian minority in the government of North Macedonia. In the Prespa agreement of June 2018, the country changed its name to the Republic of North Macedonia due to the long historical name problem with Greece, which was necessary for continuing the process of enlargement to the European family. Bilateral relations started to improve from the Initiative Open Balkan, with one of the initiators, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev. The level of cooperation in numerous areas has been deepened and intensified, as well as continuous political dialogue and exchange of visits. Aleksandar Vučić attended the inauguration of the President of Stevo Pendarovski in 2019. Prime Minister of Serbia Ana Brnabic also visited North Macedonia in 2019. In February 2021, Vucic and Zajev met at the border of Serbia and North Macedonia for Serbia to give 4,680 doses of vaccine against Coronavirus, which were highly valuable these days. The new Serbian government tries to build friendly relations with the neighboring country, and a new government of North Macedonia, which was less nationalistic orientated as was the previous one led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, from November in political asylum in Hungary.

The priorities of overall cooperation are related to the infrastructural connection. Infrastructure is the backbone of economic growth. It improves access to basic services such as clean water and electricity, creates jobs, and boosts business. It includes the completion of Corridor 10, construction of the Vranje-Kumanovo gas connection (the project is still at the level of conceptual design, without a signed document from the two sides), construction of the railway Budapest-Belgrade-Skopje (signed in 2014 agreement between China, and Serbia, Hungary, and North Macedonia) and the reconstruction and modernization of the sections of the railway Belgrade-Nis and Nis Presevo-border with North Macedonia. The construction project of the transmission line Nis-Stip was implemented and put into operation in 2016 (400 VK, length 70 km). The backbone is trade, cooperation, and exchange. "In 2019, the volume of trade exchange was close to 900 million, exports from Serbia to North Macedonia amounted to 673.9 million euros, and imports were 223.7 million euros."<sup>148</sup> According to the 2002 census, 35,939 Serbs declared their nationality in North Macedonia. Awareness of Serbian origin is expressed to

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<sup>148</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/spoljna-politika/bilateralna-saradnja/severna-makedonija>

1.836.713 citizens.<sup>149</sup> Mainly they are located in the northern part of the country cities Kumanovo and the capital Skopje. North Macedonians in Serbia are 25,000 according to the census from 2011, and awareness of North Macedonian origin around 50,000 Serbs. Serbian external politics in North Macedonia has to focus on Serbs who lived there but more on North Macedonian citizens. South Orthodox brothers with the same historical relation forget and lose their Serbian identity after almost 80 years of building a new North Macedonian identity and country. Economic and political relations must be improved at the highest possible level as a question of existence and keeping identity. Soft power, restoration, and preservation of the language, culture, science, and history of Serbia in North Macedonia should be implemented in compliance with the North Macedonian government as an answer to Albanian expansion. Reinforced Serbian influence in North Macedonia not with the goal of controlling an independent country but with the purpose of keeping the existence of North Macedonian country and the nation.

#### **4.4 Albania**

Albania, as a young European country with a history as a Republic of less than 100 years, in the past, was not a priority for diplomatic relations with Serbia. Many facts proved that diplomatic ties did not run smoothly.<sup>150</sup> During a Socialistic period from 1946 to 1985, Albania had very isolated politics, implemented mainly by Enver Hoxha. However, during 1991 and the breaking up of Yugoslavia, most Albanian citizens in Kosovo and Metohija were not satisfied. They organized a protest against the Milosevic regime and a referendum for independents. In 1991, an independence referendum in the province of Kosovo showed 87 percent electorate participation (over 900,000 people), and 99 percent voted in favor of an independent "Republic of Kosovo." As a result, Albania recognizes Kosovo as a sovereign and independent state. Albania recognized the results with an accompanying document state parliament, and this moment was the point of bad relations with Serbia (this period FR Yugoslavia) until 1997.

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<sup>149</sup> <https://www.danas.rs/svet/u-severnoj-makedoniji-zivi-18-miliona-stanovnika/>

<sup>150</sup> Douglas Wright is an American playwright, librettist, and screenwriter.



Bilateral relations after the war didn't exist, and then the new democratic government of Serbia renewed ties, and diplomatic institutions were installed on both sides. After visiting Tirana in 2007, American President George Bush announced two crucial things: Albania would be a NATO member, and Kosovo would get independence. Officially Tirana got an open, direct promise and plan from the most potent diplomatic country, the USA, regarding what it should do until reaching its goals. Kosovo is the main problem of Serbian and Albanian bilateral relations, deeply determining the foreign policy of both countries. References with each country in the world are primarily dependent on a decision about the independence of Kosovo". "According to RZS data, in 2019, the volume of trade was close to 184 million euros (Serbian exports in Albania amounted to 140.8 million euros while imports amounted to 42.9 million euros)."<sup>151</sup> We have recorded 64 agreements and contracts due to good relations in recent years.

It is noticeable that since 2014 there has been an intensification of relations between Serbia and Albania. Until then, official communication between the two countries was mostly done through a multilateral format. Since then, Belgrade and Tirana have focused on bilateral relations: Aleksandar Vucic was the first Prime Minister of Serbia to visit Tirana, and Edi Rama, the Prime Minister of Albania, arrived in Belgrade after 68 years. Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others for their sake and our own. The two countries' common aspiration is to strengthen economic relations, increase trade exchange, expand cooperation in the field of tourism, and build infrastructure projects. Despite all the announcements, the status of Kosovo and Metohija opens the complex and burdened question of relations between the two countries. That is why the bilateral cooperation between Belgrade and Tirana can be seen as a political necessity that both countries resort to show that they meet the criteria of good neighborly relations and, there, by continuing the process of European integration.

On the other hand, views on issues of importance for the security of both countries remain opposed, which, in the long term, it does not give hope that the development of cordial and fruitful relations can happen. The attempt to build Serbian-Albanian connections on new foundations is, therefore, a challenging project to achieve. "The current activities of both

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<sup>151</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.rs/spoljna-politika/bilateralna-saradnja/albanija>

countries should be seen as constructiveness that manifests itself under the pressure of EU integration and USA diplomacy."<sup>152</sup> Initiative open Balkans helped already bilateral relations between Belgrade and Tirana. As a future director, it can calm the tensions about Kosovo and meet mutual economic interest, which is only essential for citizens of both countries, especially during the next financial crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Western economic sanctions on Russia.

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<sup>152</sup> Dušan Proroković RELATIONS BETWEEN ALBANIA AND SERBIA AT THE SECOND DECADE OF THE XXI CENTURY: A NEW BEGINNING OR CONSTRUCTIVITY UNDER PRESSURE, International politics no. 1168, 2017

## 5 Open Balkan Initiative

This thesis aims to understand the complex Serbian foreign policy and historical relations with neighboring countries in the context of the Open Balkan Initiative. This work considers Serbia's national interests, territorial integrity (Kosovo challenge), protection of Serbian people in the region, and relations with the EU, Russia and the U.S., and China. Furthermore, specific parts of Serbia's bilateral relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, and Albania indicate the future development of the Western Balkans region through the "Open Balkan.

