

GLOBAL SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AFTER THE ESCALATION OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

Dušan Proroković
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**GLOBAL SECURITY
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AFTER THE ESCALATION
OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS**

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

The publication of the collection of papers *Global security and international relations after the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis* was initiated by the Institute for International Politics and Economics and the Faculty of Security of the University of Belgrade, together with prestigious scientific institutions from Italy and the USA – the Department of Political Sciences of the Sapienza University of Rome and Austin Peay State University of Clarksville.

In an era marked by rapid technological advances, changing power dynamics, and global challenges, the field of international relations is constantly evolving. Observation, analysis and continuous monitoring of global trends and phenomena and processes that determine international security is extremely important both for conducting new research and for concrete decisions that should be made by various state institutions in order to overcome current crises. International relations are changing, numerous transformations are taking place through confrontations, which brings us completely new challenges, risks and threats that threaten global, regional and national security.

In three different chapters, in 27 articles, 38 authors from 12 countries (Bulgaria, France, Slovakia, Switzerland, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the USA) discussed the issues of global changes and the role of great powers in those processes, European security architecture (continental security) and regional relations, as well as Balkan regional security in changing international circumstances. The results of those considerations are conclusions that will help further research, improvement of existing and development of new theories of international relations. The review team composed of scientists from China, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia and the USA gave full contribution to this epilogue of the joint project of the publishers of the collection of papers.

Prof. dr. Branislav Đorđević, Director of
the Institute of International Politics and Economics
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SERBIA IN A CHANGING EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract: Today, we are witnessing a change in historical epochs, with significant transformations occurring in European and global architecture. This stage of human development is accompanied by economic, political, and regional crises. The Balkans is no exception. Having gone through wars, division of territories, and economic and political crises, the Serbs are trying to become equal members of Europe, preserving their territorial integrity and national independence. These issues will be discussed in the report.

Keywords: Serbia, Europe, EU, Balkans, security.

Today, we are witnessing a change in historical epochs, with significant transformations occurring in European and global architecture. This stage of human development is accompanied by economic, political, and regional crises. The Balkans is no exception. Having gone through wars, territorial division, and economic and political crises, the Serbs are trying to become equal members of Europe, preserving their territorial integrity and national independence. These issues will be discussed in the report.

For the Central and Southeastern European region, the problem of prospects for the development of European structures is relevant today, and not only theoretically. Indeed, for a long time, many countries have offered the palm branch in the practice of foreign policy aspirations to Western European integration institutions. How reliable is this idea in the context of the growing concept of Eurasianism? Many scientists raise the question of the future of Eurasianism, considering it a node and the beginning of a new world culture.

Once stability existed in the Western European region, it was supported by a common security space, strong economic cooperation, a common European culture, a similar mentality, and stable government structures. At the dawn of European integration in our country, we carefully considered the processes of mutual state economic liberalisation taking place in Western European countries, which were then new to us. Economists and political scientists have studied the mechanisms of merging markets for goods and services and the social and economic consequences of intertwining

economies. In the 1990s, it seemed that Western-style liberal democracy had no alternative and that ideological confrontations had come to an end.

Europe has gone through the inevitable stage of romanticism, later followed by the adaptation of ideas to realistic political and economic conditions in a favourable external environment. The development of all European structures requires political stability and the tangible interests of the leading allies. Only in such conditions could the federalist idea of creating a model of unification as the United States of Europe be realised.

In recent decades, the functional problems of international and European organisations (EU, UN, and Security Council) have not only been identified but also expanded. The specifics of integration ties and the internal economic structure formed according to the “dependent market” model do not guarantee sustainable development, especially in times of crisis. Therefore, it is important to consider the radically changing geopolitical reality. The EU's existential crisis is already evident and increasingly discussed in EU countries and its institutions. It can be complex in nature and extend to the following areas: migration, unity of positions on foreign and domestic policy, and attitude towards emerging military conflicts. As a result, the EU may be overwhelmed by increased regionalisation and attention to the national interests of individual countries, especially in Southeastern Europe.

Today, the idea of Eurasianism has clearly emerged and begun to develop. Therefore, we will have to rebuild. The partnership should be constructive. It will be necessary to create organisations with a broader character that will be able to strengthen pan-European cooperation and prevent the danger of subsequent disagreements and contradictions by taking integrational steps in the future. European leaders, aware of the existing problems and thinking about possible changes, have published five hypothetical scenarios of changes in the mechanisms of European integration. Therefore, discussions on the fate of European integration will last a long time.

Serbia has been striving to become an EU member for a long time. This path became difficult for Serbia because the political content prevailed over the economic one in the criteria for joining the EU. The constant tossing of the country's political leadership between national interests, historical past, traditions, and the desire to please the European Union inevitably led to difficulties in political development and the rise of Euroscepticism. The situation is complicated by the unresolved problems of Kosovo and the

favourable attitude of the European leadership towards the accession of the self-proclaimed province to the EU.

According to several scientists, the European Union is in crisis. Therefore, the question of whether it is necessary to expand the borders of the EU is irrelevant. According to one point of view, a way out of it is the admission of new members, among other things. That would show that the EU continues to move forward and develop. The list of states seeking membership includes the countries of the former Yugoslavia (except Slovenia and Croatia, which have already joined the ranks of the European Union). The space of the Balkan Peninsula itself has recently become increasingly important in international and, especially, European politics. The Balkans is not just a group of closely located states but a historical and cultural community. Since signing the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, the European Union has defined the main outlines of its policy in the Balkans. The EU announced its participation in the process of rebuilding the region, taking measures to overcome friction and conflicts, as well as the inclusion of this space in the process of European integration. In the following years, the European Union developed relations with the Balkan states based on regional approaches developed by the EU Council aimed at stabilising the internal situation in individual states of the region and developing democratic institutions and principles of the rule of law.

In the summer of 2003, Serbia adopted a plan to harmonise economic relations with the EU and was ready to radically change legislation, the economy, the army, military doctrine, domestic and foreign policy, human rights, interethnic, and confessional relations. However, Europe has cooled Serbia's ardour. Brussels conditioned the continuation of talks about European integration on the fulfilment of additional conditions. These conditions were not only economic in nature.

For Serbia, the conditions set by the EU were difficult: cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, recognition of Serbia's guilt for starting wars in the 1990s, abandoning the autonomous province of Kosovo, expanding the rights of Muslims in Sandžak, holding gay parades, etc. The country's leadership, unlike the people, was ready to accept the conditions and began to fulfil some of them immediately: it apologised to all parties to the conflict, condemned all crimes committed and not committed by the Serbs, agreed to negotiations with the leadership of Kosovo, and restored economic and political relations with all the republics of the former Yugoslavia.

In 2008, Serbia signed an "Interim Agreement", which was considered only a symbolic step towards EU membership. After signing the agreement,

the painful process of fulfilling the conditions for its "unblocking" began and lasted until 2010.

The stages along this path were the arrest and transfer to the tribunal of the President of the Republic of Srpska (RS), Radovan Karadžić, consent to the deployment of the European EULEX mission in Kosovo, designed to prepare Kosovo for independence, and the holding of gay parades. However, Brussels has always demanded more: the arrest of the commander of the RS Army, General Ratko Mladić, the President of the Republic of Srpska Krajina, Goran Hadžić, and recognition of Kosovo's independence. The last requirement was called "normalisation of relations".

According to France's proposal, the decision on the Serbian candidature for the EU should depend on the mutual recognition of Serbia and Kosovo. In 2015, Serbia was required not only to recognise the full independence of Kosovo but also to coordinate its foreign policy with the EU, which implies the imposition of sanctions against Russia.

But today, the European Union itself needs to be reformed. This is being talked about not only by journalists but also by EU deputies and the leaders of many European states. "The EU needs reform" is the opinion of many members of this organisation. This opinion is based on many large and small facts and manifestations. But certain difficulties in communication with several countries, for example, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia, have become obvious.

The upcoming election campaign for the European Parliament will be held in 2024. Therefore, in European political circles, discussions are again being raised about the possibility of revising the principle of unanimity in decision-making on foreign policy and security issues. We are talking about using the principle of a qualified majority when voting on important issues.

This problem has become more acute for the EU, not only because of the Ukrainian and Middle East crises, which have significantly changed the geopolitical space in which the Union operates. Problems began to manifest themselves even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when a multi-level decision-making system did not allow for a rapid response to the challenges of 2020.

The fact that among the states that advocate a change in the principle of decision-making, there are such heavyweights as Germany, Italy, and France testifies to the desire of the EU leading countries to reconsider the provisions underlying the functioning of the entire EU.

The EU is going to continue the expansion process. However, this is done for political reasons and could complicate the functioning of the EU. We are increasingly hearing about the prospects of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Balkan countries joining the EU. Currently, Albania (since 2009), Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 2022), Moldova (since 2022), North Macedonia (since 2004), Serbia (since 2009), Ukraine (since 2022), and Montenegro (since 2008) have the status of an EU candidate. The most interesting is the application of Ukraine, which got the candidate status largely due to the aggravation of the conflict with Russia.

The European Union is waiting for reforms. The essence of the reforms is to expand the powers of the European Commission and other Brussels institutions of the EU and further limit the competencies of the member states' governments. The right of veto in the EU Council will be discussed, as well as future security mechanisms.

The war in Ukraine turned out to be the catalyst that revealed and exacerbated the problems that have been developing in the EU for many years. They were not so noticeable until the war in Ukraine showed that the world is changing and international organisations, including the EU, the UN, and NATO, need to reform based on new realities. However, few people talk about it today.

Some European experts believe that the EU should try to find a new position that will allow it to become an independent player from the United States. And, then, multilateral relations and international partnerships will be based on common interests.

Part I
GLOBAL CHANGES AND THE ROLE
OF GREAT POWERS

THE GREAT UNRAVELLING: THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND WORLD ORDERS

Richard SAKWA

University of Kent, United Kingdom

Abstract: In 1945, humanity came together to create the Charter international system. It expressed the hope that after the most catastrophic war the world had yet seen, a superior system of international relations could emerge. The result was the United Nations and its foundational Charter, reinforced subsequently by numerous declarations, protocols and conventions. The system worked and delivered many public goods, above all through the system's specialised agencies. The creation of a Security Council with five permanent members sought to remedy the failings of the Versailles system and the League of Nations, created in 1919, by providing a stronger steering committee for international politics. The system remains in operation today, but is facing unprecedented challenges. From the beginning, the practices of international politics were incommensurate with Charter aspirations. The creation of competing blocs (world orders) in Cold War 1 prevented consensus on fundamental matters. When the Soviet bloc disintegrated in 1989-91 the Charter system faced a new challenge – the striving for global hegemony of the remaining world order, the political West led by the US. This bloc claimed certain tutelary privileges, formulated initially in terms of a 'liberal international order' and later in the form of the 'rules-based order' over the Charter international system. This generated conflicts and even wars, with the result that Cold War II today is more challenging and dangerous than the first.

Keywords: Charter international system, United Nations, international politics, sovereign internationalism, democratic internationalism, political West, political East.

An international system endows an era with the normative framework for the conduct of international politics.¹ This paper distinguishes between

¹ This paper draws on Richard Sakwa, 'Crisis of the International System and International Politics', *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2023, pp. 70-91.

a 'system' and 'world orders', between an international system and international politics. An international system is a combination of norms, procedures and institutions, with the latter not necessarily formalised; whereas international politics relates to the conduct of states and their interactions. It is in the sphere of international politics that distinctive world orders are created. After 1945 the US created a political order of its own, the political West, while the Soviet Union established a communist bloc, which lasted until 1989-91. China formally repudiates bloc politics, despite aligning with other states, and hence will not establish a 'world order' of its own based on alliance ties, although dependencies are not excluded. In keeping with realist thinking, Henry Kissinger (2014) famously failed to distinguish between order and system. As far as realists are concerned, the shifting patterns of alliances, hostilities and balances of power represent the entirety of what matters in international relations. No one suggests that Charter international system today functions as anything akin to a world government, but it does provide the normative framework in which international politics is conducted (cf. Bull, 1977/1995). The increased divergence between systemic norms and the practices of international politics has plunged the Charter international system into the deepest crisis since its foundation after the Second World war.

International system versus international politics

The post-1945 Charter system drew lessons from the failure the League of Nations in the interwar years. The League had been unable to respond adequately to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 followed by the full-scale invasion of China in 1937. Neither was it able to avert the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 or provide any meaningful intervention in the Spanish Civil War the following year. In April 1946 the League was formally disbanded, with its assets and archives transferred to the newly-formed UN. The list of failures of the UN system is also an increasingly long one. Beginning with the US invasion of Panama in 1990, a series of US post-Cold War interventions have been conducted without even the fig leaf of formal UN sanction, and in many cases represent overt breaches of international law. The 1999 bombing of campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, followed by the forced change of an internationally-recognised border, demonstrated the continued divergence between declared norms and avowed practices. US-led interventions in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, accompanied by destabilisation operations in Syria and elsewhere, illustrate how the rules-based order has become a law unto itself. The Russo-

Ukraine war is the culmination of a long period of divergence, in which behavioural patterns of international politics have increasingly deviated from the norms and practices of the Charter system.

In Europe there have been a succession of international systems, but each incorporates the achievements of earlier ones while learning from the failures. The details change, but the fundamental problem of regulating an anarchic state-based international politics remains the same. The Peace of Westphalia brought an end to the Thirty Years' War in 1648 by codifying the sovereignty of princes. This eventually led to the definition of principles of national sovereignty. The Peace of Utrecht in 1715, at the end of the War of Spanish Succession, formalised the age of empire. The Congress of Vienna (1814-15), at the end of the era of revolutionary convulsions and Napoleonic conquests, introduced an ideological element into what became the Congress international system. The Holy Alliance brought together the conservative monarchies of Austria, Russia and Prussia to suppress republican challengers. Russia came to the aid of the threatened Hapsburg monarchy in 1848, but soon found itself the target of an 'anti-autocratic' alliance in the Crimean War (1853-56). The Vienna system nevertheless lasted for a century, but it had little to offer in the age of imperialism and intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries. The system of great power politics generated tensions that finally led to the catastrophic war of 1914-1918. The search after World War I for a more rational way of managing international politics gave rise to the League of Nations, whose failings we have already noted.

After another bout of the endemic European civil war between 1939 and 1945, the Charter international system provided a formula to prevent a reversion to the great power conflicts of the past while providing the framework for a positive peace order in the future. In 1945, humanity came together to create the Charter international system. It expressed the hope that after the most catastrophic war the world had yet seen, a comprehensive set of normative principles and institutional practices would prevent a recurrence of such a conflict. By coming together on a set of shared principles, the hope was that an improved system of international relations would emerge. The result was the United Nations and its foundational Charter, reinforced subsequently by numerous declarations, protocols and conventions. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted as well as the Genocide Convention, and in 1966 the UN adopted its Convention on Social and Economic Rights. The system worked and delivered many public goods, above all through the system's two dozen specialised agencies. The creation of a Security Council with five permanent

members sought to remedy the failings of the League of Nations by providing a stronger steering committee for international politics.

The UN seeks to balance the interests of the great powers (through the Security Council comprising what at the time of its founding were the five leading powers) with the sovereignty of the community of nations. The UN Charter provides the foundations for a system that repudiates the logic of war and provides a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of conflict. The UN is also at the heart of a dense network of international organisations, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation as well as UNESCO, dealing with culture. The UN remains the centre of multilateral diplomacy and provides the normative framework for international politics. It is far from a world government, but its norms and statutes establish the framework for what is considered legitimate and legal, and what is not. The system remains in operation today, but is facing unprecedented challenges.

The Charter peace order moderates great power politics, seeking to transcend the traditional lexicon of the balance of power and spheres of interest. Its operative principle is sovereign internationalism. Gerry Simpson couches this in terms of 'charter liberalism', advancing a pluralist concept of international politics. He describes charter liberalism as a 'procedure for organizing relations among diverse communities'. Simpson contrasts this with 'liberal anti-pluralism', which he defines as 'a liberalism that can be exclusive and illiberal in its effects', above all in its 'lack of tolerance for non-liberal regimes'. In the terms described above, this is analogous to democratic internationalism, imposing standards on the conduct of international affairs that constrains traditional forms of diplomacy between great powers, respecting their interests even when divided by ideological and ethical differences. Thus, in Simpson's analysis, liberalism divides into two traditions: 'an evangelical version that views liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine or a social good worth promoting and the other more secular tradition emphasizing proceduralism and diversity' (Simpson, 2001, pp. 539, 560).

This division is crucial to understanding international relations in the post-Cold War era. The tension between sovereign internationalism, in which respect for sovereignty is tempered by commitment to Charter values, and democratic internationalism, the expansive and illiberal view of international politics, shapes international politics. It can be described as the metapolitics of our era. There is not only a clash between world orders, in particular the US-led rules-based order, and the alignment of Russia, China and some other

states, but also ontological contestation at the level of the international system. This was not the case in Cold War I, and explains why Cold War II is so much deeper and more intractable. The palpable ideological differences of Cold War I, with capitalist democracies pitted against the legacy powers of revolutionary socialism, in this light appear as relatively superficial. Cold War I was conducted *within* the framework of the Charter international system (however much observed in the breach), whereas Cold War II is *about* the system itself. This double conflict, operating simultaneously at the level of system and orders, imbues the conflict with unprecedented depth, while at the same time remaining amorphous and protean.

Post-cold war contradictions

The Charter formula for postwar peace has lost none of its relevance, but the post-catastrophe spirit of the era in which it was formulated has dissipated. Instead, the spirit of the 1910s and the 1930s has returned, with pre-war tensions and illusions running rampant, with few restraining voices. The distinction between system and order outlined above helps explain the reversion to a new type of cold war. When the Soviet bloc disintegrated in 1989-91 the Charter system faced a new challenge – the striving for global hegemony of the remaining bloc, the political West led by the US. This bloc claimed certain tutelary privileges, formulated initially in terms of a ‘liberal international order’ and later in the form of the ‘rules-based order’ (Dugard, 2023). The part effectively tried to substitute for the whole, the particular for the universal. This generated conflicts and even wars. The second Cold War today is more challenging and dangerous than the first.

From the beginning, the practices of international politics came into contradiction with Charter aspirations. The creation of competing blocs in Cold War 1 prevented consensus on fundamental matters. At the same time, these contradictions were exacerbated by fundamental differences at the level of international political economy, although tempered to a degree by some universalistic international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the World Council of Churches. The end of Cold War I provided an opportunity for the practices of international politics and the norms of the Charter system to come into closer alignment. The intense ideological divisions of the earlier period were no longer relevant, and the world appeared to be converging on a set of common standards and norms. In the negative peace of Cold War

I conflict was managed rather than transcended, but after 1989 it was assumed that an era of positive peace would be inaugurated, in which cooperative endeavour would allow development and greater well-being (Sakwa, 2023). This was also the era of globalisation, in which the economic imperatives of global trade and investment were assumed to generate a more pacific set of behaviours. Competition would shift from military confrontation to economic rivalry (e.g., Pinker, 2011). The course of history proved to be very different.

Without the constraining influence of bipolarity one of the blocs created in Cold War I now claimed tutelary rights over the system as a whole. The US had always been wary of subordinating its autonomy in foreign policy to an external agency. This was the reason for the Senate failing to ratify US membership of the League of Nations in 1920. By contrast, after 1945 the US was a founder member of the Charter system and invested in its development, in the belief that the legitimacy of US actions would be enhanced when sanctioned by an international authority (Wertheim, 2020). However, the US always reserved the right to act independently, and it did so in the majority of Cold War I conflicts. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and its alliance system, the unipolar era was marked by a great substitution. Liberal hegemony acted as the substitute for Charter norms, and for the pluralism that they represented.

The Charter system is based on sovereign internationalism, the equality of all states engaging in international politics, combined with a commitment to the multilateralism represented by the Charter system. It was on this basis that the Soviet Union, China and some other great powers associated to become founder members. However, after 1991 the political West usurped the rights and norms of the Charter system. Democratic internationalism was advanced as the operative norms. Democratic internationalism, with its emphasis on human rights and liberal constitutionalism is outwardly attractive, but it is based on the ideology of democratism – the instrumental application of democratic norms in the service not of the democratic preferences of an actually existing demos but an idealised representation of these preferences (Finley, 2022; Sakwa, 2023). Democratism is to democracy what dogmatic Marxism-Leninism is to socialism.

The practices of international politics, driven by the ambitions of the US-led political West, increasingly diverged from Charter norms (Devji, 2024). The notion of a ‘liberal international order’ makes sense in terms of power politics and the development of a globalised economic order, but by definition it presumes a distance from the international system in which it

is ostensibly embedded. During Cold War I the parallel systems more or less coexisted, since excess ambitions were constrained by the existence of a powerful military and ideological alternative. This rival order, indeed, prompted the political West to implement reforms drawn from the adversary to maintain its own viability. The creation of welfare states in Western Europe had deep internal roots, but rivalry meant that domestic constituencies had to be satisfied to avoid alienation and sympathy for the enemy. Even the US was affected by this dynamic, although tempered by the prosperity generated by the permanent war economy and an all-encompassing informational ecosystem.

With the constraints removed, the political West went into over-drive. The language of unipolarity, of 'the indispensable nation' and 'exceptionalism' rendered sovereign internationalism redundant. In the economic sphere, the imperatives of globalisation allegedly compressed the imperatives of time and space. The universalistic aspirations of liberal hegemony transcended particular histories and traditions. The liberal international order rebranded itself as the rules-based order, based on the presumption that it was something separate and distinct from the Charter system. The UN was marginalised in the bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999 and the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and was unable to resolve the deepening crisis of European security. NATO enlargement in technical terms may have been rational, but in substantive terms it represented the repudiation of the idea of indivisible security embedded in all the fundamental agreements regulating the European security order, from the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in November 1990, through to the Istanbul declaration of November 1999 and the Astana Declaration of December 2010. The UN became an arena for the airing of divisions rather than a forum for their resolution. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the culmination of a long period in the degradation of the conduct of international politics. The divergence between Charter norms and the practices of international politics practices is complete.

The political East

Two models of world order are becoming increasingly distinct. They are based on contrasting ideas of how international affairs should be conducted – sovereign internationalism versus democratic internationalism. These diverging representations are now gaining an increasingly sharp spatial (geopolitical) profile. The loose alignment that we call the political East

brings together states defending sovereign internationalism. At its core is the Sino-Russian alignment, which is an unprecedented phenomenon. Two great powers, perhaps better described as civilisation-states, with divergent although entangled histories, have come together in a novel manner. Sometimes described as a quasi-alliance relationship, its foundation is a common approach to international politics.

This was reflected in the wording of the Joint Statement of 4 February 2022, issued by President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin when they met at the opening of the Beijing Winter Olympics. The statement condemned the attempt by 'certain states' to impose their 'democratic standards', asserting that China and Russia both have 'long-standing traditions of democracy'. Hence, 'it is only up to the people of the country to decide whether their state is a democratic one'. The statement condemned 'further NATO enlargement' and called on the alliance to 'abandon its ideologised Cold War approaches'. Above all, the statement affirmed the centrality of the UN Charter and the UDHR as 'fundamental principles, which all states must comply with and observe in deeds'. This was summed up as follows:

The sides underline that Russia and China, as world powers and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, intend to firmly adhere to moral principles and accept their responsibility, strongly advocate the international system with the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international affairs, defend the world order based on international law, including the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, advance multipolarity and promote the democratization of international relations, together create an even more prospering, stable, and just world, jointly build international relations of a new type.

The fundamental principle was that 'No state can or should ensure its own security separately from the security of the rest of the world and at the expense of the security of other states' – a position that Russia advanced since the end of Cold War I. Interstate relations between Russia and China were defined as superior to political and military alliances of the Cold War era. Friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation, strengthening of bilateral strategic cooperation is neither aimed against third countries nor affected by the changing international environment and circumstantial changes in third countries (Joint Statement, 2022).

Russia's longstanding critique of US exceptionalist and hegemonic ambitions was now joined by a China intent on asserting its status as a global

power. The statement rejected the notion that the two countries were 'global autocracies' out to subvert Western liberal democracies and instead appealed for pluralism in an international system based on Charter principles, the 'Charter liberalism' identified by Simpson. Order in international affairs could only be established on this basis. The alternative was disorder and permanent conflict.

Not all commentators in the political east hold this view. An influential group argues that the rupture with the political West at the level of international politics should be extended to a break with the international system in its entirety. For example, the Russian academic Sergei Karaganov argues that 'The United Nations is going to extinct [*sic*], saddled with Western bureaucrats and therefore unreformable. There is no need to tear it down, but it is necessary to build parallel bodies based on BRICS+, and an expanded SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation], and their integration with the Organization of African Unity [the African Union], the Arab League, ASEAN, and Mercosur. In the interim, it may be possible to create a permanent conference of these institutions within the UN' (Karaganov, 2024). In other words, the alternative was to be nurtured within the UN system, but it was not clear whether the goal was to supersede the Charter system or to wrest control back from the political West.

The mainstream view in the political east remains committed to making the Charter system work as originally intended. This view is no longer restricted to Russia and China. Its is echoed in all the fundamental statements of the BRICS+ organisation, consisting of the five original members (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and five new members as of January 2024: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. It is also reflected in the statements of the SCO, currently uniting eight countries: China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and six 'dialogue partners': Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey. The mere enumeration of these countries demonstrates the utility of the concept of a 'political East'. It encompasses the distinctive dynamics of Northern Eurasia (formerly described as the post-Soviet space), Southwest Asia (once known as the Middle East), East and South Asia, as well as the Global South (once described as the Third World). This is reflected in the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) aligning integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The political East reflects the maturation of the international system, within whose framework decolonisation was conducted in the postwar

years. The 200 countries now making up the inter-state system each asserts its sovereignty, although many remain burdened by neo-colonial legacies. At the same time, sovereignty is tempered by commitment to Charter internationalism, and thus is far removed from the statist fundamentalism considered a hallmark of the Westphalian international system.

The political West

On the other side, there is a restless and expansive political West. As noted, this 'world order' makes claims that subvert the prerogatives of the Charter international system. The ideology of democratic internationalism brooks no compromises (at least, when it comes to adversaries), and undermines the accustomed practices of diplomacy. Liberal hegemony lacks a territorial ethnonym but it is not spaceless or timeless. My argument is that after 1945 a specific type of power system took shape. The political West created during Cold War I was shaped by cold war practices. Its survival after 1989 precisely perpetuated those cold war characteristics. It claimed victory in the Cold War, but that very framing was not only problematic but destructive of the very victory that was claimed. It perpetuated rather than transcended the Cold War, which was no victory at all (except in a very narrow and impoverished philosophical sense).

The political West's normative framework is congruent with the Charter international system. It was on this basis that the US was able to contribute so much to its establishment. This brings us to a fundamental point. The political West combines two powerful impulses. The first can be labelled the spirit of 'commonwealth', the developmental and democratic agenda at the heart of the liberal international order. However, in cold war conditions this was accompanied by the creation of an overweening 'imperial' dimension. America's overwhelming military and economic power at the end of the Second World War was translated into a permanent war economy, the creation of NATO and a network of military bases globally. The political West is based on an Atlanticism that excludes other spatial configurations, such as European pan-continentalism.

The Atlantic power system ensures the permanent subordination of European powers to American strategic concerns. Nevertheless, the political West of Cold War I was more of a common enterprise in the face of a common danger. There was scope for substantive political divergence, including Charles de Gaulle's expulsion of NATO installations from France, German's *Ostpolitik* and Europe's economic and energy engagement, often

against US wishes, with the Soviet Union. In Cold War II the scope for European independent political initiatives narrowed, despite much talk of 'strategic autonomy'. After 2022 bloc discipline further reduced autonomy almost to vanishing point, although the threat of a second Trump presidency revived such aspirations. Autonomy in economic management, regulatory regimes, technological innovation and industrial strategy remain, but the development of a common European foreign, security and defence identity remain circumscribed.

The political West's dual character – between empire and commonwealth – is reflected in a duality at the heart of the American polity. As early as 1955 Hans Morgenthau identified a 'regular state hierarchy' operating within the bounds of the constitutional state, the law and democratic institutions, and a 'security state', sometime called a 'deep state'. According to Morgenthau, the security state enjoyed an effective veto over the decisions of the regular state and is based on an effective choicelessness. Its definition of security trumps all other options, whereas the regular state operates in the realm of political alternatives – although they are foreclosed by the securitisation exercised by the security state (Morgenthau, 1962, p. 400; see also Tunander, 2009). Michael Glennon (2015) took up the theme, describing how a 'Trumanite' state was forged in the Cold War, establishing enduring connections between the various branches of the military and intelligence agencies, the political class, the media, think tanks and some universities. This represented a structural transformation of the American state, in which military contractors, the armed services and their civilian acolytes play an outsize role, to the detriment of diplomacy and traditional statecraft. Constitutional control withered because of the inherent complexity of national security issues as well as the enduring bipartisan ideological consensus on America's primacy and hegemony in world affairs. Hence the 'Madisonian' constitutional state, the formal institutions of governance encompassing democratic organs such as the presidency, Congress, the judiciary and elections, are overshadowed by Trumanite imperatives. Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961) referred to this in his farewell address on 17 January 1961 when he warned against the corrupting influence of the 'military-industrial complex', the combination of 'an immense military establishment and a large arms industry', which he noted was 'something new to the American experience'. He warned that 'the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist'. Eisenhower argued that the creation of a permanent war economy would skew the priorities of American foreign policy and divert resources from domestic needs. There is a large literature which argues that this indeed took

place (e.g., McCartney, 2015). Glennon argues that the bipartisan consensus of a militarised US grand strategy endures despite the regular turnover in political leadership. US foreign and security policy remain remarkably consistent. Barack Obama's White House staffer Ben Rhodes attributed this policy continuity to the enduring influence of the foreign policy establishment, which he labels 'the blob' (Walt, 2019, pp. 91-136).

The political West is intolerant of external challenges, and thus despite rhetorical support for pluralism and tolerance, it immanently generates Simpson's 'liberal anti-pluralism'. This in turn generates neo-containment practices against potential rivals (Mearsheimer, 2014). This makes the political West inherently hermetic – deaf to the appeals of outsiders. By definition, diplomacy is about dialogue and compromise, but in a Manichean world complex issues are simplified and dialogue is considered a reward to be doled out sparingly only to those considered deserving of the privilege. Compromise is considered the betrayal of virtue. The return of the category of evil in international politics precludes normal interstate politics. Rational decision-making, diplomatic statecraft and security dialogue are undermined (Diesen, 2017). Moreover, questioning the purpose and perspectives of the political West is suppressed through ramified systems of information management. External critique is classed as a challenge to the unity of the allies to drive a 'wedge' between the two wings of the Atlantic power system. Bloc unity becomes an end in itself, even if the consequences became increasingly dysfunctional. The 'exceptionalism' that has long characterised US national identity is now projected through the collective agencies of the political West. Predictably, benign intent generates malign outcomes (Lieven and Hulsman, 2006, 2006). Empire triumphs over commonwealth.

Unravelling the Charter system

As the postwar titan, the US resented the constraints imposed by multilateralism. Nevertheless, in the postwar era the US understood that the unrestricted exercise of power comes with its own costs. Learning from its failure to join the League of Nations, influential Washington policy makers from 1940 argued that embedding US power in a multilateral format would enhance the legitimacy of its power and enhance the prospects for a more durable peace (Wertheim, 2020). The US repeatedly exercised unilateral power in Cold War I, including numerous regime change

operations and military interventions without UN sanction, but its formal commitment to the Charter system endured.

After 1989, the political West radicalised. In the absence of even a near competitor, US power and the expansive ambitions of the political West tolerated no challengers. US leadership in international politics was expected and routine, but the post-Cold War urge towards primacy was something else. Undersecretary of defence for policy, Paul Wolfowitz, in early 1992 produced a notorious paper that came to be known as the doctrine bearing his name. This later provided the foundations for what became known as the Bush Doctrine. The document was imperial in tone and proclaimed a policy of unilateralism and pre-emptive military interventions to counter threats to American dominance. The core postulate was 'to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power' (Wolfowitz, 2000, p. 309). This is a classic principle of offensive realism, as outlined by John Mearsheimer, and wholly rejects the normative dimension represented by Charter multilateralism.

A great substitution was in motion. Instead of the US-led political West remaining a sub-set of the Charter system, it now claimed directive prerogatives that properly belonged to the system as a whole. These claims were couched in terms of a 'rules-based order', implying that the Charter system did not adequately provide for globally-applicable rules and norms. The inordinate prerogatives claimed by the sub-system were roundly condemned by Russia, China and the political East more broadly. They were branded as a revived manifestation of neo-imperial ambitions and the traditional hegemonism of the West. The substitution of a part for the whole generated resistance. For the political West hegemony was the price to pay in defence of democracies against resurgent autocracies. This framing generated bloc discipline on the one side while stigmatising opponents on the other. The great substitution has a number of effects.

First, it undermines the very idea of sovereign internationalism, the foundation of the Charter international system, and thus erodes these foundations. The rights and interests of a state is judged legitimate only to the degree that they are in conformity with the rules and norms advanced by the rules-based powers. Democratic internationalism assumes a higher source of legitimate international authority, namely the appeal to ineffable and incontestable natural rights, as adjudicated not by the UN or international law but by the rules-based powers themselves – in other words, by the political West. The great substitution marginalised the UN

and its agencies. Over the decades, the General Assembly adopted 180 resolutions on the Palestine issue and the Security Council 227, but Israel has consistently violated the stipulations. In particular, the Security Council's paralysis over wars in Palestine and Ukraine undermined the credibility of the UN as a whole. Multilateral institutions were ill-equipped to deal with such crises in international politics. As one commentary puts it as the war in Gaza after the 7 October 2023 atrocity dragged on, killing over 30,000 in the first five months, half of whom were women and children: 'Israel, with the backing of the US and the various pilot fish that follow it, has begun – or resumed, better put – a concerted attack on the UN, global justice, and altogether on international public space' (Lawrence, 2024). In the heartland of Europe, the public sphere has 'been cranking up the old mechanism of sanitising Germany by demonising Muslims' (Mishra, 2024, p. 11). The wars in Palestine and Ukraine intensified continuing discussion about the redundancy of the UN as the supreme voice of the international community (e.g., Klimkin and Umland, 2020). This was accompanied by calls for Russia to be stripped off its permanent Security Council seat (Carpenter, 2023).

A second outcome flows from this, namely the stifling of diplomacy and the generation of mimetic violence. If human rights are an absolute value, then an absolutist political practice is appropriate – how can there be compromises with evil? The Manichean black-and-white divisions of Cold War I have been taken to a wholly new level. The struggle between communism and capitalism was comprehensible and easily mobilised against the adversary, but today the lack of precision (how to define a democracy or an 'autocracy', and how to distinguish between friends and foes) generated an intense arbitrariness feeding into systemic practices of double standards. In Cold War II, double standards are not an epiphenomenon of hegemony but a systemic feature of an imperial mode of governance. This is where mimetic violence comes in. Fear that the other side is insidiously subverting the domestic order generates mimetic contagion, scapegoating and repression. René Girard (2003) identified the victim mechanism as sustaining social order by redirecting violence to the scapegoat and appropriative mimesis. He considered the imitation of the desire to possess an object (which includes status and identity) a characteristic of humans throughout the ages (see Palaver, 2013). The ritualised mimetic violence of scapegoating relieves a society of accumulated tensions. The symbolic allocation of responsibility for social ills to a particular subject deprives them of the most basic right, the right to life. The scapegoating principle is a universal phenomenon, although it takes many different forms (Girard, 2005; Girard and Freccero,

1989). As far as Moscow is concerned, the prevalent Russophobia in the political West (significantly, the Global South is largely immune) is a token of the scapegoating mechanism at work, with Russia held responsible for subverting Western democracies and a host of other ills. The Kremlin naturally is no stranger to the mechanism, holding the West responsible for stirring up domestic dissent and thus discrediting legitimate opposition.

Third, the struggle for mastery over Charter institutions has intensified. The political West increasingly votes as a disciplined bloc in the Security Council while deploying all manner of intimidatory techniques against recalcitrant powers to ensure that they vote the right way. This reduces the UN and its institutions into an instrument of cold war and great power struggle, and thereby undermines its autonomy and efficacy. As China assumed more leadership roles in multilateral agencies and organisations, including the World Bank and IMF, the political West fought back. By 2021 China led four of the UN's 15 specialised agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Telecommunications Union, the UN Industrial Development Organisation, and the International Civil Aviation Organisation. This prompted a coordinated response by the political West, fearing that the so-called 'revisionist' powers were subverting liberal order from within: 'They [the revisionist powers] begin by calling for reform of existing institutions, but over time the "salami slicing" of 'existing rules and norms can create significant weaknesses in international institutions that undermine the broader institutional order' (Goddard, 2022, p. 35). As the political East shifted from rule-taker to rule-maker, the hegemony of the political West eroded. Sergei Lavrov (2022), the Russian foreign minister, observed that 'the Americans have shown a tendency to privatise the secretariats of international organisations. They place their people in leading positions. To our great regret, they have influence over countries voting on personnel decisions. Americans are rushing round the world. What sovereign equality of states?'. A case in point is the alleged 'privatisation' of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) by agents of the political West, preventing impartial investigations into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere (Maté, 2019).

Fourth, the intensifying crisis of Charter multilateralism encourages the creation of alternatives and the bifurcation of international politics. The political West did this within the framework of the rules-based order, seeking to entrench its power within an alternative constellation. This included the idea of creating a 'League of Democracies', the first steps towards which were annual 'summits of democracies'. The political East

focused initially on creating alternative financial institutions and institutions in which the views of the non-Western powers were constitutionally entrenched. The world can be seen as dividing, on the one side, between defenders of 'empire', the tutelary role of the US and its allies over the multilateral institutions of the Charter international system, and on the other side, advocates of 'commonwealth', the belief that a better order of international politics is not only possible but essential, if humanity is to survive the various calamities it faces – ranging from irreversible and runaway climate change to the nuclear Apocalypse. This division in broad and far from consistent terms corresponds to 'historical divisions between colonizing states and colonized states and ethnic/cultural divisions between "white" states and "non-white" states' (Lawrence, 2024). Russia now positions itself at the head of a renewed anti-colonial drive, while the US and its allies are presented as avatars of a new-style liberal imperialism.

Fifth, the perennial debates over reform of the UN system. There are increasing demands for UN reform, above all by expanding the permanent members of the Security Council to include, at the minimum, India, Brazil and a representative from Africa. The absence of some major powers and regions from the Security Council undermines its credibility. Another important idea is changing the balance of responsibility between the Security Council and the General Assembly. There are many more ideas, but the enduring issue of UN reform is no closer to resolution today than it was in the past (Gordanić, 2022).

Conclusion

The Charter international system is threatened as never before. Globalisation is fragmenting into at least two potential streams, accompanied by the general degradation of diplomacy and the culture of international politics. Sanctions have become not an alternative to war but a way of conducting hostilities. Given the deadlock in the UN Security Council, the only universally legitimate source of sanctions and other global managerial and deterrence policies, nations have turned to the creation of alternative blocs and alignments to achieve their goals. The war in Ukraine from 2022 and the Israel-Hamas war from 2023 signal the breakdown of the aspirations for an enduring post-Cold War peace. Earlier, when the authority of the UN was flouted and its norms breached, there was a general awareness that some offence had taken place. Today this consensus is unravelling. The postwar period is coming to an end.

The relative stability ensured by the common understanding that the UN and its norms were the gold standard for international behaviour, long eroded, may finally be crumbling (Barabanov et al, 2018; see also 2022). Major wars in the past signalled the collapse of one international system accompanied by preparations for the creation of a new one. There are many indications that today we are at such a juncture, an inflection point indicating the end of one system and the search for another. However, unlike in earlier epochs, there are no substantive ideas of what a fundamentally new system would look like. There are no ideas waiting in the wings. The Charter international system still has mileage and potential. Some reforms, above all to the permanent composition of the Security Council, are necessary, and possibly in the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council. However, in the main, the principles and norms underlying the system remain the only realistic foundations for a viable international system.

The post-1945 international system is in crisis, but it is not necessarily a terminal one. New international systems are usually created after a major war and when novel ideas and potential institutional innovations have matured to the point that old ideas become anachronistic and old institutions outdated. This is not the case today. International politics is today still conducted in the long shadow of the great wars of the twentieth century, and no one has come up with better ideas on how to conduct international affairs. Reform of the UN is necessary, but not a sufficient condition to resolve the crisis. The Charter International System will remain the cornerstone of the international community for the foreseeable future. What is required to resolve the crisis is not a new international system but a new pattern in international politics. For that to occur leadership at the national level is required, accompanied by pressure from political associations and popular movements.

The fossilised structures of the Cold War have reproduced in new forms, prompting conflict and global polarisation. The wars of our times distract attention from the pressing challenges of climate change and global development. There is no common vision of the future or even a perspective that the future can be an improvement on the past. The political West is challenged by a slowly-constituting political East, a process that may restore balance in international politics and moderate the larger changes in the balance of power in international politics. It may also inspire a new type of globalisation, focused more on development and the delivery of public goods for domestic constituencies. A new emphasis on equality and control

over unbounded financialisation and the power of capital is part of the new political agenda. The opportunity to establish some sort of positive peace order after the end of the Cold war in 1989 was squandered, but as long as the Charter international system remains in place the framework remains for progressive initiatives and some sort of global peace order. The alternative is a global anarchy that threatens the very existence of humanity.

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PRINCIPLES FOR THE MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER

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Abstract: The unipolar world that briefly existed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union is gradually evolving into a multipolar world, a necessary development that, however, entails certain risks for the peace and security of mankind because the transition is encountering resistance from the former hegemon, the United States, and its vassals, the “collective West”. The illusions of Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History* (1992) are not entirely dissipated, as shown by the speeches of Western politicians, the aggressive interventionism of the United States and NATO in the internal affairs of other states, and the efforts to encircle Russia and China. Provocation is not an innocent act, and experience shows that provocations before and after the 2014 *coup d’état* in Kiev led to the current war in Ukraine and may lead to a new war in the Asia-Pacific region.

Multipolarity and multilateralism are at the heart of the United Nations Charter, which is akin to a world constitution. Multilateralism is based on fundamental principles of international law and international relations, including respect for the sovereignty of states, the self-determination of peoples, and the prohibition of the use of force. My *25 Principles of International Order*, submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in 2017, are well anchored in the UN Charter, UN treaties, the ICJ rulings, and pertinent resolutions of the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council.

A credibility gap has arisen regarding the UN system, its agencies, and associated institutions, including the ICJ and the ICC, particularly because of the non-implementation of UN norms and decisions by its judicial and quasi-judicial bodies. The UN remains a necessary institution, especially when it comes to addressing global challenges. All member states must agree to play by the same rules; otherwise, uncertainty in law and practice will result.

This essay explores pragmatic solutions to challenges to peace and international solidarity. The loss of the UN’s authority and credibility calls for redefining and reinvigorating the institutions to serve the interests of humanity and not just those of a privileged minority of states. With the end of the US-hegemonic international order, it is also time to consider whether

the seat of the UN Headquarters should be moved from New York and installed in a country more representative of the global majority.

Keywords: World order, multipolar order, international relations, United Nations.

The Evolution from Unipolarity to Multipolarity

The United Nations Charter is akin to a world constitution. Global governance and peace depend on the implementation of this rules-based international order, which functions on the basis of the principles of multilateralism, the sovereign equality of states, the prohibition of the use of force, the prohibition of interference in the affairs of other states, and the practical necessity of mutual cooperation to address global challenges through international negotiation and not by unilateral dictates.

Over the past thirty years, we have witnessed how the unipolar world led by the United States has evolved into a multipolar world, with China, India, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, Brazil, and Turkey playing increasingly important roles.

Nevertheless, significant risks for the peace and security of mankind persist because the transition to multipolarity is encountering resistance from the former hegemon, the United States, and its vassals. Experience shows that NATO provocations before and after the 2014 *coup d'état* in Kiev triggered the current war in Ukraine and could lead to a conflict in the Asia-Pacific region. Thus, the United Nations is more than ever needed to facilitate the transition through confidence-building and negotiation. A new security architecture is needed not only for Europe but for the entire world.

New inter-governmental organisations like BRICS, with its ten current members and a queue of dozens seeking membership, are changing the geopolitical landscape. Meanwhile, new development strategies, like the Belt and Road Initiative, augur well for peace through economic interdependence.

Models of governance

The existing world order displays many models of governance, from monarchies to oligarchies to dictatorships to various manifestations of representative, participatory, and direct democracy. General Assembly Resolution 60/1 of October 24, 2005, recognises in paragraph 135:

“We reaffirm that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic,

social, and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. We also reaffirm that while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy and that it does not belong to any country or region, and we reaffirm the necessity of due respect for sovereignty and the right to self-determination. We stress that democracy, development, and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing”.

The US has already hosted two so-called democracy summits (US Department of State, 2022), which can only be described as propagandistic stunts, characterised by the exclusion of many countries, an atmosphere of confrontation, and hostility towards all who do not accept the American model of democracy as the only valid model. The third summit was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on March 18-20, 2024, under the banner “Democracy for Future Generations” (Summit for Democracy, 2024; US Department of State, 2024). Alas, it too was imbued by fake news, fake history, fake law, fake diplomacy, and fake democracy.

An obstacle to respectful and efficient multilateralism is the US/EU binary approach to the world, which divides cultures and civilizations into “democracies” and “autocracies”. More and more Western “democracies” take a moralistic approach to democracy and human rights, pretending to possess all the answers. However, when they use the word “democracy”, they essentially mean capitalism, an ideological construct that has nothing to do with the actual meaning of democracy (*demos* + *kratos*), rule by the people, or, as Abraham Lincoln nicely put it in his 1863 Gettysburg address, “government of the people, by the people, and for the people”.

In my book, “Building a Just World Order” (de Zayas, 2021), I go into the theory and practice of democracy and formulate the 25 Principles of International Order (see below), which would best function if there were genuine democracies where everyone was informed and consulted and where the right to access information pro-actively was ensured. Democracies become dysfunctional when the population is subjected to relentless indoctrination, where dissenters are intimidated, persecuted, and prosecuted for their opinions, and when the administration of justice is effectively hijacked for “lawfare” against dissenters and whistleblowers like Julian Assange (Melzer, 2022).

International Cooperation and Solidarity

The key principle of international order is multilateralism, which entails cooperation based on the UN Charter. Let us start by recalling the commitment of all states under Article 55 of the UN Charter:

“With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being that are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: ... solutions to international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation”.

The 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirms in its preamble “the commitment contained in Article 56 of the Charter of the United Nations to take joint and separate action, placing proper emphasis on developing effective international cooperation” (United Nations, 1993).

Operative paragraph 10 stipulates, “States should cooperate with each other in ensuring development and eliminating obstacles to development”.

Paragraph 6 of the Outcome Document of the World Summit of 2005, Res. 60/1, stipulates:

“We reaffirm the vital importance of an effective multilateral system in accordance with international law in order to better address the multifaceted and interconnected challenges and threats confronting our world...” (General Assembly, 1970).

In this context, it is also pertinent to recall the language of the revised draft of the UN Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity (OHCHR, n.d.), which expands on the original draft contained in the 2017 Report of the Human Rights Council’s Special Rapporteur on International Solidarity, Virginia Bonoan-Dandan (Bonoan-Dandan, 2017).

As an independent expert on International Order, I participated in the drafting of this document and advocated its adoption by the General Assembly. It is a disgrace that, to this day, the *Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity* has not been adopted, although it eloquently expresses the most noble principles of the UN Charter.

Who has opposed and still opposes this Declaration? The United States, the United Kingdom, and the state members of the European Union. In this context, it is instructive to study the voting record on many resolutions before the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. This will reveal who is really in favour of a rule-based international order and who is ultimately for a unipolar world and against the sovereign equality of states and human rights for all members of the human family (de Zayas, 2023).

Should the UN Headquarters move from New York?

As a new “global majority” becomes aware of its economic and political power, a new *modus vivendi* must be crafted. The United Nations is an appropriate forum to help shape this structure of peaceful coexistence based on the values of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Gradually, one hears voices posing the question of whether the UN headquarters should remain in New York or, perhaps, whether the time has come to consider other possible venues. Most UN offices are still in New York, including DESA, OCT, UNDEF, UNDT, UNODA, UNICEF, and, of course, the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Secretary-General himself.

Admittedly, there are two UN European offices headquartered in Geneva and Vienna. Switzerland currently hosts subsidiary organs and associated agencies, including the OHCHR, UNHCR, UNCTAD, ILO, ITU, WHO, WIPO, and WTO, while Austria hosts the IAEA, UNODC, UNIDO, and IAEA. Paris, France, hosts UNESCO. Montreal, Canada, hosts the ICAO. In Latin America, the UN established a regional office in Santiago de Chile, while in Africa, Kenya hosts the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi. The distribution of power in the UN system is overwhelmingly US- and Europe-centric. Doubtless, this scenario impacts the policies and independence of the Organisation.

More and more, one becomes aware that many countries resent the manner in which the United States government performs its obligations as host of the Organisation. In 2020, the General Assembly Sixth Committee had to deal with complaints against the US for non-compliance with the Headquarters Agreement (General Assembly, 2020). In a 2021 joint letter, permanent representatives of six countries protested Washington’s ongoing violation of the Agreement, demanding that the case be referred to a tribunal for settlement (Press TV, 2021).

Accumulated violations of the headquarters agreement by the United States government and the continued tensions resulting from the US efforts to assert its hegemony over the rest of the world have given momentum to those who envisage relocating the UN headquarters to neutral ground. Over the past 77 years, the United States has violated not only the headquarters agreement but also the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1991) and the Vienna Convention on the Representation of States in Their Relations with International Organisations of a Universal Character, making

it difficult for the UN to pursue its work without logistical problems resulting from arbitrary policies dictated by Washington.

Relocation has also become an issue in light of statements by members of the United States Congress who are unabashedly hostile to the United Nations and its goals. Accordingly, some country delegations feel that a change of venue could enable the Organisation to function more efficiently in the future. Many delegations object to the difficulties in obtaining visas to enter the United States (MEE staff, 2019; Neuman, 2014; Reuters, 2020). I remember when Yasser Arafat was denied an entry visa to the US in November 1988 (Oberdorfer, 1988), and the General Assembly actually moved to Geneva, where Arafat was received with a standing ovation as he walked the aisle to the podium on December 13, 1988 (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2022). As a young staffer in the UN Centre for Human Rights under the then Director Jan Martenson, I witnessed the event and discussed it with my colleagues in the Secretariat.

Many state delegations have been victims of the increasing politicisation of the United Nations by the United States and the multiple violations of the headquarters agreement. Among these delegations are those of the Russian Federation (AP, 2023), but also Cuban, Iranian, Nicaraguan, Syrian, and Venezuelan diplomats have all endured the discriminatory “red tape” and outright denial of visas ordered by Washington.

These matters have been signalled without any noticeable improvement. Accordingly, it would be helpful if members of the Security Council would voice the relocation proposal, which should be followed by a thorough discussion in the General Assembly and a resolution establishing a commission to look into the pros and cons.

Lavrov’s Security Council Statements of April 25

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chaired the Security Council meeting on April 25 and took the opportunity to hint at the idea of relocating the UN headquarters. He also addressed a number of grievances: *“In a desperate attempt to assert its dominance by punishing the disobedient, the US has moved to destroy globalisation, which for many years it extolled as the greatest good of all mankind”*. Lavrov objected to the practice by the US and its allies to blacklist anyone who dissents and tell the rest of the world, *“Those who are not with us are against us”*. He continued, stressing that the *“Western minority”* has no right to speak for the entire world and that its so-called *“rules-based order”* amounts to rejection of the sovereign equality of states as stipulated

in the UN Charter. He poked fun at EU Commissioner Josep Borrell's amusing statement about the European "garden" and the "jungle" outside it.

At the same meeting in the Security Council, Lavrov complained that the West made a "brazen attempt to subjugate" the UN by taking over its secretariats and other international institutions. He claimed that Washington and its allies had abandoned diplomacy and demanded a battlefield showdown within the halls of the UN, created to prevent the horrors of war. Lavrov argued that genuine multilateralism "requires the UN to adapt to objective trends" of emerging multipolarity in international relations. Accordingly, the Security Council should be reformed to increase the representation of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as the current "exorbitant overrepresentation" of the West "undermines the principle of multilateralism" (RT, 2023; Intel Drop, 2023). As was to be expected, Western diplomats rejected Lavrov's statements (Kottasová, 2023).

UN-US Headquarters Agreement

The United Nations-US headquarters agreement of June 26, 1947 (UN General Assembly, 1947), envisages in Article IX the possibility of relocating the UN headquarters to another venue. Section 23 stipulates, "The seat of the United Nations shall not be removed from the headquarters district unless the United Nations should so decide". Section 24 stipulates, "This agreement shall cease to be in force if the seat of the United Nations is removed from the territory of the United States, except for such provisions as may be applicable in connection with the orderly termination of the operations of the United Nations at its seat in the United States and the disposition of its property therein".

How did New York become the UN Headquarters?

Let us not forget that the idea of continuing the work of the League of Nations very much reflected the thinking of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Of course, the new Organisation should reflect the 1945 balance of power and move from the old to the new world. Moreover, we recall that the UN Charter was crafted at a meeting in San Francisco in April–June 1945 (United Nations, n.d.a). Thus, it is not surprising that, following the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the United States as the undisputed hegemon, the United Nations should have its seat in the US. Many cities competed for the honour of hosting the UN.

Since 1945, the UN has operated from a temporary headquarters in Lake Success, New York (Druckman, n.d.), but the Organisation also met at the old League of Nations seat in Geneva and at the Palais Chaillot in Paris, where the General Assembly adopted the Genocide Convention on December 9, 1948, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948.

The UN Secretariat building on Manhattan Island was erected in 1946-51 on the shore of the East River in New York, a skyscraper designed in the so-called “international style” on land given to the United Nations by John D. Rockefeller, who had acquired the property for \$8.5 million. UN staff started moving in in August 1950. The building is 154 metres tall and has 39 above-ground floors. While the UN building is located within the US, the site is under UN jurisdiction. As the UN expanded, it acquired many more buildings in the New York area.

By virtue of the UN-US Headquarters Agreement (11 UNTS 11), the principal headquarters of the UN was established in New York (A/RES/25(1)). The agreement is open-ended and may be modified or abandoned as necessary. In Resolution A/RES/22(I)B, the General Assembly approved the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. General Assembly Resolution 99(1) authorised the Secretary-General to conclude a headquarters agreement with the US based on a draft agreement contained within Resolution A/67 and to make arrangements for a provisional agreement related to the privileges, immunities, and facilities of the UN headquarters.¹

Obstacles to Relocation

Relocating to existing UN offices in Geneva or Vienna would be easier since the infrastructure is already there. But it would still take at least five years and cost an enormous amount of money. Alas, the UN budget is always stretched to the limit. The downside of such a move is that it would

¹ A/371 contains the report of the Secretary-General regarding the US-UN Headquarters agreement, including comments on the changes made to the original draft agreement.

A/427 contains the report of the Sixth (or Legal) Committee to the General Assembly on the study of the agreement by the sub-committee on Privileges and Immunities.

A/RES/169(II) approved the agreement between the UN and the US regarding the UN Headquarters in New York.

remain Euro-centric and not take into account the aspirations of the “global majority” to have the United Nations serve all of humanity.

As we all know, the Biden administration is hostile to the UN but still wants to use it as a tool in its geopolitical agenda. But back in 2017, during the Donald Trump administration, some Republican lawmakers already proposed a bill in the House of Representatives to withdraw US membership from the UN and ask the UN to vacate the premises, even though the Organisation actually contributes over 3.3 billion dollars a year to New York City revenues and also provides lucrative jobs to thousands of American citizens.

There is no “protocol” as such for moving the UN headquarters. First, there must be a discussion in the General Assembly, and “impact assessments” would have to be considered. The main thing would be to start the debate and rely on the media to discuss the main reasons for such a move. Many countries have formulated legitimate grievances concerning US misbehaviour, which the US has systematically ignored. Maybe the BRICS countries should join forces in formulating the necessary proposals.

Where could a New Headquarters be based?

In order to reflect the growing importance of the developing world, there are many countries that could conceivably host the United Nations headquarters. One could think of Mexico and the cities of Puebla and Guadalajara, which have advanced infrastructure. Surely, Brazil — either Rio de Janeiro or Sao Paulo. South Africa would be a credible candidate, and the cities of Cape Town or Durban would be worthy venues. India, the most populous country in the world, would benefit from a UN presence; Delhi and Bangalore have much international experience, but China would probably oppose such an idea. Indonesia is a conceivable venue, my choice — the city of Bandung.

The 25 Zayas Principles of International Order serve Peace and Security

My seventh thematic report to the Human Rights Council, presented in March 2018 (A/HRC/37/63), formulated the principles of international order, summarising my theoretical and practical approach to the subject in light of my empirical experience administering the mandate. These norms of international law and practice derive their legal basis from the Principles

and Purposes of the UN Charter, the key General Assembly resolutions (notably resolutions 2131 (XX), 2625 (XXV), 3314 (XXIX), 39/11, 55/2, and 60/1), core UN Conventions, *inter alia*, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations, and other universal treaties such as the Geneva Red Cross Conventions and Additional Protocols. They reflect the progressive development of international law as created and applied by the United Nations and its specialised agencies and propose a vision of a peaceful, democratic, and equitable international order based on the cooperation of all stakeholders – both state and non-state actors, sovereign countries, inter-governmental organisations, transnational enterprises, peoples and minorities striving for self-determination, indigenous peoples, religious institutions, and civil society.

These guiding principles should be understood holistically, rejecting any kind of “fragmentation” of international law into “stand-alone” legal regimes in competition with each other. The authority and credibility of the system of international law depend on its internal coherence and rules of interpretation that recognise a logical hierarchy as well as horizontal mutual reinforcement. Admittedly, these standards encompass not only hard law but also soft law and general notions of ethics and justice. Like Virginia Dandan’s Draft Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity (General Assembly, 2017), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), the Commission on Human Rights Declaration on the illegality of forced population transfers (Al Khasawneh, 1997), and John Ruggie’s Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (OHCHR, 2011), the Zayas principles on the international order are not exhaustive but intended to serve as useful criteria or standards to evaluate and better understand the complexities of the evolving international order. One should also keep this caveat in mind: Principles and norms are not self-executing. Indeed, as the Bible has not resolved the problem of sin and the UN Charter has not ended aggressive war and exploitation, these principles will not *eo ipso* guarantee a democratic and equitable international order in the 21st century. Realistically speaking, even if all these principles and declarations were to become UN treaties one day, they would still need political will, good faith, and an effective enforcement mechanism in order to make a difference.

1. **The paramount principle of international order is Peace.** The Preamble and Articles 1 and 2 of the Charter stipulate that the

principal goal of the Organisation is the promotion and maintenance of peace. That entails the prevention of local, regional, and international conflict, and in the case of armed conflict, the deployment of effective measures aimed at peacemaking, reconstruction, and reconciliation. The production and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction constitute a continuing threat to peace.² Hence, it is necessary that states negotiate in good faith for the early conclusion of a universal treaty on general and complete disarmament under effective international control.³ Peace is much more than the absence of war and necessitates an equitable world order characterised by the gradual elimination of the root causes of conflict, including extreme poverty, endemic injustice, privilege, and structural violence. The motto of the International Labour Organisation deserves to be recognised as the universal motto for our time: *si vis pacem, cole justitiam* (if you want peace, cultivate justice). Moreover, peace must be recognised as an enabling right, a precondition to the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights (de Zayas, 2016).

2. **The UN Charter takes priority over all other treaties** (Article 103, known as the “supremacy clause” (Kolb, 2014)). There is a hierarchy of international norms that places the United Nations Charter at the top of the system as a kind of world constitution. States have a duty to ensure that all treaties and conventions conform to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.
3. **Resolutions and decisions of the UN Security Council are legally binding.** Pursuant to Article 25 of the Charter, “the members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter”. But the Security Council itself is not above international law, and in discharging its duties, it “shall act in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations” (Article 24), i.e., the Security Council cannot adopt decisions or

² The UN Human Rights Committee regularly issues “general comments” to elucidate the scope of its provisions. See General Comments Nr. 6 and 14 on the right to life, which condemn the production and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction that may destroy life on Earth (UN Human Rights Committee, 1982; UN Human Rights Committee, 1984).

³ See my 2014 report to the Human Rights Council A/HRC/27/51, paras. 6, 16, 18, and 44. The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons entered into force on January 22, 2021 (United Nations, 2017; Nakamitsu, 2020).

resolutions incompatible with the core principles of peace, human rights, and development.⁴ Such decisions would be *ultra vires* and would lack legitimacy. In a specific case, the International Court of Justice, the highest judicial instance of the United Nations, would have the competence to investigate and make pertinent findings in an Advisory Opinion pursuant to Article 65 of the ICJ statute. Understanding that the Security Council is not omnipotent and must act in conformity with its terms of reference resolves the fundamental rule of law question: *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (Juvenalis, 2011, 347).

4. **International law and human rights law must be applied uniformly and in good faith.** The arbitrary interpretation or selective application of international law, double standards, and selectivity undermine the authority of the law and frustrate its function to ensure stability and predictability.
5. **International humanitarian law and international human rights law are mutually reinforcing legal regimes grounded in the principles of respect for human dignity and justice.** According to paragraph 25 of the 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Nuclear Weapons, “The Court observes that the protection of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not cease in times of war” (International Court Of Justice, 1996). Similarly, the UN Human Rights Committee has repeatedly reaffirmed that international humanitarian law cannot be invoked to weaken the international human rights treaty regime.
6. **States must respect not only the letter of the law but also the spirit of the law** (Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, 1749), which is the core and *raison d’être* of the rule of law and enables the legislator to codify specific norms, which are not immutable but always subject to progressive development. Blind positivism (*dura lex, sed lex*) frequently destroys the spirit of the law, *summum jus, summa injuria* (law taken to the extreme results in injustice, Cicero, *De Officiis* 1, 10, 33).
7. **General principles of law (Statute of the International Court of Justice, Article 38, para 1(c)) inform the interpretation and guide the application of international law.** Among general principles of law, we recognise good faith, estoppel, reciprocity, proportionality, *ex injuria non*

⁴ See “Views” of the UN Human Rights Committee in a case concerning UN Security Council sanctions *Sayadi v. Belgium*, in particular the separate concurring opinions of Sir Nigel Rodley and of Yuyi Iwasawa (a new Japanese member of the International Court of Justice) (*Sayadi and Vinck v. Belgium*, 2008).

oritur jus (a breach of law does not give rise to a new law), the prohibition of the abuse of rights, *sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas* (use your rights but do not encroach on others), the prohibition of contracts or treaties that are *contra bonos mores* (against good morals), the impartiality of judges, non-selectivity, the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, *audiatur et altera pars* (all sides must be heard), *actori incumbit onus probandi* (plaintiff carries the burden of proof), the presumption of innocence, the customary rule that domestic law cannot be invoked to undermine international treaties (United Nations, 1969, art. 27), and the “unwritten laws” of humanity.⁵

8. **International law is dynamic and progresses with the adoption of new treaties and conventions by the United Nations and its specialised agencies, with inter-state practice and the adoption of treaties within the framework of regional inter-governmental organisations, as well as with the resolutions of the Security Council, General Assembly, and the jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the UN human rights treaty bodies.** The international law doctrine recognises that certain principles may advance to the category of peremptory norms (*jus cogens*), such as, for instance, the right to self-determination of peoples, the prohibition of the use of force, and the prohibition of torture. Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties establishes that a treaty contrary to peremptory norms is null and void. Article 64 stipulates that when a new norm of *jus cogens* emerges, treaties must conform to it.
9. **The principles of humanity and human dignity are the source of all human rights**, which, since their progressive codification beginning with the 1948 Genocide Convention and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have expanded into an international human rights treaty regime, many aspects of which have become customary international law. A just world order requires the eradication of extreme poverty,⁶ a guarantee of food and water security, and a level playing field. The

⁵ It is not only the written law that must be applied, but also the broader principles of natural justice as already recognised in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, affirming the unwritten laws of humanity, and the concept of a higher moral order that prohibits taking advantage of a weaker party as happens with “unequal treaties”, which may be considered economic neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism.

⁶ In 2012 the Human Rights Council adopted Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (See Wronka, 2017).

international human rights treaty regime necessarily has priority over military alliances, trade, and other agreements (see my 2016 report to the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/33/40, para. 18–42), which must be interpreted and applied in conformity with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and other pertinent treaties. Commercial agreements cannot infringe on pre-existing human rights treaty obligations undertaken by states.

10. **The right to self-determination of peoples as stipulated in the Charter and in common article 1 of the ICCPR and ICESCR is a fundamental principle of international law (*jus cogens*) and international public policy (*ordre public*).** All peoples, without exception, are rights holders of self-determination. The duty-bearers are all state members of the UN. The exercise of self-determination is an expression of democracy, as democracy is an expression of self-determination. It attains enhanced legitimacy when a referendum is organised and monitored under the auspices of the United Nations. Although the enjoyment of self-determination in the form of autonomy, federalism, secession, or union with another state entity is a human right, it is not self-executing. Timely dialogue for the realisation of self-determination is an effective conflict-prevention strategy (see my 2014 report to the General Assembly, A/69/272, para. 63–77). The United Nations has an essential mediating role between states and peoples and should conduct self-determination referenda as a conflict-prevention measure because self-determination grievances often develop into a threat to the peace or a breach of the peace for purposes of Article 39 of the UN Charter. The right to self-determination has not only a collective but also an individual dimension. Moreover, the right to call for and conduct a referendum is protected by Article 19 of the ICCPR.
11. **“The scope of the principle of territorial integrity is confined to the sphere of relations between states”.** Thus rules the International Court of Justice in paragraph 80 of its Advisory Opinion on the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Kosovo.⁷ Admittedly, the principle of

⁷ “Several participants in the proceedings before the Court have contended that a prohibition of unilateral declarations of independence is implicit in the principle of territorial integrity. The Court recalls that the principle of territorial integrity is

territorial integrity is a core principle of international law, aiming at promoting international stability and strengthening the mutual respect and sovereign equality of states. Nevertheless, the principle cannot be invoked internally to deny or hollow out the right of self-determination of peoples (International Court Of Justice, 2010, p. 38), which has emerged as a norm of *jus cogens*.

12. **Statehood depends on four criteria: population, territory, government (effective control), and the ability to enter into relations with other states.** While international recognition is desirable, it is not constitutive of statehood but only declaratory. A *de facto* or *de jure* new state is bound by the principles of the international order, including respect for human rights.
13. **Every state has an inalienable right to choose its political, economic, social, and cultural systems without interference in any form by another state,** as stipulated in numerous United Nations resolutions, including the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (United Nations, 1993), the 2001 Durban Declaration (World Conference against Racism, 2001), and the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit (General Assembly, 2005a). Already in 1530, the Spanish Dominican

an important part of the international legal order and is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular in Article 2, paragraph 4, which provides that: 'All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.' In General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV), entitled 'Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations', which reflects customary international law (*Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America)*, Merits, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1986, pp. 101-103, paras. 191-193), the General Assembly reiterated '[t]he principle that States shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State'. This resolution then enumerated various obligations incumbent upon States to refrain from violating the territorial integrity of other sovereign States. In the same vein, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe of August 1, 1975 (the Helsinki Conference) stipulated that '[t]he participating States will respect the territorial integrity of each of the participating States' (Art. IV). Thus, the scope of the principle of territorial integrity is confined to the sphere of relations between States.' (International Court of Justice, 2010, p. 38).

Francisco de Vitoria (Hernandez, 1991), a Professor of Law in Salamanca and advocate of the Roman law concept of *ius gentium* (the law of nations), stated that all peoples had the right to govern themselves and could adopt the political regime they wanted (Gauthier-Mamaril, n.d.).⁸

14. **Peoples possess sovereignty over their natural resources.** A “people”⁹ is not only the collective people of a given state but necessarily encompasses a people living under domination by other people. If a people’s natural resources were “sold” or “assigned” pursuant to colonial, neo-colonial, or “unequal treaties” or contracts, these agreements must be revised in light of the UN Charter to vindicate the sovereignty of peoples over their own resources; indigenous peoples are entitled to reparation for the lands and resources stolen from them. Any future agreements concerning indigenous lands and resources are conditioned on free, prior, and informed consent (United Nations, 2007, articles 9, 10, 28, 29, 32).
15. **All peoples have the right to their homeland, their culture, and their identity** (de Zayas, 2002; de Zayas, 2003). Although closely related to the right to self-determination, the right to the homeland comprises deeper psychological elements, a metaphysics of the mind. Demographic manipulations, forced population transfers, “ethnic cleansing”, and other racist measures constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity pursuant to Articles 7 and 8 of the Statute of Rome of the International Criminal Court. If certain conditions under Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention prevail, forced population transfer and “ethnic cleansing” may constitute genocide under the provisions of the 1948 Genocide Convention and Article 6 of the State of Rome. Such measures are contrary to the ICCPR, the ICESCR, and the International Convention

⁸ See also the Outcome Document of the 2005 Millennium Plus 5 Summit, General Assembly Resolution 60/1, paragraphs 22 and 135: “We reaffirm that democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social, and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. We also reaffirm that while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy, that it does not belong to any country or region, and reaffirm the necessity of due respect for sovereignty and the right to self-determination. We stress that democracy, development, and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing” (General Assembly, 2005b, p. 30).

⁹ See the definition of “peoples” by Justice Michael Kirby (1991) and my 2014 report to the General Assembly (de Zayas, 2014, para. 4).

on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Refugees and expellees have a right to return to their homelands (de Zayas, 2012a).

16. **States shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state** or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations (Charter, Art. 2(4), OAS Charter articles 3, 19, and 20). In the absence of a resolution adopted by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter, the use of force is illegal (BBC News, 2004) and may amount to the crime of aggression under Article 5 of the Statute of Rome of the International Criminal Court pursuant to the Kampala definition (Kaul, 2011). States have the duty to refrain from propaganda for war (General Assembly, 1966, art. 20(1); Kearney, 2007).
17. **States have a positive duty to negotiate and settle their international disputes by peaceful means** in such a manner that international peace, security, and justice are not endangered (Charter, Art. 2 (3)). Chapter VI of the UN Charter, in particular Articles 33 and 34, stipulates that the Security Council may call upon states to seek solutions by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, or resort to regional agencies or arrangements. The Security Council may investigate any situation that might lead to international friction and endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.
18. **The principle of non-intervention is part of customary international law.** States may not organise or encourage the organisation of irregular forces or armed bands, including mercenaries, for incursion into the territory of another state. No state may organise, assist, foment, finance, incite, or tolerate subversive, terrorist, or armed activities directed towards the violent overthrow of the regime of another state, or interfere in civil strife in another state (International Court Of Justice, 1986). Whereas a state may be invited by the government of another state to assist in containing an internal armed conflict, it is not permitted for any state to support financially or otherwise the insurgency in another state (Pustorino, 2018). The fact that such interventions occur with impunity when the perpetrators are permanent members of the Security Council does not give rise to new international law (*ex injuria non oritur jus*). Such interventions constitute continuing violations of international law, which justify investigation and prosecution by the International Criminal Court, ad hoc tribunals, and peoples' tribunals.
19. **States must refrain from interfering in matters within the internal jurisdiction of another state** (General Assembly, 2018, paras. 29-39). No

state may use or encourage the use of economic, political, or any other measure to coerce another state in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights and to secure advantages of any kind. The unilateral coercive measures are incompatible with the United Nations Charter. Only the Security Council can impose sanctions under Chapter VII of the Charter. Therefore, states shall refrain from imposing unilateral coercive measures and financial blockades on other countries. When unilateral coercive measures cause widespread hunger and death, they may amount to crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Statute of the International Criminal Court (General Assembly, 2018, paras. 34-39; United Nations, 2021). While the promotion of human rights is of legitimate international concern and there is an *erga omnes* obligation of states parties to the ICCPR and the ICESCR to ensure their enforcement, the doctrines of “humanitarian intervention” and “responsibility to protect” have been demonstrably counter-productive and harbour grave dangers of selectivity and abuse, as evidenced in the General Assembly debate on R2P in July 2009¹⁰, and empirically shown in the chaos visited upon the people of Libya in the name of humanitarian intervention by great power instrumentalization of Security Council Resolution 1973 not for purposes of humanitarian assistance but for purposes of inducing “regime change” (Zenko, 2016; RT, 2011; Green, 2019).

20. **States have a duty to protect and preserve the natural environment and the common heritage of humankind.** The crime of ecocide (Yeo, 2020; Stop Ecocide International, 2021) entails the irreversible degradation or destruction of the human environment. It constitutes a crime against humanity that must be suppressed by the international community and prosecuted under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
21. **State sovereignty is superior to commercial and other agreements.** The principle *pacta sunt servanda* is not absolute and presupposes that the agreements are not contrary to the *ordre public* and the general welfare of the population. The principle of non-retrogression in human rights prevents a state from entering into commercial agreements that would prevent it from fulfilling its obligations under the ICCPR and ICESCR. Non-state actors have not only rights but also duties under international law, and states are obliged to ensure that enterprises registered and/or operating under their jurisdiction do not adversely impact human rights.

¹⁰ See my 2012 report to the General Assembly (de Zayas, 2012b, paras. 14-15).

The ontology of states is to legislate in the public interest. The ontology of capitalism, investment, and business enterprises is to take risks to generate profit. Experience has shown that the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism (ISDS) lacks transparency and accountability and constitutes a frontal attack on fundamental concepts of the rule of law. The ISDS cannot be reformed; it must be *abolished* (de Zayas, 2015). Free trade agreements and bilateral investment treaties that contain *contra bonos mores* provisions must be revised, and such provisions must be eliminated pursuant to the principle of severability, otherwise known as the doctrine of separability.

22. **Everyone has the right to international solidarity as a human right** (United Nations, n.d.b). Pursuant thereto, states have the duty to cooperate with one another, irrespective of the differences in their political, economic, and social systems, in order to maintain international peace and security and to promote international economic stability and progress. To this end, states are obliged to conduct their international relations in the economic, political, social, cultural, technical, and trade fields in accordance with the principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention. States should promote a culture of dialogue and mediation.
23. **The right to know and the right to access reliable information are essential components of the national and international democratic order** and find their legal basis, *inter alia*, in Article 19 of the ICCPR. Government and private sector secrecy rules and cover-ups are enemies of the democratic order. Hence, whistleblowers are necessary human rights defenders because they disclose information about the crimes and omissions of governments, transnational corporations, and other non-state actors. Transparency and accountability are crucial to every democratic society and the rule of law. A Charter of Rights of Whistleblowers is urgently needed. The right to freedom of opinion and expression necessarily encompasses the right to publish research contrary to mainstream conceptions and entails the right to be wrong. Penal laws enacted to suppress dissent and so-called “memory laws”¹¹,

¹¹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 (2011) on article 19 ICCPR freedom of opinion and expression: “Laws that penalize the expression of opinions about historical facts are incompatible with the obligations that the Covenant imposes on States parties in relation to the respect for freedom of opinion and expression. The Covenant does not permit general prohibition of expressions of an erroneous opinion or an incorrect interpretation of past events” (UN Human Rights Committee, 2011, para. 49). See also: de Zayas & Roldan, 2012.

which pretend to crystallise history into a politically correct narrative, are totalitarian, offend academic freedom, and endanger not only domestic but also international democracy.

