

## **Aims, ways, means and interests of external factors in the WB 6 region (NATO, Russia, Turkey, Gulf Arab countries)**

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### **1. The Alliance as the primary guarantor of Balkans' security**

NATO has been a success story for almost eighty years, it was created in 1949 with the signing of the Washington Treaty. It ended two wars and ethnic cleansing in the Western Balkans, confronts the threat of terrorism, it engaged in Afghanistan, and responded and still responds to many various threats and obstacles. It is the most successful security Alliance, stretching from North America to the Black Sea.<sup>1</sup>

The Alliance is the primary guarantor of the security and stability in the WB. And here we ask the question why? Well because the Alliance so far has proven to bring security and stability in the region, and of course due to this benefit the countries in the region want to join and be part of the Alliance. Lets take for example, the brief ethnic conflict from 2001 in Macedonia, and the deployment of NATO which intensified the relationship between the two, due to guarantee of stability. Serbia is the only country in the region that doubts NATO, but this is due to the bombings in Republika Srpska in the 90s, and in Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict in 1999.<sup>2</sup>

Also it should be acknowledge that the Western Balkans represent a test for the mutual relationship between NATO and the European Union. If this relationship works, NATO will remain a mutual component of security for the EU and the Balkans. And in this relationship we actually see that what is written in theory becomes reality in practice.<sup>3</sup> The aim towards Euro-Atlantic integration played a crucial role in the stabilization of the region. But this driving force towards integration has its limitations, mostly due to

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<sup>1</sup> NATO 2030: United for a New Era Analysis and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General 25 Nov. 2020 [201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf \(nato.int\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Tomasz Żornaczuk. The Challenges of NATO Enlargement to the Balkans BULLETIN No. 67 (400) July 5, 2012 The Polish institute of International Affairs [The Challenges of NATO Enlargement to the Balkans \(ethz.ch\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> VAHIT ERDEM. NATO Parliamentary Assembly SUB-COMMITTEE ON FUTURE SECURITY AND DEFENCE CAPABILITIES NATO'S ONGOING ROLE IN BALKAN SECURITY DRAFT REPORT [Microsoft Word - 169 Difesa Erdem Smith EN.doc \(senato.it\)](#)

the promises that were not fulfilled, the hope little by little fades away, it is not as strong as it was few years back. For example, 2019 began with optimism due to the Prespa Agreement and North Macedonia signing of NATO Accession Protocol. But the process towards membership in the EU was presented with another hurdle. This hurdle for all the region should be overcome fast because the stakes can be high for all. For example, there should be an awareness of the impact of the region's security on the European Union. Also, the presence of Russia, China and other external players in the region which play a positive or a negative role in the whole process of integration and security. Therefore, all of these pieces in the puzzle construct a frame, in some perspectives crooked but in other realistic. Today, the Balkan region is still stable, but this thin line between stability and conflict can be very easily fueled by rising populism, nationalism, weak reconciliation strings, external factors and actors and all these goes hand in hand with the uncertainty of EU enlargement. Therefore the factors that influence regional stability according to Katarina Djokic can be divided into three groups:

- those dividing the region, such as conflict legacy, longstanding disputes and ethnonationalist populism, spiced with a return of geopolitics;
- common security threats and risks related to weak institutional frameworks;
- the shared external (outside governance) security threats and risks that could potentially bring the region together.<sup>4</sup>

But the biggest problems in the region are the unresolved disputes, misunderstandings, the sense of identity and belonging, and so many more issues that have never been resolved and discussed, and in the meantime the politicians promote the belief that Euro-Atlantic integration will solve all the problems in the region. Of course this aspiration has improved the security and stability in the region but is this aim and belief enough. Well, Croatia is a member of EU and NATO; Montenegro, Albania and North Macedonia are members of NATO but not of the EU, and Bosnia and Herzegovina has begun the process towards NATO, and they all believe that the region is stable at the moment. But nothing is for certain. At the moment the problems of concern in the region are the status of Kosovo which affects the relations between the two neighbors. And the neighbourly relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. But despite the future outcomes and besides the fears and insecurities, it can be concluded that most of