To the traditional urban values of civic space, human scale, and diversity, the current environmental imperative has added two more: conservation and regionalism. Regionalism began to develop intensively after the end of the Second World War. Due to the need for multiple countries' connections in particular (sub)regions. "New Regionalism flourished at the end of the 20th century after the end of the Cold War. It represents "a multidimensional form of integration which includes economy, politics, social and cultural aspects to form a regional free market."<sup>153</sup> The new regionalism encompassed all world regions, including the Western Balkans. The period of multilateral initiatives in the Balkans has been intensive and widespread in the last two decades but also had periods of crisis. After Croatia entered into European Union in the middle of 2013, EU focus was on the Western Balkans region. Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo comprise today's Western Balkans region and are very similar in economic, political, and cultural development, creating favorable conditions for regionalization and European integration. Some regional leaders initially had a negative attitude toward the Western Balkans region, believing that it would complicate and slow individual processes for European integration.<sup>154</sup> A period of not-so-productive work on the process for European integration in the area motivated Germany and Angela Merkel to call for the Berlin process in 2014. "For the first time, the final declaration of the summit of the Berlin Process in Trieste held on July 13, 2017, mentioned the establishment of a Regional Economic

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<sup>153</sup> <https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/2022-open-balkan-the-future-belongs-to-the-peoples-of-the-balkans/5060?>

<sup>154</sup> "Trieste Western Balkans Summit 2017 – Declaration by the Italian Chair", Trieste, 13 July 2017, <https://europa.rs/trieste-western-balkans-summit-2017-declaration-by-the-italian-chair/?lang=en>, 22/01/2020.

Area (REA), which should be based on the existing CEFTA arrangements.<sup>155</sup> At this meeting at the summit of the Berlin Process, the European Union also promised certain funds to create and revitalize the Regional Economic Area. Creativity cannot be regulated, but it can be encouraged. The redevelopment or revitalization of the area is an art. It depends on the individual strengths of a place and the leadership's will to bring about change. The goal is to establish a cultural infrastructure.<sup>156</sup> But at the same time, it was said that this Initiative is by no means a substitute for the European integration of the Western Balkans countries, nor a similar parallel process.<sup>157</sup>

However, even though it's a unique perspective, it can still offer something universal.<sup>158</sup> The idea of creating an economic area in the Western Balkans, which will ensure the implementation of complete freedom of movement of people, services, goods, and capital, modeled after the European Union, became a prevalent topic for the leaders in the Western Balkans. The biggest challenge for the Berlin process was that Berlin needed more power and solution to normalize the Belgrade-Pristina relations. "The economic and investment plan of the European Commission for the Western Balkans from October 2020 envisages the use of up to 9 billion euros from funds from the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III). With the help of guarantees, the private sector and European and international financial institutions will fund up to 20 billion euros in investments."<sup>159</sup> Berlin process had a fantastic effect in the context of the economy and political relations in Western Balkans but after Poznan Summit in 2019 and inside problems of the European Union were signals that the process needed new transformation.

After Novi Sad, the following meetings were held in Ohrid on 11 November 2019 and then in Durres at 12 December 2019. With this agreement, Prime Minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev, Minister of Albania Edi Rama, and President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic agreed to create an economic zone and unified market of 12 million people. The question arose whether it was a

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<sup>155</sup> Peter Calthorpe (2010). "Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change", p.15, Island Press

<sup>156</sup> Charles Landry is an author and international adviser on the future of cities best known for popularising the Creative City concept.

<sup>157</sup> "Trieste Western Balkans Summit 2017 – Declaration by the Italian Chair", op. cit.

<sup>158</sup> Lynn Nottage is an American playwright whose work often focuses on the experience of working-class people, particularly working-class people who are Black.

<sup>159</sup> <https://www.dw.com/sr/zapadni-balkan-ima-koristi-od-berlinskog-procesa/a-58152055>

repetition of earlier similar initiatives and that it overlaps with the work of CEFTA, which after 2006 refers to the Western Balkans and Moldova. Finally, an essential and new question arose whether "Little Schengen" is actually in the exclusive use of only one of the Western Balkans countries here - Serbia, which achieves a surplus in economic exchange with most other countries in the region. The revolting attitude from the beginning of the Initiative in Pristina (Kosovo) was a betrayal of Prime Minister Edi Rama, who determined that the project is vitally important for the whole Western Balkans and that Pristina representatives should join the project. In Montenegro, political elites didn't see the project as a chance to improve EU integration, actually the opposite. President of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic's statement was that project Open Balkan will complicate EU integration<sup>160</sup> and that many of the regulations Montenegro already did. As the smallest economy, Montenegro will not have the benefits as the other members. The new Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic changed political course, and in the last meeting, in Ohrid, on June 7, 2022, Montenegro participated as a project supervisor. The Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dritan Abazovic, said in his opening address that he sees the "Open Balkan" as "helping us to create a better future together based on greater economic progress, mobility, greater opportunities to achieve cooperation in all fields. Abazovic added that he liked the Initiative to form a working group in the event of the energy crisis and the crisis in transportation and food production due to the war in Ukraine. Abazovic said, "We are interested in helping each other when there are fires and in having a common tourist offer. The idea of "Open Balkan" should be seen as something other than the idea of politicians. It is an idea for citizens and businesses.<sup>161</sup> Connect with people, visibly and loudly showcase initiatives that reduce greenhouse gases emissions, nurture youth leaders, or spread the message by raising awareness through campaigns. All together contributions will ensure that climate change solutions safely power our - and especially your - future.<sup>162</sup> If it develops as such, there will be less resistance". Furthermore, the Initiative was "the new face of the Western Balkans" as well as new foreign politics of the new Montenegro government."Open Balkan<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/open-balkan-initiative-risks-aggravating-political-problems-in-the-region/a-62834261>

<sup>161</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/08/montenegro-mulls-joining-open-balkan-initiative-kosovo-remains-opposed/>

<sup>162</sup> Karen Christiana Figueres Olsen DBE is a Costa Rican diplomat who has led national, international and multilateral policy negotiations.

<sup>163</sup> <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/otvoreni-balkan-samit-izazovi-rat-ukrajina/31888767.html>

## **5.1 SWOT analysis of of the Initiative**

SWOT analysis is a framework for identifying and analyzing a project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These words make up the SWOT acronym. The primary goal of SWOT analysis is to increase awareness of the factors that go into establishing a business strategy.

At the Economic Forum on Regional Cooperation held in Skopje on 29 June 2021, leaders of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia unveiled a new name for what was colloquially known as Mini-Schengen, which, from now on, will be officially called the Open Balkan initiative. In addition, the trio signed one interstate Agreement and two Memorandums of understanding, deepening political and economic ties between these countries. However, questions were raised over the complementarity of this initiative with the already existing Common Regional Market initiative, with the rest of the Western Balkan countries remaining skeptical and deciding not to participate. This section aims to alleviate some light on the Open Balkan initiative and potential threats arising from it while analyzing what it means for broader regional cooperation and the reasons behind the decisions of some not to participate. These agreements mean responding together to natural and other disasters, allowing citizens to work in one another's countries, and helping goods move without delays—the other words, to say to have a single market without borders.