24. **Violations of international law and international human rights law by powerful states and/or permanent members of the Security Council do not create legal precedents, change the UN Charter, or result in a “new international law”.** Such violations, however, weaken the integrity of the UN system and the cohesion of the international order. They constitute ongoing violations until an international tribunal like the ICJ or ICC becomes seized of the matter and suppresses them. Impunity does not sanctify the crime; it only manifests the absence of effective UN enforcement mechanisms.
25. **Wherever there is a violation of international law or human rights law, there is a state obligation to provide prompt, adequate, and effective remedies** (*ubi jus, ibi remedium* (Andrysek, Möller & de Zayas))¹². Enforcement of international judgements and other commitments frequently presupposes the existence of national enabling legislation that confers domestic legal status on international obligations. Enforcement depends on political will and international cooperation, entailing a balancing of vital interests, geopolitics, and *opinio juris*. Enforcement must not be confused with punishment or with the imposition of sanctions. The UN Security Council can impose arms embargoes to facilitate dialogue and peacemaking. On the other hand, economic sanctions and other coercive measures can result in greater injustice, as happened with the UN sanctions regime against Iraq in 1991–2003, with an estimated one million deaths, affecting the most vulnerable (von Sponeck, 2006; Crossette, 1995). Enforcement of international law commitments must build on international consensus, international solidarity, and the good offices of the United Nations and its specialised agencies, which are always ready to furnish advisory services and technical assistance. Enforcement is the measure of international order. Such enforcement is furthered by the strengthening of the regional human rights court system and the establishment of an international court of human rights equipped with a monitoring and implementation mechanism.

¹² See also Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 60/147 of 16 December 2005 General Assembly (2005).

A multipolar world based on recognition of our shared humanity is the best guarantee of peace. It seems that we in the “collective West” find ourselves amid an “epistemology trap”, caught in our own indoctrination, propaganda, and narcissism, incapable of thinking outside the box, and bereft of any sense of self-criticism.

Admittedly, we in the US and Western Europe are skilled practitioners when it comes to thinking inside the box, echoing narratives, and repeating slogans. However, sometimes it is refreshing to open our eyes to wider visions and our ears to different sounds.

While patriotism is a good thing and we have a legitimate right to be proud of the achievements of our ancestors and our beautiful philosophical, scientific, technological, musical, artistic, and architectural heritage, we should avoid the pitfalls of solipsism and chauvinism. Indeed, we are not alone in this world. We should learn to appreciate the achievements of other cultures and civilizations. We should celebrate the myriad beauties of Latin American, African, Asian, and Pacific cultures, not forgetting the common heritage of mankind, including Russian and Chinese contributions.

UNESCO’s Constitution recognises in its preamble that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed; that ignorance of each other’s ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war”.

Article I stipulates, “1. The purpose of the Organisation is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science, and culture to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and the human rights and fundamental freedoms that are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language, or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations” (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1945).

Indeed, it would be a great contribution to world peace if our leaders came down from their high horses and dealt with other cultures and peoples at eye level. In this connection, it bears recalling Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates: “1. Any propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law. 2. Any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law” (General Assembly, 1966).

Alas, we in the US and Western Europe violate Article 20 of the ICCPR daily. We violate it with total impunity, and our media shares this mindset. Instead of listening and cooperating with others, we prefer to engage in “naming and shaming” and falsely accuse others of violations of international law, human rights, etc. Our mainstream media acts as echo chambers of our Western governments and of the military-industrial-financial complex. That reflects what I would call an embedded “culture of hatred. We tend to see others not as potential collaborators or even friends but primarily as competitors, rivals, or potential enemies. We must address this hostile mindset, which is the result of the chauvinistic and jingoistic policies of our governments. As a UN Independent Expert on International Order, I advocated the adoption of a Global Compact on Education that will channel our energies towards cooperation instead of confrontation. More than anything else, we need education for peace, empathy, and a new humanistic approach to global problems. We need to rediscover the spirituality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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RETHINKING TRANSNATIONAL INFLUENCE: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING STATE DYNAMICS

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Abstract: The last several decades has seen a notable rise in the involvement of transnational actors in the international system, sparking ongoing discussions in international relations about their effects on state conduct. This emergence has given rise to the field of 'transnational studies' within international relations, pitting proponents of a state-centric approach against those who view the growing influence of transnational actors as indicative of a declining role of states in the international arena. Fresh scholarly perspectives aimed to move beyond these entrenched debates by correctly pointing out that what both camps had failed to grasp was that because both looked to how transnational actors impact domestic state behavior, they actually shared a common research question (albeit with different approaches). Whilst this fresh perspective was welcome, there has still been limited exploration into the significance of transnational actors and the inherent challenges in measuring their influence, due mainly to overly broad conceptualizations. This article introduces a new theoretical framework to evaluate the ability of transnational actors to shape state behavior that seeks to overcome these limitations.

Keywords: transnational actors, historical institutionalism, socio-legal, legal recursivity, inter-disciplinary.

Introduction

The past forty years has seen a marked increase in the proliferation of transnational actors¹ in the international system. The rise of these actors has sparked a continuing debate within the field of international relations on

¹ The most widely accepted definition of what constitutes a transnational actor is the one first offered by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in 1972. Keohane

how they influence state action. This emergent literature on 'transnational studies' within international relations has pitted advocates of an approach that views states as the dominant force in world politics versus those who see the rise of transnational actors as empirical proof that the primacy of states as actors in the international system is being replaced. The state-centered approach sees transnational actors merely as intervening forces that can assist states in cooperating with one another, implementing policy goals, or alternatively constraining behavior and action. The society-centered approach, on the other hand, views the proliferation of transnational actors as evidence that, in a wide host of international policy realms, the primacy of the state in decision-making is being eroded.

New literature in the mid-1990s tried to move transnational studies beyond the state-centered / society-centered debate, premising that, if viewed objectively, the debate between these two camps was based on a mistaken premise. What both approaches failed to grasp was that, because both looked to *how* transnational actors *could affect* domestic state behavior, they basically shared the same research question (it was only their approach to the question that differed). These original insights identified a promising new framework to explore the effect of transnational actors on state behavior. This framework highlighted the potential significance of transnational actors in bridging the gulf between international and domestic politics, and identified two general factors that could shape their influence: 'international institutionalization' and 'domestic state structure'. International institutionalization was identified as important because such processes could facilitate the access of transnational actors into national level structures. Domestic state (institutional) structure mattered because these structures could control both the ability of transnational actors to access the institutions of the state being targeted and, once in, then form 'winning policy coalitions' with relevant national level actors. This new literature has taken a welcome step in the right direction by moving away from broad discussions of whether the state or international society is the proper unit of analysis, and in identifying factors that should shape transnational actor influence, but it remains underspecified. The result is a thin account of how transnational actors matter and a series of measurement problems due to the underlying concepts being much too general.

and Nye define transnational actors as forces engaged in 'contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries...not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments' (p. xi).

The running theme of current scholarship has been a duplication of this mid-1990s approach, and while many scholars have favorably cited the initial call to bridge the state-centered / society-centered debate, only a few have taken up the task. Additionally, the minority of scholarship that has attempted to move beyond the debate and look to study how transnational actors can possibly affect domestic state behavior, has not meaningfully engaged literature in other disciplines, specifically socio-legal studies and political science, that have also looked to the same issue. Such a limited view is problematic, as scholarship in socio-legal studies and political science, combined with the current transnational studies literature in an inter-disciplinary framework, could go a long way towards improving both the understanding of the key factors influencing the ability of transnational actors to affect state behavior, as well as the ways in which these effects can be measured.

Socio-legal scholars studying the interactions between norms on the international and national levels, and political scientists studying the specific effects of institutions, have much to contribute to understanding how transnational actors operate and affect domestic state behavior. Socio-legal scholarship, with its emphasis on the mechanisms that drive the interactions between the international and national systems, can offer an analytically sound and methodologically systematic way to study the relationships between the two levels. Similarly, the emphasis within certain strands of political science on the ability of institutions to mediate and shape outcomes, and the importance of time and historical trajectory in institutional endurance and design, offers a powerful way forward towards studying the interactions that are at the heart of transnational studies.

This article introduces a new theoretical framework for testing the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic state behavior. This framework builds on the contributions of the existing literature on 'transnational studies' within international relations, but then turns to literature in socio-legal studies and political science in order to rectify problems of under-specification. This new inter-disciplinary framework: (1) more explicitly identifies the sequence of the variables that affect the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic state politics; and (2) replaces the vague concepts of 'international institutionalization' and 'domestic state structure' with more detailed and concrete concepts centering on the recursive nature of norm formation and the importance of institutional structure in influencing outcomes. An inter-disciplinary approach to the study of transnational relations would present not only a new, more systematic

structure to the exploration of how transnational actors can possibly affect state behavior, but also an understanding that the study of transnational actors is one that specifically lends itself to both multiple disciplines and multiple methods. An inter-disciplinary approach to the study of transnational relations would offer a means towards a rigorous and more systematic measurement of the variables driving the relationships under study, as well as a clear identification of the potential causal mechanisms driving these relationships.

Past and Present: The State of Transnational Studies

The past several decades has seen the state of transnational studies within international relations undergo several shifts, both in its main theoretical underpinnings, and the focus of the research questions scholars within the sub-field have sought to answer. The period immediately following the Second World War saw the sub-field marked by the debate between state-centered and society-centered approaches. This debate would gradually give way to a movement which looked to redefine the direction of transnational studies away from the state-centered versus society-centered debate and instead look to synthesize the two approaches into a realistic understanding of the international system and the place of transnational relations within it. Although some limited progress in this regard has been achieved, there is still much work to be done.

State-Centered versus Society-Centered Approaches: The Old Debate

The end of the Second World War and the subsequent birth of the United Nations (UN) gave rise to a new period within the international system which saw the proliferation and growing influence of transnational actors. Given this new reality, social scientists and especially international relations scholars began to pay more attention to the role of these transnational actors on the actions and behaviors of states within the international system. This state-centered approach would dominate the literature for over two decades until a new group of scholars began to look beyond how transnational actors affected state behavior within the international system, and instead look to also study how transnational actors were actually creating a new institutionalized environment, where the primacy of the state in the decision-making process (within the international system) was being eroded.

The state-centered approach took off with the close of the Second World War and the subsequent proliferation of international organizations within the international system. With the growth of these new international institutions, many scholars began to explore whether such organizations could affect domestic state behavior, and if so, how. These early inquiries focused their efforts on trying to unlock how large-scale international organizations could possibly affect the behavior of their member states. Analysis was conducted on such widespread issue areas as the ability of states to shape or sabotage the creation of multilateral treaty regimes (Little 1949), the effect of international organization membership on both the foreign policy of its member states (Cohen 1954; Gorter 1954; Matecki 1956), and on fostering the organic emergence of collective security arrangements between various member states (Johnson & Niemeyer 1954), and the ability of international organizations to target and lobby national legislatures (Mower 1964; Cox & Jacobson (Eds.) 1973). The findings of these various scholars pointed to the sometimes unique abilities of international organizations to affect behavioral change on the domestic level.

The society-centered approach emerged in the 1970s as a reaction to the state-centered approach. Looking beyond the domestic nation-state, a new set of scholars began to study how international institutions were exerting their own autonomous influence over the international system. These scholars directed their attention to how the emerging international system of inter-linked organizations and multilateral treaty regimes was exerting direct influence on the international system without any mediation or filtration through domestic states (Keohane & Nye (Eds.) 1972; Mansbach, Ferguson, & Lampert 1976; Jacobson 1979; Rosenau 1980; Willets (Ed.) 1982). The new 'units of action' in these interactions were no longer states but transnational actors who could either link together different national interest groups within a related issue and assist them in coordinating their actions (Nye & Keohane 1972, pp. xviii-xix; Mansbach, Ferguson, & Lampert 1976, pp. 41-45; Jacobson 1979, pp. 398-414; Rosenau 1980, pp. 1-2), or alternately create an environment where state governments were unable to directly pursue their interests in a given issue area alone and had to instead seek the assistance of the same transnational actors and networks (Nye & Keohane 1972, pp. xix-xx; Jacobson 1979, pp. 416-422; Willets 1982, pp. 21-22).

Moving Beyond the Old Debate

The new theoretical framework for the study of transnational actors was spearheaded with the publication of Thomas Risse-Kappen's 1995 edited

volume, *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, which looked to redefine the direction of transnational studies away from the state-centered versus society-centered debate. Transnational scholars should, according to Risse-Kappen, not argue over which view should hold primacy but rather study how to synthesize the two views into a realistic understanding of the international system and the place of transnational relations within it (p. 5). Such a point of view regarding the long standing state-centered / society-centered debate makes sense, for both sides agree on far more than they disagree. Indeed, the findings of the earlier work of the state-centered and society-centered scholars surveyed in Section 1.1 above do not differ radically in their research questions and findings. The earlier state-centered scholars were interested primarily in how international or transnational actors could directly influence domestic state action. Similarly, the later society-centered scholars were also primarily interested in studying the effect of transnational actors within the international system. Indeed, as the survey of the work of earlier state-centered scholars above demonstrates, the state-centered approach did accept that international or transnational actors could independently shape behavior and interests within the international system.

By understanding that the state-centered / society-centered debate is really a difference of semantics, Risse-Kappen (1995) instead proposes that the real research question that transnational scholars should ask is under what international and national circumstances do ‘transnational coalitions and actors who attempt to change policy outcomes in a specific issue-area succeed or fail to achieve their goals?’ (p. 5). Risse-Kappen then sets out to construct a theoretical framework for identifying the conditions in which transnational actors succeed in affecting domestic state policy / behavior. Risse-Kappen conceptualizes² a theoretical framework that looks to both national level institutions and networks, as well as the international level norms they operated within, in order to identify the policy impact of transnational actors (p. 6). He identifies two independent variables that can influence domestic policy impact: variation in the amount of international institutionalization in regards to the policy being advocated; and variation in the composition of national level institutional structures of the state being targeted for influence.

² Per Sartori (1970), conceptualization here is defined as the assignment of meaning (pp. 1033-1034).

International institutionalization matters because it can act as a force facilitating the access of transnational actors into national level structures (p. 31). International regimes³ can act to reduce the power of states to restrict the access points available to transnational actors to penetrate into the system (p. 31). Even the most consolidating or centralized of states, if part of some type of regulating international regime⁴ will find its available options restrained when trying to restrict transnational access into its domestic state structures.

Domestic state structures matter because they control both the ability of transnational actors to access the institutions of the state being targeted and, once in, form 'winning policy coalitions' with relevant national level actors (pp. 6-7, 25). Domestic state structures 'mediate, filter, and refract the efforts by transnational actors and alliances to influence policies' (p. 25). The more consolidated the domestic structures of a state are (pp. 23-24), the more difficult it is for transnational actors to penetrate the system (pp. 6, 26-27). States with concentrated power and rigid institutions are much more likely to be able to restrict the entry and operation of transnational actors through legal and / or financial hurdles. This being said, if transnational actors can penetrate into such rigid institutions, they could potentially have massive impacts (pp. 6, 26-27). The same holds true for the reverse scenario: the more diffuse the domestic structures of a state are, the easier it is for transnational actors to penetrate the system (pp. 27-28). Within such environments, however, penetration may come easily but, due to the fragmented institutions inherent to such systems, policy demands are not likely to have a very large impact, as transnational actors will have to build numerous cross-cutting coalitions in an attempt to influence said institutions (pp. 27-28).

The world Thomas Risse-Kappen envisions is one in which international and national level structures stand side to side – with transnational actors trying to penetrate into the domestic state structures. Whilst Risse-Kappen's framework was a welcome step in moving away from broad discussions of whether the state or international society was the proper unit of analysis, and in identifying factors that should shape transnational actor influence, it remains underspecified (see Section 2.2 for discussion). Risse-Kappen's

³ Per Krasner (1983), regimes here are defined as 'implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given [issue area]' (p. 2).

⁴ E.g. the Kyoto Protocol for regulating carbon emissions, or the Helsinki Charter which sets up a mechanism for monitoring human rights in Europe, etc.

framework behavior fails to systematically operationalize⁵ the independent variables he cites. The result is a thin account of how transnational actors matter stemming from a series of measurement problems due to the underlying concepts being much too general. Unfortunately, not only has subsequent scholarship failed to address these problems of measurement in Risse-Kappen's framework, it has also failed, in any meaningful way, to engage in Risse-Kappen's call to move away from state-centered / society-centered debates of the past.

Transnational Studies: Present State of the Sub-Field

Since the mid-1990s, the state of transnational studies has failed to develop this promising new avenue for empirical research in any sustained or systematic manner. Indeed, the running theme of much of this current scholarship is a duplication of earlier research. While many scholars have favorably cited the initial call to bridge the state-centered / society-centered debate, only a few have taken up the task. Additionally, the scholarship that has attempted to move beyond the debate, and look to study how transnational actors can possibly affect domestic state behavior, has not meaningfully engaged literature in other disciplines that have also looked to the same issue. This unintended parochialism is especially unfortunate, as scholarship in other fields that looks to how international and national systems interact, has much to offer the sub-field of transnational studies.

Missed Opportunities

The bulk of current work within the field of transnational studies has, unfortunately, not refined, utilized in any systematic fashion, or indeed moved beyond the promising theoretical framework for the study of transnational actors introduced in the mid-1990s. A survey of major empirical work in the sub-field since 1995 reveals a spate of missed opportunities.

In her work, *National Interests in International Society* published in 1996, shortly after the appearance of *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, Martha Finnemore explores how states can become 'socialized' by the

⁵ To engage in empirical work means that there must be some assignment of a value to the phenomena under study, for it is only through doing this that what is being studied can be measured, however imperfectly. In the language of social science, this process is called 'operationalization' (Adcock & Collier 2001; Munck & Verkuilen 2002).

network of actors that made up the international system (p. 2). Rejecting the realist presumption that domestic states have fixed goals of 'power, security, and wealth,' Finnemore develops a social constructivist approach which argues that socialization within the international system can affect the preferences of states (pp. 1-3, 5, 13). Finnemore empirically tests her theory through three case studies on how international institutions (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization or UNESCO; International Red Cross; and World Bank) are able to reconstitute the interests of their various domestic nation state members. This reconstitution is achieved through 'teaching,' where the various international organizations reflect (to their various domestic nation state members) new international norms through 'setting agendas, defining tasks, and sharpening interests' (pp. 12-13). While interesting in its conclusions, Finnemore's study is very much in the well-trodden path of earlier scholars surveyed such as Cohn, Johnson and Niemeyer, Keohane and Nye, and Willetts – which all explored the different ways in which international or transnational organizations could affect elite and public attitudes within targeted states.

In their edited volume, *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics*, published in 1997, Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco look specifically at transnational actors that are advocacy groups (international non-governmental organizations) and exclude from their analysis large-scale international organizations that count domestic states as members (pp. 12-15). Labeling the transnational actors they study as 'transnational social movement organizations' or TSMOs, Smith, Chatfield, Pagnucco, and their contributors look to how various TSMOs are able to push their policy preferences onto states through organizing constituencies, targeting international organizations, and mobilizing resources. While notable for the sheer number of TSMOs they study, the insights generated by Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco merely follow in the footsteps of scholars surveyed earlier such as Willetts and his work on 'transnational pressure groups.' Furthermore, Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco leave out of their analysis of TSMOs, the methods through which both international forces, and national level domestic institutions, can affect the ability of transnational actors to affect policy change.

The Richard A. Higgott, Geoffrey R. D. Underhill, and Andreas Bieler's edited volume, *Non-State Actors and Authority in the Global System* (2000) echoes the call of Thomas Risse-Kappen in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* to move the state of transnational studies beyond the state-centered

/ society-centered debate. Studying the effects of globalization on state power, Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler argue that whilst the state had seen its power in certain areas weaken, globalization had conversely strengthened the powers of the state in other areas (p. 1). Echoing Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco's work focusing on the ability of transnational actors to lobby and push for their policy preferences, Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler find that transnational actors (specifically NGOs with a global / transnational reach) can strengthen locally based NGOs through the transfer of policy advice and training (and in this way affect domestic state behavior) (p. 4; *see also* Jakobsen 2000). This finding, although useful and promising, merely duplicates the bulk of the observations made earlier by Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco.

Limited Progress

Despite the overall failure of transnational studies scholars to move forward the state of research in the sub-field from the promising strides made in the mid-1990s, there has been some limited progress spearheaded by a few researchers willing to engage with the ideas first presented in Thomas Risse-Kappen's *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* and begin to build on them. A survey of this literature reveals that, perhaps unwittingly, it has begun to move the study of transnational actors in a more inter-disciplinary direction.

In their work, *Activists Beyond Borders* (1998), Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink seek to study not only specific transnational actors and their ability to affect state behavior, but to move beyond and study 'networks' of transnational advocacy groups.⁶ 'Transnational advocacy networks' are composed of 'relevant actors working internationally on an issue' who are 'bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and a dense exchange of information and services' (p. 2). Adopting the concept of 'analytic frames'⁷ from sociology, Keck and Sikkink argued that

⁶ Note how again, along the same lines of as Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco's *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics*, Keck and Sikkink were here limiting their study to transnational actors that were advocacy groups (international non-governmental organizations), and excluding from their analysis large-scale international organizations that counted domestic states as members.

⁷ Analytic frames 'frame, or assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists' (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198).

transnational advocacy networks work in part to fashion and present issues in a way that can 'legitimate and motivate collective action' (pp. 2-4, 16-17). Citing favorably *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, Keck and Sikkink fashion a model that explains how transnational advocacy networks frame issues and motivate collective action in order to affect specific policy change in targeted states. Labeling their model the 'boomerang pattern,' Keck and Sikkink envision a world where domestic advocacy groups (i.e. in the state being targeted for influence) can activate their transnational advocacy network (made up of advocacy groups around the world with transnational reach) who will then put pressure (through framing the issues at hand and thereby motivating collective action) on other states and relevant international organizations (pp. 12-16).

In their edited volume, *The Power of Human Rights* (1999), Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink attempt to bring together the 'boomerang pattern' model, elaborated by Keck and Sikkink in *Activists Beyond Borders*, and synthesize it within the framework laid out in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*. Directly engaging the theoretical framework laid out in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* (but limiting their study to transnational advocacy networks in the issue area of human rights), Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink argue that the first independent variable presented in the earlier model, variation in the composition of national level structures of the state being targeted for influence, is not necessarily a fluid concept (pp. 4-5). Accordingly, Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink posit that transnational advocacy networks can, under the correct conditions, effectively change the national level structures themselves (pp. 4-5). Laying out these conditions in a complex model (which they label the 'spiral model'), Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink argue that Keck and Sikkink's original 'boomerang pattern' model can be elaborated (pp. 17-19). The 'spiral model' envisions a world where, much like the 'boomerang pattern' model, domestic advocacy groups (in the domestic state being targeted for influence) could activate their transnational advocacy network,⁸ who will then put pressure (through framing the issues at hand and thereby motivating collective action) on other states and relevant international organizations (Risse & Sikkink 1999, p. 20). Where the two models differ is that the 'spiral model' views the process as fluid and occurring in a number of back and forth stages, with the targeted state making first blanket denials (resulting in a new round of targeted pressure); later tactical concessions (again, resulting in a new round of

⁸ I.e. made up of advocacy groups around the world with transnational reach.

targeted pressure); and finally rule consistent behavior. The key in the back and forth is that each stage can result in the targeted state becoming 'socialized' (conforming to preferred behaviors and norms) (p. 20).⁹

In their edited volume, *Restructuring World Politics* (2002), Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, much in the same vein as Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco's *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics*, seek to study the effects of transnational social movement organizations on the international system. Like Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink limit their study to transnational actors that are advocacy groups (international non-governmental organizations) and exclude from their analysis large-scale international organizations that count domestic states as members (pp. 3-4). Looking in part to the social movements literature within sociology, including the concept of analytic frames (pp. 12, 15-16), Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink argue that the main ability of transnational actors to affect change in the international system is either through taking well established 'international norms' (i.e. shared standards of behavior accepted by a majority of actors within the international system) and using them to 'persuade' outlying actors to conform their behavior, or attempting to establish new 'international norms' where none had previously existed (pp. 14-15). Such 'persuasion' is accomplished by transnational actors through 'the use of information, persuasion, and moral pressure to contribute to change in international institutions and government' (p. 11).

While *Activists Beyond Borders*, *The Power of Human Rights*, and *Restructuring World Politics* are notable for their direct engagement with Thomas Risse-Kappen's complex theoretical model (1995), as well as beginning to lay an inter-disciplinary approach to the study of transnational actors, neither of the works goes far enough. Keck and Sikkink (1998) do not fully develop their discussion on the use and application of how the concept of analytic frames from sociology can be fully incorporated to the study of transnational actors. Similarly, Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) admirably recognize that rule implementation can act as an iterative process, they do not cite to the literature in socio-legal studies that first pointed this out in the 1980s nor do they then continue the observation into how rule making

⁹ This idea of rule implementation as an iterative process has its roots in socio-legal studies, though Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink do not cite to any of the relevant literature in that field.

can also act in such a manner.¹⁰ They also intuitively accept that historical institutionalism has much that could add to their analysis, but beyond a passing citation to some of the relevant literature, they ignore fully utilizing historical institutionalism¹¹ in their study (Risse & Sikkink 1999, p. 16.). While Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink (2002) do develop a discussion and analysis of how analytic frames act to mobilize transnational coalitions,¹² they do not extend the analysis into detailing the role institutions may play in the process. More recent transnational relations scholarship has continued this unfortunate trend of limited or, indeed, non-existent engagement outside of the sub-field (*see e.g.* Bloodgood 2011; Ohanyan 2012; Widmaier & Park 2012; Kim 2013).

Transnational Relations: An Inter-Disciplinary Approach

The study of how international and national systems interact is not solely the purview of those studying such phenomenon under the umbrella of transnational studies within the field of international relations. Though they may not label themselves as ‘transnational studies scholars,’ socio-legal scholars studying the interactions between norms on the international and national levels, and political scientists studying the specific effects of institutions, have had and have much to contribute to understanding how transnational actors operate and affect domestic state behavior, and the methods by which these effects can be measured. An inter-disciplinary approach to the study of transnational relations would present not only a new, more systematic structure to the exploration of how transnational actors can possibly affect state behavior, but also an understanding that the study of transnational actors is one that specifically lends itself to both multiple disciplines and multiple methods.

Socio-legal scholarship studying norm formation and interaction both within and between the international and national levels, and the historical

¹⁰ Section 2.1 below shall offer a full explanation and review of the socio-legal literature on norm formation, implementation, and interaction.

¹¹ Section 2.2 below shall present a full explanation and review of the historical institutionalist literature within political science.

¹² It should be noted that there is an emerging group of sociologists that have begun exploring the question of transnational actor mobilization utilizing, in part, the concept of analytic frames (*see* Smith 2002; Tarrow 2005; Della Porta & Tarrow 2005).

institutionalist movement within political science, have much to contribute to the study of transnational relations. Socio-legal scholarship, with its emphasis on the causal mechanisms that drive the interactions between the international and national systems, offers an analytically sound and methodologically systematic way to study the relationships between these two levels. Similarly, historical institutionalism, with its focus on how institutions mediate and shape interactions, and the importance of time and historical trajectory in institutional endurance and design, offers a powerful way forward towards studying the interactions that are at the heart of transnational studies.

Socio-Legal Perspectives

The study of how international and national systems interact is not solely the purview of those within the field of transnational studies. Socio-legal scholars have also produced useful empirical findings that could contribute to the study of how transnational actors can affect domestic state behavior. As has been discussed, although certain current transnational studies scholarship has grasped at some of the insights of socio-legal scholarship (e.g. rule implementation as an iterative process), this realization has come in a seemingly independent manner, with no citations to, or analysis of, the earlier socio-legal scholarship. The study of how international and national systems interact has long been of interest to socio-legal scholars, with a wide body of empirical findings produced. Socio-legal scholarship has identified, with great precision, the emergence of norms, and the causal mechanisms that accompany their implementation, in several diverse issue areas.

Lauren Edelman, in her 2005 study of civil rights law in the United States, has found that legal norms can be endogenous or ‘generated within the social realm that [they] seek to regulate’ (pp. 337-339). Instead of a traditional view that conceptualizes legal norms and the organizations that they seek to regulate as separated – i.e. law as exogenous to organizations, Edelman views norms and organizations as ‘intertwined and mutually constitutive’ (p. 337). This endogenous relationship is made possible, in the context of American civil rights law, because these laws tend to be broadly and ambiguously worded and thus provide organizations with large degree of freedom in fashioning compliance (Edelman 1992, pp. 1532, 1536-1538; 2005, p. 337). Given this, Edelman has found that organizations will turn to what she dubs their ‘legal environments’ for ideas on how to fashion compliance with ambiguous civil rights laws (2005, p. 339.). ‘Legal environments’ are defined as consisting of more than just specific laws (and

the sanctions built into them), but also of the ‘societal norms’ and perceptions associated with said laws — in other words, the ‘broad set of rules, norms, routines, and practices that shape not only employers’ understandings of the law and compliance but their notions of what is right, fair, and proper’ (1990; 2002, p. 194). As the ‘compliance practices’ of organizations becomes institutionalized, courts will, when consulted, largely defer to the interpretations as fashioned by the organizations themselves, for said institutionalization is seen as an indication (by the courts) of an ‘effective’ model of compliance (2002, pp. 199-210; 2005, pp. 350-351).

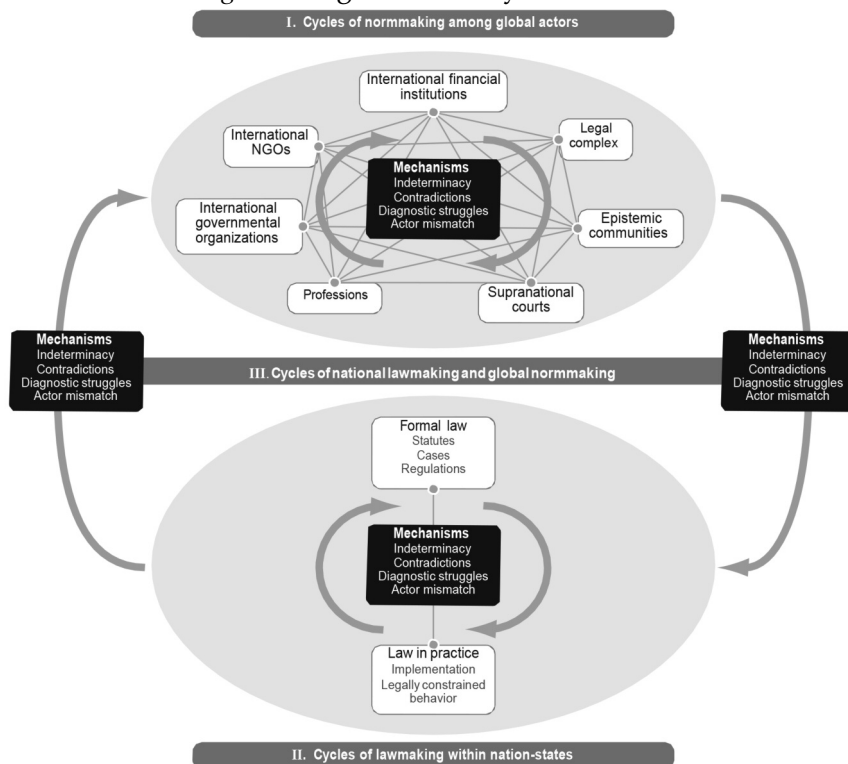
Building on the insights generated by Edelman, Terence Halliday and Bruce Carruthers have examined how norms can be exchanged and transferred between, on the one hand, the transnational governmental, quasi-governmental, and non-governmental institutions within the international community as a whole, and, on the other hand, domestic states. According to Halliday and Carruthers, law making and implementation, on both the system and national levels, can act as an iterative and recursive process (Halliday & Carruthers 2007, pp. 1135-1138). International and national level actors can develop legal norms that can then be refracted onto one another through exogenous processes such as economic coercion, persuasion through international institutions, and universal norms (that can then act as models on what constitutes acceptable behavior within the international and / or national system) (pp. 1146-1148). These norms can then undergo recursive cycles, on both the international and national levels, as formal law (‘the law on the books’) goes through cycles of change as it is interpreted and implemented (‘law in practice’),¹³ refracting back and forth between the two levels (pp. 1144, 1146-1147). That episodes of these recursive cycles will occur is not a given, nor will these cycles necessarily occur in perpetuity (Halliday 2009, p. 274); rather they are driven by four distinct identifiable mechanisms: (1) the indeterminacy of law (the ambiguities inherent in statutes, regulations, and court opinions that lead to the possible unintended consequences of their application, setting off repeated rounds of redrafting and reapplication) (Halliday & Carruthers 2007, p. 1149; Halliday 2009, pp. 281-282); (2) contradictions (the phenomenon that emerges ideologically when clashing visions amongst actors lead to imperfect legal settlements, or institutionally when legal

¹³ ‘Legal recursivity,’ following classic socio-legal theory, holds that the ‘conditions of lawmaking affect implementation, and the circumstances of practice influence what law gets placed on the books’ (Halliday 2009, p. 269).

implementation is divided out between different institutions) (Halliday & Carruthers 2007, pp. 1149-1150; Halliday 2009, pp. 280-281)¹⁴; (3) diagnostic struggles (the struggle, between various actors, of diagnosing perceived shortcomings in legal norms and identifying corrective prescriptions) (Halliday & Carruthers 2007, pp. 1150-1151; Halliday 2009, pp. 278-279); and (4) actor mismatch (mismatches that occur when there is a disparity between actors who actually participate in the norm-making process in a particular issue area, and those who the norms actually affect – in other words actors who are directly affected by a new norms implementation are not participants in its creation) (Halliday & Carruthers 2007, pp. 1150-1151; Halliday 2009, pp. 277-278). ‘Legal recursivity’ conceptualizes norm-making as, above all else, an ‘exercise of power’ and a ‘struggle among competing actors in global arenas’ (Halliday 2009, pp. 268-269). Norm-making episodes have a beginning (time 1), when there are competing claims and conflicts and an end (time 2), when behavior and expectations have become ‘routinized, orderly, and predictable’ by accepted, and therefore authoritative, norms (Halliday 2009, p. 274). Recursive cycles are what occurs between time 1 and time 2. Figure 1 below presents a simplified representation of legal recursivity in action:

¹⁴ There is also vast literature in public law on ideological contradiction, especially as related to the interactions between the U.S. Congress and the Federal Courts (see Melnick 1994; Eskridge 1994).

Figure 1: Legal Recursivity in Action¹⁵



Through its detailed description of international and national norm formation and implementation, and the mechanisms that drive the process, socio-legal scholarship in general, and the new emerging theory of legal recursivity in particular, is exceptional in offering a true blueprint for examining the methods through which international and national level norms interact. The rigorous framework legal recursivity provides for understanding the process of international / national norm formation has the potential to provide the specification in identifying the factors that should shape transnational actor influence that the current Risse-Kappen inspired framework lacks.

¹⁵ Figure replicates chart provided in Halliday (2009, p. 270).

Historical Institutional Approaches

As has been seen, current transnational studies scholarship seems to intuitively accept that historical institutionalism can contribute to the sub-field, though what form such a contribution should take is left open. Indeed, although Risse-Kappen (1995) cites to the insights generated by historical institutionalism movement generally, as potential tools in studying the relationships between transnational actors and domestic structures (p. 20-21), he fails to either explain what historical institutionalism is in any detail. Furthermore neither he nor his contributors proceed to apply clearly historical institutionalist analysis to any of the empirical chapters of the edited volume.

Historical institutionalism is ‘neither a particular theory nor a specific method,’ (Steinmo 2008, p. 118) though many scholars have confused it as one or the other. Historical institutionalism is instead a process or ‘approach to studying politics and social change’ (with the associated method most often used to study this change being the case study) (p. 118). This process is different from others because in looking to answer empirical questions, it focuses on both the historical orientation and trajectory of institutions, and how they can change and shape behavior (p. 118). History itself then becomes a methodological tool through the engagement of longitudinal cross-period analysis (i.e. time-series analysis) both within and across cases (Lieberman 2001, pp. 1016-1023; Steinmo 2008, pp. 122). Historical institutionalist analysis looks to measure the impact of institutional ‘form and configuration’ on outcomes (Lieberman 2001, pp. 1012-1013). History is important in this analysis because, once established, institutions may endure for extensive lengths of time and thus affect outcomes for significant periods (pp. 1012-1013).

Historical institutionalism, one of the three main branches to emerge out of the ‘new institutionalist’ movement in political science and sociology in the 1980s (apart from sociological institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism), seeks to explain the differences within the preferences generated by different institutions across national and transnational boundaries. Standing in the middle of the traditional definition focused on structure, and the definition offered by the new institutionalism focused on the rules and routines (March & Olsen 1989), historical institutionalism defines institutions as both the formal structure of organizations and the informal ‘rules of conduct’ that ‘structure’ decision-making processes (Lieberman 2001, p. 1013). Historical institutionalists explore how and why similarly situated institutions can function in completely different ways, both

domestically and comparatively across borders (see e.g. Thelen & Steinmo 1992). Accepting the concept of bounded rationality, as elaborated by March and Olsen, and building off of many of their dominant themes, the historical institutionalists see institutions as key in shaping the preference formation (Baker 2011, pp. 346-347). In this way, the structures of institutions have a direct effect upon the terms and realities of political situations, and thus leave 'their own imprint on political outcomes' (Thelen & Steinmo 1992, p. 9). The examination, however, goes beyond simply the institutions themselves under study; the political factors that affect the structure and authority of individual institutions, and set their function in the broader system, also have to be understood as well in order to fully unpack the institutional context of the preferences being created and shaped (Ginsburg & Kagan 2005, p. 2). Institutions then are not classic independent or explanatory variables, but rather act as mediators or filters shaping the effects of other independent variables (Lieberman 2001, pp. 1012-1015). Thus similar independent variables across cases may produce different outcomes if the institutions in question differ in substantial ways (pp. 1012-1015). The stability of institutions (or lack thereof) is important, because the more stable institutional arrangements are, the more constrained the range of possible outcomes (pp. 1012-1015). Utilizing these insights, the past decades have seen much pioneering historical institutionalist scholarship by political scientists (see e.g. Weir 1992; Rothstein 1992; Pierson 2004; Thelen 2004; Steinmo 2010).

As a process towards studying politics and social change, historical institutionalism and its associated method of the case study, can contribute to the study of transnational relations by focusing inquiry specifically on how various institutions, on both at the international and national levels, mediate and shape outcomes. By understanding that history matters in that it sets the context for the variables under study, and engaging in case studies that employ longitudinal cross-period analysis that can help test hypothesized relationships, historical institutionalism offers a powerful way forward towards studying the interactions that are at the heart of transnational studies.

3. An Inter-Disciplinary Approach to The Study of Transnational Relations: Advantages

An inter-disciplinary approach to the study of transnational relations, encompassing both work done in the transnational studies sub-field of international relations, socio-legal scholarship on how international and

national systems interact, and historical institutionalist approaches from political science, would present not only a new, more systematic structure to the exploration of how transnational actors can affect domestic state behavior, but also an understanding that the study of transnational actors specifically lends itself to both multiple disciplines and multiple approaches. As has been seen, the publication of *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* in 1995 began a process through which, the mainly international relations scholars traditionally engaged in transnational studies, sought to extend the sub-field beyond the state-centered / society-centered debate of the past and engage the sub-field with the common question of *how* transnational actors *could affect* state behavior and *vice versa*. Though the new theoretical framework presented was a promising one, for this new direction to succeed, it must be built upon and refined in order to improve on its very thin account of transnational actor behavior.

Any new model for the study of transnational relations must address the key flaw of under-specification inherent in Risse-Kappen's (1995) framework. This under-specification can be traced to the framework's failure to rigorously identify the key independent variables for the study of how international and national norms interact, and the techniques by which these effects can be measured. This last point is key, for, although innovative, Risse-Kappen's framework suffers from a series of measurement problems centering mainly on a failure to systematically operationalize the independent variables he cites. Recall that in Risse-Kappen presented the following independent variables for the study of *how* transnational actors *could affect* state behavior (1995):

Figure 2: Independent Variables as Identified by Risse-Kappen in *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* (1995)

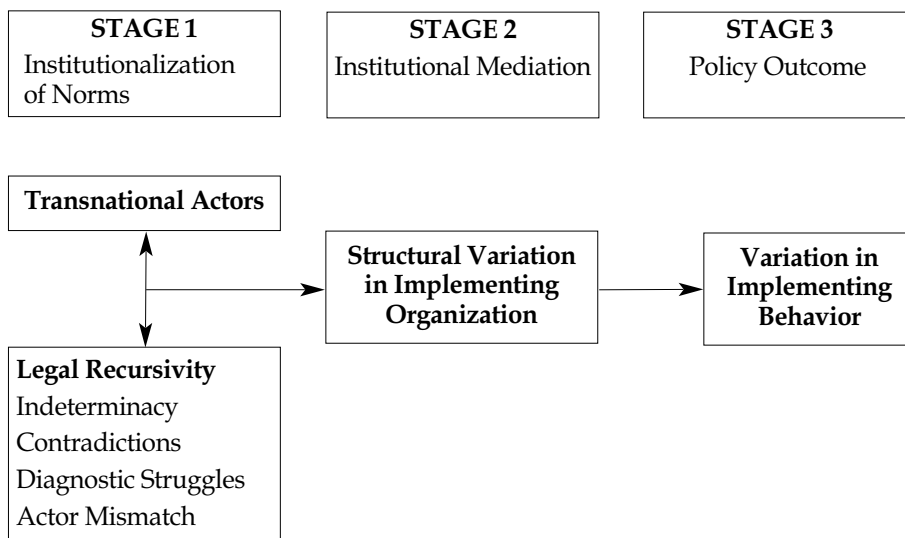
INDEPENDENT VARIABLE(S):	DEPENDENT VARIABLE:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variation in the amount of international institutionalization in regards to the policy being advocated (i.e. the scope and extent of international regulation, treaties, regimes, etc. governing that policy area). • Variation in the composition of the domestic structures of the state being targeted for influence (i.e. the political institutions at the top of the state, the societal structures or civil society at the bottom, and the policy networks linking them). 	<p>Variation in the policy impact of transnational actors on the domestic state being targeted for influence.</p>

The utilization of the insights generated by the socio-legal literature on international and national norm interaction, especially the empirical work of Halliday and Carruthers highlighting the phenomenon of legal recursivity, offers a path towards operationalizing and therefore systematically testing the phenomenon Risse-Kappen identifies as ‘international institutionalization.’ This first independent variable in Risse-Kappen’s framework (identified as the extent, or lack thereof, of international regulation, treaties, and regimes governing specific issue areas) is analogous to the differences Halliday and Carruthers describe between the beginnings of norm-making episodes (time 1) when there are competing claims and conflicts, and the end (time 2) of such episodes, when behavior and expectations have become ‘routinized, orderly, and predictable’ by accepted, and therefore authoritative, norms. Legal recursivity (driven by the four mechanisms Halliday and Carruthers identify¹⁶) being what occurs between time 1 and time 2. The advantage of this approach is that it not only allows for the identification (around specific issue areas) of conflicting versus settled norms, but it also allows for an investigation of the actual process itself through which norms may move from being disputed (time 1 of the recursive cycle) to being established (time 2 of the recursive cycle) and the effects such cycles may possibly have on the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic politics.

Fully and clearly utilizing historical institutionalism in the study of transnational relations could achieve a great deal in helping to understand how the second variable Risse-Kappen identifies as ‘variation in the national level structures,’ affects the abilities of transnational actors to affect domestic state behavior. By refocusing study on specific *institutions* and how they mediate transnational politics, rather than a system level snapshot that views ‘domestic structures’ as an integrated whole, the range of observations (the N) for study can be extended, and the specific relationships at play better identified. The importance of institutional structure and time that permeates historical institutionalist work (see Lieberman 2001; Pierson 2004), and the associated case study method’s strength in hypothesis testing, offer new tools for testing the importance of institutions in the ability (or failure) of transnational actors to affect state behavior. Figure 3 below presents a representation the independent and mediating variables in an ‘inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations’:

¹⁶ I.e. As discussed earlier, these mechanisms are: (1) the indeterminacy of law; (2) contradictions; (3) diagnostic struggles; and (4) actor mismatch.

Figure 3: An Inter-Disciplinary Framework for the Study of Transnational Relations



An inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations offers a means towards a rigorous, more systematic, operationalization of the variables driving the relationships under study, as well as an instrument to more explicitly identify the sequence of processes that affect the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic state politics. As has been seen, socio-legal literature has described the nature of norm formation and interaction as iterative and marked by possible recursive cycles driving the transformation of conflicting norms into settled ones – the literature has identified these cycles as being driven by clear mechanisms. Such insight can offer distinct advantages to the study of how norms (whether international or national in origin / nature) can be adopted by transnational actors and then used to target into states (stage 1 of the framework). Similarly, the historical institutionalist approach, with its emphasis on how institutions both mediate outcomes and shape preferences (stage 2 of the framework), offers a clear path towards the study of how specific cases of institutional design can possibly influence the ability of transnational actors to affect state behavior (stage 3 of the framework), as well as the development of these processes over time.

Stage 1 of the framework then analyzes the nature of the norms that are adopted by transnational actors and then used to target into domestic states.

Are these norms subjected to competing claims and conflicts as to their meanings and application, or rather have they gained the status of accepted and / or authoritative status? In other words, are recursive cycles on-going (thereby indicating conflicts as to application and meaning), or rather have such cycles settled and come to an end (indicating acceptance as to application of meaning)? Stage 2 of the framework looks to how these norms are possibly affected by the design of the institutions they are filtered through in their application and how this can possibly either magnify or diffuse transnational actor influence. Stage 3 of the framework tests transnational actor influence by observing their success / failure in implementing their preferred policy outcomes on targeted states through the norms in question.

4. The Inter-Disciplinary Framework: Application

What would the practical application of the inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations presented above look like? An applied example would be one way to perhaps gauge whether the claims on the advantages of this framework discussed ring true (*see e.g.* Baker 2016). An even more useful path forward could be to apply the framework to an already existing study in order to see whether it really delivers on its claims better more systematic operationalization of the variables driving the relationships under study, as well as an instrument to more explicitly identify the sequence of processes that affect the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic state politics.

Recall, how earlier in Section 1.3.2, the Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) edited volume was presented as an example of limited progress in setting the stage to move the study of transnational actors in a more inter-disciplinary direction. This progress manifested itself in the authors' willingness to grapple with the new themes that began to appear in the transnational studies sub-field in the mid-1990s. Their 'spiral model'¹⁷ accepted that the implementation of rules could act as an iterative process, and recognized the role that historical institutionalist approaches could play

¹⁷ Recall that 'spiral model' envisions a world where domestic advocacy groups (in the domestic state being targeted for influence) can activate their transnational advocacy network (made up of advocacy groups around the world with transnational reach) who will then put pressure (through framing the issues at hand and thereby motivating collective action) on other states and relevant international organizations (Risse & Sikkink 1999, p. 20).

in determining the conditions under which transnational actors succeed or fail to achieve their goals. Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink and their contributors failed however to extend their insights by exploring how rule making itself could act in an iterative process (i.e. *in addition to* rule implementation). Additionally, they did not actually engage in any historical institutionalist approaches in their analysis despite citing to the advantages of doing so.

Of the six case studies presented by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink's contributors, one of the more interesting comes from Daniel C. Thomas (1999). Using the 1975 Helsinki Accords (also known as the Helsinki Final Act) as his jumping off point, Thomas charts how the Accords and the norms enumerated within them, especially as related to freedom of assembly and expression, contributed to the ability of transnational actors in then communist Poland¹⁸ to mount challenges to the communist authorities. These challenges, per Thomas, helped to then aid in the process that culminated in the transition to multi-party rule in 1989.

The Helsinki Accords were a set of declarations that capped off the formation of the Conference on Security and Co-Operation in Europe in 1975 (CSCE). Encompassing the United States, Canada, Soviet Union, and all Western and Eastern Bloc European states (except Andorra and Albania), the Accords enumerated 10 principles that the signatory states agreed to seek to respect. Thomas focuses on Principle 7, which committed the signatory states to respect 'human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief' (Thomas 1999, pp. 207-208). Utilizing Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink's 'spiral model' Thomas charts how the model's various stages¹⁹ played out in Poland where the 'spiral model's' initial stages emerged through the Communist authorities (in 1975-1976) first downplaying Principle 7, and then attempting to resist the efforts of opposition activists to tie in the domestic adoption of Principle 7 norms through other institutional vehicles – in this case, a call by opposition for the authorities to fully implement the liberal human rights

¹⁸ Thomas actually looks at both Poland *and* Czechoslovakia in his study, but in the interests of brevity, the focus here will be only on Polish example he cites.

¹⁹ Recall that the 'spiral model' occurs in a number of back and forth stages, with the targeted state making first blanket denials (resulting in a new round of targeted pressure); later tactical concessions (again, resulting in a new round of targeted pressure); and finally rule consistent behavior. The key in the back and forth is that each stage can result in the targeted state becoming 'socialized' (i.e. conforming to preferred behaviors and norms) (Risse & Sikkink 1999, p. 20).

provisions of the Communist Polish Constitution of 1952 (pp. 209-211). As Thomas goes on to describe it, these early episodes in Poland triggered transnational advocacy networks in the West to lose their initial skepticism and begin to take the Helsinki Accords and Principle 7 more seriously and put pressure on both Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries (pp. 212-214). The U.S. Congress (after intense lobbying) eventually created a U.S. Helsinki Commission in 1976 to monitor compliance – thus creating a formalized U.S. government-based institution through which domestic advocacy groups on the ground in the Eastern Bloc could liaise with (pp. 213-214). Poland especially was sensitive to pressure, due to its failing economy and desire for loans from the Western Bloc (pp. 214-215).

As Thomas (1999) describes it, the ensuing 13 years between the establishment of the U.S. Helsinki Commission and the emergence of multi-party rule in Poland saw an environment created where transnational actors, both in the western and communist blocs, were able to alter the status quo and put the civil liberties enshrined in Principle 7 as one of the key components in the relationship between the capitalist West and the communist East (pp. 214-215). In Poland, the debate over the Constitution of 1952 mobilized opposition activists to create the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), which was designed to provide legal and financial aid to workers imprisoned over illegal strike action (p. 216). The opposition used the new prominence of Principle 7 in domestic and international discourse to justify the creation of KOR, by claiming that it was designed to help protect the Helsinki rights that the Polish Government had signed on to, and then subsequently mobilized its transnational networks and allies abroad to put pressure on the communist Polish authorities not to crack down and disband KOR (pp. 216-217). This model of pressure by transnational networks; followed by resistance on the part of the targeted state (i.e. Poland in this case); and then rounds of denial, tactical concessions, and eventual acquiesce was later replicated with other organizations created by the Polish opposition (pp. 216-217). These organizations included the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCiO), designed to monitor the Polish government's adherence to the Helsinki Accords, and later the independent trade union Solidarity, which had its roots in KOR and ROPCiO-affiliated trade union cells (pp. 217-221). The emergence of actors like KOR, ROPCiO, and then Solidarity created an environment within Poland where these actors and their international allies could apply constant pressure on the Polish authorities for reform in line with the rights guaranteed by Principle 7 (pp. 230-231). This process, in line with the 'spiral model' Thomas uses to sketch it out, was not instantaneous or one-sided,

but rather emerged from tears of back and forth between the transnational networks involved and the targeted Polish state that eventually (in combination with other factors) resulted in multi-party election in 1989.

How would an inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations apply to the Polish case study in democratization presented by Daniel C. Thomas and summarized above? Recall Figure 3 presented earlier (and the accompanying discussion) which attempted to map out the inter-disciplinary framework in a series of stages. Stage 1 of the framework (the institutionalization of norms) analyzes the nature of the norms that are adopted by transnational actors and then used to target into domestic states. Are these norms subjected to competing claims and conflicts as to their meanings and application, or rather have they gained the status of accepted and / or authoritative status? In this case, an actual investigation of the norms enshrined in Principle 7 would be undertaken. What is the status, both on the system (i.e. international) and national (i.e. Polish) levels, of these norms being pushed by transnational actors onto the targeted state? Is there a generally accepted recognition of what the freedom of 'thought, conscience, religion or belief' meant (c. 1970s), or rather were these norms subject to debate in regards to what they actually entailed and how they were to be applied? The way this could be investigated would, as previously discussed, involve the presence (or lack thereof) of legal recursivity – i.e. the idea that norms may undergo recursive cycles, on both the international and national levels, as formal law ('the law on the books') goes through cycles of change as it is interpreted and implemented ('law in practice'), refracting back and forth between the two levels. Were recursive cycles on-going, thereby indicating conflicts as to application and meaning, or rather had such cycles settled and come to an end, indicating acceptance as to application of meaning?²⁰ In other words, how clear were the concepts (c. 1970s) of freedom of thought / conscience / religion / belief? The analysis could involve international and national (i.e. Polish) level treaties, covenants, customary law, legislation, reports, and legal judgements. For example, one could look to international covenants and customary law governing the freedom of thought and observe whether any of the mechanisms indicating the presence of legal recursivity were present. Was there anything in the language of the covenants and / or customary rules indicating ambiguity

²⁰ Recall that recursive cycles are driven by four distinct identifiable mechanisms: (1) the indeterminacy of law; (2) contradictions (3) diagnostic struggles; and (4) actor mismatch.

thereby potentially setting the stage for differing interpretations by various actors (the indeterminacy of law)? Were the covenants and / or customary rules the result of messy compromises between different ideological factions and, as a result, incoherent and contradictory (contradictions)? Were the covenants and / or customary rules perhaps the result of one set diagnoses as to how to resolve the problem under issue (i.e. increasing and safeguarding freedom of expression) at the expense of others that had been ignored (diagnostic struggles)? Finally, were the covenants and / or customary rules created in a way that excluded from this process those actors who would actually have to enforce and carry out said rules (actor mismatch)? Once this analysis has concluded, and the norms appropriately grouped as either undergoing recursive cycles or being settled, one can then move on to stage 2.

Recall that stage 2 of the inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations (institutional mediation) adopts a historical institutionalist approach with an emphasis on how institutions both mediate outcomes and shape preferences over time. How similar / different institutionally were KOR, ROPCiO, and Solidarity? On the other side, what were the institutional dynamics of the Polish state institutions being targeted? Thomas never goes into detail on the Polish state actors in his discussion, instead referencing all of them under the catch all term of the 'Polish government.' A more nuanced historical institutionalist approach would analyze whether the norms under study (i.e. in this case freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief), at this point also categorized as recursive or settled (stage 1), were at all shaped by both the opposition (i.e. KOR, ROPCiO, and Solidarity) and / or Polish government (e.g. ministry of interior, ministry of justice, secret police, regular police, civilian courts, military courts) institutions they were filtered through. Such an analysis, longitudinally staged over time and taking into account sequentially both the nature of the norms under study (stage 1) and the institutions they are being filtered through (stage 2) could offer a much more nuanced insight into the dynamics behind the process of Polish democratization and the role of transnational actors in the process. Were all of the Principle 7 norms equally successful in being used by transnational actors to influence the Polish authorities or were some Principle 7 norms more effective than others? What about the nature of the institutions -- did some institutions amplify transnational actor influence? Did other institutions dampen down said influence? These are important questions for understanding the role transnational actors played in the process that transformed Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in the emergence of multi-party rule in 1989,

but yet are never identified by Thomas in his otherwise fascinating and well researched analysis.

Conclusion

This article has presented an inter-disciplinary framework for the study of transnational relations that looks to build upon earlier work across the multiple disciplines of international relations, socio-legal studies, and political science in its quest to study how transnational actors can affect domestic state behavior. This need for a new model to understand transnational actor behavior is both timely and necessary. The existing literature on 'transnational studies' within international relations is too vague in describing the factors that affect the ability of transnational actors to affect domestic state behavior. These problems of under-specificity have led to a thin account of how transnational actors matter and a series of measurement problems due to the underlying concepts being much too general.

The new framework presented in this article builds on the contributions of the existing literature on 'transnational studies' within international relations but then turns to literature in socio-legal studies and political science in order to rectify problems of under-specification. From traditional transnational relations scholarship undertaken within the field of international relations, this inter-disciplinary framework accepts the value in studying how transnational actors can affect domestic state behavior, and the importance that the scope and extent of international institutions such as regulations, treaties, and regimes governing specific policy areas have on the potential success (or lack thereof) of transnational actors in affecting domestic policy change. From socio-legal scholarship studying the interactions between norms on the international and national levels, this inter-disciplinary framework accepts that the nature of norm formation and interaction is iterative. Finally, from historical institutionalist approaches undertaken within the field of political science, this inter-disciplinary framework accepts that institutions can both mediate outcomes and shape preferences. Bringing these insights together, this new inter-disciplinary framework: (1) more explicitly identifies the sequence of the variables that affect the ability of transnational actors to influence domestic state politics; and (2) provides more detail and specificity on the process through which this influence is attempted by introducing concrete concepts (centering on the recursive nature of norm formation and the importance of institutional structure in influencing outcomes) into the equation.

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COMPETING VISIONS OF WORLD ORDER: HOW CHINA, THE US, THE EU AND RUSSIA CONCEIVE THE TRANSITION TO MULTIPOLARITY

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Abstract: Prior and in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine, the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the People's Republic of China launched a series of strategic documents, revealing their conceptions of the current and future world order. While these documents differ in form, they are based on common understanding that the Western-led "rules-based order" (RBO) is undergoing a transition towards multipolarity.

For the U.S. and the EU, the logical objective is to keep as much of the RBO intact as possible, and to absorb the changing international context to their advantage. China and Russia, on the other hand, are pursuing visions of change of world order – political, military, economic, ideological, cultural and normative – which would go beyond cosmetic changes reminiscent of a *status quo*.

This paper aims to present and analyse these differing visions of world order and their perspectives in the transition of global political trends, as all the major powers promote strategic narratives in line with strategic documents. Authors contrast the competing visions of world order and discuss how they relate to the realities of each power's statecraft capabilities.

Keywords: Russia, China, U.S., EU, World Order, multipolarity.

World order and the clash for the redistribution of power

In the age of instability, great powers compete with their visions for the increasingly multipolar world order. This has been the case particularly

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since Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2007 Munich speech, the first open diplomatic challenge to the "unilateral moment" of U.S. dominance in international politics, economy and media, followed shortly after by the formation of BRICS, as a symbol of rising Sino-Russian cooperation. Washington's counter efforts ensued to limit the reach of this expansive challenge. These dynamics changed the course of transformation of the global order which had been initiated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The transition towards multipolarity coincided with the eruption of the Western economic crisis from 2008, and the subsequent political bankruptcy of the era of liberal globalisation and humanitarian interventions, which backfired with a migration crisis. The European Union documents of strategic posture lined up with Washington's. The moral underpinnings of Western documents, which had been already hurt during the attacks on Yugoslavia and Iraq, further lost their broader public appeal following the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011 and the war in Gaza in 2023-2024, weakening the rhetoric of the rules-based order (RBO) (Jones 2011)². Although phrases and wording on the rules-based order will continue, there is a serious question whether anyone will believe it. The transition towards multipolarity is marked by "uncertainty and the fight for legitimacy of states in international relations" (Mitić and Matić 2022, 251). States use strategic communication, framing and narratives to pursue this legitimacy. Yet, they must make sure to connect the words and the deeds, and "to close the say-do gap" as one of the key elements of successful strategic communication (Mitić 2018, 143).

However, aside questions of popular opinion, the issue of the changing world order is connected to one of the central arguments of IR theories, namely its character. Every theory departs from a certain position in time and space, and the decision to employ it has an ideological background. Indeed, Cox argued that theories are more likely ideologies (Cox 1981, 128). The absence of the authority at the global level led many political scientists from Realist to English school to conclude that, unlike in internal politics where clear official hierarchy is present, the outside realm is ruled by anarchy. Realists start from the Hobbessian assertion that sovereigns act among themselves in a natural state, which is a state of anarchy. A reasonable question arises from this situation: is there a possibility of order in an anarchical environment?

² Even in the USA, three months into intervention in Libya, more Americans disapproved than approved it.

A former Australian intelligence analyst and author of a book on his country's strategy, Sam Roggeveen explained that "the international realm is anarchical not in the sense that it is chaotic, in fact, it displays an extraordinary amount of order and cohesion, but in the sense that there is no higher authority with a monopoly on the legal use of violence. It's every state to itself" (Roggeveen 2001)³. International law and organisations are examples of order in the structure without a higher power. International institutions, intergovernmental organisations and international law are just tools that do not have the ultimate power over the action of agents, without the will of the strong agents to press those not adhering to mentioned tools. When great powers (strong agents) constantly behave contrary to the tools of international ordering, transformation is occurring.

Lake, however, argued there is no inherent reason why hierarchy cannot be built in relations among sovereign states. Furthermore, some states are subordinate to others (Lake 2009, 13-15). Cooperation among states can be thus among partners, but also between the dominant and subordinate states. Global order, when it is stable, be it bipolar or multipolar, is characterised by a set of regional hierarchies (Janković 2021, 64-68). These regional hierarchies may have one hegemon power, or two and more regional powers (Lake 2009b). In times of changing international orders, these hierarchies are partially or fully in transition.

International order is the structure in which actors or agents (states and non-state actors) operate. Of course, the order refers to certain modus of organising the agents, and presumes certain rules accepted by others in the order. As Bell said, "*International order is a pattern or structure of human relations such as to sustain the elementary or primary goals of social coexistence among states*" (Bell and Thatcher 2008). But while this definition is quite neutral, the content of the rules-based order actually differs. Namely, as said above, every order, in order to fulfil the prerequisites of being called as such, assumes certain pattern, classification and organisation. Soldiers are lined up orderly or disorderly. If they are in order, there is some line, some sort of pattern that we perceive as orderly. Aside this, Bull understood that world order achieves different meanings in the West and elsewhere (Bell and Thatcher 2008, 84-85). This refers to different contents which EU, China, Russia or the United States promote in organising the global order.

³ Sam Roggeveen, director of the Lowy Institute's International Security Program, is the author of *The Echidna Strategy: Australia's Search for Power and Peace*, published by La Trobe University Press in 2023.

After the bipolar period and a short unipolar moment, the competition of rising great powers China and Russia with a previously dominant power – the U.S. and its EU and NATO partners – occurs in the context of a series of conflicts, wars, migrant and economic crises. Amid the standoff between roughly two camps and four major players (fourth being the fragile EU), with conflicts in Georgia, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and the US Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at containing China's rise, all of them published revised strategies.

A new moment in the rising clash of great powers or elites that want to shape the world and international order was the pandemic of fear, with COVID-19 rapidly strengthening previously present changes in supply chains, economic organisation and demographic slowdown. As Copley noticed, the global transformation reached the boiling point in 2020 with the end of the growth policies, deterioration of public and general population health and demographic trends. (Kopli 2022, 35). Such remarks are perhaps more appropriate for the West, which for the past few centuries had an upper hand in international politics and economy. Russia, China, United States and the EU are in competition through various instruments (conflicts and cooperation in international organisations; unilateral, bilateral and multilateral activities) in order to build, maintain or restore a certain type of order.

In that dire situation, great powers did not miss the opportunity to start a war which - albeit not direct in the presence of nuclear arms - represents a clash for the redistribution of power. This confrontation is announced or acknowledged in the strategic documents defining the position of the powers in international affairs.

The United States: a hegemon on the defensive

A declining, yet still leading great power

Since the end of the Second World War, the United States of America has been the world's leading great power. Its normative, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and particularly military power has thrived throughout the Cold War bipolar era, despite formidable opposition from the Soviet Union throughout the entire period. It succeeded in turning a revolutionary, inward looking People's Republic of China into an ally in the containment of the USSR and a partner in the globalization process. It set up a dominant foothold in Europe through an official post-1945 policy aimed at setting conditions for the establishment of NATO and the future European Union (Holcombe, 1953). In the process, the U.S. attracted both many admirers and enemies throughout

the world. Victorious at the end of the Cold War era, the U.S. logically enjoyed a sense of “all-time-high” domination from the early 1990s on. Its eastward NATO enlargement and “global policeman” interventionist policy of a “lone superpower”, at times in full breach of international law and UN Charter, further inspired awe and anger. At the height of its “unilateral moment”, the U.S. masterminded the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, at the same time attacking a European country, disregarding Russia’s opposition in the UN Security Council, and even physically destroying the Chinese Embassy in the bombing of Belgrade. In the aftermath, with Moscow and Beijing incrementally getting closer and pushing for multipolarity in opposition to U.S.-led policies of geostrategic expansion, Washington started to feel increased pressure and sense of overstretch, heightened by its prolonged War on Terror. Despite Vladimir Putin’s warnings on the need to end unipolar domination and NATO eastward enlargement, as well as Xi Jinping’s growing contestation of U.S. containment policy in the Indo-Pacific, Washington remained undeterred. However, unipolar domination began to wear off throughout the 2010s, following the effects of the global economic and financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, America’s domestic polarization and rising assertiveness of state and non-state adversaries worldwide.

A return to great-power rivalry

Coming full circle, following the humiliating retreat from Afghanistan in late August 2021, Washington turned back to great power rivalry (Mitić 2023a, 30). Already in early September 2021, President Joseph Biden met with Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, with the aim of concluding talks on the “U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership” aimed at countering the Russian Federation (U.S. Department of State 2021). In mid-September 2021, the U.S. signed an agreement with the United Kingdom and Australia on the formation of the AUKUS strategic partnership aimed at containing the expansion of Chinese power in the Pacific. At the December 2021 “Summit for Democracy”, Biden designated Moscow and Beijing as key “autocratic” challengers. Following the start of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S. focused on forging and maintaining a firm Trans-Atlantic alliance with members of the European Union against Moscow. The U.S. provided leadership in financial and military assistance, as well as diplomatic and informational efforts aimed at creating a narrative on the “Russia threat” for European security, reminiscent of the height of the Cold War. Nonetheless, Washington in

parallel pursued its key competition with China in the Indo-Pacific. It boosted bilateral (Taiwan, Philippines), trilateral (AUKUS, US-Japan-South Korea), quadrilateral (QUAD, Chip 4) and multilateral (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework) cooperation aimed at containing China's rise, while at the same criticising Beijing for its "no-limit partnership" with Moscow, in place despite China's uneasiness about the conflict in Ukraine.

How to defend the "rules-based order"?

During the larger part of the Cold War era, U.S. presidents had various approaches to strategic national security documents. When George Kennan, an American diplomat in Moscow, sent his 8,000-word "Long telegram" to the State Department in 1946, analysing the motives of Soviet conduct around the globe, he could not have assumed that it would trigger the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and become, together with the subsequent 1950 National Security Council paper NSC-68, one of the most influential and foundational documents of U.S. Cold War foreign policy. John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford did not craft documents resembling a national security strategy, and it is only with Jimmy Carter that began an uninterrupted line of such documents. Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski commissioned Harvard professor Samuel Huntington to search for alternatives to the Nixon-Kissinger strategy of détente, with the aim of highlighting the "Soviet menace", the importance of NATO and the maintenance of forward U.S. defence in Europe, as adopted in the Presidential Directive 18 (PD-18) on "U.S. National Strategy", a precursor to today's National Security Strategy documents (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 105). By 1986, the U.S. Congress adopted a requirement for each president to write a national security strategy. Since then, it is "*the* strategic planning document for the making and execution of U.S. foreign policy", as an "umbrella strategy guiding other high-level U.S. strategy documents – including the national defense strategy, quadrennial defense review, and national military strategy" (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 104). It serves to communicate the administration's foreign policy at home and to foreign audiences, and as such "provides a window into the contours and constants of American grand strategy" (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 104). In the analysis of National Security Strategy documents over time, Chin, Skinner and Yoo point to continuity and change in various aspects. In terms of key regional focus, most of the documents in the Cold War and early post-Cold War era focused on Europe and East Asia. During the U.S. "War on Terror", from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, the Middle East was the main

focus. However, since 2017, the Middle East dropped and East Asia rose to top place in terms of references (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 117). Similarly, the focus of national security strategies during the Cold War era was on great-power rivalry. The post-Cold War era documents “de-emphasized focus on major-power rivals and instead focused on growing non-traditional and transnational threats”, such as terrorism (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 119). Yet, “the shift back toward great-power competition began with Obama and has only continued”, with Trump identifying China and Russia as main challenges (Chin, Skinner and Yoo 2023, 120).

Joseph Biden’s 2022 “National Security Strategy” elevates rivalry with Russia and China to new heights. It acknowledges that “the post-Cold War era is definitely over”, and a “competition is underway between the major powers between the major powers to shape what comes next” (The White House 2022, 6). But, while “the international environment has become more contested”, the U.S. “remains the world’s leading power”, “outpacing” other large countries, and the idea that it “should compete with major autocratic powers to shape the international order enjoys broad support that is bipartisan at home and deepening abroad” (The White House 2022, 7). Biden’s strategy argues that Moscow and Beijing pose different challenges: Russia poses “an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown” (The White House 2022, 8). On the other side, China is “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective” (The White House 2022, 8). The U.S. must consequently defend the “rules-based order” it has largely spearheaded in the last decades, and which is under threat from Beijing and Moscow, which “now seek to remake the international order to create a world conducive to their highly personalized and repressive type of autocracy” (The White House 2022, 9). Thus the U.S. “will support and strengthen partnerships with countries that subscribe to the rules-based international order” (The White House 2022, 42). The phrase “rules-based order”, as an updated variant of the Western liberal international world order, has featured prominently during the Biden presidency. Examining the inflation of the use of the term in Washington’s discourse, Walt argued, half-jokingly, that “a ready ability to use the phrase ‘rules-based international order’ seems to have become a job requirement for a top position in the US foreign-policy apparatus” (Walt 2021). The “rules-based order” has been interpreted in two ways. First, as a concept based on principles of international law plus “the standards and

recommendations of international standard-setting organisations and conferences and rules made by non-state actors” (Dugard 2023, 225). Second, as “the United States’ alternative to international law, an order that encapsulates international law as interpreted by the United States to accord with its national interests” (Dugard 2023, 225). Talmon considers that the term “rules-based order”, in fact, “blurs the distinction between binding and non-binding rules, giving the impression that all States and international actors are subject to this order, irrespective of whether or not they have consented to these rules” (Talmon 2019). He points to the fact that while international law is “general and universal”, the “rules-based order seems to allow for special rules in special-sui generis cases” (Talmon 2019). Perhaps the most prominent interpretation of “sui generis” cases under the “rules-based order” has been the case of the “unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo” in 2008, masterminded by Western powers despite strong warnings by Moscow and Beijing (Mitić 2023b, 44).

The focus and terminology of the National Security Strategy is reflected in other U.S. national strategies. The 2022 Nuclear Posture Review argues that the “security architecture in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are a critical U.S. strategic advantage over those governments which challenge the global rules-based international order (U.S. Department of Defense 2022a, 1). This implies, as set in the 2022 National Defense Strategy, “detering” China, “defending” against Russia and “denying” Iran (U.S. Department of Defense 2022b, 15).

A (not so) gloomy 2040 forecast

Looking beyond the timeframe of Biden’s presidency and the outcome of the 2024 elections, the National Intelligence Council in its forecast for the year 2040 outlined five different scenarios describing possible global futures. In three of them, international challenges become “incrementally more severe, and interactions are largely defined by the US-China rivalry”: “Renaissance of Democracies”, in which the U.S. “leads a resurgence of democracies”, “A World Adrift”, in which China is “the leading but not globally dominant state”; and “Competitive Coexistence”, in which the U.S. and China “prosper and compete for leadership in a bifurcated world”. In the other two scenarios, the focus is less on US-China rivalry, and more on radical change: “Separate Silos” paints a world in which “globalization has broken down, and economic and security blocs emerge to protect states from mounting threats”, while “Tragedy and Mobilization” is about

“revolutionary change on the heels of devastating global environmental crises” (National Intelligence Council 2021, 109).

China: between building a “community of shared future for mankind” and challenging Western “rules-based order”

“Peaceful rise” or “threat” to the rules-based order?

Since the outset of the 21st century, one of the fundamental questions for researchers and policymakers regarding the structure and functioning of world order has been whether the rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is a “threat” or an “opportunity”, and whether it will be peaceful or not. Meanwhile, Beijing has structured a narrative of its “peaceful rise”, aimed at “building a community of shared future for mankind”. While deeply enshrined in the Westphalian system of national sovereignty, 21st century China has also sought to reinvigorate its traditional values and worldviews based on Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism. Key principles of Confucianism put emphasis on diplomacy, peaceful and mutually beneficial external relations (*ren*, benevolence), as well as stability, order, international norms and conflict prevention (*li*, propriety); Taoist concepts of *wuwei* (nonaction) relate to the importance of dialogue and negotiation, *Yin* and *yang* emphasize balancing own interests with the interest of other nations; meanwhile, the Legalist concept of *tianxia* (All-Under-Heaven) puts China in the position of a central power responsible for maintaining harmony and stability (Stekić, 2023a). Nevertheless, Western powers, and Washington in particular, have rather pointed to the “China threat”, increasingly arguing it is a “partner”, “competitor” but also a “systemic rival”. While there are substantial nuances among the world’s “rest”, the sheer number of participants in Beijing’s flagship “Belt and Road Initiative” (155 countries, or over two-thirds of UN members) points to the fact that its growing global clout incites largely positive connotations.

China’s growing world order interdependence and clout

Since its creation in 1949, the PRC has had different approaches to world order, in line with its own domestic development projects and statecraft capacities, as well as regional and global dynamics. Following the civil war and the country’s formation, Mao Zedong focused on consolidating China internally. This meant at first stabilising its borders and finding ways to

avoid foreign meddling in the country's own affairs. The 1950 "Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance" and the 1954 "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", confirmed in a joint statement with India, provided a basis for early stabilization. The "Five principles" (mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence) were subsequently included in the 1982 Constitution of the PRC. Yet, China's interests, combined with Mao's anti-imperialist, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary policies, increasingly clashed with those of global powers. From the imbroglios of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the first Taiwan crisis (1954-1955), to the Sino-Soviet split (early 1960s) and the Sino-Indian conflict (1962), Mao's China – troubled by internal development difficulties – was not in a position to play a decisive role in world order politics (Lanteigne 2020).

