

Edited by:

Berat Alili, Hanife Etem

**6TH INTERNATIONAL
BALKAN SUMMER SCHOOL
BALKANS AND GLOBAL
POLITICS PROCEEDINGS**

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BALKANS AND GLOBAL POLITICS
PROCEEDINGS-

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Berat Alili, Hanife Etem

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BALKANS AND GLOBAL POLITICS PROCEEDINGS



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FOREWORD

Social sciences, such as history, political science, anthropology, economics, and cultural studies, offer invaluable perspectives on the intricacies of human life and the societies we build. By examining how individuals and groups interact, govern, and evolve, these disciplines help us understand the forces shaping our world. In a time when global challenges demand innovative and collaborative approaches, the role of social sciences has become even more significant, equipping us with the tools to navigate complex social, economic, and political landscapes.

It is with great pleasure that we present this collection of proceedings from the Summer School on Balkans and Global Politics. The summer school has served as an invaluable platform for postgraduate students and scholars to engage in meaningful dialogue and rigorous exploration of the multifaceted challenges defining the Balkans today. The themes of the Balkans and global politics are among the most pressing and complex issues of our time. They intersect with historical, political, social, and economic dimensions, demanding a nuanced and interdisciplinary approach. Through thought-provoking lectures, discussions, and collaborative exchanges, the summer school provided participants with a deeper understanding of these dynamics while fostering an environment conducive to scholarly growth and innovation.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the lecturers, mentors, and organizers who brought this program to life, as well as to the participants who enriched it with their curiosity and dedication. We are confident that this book will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, policymakers, and anyone interested in the ongoing debates surrounding the Balkans and global politics.

Lastly, we offer our sincere acknowledgment to our esteemed partners: South East European University, the Oranje Institute, and the Ankara Center for Thought and Research. Special thanks also go to Elif R. Nazim and Zehra A. Sadiki for their unwavering support and essential contributions. Their collaboration has been indispensable in ensuring the successful realization of this ambitious academic endeavor.

EU POLICIES, RELATIONS AND BALKANS

PROBLEMS OF ACCESSION OF THE BALKAN COUNTRIES TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: The article deals with a set of problems that make it possible to place the Balkans in the context of pan-European development, primarily the so-called unlimited expansion of the European Union, the entry into which is the goal of the post-socialist countries of the Balkan region/ South-Eastern Europe. Currently, Bulgaria, Romania, as well as the post-Yugoslav states of Slovenia and Croatia have become full members of the EU. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania are still in different stages of the process of joining the European Union. Accession to the EU is the logical conclusion of the social, political, economic and legal transformation of the Balkan countries, in which both they and the EU as a whole and its individual states are interested in for reasons of geopolitics and geo-economics. However, the accession to Europe (or return to Europe) of the Balkan states, whose history is associated with an authoritarian socialist past, includes not only the reform of the economic and political systems, but also a change in value orientations. Nevertheless, while in the founding countries of the EU a Western European corporate civic identity is being formed, in the countries of the former Eastern Europe and the Balkan region, the basis of public consciousness is still largely ethnic identity.

Keywords: EU, Southeast Europe, Balkans, identity, geopolitics, Geo-economics, foreign politics

Introduction

The accession of the Balkan countries to the European Union (EU) represents one of the most complex and significant challenges for the region, which has faced political, economic, and social challenges for decades. The process of integration of the Balkan countries into the EU is an important part of the enlargement strategy aimed at ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity on the European continent. However, despite significant efforts and support from the EU, the accession process for the Balkan countries remains difficult and is accompanied by many problems and obstacles.

The Balkan region has historically seen a great deal of political unrest, ethnic tensions, and warfare. The various cultures, religions, and ethnic groups that exist, along with the intricate historical legacies, present distinct obstacles for every nation aspiring to acquire EU membership. Each of the Balkan nations – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – has unique difficulties and traits that must be considered throughout the integration process.

The European Union actively supports the integration efforts of the Balkan countries by offering technical and financial support through a number of programs, including the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). These initiatives seek to bolster democratic institutions, enhance infrastructure, and promote economic development. Along with promoting reforms and offering counsel and direction, the EU is also actively engaged in political discourse with Balkan leaders (European Commission, 2018).

The Balkan nations have received a great deal of assistance from the international community, including the UN, OSCE, and NATO, in their attempts to join the EU. These organizations support democratic reforms and the growth of civil society in addition to taking part in peacekeeping missions and keeping an eye on the execution of peace agreements. For instance, through its cooperation initiatives and peacekeeping operations, NATO is instrumental in maintaining security and stability in the area (Dzihic & Hamilton, 2012).

While the process of integrating the Balkan nations into the European Union is laborious and time-consuming, it also creates new chances for social and economic advancement as well as for bolstering stability and security in the area. In this process, the perspective and assistance of Europe are crucial because they give the Balkan countries the tools and motivation, they need to implement reforms and accomplish their objectives. This article looks at the primary issues and difficulties that the Balkan nations have encountered while trying to join the

EU. Analysis is done on the historical and contemporary elements impacting the integration process, as well as the part played by the EU and the global community in facilitating it.

In terms of the Western Balkan countries' current EU membership process, Croatia joined in 2013 after Slovenia did so in 2004. Following Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia are considered to be among the Western Balkan nations that are most likely to join the EU and are presently engaged in accession talks. According to Ultan and Özer (2021), Montenegro expressed a greater desire to join the EU due to their demonstrated interest in the areas of justice, home affairs, and democracy (p. 38). Serbia has advanced in the area of democracy and actively participated in the anti-corruption initiatives it has adopted.

Additionally, the EU has been active in the required areas within the framework of expansion since Serbia's successful balance policy with China and Russia would not be feasible in the long run. Aside from this, the membership process appears to be taking a while because Albania, which was identified as a possible candidate nation in 2014, still needs to complete steps in the areas of democracy and justice before it can proceed with the full membership process (European Union, 2020).

The article focuses on the challenges and obstacles faced by Balkan countries in their efforts to join the European Union. It examines political, economic, social, and legal issues that impede the accession process. The article explores the following topics: social issues, such as ethnic tensions and human rights concerns; political instability and governance issues within the Balkan countries; economic disparities and the fulfillment of EU economic criteria; and the institutional and legal reforms necessary for EU accession.

The article's temporal scope includes the post-2000 era, with a focus on developments in the Balkan region and the EU's enlargement policy during the previous 20 years. Important turning points have occurred during this time, including the EU's 2004 and 2007 expansions and the ongoing negotiations with the Balkan nations.

The Balkan region, which includes nations like Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Kosovo, is encompassed by the spatial boundaries. The article also takes into account the EU's viewpoint and policies toward these nations.

The importance of the article lies in its handling of the enduring and intricate matter of EU expansion into the Balkans. It closes a gap in the body of literature by offering a thorough examination of the complex issues preventing the Balkan

countries from joining the EU. By combining different aspects of the accession process and emphasizing the connections between political, economic, social, and legal challenges, the article presents a fresh viewpoint.

By highlighting the relationship between internal problems in the Balkan countries and the EU's accession requirements, presenting a comprehensive picture that takes into account a number of variables rather than concentrating on a single one, and dispelling myths about the countries' readiness for EU membership, the article offers a fresh point of view.

The article employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as case studies of specific Balkan nations, policy document, and EU report analysis, as well as statistical information on social metrics, governance indicators, and economic performance.

The main claim of the article is that the accession of Balkan countries to the EU is hampered by a complex interplay of political instability, economic underdevelopment, social issues, and insufficient legal reforms. These challenges are deeply rooted and require a coordinated and sustained effort from both the Balkan countries and the EU to address.

Side Statements in Favor of the Main Statement:

1. **Political instability:** The Balkan countries' ability to meet EU accession requirements is hampered by their ongoing political unrest and poor governance.
2. **Economic Disparities:** Achieving economic convergence is hampered by the notable differences in wealth between the Balkan nations and the current EU members.
3. **Social Issues:** The region's social unrest, human rights issues, and ethnic tensions present significant obstacles to the EU's membership process.
4. **Legal and Institutional Reforms:** The Balkan countries' slow progress toward achieving EU standards and regulations is hampered by their legal and institutional reforms.

Overall, the article provides a thorough examination of the accession problems faced by the Balkan countries, offering valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders involved in the EU enlargement process.

Historical Background and Balkan Region Significance

The rich and complicated history of the Balkan region – which comprises Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Slovenia, and Montenegro – continues to have a profound influence on the region's current political, economic, and social conditions. For centuries, this area has been at the intersection of various civilizations, leading to frequent conflicts and interethnic confrontations.

History's Impact on the Present Situation

The Balkan region has a long history of conflicts, the majority of which stem from differences in ethnicity and religion. Violent national conflicts erupted in the Balkans following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary at the start of the twentieth century. These battles were only made more intense by the Second World War, particularly in light of the fascist occupation and resistance. Following the war, the conflicts were momentarily suppressed but not resolved under Yugoslavia's socialist regime. Deep scars in the region's politics and society were caused by the bloody wars and ethnic cleansing that followed Yugoslavia's dissolution in the 1990s (Zakvasin & Komarova, 2020).

The political and social conditions of the Balkan countries today are still shaped by these historical conflicts and unsolved issues. For instance, the contentious question of Kosovo's independence continues to strain Serbia-Kosovo relations as well as those with other nations and international organizations. Likewise, the intricate political structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is predicated on the Dayton Agreement, continues to be ineffectual and vulnerable to domestic strife (Capussela, 2015).

The Region's Importance for the EU

The European Union considers the Balkan region to be strategically significant. Due to its geographic location, it serves as a vital bridge connecting Europe to both Asia and the Middle East. Due to the region's location along vital routes for the transportation of gas and oil, it also contributes significantly to the energy security of Europe. It is believed that integrating the Balkans into the EU will increase stability and security throughout the continent, which is crucial given the current geopolitical risks and shifts (Vachudova, 2005).

Apart from its strategic significance, the Balkans hold substantial economic potential. Due to its abundance of natural resources, the area has the potential

to grow in sectors like energy, tourism, and agriculture. Balkan countries can gain access to the single market and the chance to draw in foreign investment through EU integration, both of which can support the region's economic development and growth (Keil, 2013).

Historical Role of the EU in the Balkans

The Balkan region's reconstruction and stabilization have always been actively supported by the European Union. The EU has started a number of aid initiatives targeted at the region's development and reconstruction since the end of the 1990s wars. The establishment of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) in 1999 was a pivotal measure that established the groundwork for an enduring collaboration between the European Union and the Balkan nations. In order to support democratic reform and economic development, this process included political discourse, economic assistance, and technical support (Balfour & Stratulat, 2013).

The EU reaffirmed its commitment to Balkan integration in 2003 at the Thessaloniki Summit, stating that all nations in the region have the potential to join the EU. Ever since, the European Union has persistently bolstered reform and growth within the region by offering substantial financial and technical support via initiatives like the Instrument for Pre-Access Assistance (IPA) (European Commission, 2018).

Current Challenges and Prospects

Notwithstanding notable advancements in recent times, the Balkan area continues to confront numerous obstacles in its pursuit of EU integration. The implementation of necessary reforms is still beset by significant challenges, including political instability, corruption, and weak institutions. Meeting EU economic criteria is also significantly hampered by economic issues like high unemployment and sluggish growth (Freedom House, 2020).

To ensure harmonious social integration, it is necessary to make significant efforts towards resolving social and ethnic problems, such as interethnic conflicts and social inequality. For many of the region's nations, concerns about the rights of minorities and ethnic groups, as well as issues of justice and peacemaking in the wake of the 1990s conflicts, are still important (Kmezic, 2017).

Role of the International Community

It is impossible to overstate the contribution that the international community—particularly the EU and NATO—has made to the stability and advancement of the Balkan region. For instance, NATO’s peacekeeping operations and cooperation initiatives helped to put an end to hostilities in the 1990s and continue to promote security and stability in the area. In response, the EU generously lends substantial financial and technical support to political and economic reforms (Dzihic & Hamilton, 2012). Furthermore, the UN and OSCE, among other international organizations, are crucial to the development and stabilization of the area. In addition to supporting democratic reforms and the growth of civil society, they take part in peacekeeping missions and oversee the execution of peace accords (Bieber, 2018).

For the countries of the Balkan region as well as the EU, full integration into the EU is still a long-term objective. Notwithstanding current obstacles, the possibility of joining the EU serves as a strong motivator for modernization and reform. The nations in the area are making concerted efforts to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria, which encompass the legal, political, and economic prerequisites for EU membership (Vachudova, 2005).

The EU is also interested in Balkan integration since it creates new chances for economic development and cooperation while also bolstering stability and security throughout Europe. Through a number of programs and initiatives, the European Commission continues to actively support the nations in the region by offering financial and technical support (European Commission, 2018).

Main Problems on the Way to EU Membership

There are numerous difficulties and challenges that the Balkan countries must overcome in order to successfully integrate into the European Union. Important concerns include social and ethnic issues, economic challenges, and political instability and corruption. The primary obstacles that Balkan nations must overcome in order to join the EU are examined in this section.

Political Instability and Corruption

One of the main issues preventing the Balkan countries from joining the EU more quickly is political instability. Reforms that are required are challenging in certain of the region’s nations because of their weak and brittle political institutions. For instance, effective governance and decision-making are hampered in

Bosnia and Herzegovina by the intricate political structure built upon the Dayton Agreement (Capussela, 2015). High levels of corruption are also linked to political instability, undermining public confidence in governmental institutions and making it challenging to draw in outside investment. There has been little actual progress in the fight against corruption, even with the enactment of anti-corruption legislation and judicial reforms. Transparency International reports that high levels of corruption persist in the Balkan countries, which present serious challenges.

Economic Problems

One of the main issues preventing the Balkan countries from joining the EU more quickly is political instability. Reforms that are required are challenging in certain of the region's nations because of their weak and brittle political institutions. For instance, effective governance and decision-making are hampered in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the intricate political structure built upon the Dayton Agreement (Capussela, 2015).

Economic reforms are required to strengthen the market economy and improve business conditions. However, implementing these reforms will take a significant amount of effort and time. Improving infrastructure and attracting foreign investment are important aspects of economic development, but their implementation necessitates stable and predictable conditions, which are frequently lacking in the region (Balfour & Stratulat, 2013).

Social and Ethnic Issues

Social and ethnic issues are also important in the Balkan countries' integration into the European Union. The diversity of ethnic groups, combined with historical conflicts, continues to cause tension in some areas of the region. To ensure long-term peace and stability, issues such as border recognition, minority status, and human rights must be addressed and resolved. For example, the status of Kosovo remains a source of tension between Serbia and Kosovo, affecting their relations with other countries and international organizations (Çuhadar, 2023).

Social inequality and poverty are also significant issues. Uneven income distribution and limited access to education and health care create additional barriers to integration. For example, in some Balkan countries, poverty rates remain high, necessitating social reforms to improve living conditions and ensure social justice (Keil, 2013).

The Need for Reforms

To successfully integrate into the EU, the Balkan countries must carry out significant political, economic, and social reforms. Political reforms include strengthening democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and combating corruption. These reforms are required to establish a stable and predictable policy environment that encourages investment and economic development (Shekerinskaya, 2024).

Economic reforms should aim to strengthen the market economy, improve the business environment, and encourage foreign investment. This includes modernizing infrastructure, developing human capital, and assisting small and medium-sized enterprises. Improving transport and energy infrastructure, for example, can boost regional economic growth and competitiveness (European Commission, 2018).

Social reforms include measures to combat poverty, improve access to education and health care, and protect the rights of minorities. These measures are required to establish a fair and inclusive society, which is critical for the region's stability and long-term development (Shekerinskaya, 2024).

The Role of the EU and the International Community

The European Union and the international community play an important role in Balkan reform and development. The EU provides significant financial and technical assistance through various programs, including the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). These programs seek to promote economic growth, improve infrastructure, and strengthen democratic institutions (European Commission, 2018). Furthermore, the EU actively engages in political dialogue with the Balkan countries, encouraging reforms and offering advice and guidance. The conditionality of aid is an important aspect of this interaction, in which the provision of financial assistance and other resources is contingent on the fulfillment of certain conditions, such as reform implementation and the achievement of specific results.

The international community, including the UN, OSCE, and NATO, has also been very supportive of the Balkan countries' efforts to integrate into the EU. These organizations take part in peacekeeping operations, oversee the implementation of peace treaties, and promote democratic reforms and civil society development. NATO, for example, contributes significantly to regional security and stability through its peacekeeping missions and cooperation programs (Shekerinskaya, 2024).

Prospects for Integration

The countries of the Western Balkans have been trying to integrate into the EU for more than 15 years, but this issue still remains open. At numerous summits on this matter, it is traditionally announced that this course will be maintained, but there has been no serious progress in this direction. In total, six Balkan states are vying to join the EU - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and unrecognized Kosovo. And each of these republics has its own problems that do not allow achieving this goal (Poplavsky, 2021).

According to Reuters, the European Union actually refused to guarantee the future membership of the six Western Balkan countries in the association, although Brussels actively denies this. According to the agency, some EU countries, including France and the Netherlands, do not support expansion, fearing a repeat of history with Bulgaria and Romania - their accession led to a sharp jump in migration to the UK, which is called one of the reasons for Brexit.

Despite numerous problems and challenges, the prospects for integration of the Balkan countries into the EU remain realistic, subject to continued reforms and active support from the EU and the international community. The prospect of EU membership is a powerful incentive for reform and modernization, as well as for strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring the rule of law (Vachudova, 2005).

For successful integration, Balkan countries must continue to work towards meeting the Copenhagen criteria, which include political, economic and legislative requirements. These criteria ensure that candidate countries comply with EU standards and are ready for integration into the single European system. For example, meeting economic criteria requires a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the EU (Timakov, 2023).

In addition, it is important to continue dialogue and cooperation with the EU and the international community to obtain the support and resources needed for reform and development. This includes participating in support programs such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), as well as taking advantage of opportunities to exchange experiences and best practices with other EU member states (Timakov, 2023).

European Western Balkans is a regional web portal specialized in European integration process of the Western Balkan countries, founded in Belgrade in 2014.

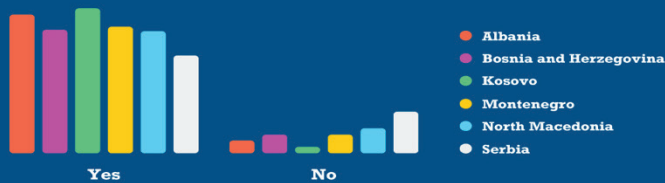


PUBLIC OPINION POLL IN THE WESTERN BALKANS ON EU INTEGRATION PROCESS

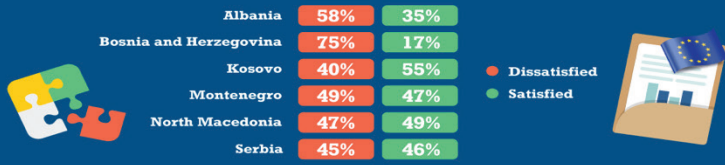


- Countries that mostly favour joining the EU are Albania and Kosovo, whereas only Serbia differs in this regard.
- The highest share of those who hope for EU access in the next five years is among citizens of Kosovo and Montenegro, respectively, whereas one third of the population of Serbia believe their country will never become an EU member.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina is the most dissatisfied, whereas Kosovo is the most satisfied country with its progress in the EU integration process.
- Kosovo and Montenegro have the highest positive score when it comes to EU's role in economic reforms and, together with North Macedonia, the highest positive score when it comes to EU's role in the democratization process.

Are you in favor of your country joining the European Union?



How satisfied are you with your country's progress in the EU integration process?



Major reasons for dissatisfaction with countries' progress in the EU integration process

Figure 1. European Western Balkans.
<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/about/>

Besides European integration, portal follows the topics related to a common European future of the Western Balkans, such as regional cooperation, political stability and the enactment of reforms in key areas.

European Western Balkans is entirely independent and it is established by the **Centre for Contemporary Politics**, think tank based in Belgrade.

European Perspective and Support

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, in his speech in December 2020, said that the situation in the EU is certainly encouraging [Report, 2020]. He said that during regular meetings, the leadership in Brussels developed short-term and long-term EU strategies, in which - we emphasize this - the region of South-Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean (Balkans) occupied an important place. Other European Council summits were entirely devoted to the development of the EU strategy in the Balkans (in particular the October 2020 summit).

The Balkan strategy fits into the overall strategy of the European Union, determined by the EU's seven-year budget plan for 2021–2027. The current budget plan includes, *inter alia*, the development of specific climate policies and green finance standards that will contribute to economic growth, job creation and competitive advantage, and also defines specific measures to combat the spread of COVID-19 (Multiannual, 2020).

For now, the EU remains determined (and able) to continue to position itself as a monolithic global center of power. But states, regions, leading world players, one of which, in our opinion, is a united Europe, today are characterized not only (and not so much) by economic success or political stability, but also by attractiveness, and the degree of attractiveness of the European Union is determined by the desire of a number of countries join this integration project. Moreover, the attractiveness of a united Europe can be characterized primarily from an axiological position, considering the value model of the European Union. At the same time, in external relations, the EU promotes its values and interests, in accordance with Art. 3 of the Lisbon Treaty [Treaty..., 2007]. It is no coincidence that since the emergence of the Common Market, the peoples of a number of states of old Eastern Europe have sought to join the EEC/EU.



Figure 2. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2021/08/12/six-balkan-nations-keep-trying-to-join-the-european-union>

EU Political Support

Political support from the EU is an important aspect of the integration process. The European Commission and the European Parliament are actively involved in monitoring and assessing the progress of the Balkan countries in implementing the necessary reforms. For example, the annual reports of the European Commission contain detailed analyzes of the achievements and challenges of candidate countries, as well as recommendations for further steps (European Commission, 2018).

The EU also holds regular political dialogues with Balkan leaders, encouraging reforms and maintaining political stability. An important aspect of this interaction is the conditionality of aid, where the provision of financial assistance and other resources is conditional on the fulfillment of certain conditions, such as the implementation of reforms and the achievement of specific results (Zakvasin & Komarova, 2020).

In the coming years, the strategic priorities of the EU (especially Italy, which is the main trading partner of Serbia, Albania¹, the most important trading partner of Kosovo/Kosova and the second largest importer and exporter of Slovenia) in the field of regional security are likely to be aimed at stabilization and

processes integration in the Balkans and South-Eastern Europe as a whole. At the same time, EU countries will have to take into account ethnopolitical conflicts in the Balkan zone of institutional instability, which have not yet been resolved after the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Thus, at present, the leadership of the European Union is consistently pursuing a course towards the gradual integration of Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the future - Serbia and Kosovo into NATO and the European Union, based on the strategic interests of the EU. In addition to the actions to relaunch the Central European Initiative and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, Italy, back in November 2014, during its Presidency of the Council of the EU, contributed to the promotion of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region, and also, as noted above, the resumption of negotiations on accession to the European Union of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia: since the fall of 2018, these negotiations began to be held on a regular basis. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there is a need to build a more thoughtful policy in the Balkan region on the part of all EU countries, as well as the UN and NATO, in order to minimize the above-mentioned challenges, threats and risks. At the same time, it is worth taking into account, firstly, a certain shift in perspective in the geopolitical guidelines of the United States in the Mediterranean Sea and, secondly, the consistently pursued course by the Russian leadership to expand Russian presence in the region, which it considers a zone of traditional (and privileged) Russian influence. Currently, this is manifested in the implementation of the energy policy of the Russian Federation, in the growth of direct investments in the region and, finally, in the increase in the number of interstate and intergovernmental contacts, due (to a certain extent demonstratively) to cultural and religious proximity, in particular with Serbia (Rapporto, 2020).

The Impact of a European Perspective on Domestic Reforms

The European perspective has a significant impact on the implementation of domestic reforms in Balkan countries. The prospect of EU membership provides a strong incentive for political, economic, and social reform. Countries in the region are actively working to strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption, improve business climates, and protect human rights (Bieber, 2018). For example, Serbia has undergone significant judicial system reforms aimed at increasing court independence and efficiency. These reforms helped to improve the legal environment and strengthen the rule of law (Komezic, 2017). North

Macedonia has taken steps to strengthen democratic institutions and improve the business environment, which has improved the country's chances of EU integration (Sherbak, 2021).

Role of the International Community

The international community, including the UN, OSCE, and NATO, plays an important role in assisting Balkan countries on their path to EU membership. These organizations offer valuable assistance in the areas of security, democratic development, and human rights. NATO, for example, actively promotes regional security and stability through peacekeeping missions and cooperation programs (Dzihic & Hamilton, 2012).

The UN and OSCE play critical roles in monitoring human rights and promoting democratic processes in the Balkan countries. These organizations also work on conflict resolution and peacekeeping, which helps to create the conditions for long-term development and EU integration (Sherbak, 2021).

Conclusion

The accession of Balkan countries to the European Union (EU) is critical for regional stability and development. However, this process is fraught with challenges and obstacles. Political instability, corruption, economic difficulties, and social and ethnic tensions are among the most pressing issues confronting Balkan countries as they seek to join the EU. Overcoming these issues will allow countries in the region to get closer to EU membership.

Political instability and corruption in Balkan countries are among the most significant barriers to EU accession. The absence of strong government institutions, low trust in governments, and widespread corruption undermine domestic stability and make necessary reforms difficult. According to Transparency International, corruption in Balkan countries is high, which has a negative impact on economic development and foreign investment (Kmezic, 2017). To address these issues, democratic institutions must be strengthened, government transparency and accountability improved, and comprehensive anti-corruption reforms implemented. Active participation by civil society and independent media can help to reduce corruption and hold governments accountable.

Economic difficulties also jeopardize the Balkan countries' EU accession process. High youth unemployment, low-income levels, and inadequate infrastructure make it difficult to meet economic standards. Improving transportation and

energy infrastructure is critical for boosting economic growth and enhancing the business environment. The European Union provides significant economic assistance to Balkan countries through the IPA (Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance). This program funds projects in infrastructure, education, health, and other critical sectors (European Commission, 2018).

However, structural reforms are also required to ensure long-term economic development. These reforms include improving the business environment, lowering bureaucratic barriers, and enhancing the investment climate. Supporting small and medium-sized businesses has the potential to boost economic growth and create jobs.

Other important factors that have a negative impact on the Balkan countries' EU accession process are social and ethnic tensions. The diversity of ethnic groups, combined with historical conflicts, continues to cause tensions in some parts of the region. Recognizing borders and addressing issues concerning minority rights and human rights are critical to maintaining peace and stability. For example, the status of Kosovo remains a contentious issue, affecting relations between Serbia and Kosovo as well as both countries' integration into the EU (Bieber, 2018). The EU supports initiatives aimed at improving social well-being, increasing access to education and health care, raising living standards, and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all citizens. IPA programs provide funding for projects that improve access to education.

The European Union and the international community play an important role in the Balkans' accession to the EU. The EU promotes reform by offering political, economic, and social support. The international community helps Balkan countries with security and democratic development through organizations like the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO (Dzihich and Hamilton, 2012). Twinning and TAIEX programs encourage institutional development by transferring knowledge and experience from EU member states to candidate countries. These programs contribute to the strengthening of public institutions, the improvement of administrative processes, and the quality of services provided to citizens (European Commission 2018).

In conclusion, the EU is expected to develop a new strategy, having reviewed its relations with the region over the past period. This is influenced by the reaction of the Western Balkan countries to protracted processes and the EU's perception of this as a security threat, because as a result of protracted processes, the authority and reputation of the union, which is faced with global and regional crises, is undermined. Many factors, such as energy security and threats from Russia, are forcing the EU to reconsider its approach to the region. In this context, it can be assumed that in the future the EU will take a more inclusive approach to the region, and many processes that have been going on for many years will end positively. The statements made together also indicate this.

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REGIONAL COOPERATION AND TRADE LIBERALIZATION IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF WESTERN BALKANS IN WAY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract: Regional cooperation and trade liberalization is considered the most important factor of a sustainable economic growth which should contribute to the mutual trade among SEE countries, growth of the foreign direct investments, further production specialization and export-import relation structure change. Countries of the region have accepted liberalization as one of the conditions of the Stabilization and Association Process, hoping, each of them individually, in that way they would improve proper position. Creating a free trade area will contribute to a further increase of intra-regional trade flows, but it shouldn't be expected that the relative importance of mutual exchange will prevail the importance which EU has for the WB countries. European integration of West Balkans countries has two main dimensions: (i) bilateral relation of European Union (EU) and (ii) their regional integration. European integration is almost universally recognized as the key strategy for achieving the twin goals of peace and prosperity in the Western Balkans. European policy-makers trust that greater European involvement in the Western Balkans can have positive and long-lasting effects on the management of ethno-political conflict. The European Commission identified the prospect of EU membership as 'the ultimate conflict prevention strategy' and committed itself to maintain and increase its proactive presence in the region. The academic near-consensus is that the Western Balkans' greater involvement in European institutions is the necessary condition for stabilization.

Keywords: Trade liberalization, Free trade area, Intra-regional trade, South East Europe, Western Balkans, European Integration, etc.

Introduction

South-Eastern European (SEE) countries have recently engaged in a regional integration process, through the establishment of free trade agreements between themselves and with the European Union (EU). This study evaluates the impact of this process on trade and firm performance. Three complementary approaches are used. The first consists in evaluating the degree of trade integration of SEE countries and determining their trade potential with their main partners, i.e., themselves and the EU. The second approach tries to evaluate the evolution of tariffs and nontariffs barriers, faced by SEE countries and estimate their effects on manufactured trade. The third part investigates the impact of trade liberalization on performance of firms in SEE. In particular, we are interested in what extent foreign trade and foreign direct investment contributed to improvements in firm performance. Several interesting results emerge from this study. Concerning our first approach, we find three results. First, Western Balkan countries have reached their trade potential for almost all sectors while Eastern Balkan countries have outreached them. One can therefore expect an increase of trade flows between the Western Balkans and the EU. Second, it seems that preferential trade agreements between SEE countries will have a limited impact on their mutual trade since their trade potentials are already reached. Third, all SEE countries' trade is below its potential with the rest of the world.

In the absence of a breakthrough in the EU integration of the Western Balkan six, the EU has been innovative in finding ways to keep the countries of the region interested in pursuing reforms. These include strengthening regional integration via the Berlin Process. Meanwhile some Western Balkan countries have initiated a parallel regional integration process called Open Balkan. This research brief analyses the scope, depth and limitations of regional integration in the Western Balkans, and considers whether it actually delivers the desired results or is rather a distraction from EU integration.

The Potential and Limits of Regional Cooperation

The EU's support for regional cooperation and (intra)regional economic integration in the Western Balkans is long-standing, having emerged in response to the Yugoslav wars in the second half of the 1990s. Moreover, since the launch of the Stabilization and Association Process in 1999, regional cooperation has become a central part of EU accession conditionality, in addition to the Copenhagen accession criteria formulated in 1993.¹

1 BiEPAG Through the Labyrinth of Regional Cooperation: How to Make Sense of Regional Integration in the Western Balkans

Regional cooperation initiatives have undoubtedly had a positive impact on the Western Balkans. This was evident especially during the first decade of the 2000s, when integration with the EU proceeded at a slow pace. At that time, regional cooperation proved to be pivotal in advancing the EU agenda for the region in a number of fields, from trade liberalization and market opening (through the 2006 Central European Free Trade Agreement – CEFTA) to police cooperation and visa liberalization, promoting stability and economic growth. A number of studies have identified a clear positive impact of CEFTA in particular on regional trade integration. In the period up to mid-2019, CEFTA increased intra-regional trade by around one third, and the positive impact rises to around 70% if Serbia is excluded from the results.

From mid-2014, under the intergovernmental auspices of the Berlin Process the EU tried to re-engage the region, based on further advancements of regional integration in the Western Balkans. Accordingly, Western Balkan leaders agreed on two important projects for regional economic integration: the Multi-annual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area 2017– 2019 (REA) and the Common Regional Market 2020–2024 (CRM).

These ambitious new plans for regional economic integration had a medium-term objective that could have helped foster the enlargement agenda in the Western Balkans on the basis of the EU’s four market freedoms. This would have fostered their alignment with the EU acquis, built trust amongst themselves and, ultimately, engender local ownership and responsibility. Other positive economic spillovers were hoped for, such as improved external competitiveness and higher exports to reduce the region’s chronic external imbalances.

Yet, notwithstanding some progress, such as the regional roaming agreement, the negotiation of CEFTA’s Additional Protocol 6 (a framework agreement extending the principle of free trade to the service sector), or the facilitation of border-crossing procedures for goods during the pandemic (thanks to “Green Corridors”), the results of regional economic integration among the Western Balkans have remained modest and uneven. Overall, there is a consensus that the cooperation often rarely moved beyond the declarative, as there is a lack of commitment and political will, together with unresolved bilateral disputes, that have not made the REA/CRM fully applicable in practice.