### **5.1.1 Open Balkan strengths and opportunities**

A few principles would ensure the success of the Open Balkans Initiative: First, it has to be a step on the path to European integration, as the Common Regional Market is intended to be. Second, it needs to remain open to all, in line with European standards and compatible with your regional and international obligations. Third, EU standards must be at the heart of the initiative. Open Balkan agreements that meet EU standards are moving the region forward on the EU path. The most notable proposal of the Open Balkans initiative is to create free access to the labor market in the region. If implemented, this proposal will allow citizens of the three countries to find employment opportunities in the region on the same terms as local citizens. While almost 40% of companies in these countries report that they face shortages of suitable workers, according to the Western Balkan Chambers of Commerce, the free movement of workers with

the announced recognition of qualifications helps companies to meet these challenges while providing sufficient employment opportunities for citizens.<sup>164</sup>

The agreement minimized customs procedures in food safety, phytosanitary, and veterinary medicine areas. Thus, product analyzes will now be carried out only in the country of origin of the product and physical control, and laboratory tests will not be applied at other borders. The energy crisis, which swept the whole world after the Ukraine Crisis, left Serbia, which imports almost all of its natural gas from Russia, in a difficult situation against this country. It has been stated that Serbia will purchase Russian gas at a price of 270 dollars per thousand cubic meters until June 1, and then a new ten-year agreement will be signed with Russia on natural gas supply. China, on the other hand, currently has an investment (indebtment) volume of 7 billion dollars in Serbia. Beijing considers the country in question as its “gateway to Europe”. Serbia currently owes China more than 3 billion euros, and it is estimated that this debt will increase severalfold with new project plans spread over the coming years. There was a deficit in the Serbian budget and that the country would have to borrow money due to the aid distributed to the youth.<sup>165</sup>

By joining the Open Balkan, project Kosovo would come out of a decades-long isolation, as it is the most isolated area in Europe. After all, this would be a step in the direction of getting visa liberalization for Kosovo citizens.<sup>166</sup>

To facilitate the free movement zone, separate lanes for citizens and goods from the participating Balkan countries will be established, open at border crossings where controls are not carried out. In addition, the leaders said they are working closely with companies on possible discounts at various hotels and restaurants for their citizens, as well as tourist routes, to further promote travel. The complete abolition of border controls and the creation of an area of free movement such as Schengen could lead to a reduction in operating costs for companies of up to 6-9%. The main strenghts and opportunities are as follows:

1. sustainable regional cooperation and economic development;
2. new agreements and cooperation protocols creating a common labor market;

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<sup>164</sup> <https://cep.org.rs/en/blogs/open-balkan-initiative/>

<sup>165</sup> <https://www.ankasam.org/the-importance-of-open-balkan-initiative-for-serbia/?lang=en>

<sup>166</sup> <https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/2022-open-balkan-the-future-belongs-to-the-peoples-of-the-balkans/5060?#>

3. bolstering collaboration in other fields such as education;
4. boosting tourism;
5. improve the closer gap between Serbia and Kosovo;
6. Ukraine war has made the Open Balkan initiative “a greater necessity.” ;
7. to reset bilateral ties with Serbia;
8. Serbia and Montenegro are interdependent countries and should jointly create a European future based on reconciliation and cooperation;
9. support any initiative that brings progress to the region;
10. Open Balkan mechanism will accelerate the region’s integration into the EU;
11. important economic project;
12. responding together to natural and other disasters;
13. allowing citizens to work in one another’s countries;
14. helping goods move without delays, without barriers, unnecessary administration and waiting at the borders;
15. enabling all labour to be employed across the region with one work permit being sufficient, which further means in-depth integration to participating countries.

Opportunities of Open Balkan Initiative are as follows:

1. clear commitment to creating a functional common market;
2. strengthening of trade and economic ties in other areas;
3. green transition will help our environment and our economies;
4. do not need to wait for every issue to be resolved, or for Europe to come to consensus, in order to make lives better for our people;
5. geographic proximity conditions trade and societal connections which will not disappear upon the EU accession;
6. a single consumer market (almost 18 million consumers);
7. the vast natural resources;
8. The Open Balkan members have great infrastructure, industrial mega-cities and qualified personnel, agricultural farms, military-industrial complex, qualified human capital.



### **5.1.2 Open Balkan threats and weaknesses**

In fact, Open Balkan is a form in which all the enthusiastic collaborators – except the leader – gradually incapacitate themselves, until they are powerless to resist the new order. As with any cult or fad, glaring inconsistencies are set aside.

Several challenges could accompany the successful implementation of the Open Balkan initiative. For instance, abolishing border controls could exacerbate drug trafficking and criminal activities. In this regard, the European Commission has already highlighted that the so-called Balkans route is one of the main entry points for various types of illegal drugs into the EU. Moreover, accompanied by a high level of corruption, with organized crime and officials often engaging in acts of corruption with impunity, abandoning border controls could turn out to be fertile soil for criminal activities. Additionally, it could prove nearly impossible to keep track of third-party citizens' entries and imports of goods from different markets in a borderless region. Unless these challenges are appropriately addressed, they could be a stumbling block to deepening regional cooperation.

If the strong commitment to this initiative persists, remedies to the presented challenges could be found. At the Skopje Summit, the three political leaders announced that steps to create a standard software and information-sharing system are already in motion. Coupled with a high level of coordination between the interior ministries, the risks of an increased volume of cross-border criminal activities can be mitigated. On the other hand, more than sharing information alone is required to prevent third-party citizens from entering one country without visa restrictions and simply crossing to another where such arrangements with the country of origin do not exist. Creating a legal visa regime might be the only solution. The same logic could also be applied to goods entering a borderless market if they are required to pay different-level customs to each state. In this case, however, harmonizing customs policies alone would not be sufficient, as countries would inevitably lose border revenues due to the lack of internal borders. Creating common regional institutions and external tariffs could be the necessary action. Otherwise, Open Balkan participating countries risk porous borders like those between Norway and the EU, with common violations.

#### **1. Distribution of Custom Revenues:**

When an Open Balkan is formed, and a standard tariff is imposed, there is crucial to how the revenues collected from customs are distributed among the member countries. Some of the alternatives in this connection may be:

- (a) Each member country retains the amount collected at its border crossing points. In this case, countries will gain or lose according to their geographical situation.
- (b) Allocation of customs revenue can be made based on the place of consumption of imported goods and that of production of exported goods. However, this system may prove unjust if the wholesale distribution of certain imports or processing of certain exports is concentrated in a specific member country.
- (c) Customs revenues may be distributed based on the member countries' population or per capita incomes. In this case, controversy may arise because of variations in the values of imports and exports.
- (d) Payments to smaller and land-locked member countries may be made on a lump-sum basis, irrespective of the revenue receipts. Each one of these alternatives has, no doubt, certain deficiencies, and the member countries must arrive at some agreement through negotiations.