The U.S. entanglement in the Vietnam War and Soviet Union's increasingly active security role globally, however, triggered an interest in Washington to seek rapprochement with Beijing in view of its potential Asian balancing act. The U.S. did not initially envision China as a global actor, content to see it as a counter-balance to Soviet influence. Combined with Deng Xiaoping's policy of "reform and opening-up", and in the backdrop of the war in Afghanistan from 1979 on, the PRC grew increasingly intertwined with Western-led globalization economy and security interests in dwindling down the "Soviet threat".

The end of the Cold War, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the vanishing of the Warsaw Pact, ran in parallel with West-China tensions over the June 1989 events on Tiananmen Square. While the U.S. started losing interest in China's geopolitical role, it continued promoting business cooperation with China amid its awe-inspiring growth rates in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, Beijing settled its border disputes with Russia and the Central Asian states, resulting in the formation of "The Shanghai Five group" (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) in 1996, a precursor of the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" launched in 2001. China adopted its first White Paper on Defence in 1995, rejecting the possibility of a global war, focusing on economic development and defensive posturing (China White Paper 1995). Yet, the Third Taiwan Crisis (1995-1996) reinvigorated uneasiness in Beijing. One of the defining moments in Beijing's change of perception on the world order has been the NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999 (Mitić, 2023b). Set at the height of the "U.S. unipolar moment" and

at the time of NATO's "soul-searching" 50th anniversary, the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade killed three Chinese journalists, sparked unprecedented public outcry in China and led to a strategic change of perception in Beijing over relations with the US. The Chinese leadership saw in the Belgrade bombing "the onset of a new era of US unilateralism" and, shortly after, adopted the "New Security Concept", which aimed to "improve the view towards a multipolar world order as a response to US global dominance" (Ghiselli 2021, 23). In the "Sino-Russian Joint Statement" on December 10, 1999, Chinese President Jiang Zemin and Russian President Boris Yeltsin proposed to "push forward the establishment of a multi-polar world on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter and existing international laws in the 21st century" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 1999).

Throughout the 2000s, Beijing furthermore saw increasing threats to territorial integrity and sovereignty: from the election of the pro-independence leader in Taipei, Chen Shui-Bian, in 2000, to a number of "colour revolutions" both around Russia and within China (Hong Kong in 2004, Tibet in 2008, Xinjiang in 2009), as well as the Western masterminding of the "unilateral declaration of independence" of Serbia's province of Kosovo by Albanian separatists. Beijing saw in these events not only a "Western hand", but also Western negligence for the sanctity of international borders and international law. China's gradual rapprochement with Russia – within BRIC(S), the SCO, bilaterally with Moscow – its rising maritime forces, agile reaction to the global financial crisis, but also its strategic assessment on the nature and future of world order, raised concern in Washington, fuelling a narrative of the "China threat". Under Barack Obama and his Department of State Secretary Hillary Clinton, the Biden administration turned more hostile towards Beijing, describing South China Sea as an issue of U.S. national interest and laying ground for Washington's "pivot to Asia".

In Beijing, times were changing too. Deng Xiaoping's long-standing policy of "hide capabilities and bide time" (*Tao Guang Yang Hui*) gave place to a policy promoted by China's new president Xi Jinping – "striving for achievement" (*Fen Fa You Wei*). For the supporter of the new policy and eminent Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong, the approach of "moral realism" meant that Beijing should selectively reward those who "want to have a constructive role in China's rise", while punishing those who are hostile (Yan 2014). He argued that strategic allies are more important than economic profit. Beijing boosted the SCO and BRICS, the People's Liberation Army

(PLA), and particularly the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Under Xi, China launched the "Belt and Road Initiative" in 2013, complemented with a number of strategic partnerships in Europe and Asia, with a view of finding alternatives to the possible clogging of its traditional maritime routes, as well as with an objective to boost development projects in the Global South, severely threatened by the aftermath of the world economic and financial crisis, as well as Western disinterest. China's BRI strategic narrative framed the initiative as "win-win", "mutually-beneficial cooperation", "sharing the fruits of development", with the objective of building a "community of shared future for mankind", in respect for multipolarity and the central role of the UN (Xi, 2014 and 2017). The BRI is, indeed, a complex narrative which can be seen as a system narrative (as it presents an alternative vision to the existing world order), an identity narrative (about the projection of China's values and power) and an issue narrative (about specific infrastructure and investments objectives envisioned by the BRI) (Mitić 2022).

China's global initiatives – an early blueprint for the new world order?

In the wake of the new geopolitical context and the Covid-19 pandemic, China launched in the early 2020s a series of "global initiatives", which can be viewed as complimentary to the BRI, and as such, an indication of how Beijing perceives the transformation of world order.

China launched its "Global Development Initiative" (GDI) in September 2022 during the UN General Assembly, with an objective of accelerating the goals of the 2030 UN Agenda, which had been threatened by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and sluggish support for Global South development from traditional Western donors in the wake of new geopolitical realities and economic constraints. The GDI is seen as a "potent and transformative force" within the emergence of new multilateral paradigms reshaping the dynamics of global governance and international cooperation (Stekić 2023b, 326). While some analysts have seen the GDI as a replacement for the BRI, others insist the BRI and the GDI should be seen as "parallel tracks", with the BRI being oriented towards economic growth, the hardware and economic corridors, while the GDI is development-oriented, focusing on development, software, knowledge transfer and capacity building (Mulakala, 2022). The GDI considers development as "master key to all problems", a "prerequisite for safeguarding world peace" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2021). It focuses on reducing inequality among

nations, “leaving no country and no one behind”. The initiative focuses on multilateralism, support for the United Nations, the strengthening of North-South cooperation, the deepening of South-South cooperation, as well as the enhancement of representation and voice of emerging markets and developing countries in global governance. For this, it counts on the synergy with the BRI, BRICS, G20, APEC, the African Union initiatives, the UN and China-ASEAN. Nevertheless, it stresses the need for an “open world economy” and global connectivity.

President Xi introduced the Global Security Initiative in April 2022, and he set the context outright by underscoring that “changes of the world, of our times, and of history are unfolding in ways like never before” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2022a). Although Xi certainly had in mind overall changes towards multipolarity, as well as changes occurring due to digitalization, climate change, and the implications of the still ongoing fight against COVID-19, the more specific context was certainly the ramification of the Russian special operation in Ukraine, which had started two months earlier, on February 24. The context of the conflict in Ukraine particularly highlighted principles such as the rejection of the Cold War mentality, bloc confrontation, unilateralism and unilateral sanctions, double standards, and pursuit of one’s own security at the cost of others’ security, as well as support for taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, building a balanced security architecture, and resolving disputes through dialogue and joint work (Mitić 2023c, 267). Xi furthermore called ‘on all countries to uphold a common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security’ and focusing on the centrality of the UN system (Cao, 2022). The formal presentation of the GSI Concept Paper in February 2023 had a prelude in the publication by the Xinhua News Agency for a major report titled “US Hegemony and its Perils”, in which it accused the US of “abusing hegemony”, and “imposing rules that serve its own interests in the name of upholding a ‘rules-based international order” (Xinhua 2023a). The following day, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the GSI Concept Paper with six core concepts and principles: (1) the need for a new vision of security – common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable; (2) respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries; (3) deep commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and opposition to the Cold War mentality, hegemonism, and unilateralism; (4) commitment to indivisible security; (5) commitment to peaceful and negotiated solutions instead of war and unilateral sanctions; and (6) commitment to security in both traditional and non-traditional domains, which have become intertwined, particularly in the fields of terrorism, climate change, cybersecurity, and biosecurity (Ministry

of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2023a). China thus presented the GSI not only at a timely moment, following the outset of Russia's military operation in Ukraine, but also insisted that the unveiling of the initiative was due to the unprecedented changes and fallacies of the existing, albeit rusting, international security architecture and mechanisms. It was able to demonstrate the instability of the world security order and its rules/principles, thus making the case that the time was ripe for a change based on the principles of its GSI (Mitić 2023c, 273)

Xi announced the "Global Civilization Initiative" (GCI) in March 2023, calling for the respect of diversity of civilizations, the diversified paths to modernization and people-to-people exchange. His arguments suggest an opposition to Westernization as the only model of modernisation, and to Western values as universal (Mitić, 2023d, 129). The appeal of these ideas is particularly high in Asia, where a number of countries have created their own sustainable models of development and modernization, without necessarily aligning with Western norms of the rules-based order. Same with the idea of protecting the diversity and heritage of traditional values. In a clear reference to the West, Xi called to "refrain from imposing their own values or models on others", "from stoking ideological confrontation" and from "feelings of superiority" (Xinhua 2023b).

When presenting its "Global AI Governance Initiative" in October 2023, China reiterated that "all countries should commit to a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2023b). In the field of AI governance, this includes "respecting other countries' national sovereignty and strictly abiding by their laws when providing them with AI products and services", while "opposing using AI technologies for the purposes of manipulating public opinion, spreading disinformation, intervening in other countries' internal affairs, social systems and social order, as well as jeopardizing the sovereignty of other states". Thus, China argued for discussions within the UN framework to establish "an international institution to govern AI, and to coordinate efforts to address major issues concerning international AI development, security, and governance".

Finally, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the BRI, in September 2023, the State Council of the PRC published its white paper "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions", outlining the achievements of the initiative and the principles for the way forward. In the paper, Beijing argued that the 10 years of the BRI showed that it had "nothing to do with self-interest and protectionism", but rather with

“confronting the hegemonic thinking of certain countries that seek supremacy” (State Council of the PR of China 2023). Furthermore, in reference to Western accusations, it argued that “there is no iron law that dictates that a rising power will inevitably seek hegemony”, an assumption which “represents typical hegemonic thinking and is grounded in memories of catastrophic wars between hegemonic powers in the past”. Beijing firmly argued in favour of pursuing development and revitalization through own efforts, rather than “invasion”, “expansion” and the “subjugation of others”. It argued that “standing at a crossroads, humanity is faced with two opposing options: either revert to Cold War confrontation or act for common wellbeing of humanity through cooperation and win-win results. It warned that the “tug of war between these two options will shape the future of humanity and our planet in a profound way”. For China, the goal of “building a community of shared future” does not mean replacing one system or civilization with another, but it is a new approach to international relations, global governance and international exchange based on the premises that countries with different social systems, ideologies, histories, cultures and levels of development coming together to promote shared interests, shared rights, and shared responsibilities in global affairs. For China, it is only by establishing a global community of shared community that emerging countries and established powers can avoid falling into the Thucydides trap. Thus, China opposes actions that “undermine the international order, create a new Cold War or stoke ideological confrontation in the name of the so-called rules-based order”. Instead, it focuses on the UN Charter, that for the world, “there is only one system, which is the international system with the United Nations at its core, that there is only one order, which is the international order based on international law, and that there is only one set of rules, which is the basic norms governing international relations based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter” (State Council of the PR of China 2023).

The EU – an economic power in search of geopolitical lifeline

Has the EU lost its strategic objectives?

The European Union of 27 countries, judging by the mere data regarding population, economy and the sum of armies, should be a great power with a strong sphere of influence, or at least should be an agent of democratisation and prosperity around it. Yet, the history of its various common foreign and

defense policies does not approve this prospect. Before assessing the key document defining Brussels' official global posture in the new environment, it is necessary to point to the legacy of previous EU common security and defense outputs.

The bureaucratic discourse employed by the EU apparatus, Brussels-affiliated think tanks and part of academia blurs reality. Reports on EU missions lack any proper expression of failure. Thus, the EU (despite having a dead link for reports on completed reforms) was, or still is, officially successful, and has never failed in Guinea Bissau, in Chad, in the Central African Republic, in Libya (EUBAM), in the Mediterranean (Sophia), in Afghanistan (EUPOL) ... despite evidence they were, or are, all failures. After proclaiming in vain its wish to intervene in Libya, or even to conduct the save and rescue operations, EU did not manage to act, albeit France and UK acted together with US. The final result of the NATO operation in Libya (2011) was instability on EU borders and less secure supply of oil (from Libya) (Janković and Gajić 2015, 60-62). While each mission has its peculiarities, with a possible exception of those in Southeast Europe, it is hardly to sincerely name one that could be qualified as accomplished with favourable outcome. How could one characterise the phrases on the official site of EU External Action: "Since 2013 EUBAM Libya is proud to play its part as an EU Civilian Mission committed to contributing to the security of Libya and its borders and to greater stability in the region... Under the EU flag, Member States deploy border management, coast guards, justice monitors, military, police or prison advisers and experts to contribute to stability in the Mediterranean, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Sahel, the Horn of Africa, the Caucasus and the Middle East" (EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya 2023).

From the 2020s perspective, one could consider that before the EU missions, these regions appeared more stable. Libya existed, while today it is torn apart, and the EU cannot protect the borders of the divided country. In 2011, in the midst of the Arab Spring, the focus of EU was on strengthening of human rights and democracy, while NATO was engaging in a military intervention in Libya (European Parliament 2011). Sahel drifted away toward cooperation with Russia and China. It is no strange then, that even the Brussels-aligned *EU Observer* headlined: "Why aren't EU's CSDP missions working?" (Larsen 2021).

The day after the Brexit referendum in 2016, and in view of the approaching US elections (with unexpected Donald Trump's victory), with a rising presence of Russia in the East Mediterranean, the EU replaced its

old, unsuccessful Security Strategy with a new one - *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. In the foreword, then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini boasted the Union as being "... in the world's G3. We are the first trading partner and the first foreign investor for almost every country in the globe" (EEAS 2016, 4). Meanwhile, China was becoming the main economic partner of the EU's south and eastern neighbours.

The 2016 strategy seemed to advance a more reality-driven approach. It invoked the "principled pragmatism", which sounded as a spring of a rationality in usually ideological approach to the world (EEAS 2016, 8). Yet, at the same time it continued to promote a formula that later became a buzz word of US strategy, namely the "rules-based global order." EU announced that by promoting the mentioned order it will "contribute to a peaceful and sustainable world." The rules-based order is further explained as a "multilateral order grounded in international law, including the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Tocci argued the UK had contributed significantly to the text, despite the firm opposition of official London to the strengthening of the defence and security position of the Union. In fact, Tocci slightly criticised those who (apart from London) "continue to view NATO as the ultimate framework for security and defence" (Tocci 2016, 2). In line with the previous history of EU defence and security policies, NATO reinvigorated its position as a focal point for Union member countries, widening its membership. The EU remained stuck with the RBO, which is most often regarded as a cynical misnomer for Washington's arbitrary hegemony, and is resolutely rejected by the so-called Global South, which accounts for four-fifths of humanity (Trifković 2023).

Since 2014, the EU was aligned with the US and UK policies of restraining Russian influence, and sanctioning it in order to punish Russia for the annexation of Crimea and support for the Donbass Russian-speaking guerilla. In 2021, the EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell stated that, in relation to Russia, the Union will adopt an approach of principled pragmatism (Comision Europea 2021).

A Strategic Compass for a feeble geopolitical structure

Since March 2022, EU has another strategic document, the *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*. In this document, crafted after the first wide EU threat analysis, conducted in 2020, Brussels is not opposing unilateralism

(characterising US foreign policy behaviour in recent times), as it would bring unwanted criticism toward the American establishment, which has had the upper hand on EU foreign policy decisions. The main opposition to multilateralism is – sovereignty, or a “strict sovereignist approach” (sic). Multipolarism is essentially seen as something negative, as it is a derivative of a sovereign approach in politics, qualified by the EU as a “return of power politics”. Sovereignty and multipolarism are in EU strategic documents connected with aggression, power politics and change of borders:

“The EU is a determined supporter of effective multilateralism and it has sought to develop an open rules-based international order, based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, universal values and international law. This vision of multilateralism prevailed internationally following the end of the Cold War. Today, it has come under strong questioning, through the shattering of universal values and a lopsided use of global challenges, by those promoting a strict sovereignist approach that constitutes in reality a return to power politics” (EEAS 2022).

Russia is a threat for the EU in this document, and Brussels is announcing vendetta: “These aggressive and revisionist actions for which the Russian government, together with its accomplice Belarus, is entirely responsible, severely and directly threaten the European security order and the security of European citizens. Those responsible for these crimes, including targeting civilians and civilian objects, will be held accountable.” (EEAS 2022, 17. The EU operates in a hostile environment, and it needs the strategy “to guide the necessary development of the EU security and defence agenda for the next ten years” (EEAS, 5).

China is “a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival.” Concerns on Chinese modernisation of military apparatus are expressed, and in particular its challenging of “the rules-based international order and our interests and values” (Ibid, 18).

Unlike China and especially Russia, the key and most important among EU partners is the US: “partners and like-minded countries in the UN, NATO and G7. In this context, the United States remain the EU’s staunchest and most important strategic partner and are a global power contributing to peace, security, stability and democracy on our continent” (Ibid).

Key words taken from *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* are: “resilience”, “rapid” and “willingness to act”. The authors of the Compass thus announce a “quantum leap forward” in order to “increase our capacity and willingness to act, strengthen our resilience, and invest more and better in our defence capabilities”. Previously mentioned objectives are to be gained through

four pillars: act, invest, partner and secure. (Ibid, 10, 15, 25) Even the basic content analysis of these pillars induces a fairly limited scope of action and aspirations. Acts should be rapid and there should be a readiness to deploy up to 5,000 troops, which is 12 times less than planned by the UK and France under the St. Malo agreement in 1998. “At the EU summit in Helsinki in the year 1999, the headline goal was the creation of the European Rapid Reaction Force – ERRF consisting of 60.000 soldiers able to deploy in the theatre of war in 60 days. Fifteen EU member states decided to establish an armed force for rapid action (rapid reaction force - RRF) of 60.000 soldiers at the EU Council Meeting in Nice in 2002” (Janković and Gajić 2015, 41). The US was obstructing the creation of an independent, strong EU military capable of autonomous operations back then. NATO is constantly keeping the US in Europe, assuring seniority in bilateral relations for Washington (Janković 2019, 168).

While the EU officially tries to behave like a great power, producing documents of global reach, it is proportionally losing economic and demographic global footprint. At the same time, the West in general is internally becoming more divisive, turning against its cultural and spiritual heritage and adopting various measures ascribing to the cancel culture. (Janković 2022, 188, 193). This in turn is increasingly dividing societies in EU, making them additionally weak in international conflicts.

Brussels’ behaviour resembles partners in the Western hierarchy, with Washington planners at the top of the structure. Therefore, the EU strategy is limited in scope, although it acts in a “hostile environment”, with a range of threats. It aims to deal mostly in the cyber sphere. For the hard security, it relies on NATO, and bilateral partnership with US and Western partner countries, such as Japan, the United Kingdom and Australia. It is opposed to multilateralism based on a concept of distinct sovereign great powers and their hierarchical webs of partnership.

Russia’s multipolar (re)vision

Is the time (now) right for multipolarity?

One of the leading Russian thinkers and *de facto* councillors on foreign affairs of the Russian political elite, Sergey Karaganov, once prominent supporter of the policy of Euro/Russia cooperation, on several occasions underlined the strategic shift in Russian policy. He repeated it at the end of 2023:

“In contemporary world, everyone goes for itself. This is a wonderful multipolar, diversified world... We have to rediscover ourselves,

understand who we are. Great Eurasian power, north Eurasia. Liberator of peoples, guarantor of peace and a military-political core of the world majority. This role is predestined for us. By the way, due to our cultural openness that we have inherited again, from our history, we are uniquely prepared for this world. We are religiously open. We are nationally open. This is all we are defending now. More and more we are understanding that at home most important issues are Russian spirit and Russian culture” (Шестаков 2023).

Russia pursues an “independent and multi-vector foreign policy driven by its national interests and the awareness of its special responsibility for maintaining peace and security at the global and regional levels” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023a). Hence, the leadership in the Kremlin promotes Moscow as one of the centers of the multipolar world. But the idea is not something new. Yevgeny Primakov launched it in the 1990s. Back then, amid the unipolar moment, part of the Russian elite ideated the return of great power politics and ways to challenge Western domination. A multi-vector foreign policy of Russia was formulated. The multi-vector policy is another expression of the Primakov doctrine, which is at the heart of the Russian foreign policy (Барский 2016). Back then, Moscow wanted to be at the table with the US, EU and UK make decisions. It wanted to be part of the Western circle. But when the US withdrew from the ABM Treaty, it became clear that enmity toward Russia had not disappeared with the fall of communism (Boese 2002). In the 2008 Concept, Moscow announced that the “balanced and multi-vector character of Russia’s foreign policy is its distinguishing feature... Our national interests today make it imperative to actively promote positive agenda covering the whole spectrum of international problems. Russia fully recognizes its responsibility for maintenance of security both globally and regionally, and is prepared to take joint actions with all other States concerned aimed at finding solutions to common problems” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2008) The language was milder, and it was the beginning of the reactive challenging to the spread of US hegemony and provocations on the borders of Russia, such as the Orange revolution in Ukraine 2004, and the short Georgian war in 2008.

Order of sovereigns

The current concept adopts a much more decisive and great power discourse in its document defining foreign policy strategy. A year into the

war, after 15 years from the latest Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation approved then by President Dmitri Medvedev, on March 31, 2023, the President of Russia Vladimir Putin approved a new version of the Foreign Policy Concept. Authors adopted a mix of Eurasianism and Russian school approach of philosophy of history⁴ (Jankovic 2023, 17-20). The document resembles a messianic posture of US strategies, with differently formulated objectives and certainly affirming multipolarity. It is clearly challenging the eroding world order. In this document, there is an expressed “commitment to promote the formation of a more just and sustainable international system based on the principles of international law and cooperation between states” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023b).

Russia is presented as a special country with “a historically unique mission aimed at maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system, as well as ensuring conditions for the peaceful progressive development of humanity on the basis of a unifying and constructive agenda” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023a).

Sovereignty is clearly positive in the Russian new concept of foreign strategy, which is in line with the previous strategic posture of Russia. Multipolarity is associated with the global balance of power and national independence:

“Russia is one of the sovereign centres of global development performing a historically unique mission aimed at maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system, as well as ensuring conditions for the peaceful progressive development of humanity on the basis of a unifying and constructive agenda” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023a).

Back in the 1990s, Primakov had started a trilateral cooperation between Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi in the moment of Russian economic

⁴ On Eurasianism: Aleksandr Dugin, *Chetvertaia politicheskaia teoriia: Rossiia i politicheskie idei XXI veka*, Saint Petersburg: Amfora, 2009; Šubrt Jiri, Šulc Irina, “The Eurasianism concept: Russian vs Western perspectives. Journal of the Belarusian State University. Sociology. 2020;3:42–48. <https://doi.org/10.33581/2521-6821-2020-3-42-48>; On Russian philosophy of history see: Нарочницка, Наталија, *Русија и Руси у светској историји*, СКЗ Београд 2008; Тихомиров Л. А., *Религиозно-философские основы истории*, М, 1997; Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History*, London 1936.

grievances and loss of political weight in the international arena. It was the way to counterbalance the growing Western influence permeating the societies of what was once called in the West the Second and the Third World.

The creation and development of BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the strengthening of bilateral Sino-Russian cooperation, are mechanisms of competitive challenging of the crumbling unipolar world order. BRICS in particular is a vehicle of eroding and decomposing previously US-led regional hierarchies from the Middle East to the Latin America and Western Africa.

The 2019 Sino-Russian summit on the anniversary of the operation Overlord (allied attack on German positions in northern France in June 1944) sealed the strategic alliance of Moscow and Beijing (Dinucci 2019). Two leaders, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, signed:

- a) an intergovernmental agreement to extend the use of national currencies, (the ruble and the yuan), to commercial exchanges and financial transactions, as an alternative to the still dominant dollar;
- b) the intensification of efforts to integrate the Belt and Road Initiative, promoted by China, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), promoted by Russia, with the “aim of creating a greater Eurasian partnership in the future.”

This cooperation was extended in the years to come, and particularly enhanced at the Beijing summit in early February 2022, at the opening of the Winter Olympic Games, when Putin and Xi declared a “no limits partnership”.

Conclusion

The handshake between Putin and Xi in February 2022 stands in stark contrast with the one between Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong 50 years earlier, in February 1972. The 1972 handshake paved the way towards Sino-U.S. cooperation which curbed Moscow’s influence throughout the rest of the Cold War and contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union. The 2022 handshake, this time between Moscow and Beijing, was a stark confirmation of the unprecedented level of strategic partnership between the Russian Federation and China in the challenging of the U.S.-led Western “ruled-based order”. This cooperation managed through a difficult challenge following Russia’s “special military operation” in Ukraine, with Western countries strongly urging Beijing to distance from Moscow and even

sanction it. Nothing of sorts occurred. Beijing refused the Western narrative on the conflict in Ukraine, particularly pointing out at its origins in NATO's eastward expansion. The two countries and leaders continued strong strategic partnership, enhanced and enlarged BRICS and the SCO, as well as economic and energy cooperation. Their cooperation and resistance to Western pressure was particularly reflected in the fact that no country outside of the "political West" imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation over the conflict in Ukraine.

This challenging of the RBO is reflected in the analysis of our paper. The U.S. and the EU are two great powers which are willing to continue and preserve the leading role they had in the previous decades, with US becoming clearly the leader of the camp. Russia and China are challengers, and together are eroding, and have eroded, the previous structure of the world order, which is becoming multipolar. Beyond challenging, in the current phase of transition, China and Russia are also setting bases for multipolar regional orders with different hierarchies. They both support the sovereign, Westphalian arrangement in international politics, while the US seeks to contain the changes, followed by the EU. Both Western actors criticize sovereignty, and seek to stop transformation toward multipolarity, seen as something negative. The relations of examined powers toward the challenged and preferred world order can be presented in the table, together with the key terms of such strategic positioning.

Great power	Posture related to challenged world order	Preferred world order	Key strategic positioning
US	Defensive	Western-led RBO	Defend the RBO, contain challengers
EU	Defensive	Western-led RBO	Resilience, transatlantic reliance, geopolitical soul-search
Russia	Offensive	Multipolar	Multipolarity and sovereignty
China	Offensive	Multipolar	New global initiatives for the "community of shared future for mankind"

Source: Authors

As long-time hegemon, Washington is logically seen as the locus of attention for analysts of world order transformation. Despite a myriad of global challenges, ascendant challengers, reduced soft power in the Global South and internal political and societal polarization, the United States is still the primary great power. Yet, the dynamics of global transformation over the last two decades, and particularly in the last several years, show that no one can bet safely on Washington retaining such status.

The EU pursues its soul-searching. An economic great power, but a geopolitical skeleton, the EU remains in defensive posture, focusing on its resilience from what it perceives as external threats – from Russia and China, illegal migrations and terrorism. It remains fully reliant on U.S.-led NATO, despite appeals for “strategic autonomy”.

Moscow’s operation in Ukraine has shown that it has set up a red line for NATO’s “open-door” enlargement policy. Together with its enhanced role in Eastern Mediterranean and Sahel, it has regained a geopolitical posture. It has succeeded in overcoming unprecedented Western sanctions by turning its economy and exports towards Asia, Africa and Latin America, accompanied by multilateral formats, of which BRICS+ is of particular importance, thus forging a multipolar order based on sovereignty.

China has a comprehensive, systematic response to the world order crisis. It underlines that it does not intend to challenge the world’s system. Rather, it proposes its own sets of principles, and announces the desire to strengthen its normative power in order to balance the U.S.-led Western rules-based order. To achieve these objectives, beyond its rising power, it counts on allies within BRICS+, the SCO, BRI partners in the Global South, as well as its global initiatives (GDI, GSI, GCI, GAII), but also understanding among certain Western partners, particularly in Europe. On the other side, the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza have further disrupted global supply chains, transport corridors, and imposed new sanctions. Competition with the U.S. over AI, semi-conductors and rare minerals has led to further export restrictions, particularly in technology. However, China’s continued and intensified cooperation with Russia, its boosting of BRICS, its more proactive role in world’s security, diplomatic affairs and infrastructure projects, from South Asia through the Middle East to the Balkans – is for the West a continued proof of China’s will to transform the “rules-based world order”.

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NEW BALANCE OF POWER IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE ROLE OF CHINA

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Abstract: Amidst the myriad debates surrounding the structure of the international system of relations, a novel issue emerges: whether China's profound growth warrants recognition as a transformative variable influencing the organization of the system. Through an examination of states' economic, political, and military capacities, it becomes evident that a multipolar order is emerging. Over the past three decades, China's remarkable economic growth has contributed significantly to rebalancing global economic power dynamics. In safeguarding its economic interests, China strategically augmented its military capabilities and spearheaded a plethora of political initiatives to foster diverse multilateral frameworks. Consequently, as the world's second-largest economy and third most potent military force, China has solidified its stature as an indispensable actor on the international stage. However, the persistent augmentation of China's economic, military, and political influence has stirred apprehensions within the United States, which, in its 2022 Defense Strategy, categorizes China as a "primary competitor" while declining to acknowledge its equal status. Consequently, China's contemporary role in international relations can be construed as catalyzing the establishment of a balanced power framework. Present and forthcoming Chinese endeavors aim to foster a multipolar order wherein China assumes the mantle of a major power and a pivotal participant in global affairs.

Keywords: multipolarity, international system, economic power, political power, military power, USA, China, balance of power.

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Introduction

In 1974, Robert A. Scalapino observed that following two decades of marginalization as an outlaw among nations, “the People’s Republic of China has experienced a sudden and dramatic ascent to the status of a great power within the United Nations. It has garnered near-universal diplomatic recognition and established client states in a manner akin to other significant powers” (Scalapino, 1974, p. 349). The rise of the PR China to the status of a great power, therefore, has been going on for half a century, since the moment it was elevated to the permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Of course, at that moment American diplomacy was guided by other strategic goals when they were “changing course” towards China.

However, as Scalapino prophetically announced – the consequences of that “change of course” will become far-reaching since they enabled the legitimisation of China as a great power in international relations. Certainly, it cannot be claimed that everything in this approach was planned, or even that everything took place according to Chinese strategies that have been defined over the decades. Numerous decisions were influenced by changing circumstances caused by various interactions in international relations. Nevertheless, the new balance of power became a reality already in the second decade of the 21st century. China has succeeded in legitimizing its status as a great power, if not a superpower. It has become impossible to think about world politics without taking into account China’s goals and ambitions. How did this happen?

The aims of this paper are to investigate the process by which the PR China ascended to the status of a great power within the international arena, particularly focusing on its legitimization as a global player. It aims to analyze the structural changes in the international system following the Cold War and the role of self-help strategies in shaping power dynamics. Furthermore, the paper seeks to examine the impact of China’s economic growth on its rise as a global power, including its implications for the global economic system and its efforts to safeguard its interests through military and political means. Ultimately, the paper aims to uncover the interconnectedness between economic expansion and power dynamics, with a specific emphasis on China’s transformation into a significant global actor.

This paper is structured as follows. First, the authors examine the structure of the international system and the principle of self-help in the aftermath of the Cold War, shedding light on the evolving perceptions of power dynamics and the notion of hegemonic stability. This section goes

deeper into the hierarchical conception of the global political order and elucidates the guiding principles of state behavior grounded in self-help strategies. Following this, the paper scrutinizes the role of China's economic growth as a catalyst for augmenting power potential on the international stage. Through an in-depth analysis, it evaluates the transformative impact of China's economic ascendance, elucidating its implications for the global economic system and its concomitant endeavors to safeguard its interests through military and political means. By traversing these thematic domains, this paper endeavors to unravel the nexus between economic expansion and power dynamics, particularly spotlighting China's emergence as a significant global actor.

The structure of the international system and the principle of self-help

The US victory in the Cold War also led to a change in the outlook on international relations during the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century. The self-confidence of the Western Bloc was at its peak. Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the "end of history" emerged as a seminal perspective in the discourse of international relations, garnering widespread attention and discussion. As one of the most cited theorists of his time, Fukuyama posited the notion that the culmination of the Cold War marked the endpoint of ideological evolution and the triumph of liberal democracy as the ultimate form of governance. This influential thesis captured the optimism prevalent in the Western bloc during the 1990s, reflecting a belief in the inevitability of liberal democratic principles spreading globally. However, as subsequent events unfolded, it became evident that the reality diverged significantly from Fukuyama's prognostications, prompting reevaluations of his thesis and its applicability in an ever-changing geopolitical landscape (Fukuyama, 1993). However, the anticipated "end of history" did not materialize, prompting inquiry into its failure to manifest. Despite the fact that some of Fukuyama's conclusions were well-reasoned, and some of his predictions were correct, the problem arose in the perception of the "end of history" by non-Western actors. As described in the concept of the security dilemma, much of international relations is about perception (Jervis, 1978, pp. 167–214). Such security dilemma underscores the precarious nature of international relations, where misperceptions and misinterpretations can significantly impact the dynamics between states, often necessitating diplomatic efforts to mitigate tensions and build trust.

The perception of non-Western actors was significantly different from what was meant by the “end of history” in the West.

According to these perceptions, the structure of the international system was to remain clearly hierarchically established. At the top of this structure would be the United States with its allies in the Western bloc. All other countries, including Russia, China, and India, would have only a second-rate role. They would remain to be regional powers, actors of regional security, but with limited influence on a global level (Proroković, 2018, pp. 295–310).

It was naive to expect that non-Western actors would agree to this kind of subordinate role. While the future of international relations in the West was viewed through Fukuyama’s prism, non-Western actors viewed the processes through the neorealist framework of Kenneth Waltz (Waltz, 1979; Waltz, 2008). Guided by the principle of self-help countries and nations are striving to achieve their interests, they are constantly questioning and redefining them, depending on how the international environment is changing and, therefore, constantly trying to increase military, economic and political power.

From the point of view of distribution of power, the world political system has its own structure, which can, according to some theorists be unipolar, bipolar, or multi-polar (Proroković, 2018, pp. 383–454). In theoretical discourse, models incorporating the existence of multiple superpowers within the international system have been developed, ranging from tripolarity and quadripolarity (Jackson, 1978), to even quintipolarity (Jackson, 1978). Additionally, literature presents several hybrid models representing variations or compilations of previous models, such as uni-multipolarity, post-unipolarity, and bi-multipolarity (Rosecrance, 1966). Furthermore, perspectives exist suggesting the possibility of an apolar (non-polar) world, although such a scenario remains absent in the practical realm of modern international relations. Despite various prognostications, states persist as the primary actors in international relations. These actors encompass a spectrum of classifications, including superpowers, great powers, regional powers, small states, and microstates.

Accepting the concept of the “end of history” also meant agreeing to the concept of hegemonic stability. The only superpower in the structure of the international system remains the USA, which will determine key processes and thus shape or at least influence all other interactions.

Superpower is a country that determines regional security dynamics in all regions of the world. Superpower is the only, or one of few major regional security actors in each region (Krejčí, 2010, pp. 674–675). A number of papers

have been published on how a unipolar structure was created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the United States as the only superpower (Waltz, 1993; Mearsheimer, 1994; Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2002; Ikenberry, 1995). The characteristic of a superpower is the dominance of the world order, the possibility to influence the shaping of political solutions in all parts of the world and to impose its will.

Great powers are states that are able to independently secure their own national security. These are the countries that have an adequate combination of military, political and economic power, so that they can independently protect their interests (Kennedy, 1987). Of course, in order to legitimize one actor as the most important in world politics, he must have a “critical mass”, that is, a sufficient number of inhabitants, the size of a territory with a resource potential, internal stability and an adequate socio-economic environment. Regional powers are significant actors of regional relations and therefore they are seen as important allies of superpowers as well as of great powers (Godehardt and Nabers, pp. 193–208).

Back in the 1990s, it seemed that, in case of agreeing to the concept of hegemonic stability, like Russia and India, China could most likely only count on the role of a regional power. Although possessing a sufficient “critical mass”, China’s role in global politics was destined to remain politically subordinate to the interests of the USA. The costs of unipolarity for China, as well as for Russia and India, were deemed prohibitively high.

At the same time, viewed from a global perspective, in the first post-Cold War years, China’s power potentials, primarily economic, but to a certain extent also military, were modest. And in the political sense, nothing indicated that China could quickly become a “disruptive factor” to the projected American hegemony. From 1971 to 1997, official Beijing vetoed only twice. Both times in 1972. In August, they did it independently to block Bangladesh’s admission to the UN (because of its relations with Pakistan), and then in September, together with the Soviet Union, on a proposal for a resolution on the Middle East crisis and the violation of the ceasefire. Avoiding the use of the veto during the transformation of the structure of the international system from bipolar to unipolar, and then also in the first years of unipolarity, indicates the prudence of Chinese policy. Foreign policy goals were subordinated to internal development. Internal development depended on Western (primarily American) investments and technologies. China did not want a confrontation with the US, to a large extent there was no reason for it. And when, in 1997 and 1999, after a quarter of a century, China twice put a veto, it was because of the attitude of Guatemala and FYR

Macedonia towards Taiwan. Thus, it was warned that the actions of other states concerning China's internal issues will not be tolerated.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, China had the opportunity to legitimize its position as a great power, but it was far from that status during the 1990s in every respect. How did the situation arise wherein the US, as outlined in the 2022 Defense Strategy, designated China as a "principal competitor", purportedly seeking to exert influence over the prevailing order through economic, military, technological, and diplomatic means? Furthermore, the EU's declaration that China, due to its backing of Russia, is evolving into a "direct adversary" of the Western bloc warrants examination.

One of the solutions to the posed questions lies within the Chinese strategy, characterized by a gradual and patient approach to constructing a balance of power in international relations. Prioritizing internal development has led to the elevation of economic prowess, thereby establishing an economic equilibrium. Concurrently, the expansion of economic strength has facilitated increased investment in bolstering military capabilities, enabling more effective protection of economic interests. This augmented military power has, in turn, supported successful endeavors to shape a favorable and desirable international landscape through various decisions, initiatives, and strategic partnerships.

Economic growth of China as an accelerator of power potential

The word *pokankuni* in a Tulu language in India means the process of learning by looking at others (De Boano, 2007, p. 171). In certain circumstances, it is the best way to gain new knowledge and acquire the necessary skills from the immediate environment. By using other people's practice, we improve ourselves. The remarkable ascent of China during the 1980s and 1990s can be encapsulated in a single term. Preceding China's economic transformation, the East Asian region observed the economic successes of Japan, followed by Taiwan and shortly thereafter, Korea. These neighboring examples provided valuable insights into fostering growth and sustaining long-term economic development, particularly through investments in education, technological capacity, and the promotion of innovation (Lin, 2017, pp. 24–31). The difference, however, was in scale. China's population is 11 times that of Japan, 28 times that of South Korea and 61 times that of Taiwan. The rise of China has left global consequences, it directly influenced the transformation of the world political system.

Because of China's size, including its "critical mass" parameters, internal development also has dramatic implications for the environment. First to the immediate environment and neighboring countries, then to the wider region, and finally on a global scale. As it rose to become the second largest economy in the world, China could no longer learn from its neighbors, but began to compare itself to the US. The higher and faster the Chinese economy grew, the deeper and more comprehensive were the implications.

Table 1 presents the share in global GDP share based on the PPP for the G20 members. Instead of aggregate results for the EU, which is a member of the G20, the table also shows indicators for Spain as the most important member and the largest economy of the EU after Germany, France, Great Britain, and Italy. This was also done in order to avoid doubts and unnecessary polemics, because in 1989 there was no EU with 28, but EC with 12 members, so an open question would be raised as to what is being compared with what.

Table 1: Share in world GDP of PPP of G-20 members from 1989 to 2014
(Proroković, 2018, p. 549)

State	2014/1989 (A)/(P)	2014 (%)	2009 (%)	2004 (%)	1989 (%)
USA	- 6,14 (-27,56)	16,14	16,98	19,64	22,28
China	+12,25 (+300,98)	16,32	13,71	9,68	4,07
Japan	-4,39 (-49,94)	4,40	4,90	5,79	8,79
Germany	-2,65 (-43,44)	3,45	3,72	4,20	6,10
France	-1,75 (-42,27)	2,39	2,65	3,07	4,14
Brazil	-0,72 (-19,25)	3,02	3,18	3,08	3,74
Great Britain	-1,29 (-35,34)	2,36	2,53	2,96	3,65
Italy	-2,26 (-53,42)	1,97	2,36	2,88	4,23
Russia²	-0,17 (-4,89)	3,30	3,44	3,47	n/a
India	+3,11 (+83,60)	6,83	6,09	4,91	3,72

² In 1989, Russia was a constituent republic within the Soviet Union. Consequently, the absence of data for that year in the table mitigates potential discrepancies in comparisons. Therefore, the initial column delineates alterations in Russia's indicators relative to the year 2004.

State	2014/1989 (A)/(P)	2014 (%)	2009 (%)	2004 (%)	1989 (%)
Canada	-0,60 (-28,84)	1,48	1,54	1,73	2,08
Australia	-0,19 (-15,83)	1,01	1,04	1,09	1,20
Spain	-0,78 (-34,98)	1,45	1,70	1,94	2,23
Mexico	-0,65 (-24,71)	1,98	2,03	2,21	2,63
South Korea	+0,45 (+37,50)	1,65	1,67	1,64	1,20
Indonesia	+0,56 (+28,57)	2,48	2,27	2,03	1,96
Turkey	+0,01 (+0,72)	1,40	1,34	1,38	1,39
Saudi Arabia	+0,10 (+7,19)	1,49	1,38	1,28	1,39
Argentina	+0,01 (+1,15)	0,88	0,89	0,81	0,87
SAR	-0,23 (-26,14)	0,65	0,68	0,70	0,88

When comparing the indicators of economic power among the USA and other major powers, notably China and India, distinct trends emerge. The USA's share in the global economy exhibits a consistent decline, whereas China and India are experiencing growth (Table 1). Over a twenty-year span, the US has witnessed a decrease in its global economic share by a quarter in relative terms. Additionally, there is a noticeable decline in the economic power of other Western nations, including European countries.

However, despite the fact that China's share in the global economy grew exponentially, Beijing still could not influence many processes. Lee Jijun asserts that in 2003, China held the position of the leading consumer of steel and the second-largest consumer of oil globally, despite having only a negligible 0.1 percent influence on the international oil pricing mechanism. Consequently, Jijun argues that China ought to proactively engage in regulating, controlling, and reforming the international economic system, as well as contributing to the establishment of a fair and equitable global economic order (Bhattacharya, 2005, p. 63).

China's growth, although it suited American investors and even certain sectors of the American economy, is also becoming a challenge for American interests. Because the growth of China's share in the world economy is taking place at the expense of America's decline. As much as this has become clear to American strategists, it has also become clear to Chinese strategists. In order not to depend on processes determined by others, such as for

example the international oil pricing mechanism, Chinese had to show the readiness to defend their own interests both by military and by political means. In order to apply the principle of self-help, and in order to ensure one's own security, in parallel with the growth of economic power potentials in China, the growth of military power potentials is also detected.

Table 2: Military expenditure by country 1990–2020 (SIPRI, 2021, pp. 3-21)

Country	1990	2000	2010	2020
USA	636.176	475.217	865.268	766.583
China	21.282	41.167	129.359	244.934
India	20.604	30.296	54.032	73.001
Russia	220.503 (USSR)	23.584	49.834	66.838
Great Britain	60.892	48.701	63.177	58.485
Saudi Arabia	27.756	30.822	53.569	55.535
France	51.395	45.010	48.415	51.572
Germany	61.408	42.403	41.046	51.570
Japan	42.690	46.223	46.420	48.160
Brazil	12.980	16.768	25.389	25.101

In 2020, China's allocations for military purposes were one-seventh higher than the combined allocations of Great Britain, France, Germany and Japan, while thirty years earlier, China allocated almost three times less than Great Britain and twice less than Japan. Technological development also caused the modernization of combat systems of the armed forces, as well as the improvement of nuclear potential. Stekić (2020) examines China's involvement in various initiatives focusing on the technological development to demonstrate the applicability of the so-called "technological sovereignty" as an analytical tool. He claims that the potential for its technological dominance through initiatives like the "Digital Silk Road" raises questions about the future dynamics of international hegemony. Stekić (2022) contends that China has reached the pinnacle of technological supremacy, surpassing European, American, and Asian competitors, notably Japan. This position enhances China's geopolitical standing, as the dominance it achieves in technology directly translates into increased

military, economic, and consequently political influence globally. To maintain its status as a “technohegemon”, China will encounter several key challenges in the future of which the most crucial challenge is closely linked to the so-called “digital” aspect of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The facts related to China’s nuclear arsenal are somewhat less well known, but it can be assumed with great probability what the nuclear capacities of this great power are (Busch, 2001, pp. 149–196). China today possesses about 260 nuclear warheads, which can be used on ballistic missiles launched from the ground, from bomber planes or from submarines (strategic triad) (Shulong and Yu, 2009, p. 169).

The peculiarity of China’s position is reflected in the fact that this country, from the moment of “entering the status” of a nuclear power, proclaimed the policy of *No First Us*³. It is a classic example of relying on the principle of self-help by using a deterrence strategy. As Thucydides says: “Instead of attacking them yourself, you prefer to defend yourself against their attack” (Tukidid, 1957, p. 47). The development of official Beijing’s military nuclear program was aimed at deterring the enemy and possibly using it in a “second strike”, a retaliatory attack on enemy territory from which the initial “first strike” was launched.

However, Richard Woolgar-James questions the validity of such a Chinese policy in the second decade of the 18th century. A key factor in changing the status of a nuclear power is submarines that can fire missiles with nuclear warheads. Nuclear powers with submarines carrying nuclear missiles have a strategic advantage and are capable of delivering a “first strike” (Woolgar-James, 2015). By increasing the potential of military power, thanks to which China has become the third most powerful military power in the world, the balance of power has been established in this area as well. This is how the ability to independently ensure its own security was developed, which is a condition for China to be classified as a great power. However, in order to achieve the status of a great power, political recognition from other actors is also necessary. First of all, from the more powerful ones. That is, in this particular case – from the USA. Despite the fact that China has become the second largest economy and the third

³ China became the fifth nuclear power in the world after a successful test on October 16, 1964. The entire project was codenamed “596”, and the first nuclear weapons test was carried out at the Lop Nur location, in the salt desert in the north of the country, in the Xinjiang region, in the Bayangol-Mongolian Autonomous Region.

military power in the world, the US has not shown readiness to recognize China as an “equal partner”. At the political level, the USA remains more dominant by using all the privileges secured during the time of unipolarity, while it sovereignly dominated the world political system. In order to complete the process of legitimizing the status of a great power, China had to act politically, through various decisions, initiatives and strategic partnerships in order to influence the formation of a favorable and desirable international environment.

China’s political power and the creation of a balance of power

Although China is today a “main competitor” for the USA and a “direct rival” for the EU, it is a big question how interested Beijing itself was in such a development. As already stated, during the 1980s and 1990s, China’s foreign policy goals were subordinated to internal development, and therefore confrontations with the USA were avoided. The same thing continued in the first decade of the 21st century.

China’s foreign policy positioning at the time was complex, elaborated on several levels and in sectoral policies, with the aim of further increasing economic power in order to stabilize internal conditions and with the leadership’s perception that political power is still insufficient for open confrontations with the USA. Sharper and more decisive Chinese reactions occur only in cases where its interests are directly threatened, which can be especially seen in the policy towards the open issue of demarcation in the South China Sea (Wang, 2011, p. 68). In that period, it was often emphasized that China needs peaceful development in order to achieve its long-term domestic goals. “President Xi Jinping has declared two century goals as priorities to be achieved in his second five-year term. First, by 2021 (that year marks one century since the founding of the Communist Party) GDP per capita from 2010 should be doubled. The idea is to create *Xiaokang shehui* – a society of moderate prosperity, which - interpreted by our dictionary – is the middle and consumer class, which will buy more on the domestic market, so increasing domestic consumption rather than exports will enable further economic growth and development. Another century goal is to achieve the Chinese Dream (*Zhongguo Meng*) of the Great Renaissance of the Chinese People (*Zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*)” (Góralczyk, 2015).

Guoguang Wu states that in relation to the immediate environment and neighboring countries, China projects the concept of “make friends - pacify - enrich” (*youlin-mulin-fulin*) (Wu, 2008, p. 269). In order to illustrate this

approach, the expression “if our neighbors are friends – the periphery is stable”⁴ is used (*mulin youhao, wending zhoubian*) (Pekkanen, Ravenhill and Foot, 2014, p. 408). Michael Yahuda notes that this kind of setup actually benefits China itself the most. It is its way to build a framework in which it can promote its interests in the best possible way.

In relation to the wider environment, Chinese multilateralism is actualized through “new regionalism”. New structures, institutions and regional organizations are being built. This approach is best seen in China’s deployment within the SCO. In this organization, China agreed to participate on a completely equal basis, although the disproportions with individual member states are easily visible (Yahuda, 2008, pp. 76–85). Jianwei Wang notes that China prefers to use a multilateral rather than a bilateral format to “delegitimise fears about the Chinese threat” held by almost all neighboring countries. This especially applies to Russia, with which China wants to maintain stable relations and have fruitful cooperation (Wang, 2008, pp. 104–126). Wang also emphasizes that, unlike other regional organizations, the SCO stands out because it deals with issues of security and military cooperation. These are more sensitive issues, and rules and principles that apply to economic integration units cannot be used in military regional organizations, so China has promoted a special principle: “top-down functionalism”. In the wider region, China, together with Russia and India, is establishing the RIC forum, which should ensure stability in relations between the key countries of East Asia and South Asia.

The same is happening during the expansion of Chinese investments to other regions within the framework of the proclaimed Belt and Road strategy. Wu Guoguan concludes that “international multilateralism is not a principle that China is fully committed to and which it is trying to achieve with a linear approach and a coherent performance” (Zheng and Tok, 2008, p. 180). Instead, China is concentrating on strengthening its own presence in different regions, by different means. Lađevac and Stekić (2021) contextualize the political risks linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) within the framework of China’s Fifth Grand Strategy. They assert that

⁴ Some authors also state that it is about two separate messages “*mulin zhengce*” (good policy towards neighbors) and “*wending zhoubian*” (stable periphery), but this does not fundamentally change anything, nor does it in any way affect the conclusions drawn in the paper amounts. Look, for example: Patrick Nopens, “The Impact of the Withdrawal from Afghanistan on Russia’s”, Security Policy Brief, 54, March 2014, p. 6.

within the Eurasian space, the BRI presents various political risks, including the potential for sudden changes in political regime types, fluctuations in foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, and challenges to the stability and peace of certain microregions (2021, p. 58).

Therefore, it can be stated that there is a special, Chinese approach to multilateralism, which implies a non-linear and asymmetric approach, which even in some cases is not long-term oriented. China's multilateralism has several levels and several dimensions. When talking about Chinese multilateralism, it should be kept in mind that there are about four different levels: 1) multilateralism in relation to neighbors (includes the region in which China is most interested); 2) pan-regional multilateralism (within the wider region, which also includes ASEAN, the North Pacific, and South Asia, in which the USA and Japan are traditionally interested); 3) global multilateralism (which is mainly based on symbolism and political messages sent by China); 4) multilateralism seen from the point of view of internal and foreign policy (China is trying to attract Taiwan in addition to Hong Kong with an active approach and policy of "one country – two systems", which can also be seen as using a multilateral approach to solve an internal political problem) (Wu, 2008, pp. 268–280).

However, the question of relations with the USA remains open all the time. "The notion of the creation of a new type of relationship between China and the US as great powers is constantly repeated in China's most important central concept on the future Sino-US relations." President Xi personally insisted on it. He often tried to get US President Barack Obama's approval for this characterization of Sino-American relations. Obama did not accept this idea" (Yinhong, 2015). In the second decade of the 21st century, this becomes one of the key issues for China's foreign policy. In June 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, speaking at the World Peace Forum, said that "China has become a great power and it guides relations between great powers, but it must not work according to the mold of the former great powers. This means that China will not tolerate the interference of others in its diplomatic decisions, will not seek alliances or hegemony. Instead, Beijing will continue the path of peaceful development" (Kejin, 2013).

Therefore, it is important for China that the USA recognizes it as an equal status partner, which would mean that it has confirmed itself as a great power. The problem with this is that the US would then independently and voluntarily renounce its own superpower status. Because if China is recognized as a great power, it automatically implies that the US is not the only great power. The period of hegemonic stability is over. Despite all the problems they face,

especially noticeable after the escalation of the financial crisis in 2008, the US is still the largest economy and the most important military power in the world. Geopolitically, American influence is evident both in Europe (thanks to relations with the EU and the functioning of NATO), as well as in the Pacific region (Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand) and in the Middle East. The US dollar continues to enjoy the status of unofficial “world currency”. Why would the US agree to China’s offer? This is where we come back to perception. The picture of the world from the point of view of the USA was one, but from the point of view of China it was completely different. The US assessments of global processes were one, the Chinese quite different.

Different perceptions and assessments caused different interpretations of certain events. Because of this, the positions of the US and China are becoming more and more distant. This is first manifested by voting in the UN Security Council during the war in Syria. If China and Russia’s double veto investments in 2007 and 2008 regarding the proposed resolutions concerning Myanmar and Zimbabwe could still be characterized as an ongoing alignment of interests, then their joint action regarding Syria could not be qualified as such. China and Russia used a double veto three times (February and July 2012 and May 2014), thus demonstrating a new strategic partnership.

Simon Norton’s observation highlights that China views the United States and its allied systems as its greatest threat to achieving its goals and safeguarding its interests. Over time, China’s grand strategy has transitioned from Deng Xiaoping’s era, characterized by a policy of maintaining a low profile, concealing capabilities, and patiently waiting. Presently, China demonstrates a greater readiness to assert its power to influence and shape the external environment. This is evident through its active modernization of the military, particularly emphasizing the development of information systems and naval capacities, aimed at protecting its security interests. There is noticeable action in the direction of strengthening naval power and territorial pretensions. At the same time, it seeks to maintain a stable peripheral environment necessary for its development, and does not take aggressive steps that could lead to military conflict. Through diplomacy, it is trying to alleviate fears that a more powerful China will be aggressive” (Norton, 2015, pp. 9–10). In its performance, China identifies itself in the international community with an anti-hegemonic attitude, which can also be interpreted as standing against the (hegemony) of the USA (Béja, 2008, pp. 253–259). Since 2012, if not earlier (since 2009 when the first BRIC summit was held), it has been doing so together with Russia. Instead of an agreement with the USA on the creation of a *new type of relationship between the great powers*, it

is moving towards the aspiration to limit the actions of the USA. With this approach, the US would eventually be forced to recognize equal status with China. Stekić (2023) characterizes China as a “hesitant hegemon” and suggests that despite its global influence, China displays reluctance to fully embrace the role of a traditional unipolar superpower in its security and foreign policy. To gain insight into China’s potential access to global leadership, Stekić (2023) delineates the layers of its foreign policy, allowing for a deeper understanding of its engagement across different segments of the international arena.

However, what makes the whole thing more complex is that the other actors gathered in the BRICS configuration were equally involved in this process. That is, in the growing BRICS+ configuration, which will expand and include an increasing number of actors interested in establishing the balance of power in international relations. Essentially, by creating a strategic alliance with Russia and acting through numerous multilateral formats, China has both shaped and accelerated the establishment of a balance of power (Proroković, 2023, pp. 46-48).

In an anarchic international environment, states are guided by the principle of self-help in order to protect and realize their interests. But, if that is not enough for them to realize their interests, they are ready to cooperate with other actors or negotiate through international organizations. Of course, up to a certain limit. Because, as Kenneth Waltz notes, the actors are not only forced to ask themselves, ‘Will they win?’, but also: ‘Who will win more?’ (Waltz, 1979, pp. 107-113). By establishing a balance of power and limiting US action, non-Western actors expect to gain more. The option that was offered to them thirty years ago was to project their interests in a clearly hierarchical system, where they would be able to reach the status of regional powers with greater or lesser influence on global processes. According to the changes that have taken place, some of them (China, Russia and India in the first place) now perceive themselves as great powers and by joint action they are establishing a balance of power towards the USA in order to legitimize this new status. In this way they are also working towards the end of transformation of the structure of the world political system from unipolar to multipolar.

The role of China and new paradigms of its global vision

China’s political power, embodied in various decisions, initiatives and strategic partnerships aimed at shaping a favorable and desirable international environment, has now been put to the function of the goal of

establishing a balance of power and forming a multipolar order. Two decades ago, it may not have been an explicit objective, and it's conceivable that the Chinese political leadership harbored different expectations. However, the current scenario is the culmination of a multi-decade process initiated with China's attainment of permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Subsequently, accelerated economic growth and dynamic development ensued, accompanied by concerted efforts to bolster military capabilities and engage in proactive foreign policy initiatives.

It is evident from the Chinese approach that changes in the international environment were induced gradually, by insisting on benefits for all interested parties and promoting win-win solutions, along with the creation of new regionalism and numerous multilateral formats. China accepted others as equals. In spite of the fact that it saw itself more and more as a great power, and in the end, in the statements of Chinese officials, they declared their status as such, they negotiated with others with full respect and on an equal basis. Even in a bilateral format, when, for example, negotiations were held with the Solomon Islands delegation in the spring of 2022. At the same time, there was an expectation that others would accept China as an equal partner. And everyone accepted it, except the USA. And without that, it was impossible to talk about the legitimization of China's status as a great power in international relations. Instead of a scenario where the transformation of the structure of the world political system from unipolar to asymmetric multipolar (or even bipolar – hypothetically, although it is difficult to imagine, it was still possible to create an asymmetric bipolar order in the agreement of the USA and China) was to take place through cooperation, it started to take place through confrontation. These confrontations were first detected on the political level and they intensified during the war in Syria. Over time, they also transferred to the economic level, with the introduction of restrictive measures in mutual trade, limiting investment opportunities and technological exchange. China's response to these American steps has been an ever-closer association with Russia, both bilaterally and in the multilateral BRICS and SCO formats. Hence the reluctance of the Chinese leadership to side with the West in their conflict with Russia from February 2022. To a large extent and thanks to the position of China, in the non-Western part of the world, despite the pressures and fierce propaganda – few responded to the demands for the introduction of sanctions against Russia (Proroković, 2022, pp. 749-750). Without a partnership with China, it is a big question how Russia would fare in this "international game". Since it is in partnership with China, it is easier for it to perform in the international arena. The strategic linking of the two

countries, with the support of numerous other actors, has withstood the test of time and trials, and has shown that a new balance of power in international relations is being built around that axis and is inducing multipolarity. China is not only the generator of growth of the global economy, but also the generator of transformation of the structure of the world political system.

In this context, the three strategic initiatives launched in 2021 and 2022 should also be considered. First is “The Global Development Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping at the 76th annual session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021”. It is “a major step towards fulfilling that promise, as it will strengthen the global development cause and help realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals”. In fact, more than 100 countries as well as the UN have supported the Global Development Initiative (Wang Lei, 2022). Through increased investment in global development and innovative financing mechanisms, the GDI seeks to bolster assistance to developing countries and foster collaborative efforts among development partners (CIKD, 2023). The Global Development Initiative (GDI) spearheaded by China emphasizes three core strategies to tackle global challenges (CIKD, 2023). Firstly, it prioritizes building international consensus on promoting development, fostering collaboration among nations to address shared developmental goals. Secondly, the GDI focuses on promoting increased resources for global development, aiming to mobilize greater financial support and investment towards sustainable development efforts worldwide. Finally, it emphasizes building cooperation platforms centered on eight priority areas, including poverty reduction, food security, pandemic response and vaccines, financing for development, climate change, industrialization, digital economy, and connectivity. Through these concerted efforts, the GDI endeavors to create a more inclusive and prosperous global community by addressing critical developmental needs and fostering international cooperation and solidarity. So far (February 2024) the GDI achieved more than 130 projects in 58 countries worldwide with focus to Asia and Africa (CIKD, 2023). The Fund South-South and GDI Fund are also established with capital of more than 4 billion USD for 2024 (CIKD, 2023). Besides, the Global Security Initiative – GSI, introduced by Chinese Communist Party general secretary Xi Jinping during the Boao Forum on April 21, 2022, aims to establish a balanced and sustainable security architecture. Its core principles include upholding indivisible security, respecting sovereignty, and resolving disputes through dialogue. With endorsements from over 80 countries and regional organizations, the GSI has garnered widespread international support. On the one hand, establishing a balance of power promises a more even development and reduction of the

current disparities that exist between the developed, mostly Western countries and the rest of the world, which consists of developing or underdeveloped countries. On the other hand, with the aim of more even development, it is proposing to establish new principles for ensuring global security.

The Global Civilizational Initiative – GCI promotes cultural and civilizational exchanges to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation among nations. Rooted in principles of sovereignty, respect, and dialogue, it seeks to cultivate a more peaceful and harmonious world. By facilitating cultural exchanges and mutual appreciation, the GDI aims to strengthen bonds between China and other countries, contributing to global harmony and prosperity. Some analysts claim that China points with pride to the large number of countries that praise its three global initiatives – development, security, civilization. Moreover, the three global initiatives now form the core of China’s foreign policy, which in part challenges American values and thus American primacy (CGTN, 2023). All of China’s initiatives, including the Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and China Civilizational Initiative, are firmly rooted within the framework of the United Nations (UN) and align with the principles outlined in the UN Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By integrating these initiatives into the broader UN umbrella, China demonstrates its commitment to collective global efforts and contributes to the realization of sustainable development objectives on an international scale.

China’s role in contemporary international relations is to establish a balance of power towards the Western bloc led by the USA. The continuity of this process, which practically proves the thesis of Kenneth Waltz, influenced the development of different perceptions that became more and more opposed over time. China wants to be recognized as an equal partner by the US, and if the Western countries still do not want it, Beijing will force them to do so by using the built multilateral configurations and new initiatives (like the two proposed in 2021 and 2022). And that’s how the transformation of the structure of the world political system into a multipolar one will end. Or will another large-scale war be necessary for that to happen? It is difficult to predict at the moment, but it cannot be ruled out. The persistent refusal of the USA to accept the change in reality and agree to a new balance of power in the world caused a dramatic deterioration of relations with Russia. Hence the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, as well as the destabilization of the global character. There is a possibility that something similar can be repeated in Sino-American relations.

However, judging by the current course of the process of establishing the balance of power, this does not mean that it can be stopped. It just means that it will play out through total confrontation and threaten regional security in different parts of the world. The transformation will take longer and cost more. The US has labeled China as “major competitor”. At the same time, judging by the development of China’s approach and the political initiatives that followed each other, the USA also became the main competitor for official Beijing.

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U.S. CONCEPT OF A “RULES-BASED ORDER” AND ITS DISCONTENTS: IS THERE A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE?

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Abstract: Recently, there has been significant discourse in political and academic circles surrounding the concept of a “rules-based order” (RBO) in international relations, championed by the Obama and, especially, the Biden U.S. administration. The primary issues revolve around the relationship between this concept and international law, as well as the reactions of other states to it. Various alternative stances towards this concept appear within and outside the U.S.-led bloc of states, ranging from its acceptance in principle, albeit with different interpretations attached, to vociferous resistance. The authors delineate the fundamental assumptions of the U.S. concept of RBO, linking it to its grand strategy of liberal hegemony (rooted in Wilsonian principles), the perceived imperatives of the current international political landscape (including challenges to liberal democracy and a growing confrontation with alleged anti-RBO powers), and a broader Anglo-Saxon legal tradition of the rule of law (in contrast to the continental European *Rechtsstaat*). Then they evaluate the credibility of alternatives to the concept, proposed by U.S.-allied Germany and Australia, rival powers Russia and China, and India as a “third force”. This assessment takes into account the specific national interests and regional imperatives of these states, their positions in the current international situation, and the distinct legal traditions they adhere to. The credibility of international law and institutions is appraised separately, considering the current international power and interest dynamics. The authors conclude by advocating for a reform of international law based on a mutual understanding of diverse national interests and legal traditions, positing it as the optimal foundation for a genuine rules-based order.

Keywords: rules-based order, international law, rule of law, the United States, European Union, Germany, Australia, Russia, China, India.

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Introduction

In his 2015 National Security Strategy, former U.S. President Barack Obama asserted that “strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity as well as the dignity and human rights of all peoples” (The White House, 2015). Similarly, in his own 2022 National Security Strategy, the current U.S. President Joseph Biden emphasized that “the vast majority of countries want a stable and open rules-based order that respects their sovereignty and territorial integrity, provides a fair means of economic exchange with others and promotes shared prosperity, and enables cooperation on shared challenges” (The White House, 2022, p. 18). The heightened frequency with which top U.S. officials employ the term “rules-based order” (RBO) has not gone unnoticed, triggering reactions from other international actors – U.S. allies, rivals and third states – and sparking discussion within International Relations academic circles. The central question raised by the widespread use of this term is: why introduce a new term like RBO when there is already international law? Is RBO merely another expression for international law, or is the distinction intentional? The debate surrounding the use of this term in both international politics and academia strongly suggests, as articulated by one prominent scholar in the field, that the preference for RBO over international law on the part of the United States is “considered and deliberate” (Dugard, 2023, p. 223).

In this paper, we operate from the premise that the U.S. concept of a “rules-based order” (RBO) in international relations is indeed intended to convey something distinct from international law. This distinction justifies the political reactions of other actors and merits academic consideration. The roots of this concept can be traced back to President Woodrow Wilson’s vision of how the world should be governed to be “safe for democracy”, evolving into Washington’s grand strategy of liberal hegemony after the Cold War. The recent surge in the usage of the RBO concept is linked to the contemporary political landscape, where Washington’s concerns about the survival of liberal democracy both outside and within the U.S-led bloc of states coincide with its growing confrontation with explicitly identified anti-RBO autocratic powers – Russia and China. The U.S. administration perceives international law, with its institutional structure based on the UN Charter and the paramount role of the Security Council in maintaining peace and security, as insufficiently credible to perpetuate its vision of a world order where its domestic institutions and values would be secure. Consequently, the invocation of RBO represents a strategic move, presenting

a flexible combination of rules and their (re)interpretations from different parallel legal orders. This approach relates to international law in a manner analogous to how the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the rule of law relates to the European continental *Rechtsstaat*.

However, the genuine intrigue lies in the reactions of other states, adding depth to the analysis of this concept. Drawing on its own legal tradition and earlier applications of the term RBO by the European Union, Germany has presented its unique interpretation, aligning more closely with international law and adopting a more “multilateral” stance. Another U.S. ally, Australia, enthusiastically embraced the concept, only to reveal that its acceptance of RBO’s departure from international law is driven more by its regional imperatives than its intrinsic vision of order. Among U.S. rivals, Russia delivered a pointed critique, dismissing the concept as a smokescreen for American circumvention of international law, and proposing its alternative concept of “genuine multilateralism”, seemingly designed to legitimize deviations from international law in its own behaviour. China responded with its own version of RBO, aiming to “complete” international law by drawing on the Confucian tradition of the “rule of virtue” for the “common future of mankind”. Finally, India seized upon the U.S. invocation of RBO to highlight the need for the international legal order to evolve towards a more consensual model, intending to position itself as a new major power within it.

It is evident that states in the international system, led by their national interests, legal traditions, geopolitical positions, and roles in the current power dynamics, determine their stance towards international law and the U.S. concept of RBO. What conclusions can be drawn from these complex relationships for impartial observers seeking a world governed by universally accepted rules? Our approach begins with providing a detailed explanation of the U.S. concept of RBO, enabling a deeper understanding of other states’ responses to it. We then analyze the credibility of the alternatives proposed by these states concerning the U.S. concept and international law. Following an assessment of the credibility of international law itself, particularly in the light of the inclination of significant international actors, starting with the United States, to deviate from it and justify these deviations by invoking alternative concepts, we suggest a direction for reforming international law to pave the way for a world order genuinely based on rules to emerge.

What is a “rules-based order”? the U.S. concept explained

The term “rules-based order” suggests the existence (or possibility) of an order not rooted in rules but reliant on the voluntary use of force by the powerful. This understanding resonates with Western legal traditions, where the primary role of law in society has been to curb power and authority, binding them into a legal framework. The international order differs from domestic ones within states; it is anarchic, lacking a single supranational center of power to which sovereign states are subordinate. Consequently, international law differs from domestic law, as there is no international monopoly of force to enforce it upon states and their citizens. This raises the question of whether states, particularly the most powerful ones (great powers), would voluntarily wield their sovereign power in the international arena, potentially rendering the international order akin to the Wild West? Alternatively, would they choose to voluntarily bind themselves by common rules, creating a more predictable and secure rules-based order? The existence of a developed international legal system since 1945, based on the UN Charter, with its institutional structure built around the UN and its Security Council as the highest authority in peace and security issues, underscores that states, including great powers, opted for the latter.

However, the frequent use of the term by the United States in recent years, instead of invoking international law and the UN Charter, sparked controversy over the true meaning and existence of RBO. Essentially, the United States also envisions an international order based on universally accepted rules rather than the voluntarism of states, but a closer examination is needed to discern the specifics of these rules and how their “breakers” (U.S. great power rivals and so-called “rogue states”) demonstrate “voluntarism”. We delve into the U.S. concept of RBO through three key issues to grasp its significance and the reason for its emphasis by Washington. The first issue acknowledges that, in addition to the UN-based international order, two more international legal orders were established in the early post-World War II years: the international economic order, which achieved universality only after the Cold War, when former socialist states transitioned to free market capitalism and joined globalized world economy; ideological Western order, which expanded from its North American-Western European core after the Cold War, but never attained universality. The second issue highlights the seemingly unbreakable link between the U.S. concept of RBO and its foreign-policy idea of liberal internationalism, rooted in Wilsonian principles and manifested today as the grand strategy of liberal hegemony. The third issue explores a subtle yet important

difference in the understanding of RBO from the perspective of the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition of the rule of law compared to the continental European *Rechtsstaat*.

The controversy surrounding the disparity between the U.S. concept of RBO and international law would likely be non-existent if there was a single international legal and institutional order. In fact, in the aftermath of World War II three distinct orders based on rules emerged, as classified by Malcolm Chalmers (2019): a universal security system, a universal economic system, and a more exclusive Western system, alongside “a set of Major Power Relations” (involving bilateral arms control agreements and informal bargains among major powers). Excluding major power relations, we mainly follow this classification of international legal orders. The “universal security system” aligns with the international legal order based on the United Nations with fundamental principles such as “self-determination and non-aggression, together with the inadmissibility of force in changing international borders”, alongside with other “security-related rules established before and during this period, particularly those related to nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, the international law of the sea and the conduct of international diplomacy” (Chalmers, 2019, p. 4). The “universal economic system” refers to a set of agreements and institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization), which laid “the political and legal framework for the massive growth in international trade and investment” since 1945 (Chalmers, 2019, p. 5). Initially limited to the capitalist world, this order achieved universality after major socialist economies joined following the Cold War. The Western system represents “a community of shared political, economic and security interests” which “brings together developed market democracies in North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific” through an exceptionally dense network of agreements and institutions (NATO, the EU, OECD, G7, Five Eyes intelligence sharing agreement, U.S. bilateral security agreements with its major allies in Asia-Pacific, etc.) (Chalmers, 2019, p. 5). This order is “based on shared democratic norms and shared responsibilities for protecting those norms” and is inherently ideological (“the West was above all an ideological endeavour”) (Chalmers, 2019, p. 15). Despite expanding into Central-Eastern Europe after the Cold War, it remains far from universal.

The United States played a pivotal role in creating all three RBOs, officially supporting each. However, tensions between them and contradictory U.S. responses to these tensions are evident. The UN order,

resulting from a bargain between the victorious World War II allies, features a veto power held by the five permanent members of the Security Council, emphasizing equality among great powers. In contrast, the Western order, conceived later to contain the Soviet Union and communism, centers largely on U.S. hegemony. Instances where the U.S. interfered in sovereign countries' internal affairs (sometimes by military intervention, without the UNSC authorization) during the Cold War or post-Cold War period, either to contain communism or in the name of human rights, aligned with the Western order but violated the UN Charter principles (Chalmers, 2019, pp. 20-21). While the international economic order was contemporaneously created with the UN order, the U.S. played a more decisive role, given the Soviet Union's disinterest in formulating capitalist rules. However, conflicts arose between the international economic and the Western order as well. One source of tension is the U.S. policy of sanctions as a primary means of intervening in non-Western states' internal affairs, which violates free trade rules (Chalmers, 2019, p. 27). The second source is the recent rise of protectionism in the U.S. and other parts of the political West, triggered by the observation that China does better playing by the existing rules, while globalization produces economic and social disparities within Western societies (Chalmers, 2019, pp. 24-26; Casarini, 2019).

So, which order do U.S. administrations envision when referring to RBO? The simplest answer would be a combination of the three orders collectively known as the liberal international order (LIO). Essentially, it comprises international law (the UN order) with additional elements from the international economic and the Western order, such as an open economy, human rights protection, and democratic governance (Dugard, 2023, p. 225; Lieberherr, 2023, p. 2). However, we have already observed that there are instances where the U.S. not only breaches international law (dissatisfied with Russia and China's use of veto in the UNSC) but also violates the rules of the international economic order when it conflicts with the Western order. Furthermore, for a full alignment of RBO at least with the Western order, the U.S. should unequivocally endorse one of its core values – democracy. However, this seems unlikely given the numerous autocracies that Washington has supported in recent decades. In its 2022 National Security Strategy, the Biden administration asserts that its “vision of a free, open, prosperous, and secure world” is supported not only by “democratic allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific as well as key democratic partners around the world”, but also by “countries that do not embrace democratic institutions but nevertheless depend upon and support a rules-based international system” (The White House, 2022, p. 8). If embracing

democracy is not an essential prerequisite for being a supporter of RBO – and we have seen that neither is a strict adherence to the UN-based international law or the rules of the international economy – then the question arises: what specific rules constitute this order? To answer this, we need to delve into the very origins of the concept.