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<sup>4</sup> Katarina Djokic. EU, NATO and Beyond: The Security Dynamics of the Western Balkans. THE BALKANS: OLD, NEW INSTABILITIES A European Region Looking for its Place in the World [ispi\\_report\\_balcani\\_2020\\_0.pdf \(ispionline.it\)](#)

the region shares strategic interests and goals: EU and NATO membership, regional stability, reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and e.t.c. They all also underwent similar reforms, and are guided by the EU, they decided on collective security through the Partnership for Peace and for collective defence through NATO. They have also contributed to crisis management and their armies respect NATO standards, therefore they have all benefited from NATO membership and negotiations.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we can conclude that **the Alliance is the primary guarantor of Balkans' security.**

## **2. Change and continuity in Russia's modus operandi**

The Balkans are very important for Russia. Why? First of all, it is implied that Russia pursues to support Slavonic or Orthodox nations, like her, as well as there is the idea that in Russian history the Balkans have played an important and crucial role for her to become a European power. When Russia reappeared on the international scene in the 90s, its policies in the region were shaped by its relationship with Europe. Therefore, unlike in the past, Russia was not interested in expansion, rather it was interested to sustain its place among the great powers. She could not achieve this position through its economic status, but it could by contributing or participating in the Balkan regions, and it did so by using the historical narratives of the Balkans mentioned previously. In 1995, Russia supported the Dayton Agreement, it supported and took part in the military operations which overthrow Bosnian leadership. During the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Russia did not consider providing military support to Yugoslavia, apart from symbolic actions and some intelligence sharing, Moscow's role was to stay among the great powers and be a mediator. Even with the march of the Russian peace-keeping battalion from Bosnia to Kosovo airport it wanted to secure Russia's presence in the region.<sup>6</sup> But is this in reality what is Russia main goal to support the West and be a game player in the background or there is hidden agenda in its foreign policy?

When Russia wanted to come back on the big arena as stated previously, its policies especially in the Balkans were defined through the West. As long as the region is at the attention of the West, Russia's interests are limited. But it also expects the West to make it a game player. And if this expectations are not fulfilled it adopts disruptive

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<sup>5</sup> Katarina Djokic. EU, NATO and Beyond: The Security Dynamics of the Western Balkans. THE BALKANS: OLD, NEW INSTABILITIES A European Region Looking for its Place in the World [ispi\\_report\\_balcani\\_2020\\_0.pdf \(ispionline.it\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> VSEVOLOD SAMOKHVALOV. Russia in the Balkans: Great Power Politics and Local Response. Insight Turkey Vol. 21 / No. 2 / 2019, pp. 189-210. [20200225121856\\_5-Samokhvalov-4.pdf \(ulg.ac.be\)](#)

policies. But Why use this kind of cynical foreign policy? Why not create an alliance with the region against the West. What are its goals and nature? The West remains the center for Russia, due to its pursuit for recognition as an equal.<sup>7</sup> But Russia in reality never gave up on the region, but its projection of power has changed. It changed due to couple of factors like the opportunities from war and peace in the region, the relations with Europe and the US, its self-perception and its power resource. In the 90s, Russia foreign policy in the region focused on conflict management, diplomacy and military power. It supported international sanctions, joined conflict resolution and proposed solutions. But this ideas did not work as Russia planned because NATO appeared as a protector and Russia viewed it as a rise of the West. In the new millennium, Russia expended in the region with the advantage to acquire political influence, to bring multipolarity, and dismisses European integration as the idea for regional order and cooperation and instead to install a great powers 'directorate' that will manage regional competition and cooperation. This is Russia real policy, and has brought her some wins, but it has failed to trigger its strategy. Therefore, in the coming years, the EU's strategy towards the region will require a more defining and precise dates in order to push-back Russia. Because Russia is a tactical player and it withdrew military from the region, but it came back with its energy and capital. Where the other powers did not wish to invest she did and that is how was created the dependence on the supply of gas from Gazprom (in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and in other strategic sectors such as heavy industry, mining and banking. This was a good disguise for its geopolitical objectives.<sup>8</sup>

The Balkans remain and will remain an arena of geopolitical rivalry by using economical and political instruments for example energy pipelines, which are used for political purposes more than economic. To continue with the example: Russia's pipeline from 2012, is competing with the Western pipeline like the Trans-Anatolian pipeline (TANAP) from Azerbaijan or the EU's Nabucco pipeline. And each Balkan state does its best to ensure that the pipelines cross its territory because its in its own interest. Thus, the current situation for the Balkans is part of the East-West geoeconomic and geopolitical rivalry which will intensify with the start of the South Stream project. Therefore, Russian energy policy in the region is to access, control, and