The achievement of truly deeper regional economic integration in the Western Balkans would further increase the level of economic development. Making it easier to move goods, capital and people around the region would boost the economy. However, even in the case of a fully functioning single market in the

region—quite a big assumption—the upside is likely to be quite limited. This is mostly because the regional market is very small, with the combined GDP of the six Western Balkan economies roughly equivalent to that of Slovakia. This indicates why even when regional trade initiatives have been successful, such as in the case of CEFTA, this has failed to do deliver a significant boost to overall economic growth momentum.

Moreover, intra-regional trade in goods in the Western Balkans tends to be of a low sophistication. Upgrading quality of production, which is associated with a generally higher economic development and better living standards, is unlikely to be significantly stimulated by a deeper regional market alone. Meanwhile another goal of deeper regional integration—to create a bigger market that is more attractive for foreign investors—is also unlikely to produce big results. The region undoubtedly has significant potential to attract increased FDI inflows, not least due to potential near-shoring in the wake of the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, foreign investors' interest in the Western Balkans is chiefly as a location for production which is then exported to the EU market, meaning that EU integration, rather than regional integration, is likely to be the key driver of greater and higher-quality FDI inflows in the future. Moreover, the idea of the six countries genuinely cooperating to attract joint investments seems quite fanciful.

Towards a regional free trade area

The trade liberalization process in SEE countries have begun by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on trade liberalization and facilitation (MoU) in June 2001, under the auspices of the Stability Pact for SEE, tending to encourage the development of a network of bilateral free trade agreements (FTA) and, by aspiration at least, the dismantling of regional non-tariff barriers. This initiative encompassed countries from the Western Balkan as well as Rumania, Bulgaria and Moldova. Among these countries 32 agreements were signed, but it is only since 2004. that about two thirds of these FTAs have effectively been applied.

The trade agreements contained provisions envisaging: elimination of tariffs on 90% of goods in intraregional SEE trade, elimination of non-tariff barriers in intraregional SEE trade, enhancement of trade in services in the SEE region, trade facilitation, harmonization with the EU trade standards and application of trade remedies according to the WTO rules. Although tariffs in many lines of goods and services had been reduced, if not abolished entirely, there were still a number of complexities, anomalies and exemptions – the most serious of which

are in agriculture (covered only partly) and in public procurement and services, which were exempted. Even when the enforcement of FTA started in 2005, it was practically obstructed on many occasions. Some of the countries suspended parts of the agreements, but many did not have sufficiently organized customs services which could cope with the large number of legal documents that these agreements represented.

Moreover, bilateral agreements differed among themselves – previously existing FTAs differed significantly from the general framework outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), each agreement contained its own specific list of protected items – and therefore this approach created rather tangled and intricate, spaghetti-like trading relationships, which were seen as confusing and judged partly responsible for failures to capitalize on trading opportunities. The fact that the agreements needed to be harmonized in areas related to “behind the border” issues such as public procurement and services and, most importantly, cumbersome rules of origin that applied to each country individually, clearly demonstrated how limited the bilateral approach was. Thus, if liberalization was to proceed further, and if intraregional trade were to come closer to its potential, then a more ambitious multilateral approach was required.

CEFTA - big opportunity for the South East Europe

CEFTA 2006 is a trade agreement incorporating new provisions such as trade in services, intellectual property rights, public procurement and investment promotion and will be completely in line with the rules of the WTO and with the parties’ obligations towards the EU. Together with an increase in trade, an increase in investments is expected as well, in as much as the launching of the CEFTA 2006 succeeds in inciting investors to develop regional strategies and making them look at the region as a whole rather than at the markets on a country-by-country basis. The fact that the regional countries are too small to be attractive to foreign investors was not decisively overcome by previously existing bilateral FTAs, as rules of origin that applied to each country individually prevented the investors from taking advantage of tariff-free access to the EU market made possible by autonomous trade measures adopted for the Western Balkans. Advantages of the CEFTA 2006 agreement: The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA 2006) is a modern trade agreement which represents another step to trade liberalization. It is realistically to expect the traditionally existing economic ties and interests within SEE will strengthen competitiveness of products from the Region, first of all within its own market, and then it is expected to find its way to the European market as well. This agreement is important because it represents:

1. Stimulus for the increase of goods-exchange in the region: as a modern and liberal free trade agreement, which covers more than 90% of mutual exchange of goods in the region, the CEFTA 2006 agreement will stimulate further growth of exchange and competitiveness of products (enables the economies of scale, reduction of production costs, increase in efficiency, productivity and specialization of production).
2. Stimulus for the improvement of regional economic cooperation, especially of the export into the EU (cumulation of rules of origin): the multilateral CEFTA agreement enables easier cross-border joint production, thanks to the implementation of the protocol on rules of origin, i.e., “cumulation of origin” of goods which are being produced mutually in several countries of CEFTA. This will enable easier free-customs treatment of exported goods to the EU countries and the region.
3. Stimulus for the foreign investments (regulations on investments): CEFTA agreement is a positive signal and represents an improved frame for mutual investments, as well as for the foreign direct investment (FDI).
4. Stimulus for the process of the integration into the EU: EU supported the conclusion of CEFTA agreement and pointed it out as one of the priorities of its regional politics on the Western Balkan.

Effects of trade liberalization - recent trends in SEE trade

In the context of regional cooperation, trade liberalization in SEE countries is considered the most significant factor of sustainable economic growth, and should provide visible and significant effects. Along with facilitation of mutual trade, liberalization should contribute to its increase and intensifying and should be a motor power of reviving and increasing the economic activities in the region. Also, it is being expected that the liberalized region with about 60 million of inhabitants (including Romania and Bulgaria) should become an attractive area for foreign direct investments, which would, except for the accelerated economic growth, significantly affect re-structural and technological modernization of economy, productivity growth, efficiency and level of economic competitiveness, improvement of export performances and higher investments in researches and development.

Stabilization and Association Agreement

By opening its market to SEE countries, the EU contributes to increase of their economic competitiveness, reduction of foreign trade and payment deficit and creation of an attractive economic environment for investing into the region. If we consider the fact that the EU is the most important trading partner of these countries, these measures become even more significant.

The Stabilization and Association Agreement constitutes the framework of relations between the European Union and the Western Balkan countries for implementation of the Stabilization-Association Process. The agreements are adapted to the specific situation of each partner country and while establishing a free trade area between the EU and the country concerned, they also identify common political and economic objectives and encourage regional cooperation.

In the context of accession to the European Union, the agreement serves as the basis for implementation of the accession process. The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) is the European Union's policy towards the Western Balkans, established with the aim of eventual EU membership. Western Balkan countries are involved in a progressive partnership with a view of stabilizing the region and establishing a free-trade area. The SAP sets out common political and economic goals although progress evaluation is based on countries' own merits. The SAP was launched in June 1999 and strengthened at the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003 taking over elements of the accession process.

Integrate the Western Balkans into the Single Market

Include the Western Balkans in the EU budget The Western Balkans should be fully included in the EU budget, subject to the usual conditionality faced by existing Member States. Technical support should also be provided to maximize absorption capacity. This would finance important infrastructure upgrading and deliver a positive demand shock, as has been the case in EU-CEE. Even increased EU budget transfers from the current 1% of GDP per year to 2%—which is still well below what many EU-CEE countries get—would increase GDP in the Western Balkans by 14% (Jovanovic et. al. 2022).

The Western Balkans should be integrated further into the Single Market, via an expansion and deepening of the stabilization and Association Agreements. Here, the DCFTAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia can provide some guidance, but the EU can also be more imaginative in thinking about how to deepen integration. The increased pressure on domestic firms that this would initially cause would be partly offset by higher budget transfers and technical support.

If the EU can manage this—creating a positive jolt to the economic integration of the Western Balkans into the EU—it would deliver a much more positive push towards regional integration than the current plan alone. Connecting the two processes more strongly will significantly increase the political incentives for local actors to invest real political capital into regional cooperation for all six countries. And the Visegrad case suggests there would be an enormous post-accession upside for regional economic integration.

Berlin Process

From mid-2014, under the intergovernmental auspices of the Berlin Process the EU tried to re-engage the region, based on further advancements of regional integration in the Western Balkans. Accordingly, Western Balkan leaders agreed on two important projects for regional economic integration: the Multi-annual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area 2017– 2019 (REA) and the Common Regional Market 2020–2024 (CRM).

These ambitious new plans for regional economic integration had a medium-term objective that could have helped foster the enlargement agenda in the Western Balkans on the basis of the EU's four market freedoms. This would have fostered their alignment with the EU *acquis*, built trust amongst themselves and, ultimately, engender local ownership and responsibility.

Other positive economic spillovers were hoped for, such as improved external competitiveness and higher exports to reduce the region's chronic external imbalances.

Intra-regional trade of goods in the Western Balkans tends to be of a low sophistication. Upgrading the quality of production, which is associated with a generally higher economic development and better living standards, is unlikely to be significantly stimulated by a deeper regional market alone.

Another goal of deeper regional integration—to create a bigger market that is more attractive for foreign investors—is also unlikely to produce big results. The region undoubtedly has significant potential to attract increased FDI inflows, not least due to potential near-shoring in the wake of the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

However, foreign investors' interest in the Western Balkans is chiefly as a location for production which is then exported to the EU market, meaning that EU integration, rather than regional integration, is likely to be the key driver of greater and higher-quality FDI inflows in the future. Moreover, the idea of

the six countries cooperating to attract joint investments seems in this line of integration process. Annual summits intensified the interaction between the EU and the Western Balkans and succeeded in keeping the Western Balkans 6 on the agenda of EU-states and institutions. Over the years, a number of important agreements were concluded in the framework of the process.²

Open Balkan — A Mystery Box?

Whereas the Berlin Process has enjoyed undivided support in the Western Balkans—the main critics were some EU member states that were not initially invited—the main home-grown regional cooperation initiative, Open Balkan, has been politically polarizing within the region. It started as “Mini-Schengen” and became officially baptized Open Balkan. Depending on whom you ask, it is added either as unwise and dangerous, or as misunderstood and beneficial.³

Despite criticisms, the architects of Open Balkan from Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia have staunchly stuck to their message of how their project would create a tide that would lift all boats in the region. Moreover, they have been emphasizing the local character of this initiative as “an internal desire, not patronized externally” (Edi Rama) and, as such, coming “the people from the Balkans, those who understand that they need to connect and solve problems on their own” (Aleksandar Vučić).

This regional ownership is now promoted as the key factor that would translate the economic benefits of Open Balkan into much needed (sustainable) regional cooperation based on sincere political partnership between regional political elites, and social trust among peoples of the Western Balkans. Similarly, this ownership transfer to the local countries is seen – by Washington and Brussels, predominantly – as a proof, as stated by Commissioner Várhelyi, that political leadership of the Western Balkan countries has matured and is genuine in its readiness to put the past behind and start working together towards future.¹⁶ Yet, the future promised by Open Balkan is but wishful thinking, as the initiative still looks like a pet-project of current state leaders, not as a shared strategic goal that includes all countries and societies at large.

2 Marina Vulović, The Berlin Process in the Western Balkans: Big Ideas, Difficult Implementation, SWP Comment, 21.12.2022, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/the-berlin-process-in-the-western-balkans-big-ideas-difficult-implementation>

3 The future belongs to the peoples of the Balkans, IFIMES, 6.7.2022, <https://www.ifimes.org/en/researches/2022-open-balkan-the-future-belongs-to-the-peoples-of-the-balkans/5060>

While Open Balkan aims to replicate the Schengen Zone's free flow of capital, products, services, and labor, it has no ambitions in substituting the Berlin Process; instead, its declarative goal is to complement it by creating cooperation and synergy that would best prepare participating states for EU membership. Besides this component there seems to be no significant added value of Open Balkan to existing initiatives in the region. However, whereas the ambition of creating a common regional market modeled on the EU's single market is somewhat clear, the political narrative and justifications underpinning it can be best described as a 'mystery box'— a plot device which uses an object or idea to grab the audience's attention by withholding information about its contents.

The Role of the European Union in Western Balkan

The ability and willingness of the international community to influence developments in the Western Balkans have been considerable. Their involvement facilitated the stabilization and economic and social revival in the region. It also supported the strengthening of weak government structures and poor governance in most of the Western Balkan countries. However, leaders and elites of the Western Balkan countries have often shown a limited interest, or even resistance, to improved governance and political reforms.

The European perspective is of crucial importance, having in mind that the years of conflicts during the 1990s, with perverted transition, increased the gap between the losers and winners in the societies across the Balkans, with high expectations and ambitions regarding economic and social development and more equitable distribution of its results. The slow down or the halting of the EU integration processes could lead to serious destabilization of the region and slow down its growth. The region cannot achieve prosperity and stability without the EU integration process. It is clear that failing states and protectorates, which characterize the region, prevent its accelerated integration into the European mainstreams.⁴

The European Union had additional reason for promoting regional co-operation among former Yugoslav republics – economic, political and security links were supposed to become a key factor of stabilization, reconciliation and overcoming nationalism and intolerance in the countries of the region. But it would not have been possible to achieve the existing level of co-operation without permanent EU support and inducement. The current intensity, areas and forms of co-operation

4 Friderich Ebert Stiftung Dialogue Paper: Ownership for Regional Cooperation in The Western Balkan Countries

in the former Yugoslav area and Albania (with participation of Moldova in most of the initiatives in South Eastern Europe), could be considered as one of the greatest successes of the EU foreign and enlargement policy.

External partners also face many challenges today in addressing regional issues. The first one is choosing the optimal scale and modalities of engagement (Kosovo is the UN/EU protectorate and Bosnia and Herzegovina is an EU semi-protectorate). As it was already underlined, there is still an unclear trade-off between investing in the nation-state building and building of a member-state that could fully match obligations resulting from the integration into the EU.

Conclusion

The paper has analyzed the effects of the ongoing parallel processes of trade liberalization in SEE countries mutual trade and their trade with the EU. Some main conclusions are given below. Importance of regional trade for SEE economics: After the period of very low level of intra-regional trade, trading within the region is becoming more important in recent years, although with considerable differences between countries.

The most recent trends in SEE countries trade patterns confirm the importance of regional markets primarily for the successor states of former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Albania, Romania and Bulgaria belong to the second group that has low trade shares of intra-regional trade. Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the new CEFTA agreement in December 2006, left it soon after, because they have joined the EU in January 2007, and as its members they cannot be members of any other regional free trade area.

Increase of trade and FDI inflow into the region will altogether contribute to change of export structure of SEE countries and to integration with the European Union market.

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Friderich Ebert Stiftung Dialogue Paper: Ownership for Regional Cooperation in The Western Balkan Countries

UNRAVELING THE KNOT: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL POWER POLITICS IN THE SERBO ALBANIAN RIVALRY OVER KOSOVO

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Abstract: The unresolved Serbo-Albanian rivalry over Kosovo stands out as a central issue in the modern Balkans, often fueling significant tensions. The two most prominent problems in their bilateral relations revolve around the issue of Kosovo's recognition as an independent state and the fate of the Serbian minority in northern Kosovo. This already complicated situation becomes even more complex if we consider the power politics of the great powers -such as Russia, the EU and others- in the region. Taking the above into consideration, this paper aims to examine how these international power politics shape, maintain and even fuel the Serbo-Albanian rivalry. Mainly using Max Singer's and Aaron Wildavsky's theory about zones of peace and zones of turmoil in the international system, the study seeks to answer the question: "why are Serbia and Kosovo still entrenched in the zone of turmoil when the rest of the Balkans experience relative peace?". Through the examination of the influence of great power politics and the domestic dynamics of Serbia and Kosovo respectively, this paper aims to elucidate both the structural and agency-related factors contributing to the continuation of the conflict. The conclusion discusses potential windows of opportunity for reconciliation and their limiting factors, contributing overall to the debates on conflict resolution and foreign influence in the Balkan region.

Keywords: Serbo-Albanian Rivalry, Kosovo, Serbia, International Power Politics, Zones of Peace, Zones of Turmoil

Introduction

The Balkan region is a mosaic of ethnicities and states with different identities and, for the most part- a long history that create a backdrop of conflicting local interests and overlapping ambitions. If to this already complicated scene we add the number of “third” actors (whether it is large international coalitions such as the European Union (EU) or NATO, or individual Great Powers such as Russia and China) that approach the Balkan area hiding under their friendly facades the pursuit of their own interests, one realizes how complex the political environment is and how easily the “powder keg” can ignite.

Too often research papers on the Balkans are accompanied by descriptions of a history of violence, aggression and underdevelopment (Todorova, 2009). This oversimplified and exaggerated description, although it originates from the long Balkan history, has largely ceased to be true. Nowadays, many of the states in the region are members of international organizations and Western institutions, such as the EU and NATO, while even those that are not yet members have begun the process of joining them. Characteristically, with the signing of the Association and Stabilization Agreement with Kosovo in 2016, the EU has now signed such agreements with all Western Balkan states. It seems, therefore, that most states in the region have joined the “West” which is identified as the “zone of peace”, having resolved their bilateral issues and promoting cooperation and the establishment friendly relations between them.

However, some states continue to face problems and their bilateral relations are still characterized by competition, suspicion and conflict, i.e., they are still in the “zone of turmoil”. Two such states are Kosovo and Serbia. The two most prominent problems in their bilateral relations revolve around the issue of Kosovo’s recognition as an independent state and the fate of the Serbian minority in northern Kosovo. Thus, overall, the Kosovo issue goes beyond a simple bilateral dispute and has significant implications for the entire region, since its states are, more or less, connected vessels and thus developments in one can bring about significant and sometimes radical changes in another (Tzifakis et al., 2021). Therefore, depending on how the dispute is resolved, there is the possibility that it will be treated by the other states as a precedent to satisfy their own ambitions. If, for example, the solution to the Kosovo issue was territorial, it could open pandoras’ box increasing Republika Srpska’s hunger for secession given its apparent centrifugal tendencies. At the same time, such a solution would provide an excellent opportunity for third-party countries as well. Russia, for example, while systematically reacting to Kosovo’s efforts for recognition and inclusion in international institutions, did not hesitate to use it

as a precedent for its intervention in Georgia or even for its invasion of Ukraine (Pineles, 2022).

With the stakes being that high, the Great Powers competing for influence in the region could not remain mere spectators of the Serbo-Albanian rivalry over Kosovo. As a result, each such state, acting in accordance with its national interests, supports either one side or the other (often both), attempting to expand its power in the region in order to benefit the most from a potential advantageous settlement to the issue, if and when it occurs. This, of course, complicates the already complex situation even more and undermines the efforts towards reconciliation.

Taking the above into consideration, this paper aims to “unravel the knot” of how exactly these international power politics shape, maintain and even fuel the Serbo-Albanian rivalry, especially in the period after 2008 and Kosovo’s independence. It’s a qualitative study conducted through the examination of primary and secondary sources, mainly official documents, academic books, articles and research papers. Mainly using Max Singer’s and Aaron Wildavsky’s theory about zones of turmoil and zones of peace in the international system, the study seeks to answer the question: “why are Serbia and Kosovo still entrenched in the zone of turmoil when the rest of the Balkans experience relative peace?”

The paper begins with an overview of the literature about the zones of turmoil and peace, as the centerpiece of the theoretical framework. Then, we will examine which main great powers are competing for influence in the area, as well as their strategies and means to accomplish their goals. Following the analysis of the international factors that influence the dispute, we’ll move on to the domestic factors, firstly examining Serbia’s ability to balance between the West and East. After that, we will analyze how both Kosovo’s and Serbia’s regimes deal with the dispute, before arriving to our conclusions. Thus, through the examination of the influence of great power politics and the domestic dynamics of Serbia and Kosovo respectively, this paper aims to elucidate both the structural and agency-related factors contributing to the continuation of the conflict. The conclusion discusses potential windows of opportunity for reconciliation and their limiting factors, contributing overall to the debates on conflict resolution and foreign influence in the Balkan region.

Balkans Cut in Half: Zones of Peace and Zones of Turmoil

M. Singer and A. Wildavsky (1993) when examining the world order from a security standpoint conclude that it can be divided into two zones that are in stark opposite states from each other. Essentially, they consist of two “fundamentally different worlds” with incompatible characteristics and orientation, one world enjoying the benefits of peace and cooperation and the other stuck in the “trenches” of turmoil and antagonism.

The first security zone type, the so called “zones of peace” are characterized by economic advancement and interdependence enhanced by collective security mechanisms. These zones feature wealth, industrialization, and a market economy, while politically they consist of democracies. As an example, the authors suggest the Western European zone of peace and democracy and all those areas that formerly belonged to the West, where warring conflicts and territorial disputes are outdated.

On the other hand, the so called “zones of turmoil” are characterized by destabilizing factors that can be split into economic and political-historical ones. The economic related reasons for instability include underdevelopment and economic backwardness. These characteristics are exacerbated by outdated economic structures and the lack of a market economy. As for the political-historical variables, they include anarchical (in terms of political realism and thus meaning without a governing body above the state) political structures, lack of security regimes, distorting historical and national stereotypes, the constant threat (or even use) of military force and long-lasting territorial disputes that challenge the national boundaries and sometimes even the existence of the state itself. These zones, according to the authors, are found in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and are almost identical with former areas with heavy communist/soviet influence, and therefore including the Balkans. However, it is important to note that many of those former communist states (in the Balkans and elsewhere) have nowadays fulfilled the necessary criteria and thus have passed to the Western European zone of peace (something that was not the case when the book was published in 1993).

While in both zones there are forces of integration and forces of fragmentation which compete with one another for dominance, the outcomes are very different in each security zone. In a zone of peace, the integration forces usually prevail and thus create cooperative interstate relations in the area, whilst in a zone of turmoil the political setting is mainly characterized by fragmentation which creates conflict. Big differences between the two zones can also be noticed in the

way conflicting interests are handled and the way military force is used. In the zones of peace, the political relations among countries aren't influenced by relative military power. There may be goals and aspirations that are incompatible with one another, but this does not manifest into a show of force, since there is "internal peace" in these areas and war as a mean of handling differences is deemed obsolete. This behavior, of course, derives not from an idealistic rejection of war overall, but from a calculated choice after weighing the pros and cons of the use of military force and finding that the latter outweigh the former. On the contrary, in zones of turmoil, the show of force and threat of using it is such a central tool for exercising foreign policy that it becomes the "continuation of politics by other means" just like Clausewitz has described (Clausewitz, 1976). This, of course, means that the exercise of international law is marginalized, and dissents are perpetuated.

If we examine the Balkan sub-system according to the aforementioned theoretical framework, we can clearly notice that some states have become part of the zone of peace (most notably countries like Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia etc.), others have just barely avoided the zone of turmoil (for example Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia etc.), but others have been stuck in the zone of turmoil for a long time (namely Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina). Serbia and Kosovo, the two states that regard our analysis, show many of the main characteristics of a typical zone of turmoil country. On the economic aspect they both face significant economic challenges, including high unemployment, underdeveloped infrastructure, and dependence on foreign aid. To make matters even worse, these issues combine with political pathogens, most notably the lack of long-lasting democratic institutions and the authoritarian shift of their governments. The use of the public's national grievances and sentiments of exceptionalism to consolidate power and further the leader's agendas have given birth to zero-sum policies that eventually lead to war to resolve conflict. The problematic situation is maintained and even fueled by the international power politics that interplay with these domestic dynamics. Having established the base of our analysis, both the international and domestic factors that perpetuate these problems are examined in the next pages, beginning with the former.

Foreigners at The Door: The International Power Politics Dynamics in The Serbia-Kosovo Dispute

If we examine the foreign influence in both Serbia and Kosovo it is evident that the situation is very complex. Serbia, until 2022 and the eruption of the

Russo-Ukrainian war, had geopolitical significance in the middle of the Balkans and, being a universally recognized state, had the advantage of choosing to balance between great powers and cultivate relations with all of them indiscriminately. Kosovo, on the other hand, is very limited to the foreign powers it can deal with, since some of them don't recognize it and don't have ties with it. The main international player in the two countries (and in Western Balkans as a whole) is the EU, offering them assistance in every field from economics and security to state building, while also acting as the mediator for the normalization of their bilateral relations with the end goal of integrating them in the Union. The United States, on their own and through NATO as a whole, is the second biggest western player in the region, having relations with both countries, but most notably being the security provider of Kosovo. However, the two powers' policy on the Kosovo issue has been lackluster the last few years, since the EU was pre-occupied with internal and external issues, and the USA was shifting its attention towards the Pacific Ocean and China, leaving a window of opportunity for other powers to establish themselves. Russia and China have, thus, taken advantage of the West's sluggishness and have tightened their grip around Serbia, mainly because of their unwavering support in the dispute with Kosovo, but also through energy and infrastructure projects and financial assistance. The remaining gaps fill other regional powers, who mainly support Kosovo but don't fail to open up to Serbia to a degree, such as Turkey and the gulf countries. In this essay we will focus on the most prominent players from each side.

The West's Influence In The Region

The EU has been the most influential power in the Western Balkans since the time of the Yugoslav wars. Its involvement in the region takes place through several means, since the introduction of the *acquis communautaire* involves thorough reforms that are, in fact, often perceived as an intervention in domestic politics. These reforms go beyond merely adapting the economies, legislation and policies of the Western Balkan countries to EU standards. Instead, they touch on the very embedment of the post-communist state, favoring certain institutional options over others and modifying each state's political system accordingly. This, of course, sometimes happens without the Union having the necessary legitimization or showing the necessary respect for the internal dynamics of each state (Keil & Arkan, 2015). That being said, the EU is the main driver of the democratization of the region, since all states are candidates for membership have signed Association and Stabilization Agreements with it and have begun accession negotiations with varying degrees of success.

Enlargement policy as a whole is the best mean the EU has at its disposal to increase its influence in the region. This policy is based on the use of the tool of conditionality. This means that the provision of financial, technical and other types of assistance to a state is directly linked to its compliance with EU conditions. This is also the basis of the accession path of each candidate state, which is evaluated yearly. In recent years, the multitude of internal (Brexit, the infringement of some EU values by some member-states, euroscepticism etc.) and external issues (the 2015 refugee crisis, wars, the Covid-19 crisis etc.) the EU faced has resulted in the shift of its interest away from the Balkans (Delevic et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the countries of the Western Balkans had returned to authoritarian tendencies and weren't trying to implement the required reforms, something that was partly reinforced by the peculiarity of the EU's conditionality to include only rewards and not sanctions for backsliding (Schimmelfennig et al., 2003). Mainly interested in achieving stability and thus tolerating the semi-authoritarian rule of local leaders (the well-known phenomenon of Stabilitocracy), EU was exposed to the eyes of Balkan public opinion and damaged its credibility (Kapidzic et al., 2023). Thus, although the policy of enlargement has developed institutionally very impressively in recent years, its efficiency has inversely decreased accordingly in the case of the Western Balkan countries. The issue is even more complicated in the case of Serbia and Kosovo, since the accession process of one has been linked to that of the other and before it is completed all bilateral issues must be resolved and their relations normalized. In this context, since the beginning of the 2010s the EU has launched a multi-tiered mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, with ambiguous results until the time of writing this article.

In the case of Serbia, although it has been a candidate since 2012 (having applied for membership since 2009) and has started accession negotiations since 2014, the path to full membership seems to have lost momentum. New negotiation chapters have not been opened since 2021 (European Parliament, n.d.) and in the Commission's report on its European course in 2022, for the first-time, no progress was recorded in any of the 33 chapters, while, in fact, in 3 chapters the complete absence of any progress was mentioned (European Commission, 2022). A similar lack of progress is evident in the 2023 report, as well (European Commission, 2023). However, Serbia has benefited more than any other state in the region from EU financial aid. For example, in the period 2000-2015 it appears that Belgrade received more than €4 billion (Hartwell & Sidlo, 2017). Serbia's arch-rival, Kosovo, appears to be in a worse position as all it has managed to do is sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union

(2016) and has achieved visa free travel for the Schengen area in 2024 (European Parliament, n.d.). Despite renewed interest of the European Union in the rapid integration of the region against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the glamor of Europe has begun to wear off in the eyes of the Balkan people, something that is also reflected in public opinion polls. When asked, at the beginning of 2022, if the European Union really wants to integrate the Western Balkans, only 57% of respondents in Kosovo and 27% in Serbia gave a positive answer, while 31% and 50% respectively answered negatively (International Republican Institute, 2022). According to estimates, if the integration process continues at the same pace, Serbia will need 50 years to join the European Union, while Kosovo will need 75 (Shasha, 2022).

The failure of Kosovo's accession process is even greater if we regard that the EU has allocated more material and human resources and diplomatic energy to Kosovo than anywhere else, aiming to avoid the recurrence of conflicts and to build governance institutions based on European standards. The reality, however, was that its strategy in that state presented significant problems on coordination and leadership due to the simultaneous intervention of the Union in multiple capacities (Papadimitriou & Petrov, 2013). The situation was made even more problematic by the parallel presence in the field of several international actors, such as the UN, NATO and the OSCE.

Overall, it seems that the ball for the future of the region is largely in the EU's court. With the means at its disposal, the resources it can invest and its advantageous geographical position encircling the Western Balkans, the EU has the potential to overcome, if so it desires, the influence of any other great power. The main condition is not to abandon the enlargement policy, but to create a clear and coherent foreign policy for the region, which will not be characterized by the current pathologies. Thus, the Unions credibility will be recovered, and its attractiveness will be revived.

The Great Powers Supporting Serbia

Serbia's most powerful non-western ally in without a doubt Russia. Moscow has been involved in the Balkan events since the 19th century and thus has historical relations with Belgrade. Russia exploits the cultural, racial and religious affinity with Serbia in order to project soft power through the vehicle of Pan-Slavism and Orthodoxy (Beckmann-Dierkes, 2018). Evident of the success of this policy is Serbian Orthodox Church's support of Russia when the Orthodox schism between the Russian Orthodox Church and Ukraine's Church took place in 2018 (Chaika,

2019). Their bilateral relations developed rapidly after the 1999 NATO bombings of Serbia and especially after Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. In both cases the Kremlin very clearly sided with Belgrade, a fact of the utmost importance since as a member of the Security Council of the UN has veto power and can therefore block the process of international recognition of Kosovo. In fact, Serbian diplomacy backed by Russia managed to convince several states to withdraw their recognition of Kosovo, with the intention of limiting the number of UN members who recognize it to half in order to avoid granting it observer status (Kosovo Online, 2023a). At the same time, again with a Russian helping hand, Kosovo remains outside of important international institutions such as INTERPOL and UNESCO (Kosovo Online, 2023b). Russian diplomatic support, however, means that Serbia became a "hostage" to Russia, pledging to avoid joining NATO.

The diplomatic relationship quickly contributed to the strengthening of their bilateral relations in all sectors, with an emphasis on the energy sector. Particularly significant was Gazprom's acquisition of the state-owned Serbian oil company NIS in 2008, which is Gazprom's most significant acquisition of a company in the Balkans. In total, the Russian companies Lukoil and Gazprom have invested in Serbia the amount of \$20 billion since 2000 (Garcevic, 2021: 4). In 2012, with Aleksandar Vučić (who has close ties to Russian leader Vladimir Putin) at the wheel of Serbia, the two countries signed an agreement to grant a ten-year, \$500 million loan to cover Serbia's state budget deficit, while in the same year a strategic partnership was signed between the two countries (Vuksanovic, 2023). A Free Trade Agreement between Serbia and the Eurasian Economic Union (led by Russia) has also been signed in 2019, making Serbia the only country outside the Commonwealth of Independent States to become a contracting party to this agreement (Panagiotou, 2021). Serbia was also part of Russian plans to build new natural gas pipelines when plans for South Stream collapsed. Thus, by 2021, Moscow had invested more than \$1.4 billion dollars in the expansion of the Serbian gas infrastructure to complete the part of the Turkish Stream (called Balkan Stream) in the country. It should be noted that Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans through which the said pipeline passes (Garcevic, 2021). At the same time, there is cooperation in the military sector as well, with the two countries having signed a fifteen-year Bilateral Defense Agreement. It is characteristic that in the year of signing the Agreement (in 2019) the two countries carried out 19 joint military exercises (Vuksanovic, 2020a).

Nevertheless, many analysts agree that Russia has no strategic and long-term plan for the Balkans and is limited to obstructing Western efforts to develop the region. Its policy in the Western Balkans can be characterized as the "disrupter",

since its primary goal is focused on creating instability (Hansel & Feyerabend, 2018) In this context, the spearhead of Russian policy is disinformation and propaganda, which are reinforced by the preferential positive coverage that Russia receives in the Serbian media. It is characteristic that although the EU is by far the largest economic partner of Serbia (representing 58.7% of Serbia's total trade and 32.9% of foreign direct investments for 2022, while Russia represented 5.8% and 10.9% respectively (Juzova, 2024), the Serbian people consider Moscow to be in the first position. At the same time, Serbian public opinion has become so pro-Russian, to the point of considering that Russia is being victimized by the West, as evidenced by a relevant survey in which 72% of Serbians believe that Russia was forced to start the war because of NATO's intentions to enlarge (Ilić & Stojilović, 2022). The above is also framed by the establishment of the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Centre in Nis. The centre is registered as a non-profit organization, but is also seen by Western officials as a potential base for covert operations to increase Russian influence in the region through indoctrination and radicalization of some groups (Stanicek & Caprile, 2023).