### **1. Loss of Revenues due to Inter-Member Trade:**

Since the Open Balkan involves the removal of internal tariffs, the member countries suffer a loss in customs revenues. However, such a loss can be offset by creating a shared pool and making compensation payments to each member country in proportion to the quantum of loss.

### **2. Budgetary Problem:**

The loss of revenue due to the abolition of tariffs can create budgetary difficulties for some member countries. However, the revenue loss may be made good either through the imposition of some other taxes or from the revenue collections through higher tariffs against the non-member countries.

### **3. Administration of Customs:**

The effective functioning of the Open Balkan vitally depends upon the degree of efficiency of customs administration. However, apart from infrastructural problems, customs administration may be undermined by the conflicting interests of the member countries and deliberate loose policing of borders.

In this connection, it can be suggested alternative ways for the administration of customs, such as:

- (a) Complete autonomy in the administration of customs for the members,
- (b) Joint supervision at the border posts,
- (c) Complete assumption of responsibility of customs.

Efficient customs administration required some degree of the merger of customs administrative authority in the union.

#### **4. Allocation of Cost of Custom Administration:**

If there is joint administration of customs, the cost of administration must be distributed among the union members. Of course, if each member country is autonomously administering its customs, there may not be sharing of costs. Nevertheless, when there is some degree of joint administration, some equitable basis for the distribution of costs must be evolved, with larger countries bearing a more significant burden of customs administration and vice-versa.

#### **5. Uniform Tariffs**

Since all the members are required to have a uniform tariff, some have to raise the rates of tariffs while others have to reduce them. All of them have to make highly complicated modifications. The changes in tariff rates for uniformity can create serious internal economic dislocations apart from attracting severe criticism from the rest of the world.

#### **6. Diversity in Tax Structure:**

The differences in internal tax rates or possibilities of double taxation create severe hindrances in the free movement of labor and capital within the union. Some countries may be inclined to maintain a lower rate structure of taxes, while others may have higher tax rates. The member countries will have to go through complex and detailed negotiations to tackle the problem of diversity in the structure of taxes and have a standard standardized tax structure.

#### **7. Uneven Distribution of Gains:**

The Open Balkan often brings relatively more significant gains to the advanced and the dominant member countries because of free internal competition. Countries having a higher structure of

tariff rates are likely to suffer from unemployment and balance of payments difficulties after the abolition or reduction in tariff rates.

#### **8. Internal Economic Dislocations:**

After the formation of the Open Balkan, some industries that receive a greater degree of protection reduce their productive capacity. On the opposite, specific other industries for which the union, as a whole, has a tremendous comparative advantage have to enlarge their productive capacities—the reallocation of productive capacity results in losses in capital values of certain lands and urban sites.

Some other capital assets make significant windfall gains. However, there is also a significant change in the pattern of demand for raw materials and other inputs. As a result, there are internal economic dislocations on a wide scale. The Open Balkan can operate if readjustments are speedily made in the entire new structure.

#### **9. Adverse Effect on the Rest of the World:**

The organization of regional economic grouping naturally militates against the interests of non-member countries. The adverse effect on the latter can be offset if the standard tariff structure is fixed at a level lower than that existing earlier. If the non-member countries remain adversely affected, they may shift their demand to some other countries offering them better terms of trade. Alternatively, they may organize themselves into rival regional economic groupings.

#### **10. Fear of Political Domination:**

There is real or imaginary fear among smaller member countries that the dominant countries can use them to serve their economic and political interests. There is some dilution of sovereignty when the economic and political decisions are to be taken by a central administrative authority of the union.

#### **11. Abolishing border controls could exacerbate drug trafficking and criminal activities**

The European Commission has already, in this regard, highlighted that the so-called Balkans route is one of the main entry points for various types of illegal drugs into the EU.

#### **12. Abandoning border controls could turn out to be fertile soil for criminal activities**

Accompanied by a high level of corruption, with organized crime and officials often engaging in acts of corruption with impunity, abandoning border controls could turn out to be fertile soil for criminal activities.

### **13. Impossible to keep track of third-party citizens' entries in a borderless region**

This puts heterogeneous visa regimes of participating countries under severe stress.

### **14. Impossible to keep track of imports of goods from different markets in a borderless region**

This would be particularly challenging in light of diverse customs policies and import duties. Unless these challenges are properly addressed, they could be a stumbling block to deepening regional cooperation

### **15. Heterogeneous visa regimes of participating countries lead to various customs policies and import duties.**

### **16. Economic disparity**

Two of the three participants, Albania and North Macedonia, have GDPs barely half that of the leading participant, Serbia.<sup>167</sup> So while all three countries will benefit from a stock market [or trading area], Serbia will always benefit more. The Serbian market is more prominent and will always be able to attract more foreign investment [one of the aims of the common market in the first place] and produce higher-value goods [for export inside and outside the regional market].<sup>168</sup> Wage differentials need to be higher to offset the advantages of investing in Western Balkans, Six's largest and most advanced economy. In other words, a rising tide will lift all boats, but one boat – Serbia — will become a ship. The enthusiastic proponents of 'Open Balkan(s)' have yet to contemplate the effects of imbalanced growth and productivity. This is surprising because such imbalances were one of the drivers of tension in former Yugoslavia, summed up in the bitter phrase uttered in poorer areas like Kosovo: '*Kosovo radi, Beograd grade* ['Kosovo works' – extracting raw materials – while 'Belgrade builds,' extracting the benefit and producing higher value goods].

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<sup>167</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/15/open-balkans-is-not-just-unwise-its-dangerous/>

<sup>168</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/managing-risks-instability-western-balkans>

The political economy of today's Balkan region – split into seven independent countries [one of which, Kosovo, is not recognized by Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina] – is different. Instead of physical, economic, and political connectivity, the region's small states are broken up. Unifying them in one market would create efficiencies, attract investment, and increase growth.

### **17. Supervening power, supervening goals, and values**

The task of regional connectivity should have been a foundational element of the post-war European Union-led strategy for the region. At least by 2020, the EU prioritized regional cooperation and connectivity at the Sofia Summit, backed by serious financial commitment – the 30 billion euro Economic and Investment Plan.<sup>169</sup>

The Sofia Summit saw commitment from the full WB6 to a regional common market in a different framework – the ‘Berlin Process’ – led by Germany and integrally linked to EU rules and norms. In other words, all WB6 parties – not just three or four – had already embraced a regional common market, fused with the goal of membership in and commitment to the values of the overarching EU bloc.<sup>170</sup>

Such a design, with a supervening power and supervening goals and values, is the antidote to bitter resentments like those in former Yugoslavia. The common accretion of EU values and reforms would dampen the ability and temptation to exploit economic power – or nurse grudges from uneven economic benefits.<sup>171</sup>

The need for supervening power to cover mistrust was at the core of the famous Schuman Plan that was the precursor to the EU – the most successful model ever devised for achieving economic growth and political cooperation among prior belligerents.