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<sup>7</sup> VSEVOLOD SAMOKHVALOV. Russia in the Balkans: Great Power Politics and Local Response. Insight Turkey Vol. 21 / No. 2 / 2019, pp. 189-210. [20200225121856\\_5-Samokhvalov-4.pdf \(ulg.ac.be\)](#)

<sup>8</sup>Stanislav Secieru Senior Analyst, EUISS. Tactical wins, strategic setbacks.RUSSIA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS. Brief 8 , 2019 [Russia in the Western Balkans - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

influence over the oil and gas business, especially in the Caspian basin and in Central Asia. The Balkans represent the final stage of oil and gas delivery from that region towards the European markets, and from there towards the world. So here Russia has to manage the economic-political affairs in the Balkans and instead of reaching towards the EU to reach towards Russia's proposed Eurasian Union. Therefore the Western Balkans' demonstrate that integration with Europe through the EU, and NATO, and europeanization are necessary and effective means of preventing further ethnopolitical conflicts. But this region's importance goes beyond this because if it fails to do so it will be bad not only for the region but for the EU as well, because it will open the region to other influences as presented and also may lead to destabilization of the region.<sup>9</sup>

It has to be understood that the expansion of the EU and NATO towards the East was perceived as a threat to Russia, which the NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997) and the NATO-Russia Council (2002) could not change. Also, the overthrow in Georgia in 2003, the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in 2004, the change of leadership in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the Ukrainian conflict in 2014, were seen as strikes of influence from the West. The years of war in Ukraine have created a bigger breach between Russia and the West. Moscow rejects the accusation of violating the "European Peace Order" and being wrongly punished with sanctions. From here, the goal of Russia is to break the consensus within the EU on sanctions. The EU sanctions on Russia must be extended every six months unanimously and the withdrawal of any member state would mean suspension on sanctions therefore Russia is using populist parties in the EU to break this consensus<sup>10</sup>.

To conclude, having one foot in the Balkans means having a say on strategic matters, Russia is driven by geopolitics and it sees the region as a vulnerable wing of Europe. Russia's only option is to act in this manner and to undermine the EU and NATO importance in the region and to use the regions vulnerability at its disposal. Its influence in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro is a bargaining tool in its strategy. From Russia, to have its influence in the Balkans is means to give "the West a taste of its own medicine", meaning if they meddle in its backyard (in Ukraine, Georgia, Russia

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Blank. Russian Policy in the Western Balkans. January 2013. Atlantic Council.  
[Russian Policy in the Western Balkans \(atlanticcouncil.org\)](http://atlanticcouncil.org)

<sup>10</sup>Gernot Erler. Western Balkans and its Big Brother. On Russia's Policy in Southeast Europe. South East Europe in Focus. No.1/2019. External Actors Series: Russia. (PDF) [Russian Energy to Europe: Western Balkans as the Security of Demand Device | Aleksandar Kovacevic - Academia.edu](#)

will do the same in the Balkans. Also another influence mechanism in the region is the field of defence and security, for example, concluding a defence cooperation agreement with Serbia in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the region for Russia is of enormous strategic, economic and geopolitical importance and should not be disregarded.

### **3. The Balkans at the center of Turkey's foreign policy (abandoning traditional politics and applying new “win-win” policies or the gate way to Europe)**

As well as with Russia, the Balkan region is also very important to Turkey. But unlike Russia's hidden foreign policy, Turkey foreign policy is not anti European, because they also want to join the EU, and they are not anti NATO because Turkey, is a member of NATO. But there are still hidden agendas behind its foreign policy.

The Balkans are at the center of Turkey's foreign policy, especially with the independence of the Balkan states, with an aim for political, cultural and historic impact. By joining the multilateral forces, Turkey took an active role in Bosnia and Herzegovina, during the Bosnian War, during the Kosovo War and throughout the dispute between North Macedonia and Greece. In all of these problems, Turkey only wanted the position of a mediator in the region. Furthermore, in the period from 2000 up until now, Turkey experienced strong economic growth, and with the rise of Justice and Development Party (AKP), it abandoned traditional realpolitik and applied the policies of “zero problems with neighbors” and “win-win” policies. With the help of nostalgic Ottoman history, as well as cultural relations, Turkey became an asset that would create close relations with the Balkans. After the post-conflict fragility in the region that actually promoted the EU integration, it hit the economic crisis and again the low enthusiasm for the enlargement, which diverted the EU from the Balkans and thereby creating a power vacuum for Turkey, which with a new policy twists it established a specific structure in the region. It opened schools and universities and revived demographic and cultural inheritance. The Hizmet movement, which is an Islamic religious and social movement has flourished by using attraction and persuasion. Turkey is being worshiped by a majority of Muslims, who regard the Ottoman times as the golden age and it succeeded in this by nurturing special relations in the predominantly Muslim areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, and Sandžak, by describing itself as a “protector” of Muslims. But the