The recent developments after the Russian invasion of Ukraine clearly highlight the extent of the Russian influence in the conduct of Serbian foreign policy. Although Serbia is a candidate country for EU membership, it supports the territorial status of Ukraine and has not recognized the annexation of Ukrainian territories to Russia (Zawadewicz, 2023), it has not implemented sanctions against Russia, as it did not after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. However, in order to avoid alienating its Western allies entirely, Belgrade supported UN resolutions condemning the Russian attack and imposed sanctions against Belarus. Additionally, since the beginning of the war it has stopped participating in joint military exercises with the Russian army and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) (Bechev, 2022: 18). In fact, Belgrade's "neutrality" was rewarded in 2023 by Russia by signing of an agreement to supply Serbia with natural gas at a preferential price until 2025 (Ibid).

Another great power, from which Serbia receives undivided support, is China. Beijing was quick to align with Belgrade on the Kosovo dispute, apparently fearing the use of the issue as a "precedent" to its own problems (eg with Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Uyghurs, etc.). Characteristically, China has no dealings with Kosovo, nor does it recognize it as an independent state, giving Serbia another ally with veto power in the UN. Serbia reciprocated by adopting some of China's positions in the pressing issues for Beijing and by giving preferential treatment to Chinese investments (Zweers et al., 2020). As a result, Serbo-Chinese bilateral relations gradually thrived in all sectors from infrastructure and trade to defense

and technology. To date, several important agreements have been signed between the two countries. For example, in 2009, a strategic partnership agreement was signed between the two countries, as well as an agreement on economic and technical cooperation in infrastructure projects (especially regarding a bridge on the Danube River and a thermal power station in Kostolac) (Beckmann-Dierkes, 2018). Since 2017, the two countries have agreed the mutual abolition of visas, in 2018 the bilateral relationship was upgraded to “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” (Bastian, 2019), while in 2023 a free trade agreement was concluded (Jovicic & Marjanovic, 2024, Advimetaj & Ilazi, 2021, Shopov, 2021). This makes Serbia the only Balkan country to have free trade agreements all the major international powers.

Chinese investments have been made in crucial sectors. For example, in 2016 the Chinese company Hesteel bought the Zelezara steelworks of Smederevo for €46 million, making it Serbia’s largest exporter (Zweers et al., 2020). Also in 2018, Zijin Mining Group, in which the Chinese government has a majority stake, acquired 63% of the TRB Bor Complex for \$1.26 billion. With this deal, Zijin investments in the Serbian copper industry have almost reached \$3 billion (Bastian, 2019, Zweers et al., 2020). According to data from the National Bank of Serbia, in the period between 2009 and 2020, Chinese FDI amounted to €2,1 billion. Furthermore, it was reported that until the end of 2021, Chinese contracts based on preferential loan agreements for infrastructure projects corresponded to nearly €8 billion. (Vladislavljevic, 2022). When we consider that in 2022, Chinese investment in Serbia nearly equaled the total investment of all 27 EU member states (31.8% of FDI came from China and 33.7% from the EU27), we can see how important Serbia is to Chinese FDI (Jovicic & Marjanovic, 2024).

China’s engagement in the broader Balkan region occurs within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 16 + 1 format, in both of which Serbia is a crucial member. Both are based on inclusiveness, but also on strengthening connectivity, cooperation, trade and cultural exchanges between China and Europe, although many analysts fear it is a means of increasing Chinese influence in the region (Papermans, 2018). Through this project, the trade between the two countries increased more than five times since 2013. In fact, for 2022, China was Serbia’s second-largest trade partner, with a share of 4.2% in Serbia’s total exports and 12.9% in total imports (Jovicic & Marjanovic, 2024). In order to create the necessary infrastructure for these projects, Beijing has provided significant financial assistance to Serbia through loans and grants. In May 2017, Serbia received a \$298 million loan from China’s Exim Bank to upgrade sections of the Belgrade-Budapest railway line. Until 2020, the borrowed sum exceeded €1

billion. Overall, if we add up all the Chinese loans, they equal 7.91% of Serbia's €24.5 billion government debt, which is approximately equal to what Belgrade owes to the European Investment Bank (Bastian, 2019, Zweers et al., 2020). In addition to loans, China has given Serbia direct grants amounting to €78.8 million for the period 2009-2020 (the EU has granted €3.7 billion respectively) (Vladisavljevic, 2022).

Another particularly important sector of cooperation between Belgrade and Beijing is digital transformation and cutting-edge technologies. Most notable examples are the 5G networks, the monitoring technology within the program of the "Safe City Solution" (which concerns the installation of cameras with face and car number plates recognition software in large cities), but also the creation of "data centers" through the program Smart Cities. The fact that the programs in question are provided by the Chinese company Huawei raises concerns among Western analysts about the possible unethical use of data and Belgrade's dependence on the Chinese company (Avdimetaj & Ilazi, 2020, Vladisavljevic, 2021).

In the defense sector, China provides Serbia with advanced military equipment. Over the years Belgrade has acquired drones (Chengdu Pterodactyl-1, CH-95 and CH-92A) and FK3 anti-aircraft systems (Zweers et al., 2020, Reuters, 2023, Avdimetaj & Ilazi, 2021), while between 2008 and 2018, China became the second provider of military aid to Serbia after the US (Vuksanovic, 2020b). With the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war this cooperation is expected to become even closer. This hard power is also framed using soft power, with Beijing having created a number of Chinese cultural centers (most notably the one above the Chinese embassy bombed in 1999 by NATO) (Shopov, 2021). At the same time, two "Confucius" institutes operate in Serbia, one in Belgrade and one in Nis (Bastian, 2019).

Although Chinese influence in the Balkans, unlike Russian influence, does not oppose European policy, there are considerable doubts about Beijing's real motives. China supports the EU enlargement to the Balkans (this way at least, China will have more of its friends at the European negotiating table to support it), yet its economic practices often fail to meet European standards, threatening to undermine EU conditionality, and increase the region's overall susceptibility to corruption. Also, there are fears that the acceptance of Chinese loans for major infrastructure projects may create financial dependency and imbalances (Beckmann-Dierkes, 2018, Hansel & Feyerabend, 2018, Shopov, 2022, Zweers et al., 2020).

All in all, the Russian and Chinese influence on Serbia mean that the Kosovo dispute will be perpetuated, since these two international titans have aligned

their foreign policy with that of Serbia. The fact that Serbia has established the National Council for Cooperation with Russia and China headed up by former President Nikolic (Beckmann-Dierkes, 2018), clearly shows that Serbia intends on cultivating its relations with both great powers. All this of course provides an extra challenge for the EU's policy in the region and a potential threat to the region's stability.

Serbia's "Balancing Act"

Serbia's ability to balance between West and East can be explained on the basis of external and internal factors affecting its policymaking. Belgrade's external legitimization derives mainly from EU's support for Vučić. Although he was praised as a reformer when he came to power in 2012, in practice from that year until now there has been a systematic decline in the democracy level of the country. A recent Freedom House report states that the Serbian ruling party "has steadily eroded political rights and civil liberties, putting pressure on independent media, the political opposition, and civil society organizations", whilst the country's score dropped from 4.36 (with 7 being the "excellent") in 2012, to 3.61 in 2024. This resulted in Serbia dropping in rankings from a "Semi-Consolidated Democracy" to a "transitional or hybrid regime" (Freedom House, 2024). Thus, it is evident that Vucic's regime has all the components of what Pavlović (2016) described as a Stabilitocracy. The paradox is that while the Union closely monitors developments in the country and has repeatedly pointed out its malfunctions, it does not withdraw its support for the Serbian leader, as long as he offers stability to the region. The support of the Stabilitocracy, however, undermines the EU's credibility as a source of democratization in the region by revealing its double standards, while simultaneously depriving its enlargement policy of valuable diplomatic capital (Stratulat et al., 2020). At the same time, it allows Vučić to use the EU's ambivalence as diplomatic leverage to negotiate his own terms for Serbia's accession path, capitalizing on the Union's fear of closer Serbian-Russian cooperation (Di Lellio, 2009: 374-375).

In the context of Stabilitocracy, the greatest source of internal legitimization is the ability to control the electorate, which comes from the constant creation and resolution of crises to distract the public opinion and rally the people around the leader. (Bieber 2018: 179, 182-183). Especially in the case of Serbia, Serbian nationalism has an important legitimizing role including both the feeling of Serbian exceptionalism and the perception of victimization of the Serbs by the international community. Both aspects of Serbian nationalism received a particular boost in the post-2008 period, when the West recognized Kosovo's independence

and demanded the extradition of Serbian generals Mladic and Karadzic to the International Court of Justice. The Serbs interpreted these actions as an exclusive condemnation of the Serbian side for the outcome of the wars, especially since they were not accompanied by corresponding actions against the other warring parties. Thus, the Serbian perception that everyone is against them was reinforced the image of the “Other” that a stabilitocratic regime needs to thrive (Gordy 2013: 46-47). The result of these dynamics is the shift of Serbia towards non-Western powers, which better understand the Serbian position and support it.

The above are framed by the difference in the approach conditions of the Great Powers to Serbia. EU’s conditionality creates a strict framework that regulates the relations and that requires important reforms from the Serbian side in order to complete the integration process and finally join the Union. If these standards are not met, then the relations can’t develop any further. In contrast to this “oppressive” framework, non-Western countries offer a cooperative framework with far fewer conditions. Since these countries are also ruled by hybrid/authoritarian regimes, they are more lenient on issues such as the environment, human rights or the rule of law. This results in the approach with these non-Western countries becoming easier for Serbia, precisely because it does not require the previous compliance with all these conditions (Zweers et al., 2020).

The Domestic Dynamics in Kosovo and Serbia

Examining the way in which each country perceives and deals with the Kosovo issue in the domestic level allows us to discover precisely the dynamics on which the international power politics gain footing and increase their influence. We observe that both Belgrade and Pristina are quick to exploit bilateral problems in order to mobilize their audiences and consolidate their regimes’ power. The result, of course, is that relations become a zero-sum game, which makes compromising difficult and perpetuates the differences.

The most prominent unresolved issue is that of Kosovo’s recognition as an independent state, which carries great political risk and for that reason little progress has been made. Since 2011, the EU has established the “Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue”, aiming to find a solution through its own mediation. In this context, the central debate revolves around the exchange of the normalization of relations (with the ultimate goal of recognizing Kosovo), with the creation of a Union/Community of Serbian Municipalities in Kosovo. Over time, the two sides have signed several related agreements, most recently the Ohrid Agreement in 2023, but the situation has not improved yet, as neither side implements them

but instead blames the other for the non-implementation. Characteristically, the two countries cannot even agree on the name that this unification of the Serbian element will receive when and if it is implemented as the words hide important meanings. Serbia is pushing for the creation of a “Union” that will have executive powers, while Kosovo is talking about a “Community” that will only have coordinating responsibilities for the municipalities (International Crisis Group, 2023). Both regimes also take advantage of the “creative ambiguity” that permeates these agreements and in practice means that each party can interpret aspects of the agreements as they see fit and thus present them as their own victories (Bashota & Dugolli, 2019).

More specifically, Kosovo has agreed on three separate occasions (2013, 2015, 2023) to promote the creation of the Union/Community of Serbian Municipalities, without however having implemented its commitments. For Kosovars, any concession to the Kosovo Serbs raises fears, since autonomy is interpreted as the harbinger of independence. Thus, Kurti participates in the dialogue with Serbia in order not to be blamed for the collapse of the negotiations, but in practice has no intention of implementing the agreed. Instead, he is pursuing an aggressive policy of integrating the Serb element, which includes raising tensions to show that he will not accept any compromise on Kosovo’s sovereignty. It is characteristic that from 2021 almost every 3 months a crisis is created in Serbo-Kosovar relations for which Pristina’s policy is to a significant extent (but not necessarily exclusively) responsible. Notable examples include the issue of the vehicle plates, the election of mayors of Albanian origin in the northern municipalities with a Serbian majority, or more recently the ban on the use of the Serbian dinar (International Crisis Group, 2024).

All these incidents, in fact, led Kurti’s main Western allies to impose sanctions on the country for the first time (Dunai, 2023, Dunai et al., 2023), and even affected the relations between Albania and Kosovo (Beqa, 2023). The Kosovar president, however, continues his aggressive policy, which “relies on deeply ingrained negative sentiments among Kosovo Albanians towards the Serbs, fostering enmity that fuels paranoia and stokes a constant fear of alleged Serbian danger” (Garic, 2024). With his eyes fixed on the elections he thinks that confrontation with the West works in his favor because he can once again evoke sympathy from the Kosovar public, through the rhetoric that the West pressures him to capitulate with Serbia (Ibid). Paradoxically, this strategy, although aimed at regaining total control of the states’ northern provinces by Pristina, also paves the way for the development of even closer ties between Serbia and Kosovo Serbs, further undermining Kosovar control.

The Serbian element in Kosovo allows Serbia to have a say in the affairs of Kosovo in the first place. Besides, the Serbian parallel institutions in Kosovo rely entirely on the help of Belgrade for their operation, while the Serbian List, the party that dominates the parallel structures' political scene, is also largely controlled by Serbia (Radosavljević & Ničić, 2021: 11-12). It is characteristic that in the first 13 years of their operation, Serbia spent over 5 billion euros to keep them up and running (Selimi, 2015: 118), while for the 2024 budget it was decided to spend approximately €140 million (Cvetkovic & Ahmeti, 2024). The heavy reliance on Serbia and Kurti's aggressive policy provides a prime opportunity for Vucic to create and/or exploit the constant crises his regime needs to survive. This tendency is also proven by the fact that although Vucic supports the Kosovo Serbs in the crises, at the same time he participates in the negotiations with European mediation, thus presenting himself both as a defender of Serbian national interests and at the same time as a leader who wishes for reconciliation and stability in the region, even though Serbia often violates what is finally agreed in said negotiations.

Therefore, it seems that for Serbia the Kosovo myth has a normative and an instrumental role: On one hand, it fuels authoritarian nationalist elites' political rhetoric, which they use to highlight moral commitments to the nation and gain the support of a large portion of the population. On the other hand, it provides the Serbian leadership with the diplomatic capital to negotiate advantageous terms abroad, with the most typical example being the process of joining the EU, as the Union fears the possibility of closer Serbo-Russian ties (Di Lellio 2009: 374-375). Serbia's handling of the mayoral crisis in northern Kosovo amply demonstrates the above: immediately after the crisis broke out, Vucic openly supported the Serbian population of the region and put the Serbian army on alert, showing the patriotism that the Serbian public wanted to see. At the same time, he convened with the ambassadors of China and Russia, to send the West the message that if it doesn't intervene in favor of Kosovo Serbs, others are willing to (Taylor & Zimonjic, 2023)

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt was made to "unravel the knot" of how the international powers with the greatest influence in the region influence the Serbo-Albanian rivalry over Kosovo, embedding the two states in the zone of turmoil. The main international power, the EU, although it had important foundations, has lost its prestige and only after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war did it focus again its attention to the Balkans. Although theoretically it never stopped being

interested in the fate of the region, in practice its initiatives have not succeeded in bringing the two countries in its zone of peace. More specifically, the mediation of Brussels in the Belgrade-Pristina confrontation, despite being initiated more than a decade ago, has brought results only for small and insignificant issues, while the “burning” and most important ones have remained largely intact. Agreements reached by the two sides are signed and then never implemented, creating a history of unfulfilled commitments that burdens bilateral relations and is a prime pretext for each side not to implement subsequent commitments. In the meantime, the dysfunctions of the enlargement policy have created the so-called “enlargement fatigue” both in the candidate states and in the EU itself. Not only are the required reforms not completed, but sometimes there are setbacks in the process, that the Union doesn’t have the mechanisms to prevent. The accession of Serbia and Kosovo in particular, is one of the most difficult cases, since it requires the mutual recognition and the normalization of relations, something that is considered very unlikely to happen in the near future.

The situation becomes even more complicated as other international actors rush to fill the gaps left by EU policy. Russia, a revisionist power, and China, an overtly non-revisionist power but with hidden ambitions for the region, have openly aligned themselves with Serbia’s interests, offering valuable political support on its national issues that the West is unable to provide. This support, however, is not free. In return, these two countries have penetrated deeply both into the interior of Serbia as a state and into the consciousness of its citizens. Thus, Russian and Chinese interests find footholds within the Serbian economy, while at the same time Serbian public opinion remains particularly friendly to their cause. The result is that the country’s full integration into the West is not a key priority for the Serbian political leadership, keeping the state in the zone of turmoil. Belgrade likes to strike a balance between its allies, since this makes all the major powers fight with each other so that the influence of the other powers in the country does not increase. This is particularly effective in the case of the EU, which is afraid to become more critical against Serbia’s backsliding, so as not to drive Belgrade closer to Moscow. After all, Serbia has no sense of urgency to resolve its differences with Kosovo, especially since such a prospect entails a large political cost, which is not existent in continuing the policy of balance.

For its part, Kosovo is trying to convince its allies to pressure Serbia into making concessions. At the same time, however, it “raises the gauntlet” against the country’s Serbian minority, prompting it to seek the protection of neighboring Serbia, while simultaneously pushing Serbia closer to its non-Western allies. That means that Pristina’s fears of Belgrade’s influence in its northern territories, lead

to an aggressive management of the problem, which ultimately increases Serbian influence among the country's Serbian population (and thus completing a "self-fulfilling prophecy"). Kurti's "show of strength" approach has had a significant impact on the Western attitude toward his country. Despite the West's calls to change its behavior and the sanctions imposed on Kosovo, Pristina continues to pursue a confrontational policy, primarily for domestic reasons. This, of course, prolongs the area's stay in the zone of turmoil.

It therefore becomes obvious that the domestic dynamics of Serbia and Kosovo set the stage for the perpetuation of the conflict. At the same time, international power politics take advantage of the hostile environment to promote their own interests and undermine the reconciliation process. After all, resolving the bilateral disputes may benefit the EU, but doesn't benefit all the great powers involved. Reconciliation, for example, would entail clearing Serbia's way to Western integration, implying a reduction of Russia's "special weight" in Serbian foreign policy and the suspension of the serbo-russian "special relationship". As a result, the combination of domestic environment of the two states and the international forces' behavior severely limits the chances of compromise and the prospects of a mutually acceptable solution. For this reason, the two countries are still embedded in the Balkan zone of turmoil and will need to implement several radical reforms in the coming years in order to escape from it.

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II

GREAT POWERS AND BALKANS

CHINA'S DEBT-TRAP DIPLOMACY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: MONTENEGRO'S HIGHWAY AND GEOPOLITICAL COMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: The Western Balkans play a significant role in China's debt trap to expand its influence. China uses debt-trap diplomacy to enhance infrastructural growth and dependency in the future. This article analyses Montenegro as one of the first cases of becoming a victim of debt-trap diplomacy. Chinese investments were present in the country because of the highway's construction to link the capital with the port city of Bar. However, the consequences and circumstances changed in China's favour of high interest rates and debt. As a result, the paper examines the case of Montenegro to understand the causes and roots of debt-trap diplomacy and how Montenegro fell into this challenge. The challenge is more than just a simple bilateral issue between China and Montenegro. China has continued to spread its influence in the region for an extended period by giving loans to ensure long-term geopolitical control. The paper argues that Montenegro's experience with debt-trap diplomacy revealed the issues with the loans and the associated risks. The paper emphasizes the need for countries in the Western Balkans to develop strategies for managing debt and protecting their sovereignty. By understanding the case of Montenegro, debt-trap diplomacy is analyzed through its lending practices and outcomes. In the end, the paper concludes the importance of government accountability and transparency in projects from foreign powers to prevent future challenges of debt-trap diplomacy.

Keywords: Debt-trap diplomacy, China, Montenegro, Geopolitics, Western Balkans.

Introduction

China continues to spread its influence in the Western Balkans by adjusting to the countries' economic needs. Debt-trap diplomacy faces challenges and ambiguity in understanding whether it is a myth or a reality (Himmer & Rod, 2022). Montenegro's case demonstrates that the need to build a highway can negatively affect the cooperation's outcome and create dependency without realizing the consequences. Through debt-trap diplomacy, China cooperates economically and spreads its influence across borders. In essence, the debt-trap diplomacy has allowed China to exert its power and invest heavily in high-interest investments by aiming for higher goals, such as dominance and influence.

To better understand debt-trap diplomacy, a closer analysis of the Montenegro case reveals risks associated with the loans taken from China and the failure to pay off the debt. Through this analysis, the paper ascertains better long-term objectives of the country and potential effects on the region that can cause geopolitical changes in the Western Balkans. By highlighting the importance of fiscal stability, Montenegro grasps the significance of its sovereignty and independence. The paper brings the perspective of understanding and protecting the country from foreign powers, regardless of the cheap or accommodating projects, when scrutinizing national security and foreign policy.

Additionally, the paper addresses the research questions in light of the geopolitical dominance in the Western Balkans. The research questions are: what are the primary objectives of debt-trap diplomacy? How has the construction of the highway influenced Montenegro's political and economic landscape? What are the challenges and risks for the Western Balkans and Montenegro due to China's debt-trap diplomacy?

Papers add value to a detailed account of Montenegro's case and the influence of China on the Western Balkans. Based on the statistical reports of the GDP to debt, trade outcomes, and foreign policy, the paper emphasizes the period from the beginning of the project until the recent changes due to the debt. Moreover, the paper interprets data based on tables and figures. The table includes GDP, national debt to China, GDP per capita, Montenegro's Nominal GDP and foreign direct investments (FDI). The figure is about the scale of transparency and corruption in Montenegro. Therefore, the paper concludes that economic trade statistics and internal political and geopolitical challenges are sufficient to understand China's long-term regional influence and objective.

Literature review

Debt-trap diplomacy emerged as a new topic in international relations, referring to economic strategy and foreign policy. The literature in the paper analyses the existing academic discourse on the controversy of debt-trap diplomacy. Brahma Chellaney, an Indian strategic analyst, used China's debt-trap diplomacy for the first time. Chellaney (2017) argues that the Belt and Road Initiative tricks mainly developing countries into receiving loans and failing to pay them. This way, the countries fall under China's dominance.

However, there are a lot of contradictions regarding the Chinese debt-trap diplomacy, whether it is a reality or simply a speculation used by different scholars. A published paper argues that the BRI is a multi-vector and sector spatial fix that relies on the issues of the Chinese capital and materials as the geopolitical dimensions. For example, during COVID-19, the cases included the overreaching debt crisis in Africa and economic benefits from the BRI projects. (Carmody et al.,2021).

Moreover, Hameiri and Jones (2020) deflate the myth of debt-trap diplomacy and demonstrate that what drives BRI projects are economic factors in countries and that China's development financing system is too poor to coordinate and pursue detailed strategic objectives. Based on their financial and political interests, the governments of developing countries must address the specifics of the BRI projects implemented in their country.

Another example of concern for China's diplomacy is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. Shaikh and Chen (2021) concluded in their paper that there are worries about the BRI projects in Pakistan and how weak economic indicators have affected them. Carmody et al. (2022) argue that sovereign debt has become a point of BRI in some parts of the Global South and has led to the question of mutual benefits.

Brautigam (2020) challenges the debt-trap diplomacy narrative by arguing that the concept is oversimplified and critiques the widespread belief by analyzing specific cases, such as Sri Lanka, demonstrating the role of media, academia, and policy words in pointing fingers towards Chinese malevolence.

The implications for European integration are present in Montenegro. Okic (2021) argues that the burdensome nature of EU convergence criteria and China's regional strategic interests complicate the integration and geopolitical landscape.

In addition, the EU holds significant political and economic positions in the Western Balkans. However, some citizens see the EU integration as a burden due to the criteria and accession requirements. Therefore, infrastructure investments have made China a dominant player in the region. (Jaćimović et al., 2023).

The literature on China's debt-trap diplomacy presents a challenging discussion that the recipient countries, as in the case of Montenegro, play a crucial role in understanding Chinese lending practices. The ongoing debate helps to explore the comprehensive and balanced understanding of China's debt-trap diplomacy and its consequences, whether they are overvalued or undermined by the concept of debt-trap diplomacy. (Liu, 2022).

Methodology

The methodology used in the paper is based on qualitative supported by a brief quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis consists of writings, books, case studies, empirical studies, research, historical events, analyses, reports, journals and papers that discuss the debt-trap diplomacy and cases relevant to Montenegro's case. This methodology provides a clear explanation of the economic and geopolitical contexts that allow an in-depth understanding of the complications of debt-trap diplomacy in Montenegro. Gaining insights from the qualitative method demonstrates perspectives, patterns, and analysis that are important to understanding the geopolitical challenge of Montenegro due to its debt. Comprehending how Montenegro fell under the debt-trap diplomacy is crucial by analyzing the country's geopolitical factors and internal political complexity.

The quantitative analysis describes and explains, in brief, the economic consequences of Montenegro in the numbers related to the GDP and national debt, and foreign direct investment (FDI). Analyzing these trends helps determine economic indicators which are critical to the country's economy.

Additionally, the paper consists of primary and secondary sources to analyze the subject comprehensively. Primary sources are important to understand the essential outcome and roots of the debt-trap diplomacy in Montenegro. Because the paper follows China's debt-trap diplomacy, primary sources offer most case evidence and facts from other countries. Secondary sources consist of more scholarly evidence that frames primary sources with a broader understanding. The combination of both primary and secondary sources gives the paper scientific and academic rigour on the subject.

Lastly, this paper aims to provide the most elaborate point of view by interpreting empirical evidence and the case study as examples of debt-trap diplomacy.

Objectives of China's debt-trap diplomacy

The debt-trap diplomacy, a strategic move that originated from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and was presented in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping, is a significant development in international relations. This Chinese strategy aims to connect the Eurasian economy with investment, trade, and infrastructure, marking a new era in global economic dynamics.

The debt-trap diplomacy as a strategy links geographic regions and connects in Asia and Africa. (Ajnoti, 2022). For instance, the BRI projects involve African countries and Latin American nations. Furthermore, China's influence is expanding into Europe and the Western Balkans. As part of this strategy, China provides loans to developing countries and supports constructing crucial infrastructure such as water supply, energy, transportation, and other related sectors (Foster et al., 2009). This comprehensive support is a critical factor in the popularity and acceptance of China's approach.

BRI projects continue to receive criticism from countries that are well-developed and do not need any particular funding from China. One of the main criticisms is the need for more transparency because, in most projects implemented in developing countries, there is no open process to understand how the contractor is selected, as well as loans and other issues. (Standish, 2021). The other famous criticism is about loans, which provide debt and burdens for countries due to the high interest rates and inability to pay off (Wang, 2022). These concerns are relevant in the case of Montenegro, where the debt-trap diplomacy happened and caused turmoil in the country on how to overcome the situation. (Xhambazi, 2021).

The debt-trap diplomacy with Montenegro started in 2014 when Montenegro took a loan of 800 million euros from the Chinese Export-Import Bank known as EXIM Bank (Reuters, 2014). The idea of taking the money was to build the highway Bar-Boljare for the first 41 kilometres (Kajosevic, 2023). It is crucial to know that Montenegro has one of the most challenging terrains and faces difficulty in construction. The highway is important because Montenegro is the only country in the Western Balkan lacking a highway (Sosic, 2021). The highway is planned to connect two countries, Montenegro and Serbia, through the port of Bar to the southern of Montenegro.

The project's contract is with the China Road and Bridge Cooperation (CRBC), one of the largest and most critical companies for the construction of projects. (DW, 2023). It is one of the largest engineering companies in the state-owned Chinese industry, leading most BRI projects worldwide, including the one with

Montenegro (Development Aid, 2024). The EXIM bank, a state-funded and owned bank, strategically supports Chinese international economic cooperation, foreign trade, and investments. This mission-critical function of the bank contributes significantly to China's national development strategies (The Export-Import Bank of China).

The EXIM Bank is crucial because it lends money to the BRI projects. In the case of Montenegro, it accounts for 85% of the expected cost for the following six years and twenty years of repayment by Montenegro. The condition with the Chinese projects requires the country to have construction and contractors from China for at least 70% of the construction (Reuters, 2014). Moreover, in 2024, the Exim Bank signed an agreement to extend 944 million dollars to Montenegro with an interest of 2% and a six-year grace period (Pavlova, 2024).

Moreover, Montenegro has a long way to go in reaching its goal of paying off the debt due to China's total debt and its nominal GDP. However, the foreign direct investments (FDI), China is not the primary source country, so highway construction remains crucial, (see Table 1).

Table 1. Trending Statistics of Montenegro's Economy

Category	Details
GDP	GDP (Nominal): \$7.404 billion (2023)
	GDP per capita: \$12,007 (2023)
National Debt to China	Total Debt to China: Approx. \$1 billion
	59.7 % of the country's Nominal GDP (2023)
Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)	Major Source Countries: Serbia, Russia, Germany, Switzerland, UAE, Turkey, Italy, and the United States (2022)
	Key Sectors: Real estate, energy, telecommunications, tourism

In 2024, Montenegro said it had paid 40.5 million dollars to China's Exim Bank to cover the sixth instalment of the loan to construct the Bar-Boljare. Moreover, in 2022, Montenegro opened the Smokovac-Matesevo section (Pavlova, 2024). The 129-km highway has three main projected sections, Andrijevića-Boljare and Podgorica-Djurmani, which are still to be built. In addition, Montenegro signed a hedging transaction with 4.4 million dollars, which helped to cut the interest rate from 2% to 0.98%. (Pavlova, 2024).

The highway's idea is to connect Montenegro's Adriatic port of Bar to the country's border with Serbia. The project is part of the European Transport Corridor XI, which links Italy's Bari to Romania's Bucharest through the port of Bar and Serbia. The Belt and Road Initiative highlights the trap that Montenegro fell. As Montenegro continues to face challenges in repaying the debt, the risk of financial dependency and challenges in sovereignty increases.

The geopolitical influence of China's presence in Montenegro

While China increases its economic presence, its political presence increases, too, due to dependency. Bilateral relations between Montenegro and China are still developing, regardless of the recent incident with highway construction. Moreover, some visits involve tours of Chinese companies, media, historical culture, and project locations. Most visitors see the positive side of China and gain good experiences.

The increase of China's presence in Montenegro is reshaping the region's geopolitical landscape. The project raised concerns about financial dependency on China and the future geopolitical implications in the country and beyond.

The geopolitical constraints extend beyond economic presence and highway construction. China's engagement in Montenegro created a more profound political and cultural tie, causing the country to increase its dependency. Due to the historical influence of Russia and the Western Powers, Chinese influence in Europe is a firm foothold and a familiar player, particularly in the Western Balkans (Zeneli, 2023).

The Western Balkans play an essential role in exerting influence from China and growing concerns about the rise of influence. The concerns are related to the economic investments for strategic gains, political influence, and the disruption of the balance of power in the region. By following solid bilateral relations, China aims to expand its counterbalance and influence Western presence in the region.

However, China's approach to the Balkans differs from that of other foreign powers, such as Russia. China does not promote opposition to NATO and EU enlargement in the Western Balkans (Vučković, 2024). China's tool for spreading its influence is leveraging economic power and increasing regional influence through its main project, BRI.

The crux of the issue leading to Montenegro's reliance on China is the rampant corruption within the country. The construction of the highway, while intended to generate employment and enhance connectivity, has been marred by unresolved documents and corruption allegations. Instead of being a boon, the project has become a burden for the country.

Besides dealing with the loan burden, Montenegro faces challenges in its internal politics due to corruption. However, the corruption score in 2023 was better compared to 2014 (see Figure 1), when it was lower. In 2023 Montenegro scored 48 out of 100 and ranked 63 out of 180 countries (Transparency, 2023).

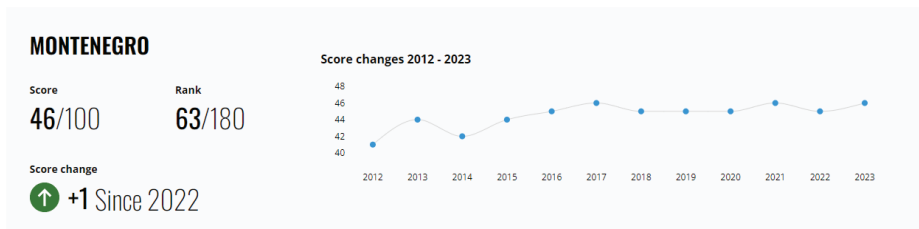


Figure.1 Corruption Perceptions Index ¹

In addition, Montenegro has challenges in its internal political circumstances. The challenge on the path to the EU is failing, and its membership in NATO questions its true progress of integration and alignment with the allies. Montenegro's ruling elites embraced Chinese investments to benefit consumption without interfering with the country's political legitimacy. This approach was particularly significant for Montenegro's future in the EU and its alignment with NATO (Golubovic, 2024).

With the rise of the Chinese influence and economic presence, the citizens in the country viewed it as more positive. Other Western countries need to catch up. This dynamic emphasized the complexity of Montenegro's geopolitical situation and its challenges with international partners. This debt-trap diplomacy causes political sovereignty challenges and strategic objectives to change with the aspirations for cooperation with the EU and NATO.