The first U.S. president to advocate for an international order based on rules was Woodrow Wilson. His famous phrase “to make a world safe for democracy” is often misunderstood, and does not imply a desire to transform every country in the world into a liberal democracy. Instead, it was a call to protect existing democratic governance in the United States and its Western European allies, ensuring it was shielded from threats by illiberal powers. This conceptualization, known as “liberal internationalism”, aimed to create a world order where democracies would be safeguarded like “eggs in an egg carton”. The key elements of this order included economic openness (opposed to closed mercantilist blocs), rules and institutions, liberal-democratic solidarity (close cooperation among liberal-democratic states), cooperative (collective) security, and progressive social purposes (Ikenberry, 2020, pp. xi-xiii, 33-44, 122-140, 307-311). The failure of the interwar (Versailles) order, partially due to U.S. isolationism, convinced Washington elites that a robust international RBO required active U.S. involvement in global politics, evolving over time to signify U.S. global hegemony. NSC-68, a programmatic document from the Cold War’s onset, expanded upon the original Wilsonian idea, emphasizing the need to “build a healthy international community”, which the U.S. “would probably do even if there were no international (Soviet) threat”, with the objective of creating a “world environment in which the American system can survive and flourish” (Ikenberry, 2020, p. 187). With the advent of unipolarity after the Cold War, Washington adopted a grand strategy of liberal hegemony, seeking to establish a hierarchic international order under U.S. leadership in the name of liberal ideology (Posen, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2018; Walt, 2018; Trapara, 2022). President George H. W. Bush’s vision of a “new world order” was explicitly rules-based, presenting “a world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle” (Sakwa, 2023, p. 46). If RBO is indeed equivalent to an American hegemonic order, suggesting that the U.S. can break international rules if necessary to establish or maintain its global hegemony as the only arrangement in which American (and allied) liberal democracy could be secure, critics arguing that this is not a genuine rules-based order but rather a “rule based on orders” – an “alternative to international law, an order that encapsulates international law as interpreted by the United States to accord with its national interests” – may have a point

(Dugard, 2023, p. 226). However, considering the intricacies of the American legal tradition, the answer is not that straightforward.

The United States subscribes to the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of the rule of law, which differs in important and interesting ways from the European continental concept of *Rechtsstaat* (a German word translated as “state of law”, or “legal state”) (Barber, 2003, p. 444). Fundamentally, both concepts share the same meaning – governance by law, rejecting the dictate of any powerful individual or group (Barber, 2003, p. 444; Krygier, 2015, p. 780). However, a stark difference lies in how these doctrines perceive the connection between the state and the law. *Rechtsstaat* binds law and state together: society should be governed by the law with a separation of powers within the state, and those who rule (state officials) should also be bound by the law. There is no law without or outside the state – the law is exclusively a product of the state for the sake of certainty and predictability (Barber, 2003, pp. 447-450; Krygier, 2015, p. 782). In contrast, the rule of law etymologically lacks the word “state”, which is not accidental (Krygier, 2015, pp. 780-781). It rests on legal pluralism, allowing for multiple legal orders in the same territory (including sub-national and supra-national, alongside with multiple sources of the law, such as unwritten customs, court judgements, etc.) and different institutions determining the content of the law (Barber, 2003, pp. 450-451; Krygier, 2015, p. 781). This concept separates the state from the legal system, fosters flexibility, and lacks an ambition for a harmonious state-law relationship (Barber, 2003, pp. 451-452; Krygier, 2015, pp. 781-782). Thus, the rule of law is both a legal order and “a theory about a legal order” embodying “a set of qualities that ought to be present in all legal orders” (Barber, 2003, pp. 444, 452). Applying this to the international level, one can draw an analogy between *Rechtsstaat* and international law, with its institutional structure centred on the UN and its veto-powered permanent members of the UNSC. The U.S. concept of RBO, characterized by overlapping sources and a flexible interpretation of rules, can then be seen as analogous to the rule of law. While it remains rules-based, the determination of what the rules are and how they are interpreted and applied cannot solely be entrusted to the UN, where illiberal states hold veto power. Instead, there should be room for the “judicial” prerogative of the U.S. as an “exceptional” nation. Hence, the U.S. concept of RBO can be defined as a flexible combination of rules from multiple parallel international legal orders, with their also flexible interpretation a prerogative of the United States as a liberal-hegemonic power. To those in the rest of the world not attuned to the peculiarities of the rule of law this might seem like

pure voluntarism of the world's most powerful country. It is them whom we now turn our attention to.

Alternatives on the inside: European/German “effective multilateralism” and Australian regional approach

The Western order operates within the sphere of U.S. hegemony. Consequently, it is unsurprising that U.S. allies within this order align with its foreign policy more often than not, including a recent frequent employment of the term RBO. However, the interpretations they attach are somewhat different from Washington's perspective, with Germany and Australia serving as illustrative examples. Germany, unlike the U.S, directly links its understanding of RBO to international law, encompassing the UN Charter, human rights conventions, arms control and non-proliferation treaties (Lieberherr, 2023, p. 3). In its first-ever 2023 National Security Strategy, signed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz, RBO is mentioned ten times. “The Federal Government advocates the strengthening and further development of a free international order based on international law and the United Nations Charter. Such a rules-based order creates stability and the conditions for peace, security and human development” (The Federal Government, 2023, p. 48). The adoption of this Strategy was motivated by a significant shift in Germany's security environment during the “watershed era” (*Zeitenwende*) marked by “Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine” which is deemed “a violation of international law and of the European security order” and makes Russia “the most significant threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area” (while China is “a partner, competitor and systemic rival”) (The Federal Government, 2023, pp. 11-12). Germany views the world as increasingly “multipolar”, acknowledging new centers of power and rising systemic rivalry (The Federal Government, 2023, pp. 5, 13, 22, 23). In this evolving security landscape, Germany (and Europe) seek to compete with challengers to the international order and reduce dependence on other “poles” in world order, including the United States, perceived as an unreliable ally during Trump administration, when earlier calls for a more robust German security policy were voiced (Kostić Šulejić, 2023, pp. 79, 100).

This dissatisfaction with the hegemon of the Western order expressed through calls for a rules-based order from the other side of the Atlantic is not a novel occurrence. The term (without “s” at the end of “rule”) was previously employed in the European Security Strategy in 2003: “Our

security and prosperity increasingly depend on an effective multilateral system. The development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order is our objective. We are committed to upholding and developing International Law. The fundamental framework for international relations is the UN Charter. The United Nations Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security” (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 9). The adoption of this Strategy coincided with the U.S. invasion of Iraq without UNSC authorization, opposed by Germany and France. The document emphasized that “the end of the Cold War has left the United States in a dominant position as a military actor”, but highlighted that “no single country is able to tackle today’s complex problems on its own” (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 3). From a German/European perspective, the United States two decades ago played a similar role to Russia today – a violator of international law whose unilateral actions undermined German and European security, necessitating adherence to a RBO founded on the UN Charter through “effective multilateralism”.

The state that most frequently officially employs the term RBO is not the United States but Australia. It was also the first to incorporate this term into its strategic document, the Defence White Paper from 2009: “The United Nations and the UN Charter are central to the rules-based global security order... Within the UN context, the ‘responsibility to protect’ principle, which is currently at an important stage of development, holds that states are responsible for the protection of their own citizens from mass atrocities... Australia supports the principle, and recognizes that, on occasion, it may be necessary for other states to intervene, under the auspices of a UN Security Council resolution, if a state cannot or will not protect its population... The global leadership role played by the United States since the end of World War II has provided the strategic underpinning for the postwar global order” (Australian Government, 2009, pp. 43-44). The link with the UN Charter and the supreme authority of the UNSC in matters of global security is evident, but also the support to R2P as a LIO addition to international law, and the acknowledgement of the indispensability of the U.S. leadership for a stable global order. While later editions of the document show a diminishing direct link with the UN Charter, aligning more closely with the U.S. concept of RBO, this evolution is attributed to political shifts in Australia (the Conservatives replacing the Australian Labour Party in power) (Lieberherr, 2023, p. 3; Raymond, 2019, pp. 221-222).

This alignment with the U.S. concept of RBO is motivated by Australia's specific regional security context, particularly the rising multipolarity in the Indo-Pacific region, and the perceived threat of an illiberal and increasingly assertive China. This introduces a contradiction, as Australia seeks to support international law against China's activities in the South China Sea while simultaneously endorsing the U.S. concept of RBO, which allows Washington the "right" to use force unilaterally, contravening international law (Raymond, 2019, pp. 222-224). Critics also highlight the inconsistency between Australia's support for international law and recent U.S. decisions such as exiting the Trans-Pacific Partnership, raising questions about the compatibility of Australia's stance with the U.S. approach to rules of global trade and investments (Rigby, 2018). This situation exemplifies a hedging strategy, by which "a small state can effectively establish the basis for pursuing its national priorities and managing the complexities of its relations with a larger neighbour" (Jović-Lazić, Bošković, 2024, p. 60). Regional imperatives lead Australia to strongly support international law in matters of security and economy, while simultaneously relying on the U.S. as an indispensable protector in a worst-case scenario, even if it means aligning with its concept of RBO.

In conclusion, despite the frequent use of the term RBO by both Germany/the European Union and Australia, along with their identification of the same actors as threats to it, variations in the congruence of meaning with the U.S. concept are revealed. This divergence primarily hinges on their respective national interests, geopolitical positions, and places in the global power structures. Perceiving the U.S. as an unreliable hegemon and facing a direct Russian and a looming Chinese threat, Germany wants to establish itself (and the European Union) as one of the poles in a global multipolar system and leans towards viewing the UN Charter and the international law as the foundations of RBO. On the other hand, Australia prioritizes regional multipolarity and aligns more strongly with the U.S. concept of RBO due to its reliance on the U.S. as an indispensable ally in the face of a powerful China. The difference in legal traditions further contributes to this variation, with Australia sharing the Anglo-Saxon rule of law doctrine with the U.S., while Germany's adherence to the doctrine of *Rechtsstaat* inclines it to emphasize the UN Charter and international law as the foundations of RBO. Assessing the credibility of these alternatives to the U.S. concept of RBO within the Western order, it becomes evident that in the case of Australia it is compromised by its strictly regional approach and reliance on a hedging strategy. In the case of Germany/European Union, the credibility concerns are twofold. First, the German RBO concept rests on its

ambitious vision that the EU – with all its external and internal limits of capacity – should play the role of an independent pole in a multipolar international system. Second, while much closer to international law compared to the U.S. concept, the German concept of RBO also includes some extra features of LIO (such as human rights), with uncertain borders. Why, for example, Germany resisted the invasion of Iraq, but supported NATO when it bombed Serbia in 1999? These borders are the issue which concerns external critics the most.

Alternatives on the outside: Russian “genuine multilateralism” and Chinese “community of common destiny”

The United States identifies Russia and China as the primary violators of RBO, attributing breaches to its all three pillars (the UN-based security order, liberal economic order, and the Western democratic order) in 2022 Biden’s National Security Strategy relates to all three pillars of RBO: “The most pressing strategic challenge facing our vision is from powers that layer authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy. It is their behaviour that poses a challenge to international peace and stability – especially waging or preparing for wars of aggression, actively undermining the democratic political processes of other countries, leveraging technology and supply chains for coercion and repression, and exporting an illiberal model of international order... Russia and the PRC pose different challenges. Russia poses an immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown. The PRC, by contrast, is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective... And yet, they concluded that the success of a free and open rules-based international order posed a threat to their regimes and stifled their ambitions. In their own ways, they now seek to remake the international order to create a world conducive to their highly personalized and repressive type of autocracy” (The White House, 2022, pp. 8-9). This mirrors the Wilsonian idea at the core of the U.S. concept of RBO, of creating a world safe for democracy. Russia and China counter these accusations by accusing the U.S. of breaking international law and undermining the UN order, pledging their adherence to its principles. Despite the shared rhetoric of commitment to international law, the responses of Russia and China to the U.S. concept of RBO, as well as their respective visions of the legal order, exhibit significant differences.

Russia has consistently opposed the U.S. concept of RBO, as articulated in various strategic documents and officials' statements. Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov's article published in the *Russia in Global Affairs* journal in 2023, illustratively titled "Genuine Multilateralism and Diplomacy vs the 'Rules-Based Order'", serves as a notable expression of Russia's stance. The key point in this article is that the UN Charter-based post-World War II international order, considered as "an embodiment of true multilateralism", is now undergoing a deep crisis as a result of "the decision of certain UN members to replace international law and the UN Charter with some 'rules-based international order'", the rules of which remain "mysterious", for they "have never been the subject of transparent consultations, nor have they been laid out for everybody's attention" (Lavrov, 2023, pp. 104-105). By imposing a "rules-based order", the Western "minority" within humankind rejects "the key principle underlying the UN Charter, which is the sovereign equality of states" (Lavrov, 2023, p. 106). "One is left with the impression that today both the UN and the provisions of the UN Charter pose a threat to Washington's global ambitions" (Lavrov, 2023, p. 107). According to Lavrov (2023, pp. 111-112), "genuine multilateralism" implies "respect for the UN Charter and all of its interconnected principles", where "multilateralism and democracy should enjoy respect both within the member countries and in their relations with one another", contrary to the behaviour of the West, which imposes "its understanding of democracy on other nations", but "opposes the democratization of international relations based on respect for the sovereign equality of states". In addition, "genuine multilateralism" also "requires that the UN adapt to objective developments in the process of forming a multipolar architecture of international relations", through the expansion of the UNSC with new members from Asia, Africa and Latin America, because "the inordinate over-representation of the West in the UN's main body undermines the principle of multilateralism" (Lavrov, 2023, p. 112). How does Russia's 2022 unilateral invasion of Ukraine fit into this? Lavrov offers an answer: "Russia patiently tried to reach mutually beneficial multilateral agreements based on the principles of indivisible security", but its proposals were "haughtily rejected", so Russia then "clearly elaborated the goals of its special military operation, which are to remove threats to its security that have been instigated by NATO... and to protect the people who were stripped of their rights set forth in multilateral conventions" (Lavrov, 2023, pp. 107, 110-111). "In order to avoid double standards", Russia calls on everyone to follow the 1970 UN Declaration of Principles of International Law, which "declares the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states that conduct

‘themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples... and thus possessed of a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory’”, which is not the case with the “Nazi Kiev regime” who unleashed the war against “the residents of the territories who refused to accept the results of the bloody February 2014 coup”, the same way that “Priština cannot claim to represent the interests of the Kosovo Serbs” (Lavrov, 2023, p. 109).

Russia’s negative response to the U.S. concept of RBO is logically consistent with its self-perception as one of the world’s great powers (“greatpowerness”). The status of great power implies independence and equality with other great powers, and is thus incompatible with subordination to the hegemony of another power (Trapara, 2020, pp. 33-48). Given that the U.S. concept of RBO is inherently hegemonic, it is logical for Russia to resist it by emphasizing multilateral diplomacy and sovereign equality between states as one of the key principles of the UN Charter, as well as the central role of the UN Security Council (where it has a permanent seat with veto power, but is also open for this body’s reform). In a world order based on “genuine multilateralism” Russia envisions itself as a “rule-maker”, rather than a “rule-taker” under the U.S. RBO (Allison, 2019, pp. 7-8). However, Russia’s defense of its invasion of Ukraine, which according to Richard Sakwa (2023, p. 314) “more than any earlier crisis... threatened the very existence of the Charter international system”, employing quasi-legal and sometimes absurd arguments, suggests that its great power status is particularly tied to the possession of an exclusive geographic sphere of influence. Despite its commitment to the principle of sovereign equality in general, Russia applies a different set of rules within this sphere, characterized by clear subordination and rules akin to those of the U.S. RBO, albeit without the liberal content. In Russia’s vision, the principle of sovereign equality is valid only outside its exclusive sphere, protecting it from foreign interference. This stance results in a “zone of legal exceptionalism” for Russia in the most of the post-Soviet space, while in the broader international system “Moscow falls back on traditional UN Charter principles and deploys them to constrain Western power” (Allison, 2019, p. 18; Jović-Lazić, 2015, pp. 189-283). For example, back in 2015 Russia stood in defense of Syrian sovereignty at the expense of human rights approach (which the West adopted in siding with Syrian opposition rebels against the Assad regime), although a year before it annexed Crimea citing humanitarian concerns (Allison, 2019, p. 17). Furthermore, Russia leverages U.S. acting in accordance with its concept of RBO, rather than adhering

strictly to international law, to “justify” its own violations of the international law by citing precedents (Dugard, 2023, p. 229).

China, like Russia, rejects the replacement of international law with the U.S. concept of RBO. A Joint Statement by presidents Putin and Xi in February 2022 emphasized that their respective countries “strongly advocate the international system with the central coordinating role of the United Nations in international affairs, defend the world order based on international law, including the purposes and principles of the UN Charter”, while they “intend to resist attempts to substitute universally recognized formats and mechanisms that are consistent with international law for rules elaborated in private by certain nations and blocs of nations, and are addressing international problems indirectly and without consensus” (President of Russia, 2022). However, unlike Russia, China has not engaged in flagrant breaches of the UN Charter-based international law, such as military invasions of other sovereign countries, nor has it advocated alternative interpretations of Charter principles to legitimize such actions. This divergence prompts the question of whether China represents the only great power that genuinely upholds international law and the UN system as sufficient descriptors for an international order centred on sovereignty and non-interference (Lieberherr, 2023, p. 3). China actually presents its own view of multilateralism and international rules based on Confucian legal tradition, where the rule of law should be complemented with the “rule of virtue”, because the law itself is “powerless to defend itself against human manipulation” without “the virtuous man”, while multilateralism should aim to “complete” the existing international order by constructing a “community of common destiny” for humankind (Carty, Gu, 2021, pp. 6-7, 16, 20). Unlike Western liberal tradition, which sees rules as an “outcome of deliberate negotiation and conclusion of contract or treaty between separated autonomous individuals”, rules in Confucianism evolve through relations “among a group of persons or partners who are all the time developing a common life-world which they all come to inhabit” (Carty, Gu, 2021, p. 17). The “community of common destiny” should serve as a win-win model for integration of national interests, and is a “significant guiding influence in China’s foreign policy” regularly found in its strategic documents since 2011 (Carty, Gu, 2021, pp. 36-37). China’s approach to “completion” of the international legal order by “its own cultural heritage of ethical, social, and international organization” corresponds “to the role that the idea of a liberal, democratic order plays in Western aspirations to improve and complete the international legal order” (Carty, Gu, 2021, p. 73).

In summary, both Russia and China, as global actors seeking to maintain their great power status, naturally oppose U.S. hegemony and its RBO concept as a replacement for international law and the international institutional order built around the UN. However, the credibility of their alternatives is compromised as they introduce extra features to their respective visions of international order that may not align with the principles of the UN Charter they claim to respect. Russia's pursuit of a sphere of influence around its borders results in unilateral breaches and false interpretations of international law, mirroring some aspects of the U.S. approach. On the other hand, China, while not engaging in territorial expansion through the use of force, seeks to "complete" the international order with elements from its own legal tradition, such as the "rule of virtue", which mirrors the "completion" of a world order sought by the "exceptional" U.S. nation through the introduction of RBO concept. The questions arise of whether the CPC's officials are those "virtuous men" who should protect international rules from manipulation, and whether the "Middle Kingdom" is destined to be the center of a "community of common destiny" for humankind? The common ground between the U.S. concept of RBO and its alternatives, both on the inside and the outside, should apparently lie somewhere in between, requiring further exploration and understanding.

On the fence: Indian reformism and the (false) promise of international law

India occupies a middle ground between the U.S.-led suborder and rival powers opposing it. It prioritizes sovereignty, refusing subordination to American hegemony, yet it also contends with security concerns and border disputes with China. It participates in "alternative" international institutions led by China and Russia, such as SCO and BRICS, while concurrently engaging with U.S. regional proto-alliance Quad and occupying an important place in Washington's Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). India's dual approach manifests in its nuanced perspective on the U.S. concept of RBO. On the one hand, India is among the major proponents of RBO. Concerned with the rise of China and aware of the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as security and economic region, it joined the statement of the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the U.S, India, Japan and Australia) which reaffirmed its members' "resolve to uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of

military, economic and political coercion” (Lieberherr, 2023, pp. 1, 3). On the other hand, India’s understanding of RBO extends beyond countering China to also address concerns regarding the dominance of the U.S. and its allies. Besides sovereignty and territorial integrity, this concept emphasizes the equality of all nations. RBO is understood as a process of evolution through dialogue which would strengthen the voice of lesser powers, so that, in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s words, “the rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not the power of the few” (Lieberherr, 2023, p. 3). Central to India’s vision of this evolution is the reform of international bodies like the UNSC, IMF, and World Bank, seeking better representation than the existing one dominated by the West, to achieve a “more perfect system of multilateral regulation of international relations” (Vylegzhanin et al, 2021, p. 45).

Despite India’s interest in securing a permanent seat in the UNSC, which compromises the credibility of its RBO concept, the idea that RBO is yet to be established through reforms of international rules and institutions resonates, and introduces the question of whether international law, conservatively interpreted, can serve as a credible alternative to the U.S. concept of RBO and its alternatives. The UN Charter-based international law is underpinned by two most important principles: self-determination of peoples and prohibition of aggression (Chalmers, 2019, p. 7). These principles, when combined, establish that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states cannot be undermined by the threat or use of force. Changes to state borders should be consensual, excluding former colonies and socialist federations (Chalmers, 2019, pp. 7-9). In the latter two cases, self-determination is permitted only within the borders of previous colonial territories and federal units, following the *uti possidetis* principle. Any further alterations to borders, either by subunits acquiring independence or countries expanding territories at the expense of others through annexation, are forbidden. Instances of such changes most often result in *frozen conflicts*, as they fail to gain universal international recognition (with South Sudan being the only recent exception). Furthermore, the unacceptability of interfering in sovereign countries’ internal affairs by force (non-intervention principle) often clashes with the almost universally acknowledged human rights regime (Chalmers, 2019, p. 13).

If the UN Charter-based international law was flawless and promised a more stable and peaceful world, it would not prompt influential world powers to devise new concepts justifying deviations from it or advocate for its profound reform. This legal order emerged from a deal made by victorious

great powers during ongoing World War II, yet the balance of power and interests among these nations, as well as in relation to the rest of the world, has since undergone significant changes. This has fuelled dissatisfaction not only among the disenfranchised, but also among these very powers, making the threat and use of force analogous to illegal yet prevalent phenomena like drugs and prostitution. These issues are exemplified by the sanctity of the norm of territorial integrity inviolability and the absence of universal rules for state recognition (Newman, Visoka, 2023). In a world where interstate borders resulting from millennia of wars and the strong preying on the weak have frozen at some point, a question of whether this can be deemed a just world arises. Does the only hope for stateless peoples and oppressed minorities (or even majorities in autocratic countries) lie in friendly great powers supporting their cause through violations of international law, thereby alienating others? Or could an order based on rules be established without necessitating the deprivation of any party?

Conclusion

The United States introduced its concept of a “rules-based order” to address two seemingly contradictory needs. The first is to establish international relations based on universally accepted rules that apply to all, replacing the voluntarism of great powers. The idea is that the U.S. and Western liberal and democratic societies can survive and thrive only within an order grounded in stable and predictable rules and institutions. The second need is to legitimize its own hegemony in the international order. In a world with two, three, or more equal powers, the U.S. would have to share leadership with illiberal states, and this would not be “a world safe for democracy”. The bridge between these two needs was provided by the legal tradition of the “rule of law”, which allows for the flexible combination of different orders, rules and interpretations. Some of the closest U.S. allies accepted RBO in principle but attached interpretations closer to the UN Charter-based international law. Germany adopted RBO as “international law plus”, driven by concerns about U.S. unreliable hegemony and the desire to establish Europe as one of the equal poles in “effective multilateral” diplomacy of a new multipolar world. Australia opted for hedging between the UN Charter, to contain China and other regional poles, and the U.S. concept of RBO, viewing U.S. hegemony as indispensable for preserving the regional balance of power. Russia posed a frontal challenge to the U.S. concept of RBO, viewing its deviations from international law as a threat to

its great power interests. It proposed “genuine multilateralism”, a concept of order with flexible interpretations of rules to ensure these interests, particularly Russia’s “right” to have a sphere of influence around its borders, and “justify” Moscow’s own deviations from international law. China stood by an existing UN Charter-based legal order but asked for its “completion” by its own tradition of the “rule of virtue” for the establishment of a “community of common destiny”. India, “on the fence” between the U.S. suborder and its opponents, embraced RBO as something yet to be established by an evolution of the existing legal and institutional order through reform, reflecting its ambition to use this reform for its own promotion into the ranks of great powers.

No single country’s concept of an order based on rules can fully address the need of the contemporary world for increased peace, security, and stability. The same holds true for international law based on the UN Charter. So, what kind of reform could meet this pressing need? The initial step would involve mutual recognition of the legitimacy of different powers’ national interests and legal traditions, upon which their respective concepts of the international legal order rest. Despite their compromised credibility, each of these concepts brings something valuable and compatible with others to the table. In theory, the U.S. “rule of law” and China’s “rule of virtue” do not necessarily exclude each other. Both provide a degree of flexibility in the interpretation of rules that could add substance rather than cancelling them out. Both German/European “effective” and Russian “genuine” multilateralism reflect a deeper truth: the world cannot be effectively governed from a single, unrestrained center. Australia underscores that nations harbour diverse domestic and regional concerns, while India emphasizes that RBO has yet to be fully constructed, for when the current one appeared, many members of the international society were not even present. What could be a common denominator among all these valuable inputs that would pave the way for successful reform? In our view, it is democracy, understood as free and limited governance both within and among states. In a world of consolidated democracies, the U.S. would no longer strive to be a hegemon to ensure the security of its domestic order but could embrace more multilateral governance. A democratic Russia would no longer tie its status as one of several equal great powers to restoring and maintaining an empire. Similarly, democratic governance in China could embody its professed “rule of virtue”, paving the way for a democratic “community of common destiny” worldwide. Like “order”, “rule” has two meanings. To be ordered by rules, and not ruled by orders, a rule should have a specific nature – a rule for the governed and by the

governed. Those who claim that such a rule is “not in the tradition” of their countries, only seek to perpetuate their own tyrannical order based on force and fear, rather than law and freedom.

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MEDIATOR KNOWLEDGE COMPETENCY: HOW VARIOUS TYPES OF MEDIATOR TRAINING IMPACT THE SUCCESS OF THE PEACE MEDIATION PROCESS

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Abstract: This paper seeks to begin remedying that lack of microlevel research. Borrowing from the fields of human relations and psychology, I argue that individual mediator competency skills can have important effects on the outcome of peace mediation processes. These competency skills are commonly grouped into three forms – knowledge, know-how, and behavior competencies. The focus on this paper zeroes in on the first – knowledge competency skills. Utilizing qualitative research gathered through 28 interviews with mediators, collected from either personal efforts or first-hand written or recorded accounts, I assess the impact of knowledge competency skills gained through formal, religious, or military training. While I initially intended to find support for formal training having positive impacts on mediation in Western states – where one’s educational background can play a role in audience acceptance of one’s expertise – and religious training having a positive impact on mediation in cultures where social connections are more highly valued, the revelations of this research actually underscored the importance of military training for individual mediators. As interviewees in this study consistently revealed, military training provides individual mediators’ with specialized knowledge of the military and armament jargon needed in drafting agreements between combative parties. Those with officer-level backgrounds also often have effective organizational experience with leading multiple initiatives at one time, as has often become part of complex mediation processes today. Finally, mediators with military backgrounds are often regarded by disputing parties as those that can empathize with their experiences and positions, thus building an instant comradery. Still, as this research will reveal, there are other potential merits and needs for future investigation regarding formal training and religious training of individual mediators.

Keywords: mediation, mediator training, peace mediation process, international relations, peace

Introduction

In recent decades, the importance, frequency, and complexity of peace mediation, has led to a growing body of conflict mediation research within the field of International Studies. Within this literature, researchers have debated what conflict management factors are important to achieving peace resolutions, whether they be ceasefires, partial settlements, or full settlements. Conflict ripeness, intensity, duration, and issue type are just a few of the factors that have been examined in relation to the conflict itself. The literature is also rife with investigations of disputing party characteristics, which are too numerous to list here but include such variables as relative power, state alliances, political system, and dispute history. Moreover, both psychology and political science include a fair amount of research on the psychological interactions of negotiating, or 'disputing,' parties.

What is surprising in this vast investigation of factors related to conflict mediators, the overwhelming majority of the research only focuses on the mediating entity/body, which I term the *macrolevel* of mediator analysis. Collecting data largely from the creation of the UN in 1945 through to present day, scholars have assessed whether the geographic proximity of a mediating state to the negotiating parties influences mediation outcomes. They have researched whether a mediating state's regime type plays a role in successful resolutions, or what effect mediator bias or leverage has on the negotiations. However, a portion of the story remains missing because of the lack of studies conducted at the *microlevel* – the level of the individual mediator(s).

This paper seeks to begin remedying that lack of microlevel research. Borrowing from the fields of human relations and psychology, I argue that individual mediator competency skills can have important effects on the outcome of peace mediation processes. These competency skills are commonly grouped into three forms – knowledge, know-how, and behavior competencies. The focus on this paper zeroes in on the first – knowledge competency skills. Utilizing qualitative research gathered through 28 interviews with mediators, collected from either personal efforts or first-hand written or recorded accounts, I assess the impact of knowledge competency skills gained through formal, religious, or

military training. While I initially intended to find support for formal training having positive impacts on mediation in Western states - where one's educational background can play a role in audience acceptance of one's expertise - and religious training having a positive impact on mediation in cultures where social connections are more highly valued, the revelations of this research actually underscored the importance of military training for individual mediators. As interviewees in this study consistently revealed, military training provides individual mediators' with specialized knowledge of the military and armament jargon needed in drafting agreements between combative parties. Those with officer-level backgrounds also often have effective organizational experience with leading multiple initiatives at one time, as has often become part of complex mediation processes today. Finally, mediators with military mediators with combat backgrounds are often regarded by disputing parties as those that can empathize with their experiences and positions, thus building an instant comradery. Still, as this research will reveal, there are other potential merits and needs for future investigation regarding formal training and religious training of individual mediators.

Background on Mediation Research

In the 2009 Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution, mediation scholar Jacob Bercovitch notes that for many years, both formal and informal mediation practitioners at the domestic and international levels did not think their form of conflict management contained any patterns that could be measured and analyzed. However, as mediation attempts increased in the 1990s (Greig & Diehl, 2012) and the decades that followed, scholars in the subfield of mediation indeed began to find patterns associated with mediation success and the ripeness of the conflict for mediation (Zartman, 2000; Greig, 2005), the conflict's intensity (Ghosn, 2010; Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006b; Greig & Regan, 2008; Wiegand, 2014), the willingness of the conflicting parties to settle a conflict (Zartman & Touval, 1996; Bercovitch, 1997), mediator bias versus neutrality (Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2009), mediator leverage (Böhmelt, 2010; Beardsley, 2008; Greig & Diehl, 2012), mediator tactics and characteristics (Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010; Rubin, 1992; Wilkenfield et al., 2005), contentious issues (Walter, 2009; Fearon, 2004), and non-state actors (Crocker, 2018).

For mediation to occur, Zartman (2000) suggests that first, conflicting parties must have reached a point in their hostilities where the situation

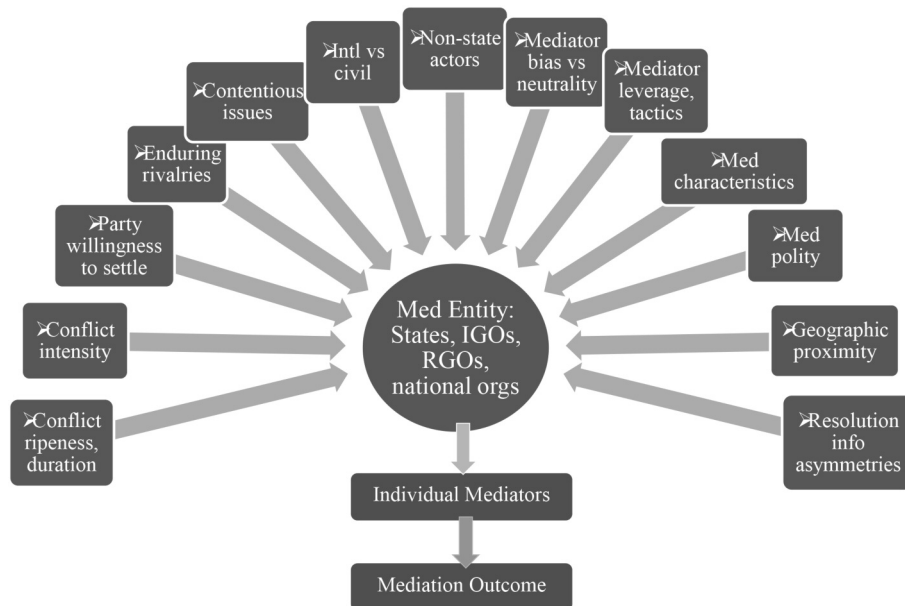
is so costly and uncomfortable that parties are willing to make mutual concessions. The longer the duration of the conflict, the more likely parties will seek other means of resolution as neither side may be able to militarily prevail (Greig & Regan, 2008). At that point, it may be said the conflict is 'ripe' for negotiation or mediation. However, if both parties have not yet experienced high costs, or if the conflict has escalated too much, mediation is likely to be less effective, and forcing one party to the table too early can lower their satisfaction with the process (Wiegand, 2014; Ghosn, 2010; Wall et al., 2001). Mediation is also unlikely to occur in enduring rivalries, low-intensity conflicts, or civil wars (Bercovitch, 2007; Greig, 2005; Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014). Particularly, in low-intensity conflicts, the negotiating parties usually attempt to solve the hostilities themselves as mediation comes with tradeoffs. Negotiators sometimes fear they may be persuaded to accept unanticipated concessions (Bercovitch, 2007) or, in the case of civil wars, undesirably legitimize a hostile domestic group (Wallensteen & Svensson, 2014). Thus, mediation is more prevalent in international conflicts (Melin & Svensson, 2009) where the intensity is higher but the conflict is not enduring.

Taken together, much (but not all) of the previous research on macrolevel conflict mediation factors that impact mediation outcome can be represented by Figure 1-1. As displayed in this figure, considerable previous research in this area has often assumed individual mediators are only agents of mediating entities, and variables related to the mediating entities are almost solely what accounts for any effects of the third-party on mediation outcome. Because the individual mediator is only an agent, factors related to him individually have minuscule or insignificant effects on whether a mediation succeeds.

However, one must question if this lack of further consideration for individual mediator (or microlevel) effects on mediation success leaves a hole in the understanding of how mediating bodies and their agents impact the outcome of peace talks. The ability to achieving enduring peace is important. In taking on a conflict, individual mediators and mediating entities have significant interests in achieving a successful resolution. While a positive outcome can improve an entity's reputation, failure may result in political criticism, reputational loss, or strategic liabilities (Princen, 1992; Greig & Regan, 2008; Melin & Svensson, 2009). Furthermore, mediation is financially costly, albeit though not as costly as war or peacekeeping. Mediators may be asked to engage in subsequent meetings with the same parties or to remain in the conflict area for a

protracted time as ‘the probability of success [in sustaining peace] increases to the extent the same mediator participates in subsequent mediations’ (Greig & Regan, 2008, p.765). Personnel and living costs can grow for both the mediating and negotiating parties, making the financial burden too difficult to sustain over the long term for some states or groups, especially rebel groups. Thus, it is prudent to know what other third-party factors may contribute to timely, lasting resolutions versus those factors that can impede the peace process.

Figure 1.



Existing Research on the Microlevel

Some literature in the field has noted the potential impact of individual mediators on the mediation process. For example, both practitioners and researchers seem to agree one factor that exists both at the macrolevel and the microlevel and can affect mediation outcomes is bias. When mediation was formalized by the United Nations, the international organization called on John W. Burton of Australia to write the initial guidelines for international mediators. Burton, an International Relations professor

regarded by some as the founder of peace science research (Dunn, 1995; Steinmeyer, 2017), believed in conflict *provention*, ‘taking steps to remove sources of conflict...to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control behavior’ (Dunn, 1995, p.203). He felt this could be partially accomplished through formalized alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and professional mediators that exhibited neutrality towards negotiating parties in hostile situations (Burton & Duke, 1990).

Burton’s concepts have largely been adopted as practice in Western mediation. However, scholars still debate whether neutrality is always appropriate in mediation or if mediator bias can sometimes be beneficial. Those that support professional neutrality argue mediators should be impartial towards disputants and largely unfamiliar with the local conditions of the conflict or the parties involved prior to negotiations. Too much knowledge could bias them towards certain resolution outcomes (Jackson, 1952; Northredge & Donelan, 1971; Burton & Dukes, 1990; Beber, 2012). Conversely, some scholars have suggested biased mediators are better able to gain combatants’ trust and can be more effective when they are biased towards weaker or conciliatory parties in a conflict (Rauchhaus, 2006; Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2007, 2009).

Mediators can also credibly transfer information during negotiations to alleviate information asymmetries (Regan, et al. 2009). Fearon (1995) suggests that during conflicts, parties have incentives to misrepresent their capabilities or resolve. To resolve conflictual situations, the transfer of information is key, especially to combatants, and can reduce the duration of civil wars as combatants may be more willing to transfer credible information to mediators than directly to their adversaries (Regan & Aydin, 2006). Mediators have special skills that they can use to accomplish this information. At the macrolevel, process knowledge in the form of past mediation experience and colonial ties, and diplomatic knowledge in the form of diplomatic ties are effective in securing peace agreements (Keels et al., 2018). However, these factors have not yet been fully investigated on the microlevel. Perhaps the closest scholars have come to doing so is the insider-outsider debate. In this discussion, outsider mediators – entities and individuals external to the conflict area – are compared to insider mediators – those familiar with the culture and vulnerable to the conflict because they live in the conflict area (Roepstorff & Bernhard, 2013). Lee and Hwee Hwee (2009) find that in areas of the work where communal ties are particularly important, like in Asia, insider mediators’ commonalities and connectedness with the disputing parties make them

more trusted. This trust is key, especially when directive-manipulative strategies are used in the mediation process (Muldoon, 1996).

In their review of theory development in mediation, taken from various fields including political science, legal studies, and sociology, Wall et al. (2001) point to several important findings concerning individual mediators. One of these discoveries is that mediators' ideologies, training, and rules of their practice strongly influence their selection of particular tactics and strategies. Inexperience can limit these techniques, but professional neutrality seems to have little effect on technique selection. Despite this finding, Chester Crocker (2018), a former mediator himself, suggests a rise in the creation of mediation entities has resulted in a free-for-all mediation arena where the lack of 'gatekeepers' to create barriers of entry into the conflict-management space has resulted in a lack of discipline in the mediation process.

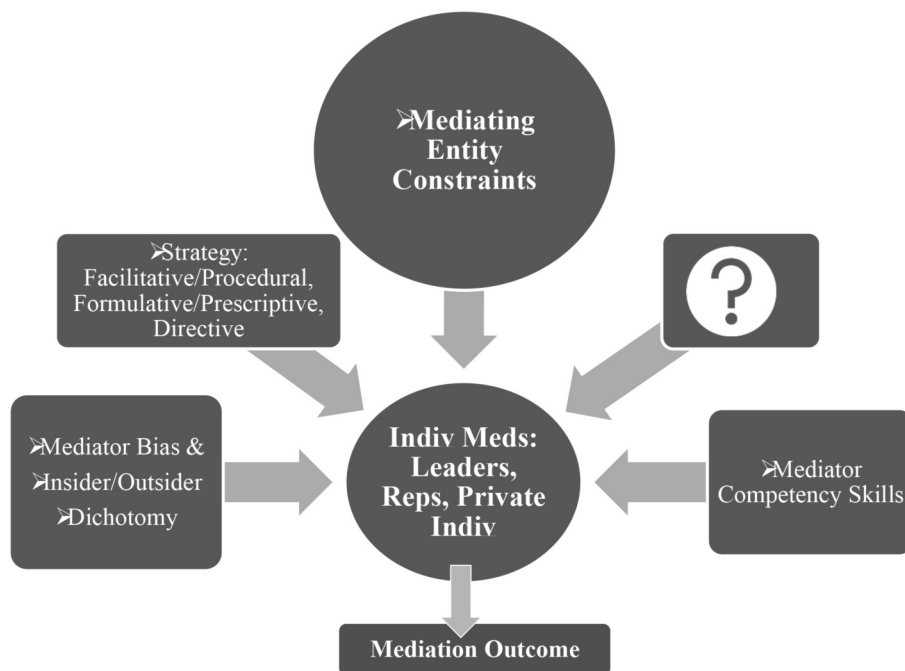
Historically, most mediators have come from major power states and IGOs. However, mediators from regional organizations are indeed on the rise (Wallenstein & Svensson 2014). Plus, a number of non-governmental institutions like the International Peace Institute, the International Mediation Institute, and a variety of international professional schools – which train individuals either online or in person – are also trying to become go-to choices for disputants seeking conflict management options. Despite this growth, however, there remains a limited pool of senior professional mediators in the field, and these individuals are overloaded with a number of conflicts to mediate (Crocker 2018).

As the number of novice international and civil war mediators burgeon and the small number of seasoned mediators retire, it has never been more important to determine what characteristics of individual mediators contribute to the likelihood of successful conflict resolutions. In the fields of sociology, business, psychology, and public administration, a variety of studies already exist on personal factors that can be used to determine which individuals are the best fit for particular jobs. However, in the field of conflict management where the consequences of failure carry far greater economic and humanitarian costs, our knowledge of the mediation profession is largely incomplete and there is an insufficient understanding of how individual mediators may impact the mediation process for the better or worse.

As displayed in Figure 1-2, I acknowledge that while macrolevel factors can indeed impact mediation outcomes, there is also more going on at the individual mediator microlevel that is affecting the likelihood of

mediation success, which I follow previous research in defining as the achievement of a full or partial settlement or ceasefire reached between disputing parties.

Figure 2.



Understanding Competency Skills

The field of Human Relations has utilized vast research on organizational theories to test how to optimize professional performance in a variety of occupations. Key to that research are human competency skills which the literature has summed into three categories – Knowledge, Know-how, and Behavior. The competency category of *Knowledge* includes a person's cognitive processes, education, and training, and is associated with that person's ability to communicate and reason, as well as comprehend new or updated theoretical processes. Conversely, *Know-how* is 'learning by doing' or the practical knowledge gained through

practice and experience. Finally, *Behavior* includes a person's traits, talents, and qualities that spur how he acts and reacts to certain conditions and/or interacts with different people (Russo 2016).

Though some work in applied psychology has explored competency skills, specifically in relation to negotiations between dissident parties (Smolinski and Xiong, 2020; McClelland, 1973; Mansfield, 2006), in the field of conflict mediation research, there has been a lack of similar organizational studies that identify how to optimize individual mediator performance. However, one can reasonably assume mediators also need competency skills to overcome negotiator resistance in mediation proceedings. Therefore, a study on these competency categories as they specifically apply to mediation is highly important to improving the process of peace talks and consequently, saving many lives through an increase in the pacific settlement of hostilities. Due to the limited space available of this work, I reserve further examination of know-how and behavior competencies to later publications. However, focusing on the area of knowledge competency, I assert skills in this area can largely be measured through whether a mediator has engaged in mediation training, which occurs in three major forms – formal training, religious training, and military training,

What is often regarded as *formal training* is largely based upon Australian peace negotiator John W. Burton's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) guidelines for mediation that suggest mediators should be unbiased third-parties that maintain professional neutrality towards any and all disputants in a conflict (Burton and Dukes 1990). After being adopted by the United Nations, Burton's ADR guidelines for formal mediation training spread to many Western states and regional organizations, as well as mediating nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that resided inside those areas. Thus, formal training became associated with *Westernized mediation*, which in turn, expanded the concept of professional neutrality to recommend mediators should have little to no knowledge of the disputants and the background of the conflict prior to engaging in mediation proceedings. Instead, mediators should 'discover' this knowledge during the mediation process. They should also have no social ties to the negotiating parties. By exhibiting such professional neutrality, mediators would guard against bias.

However, research on the insider-outsider dichotomy in mediation has revealed cultures that place emphasis on social connections, like in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, have tended to regard such professional

neutrality with great skepticism (Billings-Yun 2009; Roepstorff and Bernhard 2013). To them, these ‘outsider’ mediators who profess to have no relations to any of the dissidents may instead have hidden biases and agendas. Thus, these cultures are more accepting of ‘insider’ mediators, mediators with pre-existing ties to one or both negotiating parties, for two main reasons. First, the mediators’ biases are known. Second, their social connections legitimize them similar to how a mediator’s degrees/education and professionalization may legitimize him in Western states.

Previous literature has argued that mediators can use their insider knowledge to better establish trust with negotiating parties (Muldoon 1996) and mediating entities with diplomatic and process knowledge of the disputants are more adept at credibly transferring information, leading to greater likelihood of mediation success (Wiegand et al 2019). Because this insider-outsider dichotomy and the link between diplomacy knowledge and mediation success has been recently investigated in these and other studies, I do not test the direct effect a mediator’s background knowledge of the conflict and disputants has on conflict mediation outcome. Instead, I accept these arguments that mediator knowledge can have a positive effect on achieving peace settlements or ceasefires. However, I argue cultural expectations of individual mediators’ closeness to the disputants and the profession of mediation can create regional differences with regard to formal mediation training, and this difference centers around the element of professional neutrality.

While the concept of professional neutrality in Westernized formal training has led to the adoption of using outside mediators to avoid bias against negotiating parties, I consider this stance to verge on the extreme. Better knowledge of disputants can alleviate information asymmetries (Regan et al. 2009), and through credible transfer of information, reduce the duration of conflicts, particularly in civil wars (Regan & Aydin 2006). Mediator knowledge of the parties in a conflict can also help thoughtful mediators better understand each disputant’s fundamental needs, resistances to peace, and sticking points, which can aid in overcoming resistance to the peace process.

Instead, when testing how the relation between formal training and the likelihood of mediation success, I argue the primary focus should be on that training type’s original mandate of professional neutrality. Through Western legal traditions, Western states have established expectations that mediators are to be professionally neutral. Thus, those mediators with formal training should be better adept to conduct

mediation proceedings in a manner that is both acceptable and expected by Western disputants. On the other hand, social cultures often regard professionalism neutrality with great skepticism (Lee and Hwee Hwee 2009). Similar legal traditions that mandate professional neutrality in mediation have often not been established in those cultures. Thus, disputant parties often see mediators who claim to be 'professionally neutral' as hiding their true allegiances and agendas. Instead, they often prefer to know a mediator's bias, which can be established through communal connections, and again, these communal connections are key to mediator legitimacy more so than legal degrees or certifications of formal training. It is for these reasons that I also look at the impact of religious training and military training with regards to mediation as both embrace their own concepts that can differ from those promoted by Westernized formal training. First, mediators with religious training often draw on value-based connections with disputants that appeal to their own worldview. With legitimate knowledge and acceptance of a community's religious texts and belief systems, they have more interpretive authority of those texts than 'outsider' mediators. Using religious concepts, they can make faith-based principles behind reconciliation more palatable and authentic to the disputants (Peace Insight 2017), and even if their specific faith may be somewhat dissimilar, local priests, rabbis, imams, and sheikhs can still appeal to remaining religious commonalities.

Religious mediators can also draw on their background knowledge of the negotiating parties to better assess the emotional and physical needs of those communities. Plus, their 'insider' ties with social cultures through their faith-based communal networks give these mediators the legitimacy, credibility, and respect that is needed to guide such negotiating parties through the peace process. These faith-based ties often additionally extend to larger religious NGOs and regional networks, and through these, religious mediators also have access to large amounts of human and financial resources that can help aid in relief, mitigating the effects of poverty, hunger, and need for medical attention (Democratic Progress Institute 2012).

On the other hand, military training of mediators varies by country and has a somewhat different agenda than the other two types of mediation training. Around the world, many state militaries offer mediation training that primarily seems to be reserved for officers (Druckman et al. 1997). Depending upon the state, though, these militaries may embrace ADR concepts of professional neutrality, as do U.S. and Australian forces (Wood 2013-2014), or their military mediation training

may utilize very different concepts. Departing from ADR, they may emphasize knowledge of the language of the disputants or of the genesis and underlying issues of the conflict. They may also see the sacrifice of neutrality as a minor obstacle to overcome as long as trustworthiness and credibility have been established (Druckman et al. 1997).

What remains common is that military training of mediation centers around how the military should interact with local actors in order to best achieve peace. This training can focus on humanitarian and governance needs, as well as conflict analysis, conflict prevention, peace enforcement, peacebuilding, etc., (African Union Mission in Somalia 2015). However, it can also blur the instructional lines between serving as a third-party mediator versus a primary party-negotiator in the conflict who might need to deescalate hostilities. In the former, military training still calls for a mediator to maintain the goals of his constituents (e.g., establishing peace) while also preserving his own goals, like ensuring the safety of his troops. Thus, mediators are encouraged to increase their own strength, as they would in a primary-party role, and use it to reduce one or both disputants' strength and/or to leverage them. However, this may come with the cost of encouraging retaliation and directly involving the mediator's forces in the conflict as a primary-party (Druckman et al. 1997).

It is for these reasons that regardless of a military mediator's attempt to learn the language or background knowledge of the disputants and the conflict, he will probably be seen by the local community as an 'outsider' that is most likely not neutral. Thus, I expect mediators with military training to have a negative effect on the likelihood of mediation success, regardless of the region of the world or whether it is an interstate versus civil conflict. Although training increases one's knowledge competency skills and in conflict situations can improve how military members diffuse and overcome hostilities, formally trained mediators and religious mediators are likely more prone to achieving ceasefires or peace settlements, with regional caveats for each.

Based on the logic of the above discussion about mediator training, I expect that:

H(1): In conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success.

H(2): In conflicts where disputants place emphasis on social connections, (conflicts in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) and especially in civil conflicts, mediators with religious training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success.

H(3): In all regions, mediators with military training will have a greater likelihood of mediation failure.

Research Methods

Little information exists, especially public information, regarding the training curriculum mediators undertake prior to engaging in conflict mediations. Moreover, while some information may be deduced from prominent mediators' titles of 'General' or 'Pope,' no known data currently records if individual mediators have completed military, religious, or formal *mediation* training. There is also a lack of unified or common curricula. Multiple IGOs and NGOs, like the United Nations, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), and Swiss Peace, are known to have their own training programs and supporting handbooks or materials. The U.S. military also trains its officers in mediation strategies in case there is a need to deescalate conflicts, especially local ones (Asquith). Furthermore, the Catholic Church has often engaged in international and civil conflict mediations. However, few can explain, except for those who have actually engaged in conflict mediation, 1.) what mediation training looks like, 2.) whether the knowledge competencies gained from mediation training are effective or essential in mediating peace settlements, and 3.) whether some types of training are more effective than others.

Moreover, even if quantitative data were to be gathered today that profiled individual mediator demographics, training/educational backgrounds, etc., researchers would have much difficulty reporting which mediators were connected to what conflict management attempts and outcomes. In the modern era, parties involved in international and civil conflict mediations are often bound by strong confidentiality agreements that greatly limit discussion of particular mediation proceedings or the microlevel actors involved. Therefore, further study of the impact of mediator competencies on conflict management outcomes is well-suited for a qualitative investigation that allows mediators to share their experience and opinions regarding what microlevel skills/ characteristics seem to influence mediation outcome positively or negatively without violating any confidentiality agreements, to which they may still be bound, on the specific proceedings of certain conflict management processes.

To qualitatively analyze how mediator training may contribute to mediation success or failure, I designed an original survey and conducted interviews with those in the field. Survey data that was quantitative in

nature was reserved for future research and assessment of mediator *know-how* and *behavior* competencies, while several of the open-ended survey questions and interview questions were relevant to the investigation of knowledge competency skills gain through mediator training. I did encounter difficulties, however, in identifying and recruiting mediators.

Because of the confidentiality of many conflict mediation proceedings, details regarding the individual mediators that were involved in specific conflicts from the year 2000 onwards were especially elusive. Furthermore, because many mediators have other primary jobs, they often do not identify as a peace or conflict mediator on professional bio pages or websites such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Also, a large number of those who professionally identify as 'mediators' on their bio pages are attorneys who mediate civil cases, particularly those related to family law and corporate disputes with domestic or international businesses. Therefore, great care was taken in recruiting peace mediators that fit one of the following criteria: 1) I had met them in professional settings and knew their prior involvement in conflict mediation; 2) They were vetted and referred by another conflict mediator; or 3) They were professionally linked to a mediating entity and had identified expertise in mediating peace settlements for interstate or civil conflicts.

In Bercovitch's International Conflict Management data, about 22.68% of mediations through 2003 were conducted by leaders of countries, IGOs, and RGOs while 4.5% of mediations were conducted by private individuals. Former heads of state are frequently listed in this latter group. Current or former leaders of states, IGOs, and RGOs are extremely difficult to access, though I did attempt a few interview requests through various foundations to which they were linked. These requests were unfruitful. Thus, my interview and survey responses were solely conducted with representatives of governments, IGOs, RGOs, and national organizations, as well as private individuals. To avoid having to obtain special prior permission from mediating entities, I also promised the respondents I would not purposely link them to their mediating entity though they could use their own professional discretion in commenting on the training, mediator selection processes, and procedures they knew about with various entities. I also charged them to use professional judgment in discussing any details of mediated conflicts, especially regarding what was or was not confidential to the proceedings.

Because confidentiality agreements often limit mediators from disclosing the inner proceedings of conflict mediations in which they

participated, I also worded both my survey and interview questions to be opinion-based. Thus, I asked several questions regarding which individual mediator characteristics they believe, from their professional experience, positively or negatively influenced mediation proceedings. I then narrowed the focus of my questions to inquiries about the applicability and helpfulness of formal, military, and religious mediation training. Overall, I found members of the mediation community were far more willing to agree to interviews than they were to complete a survey. Still, I was able to collect some feedback on open-ended survey questions to combine with information revealed in interviews.¹

To expand my qualitative data, I also collected information from numerous recorded mediator panels and interviews that were conducted by entities including the International Mediation Institute (IMI), the International Peace Institute (IPI), and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) Finland – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. These panels and interviews focused on discussing the traits of effective mediators (especially master mediators), how peace can best be achieved in mediation, the professionalization of mediation through training, and/or details of how specific mediation attempts either succeeded or went awry. Therefore, parts of the discussions were in line with information I was trying to collect from current or former mediators through my survey and interviews. Where information shared applied to any of my survey or interview questions, I transcribed the direct quotes from the mediators in the recordings. In a similar form, I also collected information from lead mediators' autobiographies and mediation guides or first-hand assessments by fellow mediators and support staff who were present at the mediation proceedings. Regarding the latter, executive summaries of interviews collected through the Oral Histories Project at the United States Institute of Peace (and available online) served as an invaluable source of information, especially those on The Sudan Experience Project and the Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Also, these methods allowed me to include some primary source information from former leaders of states and/or IGOs.

Altogether, I was able to obtain information from first-person accounts of over 28 interstate and civil conflict mediators. Most were willing to be identified in this research, but six chose for their identity to remain confidential while still allowing for some demographic information to be shared to reflect diversity in the population of respondents. At least 25%

¹ See Appendix.

of the mediators in this study openly identified as female. Also, at least one respondent was professionally open in identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. In light of the U.N.'s Women, Peace and Security initiative and similar initiatives by some other mediating entities, especially those in the West, to actively include more diversity on mediation teams, this information was important for exploring diverse mediator perspectives, especially for future research regarding individual acceptance by negotiating parties.

Within this study, the individual mediators also varied in age, primary profession, experience, training, country of professional origin, and type of entity/entities with which they are affiliated. Some were early in their post-graduate careers while others were mid-career or retirees. Some of the mediators were career diplomats, which may or may not have retired to adjunct positions with universities or opening their own NGOs. Others were career mediators or full-time professors, and several were engaged with various entities in training mediators. Their training methods, experiences, programs, and philosophies varied greatly, which allowed for valuable insights regarding how the professionalization of mediation differs from region to region and state to state, etc. Most of the mediators were, or had been at some point, affiliated with an IGO. However, several had also been official representatives for their states in mediation proceedings, and a few were either strictly affiliated with NGOs or had left an IGO to work for an NGO. Particularly, most whose primary careers were in mediation worked for NGOs.

Finally, the countries of professional origin for mediators in this study were identified to help reinforce that this study contains a variety of cultural perspectives. Their countries included the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Germany, Guatemala, Columbia, Finland, Pakistan, Switzerland, Peru, Singapore, Ghana, The Netherlands, and Kenya. One also identified professionally as 'European,' in general. Primarily, mediators hailed from the United States, the U.K., the European Union (E.U.), and states in Africa or Latin America. Thus, a limitation of this study is that there was no participation from mediators in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and limited participation from mediators in Asian states. Particularly, the lack of inclusion of Chinese or Russian mediators is of concern as both states have been frequently involved in conflict management attempts. The absence of responses from 'insider' mediators in the Middle East also creates an informational gap regarding cultural expectations in mediation. Particularly, the Middle East was an

area where religious mediators were expected to be highly valued because of their social connections and spiritual authority. Consequently, to understand cultural expectations of negotiating parties in the Middle East and mediating parties in China, this study is largely reliant on the testaments of mediators from other parts of the world.

Data & Findings

Formal Training

Originally, I assumed from my knowledge of the previous literature in the field that formal mediation training would largely be related to mediators possessing legal degrees and/or being trained in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques - established by John W. Burton and vastly utilized in Western mediation. This informed the expectations for my Hypothesis 1, that in conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of success. In the West, one's professional authority is partially established through educational attainment and training certificates (Lee and Hwee Hwee 2009). Within mediation, there is an expectation of 'professional neutrality' or non-bias, especially as this is one of the tenants of ADR methods. However, findings from interviews revealed great variation in formal training expectations and programs in the West.

For example, within the United States, little emphasis is sometimes placed on formal training. The U.S. Department of State, a primary supplier of state level mediators, tried to establish a training program in the early 2010s, but the program did not materialize.² Moreover, the Carter Center, an NGO created by Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter that is often engaged in mediation support, does not offer formal training. Instead, Swiss Peace has tended to be a frequent training entity for those U.S. mediators interested in either enhancing their skills or obtaining a certificate. For other interested individuals, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) does promote an online training program. However, its new mediation content is commonly regarded as more theoretical than practical, thus offering little true preparation for the field.³ Overall, in

² Author's interview with an anonymous U.S. mediator, Knoxville, TN, May 2020.

³ Author's interview with mediator and mediation trainer Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

person, formal training programs are largely absent within the borders of United States, except for some university degree or certificate programs crafted to teach diplomacy and mediation skills. However, when U.S. mediators were asked about the content of formal training or where to receive it, respondents often had to take a pause in thought before recalling places like Harvard's Program on Negotiation (PON) or the Fletcher School at Tuft's University.⁴ Ambassador Susan Page noted that training is important for major figures without experience. However, when asked about conflict mediation training options, she mentioned the United Nation's mediator training program and then conceded, 'I know there are a lot of Master's programs in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies. I do think they are very useful and helpful, especially when there are kinds of simulations...but none of these people ever get jobs as mediators.'⁵

On the other hand, in many Western European countries, mediation training is routine and taken seriously. As EU mediator and conflict resolution researcher Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Pirauudeau revealed, U.S. mediators may occasionally have legal degrees, earned prior to rising through the political ranks. In Germany, the educational and career pathway to becoming a mediator is intentionally separated from any legal tracks. Mediators are not lawyers, and those in the two fields differ in their conceptual thinking. Moreover, mediators in Germany are required to have at least 200 hours of training prior to practicing.⁶ They are also legally bound to only utilize facilitative approaches. It is a breach of the law to offer options or solutions.⁷ This differs from Chinese mediation, which is very formulative/prescriptive with solutions being offered.⁸ Thus, disputants seek conflict managers that use either the facilitative or formulative strategy they prefer. Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland have also implemented mediation thinktanks and conflict resolution organizations. Within these entities, career mediators gather information and conduct conflict analysis.⁹ Additionally, Norway has developed specialized

⁶ Author's interview with Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Pirauudeau, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Dr. Joyce Neu in a recorded talk. "Blurring the Lines in International Mediation." YouTube video, 1:00:53. Posted by Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 27 Oct 2017. <https://youtu.be/17j2ymQ4ZSs>.

mediator training on ceasefires,¹⁰ while the Swedish have developed the Folke Bernadotte Academy.¹¹ Overall, though, the consensus from several interviewees was that Swiss Peace and the UN were known for having the best formal mediation training programs with numerous specialized courses, which include High-Level Mediation, Specialist - Ceasefire Mediation, Specialist - Gender and Mediation, and at different points, Specialist - Natural Resource Mediation. Often when RGOs seek formal training, they also turn to the UN. However, much UN training is by invitation only and targets multilateral or state-level practitioners.¹²

While the consensus from several subjects was that formal training - typically from the UN, one of the previously named European programs, or some higher-level U.S. Master's programs¹³ - was effective and important in properly preparing one to lead mediations, there is a lack of consistency in both formal training and professionalization in the field. Several NGOs or national organizations, such as the International Mediation Institute (IMI) have attempted to professionalize mediation, but the number of mediators without any formal mediation training is still very high. Mediators tend to be diplomats, government officials, and former government officials or people who have achieved high level positions in international organizations.¹⁴ They tend to not have any background in mediation, though they may be very skilled at negotiating. However, says Dr. Joyce Neu, mediator, mediation expert advisor, and Founding Executive Director for the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego, 'Negotiation is not the same as mediation. The two are very different skills. Mediation requires stepping back and listening to others.'¹⁵ Neu further explains this issue with a lack of professionalization of the field is what partially prompted the UN in recent years to create its Standby Team of Mediation Experts, made up mostly of young professionals with degrees

¹⁰ Author's interview with mediator Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

¹¹ Author's interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Again, I acknowledge here a lack of greater information on mediation training and practices in Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

¹⁴ Dr. Joyce Neu in a recorded talk. "Blurring the Lines in International Mediation." YouTube video, 1:00:53. Posted by Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 27 Oct 2017. < <https://youtu.be/17j2ymQ4ZSs> >.

¹⁵ Ibid.

in peace studies and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, an ongoing concern is that assignments to the team are only one-year in length with all of the experts being replaced each year.

Lamenting that he had argued for almost 25 years for mediation to become a formally-trained profession, Dr. Laurie Nathan, mediator and Director of the Mediation Program at Kroc Institute for International Peace, Notre Dame University, repeated a military analogy he often shares with others:

You would never appoint a colonel, a captain, or a major - you would never appoint a general without taking into account her temperament, her experience, her competence, and her skills. I mean, we would be insane. At no level of the armed forces would you make an appointment or promotion without taking into account those factors, but we're appointing senior mediators all the time, ignoring that stuff.¹⁶

In one of the most revealing insights on the impact of formal training on mediation outcome, Dr. Nathan noted he and other very experienced mediators often train UN Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRGs), Heads of Mission, etc., in a 5-day simulation. They work with attendees on tactical skills and techniques. However, the impact of the training on subsequent mediation success is largely dependent upon the temperament of the trainee. Says Nathan:

Some of them are fantastic and some are just really terrible. You wouldn't want them to mediate a fight between your dog and your cat. I mean...even though we have modeled mediation and we have very senior practitioners in the room giving them advice, some of them are just useless. As a very experienced trainer, I am convinced that mediation is part science and part art. You can teach the science, but you can't teach the art. Art is a matter of temperament, and whether you look in your own family or the workplace or the UN or the mediation community itself, there are some of us that hate conflict and run away. We go into flight mode. There are others that go into fight mode. And there are others that are natural temperament peacemakers. Roughly one-quarter or less of the people in the senior UN Mediation training course are natural mediators. And at least one-quarter of them will never, ever be competent mediators. This is my impression based on a lot of training, for a long time, in many parts of

¹⁶ Author's interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

the world. Is this taken into account when senior mediators are appointed? Absolutely not. And when senior mediators make a hash of it, and are generally renown for making a hash of it, do they get reappointed to the next case? Yep, they do.¹⁷

With all of this information on formal training considered, I find insufficient support for Hypothesis 1 that in conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success. This hypothesis might have garnered more support if I had not constrained the scope geographically. Additionally, the analysis of ‘formal training’ was too wide and should have been narrowed to assessing the impact of particular training programs, like the United Nations, Swiss Peace, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, or others, and to comparing their training content, perceived value of the program, etc. As Dr. Nathan noted, the impact of training on improving a mediator’s abilities can also be tempered by that mediator’s personality.

Despite the inconclusive results on the effectiveness of formal training, however, it is important to note that disputing parties in many parts of the world have held Western or ‘European’ mediation as superior. Said Ambassador Page, ‘I’ve seen times where a country has felt they are considered “less than” if they receive African experts. [They] believe Europeans or “whites” have had better training, access to resources, and status.’ Therefore a stigma exists with some disputants that they are being slighted by not ‘receiving the best’ if third-party IGOs, like the UN, assign a non-Western mediator.¹⁸ Additionally, Deborah Masucci, global expert in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and Honorary Director of the International Mediation Institute, revealed that IMI conducted an internal survey on the potential credentialing of mediators and found that while US mediators were split on ‘whether certification would improve mediator performance,’ 70% believe it would increase respect for mediation, and 80% of mediators were willing to become credentialed. This led IMI to conclude there was a need for mediation certifications or qualifications to ensure disputants of the quality of mediators.¹⁹

¹⁷ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with former Ambassador Susan Page, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

¹⁹ Deborah Masucci in a recorded talk with Laura Kaster. “Mediator Credentialing Conversation with Deborah Masucci and Laura Kaster.” YouTube video, 36:19. Posted by International Mediation Institute. 17 June 2019. <https://youtu.be/nBhb1i0aReU>.

Altogether, though there was no support for my hypothesis about formal training helping with mediation success, the insights into the complexity and ambiguity of formal training in mediation is fruitful for several reasons. First, the information obtained from the interviews demonstrates the lack of universal training, which even persists to some degree at the UN and among states that are highly involved in mediation, such as the U.S. and several Western European countries. Second, there is a wide call among mediators to professionalize the practice of peace mediation. However, such recommendation comes with the understanding that in some states, those who receive graduate educations in mediation will likely never be appointed (under current political conditions) as a state-level mediator or IGO or RGO representative mediator without first becoming a nationally elected official and/or diplomat. Third, the data collected prompts the need for future comparative research on formal training offered by various entities to determine if certain training programs are more effective and thus, should be emulated and/or form the basis for mediator education in a professionalized field. Moreover, this study further begs the need for research on mediation training programs in Eastern Europe, China, and the Middle East. Fourth, based on current findings, small states in Western Europe seem to be leading the way on providing and requiring formal training of mediators. Though respondents noted particularly strong programs at some U.S. universities, these degree programs are not yet being pushed in the United States as a requisite for mediators officially representing the country. Fifth, there is debate regarding whether the profession of mediation and any required content background for the field should branch off the legal field or be separated from it. Again, such divergence on thought allows for interesting future explorations regarding the advantages and disadvantages of separating mediation from the legal profession.

Religious Training

Another area where I anticipated clearer results was in analyzing the impact of religious training on mediation outcome. While this qualitative study had low participants who originated from Asia and none from the Middle East, I hoped more respondents could comment on whether inclusion on mediation teams of local religious leaders with social connections to the community was helpful in resolving non-Western conflicts, particularly those within the Middle East. Many respondents had not experienced team interactions with local religious leaders.

However, Dr. Nathan shared the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) had been ‘very effective mediators at the local level’ during the Sudan crisis. ‘They are one of the most credible actors. Though they are split by the same factors that caused the civil war, they are arguably the least partisan and the least ethnized of all non-governmental actors. But can they mediate a civil war? No.’²⁰ Nathan attributed this limitation to the SSCC’s lack of experience, stature, capacity, and resources. While such actors might have success with local demands and disputes, ‘when the level of a conflict reaches a certain intensity, [the disputants] are going to have external states or external multilateral organizations [mediating], and that’s the fight we see over and over again. It’s the fight to lead the mediation. Is it the African Union or the UN?’²¹

On the other hand, in some countries, religious organizations are excluded from mediating conflicts. For example, in Turkey, it is illegal for religious leaders to engage in mediation because it is a secular state; a mediator must have legal background.²² In Columbia, on the other hand, religious entities are not excluded from participating in conflict resolutions, but they cannot utilize a religious approach. Mediator and trainer Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., has lived in Columbian communities amongst embroiled disputants and trained religious leaders in his home country of Guatemala.²³ When asked what effect religiously trained mediators had on mediation outcome, were they more or less likely to resolve a dispute, Lucerno offered a comparison between religiously ‘trained’ mediating groups – one in Columbia and one in Guatemala. In the former, a Catholic Church organization was not actively engaged in the mediation talks. However, they were highly effective local partners that helped guide the community towards healing and peace. Said Lucerno:

They were very good with reconciliation processes and helping parties deal with their grievances from the war, and that created the scenario for us to then deal with conflict mediation. You cannot jump directly to conflict mediations in post-war scenarios if the people still have those kinds of deep griefs. The community perceived them as a good

²⁰ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

²¹ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

²² Author’s interview with Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Piraudeau, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

²³ Interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

entity and wanted to work with them. The main thing I liked in Columbia is that they did not bring any religious elements into the proceedings because in Columbia you cannot [do that]....So they said, 'We will talk about God himself but not a Catholic approach of God.'

I had a different experience training [various] Evangelical religious leaders in Guatemala, and they have had all sorts of troubles because they didn't receive any [prior formal] training in conflict mediation, but their communities perceived them as mediators. So, they usually made the mistakes of giving people advice in how to solve their conflicts, and then their own community blamed them for the consequences of that advice. So [formal] training is important.

Overall, there were only a small number of respondents that could comment on the effectiveness of religiously trained mediators. Additionally, with this sample of participants, I was unable to capture information regarding the social connection effect of 'insider' religious mediators in Asia and the Middle East save for learning that religious leaders are not allowed to mediate in secular Turkey. However, the information on local religious organizations in Columbia and Sudan seem to support that religiously trained mediators can be effective local level mediators or reconciling partners (who work alongside mediators) in low-intensity, more localized disputes. Of particular interest is the role they can play in potentially helping communities work through post-conflict grievances by guiding disputants to the point of 'forgiveness' of the adversarial party/parties.²⁴ Speculatively, such local mediation partnerships could increase peace endurance.

Taken together, the very limited data partially supports Hypothesis 2 that in conflicts where disputants place emphasis on social connections, (conflicts in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) and especially in civil conflicts, mediators with religious training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success – meaning a greater likelihood than those with no training. However, I acknowledge this hypothesis should be modified to also include Latin America. Moreover, the conflict scope should be limited to low-intensity conflicts, but I stop short of suggesting civil disputes only as religious leaders may be effective in helping resolve local border skirmishes in some regions. Additionally, there is strong potential that better results could be produced from examining local religious mediators' effects on either peace endurance after mediation or how their

²⁴ Interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

efforts can shorten time it takes for a conflict resolution process to end in a successful settlement or ceasefire.

There were two other takeaways from the responses that have contributed to broadening the understanding of the role of religious training, despite the lack of support for my hypothesis on this factor. First, in my original hypothesis, I had not thought to include potential social connections of religious mediators to local communities in Latin America. Thus, this is an area of future expansion for testing. Second, similar to the findings for formal training, there is a need to either further narrow the category of 'religious training' to a particular denomination, religion, etc., or else compare the group mediation outcomes to one another. With the latter option, studies on religiously trained mediators could also be narrowed geographically. What emerges is that different religions, denominations, and institutions have different expectations regarding what mediator 'training' looks like for their faith. The Catholic Church and its Popes have been occasional mediators in international and civil conflicts and seem to be more formalized in their approach to mediation.²⁵ On the other hand, there is a tendency by some groups to self-declare expertise as peace mediators despite lack of either true institutionalized or external training, such as the Evangelical leaders in Guatemala. Those in this latter category can especially face blame and potentially dangerous backlash for poor formulative suggestions.

Military Training

A surprising and much clearer connection, than formal or religious training, to mediation success emerged with military training. Originally, in Hypothesis 3, I had expected that in all regions, mediators with military training will have a greater likelihood of mediation failure. Evidence from the qualitative data consistently opposed this assumption. Military trained *officers* from various locations were often utilized in mediations for: 1) their abilities to help organize and manage complex mediations with lots of actors, and 2) their expert knowledge of weapons and military craft jargon and expertise, which aids in drafting highly important armament language in any peace agreement.²⁶ Mediator Kenny Gluck illustrated how military

²⁵ See the International Conflict Management (ICM) codebook by Bercovitch (2002) for the list identifying third-party mediators.

²⁶ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

officers could be especially useful in the management phase of mediation, particularly when attempting to draft written agreements. Said Gluck:

There were certain issues that the parties were raising about some of the definitional questions – direct and indirect fire, weaponry, permissible and impermissible activities [especially regarding] the range of different types of weaponry...the category of weapon or unit which you're allowed to move or not allowed to move.²⁷

Having a military trained mediator on the team helped parties know exactly what they were agreeing to and exactly what requests they wanted to make regarding agreements on combat positions and assets. Further, Gluck said he thought it was important to have 'military officers talking to military officers,'²⁸ especially as military trained mediators have an understanding of the types of military units and weaponry.

Vern Hockney, who served in the US Army for five years and did a tour in Iraq before attending a Master's program on conflict resolution and mediation, said military training can create an 'instant brotherhood' with others who have military backgrounds. Particularly in referencing those with experience in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), he said that brotherhood connection 'transcends religious and national boundaries.' Hockney placed the combatants he often encountered into three categories – the 'very right-wing conservative and militaristic,' the liberalistic who 'believed in peace at all costs,' and those 'who were entirely disenfranchised because of the conflict.' Said Hockney, 'Being in the military really helped me to understand the more extreme views that people can hold.'²⁹

Hockney's classmate Mike Duerr, an 11-year officer in the U.S. army who did three tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan, attested 'I think with my experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, I didn't realize how much conflict resolution and a lot of mediation I would be doing over there.' For him, those with military experience often have a 'mutual understanding of what it means to wear the uniform.' They can relate to others with military backgrounds, and that similar experience spurs conversations. Says Duerr, the sentiment is 'Yeah, we get where you come from, and we understand how that affects one person doing those things.'³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

²⁹ Vern Hockney with Michael Duerr in a recorded interview. 2016.

³⁰ Michael Durr with Vern Hockney in a recorded interview. 2016.

While sometimes military officers find themselves serving as local mediators within conflicts, various respondents in this study shared military trained mediators are often formally used as support mediators on a team unless they have served, or are currently serving, in a diplomatic or political position. In the latter case, they may then take on the role of lead mediator. However, lead mediators often highly value the skills of support mediators with military training and rely upon them,³¹ as Juan Carlos Lucerno reinforced with an example from a previous mediation experience:

Two colleagues were with me – one a police officer and one a military officer. They understood mediation though they were not interested in conducting it themselves. They were very good at reading the room and understanding when the context was appropriate for mediation... or if something had changed in the scenario and we needed to change the approach or try another day. I think it is very good to have a team with different kinds of profiles. [Their help] became particularly useful when proceedings became more intense.³²

Another issue that military trained mediators seem to be very adept at handling is instituting structures within groups that were either weak or in which no structures already existed. Says Gluck,

When you're dealing with very weak militaries – very weakly structured, incoherent groups – you...need to put in structures which replace the chain of command of a military unit so you can deal with the various levels,...the bigshots often outside of the country,...all the mid-level and low-level commanders who need to be brought online.³³

For Gluck, those with military training understood these structures and were also good at managing the complexity of all the various staff, groups, and teams involved in mediating numerous elements of a conflict. Said Gluck, the idea that mediators simply mediate is often a fallacy. In one conflict mediation series in which he was involved, Gluck said,

[The mediation team] had 17 peace processes going on around the country – local-intercommunal issues, local-religious issues, local land issues, local issues with different armed factions which need to be

³¹ Author's interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

³² Ibid.