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<sup>11</sup> Dimitar Bechev. Making Inroads: Competing Powers in the Balkans. The Balkans: Old, New Instabilities Edited by Giorgio Fruscione First edition: May 2020 [ispi\\_report\\_balceni\\_2020\\_0.pdf](https://ispi-report-balceni-2020-0.pdf) ([ispionline.it](http://ispionline.it))

promised economic prospects in the region have not occurred, and it is not among the top economic partners in the region. In the past few years Turkey has become more authoritarian and it presents non-democratic tendencies such as the absence of the rule of law, brutal confrontations with opponents and its alienation from the European Union buffs it from being a role model. But non the less, the danger for the region is that the political elites, who embrace non-democratic practices, may find Turkey's way of governance good. If more authoritarianism is reinforced in the Western Balkans, fragile democracies in the region might suffer irreversible damage.<sup>12</sup>

Turkey is very strong militarily. This is important because it had and it has strong influence in the region. Turkey is a NATO member from 1952, which defined its defense policies. In 2014, Turkish armed forces were ranked 10th globally. In the Cold War era, Turkey's objective was to be an active player in the western union, after the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, Turkey's defense policies had new goals. Turkey dedicated significant military efforts to the Western Balkans in the 1990s. It took part in the South-Eastern Europe Defense Ministerial process, in 1996. It also helped initiate the Multinational Peace Force in South-Eastern Europe, known as the South-Eastern Europe Brigade (SEEBRIG). In Bosnia, it participated in United Nations Protection Force. After the Dayton Agreement it increased its presence in IFOR later the Stabilization Force (SFOR). It signed bilateral agreements with B&H that established the cooperation between the two in the fields of military, defense, industry, infrastructure, technology, research and development, and medicine. After the declaration of independence from Yugoslavia, North Macedonia (then FYROM) was weak, with no international support and recognition, and with an ethnic conflict and bilateral dispute. The country needed an ally, and Turkey was the one, in 1994, it donated \$1.9 million military aid and by 2006, it donated \$15 million military equipment. The donations aimed to support North Macedonia toward Euro-Atlantic integration. In addition, it led several operations like Essential Harvest, Amber Fox.<sup>13</sup>

The aims of Turkey's new foreign policy in the region have been conducted around the history, culture, and geopolitical position. Turkey puts the Balkans at the center of five

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<sup>12</sup> Alida Vračić Turkey's Role in the Western BalkansSWP. Research Paper Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs. RP 11 December 2016 Berlin. [Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans \(swp-berlin.org\)](http://www.swp-berlin.org)

<sup>13</sup> Alida Vračić Turkey's Role in the Western BalkansSWP. Research Paper Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs. RP 11 December 2016 Berlin. [Turkey's Role in the Western Balkans \(swp-berlin.org\)](http://www.swp-berlin.org)

intersecting regions, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean. More access to the region is of national priority due to its strategic position. Furthermore, it added a political aim in its foreign policy by creating close ties with the region based on Ottoman nostalgia. Also, immigration, on both sides, has cultivated close connections. For Turkey, the Balkans are its main aim in its foreign policy and a practice of soft power. But the relationship between the two is supported by both sides, because the region displays devotion towards Turkey.<sup>14</sup>

As I mentioned in the beginning, Turkey in the WB wants to practice more a soft power, and it never backed up from its position to support the EU and WB integration. It is among the founding members of the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) to promote European cooperation on armaments, Turkey acquired “Associate Member” status in the WEU in 1992. And as an EU candidate country and a long-lasting member of NATO, Turkey plays an important role in the region, although in the last year it shifted a little bit from the main postulates democracy, freedom, the rule of law, human rights and e.t.c it still plays an active role in the region through the EU perspective.<sup>15</sup> Turkey’s emphasis on European integration is important because it believes that the region as an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic structures would achieve a stable and peaceful order and with this Turkey will benefit.<sup>16</sup> Also, Turkey imitated the European Neighbourhood Policy from visa free relations to cultural diplomacy in order to obtain religious sponsorship. Turkey sought to expand its influence, especially among Balkan Muslims, through soft power by concentrating on religious institutions, history, education, media and popular culture. Turkish foreign policy in the Balkans changed drastically in 2016, due to the departure of Prime Minister Davutoğlu and to the political earthquake. The new foreign policy is characterized by erratic decision making and the