The Risks of Debt-trap Diplomacy in Montenegro

After signing the contract and choosing the construction partner, Montenegro faced challenges and risks that eventually became unbearable. In the contract

1 Transparency International. (2019). Montenegro. Transparency.org. <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/montenegro>

signed between Montenegro and the construction company, many points were not considered, such as electric installations, water, and the connection of the highway with the capital city of Podgorica. These factors caused a delay in the construction and affected its initial deadline.

Other international financial institutions, including the IMF, World Bank, and European Investment Bank, foresaw that Montenegro's national debt would exceed the average GDP, a prediction that materialized (Barkin & Vasovic, 2018).

Concerns about losing sovereignty caused a major fuss in the country. The Montenegrin government knew what kind of agreement they signed and the consequences. However, this was not the case because the sovereignty of the territorial parts was not affected. (Deron et al., 2021) However, the highway project increased the risks of environmental issues, notably causing damage to the Tara River, a site protected by UNESCO (Todorovic, 2020). Environmental degradation and financial instability clash with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) Montenegro, established in 2007. Under this agreement, Montenegro must reform its laws by the EU *acquis*. (EUR-Lex, 2022).

The risks from the debt include political autonomy, sovereignty, economic vulnerability and fiscal instability. With political autonomy and sovereignty, it is associated with China's debt-trap diplomacy in Montenegro and the Western Balkans. When countries accept large loans from China and fail to pay them back, China can leverage their interdependency to exert political influence. China can favour political decisions aligned with its interests and autonomy based on having indirect control over its international politics and influencing its sovereignty.

The second risk is fiscal instability and economic vulnerability, which causes countries to depend on each other and creates dependency and burden on the recipient countries. The pressure to service large debts can divert funds from the public debt and increase by limiting fiscal capacity. The construction project can lead to decline or even economic stagnation to repay more debt. The worst-case scenario is when repayment cannot happen, causing a financial crisis and falling into the debt trap.

The last risk can be the geopolitical repercussions and strategic imbalance from Chinese regional influence. Western Balkans have always played a role in geopolitical crossroads, becoming a great power competition for many players. China is present, and increasing its influence can shift the strategic balance and diminish the foreign policy of the United States and the EU. Such realignments might complicate the region and Montenegro's path to the Euro-Atlantic alliance and can destabilize regional security.

Conclusion

Debt-trap diplomacy in Montenegro emerged as a new tool for China to exert its power and influence in the Western Balkans. Through economic dependency, investments, projects, and infrastructural projects such as the construction of the Bar-Boljare highway, China managed to find its path and intertwine Montenegro's financial needs with its broader geopolitical ambitions. The approach demonstrates how China uses economic cooperation to gain political umbrellas and foster stronger bilateral ties through debt with the Western Balkans countries. (Kovacevic, 2021).

For Montenegro, the construction of the highway project underlines both the risks of debt-trap diplomacy and the challenge of having stable financial and political autonomy. While the infrastructural project promises more job opportunities and a better connection between countries, it creates a dependency that could cause a collapse of the country's independence and fiscal stability. This dynamic demonstrates the broader implications for Western Balkan countries willing to participate in Chinese initiatives.

Moreover, integrating the Western Balkans into China's project presents challenges for Western allies such as the United States and the EU. The success or failure of the projects increases dependency and paves the way for larger-impact efforts.

The paper concludes that the insidious threat of debt-trap diplomacy significantly hampers the path to the EU and NATO membership. It provides China with strategic avenues to extend its control and promises economic development and stability. However, the delicate balance of power and respect for political autonomy remains a critical factor in avoiding such situations in the future. China can exploit the opportunity to increase its influence by advocating for a trading system that leads countries to accept debt but ultimately struggle to repay it in the long term.

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RUSSIAN FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKAN: DOES IT THREATEN SECURITY AND STABILITY TO REGIONAL STATES?

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Abstract: Since 2013, Russian influence in the Western Balkan has been coming to the fore. In the same year, Russia published a strategic document, „Foreign Policy Concepts, “marking the Balkan region as strategically important. Besides traditional ties with the Orthodox population in the Western Balkans, the document marked the Balkans as a region of strategic importance to Russia in distributing gas and oil to European countries. Since then, Russia has piled up its engagement in the Western Balkan region as a spoiler. Russian engagement in the region was primarily to thwart countries from the EU and NATO accession. It leads to threatening security as well as democracy in the region. Russian oligarchs play an important role in undermining regional security. Russia had tried a coup d'état in Montenegro before its NATO accession. Further, Russia equipped Serbia and the Bosnian entity Republika Srpska (RS) with weapons, making a balance in favor of the Serbs. Also, Russian personnel in the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) play in favor of Serbia, implementing its own agenda and colluding with the West in the region.

In the economic sphere, Russian oligarchs purchased oil refineries, making the region dependent on Russian gas and oil. The staunchest Putin's allies got favorable oil and gas prices, but the question is the background of favorable prices for them. Recently, Russian media and NGOs have penetrated the Western Balkans. Russian presence was entrenched by establishing affiliations with the Cossack Army and Night Wolves in the region. They organize events and gatherings praising Putin and his politics. Also, Night Wolves drew attention in 2018 when they made a Western Balkans tour visiting important Orthodox places. In the media field, the Russian news state agency Sputnik opened its office in Serbia, disseminating news across the region. Pro-Russians media in the region share news that contributes to the sense of insecurity and negatively depicts Euro-Atlantic democratic reforms.

Keywords: Russian influence, Western Balkans, Geopolitics, Security threats

Introduction

Western Balkans is not an influence region where countries export own interests to other states. Inter- and intra-state political games in the region play an important role in understanding how region works. In principle, states are parliamentary democracies by its own constitutions. Only Bosnia and Herzegovina have a different kind of parliamentarism. He is parliamentary democracy but power-sharing plays a crucial role in distribution of authority positions. Additionally, decision-making is based on ethnical principal. Serbia nominally elects the Prime Minister but President Vučić is the most influential politician in the country. On the other side, we have a young state, Kosovo, declared independence in 2008. The utmost issue is normalization of relations with Serbia where northern Kosovo mostly inhabited by Serbs loyal to Serbia and President Vučić. Montenegro is the only country in the region, covered by the research, who joined NATO. They had been the leaders in the region regarding EU accession until political turmoil. Among others, its EU path was threatened due to Constitutional Court appointment blockade.

As a relatively weak and poor region, it provides space for external actors' influence. On the one side, eastern countries like Turkey, Russia and China became more influential in the region due to inactivity of western countries and allies. Although region has not been the conflict hub the most influential western countries are present in the region, US, Germany, UK as well as EU and NATO. Also, abovementioned countries work through NATO operations in the Western Balkans.

Article brings all main Russian activities in the region opening the space for further research. So far, we had short annual reports and some news and op – ed articles concerning Russian influence in the region. This article covers main fields how Russia has been engaged in the region since 2008. In 26 years, Russia succeeded to entrench themselves and find regional proxies who align with Russian politics. Although EU stands with Ukraine since Russian aggression providing them aid to defend their territories. But two Russian proxies in the region, Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vučić, regularly met Russian president and Russian officials. On that account, this article is important to examine how Russia uses tools to undermine security and stability in the Western Balkans.

Russia is the country whose influence is the most striking in the region. Its presence in the Western Balkans has been evident since 2008, posing threat to security and stability engaging through several fields. Russian diplomats, who had been expelled from European countries due to intelligence activities, mostly

accredited in BiH and Serbia. They got diplomatic status and easily met officials who aligns with Russian politics. Anti-NATO coalition between Western Balkans political parties and Putin's United Russia, lays out Russian interference in internal affairs of regional states. They signed an official document binding themselves to thwart NATO membership of Western Balkan countries. On that account, Russian agents organized coup d'état in Montenegro trying to topple Milo Đukanović's regime.

To entrench its position in the region, Russia uses its proxies to shake the region by borrowing money and investing projects mostly in Serbia, BiH entity Republika Srpska and Montenegro. Also, Putin utilized economic impediment to be engaged in the region. His oligarchs purchased oil and electricity companies and made the region dependent on Russian fuel. Some of purchased companies are located in BiH, Montenegro as well as Serbia.

Unavoidable part of Russian influence is non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, education centers, culture and religion. They are organizations who supports Putin and vice versa. Night Wolves organized parade in the region and threatened states' security and stability by its own activities. Kosovar PM, Albin Kurti, claimed that Wolves were filmed in the northern part of country on the barricade built by local Serbs population. Russian Serbian Humanitarian Center, located in Niš, established to train activists how to work in emergency. US concerns over the Center came true when Russians required diplomatic status to the Center's staff.

Russian Engagement in the Western Balkans

Nikolai A. and Vladimir N. Nartov described, in their geopolitical textbook "Geopolitika", why Russia has been engaged in Balkans. According to them, West wants to interfere in domestic issues and impose solutions in domestic affairs of Slavic people including Serbia and Bulgaria. Moscow would determine the fate of Slavic people making decisions in the UNSC. For Moscow, the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo is guests. But on the other side Serbia is the region's masters. Nartov argued that Albania would annex Kosovo and Albanians would tear away ethnical territories from Macedonia (Felberbauer, Jureković, & Labarre, 2008). The Western Balkans is the closest part of Russia to Europe due to cultural, religious and political affiliations. Also, region is used to suppress Turkish and European interests (Karić & Mulalić, 2014).

Economic Influence

The Russian economy plays a significant role in the Western Balkans. Energy is a leading asset which holds Russian economy in the region. Russian oligarchs and businessman have purchased oil and energy companies occupying Western Balkan market. On the contrary, trade volume between states is at low level.

Western Balkans states exported to Russia between 2.8% and 4.2% to Russia but imported between 3.3% to 5.7% for the period 2017-2021. In the energy sector, Kosovo and Montenegro are independent from Russian gas because they do not need it. On the other side, BiH imported 98.7% but Serbia imported 24.5% Russian gas by 2021. (Vulović, 2023)

In January 2008, Serbia joined South Stream Gas Pipeline project which puts her in key transit junction to Europe. In February 2008, Chairman of Gazprom Management Committee Alexei Miller and Srbija gas Director Saša Ilić signed an agreement for the construction of pipeline across the territory of Serbia. In the same year, Gazprom Neft signed an agreement with Serbia in 2008 to take over stake of 51% in Serbian state-owned oil company Naftna industrija Srbije (NIS). Pro-European critics in Belgrade said they would have to pay back political debt in exchange for Russian's support over Kosovo. Two days before the Parliamentary election in 2008, Serbian cabinet unanimously concluded an agreement (Felberbauer, Jureković, & Labarre, 2008). On account of Russia's support on Kosovo, Serbian parliament ratified an energy agreement with Russia. It runs for 30 years and will be automatically renewed (Stiftung, 2018). Gazprom bought refineries in Pančevo and Novi Sad as well as the only gas deposit that Serbia has located in Banski Dvor (Marković, 2017). During a visit in 2019, Putin pledged 1.4 billion US dollars to bring Russian gas to Serbia, which is the important transit route for Russian gas transition to southern Europe over Turk Stream pipeline (Metodieva, 2019). In the mid of Russian aggression on Ukraine, Serbia purchased gas from Russia for 31 US dollars per kilowatt hour from Russia. On the market spot gas costs 99 US dollars (Vulović, 2023). But Russia did not stop in Serbia.

KAP, Montenegrin state-owned electricity company, under Deripaska ownership was significant for Montenegrin economy. It made up more than 50% country's export, contributed to approximately 15% country's GDP, employing 2.3% of all workers in country. Noteworthy, Russia's loans helped budgets in the region.

In 2014, when BiH struggled for IMF loan, authority of Republika Srpska (RS), BiH's entity, negotiated 270 million euros to budget. Due to disagreement with Russia, Dodik did not negotiate more money as he promised. According to other version, Russia pledged to loan 625 million US dollars but delivery track is

not clearly evident. On the other side investments came to RS. Oligarch Rashid Sardarov pledged to invest 800 million euros in RS and scheduled to open thermal power plants in 2017 what is indefinitely delayed. Besides, thermal power projects, Russian company Zarubezhneft took over refineries in Modriča and Brod. Noteworthy, company has invested more around 60 million US dollars in refineries since 2016 (Bechev, 2019). After a fire in refinery Brod, oil processing stopped in 2018 and never restarted.

Kosovo is the only state in the Western Balkans with no significant Russian economic investment. In 2017, Russia donated to the North of Kosovo train painted in Serbian colors and orthodox symbols. Also, it carried a slogan Kosovo is Serbia in 20 languages.

Russian Culture and Religion in the Western Balkans

The most prominent oligarch who uses soft power through Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is Konstantin Malofeev. His St. Basil Great Charitable Foundation is the largest Orthodoxy charity in Russia with budget over 40 million dollars. Organization financed “ritual of Holy Fire” from the Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to Serbia for Orthodox Waster in 2015. Flame also traveled to Croatia, Montenegro and RS while ceremony was broadcasting in Russian and Serbian (Stronski & Himes, 2019).

Since 2008, Russia has intensified relations with Serbia as Russia reconstructed Serbian churches in Kosovo. Four years later, Russia provided 2 million dollars for four UNESCO Orthodox buildings in northern Kosovo. Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been involved in return of Serbs in northern Kosovo building houses to accommodate 1500 Serbs. Expressing gratitude to his engagement, Iversk chapel contains the name of Vladimir Putin (Rrustemi, de Wijk, Dunlop, Perovska, & Palushi, 2019). Beside state, Russian companies made donations. Gazprom donated 5 million US dollars to Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) showing Russian growing presence in the region based on cultural-religious ties (Metodieva, 2019). In 2018, Russia has built a Russian Orthodox religious and cultural center in the heart of Banja Luka, BiH’s entity RS. Cultural and religious ties between Orthodox people in Balkan is tied up with biker group, Night Wolves.

The Night Wolves is an organization which connects Slavic and Orthodox people and explores Russian and Orthodox history across the Western Balkan. His president is Alexander Zaldostanov born in Ukraine. They are known to its allegiance to Russian President Putin. Organization is blacklisted by the US because

their members served in armed conflict in Ukraine. Group patrolled the streets of Sevastopol but some members have joined pro-Russian militant group in eastern Ukraine. They have organized tours around the region.

In 2018, Wolves organized “Russian Balkan” tour in Serbia and BiH. Its president was banned from entering BiH and did not take part in the rout. But other members visited Orthodox churches monasteries, cultural and historical sites in Serbia and RS. After the tour, representatives of Russian Moto Federation and Night Wolves hold a conference in Serbia.

Yevgeny Strogov, a representative of Russian Moto Federation, emphasized importance of tour saying that bringing Russian and Serbian people together is the main aim of such activities. He said that “Russian influence is most visible in Bela Crkva (Bela Church) and Pancevo. Russian cadet corps were placed in Bela Crkva (Bela Church), and there was Vrangelov hospital in Pancevo, at the site of today’s General Hospital.” He announced they worked on a route Kosovo Polje and Kulikovo Polje calling Russian and Serbian priests to join them. Saša Savić, a president of Serbian Night Wolves, was disappointed that relevant institutions in BiH banned him from entering country. He said that Surgeon, nickname of Zalostadinov, only gathers Slavic people around driving and love, spreading peace and harmony. Cultural Center in Niš and Russian Embassy in Serbia received Icon of Archangel Michel by Night Wolves for their cooperation on this project (I., 2018).

Media, Education and Centers

Russian soft power is exerted through media, education and centers. All of them portray Russia in positive way and confidential partner to the region. They are most active in Serbia and BiH’s entity RS.

Serbia and Russia signed an agreement in 2012 establishing Russian Serbian Humanitarian Center (RSHC). As it stated, RSHC is a non-profit organization registered in accordance with Serbian law. Competences of RSHC are:

- participation in the emergency prevention and elimination measures;
- humanitarian assistance to people affected by emergencies;
- implementation of joint projects and programs in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and other countries of the Balkan region;
- training and professional development of specialists in the field of emergency prevention and response;

- testing and demonstration of modern fire and rescue equipment and technologies;
- other tasks that are not contrary to the goals of the Center. (Center, 2021)

US concerns over this center were Russian intentions about status of Center's staff. Question was what would happen if Russia requests special diplomatic status or immunity. US predictions came true when Russia had applied for diplomatic status of Center's staff. According to Demostat, Serbian government should change the status of Center as a first step to abolishing it. So far, it has not happened (FoNet, 2022).

Russia's engagement through media has been evident. Tsargrad TV and conservative think-tank Katehon are owned by Malofeev. These organizations "supported family values campaigns, promoted pan-Slavic views, pushed a variety of conspiracy theories against Western-friendly politicians in the region, and published articles justifying Russia's 'civilizational role' in the Balkans." (Russel & Branislav, 2022).

In RS, the public news agency SRNA and the public broadcaster RTRS share pro-Russian propaganda from controlled media RIA Novosti and Sputnik. This practice was dominant during election campaign in 2022, especially after Putin met with the former member of BiH Tripartite Presidency Dodik (Georgiev, Petrova, & Tsabala, 2023). Since the Ukrainian invasion, they have disseminated Russia propaganda and established own reporting structure from Russian controlled territories in Ukraine. In that time, Sputnik's content doubled in the region. Ukrainian invasion was not the only reason for increasing pro-Russian propaganda. When Montenegro joined NATO, compared with 2015, Sputnik's content increased almost fivefold. (Metodieva, 2019) Online portal includes into dissemination of propaganda. In BiH nezavisne.com shares pro-Russian propaganda while in Montenegro, in4s.net and mondo.me follow suit. Also, Western Balkans media outlets referred to Russian state-controlled media sources like Russia Today (RT), Russian News Agency (TASS), RIA Novosti and Sputnik. In the first half of 2022, pro-Kremlin propaganda was almost absent in Kosovo (Georgiev, Petrova, & Tsabala, 2023). Serbian media also shares pro-Russian propaganda referring to abovementioned Russian state-controlled media.

Sputnik's content is shared by Blic, Kurir, Vecernje Novosti and Blic. Portals with pro-Russian propaganda include Srbinfo, Faktor, and Kremlin.rs, Gazeta, Fakti, and Glas Moskve. Serbian tabloids also promoted Russian interests as well as newspapers Politika, Geopolitika and Nedjeljnik. Additionally, Russian foundations increased their activities in the region while a school opened in Montenegro.

First Russian school in Montenegro, “Dukley Academy-Center of Continued Education”, founded in 2016 obtaining a state Russian diploma (Šabanović, et al, 2020). Russian foundations gather academics, journalists, analysts and intellectuals who share anti-western propaganda and create projects with them. Some of foundations are Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, the Center of National Glory, and the Russian Institute of Strategic Research with its only branch in Belgrade (Metodieva, 2019).

Political Engagement

Russia established political relations with those parties who has opposed NATO expansion to the Western Balkans. Its ally from Montenegro Democratic Socialist Party (DPS), led by Milo Đukanović, shifted policy toward West. After Montenegro had joined to NATO, relations between parties deteriorated. But stable and confidential partners are Serbia and entity RS led by Aleksandar Vučić and Milorad Dodik respectively.

Current relationship with Serbia dated back in the late ‘90s when Russia did not support NATO bombings against than Yugoslavia. On the account of veto that Russia wields in the UNSC, Serbian officials, either pro-European or Eurosceptic, have kept close relations with Russia.

During the official visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Sergei Lavrov to Belgrade in 2016, his counterpart Ivica Dačić stated that Russia plays important role in protection of territorial integrity regarding their stance on Kosovo’s independent (Zorić, 2017). In international politics, Russia backed Serbia especially when it comes to Kosovo.

Russia condemned Kosovo’s independence, and Russian permanent representative in the UN, Dmitri Rogozin told the press that European politicians may be bribed by Albanian drug dealers to recognize Kosovo. Also, Russian FM Lavrov called for a resumption talks between Belgrade and Prishtina. China joined Russia blocking Kosovo’s recognition in UN and Moscow signaled to nullify Kosovo’s independent in the UNSC (Felberbauer, Jureković, & Labarre, 2008). Russian officials, especially president Putin, are welcomed in Belgrade.

In 2019, Putin visited Belgrade and attended re-opening Saint Sava cathedral. He was warmly welcomed by the crowd who came to see president, even from BiH entity RS. During his visit, two countries have signed 21 economic and political agreements by their own signatures (Secrieru, Saari, & Bechev, 2021).

Political relations are not constrained to Serbia. Pro-Russian Western Balkans political parties signed a “military neutrality” declaration with the United Russia. Parties signed declaration against NATO expansion, aligning with Russia. Following parties signed declaration: The Serbian People’s Party (in coalition with Vučić), the Democratic Party of Serbia, Dodik’s Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the New Serbian Democracy and the Democratic People’s Party (both from Montenegro), and the Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia. (Bechev, 2019) Also, Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) signed agreement with the same party in 2018. Four years later, United States (US) claimed that Democratic Front (DG), Montenegrin political party, and Milorad Dodik, then member of BiH Tripartite Presidency, received secret funds from Russia. Both parties have a good relation with President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić. Russian proxy and partner in BiH Milorad Dodik is blacklisted by the US.

Russia has been backing Dodik since his first election win. Russian and RS officials have met in the election year. Before the 2018 election FM Lavrov visited BiH and received the Award of Republika Srpska. 2016 referendum was also supported by Russia but next one in 2018 did not hold. Dodik called for RS to recognize Crimea annexation and welcomed Night Wolves in RS. Further, Konstantin Malofeev has significant political and economic role in the WB. He organized controversial visit of Cossacks to Banja Luka in 2014 to support Dodik’s electoral campaign. A year later, Dodik awarded Malofeev along with Putin’s adviser Igor Shtegolev and Leonid Reshetnikov the Order of Njegoš (Metodieva, 2019).

Russian influence is not only evident in RS. Politicians from RS, elected in state’s Parliament and members of Council of Ministry, carried out pro-Russian politics. In April 2022, Serb ministers in the Council of Ministry of BiH blocked a decision to apply sanctions on Russia. It was not in line with the EU foreign policy, BiH pledged to follow. Instead of making distance from Putin after Ukrainian invasion, on the January 13, 2023, Dodik awarded him for support to Dayton Agreement implementation.

Putin and Russia, under his leadership, has not proven their commitment to Dayton implementation. In 2021, Russia vetoed appointment the High Representative Christian Schmidt during the UNSC session. In the same way, they obstructed Steering Board of Peace and Implementation Council (PIC) work and tried to abolish the office of High Representative (OHR) to reduce Western influence in Bosnia. Russia also opposes verdicts and indictments against Serb officials who committed war crimes including GENOCIDE.

Aside from Dayton obstruction through PIC, Russia interfered in internal issues. On September 29, 2023 National Assembly of RS adopted a Law on foreign agents. It implies opening special register for NGOs who are financed by foreign donators. Law is prepared in cooperation with Russian advisors (Stiftung, 2018).

Although, Montenegrin oriented to Western, they had remained good relations with Russia until 2016. Paul Manafort, political consultant, said Oleg Deripaska contacted him to help in referendum campaign. Montenegrin used Deripaska contacts to lobby in supporting country's independence. In 2011, ruling party signed an agreement with the United Russia. In 2017, Democratic Party of Socialist (DPS) Member of Parliament (MP) was arrested in Russia as a response to EU sanctions that Montenegro joined after 2014 Crimea annexation (Šabanović, et al, 2020).

Security Issues

In 2013, Serbia signed Strategic Partnership with Russia what includes cooperation and coordination in military, intelligence and international bodies. It was followed by Serbian joining to Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), alliance led by Russia, as observer state. Serbia participates in "Slavic Brotherhood" military exercise. Participants of exercise are Russia, Belarus and Serbia. Exercise has been held once a year since 2015. These exercises also held in Serbia in 2016 and 2019. In 2022, Serbia and Russia agreed that the Russian Defense Ministry opened the office in Serbia. Such act would run counter Serbian neutrality which they claimed since 2007.

In 2016, Serbia signed an agreement with Russia to modernize its own military. It includes "upgrading and replacing its Yugoslav-era military stocks with used MiG-29 fighter jets, T-72 tanks, and combat patrol vehicles donated by Russia or Belarus" (18; 123). Two years later, it seems that abovementioned agreement starts to implement. In that way, "Russia donated to Serbia six used MiG-29 fighter jets and promised to deliver 30 T-72 tanks and 30 armored personnel carriers." (Metodieva, 2019).

BiH's entity, Republika Srpska (RS), has opened a training center for police under the program led by Russian special forces. In 2016, RS and Russia signed an agreement entailed cooperation in intelligence collection, counterterrorism and cybercrime. Agreement enables sending police to each other's country for training. Bosnian officials from Sarajevo claimed that RS tries to procure Russian anti-aircraft Iгла I-V missiles which can be mounted on helicopters (Rrustemi, de Wijk, Dunlop, Perovska, & Palushi, 2019).

In May 2019, Kosovo police launched operation in Serb majority town of Mitrovica. Suspects supposed to be detained, those who have been involved in organized crime: smuggling, misused of official positions and other crimes of similar severity. Raid has been executed in the accordance of rule of law. On the other side, the Head of the Serbian Government Office in Kosovo Marko Đurić, currently Serbian ambassador in the US, stated that raid has been executed against Serbs spreading fear among citizens. During the operation, a member of the United Nation Mission in Kosovo, UNMIK, was detained. Mihail Aleksandrovich Krasnochekov was released after UNMK and Russian FM had demanded that.

Cyberattacks in South East Europe focused on Montenegro against government institutions in 2016 and 2017 when Montenegro should join NATO. Those attacks traced to APT28, known as Fancy Bear, tied to Russian military intelligence by the US claims. Russia also attempted coup d'état in 2016.

Bratislav Đikić, a former Serbian gendarmerie commander, was one of the key figures who should occupy Parliament with 20 individuals dressed in stolen police uniform. Meanwhile, DF would declare victory and call supporters for protest. Group of disguised police officers should fire on protestors when protestors storm the Parliament building. DF, in this situation, would call for protest in the country and claim “victorious” party was prevented from seizing power. Nevertheless, PM Đukanović should be assassinated. Aleksandar Sinđelić, co-founder of Serbian flank of Night Wolves – Serbian Wolves, was served as liaison with the GRU and recruited 300-500 volunteers for plot. He also distributed hundreds of thousand euros for coup-related activities. Bratislav Đikić, received 15000 euros for his role in coup. After arrest, they admitted their role in plot and provide key information and links between local conspirators, Russian agents and political actors in Montenegro. Russian interference was evident in coup. According to Montenegrin authorities, GRU agents, Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Popov, were interlocutors to plotters in Montenegro. To finalize plot, in 2016 they met with Sinđelić in Moscow and provided 200000 euros for attendant costs. Photo, shot in Belgrade a year after coup attempt, proved close relations between Sinđelić and Shishmakov (Bajrović, Garčević, & Kraemer, 2018).

Russian agents also pose a security threat and are active members of UN bodies. Some of them have been working in BiH and Kosovo missions.

At least three Russian-expelled diplomats accredited in the Embassy in Belgrade after Ukrainian had launched. Another one diplomat, left mission in Helsinki after Finland had announced expulsion of Russian diplomats due to invasion of Ukraine (Živanović, Gočanin, Aljas, Krutov, & Dobrynin, 2023).

Andrej Nikolaevič, staff of UN mission in Kosovo, declared “persona non grata” by Kosovo’s government. He was the second UN staff declared this status after Mihail Krasnoščekova. Later he was accused to lift barricade in Zubin Potok what is “infringement of Constitutional order in Kosovo, universal values, peace and stability.” There have been other members of Russian GRU took UNMIK positions up. Their aim was to provoke inter-ethnic unrests due to delay of negotiation process on Kosovo status and represent settlements with Serb majority and Orthodox churches as threatened. Igor Kulga, Olga Mokrova, Aleksander Kasatkin (Istraga, 2022).

In April 2021, Croatia expelled 18 Russian diplomats including Aleksej Ivanenko. After expulsion from Croatia, he got promotion and became First Secretary in Embassy in Belgrade. Before he became diplomat, Ivanenko had been working in Unit 71330 or Centar 16 which is under Federal security service (FSB). It was not final list of expelled Russian diplomats. Expelled diplomat from Poland, Mikhail Generalov, became advisory in Russian Embassy in Belgrade. Leaked information showed he has residence in Vilnyusskaya Ulitsa, built for foreign intelligence service members. Pyotr Dolgoshein worked as Second Secretary in Russian Embassy in Helsinki. After Russia had started invasion of Ukraine, he got a role in Embassy in Belgrade. It is not clear that he was among diplomats who were expelled from Finland (Živanović, Gočanin, Aljas, Krutov, & Dobrynin, 2023).

Serbia is not the only shelter for Russian expelled diplomats. Some of them are accredited in BiH. A year after Ilija Serov had expelled from North Macedonia, he was accredited at Russian Mission in BiH. He attended concert on celebration of “Victory Day Against Fascism” In Sarajevo Hall. Anton Sokolov, expelled diplomat from Croatia, became the First Secretary of Russian Embassy in Sarajevo. Before his arrival in Zagreb, he served as the Second Secretary in Russian Embassy in Sarajevo. Sokolov met with the Director of Service for Foreigner’s Affairs, Žarko Laketa. They discussed challenges Service faced with and projects and results of Service. Sokolov thanked for meeting and information exchange emphasized importance of “keeping professional networks and relations between Service and Embassy.” (Bilajac & Kuloglija-Zolj, 2023).

Conclusion

Russian influence in the Western Balkan is malign due to its policies and activities conducted in the region. Sending spies as an Embassy staff, favoring domestic regional spoilers, interference in domestic issues like coup attempt in Montenegro proved our claim. Some Russian diplomats from European countries

expelled owing to intelligence spy. Although they pose a threat as a potential spy in region, such diplomats are welcomed in Serbia and BiH. They regularly met Russian proxy officials organizing violent protest. On the account of Montenegrin membership in NATO, Russian orchestrated coup attempt trying to topple Milo Đukanović's regime. Plot was obstructed and organizers and logistic arrested. Current Chairman of Montenegrin Parliament, Andrija Mandić, arrested waiting for verdict. Another direct Russian interference and threats is cooperation with anti-NATO forces. United Russia, Putin's party, signed an agreement on the anti-NATO basis with following parties in the Western Balkan: the Serbian People's Party (in coalition with Vučić), the Democratic Party of Serbia, Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the New Serbian Democracy and the Democratic People's Party (both from Montenegro), and the Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia. It was another signal that Russia may produce instability and threaten regional security in following years. Leaders of abovementioned parties are hardliners, particularly Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vučić, who unequivocally support Russian endeavors in the region.

Besides striking signals of Russian malign influence in the region, there are soft means, like economy, media and education, and culture and religion, entrenching Russian influence in the Western Balkan. In economy sphere, Russian oligarchs, linked with Putin, purchased oil and electricity companies. Russia got 51% stake in state company NIS becoming the major owner. Pro-European critiques in Belgrade said that Serbia had to pay back in exchange for political support concerning Kosovo's independent. On the other side, by Russian purchase some workplace saved. Russia expected that these regimes will play its own game. Dodik and Vučić follow suit but Đukanović reoriented Montenegrin policy toward NATO and faced coup attempt.

Russian entrenchment in the region was strengthened by donations to and reconstructions of religious buildings. Russia reconstruction of religion buildings in Kosovo proved that it follows Serbian politics claiming Kosovo is Serbia. Noteworthy, Russia donated 20 trains to North Kosovo, where Serbs population lives in majority, painting slogans that Kosovo belongs to Serbia. It was distinct harm of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Kosovo.

Night Wolve's 'Balkan Tour' in 2018 draw attention due to enter banning in BiH to Saša Savić, a president of Night Wolves in Serbia. It said that he posed a threat to country and his presence and activities would jeopardize security and stability in BiH. Night Wolves did not stop and enter those parts of the region where Serbs rule.

By its presence in the region, Russia threatens regional stability and security. Russian state or non-state activities are the same because NGOs, engaged in the region, are linked to Russian president carrying out his policy. If countries from the Western Balkan want to join EU, they have to distance itself from Russia thwarting Russian influence and interference in their respective countries.

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THE BALKANS AS A TEST FOR THE MILITARIZATION OF TÜRKİYE'S FOREIGN POLICY HYPOTHESIS

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Abstract: The Balkans has always had important strategic significance for Türkiye due to its geographical proximity and historical, political, and economic ties. The objectives of this article are several: first, to offer a brief information for the Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkish) since 2002. The text argues that the main tool of the Ankara's engagement with the region is the soft power. Secondly, another aim of the text is to explore whether features of the Turkish foreign policy in other regions are also applicable to the Balkans. While most authors note an increased militarization of the Turkish foreign policy in the period 2016 – 2020, especially in the Middle East, after extensive review of the foreign policy instruments, used by Türkiye, the article demonstrates that the “soft power” remain the key characteristic of Türkiye's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Balkans. Thus, it can be argued that the Balkans are a case study, which shows that the hypothesis of the militarisation of the Turkish foreign policy is not universally applicable. The use of the hard power in the Middle East by Türkiye is to counter a direct threats to its national security, while there are no such threats, emanating from the Balkans. At the same time, the NATO and EU-integration are other factors, pacifying the region and leading to emphasize on the use of non-military foreign policy instruments.