³³ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

mediated locally, but [a mediator is] also the head of a peacekeeping mission. You're supervising a mixed military-civilian activity, which is doing a lot more than just mediating. We were helping set up the new army. We were helping train the police. We were helping set up administrative structures. And we were conducting military operations. So, the mediation is one piece of the puzzle.³⁴

In considering this insight, Gluck's assertion that mediators 'need a lot of managerial skills...to manage a large number of processes and relationships'³⁵ makes sense. For the respondents who had insights on working with mediators with military backgrounds, mediators who were military-trained, officers – either current or former – often exhibited such ability to manage and coordinate numerous groups and mediation efforts that were happening simultaneously. Moreover, it was suggested that in conflict situations where a range of experts is needed, it is often particularly important to have a person with military expertise on the mediation team.³⁶

The interviewees in this study also noted they knew of no reported instances where military-trained mediators were rejected by combatants for possessing a military background, though 1.) combatants often prefer currently active military members over retirees, and 2.) some NGOs avoid dealing with military entities because of NGOs' typical aversion to

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview #30 collected by W. Haven North for the United States Institute of Peace's Oral Histories: The Sudan Experience Project (USIP), October 2006. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/sudan/30.pdf>. The interviewee was a former U.S. State Department officer and current lawyer and member of the United Nations Development Programme that was asked by a former supervisor at the U.S. State Department to serve on the mediation team as a technical legal advisor for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan.

³⁷ Interview #11 collected by Larry Lesser for the USIP-ADST's Oral Histories: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team project, April 2005. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/afghanistan/11.pdf>. The interviewee was a military veteran and employee of the U.S. State Department who worked as a political officer with the Provincial Reconstruction Team Army Civil Affairs Unit to mediate peace in Afghanistan between 2004-2005.

violence.³⁷ Said one interviewee in an interview project collected by the United States Institute of Peace:

One of the recommendations that was made to [the mediation team] was that the deputy team leader should be an active duty officer, not a civil affairs specialist, and he should be from the kinetic side; this is especially true in a combat environment, or an environment where active combat is still the norm or combat operations are underway. They will respect a fellow combat officer who is in the role of deputy team leader [of the mediation]. They will simply group a civil affairs officer (and those tend to be, of course, reservists)...as part of the civilian team. So, one of the recommendations made was to try to have the number two, a military officer, as an active duty deputy.³⁸

In some cases, combatants also expressed positive support of a mediator's military background connection if it was regarded that the military from that mediator's country had offered them support or protection at some point in the past.³⁹ Regardless, though, the presence of a lower-level (or lead) military officer in a kinetic conflict seemed to help underscore a representative-rank, lead mediator's strength as he is perceived to have the support of a state military behind him,⁴⁰ perhaps serving as either a leveraged threat if a peace agreement is not made or a promise to hold the disputant(s) on the other side of the conflict accountable if they break any agreement.

No studies on the effectiveness of the application of military training to mediation have previously been conducted, and the topic is very rarely noted in recorded mediator panels or interviews. However, within the

³⁸ Interview #71 collected by W. Haven North for the USIP's Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Experience Project, November 2008. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/iraq_prt/71.pdf. The interviewee as a USIP representative who served on several PRTs in Iraq in 2007-2008 before becoming a Director of Programs at USIP.

³⁹ Interview #11 collected by Larry Lesser for the USIP-ADST's Oral Histories: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team project, April 2005. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/afghanistan/11.pdf>

⁴⁰ Interview #71 collected by W. Haven North for the USIP's Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Experience Project, November 2008. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/iraq_prt/71.pdf

mediator accounts gathered for this study and others reported in the United States Institute of Peace's transcribed interviews, there is consistent reinforcement that military-trained mediators, whether they are lead mediators or support staff, are often highly useful in: 1) managing and coordinating complex mediation processes, 2) establishing structure where little or no structure exists – both in trying to form cohesive disputant group structures and civil society structures, 3) personally connecting with those disputants who also have combat experience, 4) drafting combat- or military-specific language in agreements regarding the limitations of combat, and/or 5) serving as a guarantor of a representative-level mediator's legitimacy to enforce peace. Moreover, it is not unlikely for officers within state military units to have previous experience conducting localized mediations during their military tours.

Analysis

The overall results of this qualitative research lend support to the argument that mediator knowledge competency skills have important effects on the likelihood of mediation success. Specifically, I found strong support for military training having a positive impact on whether a peace agreement is achieved. Mediators often utilized managerial and organizational skills gained from this training to coordinate complex groups of mediation teams, invited specialists, and multiple disputants. Moreover, knowledge regarding the language of military/combatant assets, vantage points, weapons, and craft was extremely beneficial in drafting concessions or allowances between disputants. Negotiating parties also seemed to be more receptive to military mediators with combat backgrounds as there was a mutual empathy of experience.

On the other hand, mediators with religious training had mixed effectiveness. A major issue in the variety of outcome was a lack of uniformity in training (especially compared to military training which often has high uniformity). Some faith organizations and denominations were consistent and educated in their practices, such as the Catholic Church in Columbia.⁴¹ Conversely, groups that lacked true training but self-declared as experts, like the Evangelical leaders in Guatemala, not only were highly ineffectual, but they also sometimes placed themselves

⁴¹ Author's interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

in danger of disputant or communal blame and backlash. In some contexts, though, local religious mediators provided grief support towards conflict reciliation. This seemed to be a particularly useful aspect of religious mediation training in countries that allow non-secular mediators. Limitations to the study were noted, though, as the lack of respondents from the Middle East and Eastern Europe, plus low numbers of Asian respondents limited me from exploring more of how some religious 'insider' mediators may provide local access and acceptance in socially connected, non-Western cultures.

Finally, the effect of formal mediator training was difficult to assess due to the great variance in programs, lack of uniformity of curriculum, and differing mediating strategies supported. Respondents frequently lamented the need for a professionalization of the field and pointed towards formal mediator training programs with the UN or Swiss Peace as some of the best available. They believed the knowledge gathered from these programs was very useful to increasing the likelihood of mediation success as long as the taught tactics and techniques were actually applied, and that application could be dependent upon the individual mediator's personality and willingness to modify their methods based on training information and outcomes.

University graduate programs, on the other hand, had mixed support. Several in the United States were noted as being very useful. except that the students produced from these programs would likely never work in conflict mediation due to the political limitations around much of the practice. In contrast, some university programs in Western Europe were heralded as excellent places for both training and research while other programs were deemed too theoretical and of little practical value. Regardless, though, Western European graduates had greater access to professional careers in the field as some countries in West Europe strongly delineate between the fields of law and mediation and require a high number of formal training hours before one can declare himself as a mediator.

Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative findings of this study supported my assumption that mediator knowledge competency does indeed impact the likelihood of whether an interstate or civil conflict mediation attempt will result in a ceasefire, partial agreement, or full agreement. Particularly, I identified connections between military trained mediators and greater

effectiveness in achieving positive mediation outcomes, primarily due to their organizational and managerial skills in coordinating complex networks of parties and their needs, as well as their knowledge of specialized military and weapons jargon and tactical concepts that aid in the drafting of peace agreements. While respondents in the study advocated for the importance of formal training, I, however, found the terminology for both 'formal' and 'religious' training needs to be more specific or categorical to properly assess. Within this, though, UN and Swiss Peace training were routinely mentioned by mediators as both effective and highly necessary to the likelihood of achieving successful mediation results. Other training institutions, especially in Western Europe, also offered promise in their training results, but the findings regarding these and non-Western training programs were limited by the backgrounds of the respondents in my study. However, I express this with the caveat that multiple respondents noted the high-value placed by many disputants on Western mediation institutions. There was some mention, though, of some disputants seeking formulative/prescriptive mediation from China, and this needs to be further investigated.

As for religious training, again, this definition was too broad. However, within this group, Catholic organizations were noted as having some established expectations towards proper mediation procedures, and thus, those organizations have been effective in Latin America. Some Evangelical leaders in Latin America have also begun to seek out training. This type of training, though, proposes great possibilities for future research. In some regions of the world, religious 'insider' mediators may provide access to and authority in local communities or disputant groups, particularly in cultures that place high value on social connections. On the other hand, in many societies that allow for non-secular mediators, those with religious training may be especially adept in aiding with conflict reconciliation measures that lead to longer durations of peace.

The findings of this research also lend support to my assertion that a strict focus on macrolevel mediator factors in analyzing the impact of a third-parties on conflict mediation success is insufficient. Indeed, macrolevel factors may affect both mediation outcome and whether a mediation is even accepted in the first place. Still, microlevel factors also play important roles in acceptance and outcome. While, most often, offers by third parties to mediate conflicts have already been accepted before individual mediators – the agents of the third parties – are sent to the conflict to initiate peace talks, elements of their person can affect whether

they are, likewise, accepted by negotiating parties and their management of the mediation or advice is respected.

Additionally, this research revealed a potential area of concern regarding mediating entities' lack of consideration of individual mediators' knowledge competency skills. Some mediating entities have good selection, vetting, and training processes in place for mediators. Other entities fail to consider the importance of these processes and instead assign mediators based on their political or diplomatic backgrounds versus their true mediation abilities. Such lack of consideration for an individual mediator's skills can easily have negative impacts on the peace settlement process.

While this research establishes the importance of investigating microlevel mediation factors associated with mediator knowledge competency skills, future research will also need to explore mediator know-how and behavior competencies. Additionally, more remains to be examined regarding the mediating entity selection process for mediators and how mediator training and expectations differ in Eastern Europe, China, and the Middle East. The further opening of mediation research into the microlevel also lends opportunities to better investigate the acceptance or rejection of individual mediators. Overall, there is great research and policy value in better understanding how macrolevel and microlevel mediator factors either singularly or interactively affect the outcome of peace efforts, and hopefully this research has helped build a foundation of support for continued investigation of the salience of individual mediator knowledge competency skills.

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
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ILLEGAL ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED SEIZURE OF RUSSIAN CENTRAL BANK ASSETS

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Abstract: The conflict in Ukraine has brought about destruction and casualties on an immense scale for this state. Its allies in the Western world have identified Russia as the aggressor state and therefore responsible for paying reparations for these damages. The freezing of Russian central bank assets held in Western states offers an opportunity to enforce the obligation to pay reparations. This article is focused on the legal issues related to the possible confiscation of frozen assets. It starts from the hypothesis that although international law does not treat the issue of foreign state property directly, it is nevertheless protected from confiscation by the rules on sovereign immunity, investment protection, and non-interference. The author explores the legal arguments and proposals put forward by Western officials and doctrinal proponents of confiscation and puts them through the test of these three rules to discern if they are legally viable. The hypothesis is developed through the content analysis of official statements and doctrinal works and deduction from established rules of international law to a specific case of seizure of a foreign central bank. The article concludes that no matter which possible model of confiscation is chosen, they are all confronted with the problem of breaching existing rules of international law. Therefore their application will inevitably result in further erosion of relations between the West and Russia, but also might create a legal basis for future litigation to recover seized assets from Russia in international forums.

Keywords: Central Bank of Russia, Ukraine, foreign assets, sovereign immunity, non-interference, countermeasures, investment protection.

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Introduction

The armed conflict in Ukraine presents the world with many new challenges and the answers are crafted on the run. One of these challenges is the issue of post-conflict recovery and reconstruction of the ravaged country, once the arms inevitably fall silent. The enormous resources needed for such an operation would be hard to come by. The idea floated by Ukraine's allies in the West is a rather straightforward one – the one party responsible for the start of the conflict should cover the costs incurred during the hostilities. In this case, Russia, as the state that invaded Ukraine in February 2022, should be charged with the costs of the invaded country's recovery. Since it is unrealistic to expect the authorities in Russia to accept this obligation of free will, they must be either compelled to do it on the field of battle, by a complete defeat of their armed forces, or through other means that would go against that will. One such idea, and the one that is gaining momentum as time passes by and the conflict continues, is to use Russian sovereign assets immobilized in the West which according to most estimates total about \$300bn (REPO 2023).

These assets had been managed by the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) before the war in Ukraine started. The CBR is a separate legal entity from the government of the Russian Federation but is entrusted with the sovereign authority to issue currency and protect the Russian rouble (Bismuth 2023). It holds assets abroad in the form of foreign currency or securities denominated in foreign currencies at other central banks or foreign commercial banks. These foreign assets serve the CBR to stabilize the rouble and to perform transactions in foreign currency. As part of the package of unilateral sanctions introduced in 2022 at the start of the conflict, the property of Russia itself as well as that of significant state organizations, in particular the CBR, was frozen (Stephan 2023, 195). Over thirty States over time imposed economic sanctions against Russia, including sweeping asset freezes, import bans, export controls, and investment restrictions (Criddle 2023).

Ukraine itself has proposed an international mechanism for the confiscation of Russian sovereign assets called the Global Compensation Mechanism (GCM). The focus of this article is not so much on its technicalities but on the reforms to international law that it proposes, namely the adoption of new rules limiting sovereign immunity concerning Russian state assets. The GCM has already been politically legitimized on a certain level by a majority vote in the United Nations General Assembly in November 2022 (UNGA 2022). However, before it becomes a legally binding

and operative act, considerable obstacles would need to be overcome, of which sovereign immunity is but one.

This article aims to explore the obstacles to the confiscation of Russian sovereign assets situated on the territory of foreign countries. There indeed exists in international law no explicit rules prohibiting the confiscation of foreign sovereign assets. However, other, more general rules apply to this case, and they are among the most developed and important in the field. No matter the type of proposed mechanism to confiscate those assets, it is argued that the existing international legal rules of sovereign immunity, investment protection, and non-interference prevent any confiscation from being realized and that the confiscation would give rise to the claim by the Russian Federation to recover any such seized assets in future litigations against the perpetrators. The hypothesis is developed through the content analysis of official statements and doctrinal works and deduction from established rules of international law to a specific case of the confiscation of the CBR's assets.

The article does not deal with the issue of the legality of confiscation as a countermeasure, although in the doctrine there have been attempts to justify this measure based on the law of countermeasures. To this view, Ukraine may deploy countermeasures by freezing Russian assets in response to Russia's injurious and illegal conduct against it. Going a step further, it is argued that frozen or seized assets need not be returned to Russia at the close of the war as long as Russia has failed to pay reparations. That is because the failure to pay reparations is itself an unlawful act for which countermeasures (continued freezing of assets) may be kept in place even if the unlawful war has ceased (Hathaway et al. 2024). It is the opinion of this author that countermeasures are the unsettled field of international law and prone to unilateral interpretations. Besides, „the procedural limitations to the resort to countermeasures, mainly identified in the need to exhaust preliminarily amicable means of dispute settlements, substantive limitations to countermeasures and, in particular, the most important one: proportionality“ (Cannizzaro & Bonafe 2016), as necessary preconditions for the deployment of countermeasures would all need to be analyzed by the state that would deploy the countermeasure itself. Thus, it would lack legitimacy in the wider community of states. It is a similar dilemma as with the use of sanctions, which is also touched upon later in the text.

The article starts with an overview of proposals to confiscate Russian sovereign assets in the countries allied to Ukraine that have access to these assets on their territories. Then it proceeds in a tripartite structure to analyze

three various objections based on international law against such proposals – sovereign immunity, non-interference, and investment protection. At the end, a concluding discussion of the issues raised is offered.

Proposal to confiscate Russian sovereign assets

The Government of the United States of America first started the idea of confiscation, but as time passed it seems most proposals have ended as dead letters on paper or instead focused on linking confiscation to organized crime and corruption, which is another matter completely and perfectly legal in international law. Shagina implies that this is due to constitutional obstacles, not international legal: “The Fourth Amendment of the US Constitution is construed as barring the federal government from seizing assets based on sanctions designations, but it has considerable latitude to do so for alleged crimes” (Shagina 2023). Anyway, in October 2022, some US senators proposed targeting the assets of Russian oligarchs and channeling the proceeds toward Ukraine’s reconstruction (USS FRC 2022). As Shagina again notes, this proposal led to last year’s seizure of a superyacht owned by Viktor Vekselberg, a close political ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and more recently the US Department of Justice seized an aircraft owned by the Russian oil company Rosneft (Shagina 2023).

In the meantime, public discussion in the US about seizing Russian sovereign assets has been guarded: “US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has noted that under the current legal framework, it is not permissible to seize Russian sovereign assets” (Shagina 2023). Probably one of the long-term priorities for the US government is to avoid diminishing the role of the US dollar as the world’s dominant reserve currency. While such concerns are warranted, the process of de-dollarisation in central-bank reserves had already been underway in Russia, triggered by financial sanctions before major fears of confiscation materialized. As a result, US institutions hold only 6% of Russia’s foreign reserves, significantly less than Germany (16%), France (10%) or even Japan (9%).

In the United Kingdom as well concerns over property rights and due process seem to have slowed progress in the confiscation debate. Nevertheless, the government is “considering all options on the seizure of Russian-linked assets in the UK” (UK Parliament 2023). Panja & Smith explain how the issue originated in February 2023, when Labour MP Chris Bryant introduced a bill in the House of Commons to provide a framework for the seizure of both Russian private and public assets. The bill was

rejected, but it will be given a second hearing. Having frozen more than £18bn in assets last year, London, like Washington, is accelerating the seizure and forfeiture of Russian oligarchs' assets. As part of the deal between one such oligarch, Roman Abramovich, and the UK's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, Chelsea Football Club, which Abramovich owned, was sold for £2.5bn in May 2022 (Panja & Smith 2022). The proceeds of the sale will be deposited in a frozen bank account and later redirected to victims of the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, the expedited passage of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill in March 2022 introduced significant reforms to Unexplained Wealth Orders, an investigative tool that can speed up asset recovery of private funds (UK Parliament 2023b).

At the EU level, discussions on confiscation have revolved more around private assets than public ones. In May 2022, the European Commission proposed amending its directive on asset recovery and confiscation, with a focus on organized crime and racketeering (EC 2022). The proposal highlights the need for effective asset tracing and identification. The EU has also expanded the list of criteria for conduct that would constitute a crime, adding the violation or evasion of sanctions (Council 2022). It emphasizes sanctions evasion as the main justification for asset seizure. As of November 2022, EU countries had frozen around €18.9bn-worth of Russian private assets (Criddle 2023). Like the US, the EU is wary of pursuing Russian sovereign assets. The concerns about the role of the euro as a reserve currency are not as important as in the US with the dollar, but I have noted previously that the EU officials are keen to maintain the moral high ground and avoid distorting international law to fit their foreign-policy objectives the way authoritarian states do (Vučić 2021). Their bottom line is to ensure that any EU legal framework for seizure can withstand a legal challenge by the Russian state. Germany also wants to avoid setting a precedent for state immunity whereby the Greek, Italian, or Polish governments might seek reparations for Second World War forfeitures (Shagina 2023).

Despite the limited legal room for maneuver, however, there seems to be considerable enthusiasm within the EU to explore all feasible options. Under the Swedish presidency, a new working group has been set up at the Council of the European Union to "carry out a legal, financial, economic and political analysis of the possibilities of using frozen Russian assets" (Sweden 2023). The European Commission has suggested creating a trust fund through which to invest Russian foreign reserves for rebuilding Ukraine. In the short term, the ownership of the assets would not change, thus bypassing the issue of state immunity. It is unclear whether the fund would

be centralized at the EU, decentralized at the member state level, or placed in a third country like Switzerland, and how seized sovereign assets would be channeled to Ukraine. In the longer term, the CBR reserves would be returned upon negotiated settlement and Russia's payment in full of agreed compensation to Ukraine.

While the trust fund is inventive, it remains unclear what would happen if the trust investments generated losses, potentially putting the EU in the awkward position of having to guarantee Russian sovereign assets with EU public money. The long-term solution also seems to exaggerate the leverage that immobilized Russian central bank assets would afford the West in compelling Russia to reach a peace agreement. Due to record-high energy prices last year, Russia accumulated about \$250bn from the export of hydrocarbons – almost the equivalent of its immobilized assets. In addition, the EU mechanism would rely strongly on Russia abiding by the rules and paying reparations to Ukraine against the backdrop of a raft of flagrant Russian violations of international law.

Canada is the only G7 country to have amended its legislation to allow for the seizure of assets. Under the amendments, the proceeds of the forfeited property can be used for the reconstruction of a foreign state to the extent that it is adversely affected by a grave breach of international peace and security, and the proceeds are needed to restore pre-conflict conditions and compensate victims. Thus, Canada's new powers allow it to go after Russia's central bank assets, which amount to almost C\$20bn (Kaminga 2023).

Sovereign immunity

Sovereign immunity comprises two different concepts: immunity from jurisdiction and immunity from enforcement (ICJ 2012, 113). Immunity from jurisdiction prevents domestic courts of one state from establishing jurisdiction over another state (Fox & Webb 2015, 75). Immunity from execution prevents a state from coercing another state to enforce a decision by a domestic court (Ibid, 484). Sovereign immunity as a rule of international law is of a customary nature and has been developed in state practice for a considerable time (ICJ 2012, 56; Jennings & Watts 2008, 342). More recent times have seen its codification in the United Nations Convention on the Jurisdictional Immunities of States adopted by the UNGA in 2004 (UNCIS 2004). The UNCIS is not yet in force, however, at least some of its provisions are a reflection of existing customary law (Salvati 2022). Given that the majority of states that propose the confiscation are members of the Council

of Europe, it is important to mention the European Convention on State Immunity (ECSI 1972), adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972. Some of those states have also enacted national statutes to implement international obligations on state immunity protection (Wuerth 2019).

According to the proposals on the table, it is the executive and not the judiciary that orders the seizure of sovereign assets (Shagina 2023). This also means that the enforcement of the decision does not relate to court proceedings. It is based on extrajudicial proceedings. The distinction is important since the explicit focus of existing rules on immunity from the judiciary's jurisdiction leaves a legal loophole when it comes to the executive's jurisdiction. In a landmark case, the International Court of Justice defined immunity from jurisdiction as "the right of a state not to be the subject of judicial proceedings in the courts of another state", and referred to the immunity from enforcement only in the context of court proceedings (ICJ 2012, 113, 114). However, the ICJ's approach is only logical since the facts of the case only related to court proceedings: on the one hand, the case concerned judgments rendered by the national courts of Italy and Greece against Germany, and, on the other hand, enforcement measures against assets of Germany for executing these judgments. The ICJ simply did not have to discuss whether state immunity applies in extrajudicial proceedings and there is no indication that the reasoning would be any different.

Regarding the immunity from jurisdiction, Art. 5 UNCSI stipulates that "[a] state enjoys immunity, in respect of itself and its property, from the jurisdiction of the courts of another state". Regarding the immunity from execution, Art. 18 and 19 UNCSI provide that neither pre-judgment nor post-judgment measures of constraint "may be taken in connection with a proceeding before a court of another state". It would seem, thus, at first glance, that the definition is a narrow one. Yet, it is important to note that the treaty defines the term "court" as "any organ of a state, however named, entitled to exercise judicial functions (UNCSI 2004, Art. 2(1)). The position of the organ that decides on the confiscation in the political system of a state is not relevant, therefore, but the nature of the function it exercises through the act of confiscation is, so the executive organ might still qualify as a court, and be bound by the immunity prohibitions.

This wide interpretation is in nature with the purpose of the sovereign immunity rule in international law. Sovereign immunity derives from the principle of the sovereign equality of states. This principle is enshrined in the UN Charter. It stipulates that "the Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members" (UN 1945, Art. 2(1)). Sovereign

equality represents the essence of the international legal order. Whereas states differ in the military power, wealth, population, or the territory they possess, they are equal from a legal point of view. If they are equal, it follows that a state cannot decide upon another state - *par in parem non habet imperium* - as the old Latin maxim goes (De Vattel 1758, 105). By shielding a state from the jurisdiction and measures of enforcement by another state, state immunity protects the principle of the sovereign equality of states. This facilitates international cooperation as it helps reduce friction among states.

Still, there are precedents of states seizing assets of other states in extrajudicial proceedings in times of war. Yet, in peacetime, states generally abstain from seizing assets of other states in extrajudicial proceedings (Egli 2023, 32). By contrast, the situation looks different when it comes to the practice of sanctions. States have increasingly used the tool of financial sanctions against other states (Ruys 2019, 671). Sanctions are the domain of the executive and legislative branches of states and have a coercive character. Thus, they entail measures of constraints in extrajudicial proceedings. The practice of sanctions shows that at least some states engage in exercising jurisdiction and the application of measures of constraints against other states in extrajudicial proceedings. However, the legal basis for sanctions must be provided in another binding act of international law, such as a UN Security Council resolution empowering those states to perform sanctions. Otherwise, sanctions are only a unilateral measure of diplomatic pressure staying outside the realm of international law. This is because the unilateral application of international law endangers reciprocity and equality and undermines the whole system. The same argument can be used to oppose those scholars who claim that „it is time to revisit sovereign immunities to interpret and apply them in a manner that complies with international human rights law“, adding that in the context of the Ukraine war and Russia's role as the attacker: „one may reasonably doubt the legitimacy of the sovereign immunity rule as far as it prevents compensation for serious human rights violations such as thousands of recorded civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of destroyed residential buildings“ (Chernohorenko 2023, 1070-1071). These arguments suffer from the same deficiencies that burdened the concept of humanitarian intervention, once a popular instrument to intervene in a conflict by the Western powers – they are simply out of touch with the system and nature of international law, since they would suppose one state taking in its hands the role of the judge and the executor against another state which is its equal (Vučić 2018).

Non-interference

The non-interference rule in international law prohibits “forcible or dictatorial interference by a state in the affairs of another state, calculated to impose certain conduct or consequences on that other state” (Jennings & Watts 2008, 430). In our present analysis, the question arises whether the seizure of the CBR assets by another state’s organs constitutes an intervention in the affairs of Russia and is thus prohibited under international law.

Like the principle of state immunity, the prohibition of intervention is rooted in the principle of sovereign equality of states. If states are equal, it follows that a state is not allowed to interfere in the affairs of another state. The prohibition of intervention can be understood as a principle that, at least in a rudimentary fashion, coordinates the coexistence of sovereign states. In this sense, the sovereignty of a state ends where the sovereignty of another state begins. The prohibition of intervention has evolved as a rule of customary international law and it was finally incorporated into the UN Charter (Art. 2(7)). Its most succinct definition was provided again by the ICJ in another seminal judgment: „The principle forbids all states or groups of states to intervene directly or indirectly in internal or external affairs of other states. A prohibited intervention must accordingly be one bearing on matters in which each state is permitted, by the principle of state sovereignty to decide freely. Intervention is wrongful when it uses methods of coercion in regard to such choices, which must remain free ones” (ICJ 1984, 205). Two elements of the definition are essential: the intervention interferes with the freedom of another state; the intervention is coercive.

Another state’s freedom is usually described in theory as the domain where a state has the exclusive rights to make decisions - *domaine réservé* (Tzanakopoulos 2015, 621). Interference in the exclusive domain can be direct or indirect and based on positive as well as negative acts (Ibid). The exclusive domain is somewhat difficult to define. It comprises all matters not regulated by international law and thus is the sole responsibility of a state (Egli 2023, 20). Since states differ in their international obligations, the exclusive domain is not the same for every state. The ICJ held that the *domaine réservé* includes “the choice of a political, economic, social and cultural system, and the formulation of foreign policy” (ICJ 1984, 205).

Interference by a state in the exclusive domain of another state must be accompanied by coercion, which should be distinguished from mere pressure exertion (Tzanakopoulos 2015, 620). Coercion exists in the case of the use of

force. This holds both in the case of using force directly as well as in the case of indirectly using force by supporting armed activities in another state operating against the government of this state (ICJ 1984, 205). However, not only the military force but also economic, political, or diplomatic measures can qualify as coercion if they achieve the required coercive effect. Again, as with the notion of the “court”, the definition is functional. This understanding acknowledges that instead of relying on brute force, there exist more subtle ways to coerce another state. The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States under the Charter of the United Nations adopted by the UNGA takes up this approach by stating that “no state may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another state to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign rights and to secure from it advantages of any kind” (UNGA 1971). However, it can be hard to distinguish between, on the one hand, a state pursuing economic interests that affect the exclusive domain of another state and, on the other hand, a state using its economic power to impose decisions on a state concerning a matter where this state is entitled to freely make its own decision.

The seizure of CBR’s assets, therefore, might constitute a prohibited intervention if this measure coercively interferes in the exclusive domain of the Russian Federation. In other words, an intervention exists if the seizure of assets imposes a decision on Russia regarding a matter where Russia is entitled to decide freely under international law. If states permanently deprive Russia of certain assets located on their territory for the payment of reparations, they impose these payments on Russia. This is coercive. The issue turns around to whether is then Russia obliged to pay reparations to Ukraine. If there is an international obligation for Russia to pay, Russia cannot decide freely whether it wishes to pay or not but would be obliged to pay reparations under international law.

Therefore, it is crucial that the authority of a state that adopts the decision to deprive Russia of certain assets carefully evaluates the extent of Russia’s obligation to pay reparations. In other words, Russian responsibility for an internationally wrongful act should be established first by a court decision. Furthermore, a state must consider to which extent Russia has already fulfilled its obligations, notably because authorities of other states might already have adopted measures to deprive Russia of certain assets. This shows that the allies of Ukraine must work together. If they go beyond the enforcement of Russia’s international obligations, the seizure of assets of Russia becomes a prohibited intervention.

Investment protection

International investment law aims to protect foreign investments, which means investments in a state (the capital-importing state) made by investors from another state (the capital-exporting state) (Collins 2016). There are only relatively few multilateral treaties protecting foreign investments. Bilateral investment treaties (BITs) are the main source of international investment law (Ibid) BITs regulate how investments by a foreign investor are treated, the so-called “post-establishment provisions”, and, in some cases, under which condition a foreign investor is allowed to invest in the first place (“pre-establishment provisions”) (Ibid).

One of the post-establishment provisions is the key for the present analysis, namely the prohibition of expropriation of foreign investors by the host state. The main idea of international investment law is to ensure legal security for the investors and therefore enable the free flow of capital globally. States conclude BITs because, on the one hand, they are interested in attracting investments from abroad and, on the other hand, they wish that investments of their nationals are protected in other countries, that is they expect reciprocity in the treatment of investors. The scope of BITs depends on how they define the terms “investor” and “investment”. As each BIT is the result of negotiations between two states, BITs comprise different definitions of those terms. Therefore, the scope of BITs requires a case-by-case analysis.

Russia has concluded 85 BITs of which 64 are in force – those in force include BITs with almost all member states of the EU as well as Canada, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, and the UK (UNCTAD 2024). On the other hand, the BIT signed between Russia and the USA in 1992 never entered into force. For the present analysis, due to constraints of time and space, not all relevant BITs will be analyzed. The proper analysis would have to take into account all BITs between the Russian Federation and allies of Ukraine that are planning on confiscating the CBR’s assets. It is the opinion of this author that it suffices to take one BIT as an example and a case study. The decision was made to take as a case study the BIT between Russia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 1989 (UK BIT 1989). This BIT was concluded by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as the predecessor of the Russian Federation. After its disintegration in 1991, the newly emerged Russian Federation succeeded in all international treaty obligations of the USSR. Therefore, the BIT is still in force. Although it is a model treaty, it was adopted at the time when the USSR was starting to fall apart and its strength in international relations was

on decline. The provisions agreed upon, and obligations assumed by the UK reflect the minimum standards it believed should be afforded to a country that was desperate to start its economic transition to the free market. If the UK would breach any of its provisions in the attempt to confiscate CBR's assets it would represent a blatant disregard for minimum standards of foreign investment protection.

The first issue that needs to be clarified is whether the BIT with the UK protects the foreign reserves of the CBR. at all. Let us analyze the scope *ratione personae* of the BIT. According to Art. 1, the term "investor" shall comprise with regard to either Contracting Party:

- i) natural persons having the citizenship or nationality of that Contracting Party in accordance with its laws;
- ii) any corporations, companies, firms, enterprises, organizations, and associations incorporated or constituted under the law in force in the territory of that Contracting Party; provided that that natural person, corporation, company, firm, enterprise, organization, and association is competent, in accordance with the laws of that Contracting Party, to make investments in the territory of the other Contracting Party".

The BIT with the UK differentiates between natural persons and legal persons. Regarding legal persons, the BIT lists seven structures that are protected. Furthermore, it is required that these structures are lawfully incorporated or constituted in one of the contracting states. The BIT does not indicate whether a state itself or state entities can qualify as investors. In this regard, this treaty is no exception. The great majority of BITs do not make any reference to states or state entities as investors (Qureshi & Ziegler 2019, 25). It is rare that BITs explicitly include or exclude states or state entities. Let us take for example another BIT concluded by the UK, this time with the United Arab Emirates. In Article 1(b), the term "investor" is defined as "any national or company of one of the Contracting Parties or the Government of one of the Contracting Parties, or the Government of any of the Emirates of the United Arab Emirates" (UK BIT 1992). In the absence of an explicit rule, a BIT must be interpreted to establish its scope. As for other treaties, Art. 31 and 32 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) serve as the guidelines for interpretation (VCLT 1969). According to Art. 31 par. 1 VCLT, a "treaty shall be interpreted in good faith in accordance with the ordinary meaning to be given to the terms of the treaty in their context and in the light of its object and purpose".

Thus, three different methods of treaty interpretation can be distinguished: textual interpretation (the ordinary meaning), systematic

interpretation (the context), and teleological interpretation (the object and purpose) (Vučić & Đukanović 2024, 31). Regarding the CBR, it is doubtful to qualify it as a “corporation”, “company”, “firm”, “enterprise” or “association”. However, the CBR might be considered an “organisation” in the ordinary sense of the term. Furthermore, the treaty does not make any distinction whether the entity is of a private or public nature. Thus, the CBR can be considered as covered based on a textual interpretation of the BIT.

The systematic interpretation requires considering the context of a treaty, including the entire text as well as the preamble and annexes. The preamble of the BIT with the UK states that the contracting parties are “recognizing that the promotion and reciprocal protection under an international agreement of such investments will be conducive to the stimulation of business initiative and will contribute to the development of economic relations between the two states”. The wording is very broad. It does not provide any hints that the treaty should be limited to private investors.

Regarding the object and purpose of the treaty at hand, it is instructive to consider its historical context. The treaty was concluded by the USSR in 1989. The USSR was based on a communist model. According to Soviet law, only the state could have ownership of significant property (Annacker 2011, 539). If the BIT concluded by the USSR in 1989 had not covered the state and state entities, the treaty would have offered no protection to Soviet investments, given that at this time only state entities made such investments abroad. In conclusion, given the broad wording of the treaty and the historical context, it seems plausible that Russia and its entities (including the CBR) qualify as investors under the BIT.

But one issue remains to be clarified. Is it possible for a state or state entity to also qualify as an investor if it does not act like a private actor in a commercial context but exercises sovereign functions? This issue is a subject of some discussion in international investment law doctrine, because state-owned enterprises (SOEs) play an increasingly crucial role in the global economy as foreign investors (El-Hosseny 2016). In principle, the CBR is a “juridical person” that may qualify as a “national of another Contracting State” within the meaning of Article 25 of the ICSID Convention (ICSID 1965). A central bank from an ICSID Contracting State that invested in another Contracting State should, *a priori*, be entitled to standing before the Centre for the settlement of investment disputes. One of the lead drafters of the ICSID Convention, Aron Broches, confirmed that SOE claims against states under the Convention should be permissible provided that the SOE was not “acting as an agent for the government” or “discharging an essentially governmental

function” (El-Hosseny 2016, 375). This statement has become known as the “Broches test”. The application of the Broches test in the CBR’s case depends on whether the nature of the acts performed by it was commercial (*jure gestionis*) or governmental (*jure imperii*). If one follows these considerations, the CBR does not qualify as an investor under the BIT with the UK. The CBR is entrusted with the task of issuing currency and protecting the Russian rouble. The assets invested by the CBR abroad are used as reserves for protecting the stability of the rouble. Thus, the CBR exercises a governmental function. It is therefore not protected under the treaty with the UK.

However, the Broches test was claimed to be on the ebb in international investment law already in the middle of the last decade (El-Hosseny 2016). It is doubtful whether an investment tribunal in a future case led by Russia to recover the CBR’s assets would follow it. It is not a customary or a treaty rule of international law, not even a binding precedent, but rather an authoritative interpretation by one of the principal creators of the ICSID convention. Furthermore, the open-ended nature of BIT interpretation, which takes into account myriad factors, not excluding the *travaux-préparatoires* and the subsequent practice by the parties (Vučić & Đukanović 2024), “forbids too categorical an assessment of how any given BIT dispute would turn out (Moiseienko 2024, 32).

Finally, international customary law of foreign investments only includes the so-called international minimum standard. This is a set of rules governing the treatment of aliens (Dickerson 2010, 1). The minimum standard has developed concerning the status of aliens in general and concerns various areas. It includes rules protecting the property of aliens. In particular, it prescribes that expropriation is only allowed if certain requirements are fulfilled (Hobe 2015, 7). The question is who qualifies as an alien and is thus protected by the minimum standard. Aliens are individuals who reside within a state but are not citizens or subjects of that state (Dickerson 2010, 2). Furthermore, foreign legal persons can also qualify as aliens (Hobe 2015, 8). The minimum standard might protect states and state entities when their acts are commercial. By contrast, it is not plausible that they enjoy protection under the minimum standard if exercising sovereign authority.

Conclusions

The article focused on the proposals to confiscate frozen sovereign assets of the Russian Federation and the legal obstacles to these proposals. The first part of the article presented various proposals in the US, UK, the EU, and

Canada, some of which have already become law, to interfere with the foreign assets of Russian individuals and entities. CBR's sovereign assets have already been encroached upon by the law in Canada and it might be expected that the analogous situation would develop in the rest of these countries. No matter the particular legislative concept, all of these acts would have to cope with the obstacles presented by international legal rules.

The Central Bank of Russia, which had previously managed these funds is a part of the Russian state and it enjoys sovereign immunity from the jurisdiction and enforcement of another state. The second part of the article presented the contents and purpose of this concept in international law and it reached a conclusion based on the analysis of customary international law, and general and regional treaties.

The CBR functions as an entity that conducts monetary policy, part of the exclusive domain of the Russian Federation, and therefore any interference that would prevent the CBR from performing this function would breach the rule of non-interference. The third part of the article presented the contents and the purpose of the concepts of exclusive domain and non-interference. State practice and available treaties were used to conclude.

Finally, even if it is assumed that the CBR is a separate entity from the Russian state that performs commercial functions that do not fall under sovereign immunity or non-interference protection, existing rules on investment protection in international law regulate against any confiscation since it would amount to illegal expropriation and alien mistreatment. The fourth part explored this argument through the case study of the UK-USSR BIT and principles of international investment law.

Any proposal to confiscate the sovereign assets thus inevitably reaches the same dead-end – existing rules of international law that serve to create free trade and investment community of states. The very same states and entities that have inspired the creation of such a community, the USA, the UK, and the EU would now attempt to undermine it and thus provoke long-term instability in international relations. Indeed as one author notes: “The justice of making Russia pay for the reconstruction of Ukraine seems undeniable. Yet using the invasion as a pretext for erasing Russian property rights without regard to due process and the rule of law, international law included, would undermine the enterprise” (Stephan 2022, 287). It would be hard to expect other states to continue investing and trading from their bank accounts held in foreign countries since legal security would be utterly shattered after such a confiscation. Finally, the Russian Federation can one day surely be expected to initiate legal proceedings to recover the

confiscated funds. The money would then already have been spent and the US's, UK's, EU's, and other Western taxpayers would have to pay the damages, loss of interest and costs of proceedings from their own pockets.

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Part II
EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE
AND REGIONAL RELATIONS

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE IN UNITED STATES STRATEGIC VISION

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Abstract: Central and Eastern Europe is relatively one of the youngest regions in the world in the foreign policy strategic planning of the United States. Despite having established formal diplomatic relations with countries of this region many decades or in some cases a century ago, the nature of the relations between the U.S. and them was largely defined in the new post-Cold war era. Over the last thirty-five years the international relations in this region went from a highly structured logic of bipolar confrontation between the United States-led Western block and the Soviet-led Eastern block to a more complex set of relations within the framework of the European Union, NATO, and outside these organizations. Such qualitative transformation of relations in the region – from the Cold war, to a period of peaceful cooperation, and then again to a new confrontation between the U.S., China and Russia raises a serious research question – how the United States has been defining and building up their relations with the vast number of very different countries in the new international relations contexts. The paper will try to formulate the functional value of the relations with regional countries for the strategic imperatives of the United States. In order to determine that the author will analyze the evolution of diplomatic and political relations, investments and trade dynamics, military cooperation and strategic significance of those relations for American regional security interests. This research of the U.S. foreign policy practices towards the Central and Eastern Europe will try to formulate what are the main factors that served as a driving force of the development of those relations, and to understand the scale of how those policies are dependent on the U.S. strategic imperatives towards Russia, China, or major European allies.

Keywords: United States, US foreign policy, liberal world order, Central and Eastern Europe, Balkans, Russia, European Union, NATO.

Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Europe for the United States has been playing a crucial role throughout all the history of this country. From almost all aspects of social and international life the so-called Old World has in large scale determined the inception of the most powerful country not only in the New one, but eventually in the whole world. The European influence embraced in its philosophy, religion, strategic culture, political regimes as well as a great number of conflicts, wars and other problems served as important factors for the establishment of a large migration flows into North America, the design of the United States government and all future logic of its behavior. For the biggest part of the American existence the events on the European continent and foreign policy of its powers have defined the long-term strategic interests of the United States first on the regional, hemispheric, but then on the global spheres.

The XXI century brought to this state of affairs an absolutely new quality, previously not seen for more than two hundred years. The global economic, political, technological and in some part military rise of China has seriously shifted the global focus of the United States foreign policy from the West towards the East. Of course, it would be inaccurate to say, that the European vector of the United States foreign policy, that has been systemically significant from the beginning, faded into the background. The deep crisis of European security architecture, the degradation Russian American relations and the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict still has a very dangerous and glooming perspective to affect not only regional, but global affairs and thus the American national interest. China's evolution of national might as well as its macroregional Belt and Road Initiative and global vision of "the Community with a shared future for mankind" gave Beijing such qualitatively new posture in the international relations system, that Washington under the presidency of Donald J. Trump for the first time officially categorized these processes as a systemic and long-term challenge (National Security Strategy, 2017, p. 25).

At the same time this globally significant change in the United States strategic goal setting was not the only one that had seriously influenced the long-term nature of the American-European relations. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw pact and other socialist states the substantive structure of regional affairs shifted in a such drastic scope, that it still continues to heavily influence the U.S. foreign policy in the continent. The end of socialist rule at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s eventually gave birth to new 19 independent countries, thus creating a new political space, that

was not heavily integrated in neither any economic, nor military multilateral organizations.

This situation also created a new front in the United States foreign policy, which required developing a new strategic planning approaches towards this subregion. Despite having a lot of common history and problems of post-socialist development, these newly independent Central and Eastern European countries came from quite distinct and different structural background: Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania were former Soviet Republics, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria were former members of the Warsaw pact, and Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia were once part of the united Yugoslavia.

This moment in history was a bifurcation point in the the U.S. foreign policy and posed a new serious challenge to its future evolution in the most important region in the world. First of all, it raised a serious question for the American political establishment – what would be the main functional value of this new set of relations with newly independent states? How did the U.S. strategic imperatives change over time during the post-Cold war era and with the start of new confrontation with China and Russia? And, finally, would it accurate to presume that main factors that fueled the development of bilateral relation between the United States and these countries were predominantly exogenous? Were there some serious endogenous reasons that shaped the structure and nature of those relations? Developing an understanding of the structural significance of this new political region in Central and Eastern Europe could bring more clarity about what the main contradictions and problems are, that could seriously pose the stability of European security architecture in the nearby future.

The inception of fundamental approaches

Throughout all the initial part of the United States history Washington's attention towards the European continent was first of all focused on major Great Power empires, while all those peoples and nations that were under their domain in the region did not present any systemically significant interest for the first democracy. During the so-called isolationist period of the American foreign policy towards the Old-World Washington was quite consistent in following its approach of not intervening into European affairs, wars and conflicts in order not harm its newly born republic. Even despite having conceptual disagreements with the social order of European

monarchies at that time, the United States was not eager to support diplomatically, militarily or by any other deeds political forces they vocally sympathized with (Wilson, 1917).

This approach clearly manifested itself during the Hungarian war of independence of 1848-1849, when the 12th American president Zachary Taylor despite all the compassion to the Hungarians did not deviate from the established approach. In his 1849 annual address before Congress, he stated: "... During the late conflict between Austria and Hungary there seemed to be a prospect that the latter might become an independent nation. However faint that prospect at the time appeared, I thought it my duty, in accordance with the general sentiment of the American people, who deeply sympathized with the Magyar patriots, to stand prepared, upon the contingency of the establishment by her of a permanent government, to be the first to welcome independent Hungary into the family of nations. ... The powerful intervention of Russia in the contest extinguished the hopes of the struggling Magyars. The United States did not at any time interfere in the contest, but the feelings of the nation were strongly enlisted in the cause, and by the sufferings of a brave people, who had made a gallant, though unsuccessful, effort to be free." (Taylor, 1849).

The establishment of bilateral relations with new nations was a step-by-step process, that was reactive to the gradual dissolution of European empires. The first wave of recognition came after the end of the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-78. In 1880 Washington established diplomatic relation with Romania (gained independence in 1877), then in 1881 – with Serbia (1878), in 1903 – with Bulgaria (de-facto was autonomous 1878), and finally in 1905 – with Montenegro (1878). Nevertheless, this moment in history does not reflect a formation of a perception of these new states as a new specific and unique political space on the continent. The American diplomacy was first of all focused on the issues of diplomatic significance (the establishment of the relations and the signing of international agreements), while in some part Washington saw some opportunity in developing new trade roots with the Near Eastern markets (Hayes, 1879; Hayes, 1880; Arthur, 1883; Taft, 1910). Yet once again, when Turkey broke out the war with Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia Washington limited its participation to only providing safeguard and humanitarian aid when it was needed. As at that time the U.S. President William H. Taft stated, "the United States has happily been involved neither directly nor indirectly with the causes or questions incident to any of these hostilities and has maintained in regard

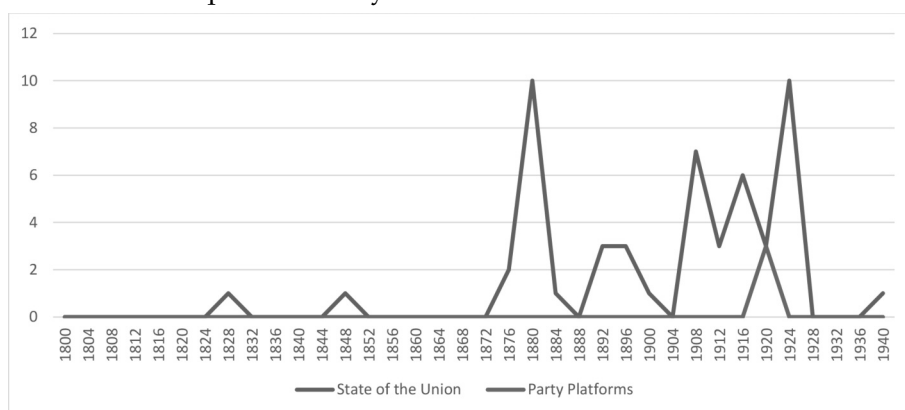
to them an attitude of absolute neutrality and of complete political disinterestedness..." (Taft, 1912).

The next wave happened right after the end of the First World War with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and the Russian Empires. In 1919 the United States established relations with Poland (became independent in 1918), Czechoslovakia (1918), in 1921 with Hungary (1918), and in 1922 with Albania (1912), and the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (all became independent in 1918). Thus, after the war the new map of Europe included more than a dozen of new nations, who gained their independence within the lifetime of one or two generations of their citizens, creating a de-facto new subregion and political space composed of Central and Eastern European countries.

Nevertheless, this huge change in the European landscape did not in any serious manner change the overall American strategical perception of the continent in general or the subregion in particular. During the war president W. Wilson even tried to stimulate the closest German ally the Austrians to make a separate peace by saying in his 1917 State of the Union address that the United States will not "...in any way to impair or to rearrange the Austro-Hungarian Empire" (Wilson, 1917). W. Wilson did invest a lot of energy to guarantee independence of new countries, as well as he put serious effort into the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (Wolff, 2020), but he did not stand in favor of the principle of self-determination over peace in Europe and in the world (Wilson, 1918). Washington considered newly independent nations no more than yet another member of "the family of European States" without deeply delving into the specifics about each of them in order to restructure the regional affairs for its own benefit (Thompson, 2013, pp. 61-62). A very symptomatic example of that trend was demonstrated a couple of years later, when the new administration of the republican president C. Coolidge was primarily requiring these new countries nothing else, but to pay their financial debts: "I am opposed to the cancellation of these debts and believe it for the best welfare of the world that they should be liquidated and paid as fast as possible. I do not favor oppressive measures, but unless money that is borrowed is repaid credit can not be secured in time of necessity, and there exists besides a moral obligation which our country can not ignore and no other country can evade. Terms and conditions may have to conform to differences in the financial abilities of the countries concerned, but the principle that each country should meet its obligation admits of no differences and is of universal application." (Coolidge, 1924; Coolidge, 1925).

Therefore, up until the Second World War the United States did not have any specific role designated withing its strategic planning logic to the Central and Eastern European countries, and Washington had little interest in developing strong ties with these nations. Unlike other European countries, these new states or any matters related to them were never reflected in the internal political processes within the American establishment: the Democratic party congratulated the newly independent nations only in its 1920 party platform (Figure 1) (Democratic party, 1920).

Figure 1. Number of mentioning of Central and Eastern European nations in the annual State of the Union address and quadrennial democratic and republican Party Platforms from 1800 to 1940.



Source: The American Presidency project.

Note: countries in search are Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia (Czechia and Slovakia), Hungary, Romania, Albania Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia (Yugoslavia), North Macedonia.

The start of bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union served as a serious catalyzer for the formation of first U.S. foreign political approaches towards the Central and Eastern European countries. The establishment of socialist regimes in this political space led to a formulation the first U.S. foreign region-wide political approach as a part of a more general containment strategy to address the Soviet expiation further in Europe and around the world (Truman, 1951).

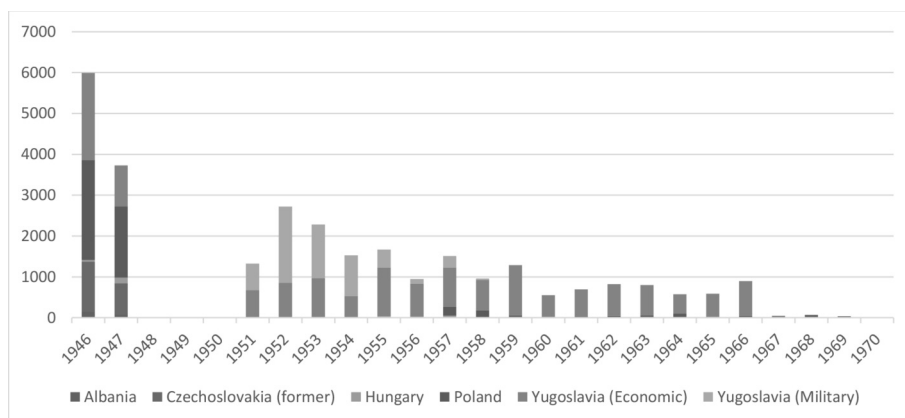
Under the Truman presidency the rise of strategic importance of the Central and Eastern European countries was reflected not only in the work of the governmental institutions, but also in the platforms of both Democratic and Republican parties, which showed their deep anxiety with the unfolding situation. If twenty years before the predominant mood in the American establishment was to steadily follow the noninterventionist approach, now the bipartisan consensus favored a more pro-active foreign policy in almost every corner of the world (Republican Party, 1952), and with regard to Central and Eastern Europe in particular it advocated that the United States must assume the mission to liberate its peoples. "We look forward to the day when the liberties of Poland and the other oppressed Soviet satellites, including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia and other nations in Asia under Soviet domination, will be restored to them and they can again take their rightful place in the community of free nations." (Democratic party, 1952).

At first in 1946 and 1947 the United States had provided a record amount of foreign assistance through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – \$9,7 billion (in constant 2020 U.S. dollars), a number that hadn't been surpassed ever since. The assistance was sent only to five countries: Poland (\$4,1 billion), Yugoslavia (\$3,1 billion), Czechoslovakia (\$1,9 billion), Albania (\$214 million) and Hungary (\$183 million) (Foreign Assistance, 2024). With the start of the Marshal plan the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes declined to participate in this program, assuming it might lead to an increase of American influence over the Eastern Europe (Britannica, 2024a). The eventual Moscow's initiative to create a multilateral economic organization called the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance seriously alarmed the U.S. foreign policy officials, that started to advocate a readjustment of the U.S. its economic policies towards the Soviet block by tightening export-import control over luxury, U.S. machinery, and stimulating the conditions for the so-called brain drain (Kohler, 1949). Thus, Washington addressed its assistance funds to countries with no or disputable communist influence (like Greece), which in conjunction with Truman's ideological doctrine and the establishment of NATO laid the foundations of the U.S. dominance in Western and partly in Southern Europe (Folly, 2013, pp. 93-94).

One of the crucial events that undermined Moscow's long-term expansion in the region was the aggravation of Soviet-Yugoslavian relations due to an argument between Stalin and Tito over the latter's influence in the Balkans, and especially over Albania (Perović, 2007). It not only limited

Yugoslavia's participation in the civil war in Greece, which had great strategic importance for the U.S. (Truman, 1947). Even before the formal breakup of diplomatic ties, while the bilateral crisis was taking place, the United States had immediately started to develop plans for the enhancement of economic relationships with Belgrade (Gannon, 1949). That crisis seriously undermined mutual trust between the USSR and Yugoslavia, which could not be restored even after Stalin's death. Belgrade not only increased bilateral trade with Washington, but also the U.S. Congress passed the Yugoslav Emergency Relief Assistance Act of 1950 (Truman, 1950), which eventually from 1951 to 1966 provided Belgrade with \$12,5 billion of economic aid, and \$5,7 billion of military assistance (Figure 2) (Foreign Assistance, 2024). This context also helped to settle with the active participation of the United States a dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia about Trieste in 1954, which from the American strategic assessment seriously improved the security situation in the Mediterranean (Eisenhower, 1951).

Figure 2. The U.S. foreign assistance to Central and Eastern European countries from 1946 to 1970 in 2020 constant U.S. million dollars



Source: foreignassistance.gov

From offensive to cooperation

Throughout the 1950s and in the beginning of the 1960s the United States had been predominantly following the established strategy of containment and isolation of Eastern European socialist regimes (Britannica, 2024b). In the end of 1940s, the U.S. and 14 of its allies established the Coordinating

Committee on Multilateral Export Controls to regulate trade of dual-use goods and sensitive technologies with socialist states (Henshaw, 1993). In cohesion with this approach in 1951 Congress passed the Mutual Defense Assistance Control Act that prohibited assistance those who shipped goods of strategic importance to the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe (Public Law 82-212, 1951). At the same time in order to counter Moscow in the ideological field, Washington since early 1950s started broadcasting informational programs via a newly established Radio Free Europe (Hill, 2001).

Nevertheless, this set of economic, diplomatic, and ideological measures were not effective enough at the initial stage of the Cold war. The deterioration of economic conditions of the Eastern European societies didn't lead to the collapse of local governments or the deterioration of Moscow's power (Borhi, 1999). A vivid example of that was the suppression of the uprising in Hungary by Soviet military forces and Hungarian communist loyalists. Though it was condemned by the American political establishment (Republican Party, 1960; Democratic party, 1960), the United States could do little in that regard, but to help the refugees (Eisenhower, 1957), because Washington's potential intervention could lead to a military escalation with unforeseen consequences (The U.S. Department of State, 2001–2009).

The Hungarian events led to a start of readjustment of the U.S. foreign policy approaches towards the Central and Eastern countries. The conjunction of isolationist measures and "liberation policies" was not effective in influencing the strategic situation in the region. As in 1960 the future U.S. president stated on the Polish-American Congress: "We recognized after the experience of the 1960's the limitations of the so-called policy of liberation. We do not want to mislead the people of Poland or Hungary again, that the United States is prepared to liberate them. Therefore, within the general framework of present events, what policies should we carry out? ... Our task is to encourage and pursue a policy of patiently encouraging freedom and carefully pressuring tyranny, a policy that looks to evolution and not toward immediate revolution ... We must never, at the summit, in any treaty declaration, in our words or even in our minds, recognize the Soviet domination of eastern Europe as permanent" (Kennedy, 1960).

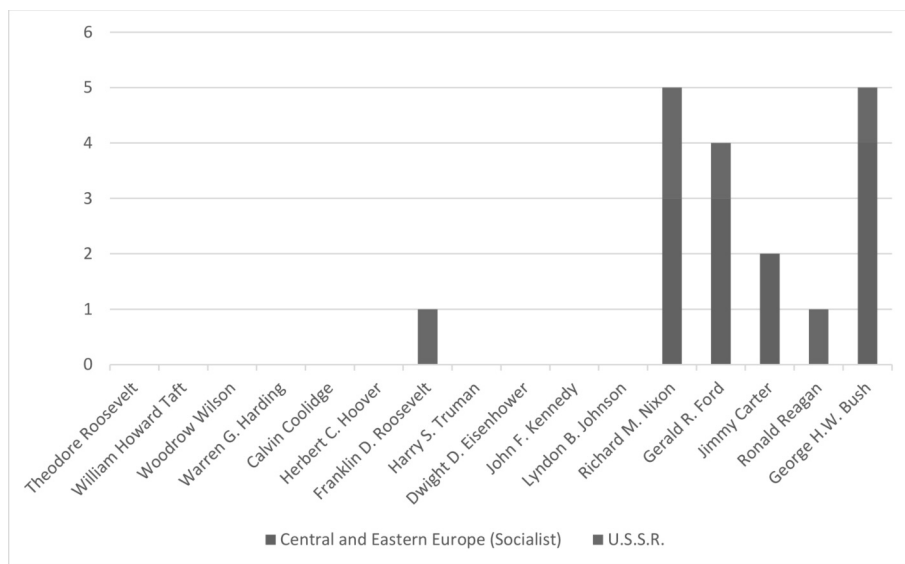
The acceptance that the status quo will not change in the foreseeable future although did not abort the liberation mission led to a gradual establishment in the U.S. foreign policy of the approach of building bridges and peaceful coexistence with socialist states in Europe (Kennan, 1960). Starting right after the Hungarian uprising from 1957 up until 1970 Poland became the second

after Yugoslavia major recipient of the U.S. economic assistance (predominantly agricultural), receiving throughout this period \$922,6 million U.S. dollars (in constant 2020 prices) (Foreign Assistance, 2024). At the same time, a start for a serious trade liberalization has been carried out in the 1960s by Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations. Within one decade the United States increased the volume of trade with major Comecon economies many times over. For example, from 1962 to 1972 the trade overflow with the Soviet Union increased from \$34,8 million to \$626,3 million U.S. dollars, with Poland – from \$41,5 million to \$236 million, with Hungary – from \$2,4 million to \$33,9 million (Atlas of Economic Complexity).

Nevertheless, the real qualitative change happened with the start of the so-called *Détente*. The start of the U.S. direct military involvement in the Vietnam war due to the failures of the Saigon government, the crush of Czechoslovakia's liberalization reforms (Democratic party, 1968), and most importantly the reach of the so nuclear parity between Moscow and Washington only endured the belief of the latter the need for change the U.S. approaches towards the Socialist block: "On occasions when a liberalization of trade in non-strategic goods with the captive nations can have this effect, it will have our support", said the Republican party platform in 1968 (Republican Party, 1968).

The rise of degree of openness laid the prerequisites for future restructuring of regional relations. The steps undertaken by the United States in the 1960s were quite humble with comparison to what was about to happen in the 1970s and 1980s. With the improvement of Soviet-American relations and the start of first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Washington engaging more actively with Eastern European countries. Under Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations the United States made its first official presidential visits to the sphere of the Socialist block: Romania (August 1969), Yugoslavia (September 1969), and only then the USSR (May 1972, Figure 3) (Travels Abroad of the President).

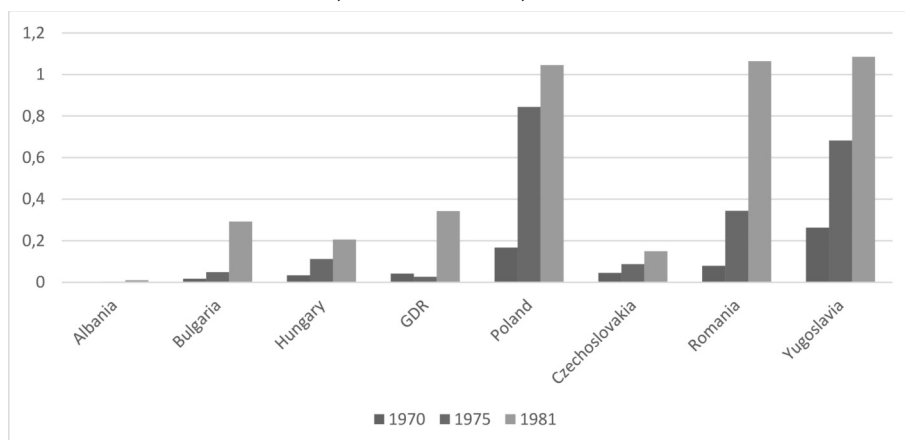
Figure 3. Number of official visits of the United States presidents to Central and Eastern European countries and to the Soviet Union from 1901 to 1993.



Source: The U.S. Department of State, the Office of the Historian.

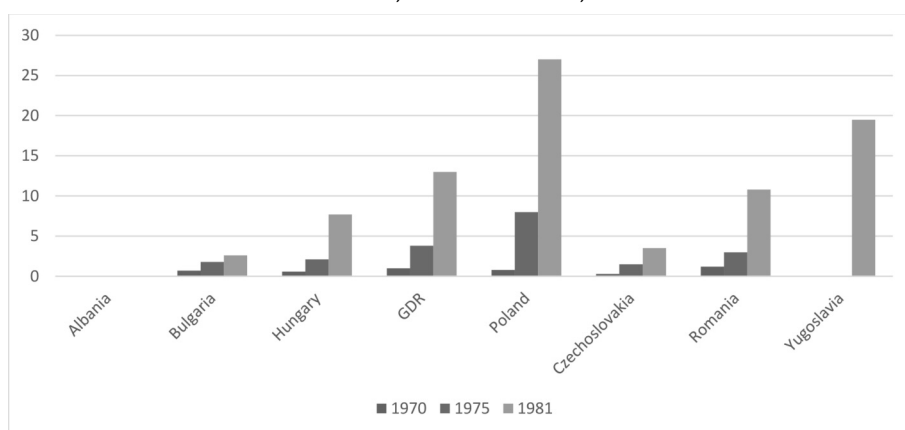
Perhaps one of the most important consequences of this liberalization was a critical rise of economic connectivity of socialist states with the U.S. and West in general. By the beginning of the 1980s the trade overflow between the United States and all Central and Eastern European countries had increased 6,4 times within one decade and became \$4,1 billion U.S. dollars (Figure 4), which sometimes accounted for 30 to 40% of their foreign trade (Morgan, Graham, 1982). More importantly, over the same time the soviet allies had tremendously increased their debt dependence on the United States by 18,2 times, reaching \$84 billion U.S. dollars (Figure 5) (Davydov, 1983, pp. 257-258). This burden on socialist economies was eventually even worsened by the inability of the Soviet Union to fulfill the demands of its allies even after the 1973-1974 energy crisis (De Groot, 2020).

Figure 4. The U.S. trade overflow with Central and Eastern European countries in 1970, 1976 and 1981, in billion U.S. dollars



Source: Calculations made by Yu. P. Davydov based on the Statistical Abstract of the United States, and the U.S. Department of Commerce data.

Figure 5. The debt levels of Central and Eastern European countries to the United States in 1970, 1976 and 1981, in billion U.S. dollars.



Source: Calculations made by Yu. P. Davydov based on the Statistical Abstract of the United States, and the U.S. Department of Commerce data.

The second Cold war and eventual restructuring

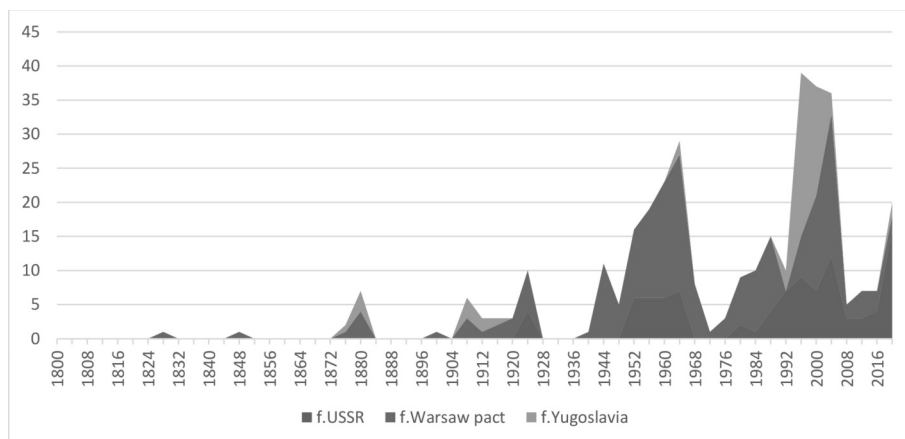
Another one of the most important legacies of the Détente era was the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. It established a formal framework for East-West international relations in a vast number of spheres of cooperation: diplomatic, scientific, economic cooperation. One crucial novation of this agreement was that the Helsinki Act obliged all signatory countries to stand for the defense of human rights in accordance with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including freedom of emigration, cultural exchanges and freedom of the press (Helsinki Final Act, 1975). Initially in 1948 the USSR, Belorussian SSR, Ukrainian SSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia abstained from voting on the acceptance of the Declaration by the United Nations General Assembly (Yearbook of the United Nations, 1948-1949, p. 530), but the inclusion of the so-called “Block III” in the Final act, that specifically stated the formal agreement with the Declaration, gave the United States a normative leverage on these socialist governments (Selvage, 2009, pp. 671-687).

This circumstance led to a significant change in the U.S. foreign policy with the arrival of Carter administration and especially during the Reagan presidency. Right after the admission of the Final act the U.S. Congress passed a law, that established a bipartisan Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1976, that specifically was focused on monitoring the compliance of its provisions by countries signatories (CSCE). The Department of State, the Agency for International Development and the U.S. Information Agency were specifically reformed to take more attention and to express condemnation and concern regarding the acts of human rights violation (Dumbrell, 2013, pp. 132-135; Carothers, 1999, p. 29). Finally, under the Reagan administration the United States established a new formally independent, but controlled by the government and Congress organization, directly specializing in supporting local civic organization and activist – the National Endowment for Democracy (Davydov, Pee, 2023).

Moreover, the United States made a significant shift back in their rhetoric and strategic thinking, by taking a more offensive approach towards the socialist block. In 1980 and 1984 the Republican party started emphasizing the need to liberate not only the Central and Eastern European countries, but also the peoples in the Soviet Union itself: “We stand in solidarity with the peoples of Eastern Europe: the Poles, Hungarians, East Germans, Czechs, Rumanians, Yugoslavs, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Baltic peoples, Armenians, and all captive nations who struggle daily against their Soviet

masters” (Republican Party, 1984). This became the harbinger of a new and largest wave of United States attention towards the region (Figure 6).

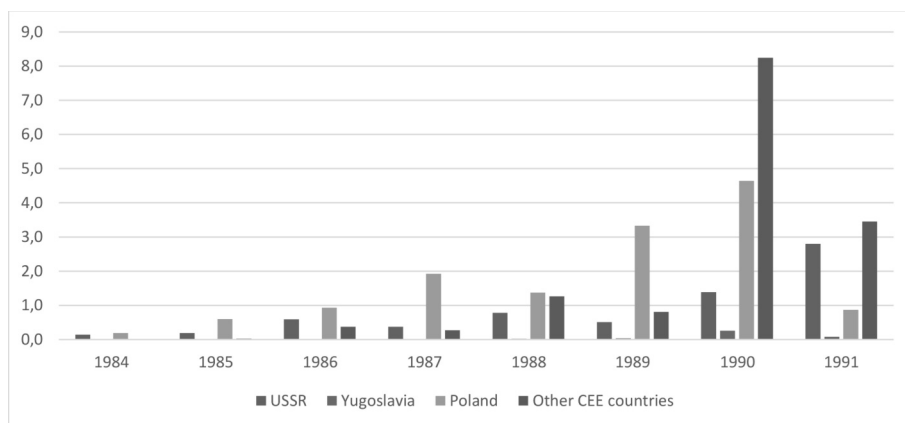
Figure 6. The numbers of mentioning of Central and Eastern European Countries in annual State of the Union addresses and Party Platforms from 1800 to 2022



Source: State of the Union addresses and Republican and Democratic Parties Platforms.

With this change in the U.S. strategy the new people’s upheaval in the region led to more active measures. In the period from 1984 to 1990, the main emphasis was placed on supporting anti-government movements in the Eastern European bloc, primarily in the Polish People’s Republic (Domber, 2019). The rise of the “Solidarnost” movement reinforced fears in Washington that Poland could become another Eastern European country for a Soviet invasion (Carter, 1981). Thus, through the conclusive part of the Cold war projects in Poland received almost 40% of all funding directed to the region. For comparison, \$13.9 million was allocated to Poland, \$17.7 million to the rest of the countries of the social bloc, while only \$4 million was allocated to projects throughout the Soviet Union (Figure 7) (NED, 1985–1992).

Figure 7. Financial flows of the National Endowment for Democracy projects in the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe for the period from 1984 to 1991.



Source: Annual National Endowment for Democracy reports

In the late 1980s NED started supporting projects on separatist issues within the USSR itself. The movement for independence was openly supported in the Baltic republics (from 1984 to 1991, funding amounted to 754 thousand dollars), in Armenia (70 thousand dollars), the Crimean Tatar movement (86,5 thousand dollars), various independent civil society organizations in the RSFSR (1 million dollars), in Ukraine (472 thousand dollars). By 1990 projects on the Soviet outskirts have reached such importance that in the annual reports of the NED the region "Europe" has even been named "Europe and the Soviet Republics" (NED, 1985-1992). Finally, in 1989 the U.S. Congress adopted Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Act in order to support for reforms and economic assistance to the region (Public Law 101-179, 1989).

The fall of Berlin wall, of socialist regimes in late 1980s and eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a strategically significant qualitative change in the structure of the of relations in Central and Eastern Europe. The core multilateral system of socialism was built first of all on the existence of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw pact, and cease of their existence created an organizational vacuum and largely undermined the emerging order, the spirit of which was embodied in Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The restructuring of regional relations in the logic of NATO expansion became the main stumbling block in bilateral relations between Russia and the United States, which had largely determined the whole subsequent logic of the U.S. strategy in the post-socialist space. The factual end of Cold War competition did not eradicate maybe the most significant by its long-term consequences product – a zero-sum logical framework. The dissolution of the Soviet pole could not stop the inertia of bipolar thinking model, and led to an almost automatic reaction of the American political class to support its unilateral expansion (Krauthammer, 1990). Right from the start of the new era the first U.S. National Security Strategy directly stated NATO's mission to play central role in filling the macroregional organizational vacuum of in the post-Cold War order in Europe (National Security Strategy, 1994, pp. 21–22).

Washington's establishment overtly formulated the limits of Russian activities in the new realities. In his 1994 State of the Union address president W. Clinton stated that the United States "... will seek to cooperate with Russia to solve regional problems, while insisting that if Russian troops operate in neighboring states, they do so only when those states agree to their presence and in strict accord with international standards" (Clinton, 1994). The Republican opposition in Congress articulated its views in the same logic: "...Our foreign policy toward Russia should put American interests first and consolidate our Cold War victory in Europe. We have a national interest in a security relationship with a democratic Russia. Specifically, we will encourage Russia to respect the sovereignty and independence of its neighbors; support a special security arrangement between Russia and NATO – but not Moscow's veto over NATO enlargement..." (Republican Party, 1996).

The issue of NATO admission of former Warsaw pact members and Soviet Union republics was highly sensible for Moscow. George F. Kennan pointed out that such move could trigger a strong militaristic reaction, therefore undermining long-term American interest of pacifying Russia (Kennan, 2022). To address these concerns a specific compromise was formulated in the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997. At that moment presented the highest point of Russian-American dialogue over the new security architecture in Europe. The Act established a permanently working NATO-Russia Council – a mechanism for joint policy coordination, information exchange and peaceful settling of disputes. Moreover, while it directly said that Russia had no veto over NATO's internal affairs, the Act also prescribed not to proliferate nuclear arsenals and not to establish

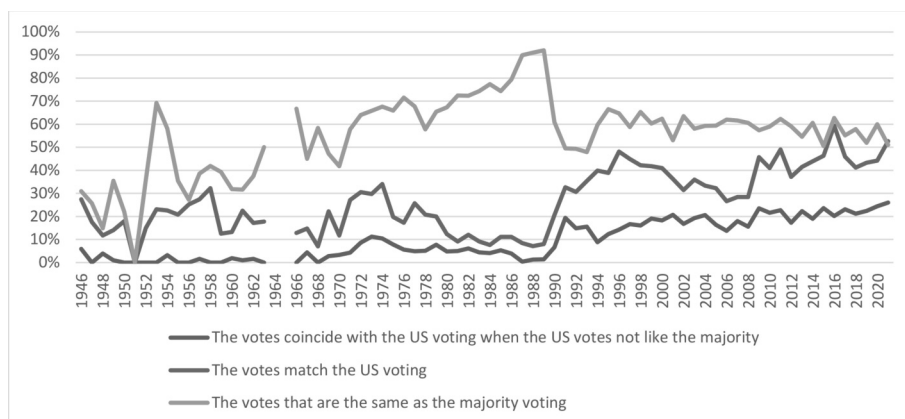
additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new NATO members (The U.S. Department of State, 1997).