After World War Two, France harbored fears of reviving German power flowing from access to coal and steel production in the Ruhr Valley and Saarland. The Schuman Plan addressed French concerns and German demands by putting coal and steel production under a supranational High Authority that eventually became the European Coal and Steel Community and later the European Economic Community before ultimately evolving into today’s EU.

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<sup>169</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/15/open-balkans-is-not-just-unwise-its-dangerous/>

<sup>170</sup> <https://visegradinsight.eu/whats-up-in-western-balkans-ask-an-expert/>

<sup>171</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/managing-risks-instability-western-balkans>

‘Open Balkan(s)’ flips this successful precedent on its head, discarding any supranational trust-building mechanism [such as the Berlin Process] in favor of immediate reduction of barriers. The underlying philosophy, evangelized by Richard Grenell, the former Trump Administration envoy and now embraced by the Biden Administration, is that trade and job creation overcome mistrust.

A glance at the raging war in Ukraine, which traded heavily with Russia until the invasion, punctures this concept. Similarly, trade between China and its democratic neighbors, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, has exploded, just as trust between Beijing and its neighbors has plummeted. The same dynamics apply in the Balkans. If trade equaled trust, then Serbia – Montenegro’s number one trading partner for exports and imports – would already have a trusting relationship with its much smaller trading partner. Instead, Montenegrins accurately perceive Belgrade as a predator. The character of the trading partner, democratic or authoritarian, counts in trading relations. West Germany gradually evolved into Europe’s strongest economic power – a leading democracy that did not exploit that power to subvert its neighbors – thanks to a regime built on shared interest, democratic values, and realism, not credulity.

### **18. Greater Serbia, Greater Albania**

With Open Balkan(s), the US is enthusiastically promoting a trading regime led by an autocrat, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who undermines the Western order for the region.<sup>172</sup> Albanians [in Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia] and Macedonians do not share anxieties about Serbian economic dominance because they do not face direct threats from Vucic's authoritarianism. Just to clarify. Authoritarianism is not pretending anymore to be a natural alternative to democracy, but we can see many more authoritarian practices and styles being smuggled into democratic governments.<sup>173</sup>

Seeing their path to the EU blocked, Macedonians are willing to go along with Open Balkan(s); integration among the WB6 is a buffer against Bulgarian predatory nationalism. In addition, the recent recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church by the Serbian Orthodox Church has boosted relations when the Macedonian identity is under assault by Bulgaria, also Serbia's

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<sup>172</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/06/15/open-balkans-is-not-just-unwise-its-dangerous/>

<sup>173</sup> Ivan Krastev is a political scientist, the chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia.

rival.<sup>174</sup> Partition automatically opens up the "Union of Kosovo and Albania" in other words, Greater Albania – a solution compatible with Greater Serbia once Kosovo is split.<sup>175</sup>

## **19. Win for Russia**

All this would be a win for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Putin's vision for the Balkans and Europe. Moscow generally backs Western initiatives in the region that the Kremlin believes can't work, like the EU-led Dialogue, or that advance the Russian agenda.<sup>176</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in emphatic terms, recently asserted Moscow's support for Open Balkans. This is no one-off. Russia's main media outlet in Serbia, Sputnik Serbia, has repeatedly promoted „Open Balkan“, as Srdjan Darmanovic and Anđelka Rogac noted in their CEDEM report on 'Russian Digital Footprint in the Balkans.' The report cites a number of laudatory Sputnik headlines, including this gem: 'Vucic: 'Open Balkans' will work, just because no one but us has come up with it'. As he has made clear, Rama doesn't care about any of this. For the moment, all he and other Open Balkan(s) proponents want are 'results.' Unfortunately, despite all the ballyhoo around Open Balkan(s), it hasn't delivered many.<sup>177</sup>

The threats to the Open Balkan Initiative are as follows:

### **1. The lack of an "Open Balkan" identity**

In the Open Balkan countries, the stereotypes and fears of a totalitarian past have yet remained. The independent now countries want to protect their own national interests.

### **2. In the Open Balkan countries, there are high indexes of corruption and bureaucracy**

Serbia's and Kosovo's rankings also worsened compared to 2019. Serbia declined by one point from 39 points to 38 and was ranked in 94th place in 2020, down from 91 the previous year. Kosovo again scored 36 points and was ranked in 104th place, a decline of three places compared to 101 the previous year. According to the report, Serbia earned its lowest score on the CPI since 2012, and "the country's biggest corruption challenges include serious rule-of-law issues, continued democratic erosion and efforts to silence critical voices". Montenegro also kept

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<sup>174</sup> <https://visegradinsight.eu/whats-up-in-western-balkans-ask-an-expert/>

<sup>175</sup> <https://visegradinsight.eu/whats-up-in-western-balkans-ask-an-expert/>

<sup>176</sup> <https://visegradinsight.eu/whats-up-in-western-balkans-ask-an-expert/>

<sup>177</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/managing-risks-instability-western-balkans>



the same score (45), but declined in rank from 66th to 67th place. Albania actually improved its score, rising from 35 to 36 points and its rank rose from 106th to 104th place. Macedonia scored 39 points out of 100 on the 2021 and Bosnia and Herzegovina scored 35 points out of 100 on the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index.<sup>178</sup>

**3. The interstate structures are not completely coordinated and the national legislations of the Open Balkan members are not harmonized;**

**4. There is a strong dependence on the Open Balkan economy from external factors such as economic sanctions of the Western countries on Russia; the world prices of energy carriers and natural resources, the American dollar and euro exchange rates.)**

**5. Threats of terrorism, extremism and separatism;**

**6. Particular economic threats caused by excessive dollarization of national economy of certain Open Balkan members. The people live in fear of devaluation;**