Keywords: The Balkans, Türkiye, foreign policy, soft power, militarization

Introduction

The Balkans has a significant importance for Türkiye because of their geographic proximity, especially for Istanbul, and the most industrially and economically developed Western region of the country near the Sea of Marmara and the Straits. The Balkans are the gate of Türkiye to the West, and the bulk of Türkiye's trade with Europe is carried out via the Balkans. In addition to this, Türkiye and region has historical, ethnic and religious ties due to the Ottoman rule of the Balkan lands and Turkish and Muslim minorities living in the Balkans.

During the interwar Türkiye signed bilateral friendship treaties with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as the multilateral Balkan Entente with Greece, Yugoslavia and Romania in 1934. The primary aim of Türkiye was to counter growing Italian revisionism in the Eastern Mediterranean (and for the other countries in the pact - Bulgaria) via collective security system. After World War II, the bipolar world restricted substantially the Turkish sphere of action in the Peninsula. Encouraged by the USA, Greece, Türkiye and Yugoslavia signed the Second Balkan Pact in 1954, but Belgrade's reconciliation with Moscow and the flare-up of Turkish-Greek tensions over Cyprus rendered it defunct a short time later (Mufti, 2009: 31). During the Cold War, Türkiye maintained correct, but aloof relations with Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia. Relations with Greece were highly problematic on account of Cyprus, while Albania was in self-isolation from the world.

In a nutshell, the opportunity structures for Turkish engagement in the Balkans were very weak during the Interwar and Cold War periods. The difficult communications, the restricted economic contacts, lack of the concept of 'soft power' or its tools were a barrier for a serious Turkish penetration into the Balkans.

The interest of the many international actors, including Türkiye, towards the Balkans significantly increased during the breakup of Yugoslavia wars. Ankara was actively involved on the international arena in the US and UN-led diplomatic campaign for military intervention against the Serbs. Aiming at balancing Greece, Ankara focused on developing strategic ties with Albania and Republic of North Macedonia (RNM).¹ The strategists in Ankara believe that influence on RNM would break at the middle also a possible Serbian-Greek "Orthodox" axis in the Balkans, which would be detrimental of the Turkish interests. Türkiye

1 The official name of the country since 11 January 2019 is Republic of North Macedonia (RNM). Due to the dispute about the name of the country with Greece and the lack of official recognition of the name, from 1991 to 2019 the country was frequently refer as Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). In this text the current name of the country will be used, regardless of the period.

developed its trade relations with Bulgaria and Romania as well, while Sofia and Bucharest relied on Ankara's support in their NATO bid.

Turkish state activism in the Balkans during the 1990s was restrained due to the fact that the country suffered from three parallel weaknesses: political, foreign policy and economic (the crises in 1994, 2000, 2001). The political instability was the result of fragmented parliaments, which brought to light eleven patchwork coalition governments between 1990 and 2002. Additionally, the foreign ministry saw the change of 13 foreign ministers, which made following a consistent policy difficult. At the same time, Turkish institutions remained preoccupied with domestic affairs, notably the war against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the Balkans remained relatively low priority.

The relative lack of state involvement of Türkiye was compensated by the Turkish non-state actors. Turkish religious groups stepped on the Balkans in the early 1990s. The local context was favorable, since the collapse of the secular socialist model, the subsequent economic crisis and the war in some of the countries created nationalist and religious mobilization, resulted in a rediscovery of religion.

Among the pioneers were Turkish Sufi Orders (*cemaat/tarikat*) and neo-Sufi communities. The starting point for the religious and educational efforts of these groups was usually Albania in the midst of a crisis in the 1990s, and during the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a number of Turkish charity organizations provided assistance to the Bosnian Muslims. After the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, their actions spread towards those two countries, as well as towards the North Macedonia. The choice of these countries was logical both due to the deteriorated socio-economic conditions, and on account of the fact that certain *tarikats* had been preserved in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia since the Ottoman times. These Turkish Islamic charities have played an important role in establishing contacts between the pro-Islamic civil society in Türkiye and Muslim communities and institutions in the Western Balkans. (Solberg, 2007) After 9/11, due to US pressure, some of the Salafi and Wahhabi actors were arrested, and the others were forced to leave the Balkans. This facilitated considerably the possibility of Turkish religious organizations penetrating into the Balkans.

Türkiye's Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans During the Early Years of the Justice and Development Party's Rule

A new era in Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans begins when the Justice and Development Party (JDP, also known by its Turkish abbreviation, AKP) came to power in Türkiye in 2002. Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans become more active due to two groups of reasons - internal and the regional conjuncture. Domestically, the JDP formed the first single-party government in two decades and began large-scale structural reforms aimed at European integration of the country. Relative political stabilization and favorable international conditions lead to economic growth.

Türkiye's increased activism was also favored by the regional situation. By 2001, the conflicts in the Balkans had been subdued. By the year 2000, most Balkan countries (with the exception of Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia) had generally already completed their internal economic and political transformations related to the transition from one-party to multiparty regimes and from a centralized economy to capitalist free market economy and the period of adaptation to the new conditions has passed. Taking advantage of the favorable global situation, the Balkan countries are experiencing good economic growth.

During the first years of JDP government, Türkiye sought consolidation and strengthening of its relations with the countries in the region, predominantly in the economic sphere, but this continue the trend from the previous decade, so it was entirely within the Atlantic paradigm, meaning its foreign policy actions were in line with the EU and U.S. policies (Rašidagić & Hesova, 2020: 101), (Андреев, 2021).

Two factors are important for the development of the economic ties of Türkiye with the Balkan countries. The first one are the free trade agreements (FTA). After the Customs Union between Türkiye and the EU came into force in 1996, Ankara concluded FTA with almost all other Balkan states: Romania (1997), Bulgaria (1998), North Macedonia (1999), Bosnia and Croatia (2002) and Albania (2006), after all these countries had signed their own association agreements with the EU. The last countries were Montenegro (2008) and Serbia (2009), due to obstacles after the Montenegrin independence (Bechev, 2012: 136). Secondly, the end of the conflicts in the Western Balkans opened new possibilities for the trade relations between Türkiye and the region. Under the AKP, trade with these countries rose six-fold from 3.6 billion USD in 2002 to 18.6 billion USD in 2008 and to remain steady above 20 billion annually after that. This was part of a general trend. The amount of trade with other regions also grew during that

period. However, despite the rise, the share of the Balkans in Türkiye's foreign trade never exceeded 6.1 per cent that had been reached in 2007 (Muhasilovic, *Bosnian–Turkish relations, 2022*: 137) The cumulative value of Turkish foreign direct investments (FDI) in the Balkans increased as well, and in 2009 it stood at around USD 4.6 billion, while the total value of Turkish construction projects in the Balkan countries during the 1994–2009 period was around USD 8.8 billion (Türbedar, 2011: 142).

Turkish construction companies also built some big infrastructural sites in the Balkans, including highways. Turkish companies invest in other strategic sectors such as communications, transportation and banking, having at least one bank with Turkish capital in each Balkan state.

In the meantime, Türkiye made efforts to attain agreements for visa-free travel with all Balkan states that are not EU members, and these efforts were finalized at the start of the next stage in the Turkish foreign policy vis-à-vis the Balkans. Due to all these changes, interactions between Türkiye and the Balkans became easier, cheaper and quicker.

Ahmet Davutoğlu and Turkey's Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans

In 2009, Ahmet Davutoğlu, an IR Scholar and foreign policy adviser to the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, was appointed as a Foreign Minister. Thus, Davutoglu gets the opportunity to put his ideas into practice. In a number of texts written in his capacity of foreign minister, he clearly presented the principles on which he wished the Turkish foreign policy to be built. They comprise rhythmic and proactive, not reactive diplomacy, multi-dimensional foreign policy (opening new vistas, not focusing solely on the relations with the West), zero problems with neighbors, and desire Türkiye to be an order-instituting actor (*düzen kurucu*) (Davutoğlu, 2012). A document published by the Turkish Foreign Ministry summarizes his views on the Balkans: regional ownership, inclusiveness, regional and European integration, and the establishment of a common stance in regional and international organizations. (Davutoğlu, 2011) His main aim is in short and medium term Türkiye to develop economic partnerships and to establish a strong political, economic and cultural presence, hoping that in the long run it would become a more influential regional power, ideally a pivotal state across different regions (Ekinci 2017, 164-165), including the Balkans and the Middle East.

Certain ambition was obvious from the words and deeds of A. Davutoğlu. In a speech in Sarajevo in 2009 he claimed that the history of the Balkans during the Ottoman period was history of success that can be repeated today by building intercultural cooperation and a joint economic area. Türkiye is the “certain refuge” and “relative” for all Muslim peoples in the Balkans, in the Middle East and in the Caucasus. For that reason, everything happening in those regions is “our problem” and “responsibility.” “If a 1,000 km circle is drawn from Ankara, it comprises 23 countries, each of which is with “our relatives and is expecting something from Türkiye”, Davutoğlu states. He concludes his speech by saying:

“Our history is the same, our fate is the same, and our future is the same. As the Ottoman Balkans had risen to the centre of world politics in the sixteenth century, we will make the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East, together with Turkey, the centre of world politics. This is the aim of Turkish foreign policy and we will achieve this. To provide regional and global peace, we will reintegrate with the Balkans region, the Middle East and the Caucasus, not only for ourselves but for the whole of humanity” (Davutoglu, 2009).

The emphasis on the use of the so-called “soft power” is among the hallmarks of Ahmet Davutoğlu’s foreign policy. During that period, Türkiye expanded considerably the toolbox that it was using, and built over the efforts of initiatives that had existed earlier as well. The efforts of different state and non-state players were engaged in symphony. However, the use of the soft power as a main tool of Turkish engagement with the region outlived the term of Ahmet Davutoğlu and remain a constant characteristic of Turkish foreign policy in South East Europe ever since.

Mediation was instrumenting that Turkish diplomacy started using frequently all over the world at the time of Davutoğlu. On the Balkans Türkiye launched trilateral mechanism initiatives: regular gatherings of the foreign ministers of Bosnia, Serbia and Türkiye, as well as the foreign ministers of Türkiye, Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia (Demirtaş, 2018: 137-138). In spite of its initial successes, the trilateral mechanism soon exhausted its potential and faced challenges ahead. Although not entire flawless, the economic dimension of the trilateral cooperation has experienced fewer problems than the political one. (Pavlović: 27-35); (Mulalic, 2019: 138). In addition to acting on inter-state level, Türkiye also made efforts to mediate in the relations between the respective states and their Muslim minority, as well as in the disputes within the Islamic communities in the Balkans, e.g. in Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro. (Muhasilovic, 2020: 125-212); (Kelkitli, Turkey and the Western Balkans during the AKP Period, 2013: 97).

The work abroad of Yunus Emre Cultural Centers started from the Balkans. These centres are part of the Yunus Emre Foundation, which was established in 2007, tasked to present Turkish cultural heritage, to promote cultural exchange, to make information about Türkiye available and to provide educational services on Turkish language and culture. The first two centers were established in 2009 in Sarajevo and in Tirana, followed by another one next year in Novi Pazar, the “capital” of the Serbian region of Sandžak, populated by many Muslims. During the inauguration of the centre in Sarajevo Ahmet Davutoğlu was explicit that this was on purpose, because the Bosnian capital is “place that reflects Turkish culture in the best way, ... the city of our common culture. Istanbul and Sarajevo are twin souls.” (Aydın, 2014: 16, 18-19). Currently, 15 out of all 58 (26% of the total) Yunus Emre Cultural Centers are located in the Balkans. Branches of the Institute are active in all Balkan countries, with the exception of Bulgaria, Greece and Slovenia (Yunus Emre Enstitüsü: 14).

In 2010, the Office for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) was established to support not only Turkish citizens abroad and their associations, but also “related communities” - people who have historically shared the geography and “culture” of the Turks as well as to support students of Turkish or Muslim origin from the Turkic republics and the Balkans to study in Türkiye (Aydın, 2014: 17-18).

The activities abroad of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı), were also enhanced. The Diyanet’s budget expanded more than fourfold since 2006, reaching 35 billion Turkish liras in 2023 (Çakır, 2022). Its personnel have constantly grown as well to 128,000 people in 2020 from 80,000 a couple of years earlier (Sonmez, 2021). In the early 1990s, the principal activities of the Diyanet with respect to the Balkans comprised the theological education of students coming from the region, as well as providing Islamic literature in Turkish and in the local languages. However, the activities in which the Diyanet was involved gradually increased. Coordination Offices for Religious Services in Turkish embassies and Religious Attaché Offices in Turkish General Consulates were created. The Diyanet has Consultancies in every Balkan country except Slovenia. Attaché Offices are active in Bosnia and Romania, while Coordination Offices exist in Greece and Serbia. In Bulgaria there are both a Coordination Office and an Attaché Office. The Twin Cities Programme was launched in 2006, within its framework mufti’s offices in Türkiye cooperated and implemented joint projects with the religious hierarchies in other countries. As of 2015, 215 cities in Türkiye were responsible for the construction of over 100 mosques, Quran courses and madrasahs in 203 sister cities in 95 different countries; 66 of these

cities are from the Balkans, which represents almost a third of all matchings (Muhasilovic, 2018: 70-72).

The Diyanet donates sheep and food packages for the Muslim and Turkish population in various Balkan countries for the Eid al-Adha holiday. Very often during religious holidays Turkish municipal and non-state actors are organizing mass public circumcision ceremonies for predominantly poor families in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Serbia. The Diyanet also provides financial support to official Islamic institutions in the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria. In the past several years, the Diyanet financed the building of the biggest Islamic places of worship in the respective Balkan countries as a symbolic and even physical expression of the Turkish prestige and influence. Among the projects are the biggest mosque in Tirana, the “Central Mosque” in Pristina and a large new mosque in Skopje.

Turkish scholar Ahmet Erdi Öztürk observes that during the AKP era, the Diyanet became a high-profile institution, with more conservative worldview, which became synchronized with the ruling party’s discourses and actions in spheres like gender, social media, and even political questions such as strikes, coup attempt reaction, etc. (Öztürk, 2016). He summarizes that the Diyanet’s activities take place at the intersection of Türkiye’s Neo-Ottoman ambitions, its newly-emerged kin and diaspora policy, and its commitment to belief-based transnational solidarity (Öztürk & Gözaydın, 2018: 335).

The Balkans are one of the centers of activities of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), founded in 1992. TİKA’s data on the distribution of the aid demonstrate that the Balkans and Eastern Europe are the region that ranks second with the number of projects, but the number of the projects in Eastern Europe (with the exception of the Gagauz region of Moldova and Hungary) is negligible. The volume of its aid to the Balkans amounts to about USD 150 mln. annually, i.e., about USD 10-20 mln. per country (author’s own calculations on the basis of TİKA official website). The realized projects are in the fields of the preservation of non-material and material Ottoman heritage, including restoration of a number of significant monuments, such as historical bridges, mosques and others. Due to the indisputable emphasis on the restoration and reconstruction of Ottoman monuments and Islamic institutions, most authors examine TİKA’s activities through the prism of Neo-Ottomanism. However, others express doubts about that hypothesis and explain TİKA’s activities as “a way of Türkiye gaining soft power through foreign aid” (Todorović, 2021). Be it as it may, the Balkans are an indicative example of TİKA’s evolution, which started as agency for technical aid and worked in the sphere of restoration, but in recent years it is already acting as an agency capable of implementing projects

from A to Z: designing, financing and building from scratch of various sites and infrastructures.

Providing humanitarian aid is another aspect of the Turkish “soft power.” After the severe floods that hit Serbia, B&H, and Croatia in May 2014, Türkiye was one of the first countries to offer a helping hand (Pavlović: 34). In 2016, the Diyanet helped 2,000 families affected by floods in RNM, and contributed to the restoration of the flood-damaged mosque. (Daskalovski, 2022: 67). Türkiye was one of the first countries to offer help to Albania after the severe earthquake in November 2019 and to Croatia after the earthquake in the Petrinja region in December 2020. After the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Türkiye proved to be in the privileged position of a major manufacturer of face masks, protective clothing and other consumables, and it supplied large shipments of materials to Albania, BiH, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia (Zdravković & Peović, 2022: 156).

With the end of the Cold War, Türkiye started actively offering scholarships to students from the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans. In 1992-2007 more than 26,000 students of Turkic/Turkish origin from 55 countries studied in Türkiye. In the 1990s half of the foreign students in Türkiye came from the Balkans and Central Asia, and youngsters from Albania and the former Yugoslav countries had the highest graduation rates among them. Later on, the share of representatives of the Balkan group declined and they became the third largest cohort, accounting for 5,000–7,000 people (Turkish Review, 2014: 510-513, 542). According to other data, between 1992 and 2011 the beneficiary countries sent 31,307 students to Türkiye, but only 8,914 students ultimately graduated. Ankara launched the state-funded Türkiye Scholarships Programme (Türkiye Bursları) under YTB aegis in 2012. This programme avoids past mistakes and covers tuition fees, a scholarship, one year induction Turkish language training, accommodation in state dormitories, health insurance and a round-trip flight ticket. The Programme has introduced two significant novelties that were absent in the previous ones. First, it organizes various academic and social programmes to inform the international students about Turkish history and culture. Second, launching a website for the graduates and the establishment of alumni associations in the sending countries lends greater sustainability to the efforts invested.

The success of these programmes can be explained with the combination of good conditions for the students coming predominantly from poor Balkan communities, and the possibility to reconnect and rely on relatives from the diaspora Balkan communities in Türkiye. However, infrastructural problems surrounding dormitories and the overall difficulties encountered by international students

while adapting to Turkish educational programs persist. There have also been criticisms against the selection criteria (Kelkitli, 2021: 42, 46-47).

In addition to attracting students from abroad, Turkish educational institutions were also established in the Balkans. In 2004–2005, the International University of Sarajevo (IUS) opened its gates, and a year later – the International Balkan University (IBU, Skopje) followed suit. With the support of Turkish teachers, Turkish language is taught as an elective subject in primary and secondary schools in Bosnia. (cf. Yunus Dilber`'s article in this volume).

The Gülen movement² also opened schools (Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia) and universities (Albania, BiH) in different Balkan countries. In the aftermath of the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, Türkiye started a campaign for all Gülen-affiliated schools around the globe to be closed down or handed over to the Turkey Maarif Foundation, which was founded in June 2016 by the Turkish Parliament as the sole entity “authorised to provide educational services abroad.” The Foundation is represented in 67 countries worldwide, including Albania (eight educational institutions), Bosnia (six), Kosovo (seven) and Macedonia (four institutions + one students' hostel). (Türkiye Maarif Vakfı)

Turkish state media such as TRT Avaz and Anadolu Agency (AA) are also targeting the audiences in the Balkans, having broadcasts and websites in different local languages. AA has offices in Belgrade, Pristina, Sarajevo, Skopje and Tirana. Turkish soap operas have been immensely popular throughout the Balkans. They are of major importance for familiarising many people with Turkey and for heightening the interest in tourist visits to the country. Productions like the “Magnificent Century” (Mühteşem Yüzyıl) demonstrate the Ottoman past in a positive light.

In the political sphere ruling AKP is maintaining close contact with different Balkan parties, representing the Muslim and Turkish minorities in the region, and also Turkish president R. T. Erdoğan is having a regular high-level contact with local political leaders such as Alexander Vučić of Serbia, Boyko Borissov of Bulgaria, Bakir Izetbegović of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Edi Rama of Albania.

Until 2011, this approach characterized Türkiye's foreign policy as a whole. After the outbreak of the so-called “Arab Spring”, conditions for an increase in Turkish foreign policy activism in the Middle East emerged. Domestically, there are two prerequisites for this: first, the AKP has already managed to limit the influence

2 This movement has been recognized as a terrorist organization since 2016 by the Republic of Turkey, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Gulf Cooperation Council. (By Editors)

of the military-civilian bureaucracy, and second, it won again the general elections in June 2011, which gave it renewed democratic legitimacy. Regionally, the Arab Spring simultaneously creates opportunities to expand Türkiye's influence, but also risks and threats.

At one hand, Turkey's foreign minister Ahmed Davutoglu has repeatedly stated that what is happening in the Middle East is a revision of the colonial order imposed after the First World War, which is a "historical parenthesis" that a hundred years later the peoples of the region will close, reuniting Türkiye with the rest of "Mesopotamia" (Davutoğlu, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2013). He also several times highlights Ankara's ambitions to restore regional order in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East (Anadolu Ajansı, 2013).

On the other hand, threats also surfaced. When the Syrian governmental forces withdrew from northern Syria, in March 2012, local Kurdish organizations affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) announced the creation of their quasi-state with an area of about 40,000 sq km in the region. Ankara is deeply disturbed by this development, fearing for its internal security (Yeşiltaş, 2020).

In response to the meteoric rise of the Islamic State (ISIS, ISIL), in March 2015 the United States began providing arms and air support to the Kurdish People's Protection Forces (YPG), which are fighting against the terror group. In June 2016, YPG captured from ISIS the northern Syrian towns of Manbij and Tel Abyad near the Turkish border, forming a continuous corridor along the Turkish-Syrian border east of the river Euphrates. They were also heading to take from the Islamists Jarablus west of the river (Tanchum, 2020). However, Türkiye considers the YPG to be a Syrian branch of the PKK and in August 2016 Ankara launched operation "Euphrates Shield" against both ISIS and Kurdish forces. Another Turkish military operation against Kurdish militias ("Olive Branch", beginning at 20 January 2018), "Peace Spring" (9 October 2019) and the Syrian army ("Spring Shield", 27 February 2020), as well as a series of commando-supported airstrikes on the ground against Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq (Operation Claw (Pençe - Kilit) in 2021) will follow in the coming years in Syria.

Türkiye is also intervening in the civil war in Libya. Since 2014, Türkiye began training forces of the internationally recognized Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), close to the Muslim Brotherhood, and supplying them with weapons. After Marshal Khalifa Haftar-led Libyan National Army launched an offensive against the GNA in the spring of 2019, Türkiye intervened even more decisively. On 27 November 2019, Ankara and the Tripoli government signed agreements on military cooperation and the maritime border delimitation, and

Türkiye shifted from indirect (training and supplies) to direct support to GNA, sending not only fighters from Turkish-controlled areas in Syria, but also regular Turkish military and intelligence personnel with command, coordination, training and advisory functions. There has also been a significant increase and diversification in the amount of weaponry supplied to the NTC, which now includes not only ammunition and light weapons, but also drones, missiles and other advanced systems (Tanchum, 2020). This reflects the increased importance of Libya as Ankara's only ally in the Eastern Mediterranean, as the relations of other countries in the region (Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, Greece) with Ankara are strained. Moreover, in Libya many construction projects of considerable value are carried out by Turkish companies and Türkiye hopes for their completion, once the situation has calmed down.

Türkiye's support to Azerbaijan during its operation against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020 took roughly the same form already worked out in Libya - training, supplying drones, missiles and providing mercenaries (Heukelingen, 2022, s. 9) (Yaşar, 2021, s. 15).

These developments are both a result and a stimulus for the development of the Turkish military-industrial complex. For the country, its defense industry plays several roles: strengthening the Turkish armed forces, gaining a stronger position for Türkiye in its competition with some neighboring countries and the possibilities of projecting power abroad, as well as related to the military doctrine of forward defense. In October 2016, President R. T. Erdogan stated that Türkiye needed a new security strategy that would meet threats against the country "where they nest" (BBC Türkçe, 2016). In 2019 his speaker elaborates that this includes places beyond the borders of the Turkish "National Oath" from 1920. (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı, 2019) This forward defense doctrine includes a military presence and the establishment of military bases not only in neighbouring countries such as Syria, Northern Iraq, the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, but even in more distant countries and regions such as Libya, Qatar, and Somalia. (Adar, 2020)

All this leads a number of authors to talk about a change in Turkish foreign policy. Italian researcher Federico Donelli notes that after 2015 the previous Turkish proactive or assertive foreign policy behaviour (since 2011) was replaced by interventionism and instead of soft power (2002–2009) or a combination between soft and hard power (2010–2014), hard power became the main Turkish foreign policy tool. At the same time, increasing use of force came together with an "Erdoğan doctrine" of preemptive action (Donelli, 2020: 230-244). According to the Washington-based analyst Gönül Tol, this mind-set is deeply suspicious of

multilateralism and urges Türkiye to act unilaterally when necessary; it is anti-Western and anti-imperialist in a sense that it challenges the Western-dominated order. The new foreign policy doctrine views Türkiye as a country surrounded by hostile actors and abandoned by its Western allies (Tol, 2020). Turkish author Şaban Kardaş simply calls it “coercive diplomacy” (Kardaş, 2020).

By 2020, however, militarisation in Turkish foreign policy has been gradually abandoned and replaced by a drive to restore good relations with countries in the Middle East. This is due to the lack of allies at the state level (except non-state actors); the problematic international legal legitimacy of Turkish operations in Iraq, Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean; the difficulty in many cases to consolidate victories on the ground into diplomatic successes; the lack of exit strategies from conflicts as well as the creation of coalitions of countries balancing against Türkiye; and the risk of political-economic and operational overstretch (Kardaş, 2020); (Yeşiltaş, 2020: 110) (Uzgel, 2022).

However, as demonstrated above, notwithstanding the changes in the toolkit used in Turkish foreign policy in other regions, in particular in the Middle East, the use of “soft power” remains dominant vis-à-vis the Balkans. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost is the absence of open conflicts at the peninsula from which direct threats to Turkish national security and territorial integrity can arise. This is due to NATO’s presence in the region and the overall paradigm of European integration. Secondly, Türkiye’s policy towards the Balkans can be assessed as successful and therefore, from a Turkish point of view, no change in the instruments used is necessary. In general, any claims about a possible militarization of Turkish foreign policy should be historicized, meaning placed in a specific historical moment, and cannot be drawn as its overall characteristic due to the presence of the example of the Balkans.

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III

IDENTITY, HISTORY AND BALKANS

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S ANNEXATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA IN HUMOR MAGAZINES

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Abstract: With the rapid and organized progress of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan geography in the mid-15th century, it first dominated Bosnia and then the geography of Herzegovina. The region, which is a strategic location for the south of Central Europe and one of the key points in terms of the Adriatic, has become one of the central points of due to influence between the Habsburg dynasty and the Ottoman Empire over time. Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has important underground resources in addition to its geographical location, has increased its importance with the mercantilist policies as a result of the new age colonization. For such reasons, in the 19th century, conflicts and reformist demands arose between Russia with its Pan-Slavist policy, Austria-Hungary due to its geographical location, and the Ottoman Empire, which wanted to protect its rights over the region with its religious and cultural ties dating back nearly four hundred years. One of the important crises in this network of relations in which many actors were influential was the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary in late 1908. After the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era, the peaceful and ideal plans for a solution in the Balkans, which were expected for the Ottoman Empire, were postponed for a while due to this crisis, and an active policy was tried to be followed against annexation in both domestic and foreign politics. İttihat ve Terakki also used the press in order to be strong in its planned politics. In our study, domestic and international magazines, especially Karagöz and Kalem magazines, which were the important humor magazines of the period, were scanned and how the press commented on the annexation was examined. With these drawings, political history was approached and analyzed from a different perspective.

Keywords: Cartoons, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Annexation

Introduction

Herzegovina Crisis

The Balkan geography constituted one of the important conflict points in the history of modern Europe. Various policies and crises were experienced between Russia, which was carrying out Slavic propaganda in the region, the Ottoman Empire, which was trying to preserve the status quo as much as possible, and Austria-Hungary, one of the important political powers of Central Europe. One of these crises is the 1875 Herzegovina Uprising and the Bosnian Crisis. Although various studies have given different dates for the beginning of the rebellion, it is seen that the first movement occurred in 1872 when local families fled their regions outside the borders of Bosnia due to taxation (Turbic, 2018: 53). The Podgorica crisis that followed further escalated the tension, and with Montenegrin prince Nikola drawing Austria and Russia into the relationship, the situation soon became international. The bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire did not consider the developments as a rebellion that would reach important levels and was slow to give the necessary reactions. The slowness of the Governor of Bosnia, Derviş Pasha, in communicating with the Babıali and his passivity in the process caused the uprising to grow and the crisis widened further.

In a short time, due to foreign states becoming involved in the crisis and the Ottoman bureaucracy's inability to give the necessary reactions, the uprising reached a point where it had to be suppressed. Thereupon, although the Babıali sent a military force of around four thousand to the region, it was unable to establish dominance over the region (Otukfalay, 2019: 23). An environment in which the political balance shifted in Russia's favor was not something that the Ottoman Empire or Austria-Hungary wanted, and they wanted the uprising to be suppressed in a short time and the status quo to be preserved. Russia, on the other hand, started bilateral negotiations with Austria-Hungary in 1877 because it was thinking of expanding its sphere of influence by controlling the Slavic communities in the region. As a result of these negotiations, Russia and Austria signed the Treaty of Pest, which freed them on a part of the Balkan geography. With this agreement, the right to speak on the Herzegovina region, where the uprising broke out and which had now turned into an international crisis, was left to Austria-Hungary. Thus, the establishment of a Slavic state with wide borders centered in Croatia, which was another threat to Austria-Hungary, was prevented.

After the rebels received support from the Slavic communities, their demands for talks and reconciliation with the Sublime Porte came to the fore. The rebels' main demands were as follows:

- “Freedom of religion and belief,
- Establishment of Christian courts,
- *Reforms in the tax system,*
- *Granting autonomy to Bosnia-Herzegovina under the administration of a Christian governor,*
- *Until these things are completed, the state should be guaranteed by the big powers.* (Karal, 1988: 75),
- *Muslims should not harass Christian women and girls* (Gölen, 2010: 476)”

These requests were not accepted by the Babiali and conflicts continued between the parties for a while. The continuation of the uprising affected different religious groups in the region and there were clashes between the Muslim and Orthodox populations in Bulgaria (Turbic, 2018: 55). The Ottoman Empire, concerned about the threat of a general uprising in the Balkans, announced in a decree published in December 1875 that changes would be made in the tax and justice systems. According this:

- *“Abolition of the tax procedure,*
- *Discount on military service fees for, Christians (Military service fee has been abolished for men under 20 and over 40)*
- *Reorganization of the courts,*
- *The public has the right to complain through the courts about officials who abuse their power,*
- *Respect for religious privileges* (Karal, 1988: 80)”

These decisions, taken to limit the intervention of Western states in the internal politics of the Ottoman Empire, did not yield significant results. In January 1876, another note was sent to the Babiali by the Austrian Prime Minister Andrassy. With this note, which included decisions such as tax regulation and equal treatment for religious beliefs, many villagers in the region were given privileges and the process was monitored by a commission established by the European great powers (Yilmazata, 2005: 32).

One of the important developments in the internal politics of the Ottoman Empire during this period was the change of sultan. Abdulaziz, who was somehow removed from power, was replaced by Murat V. The new sultan offered a general amnesty and a two-month ceasefire to the people of Bosnia in order to stop the uprising, but these were not accepted. Shortly afterwards, Sultan Murad V, who

was deemed psychologically unfit to remain on the throne, was replaced by Sultan Abdulhamid II, and Serbia and Montenegro, trying to take advantage of the changes in authority in domestic politics, declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Although Russia and Austria preferred to stay out of the war in this hot conflict in the Balkans, Russia in particular sent money and aid supplies to the Serbs throughout the war. The Serbian army, advancing with Russian support, suffered heavy losses in July and August 1876 and was forced to retreat. In October 1876, Russia sent a note to the Babiali, which was planning to advance as far as Belgrade, asking it to declare a ceasefire. The Ottoman Empire responded positively to this note and approved the holding of a peace conference in Istanbul in order to avoid a possible war with Russia. During this meeting, known as the Istanbul or Tersane Conference, it was announced to both domestic politics and foreign state representatives that the Kanun-i Esasi had come into force and that the Parliament would be opened (Drkenda, 2013: 21).

The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878 and The Situation of Bosnia

Russia signed an agreement with Romania in order to secure itself. When we look at the content of the agreement, it is understood that Russia aims to use Romanian territory, especially to be able to send troops to the Balkan geography (Selver, 2003: 46). Russia, which also increased its bilateral relations with England, reached an agreement that Egypt, Suez and Istanbul would not be touched in a possible war with the Ottoman Empire. In its policy with Austria, Russia was careful to keep its relations balanced, and according to the agreement made in Budapest in January 1877, Austria would not be on any side and would have rights over the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the future. Thus, Russia managed to keep its position in the forefront by making agreements with the parties in the new balance that would emerge in the Balkans and by making concessions from time to time, and rose to a strategic position ready for war with the Ottoman Empire. As a final result of these preparations, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877.

In the war, in which intense fighting took place on two fronts, the Russians advanced rapidly and came to the point of threatening Istanbul. In this case, it was one of the reasons for the tension between England and Russia, which had agreed before the war that certain regions would not be touched. A Russia dominating Istanbul, instead of a weak and easily controlled Ottoman Empire for colonial routes, could put pressure on England in many ways, so with the intervention of other European states, an armistice was declared in January 1878.