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<sup>14</sup> Alida Vračić Turkey’s Role in the Western Balkans SWP. Research Paper Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs. RP 11 December 2016 Berlin. [Turkey’s Role in the Western Balkans \(swp-berlin.org\)](http://www.swp-berlin.org)

<sup>15</sup> Oya Dursun-Ozkanca, Ph.D. Turkish Foreign Policy and the Balkans: Implications on Transatlantic Security. [2013-May-Oya-Dursun-Ozkanca-LSEE-Presentation](#)

<sup>16</sup> Birgül Demirtaş. Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans: A Europeanised foreign policy in a de-europeanised national context? Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies 2015, VOL. XX, NO. X, 1–17 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/XXXXXXX.2015.XXXX> Routledge Taylor and Francis group 2015 [Turkish Foreign Policy towards the Balkans: A Europeanised Foreign Policy in a De-europeanised National Context? \(tandf.co.uk\)](http://www.tandf.co.uk)



authoritarian streak of President Erdogan.<sup>17</sup> Also we cannot exclude the 2020, Istanbul launch of the TurkStream pipeline. (In collaboration with Russia in 2014, it was proposed the plan for a natural gas pipeline running under the Black Sea up to the Turkish coast and from there to the Balkans and Central Europe). TurkStream has come, as an opposition to the European Union. (EU disputes with Gazprom associated by the Ukraine crisis and the Russian sanctions had presented a collapse to South Stream, an earlier pipeline). They used TurkStream as a vehicle for attracting foreign investment, revenue and gaining bargaining power for future deals.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Bi-regional relations between the Western Balkans and the Gulf countries

Many of the Middle Eastern Gulf countries, part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have increased cooperation with the Western Balkans. Out of them, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been the most involved in the region. This involvement has been through, the establishment of Al Jazeera Balkans by Qatar, the investment in mosques and religious schools by Saudi Arabia, and the Belgrade Waterfront project funded by the UAE. In addition, the Serbian air carrier is owned by Etihad airlines, and UAE has invested in the Serbian defense industry (this are just few examples). The Gulf states purchased over €561m worth of armaments from Western Balkans in 2016, supporting the arms industry. Saudi Arabia is the largest purchaser of weapons with around 118 million while the remaining were sold to Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, Algeria and the US. From the regional export Serbia has sales exceeding 400 million euros, Bosnia with 104.3 million, Albania with 1.28 million, North Macedonia 1.21 million and Montenegro with 1.13 million. Overall, the last ten years has seen a huge increase of the Gulf countries involvement in the region with positive

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<sup>17</sup> Ešref Kenan Rašidagić, Zora Hesova. Development of Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans with Focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatian International Relations Review · January 2020. [\(17\) \(PDF\) Development of Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Western Balkans with Focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina \(researchgate.net\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> Dimitar Bechev. Making Inroads: Competing Powers in the Balkans. The Balkans: Old, New Instabilities Edited by Giorgio Fruscione First edition: May 2020 [ispi\\_report\\_balcani\\_2020\\_0.pdf \(ispionline.it\)](#)

economic effects for both sides. Their involvement in cultural, educational, religious and political activities have raised questions regarding the long-term objectives.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, in 2017, the UAE gave to Serbia Official Development Assistance, holding two loans in total, to US\$1.2 billion, ahead of the EU institutions whose assistance was US\$500 million. Also the Emirates have made investments in the region in construction, agriculture, defense and aviation and most towards real estate and tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The UAE for now is mostly an economic actor but the regional political strategy is not excluded. The UAE involvement in the region is part of its attempt to make long-term investments that will help in its preparation towards its transition to the post-oil era. What is particular about the Balkans, is that the business environment is compatible with the UAE business that is characterized by informality, interpersonal relations and non-transparent procedures.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Qatar's influence ranges from 0.01% to 0.04% of total influence for 2016. Qatari influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina was much higher (1.02%). Therefore, Qatar is not a significant influential power in Western Balkans. Generally, the total flow of economic, political and security relationships is increasing. But while the relationships has increased, the opportunities to influence remains low. One reason is that Qatar operates more in the religious and cultural spheres, which are not measured. Bosnia and Herzegovina has high dependency on Qatar, mostly in the security sphere, due to a high level of arms donated in 1997. The political dependence on Qatar is also high due to its diplomatic representation in B&H. Moreover, economic relations between Qatar and Serbia have increased in 2016. Albania's has high economic dependency with Qatar due to a lot of loans for infrastructural investment and there are increasing political interactions, and there have been some relations with Kosovo and North Macedonia. Qatar is also attempting to gain social and cultural influence, especially in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia through presenting work package, visa-free travel, high economic investments and usage of media.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Arlinda Rrustemi, Rob de Wijk, Connor Dunlop, Jovana Perovska and Lirije Palushi. Understanding Geopolitical Influences of External Powers in Western Balkans. Geopolitical Influences of External Powers in the Western Balkans Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (2019): <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19582.4>

