

The EU as strategic actor in the WB and the importance of stable WB for the stability of Europe in current security and international political implications

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Hello, my name is Elena Tilovska-Kechedji, and I am an Associate professor at the Faculty of Law, University St. Kliment Ohridski -Bitola. I'm going to talk to you today about **“The EU as strategic actor in the WB and the importance of stable WB for the stability of Europe in current security and international political implications”**. In order to clearly understand this chapter, I divided it in seven sub-chapters discussing different specific issues regarding the main topic. First I will begin with the Strategic importance of the WB.

1. Strategic importance of the Western Balkans

To begin with we can ask the question: Why should the WB be so important strategically, when they are countries with so many historical, political and economic problems. They have so many problems and weaknesses. And we could simply answer with another question, what kind of interests would possibly EU have or any other country from the WB. Well I will divide that interest and importance into geographical, economical and geostrategical. Geographically, the Western Balkan region is a bridge that connects the south-east of the European continent with central Europe. This is not a new route it existed even in Roman times. It connects the whole continent as one. Also in regards to the EU the Balkans are not only the main route of connection but they are part of the European continent and they are the center. Therefore, the region geographically is of crucial and strategic importance to the EU and to the entire continent. Also the geographical position of the WB gives the region an enormous strategic importance in regards to security and stability of the region, and the continent, but also it holds a geostrategical importance in regards to the other powers economically and in regards to security. Furthermore, the Western Balkans economies are very integrated with the EU. They hold up a large space in the trade and labour market. So economically the interests are both-sided. The WB are the largest trade partner with the EU, largest foreign investment, trade and transit route. Therefore, the Western Balkan countries' economic and political prospects, and their future within the European Union should remain one of the top priorities for the EU. ¹

¹ Marek Dabrowski and Yana Myachenkova. The Western Balkans on the road to the European Union. Policy Contribution Issue n°04 | February 2018. [The Western Balkans on the road to the European Union \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328111111)

2. The importance of regional cooperation within the neighbouring countries

Regional cooperation is the most important principle for the political stability, the security and economic development of the Western Balkan. Many of the challenges are not only faced by the countries themselves but they also have a cross-border dimension, which involves the neighbors and the neighborhood (meaning it affects not only the other WB countries but also the wider neighborhood the EU). Therefore, for the EU, the Western Balkans are of great importance because they are part of EU's neighbourhood and whatever happens in the WB affects the EU as whole. Therefore, the progress of the WB is of crucial importance to the EU not only politically, but economically and especially in regards to the stability. Regional cooperation is important for all the WB, because they are all linked to one another and what affects one it will affect the other, that is why the spill over effects in this neighbourhood should be avoided by all costs. Regional stability and security are needed for economic development in the region, which in return will stabilize the region. And in political sense it is needed because it is a catalyst for reconciliation, good-neighbourliness, as well as overcoming nationalism and intolerance and promoting mutual understanding and dialogue.²

3. Current security and political implications in the WB

The political and security implications in the WB are also interlinked with each other. The political implications in the Balkan are characterized by a transition. Transition from an old authoritarian regime to a new system of pluralist democracy. Fundamental reforms are needed to brake old habits. Although there have been some reforms in the 90s still the transition in the WB is very slow and an ongoing process. For some of the WB countries the political and economic process of transition is faster and for some is slower but non the less it is till in the process of change. The process of democratization and political stability is very slow and it is influenced by different factors, including fragile and weak economic development, history, civil society, perceptions, mentality, religion, values, beliefs, national identity they all lie at the heart of the transition process. The greater the gap of cultural, linguistic and religious pluralism is, the more complex the democratic transition will be. The greater the economic and political transition and development are, the greater the stability in each country and in the region will be which leads to stable and secure region. The transition process was excellently implemented by the EU towards the WB with the stabilization

² Regional cooperation in the western Balkans A policy priority for the European Union. European Communities, 2005. [NF5703249ENC_001 \(europa.eu\)](http://NF5703249ENC_001.europa.eu)

process towards the integration process which provided sustainable conflict management policies.³

4. Prespa agreement

The name dispute dates back to 1991 and ex- Yugoslavia, when North Macedonia declared independence as the Republic of Macedonia. Athens objected its recognition due to the shared name with a region in northern Greece, and it was concerned it could imply territorial claims. The country joined the United Nations in 1993 under a provisional name (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Following a 19-month Greek trade embargo, Macedonia amended its constitution and changed its flag in 1995. But all of this was not sufficient for Greece so it blocked it from joining NATO or beginning accession talks with the European Union until the name issue is resolved.⁴ The year 2018 turned out to be decisive, North Macedonia was finally ready to make amends with Greece and add a geographical qualifier to their name, leading to a remarkable shift in the deadlocked negotiations.⁵ The Prespa agreement was an important success because it solved a problem by common consensus, creating and facilitating good-neighborly relations and shared development in the European perspective.⁶

5. Montenegro and Kosovo border demarcation agreement 2018

The problem between Montenegro and Kosovo is a territorial dispute between the two countries that began in 2008. Specifically the problem lies in acknowledging the border demarcation which in reality began with the independence of Kosovo, the two countries shared international border that previously represented a border between the two federal units. From 2009, they began negotiations and decided that it is in their interest to have an expert commission on this issue. But due to parliamentary crisis in Kosovo the ratification of the commission's decision was prolonged. The demarcation issue became the basis for more serious discussions in 2017 and in March 2018, the