As a result of the search for a new European balance, the Berlin Congress held in June 1878 and the Berlin Treaty signed on July 13 were a turning point for the future of the Ottoman Balkans and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The main aim of the Berlin Congress was to provide relief to the international problems of the “Eastern Question”, which had been aggravated by the War of 1877-1878, rather than to protect the interests of the Ottoman Empire. Minister Todori Pasha and Berlin Ambassador Sadullah Pasha attended the conference representing the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman delegation did not receive the support it expected, especially from England. During the Berlin Congress, British policy was based on maintaining the European balance by keeping Russia away from the straits rather than supporting the interests of the Ottoman Empire and preserving its territorial integrity. The treaty, consisting of sixty-four articles, protected the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania, but eased the terms of San Stefano in some matters from the perspective of the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria was divided into three parts: a principality subject to the Ottoman Empire; the Eastern Rumelia Province, which was administratively independent but militarily and politically dependent on the Ottoman Empire and governed by a Christian governor appointed with the consent of the European states and the approval of the Ottoman Empire; and the Rumelia lands (Vilayet-i Selase) left to the Ottomans on condition of reform. In addition, it was decided to implement the 1868 regulations in Crete. The important articles of the Treaty were the preservation of the status determined by the Paris and London Treaties regarding the Straits, the payment of compensation to Russia, and the transfer of Kars, Ardahan and Batum to Russia for this purpose. One of the most important results of the Berlin Treaty was that Austria-Hungary was granted the “right to occupy and administer” Bosnia-Herzegovina for a temporary period, in accordance with Article 25 of the Treaty.

While the congress was in progress, news of Austria’s planned invasion of Bosnia-Herzegovina spread throughout Bosnia, causing great excitement. With the official announcement that Bosnia and Herzegovina would be left to Austria on July 5, all shops in Sarajevo’s largest bazaar, Bascarsija, were closed at 10:00 and everyone locked themselves in their homes in great fear. This situation meant that the 200-year-old nightmare of Bosnian Muslims was coming true. Muslims took immediate action and began preparations to resist the occupation. The anti-occupation demonstrations that began in Bosnia spread to Herzegovina on July 10, 1878.

Following these developments, the Austrian army crossed the border over the Sava River on July 28, 1878, and began occupying Bosnia-Herzegovina,

encountering resistance in many places on the road to Zvornik. As a result, they were defeated by the Bosnian resistance fighters on August 4 at Garačanik, on August 8 at Biskova Han and on August 9-10 at Tuzla and were forced to retreat. The majority of the occupying army, including the division under the command of the Duke of Württemberg, arrived in front of Sarajevo on 18 August. After fierce fighting between the Bosnian resistance fighters and the occupying army, the Austro-Hungarian army entered Sarajevo on August 19, suffering serious losses (Üçok, 1975: 194).

Babıali insisted on the fact that the occupation was temporary until Austria-Hungary entered Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, the Babıali wanted the negotiations to continue to avoid a bloody occupation. That is why the Ottoman bureaucracy never severed its ties with Austria-Hungary, even while the process was ongoing. In the September 7, 1878 issue of *Tercüman-ı Şark*, it was stated that the negotiations between the two parties did not yield any results (*Tercüman-ı Şark*, 7 Eylül 1878). While decisions were being made for Bosnia at the Berlin Congress, Austria later put forward the idea of signing a treaty between the two. The reason for this was that they wanted to convince the Ottomans himself and bring the situation to a *fait accompli*.

Despite the resistance of the local population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the occupying army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire captured the cities of Doboj, Jajce, Banjaluka and Maglay during August 1878 (Castellan, 1993: 362). On October 20, they took control of all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina cost the Austro-Hungarian Empire eight thousand soldiers, and the dissatisfaction of the Bosnian people against the occupation continued after the occupation (Hayta, 1999: 65). As a result, the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina began on July 28 and was completed on October 20, 1878.

Babıali, which did not want to give up its rights in the region and sever its ties with the society for the future, announced that it was open to bilateral talks with Austria-Hungary for a treaty text containing the conditions of the occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Hayrettin Paşa'nın As a result of the negotiations that began under the leadership of Hayrettin Pasha, an agreement was reached between the two states in April 1879. Accordingly, although the administration of the province would be left to Austria-Hungary, the sultan's sovereign rights in the region would be preserved, the people would have religious freedom, and Ottoman coins would remain in force in the region. In return, the "temporary occupation" clause in the Berlin Treaty would be annulled. With the agreement announced to the public in June 1879, the region found a temporary solution (Akgündüz, 2003: 122).

Development of the Press and Humor Magazines in the Ottoman Empire

The development of publishing life, which began with the printing press in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 15th century, came to the fore as a result of the efforts of non-Muslim nations for many years. Printing, pioneered by the Jewish people who escaped from the reconquista movement in Spain and organized themselves especially in the port cities of the Ottoman Empire, progressed in a limited way until the beginning of the 18th century (Lewis, 2011: 71).

In the early 18th century, the Ottoman Empire entered a period in which it examined Western societies regarding both its sociology and administrative modernization. This period, known as a relatively calmer period after long wars, is known as the Tulip Era. Turkish publishing in the Ottoman Empire, which began with İbrahim Müteferrika and Sait Mehmet Efendi, who are considered to be the founders of the first Turkish printing house, also emerged in this period with the support of Damat İbrahim Pasha, the Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire (Duman, 2013: 1034). According to Berkes, only seventeen works were published in fourteen years (Berkes, 2014: 62). When the printing numbers of the Western states of the period are examined, this figure remains very low. For this reason, the printing modernization, which had a short-term effect, has not yet achieved the desired cultural modernization due to the lack of social infrastructure and awareness. Kemal Beydilli describes this deficiency as follows:

... “It is clear that there is no validity to the view that the printing press was came too late, as they was a society that met they need for certain books by writing, but whose readership was limited and had no demand: What does it mean if a bus arrives late or early at a stop with no passengers waiting? (Yüksel, 2007: 156)”

With the Tanzimat Period, press life in the Ottoman Empire turned into a more systematic structure. In the state, which could not show the desired changes with the reforms made in the 18th century, minority rebellions and the independence processes that followed these began to occur, also under the influence of the French Revolution. In a political environment where territorial integrity was gradually weakening, the Ottoman Empire issued the Tanzimat Edict in 1839. The Ottoman administration, aiming to gather Muslim and non-Muslim elements among its subjects under the title of unity of the elements and thus to partially reduce the effects of the French Revolution, also used the press, the most important social communication product of the period, which could spread this idea to the society.

When we look at it, the first newspaper published in the Ottoman Empire is accepted as *Bulletin de Nouvelles*, which was printed by the French embassy and not by the nations within the Ottoman subjects (Kızılca, 2016: 74). The newspaper, which was published in order to prevent opposing views, especially in states with imperial characteristics, as a result of the French Revolution, was printed in places such as Istanbul and Izmir, which were within the Ottoman Empire and where cultural and ethnic diversity was more important than other cities.

Newspaper life officially began in the Ottoman Empire with the *Vekayi-i Misriyye* published in Cairo and the *Takvim-i Vekayi* published in Istanbul (Benek, 2016). *Takvim-i Vekayi*, which was the official press organ of the state, was translated into Arabic, Persian, French, Greek, Armenian and Bulgarian in order to convey the ideology that the state wanted to create in society and the reforms that were made to Muslim and non-Muslim subjects. Following *Takvim-i Vekayi* newspaper, *Tercüman-ı Ahval*, which is considered the first private newspaper in the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of Tanzimat literature, was also published by Şinasi and Agah Efendi (Öztay, 2020: 240).

A legal regulation regarding newspapers and magazines, the number of which has increased over time, has also come to an essential point. Although the working programs of printing houses were previously regulated by the 1864 Press Regulation, the first law that generally regulated the press and publication in the Ottoman Empire is considered to be the 1857 Printing House Regulation. This regulation, which regulates the opening and closing of printing houses and whether books can be printed or not, has regulated press and publishing practices within a legal framework (Demirkol, 2016: 690).

The Ottoman Empire, which adopted a constitutional government system with the declaration of the Constitution in 1876, entered a more controlling period when Abdulhamid II brought the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Tsardom to the fore, adjourned the Chamber of Deputies, and implemented censorship on the press that would last until the Second Constitutional Era. During this period, many magazines and newspapers were closed or their privileges were revoked (Duman, 2013: 1037).

With the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era, censorship in the press was lifted and there was a literary boom. Until that period, journalists were restricted in many areas and were unable to inform society about developments, especially in the Balkans. However, with the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, they began to publish their writings freely. In the Istanbul press, the declaration of the constitutional monarchy was perceived as a favor from the

Sultan due to the censorship that had been applied until then. After the abolition of censorship, articles of gratitude to Sultan Abdulhamid II began to appear, especially in newspapers close to the Palace. In this context, the *İkdam* newspaper expressed its loyalty to the sultan with a headline on July 25, 1908, “Long Live My Sultan!” (Akşin, 2011: 140). However, the newspaper said that constitutionalism was extremely compatible with Islam and that this method of government was also the method that was valid during the period of the Rashidun Caliphs.

Hıfzı Topuz writes that there were four newspapers published in Istanbul at that time. Although he stated that these newspapers were *Sabah*, *İkdam*, *Tercüman* and *Saadet* (Topuz, 1973: 102), in the liberal environment of the constitutional monarchy, approximately 350 publications (Demir, 2015: 374) would take their place in the press life over time. With the press becoming such an effective tool, the Ottoman society began to follow world politics, although not as much as its contemporary societies, especially those of the Western states. Journalists tried to explain the concepts of constitutionalism, rights and law to the reader through their articles, and when they were not happy with the policies implemented by the administration, the criticisms they made through the articles they wrote sometimes became the subject of humor magazines and sometimes began to appear in the pages of newspapers.

After the abolition of censorship within the borders of the empire, many newspapers and magazines began to find a place for themselves within the system. Many new dynamics were emerging in the press life with the diversity of these publications advocating different ideologies and having different world policies. In line with these developments, it is necessary to analyze the press of the period thoroughly. In this context, we can explain the press of the period in three separate categories. First, the group that prepared the Second Constitutional Era and started publishing abroad, secondly, the press in Istanbul from the period of tyranny and another group that emerged after the declaration of the constitutional monarchy and whose numbers were much greater than the first two groups, we can talk about three different literary policies. Among the main newspapers of the first group, which had a great influence on the organization of the cadre that declared the Constitutional Monarchy, are as follows in Kocabaşoğlu’s research: There are newspapers such as “*İctihad*, *Mizan*, *Mesveret*, *Osmanlı* and *Şûra-yı Ümmet*”. In the second group, there are official publications such as newspapers such as “*Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, *Sabah*, *İkdam* and *Saadet*”, magazines such as “*Ceride-i Askeriye*, *Vekayi-i Tıbbiye* or *Mecmua-ı Umur-ı Nafia*” as well as periodicals such as “*Servet-i Fünun*” or “*Musavver Terakki*, *Çocuklara Mahsus Gazete*” or “*Ziraat Gazetesi*” (Kocabaşoğlu, 2017: 165). The third and last group, which

is much more quantitative than the first two groups, is not homogeneous. The numbers of these publications, which include different ideologies, politics and cultures, vary according to the sources.

The development of the humor press in the Ottoman Empire coincides with the Tanzimat Period, when the state experienced transformation in many areas. The first humor magazine, *Meğü* magazine, continued its publication life until 1874 and was printed in Armenian every two weeks (Heinzelmann, 2014: 43). The first humor magazine published in Ottoman language was the additional section of *Terakki* newspaper named *Letaif-i Asar*. It also stood out with its correct use of visuals during the process. After *Letaif-i Asar*, *Diyojen*, which is considered the first independent humor newspaper, started its publication life (Çakır, 2006: 163). The humor press was also affected by the censorship applied to the press and politics in the process following the accession to the throne of Abdulhamid II and the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Tsardom. In a circular published in 1877, it was stated that humorous newspapers and magazines had strayed from their goals, and that they were publishing particularly negative articles about political cadres and political developments, and that the Constitution would have the authority to punish in such cases. With the bans imposed, humorous magazines published in the Ottoman Empire decreased significantly during this period. The magazines that continued to be published were generally the publications of the pioneers of the Young Turk movement, which continued its activities in Europe and Cairo. As is known, this period of censorship ended with the Second Constitutional Era, and the variety of publications in the press began to increase.

Cartoons, which we can define as the embodied reflection of humorous press, were frequently drawn in newspapers and magazines during the Ottoman period. Especially on the period of the Second Constitutional Monarchy and Abdulhamid II, which is the period in which the research is concentrated, cartoonists approached the events from different perspectives. The sultan depiction frequently observed in European cartoons was seen as Abdulhamid II, however, humorous magazines reflecting the ideas of the Young Turks who continued their press life in Europe also made propagandist statements against Abdulhamid II in their drawings (Alkan, 2022: 21).

The humor magazines seen in the period have varying perspectives and different styles of interpreting events. In addition to humor magazines that follow traditional narratives, there are also humor magazines that draw in a Western style and, as in *Eşek* magazine, a drawing style that has harsher satires than the first two narrative styles.

In addition to single-issue humor magazines such as *El Üfürük*, *El Üfürük'e Zeylen Körük*, *Ton Ton Risalesi*, *Çingirak*, *Mahkum* (Davulcu & Temel, 2015: 859), there are also humor magazines published twice a week such as *Karagöz*, *Kalem* and *Cem*. According to Heinzelmann, *Karagöz* and *Kalem* magazines are considered to be the most frequently published magazines during the Second Constitutional Monarchy. The publication life of the magazines other than these magazines does not exceed one year (Heinzelmann, 2014: 44).

Bosnian Crisis in Karagöz and Kalem

On July 23, 1908, posters were pasted on walls in Istanbul, announcing the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy. Abdulhamid II understood the seriousness of the situation and put the constitution back into effect. In the meantime, while the Ottoman Empire was dealing with its own internal affairs, the Austro-Hungarian Empire took advantage of the situation and accelerated the process of annexing Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The letter sent by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Joseph to the German Emperor Wilhelm II clearly shows the real intentions of Austria-Hungary regarding Bosnia-Herzegovina:

“My dear friend,

The developments that led to the declaration of the constitutional monarchy in Turkey have also affected the regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina governed by my government. While these two regions, which have shown satisfactory cultural and material developments, have declared their desire for the declaration of the constitutional monarchy, they have put forward their aims so zealously, especially as matters deteriorate in the Ottoman Empire, that our government no longer feels it possible to oppose them, especially if peaceful developments on the southern borders of the monarchy are not interfered with.

Since the constitutional monarchy can only be implemented by a sovereign power, I feel obliged to declare that Bosnia-Herzegovina has been annexed.

We will inform the Ottoman Empire about this and warn it that we will reject our peace policy and any idea of acquiring any territory in the Balkans. We will withdraw our troops from Sanjak (Yeni Pazar) and will renounce the privileges granted to us in Sanjak by the Berlin Treaty in the future.

As a close friend, I am informing you of this situation immediately. I am sure that you will evaluate this situation in good faith and that you will not have difficulty in understanding that we are acting in this way because of an urgent necessity. (Yılmaz, 2004: 83) ”

On October 7, 1908, the annexation was officially announced to the public in the *Wiener Zeitung*, the official newspaper of Austria. In the news on the first page of the annexation newspaper, the Emperor addressed the public in German and Serbian and announced in Sarajevo that Bosnia and Herzegovina had been officially annexed (*Wiener Zeitung*, October 7, 1908: 231). *Kalem* magazine, on the other hand, called for peace with a cartoon it published about the horrors of the war and the Bosnia crisis that began with the Herzegovina crisis and ended with annexation. A turban, understood to belong to a ruler, is seen on an ornate throne placed on the peak of a hill made up of skulls piled on top of each other. The sultan's tughra on the throne and the crescent-shaped ornament of the turban bring to mind Ottoman rulers. With the caption: "Result of the War", the artist may have also conveyed the message that war strengthens despotic rulers (Figure 1, *Kalem*, October 15, 1908).

Figure 1 "Result of the War"



On the front page of the January 7, 1909 issue of *Kalem* magazine in French, a naked, winged boy is seen. The boy is sitting on a giant cannon, built on a hill of guns, bullets and gunpowder, its barrel pointed threateningly into the sky. A bright sun, completely at odds with the dark and frightening landscape, rises in the sky and sheds light around him. The sun, with the word "1909" written on it, surrounds the boy's head. It can be inferred from this that the boy symbolizes the year 1909, or it can be thought that he represents the angel of peace, based on his facial features (Figure 2, *Kalem*, January 7, 1909).

Figure 2 “1909”



In a cartoon published on May 5, 1910, a mother is seen sitting by the cradle of a newborn baby. The baby has a fez on his head and a toy gun in his hand. Two women guests ask, “Sister, is it a boy or a girl?” The mother replies, “A soldier, maşallah.” The inevitability of war in the future is indicated here with a satirical narrative (Figure 3, Kalem, May 5, 1910).

Figure 3 – “Guest: Sister, is it a boy or a girl?”

– Mother: Soldier, maşallah”



There are many caricatures where the Austrian ruler is also present next to the Bulgarian Tsar. From this understanding, it is understood that the caricatures depicted Franz Joseph and Ferdinand as close. < the caricature dated October 15, 1908, Franz Joseph is seen inflating Ferdinand with a pump to the point of bursting (Figure 4, Kalem October 15, 1908). A commentary on Bulgaria supporting Joseph in his Balkan policies can be derived from this drawing.

Figure 4 “Majestic Frans Joseph - Should I inflate the balloon even more?”

Ferdinand – Almost., I’m gonna explode!”



In another cartoon, Ferdinand is shown as a giant balloon carrying a crown on top. The balloon is seen to be about to fly away, having escaped from the hands of the powerful European states of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and also the Ottoman Empire. Franz Joseph sits in the basket attached to the balloon and throws the ballast, which consists of two sandbags, one with the words “Bosnia” and the other with the words “Crete”, out of the basket. The words “Franz Joseph’s new balloon with the ability to dispatch” can be seen under the cartoon (Figure 5, Kalem, October 15, 1908). In this cartoon, the Bulgarian ruler is also shown as a pawn of the Austrian emperor. However, the idea that Franz Joseph introduced the Bosnian and Cretan issues to divert attention during Bulgaria’s declaration of independence is also reflected in the cartoon. This is the expression of an unusual view. In the cartoon, in order to accelerate the balloon rising into the sky and to provide security, the Bosnian and Cretan issues are thrown at the feet of the European states and the Ottoman Empire in the form of sandbags. In general, the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Austria and Karagöz and Kalem are evaluated differently from each other.

Figure 5 “Franz Joseph’s new balloon with the ability to dispatch”



One of the most important reactions of the Ottoman Empire to the annexation was the boycott practices. Many Austrian goods were banned from entering the state, thus trying to deal an economic blow to Austria. In a cartoon published in Karagöz on December 14, 1908, Emperor Franz Joseph is seen sitting in an arm-chair in his nightgown. His entire body is swollen. Karagöz, in his elegant attire, plays the role of a doctor, smoking a cigar while taking the pulse of his patient Franz Joseph. Hacivat, standing on the right, gives information about the test results:

Figure 6



“Hacivat – Doctor.. Did you see the analysis report?.. It’s eighty percent sugar..

- It would be good if it were just sugar.. Clothes made of grass, paper made of sawdust, and everything else.. They call it a boycott disease..

- So if there is no export, it’s bad.. Undoubtedly.. Undoubtedly.. I don’t see any way to treat it either.. Dangerous.. Pharmacist.. Dangerous..”

(Figure 6, Karagöz, December 14, 1908).

Franz Joseph can no longer export, in other words, he can no longer “expel what is inside”. When relations were normal, the goods he sent to the Ottoman Empire remained and accumulated “within his own structure”, that is, in Austria-Hungary. Since Franz Joseph could not export the sugar he wanted to export, Karagöz and Hacivat diagnosed him with diabetes. In addition, since poor quality paper and textile goods could not be exported and accumulated in the country, the Austrian emperor’s body appeared swollen for these reasons.

Kalem magazine dealt with the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina to Austria and the boycott of Austro-Hungarian goods in its columns to a great extent. For example, a cartoon by Cemil Cem, which appeared on the front page of its December 17, 1908 issue, is meaningful. In the cartoon, Joseph is seen wearing a long military coat. He turns his face towards the reader and gives a military salute, his eyes are tired and half-closed. The fact that his nose resembles a lump and that a fez is worn on his head instead of the headdress of the Austrian uniform makes him look ridiculous. The caption of the drawing reads:

Figure 7



“In order to protect the fez factories, the Austrian emperor adopted the fez as an official headgear for himself and the Austrian army.” (Figure 7, Kalem, December 17, 1908)

In a cartoon published in the magazine dated December 31, 1908 (Figure 8, Kalem, December 31, 1908) under the title “End Times Bandits”, the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Joseph is seen holding onto the Grand Vizier’s collar with one hand, pointing a gun in the other hand and threatening Grand Vizier Kamil Pasha by saying, “Either you take my goods, or I will not interfere!” The cartoonist portrays him as a bandit who increases his wealth by exploiting his victims. In order to provide money to Austria, Joseph uses his power to force the Ottomans to end the boycott and buy Austrian goods. Kamil Pasha, who is attacked, is described as a person who has no weapon in his hand and is incapable of defending himself.

Figure 8 “End Times Bandits”



Starting in October 1908, some articles and pictures were published in Kalem, expressing views on the role played by Germany in the annexation of Bosnia to Austria. One of these cartoons depicts the double game of the German Emperor Wilhelm. On the one hand, Wilhelm claims to protect the Ottoman Empire, while on the other hand, he takes the side of the Bulgarians by proposing that they declare their independence. In Wilhelm’s opinion, the Ottomans are forced to accept without objection the damage to their interests. However, it is understood that he does not take either side very seriously, as he treats them like little children and presents them with toys (Figure 9, Kalem, October 8, 1908).

Figure 9: “.....(?) – To the young Turks – Peace, my child, peace



Conclusion

In conclusion, the process that started with the Herzegovina Crisis and continued with the loss of Bosnia and Herzegovina coincides with a period in which many changes were experienced in both the foreign and domestic policies of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the problems experienced in domestic politics, new problems emerged in the Balkans and the Aegean. Securing the legal status of Bosnian Muslims in the Balkans remained in need of an international solution for a long time. In the following process, the Ottoman Empire's humor press continued its activity during the Tripoli and Balkan Wars. The international situation created by the Balkan Wars in particular greatly increased the variety and depictions in cartoons. During the World War, the press generally weakened and a certain number of magazines were able to continue publication. When we look at humor magazines, Karagöz was one of the most frequently published publications of the period.

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THE “NEUTRALITY” OF AUSTRIA DURING THE OTTOMAN-RUSSIAN WAR OF 1877-1878 THROUGH GREEK- LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS OF THE OTTOMAN STATE

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Abstract: The aim in this paper will be to study Austria’s stance of “neutrality” during the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878. The research will be based mainly on seven Greek-language newspapers, Anatoli (Ανατολή), Anatoliko Astir (Ανατολικός Αστήρ), Byzantis (Βυζάντις), Thrace (Θράκη), Metarthymisis (Μεταρρύθμισις) and Neologos (Νεολόγος) which were published in Istanbul and Nea Smyrni (Νέα Σμύρνη) which was published in Smyrna during the Ottoman period. The specific newspapers are digitized in the Digital Library of the Hellenic Parliament. At the same time, information from documents found in the Archive of “T.R. Presidential State Archives Directorate (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı)” and related bibliography will be combined. Russia declared war on Ottoman State on April 24, 1877. Russia’s entry into the war brought the Balkan crisis to its most acute phase and gave it an international character. Already earlier, Russian diplomacy, facing the possibility of war with Ottoman State, had concluded an agreement with Austria to neutralize a possible Austrian reaction to Russia’s attempt to invade the Balkans (Reichstadt Agreement 1876 and Budapest Military Convention 1877). It ensured Austria’s benevolent neutrality in the event of a future war between Russia and Türkiye. In return, Russia agreed that Austria would occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina, in case of defeat of the Ottomans. Thus, it was leaving the western Balkans to Austria and Austrian politics while shifting the center of its Balkan interests to Bulgaria, which lay on the road to İstanbul. The contribution of this paper to a well-known topic and its greatest

interest will be precisely the depiction of Austria's "neutrality" through the eyes of the Greek-speaking - Greek press that was published within the Ottoman State, while it was being fought by Russia-Great Powers and the Balkan peoples whom the Great Powers used.

Keywords: Austria's neutrality, Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, Greek-language newspapers, Balkan crisis, Ottoman diplomacy

Introduction

In order to examine Austria's "neutrality" during the Ottoman-Russia War of 1877-1878, this research was based on seven Greek-language newspapers: *Anatoli* (Ανατολή), *Anatoliko Astir* (Ανατολικός Αστήρ), *Vyzantis* (Βυζάντις), *Thraki* (Θράκη), *Metarthymisis* (Μεταρρύθμισις) and *Neologos* (Νεολόγος), as well as *Nea Smyrni* (Νέα Σμύρνη), which were respectively published in Istanbul and Smyrna during the Ottoman period. A total of 141 articles. The specific newspapers are digitized in the *Digital Library of the Hellenic Parliament*. At the same time, information from documents found in the Archive of T.R. *Presidential State Archives Directorate* (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı) was also combined. The primary aim of this paper is to shed light on Austria's "neutrality" during the Ottoman-Russia War of 1877-1878, particularly through the perspective provided by the Greek-speaking press within the Ottoman Empire. This period was marked by the conflict between Russia, the Great Powers, and the Balkan peoples, all of whom were significant players in the region. By examining the portrayal of Austria's neutrality in Greek-language newspapers published amidst this complex geopolitical landscape, we aim to gain insights into the intricate dynamics of the era. However, as emerged from the research, the numerous articles identified on this topic were primarily from foreign newspapers, with Austria taking the lead.

Russia declared war on the Ottoman State on April 11, 1877, and it ended on March 3, 1878 (The newspapers carried dates according to the Julian Calendar. This means there is a difference of 13 days from the current Gregorian Calendar). Abdulhamid II communicated the event stating that the Russian government, by interrupting their relations and declaring war on them, forced them to resort to arms, although they always desired peace and tranquility. They had listened to the advice of friendly states and worked according to them to achieve their intended purpose, but their enemy intended to destroy their rights, independence, and their country («Εσωτερικά, Τα Του Πολέμου» ["Domestic, War Affairs"], 1877. «Έτερα Προκήρυξις Της Α. Α. Μ. του Σουλτάνου απευθυνθείσα τηλεγραφικώς προς τους Ναυάρχους και Αξιωματικούς του Αυτοκρατορικού Στόλου» ["Another

Proclamation of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan addressed by telegraph to the Admirals and Officers of the Imperial Fleet”], 1877. «Προκήρυξις Της Α. Α. Μ. Του Σουλτάνου απευθυνθείσα τηλεγραφικώς προς τους Αρχηγούς των εν Ευρώπη και Ασία Αυτοκρατορικών Στρατευμάτων» [“Proclamation of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan Addressed by Telegraph to the Commanders of the Imperial Armies in Europe and Asia”], 1877. «Προκήρυξις Της Α. Μεγαλειότητος Του Σουλτάνου Εις Τον Στόλον» [“The Proclamation of His Majesty the Sultan to the Navy”], 1877. «Προκήρυξις Της Α. Μεγαλειότητος Του Σουλτάνου Προς Τον Στρατόν» [“The Proclamation of His Majesty the Sultan to the Army”], 1877).

Russia’s entry into the war brought the Balkan crisis to its most acute phase and gave it an international character (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Hariciye Nezareti Maruzatı [BOA., Y.PRK.HR], H-27-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 11 και H-28-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 12. «Διακήρυξις Πολέμου» [“Declaration of War”], 1877. «Η Εγκύκλιος Του Γορτσακώφ» [“The Circular of Gortschakoff”], 1877. «Η Κήρυξις Του Ρωσσοτουρκικού Πολέμου» [“The Proclamation of the Russo-Turkish War”], 1877. «Τηλεγραφήματα» (Telegrams), 1877, April 14, *Θράκη*. «Τηλεγραφήματα Ευρωπαϊκών Εφημερίδων» [“Telegrams from European Newspapers”], 1877, April 11). Earlier, Russian diplomacy, anticipating a possible war with the Ottoman State, had concluded an agreement with Austria to neutralize a potential Austrian reaction to Russia’s attempt to invade the Balkans (*Reichstadt Agreement 1876* [«Κωνσταντινούπολη»] [“Istanbul”], 1877. [«Ξένα Τηλεγραφήματα»] [“Foreign Telegrams”], 1878, January 27, and *Budapest Military Convention 1877*). This ensured Austria’s benevolent neutrality in the event of a future war between Russia and Ottoman Empire. In return, Russia agreed that Austria would occupy Bosnia and Herzegovina in the event of the Ottomans’ defeat. Thus, it left the western Balkans to Austria and Austrian politics while shifting the center of its Balkan interests to Bulgaria, situated on the road to Istanbul.

The war initiated by Russia was deemed disastrous primarily for itself. Whether the Turks emerged victorious or defeated, Russia would never achieve the goal of its endeavors in the East, facing the high and insurmountable interests of all other European powers. It was engaged in a futile struggle as the interests of Austria, England, Germany, and France were all arrayed against it («Η Ευρώπη Και Ο Πόλεμος» [“Europe and the War”], 1877).

After Russia’s declaration of War, the Sublime Porte stated that twice the “friendly” powers attempted to achieve the pacification of these provinces. The first attempt was through the intervention of Consuls, which intervention yielded no other result than to demonstrate the disdain of the leaders of the Slavic conspiracy towards the principles of Europe. The second attempt was through a program

of reforms proposed by the Vienna Conference, which, after being accepted by the Sublime Porte, was rejected by the rebellion («Προκήρυξις Της Υψηλής Πύλης» [“The Proclamation of the Sublime Porte”], 1877).

However, as it was said, the *Treaty of Paris* of 1856, which ended the Crimean War (1853-1856), seemed to have been downgraded by the “friendly” powers and had become a dead letter. It was not in Austria’s interest to undertake the task of reminding them of it, making itself a hero and risking its own interests, when all other associated powers had left the Treaty to fall by the wayside («Κωνσταντινούπολη», 1877).

Austria’s Neutrality and The Rumour of its Lift

The battle between the attacking Russia and the defending Ottoman Empire was significant and experienced many fluctuations, as depicted in the Ottoman-Greek newspapers that served as the main source of this study. However, it should be clarified that in these newspapers, almost entirely, intact articles and comments from other foreign newspapers, were identified. There was no personal commentary from Ottoman Greek editors. As formulated, the news from Austria was the most reliable during this period and supplied all of Europe, («Τηλεγραφήματα, Ειδήσεις Διά Του Αυστρ. Της Τεργέστης» [“Telegrams, News Through the Austrian from Trieste”], 1877. «Το Γερμανικόν Επιτελείον Και ο Ανατολικός Πόλεμος» [“The German High Command and the Eastern War”], 1877).

Regarding the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, the press of Austria and the rest of Europe depicted day by day the developments, not leaving unnoticed the stance of Austria itself in this war. Publications regarding its decision of “neutrality,” numerous rumors about a change in this stance, and alleged war preparations by Austria did not cease on a daily basis. While one day there were publications regarding Austria’s news about the beginning of military preparations, mobilizations, organization of military actions, secret agreements, the next day these were overturned (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-04-05-1294, 1877, May 17 και H-15-07-1294, 1877, Temmuz 26. «Αι Προς Συνεννόησιν Προσπάθειαι του Πρίγκηπος Βίσμαρκ» [“Prince Bismarck’s Efforts Towards Understanding”], 1877. «Ανατολικά Χρονικά» [“Eastern Chronicles”], 1877, February 24. «Αυστριακή Κατοχή» [“Austrian Occupation”], 1877, April 19. «Διάφορα» [“Various”], 1878, February 17, *Νέα Σύμυρη*. «Εξωτερικά, Τελευταία Ειδήσεις» [“Abroad, Latest News”], 1877, June 1. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, July 23. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, July 27. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, July 30. «Η Αυστριακή Κατοχή» [“The Austrian Occupation”], 1877, April 20. «Η Αυστρία Παρασκευαζόμενη» [“The Austria Preparing”], 1877. «Η Πολιτική Των Δυνάμεων Εν Ταις Παρούσαις

Περιστάσεων» [“The Policy of the Powers in the Present Circumstance”], 1877. «Κρίσεις Αυστριακού Τύπου Περί Του Πολέμου» [“Austrian Press Critiques Regarding the War”], 1877, *Βυζάντις*. «Λόγος Ανδράσσυ» [“Speech of Andrassy”], 1877. «Ο Περιορισμός Του Πολέμου» [“The Limitation of War”], 1877. «Ρουμούνια» [“Romanian”], 1877. «Τελευταίαι Ειδήσεις Διά του Αυστριακού Ατμοπλοίου» [“Latest News through the Austrian Steamship”], 1877. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, April 27 και 1877, May 30 και 1877, July 23 και 1877, July 25, *Βυζάντις*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 27, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*). The press was fueled by these rumors, which kept the issue of “neutrality” current. Any meeting among high-ranking officials (BOA., Y.PRK. HR, H-09-08-1294, 1877, Αὔγουστος 19. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 9, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 23, *Βυζάντις*) was commented on, and entire scenarios were written, engaging public opinion («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 9, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*). Criticism of Austria’s behavior also developed, portraying it as hypocritical, as it was rumored that while on one hand it showed friendly intentions towards the Sublime Porte, on the other hand, it provided its favorable neutrality to Russia («Αι Περί Του Δουνάβεως Τελευταίαι Διαπραγματεύσεις» [“The Latest Negotiations Regarding the Danube”], 1877. «Διάφορα, Επίσημοι Κοινοποιήσεις» [“Various. Official Announcements”], 1877. «Εσωτερικά», 1877. «Η Διαγωγή Της Αυστρίας» [“The Conduct of Austria”], 1877. «Ημερήσια Νέα, Ο Πόλεμος» [“Daily News, The War”], 1877).