Nevertheless, the turning point came in March 1999. The acceptance of former Comecon and Warsaw pact members Hungary, Poland, and Czechia into NATO on 12 March and almost simultaneous bombing of Belgrade two weeks later triggered substantial changes in the U.S. strategy. Looking at this sequence of events through Cold War symbolical lenses it was the first in the new era act of decomposition of former Moscow-centered political space, in which Washington-centered institutions deliberately turned former socialist countries against each other. It led to gradual antagonization of U.S.-Russia relations and increased significant level of distrust later.

Moscow's major dissatisfaction with the U.S. policies over Yugoslavia and NATO expansion significantly shifted the Washington's strategic thinking. The 1999 National Security Strategy contained criticism of Russia's practices over dealing with Chechen separatists and terrorists. "The conflict in Chechnya represents a major problem in Russia's post-Communist development and relationship with the international community; the means Russia is pursuing in Chechnya are undermining its legitimate objective of upholding its territorial integrity and protecting citizens from terrorism and lawlessness." Moreover, for the first time the NSS formulated clear imperatives and significantly broadened the agenda towards other Newly Independent States. The Clinton administration directly stated its concern regarding the withdrawal of Russia forces from Moldova and Georgia under the Conventional Armed Forces Treaty. It also stated Washington's interest in supporting Moldovan, Armenian, Georgian, Kyrgyz, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Ukrainian admission to the World Trade Organization (National Security Strategy, 1999). Although there would be an exaggeration to characterize the 1999 NSS as anti-Russian, it clearly showed the first non-Russian centered approach of building relations with post-soviet states.

The huge structural change in the region led to a visible shift among the majority of countries in their political solidarity with the United States. A step-by-step entry of all former Warsaw pact members into NATO was accompanied by the fact that this group of states eventually have become one of the most loyal among all the U.S. allies. Three decades after the fall of communism those regimes the average solidarity voting with the Washington when it voted not loke the majority of members of the United Nations General Assembly was from 24,1% (Romania, Bulgaria) to 27,8% (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic; Figure 8) (Davydov, 2023).

Figure 8. The percentage of equal voting of former members of the Warsaw pact (without USSR and GDR) with the majority of UN General Assembly members, with the United States, and with the U.S. when it voted not like the majority (1946-2021)

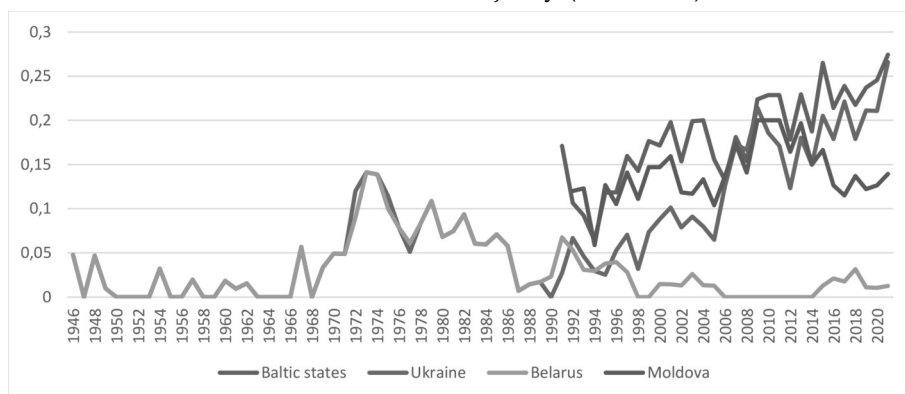


Source: Voeten E., Strezhnev A., Bailey M. United Nations General Assembly Voting Data // Harvard Dataverse. 2009. V 30. URL: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?fileId=6358426&version=30.0> (accessed 05.04.2024). Hereafter: UN GA Voting Data.

Note: the dataset does not provide voting statistics for 1964 and 1965.

Totally heterogeneous trajectories can be seen among former Soviet republics. All three Baltic states have synchronously increased their political solidarity just like all former members of Warsaw pact, while Belarus and Moldova have been stable in their voting throughout the last three decades (average solidarity voting have been 1,6% and 14%, respectively). Ukraine has been demonstrating very strong alinement with the United States only after the 2005 Orange revolution, almost instantly doubling its voting solidarity from 6,5% in 2005 to 12,5% in 2006, while increasing it to 26,6% in 2021 (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The percentage of equal voting of former Soviet republics (without Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus) with the U.S. when it voted not like the UNGA majority (1946-2021)

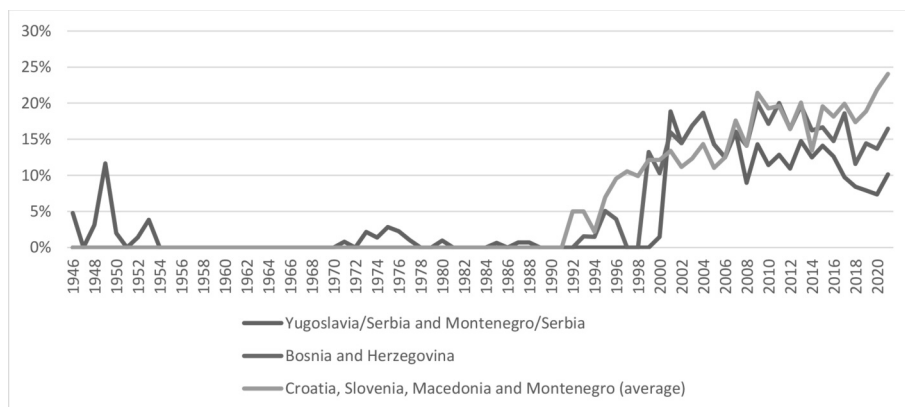


Source: Voeten E., Strezhnev A., Bailey M. United Nations General Assembly Voting Data // Harvard Dataverse. 2009. V 30. URL: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?fileId=6358426&version=30.0> (accessed 05.04.2024). Hereafter: UN GA Voting Data.

Note: the dataset does not provide voting statistics for 1964 and 1965.

Finally, similar picture can be seen in former Yugoslavia. Serbia's solidarity with the United States has been decreasing after the tragic bombardment in 1999 to 10,1% in 2021, while all future members of NATO (Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Montenegro) over the years increased their solidarity to 24%. Bosnia and Herzegovina voting remained stable around 16% annually (Figure 10).

Figure 10. The percentage of equal voting of former Yugoslavia states with the U.S. when it voted not like the UNGA majority (1946-2021)

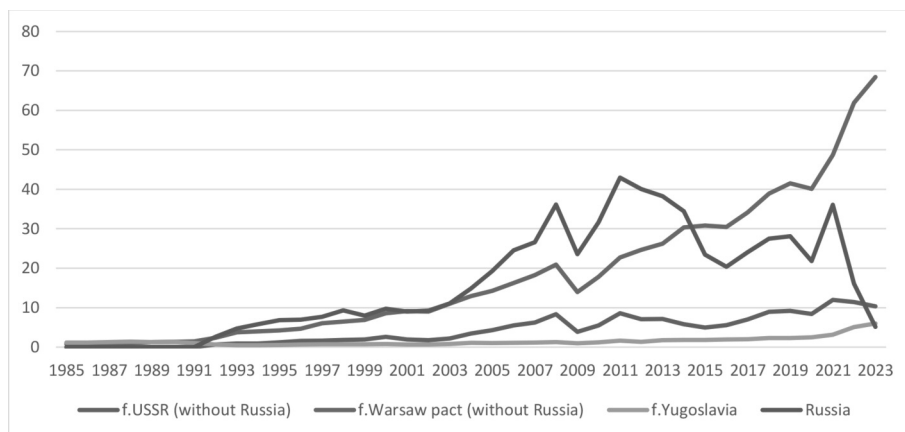


Source: Voeten E., Strezhnev A., Bailey M. United Nations General Assembly Voting Data // Harvard Dataverse. 2009. V 30. URL: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/file.xhtml?fileId=6358426&version=30.0> (accessed 05.04.2024). Hereafter: UN GA Voting Data.

Note: the dataset does not provide voting statistics for 1964 and 1965.

Divisions between Central and Eastern European countries based on their membership in NATO and on the degree of their solidarity with the United States also shaped Washington's long-term priorities in developing economic cooperation with these states. After the fall of the socialist block the United States has focused on the development of trade and investments predominantly with three countries: Poland, Czechia and Hungary, while other states presented little or almost no interest from the economic point of view. The development of economic relations with Russia stumbled over Moscow's accusations against Washington regarding a possible interference in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2011-2012 (Davydov, 2022, p. 138), and then over the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014 (Figure 11, 12).

Figure 11. Trade overflow between the United States and Central and Eastern European countries from 1985 to 2023 in billion U.S. dollars



Source: The U.S. Census Bureau.

Figure 12. The U.S. direct investments abroad into Central and Eastern European countries from 1989 to 2023 in billion U.S. dollars

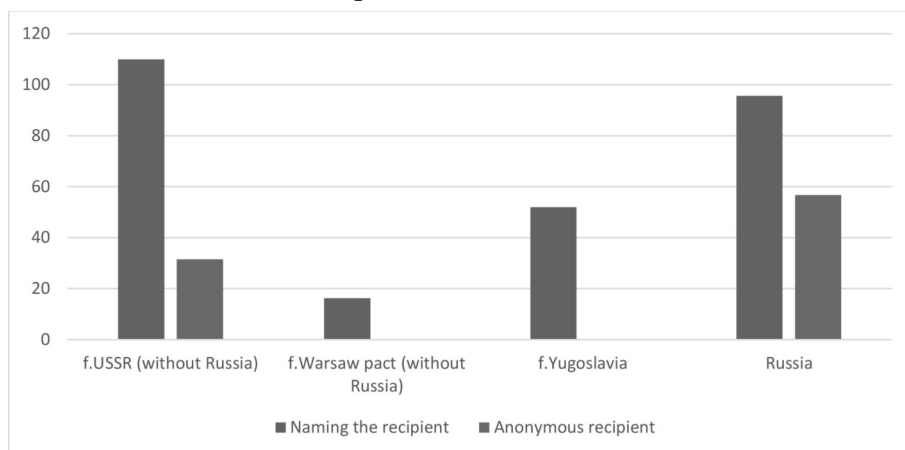


Source: The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Finally, a completely opposite picture can be seen while analyzing the distribution of finances regarding the democracy promotion projects in the region. Over the first two decades of the 21st century the National

Endowment for Democracy had projects in first of all in those countries, who were not members of NATO and who did not represent long-term economic interest and were not demonstrating increasing levels of solidarity with the United States (Figure 13).

Figure 13. The overall budget of the National Endowment projects in Central and Eastern Europe from 1999 to 2020 in million U.S. dollars



Source: The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Thus, after the end of the Cold war the United States had restructured the multilateral relations in Central and Eastern Europe in such a manner that the fundamental long-term dynamics of future evolution of regional affairs were largely determined by the affiliation of regional actors with Washington and its multilateral institutions.

* * *

The strategic logic of United States foreign policy towards the Central and Eastern European countries have largely been determined by exogenous factors, that were first of all connected to Soviet and then Russia's policies towards those states. After these countries obtained their independence, the United States, although verbally had been expressing sympathy towards them, showed little interest in dealing with them due to their limited security and economic importance for the U.S. national interest.

Only the start of the Cold war and vast expansion of the Communist influence laid the foundation of a coherent U.S. strategical approach towards the region. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Washington's policies in designing and strengthening a more preferable structure of relations with regional countries was predominantly determined by exploitation of shortcomings of its counterparts and crisis in the socialist bloc.

From the long-term strategic perspective, the Soviet split with Yugoslavia, the inefficiency of the planned economy, repressive and military practices within the alliance, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw pact and Comecon, and eventually the Ukrainian crisis were step-by-step exploited by the United States in order to increase bilateral or multilateral ties with the Central and Eastern European countries.

The case of Central and Eastern European policy of the United States demonstrates that Washington's long-term strategy towards the opposite powers has always been consistent in its goal-setting approach, while was quite flexible in its methods. When the U.S. establishment realized the inevitability to achieve the fall of communist regimes in this region in short- or middle-term perspective, Washington supported the institutionalization of the established order of things in order to make it more predictable. But at the same time the U.S. policy makers were designing their plans of restructuring the unfavorable status-quo.

Nevertheless, the long-term perspectives of the United States strategy towards the Central and Eastern European region are more uncertain than 30 years ago or even as they were on the eve of the Cold war. Taking in consideration previous dispute resolution practices in the region Russia's start of military operation in Ukraine could be interpreted as an attempt to coerce a dialogue over a new restructuring of the European security architecture, based largely on the demands formulated in December 2021 to withdraw NATO's military infrastructure to its positions in 1997.

This contradicts Washington's general political approach, that NATO should remain the main and only organization, that determines the security architecture in Europe, while Russia should not have a word in NATO's affairs. This approach is a direct continuation of the old Cold war zero-sum logic, while the nature of the contemporary system of international affairs largely depends on another set of differences – between China and the United States. In this regard an excessive pressure on Russia could lead to unpredictable consequences, which might even include the usage of nuclear weapons, which would undermine long-term position of the United States in their competition with China. At the same time a potential start of such

dialogue could lead to a decline of the spirit or a potential destabilization in the most crucial security space of the United States – NATO. That circumstance correlates very much with Moscow's initial position to intertwine the U.S.-Russia dialogue regarding the strategic offensive nuclear weapons with the issue of security architecture in Europe.

Indeed, the eventual resolution of the Ukrainian crisis, that affects the situation on the battlefield, the Russia-West economic competition, the principles upon which the European security architecture is designed and how modern structure of the international relations system is functioning, depends on vast number of unpredictable factors: presidential elections in the United States, decline of rise of China's economy, enforceable global crisis. Nevertheless, it's resolution will eventually lead to a serious systemic transformation of the European and global security architecture and it will define a new pillar of the United States' long-term strategy in Central and Eastern Europe in the foreseeable future.

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THE CHANGE OF SECURITY STRATEGIES OF CENTRAL EUROPE IN CONTEMPORARY CRISIS: BETWEEN COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES¹

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Abstract: In our contribution, we would like to discuss the impact of contemporary risks and threats on the change and development of strategic security culture. Geopolitical impacts, the policy of powers, and the national interests of small states modify the structural quality of the balance of power in contemporary international relations. In our analysis, we would like to present a view of the future development of relations between powers in Europe, regions, and states from the perspectives of cooperation and confrontation. Security is a mutual value of European states, and the redefinition of the importance of soft power, negotiations, conflict prevention, and transformation processes could be an opportunity for small states to strengthen their own position in diplomacy and inspire each other. The key question we would like to answer is: What is the future role of a small state in diplomacy? Based on historical accounts, it is argued that within the transition of the world order from a unipolar to a multipolar system, the European continent will assume a more decisive balancing position for the US. Focusing on Central Europe, this paper concludes that the US may need to exercise a theory of containment, dwarfing other great powers advancing their interests on the European continent. The aim of this article is to analyse the significance of the European continent in the foreign policy of the United States of America (US). The emphasis is put on the developments that have taken place in the close partnership between the US and the European continent since the end of the Second World War. Furthermore, historical accounts summarise that the European continent is internally inconsistent and destined to succumb to the objectives of other great powers regardless of its geostrategic potential. The conclusions of the

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review point out that, if the US decides to disengage from the European continent, it will also have to disengage from other parts of the world. Under such circumstances, the US's standing as a great power may deteriorate to the point that it cannot be restored, at least not in the near future.

Keywords: power, world order, geostrategic region, Cold War, Europe.

Introduction

The collapse of the bipolar world order in the 1990s provided an opportunity for the United States of America (US) to gain a leading position in a subsequent unipolar international system. However, current world affairs are defined by a continuum of the establishment of a multipolar system in which selected great powers intensively promote their interests, for example, through proxy wars or by exploiting other powers and regions in order to gain a maximum share in the undergoing power realignment. Such a change in the distribution of power may also be considered positive for re-establishing the balance of power that existed, for example, during the Cold War. With the current great powers in place, namely the US, Russia (RU), and China (CN), either a multipolar or even a bi-multipolar international system is more viable than a Cold War-style bipolar or successive unipolar system.

To counterbalance the growing influence of Russia and China, the European continent would need more robust capabilities. Without efficient capabilities in place, it would be deeply dependent on massive US support. Likewise, the European continent has significant importance for the US to counterbalance RU and CN in other parts of the world and on the European continent. In such a situation, where the great powers see themselves in a zero-sum competition for global influence, having control over a geostrategic region such as the European continent may contribute to gaining a contested power share. The US, with its power potential (economic, political, and military), is thus one of the most influential powers that can fundamentally determine the balance of power on the European continent, which multiplies the US power that it uses elsewhere. Within US foreign policy, the European continent has long been perceived as a key region, especially since the end of the Second World War (WWII). In agreement with Teixeira, the US has constantly focused its strategy on acquiring and maintaining its leading great power status over its rivals, first in North America, then on the European continent, and, finally, globally. In order to succeed, the US has employed a strategy called containment, which was most vivid during the Cold War. The

strategy consisted of security and strategic treaties, limiting access to natural resources, and safeguarding the military, economic, and technological supremacy of the US (Teixeira, 2019, pp. 174–175).

Europe is defined geographically as a continent and regionally as Western, Central, or Eastern Europe. From a geopolitical point of view, Central Europe (CE) is the territory that divides or connects, depending on one's point of view, the geographical region of Eurasia with the rest of the world. CE is a territorial process and has never been, and probably will never be, a unified geopolitical power due to the diversity of ethnicities, religions, or interests of state actors on the continent. The geopolitical subconscious of CE, as a divider between East and West, is given by the historical growth of colonialism as well as the expansion of powers such as Germany, Russia, or, later, the US. CE can be perceived on two levels: as a geostrategic space and, at the same time, as a focus of tension. In the first case, geostrategic power claims to use force to achieve its interests in the given space, and in the second case, it is an imaginary neuralgic point that affects the behaviour of geostrategic power when it wants to advance its interests within the region.

Due to the scope of the work, and without claiming to be exhaustive, the CE region will be assessed mainly in the context of its development after WWII. CE is an area with geopolitical implications that, to a degree comparable to the AUKUS security pact (Economist, 2021) concluded in September 2021 between the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia, illustrates the policy of balance of power and balance of threats in practice. In the above context, CE can also be perceived as a shatter belt, a buffer zone, and, in certain situations, a critical access point (chokepoint, gateway). The geopolitical character of CE can be defined from a traditional perspective, where CE is a bridge between East and West. Another perspective is that of a neutral belt, which dates from the time of the bipolar division of Europe. The third perception comes from a powerhouse role, which was in place during the Austro-Hungarian Empire's fight against the Ottomans. Additionally, a geopolitical turning point perspective could emerge based on differences between a highly developed part of Europe and its opposite on an issue, such as the migrant crisis in 2015. Finally, a regional powerhouse perspective would emerge in the case of a division of Europe into political regions, and CE could be of interest to, for example, Germany. The stability of CE is historically dependent on the geopolitical interests of the great powers and can, as in the past, fundamentally influence the future arrangement of the world order and the decisions of the current great powers, the US, RU, or CN.

This paper uses a descriptive-analytical approach to define the role of the European continent and its central region in great power politics, to review its short history and political geography, and to demonstrate the correlation between the power politics of the US and the European continent. For this reason, the findings of the paper contribute to answering the question of the roles of geostrategic regions in the power politics of great powers, in consonance with Cohen, who stated that a geostrategic area must be large enough to have certain world-affecting potentials and functions. Furthermore, geostrategic regions embody the interconnectedness of large parts of the world in terms of location, flow, trade direction, and cultural or ideological ties. Although it is a single-feature region whose purpose is to contain regions where energy can be applied, it is a multi-feature region in its composition. Control of strategic land and sea lanes is often critical to the unification of geostrategic areas (Cohen, 2017, p. 348).

The data used in the correlation review consists of systematic reviews of library resources, monographs, review articles, research papers, etc. No new data was gathered for finalising this paper. There is a rather low amount of information about the role of the European continent, its central role in the power politics of the US, and its impact. In line with Nourbakhsh et al., its impact and developments have not received much attention in the media, even though they have changed tremendously in recent years (Nourbakhsh, 2020, p. 777). The interesting part of the paper might be, as stated by Ružicka, “that the heightened engagement between the US and CE countries has had its greatest impact not on the US or even individual countries of CE, but on CE as a regional idea” (Ružicka, 2010, p. 64). The focus on the European continent and CE, and the reason for their pivotal role in US power politics, is important not only because the topic is understudied but also because of their transcending potential impact on the emerging multipolar international system.

The European continent and the United States of America

In the context of the next decade, the European continent² will certainly play an even more crucial balancing role in US power politics than it has so far, thus helping to maintain US great power status. This is due to the

² In this paper, the term European continent excludes Belarus and European Russia in order to differentiate between a geographically defined region and an area identified by US power politics.

fluctuating distribution of power, when, for instance, China (CN) is expected to achieve a full-fledged great power status (political, economic, and military power combined) and Russia (RU) will probably continue to seek to increase its influence in its near abroad, which is a norm of great power behaviour. Besides, the balancer status of the European continent within the framework of the US power-political scheme of the will certainly have a transcending impact in clarifying and redefining the demarcation lines of future spheres of influence amongst current (US, RU) and future (CN) great powers. The outcome of such a great power landscape may also have a significant impact on defining a new level of interactions among such powers, which may either evolve into favourable or hostile relations. The important role that the European continent has played in US power politics since the 20th century is indisputable. Without a doubt, the current state of world affairs is unlike anything the US was used to during that century. Just for comparison, Europe in the first half of the 20th century was stigmatised with German fascism more than today's Russian aggression in Ukraine, and Asia was more threatened by expansionist imperial Japan than today's Chinese assertiveness and the discomfort of its re-emergence as a major military power in the region.

The end of the Second World War (WWII) marked the beginning of what is now defined as the US century, signified as a unipolar system led by the US. It is derived from the fact that by 1950, the US had reached an unrivalled global leadership position, which at that time was based on a gross domestic product (GDP) comparison. The GDP of the US in 1950 was 3.4 times that of the Soviet Union. However, the US century, crowned by its global rise to become by far the most powerful major power, is highly likely to reach its end. It is being counterbalanced by the economic and population rise of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. US foreign policy over the past 75 years has been heavily based on a world economy led by the North Atlantic region, namely Western Europe and the US (Sachs, 2018, pp. 31–41). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact brought an end to the Cold War in the 1990s and spurred the spread of democratic systems in Central Europe (McCormick, 1998, p.172). According to Herring, the end of the Cold War and economic development on the European continent facilitated the emergence of the US as a leading great power beyond the most extravagant imaginations of its first president, George Washington (Herring, 2008, p. 917).

However, these changes have not been completely peaceful. The wars that have been fought during the US century include the wars in Korea and

Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, military interventions in the former Yugoslavia, and invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq. Furthermore, the current state of great power politics does not seem to resemble either a peaceful path of economic globalisation or a peaceful acceptance of democratic theory principles and an unconditioned willingness to follow liberal institutionalism. It rather looks a lot like a scene where power politics are intensely exercised by great powers. As a result, it proves that great powers such as the US have never abandoned the possibilities of exploiting power politics and power balancing, and the topic has stayed permanently on their everyday agendas.

It would be rather unfortunate not to explain the term power politics, which has different connotations, even if the scope of this paper is not about reviewing the term or confirming a new meaning for it. Thus, Professor Martin Wight's statement on power politics fits the framework of this paper, as reported by James: "Power politics means the relations between independent powers. It refers to the activities of states in relation to each other that arise out of discord" (James, 1954, p. 307). Hence, according to Mearsheimer, power politics is a reckless and dangerous enterprise. In addition, its overall objective is to maximise one's share of power, which is usually achieved at the expense of other powers. This relentless quest for power means that great powers tend to find ways to change the distribution of power in the world to their advantage. If they have the required skills, they will take advantage of these opportunities. In short, great powers are preparing to attack. But a great power not only seeks to gain power at the expense of others, but it also tries to thwart opponents who want to gain power at the expense of others. Thus, one great power will upset the balance of power whenever trends favour another great power (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 17).

Within US foreign policy, the European continent has long been perceived as a key region, with particular emphasis since the end of WWII. The balance of US foreign policy towards the European continent has remained essentially unchanged over the past century. The European link has undeniable security dimensions, as it is the European continent that acts as a balancer for the US in other parts of the world or against other powers (Khol, 1997, p. 19). In consonance with Sachs, the tensions vividly present among the current great powers (US, RU) and the emerging ones (CN) are symptomatic of the passing of the old order led by the US and the emergence of a new one.

Within the realistic school of thought of international relations, a great power is always assessed as a threat to other weaker powers; however, this

does not apply to the relationship between the US and the European continent, where the European continent has played the role of a weaker power. Hence, it is within the framework of the current power contest between the current great powers (US, RU) and an emerging one (CN). It is only a matter of time before the unipolar power system led by the US dissolves. Therefore, power balancing never seems to be out of fashion in international politics, not even at the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century. It is therefore legitimate to ponder whether the US century shall survive or will be counterbalanced by a Russian or Chinese century.

Since the end of WWII, the US has promoted the development of a close partnership with the European continent, also known as the transatlantic relationship. This relationship is determined by the status of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) and by extensive political and economic ties with most of the countries of Western and Central Europe. The US considers the transatlantic relationship to be a key pillar of US national security and economic policy (Archick et. al., 2020). In addition, the extensive economic ties that the US has with the EU countries are proven by historical statistics of total trade in goods and services. According to Akhtar, Fefer, Johnson, and Swarzenberg, the latest statistics show that total trade in goods and services grew at an average of about 5% annually from 2010 to 2019. In 2020, total US-EU trade in goods and services decreased by about 30%, reflecting global trade and economic trends associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. In 2021, the trade statistics show an increase of 17%. By and large, the EU remained the largest trading partner in 2021 for the US (Akhtar et al., 2022).

The expansion of NATO, especially after the end of the Cold War, also confirmed the continued strong US interest in the European continent, as the question was not whether to remain but how to continue to be the most influential power on the continent (Porter et. al., 2018, p. 27). This proves that a continent on which a great power gains its influential power status acts as a power multiplier that can be exploited in other regions or continents of the world. According to Katsy, Sacko, and Khudoley, this paradigm applies to the European continent because a politically stable and secure Europe is paramount to US security and enables the US to advance its interests in other parts of the world (Katsy et al. 2008, p. 127). In addition, the US political, economic, and security interests on the European continent can be viewed in terms of the benefits that accrue to the US from these relationships, including:

- Maintaining stability and peace in Europe is crucial to containing competing powers, especially RU and CN.
- NATO and the EU are critical pillars in the maintenance and development of the international order that was established under US leadership after WWII, and they strengthen the credibility of US global leadership, including in international community institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organisation.
- The US involvement on the European continent increases the level of deterrence against influence that RU or CN may wish to exert on the continent.
- Promoting the development of political and security stability in the Balkans and jointly addressing the aggression of RU in Ukraine.
- Security challenges and threats, such as terrorism, cybercrime, cyberattacks, hybrid threats, or the spill-over of instability in the Middle East in the form, for example, of uncontrolled migration (such as the European migrant crisis in 2015 or the recent one that was orchestrated by the Belarusian and RU regimes in 2021), cannot be effectively addressed in isolation in a transatlantic relationship.
- Intense cooperation based on long-standing trust is not possible with other state actors in the areas of armed forces and intelligence information sharing.
- The interconnection of mutually beneficial economic links that are integrated and interdependent in many areas. The economic result is the generation of about \$6 trillion a year in foreign subsidiaries of business entities and more than 16 million jobs through direct employment or through third parties.
- The US and the European continent thrive on the economic prosperity of the transatlantic relationship, which accounted for about nearly half of global GDP in 2018. The economic balance creates significant global economic influence and enables the US to establish critical global rules and norms (Archick, 2022).

Most of the world's human population, energy and raw material resources, and economic activities are located mainly in Eurasia. In response to this reality, US foreign and security policy over the past several decades has been directed at preventing the emergence of a domination by one or more powers in Eurasia that would overwhelm US power in the region. Consistent with this goal, for the US to be able to conduct sustained, large-scale military operations in Eurasia, it must have significant numbers of

forces and supplies deployed at forward permanent military bases, particularly on the European continent. Consequently, the permanent presence of US forces on the European continent reflects its importance in the given calculus, confirms strategic foreign policy priorities, and portrays the ambitions of the role the US still intends to play in the world of great powers (O'Rourke, 2022). According to Šimčková, the US foreign policy priority in the Eurasian region, for instance, focuses on ensuring security, which will create conditions for a politically open society, which in turn will provide conditions for economic development (Šimčková, 2010). According to Edström and Westberg, the US is advocating balance-of-power strategies to prevent any power other than the US from dominating Eurasia (Edström, 2022, p. 102).

Historically, it can be argued that the 20th century was more tilted in favour of the US than any other century. For instance, the US was on the winning side after the end of WWII and became the sole victor of the Cold War, in which the European continent played a decisive role. To begin with, both milestones took place on the European continent, which, in consequence, gave the US decisive status in the international political arena. In addition, it was the European continent that played a crucial role in enabling the US to gain and exert supremacy of power globally in the 20th century based on the economic results generated. Simultaneously, it was and still is the European continent that has acted as a forward base for the major US military units to be able to deploy their forces in other parts of the world. However, it is a real paradox that the European continent, acting without the support of the US, does not currently have the potential to independently play the role of an influential global power on its own. This is probably due to the diversity of interests of European state actors, even though economic indicators predispose it to great power status. On the contrary, given the complicated and ambiguous evolution of great powers' relations, the European continent still plays a crucial role in the effective exercise of the US balance of power in the world.

The deliberate effort the US invested in establishing the international world order after WWII under its leadership was to safeguard constitutional democracy in Western Europe, North America, and Japan. It was a grand US strategy designed to counterbalance the Soviets, but in essence, the US was working on its niche construction. Such as Owen defined: "For any population of organisms, the environment selects for certain traits; the organisms can also shape that environment (construct a niche) so as to favour themselves in some way; and the reshaped environment can then

select for a different set of traits in the population. By analogy, states' environments can select for certain traits, including domestic regimes. A domestic regime endures as long as the balance of power within the state favours its adherents; regime change will happen when that balance changes sufficiently" (Owen, 2021, p. 1417). Democracy on the European continent and in Japan was decisive for the US to succeed in its grand strategy, that is, to become the leader in a unipolar world order. Therefore, it was not out of altruism but out of the principle that by helping to build strong democratic states on the European continent and in Japan, it would help to secure its own democracy. The main drive for establishing a unipolar world order under US leadership was based on historical accounts. Most of the US population, before the 1930s, thought that the North American continent needed to be protected from the European continent and the great powers' rivalries that were taking place on that continent (Owen, 2021, p. 1422–1423). According to Herring, such a stance was supported by the experience of 1774, when the colonists were drawn into the continental wars because of their connection with England. The notion was that there would have to be no European hostility if there were no ties to the European continent. For the time being, it was more desirable to cut the new continent off from England and thus secure peace and friendship with the rest of the European continent. The generation of that time believed that they were the chosen people to disdain established practices and considered themselves the harbingers of a new world order, establishing governance and trade that would appeal to peoples worldwide and empower them to change the course of world history. They saw themselves as having the power to start the world all over again (Herring, 2008, p. 11–12).

According to Owen, however, the non-interference stance cost the US dearly, and the traumas of the 1930s and 1940s "taught the Americans that no democracy was an island and that in the modern world, the survival of this form of government and way of life that they cherished required deliberate changes in the way democracies related to one another and to the rest of the world" (Owen, 2021, p. 1422). The aftermath has cost the US approximately \$130 billion (in 2020 dollars) in the form of aid that was materialised in the Marshall Plan for Japan and the European continent to rebuild economies and employment.

Consequently, it would be another repetition of the painful experiences of the 19th and 20th centuries for the US if it were to lose its superiority over the European continent in the future, as the power struggle between the current great powers (US, RU) and an emerging one (CN) is intense. Not

only would it have to pay dearly, but it would also have to withdraw from other parts of the world, such as Asia and the Middle East. Under such circumstances, the US would find it difficult to regain its status as a leading power in either a unipolar or multipolar world order.

As reported by Archik, Belkin, and Akhtar, Mix, cooperation between the US and the European continent has been and is seen as crucial for the US, and its rationale is being reinforced once again, particularly in relation to balancing power against current and emerging powers. Historically, the transatlantic relationship has been based on a commitment to world order that was achieved after WWII through alliances with like-minded democratic partners (Archick et. al., 2022). US support for a strong partnership with Europe is largely based on the belief that US leadership in NATO and close US-EU relations promote US security and stability and multiply US global power and financial influence. Despite periodic US-European tensions, particularly due to the US unilateral approach to security challenges and changes in the security environment since the end of the Cold War (e.g., in Afghanistan and Iraq), the US continues to assess the transatlantic partnership as strategically important and supportive of US economic, political, and security interests.

The strategic importance of the transatlantic partnership was also confirmed at the NATO Summit that took place in Madrid (Spain) on June 29-30, 2022. Belkin defines it as follows:

- Bolstered defence posture of NATO countries in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
- Increased support for aspiring NATO members, Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- NATO enlargement to Finland and Sweden.
- Larger forward presence of US combat forces on the European continent.
- The new regional command and control headquarters of US forces on the European continent (Belkin, 2022).
- More pre-positioned equipment and weapons, including heavy weapons systems, in Europe.

As a result, it is a well-supported argument that the US gained its full-fledged great power status right after WWII and continued to build on it during the Cold War. This is due to the economic and military power it exercised, which, combined with its global presence and the alliances it built, was unparalleled by any other great power alliances in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Owing to the historical experience of non-interference in

European business, which caused the US to pay dearly, it shows that the European continent has become a traditional region of interest for the US, which has been gained not through historical connotations but rather via economic and military power. Such a gain is based on a fluctuating distribution of power in international politics, such as defined by Kagan, where great power status is not based on heritage law but is acquired through the usage of economic, military, and political power to ensure the security, prosperity, and independence of an actor or region (Kagan, 2002, p. 16). Such a fluctuating distribution could be compared to the great power status of the United Kingdom and France, which they once held and lost in favour of the US. Hence, if a great power cannot enforce its sphere, it is doomed to exist as an isolated and fragmented actor. As a result, the European continent becomes genuinely attractive not only to the US for what it offers economically but to other great powers as well, especially in the role of a decisive balancer in a balance of power strategy.

Geopolitical interests of the United States of America in Central Europe

Geopolitically, CE is a strategic area, of which the eastern part is also NATO's eastern flank. That area also determines the geopolitical pivot point for the US in relation to access to Asia, especially in terms of eliminating threats to the US, for example, originating from Russia. Since the end of WWII, US interests in CE have also been aimed at preventing a closer rapprochement between CE and RU, which could, according to US interests, undermine security stability in CE and in Europe in general (Tchakarova, 2017). Since the end of the Cold War, CE has been in a process of geopolitical restructuring, the final state of which depends largely on the US and to a large extent on the EU (Cohen, 2017, p. 359). In terms of geopolitical interests, the entire CE is important to the US. If the different geographical units of CE are evaluated, its north-eastern part is particularly important, since three critical areas of US geopolitical interests – the Baltic States, the northern states of the European continent, and RU – intersect there. Instability in any one of these areas affects all three US geopolitical interests (Brzezinski et al., 1999). Moreover, the Baltics are the only area in the northeast where a military confrontation between the US and Russia is realistically possible at any time. Therefore, US interest in the Baltic region is high, especially to mitigate potential conflicts in the area and promote its stable economic and political development. At the same time, the Baltic region is also of

geopolitical interest to Russia, given that the region directly affects its security interests. According to Balogh, regions that do not have a fixed meaning, for instance, such as CE, are empty signifiers for great powers, “i.e., notions that mean little per se but that can be filled with almost any content, for instance, to legitimise pragmatic political purposes”. In accordance with the prior, the interest of the US in CE is obvious in that it supports the US-led liberal international order against, for instance, RU and CN. Simultaneously, CE confirms once again its role that Mackinder defined as a sanitary cordon (Balogh, 2017, p. 192).

This is, however, with the modification that the current cordon is not between Germany and RU, as it was originally designed after WWI, but a cordon preventing the advancement of other great power interests in CE (e.g., RU or CN). In retrospect, since the end of WWI, it is possible to define US geopolitical interests in CE as the goal of preventing the domination of the European continent by a hostile power whose efforts would deny the advancement of US interests in the region, especially in the economic and military sectors.

As a friendly power, the US has supported the EU since its inception. The EU was supposed to provide coherence and the ability to resolve potential power issues in relation to the Mackinder sanitary cordon. However, the acceptance of the role of the EU from the US perspective has a limit, and that is when the US, from time to time, uses individual EU member states to its advantage in balancing power, especially in situations where the EU competes with NATO. Since the end of the Cold War, US geopolitical interests in CE have had the following characteristics:

- Helping to maintain the status of a so-called European power under all conditions in order to strengthen strategic confidence in CE with the possibility of promoting its own interests on the European continent.
- Preserving the best that history has to offer, particularly in the area of defence cooperation in the form of NATO, with the aim of avoiding the withdrawal of its member states from NATO.
- Preservation of the settled power-political issue in relation to Germany after WWII.
- The erasure of the CE states from the so-called European geopolitical chessboard was due to the causes of the two World Wars and the Cold War.
- Ensuring that Ukraine, the most important state bordering CE, does not fall under the influence of Russia.

- Redeployment of NATO military forces and assets from Germany and their increased concentration along the eastern borders of CE (Hunter, 1999, pp. 9-10).

The above-listed geopolitical features are based on the traditional role of the US in the post-WWII world, often not explicitly articulated by US officials, which is to prevent the emergence of regional powers in Eurasia. The above reflects the US view of geopolitics, which always has two paradigms:

Given the size of Eurasia's population, resources, and economic activities, a regional power in Eurasia would represent a major concentration of power and could threaten vital US global interests.

Eurasia lacks the capacity for self-regulation in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemony, which means that Eurasian states cannot be relied upon to prevent the emergence of regional powers by their own actions and may therefore need the assistance of one or more non-Eurasian powers to be able to implement such actions effectively (O'Rourke, 2021).

Consequently, CE can potentially act as a balancer and help advance US interests in various regions of the world, such as Eurasia, linking Asia and Europe via economic land routes. For this reason, the economic sea routes on which the US achieved its leading position in a unipolar system may become less attractive. To illustrate such a role, Maró and Török give the example that there are two main land routes that connect Asia with Europe: the Trans-Siberian Railway and the New Eurasian Continental Bridge (one of its routes, the Central Belt, would pass through CE). The latter of these land route connectors will make it possible to create a New Silk Road, which, if finalised, could affect 64% of the world's population (4.4 billion people) and cover 30% of the world's GDP (\$21 trillion) (Maró et. al., 2022, pp. 7-10).

Hence, the CE region may contribute a focal point in the containment theory of the US, possibly dwarfing the New Silk Road Initiative of CN. Thus, in comparison to the Marshall Plan mentioned above, whose impact was regional, the New Silk Road Initiative is intended to have a global impact. The geopolitical interests of the US in the CE are manifold: economic, military, and political. When considering the economic front, Germany's economy is the largest not only within CE but also on the European continent. The GDP index for 2021, for instance, came to a figure of 3.57 trillion euros. Compared to other leading economic powers, this is the fourth highest GDP in the world, right after the US, China, and Japan. Similarly, the military aspect of NATO's eastern flank is equally important, especially with the worsening security situation in Ukraine. In reaction to this situation, the US is increasing its military presence along the entire NATO's eastern

flank to 100,000 personnel troops by the end of 2022. Politically, the CE region consists of some of the countries that were once part of communist Europe. Their political liberation has been a major achievement of US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Broadly speaking, the CE concept confirms the notion that it is not just an economic project but has a much wider security aspiration for the US.

Conclusion

The anticipated turbulent development of international relations in the next decade of the 21st century, especially due to the affirmation of the increased global influence of RU and CN, indicates that the US will have to coordinate and revise its various foreign policy vectors. The European continent has always played a force multiplier role for the US power potential from a global perspective. In the post-Cold War world power architecture, the European continent has been and still is of indispensable importance to US foreign policy, providing a vital fulcrum for the pursuit of US interests globally. The role of the European continent as a balancer of US interests in other regions of the world is indisputable, and therefore security and stability on the European continent are also unmistakably key pillars of US national security and economic policy.

As reported by Archick, Belkin, Akhtar, and Mix, cooperation between the US and the European continent has been and is seen as crucial to the US, and its rationale is being reinforced once again, particularly in relation to balancing an increasingly assertive RU and CN (Archick, 2022). Historically, the transatlantic relationship has been based on a commitment to the post-WWII world order through alliances with like-minded democratic partners. US support for a strong partnership with the European continent is based largely on the belief that US leadership, for example in NATO, and close US-EU relations promote US security and stability and multiply US global power and financial influence elsewhere. Despite periodic tensions between the US and the European continent, particularly over the unilateral US approach to security challenges and changes in the security environment since the end of the Cold War, the US continues to view the transatlantic partnership as strategically important and supportive of the US economic, political, and security interests.

However, these differences have never altered the basic concept of US foreign policy towards the European continent. The relationship between the US and the European continent has always been asymmetrical. The US

has global interests and unparalleled economic and military power. In many cases, however, the US needs the European continent as a diplomatic and economic power and as an additional security factor outside the continent.

The anticipated turbulent evolution of international relations in the next decade of the 21st century indicates another confirmation that CE, despite the diversity of interests of powers within the region, has historically always played a multiplier of power potential from a global perspective. Since the post-Cold War world power architecture, the European continent has had irreplaceable importance for the European geopolitical vector of the US, which is also a crucial fulcrum for the advancement of US geopolitical interests in CE as well.

As a result of its geolocation, CE has always been in danger of being defined by the imagination of someone other than the CE states. CE represents a geostrategic region whose internal inconsistency, together with the conflicting interests of geostrategic powers, predestines it to be a zone of turbulence. CE can also be seen as an entry space or a point into another region, which in the geopolitical vectors of a power may imply the need for an uncompromising approach to control it economically, politically, or militarily. Thereby, it can be assumed that in the event of an armed conflict coming from the East or the West, CE would serve as a space where the main clashes of forces on the European continent would take place. The geopolitical significance of the CE region derives from its international status, as it is not a political organisation but a region based on cultural proximity and power interests. The significance of CE is determined by geographical determinism, which makes it vulnerable to the actions of geostrategic powers. CE cannot be compared to its geopolitical status of, say, 40 years ago. There are two decisive historical moments that have taken place in the CE region: the eastward expansion of NATO and the economic integration of the EU states. CE is no longer just a sanitary cordon that divides the antagonistic blocs of East and West. The changes taking place in CE confirm that it is a concept of fluid change in the context of prevailing geopolitical conditions. The history of CE is inseparable from the great themes of European and world history, and US foreign policy towards the European continent is also inseparable from its overall policy or global strategy. In the past, when the US attempted this separation, it ended in bad policies and worse results, such as the outbreak of WWII or the division of the CE region into Western and Eastern zones.

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BETWEEN EUROPEAN UNION AND THE THREE SEAS INITIATIVE: A NEW GEOPOLITICAL ROLE OF POLAND?

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Abstract: This paper's aim is to provide a retrospective of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI). The Initiative is made up of countries, with a leading role of Poland, that joined the European Union and NATO relatively late (EU – 2004, 2007, 2013; NATO – 1999, 2004, 2009), (does not apply to Austria and Greece) but have participated in these integration projects for several years, especially in the European Union and have sufficiently developed economically to want to throw off the corset of (semi)peripheral countries, which only adapt to the political and economic solutions generated by the countries belonging to the “core” of the EU. The will to participate more actively in this European project seems to be an important factor integrating the Three Seas countries, especially since for several years this organization has been experiencing a deep structural crisis. The paper's aim is to explain the multilevel tasks of the 3SI including its economic and geopolitical dimensions. It also includes a brief analysis of various theoretical approaches (classical realism, neorealism and constructivism) in understanding the 3SI throughout the comparative method.

Keywords: Three Seas Initiative, European Union, Poland, Economy, Security, Realism, Constructivism

Introduction – Three Seas Initiative (3SI)

The Three Seas is an initiative of thirteen countries located between the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea¹. It was established in 2015 by Polish President Andrzej Duda and Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in order to tighten economic and infrastructure cooperation between the countries of the region. Currently, the condition for

¹ Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary.

membership in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) is membership in the European Union. An interesting relationship can be observed: the need to establish a new regional organization was felt by the younger EU member states. Out of the 13 countries that created the Initiative, only Austria and Greece were members of the EU before 2004. This fact already shows that for the Initiative countries, activities within the EU were insufficient and they did not feel heard enough, hence the need to establish an organization that would become an arena for speaking loudly about issues that do not resonate enough in Paris or Berlin. As one Polish author notices: “3SI is an original project proposed by leaders representing the region, an autonomous project whose content and format were not imposed or suggested by external actors. (...) The Three Seas Initiative is a response to the diagnosis of common weaknesses of the countries in the region, the peripheral status imposed on them within the European Union, the preferred model of passive Europeanization according to the top-down scheme, and the constant treatment of the region as “New Europe”. One of the elements noticed and defined by the leaders of Central European countries (except Austria and Greece) was that there was a danger of falling into the middle-development trap, remaining an economy subordinated and auxiliary to larger markets” [Bajda 2020: 4-5].

Although the Member States differ significantly in terms of territory, population, economy, etc., the principle adopted is that cooperation takes place on a partnership basis, respecting the distinctiveness and sovereignty of individual countries. However, Radosław Zenderowski, an Author that extensively writes about the Initiative, notices that from the very beginning, some politicians and commentators who are not very friendly to the 3SI, have been spreading the thesis that Poland is returning to the pre-war concept of Intermarium. “Very often, even some commentators publicly used the name “Intermarium” instead of “Three Seas”. Thus, it was suggested that Warsaw intended to treat the Three Seas Initiative instrumentally in order to achieve its own geopolitical goals, including: monopolizing relations with the USA and acting on behalf of the entire region. Significantly, the same commentators almost always emphasized the existence of “traditionally bad” Polish-Russian relations, which was intended to discourage those countries that try to establish a relatively correct relationship relations with Moscow or more - they count on some privileges resulting from not pursuing an antagonistic policy towards the Russian Federation” [Zenderowski 2021: 41].

What would be the arguments of these unnamed “unfriendly commentators” mentioned by Zenderowski? The author of this paper can offer the following arguments: The 3SI is a revival of the anti-Russian military project of Polish Marshal Józef Piłsudski from the 1920s. Then the Marshal envisioned the creation of a military bloc of states from the Baltic to the Black and Adriatic seas to resist the Soviet Union. The military bloc militarizes the united space, with the help of which it will be possible to decisively break the ties between Russia and Germany. All this was supposed to lead to the encirclement of Russia with a “cordon sanitary node”, which would weaken and undermine its power. In short, it is all about setting up a massive barrier between Western Europe and Russia, as well as preparing for war against the “land of the Soviets”. The “Polish block” from the Polish to the Turkish border? The new undertaking of the Three Seas Initiative in the first quarter of the 21st century does not have primarily an economic, but a military-geopolitical goal: “gathering” the military potential of the participating countries, modern rearmament financed by the participating countries, increasing the number of American military bases, full coordination of allied armies in preparation for war, turning the territories around Russia into the epicenter of military tensions, taking over part of the tasks carried out by American contingents in Germany, Poland, Romania. It also points to its task related to the interruption or drastic reduction of the energy connection between Russia and the EU, and Russian gas should be replaced by the import of American liquefied gas, as well as gas from Israel and Azerbaijan². As mentioned above, the author of this paper might also be qualified as a skeptical observer of the Initiative as he publicly asked some fundamental questions as early as 2016.³

² The latter de facto happened after Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

³ This was a commentary for *biznesalert.pl*, published by the conservative Instytut Jagiellonski: „The aim of the 3SI was to discuss political issues and cooperation in the fields of energy and transport in this part of Europe. It is still an open question for many observers which part should dominate within this initiative. And if neither, what balance between them would be acceptable? Undoubtedly, good political cooperation in the region can and will have a positive impact on economic cooperation. At the same time, political issues may constitute an obstacle to the development of economic cooperation. It is the political differences, among others contributed to the failure of the pre-war concept of Intermarium, with which observers identify the current ABC Initiative. Nevertheless, a rhetorical question should be asked: if this concept is decades old, why is it being implemented so reluctantly? Isn't there a formal attempt to create an alliance or coalition of countries that naturally have different

But, are these arguments relevant? What is the reality of the Initiative?

Reality of the 3SI

Officially, from the Polish point of view, the 3SI since 2016 has primarily been a project of loose cooperation between thirteen EU countries. Its main goal has been to expand the infrastructure connecting the north and south of the eastern part of the EU and develop economic cooperation of this region in three areas: transport, energy and digitalization. When developing the concept of the Three Seas Initiative, participants had to define not only the subject of cooperation, but also had to choose the degree of its institutionalization and form. States when choosing a degree of institutionalization, strive to maximize benefits while optimizing the costs of managing a specific task. According to this line of thinking, further institutionalization would be needed. However, a very skeptical stance on this issue currently dominates within the participants of the Initiative. Currently, the issue of possible further institutionalization of the Three Seas Initiative is not the subject of public debate. Increasing the effectiveness of this cooperation is based on activities based on specific projects (project-oriented), and not on building permanent bureaucratic structures.

The Three Seas Initiative as a geopolitical project entered the operationalization phase in 2015–2016, when there was a tendency in Central Europe to look for an alternative to the previously leading orientation towards the Brussels-Berlin center. Already then, a factor that deeply determined changes in this part of the world was the first phase of the war in Ukraine (2014), blocking or slowing down most of the joint German-Russian projects, with the exception of the energy project in the

and divergent interests? Not only economic, but also political. The composition of the forum may confirm these fears: somewhat ironically, one may ask whether Europe will actually be strengthened by the improvement of, for example, Lithuanian-Albanian relations? Will the search for common interests in relations between, for example, Montenegro and Latvia really contribute to economic development and security in Europe? Is there really a genuine community of interests and goals here, considering the fundamentally different place of these countries on the geopolitical map of Europe?”, See: Babić: Bez integracji Międzymorze pozostanie forum dyskusyjnym AT: <https://biznes.alert.pl/babic-bez-integracji-miedzymorze-moze-zostac-forum-dyskusyjnym/> [Accessed: 22.3.2024]

form of Nordstream 2. The migration crisis and the relatively compact position of the Visegrad Group states in the face of the dislocation concept supported by Germany, gave another reason to question the growing influence of this country in Central and Eastern Europe (sometimes referred to as Mitteleuropa 2.0). The countries in the belt between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas clearly faced two scenarios: some form of bandwagoning, i.e. becoming part of the *modus operandi* of the Federal Republic of Germany and/or the Russian Federation, and the search for the possibility of creating an independent geopolitical quality that could constitute a response and an alternative to Mitteleuropa 2.0 and Eurasian tendencies.

3SI's flagship infrastructure projects: Via Carpatia, Via Baltica and the inland waterway based on the Oder, are mainly initiatives of the Polish government [Bieńczyk-Missala: 2019 322]. Via Carpatia as a strategic project in the field of road connections appeared in the concepts promoted by the authorities of the Republic of Poland. relatively early. In 2006, as a consequence of the International Conference "One Road - Four Countries", the Łańcut Declaration⁴ was signed by the ministers of transport of Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania and Poland. Conceptual work has gained momentum since 2010, after Bulgaria, Romania and Greece joined the project. This expressway with highway elements was supposed to eventually lead from Klaipėda to Thessaloniki.

Via Baltica connects Poland (Warsaw) with Estonia (Tallinn), passing through Lithuania and Latvia. In addition to complementarity with Via Carpatia, the Baltic Road, combined with the Rail Baltica railway line, which is to be part of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TET-N) and the High-Speed Railway, is to connect Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland with the Baltic states. Ultimately, the functionality of the infrastructure complex supporting transport and logistics in the 3SI area is to be achieved. The previously mentioned project includes the project of a large logistics and transport HUB located in Poland – the Central Communication Port. The Baltic-Adriatic Corridor is to be the final keystone of the logistics and transport dimension of the Three Seas Initiative. Running through the territories of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Italy and Slovenia, it connects ports in Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin and Świnoujście with ports in Trieste, Venice, Ravenna and Koper. By connecting agglomerations, logistics and transport terminals, sea ports and airports,

⁴ <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/aktualnosci/rok-2006/art,150,1025,deklaracja-lancucka.html> (accessed: 20.3.2024)

safe and efficient multimodal transport chains for transporting people and goods will ultimately be created. The construction of such infrastructure will enable the implementation of sovereign choices, unencumbered by political and historical determinism inherited as a legacy of years of functioning in foreign state bodies or spheres of influence.

The countries of the Three Seas Initiative show great similarities in the conditions of energy security. All of them are far from energy independence and therefore must pursue policies aimed at increasing the level of energy security as a result of diversification and balancing of supplies. A significant part of them, as a legacy membership in the Soviet bloc, inherited poorly modernized economy with significant energy intensity, an energy sector based on high-emission coal-related technologies, a structural connection of the gas and oil transmission infrastructure with the Russian Federation [Ascari 2013: 14-17]. When characterizing the system, it is also worth pointing out the high degree of centralization and nationalization of companies operating on markets [Ruszel, Kucharska 2022]. Today, these challenges are met by the so-called the North-South gas corridor, the implementation of which will enable greater independence from energy resources from Russia, including by using a physical reverse. The corridor is to connect the LNG terminal in Świnoujście and the Baltic Gas Pipeline with the terminal on the island of Krk in Croatia. The newly opened Baltic Gas Pipeline enables the transmission of raw material on the Norway-Denmark-Poland line, although its final capacity has not been achieved⁵. In the gas reality of the region, initiatives are divided into two/three areas: the Baltic Sea, based on the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea, with the latter two having many common elements. The essence of the Three Seas Initiative seems to be the attempt to connect them into one coordinated and agile system. Of course, this does not apply only to the gas. The development of other energy technologies: renewable energy, nuclear energy and – ultimately – hydrogen, make the 3SI project seem to be a promising prospect. If we assume that energy security is not limited to ensuring a constant supply of raw materials at an acceptable price, but is a geopolitical factor (energy geopolitics) [O'Sullivan 2013: 31-32], it becomes necessary to transfer reflection to the level of vital interests. The expansion of energy infrastructure, resulting in an increase in its complexity and therefore

⁵ <https://www.baltic-pipe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/3-SMDI-19022-019-niechorze.pdf> [accessed: 20.3.2024]

sensitivity, necessitates the launch of another one pillar of the Three Seas cooperation – this time in the field of a more classically understood security.

In the digital dimension, which for now seems to be placed lower than the other pillars in the hierarchy of the Initiative's objectives, a number of important initiatives have been undertaken. The Digital Three Seas Initiative (D3SI) has increased the level of quantitative and qualitative digitalization in the region. The flagship project is 3 Seas Digital Highway. Already on September 17, 2018, at the third Three Seas summit in Bucharest⁶ representatives of the Three Seas countries adopted the main strategic projects in the field of energy, transport and digital technology⁷. The latter established the 3 Seas Digital Highway, an integral part of D3SI, as one of the priority interconnection projects to strengthen secure north-south digital connections. It can fill gaps in the communication infrastructure, including fiber optics (both in the backbone and access layers) and 5G infrastructure.⁸ The planned digital infrastructure is to be implemented along the planned Three Seas transport and energy routes.

The 3SI versus selected theoretical approaches

In its functional dimension, the 3SI is a specific subsystem combining the capabilities of states, regional international institutions, more or less formalized regimes, mechanisms present in existing superior systems (e.g. European Union). In political terms, the stakes of the game are to increase the potential and ability to independently shape one's own security, understood as ensuring the possibility of survival and development. In fact, these issues concern the issue of power and, as such, situate the problem in the domains related to the realist paradigm – especially its structural and defensive trends. However, the responses to such identified threats, challenges and risks, and the adopted strategies – including those regarding opportunities – are built based on cooperative models. It therefore seems that neoliberal approaches should also be taken into account.

⁶ <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/trojmorze> [accessed: 21.3.2024]

⁷ https://pism.pl/publikacje/Wymiar_cyfrowy_Inicjatywy_Tr_jmorza [accessed: 21.3.2024]

⁸ https://digital3seas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/digital3seas_initiative_roadmap_report_2018.pdf [accessed: 21.3.2024]

Regarding the latter, can we treat the 3SI as an “imaginary community”? True, 3SI is still not fully institutionalized. Its face is constantly being shaped and grinding, and its future is not yet decided. It is certainly one of the visible manifestations of new regionalism, born of the growing sense of threat from Russia and questions about the sufficient sensitivity of the West to these threats. However, an important element of the development of 3SI was the establishment of the ‘State of Poland foundation’, one of whose goals is to go beyond “hard” projects (politics, economics, infrastructure) and supplement them with soft, cultural projects. The program document here is the ‘Three Seas - a fascinating story’ published in 2021 Report and communication strategy [Nerada 2021: 35]. This strategic report can be treated as a kind of manifesto of the Three Seas Initiative. One of the goals set for 3SI is to build regional soft power. Soft power as a concept was constituted for the first time in Joseph S. Nye’s work “Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power”, published in 1990 (Nye 1990). For him, “soft power is the power to get what you want which is desired by attraction, not by compulsion or payment” (Nye 1990: 74) and the “ability of a state to use soft power is based on three basic resources: the culture of the state, political values (at home and abroad), and external politics (which must be legitimate and moral in the eyes of others)” (Nye 2011: 112). However, soft power measures primarily concern states, not supranational organizations such as the European Union or transnational initiatives such as 3SI. In relation to the EU, the concept of normative power is used more often than soft power, but this time with emphasis not on the moral position, but on the norm-creating power of the EU. Considering the fact that currently all members of the Initiative are also members of the European Union, it is also interesting to note that collective soft power can be strengthened through active participation in existing, larger organizations - and through cooperation within a bloc of countries perform effectively above their ‘weight class’. From this perspective, the collective soft power of the 3SI should be understood as a certain value, potentially complementing the “soft power” of the countries that constitute it. In order for a given entity, including supra- and international entities, to obtain moral capital, it must first become an entity. It must – referring to Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as a community imagined – to be imagined as a community in time and space, which is a kind of creation to the extent that as long as its members feel connected to each other, despite that they don’t know each other or that they often don’t even look alike [Anderson 1983: 6].

Considerations on the moral capital of the 3SI cannot abstract from the question whether the Initiative exists at all, and if so, what it actually is. The

claim to the identity of the 3SI was formulated by introducing the neologism “Three Seas”. This term appeared, among others, during the speech of Polish President Andrzej Duda for the diplomatic corps in Kiev in 2016⁹. It replaced the names of the ABC countries (from the names of the Adriatic, Baltic and Black seas) or the Intermarium countries, which were often used interchangeably. Intermarium, a pre-II world war Polish idea associated with the idea of Józef Piłsudski, was often indicated as one of the main sources of the contemporary concept of the Three Seas, which was sometimes questioned whether it was not a vehicle primarily for Polish national and even neo-imperial interests. Nevertheless, moral capital of the Initiative could be searched for in the feeling of achieved geopolitical maturity and a break with moral status assigned by others for the one shaped by their own. The 3SI space would be a space of the countries, within the European Union, talking about themselves using their own political language of self-interest and not being an object defined by external actors.

It is worth noting though, to what extent the ongoing war in Ukraine has influenced this moral narrative approach within the Initiative. It is still a dominating narrative in Poland. In recent years, the 3SI has gone through the slow process of constructing it as a collective entity. The situation has dramatically changed since February 2022 and Russian invasion of Ukraine. This made it possible to cast oneself in the role of a hero who defends Ukraine against Russia’s invasion and the passivity of the EU, especially Germany and France. Even if never before there was no question of the 3SI as an area of community of interests, the logic of the current political situation in the European Union and on the Eastern flank of NATO resulted in the emergence of a community of interests and a community of Central and Eastern Europe states threatened by Russia. It became a new, strongly resonant tone the common experience of disappointment among the 3SI countries - especially Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - as they have been neglected and treated patronizingly for years regarding, i.e. the approach to the Nord Stream gas pipeline.¹⁰ And these are the countries that reacted to the 2022 war decisively, but completely different than Western countries, which largely took a more wait-and-see attitude (at least at the

⁹ See: <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/530239,trojmorze-rosnie-dzieki-wspolpracy-z-rumunia-i-chorwacja.html> [accessed: 25.03.2024].

¹⁰ A gap that has been existing in recent decade or so between Polish calls for Common European Energy Policy solidarity and Germany-Russian Project of Nordstream 2 pipeline.

beginning of the conflict). The unyielding, common attitude of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, supported by the Czech Republic and Slovenia, and basically all other 3SI countries, (apart from Hungary and Austria), it was so convincing that it allowed (and this is a rare moment in history!) to impose canons of behavior on the West in relation to this war, setting the boundaries of what is moral and what is not. As a consequence, the war allowed the 3SI countries to cast the East (Russia) as the perpetrators, the West (Germany, France), which was looking for neutral solutions, as at least accomplices or passive observers, and themselves as the heroes. Shortly, the narrative is as follows: If the West is to recover from its moral decline, it must convert, and its conversion must be a recognition narrative of the 3SI countries. In this sense they appear as the depository of Western morality. Conversion of the West is in fact a return to Central Europe. In this way, perhaps the 3SI will be able to go beyond its postcolonial paradox and polarization between East and West, showing that it is the “moral epicentre”, and that the Central Europe was right.¹¹

The 3SI should also be analyzed throughout the dimension of power and hard-core security issues ensuring the possibility of survival and development. Namely, through the realist paradigm. In the theory of realism, the key assumptions are a pessimistic vision of human nature and the belief in the conflictual nature of international relations, based on competition and the threat of war. The greatest importance is attached to state security. The key concept explaining the motives of states' actions is the category of power, which is the basis for defining the national interest

¹¹ There was one more important element in the mutual “superior/inferior morality narrative” when it comes to the war in Ukraine. In the early 2022 the major western European countries considered a rebellion of the European “periphery” in relation to the war in Ukraine, i.e. the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This approach can be explain by their attitude to the region: the task of the latter since the beginning of EU membership was “only” to provide cheap labor, to be the terrain of German and French penetration of capital in return for westernization and a modernization economic package with axiological content (in accordance with the binding neoliberal paradigm). Neither the Germans nor the French wanted the states of Central and Eastern Europe to impose much in “their” EU, that is, EU policy in these turbulent regional and global tectonic movements. Since the “periphery” is disobedient, there has been an obvious frustration among the leading EU countries. This is why, inter alia, we talk about deep structural crisis in the EU and a lack of a unified vision of the further development of the Union.

[Snyder 2004: 52]. In an anarchic international environment, over which no superior authority is exercised, the basic entities are states that undertake rational actions motivated by national interest [Legro, Moravcsik 1999: 5]. Realism explains that international cooperation is understood in the context of struggling for the interests of states. Seen from this perspective, the process of European integration profoundly modifies the environment in which the struggle for power takes place. The European Union brings about a change in the conditions of competition, but this does not negate the basic assumption of classical realism – the role of national interest as a universal force driving international relations. The 3SI, in the light of the theory of realism, can be considered an example of international cooperation resulting from a strong pursuit of maximum satisfaction of the interests of the states that create it and compete with each other. Basically, the motives for establishing cooperation are explained in two ways [Borkowski 2007: 58]. Firstly, cooperation occurs when states are united by a limited common interest and at the same time respect each other's national interests, and when the potential benefits outweigh the losses caused by the partial limitation of sovereignty. What matters most in cooperation is relative, not absolute, profits. What is important is the influence on changing the balance of power on the international stage, which means that those in power, when assessing the possibilities of economic cooperation, do not consider whether a given country will benefit from it at all, but try to determine whether they will gain more from it than other countries. It is important to emphasize the primacy of the political sphere over the economic sphere, because for political reasons states may withdraw even from very beneficial economic projects. Secondly, cooperation occurs when the distribution of power in a given group results in the emergence of a hegemon that can pursue particular national interests by imposing on others or convincing them that these are common interests. This cooperation may be effective, but it will depend on the interests of the dominant state.

Various events taking place at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century were consistent with the pessimistic vision of the Hobbesian world. Among them, it is worth emphasizing the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and a war with Ukraine. The sense of security that prevailed in Central and Eastern Europe after the enlargement of the EU and NATO was giving way to fears related to the emerging new order. The Euro-Atlantic system, which is the pillar of the security of the countries in this region, has faced serious challenges. This is the exact time when the 3SI appeared on the scene. From the perspective of realism, the activity of superpowers, in particular the USA, Russia and regionally – Germany, is important for

understanding the motives for cooperation between the countries creating the Three Seas Initiative. The United States, of course, is not and will not be a member of this new project, but it shows great interest in it. According to the assumptions of neoclassical realism [Waltz 1979], the source of this involvement can be found in the pursuit of maximizing influence. In competition at the global level, the initiative may be a tool for long-term strengthening of the US position in this part of the world. Central and Eastern Europe is an important area in strategic terms because, on the one hand, it neighbors Russia, which openly undermines the unipolar order and strives to build a multipolar world, and, on the other, Germany, which, after unification in 1990, has been systematically strengthening its position. Referring to Modelski's theory of hegemonic cycles, which is based on the assumptions of realism, one can notice phenomena that are part of the phase of delegitimizing the position of the United States. In the game of changing the world order from unipolar to multipolar, potential rivals of the hegemon try, on the one hand, to benefit from the still existing system, and on the other, to undermine it. None of the Central and Eastern European countries is a potential rival of the USA nor aspires to the role of a world power, which from Washington's perspective increases the attractiveness of this region.

Economic cooperation in the theory of realism is allowed provided that it does not lead to a relative increase in the power of another country, which may turn from a partner into an opponent in the future. It cannot be a factor in an unfavorable change in the balance of power. Cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe does not carry such a risk for the USA, because it is a highly politically fragmented region, including small and medium-sized countries that do not have their own significant gas deposits, but use large amounts of it. Americans are intensively looking for customers for liquefied gas (LNG), so this gives them a chance to conquer new markets and block the influence of potential competitors. Interestingly, in 2016 analysts warned that half of American LNG projects were at risk of closure within five years if they did not find new contractors and eliminate Qatari and Russian competition from Europe.¹² The implementation of large infrastructure projects – such as the expansion of the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, the construction of a terminal on the Croatian island of Krk, the construction of north-south transport connections, gas and oil pipelines – would facilitate the transmission of raw materials, also affecting the level of

¹² Forbes on-line: www.forbes.com/sites/judeclemente/2016/05/15/six-threats-for-the-u-s-liquefied-natural-gas-business/#448f00413a1b [accessed: 22.3.2024]

energy security of Central and Eastern Europe. From Russia's point of view, this was an action against its vital interests. It also complicated Germany's plans to become a Central European gas hub. In the case of the USA, the potential benefits from such trade could lead to the strengthening of its economic power. In realism, material factors included in hard power are the central category among the determinants of power. Nowadays, the economic potential of the state as an element of power is gaining in importance.

In the theory of realism, security is strongly emphasized. In a rigid hierarchy of goals, survival and strengthening security become the primary goals. The strengthening of security is relative, i.e. it is always assessed in comparison to the capabilities of other countries. The key to explaining their actions in the international arena are the current conditions - the balance of power. Realism emphasizes the possibility of conflict and the threat of war in international relations. For Central and Eastern Europe, the growing uncertainty about the behavior of other countries (especially Russia) and the EU's weakness in terms of security and defense are important. Although the 3SI focuses on infrastructure projects, it is also of great political importance, especially for increasing the importance of Central and Eastern Europe in the EU, developing cooperation with the USA and improving energy security. This aspect has gained significance particularly after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 and doubtless after February 2022 after which the existing security architecture in the region has been seriously damaged. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe differ in their assessment of threats and interests in their policy towards Russia. Some of them - especially Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Romania - see the Kremlin's actions as a threat. Others, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia, emphasize the positive aspects of economic and energy relations with Moscow, but do not break away from the common European front of sanctions against Russia and do not oppose the strengthening of NATO's Eastern flank. Despite some differences, concerns about potential threats encourage the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to strengthen ties with the United States. Their main goal is not to maximize power, as in the case of the USA, but to maximize security, which is emphasized by neorealism.

With regard to the European Union, the 3SI can be perceived in two ways - as a factor of integrating or disintegrating the Union. From the perspective of neorealism, the establishment of this project can be considered a solution to strengthen the entire EU in the changing international order. The 3SI could become a factor consolidating the Union in a conflicted,

competitive world. Realism sees the pursuit of competition at the global level as the main driving force of integration and explanation of the processes taking place within the EU. The Three Seas Initiative could therefore support the Community in its competition with other economic and political centers: China, Japan, Russia, Turkey, the USA, etc. However, if the Union's goal was to compete with the US on the global stage, the Americans would have no interest in strengthening it by supporting the Three Seas Initiative. It is also difficult to answer the question of which political preferences of the strongest country should be reflected in the Three Seas. The most powerful EU countries, Germany and France, initially distanced themselves from this initiative, and Berlin's later attempt to join it raised fears that it might dominate this format, and has so far been unsuccessful. If we consider Poland to be the strongest country in this group, then it should be said that compared to Central and Eastern Europe, its potential is significant, but compared to Germany, France, Turkey or Russia - much weaker. Given the current balance of power, Poland has no way of persuading several countries in the region to cooperate if it would be against the interests of the major powers. However, the emergence of the 3SI can also be explained differently - as a factor disintegrating the EU, or rather strengthening the disintegration processes affecting the weakening Union, which would limit its ability to compete with the USA. This is consistent with the opinions that the 3SI is to be a political competition for the old European Union, a counterweight to Brussels, Berlin and Paris, and even a step towards establishing an alternative, Central European structure after the collapse of the EU. This would be a step towards increasing the role of the Central and Eastern European countries as a consolidated bloc, but at the expense of the EU. Some realists scholars such as John Mearsheimer predicted the imminent decline of the integration process already in the early 1990s, when the threat of the USSR disappeared [Mearsheimer 1990: 5-56]. Initially, it seemed that this would not happen, as integration was deepening dynamically, but after two decades the EU found itself in a deep crisis. The internal problems of the European Union are accompanied by the strengthening of the role of nation states. In classical, state-centric realism, international relations are based on relationships between sovereign states that retain full control over their populations, territories, and internal resources. Therefore, the Three Seas Initiative can be perceived in this sense as a step towards turning away from the integration model towards intergovernmental cooperation, shaped by traditional foreign policy channels. This would explain why the key role in this format is played by

the highest representatives of the states, why no treaty has been adopted and no steps have been taken to institutionalize this cooperation.

Conclusions

Regardless of whether we observe the 3SI in terms of its economic, political or geopolitical dimensions, there is no question that it is an effort of the states of the Central and Eastern Europe to overcome geopolitical fatalism of the region and escape from peripheral position in Europe. We must acknowledge that after February 24 2022 and Russian invasion of Ukraine major vectors in international politics (and economy) have deeply changed. This includes the Three Seas Initiative as well.

The liberal paradigm narrative layer of the last 30 years is becoming a thing of the past. In other words, it is no longer a useful explanatory tool. This includes, inter alia, the narrative of globalism and the narrative of the primacy of values in politics. We witness the return of the balance of power narrative, return to industrial policy, return to protectionism, narrative about protecting one's own civilization.¹³ When it comes to security issues we need to conclude that there is no shared pan-European identity. This EU narrative is a fiction because there will always be differences in threat perception in Europe. It is important to understand that in the near future the USA will withdraw from the paradigm of domination to the paradigms of selective engagement and off-shore balancing. The question remains whether Poland, together with its partners in the Three Seas Initiative will be able to adapt to the new security reality in Europe. This will have a significant impact on the remaining dimensions of cooperation mentioned in this paper. It will also decide about the success or a failure of the Three Seas idea in this part of Europe.

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¹³ Another words, we need more Huntington and less narratives about globalization.

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THE MEDITERRANEAN BETWEEN CENTRALITY AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract: The relevance of the Mediterranean in the panorama of global flows of goods is a consolidated historical-economic constant. The opening of Suez has transformed it from a formidable interface between culturally, economically, and politically different shores to a global crossroads of maritime routes and geo-economic and geopolitical interests, which have reshaped its roles and vocations. One of these, the “mid-oceanic” label, is (perhaps too) frequently attached to the Mediterranean, almost as if to imply that the fortunes of “our sea” are inexorably linked to those of the other seas (i.e., oceans) and that, after all, any success of southern Europe and northern Africa is governed by external actors. It seems the centrality of the Mediterranean and its peninsulas, first and foremost the Italian one, only makes sense as points of passage.

Keywords: The Mediterranean, maritime traffic, Europe, shipping, resilience.

Introduction: A destiny of middle lands and inland seas

G. Fioravanzo (1936) identified the *Latin, Australasian, American, and Japanese* Mediterranean seas as maritime areas in which political, economic, cultural, and strategic dynamics coexisted, capable of nurturing relational processes. Two of these, the American and Latin, acquired their (also) mid-oceanic vocation (and thus centrality) thanks to the construction of two artificial works, the Panama and the Suez canals, respectively. The Australasian one and the Japanese one in contemporary times have been able to enjoy a clear centrality as a consequence of their amount of traffic, especially containers.

In all cases, the maritime trades that have unravelled both in the past and in contemporary times have played a fundamental role in the processes of territorial development, giving certain coastal areas a variable geopolitical centrality depending on their ability to attract traffic, economic interests, and foreign investment. Multiscale centralities, taking up the definitions of Fleming and Hayouth (1994) and Wang and Cullinane (2016), i.e., relating

to individual ports, port systems, or entire maritime regions, and Vallega's numerous writings on the sea, have often reminded us that the geographic-economic centrality of ports and maritime systems is closely related to geopolitical centrality and that transport geography and geopolitics are, in themselves, two sides of the same coin: that of global trade flows and their different types. The latter results from the progressive international division of labour and the creation of supply chains that are increasingly complex in their functioning and subject to geopolitical determinants. The hierarchization of the oceans could not, however, disregard the role of "maritime intermediation" played by "Mediterranean" actors: from both a geopolitical and a geo-economic standpoint, the latter assumes a relational and spatial dimension far removed from oceanic supremacy and the subordination of the inland seas (Vallega, 1997).

The Genoese geographer, echoing the observations of the French Vigariè, highlighted how the evolution of maritime transport and of its "actors" at sea (ships) and on land (ports) were actually components of a more complex system formed by the interaction between the *maritime horizon* and the *terrestrial horizon*. Geopolitical action had to be conducted by the state, or by other actors, in such a way as to favour the optimisation of this relationship in favour of a hinterland that had to go as far inland as possible.

The centrality of the Mediterranean was relevant in the *neo-industrial stage* (1900–1970), especially in the phase following the Second World War. Maritime traffic underwent a major transformation that stemmed from the flow of raw materials, especially oil. Maritime traffic was affected, as never before, by the passage through areas sensitive to geopolitical events (the Middle East straits and the Suez Canal). Economic geography could detect new coastal industrial developments concentrated in or close to port areas, in deference to Alfred Weber's localisation theories on the point of minimum transport cost (Cerreti et al., 2019). It was at this stage that "oceanic" power began to be joined by "mediterranean" power: ports on the northern shore were increasingly becoming ideal docking points for oil tankers from Suez.