<sup>20</sup> Florian Bieber and Nikolaos Tzifakis. The Western Balkans as a Geopolitical Chessboard? Myths, Realities and Policy Options. Policy Brief 2019 [The Western Balkans as a Geopolitical Chessboard.pdf \(biepag.eu\)](http://www.biepag.eu/The_Western_Balkans_as_a_Geopolitical_Chessboard.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Arlinda Rrustemi, Rob de Wijk, Connor Dunlop, Jovana Perovska and Lirije Palushi. Geopolitical Influences of External Powers in the Western Balkans. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (2019) Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep19582.10>

But this presence, despite the economic benefits has increased regional fragility, the spread of Wahhabism doctrine which is facilitated by building and renovating hundreds mosques and schools, but this fundamentalism threatens the fragile cohesion among the Balkan Muslims and threatens ethnic relations. It is also reflected in producing the highest number of foreign fighters in the region who join armed groups in Iraq and Syria and they can disseminate radical ideas and fragility in the region. In contrast to Russia, which openly undermines the EU, both Turkey and the Gulf States still treat the region as a bridge to the EU. In the near future the impact of both on the region will depend on four factors.

- The first one relates to how the EU faces up to current challenges. If the EU weakens internally and/or its enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans halts, other external actors including the Gulf States and Turkey will seek to fill the vacuum and not necessarily for the benefit of the region
- The second factor is the wider geopolitical environment in the Middle East. As political, economic and security interdependence between these regions increases, the Western Balkans will be increasingly susceptible to import both their positive and negative influences.
- The third factor is how the EU's relationships with Turkey and the Gulf States will evolve. Their deterioration would deepen tensions in the Western Balkans while a wider geopolitical convergence would boost regional resilience. For example, a proposed formal end of accession talks following Turkey's controversial constitutional referendum and the announced retaliatory withdrawal of Ankara from the migrant deal with the EU might have a devastating effect on all states along the Balkan route.
- Finally, if the democratic backsliding in the Western Balkans continues and a solution to the political stalemate in Bosnia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia/Kosovo is not found, external players will be increasingly tempted to exploit divisions in the region, thus seriously jeopardize its development and prosperity.<sup>22</sup>

## Concluding remarks

Through this chapter: **Aims, ways, means and interests of external factors in the WB 6 region** I tried to present how different external actors affect the Western Balkan region but also they affect the EU as well. The fields where this external actors act upon

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<sup>22</sup> Filip Ejodus. THE IMPACT OF TURKEY AND THE GULF STATES. Resilience in the Western Balkans European. Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) (2017). <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep07086.11>

range from economic to political but the most suspicious is the cultural and religious one through which extremism can be promoted and endured.

I firstly, presented The Alliance as the primary guarantor of Balkans' security and tried to point out that this is true for the region and for the EU and the relationship between the three players is of crucial importance to stability and security. Furthermore, I elaborate on the change and continuity in Russia's modus operandi, which in reality represents the hidden face of Russia's foreign policy. In the next sub-chapter I presented that the Balkans are at the center of Turkey's foreign policy and the interest have changed from playing the soft power mediator to Erdogans foreign policy. And at the end I presented the Bi-regional relations between the Western Balkans and the Gulf countries, which have been very active in the past ten years especially in the economic sphere, but as all the other actors mentioned above they have also a hidden agenda besides the economic one in the Western Balkan region. Therefore, the EU should finally open the doors for the region because if it does not it will live the door open for other actors to operate as they are already doing, and it will create the possibility for them to open the Pandora box from where there is no escape not for the region and not for itself.

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