When the conservative factions in the Parliament discussed the possibility that the policy of “neutrality” might not be suitable for the interests of Austria-Hungary, the Austrian government responded that this was not the case. The conservatives expressed fear that during the peace negotiations, they would be accused of not having fought alongside them and therefore not entitled to intervene, as happened during the *Treaty of Paris* in 1856 to the representatives of Prussia and Austria. In this regard, the response of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria-Hungary, Count Gyula Andrassy, was characteristic: “There were two ways to safeguard their interests: maintaining good relations with other powers or not maintaining them. The value of both was undeniable. However, the first option was certainly preferable because one could easily resort to the second, while the reverse was much more difficult”. His conscience obliged him to follow the first path, as he emphasized («Λόγος Ανδράσσυ», 1877).

In general, even the stance of the opposition in Austria did not appear particularly hostile towards the “neutrality” policy applied by the Austrian government in this study. The greatest opposition to Austria’s policy choice of “neutrality” may need to be sought in the reputation cultivated across the numerous pages of newspapers.

As long as Russia conducted war against the Ottoman Empire merely to achieve privileges for the Christians of the “subjugated” provinces without any other ulterior motive, and particularly as long as it did not harm Austria’s interests, Austria had no reason to engage in futile and costly military actions. This was the political decision Austria made and implemented throughout the duration of the Russo-Ottoman War, despite the daily rumors circulating to the contrary (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-27-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 11. «Δήλωσις Του Ουγγρικού Υπουργείου» [“Statement of the Hungarian Ministry”], 1877. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, April 27. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, April 25, *Βυζάντις*. «Κωνσταντινούπολη», 1877. «Νεώτεροι Ειδήσεις, Η Θέσις της Αυστρίας» [“Latest News, Austria’s Position”], 1877. «Σπουδαιότατη Επερώτησις» [“A Most Important Question”], 1877. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, April 25, *Βυζάντις*). Certainly, however, it was confirmed that if events occurred that were dangerous to Austria’s interests, which they could not foresee at that moment, it was natural that they would influence their outlook and the stance of Austrian policy (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-15-07-1294, 1877, Temmuz 26. «Σπουδαιότατη», 1877. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 11, *Βυζάντις*). Austria-Hungary would remain “on standby” according to its established political position. It would stay neutral and carefully avoid getting involved in any action. If there came a time when this policy of abstention was not possible, it would be forced to take action («Κρίσις Αυστριακού», 1877. «Νεώτεροι Ειδήσεις, Η Θέσις», 1877).

The Significance of The Ottoman-Russian War for Austria

For the crisis in the East, it was said that England and France could not act in the East without Austria against Germany («Το Ανατολικόν Ζήτημα Και Το Ουατικανόν» [“The Eastern Question and the Vatican”], 1877). Apart from the perennially noisy situation arising from the adventures of the Eastern Question, Europe was in a state of palpable unease («Η Γενική Της Ευρώπης Κατάστασις» [“The General Situation of Europe”], 1877).

Russia had its sights set on the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, aiming to become a rival to the English naval power in the Mediterranean and to turn Asia Minor from the plains of Troy to the borders of Arabia into a vassal state. This was cited as the reason why Russia waged this “unjust” war against the Ottoman Empire in 1877, rather than the “oppression of Christians” it purportedly invoked as a pretext («Διαβεβαιώσεις Του Τσάρου» [“Assurances of the Tsar”], 1877. «Η Ρωσική Προκήρυξις» [“The Russian Proclamation”], 1877. «Κρίσις Του Αγγλικού Τύπου Περί Ρωσσίας» [“Critiques of the English Press Regarding Russia”], 1877. «Μεσολάβησις και Ειρήνη» [“Mediation and Peace”], 1877). Great Britain was

the only barrier against Russia's triumph in the Bosphorus («Η Επιτροπή Των Φιλότητων Παρά Τω Λόρδω Δέρβυ» [“The Committee of Philo-Turks Close to Lord Derby”], 1877). The “grand” consultations between Austria and Germany increased England's concerns and aroused suspicions of a plan to divide the Ottoman Empire to its detriment («Οι Ουδέτεροι» [“The Neutrals”], 1877). The newspapers in St. Petersburg wrote that the agreement between Austria and Russia was most complete and that England had never been in such dire isolation («Αι Εφημερίδες Της Πετροπούλεως» [“The Newspapers of Petrograd”], 1877).

According to the German historian and author Springer, Austria-Hungary had to ensure that the Slavic peoples did not prevail during the imminent changes and make every effort to strengthen the two non-Slavic Christian states, Romania and Greece («Εξωτερικά Ειδήσεις» [“Foreign News”], 1878, January 11, *Νέα Σύρνη*). In January 1877, reports indicated a relative sympathy from Austria towards Ottoman Empire. It was observed that the Sublime Porte's resistance to the conference's demands should partly be attributed to the secret sympathy of England and Austria towards Ottoman Empire, and partly to Germany's not entirely sincere conduct. Germany made efforts to obtain the Sublime Porte's consent to Romania's independence and to erect a barrier between Russia and Ottoman Empire («Διάφορα», 1877, January 29). *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*, p. 5451. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, January 3, *Βυζάντις*).

In the Eastern Crisis of 1877-1878, Germany proposed maintaining indifference. It wielded influence over Austria. Since the Russian government was not directed against the territorial status quo of Eastern Europe or the security of Austria-Hungary, it was better to maintain indifference to the declaration of this war (BOA., Υ.ΠΡΚ.ΗΡ, Η-28-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 12. «Η Πολιτική Της Γερμανίας Εν Τη Ανατολή» [“Germany's Policy in the East”], 1877). Thus, in the Ottoman-Russia War of 1877-1878, Austria decided to declare “neutrality” (BOA., Υ.ΠΡΚ.ΗΡ, Η-27-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 11 and Η-28-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 12. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, April 23, *Θράκη*). Despite the fact that Russia's war against the Ottoman Empire was burdensome for much of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and as commented, if there was a chance that a European power would be affected, it would be Austria first («Δήλωσις», 1877. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, May 27. «Κρίσεις Του Αγγλικού», 1877. «Κωνσταντινούπολη», 1877), Austria declared “neutrality” amid the European instability prevailing at the time. It judged that it could not depart from the German policy with which it had been aligned until then and therefore could not act unfavorably towards Russia («Κωνσταντινούπολη», 1877). It was commented that there was full agreement and a satisfactory outcome between Prince Otto Von Bismarck and Count Andrassy, the Foreign Minister

of Austria-Hungary, on issues concerning the East («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 12, *Βυζάντις*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 14, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*), regarding their joint intervention to restore peace in the East based on the known decisions of the diplomatic conference in Istanbul. That was, the autonomy of Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Herzegovina («Τελευταίαι Ειδήσεις, Διά Του Αυστριακού Ατμοπλοίου» [“Latest News through the Austrian Steamship”], 1877). The trust between Austria-Hungary and Germany was based on the personal trust that Count Andrassy inspired in Prince Bismarck and vice versa («Αι Προς Συνεννόησιν», 1877).

The three strong arguments supporting the claim that the war had the greatest significance for Austria in Europe were: A) Austria did not want to see the Danube River turning into a Russian river (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-15-07-1294, 1877, Temmuz 26. «Δήλωσις», 1877). The Danube was the vital artery of Austria and Germany. These two powers had the right to demand that the river remain free-flowing up to its estuaries («Αι Προθέσεις Της Ρωσίας» [“The Intentions of Russia”], 1877. «Ο Ρωσικός Τύπος» [“The Russian Press”], 1877). B) The threat of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was under the watchful eye of Serbia. C) The fate of Bulgaria, which could be threatened by Russia at any moment, was of concern not only to Austria but also to Germany (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-15-07-1294, 1877, Temmuz 26. «Δήλωσις», 1877. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, May 27. «Κρίσεις Του Αγγλικού», 1877). Bulgaria was the direct route to Istanbul. England and Austria had interests in supporting the Bulgarian regime, as they did not want to see Russia entering Istanbul (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-15-07-1294, 1877, Temmuz 26. «Ανατολικά», 1877, May 4. «Λόγος Χαρκούρ» [“Speech of Harcourt”], 1878). For these reasons, public opinion in Austria, as reported, believed that Austria could not remain neutral and intended to ally with England against Russia to prevent it from entering Bulgaria with all its might.

The occupation of Istanbul by the Russians would not have been beneficial for England, Austria, Germany, or any other power. The Tsar officially promised not to occupy it («Λόγος Χαρκούρ», 1878. «Ξένα Τηλεγραφήματα», 1878, January 23). The Russian government also undertook the obligation towards Austria not to navigate the Danube between the Austrian frontier and Rouse («Ειδήσεις Εκ Του Δουνάβεως» [“News from the Danube”], 1877). England and Austria were requesting the final settlement of the Eastern Question to be done through a European Congress («Εξωτερικά», 1878, January 27, *Νέα Σμύρνη*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1878, January 23, *Νέα Σμύρνη*).

Austria decided not to deviate at present from its “neutrality.” The ministerial council in Vienna approved the policy of neutrality with its main proponent

being the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Count Andrassy. It was decided that only in the following cases should the Austro-Hungarian army prepare for war on the eastern borders: a) if Serbia and Montenegro pursued a policy objectively contrary to Austro-Hungarian interests, b) if a revolution erupted in Serbia, c) if defeats of the Turkish army endangered Christians in Ottoman Empire, and d) if unexpected incidents in the East tended to damage Austrian interests («Τελευταία Ειδήσεις Διά του», 1877).

Indeed, it was generally accepted that if the Russian Army intervened in Serbia, England would not resist Austria's occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is said that the Ambassador of the Ottoman Empire, Musurus Pasha, also announced that the Sublime Porte would not resist this occupation («Πολιτικά Ειδήσεις, Διπλωματικά Συνεννοήσεις» [“Political News, Diplomatic Consultations”], 1877). However, as stated elsewhere, it was completely wrong to assume that the Ottomans wanted to greet the Austrians as allies and allow them to invade Bosnia without bloodshed («Η Πολιτική Των Δυνάμεων», 1877). We are informed of the following, characterized as “peculiar,” that Midhat Pasha, during his stay in Vienna, told everyone that the Sublime Porte would not tolerate under any circumstances the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Austrian army («Τελευταία Ειδήσεις Διά του», 1877).

The assurances given by Russia that it would not harm the interests of Austria or Germany were naturally guaranteed by Russia itself. However, it appears that Austria felt more secure by obtaining guarantees from Germany. Germany served as the connecting link between Russia and Austria. For German policy, maintaining the Triple Alliance (Austria, Germany, Russia) was essential because it guaranteed the agreement between Russia and Austria and ensured the complete isolation of France (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-28-03-1294, 1877, Nisan 12. «Διαβεβαιώσεις», 1877. «Διατί Η Γερμανία Ενδιαφέρεται Υπέρ Της Ρωσσίας;» [“Why is Germany Interested in Russia?”], 1877. «Επεισόδια Του Πολέμου» [“Episodes of the War”], 1877. «Η Αυστροουγγαρία Και Το Ανατολικόν Ζήτημα» [“Austria-Hungary and the Eastern Question”], 1878. «Η Πολιτική Της Γερμανίας», 1877. «Οι Ουδέτεροι», 1877). The Germans did not feel secure from France, fearing the speed with which France was restoring its military forces. However, they also watched Austria with apprehension, which in 1870 had stated that it was impossible to reject an appeal from France. At that time, Austria had been restrained only because it feared Russian intervention. Germany feared that the time might come when Austria would become the natural ally of France. It was certain that Austria had strong reasons to abstain from war, especially such a predictable one. It necessarily had to be concerned about the temptations Austria would be exposed to when France fully

restored its former military power. Prince Bismarck wanted to maintain friendly relations between Germany and Austria, even at the cost of many sacrifices, but the only effective means to do so was to secure an ally who, if necessary, could counter Austria's hostility. For this purpose, Italy was not sufficiently strong, and only the Government of St. Petersburg could provide the necessary conditions («Διατί Η Γερμανία» 1877).

The Ottoman-Russian war was characterized as having been premeditated by Prince Bismarck long before the Russians themselves contemplated it, and as soon as Bismarck intervened in Austria through the Triple Alliance, he condemned it to accept Russia's ongoing plans («Η Διακοίνωσις Του Πρίγκηπος Γορτσακώφ» [“The Statement of Prince Gortschakoff”], 1878). In the German press, it was written that the risk of sparking a global conflagration could be considered remote as long as Austria did not perceive itself as threatened and if England could be persuaded that it was in its best interest not to intervene in matters it could not contain. Austria would have to conform to the new arrangements and align its future with the interests and sincere desires of Germany towards common direction. “The most significant expressions, heard from the mouths of eminent Austrian politicians, provided hope that the helm of the state was governed there not by passions but by sober politics” («Οι Όροι Της Ανακωχής» [“The Terms of the Ceasefire”], 1877). In Vienna, the emperor, welcoming the committees of the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments, sincerely lamented that he and his government had not been able to prevent the outbreak of war between Russia and Ottoman Empire. Amidst the serious complications of the East, their relations with all powers remained friendly, while at the same time the legitimate interests of Austria-Hungary remained intact («Αυστρία» [Austria], 1877).

Ironically, comments in Vienna, as reported, remarked that Austria remained as faithful to the duties of “neutrality” today as it did in the past, notably in 1876 when the Austrian Government blocked the port of Klek to prevent the sending of reinforcements by sea to the actively operating Mukhtar Pasha in Montenegro, while allowing war supplies to be sent to the Montenegrins via land. In 1877, the export of contraband weapons through Austrian borders was prohibited, but their transit was allowed. Thus, weapons originating from Germany, which were illicitly sent, passed through Austria to the Danubian regions, while weapons and war supplies freely traversed through Dalmatia. Their armories had no benefit from the war, while Germans, English, and Americans abundantly supplied both sides of the conflict. Austria has always been selfless and impartial. In fact, today it allowed the railroad, guaranteed by the Austrian State and made of Austrian material, to be exploited by Russia, which most likely would offer nothing

in return. The material losses suffered by Austria from that war were countless. Austria-Hungary's trade with the Danubian principalities once amounted to an average of thirty million florins for imports and five million for exports. This trade has been at zero for a year now, while Bosnia has ceased consuming Austrian goods for two years. As calculated, Austria had incurred losses from the war exceeding two hundred and fifty million florins («Ο Βιενναίος Τύπος Περί Της Ουδετερότητας της Αυστροουγγαρίας» ["Viennese Press Regarding the Neutrality of Austria-Hungary"], 1877).

The Attitude of Serbia in The War Concerns Austria

Austria had to renew Russia's accreditation assurances through Germany many times when it heard news of possible infringement of its interests, such as when Serbia's involvement in the war was discussed («Αι Μεταξύ Ρωσσίας και Σερβίας Συμφωνίας» ["The Agreements Between Russia and Serbia"], 1877. «Διαβεβαιώσεις», 1877. «Διάφοροι Ειδήσεις», «Η Ουδετερότης Της Σερβίας» ["Various News, The Neutrality of Serbia"], 1877. «Εξωτερικαί», 1877, May 23, *Βυζάντις*. «Η Αυστριακή Κατοχή», 1877, April 18. «Η Κατάστασις» ["The Situation"], 1877, April 12. «Ημερήσια Νέα, Ο Πόλεμος, Ρουσσούκιον», 24 Μαΐου 1877. «Ιδιαίτερα αλληλογραφία «Μεταρρυθμίσεως»» ["Daily News, The War, Rousse, May 24, 1877. Particular correspondence 'Metarrythmisis'"], 1877. «Η Οροθετική Γραμμή του Πολέμου» ["The Front Line of War"], 1877. «Η Πολιτική της Αυστροουγγαρίας» ["The Politics of Austria-Hungary"], 1877. «Οδηγία Του Κόμητος Ζισύ, Κατοχή Βοσνίας Και Ερζεγοβίνης» ["Directives of Count Zichy, Occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina"], 1877. «Ο Επίσημος Ρωσσικός Τύπος» ["The Official Russian Press"], 1877. «Πολιτικά Ειδήσεις», 1877. «Πολιτικά και Πολεμικά Ειδήσεις» ["Political and Military News"], 1877, June 18. «Πολιτικά και», 1877, September 5. «Ρωσσικοί Συνδυασμοί Περί Κατοχής» ["Russian Combinations for Occupation"], 1877. «Σερβικά» ["Serbian"], 1877. «Σπουδαιότατη Επερώτησις, 1877. «Τα Του Πολέμου» ["War Affairs"], 1877, August 10. «Τελευταίαι Ειδήσεις», 1877, November 12, *Βυζάντις*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 10 και 1877, September 21, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*. «Τηλεγραφήματα Ευρωπαϊκών», 1877, April 15). Austria did not cease to clarify that in the event of Russian troops entering Serbia, Austro-Hungarian troops would enter Ottoman territory («Τα Του Πολέμου», 1877, April 22). When the Liberals in the Austrian Parliament asked if the Austrian Government would prevent any potential action by Serbia («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 10, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*), Prince Auersperg indicated additionally that there was a difference between the principle of approved neutrality and any pressure on Serbia. However, the minister requested that the assembly relieve

the government from deciding on the behavior it would adopt in the event of Serbia's joining the war («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 17, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 17, *Βυζάντις*). Austria-Hungary was portrayed as opposed to the warlike and ambitious tendencies of Serbia, which at that time seemed ungrateful towards the generosity of the Ottoman Government and unworthy of the protection of the Great Powers («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 3, *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*). The newspapers of Vienna generally applauded the government's response in Parliament («Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, September 19, *Βυζάντις*).

Austria was simultaneously interested in the intentions of the Sublime Porte regarding Serbia. The Sublime Porte had responded that it would not intervene in Serbia unless it declared war against the Ottoman State, or if a rebellion broke out, or finally, if Russia intervened in it («Διάφοροι Ειδήσεις, Η Στάσις Της Αυστρίας» [“Various News, The Position of Austria”], 1877).

Great pressure seemed to be exerted on Austria more by Hungary, which organized anti-Russian rallies, celebrated with illuminations for the victories of the Ottoman army, and demanded the intervention of Austria-Hungary when the Ottoman army faced failures, calling Austria-Hungary's intervention to thwart Russia's plans its duty («Αι Εν Πέστη Φωταψία» [“The Illuminations in Pest”], 1877. «Διάφορα», 1877, July 20, *Βυζάντις*. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, July 27. «Νεώτεροι Ειδήσεις, Ο Ερεθισμός των Ούγγρων» [“Latest News, The Irritation of the Hungarians”], 1877. «Τα Του Πολέμου, Τηλεγραφήματα Εκ Του Πεδίου Του Άρεως» [“War Affairs, Telegrams from the Field of Ares”], 1877, July 20. «Τελευταία Ειδήσεις», 1877, October 5, *Βυζάντις*. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, July 25, *Βυζάντις*). Austria's passive stance towards rumors of Serbia's impending involvement produced the liveliest discontent primarily in Hungary («Τελευταία Ειδήσεις», 1877, October 10, *Βυζάντις*). Count Andrassy promised the Hungarian Ministry the occupation of Serbia in the event that this hegemony would participate in the war («Εξωτερικά», 1877, May 23, *Βυζάντις*). Other Hungarian ministers presented themselves in the chambers and assured that the interests entrusted to them were indeed preserved («Οι Ουδέτεροι», 1877).

Despite the discussions and the resounding statements of Austria, according to the studied press, that Austria would react in case of Serbian action in the war, this did not seem to happen. When Serbia declared war, Austria's policy of neutrality remained unchanged. The Serbian Government assured Austria that it did not intend to conduct aggressive warfare against Bosnia. This assurance was prompted by a strong statement from the Austro-Hungarian agent («Έένα Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, December 23). In the committee of the Austrian

Parliament on the budget in Vienna on December 6, 1877, Count Andrassy reiterated that they would strictly adhere to the current policy, aiming to maintain strict neutrality in military events, maintain friendly relations with all powers, and safeguard the interests of Austria-Hungary as well as its influence in the settlement of Eastern affairs. Count Andrassy reminded that if Serbia ever touched upon their interests with actions, for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, then Austria would strongly protest and actively prevent such actions («Έένα Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, December 14). Here we see how all the comments made from the beginning regarding the scenario in which Serbia declares war, mimicking Romania, and the difficult position Russia would face against Austria («Εξωτερικά», 1877, June 8. «Ο Επίσημος Ρωσικός», 1877. «Πολιτικάί κα», 1877, June 18. «Τηλεγραφήματα», 1877, June 6 and June 8, *Βυζάντις*), are now simplified in the argument that Serbia promised that by participating in the war, it would not harm Austria's interests. The Ottoman-Russian War had begun in April 1877, and essentially Serbia entered the war 8 months later. This sudden acceptance, with interested parties suddenly relenting on their assurances that Serbia's actions wouldn't harm Austria's interests regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, raises questions. The question arises: what intervened to give Serbia the green light to enter the war?

Scenarios of Ceasefire and Peace

And on the issue of Ceasefire and Peace in the Ottoman-Russian War, comments and rumors were abundant (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-19-12-1294, 1877, Aralık 17. Η Αγγλία, η Αυστρία Και Αι Ευρωπαϊκάί Συνθήκαι [England, Austria, and European Treaties], 1878. Η Ανακωχή Και Η Ειρήνη [The Ceasefire and Peace], 1878. Η Αυστροουγγαρία Και Οι Όροι Της Ειρήνης [Austria-Hungary and the Terms of Peace], 1878. Η Ειρήνη Και Το Συνέδριον [Peace and the Congress], 1878. Όροι Ανακωχής [Terms of Ceasefire], 1878. Το Ανατολικόν Ζήτημα Και Αι Μεγάλαι Δυνάμεις [The Eastern Question and the Great Powers], 1878). Already from July, comments about mediation for ceasefire and peace had begun to be published (BOA., Y.PRK.HR, H-09-08-1294, 1877, Αύγουστος 19. Γενική Άποψις [General View], 1877. Ειδήσεις Εξ Ευρώπης [News from Europe], 1877. «Εξωτερικά», 1877, July 13. Τα Του Πολέμου, 1877, September 21). Regarding this, the first to express willingness with full boldness and determination up to that point, as it was written, was England (Λόγος Του Λόρδου Βηκονσφίλδ [Speech of Lord Beaconsfield], 1877. Νέαι Περί Ειρήνης Φήμαι [New Rumors About Peace], 1877. «Το Ζήτημα Της Μεσολαβήσεως» [“The Issue of Mediation”], 1877). It was argued that Germany and Austria were reluctant to agree with England on mediation, but neither did

this power in the least cease in these attempts. Therefore, diplomatic negotiations continued between the councils of Vienna, London, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, because the duration of the war and the expansion of the Russians' raiding zone threatened to harm not only the interests of England, but those of all in general («Το Ζήτημα», 1877).

England hinted that it expected the intervention of another great power if the Russians entered Istanbul, without explicitly naming it. However, it was apparent that this referred to Austria, whose interests were linked to those of England and which, due to its geographical position, found itself both on the side and in the rear of the Russian army. This position would have provided Austria with maximum power if its policy had been more decisive from the beginning and if its government had been free from any obligation to Germany and Russia. Unfortunately, Austrian policy was lax, uncertain, and hesitant, and today it was no longer time to rectify the mistakes. But it was indifferent! Austria always remained a respected power, and if there were to be an alliance with England, it would exert unquestionable moral influence (Η Αγγλία Και Αυστρία Εν Τω Ανατολικώ Ζητήματι [England and Austria in the Eastern Question], 1878).

According to another publication, labeled as “rumor from London,” Austria and Germany were reportedly preparing to mediate between the Ottoman Empire and Russia. However, it was questioned whether Ottoman Empire would accept such a proposal. Nevertheless, the joint intervention of all Great Powers, although fraught with great difficulties, could provide multiple opportunities for hoping for a solution (Ειδήσεις Εξ Ευρώπης, 1877). The Ottoman government, as it was stated, responded that it was willing to engage in peaceful negotiations for a ceasefire but not while the Russians were on Ottoman territory (Τελευταίαι Ειδήσεις, 1877, September 24, *Βυζάντις*).

According to later publications, the Sublime Porte itself requested the intervention of friendly powers, expressing its desire to negotiate peace through them or directly with Russia if the powers did not provide mediation. Great Britain, Germany, and Italy agreed to mediate. However, the consent of France and Austria had not been received by the morning of December 8, 1877 (Εγχώρια [Domestic], 1877). In response to the Sublime Porte's request for mediation, Austria, among other things, wrote that they desired the cessation of bloodshed and the end of the war, but according to them, the Ottoman circular did not provide a basis for negotiations between the belligerents. Austria reserved its legitimate influence as a guarantor and neighboring power for the final settlement of the situation in the East (Η Αυστριακή Απάντησις [The Austrian Response], 1878).

As expressed, Count Andrassy seemed reluctant to refrain from objecting if Ottoman Empire and Russia were to commence peace negotiations without Austria's involvement. However, despite not wanting to protest such negotiations, Count Andrassy reserved the right to examine the terms of peace between the two belligerents and to oppose them if necessary. If these terms posed greater danger to England or Austria, the Viennese council would certainly compromise, leaving the London council to take the lead. However, it would hasten to protest if Russia attempted to significantly increase its power over European Turkey. As reported, a few days earlier, Count Andrassy showed little willingness to compromise, refusing to entertain even the slightest suggestion of a separate peace (*Η Αυστρία Και Η Ειρήνη* [Austria and Peace], 1877). The change in attitude was influenced by Bismarck. It was assured that Bismarck communicated to Vienna that Germany would ensure that the Tsar would not forget his promises to Germany, and therefore Austria would not be harmed by negotiations between Russia and Ottoman Empire (*Η Αυστρία Και Η Ειρήνη*, 1877).

On December 27th, according to multiple reports from Vienna, it was mentioned that there was unanimity in the expressions regarding the immediate cessation of negotiations between the conflicting parties (*Ξένα Τηλεγραφήματα*, 1878, January 9). Germany's agreement with Austria would only last if the Porte were to hasten to negotiate directly with Russia regarding a ceasefire and the preliminary terms of peace. However, if, during the final peace negotiations, Germany continued to support Russia's bold plans, Austria had decided to withdraw from the Triple Alliance («Εξωτερικά», 1877, December 28, *Νέα Σύμυνη*). The ceasefire agreement would be based on the peace proposals, the negotiation of which was also not far off (*Ανακωχή* [Ceasefire], 1878). In Vienna, on December 28th, the diplomatic discussions regarding the preliminary terms of peace concluded. Peace was considered secured (*Ξένα Τηλεγραφήματα*, 1878, January 5).

Conclusion

From the present study, it was observed that examining the "neutrality" of Austria in the Ottoman-Russian War entails parallel references to other Powers, Balkan States, and certainly to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy or specifically to Hungary.

The Greek-speaking Ottoman press that was studied - a total of 7 newspapers and 141 articles - was found to be largely based on publications from the Viennese and other European press. In these Ottoman-Greek newspapers, commentary from their own writers was almost entirely absent.

In short, the management of “neutrality” throughout the duration of the war often involved inquiries within the Austrian Parliament, where every detail and piece of news was discussed to refute any rumors about lifting “neutrality” Ultimately, it was reiterated each time that maintaining “neutrality” as the most necessary and best solution would continue (Σπουδαιότατη Επερώτησις, 1877). Austria’s stance during the war was a subject of discussion and criticism both domestically and internationally. The way it managed the situation could affect its image and influence on the international stage. Austria had strategic interests in the Balkans region and closely monitored the progress of the war.

Austria-Hungary’s decision to maintain its neutrality during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 appears to have been significantly influenced by Germany’s policy and the strategic objectives of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Specifically, Austria-Hungary’s decisions were influenced by the following factors:

A) **Diplomatic Guarantees:** Germany acted as a mediator between Russia and Austria-Hungary, offering guarantees for the latter’s security and interests. This allowed Austria-Hungary to feel more secure and avoid direct involvement in the war. Many times it was apparent that Austria was represented in various conferences, etc., by a German official who essentially represented Germany. This fact indicates that Austria indeed relied on Germany’s assurances for the protection of its interests against Russia and the states operating under its influence, such as Serbia, Romania, Montenegro, etc.

B) **Maintenance of the Triple Alliance:** Germany considered the maintenance of the Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Russia crucial for ensuring European stability and isolating France. Recognizing the importance of this alliance, Austria-Hungary decided to align with German policy.

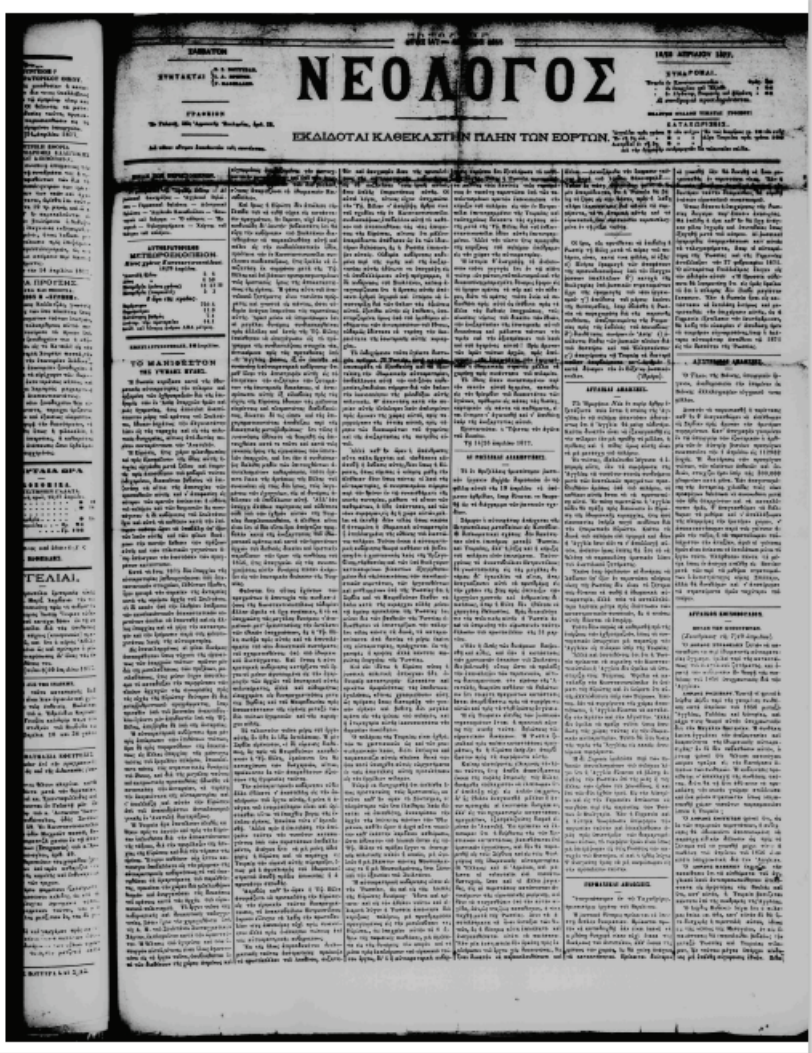
C) **Strategic Considerations:** Austria-Hungary had strong interests in the Balkans and did not want to see the region fall under Russian influence. However, instead of engaging directly, it preferred to wait and intervene only if developments directly threatened its interests.

D) **Concerns about France and Russia:** Germany feared the strengthening of France and the possibility of an alliance between France and Russia or other powers that could isolate Germany.