In addition to its centrality, the industrial phase also revealed some vulnerabilities. The Suez closures in 1956–57 and between 1967 and 1975, coinciding with the Arab–Israeli wars, sanctioned the redirection of maritime traffic along the Cape route. Global flows across the Mediterranean resumed with great vigour after 1980, both because of the stabilisation of relations between Egypt and Israel and the vigour with which containerised goods transport began to take its place alongside traditional commodities transport, making the route between the Far East, Suez, and Europe take on

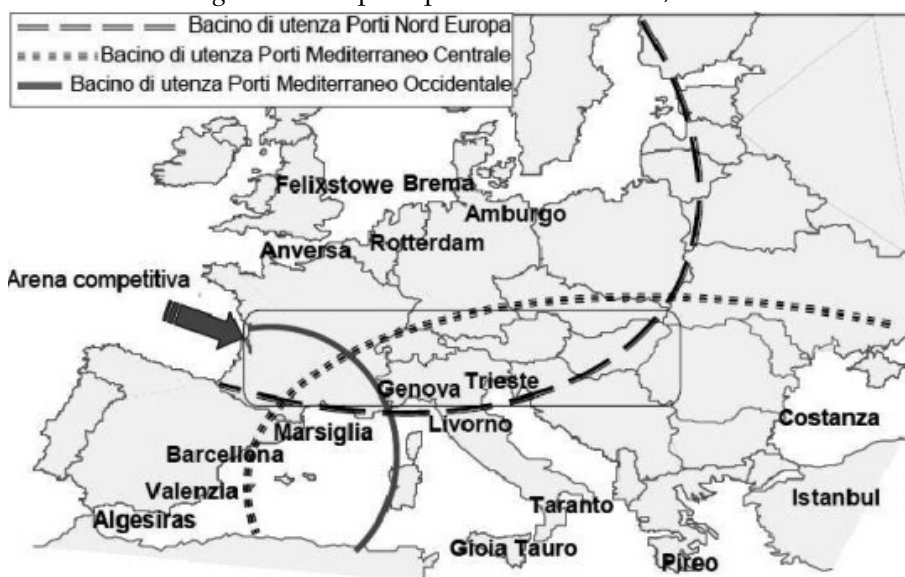
the role of “organising principle” of world maritime transport. In the 1990s, the dominant routes were used by so-called *round-the-world* ships, in which Mediterranean actors played important transit roles thanks to the Suez and Panama Canals. The container ships sailed around the world, touching ports in the Asian Seas (China Sea and Japan), Latin America, and the Americas, completing the route to Asia via the Pacific. A system that optimised the filling level of ships called at a few hub ports capable of receiving and, at the same time, replenishing large quantities of goods destined for the three main geo-economic and geopolitical “poles” of the post-bipolar world: East Asia, Europe, and the United States.

The Latin region represented a weak link in the chain due to the well-known infrastructural deficits from which it suffered at least until the first decade of the 21st century. Deficits that complicated the realisation of that land-sea interface desired by Vallega in the European context placed the Mediterranean in a relegated position compared to the Northern-range ports.

On the other hand, the massive use of containers required radically new land-sea interfaces and reduced industrial space in ports in favour of infrastructural interconnections and space for logistics. What became decisive for a port and the entire maritime transport chain was the efficiency of land-based work and the speed of transferring goods to their final destination through intermodal systems. Flat, equipped, and connected areas had an undeniable competitive advantage that established a natural hierarchy based on deterministic factors. Even today, northern European ports are preferred due to the existence of numerous inland waterways (rivers and artificial canals). Mediterranean ports, on the other hand, are subject to orographic constraints that have proven to be highly critical at a time when maritime transport needed perfect interoperability with land transport.

Therefore, for the Mediterranean, the last decade of the last century was one of the most critical periods in recent history. The inability to intercept the flow of goods from the East to the more efficient Northern Range ports became almost structural. The better infrastructure of the Northern European ports made them preferred for import and export activities even compared to areas close to the Mediterranean itself. The location advantage of the proximity of the Suez-Gibraltar route was almost cancelled out by the inefficiencies in terms of handling and bureaucratic burden. The studies conducted by T. Notteboom (2012) and Isfort (2011) showed how the hinterland of the ports of Rotterdam and Antwerp stretched as far as the entire Po Valley, relegating the Ligurian ports to landing points mostly for raw materials and low value-added goods (Fig. 1).

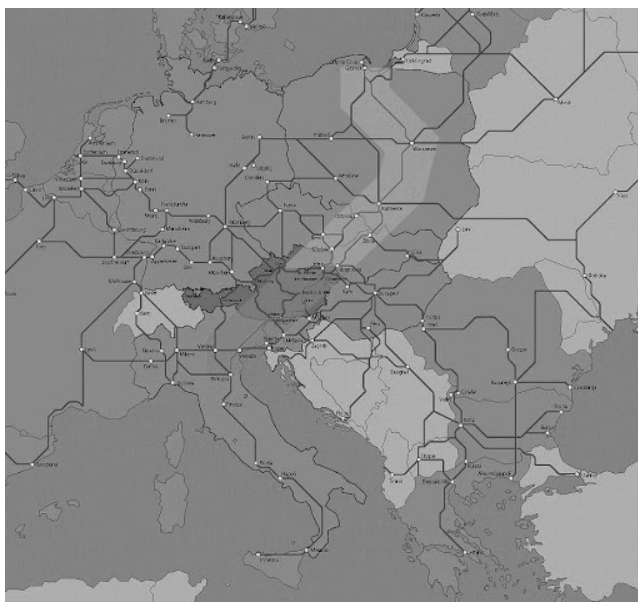
Figure 1: European port influence areas, 2011



Source: ISFORT, 2011

The opening up of Eastern European markets, following the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, seemed to be able to give, especially to North Adriatic ports, new opportunities for growth thanks to their geographical proximity to the new Central European logistics areas and thanks to hypotheses for the development of multimodal corridors, such as the Baltic-Adriatic one, potentially capable of creating a maritime-port macro-system innervated by a rail *landbridge* between Trieste and Gdansk.

Figure 2: The Baltic-Adriatic Corridor



Source: Sellari, 2013.

At the same time, competition within the *mare nostrum* was fuelled by ports on the southern shore, such as Port Said and Tangier, which could count on Asian investments and labour costs at much lower levels than those on the northern shore. The consolidated port hierarchies within the basin appeared to be changing, almost defining a sort of “upside-down Mediterranean” (Sellari, 2013).

In decades at the turn of the 21st century, when, as we have seen, the Mediterranean seemed destined for inexorable decline, the trend appeared to reverse. The Spanish hub ports of Valencia, Barcelona, and Algeciras, the Italian port of Gioia Tauro, the Maltese port of Marsaxlokk, Piraeus, Ambarli, Port Said, and Tangier became important pivots in the strategies of shipping companies in *transshipment* operations.

However, although this type of traffic has allowed the Mediterranean to achieve significant results compared to its North Sea rivals (see Table 1), it should be noted that the added value of traditional ports is about six times higher than that of a transshipment port. Moreover, ports with a high transshipment share are particularly vulnerable, as transshipment flows are

highly contestable due to imitation processes of easily replicable activities and the ease of entry by new actors into the market, disconnected from the territorial context (Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2015). The demand that sustains gateway ports is linked to associated logistics services that are much more complex and integrated with the territory of reference, with which the ports themselves have developed links throughout history that go well beyond simple financial investment by foreign entities.

Table 1: Traffic trends 1994-2021 Northern Range and Mediterranean ports (Teu's)

	1994	2000	2005	2010	2015	2017	2019	2020	2021
Northern range									
Rotterdam	4.534.253	6.274.556	9.288.000	11.147.573	12.234.535	13.734.334	14.810.104	14.349.446	15.300.000
Amers	2.208.173	4.082.334	6.488.029	8.468.476	9.653.511	10.450.898	11.860.204	12.023.000	12.020.000
Brema	2.725.718	2.736.741	3.736.000	488.655	5.546.657	5.513.802	4.857.000	4.771.000	5.019.000
Amburgo	1.480.030	4.248.247	8.088.000	7.895.736	8.821.481	8.815.469	8.257.683	8.540.000	8.715.000
Le Havre	872.939	1.464.901	2.119.000	2.358.077	2.559.410	2.875.281	2.786.000	2.445.000	3.070.000
Zeebrugge	609.600	965.435	1.408.000	2.499.756	1.568.938	1.520.406	1.700.000	1.800.000	2.205.547
Mediterraneo									
Valencia	466.869	1.308.010	2.397.915	4.206.937	4.615.196	4.832.156	5.440.000	5.430.000	5.614.454
Algeciras	1.003.528	2.009.122	3.179.614	2.806.884	4.515.768	4.380.849	5.120.000	5.110.000	4.796.000
Pireo	516.669	1.161.099	1.394.512	885.155	3.327.778	4.060.000	5.650.000	5.437.477	5.320.000
Marsa alik	383.060	1.033.052	1.321.000	2.370.729	3.064.000	3.150.000	2.720.000	2.400.000	2.970.000
Barcellona	605.356	1.387.392	2.078.329	1.931.033	1.965.241	3.006.872	3.324.650	2.958.040	3.530.814
Genova	512.098	1.500.632	1.624.964	1.758.858	2.242.902	2.622.187	2.669.917	2.498.850	2.781.112
Gioia Tauro	0	2.653.000	3.205.859	2.852.264	2.546.805	2.448.570	2.522.876	3.193.364	3.146.533
La Spezia	846.000	910.142	1.024.455	1.285.155	1.300.442	1.473.571	1.409.381	1.173.660	1.476.914
Marsiglia	437.077	722.445	906.000	953.435	1.223.173	1.362.204	1.498.000	1.300.000	1.503.000
Trieste	143.168	206.134	198.316	281.643	501.222	616.156	789.640	776.025	757.255
Capodistria	ND	86.679	179.745	476.731	790.736	911.528	959.354	945.051	996.000
Salonico	ND	229.475	366.000	273.131	351.407	402.422	449.000	461.000	471.000
Napoli	200.035	397.000	373.626	534.694	438.280	509.876	681.929	643.540	652.599
Livorno	371.173	501.339	658.506	628.489	780.874	734.085	789.833	716.233	791.356
Venezia	114.656	218.000	289.860	393.913	560.301	611.383	593.070	529.064	513.814
Alessandria	ND	ND	733.883	1.354.813	1.688.301	870.540	974.137	1.230.000	1.164.000
Port Said	ND	ND	1.521.855	3.627.813	3.575.857	ND	3.658.159	4.010.000	4.760.000
Ashdod	ND	ND	ND	ND	1.307.000	1.525.000	1.633.000	1.584.000	1.612.000
Ambarfi	ND	ND	1.185.768	2.540.353	3.091.026	3.122.504	3.104.883	2.887.807	2.942.550
Mersin	ND	ND	596.289	1.030.391	1.466.119	1.553.841	1.854.312	1.948.695	2.106.937
Tangeri	ND	ND	ND	2.058.430	3.000.000	3.312.409	4.801.713	5.771.221	7.173.870
Haifa	ND	ND	1.123.000	1.264.000	1.215.000	1.343.000	1.463.997	1.470.000	1.463.000

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Assoporti, Worldshipping.org, Worldbank.org, Lloydlist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com, various port authorities.

Mediterranean: *Mare Nostrum* or *Mare Aliorum*?

The Mediterranean, seen as a basin mainly characterised by transshipment movements, has therefore consolidated, in the first two decades of the new century, a purely “medium-oceanic” vocation. The geographical variable, i.e., the position with respect to Suez, has provided shipping operators with sufficient motivation to position their hubs there and develop their strategies.

Among the major investors in the Mediterranean transport scene, China has emerged as a frontrunner for more than a decade now. Although the Mediterranean is not its main geopolitical priority, compared to, for instance, the South China Sea, it has undoubtedly become increasingly important for Beijing as the western terminal of the BRI (Fardella and Prodi, 2017; Ekman, 2018).

The Mediterranean, as a hub of international trade, stands for Beijing as a space of opportunity in which to act through acquisitions and infrastructural investments, the most important of which took place in the Greek port of Piraeus, of which the Chinese company COSCO holds 67% ownership. This acquisition has become the subject of geopolitical narratives aimed at highlighting the conquest geopolitics by the Dragon on the Old Continent, especially if linked to the Budapest-Belgrade-Piraeus railway financed by China, which would play the role of a penetration line within the Balkan interior.

This land infrastructure policy promoted by China has raised concerns for Brussels because it would overlap/compete with the TEN/T network projects. While most of the latter were proposed to ensure the cohesion and accessibility of less advanced regions within the EU, the BRI strategy on eastern European soil is functional to the objectives of the Silk Roads on land and sea and thus responds to Chinese rather than European strategies (van der Putten, 2016).

The Balkans is the European region that saw a great deal of activity towards the end of the second decade of the 21st century on the part of Beijing, which saw the area as a kind of geopolitical fault line within the European Community. Many economic and financial activities involved the acquisition of seaport shares. In Croatia, the port of Zadar has been co-owned by Chinese companies since 2018, and in 2019, COSCO announced the opening of the “Rijeka Land Sea Express” service to Central Europe, which will make the Rijeka gateway the main distribution port option for China in the Balkan Adriatic. In Slovenia, the port of Koper signed a cooperation agreement with the Chinese port of Ningbo.

In Italy, in 2016, COSCO and Qingdao Port bought shares in the Vado Ligure Reefer Terminal, a key port of call, especially in the future when the so-called Terzo Valico high-capacity railway will be built.

Port investments were also made in the Maltese port of Marsaxlokk (in which China Merchants Port has a 49% stake), Marseille (with a 25% stake owned by EuroFos), the Spanish port of Valencia (in which COSCO holds a 51% stake), the Turkish port of Kumport (where it holds a 65% stake), and the North African ports of Port Said and Tangier, where the Chinese also hold part of the *Free Zone Areas* share packages.

Chinese investments, albeit controversial, bear witness to the fact that the Mediterranean is nonetheless seen as a space of opportunity thanks to a “centrality” that has never waned. The “neo-colonialist” characterisation appears to be the outcome more of anti-Chinese geopolitical narratives than of analyses capable of highlighting the structural flaws of a port system that is often unresponsive to the impulses of the global economy. A system, as a whole, has almost always shown forms of adaptation and resilience to changes, even traumatic ones, deriving from exogenous events. It has demonstrated this by its ability to develop alternative relations and forms of exchange, for example, during the aforementioned periods of the closure of the Suez Canal. It has demonstrated this by being able to adapt to changes in global transport. More recently, it has confirmed this with its reaction to the shocks resulting from the pandemic and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict by diversifying supplies as well as de-structuring and re-structuring globalisation-related economic processes that seemed irreversible.

The Resilient Mediterranean Between Pandemic and War

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the second global crisis after the 2008 financial crisis, which caused a recession in all OECD countries and most emerging economies.

The geopolitical and trade tensions between the US and China, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the instabilities in the Middle East have deeply affected the functioning of the economic system, triggering a sharp contraction of trade flows and destabilising the global logistics system.

Global value chains have undergone partial changes in both their structure and operation. Companies, especially multinational ones, have acted through strategies of reconfiguration of raw material supplies, geographical relocation of production, and streamlining of decision-making processes (Giovannetti G., Marvasi E., 2021).

The stability of global financial institutions, sustainable GDP growth, and widely applied logistics concepts such as just-in-time have been challenged, despite support by national governments and some supranational institutions, with a substantial impact on shipping companies and port terminals (Notteboom, Pallis, and Rodrigue, 2021).

The congestion of the entire global port and logistics system, besides producing unreliability in deliveries, has produced inflationary effects in the freight market. Container prices skyrocketed due to a progressive imbalance in the dynamics of demand (which rose sharply in the immediate post-crisis period) and supply (regulated by speculative logic on the part of operators). The consequence was an increase in freight rates of around 500% between the end of 2020 and 2022.

In this framework of strong speculative phenomena, contraction of world demand for goods, and uncertainty, the Mediterranean, as an element of a global supply chain system, could have seen a widening gap with its northern European competitor, which in any case can traditionally count on consolidated critical masses capable of withstanding the impact of crises. Moreover, we have already pointed out how routes competitive to the Suez options are easily activated depending on the geopolitical and geo-economic contexts that are created, from Chinese investment in the Asia-Europe railways as part of the BRI project to the Cape route that, although more expensive, does not involve passing through Middle Eastern areas being at high geopolitical risk.

Nevertheless, the analysis of ship passages through the Canal (Fig. 3) did not show (as of 2022) any negative trends but rather a significant reaction to all the shocks that the (de)globalisation of maritime traffic has experienced from 2020 onwards.

This is not to argue that the global system of traditional supply chains has emerged entirely solid and immune from the pandemic and the war, but to emphasise that the Suez-Mediterranean system has nevertheless maintained high levels of involvement in global maritime transport and, indeed, increased them. This even though the impact on supply chain stability led to inflationary processes and forced a redefinition of industrial and production strategies, which resulted in a substantial reorganisation of oriented production chains (modification of supply systems and shortening of the main value chains). The just-in-time system aimed at reducing or even eliminating warehouse stocks had turned ships into real travelling warehouses. The supply chain crisis forced a paradigm shift in the supply

system: from just in time to just in case, i.e., sufficient storage to cope with any supply anomalies (Notteboom et al., 2021; Yan et al., 2021).

One of the solutions adopted by the United States and many Western countries concerned the choice of bringing certain stages of the production chain back home, i.e., to geopolitically “reliable” neighbouring contexts. This process, initiated in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis, has triggered a profound reorganisation of production and a radical reconfiguration of global value chains centred on widespread *reshoring* and *backshoring* processes (Ellram et al., 2013; Pegoraro et al., 2020), which are also accompanied by *friend-shoring* practices, i.e., relocation to more politically reliable countries (on this topic, see the work of P. Savi, 2019).

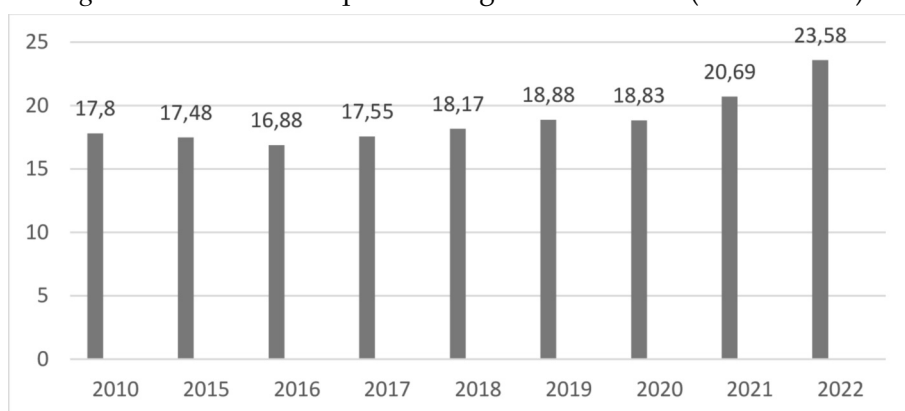
Within this framework of radical change in the economic, logistics, and transport panoramas, the Mediterranean is experiencing *reshoring* movements that can rely on a powerful apparatus of *short-sea shipping* links functional to the development of intra-Mediterranean industrial and commercial flows. Intra-regional routes between 2001 and 2022 grew at an average annual rate of 6.8%. The Mediterranean confirmed its position as the main EU27 area for cabotage traffic with 627 million metric tonnes of goods, accounting for more than 35% of the European figure. Within the basin, Italy is the undisputed leader, with 314 million metric tonnes.

The *reshoring* and *nearshoring* phenomena, although they concern specific sectors with high added value, have shown a certain dynamism in the Mediterranean context, especially towards Turkey and the Balkan countries (e.g., the famous case of IKEA’s relocation in 2021 of a large factory from China to Turkey). In the Italian case, on the other hand, the returns have mainly concerned the textile and manufacturing sector towards mostly North African and Balkan geographical destinations (the case of Benetton, which moved 50% of its Asian production to Serbia, Egypt, and Turkey, is well known). According to a study by SRM (2022), 60% of the basin’s companies intend to relocate production sites within the basin itself to free themselves from the negative effects of exogenous shocks, assisted in this process by the growth of Mediterranean free zone areas such as Tanger Med and Port Said (the former as a notable automotive hub with the presence of Stellantis and Renault, the latter as an energy and industrial hub, in addition to the seven Special Economic Zones planned in Italy¹), and the Mersin back-port area in Turkey.

¹ Legislative Decree No. 91 of 20 June 2017, and the subsequent one of 25 January 2018, as part of the urgent interventions for economic growth in Southern Italy,

Historically, the MENA region has had a marginal participation rate in global value chains, partly due to its poor infrastructure connectivity. Within this general framework, many countries on the southern shore have started to invest in rail projects interconnected to seaports, notably Egypt (with USD 66 billion), Algeria (with USD 22 billion), and Morocco (with USD 13 billion) (SRM, 2023). Fundamental investments for the creation of the necessary conditions for the development of cooperative and non-competitive regional value chains with those on the northern shore will strengthen a common fabric to make the Mediterranean return to being the *mare nostrum* and not the *mare aliorum*.

Figure 3: Number of ships transiting the Suez Canal (in thousands)



Source: SRM, 2023, on suezcanal.gov.eg data.

Conclusions

The Mediterranean context has more or less followed a trend that has seen a significant holdup of maritime traffic at the global level. Even gigantism, from which negative outcomes could be expected given a

provided for and regulated the possibility of setting up Special Economic Zones (ZES) within which companies already operating or newly established can benefit from tax breaks and administrative simplifications. The planned Economic Zones are: Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Ionica interregional Puglia-Campania, Adriatic interregional Puglia-Molise, eastern Sicily, western Sicily, and Sardinia.

hypothetical and feared contraction in volumes, has fuelled growing transshipment quotas that have enabled Mediterranean ports, as a whole, to close the historic gap with those in northern Europe. The geopolitical variable remains ever-present, activating scenarios capable of conditioning, not in a small way, the picture described. Such as the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, which has forced the reconfiguration of many supply chains, especially in the agricultural and energy sectors; and the recent crisis in the Gulf of Aden, which has forced shipowners to seek alternative routes to the Suez route. Chinese investments in the Arctic, which have given rise to a rich narrative in the Asian scientific literature (Zhang et al., 2018; Cao et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2022), claim to represent a viable and sustainable alternative for trade between the Far East and Europe, although on several occasions we had the chance of refuting such assumptions (Sellari, 2021; Sellari, 2023). Even assuming that the melting of Arctic ice proceeds at the pace predicted by the International Panel on Climate Change, according to which by 2049 the entire Siberian Arctic route would be ice-free for nine months of the year, it would still be a seasonal route subject to risks to navigation and additional costs to ensure its safety (Barnes et al., 2021; Gunnarson and Moe, 2021). It should also be considered that the strategies of shipping companies increasingly favour the use of large container ships that need to make stops along the way. This dynamic can be ensured by the traditional route to the Indian Ocean and the intermediate markets served along the way (the Indian route and the Persian Gulf route), i.e., markets that are not present along the Siberian coast at present. The advantage resulting from the reduction of about 4000 nautical miles between the ports of North Central China and those of the North Sea would be negatively compensated by the reduced speeds that ships in the Arctic must respect for the integrity of the glacial ecosystem.

Even the overland alternative, hypothesised by China through the BRI project, would not appear to be a competitor to the sea route to Suez but, at most, complementary, both because of the geopolitical risks involved in crossing territories with a high potential for instability and because of the small number of goods that can be transferred by rail. And this, even though in the years immediately preceding the Russian-Ukrainian war (2018 and 2019), Eurasian railway lines had transported over 1.5 million containers in a westbound direction (SRM, 2023). Both hypotheses, Arctic and land-based, seem to be a narrative device on the Chinese (and Russian) side to reinforce their control over the Eurasian heartland and the sea (ocean) that surrounds it to the north. There are, therefore, no credible alternatives to Suez and the Mediterranean, at least in the realistically short term.

The Mediterranean as a whole is as divided internally as it is solid in its totality. Between 2001 and 2022, container traffic between Europe and Asia grew at an average annual rate of 4.4%, while the trans-Atlantic route (which in terms of volume, with 36% of the world total, remains the world's largest) increased by 2%. A mid-ocean vocation for deep-sea traffic (12% of world traffic, 27% of container traffic, 5% of crude oil, and 8% of LNG transit through Suez), but also an intra-Mediterranean vocation, fuelled by significant growth in short-sea shipping (6.8% per year between 2019 and 2022) and prospects for growth in industrial relocation.

This is why the *Mare Nostrum* remains "central", despite everything. The real problem of the Mediterranean, in the end, can only be itself and its (in)capacity to activate virtuous processes between the two shores based on cooperation and cultural and functional integration, which Europe, after the failed attempts of the 1990s, should take charge of.

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THE WIDER MEDITERRANEAN AS A GEOPOLITICAL REGION: THE CASE OF THE EASTERN BASIN¹

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Abstract: The geopolitical rediscovery of a Mediterranean reaching as far as the Persian Gulf and the Ukrainian coasts during the 1980s and at the hands of the Italian Navy is certainly not accidental. The slow deterioration and finally the sudden collapse of the bipolar order imposed a reshaping of the doctrines and strategic concepts developed during the Cold War, which were unsuited to the new international context.

Although the end of bipolarity coincided with the end of the clash between antithetical cultural, social, moral, and economic conceptions, the global hegemony of the Western development model did not automatically translate into the political dominance that most proponents of the “End of History” (Fukuyama, 1992) expected.

Rather, the front that emerged victorious from the Cold War showed numerous cracks, maintaining unity of purpose more out of a lack of real alternatives than conviction. The new Global Order turned out to be a hybrid system, dominated by a widely shared rhetoric but formed by a complex web of regional and transnational balances.

Although the United States and NATO have formally retained their role as the ultimate guarantors of stability and international law, giving rise to

¹ The first part of the text is a reworking of the author’s previous publications: Matteo Marconi, *Una regione geopolitica in formazione: il carattere anfibio del Mediterraneo Allargato infrange l’egemonia delle talassocrazie oceaniche*, in *Il Mediterraneo allargato, una regione in transizione: conflitti, sfide, prospettive*, edited by Campelli E., Gomel G., Quaderni CeSPI, 6, Donzelli, Rome, 2022, pp. 45-48; Matteo Marconi, *Dallo spazio fisico allo spazio relazionale: una nuova visione geopolitica per il Mediterraneo Allargato?* in *Geopolitica e spazi marittimi*, edited by Marconi M., Sellari P., Nuova Cultura, Rome, 2021, pp. 75-86; Matteo Marconi, Enrico Mariutti, *Ricostituire la coesione e la centralità mediterranea: il tentativo italiano per un Mediterraneo Allargato*, in *Espaços económicos e espaços de segurança*, edited by Motia L., Valença Pinto L., Observare, Lisbon, 2017, pp. 221-240. The latter limited to paragraph 3.

what has been (erroneously) termed a unipolar order, international governance is ensured by a complex and interconnected jigsaw puzzle of areas of influence, overlapping and intersecting centralised and hierarchical religious beliefs, international alliances of varying intensity and structure, financial markets, industrial clusters, and trade leagues, resulting in a multi-dimensional multipolar order (Redaelli, 2021).

In this process, the oceanic order is still highly resilient, as shown by political practice, which completes our picture after the analysis of the geopolitical landscape. The framework of political relations in the area does not yet seem adequate for the fundamental change taking place and, thus, for creating an autonomous region. Evidence of this is the long series of failures in stabilisation attempts.

Keywords: Mediterranean, geopolitics, oceanic order, regionalisation, Turkey

Introduction: Regionalisation Processes in Geopolitics

The technological revolution in communications that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries reduced material distances, allowing for faster interaction between places traditionally considered distant. This has also allowed mutual relations to increase enormously, so that even events that occur at a great (material) distance from us can have a direct effect on our ability to act and the context in which we move. For example, friction in the South China Sea between Beijing and Washington directly affects Italy because it impacts imports and exports with China.

In general, the interconnectedness of the globe facilitates encounters, clashes, and hybridisations that were previously much slower and rarer. Looking at the hypertrophy of relational space in the Mediterranean, we easily realise the enormous relative complexity generated by this new geography of places.

Complexity, however, is not just a skein that thickens proportionally and homogeneously. Relationships are unstable and irregular, dictated by criteria that can make interactions between very distant countries difficult. For example, trade links between Italy and China are very complex, just as connections between relatively close regions, such as the north and south shores of the Mediterranean, are rarefied by the same criterion.

When complexity is endowed with internal coherence, i.e., the relationships between certain places are solid and significant across multiple criteria, then geopolitical regions emerge. The criteria that produce coherence are mainly of two types, in constant reciprocal rebalancing: 1) a

structural force, called the geopolitical landscape, which is composed of the environmental configurations as well as all the sedimentations that affect the territory, from social to economic and symbolic relations; 2) a voluntary force, political action proper, which changes the geopolitical landscape in which it is exercised while having to face the resistance that such a landscape offers and, above all, being affected by its influences.

The Wider Mediterranean as a Geopolitical Region

Since the early 1980s, a new geopolitical structure has been emerging as an alternative to the prevailing division of the world into two opposing ideological blocs. US-USSR bipolarisation gave way to complex and overlapping geopolitical representations. Among these, reflection on the Wider Mediterranean has been growing in Italy. This is a strategic concept whose elaboration starts with the Italian Navy and aims at the Mediterranean region in order to restore its coherence and autonomy (Credendino, 2023). The research and synthesis work carried out since the eighties of the twentieth century at the Maritime Warfare Institute in Livorno took the name of the Wider Mediterranean Doctrine thanks to the intellectual work of officers such as Rear Admiral Pier Paolo Ramoino (Ramoino, 1999, 2001) and academics such as Giorgio Giorgerini (Giorgerini, Nassigh, 2002).

The Wider Mediterranean is perhaps the most interesting strategic proposal produced in Italy in the last forty years. This concept² carries an innovative political and theoretical value, capable of discerning the elements of the epochal change taking place in the 1980s, rethinking Italy's role in international relations beyond its membership in the Atlantic Alliance, and overcoming the cognitive limits of physical space.

From a theoretical standpoint, the concept of Wider Mediterranean ideally refers to the fortunate and famous intuition of French historian Fernand Braudel, elaborated at the end of the 1940s to signify that the Mediterranean Sea is not composed of a single physical basin but rather of a succession of seas and lands joined together by commercial, political, and cultural exchanges that have come to produce, at their apogee, a sea far wider than the one visible on maps (Braudel, 1949)³.

² The expression 'concept' is used here in a military sense, i.e. as a synonym for idea-guide.

³ Braudel uses the linguistically assimilated expression '*plus grand Méditerranée*'.

For Braudel, what mattered in the economy of the Sea were the multiple relationships between men, which, beyond identity politics, made up a surprisingly united framework of common interests and complicity. A true geographical theory observed the relationships between things to arrive at a synthesis that was not only morphological but relational as well. For this reason, Braudel spoke of the Mediterranean as a “luminous centre” whose civilisational force exceeded the limits of the physical basin and gradually faded out, so that light could not be clearly distinguished from shadow, i.e., the physical boundaries could not be precisely determined. On the other hand, Braudel’s teacher was Lucien Febvre, who had reached the pinnacle of his teaching in a work entitled, significantly, *Man and the Earth* (Febvre, 1922).

These prestigious assonances allowed the concept of the Wider Mediterranean, which is by no means taken for granted, to be in line with certain aspects developed by the contemporary human and social sciences. Indeed, in the 1980s, the critical wave of the spatial turn reminded us that quantitatism is not the only possible perspective to approach space. If the neo-positivist approach referred exclusively to the quantitative and geometric aspects, the spatial turn rediscovered the economic, social, and, more generally, cultural dimensions of space. Space was no longer an abstract container with its characteristics but the result of the constant interaction between entities.

Similarly, for Italian Navy circles, the criterion for delimiting the space of the Wider Mediterranean is established on an anthropic rather than morphological basis (Ramoino, 2012, p. 76). Only, in addition to socio-political-economic relations in the broadest sense, or “structure”, what matters now is the defence of choke points and lines of communication and supply, i.e., the strategic military and economic nodes essential to the life of the state. From the Suez Canal to the Strait of Gibraltar, opening the Mediterranean to the oceans, to Bab-el Mandab and Hormuz, the choke points are key hubs for the traffic that takes place in the region. Added to these are the maritime lines of communication, equally essential for the unfolding of economic life, such as the world’s most important trade route, which runs from the South China Sea ports along the perimeter of Eurasia to Europe and beyond. Traffic that in part feeds local Mediterranean economies above all finds on these waterways the most efficient system of communication on a global scale. The Wider Mediterranean is a theatre of operations, united by reasons that are not only strategic but for which it is necessary to have a strategic approach because it is the theatre of action of its own interests.

The result is a picture in which the Wider Mediterranean is as much the basin proper as the seas and gulfs close to it and strongly influenced by it. First and foremost, the Black Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, up to the most recent elaborations, in which the Gulf of Guinea and the Gulf of Aden are also included. Seas, however, develop the lives of the peoples who live on their shores, and thus both the European countries on the southern shore and North Africa and the Near East are involved.

The Wider Mediterranean is a geopolitical landscape consistent at least on these criteria, namely a succession of aquatic spaces and dry lands arranged in a grid of supply and communication lines.

This implicitly suggests the geopolitical vision of the Wider Mediterranean, to be summarised in one word: preserve. That is, the concept involves the preservation of the essential supply of the community, i.e., ensuring subsistence, understood in food, economic, and military terms, but also the preservation of security and stability. The survival of the Wider Mediterranean community passes through the preservation of supply and communication lines, the main object of attention.

Preserving the essential needs of sustenance as the basis of associated living is one of the *topos* of modern politics, and this partly explains the concept's appeal to its admirers.

The complexity of cultural and economic relations means that the delimitation of the Wider Mediterranean is not a simple border but a mobile frontier, which varies in intensity and moves according to historical contexts. The result is a perspective that does not merely include or exclude geopolitical actors but rather attempts to render the complexity of the interests at stake. This is why the Wider Mediterranean has been associated, directly or indirectly, as the case may be, as a relevant element for alliances or international organisations such as NATO and the European Union, leaving behind the state-centric aspect (General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, 24 June 2014).

The Wider Mediterranean is a diverse space given by the different importance of the points and lines that compose it based on deliberately subjective criteria, which develops an important, though not irreconcilable, contrast with the Cartesian space of the modern state, fixed and homogeneous, strictly delimited according to the coordinates of the western state tradition. It was certainly not a foregone conclusion that a military concept would redefine certain essential characteristics of the (modern) state, but if this were possible, it would be due to the maritime perspective. The sea cannot be contained by the rigid prescriptions of the rule of law but

rather tends to escape it in the name of navigation freedom. The principle of freedom of the seas does not easily submit to that of absolute sovereignty. Proof of this is the fact that the Wider Mediterranean does not claim sovereignty over a stretch of sea or a specific area but rather establishes the fundamental nodes to be defended in order to make associated life secure. Therefore, it introduces the idea that security no longer lies only in the defence of the rigid borders established by the nation-state but must necessarily project itself beyond, into the complexity of a world made up of contrasting and highly liquid interests, such as the sea on which disputes are often played out.

It is, however, something very different from the freedom of the seas claimed by the English thalassocratic power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In that system, the order of the sea did not directly involve the land but generated a dichotomy, which even in the early twentieth-century classical geopolitics interpreted as the opposition between thalassocratic and telluric powers (Marconi, 2015, pp. 64-65). The Wider Mediterranean, on the contrary, directly involves the coastal countries and wedges itself far beyond the physical limit of the coastline. Maritime and land order now find their connection as complementary moments of the same cultural, political, and economic process. Although the strategic concept is concerned with defending lines of communication and essential junctions, these are nothing more than the nerve centres of a political-economic system that also extends to the mainland. The very idea of a Wider Mediterranean suggests that the relevance of the space does not only depend on the focal points to be controlled but also on the cultural and economic qualities of the countries that are linked to it⁴. From this perspective, Fernand Braudel could see the Mediterranean as a combination of water and land.

Oceanic Order and Mediterranean Order

The unitary vision of the Mediterranean clashes with a depiction of the same sea seen from the ocean. The characteristics of these two geopolitical representations were already clear in the work of Captain Francesco Bertonelli, an officer of the Italian Royal Navy:

“The Mediterranean can be studied from two different points of view:

⁴ This aspect, although present in the strategic concept, is in fact the least developed and most problematic.

1. As one of the world's great lines of communication and as the transit channel between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In this sense, the Red Sea becomes not only a geographical but also a political extension of the Mediterranean. [...]
2. As an inland sea that has problems of its own, independent of those that affect it as a major transit channel between the two oceans. More precisely, they have problems concerning the borders between the various states, possession of the various islands, communications between one shore and the other, problems of economic competition, and political supremacy" (Bertonelli, 1930, p. 16).

Those who dominate the ocean experience the Mediterranean as a subordinate area, a simple line of communication between the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean. For those who sail the oceans, making their movements more efficient by avoiding the Cape of Good Hope to go from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean means saving many days of travel. A question concerning the economy of communication lines that, however, completely ignores the peculiarities of the inhabited lands on the Mediterranean shores. The oceanic interpretation of the Mediterranean was born in the modern world, led by Britain, from a vision of radical opposition between land and sea, whereby the maritime order is experienced as *mare liberum*, governed by the control of communication lines and junction points.

This vision is countered by Bertonelli, who in the early 1930s elaborated a radically innovative strategic conception of the Mediterranean, both in terms of method and conclusions, capable of grasping the fundamental importance of the control over European supplies and intercontinental trade routes of the Mediterranean choke points, i.e., the Bosphorus, Dardanelles, Suez, Gibraltar, Hormuz, and Bab-el Mandab; all this without forgetting the complex historical and cultural relationship that characterises the region. Bertonelli defined the Black Sea, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden as the "Mediterranean", grouping them into a single geostrategic region due to the interpenetration of their respective interests and the sharing of important geopolitical issues:

"It is necessary that communications with the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and with the Black Sea, are always ensured, in peace and war; that is, the gates of the Mediterranean mustn't be exclusively under the dominion of powers that may have interests hostile to those of Italy' (Bertonelli, 1930, p. 15).

Although the oceanic order and the Wider Mediterranean are united by the hubs and lines of communication that characterise their respective

geopolitical landscapes, the fundamental difference is that in the Wider Mediterranean, the lines of communication are functional for the subsistence of the lands and peoples that comprise it, whereas the global thalassocracy values only the line that crosses the inland sea. Within the Wider Mediterranean, this allows, at least potentially, for vital food and economic supplies as well as security and stability.

This is a decisive confrontation; the era we live in still suffers from the Anglo-Saxon oceanic hegemony in the Mediterranean, which materialised in the 18th century after our inland sea had long since lost its centrality as a terminal outlet for trade from Asia.

Hybridisation of Land and Sea: The Renaissance of the Inland Sea

In today's world, we are poised for a model leap, occasioned by the irreparable crisis of the modern Anglo-Saxon maritime order, which has been progressively hybridising with the continental order for about a century. The decay of the modern opposition between land and sea has manifested itself with technological progress, which has fostered the confusion of land warfare and maritime warfare with the invasion of each other's spatial realm. Add to this the inevitable disappearance of the high seas, which manifested itself in the expansion of territorial waters in which the state holds absolute sovereignty and then in the proclamation of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (an institution envisaged in the Convention on the Law of the Sea signed in Montego Bay in 1982, better known as UNCLOS). The EEZ certifies the projection of the jurisdiction of a coastal state up to 200 nautical miles from the baseline and allows it to claim exclusive exploitation of the water column and the seabed with its resources.

Overall, while the territorial sovereignty of the state has been weakened by globalisation, the possibility of exercising jurisdiction over the sea has increased. The coincidence of state, territory, and power, typical of political modernity, has collapsed, as has the mirror image and opposite idea of a free and inappropriable sea. A mechanism of expansion and retraction of state power that no longer depends solely on the sanction of legal systems but also on the concrete possibilities offered by the geopolitical landscape of each actor.

The sea territorialisation process then led states to proclaim specific sovereign functions over what was once the open sea, to the point of subordinating a thalassocratic-oceanic vision of the Mediterranean. Without a free sea, oceanic power loses freedom of action, both in terms of freedom

of trade and war. Economic freedoms become the prerogative of coastal states, while military activities are pushed away from the coast with the extension of territorial waters. It now becomes normal to discuss and bargain among coastal states over what was previously not subjugated, starting with the need to make agreements to delimit their respective jurisdictions at sea, just as has been the case on land for millennia.

One of the most obvious consequences of this change in the geopolitical order is the increase in conflict at sea and over the sea. Suffice it to think of the events linked to the discovery of offshore gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean. This has led to frictions and rearrangements of alliances between the countries in the area, which are fighting to be granted a portion of the sea where they can carry out explorations and soundings. It is a sea, then, that can also be looked at based on its internal dynamics, independent of the fact that it represents a passageway between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

Political Practices in the Inland Sea

The geopolitical rediscovery of a Mediterranean reaching as far as the Persian Gulf and the Ukrainian coasts during the 1980s and at the hands of the Italian Navy is certainly not accidental. The slow deterioration and finally the sudden collapse of the bipolar order imposed a reshaping of the doctrines and strategic concepts developed during the Cold War, which were unsuited to the new international context.

Although the end of bipolarity coincided with the end of the clash between antithetical cultural, social, moral, and economic conceptions, the global hegemony of the Western development model did not automatically translate into the political dominance that most proponents of the “End of History” (Fukuyama, 1992) expected.

Rather, the front that emerged victorious from the Cold War showed numerous cracks, maintaining unity of purpose more out of a lack of real alternatives than conviction. The new Global Order turned out to be a hybrid system, dominated by a widely shared rhetoric but formed by a complex web of regional and transnational balances.

Although the United States and NATO have formally retained their role as the ultimate guarantors of stability and international law, giving rise to what has been (erroneously) termed a unipolar order, international governance is ensured by a complex and interconnected jigsaw puzzle of areas of influence, overlapping and intersecting centralised and hierarchical

religious beliefs, international alliances of varying intensity and structure, financial markets, industrial clusters, and trade leagues, resulting in a multi-dimensional multipolar order (Redaelli, 2021).

In this process, the oceanic order is still highly resilient, as shown by political practice, which completes our picture after the analysis of the geopolitical landscape. The framework of political relations in the area does not yet seem adequate for the fundamental change taking place and, thus, for creating an autonomous region. Evidence of this is the long series of failures in stabilisation attempts.

The oceanic vision is still dominant among the main actors in the area, so much so that NATO, the United States, Great Britain, and, to some extent, the European Union approach crises in the Mediterranean as disconnected from their more general regional balances. NATO expresses the vision of a fragmented Mediterranean already from the reference to the North Atlantic in its name. Similarly, the European Union embraces a thesis in which the southern shore becomes a periphery, as evidenced by political investments mostly directed towards Eastern Europe.

European policies towards the southern shore are implemented under the banner of contradictory assertiveness, whereby the European Union wants to be the point of reference for any progress in social and economic relations between the two shores but does not invest sufficient resources to enable the partner countries to carry out a possible transition to a western socio-economic model. Ultimately, the European Union claims the legitimacy of its hegemonic role without, however, fully assuming its responsibilities, as if it were a disempowered sovereign. In the end, that leaves room for action for the individual European states, which run free with their specific national interests, mostly unable to imagine an overall framework for the area.

Similarly, the new forces entering the Mediterranean, from Russia to China, do not have a unified vision of the sea. However, they contribute to making the picture of the powers involved in the area more complex, preventing the hegemony of a single model or actor (Radojević, 2020).

Moreover, it is significant that both Asian powers are traditionally continental and bring a different approach from the thalassocracies. This novelty follows the general proliferation of amphibious powers capable of acting both on land and at sea, as is normal in the age of hybridisation of the relevant geopolitical orders.

Alongside these elements of fragmentation, others lead instead to a unified vision of the sea, a Wider Mediterranean vision:

- a) As an inland sea, the Mediterranean is particularly suited to amphibious powers; the short distances between its shores disfavour the development of the high seas, all the more so with the closure of the free sea. Here, the territorialised sea dominates, similarly to the sovereignty of the state over land. That is an innovation that is accompanying the reduction of the US role in the Mediterranean, which is now limited to controlling the functioning of its choke points and related communication routes. This need, however, is not at odds with the prospects of the amphibious powers present there. As US interest in the Greater Middle East, the Islamic area's equivalent of the Wider Mediterranean, wanes, the possibilities for cohesive political initiatives within its basins increase.
- b) Macro-regional interests are asserting themselves, requiring defence on the same scale. This is certainly not new, since throughout the Cold War, the logic of imperial power led to overcoming and sometimes ignoring the limits placed on superpower action by the non-interference right typical of the modern state. The waning of ideological imperialism has certainly not reduced the increasingly uneven and territorially indefinite character of national interests, if anything the opposite. The rigidly state-related dimension of political legitimacy is contrasted with a much broader and more varied macro-regional system of interests and a legal system that increasingly struggles to adjust or regulate the lawfulness of the interests pursued.

Ultimately, state sovereignty is still defensible only by overcoming the idea of the border as the extreme limit of the national community's interests. The Wider Mediterranean expresses this need and thus opens up a *de facto* reconsideration of the relationship between sovereignty and national interest. The defence of national interests now entails a questioning of the absolute nature of sovereignty. Hence the assumption of a broader perspective, including a multilateral one, which is why the concept of the Wider Mediterranean lends itself better than others to strategic elaboration in contexts such as NATO and the EU (Marconi, 2015).⁵

⁵ The inherent limitation of the principle of non-interference was already clear to geopolitical thought in the period between the two world wars, and the ostracism of geopolitics also played out on this point. The world that arose after the Second World War, in fact, still had a cultural sensibility that had little inclination towards the return of empires, while the belief in the classical state model had created a sense of unbridgeable otherness from geopolitical doctrines.

It would be shortsighted to think that the growing conflict and instability in the Mediterranean scenario only concern the countries that are part of it, as well as to underestimate their connective and economic capacities.

Only in the light of an “interconnected geo-dilation” involving every political, strategic, and economic aspect of a complex and vast area that has its centre in the Mediterranean” (Giorgerini, Nassigh, p. 209) is it possible to interpenetrate this geopolitical complexity and, consequently, to develop effective solutions.

As Bertoneilli realised almost a century ago, the Mediterranean is a key nerve centre of the international maritime system, and with the enlargement of the Suez Canal, completed in 2015, its importance is growing even further. Although the opening of the Panama Canal in the early 20th century provided intercontinental trade with a second route on the East-West axis, the Mediterranean has remained an extremely busy and strategic route between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region, where a large share of global industrial production has been concentrated in recent decades. Although Mediterranean port infrastructures do not yet have sufficient capacity to challenge the ports of Northern Europe, the strong growth of short-haul trade provides excellent prospects.

Moreover, even though the shale revolution has exploded US crude oil production, the south-eastern areas of the Mediterranean remain a central hub in the global energy landscape, with estimated reserves of conventional and unconventional hydrocarbons amounting to hundreds of billions of barrels and production that places them firmly at the top of the global ranking (Energy Information Agency database, 2023).

The natural evolution of the concept of the Wider Mediterranean should lead to espousing an explicit geopolitical direction that is systematically discussed and engages Italy in a broader framework of interests. The Wider Mediterranean implies a unionist political dimension, so if we intend to espouse its perspective of action, this leads to the goal of union (in the broad sense) of the “coastal” countries. However, such a union will have to be pursued within a broader political sphere than the nation-state.

These should be the minimum coordinates to start debating a geopolitical vision of the Wider Mediterranean. We will then have to ask ourselves how wide this political space should be, i.e., whether it should involve only NATO and the EU or non-Western actors in the area as well. Another central question is what political institutions the new union of the Sea should consist of.

The opportunity of a Wider Mediterranean as an autonomous region is obvious: to engage the different actors in the area in concerted solutions to address key issues such as the recurring migrant crises, the enduring Israeli-Palestinian issue, the outbreaks of terrorism, the collapse of Libyan institutions, and the general weakness of Arab states (Giordano, 2021). At the moment, there is a favourable structural condition and a geopolitical landscape suitable for thinking up a coherent amphibious regime for the Mediterranean, but there are still no actors capable of grasping the opportunities presented by the emerging geopolitical order.

Turkey's Foreign Policy in the Wider Mediterranean

The concept of a mobile frontier, the characteristics of a diverse space, and the survival of the Wider Mediterranean community through the preservation of the supply lines in the seas and gulfs close to the Mediterranean basin also tend to be linked to the attempt to delimit its space and carry forward its territorialisation (Moita, Pinto, 2017).

When considering Turkey's policy, including the choices of an increasingly proactive foreign policy throughout the Wider Mediterranean, the first parameter to take into account is precisely the dynamism of this "mobile frontier" and the apparent dichotomy between the principle of freedom of the seas and that of sovereignty. Therefore, the notion of security itself, emancipated from mere physical survival (in its various forms and facets), becomes central (Baldwin, 2020).

Despite the gradual marginalisation in both the political and economic spheres that has emerged since the 17th century, the Mediterranean is still a central pivot in today's balance of power.

A Mediterranean that, as described earlier in this essay, lends itself to different geopolitical representations.

On the one hand, the concept of "Wider Middle East" is based on fragmentation/marginality, which tends to give prominence to ethnic, religious, and political divisions, as well as all those divisive factors that are the premises for endemic instability. On the other hand, there is the Wider Mediterranean, with its "inclusive" vision aimed at safeguarding and preserving the continuity of traffic that synergistically unites the Black Sea, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and all the choke points related to them (Gibraltar, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Suez, Bab-el Mandab, Hormuz, etc.) through momentum and a partial connection between maritime and land orders.

Therefore, this supranational dimension of the Wider Mediterranean tends to place great emphasis on the needs of the coastal countries to preserve their supply and livelihood in both the commercial and economic spheres.

Turkey plays a central role in these dynamics. Indeed, since 2002, with the rise of Erdoğan, it has pursued a foreign policy capable of overcoming certain constraints present in the bipolar past (Walker, 2007). This change of perspective by Erdoğan has affected both the internal and international spheres, increasingly after the Gezi Park protests (2013) and the failed military coup (2016), a real turning point for the subsequent evolutions that have affected this country.

One of the tools Erdogan used to strengthen his domestic legitimacy and govern a strong socio-political polarisation was precisely a proactive foreign policy made possible by strengthening economic growth.

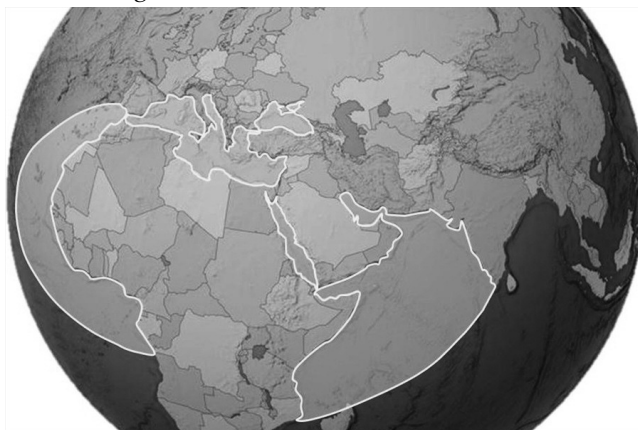
Thus, the trend of the Turkish economy has direct effects on the consolidation of the ruling class in power and the strengthening of the country's external projection throughout the Wider Mediterranean, with consequences for the territorialisation of this basin and Turkish activism at choke points increasingly relevant for trade stability.

Despite the criticalities of the Turkish economy (hyperinflation and macroeconomic vulnerability, currency devaluations, low productivity and GDP *per capita* indices, and very high unemployment), Turkey still seems capable of playing that new role.

Turkey's exposure to speculative turbulence has not, however, conditioned Ankara's new foreign policy approach, despite the risks of overexposure. For Erdogan, building a broad and reliable consensus base passes through a form of activism that, if one takes into account the Wider Mediterranean, has significant repercussions in two specific areas:

- 1) The reassertion of Turkish influence in strategically important choke points (besides the Bosphorus and Dardanelles): from Suez to the Gulf of Aden, etc. (Miscellaneous Authors, 29 November 2015; AA.VV., 2018).
- 2) The attempt to define the territorial waters of the central and eastern Mediterranean to Turkey's advantage.

Figure 1. The Wider Mediterranean



Source: <https://www.ammiragliogiuseppedegiorgi.it/mc/481/il-mediterraneo-allargato>

On the one hand, Turkish projection resumes some long-standing strategic lines following the pillars of imperial history (1299-1922) and its ability to extend its sphere of influence to the East and West. This strategic repositioning is, however, the “child” of the end of bipolarity, a historical phase in which Turkish expectations were bridled by rigid alliances. Ankara’s autonomy and greater margins for manoeuvring therefore tend to follow the two aforementioned priorities.

Turkey had to adapt to a new international context by leveraging, once again, its military capabilities to rebuild a more credible, pragmatic, and proactive role for itself by following well-defined geographical directions of expansion (Bozarslan, 2006, p. 42).

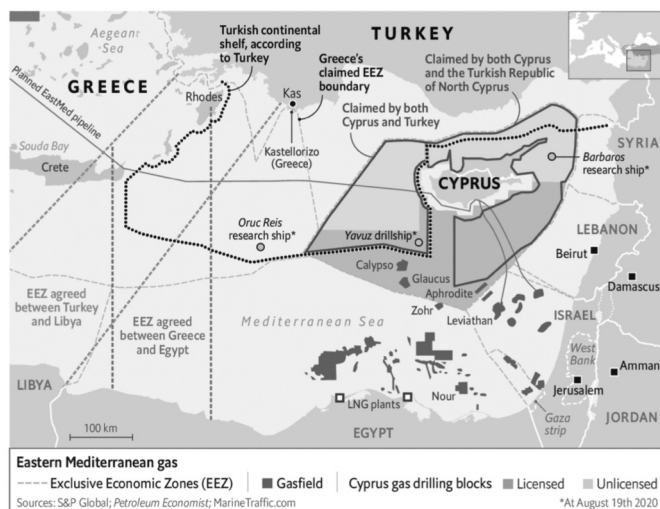
If Turkey’s economic and military presence in Djibouti or Mogadishu can be attributed **to point (1)**, even more significant is Ankara’s activism to delineate territorial waters in the Eastern Mediterranean **[point (2)]**, given the presence of potentially exploitable offshore oil and gas fields of strategic importance. Turkey’s projection throughout the Middle East influences its relations with Greece and Israel and the variable geometries of the Sunni front (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and of course Qatar)—all factors that are also strongly influenced by energy security and the role of conventional raw materials. Turkish activism has indeed heightened tension with countries that are geographically adjacent or historically in competition with Ankara in the regional sphere.

The “direct” intervention in Libya constitutes a milestone, as the new Turkish strategy shows, and ends up significantly conditioning its maritime dimension as well. Erdogan’s support for Tripoli in an anti-Haftar effort (and his regional and international allies) is part of a framework in which the Turkish President also intends to exploit the weakness of the European Union, which is divided internally between different national interests and incapable of actively projecting itself in an area that seems to be considered peripheral.

Turkey has entered this range of opportunities, including new manifestations of sovereignty over territorial waters (EEZs, etc.) and the consequent paradigm shift towards the “free sea”. That process affects the energy potential found in the eastern Mediterranean and the extremely rich deposits found there, which have profoundly changed the regional energy balance.

The territorialisation of the sea is therefore also of central importance in the central Mediterranean in light of the agreement signed precisely between Turkey and Libya regarding the definition of the maritime borders between these two states (MoU in 2019) and the related economic consequences in terms of energy (MoU of October 3, 2022). An initiative that ends up significantly disadvantaging regional competitors. An increase in conflict and the related complexities remain in the background, given the risk of unilateral approaches.

Figure 2. The deposits in the eastern Mediterranean



Source: S&P Global; Petroleum Economist; MarineTraffic.com

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À LA CARTE GLOBAL ORDER AND REGIONAL ACTORS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TURKISH AND SERBIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE

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Abstract: There is an increasing body of literature on the changes in the global order in the 21st century. There is almost a consensus in the International Relations (IR) literature that the Western-dominated global system has been changing in recent years. Some scholars argue that a multiplex international system is emerging, while others claim that emerging powers are becoming more influential in world affairs. In this shifting international system, it is argued that a more à la carte kind of foreign relations is being preferred, meaning that instead of stable alliances, a more flexible type of partnership is emerging. Turkey and Serbia are important regional powers in their respective neighbourhoods. Both of them have material capabilities, historical roots, and normative power in their regions. As important regional actors, both countries have been pursuing an à la carte kind of foreign policy in their attitude towards the Putin regime's war in Ukraine. On the one hand, they criticise the Russian invasion and state that it was against international law; on the other hand, they kept their dialogue with the Moscow administration and did not join the European Union (EU) sanctions on Russia. This paper aims to understand the foreign policy of both countries towards the Russian war. It will make a comparative analysis and explain the differences and similarities in their approaches. It will also shed light on how the shifting global order and internal dynamics have been influencing the foreign policies of both countries and why both states pursue flexible types of partnerships instead of stable alliances.

Keywords: Turkey, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine, Regional Actors, Global Order, À la Carte Foreign Policy.

Introduction

Since February 24, 2022, the international community has been witnessing an aggressive war by Russia against Ukraine. This conflict has not only created important security challenges in the Black Sea region, but it has also deteriorated global peace and security. What we have been experiencing in Ukraine is a reflection of a proxy war between Russia and Western powers, led by the US and European countries. The resurgence of the possibility of a global war has been an indication of the danger that this war poses to the global system. In addition, the Putin regime's threat of starting a nuclear war has been evidence of how the security of the whole international structure has been endangered.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has led to different responses by the states and international organisations. We can categorise them into three groups. On the one hand, there are those states that fully support the Putin regime's war at the level of discourse as well as practice. Belarus is an example of one of those pro-Russian countries. From the very beginning onward, Belarus has been standing side by side with the Russian administration. The second group of actors consists of those that condemn Russian aggression and put sanctions on Russia to weaken the Russian military and economy. The US and the European Union are the best examples of the second group of countries. The third category consists of states that implement *à la carte* foreign policy, which means a mixed foreign policy approach towards the conflict. On the one hand, they condemn the invasion of Ukraine by the Kremlin administration and state that it is a clear violation of international law. They respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. And their support for Ukrainian territorial integrity did not start a day after the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, but it goes back to the Russian invasion of Crimea on March 21, 2014. These countries did not support the Russian invasion of Crimea either. However, they rejected applying any sanctions against Russia for differing reasons. In addition, they give special importance to maintaining dialogue with both of the conflicting parties. This dialogue does not continue just at the discourse level, but at the level of foreign policy practice as well. There are bilateral official visits to and from Russia. Turkey and Serbia are examples of this third category of states.

This paper aims to analyse the foreign policies of two important regional countries, Turkey and Serbia, towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It analyses why and how these two countries implement *à la carte* foreign policy by condemning the Russian invasion but, at the same time, do not implement

the EU sanctions against it and keep the dialogue with the Kremlin administration at the highest level. Which historical, internal, and global factors led to this line of foreign policy? What are the similarities and differences in the approaches of Ankara and Belgrade towards the conflict in the Black Sea region? The paper seeks to explore the answers to those questions.

In the next section, the conceptual framework of the article will be introduced. The conceptual perspective will emphasise the debates on shifting global order and the à la carte foreign policy of regional actors. In the third section, the foreign policy of Turkey and Serbia towards the conflict in Ukraine will be analysed from a comparative perspective. The perceptions and policies of both countries towards the Russian-Ukrainian war will be explored. The third section will also shed light on the conceptual explanation of approaches of both countries. The last section will summarise the main findings and arguments of the research.

Conceptual Framework: Ambiguous Global Order and À la Carte Foreign Policy of Regional Actors

There is almost a consensus among International Relations scholars that the global order is in a process of change. The decade of unipolarity in the 1990s, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, is already over. Since the early 2000s, we have been witnessing some new tendencies in the global order. This paper argues that we have been witnessing the emergence of different global orders with regard to economic and political dimensions. The article states that, with regard to the economic dimension, we have been in a transition phase to a multipolar global order. However, with regard to the political dimension, we have been living in an age of non-polarity. In addition, this work tries to understand how this two-tiered global order has an impact on regional actors, as exemplified by the case studies on Turkey and Serbia.

With regard to the economic dimension of the global order, we must emphasise the rising importance of the BRICS¹ countries, especially China, one of the most powerful BRICS members, for the global economic system. The concept of BRICS was developed by an expert working at an investment banking and management firm, Goldman Sachs, in New York back in 2001 to

¹The acronym BRICS refers to the following countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

refer to the rising economies of those four countries and the investment potential in those countries (Cooper, 2016, p. 103). Subsequently, Group of 8 (G8) countries started inviting some countries characterised by rising economies to their summits, like China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa.

The establishment of the BRICS was very much influenced by the global financial crisis in 2008. The official start of the BRICS was in 2010. These countries wanted to contribute to global economic recovery and reform global economic organisations. Consisting of countries with high growth rates, they want to have their say in the global economic order and to further a multipolar global order. So far, they have created important institutions, as exemplified by the New Development Bank (NDP) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). As the NDP aims to provide financial help to infrastructure projects in the BRICS countries, CRA has the target of helping those countries with financial difficulties. (For a comprehensive account of the history and development of the BRICS, see Cooper 2016).

Although the BRICS countries do not have any common foreign and security policy and do not have any common position with regard to global political order, it has been considered an important symbol of the emergence of multipolar order. The fact that the IMF increased the voting rights of China, India, Brazil, and Russia in an important historical quota and governance reform in 2016. After that reform, these countries became among the top 10 members of the IMF. In the official press release, the IMF stated that “the reforms represent a major step towards better reflecting in the institution’s governance structure and the increasing role of dynamic emerging markets and developing countries” (Press Release: Historic Quota and Governance Reforms become effective, 2016). More than 6 per cent of quota shares were taken from overrepresented countries and given to emerging economies. The IMF stated that this reform process would lead to a more representative institution (Quota Reform, 2016). Hereby, the IMF accepted the changing global economic system, took it into consideration, and realised a historical institutional change.

As a sign of emerging multipolarism, the BRICS decided to enlarge by accepting six countries into its membership. Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates became new members in 2024. By getting new members from Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, the BRICS has become more representative of the change in the global system. How an increasing share of the BRICS countries in the global economic system will be reflected in world politics is to be seen. However, we should notice that the Western-led international order has been showing signs of

change since the early 2000s, as seen in the increase of the share of the BRICS countries and the decline of the Western countries.

As opposed to a transition to a multipolar global economic order, we witness political non-polarity in the international structure. Although the conflictual global system returned with the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Israel-Hamas conflict, global actors and international organisations failed to provide order and peace. If we define the global actors as the ones that set the rules of the game and provide order as well as stability in the international system, we can say that there is no such actor at the moment. Despite all the gross violations of international law and the high number of casualties in Ukraine and Palestine, none of the actors have been doing enough to bring peace. No serious mediation or facilitation attempt has been made by the great powers. The instability of the global system has been accepted as a given, and there is the absence of actors that would provide stability and peace in the global system. Therefore, we can state that the global political order is closer to non-polarity as opposed to the emerging multipolarity in the international economic system.

À la Carte Foreign Policy of Regional Actors

There has been an increasing body of literature on middle powers in this changing global system in recent years, mainly after the establishment of the BRICS. It is stated that the middle powers have a greater manoeuvring space in their foreign policy in the current global system. It is argued that the bipolar systems put pressure on regional powers to ally with one of the great powers. However, multipolar or non-polar systems give greater independence to regional actors.

Meanwhile, the academic literature in the field of International Relations (IR) provided different definitions of middle powers. Briefly, the major characteristics of the middle powers can be defined as follows: First of all, they are more powerful in terms of material elements compared to their neighbours, e.g., military power, economic power, demographic power, and geographic power. Second, they conduct an active regional policy and try to influence their neighbourhood. Third, they use novel issues in their foreign policy (Öniş and Kutlay 2017, 164-183; Parlar Dal, 2016, 1425-1453; and Parlar Dal, 2018, 1-31). Turkey is considered one of the middle powers in the global system.

On the other hand, Serbia can be considered a regional actor. It is one of the key actors in the Balkans when it comes to regional peace, stability, and

security. It has also played an important role in the construction of the region. It has more material interests than its neighbours. The substantial problems in the region, like the political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the status issue of Kosovo, can only be solved with the help of Serbia.

Therefore, we can state that both Turkey and Kosovo are important regional actors in their region, and they play key roles in their neighbourhood. In addition, they are recognised as such by global actors. The US, the EU, and Russia give importance to taking them into consideration whenever they want to solve regional issues

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) and Oxford University's Europe in a *Changing World* research project conducted an important poll in 21 countries and put forward important results. In our contemporary world, many Western leaders perceive foreign policy through a binary lens, stating that countries should make a choice between a Western and an anti-Western orientation. They assume that countries still have a fixed foreign policy approach to interpreting global affairs and implementing their international relations. This Cold War-centred approach seems to still have a substantial impact on US and European decision-makers. However, the results of the opinion poll show that citizens in those countries prefer to have governments implement an à la carte foreign policy approach, which means states choose their partners according to the issue at hand (Ash, Krastev, and Leonard, 2023). This would provide countries with flexible alliances. The poll conducted in some Western and non-Western countries found that Europe and the US are thought to have more soft power, but it does not lead to any tendency on the part of people to have a fixed arrangement. The study concluded that especially people living in the great powers and the middle powers do not prefer any kind of fixed foreign policy attachment.² It states that "... they seem to prefer an à la carte arrangement, in which their governments do not have to align and where they can pragmatically pursue their own national interests with different partners on different issues" (Ash, Krastev, and Leonard, 2023).

This study analyses the cases of Turkish and Serbian foreign policies towards the Russian-Ukrainian war and tries to understand whether their approach can be analysed through the concept of à la carte foreign policy. After explaining the conceptual framework of the paper, the following section defines how the decision-makers in two countries perceive the war.

² Turkey is included in the poll, but Serbia is not included.

Perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian War Through the Lenses of Ankara and Belgrade

Both Turkish and Serbian leadership has criticised the violation of international law by Russia and supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 onwards. They have never recognised the Russian annexation of the Crimean region. They have criticised the revisionist Russian foreign policy. This line of discourse has been maintained by both actors since the Putin regime started the war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

The first official statement of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the Russian aggression started was as follows:

“We do not accept the military operation that was started by the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and we reject it. This attack not only destroys the Minsk agreements, but it is also a severe violation of international law and a serious threat to our regional and global security. Turkey believes in respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries, and it is against the change of borders through arms. We call upon the Russian Federation to end this unfair and unlawful action as soon as possible. Turkish support for the political unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine will continue” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 24, 2022).

This declaration can be considered an example of Turkey’s attitude towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. On the one hand, the decision-makers of the Justice and Development Party (JDP) expressed their full support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and respect for international law. It should be noted that they just took the Russian labelling of the invasion as a “special operation” as it was at the beginning. They did not question the Russian naming of the “special operation” when the aggression started.

Turkish leadership has expressed “soft criticism” of Russia throughout the war, but in fact, we should note that this soft criticism by the JDP leadership started in 2014 during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Turkey’s ruling political elite, in all its declarations, statements, and speeches, emphasised the violation of international law by the Russian action, but they were always careful about the wording. They never used harsh rhetoric. We know very well how Turkey criticises Israel, for example. In the case of Israel, we hear criticism of state terrorism and genocide towards Israel from the JDP political elite. Turkish decision-makers have never made harsh

criticism of Russia, although political Islamist leaders have claimed to be supporting the victims in global politics.

It is also noteworthy that it took some time for Turkish leadership to label the Russian invasion as “war”. As stated above, the JDP elite bought the Russian labelling of “special operation” at the beginning, as opposed to many Western countries that perceived it as a war from the very beginning. Only after a while did Turkey start using the concept of the war to name the Russian invasion. Accepting the Russian naming of “special operation” at the beginning was further proof of how careful the government in Ankara has been towards the Russian aggression.

On the first and second anniversary of the Ukrainian invasion, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued declarations that did not include the word “Russia” at all.

On the first anniversary, the following declaration was issued:

“Despite all our attempts, the war, which began in Ukraine one year ago today, still goes on.

Unfortunately, the heavy cost of war is felt not only in the two countries but also throughout the world.

On every platform, we emphasise the need for a just and lasting end to this war as soon as possible through negotiations. We support efforts towards a solution through initiatives such as the Istanbul Grain Deal.

We will keep on extending every support and exerting every effort towards ending this war, which we have denounced since the outset, so as to restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 24, 2023).

On the second anniversary, the Turkish Foreign Ministry made the following declaration:

“As the war in Ukraine leaves its second year behind, the devastating impact of the conflict on Ukraine is growing, and its negative regional and global consequences are deepening.

The conditions conducive to the revitalization of the diplomatic process will eventually emerge. With this understanding, we offer constructive input to both sides.

Turkey’s efforts for a just and lasting solution based on Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity will continue” (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 24, 2024).

Both declarations emphasise the negative consequences of war as well as Turkey's attempts and hopes to reach peace. Both of them underline the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. However, none of them mentions the word Russia. That is evidence of how Turkey has been implementing its balanced policy by not confronting Russia directly. In the second declaration, it is stated that Turkey has been offering constructive input to both conflicting parties. That point has been underlining Turkish contact with both parties.

Turkish President Erdoğan stated that the killings in Buca, Irpin, and Kramatorsk by the Russian army were “negative developments” (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, April 18, 2022). What happened in these Ukrainian cities was called a massacre or ethnic cleansing by many observers around the world. However, Turkey's ruling elite refrained from using any kind of harsh rhetoric against Russia. This is another proof of how the JDP elite did everything to criticise Russia softly and not to damage ties with Moscow.

Another important point is that Turkish leaders have insistently argued that, in fact, the war indicates the failure of the global order. The JDP elite claimed that there are serious problems in the current international structure that resulted in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The main point of the JDP elite is that the global order established after the end of the Second World War has become dysfunctional, and it cannot solve any of the important global problems any more. They argue that the failure of the global order is the fundamental problem. President Erdoğan has repeatedly stated that the world is bigger than five, referring to the structure of the United Nations Security Council (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, September 16, 2022). He criticised the structure of the Security Council, giving the five countries an extraordinary privilege in the governance of the international system. For the Turkish leadership, all the conflicts ranging from Syria to Yemen to Libya to Ukraine and Gaza are just manifestations of how the current global system lost its relevance and became dysfunctional (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, March 1, 2024). The JDP elite thinks that a more fair, more representative, more inclusive, and more effective global order should be established (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, September 16, 2022). It is interesting to note that instead of condemning and criticising Russia directly, the Turkish leadership relocated their criticism to the deficiencies of the current international system.

This approach has two benefits for Turkey: First of all, Turkey could keep its good relations with the Russian leadership. Turkey is dependent

on Russia, especially with regard to energy. Therefore, maintaining good ties with Putin is important for the JDP political elite. Second, this approach allows Turkey's decision-makers to raise their voice with regard to the current international system. Since the JDP rulers want to create an image of Turkey as a rising global star, this discourse has a special meaning.

Similar to the Turkish discourse, Serbian decision-makers are also careful to have moderate criticism of Russia and to refrain from any harsh rhetoric. Whenever Serbian relations with Russia are discussed, historical ties and cultural closeness are emphasised by the Serbian leaders. Russian support for Serbian independence, common religion, and cultural affinity have impacted bilateral relations throughout history. In addition, Russian support for Serbia with regard to the Kosovo issue creates a special bond between the two countries. Meanwhile, the energy issue creates an asymmetrical interdependence between Belgrade and Moscow, as is also the case in Turkey's ties with the Putin administration.

The statement of the National Security Council of Serbia on February 25, 2022, just one day after the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine, is important in terms of explaining the main parameters of Serbian foreign policy:

“1. The Republic of Serbia most sincerely regrets everything that takes place in the east of Europe. Russia and Ukraine have always been friendly countries to the Republic of Serbia, and Serbian people think of Russians and Ukrainians as fraternal nations. We see the loss of life of each man in Ukraine as a true tragedy.

2. The Republic of Serbia is committed to observing principles of territorial integrity and political independence of the states, as one of the basic principles of international law contained in the United Nations Charter and the Helsinki Final Act (1975), which guarantee the right of states to inviolability of borders” (Conclusion of the National Security Council, February 25, 2022).

Similar to Turkey, Serbia does not condemn the Russian aggression either. It also emphasises its friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine. Serbian respect for international law is also underlined. The military neutrality of Serbia is also being noted. Serbian non-compliance with Western sanctions has been explained by two factors: history and Serbian economic and political interests. Article 8 of the statement is as follows:

“Starting from the fact that its elementary duty is to invest all its efforts in the preservation of peace and the wellbeing of its citizens, while

considering the need to possibly impose restrictive measures or sanctions against any country, including the Russian Federation, the Republic of Serbia will be guided exclusively by the protection of its vital economic and political interests. As a country that experienced sanctions from the West in the recent past and whose compatriots in the Republic of Srpska are suffering from sanctions today, the Republic of Serbia believes that it is not in its vital political and economic interest to impose sanctions against any country at this moment, nor on representatives or business entities of the respective" (Conclusion of the National Security Council, February 25, 2022).

Any discourse on sanctions reminds Serbia of its bitter memories of the 1990s, when Western countries put sanctions on Serbia. This historical background leads the Serbian administration to contest the validity of the sanctions on Russia. In addition, it is also emphasised that any kind of sanctions would harm Serbian political and economic interests as they would disturb the ties between Belgrade and the Putin administration.

Serbian President Vucic claimed that the West and Putin have been using the same rhetoric in their interventions. He stated that Western countries had intervened in Kosovo with the claim of ending a humanitarian tragedy, and Putin is using a similar narrative. He also argued that those countries that supported the attack against Serbia are now supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine (Address by the President of the Republic of Serbia, September 21, 2023). That is why, for the Serbian administration, Ukraine has been another case in which Western hypocrisy can be witnessed.

After analysing the discourses of the Turkish and Serbian political elites, the next section explores the policies of both countries towards the conflict in the Black Sea.

Comparative Analysis of Turkish and Serbian Policies

The multiple identities of Turkey and Serbia have had an impact on the foreign policies of both countries. On the one hand, both countries are EU candidates and carrying out negotiations for accession (in the case of Turkey on paper). On the other hand, they have been furthering their ties with emerging powers, especially Russia and China. We can say that in a shifting global order, both countries have been furthering their multiple identities and using their manoeuvring space in foreign policy.