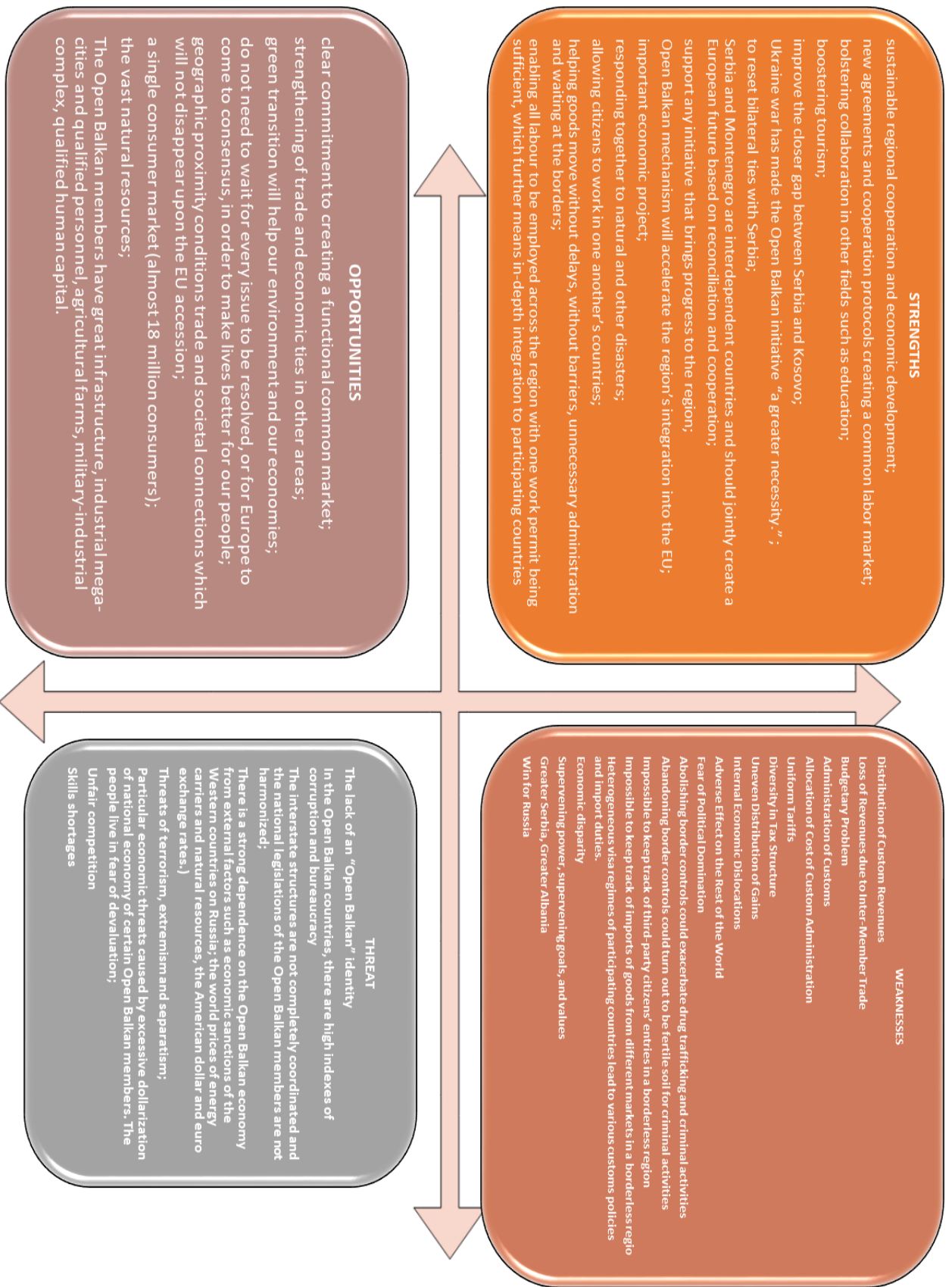
7. **Unfair competition**, particularly from the informal sector, represents an important constraint for businesses in most Western Balkans economies. In the enterprise survey, 44.5% of Western Balkan firms stated that they compete against informal firms, while 35.5% of firms stated that informal competition is a major obstacle for their business. The share of informal employment in the region is estimated at 17-40%.<sup>179</sup>

8. **Skills shortages** are an increasing obstacle to doing business in Serbia. More than 70% of enterprises identify skills shortages as having a negative impact on enterprise development. Despite recent reforms, including the development of the national qualifications framework, the Serbian education system fails to deliver the skills the labour market needs. More than half of surveyed enterprises (53 per cent) perceive graduates from vocational and higher education institutions only partly prepared or completely unprepared to meet the needs of enterprises. Approximately 45 per cent of surveyed enterprises reported having difficulties in recruiting workers with the right skills, especially highly skilled ones. The survey also concluded that adult professional development remains low, with a participation rate below 20 per cent, whereas life-long learning opportunities are still underdeveloped.

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<sup>178</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/mkd>

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/66c185f2-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/66c185f2-en>



**Figure 1. SWOT analysis of the Open Balkan Initiative**

## 5.2 Notable Absentees

Montenegro elites' decision is to join the Open Balkan initiative. As usual, time changes things, but this time, we actually have to change them ourselves.<sup>180</sup> Montenegro elites debate that their country opened more to joining the EU than other Western Balkans counties. Dritan Abazovic is ready to join the initiative and says Montenegro is making every effort to promote a policy of regional cooperation, reconciliation, coexistence, and better economic cohesion in the Western Balkans. Relations with Serbia are a priority – we are ready for intensive cooperation in all areas of common interest.

Montenegro also has a few significant political issues, and from this perspective, they hope that EU full membership will be much more complicated than joining the Open Balkan initiative. The latest calculations show that Montenegro could disproportionately benefit the most from the Open Balkan project. That should take a new fact into account in the context of the post-Covid recovery and the crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The initiative can help jointly create a future of economic progress, business, greater mobility of citizens, and greater cooperation in all fields. Every initiative that can lead to progress and reconciliation will have the support of the Montenegrin government. But the decision of foreign policy of Montenegro should be accepted in the Parliament by the government and by President Milo Djukanovic, who is openly against the Open Balkan initiative. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro are worried that Open Balkan is a facade for Serbia's regional hegemony. The idea of a "Serbian world" -- most fiercely advocated by Serbia's Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin -- looms large in any discussion of Open Balkan. Many see this Serbian world as a reincarnation of the Greater Serbia of the 1990s, which brought bloodshed, and are worried about Serbia's real objectives in the region. While President Aleksandar Vucic does not promote the idea, he has not publicly rejected it so far either.<sup>181</sup>

Some Montenegrin economists claim it is economically most profitable for Montenegro to remain within the process of European integration and that for its underdeveloped economy, even in comparison with other countries in the region, it would be very dangerous and harmful to

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<sup>180</sup> Warhol, A., 1977. *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*, Harvest; First edition

<sup>181</sup> [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/montenegro-may-be-set-to-join-open-balkan-initiative/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/montenegro-may-be-set-to-join-open-balkan-initiative/)

open abruptly. On the other hand, Montenegro has implemented some of the standards that other countries in the region have not yet adopted, such as those in the food safety area, where more than 5,000 directives have been adopted. Joining an initiative, such as the Open Balkan, would essentially mean a step backward for Montenegro. Speaking in the language of economic integration – the Open Balkan actually means a Open Balkan, which brings with it a whole series of challenges and problems, as well as the need to finance, organize, structure, and institutionalize it.<sup>182</sup>

The President of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zoran Tegeltija, said he hopes to be the last one from Bosnia and Herzegovina to come as an observer and guest. He stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have a consensus regarding the “Open Balkan.” “The reasons are part of the prejudices from the past about who is the proposer of this initiative. Who will profit? Whether this is a substitute for the Western Balkans and the European Union is also a question of political influences. I am here because I know that the business community in Bosnia and Herzegovina supports “Open Balkan,” he says. Tegeltija also said that he knows that “the majority of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens support this project. “I believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina will soon become a member of the Open Balkan,” concluded Tegeltija.”<sup>183</sup> At the summit in Ohrid, Gabriel Escobar, USA envoy for Western Balkans, spoke on a video call with the rest representatives and gave full support. He said that Open Balkan Initiative has to stay economical, not political, to focus on citizens, as this form has a promising future and support from the USA.<sup>184</sup> The Open Balkan Initiative is just one of the initiatives for regional cooperation. We support all economic initiatives that bring the region closer and promote peace and stability among the Western Balkans countries. If any success is to be open to all, any economic integration initiative must involve all six Western Balkan countries at the same level. In Ohrid, European Commissioner for Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi said that initiative would help faster enlargement in the EU.<sup>185</sup> According to his information, the Western Balkans region can only create one-third of its GDP through integration into Open Balkan. So, the USA and the