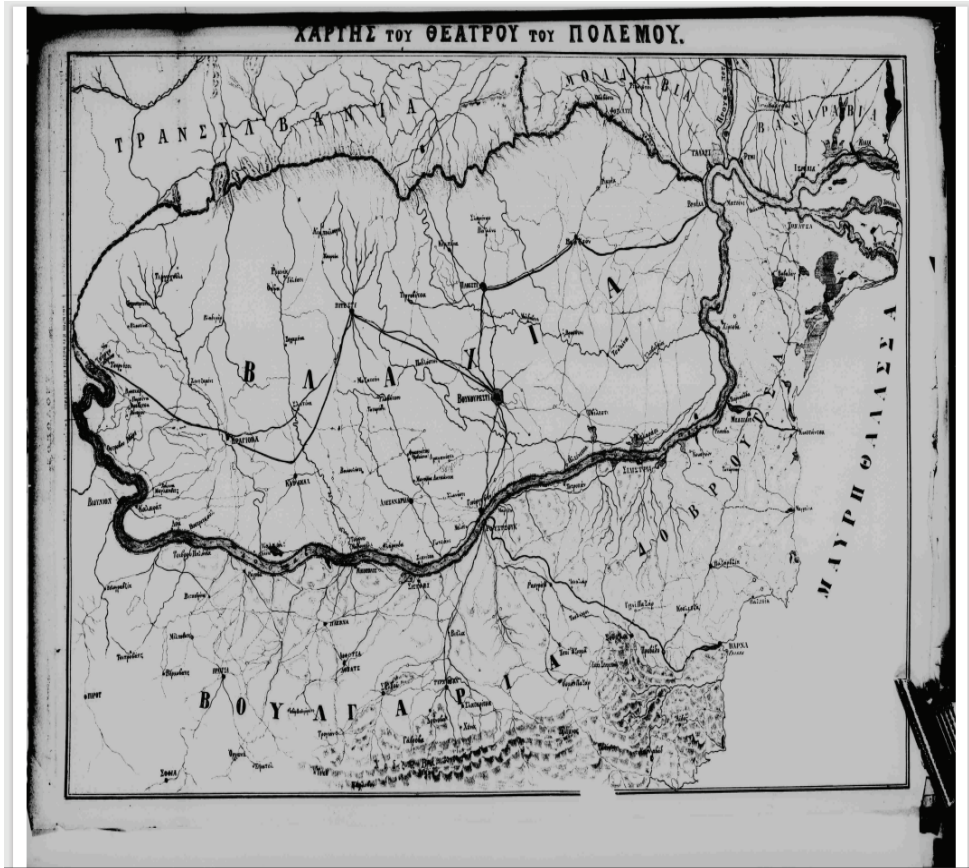
These elements, indicate that Austria-Hungary’s neutrality was a strategic choice influenced by the need to maintain relations with Germany and protect its national interests.



Appendix E: 1877, May 25. Μεταρθμοσις (Metarhōmēis).



Appendix G: 1877, April 16. Neologos (Neologos).



Appendix H: Χάρτης Του Θεάτρου Του Πολέμου (Map of the Theater of War). 1877, April 16. *Neologos* (*Neologos*), p. 4.

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- Νέαι Περί Ειρήνης Φήμαι (New Rumors About Peace). (1877, November 2). *Βυζάντις*, p. 1.
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- Νεώτεροι Ειδήσεις, Ο Ερεθισμός των Ούγγρων (Latest News, The Irritation of the Hungarians). (1877, July 16). *Βυζάντις*, p. 1.
- Ξένα Τηλεγραφήματα (Foreign Telegrams). (1877, December 14). *Νέα Σμύρνη*, p. 1.

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- Προκήρυξις Της Α. Μεγαλειότητος Του Σουλτάνου Εις Τον Στόλον (The Proclamation of His Majesty the Sultan to the Navy). (1877, April 14). *Θράκη*, p. 2.
- Προκήρυξις Της Α. Μεγαλειότητος Του Σουλτάνου Προς Τον Στρατόν (The Proclamation of His Majesty the Sultan to the Army). (1877, April 14). *Θράκη*, p. 2.
- Προκήρυξις Της Υψηλής Πύλης (The Proclamation of the Sublime Porte). (1877, April 16). *Θράκη*, p. 1.
- Ρουμούνια (Romanian). (1877, April 19). *Θράκη*, p. 2.
- Ρωσικοί Συνδυασμοί Περί Κατοχής (Russian Combinations for Occupation). (1877, April 15). *Θράκη*, p. 2.
- Σερβικά (Serbian). (1877, August 24). *Βυζάντις*, p. 2.
- Σπουδαιότατη Επερώτησις (A Most Important Question). (1877, April 20). *Θράκη*, p. 1.
- Τα Του Πολέμου (War Affairs). (1877, April 22 & August 10 & September 21). *Ανατολικός Αστήρ*, pp. 5541, 5667, 5716.
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A CASE STUDY OF YUNUS EMRE INSTITUTE'S LANGUAGE POLICIES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE 'MY CHOICE IS TURKISH' PROJECT AS AN EXAMPLE OF TURKISH AS A SELECTIVE FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract: The article investigates the Turkish language policy implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, one of Türkiye's soft power components. This investigation is conducted from the perspective of soft power, which has emerged as a prominent form of influence in global politics over the past three decades. In this context, the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü's overall Turkish teaching policy will be briefly outlined before focusing on the "My Choice is Turkish" project. The primary focus of the study will be the Turkish language program "Tercihim Türkçe" ("My Choice is Turkish"). During the 2009–2010 academic year, the study will examine how the project implemented Turkish as a foreign language in Bosnia and Herzegovina's elementary schools and the activities conducted within this framework. Using data from the BiH statistical institution regarding the teaching of Turkish in schools, we will also review information from the YEE homepage, news, and academic research on these initiatives. As part of Türkiye's language policy, the "My Choice is Turkish" project is the subject of this research. Over 100 Bosnian Turkish teachers conduct a 4- or 8-year learning process that includes high school education, making this project the largest Turkish learning community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With about 170 schools dispersed throughout seven cantons, its influence has grown to encompass a significant portion of the entire country.

Keywords: Türkiye's Language Policy, Bosnia and Hercegovina, My Choice Turkish Project, soft power, Turkish teaching

Introduction

This study attempts to shed light on the Turkish language policy implemented in Bosnia-Herzegovina¹ by the Yunus Emre Enstitüsü,² one of Turkey's soft power components, from the point of view of soft power, which has become a significant power type in world politics in the last three decades. In this context, after briefly mentioning the general Turkish teaching policy of Yunus Emre Institute, the focus will be on the My Choice is Turkish Project.

Finally, as the main subject of the research will be the Turkish language education called 'Tercihim Türkçe (My Choice is Turkish).³ We will examine the project's implementation of Turkish as a foreign language in BiH primary schools during the 2009-2010 school years, as well as the activities conducted within this scope. We will analyze the YEE's homepage, news, and academic research on these activities, using statistics from the BiH statistical institution about the teaching of Turkish in schools as a source.

My research focuses on the 'My Choose Turkish' project, which is a component of Türkiye's language policy. This project boasts the largest Turkish learning community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a learning process that spans 4 or 8 years, including secondary school, and is led by over 100 Bosnian Turkish teachers. Its reach has expanded to encompass a significant portion of the country, with approximately 170 schools spread across seven cantons. Furthermore, YEE conducts numerous activities, including competitions, throughout the year, with substantial budgets and resources, which is why I chose this particular case.

Research Methodology and Conceptual Approach

In this study, a qualitative research method will be used to descriptively understand the policies implemented in primary and secondary schools in BiH, which are aligned with Türkiye's practical language policies, as well as the activities and goals of the 'My Choice is Turkish' initiative. The research question for this study is: What is the 'My Choice is Turkish' project, and what are the activities conducted by YEE in primary and secondary schools in BiH and their purposes? For this study, a fieldwork analysis will be conducted, and we will interpret our research results and data using a descriptive analysis.

1 Afterwards, BiH the abbreviation will be used

2 Afterwards, YEE the abbreviation will be used

3 Afterwards, Tercihim Türkçe will be used the English of it as My Choose Turkish

Language is an essential tool for people to exchange meaning with one another. Simultaneously, it is an indispensable instrument that enables states to accomplish their political objectives and enforce their political will. Power is a commonly used essential explanatory concept in international relations theories and foreign policy analysis. In the 1990s, Nye used the term 'soft power' to characterize a form of influence that relies more on persuasion and appeal than on coercion or force. Soft power is based on institutional, cultural, and ideological elements to influence people's preferences and actions (Nye, 2008).

According to Joseph Nye, soft power is '*the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment*'. One of the methods to influence a state's actions by using attractiveness to persuade people to share your desires (Nye, 2008: 95). The culture is one of the resources of soft power. Because of that, my research focuses is the language as one of the cultural components described by Nye as '*the set of practices that create meaning for a society*' (Nye, 2008). Foundation and cultural and language Institutions like YEE are some of the instruments of soft power (Nye, 2004: 73-97) that expanded and appeared later in the international relations as definitions such as *smart power* or *meta power* (Gallarotti, 2011: 2-13).

The mission of the YEE, which is regarded as one of Türkiye's soft power components in international relations, as well as its initiatives pertaining to Turkish instruction in BiH will be investigated in this research. The findings in this research were prepared using the news on YEE's homepage and social media accounts, news in the BiH's press, and data from scientific studies previously published in the field of Turkish language teaching in BiH.

Türkiye possesses a multitude of soft power assets, such as its geopolitical location, culture, history, and values that align with universal norms (Çavuş, 2012: 28). The most important soft power in Turkish foreign policy is its culture and history, which includes also education, language teaching and related projects that support Turkish culture, language, and identity (Cultural Diplomacy, 2019: 87, Kalın, 2011: 21).

In the context of the issues we mentioned above, YEE is an organization established to teach Turkish abroad. The teaching foreign languages entails by definition learning about the culture, values, traditions, and goals of the intended audience that provides also a distinct viewpoint for discovering and understanding of focused nations. It takes more than merely applying and activating new insights and considering diverse cultural systems to understand language. In this regard, the followings objectives are essential for language planning activities like

formalizing or improving the status of language, altering a language's corpus, promoting language learning and literacy acquisition, extending the language's domains, enhancing the language's esteem and prestige; and finally modifying discourse and attitudes toward the language. However, it depends also on effective management, technical expertise from teachers, and the qualifications of administrators and educators (La Bianco 2010: 38-54).

Historical Development of Turkish in Bosnia and Hercegovina

It is useful to present a brief historical process of Turkish in this country, before going into the Turkish language teaching policy implemented through YEE in BiH. The Ottoman Empire governed BiH for about 415 years before the Austro-Hungarian Empire annexed BiH in 1878. Over the period of almost five centuries, Bosnians have absorbed several cultural and linguistic traits from the Ottoman Empire (Yenigün & Hacıoğlu, 2010). The development of Turkish in BiH was largely influenced by the professions established by Ahi Teşkilatı (tradesmann organization), the Dervishes their main focus is on the universal principles of love and service, forsaking egotistical illusions in order to approach God, educational establishments such as elementary schools (mektep) and religious schools (madrasa), the conversion of Bosnians to Islam over the centuries, and the publication of newspapers and magazines such as *Bosanski Prijatelj* (The Bosnian Friend) or *Bosanski Vjestnik* (Bosnian Herald), *Bosna*, *Gülşen-i Saray*, and *Neretva* during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. The number of published magazines and journals like *Vatan* (Homeland), *Rehber* (Guide), *Behar* (Blossom), *Müsâvât* (Unity), *Tarık* (Path), *Muallim* (Theacher), and *Misbah* (Lantern) increased in the period of the Austria-Hungarian Empire (Gölen, 2010: 213-21).

The social status of those who returned to their countries after completing their high school education in Istanbul played also the most important role in the cultivation, development, and popularity of Turkish in this region. Being able to communicate in Turkish as the rulers' language, became critical for rising in society. More than 300 Bosnian poets, intellectuals, and philosophers published books in Turkish. Beside this, as *Alhamijado* literature called in Arabic Alphabet written Bosnian calculated for hundreds years, consists of enormous Turkish origin words like folk songs like *Hasanaginica* as the most prominent in the region and written in the 17th century and translated by Goethe into German in the Ottoman period, that continued even during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Furthermore, the first Bosnian-Turkish dictionary was written in 1631 by Muhamed

Hevaji Uskufi Bosnevi considered one of the most significant documents of this shared identity and history between Turks, particularly Bosnian Muslims (Balić, 1992: 165-90, Öner & Dedeic, 2015: 58, Bayram, 2016).

After the Ottoman Empire withdrew from BiH, Turkish gradually began to disappear from social life and the press. After the end of the War in BiH in 1995, it can be said that Turkish took the first step when Turkish Soldiers came to the region as a Peace Force Mission and offered free Turkish courses to Bosnians in their duty areas. Afterwards, the establishment of Turkish Language and Literature Departments in the cities of Tuzla and Zenica established by TIKA⁴ and later in Mostar, are some of the other indicators of the growing interest in Turkish. The opening of the Sarajevo branch of YEE, which is also its first center in the world, in 2009 is one of the most concrete examples of the language policies implemented by Türkiye. After this period, books translated from Turkish to Bosnian, broadcasting of Turkish TV series in their original Turkish language on Bosnian channels, increase in Turkish investments in the country, Ziraat Bank, Anadolu Agency, TRT⁵, Kızılay⁶, Maarif Vakfi, YEE, Education and cultural attachés etc and YTB⁷ responsible for Turkish Scholarships, that increased the interest to Turkish and studying in Türkiye. The allocation of Turkish diplomatic institutions has both created a need for people who know Turkish and offered new job opportunities for Turkish learners. While YEE offers Turkish courses to Bosnians in its centres, on the other hand, it has included Turkish as an selective foreign language in primary and secondary in BiH around 7000 kids since 2009. The activities carried out in this area will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

Yunus Emre Enstitüsü as a Language Policy Maker of Türkiye and its Activities Concerning Language Teaching

Launched in 2009, the YEE aims to promote Türkiye, the Turkish language, its history, culture, and art. The institute's name, Yunus Emre, comes from a Turkish folk poet and Muslim Sufi mystic who lived in Anatolia in the 13th century

4 Türkiye İşbirliği ve Kalkınma Ajansı (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency)

5 Türkiye Radyo Televizyon (The Turkish National TV)

6 Turkish Red Crescent,

7 Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı (Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities)

and had a profound influence on Turkish language and culture. It also seeks to make records and information on these subjects more globally accessible. YEE is a foundation-affiliated organization that promotes Turkish education through cultural centers abroad, supports scientific research, and uses culture and the arts to elevate Türkiye's reputation. YEE currently operates over 90 cultural institutions worldwide and contributes to university departments of Turkish language and literature, in addition to Turkish teaching. The cultural institutions organize a range of activities aimed at promoting Turkish culture and art. It declares that its goal is to increase the number of people who are favorable to Türkiye around the world, and that its aim is to enhance Türkiye's recognition, credibility, and prestige in the international arena (Yunus Emre, 2024).

The Balkans, commonly known as the 'Old Ottoman geography', host the majority of Institutü's centers. The YEE opened its first facility in Sarajevo to demonstrate Türkiye's strong interest in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2009. Through its worldwide offices, YEE provides lessons for a variety of age groups and professional groups, specializing in certified Turkish courses. The motivations for learning Turkish include appreciating Turkish art, pursuing scholarship opportunities in Türkiye, and anticipating job opportunities in Turkish companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gül, 2020).

Following this brief introduction, the subsequent sections will present an overview of YEE's activities.

1-Teaching Turkish in Cultural Centers

The YEE's course centers teach Turkish from A1 to C2 levels using a 72-hour curriculum that covers four fundamental skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening.

2-Turkish Language and Literature Departments

According to the protocols signed with the target countries, support in the form of academicians, teachers, and books is provided to over 100 Turkish Language and Literature Departments across 50 countries.

3- Turkish Teaching Portal

YEE provides a free Turkish Language Teaching Portal, accessible at turkce.yee.org.tr and learnturkish.com, for those wishing to learn Turkish without time and space constraints. This portal aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

4- Turkish Summer School

The summer schools invite exceptional kids from YEE courses abroad to various cities across Turkey, offering them an opportunity to fully engage with Turkish culture. Besides their academic activities, kids also join excursion programs to explore the region's cultural and natural landmarks.

5- Turkish Proficiency Exam (TYS)

TYS is a proficiency exam that offers an internationally recognized standard for Turkish. It facilitates the admission of foreign kids to universities in Turkey and provides an exemption from attending a Turkish preparatory class.

7-Tercihim Türkçe (My Choose Turkish)

Since the 2018-2019 academic year, through the initiatives of YEE, Turkish has been offered as an elective foreign language in primary, secondary, and higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Romania, Japan, Poland, Albania, Palestine, Ukraine, and Kosovo. As in the methodology section mentioned, the main subject of this research called 'My Choice is Turkish' project in BiH, will be scrutinize in the following section.

My Choise Turkish Project and the Activities Related to the Project

This section of the study will include the statistical data on the number of kids learning Turkish in schools. Furtermore the prominent activities carried out within the scope of My Choice is Turkish will be listed and endeavour to analyse.

Based on data from the BiH statistical agency for 2022, there are 1,702 primary schools in BiH that offer the option for 264,802 children to choose a foreign language as their first, second, or third language. The available language options include English, French, German, and Russian. Additionally, Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, and Italian are offered as supplementary language choices (ASBH, 2023: 1-5).

School	Pupils (Total)		Turkish		
	FFL*	SFL**	FFL	SFL	TFL***
Primary school	223,1	121,537	-	6,866	-
Secondary School	107,936	58,305	-	1,553	88
Total:	331,12	179,853	-	8419	88
*FSL: First foreign language **SFL: Second foreign language ***TFL: Third foreign language					

Figure: The number of kids learning Turkish as a selective foreign language in BiH schools in primary and secondary school in 2022/23

Before the introduction of 'My Choice Turkish' in schools in BiH, Turkish was compulsory in madrasahs in BiH after the war until 2000. However, it was subsequently abandoned as a result of the implementation of the Bologna standards and the introduction of the new educational system. Subsequently, it was included to the curriculum as a language that could be chosen as an optional, in response to the request made by the madrasahs (Solak, 2011, p. 167). The 'My Choice Turkish' campaign was launched when Turkish was introduced into the high school curriculum in BiH in the 2009-2010 academic year. Since the establishment of YEE in Sarajevo, the Turkish language has been actively promoted and strategically prioritized as part of Türkiye's language policy. As a result of an agreement with seven cantons in the Federation of BiH, Turkish has been included as a foreign language in the Bosnian education system curriculum. As of 2023, more than 7,000 children are acquiring proficiency in Turkish through the implementation of the 'My Choice is Turkish' program, which was introduced into the curriculum during the 2011-2012 academic year. During its first year, a total of 1,088 children took part. In the 2022-2023 academic year, Turkish is being offered as an optional foreign language in approximately 170 schools across 7 cantons. The number of schools offering Turkish is increasing each year, with the exception of cantons numbered 2, 8, and 10, where there is no evidence of the aforementioned protocol. These cantons are predominantly populated by Croats (Crnovrsanin, 2019). (Refer to the figure)

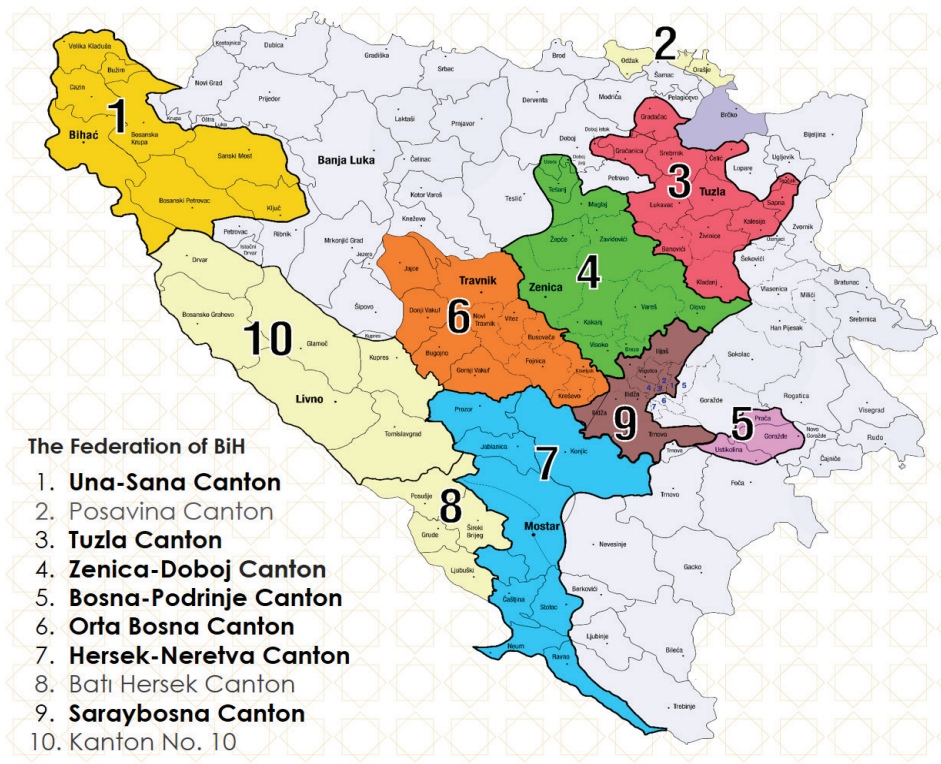


Figure: The canton offered Turkish as a selective foreign language

At the next section, we will explore several instances of activities that are arranged to enhance the enjoyment of learning Turkish and motivate kids at these educational institutions.

In-Service and Pedagogical Formation Training Program

Turkish language and literature departments at BiH's universities provide the majority of the country's teachers. Through the creation of in-service and pedagogical formation training programs in both Türkiye and BiH, the YEE assists to develop almost 100 teachers. For example, in November 2022, Turkish professors from Türkiye participated in the 16th training program, which involved collaboration with educational Institutions from BiH (Saraybosna (2023'a).

Sister School Project:

It is the name of the exchange program that collaborates with educational establishments like elementary and secondary schools to improve learning outcomes,

value exchange, and cross-cultural comprehension. More than 150 of BiH's schools that offer Turkish as a foreign language are involved in the 'Sister School Project' linked with Istanbul schools as a result of agreements signed by the YEE, the BiH Federal Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Türkiye, and the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education (MEB,2017). Through this project, around 5,000 children, kids, teachers, and school principals had visits that provides up the possibility to many contributions, such as intercultural school exchanges, learning Turkish, and experiencing Turkish and Bosnian cultures in visited country, in 2016 and 2019 (Crnovrsanin, 2021). One significant example could be the '*Selçuk – Sarajevo Brotherhood Bridge*' five-day mutual visits with the 107 kids from Selçuk Municipality in Konya and 130 kids from schools in Sarajevo (Saraybosna, 2023b)

Creation of Turkish Classes

The attractive features of YEE activities, such as educational excursions and scholarship awards, free textbook distribution, and the establishment of language classes through sister municipalities under TDBB's supervision, provided learners interested in learning Turkish with a thousand reading sets (Muhasilović, 2020,155 TDBB, 2020). Besides TDBB, It is known that the TİKA and by Turkish Armeer throughout of Lot-Houses⁹ provides services in the area where the house is located, both in terms of ensuring security as Peace Mission after Dayton Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina and carried out cultural activities as well as Turkish courses in the schools before estblishment of YEE (Çangal, Ö., Hattatioğlu, A. & Ilgar, M. 2016: 81-2). Although the relevant institutions do not share any statistics because of their approach principles it is estimated that the number of schools that received technical support such as building of fully equipped classrooms etc. through unofficial channels was more than 200 schools between 1996 and 2024 years.

23 April Kids Festival

It is the largest children's festival in BiH broadcastet live by Turkish TRT, organized since 2013 and organized for more than 6000 Turkish learning kids in more than 170 schools in BiH by 2023. This event, which is the largest part of the 'Türkiye Days' event that lasts for a week, is organized under the leadership of

8 Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği (Union of Turkish World Manicipalities)

9 Liaison and Observation Teams

the educational Institutions of the two countries and the YEE. This event is also supported by sister schools and municipalities in Türkiye, the Turkish armed forces in BiH, and Turkish companies. The event includes many competitions for children, stage shows, famous actors from Türkiye, awarding with a weekly holiday in Türkiye for those who win the competitions throughout the year, scholarship opportunities at the International University of Sarajevo, gifts for each participating kids, and finally a performance of concert by one of the famous artists of BiH, such as Dino Merlin. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, this event was held Online.

Competition to Improve the Skills of Children Learning Turkish

Aiming to boost kids' interest in Turkish, enjoyable and award-winning competitions are held to encourage them to learn the language. Travels to Türkiye, money, tablets, smart watches, and school supplies are some of the prizes. The certificates that kids receive after successfully completing Turkish language competitions play an important role in giving them an advantageous position in getting a job in BiH after school life or in documenting the necessary conditions when they aimed to study in Türkiye. Below are a few of these competitions as examples.

Turkish Competition: As the Bosnian map of above illustrated, in the seven cantons where Turkish is taught, competitions are held in cooperation with the local ministries of education to assess the ability of learners in the language in the four fundamental skills which are writing, speaking, listening, and reading. These competitions are held first in schools and subsequently in cantons, by attending of more successful kids from secondary and high schools. Only fourth-graders could participate in the 'Kalem Turkish Competition,' in which 30 successful winners receive scholarships in various percentage from the International University of Sarajevo (Saraybosna 2020, Mostar, 2023).

Speaking Club: Organizing Online speaking clubs for successful kids learning Turkish in high schools and secondary schools across six cantons is a commendable initiative. This program enhances their language skills like enhancing of their language practice, interactive learning, cultural exchange, confidence building, network building opportunities, motivation and engagement (Mostar, 2021).

Graduate Certificate: The graduation certificate that is given to kids who have learned Turkish for a long time like four years in primary school or eight years

in both primary and high school is an important document that recognizes their dedication to and success in the language. This award aimed several goals, such as providing a concrete acknowledgement of their academic achievement and linguistic proficiency, keepsake value denotes their sense of pride and accomplishment in their language learning journey, as well as their advantage in projects and opportunities to participate in a variety of Turkish-related projects. It also serves as encouragement for future endeavors, such as internships, scholarships and joint projects with Turkish organizations (Saraybosna 2019c).

Social Activities Related to the Turkish

Social and cultural activities are essential for enhancing the educational experience of children learning Turkish in BiH. By connecting and bonding with one another, supporting, and enjoying fun, these activities help kids develop a sense of community. Learning processes improve language retention and foster a more positive attitude toward language acquisition. They also help kids develop their confidence, which enables them to practice speaking Turkish in real-life situations and improves their speaking abilities. Finally, cultural interaction gives kids a deeper understanding of the culture linked to the language and social skills necessitate cooperation and communication, assisting children in acquiring critical social abilities and forming enduring friendships. Some of the activities that can help them develop the skills mentioned above are listed below.

Fairy Tale and Music: These events are organized many times a year with renowned Bosnian artist like Latif Moćević, who organizes entertaining events for children and positively impact them (Saraybosna, 2022).

I have a guest: Turkish television shows are widely viewed, just like they are globally. During the meeting with Turkish learning kids Isabella Damla Güven, the lead actress of the most popular series in Bosnia and Herzegovina, named “Elif,” who had also invited in the April 23 children’s festival, had the chance to ask the guest artist their question Online (Saraybosna 2020a).

Talent and Theatre Competition: Turkish learning kids challenge in a variety of events, including Turkish theatrical performances, musical instrument playing, Turkish song singing, impersonation, and numerous entertainment talents. The team that played the Turkish theater play Hasanagani took first place in the competition, attended as representative of BiH in the Kayseri Inter-High School Theater Competition in 2019 (Saraybosna, 2019a).

Gift Exchange for Aid: The schools, which could not make mutual visits with their sister schools due to the pandemic, wrote letters in Turkish to each other with the participation of approximately 1200 kids and pupils and celebrated each other's holidays with gifts consisting of important symbols of their cities in 2021 and 2022 (Mostar, 2022).

Sports tournaments: Football tournaments are organized for boys and volleyball tournaments for girls who learn Turkish. The events, which are organized to contribute to the personal development and socialization of kids learning Turkish and to increase their motivation, are organized in schools, municipalities and cantons, respectively, and the best teams from each canton participate in the finals. Approximately 1000 Turkish learning kids and pupils participate in this event throughout the year (Saraybosna, 2019).

Introducing My City and School: Getting kids to produce short films in Turkish to advertise their school and city is a creative method to get them interested in learning the language while simultaneously assisting the community. Through practical language use, improved communication skills, cultural promotion, tourism boost, creative expression, and community effect (Saraybosna, 2019b).

Art Workshop: Many Turkish learning kids discover their talents by participating in workshops such as marbling, decorative wood ornamentation, philography and kviling in art workshops of KAYMEK, which is the art education center of Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality on scope of the sister city (Mostar, 2020).

Results and Discussion

It is evident that YEE has effectively utilized the Turkish language as a part of culture, considered as a key element of soft power to achieve significant success in a relatively short period of time. The growing attractiveness of Turkish is a observable indication that YEE has effectively employed the methodologies associated with soft power. By leveraging cultural and educational strategies that align with the principles of soft power, YEE has successfully enhanced the appeal of the Turkish language.

YEE has made a significant impact in a relatively short time, despite being a relatively young institution in BiH. The results of the activities carried out by YEE have attracted great interest from kids in a short period of time, even though the institution was established in BiH approximately 15 years ago. The YEE supports Turkish language teaching with activities that are more entertaining for kids and

contribute to their personal development and self-confidence. One of the issues that needs to be examined is how much these activities affect children and their opinions about these activities.

At this point, it is obvious that it receives various support concerning the implemented projects primarily from Turkish institutions in BiH, as well as from municipalities in Türkiye. After the war, Turkish language teaching was first started by Turkish soldiers serving in BiH as peacekeeping forces, and then TIKA took over this task until the YEE was founded. Kids attraction to the Turkish language has grown as a result of rewarding successful kids with cash prizes, excursions to Türkiye, tablets, laptops, smart watches, or school supplies. In this regard, the Turkish soldiers, Turkish municipalities, and TIKA which constructs or renovates classrooms with all the necessary equipment, have all provided support to Turkish language schools. It has been highlighted that language policy implementers in this context hold a variety of competitions in an effort to cultivate a love of Turkish in kids. More kids will be able to learn Turkish if innovative activities are created that encourage them. The future research needs to be conducted to scrutinize the effectiveness of this implemented language policy by conducting field studies and kids evaluations about them.

As abovementioned, there are many foreign language options for kids in the schools. Therefore, the motivations of children to choose Turkish should be examined in detail with different approaches by researchers.

In addition, which activities kids participate generally and the continuity of their participation which are crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of them. Ultimately, teachers' thoughts provide valuable perspectives on the strengths and areas for improvement on them, need to be investigated by surveys and interviews to measure their success and the policy of YEE.

Conclusion

The increase in the number of cantons offering Turkish and the growing number of Turkish learning kids, alongside the diverse range of activities provided, suggests that YEE has implemented a successful language policy. However, if Turkish has not been introduced in all schools within these cantons, it is important to thoroughly investigate the obstacles preventing its expansion into new cantons.

The biggest limitation of this research is that it is only an evaluation based on the news shared by YEE on its own homepage. Regarding those activities, new

researches would increase the evaluations of this policy and activities by gathering of opinions of schools' directors, the comments on social media accounts of schools and local media, of children who are the main focus point of this policy and their families that would contribute to both YEE and Türkiye's updating and revising their language policies and methods in BiH for the extending of Turkish to more kids across the region.

Türkiye's language policy in BiH represents a significant diplomatic and cultural effort aimed at deepening ties between the two countries. The establishment of the YEE in BiH highlights Türkiye's commitment to promoting the Turkish language and culture abroad. This move is part of a broader trend where various Turkish Institutions, including municipalities and cultural organizations, are increasingly involved in expanding Türkiye's influence and fostering closer relations with BiH.

The YEE's role is crucial as it serves not only as a center for teaching Turkish but also as a hub for cultural exchange and cooperation. By offering Turkish language courses, cultural programs, and other educational activities, that helps to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen the bilateral relationship between Türkiye and BiH.

The support from Turkish Institutions underscores a strategic approach to language diplomacy, which involves leveraging cultural and educational initiatives to build soft power and foster international partnerships. This approach can enhance Türkiye's presence and influence in the region, while also contributing to the cultural and educational development of BiH.

Over the past decade, Türkiye has actively engaged in promoting its language and culture through various educational and extracurricular activities in schools. By integrating language, sports, talent competitions, and cultural events into the school environment, Türkiye aims to enhance its cultural footprint and foster a positive perception among kids.

These activities serve multiple purposes:

- 1. Language Acquisition:** Through fun and engaging methods, kids are exposed to Turkish, which helps them learn the language more effectively. This immersive approach makes the learning process enjoyable and natural.
- 2. Cultural Appreciation:** By participating in Turkish cultural events and activities, kids gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Turkish culture, traditions, and values.

3. **Confidence Building:** Talent competitions and sports events help kids develop self-confidence and interpersonal skills that provide opportunities for the Turkish learners to showcase their abilities and engage in positive social interactions.
4. **Strengthening Ties:** These initiatives also help in fostering stronger cultural and educational ties between Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina. They create a sense of connection and goodwill, which can lead to more favorable perceptions of both countries.

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