³ Nina SKOČAJIČ JUVAN, Anton GRIZOLD* THE COMPLEX OF SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: PROCESSES AND ISSUES TEORIJA IN PRAKSA let. 54, 2/2017 [tip_02_2017_skocajic_grizold.pdf\(uni-lj.si\)](http://tip_02_2017_skocajic_grizold.pdf(uni-lj.si))

⁴ Sloat, Amanda. "Diplomacy triumphs" Greece and Macedonia resolve name dispute". Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/12/diplomacy-triumphs-greece-and-macedonia-resolve-name-dispute/>

⁵ Satanakis Sofia Maria. "Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: The Prespa Agreement. What come next?" Austria Institut für Europa-und Sicherheitspolitik. Retrieved from: https://www.aies.at/download/2018/AIES-Fokus_2018-06.pdf

⁶ Bartsidis, Michalis. "After the referendum and the vote in the Parliament of North Macedonia". 9/Nov./2018 Retrieved from: <https://www.transform-network.net/en/blog/article/after-the-referendum-and-the-vote-in-the-parliament-of-north-macedonia/>



agreement has been ratified by Kosovar Parliament. The border follows a defined territory by the Yugoslav State Border Commission of 1946, the Border Commission came out with the joint statement which served as a basis for an inter-governmental Agreement signed in 2018.⁷

6. Future of Serbia and Kosovo - a positive outcome

The conflict between Kosovo and Serbia begun when Kosovo announced its independence on the rules laid out by the Badinter Arbitration Commission in 1991–1992 and based on the premise that Yugoslavia, had dissolved and that its constituent units would become its successors. The conflict in the period between 1998–1999 clarified that independence of Kosovo was the only plausible solution. Since 2011 there have been talks and agreements between the two states mediated by the EU and they represent a step toward the normalization of relations between the two. They are also a test for EU's ability to mediate such conflicts. In April 2013 the two parties signed an agreement that consisted of fifteen most controversial aspects in their relations. The agreement addressed the status of the north, including the Community of Serb-majority municipalities, it allows municipalities to coordinate on different issues, for example it can be granted additional powers by the central government and its existence protected by government decision, it does not have explicit legislative competences nor does it constitute an additional layer of government. The acceptance of the 2013 Brussels Agreement was mixed. Although the international community welcomed it, the opposition parties in both countries did not accepted it. The Serbian Assembly has not ratified the Agreement yet, while the Kosovo Assembly ratified the Brussels Agreement, with majority.⁸

7. The attitude of Bulgaria towards North Macedonia's EU accession process

North Macedonia aspires to be part of the EU, but on that road to be part of the European family the country had and has few obstacles. One of the obstacles was resolved with the signing of the Prespa agreement which I explained in the previous slide. And in 2017 North Macedonia signed the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria, but in 2020 when the Council of the EU adopted the Decision to open accession

⁷ Montenegro External Relations briefing: Kosovo-Montenegro border demarcation problem and its implications for Montenegro Ivica Bakota CHina-CEE Institute Vol. 5, No. 4 (ME) March 2018 [2018er320 \(9\) Montenegro.pdf \(china-cee.eu\)](#)

⁸ Florian Bieber. *The Serbia-Kosovo Agreements: An eu Success Story?*. review of central and east european law 40 (2015) 285-319 Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287405200_The_Serbia-Kosovo_Agreements_An_eu_Success_Story [accessed Jan 17 2021].

negotiations, Bulgaria said that until the issues are resolved North Macedonia can not be an EU member.⁹ Part of the issues are the historical identity of North Macedonians also the unresolved historical dispute regarding the Macedonian language, which, Bulgaria says it is a dialect of the Bulgarian language and the status of the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria.¹⁰ At the moment there are negotiations and talks between the two countries but the issue is still open.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter we discussed the EU as strategic actor in the WB and the importance of stable WB for the stability of Europe in current security and international political implications. The chapter was divided in several sub sections regarding the Strategic importance of the Western Balkans, The importance of regional cooperation within the neighbouring countries; the Current security and political implications in the WB; Prespa agreement; Montenegro and Kosovo border demarcation agreement 2018; Future of Serbia and Kosovo - a positive outcome; and the attitude of Bulgaria towards North Macedonia's EU accession process this sub-points gave a clearer picture of the topic and hopefully enhanced your understanding of the general topic that is **The EU as strategic actor in the WB and the importance of stable WB for the stability of Europe in current security and international political implications.**

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⁹ Policy Brief No.23/2020 - The devil is in the details: negotiating North Macedonia's European Union accession Authors: Dragan Tilev and Zoran Nechev - May 2020 [00a1f41c-4e8c-26a7-06fb-5fb773ba5cc5](https://www.kas.de/en/policy-briefs/2020/05/23-2020-the-devil-is-in-the-details-negotiating-north-macedonia-s-european-union-accession) (kas. de)

¹⁰Bulgaria Blocks EU Accession Negotiations with North Macedonia. [Bulgaria Blocks EU Accession Negotiations with North Macedonia | Warsaw Institute](https://www.warshawinstitute.org/en/bulgaria-blocks-eu-accession-negotiations-with-north-macedonia)

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