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<sup>182</sup> <https://cgo-cce.org/en/2022/07/17/open-balkan-cannot-be-an-alternative-for-european-integration/>

<sup>183</sup> <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/otvoreni-balkan-samit-izazovi-rat-ukrajina/31888767.html>

<sup>184</sup> <https://ba.n1info.com/english/news/us-western-balkans-envoy-visiting-sarajevo/>

<sup>185</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/report-main-conclusions-2022-enlargement-package-delivered-commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-council\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/report-main-conclusions-2022-enlargement-package-delivered-commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-council_en)

EU also support the initial public. However, they still did not accomplish a budget for the initiative, which will work to open more accessible and other Western Balkans states to join. But a functioning Open Balkan is also key to maximizing the benefits of EU support to your economies and to realizing the full potential of the Economic and Investment Plan. With the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, we are offering the region a EUR 29 billion investment package. It brings the potential to transform the area and boost its economy to a level of prosperity never seen before. Creating a specific budget will help every member, and as a benefit for the sponsors, they will control the situation in the Western Balkans region more than Russia and China. The opinion that the war in Ukraine and Russian aggression have returned the focus of the USA to the Western Balkans because the integration of the region into Euro-Atlantic structures remains unfinished business. As a satisfaction for EU reforms until this initiative, Open Balkan is the only option. To be a complete initiative and full potential, Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo must join. With 5 + 1 member states, Open Balkan will have a unique market of almost 18 million citizens. Keeping in mind this data Open Balkan initiative has extra value for the European Union as a final destination for all initiative members. Why EU is supporting this initiative, and is this represent a new form of the Berlin process? EU looking for enterprise as an excellent opportunity for preparation of the whole region as one unity ready for final entering in EU at the same time are some of the questions. In Bosnia negative perspective is having Bosnian Muslims, with the most significant political party, SDA, and their traditional leader Bakir Izetbegovic who is against everything that has any relation to Serbia. The decision to join the initiative Open Balkan for Bosnia and Montenegro, NATO member states, should be linked and addressed in Washington and Brussels. The influence of these two world diplomatic centers for such small and very dependent economies as Montenegro and Bosnia is powerful. The real question is whether the USA and EU want to support this initiative to benefit all citizens of Western Balkans rather than the general politics of the region and as a final process of EU integration with the traditional influence of USA diplomacy in the Western Balkans region. Surely, a gift consists not in what is done or given, but in the intention of the giver or doer.<sup>186</sup> Kosovo, politically and openly against joining an initiative led by Albin Kurti, definitely didn't see a change. Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama

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<sup>186</sup> Seneca, 1935., Moral Essays, Volume III.

said he fully agrees with Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti that Serbia should not only recognize Kosovo but also apologize to Kosovo, but that they disagree on when this should happen. One giant step forward in their goal is recognizing Kosovo as an independent state from Serbia, which should be impossible in all other international institutions. The Open Balkan is not an organization but an informal group of states, like the G7 or G20. And in my view, it would be easy for Kosovo if it behaves constructively creatively, participates in the Open Balkan, and asks for support from the states for us to become part of the Council of Europe, become part of the partnership for peace of NATO.<sup>187</sup>

“And while the Prime Minister of the temporary institutions of Pristina, Albin Kurti, bases his extreme policy on conflicts and artificially raising tensions, the other Albanian political parties understand that, at least at this moment, the best way to get out of their misery is to join this project. Thus, the Vice-President of the Kosovo Assembly, Enver Hoxhaj, stated that Kosovo should become part of the “Open Balkan” initiative and assessed that in this way, it would increase cooperation with the countries of the region. Hoxhaj, the leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo, told the RTK that Pristina should participate in regional organizations or initiatives, seeking the support of states to become part of the partnership for peace, the Council of Europe, and NATO”<sup>188</sup>. Enver Hoxhaj said: “As long as I was in the Minister of Foreign Affairs position, we followed an approach that allows Kosovo to be a part of every organization, in every regional initiative. “Open Balkan” is not even an organization. It is an informal group of states, like the G-7 or G-20,” said Hoxhaj, Minister of Foreign Affairs for two terms. Kosovo. In his words, “you cannot say no to an informal initiative for cooperation in the region and ask partners from different countries to support you, either in Strasbourg or Brussels.” The head of European diplomacy, Giuseppe Borelj, pointed out that he firmly believes that the accession of the Western Balkans to the European Union is in the common interest. Will geopolitically strengthen both the EU and the region, adding that “Open Balkan” is an initiative of essential importance that includes the entire Western Balkans region. As reported by “Vijesti,” Borelj emphasized that EU accession is a merit-based process, so it is difficult to set a time frame. When asked how he views the “Open Balkan” initiative, Borelj states that “leaders' commitment

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<sup>187</sup> <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kosovo-should-become-part-of-open-balkan-initiative-ex-minister/2635957>

<sup>188</sup> <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/512533/Klizi-li-Pristina-ka-Otvorenom-Balkanu>

to regional cooperation is an essential element of the European perspective of the Western Balkans and an integral part of the stabilization and association process.” Process of harmonization of procedures which will give the first results of free movements of goods, services, and people very soon. The exact Process of harmonization that the EU was using years ago. It is beneficial for upcoming EU processes for every Western Balkans country. The fact that Serbia will be a dominant economy is logical by the size of the population and economic capacity. Still, the EU market, which is a goal for each economy, is more extensive. For example, Serbia's economy is about 14 times the size of Montenegro's. Serbia's economy is nearly double the size of Albania's and North Macedonia's combined. “Serbia will always benefit more from open barriers (the four freedoms) than its neighbors. Serbia will be able to produce higher-value goods for export, growing even more dominant.”<sup>189</sup>

Balkans, as a region full of tensions, needs an Open Balkan initiative essential for founding peace and open communication between member states for all joint problems that can be overcome with economic prosperity for each citizen. Economic growth will change the mentality and national conscience, it will reduce inter-ethnic differences, and as one region will be ready for EU principles and EU values. European membership in the Western Balkans is observed as one of unity with a fully open economy, a competitive market prepared to answer on EU competitiveness, and honest politics of respect and politics of compromise as the only solution for Western Balkans political problems. Politics of settlement in this region is possible only with a positive atmosphere, open and intensive communication which exactly makes it possible Open Balkan initiative.

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<sup>189</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/open-balkan-initiative-risks-aggravating-political-problems-in-the-region/a-62834261>

## 6 Conclusion

After the war period in the 1990s and the creation of the new states Western Balkans region is ready to forget the bad past and political difficulties. If people in this region cannot understand the beauty of life, it is probably because life never understood the beauty in him. Peace in the area is essential for all member states, and every initiative and project that produces peace and open communication between states is more than welcome. We must welcome the future, remembering that soon it will be the past, and we must respect the past, remembering that it was once all that was humanly possible. The EU and USA openly support Initiative Open Balkan. It was founded in Serbia in 2019 on the initiative of Aleksandar Vucic, Edi Rama, and Zoran Zaev as a symbol that Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia, without direct EU instruction, can create regional initiatives with great potential. The integration process in all these countries came in confusing and disappointing periods about the integration suitable for regional multilateral cooperation and focusing on their potential and economy. Beauty of integration emerges from selection, affinities, integration, and love. Difficult foreign policy and close historical and economic relations Serbia with Russia added problematic situations for Serbia. Unity is of EU these days dependent on Western Balkans foreign policy and enlargement. One of the priorities for the EU is the finalization of Kosovo's independence, which is the most challenging question for the Serbian government. Economic facts, what the creation of initiative will bring here is faster and more accessible transport of goods and services, labor shortage, free movement, mutual agreements for help in urgent climate disasters, and a larger single market. Including all Western Balkans states will give enormous international legitimacy.

Open Balkan with Montenegro, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo will expedite EU integration for all countries individually. Still, the EU is also observing with parallel development, which is easier and more effective to adjust to EU standards and conditions. Informal cooperation initiative Open Balkan is not stopping EU integration or any other regional initiatives. Any agreement was not easy to achieve, but this initiative was the biggest one after a period of war that came from here directly invented for the Western Balkans region. It symbolizes the maturity of political elites after many years of self-destruction. We can notice skepticism in countries'



observers about the initiative as an organization that will slow down EU enlargement. No suspicion leads to no understanding. People in the Balkans and politicians are willing to look very skeptical about every new idea, primarily if the concept was founded here in Balkans as the Open Balkan initiative was.

The concept of the Serbian World uniting Serbia with Republic Srpska and Montenegro, and on the other side deleting borders between Albania and Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia (the concept of Great Albania) are very negatively observed. Still, they are facts that should happen naturally and very soon. This initiative will help their ideas happen faster through an economic form of regionalization and integration and later political (new borders/without borders). In creating positive energies and without external mentors from USA and EU, both leaders Edi Rama and Aleksandar Vucic are very proud that they can serve their national interests through the Open Balkan. Due to the Ukrainian war, most western media see Serbia as the dominant factor in this initiative, knowing the excellent relationship that Serbia has with Russia. For this region, there is no time for any try of political stopping trade processes, even if this trade comes from the Eastern economy. All Western Balkans states must be open for marketing and communication, not just with the Western economy. The focus is the economy, and only the citizens of Western Balkans will benefit and create a new standard, sustainable working and living atmosphere with more jobs to reduce the economic exodus of citizens and emigration. A great emigration necessarily implies unhappiness of some kind or other in the deserted country. Western Balkans countries should work hard on solving political challenges to speed up financial turnover, which will catch up with European standards to create a welfare region through initiatives such as Open Balkan". Serbia must be a factor of stability in the Balkans region and strategically achieve its national interests wisely and smartly through the economy and soft power.

SWOT analysis was done to clarify the objective purpose of the Open Balkan initiative. SWOT analysis shows that the importance of cooperation and solidarity is most evident in the case of natural disasters (fires, earthquakes, floods, etc.). There is no stability without solidarity and no solidarity without strength. However, the latest challenges that individual countries and regions have faced were the Covid-19 pandemic and the energy and food crisis resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Cooperation is also essential because of the relations between the

Western Balkans and the EU. A voice of one country towards the EU does not mean much. However, when all six Western Balkan countries act and speak with one voice towards the EU, that generates a new quality and weight. The Open Balkan initiative is not an alternative to membership in the EU but a path for the country to faster prepare itself for membership in the EU and seize all the untapped opportunities for synergy and cooperation. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. An economy of scope without administrative barriers is essential for regional cooperation. The Open Balkan is an embryo of new economic clusters already being created in the region and constitutes a competitive advantage for the countries and the area. It is necessary to align Open Balkan with other initiatives more concretely so they are distinct. That would facilitate the achievement of a high level of integration. It is vital to ensure economic development and competitive advantages, invest efforts in creating higher predictability in the region and work on developing institutions that should reduce black-marketing, smuggling, and evasion of taxes and duties. It is necessary to create an economy that will assist investors who want to work in line with the legal framework and legally. Chambers of commerce have displayed enthusiasm concerning the Open Balkan, primarily an economic project focused on creating new opportunities. Energy-wise, Western Balkans is more vulnerable than other regions. It is particularly vulnerable in the context of the upcoming winter. The Western Balkan countries do not have the luxury of turning their back on each other. Suppose they want to have energy products, electric energy, and food. In that case, they need to focus on intensive and quality cooperation because the Open Balkan belongs to the people, not Vučić, Rama, Kovačevski, Abazović. The Open Balkan is yet another mechanism that should facilitate crisis response. Analysts believe that if the people of the Balkans cooperate and focus on the future, the future will belong to them. The credibility of the EU is at the test in the Western Balkans, and the EU is probably at its last chance to save the Western Balkan countries from the “*grip*” of Russia, China, and Turkey. The level and intensity of cooperation in the region will be most evident through the success of preparation for surviving the upcoming winter of 2022/23, which will be the biggest challenge for all in the last several decades. In this respect, the more significant role of the US will be of crucial importance, particularly in preventing possible new conflicts that could emerge due to a deteriorated security situation and the changed security architecture in Europe caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The Western Balkans have to be treated differently. First, the overall relations must constantly be relaxed so that the Western Balkans region is no longer perceived as problematic. That is: An area of opportunities and development; An area in which agreements are made; A place that wants to keep moving forward; An area in which primary topics focus on the economy and the future. The past cannot be changed, but the future is yet in our power. The region can be made additionally secure. The upcoming winter will constitute a significant challenge for all, and the preparations to overcome it will largely depend on regional cooperation and solidarity. That does not mean that countries in the region have given up on their European path and membership in the EU.

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## About the Author

Ivan Peric is born in Nis, (Yugoslavia) at the 3, August 1992. He grew up in Belgrade where he finished primary and secondary school. Then he undergraduate in Economic science, Finance and Banking. In 2018, he finished first Master in Political science, Public policy and Local government, also at University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political science. His professional career took him in Greece, where he also continued research in the field of political and economic science at Univeristy of Macedonia in Thessaloniki. He defended his second Master in Politics and Economics in South Eastern Europe in topic of Open Balkan Initiative in the context of Serbian Foreign Policy (Western Balkans Relations and Challenges) in English language. Currently, he's living and working in Thessaloniki with offen visiting Belgrade.