Serbian President Vucic defined Serbian multilateral foreign policy as follows:

“I stand before you as the representative of a free and independent country, the Republic of Serbia, which is on its EU accession path but which at the same time is not ready to turn its back on traditional friendships it had been building for centuries (Address by the President of the Republic of Serbia, September 21, 2023)”.

Hence, President Vucic underlined the importance of both the EU and traditional allies of Serbia for the country. In the same speech, he also stated “centuries-long traditional friendship with the Russian Federation” (Address by the President of the Republic of Serbia, September 21, 2023). In fact, we can state that the four pillars of Serbian foreign policy declared by then-Serbian President Boris Tadic are still valid: the EU, the US, Russia, and China.

Similarly, the JDP government also focuses on Turkey’s multiple identities. As an example, the current statement defining the main parameters of Turkish foreign policy on the website of the Foreign Ministry is noteworthy:

“As the Easternmost European and the Westernmost Asian country, Turkey aims to **strengthen its strategic relations** and establish new ones. Turkey has a strategic partnership with the United States as a NATO ally and considers the transatlantic link vital for security and prosperity in Europe... Turkey has developed a globally extensive network of cooperation, including High-Level Cooperation Councils with 30 countries, four Intergovernmental Summits, and a host of trilateral or other multilateral regional formations. Turkey continues to further strengthen its close ties with countries in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa, the Southern Caucasus, and South and Central Asia. Beyond these neighbouring regions, Turkey also deepens its partnership policy in **Africa** and reaches out to countries in **Latin America and the Caribbean** more and more every day. The **Asia Anew** initiative announced in 2019 has given Turkey the opportunity to lay the foundations of a holistic and comprehensive policy towards Asia and the Pacific, home to the rising powers of the 21st century” (“National Foreign Policy in the ‘The Century of Türkiye’”, n.d. Bold in the original text).

By emphasising the newly developed concept of “The Century of Turkey”, it is stated that Turkey will contribute to its neighbourhood and areas beyond it.

These multiple identities of Serbia and Turkey have led to a balanced foreign policy with regard to the crisis in Ukraine. Both countries criticised the Russian aggression, albeit in a soft manner, but at the same time, they refrained from implementing the European Union sanctions. For Turkey,

sanctions would not contribute to the solution of the problems. The Turkish leadership stated that they did not want to add fuel to the fire; therefore, they used a careful foreign policy. For Ankara, it was the failure of the Western-led global order that led to the conflict anyway.

Serbia, on the other hand, remembered its own experiences with Western sanctions in the 1990s. Thinking of its own vital interests, Belgrade refrained from implementing the Western sanctions. The Serbian administration accused the Western world of showing hypocrisy by comparing their attitudes in the 1990s towards Kosovo and now towards Ukraine.

In contrast to the Serbian case, the Turkish political elite tried to become a facilitator between Ukraine and Russia. Foreign ministers of both countries met during the Antalya Diplomatic Forum on March 10, 2022, and Ukrainian and Russian delegations came together in Istanbul on March 29, 2022, although to no avail. However, even the attempt by Turkey to bring parties together showed the proactive dimension of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's role in the grain deal should be noted as well. Turkey played an important role in the deal to allow the Ukrainian grain to reach global markets.

In sum, both countries have been trying to maintain their good ties with their Western partners on the one hand while maintaining their dialogue with Russia on the other. Although they stressed their friendship with Ukraine, underlined their support for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and criticised the Russian invasion, they have not used any harsh criticism towards Russia so far. Soft criticism of both countries should be noted. Why did they just use soft criticism? First of all, the energy dependence of both countries on Russia should be noted. Second, Russian support for the Serbian policy towards Kosovo played an important role. Third, Turkey wanted to keep good relations with Russia because of the Russian impact in Turkish neighbourhoods, for example, Syria and Libya. Fourth, historical ties with Russia were always emphasised by the Serbian leadership. Hence, both countries have been implementing *à la carte* foreign policies towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Conclusion

There are certain similarities in the attitudes of Turkey and Serbia towards the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. First of all, both countries criticised the Russian invasion and declared their support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Both of them declared that they wanted to maintain good relations with Russia and Ukraine. In a

similar way, the Turkish and Serbian governments emphasised the importance of international law.

At the same time, they were careful not to use harsh rhetoric towards the Putin regime. It is an important characteristic of the discourses of both countries. They underlined the importance of international law and criticised the Russian invasion; however, the leaders in Ankara and Belgrade were careful not to use any harsh language against the Kremlin.

The case of Turkish and Serbian foreign policies is a good example of how regional actors have been using an à la carte foreign policy in this shifting global order. They refrain from any kind of fixed alliance. On the one hand, they keep their ties with the Western partners, but on the other hand, they do their best to maintain their good relations with Russia as well. This case study shows us the importance of analysing the attitudes of regional powers and regional actors to understand how the shifting power dynamics in the international system has been influencing the manoeuvring space of countries. It is time to go beyond the fixed understandings of classical international relations and dwell further on the flexibility and pragmatism of middle powers and regional actors.

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RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS¹

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Abstract: The history of Russian-Turkish relations extends far into the past and is marked by numerous striking moments and unexpected turns. The nature of their relations, far beyond mere trade connections, has been shaped by mutual conflicts, as evidenced by the fact that Turks, more frequently than other nations, have been adversaries of Russia on the battlefield. The relations between Russia and Turkey are characterised by complexity and cooperative competition: on the one hand, there is an increase in economic collaboration and exchanges, coupled with the intensification of military-technical cooperation, and on the other hand, support for mutually confronted forces in conflict zones in North Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Russia and Turkey endorse opposing belligerents in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh, but their interests do not necessarily clash. As revisionist powers aspiring to restore regional and global influence, they do not view favourably the expansion of influence by the other party. In contrast to past times, when geopolitical disputes were settled through direct military confrontation, these two powers now engage indirectly, employing intermediaries. Despite geopolitical rivalry, the challenges of the regional and global strategic environment are increasingly aligning the foreign policy positions and actions of Russia and Turkey. The pragmatic partnership between the two countries rests on two key pillars. The first is mutual distrust towards the West, and the second is benefit, primarily from the economic cooperation between the two nations. Such a relationship between the two countries is also discernible in the Ukrainian crisis. The implications for the Balkans and Serbia, in terms of the results of mutual relations between Russia and Turkey, are currently relatively favourable, as the current mutual relations between these countries are good and relatively stable, with certain oscillations on specific crisis issues.

Keywords: Russia, Turkey, relations, Ukraine crisis, Western Balkan.

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Introduction

The contemporary foreign policy actions and mutual relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey are shaped by the shifting global power dynamics as we transition from the old to the new millennium. After almost five centuries of Western dominance, first by European powers from the 16th to the 19th century and then by the United States of America in the 20th century, the centre of global power is shifting from the West to the East, gradually but inexorably (Miršajmer, 2017, pp. 29-31). The decline of Western power and the re-establishment of a multipolar world have led to a more active participation of rising powers like China, Russia, and India in global politics in the current redistribution of global power, encouraging their foreign policy agenda in that direction (Vuletić, Đorđević, 2021, p. 53; Đukić, Vuletić, 2023, p. 621).

The described agenda is not a novelty, as the history of international relations demonstrates that great powers, which shape the global system, are in constant competition for power. They actively seek opportunities to alter the distribution of global power in their favour. In support of this, the theory of long cycles indicates that the aforementioned struggle is most evident in the period of imbalance in the world in the global balance of power caused by the decline of the power of the hegemon when, as a rule, new rivals appear aiming to challenge the increasingly vulnerable world leader (Kegli, Vitkof, 2004, p. 167). Today, this is evident in the US's declining global dominance and the emergence of challengers to its global interests, as identified by American strategists and theoreticians. These challengers include not only traditional geopolitical rivals such as Russia and China but also confirmed strategic partners from the Cold War period, such as France, Germany, and the European Union in general, as well as Turkey.

The first diplomatic act in relations between Russia and Turkey was related to a document from 1492 regulating their maritime trade in the waters of the Black and Azov Seas. Their political-diplomatic relations were formally established in 1701 with the opening of the Russian embassy in Constantinople. Nevertheless, the nature of their relations was marked by mutual conflicts, far more than by trade ties. The Turks, more than any other nation, were adversaries of Russia on the battlefield. Their first war occurred at the end of the 16th century, and they clashed more than ten times over the centuries, culminating in the First World War (1914-1918). Most of these wars ended with Russia's victory, resulting in the expansion of its territories to the west and southwest through the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire.

This expansion strengthened Russian influence in the world and raised suspicions among Western European countries (Iskendrov, 2020, p. 1).

After the First World War, a weakened Turkey shifted its focus towards internal development and societal reforms rather than pursuing global or regional dominance. This period saw the nation rejecting its Ottoman past and embracing Western values, defining itself as a national and secular state. During most of the Second World War, it remained neutral, skillfully avoiding attempts by both the British and Germans to involve it in the conflict. It only joined the Allied Powers in February 1945, when the outcome of the war was already determined. The fear of Soviet influence spreading over Turkey led the US to turn towards this country of exceptional geopolitical importance in 1947. Throughout the Cold War, American-Turkish relations, primarily focused on security, remained relatively close. American policymakers recognised Turkey's strategic significance in their efforts to achieve global dominance and curb Soviet influence. Control over Turkey was crucial to containing the USSR and preventing it from accessing the ocean and warm seas. For the reasons stated above, Turkey has been the easternmost member of NATO since 1952 and a key component of the American Cold War strategy, as highlighted by Vračar and Šaranović (2016, 497, p. 504). As NATO's Eastern Mediterranean anchor, Turkey controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, restraining Russia's influence in the Caucasus, the Black Sea, and the Balkans. Russia and Turkey are direct rivals in the struggle for supremacy in the Balkans, with the potential to become significant geostrategic players (Stepić, 2016, pp. 479, 501).

Cooperation between Russia and Turkey

The challenges of Turkey's external environment certainly affect its internal conditions as well. The consequences of the world economic crisis, which dates back to the time of the pandemic, significantly affect economic and financial events within the country. High inflation, currency devaluation in comparison to the US dollar, an increased unemployment rate, the price of basic goods and services, and other economic problems induce significant social problems in Turkish society and cause internal political instability. Cooperation rather than confrontation with Russia is the way the authorities in Turkey are trying to reduce some of their problems in the areas of security and economy. It is in this context that the pragmatic, and not allied, relations between Turkey and Russia should be viewed.

The economic partnership between Russia and Turkey has been robust and undisguised, and it is most recognised in the field of energy. It dates back to the time before the start of the Ukrainian crisis, but in the midst of its unfolding, that cooperation intensified. Since 2020, with the commissioning of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, Turkey has become a transit country of strategic importance for Russia. However, after blowing up two Nord Stream gas pipelines, Russia found a solution that would increase profits for itself, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, but not for Germany, which for many previous years has done everything to become the gas hub of Europe. Namely, in the background of the energy crisis that broke out during the Ukrainian conflict, Turkey gradually strengthened its position as an “energy hub”, which it now certainly uses as its trump card. In order to make up for the lack of gas delivery via the Nord Stream, Moscow launched an initiative, which Ankara accepted, to make Turkey a gas hub for the whole of Europe. It is assumed that it will be built in Thrace and will be supplied with Russian and Azerbaijani gas. With that project, Russia gets a double benefit. Firstly, it avoids the upper limit of the gas price in direct trade with Europe, and secondly, the gas price will be formed in Turkey, not in Europe. Statements by European officials indicate that the EU is determined to eliminate its energy dependence on Russia, but Russian estimates are such that Europeans will, at some point, return to Russian gas that is many times cheaper and of better quality than the one they currently import from the US (Đukić et al., 2022, p. 8).

Turkey, therefore, tries to maintain good relations with Russia despite numerous disagreements. It is increasing the volume of trade with Moscow in an attempt to stabilise the damaged economy. Against the background of problems with the Kurdish minority in Syria, which is supported by the US side, Turkey is using its partnership with Russia to restore its broken relations with the Syrian regime. Therefore, Ankara proposed to Moscow the organisation of a trilateral meeting in which, in addition to the Turkish and Russian ones, the Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad would also participate. Also, through the “Astana format”, Turkey, through Russia, is trying to improve relations with Iran, its important supplier of energy. However, while developing close economic relations with Russia and using Moscow as a mediator to improve relations with Syria and Iran, Turkey has consistently provided political and military support to Ukraine. In addition to the supply of combat drones since the beginning of the military operation, Turkey has sent an additional contingent of 42 BMC Kirpi-armoured combat vehicles to Ukraine.

Due to close economic relations with Russia and the non-introduction of sanctions, Turkey constantly suffers criticism from the West, both from the US and the European Union. Turkey is under the threat of US sanctions for exporting chemicals and microchips used by Russia in the military industry. It is evident that Turkey's confrontation with the US and the EU is taking on a progressive character over time, which certainly suits Russia in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis. That is why Moscow does not react in full capacity to the delivery of Turkish weapons to the Ukrainian side. Russia uses Ankara to mitigate the consequences of economic sanctions, especially in the field of energy, but also as a factor that could undermine NATO unity in the future. Moscow hopes that the process of accelerated polarisation of the world scene will further attract Turkey to its side, and this will certainly weaken the global position of the political West, primarily the US. The further development of Russian-Turkish relations during the Ukrainian crisis should be viewed in this light.

Since Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP) came to power in 2002, Turkey has gradually grown into a powerful regional power with significantly greater geopolitical ambitions. During all that time, Turkish foreign policy was guided by national and not necessarily Western interests. As a consequence of that, Turkey's cultural and thus political influence is strongly felt today in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, practically in the entire area where the mighty Ottoman Empire once spread. In those regions, Turkey has an independent policy, which over time has turned into a stumbling block in its relations with the West. At the very beginning of Erdogan's rule, Turkey openly opposed the American invasion of Iraq. It has also had mixed views on the crisis in Libya and does not look favourably on US support for the Kurds in Syria. These are certainly moments that distance Turkey from Washington and its allies within the NATO Alliance. Certainly, this country is no longer ready to be limited by Washington in conducting an independent foreign policy.

In recent years, Erdogan has simply torn Turkey from the tight embrace of the United States, whose influence in that country has dominated almost since the middle of the 20th century. The success of such a risky undertaking was supported by the economic and military strengthening of Turkey, which, among other things, required its rapprochement with Russia. Turkey's growing economy has become dependent on Russian energy sources and markets, and security problems, such as the Kurdish issue in Syria, have undermined Ankara's trust in Washington and turned it in

Moscow's direction. The West is aware that Russian influence is deeply present in Turkey. That is why many Western politicians hoped that the Turkish leader would finally be defeated after more than two decades in power. On the other hand, Russian hopes were focused on the survival of Erdogan's regime. Moscow does not need a hostile regime in Ankara that would control the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as the movement of the Russian Black Sea fleet towards the Mediterranean and other seas.

The personal relations between Erdogan and Russian President Putin have become close over time. However, the cooperation between Turkey and Russia is not moving in the direction of establishing an alliance between the two countries. It can be defined, above all, as pragmatic, cautious, and limited. It was created on the basis of mutual mistrust towards the West, Turkey's suspicion of American support for the Syrian Kurds, and, of course, the benefits of economic cooperation between the two countries. However, Turkey is not ready to give up its membership in NATO or its candidature for membership in the European Union. Thus, Ankara and Moscow's political, economic, and security ties remain within limits that allow Turkey to achieve certain benefits without endangering its NATO membership, escalating open hostilities, or severing ties with Western countries entirely.

The importance of Turkey in the international arena should not be viewed only through the lens of the Ukrainian crisis. As one of the most militarily powerful members of NATO, a country with an extremely important geostrategic position at the crossroads of Europe and Asia (the Middle East), with complete control of the entrance to the Black Sea, and a regional power with widespread influence, Turkey's position in the international arena is becoming extremely important for the outcome of the current process of recomposing the international structure. Such a role by Turkey encourages Washington and, in general, the West to think that it is "an inconvenient partner that cannot be done without at the moment". That is why Washington does not give up the Turkish alliance lightly, but it is certainly ready to change Erdogan's regime.

Erdogan's many years of disobedience caused first suspicion in Washington and then open dissatisfaction with his policies. This was already evident in the case of Syria, where Turkey avoided a direct confrontation with Russia, which the US encouraged it to do. The turning of Turkey towards Russia after the failed coup, through the establishment of political and security cooperation with Moscow in Syria, then the purchase of Russian air defence systems S-400, the commissioning of the gas pipeline "Turkey Stream", the construction of a nuclear power plant in the province of Mersin by the Russian

company “Rosatom”, and the construction of a gas hub for Europe on Turkish soil at the initiative of the Russian side, is a more than obvious confirmation of the disobedience of one of the most loyal American allies until recently. Erdogan’s refusal to follow the Western agenda towards Moscow during the Ukraine crisis only added fuel to the fire and deepened Washington’s dissatisfaction with Ankara. Dissatisfied with Erdogan’s policy, the US certainly did not remain passive towards Turkey. Erdogan still holds the US responsible for the attempt to overthrow him during the failed coup in 2016. In addition, the US constantly undermines Erdoğan’s position through constant economic pressure, trying to give wind to the Turkish opposition.

In the context of international events, the relations between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey continue to represent a complex issue. Relations are characterised by increasing economic cooperation and exchange and intensifying military-technical cooperation while still supporting mutually confronting forces in the conflict areas of North Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Relations between Russia and Turkey are based on mutual recognition of security interests and numerous bilateral agreements. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia and Turkey have not been neighbours in a strictly geographical sense, but a rich legacy of historical relations and a multitude of current ties create a specific interconnectedness. Political efforts to build a “strategic partnership” resonated strongly in both societies, but events such as the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and the Caucasus contributed to the citizens of both countries becoming significantly disappointed in this rapprochement.

Russian-Turkish relations in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine

Ukraine is historically, geographically, and culturally closely tied with Russia. It is a Slavic, Orthodox country and part of the oldest Russian tradition. With a population of over 40 million and the largest territory in Europe, it has the potential to be a strong ally of Russia. This certainly represents a challenge for Western interests, primarily American. On the other hand, viewed as “anti-Russia”, Ukraine represents a powerful instrument for curbing Russia’s regional and global ambitions, possessing the potential for long-term destabilisation and even disintegration of the Russian state. Therefore, in addition to providing Russia with the opportunity to rise again to the level of a world power, Ukraine also represents its “weak point”, that is, an area on which the very survival of Russian statehood may depend in the long term.

The ideas of American strategists and politicians, from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, about the division of Russia into several states are well known. In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, which is certainly global in nature, those ideas are reviving and gaining political weight. Statements by Western officials, not only American but also European, are increasingly present in the public, calling for the use of the Ukrainian crisis for the economic weakening of Russia, all with the aim of causing its internal instability and, ultimately, the dismantling of its state territory. Ukraine's independence meant for Russia the loss of a vast, fertile, raw material-rich, energy-industrially developed, and geopolitically significant territory (Bžežinski, 2001, p. 89).

The role of Turkey in the Ukrainian crisis is noteworthy considering the global character that the crisis has had from the very beginning. The territory of Ukraine represents only the military aspect of a fairly wide battlefield on which the hybrid conflict of the political West with Russia, and indirectly with other challengers of Western supremacy, is currently taking place. At the height of the crisis in which the West is evidently losing its influence in Africa and the Middle East, when significant financial and military aid to Ukraine is not producing results on the battlefield, Turkey's position is certainly gaining strategic importance. The West is aware of the fact that Turkey and Russia are traditional geopolitical rivals in the Black Sea region. Turkey uses Ukraine as an instrument to contain Russian influence in the region, and in this sense, it constantly provides military aid and develops military cooperation with this country. Still, in a way, the West benefits from Turkey's closeness to Russia. It is the only NATO member that has open communication with Moscow and influence over the establishment in the Kremlin. It is in this context that Turkey's persuasion of Moscow to end the maritime blockade of the export of Ukrainian grain should be viewed. During the crisis, Erdogan repeatedly played the Western card. Certainly an important move in recent times is that, after a long hesitation, he approved the entry of Finland into NATO, which is certainly important because of its long border with Russia.

The events in Ukraine undoubtedly have the potential for a global crisis, since the "hybrid confrontation" between the West and Russia has been taking place on its territory for years. After the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine represented an area in which the interests of Russia and the Western powers clashed (Vuletić, Milenković, 2023, p. 185). The primary goal of the US in Ukraine, as well as in Belarus, is to prevent the spread of Russian influence in the depths of European space and to keep Russia at the level of a regional power, that is, to prevent its growth into an "equal partner". This would

represent at least one step in the direction of stopping, or at least slowing down, the process of the emergence of a multipolar world in which Russia, along with China, plays a leading role. That is why, since the end of the Cold War, Ukraine has been a geostrategic space in which the US tries to exert a strong influence in order to get militarily closer to Russia's borders with the aim of containing it. In other words, by controlling the territory of Ukraine (and Belarus), the US is trying to break down the existing strategic barrier of Russia towards NATO. Ukraine falling under American influence, in a geo-economic sense, would mean the separation of Russia from the rest of Europe, primarily by putting out of service the wide network of Russian gas pipelines that extend across Ukrainian territory. This would, in accordance with American interests, end European dependence on Russian gas and, at the same time, eliminate Russia's influence on political events within the European area.

In addition to the escalation of the conflict in all dimensions, the Ukrainian crisis is further complicated by the involvement of other global and regional actors, certainly including Turkey. Like the West, Turkey does not look favourably on the expansion of Russia's influence and its growth into a regional and great power. The strengthening of Russian influence began with the military intervention in Georgia in 2008, further progressing with the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014, as well as with the military intervention in Syria since 2015. Such an action taken by Russia poses a threat not only to Turkey's regional interests but also to its global interests. Namely, Moscow becomes an attractive partner for all those countries where Turkey wields considerable influence, such as Libya or Syria. That is the reason why Turkey, years ago, used Ukraine as an instrument to curb Russian influence in the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, despite its NATO membership, Turkey's political objectives in Ukraine are not as overtly aimed at undermining Russia as those of Western countries. Primarily, Turkey lacks the requisite means, namely the power, for such endeavours, and secondly, in recent years, Turkey has become more and more dependent on Russia in terms of economy and security.

In order to counteract the spread of Russian influence in the region, Turkey has been fostering a partnership with Ukraine for years, irrespective of Western involvement. After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ankara openly supported the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, which it continues to do unequivocally. In recent years, Turkey has become one of the leading investors in Ukraine, and the two countries have signed a free trade agreement. In addition to providing diplomatic support

and deepening economic cooperation, Turkey has also developed military relations with this country. During 2019, Ukraine purchased Turkish combat drones of the “Bayraktar” type, and a year later, the two countries signed important agreements in the field of defence, facilitating the provision of Turkish weaponry to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Just prior to the commencement of the Russian “special military operation”, the two countries also signed an agreement on the joint production of Turkish combat drones in Ukraine.

With the start of the Russian “special military operation”, the events in Ukraine take on a fundamentally new significance for Turkey’s foreign policy agenda and the development of its relations with Russia. The global implications of the Ukrainian crisis have outweighed the importance of Turkey’s regional interests and shaped its relations with Russia in a manner divergent from initial assumptions. Despite their disagreement on many issues, it is evident that the challenges presented by the global strategic landscape are gradually aligning the foreign policy stances and actions of the two countries. Despite being competing powers, they are forced to build a pragmatic partnership to confront common challenges that surpass the significance of their regional competition.

Without a doubt, Ukraine is the area where Russia is trying to regain its regional and global influence. However, of greater significance is the fact that among the countries of Central Asia, Ukraine represents a “vulnerable locus” through which the West is trying to endanger the very existence of the Russian state. That makes it a space of vital importance for Russian interests. On the other hand, Ukraine has no such importance for Turkey. Vital Turkish interests are currently located in the area of northern Syria and Iraq, which is inhabited by a majority Kurdish population, otherwise closely linked to the separatist-oriented Kurdish population in the south of Turkey. Therefore, the Kurdish question is of vital importance to Turkish national interests. However, Ukraine does not pose threats to Turkey’s vital interests; rather, it holds significance in terms of advancing its regional influence. According to official Ankara, Ukraine is pivotal for fostering stability, security, peace, and prosperity in the Black Sea region. Yet, underlying this stance is Turkey’s utilisation of Ukraine as a tool to counteract rival Russian influence in the region.

The political partnership between Russia and Turkey lacks substantial strength. It would be more accurate to describe it as prudent, which can be seen through Turkey’s political actions at the scene of the Ukrainian crisis. Since the onset of the Russian military operation in Ukraine, Ankara has

been trying to position itself as a neutral intermediary between Moscow and Kiev, as well as between Russia and the West. At the beginning of the crisis, Turkey hosted negotiations between Moscow and Kiev; although they were unsuccessful, it successfully mediated the exchange of Russian and Ukrainian prisoners. Turkey, in fact, plays a multiple role in Ukraine, trying not to hold grudges against Russia or the West while at the same time gaining benefits from both sides. Furthermore, Turkey seeks to garner favour with the international community. This is exemplified by the agreement on the free export of Ukrainian grain brokered by Turkey with the involvement of Russia, Ukraine, and the UN. The agreement entailed facilitating the export of grain that was stalled in Ukrainian ports along the Black Sea. This export was crucial in addressing the global food shortage crisis, which posed a significant humanitarian threat.

Despite the narrative of pursuing a neutral policy towards the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey provided unequivocal support to Ukraine until the commencement of the Russian military operation. Ankara's actions were met with disapproval from Moscow, resulting in a response from Russia. Indeed, Moscow refrained from taking drastic measures akin to the economic sanctions imposed on Turkey in 2015 following the downing of a Russian fighter jet over Syria. Although less impactful on the Turkish economy, Russia's actions conveyed a clear warning message. In the lead-up to the military operation in Ukraine, Russia rejected Turkey's offers for mediation. Furthermore, to express its discontent with Turkey's policies, Russia repeatedly leveraged Turkey's economic dependence. In 2021, following a meeting between the Turkish president and his Ukrainian counterpart, Russia suspended commercial flights to Turkey. Subsequently, Russia repeatedly rejected Turkish agricultural products, citing alleged pesticide contamination. It is evident that these economic measures, along with others, aligned with Moscow's disapproval of Ankara's perceived unfavourable political actions towards Kiev.

The onset of the Russian military operation in Ukraine prompted significant changes in Turkish policy. The newly established circumstances narrowed the scope of Turkey's previously perceived neutral political engagement. Given the strained and openly hostile relations between the West and Russia, it was anticipated that Turkey would adopt a more assertive stance as one of the parties involved in the conflict. In formulating its policy towards the Ukrainian crisis, Turkey was guided by the recognition that the American policy of sanctioning Russia, which was unequivocally supported by other NATO members, poses significant risks to its economy.

Turkey's decision not to align with such a policy was further motivated by the recognition that, unlike other NATO members, it has lacked complementary interests with the US on many issues for an extended period. Turkey's security policy in Syria no longer receives the same level of support from the US and the West as it did at the onset of the crisis. It was largely shaped by Turkish national interests as well as the outcomes of trilateral cooperation with Russia and Iran within the "Astana format". Overall, Turkey's mistrust towards the West, concerns regarding the Kurdish issue, and the challenging economic situation within the country have led to its apparent adoption of a neutral policy towards the Ukrainian crisis.

As a member of NATO, which maintains good relations with both Ukraine and Russia, Turkey is acceptable to the West in the role of negotiator. Specifically, for the West, it is unacceptable for the negotiating party to be a country perceived as sympathetic to Russia. Nevertheless, such a stance enables Turkey to assert certain concessions from the West and NATO, as evidenced by its role in the admission process of Sweden and Finland to the organisation. The Kurdish issue stands as a significant obstacle in the relations between Turkey and the US, and the Ukrainian crisis provides a favourable opportunity to raise this issue within the framework of NATO, as was evident during the reception of Sweden and Finland.

Russia perceives Turkey as a factor that undermines the unity of the Alliance, a perception that has been reinforced by the commencement of the Russian military operation. In order to appease the West, Turkey continues its diplomatic efforts to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. However, it also criticises certain NATO members for their role in exacerbating the conflict. During a period when Russia encountered an almost complete financial and economic blockade by the West and lacked clear allies or declared support from other countries for its military venture in Ukraine, Turkey opted not to align with Western policy and maintained a neutral stance. Indeed, Turkey condemned Russia for its aggression but refrained from joining the Western sanctions. Furthermore, in the initial stages of the war, Turkey opted not to close its airspace to Russian flights, a move that Western countries had taken. However, at the explicit request of Ukraine, Turkey closed the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Remarkably, this move by Turkey was also supported by Russia. By closing these sea passages, Turkey not only prevented the entry of Russian military ships into the Black Sea, as desired by Ukraine, but also hindered NATO ships from entering, a development that aligned with Russia's interests. Two weeks after the onset of the conflict, Turkey also declined NATO's invitation to provide Ukraine

with Russian S-400 air defence systems in exchange for American Patriot systems, as Slovakia did with its S-300 devices, for instance.

Undoubtedly, Ankara's various actions during the Ukrainian crisis could be characterised, if not as partnership, then at least as benevolent towards Moscow. Russia is cognizant of Turkey's current position and is increasingly welcoming its involvement in mediating the crisis. After the initial talks were held in Belarus, the subsequent round of negotiations took place in Turkey. Despite not yielding significant results, Turkey persisted in mediating the crisis. The first significant strides in its mediation efforts were achieved through the agreement brokered between Russia and Ukraine regarding the export of grain. This agreement effectively lifted the wartime halt on the export of several million metric tonnes of Ukrainian grain. The direction of Turkish mediation will depend significantly not only on the willingness of the warring parties but also on Turkey's own stance.

It is crucial for Turkey that Ukraine maintains its integrity and sovereignty, as it serves as a bulwark against the expansion of Russian influence along the northern coast of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, we cannot discount the possibility that Turkey may not agree with Ukraine's close association with the West. In doing so, Turkey would risk losing opportunities to expand its influence in Ukraine and the broader region. In this regard, it's important to consider Turkish perspectives on the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans, as there is a certain analogy with the situation in Ukraine. The full integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (due to the Raška region and the so-called Preševo Valley), and potentially Kosovo within the framework of the Western political sphere would result in a reduction of space for the expansion of Turkish influence in that region of Europe. Hence, it could be inferred that the non-integrated regions of the Western Balkans align more closely with Turkish interests. Similarly, an independent and neutral Ukraine, unaligned with either the East or the West, corresponds to Turkey's preferences. It is essential for Turkey that Ukraine remains a buffer zone between the two conflicting geopolitical blocs, as this allows for the unimpeded expansion of Turkish influence in the Black Sea region.

Russian and Turkish engagement in the Western Balkans

Both Turkey, which has been present in the Balkans since the 14th century during the Ottoman occupation, and Russia, which expanded westward and southwestward through the Balkan territories of the Ottoman

Empire since the 18th century, have profoundly influenced Balkan events. During that period, Russia consistently asserted itself as a great power, particularly in conflicts with Turkey, exerting significant influence on Balkan affairs and emerging as one of the primary geopolitical actors in the region. While the civilizational role of Russia in the Balkans and its connection with the Orthodox Balkan peoples is widely acknowledged, it is often overlooked or intentionally disregarded that Russian foreign policy towards the Balkans has consistently been driven by geostrategic interests, particularly regarding access to the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, i.e., aspirations for access to the Mediterranean (warm seas). Russian wars against Turkey progressively weakened the Ottoman Empire's resistance, bolstered nationalist movements in the Balkans, and reinforced Russia's perceived role as the protector of Orthodoxy (Terzić, 2021, pp. 705-708).

Russia's interest in the Balkans persisted beyond the creation of the Soviet Union. Despite the rejection of pan-Slavism and Orthodoxy as the basis for the Soviet presence in the Balkans in line with the ruling communist ideology, the Soviet Union maintained its claim to Turkish territories and interest in controlling the straits. At the outset of the 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc, the Cold War ended, leading to a decade characterised by unipolar global dominance by the US. These profound changes reverberated throughout the Balkans like a geopolitical earthquake, with the epicentre situated in the multi-national Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which, akin to a testing ground for assessing the influence of major powers, vanished from the political map of Europe. During this period, Turkey skillfully exploited the ensuing geopolitical region and, in alignment with American interests, actively engaged in the Balkan crisis.

The term Western Balkans refers to the region comprised of the newly formed states on the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), excluding those that have already joined the European Union (Slovenia and Croatia), and including Albania. The term Western Balkans is relatively recent, initially used informally but quickly gaining acceptance as an official designation in international politics and even appearing in some international documents (Svilar, 2010, pp. 503-504). The introduction of the term Western Balkans nearly coincides with the gradual development of the European Union's regional approach to the conflict-ridden region, which has been beset by conflicts for several years (Đukanović, 2009, p. 496). The term Western Balkans was also introduced by the European Union, delineating its strategy through a specialised

programme of economic, financial, political, expert, and other assistance aimed at that region of the Balkans. The Western Balkans is not a geopolitical or geostrategic category; rather, it is exclusively a practical political-economic term, serving as a common designation for a subset of countries in the Southeast European region (Vuletić, 2018, p. 41).

Even years after the end of the armed conflicts, the Western Balkans continues to be a distinct region characterised by its political, economic, and security attributes. Clearly, this is a geopolitically significant area where armed conflicts occurred in the recent past, and the political and security situation remains unstable even today. Owing to its crucial geopolitical and geostrategic position, the Western Balkans serves as a focal point where the diverse strategic interests of America, Europe, and Asia, as well as the Christian and Islamic worlds, collide and intertwine.

The influence of Turkey on the area of the Western Balkans is increasingly strong, and such a trend will continue with the strengthening of Turkish economic power and the conduct of a more independent foreign policy in relation to the US and NATO. The foundation of Turkey's contemporary political influence in the Western Balkans is precisely the Muslim communities of Albanians and Bosniaks, with whom they have close relations. Turkey's short-term and medium-term objectives in the Balkans entail bolstering Bosnia and Albania. The future of Bosniaks and Albanians is pivotal for the trajectory of the entire Balkan region. Turkey's foremost priority in the Balkans lies in ensuring security for societies that, by remaining in their respective areas, align their futures with Turkey's regional power and influence. For Turkey, this scenario represents not only a responsibility but also the most significant avenue for shaping its sphere of influence in the Balkans (Talić et al., 2015, pp. 75-80; Tanasković, 2010, pp. 92-94; Proroković, 2012, pp. 463-464, 724-725). In this context, Turkey's contribution includes the donation and sale of specific weapons and equipment to the Kosovo Security Forces, such as drones like the "Bayraktar TB2", anti-tank systems like the "OMTAS" with a range of up to 4500 metres, howitzers such as the 105mm calibre "Boran," infantry fighting vehicles like the "Vuran", and mortars like the 120mm calibre "ALKAR".

Besides the political dimension, the economic aspect also plays a crucial role. Turkey perceives itself as a significant regional investor, particularly in the infrastructure, construction, agriculture, trade, and tourism sectors. The primary objective of this foreign policy is to expand economic diplomacy throughout the entire Western Balkans region. This is evidenced by the presence of numerous prominent companies in the construction

sector, particularly in highway construction. Turkey is actively involved in road construction projects in the Balkans, particularly in Albania and Kosovo, but also in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with efforts focused on linking traffic corridors E-10 and E-8. Turkey aims to forge connections between the Balkans, the Middle East, and Asia. Consequently, Turkey is keen on investing in collaborative projects such as transport infrastructure and capacities, with a clear emphasis on horizontal east-west directions, aimed at linking territories with significant Muslim populations. Turkey's engagement in the Balkans places strong emphasis on the economic dimension, particularly considering that many countries in the region are undergoing transition periods where every investment is welcomed (Tanasković, 2010, pp. 102-103).

On the other hand, Russia endeavours to pursue its long-term political and economic interests in the Western Balkans, primarily focused on exerting influence over the Orthodox population, thereby encompassing both political and economic dimensions. Russia's political interests in the region include diminishing NATO's influence and fulfilling its centuries-old aspiration of gaining access to warm seas. However, Russia is acting very cautiously in this effort, guided by the changed geopolitical situation in the Western Balkans, in which certain countries, such as Montenegro, have reoriented themselves to a western course. Therefore, Russia's foreign policy emphasis on this region lies in restoring traditional civilizational ties and primarily in fostering economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector. This involves developing infrastructure to transport energy products from Russia to the European market. Russian energy policy in the region is prominently demonstrated through the strategy of constructing new oil and gas pipelines. This strategy aims to circumvent countries that have fallen under political dependence on the US, thereby bypassing existing gas pipelines built during the Soviet Union era. In this context, the construction of gas pipelines like the "South Stream" and "Turkish Stream" holds particular significance. The interests of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans were notably manifested during the construction of the Balkan gas stream. This project connects Russia and Turkey via the Black Sea and extends through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, and Croatia, aiming to supply gas to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe while bypassing Ukraine. Plans were underway to extend the gas pipeline to include the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

All forms of cooperation between Russia and Turkey, including diplomatic, military, and economic collaborations, particularly long-term

engagements in the energy sector, would serve to stabilise conditions in the Western Balkans. Such stability is of mutual interest to both Russia and Turkey, ultimately benefiting the countries in the region. Given such relations, there exists the potential for a pragmatic resolution of disputes between Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans, akin to their approaches in the Caucasus and the Middle East. Additionally, similar avenues for resolution could be explored for disputes involving Serbia, Bosnia, and Albania. Consequently, this approach could pave the way for resolving longstanding issues over a more extended period, particularly concerning Kosovo and Republika Srpska, which are vital national interests of the Republic of Serbia.

Turkey's foreign policy imperative in the Balkans is to foster and maintain positive relations with all countries in the region. Serbia holds a central position in the Balkans, being the largest country in terms of land area. Moreover, it serves as a crucial transit route from Asia Minor to Europe due to its geographical location. Serbia's strategic geographical location renders it highly significant for Turkish interests. Secondly, Turkey recognises Serbia's substantial political influence in the region, understanding that its involvement is crucial for resolving any major regional political issue. Serbia's soft power extends particularly to those Balkan countries within Turkey's sphere of interest. These are countries where a significant Muslim population coexists with a Serbian or Orthodox population, stretching from Bosnia and Herzegovina through Montenegro to North Macedonia. Therefore, it is crucial for Turkey to maintain positive political relations with Serbia, as it views Serbia as a key country for preserving regional stability.

Russia supports the implementation of the Dayton Agreement and the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a stance shared by Turkey, which has a vested interest in the region. At the bilateral meeting of foreign ministers at the beginning of January 2022, Turkey and Russia confirmed their support for the restoration of the internal political dialogue in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the firm basis of the Dayton principles and in the interest of all state-forming peoples, with an agreement on the continuation of constructive cooperation on these issues.

Undoubtedly, the cultural aspect of Turkey's soft power holds significant influence among the Muslim population of the Balkans, particularly among the Bosniaks. However, in Serbia, Turkish influence is generally minimal, except in the Raška-Polimlje region. While not insignificant, this influence alone is insufficient to yield a substantial impact

on political trends in Serbia. Turkey compensates for this deficiency with another component of soft power: its economy. The factor that can bring Serbia, as a developing country, closer to Turkey is precisely its economic interests. Turkey recognises this, and therein lies the answer to the frequently asked question of why Turkey favours Serbia over other countries in the region in terms of economic cooperation.

Despite the evident improvement in Serbian-Turkish relations, it should be emphasised that they are the result of the current constellation of forces, both regionally and globally. There should be no doubt that under different circumstances, if permitted or necessitated, Turkey would readily employ hard power to safeguard or advance its interests in the region. Recent history in the Balkans indeed underscores this reality. Turkey's readiness to employ force to safeguard its interests is unequivocally demonstrated by its actions in Libya, Syria, and the Caucasus. In the Balkans, Turkey is currently exerting its hard power indirectly, such as by providing military assistance to the so-called Kosovo security forces.

Russia and Turkey, despite their divergent interests in the Balkans, have thrown their support behind Serbia's "Open Balkans" Initiative, which was agreed upon by Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania. This initiative extends an open invitation for the accession of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the temporary institutions in Pristina. The initiative aims to facilitate the movement of people, goods, capital, and services among the signatory states. Both Russia and Turkey advocate for Serbia's military neutrality. Serbia currently participates in the CSTO as an observer, although full membership is precluded by its accession to the European Union. Additionally, Serbia cooperates with NATO through its membership in the "Partnership for Peace" program. Serbia's military neutrality allows for military and technical cooperation and the procurement of weapons and military equipment from both NATO and CSTO member states, as well as from third countries. However, this cooperation has been significantly limited since the start of the war in Ukraine, as well as due to the sanctions imposed by the EU and the US against Russia and Belarus.

Delaying the accession of the Western Balkans to the European integration process creates space for a more intense and meaningful influence of Russia and Turkey in the region. In the long term, this poses a threat to the interests of the EU and the US, leading to their open concern. The West is thus confronted with a significant dilemma: whether to accelerate the European integration of this region despite its existing challenges or to prolong the process until the region meets the required

standards, which would inevitably lead to further expansion of Russian and Turkish influence. The situation is further complicated by the increasingly aligned foreign policy interests of Russia and Turkey, which may have implications for the Western Balkans.

Conclusion

The history of Russian-Turkish relations is characterised by a long-standing geopolitical rivalry. Despite the recently established partnership, the fundamental nature of relations between the two countries has not changed. In the early 21st century, their relationship merely adapted to the challenges of the regional and global strategic environment, leading to a convergence of their foreign policy positions. The interests of Russia and Turkey continue to intersect in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. As revisionist powers seek to regain their regional and global influence, they do not view favourably the expanding influence of the other side. Unlike past times, when geopolitical disputes were resolved through direct military confrontation, these powers now engage indirectly through their proxies. Hence, in terms of pursuing their interests in the post-Soviet and Euro-Asian space, Ukraine occupies a significant position in the strategic visions and foreign policy actions of both powers.

Following the Cold War, Ukraine emerged as a focal point for regional competition between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey. For post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine holds particular significance, serving not only as a battleground for regaining regional and global influence but also as a critical factor in ensuring the survival of its statehood. Turkey, on the other hand, strategically leverages Ukraine to counterbalance the prevailing Russian influence within the Black Sea region. Contrary to initial expectations of heightened regional confrontation between Russia and Turkey amid the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, it instead affirmed and even fortified the pragmatic partnership between the two nations. The evolving challenges of the global strategic landscape are progressively aligning the foreign policy stances and actions of both nations, temporarily relegating their regional rivalry to a secondary position. Russia seeks to alleviate the adverse effects of Western sanctions through economic cooperation with Turkey, while Turkey endeavours to stabilise its economy by expanding trade volume with Moscow. The nature of the world order and the distribution of global power will undoubtedly continue to influence

Russian-Turkish relations. Turkey, seizing the opportunity, will seek to enhance its position in the emerging multipolar world.

In the Western Balkans, as in other regions, the interests of Russia and Turkey do not completely align. Turkey, as a NATO member, has greater latitude for economic investments and facilitating economic exchange with the European Union, whereas Russia's opportunities in this regard are more limited. Russia aims to limit NATO's influence to some extent by promoting the neutrality of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is pursued through economic, political, and military-technical cooperation with Serbia and the Republika Srpska. It is reasonable to anticipate that the shared interests of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans, along with their established cooperation and interdependence in other regions, will foster collaboration in this area as well. Such cooperation could have notable implications for the economies of Balkan states and contribute to peaceful resolutions of security challenges that afflict the region. In the current geopolitical context, while Serbia and Turkey have experienced a degree of rapprochement, their ties remain inherently fragile and susceptible to numerous challenges. These challenges not only threaten economic relations but also pose the risk of complete separation. Serbian-Turkish relations should be analysed within the broader framework of geopolitical and security dynamics unfolding at both the global and regional levels.

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COLORED REVOLUTIONS AS A MEAN TO CAUSE CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract: Colored revolutions are a complex political and security phenomenon, which in the last two decades reflected different geopolitical nuances in the kaleidoscope of contemporary international relations. Today's theorists believe that the first colored revolution took place on October 5, 2000, in Belgrade, after which the series continued in the post-Soviet space, North Africa and the Middle East, where such a form of revolution was romantically called the "Arab Spring", and essentially were extremely unfavorable and destructive, above all for the people and states in that area. The scientific goal of the work is primarily determined in the direction of the theoretical clarification of all important aspects of this complex political-security phenomenon, bearing in mind that it also penetrates deeply into other vital spheres of modern society, which are of economic, sociological, cultural, religious and other important importance. The social goal of the work is, for example, focused on the analysis of the scope and effects that resulted from the realization or attempts to carry out such forms of political coups, as well as on the research ambition to shed light on the perspectives of the further development of colored revolutions.

Keywords: Colored revolution, coup, political power, opposition action, foreign factor, conspiracy.

Introduction

Colored revolutions are a form of unconstitutional and illegal change of government, where in the initial stage of manifestation they have a non-violent character, while at the end of their manifestation they take on a violent character, where violence and pressure play a very important role in their embodiment. Experience shows that a relatively small number of people (usually a few tens of thousands) overthrow the government in front of millions of passive and anesthetized citizens. Colored revolutions are a relatively "young" political phenomenon and have existed in modern social history for about twenty years. In the beginning, they were most often

associated with the post-Soviet space, while there are theorists who believe that the first coup according to the colored revolution model took place on October 5, 2000, in Belgrade. Interpretations are certainly different and subject not only to theoretical but also to public debate, where the general consensus is that the mentioned complex political and security events certainly had to a significant extent the peculiarities of the mentioned political phenomenon (Parezanović, 2022, p. 35).

Colored revolutions are, in essence, special operations of a hybrid war with the aim of implementing a political coup, they are carried out with the use of political, informational, communication, sabotage-terrorist and moral-psychological methods of influence in gross violation of international law. The goals of such illegal actions can be the complete or partial disintegration of the state, a qualitative change in its internal or foreign policy, the replacement of the state leadership with loyal regimes, the establishment of external control over the state, its criminalization and submission to the dictates of other states or transnational corporations (Panarin, 2019, p. 325).

In contemporary international relations, rarely has any political process been so intense and powerful, and one can say effective in political changes, as a colored revolution. In one period, the impression was made that the era of colored revolutions would pass quickly, however, the events in Ukraine in 2014, Venezuela in 2019, Belarus in 2020, and in Kazakhstan in 2022 deny that (Sungorkin *et. al*, 2023). What took place and is taking place in the mentioned countries regarding the implementation or attempts to implement various forms of political coups, as well as the effects, scope and consequences of those coup movements, certainly represent a complex research field.

Basic characteristics of colored revolutions

The basic characteristics of colored revolutions are contained in the fact that they are non-violent, more precisely that violence is used restrictively and to the extent that it is necessary for execution of the goal. They usually manifest themselves after long-term political crises, and the culmination most often occurs during or immediately after the end of the electoral process.

The opposition forces declare victory in advance, the election result of the ruling structures is characterized as falsified and mass demonstrations are organized with the aim of paralyzing the system. The main political force of the opposition is not represented by politicians and parties, but non-governmental organizations (Gapich and Lushnikov, 2010, pp. 12-13).

The very technique of organizing and carrying out colored revolutions in the initial phase creates the environment for the economy of a certain country (which is the target of aggression) with different economic pressures to make it dependent on external factors as much as possible. This is most often performed various financial interventions and pressures from multinational companies, even the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and where these are not present institutions, acts through commercial banks, investment funds, oligarchs, corrupt managers and similar entities. It is not a rare occurrence that they are individual economic sanctions imposed on states by the international community. Anyway, the goal is to induce a strong and intense in the shortest possible time destabilization of the entire economic system, in order to cause economic collapse, and therefore a drop in the standard of living. With the decline in living standards on the scene social tensions and contradictions, which were less noticeable and visible until then, set in. Psychological-propaganda action creates an environment that political state leadership most is responsible for the difficult economic and social situation in the country, which plunges the country into an even deeper political and security crisis. That subversive action from abroad, with the help of domestic factors, including the marketing of various disinformation is carried out in many ways, and the list of modalities is almost endless, and it is conditioned by imagination and creativity. The most common modality is use of media, primarily social networks, given that nowadays the Internet has become a major communication field with incredible possibilities. Therefore, in the media play a particularly important role in the architecture of colored revolutions. When it comes to media, we underline once again that here we mean the negative role, which is primarily refers to non-objective and biased information, which in certain cases causes serious political and security complications. Especially destructive role played by certain subversive phenomena on social networks, which are present today and have become a part of everyday life and are almost accessible to a greater or lesser extent to all of humanity. When it comes to the mentioned negative phenomena, first we think of the Institute of Spreading the so-called fake news, which were designed and marketed in advance causing certain negative consequences. That fake news is not just about domain of political struggle, they can already spill over into the terrain of discrediting the individual, in the direction of spreading of panic among the population and alike. Destruction and subversion are almost always in the background of fake news. In addition, there are other ways of spreading disinformation, which certainly represents one of the domains of work of special services, which

challenges them with very harmful, one might even say devastating consequences (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 88).

In this sense, tendentious marketing of carefully conceived products is almost always carried out by fake news aimed at creating the impression that the government that needs to be overthrown is powerless, unable, incompetent and ineffective to deal with the problems that plague the country and its citizens. Usually, on those occasions, situations are chosen that should show that the competent institutions are not able to protect or enable some fundamental civilization values and indispensable needs of people, such as security, elementary and other conditions in the domain of living standards, dignity and the like. If they are like that constructions are hardly sustainable, because the people fundamentally do not feel the shortcomings in the target areas, other means and topics are chosen (Parezanović and Željki, 2019, p. 416).

Due to accumulated political and economic tensions, they are organizing in the country strikes, which eventually turn into well-organized protests. Those protests often they get the epithet of disorder and unrest on a wider scale, which causes the intervention of security forces. Then, almost automatically, the opposition structures and those media sympathetic to them proclaims the excessive use of force against protesters, thus creating favorable conditions for the internationalization of those internal conflicts. Most often the threat of human rights and freedoms is emphasized, which initially implies verbal condemnations from certain foreign officials and international organizations, while in the next phase they vote certain resolutions, which condemn “violence” towards the opposition circles. Soon after that, alliances of several states are formed, which are part of the international community and is entrusted with a mandate to supposedly find a political solution for overcoming the crisis, which actually their subversive and covert activity gradually introduces it into, conditionally speaking, legal and legitimate frameworks (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 89).

Actors from abroad

It is no secret or unknown that actors from abroad have a very important role in the realization of colored revolutions, which is primarily reflected in a wide spectrum of various subversive activities, which include illegal ones, among others financing of opposition parties, non-governmental organizations and others anti-regime movements, which in certain cases can last several years (Gapich and Lushnikov, 2010, pp. 12-13). Because of this,

it is very important that the security authorities perform a multi-layered and thorough analysis of operational data of the real financier's institution, because then things will be much clearer.

After unambiguous identification of the mentioned subjects and adequate documentation of those transactions, which can be very diverse, starting from offshore company, through cryptocurrencies, and up to the so-called hawala system, there are several ways it can be documented and legally disabled, which is part of the work domain of special services and state bodies in the field of financial control (Parezanović, 2022, str. 54).

Otherwise, the mentioned subjects constantly face the challenge of finding different source of collection of material resources. Sometimes the support is completely domestic, and in other cases, they manage to obtain a significant amount of international aid. Home support mainly comes from local associations of citizens and non-governmental organizations, business communities, religious institutions, trade unions and professional associations.

Youth and student organizations profit from their age – reliable source of financing are their families. According to one approach, there are four levels of possible sources of material support: 1) membership and supporters, their families and friends; 2) potential allies, non-governmental organizations, opposition parties; 3) local business community; 4) international organizations (Popović, Milivojević, Đinović, 2007, str. 94).

When it comes to the types of material resources, well organized opposition-oriented movements always make a detailed assessment of material needs means. These needs have the following basic functions: i. survival and maintenance of morale (food, clothing, medical aid, funds for people who lost their jobs, and the like); ii. transport and communication (computers, mobile phones, transmitters, office supplies, vehicles, fuel, plane tickets and more); iii. fixed operating costs (office space, overhead and clerical expenses, etc.); iv. immediate actions and campaigns – flyers, brochures, access cards, materials for recruitment, rental of event space, press releases, rental media space, expenses for the arrival of guests from the country or abroad, awards and incentives for activists, costs of political action projects, thematic campaigns and similarly (Popović et. al, 2007, str. 93).

All the above is not final and fixed in the context of the preparation and organization of the colored revolution, and it is conditioned by concrete circumstances, climate and overall situation in which an opposition organization that has such ambitions operates (Parezanović, 2022, str. 41).

In addition to the above, actors from abroad often assume the role of supreme arbitrators, determining the legitimacy of the electoral process, that is, they support the possibly illegal action of opposition forces. They also send various foreign policy ultimatums governing structures, creating conditions for the engagement of international negotiators and other mediators, who would act in the interests of the opposition forces. Also, an important role political subjects who once were play a role in the realization of color revolutions part of the ruling structures, and then, due to professional or personal conflicts, moved to the opposition. They know the regime best from the inside and foreign actors turn to them special attention (Gapich and Lushnikov, 2010, pp. 12-13).

The foreign factor pays special attention to contacts and active use certain provocateurs, mercenaries, terrorists, extremists, etc. They are used as the mechanism of the organizational system of interference in the internal affairs of the target country aggression. They receive maximum support from abroad to carry out their actions legitimately and for this purpose they use help from interested foreign centers of power.

In parallel with all the above, active work is also being done on the so-called early creation of “leaders”, who are designed to take overpower after the coup is over (Panarin, 2019, p. 327).

In addition to the above, it is crucial to fight for the undecided and win their sympathy in all ways. Violent protesting is exactly what it does – it leads to inwardness undermining the regime. In parallel, the recruitment of members of the elite is carried out, and above all members of the security services to go to the other side. Undermining the morale of the army and of the police is among the priorities (Đurković, 2021, p. 125).

Opposing colored revolutions

The question arises as to how in the era of today’s technical and technological process and high-speed communications to combat this phenomenon. The answer is very difficult and complex. It used to be simpler, and today, in the era of hybrid actions, it represents a huge challenge (Parezanović, 2022, p. 42).

It is especially important to identify the external factors that contribute to the cause of colored revolution, and internal causes that create the conditions for such events (Way, 2008). There where the government enjoys authority, and citizens have confidence in state institutions, there is none external actors who will be able to promote “colored” technologies of change

authorities. And vice versa, if citizens feel that the existing state institutions do not support them and do not allow them to express their position, they resort to unconstitutional forms of expression of political will, which is actively used by those who are interested in promoting their interests. Due to all the above, it is very important to establish and maintain trust in state institutions, as well as during maintenance of all electoral processes. Any internal instability and disunity of society can open the door not only to a colored revolution but also to military intervention. Almost in every state the opposition is made of the same citizens, who supported the government, and therefore the opposition should not be seen as an enemy of the state (Parezanović, 2022, p. 332).

It is precisely these relations of distinct political differences in one society, which over time turn into open hostilities between the government and the opposition, they can cause harmful consequences for the state and its order. The first phase is political confrontations, and after that political hostilities and finally we enter the phase of personal conflicts between representatives of the government and the opposition. That's when the most dangerous, one might even say terminal, occurs the phase, when all options for the further development of the crisis are possible, including those of a violent nature.

The responsibility for this state of affairs in society is most often borne by the government, which, unlike opposition has concrete institutional and all other management mechanisms, crisis and its containment. However, it can also happen that opposition forces in an organized and targeted manner, act destructively in the direction of causing a crisis and consciously introduce political relations in the field of violence, less often independently, but almost always with the support of certain actors from abroad. Due to all the above, social stability is to the greatest extent possible and achieved by the rule of law, functionality of institutions, respect for democratic forms of organization of political relations, as well as progressive shifts in development of the most important social areas (Parezanović, 2022, str. 43).

It is very interesting the way in which the political changes of the rulers took place from structures that came on the wave of colored revolutions. Those changes followed on legitimate way, which bypassed the famous "they came by force, they will leave by force".

So, those changes were followed by the victories of the opposition political forces in the election process, which is the opposite of the way changes were made after colored revolution (Parezanović, 2013b, p. 74; Parezanović, 2013a).

It is also interesting that the colored revolutions gave birth to another mechanism pressure, which is to introduce to certain state officials or individuals sanctions due to alleged non-respect of human rights (Lincoln, 2012). Those sanctions can be of a financial and economic character, or those that imply transit bans and stay in certain countries. They are almost always introduced by those countries that covertly or openly stand behind the organization of colored revolutions. That's how they make additional pressure and additional internationalization of the political crisis, and in general the most significant political problems in the country that is the target of aggression. This is in practice most often realized through the so-called blacklists, which are also published publicly (Parezanović, 2013b, p. 89).

In this sense, it is necessary to dispel the misconception that in international relations there are sanctions that are strictly aimed at individuals. Sanctioning party will never admit that they are directed against collectivity in the sense of one nation or the state, because it would not be expedient, first politically, and then not even legally (under appropriate conditions, there would be a risk of being treated as an element of genocidal intent).

Instead, it is emphasized that sanctions are being introduced against an "undemocratic regime", and that's all more frequent targeting of key individuals, under the explanation of their alleged corrupt activities (it is about the abuse of the institute of criminal law in subversive political purposes). Therefore, any introduction of sanctions to the legally elected state to the officials, it is actually intended to paralyze the targeted political system, and it is inevitably directed against the entire state order. The impossibility of a single carrier of state functions to regularly perform their duties as a result of the imposed sanctions undermines its political legitimacy, artificially creates social tensions, suspends regular internal political life and has a negative psychological effect on citizens and overflows into the domain of the economy, which initiates a spiral of general destabilization. Also, this sight pressure can in certain cases destabilize state officials exposed to sanctions on a psychological level, and in their professional and personal environment. For example, it is enough that a high-ranking government official is unable to fulfill its international obligations through official visits abroad or receptions foreign statesmen to provoke public opinion in the manner of "psychological warfare". It is a sense of anxiety and isolation, thus providing the impetus for the colored revolution.

An additional danger lies in the circumstances that due to the lack of developed state-building awareness, some political actors see foreign sanctions

as an opportunity for easy and effective elimination of political competition, but from the objective population, this is actually practice of complicity in undermining the constitutional order (Parezanović, 2022, str. 44).

Activities related to the legalization of subversive activities that resulted from the colored revolutions

When it comes to the legalization of subversive activities at the national level on the part of the organizers of the colored revolutions, it is important to note that this process implies the introduction or attempt to introduce those groups and individuals who until yesterday operated from different intelligence centers, primarily in the form of “independent observers”. These verifiers have already prepared reports on violations of human rights and freedoms, suppression of democratic processes and the overall political situation, which is the predetermined result of their eventual revision. Since most of the states affected by the wave of colored revolution did not allow this form of external interference in the internal issues, it was a reason to declare them undemocratic and authoritarian states. And if we add to that the unwritten rule that almost all forms of political struggle against authoritarian regimes, they “tolerate”, especially the illegal ones, in a covert way are action moves towards open destabilization of circumstances and additional deepening crises (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 89).

In such a state of strained and complex overall social relations environment for certain forms of political violence is created. So, for example, it is not a rare occurrence that assassinations or attempted terrorist activities, diversions, sabotage and the like were carried out in countries where color revolutions were realized. Also, there were cases of attempted or executed “suicides” with a political background, which is contributed to the impression that it was a state of powerlessness, but also strong apparatus struggles and fractures within the ruling political systems (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 90).

In such an extremely crisis environment, with public support from abroad, the opposition forces insist on calling for extraordinary elections at all levels of government.

In the pre-election period, the opposition carries out strong political activity in the direction of voting by animating as many citizens as possible, whereby the money for the political campaign is provided from abroad. Election day is crucial for the realization of colored revolutions, because these revolutions are carried out according to an exact scenario, and when

it comes to this day, improvisations are minimal. The key feature is that shortly after closing of polling stations, the opposition forces declare victory, before declaring any preliminary voting results. Then they invite citizens to gather at the central town square or some other similar place, in order to “celebrate the victory”. When the masses of the people gather, in the event that the opposition forces did not win the elections, they are informed that the electoral process was irregular, that the government stole the elections, and that published preliminary results are not credible. Citizens are invited to stay on protest until the fulfillment of their demands, and for this purpose the setting up of tents is organized, delivery of food, water, medicines, hygiene products and clothes, as well as other necessities, all in order to enable the conditions for the masses to stay as long as possible. In order to maintain the political tension and psychological tension of each individual, oppositionists hold incendiary they speak, but they also organize an entertainment-artistic program so that as many people as possible encouraged them to stay at the protest (Parezanović, 2022, str. 46).

Considering that in the colored revolutions, the importance of the mass as one of dominant actors, they essentially come down to the measure of social dominance. However, their success does not depend on whether the majority of the population in the state or city actively supports the idea of a colored revolution, it is enough that the inspirers and organizers of mass protests gather a large number of people who with their messages and activities pose a security challenge to the government. The exact number depends on each country individually, from the characteristics of its leadership, the economic and political strength of the government and capabilities of its security apparatus (special services, police, army, judicial structures) to counter these types of security risk.

Social dominance is achieved in the moment when that critical mass, which has risen in order to change the current regime, provokes an inappropriate and chaotic reaction of the authorities (Korybko, 2015, p. 30, according to: Milenković i Mitrović, 2019).

All the above is combined with a pre-planned tactical performance of the attempt of gaining part of the ruling structures, especially from the department that controls the apparatus coercion and force. Meetings with officials from ranks of the special services, the army and the police, and they are promised not only the alleged “amnesty” for previous work, but also new promotions. In this way, skillfully playing on the map of human greed and treachery, cracks are being created within the ruling system, and alongside protests in support of the opposition forces are also being

organized in the interior of the country. The goal is that the crisis acquires a comprehensive character, and that the action of the security authorities is dispersed on the whole country, which reduces their effectiveness. Work stoppages – strikes are also a very effective modality in paralyzing the government. All colored revolutions were preceded by mass strikes, which grew into riots and riots on a wider scale. However, it is very important to emphasize that the organizers of colored revolutions are the masters of timing, because they activate the foreseen activities and actions at the exact time. For example, if it is decided to provoke a police reaction to use force against protesters, it always seems synchronized, and simultaneous in several different locations. Use of means of coercion and engagement of the police unit represents one, conditionally speaking, bureaucratic procedure, where it is necessary to follow the sequence of procedures when commanding. That's why the protestors are always faster and in advantage, while the creators of colored revolutions play and, on that map, when there is a conflict with the security authorities (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 90).

In connection with the above, there is a growing need for a systemic approach to potential modeling efficient and effective state system and its subsystems through the application of science, prognostic scientific methods and experiences from practice in accordance with modern security challenges, risks and threats (Gordić, 2011, str. 30-53).

Both in the phase of preparation and in the phase of immediate execution of the colored revolution, the external factor behind this form of political upheaval will intensify the pressure thereby, which will be through various international organizations, the non-governmental sector and various others "experts" present alleged analyzes and legal interpretations of election irregularities process and thereby additionally introduce instability into a society gripped by a political crisis.

Thus, those short-term legitimate forms of political struggle, such as elections and the post-election process, various protests, demonstrations, strikes etc., disappear from the scene and once again enters the domain of illegal forms of political struggle. These illegal forms such as assassinations, suicides with a political background, diversion, sabotage, etc., even terrorism spill over into the field of political upheavals. When does it even happen?

The answer to this question is not at all simple, with the example of the previous colored revolutions differentiated several key parameters, of which we highlight: that the intensity of political intolerance has been long since surpassed democratic forms of political struggles, as well as that both the ruling and opposition forces are ready for a total conflict, without fear of

possible consequences; that opposition structures enjoy strong support from abroad, from where they receive a signal for their realignment on a new track of violent political struggle, accepting various forms of political violence as the only possible instrument conquest of power; that the political, social and economic crisis has reached such a level that the commitment of the opposition structures to radical methods is perceived by them as the only possibility for overcoming internal problems.

Certainly, the listed factors that condition illegal forms of political struggle towards the execution of a political coup are not final, but represent only research framework, where they can be elaborated in one multidisciplinary approach some new conditions, which are determined by forms in each individual case social arrangements, ideology, religion, tradition and similar (Parezanović, 2013b, str. 91).

Regardless of everything that has been said, this is only one, conditionally speaking, short theoretical overview of the phenomenon of colored revolutions, which was carefully supplemented by certain experiences from operational practices. In any case, colored revolutions have the properties of a living organism, and are subject to change, so that they manifest their articulation depending on current and contemporary parameters affecting them. Therefore, the authorities in charge for the protection of the constitutional order and opposition to this form of illegal politics actions must actively follow all changes and current trends around this complex political and security phenomenon. Only in this way can the preconditions be created and send appropriate recommendations to the state leadership, because, as we have already emphasized, colored revolutions cannot be prevented only by the action of the security authorities, but only in their cooperation with the political leadership and other state institutions (Parezanović, 2022, str. 49).

Conclusion

Colored revolutions are a hybrid of classic revolutionary action, to be more precise democratic revolutions with certain modifications adapted to the periods in where the coups took place. This means that the effectiveness of this type of political coup was significantly higher in the beginning, in the first years of the “export” of the colored revolutions, while their effectiveness declined in the years to come. The colored revolutions were just the beginning.

In the 2000s, the regimes in the countries that were exposed to this were destroying everything in front of them in the form of a political

phenomenon, they fell mowed down one after the other, which was specially characteristic for many countries of the post-Soviet space that were washed over and submerged to the “colored wave”. In a wide range of methods and means that were used on the occasion of the realization of this form of political coup, institutions in charge of protection of the constitutional order did not have a timely and effective response, because all previous mechanisms for defending order were not effective. However, after a certain period, numerous states that could fall under this “export political hybrid” got antibodies by studying these phenomena, but also by exchanging experiences with other countries that were affected by colored revolutions. A vivid example are the unsuccessful attempts to carry out color revolutions in Belarus (2020) and Kazakhstan (2022).

For the above reasons, an essential dilemma arises, what is the perspective of people of colored revolution, that is, whether this complex political and security phenomenon will survive on the world political stage as a mechanism for unconstitutional government change across the board of the world or it will develop in another direction. Basically, that direction can go in two directions. The first implies that the color revolutions in their current political form will die out, and the other direction indicates that there is a high degree of certainty that colored revolutions will modify and develop into a new, relatively different form of politics coup, which will enable the effectiveness of a modified form of colored revolutions and its maintenance on the pedestal of global unconstitutional action.

Colored revolutions did not bring with them social progress in the countries where they were taking place. They only further increased the accumulated numbers of social contradictions within the countries they invaded. Citizens who took part in the colored revolutions with emotions and enthusiasm, mostly after several months or years realized that they were manipulated and abused by the centers of power, who were the creators of unconstitutional changes in their states. In certain countries, the colored revolutions were the lobby of wars, extremism and everything bad.

Picturesque examples are Egypt and Ukraine. In Egypt, in 2011, colored revolution was performed with the romantic name “Arab Spring”, which brought to power in Cairo terrorist organization “Muslim Brotherhood”. In Ukraine in 2014 colored revolution that was conducted, indirectly, led that country into war.

In any case, colored revolutions will remain a controversial political phenomenon, which will occupy the attention of the world public for many

years to come, but above all of experts, scientific and professional circles, of course for each of the listed from his own point of view and.

Therefore, any attempt to fully understand them will be impossible, because the colored revolutions will always be observed differently, with the angle of observation, always imbued with different, mutually opposed interests, which are self-contained and at the basis of the initiation or suppression of this complex political phenomenon.

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Part III
BALKAN REGIONAL SECURITY
IN CHANGING INTERNATIONAL
CIRCUMSTANCES

THE WESTERN BALKANS: BETWEEN BREAKUP AND REGIONAL RESTRUCTURING

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Abstract: The Western Balkans region is undergoing a significant transition marked by both fragmentation and efforts toward regional reorganization. Political, economic, and social dynamics are shaping this complex landscape, with historical legacies and contemporary challenges playing crucial roles. The region's trajectory reflects a delicate balance between fragmentation stemming from historical conflicts and aspirations for regional integration and stability. The Balkans has historically been a focal point of geopolitical competition, characterized by diverse cultural influences, unresolved conflicts, and strategic interests of global powers, making it crucial for regional stability and international relations. Western firms are increasingly drawn to the Balkans due to the region's abundant natural resources and more important strategic location. This growing interest reflects a trend of economic expansion and investment opportunities, shaping the Balkans as a significant area for international business and resource development. Kosovo has become an American protectorate formed by force, outside of international law. The European Union, as the second geopolitical player in the Balkans, acts as a destabilizing factor in the Southeastern Europe region, despite advocating for integration in theory. The main question addressed in this work is whether the European order can endure and if there will be restructuring in the positions of Balkan states.

Keywords: Balkans, geopolitics, geostrategy, Serbia, Kosovo, energy, EU, international order.

The Balkans as a major geostrategic issue

In his famous book “Le Grand Echiquier”, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a naturalised Polish American, coldly announced the American strategy in Eurasia. In order to perpetuate the control of the world by the United States, Russia should be dismantled into three parts: European, Asian, and Central, and a direct east-west corridor should be opened via the Balkan Peninsula, the Caucasus, and Turkestan. The oil from the Caspian Sea could reach directly to the West thanks to two new pipelines, one through the Caucasus

and Turkey and the other crossing the Balkans via Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania, leading to the Adriatic Sea. It is no coincidence that just weeks after the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia began, Brzezinski wrote, "The fact is that the stakes are infinitely higher than the future of Kosovo"

The American strategy in the Balkans was developed more than forty years ago. It is well known that the CIA planned, in a 1988 report, the explosion of Yugoslavia. This country had, long before Poland or Hungary, signed a pre-accession agreement with the EEC in 1989; it was therefore well placed to integrate the Western system. In addition, its self-management system gave way to private initiative. In 1990, Yugoslavia was the third country in Europe, ahead of Italy or Germany, for its hotel capacity. Finally, the Yugoslav Army, based on the idea of decentralised territorial defence, represented the first army in south-eastern Europe.

We had to break the middle power, which was Yugoslavia. The United States and the West attached to it needed to destroy a model that, when the Soviet bloc fell, represented a kind of third way. This neither liberal nor communist model dominated the capitalist economy and social advances, which could represent an attractive ideal, challenging the two models mentioned above. The Russians also had an interest in the disappearance of this former leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, of which they were suspicious. In the early 1990s, Russian generals remembered that the Yugoslavs had, after the 1948 schism between Tito and Stalin, sporadically rejected offers of Russian military exchanges and even built their territorial defence in anticipation of an attack by the Red Army. Despite repeated calls from Slobodan Milošević to Yeltsin during the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia, the Russian generals were taking revenge on the Yugoslav outcry by not helping Veljko Kadijević, Chief of Staff of the Yugoslav Army. But in 1992, as the weakened Russians struggled through the turpitudes of the economic transition, Clinton and his team devised a strategy that would gradually impose an empire logic on Yugoslavia by slowly breaking up this country of 24 million inhabitants, the largest in the Balkans. The Democratic administration was hesitant at the beginning of the Yugoslav conflicts, but very quickly it knew how to choose its side. In Croatia, strongly influenced by the Croatian lobby in the American Congress, formed in particular of pro-ustasha exiles of the Second World War, the influential political leaders and the intelligentsia worked for more than thirty years to develop the Croatian national programme around the idea of a Croatian state; this was in contradiction with the idea of Yugoslavia, as the Serbs supported it.

The American government had been arming the Croatian army since 1993 through the port of Split. But especially in 1995, the action of its veterans, who

for two years trained and financed the Croats, allowed them to drive not only the militias but also the Serb civilians of Krajina in two stages: the operation “Hurricane” in May and “Storm” in August. However, these two operations, conducted by private agencies linked to the American military-industrial complex, have provoked what the official media inappropriately called “collateral damage”. The success of “Storm” resulted in several hundred deaths on the roads of the exodus, and 230,000 Serbs were irremediably expelled from Croatia in the summer of 1995. By diverting the international embargo that it had called for two years before, the Bill Clinton government armed Bosnian Muslims in 1994; it was the Bosniagate. In a new conception that marked the apogee of American unilateralism in the mid-1990s, the three national leaders of the Bosnian conflict were ordered by the American administration to sign separately, at a base in Ohio (Dayton), a peace treaty under an authoritarian view of diplomacy. That is not all. Through Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), the US supported the arrival of jihadists on Bosnian soil in its struggle against the Bosnian Serb Army. The goal was to fight Serbian “barbarism”. In this way, the European Union would be able to establish itself in the heart of the Balkans. Since 1996, the programme “Equip and Train”, directly controlled by the Pentagon, has allocated a tidy sum of 400 million dollars to the army of Bosnia-Herzegovina; in a year, no less than 5000 Bosnian soldiers were trained by 200 American specialists.

But the American policy of support for Muslims in the Balkans continues, both according to the principle of “small is beautiful”, through which the Bochnians were martyrs against the Serbian ogre, and the principle of “freedom”, which would see the little Albanian thumb shed the horrible Serbian communism. Now we know that the two principles, which the Americans sincerely believed in, are false. The Sarajevo Historical Documentation Centre has shown, after ten years of scrupulous investigations, that 102,622 Bosnian citizens died during the Bosnian civil war. This number of deaths is proportional to the demographic number of each people at the beginning of the conflict: 69.9% of Bosniaks and Croats (68% of the population in 1991) and 30.1% of Serbs (32%) died between 1992 and 1995 in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Kosovo: the birth of a US protectorate in Europe

In 1997, the US State Department decided to arm the KLA. This ultra-violent Maoist group, founded in 1993 with the support of the Albanian diaspora in Europe, was fighting to impose a regime that was the antithesis

of the American democratic ideal. From 1995 on, it planted numerous bombs in Serbia and was even placed on the CIA's list of terrorist movements. But it did not matter: by the end of the 1990s, the aim was already to prevent the resurrection of Russia and to hinder the construction of a European defence system. In 1998, the KLA had rear bases in Albania and embarked on the politics of the worst just when it felt the game was getting out of hand. As Balkans specialist Christophe Chiclet puts it, it was "at this point that the US decided to use the KLA as a tool to finish off Milošević". During the NATO operation in the spring of 1999, the KLA took over the entire territory of Kosovo in the luggage of KFOR, not without taking the precaution of assassinating a number of moderate Albanian leaders.

A senior French UN official explained the subtleties of the American presence in Kosovo. The American emissaries are careful to keep a tight rein on all the important decisions taken by UNMIK. In Kosovar municipalities, American advisors take care to maintain good relations with Albanian-speaking mayors, and through US government agencies, such as "US AID", they have been providing indirect financial support to these municipalities for the last ten years. These are often secondary economic projects, such as the construction of libraries or thermal baths, but they are very useful in ensuring the loyalty of elected municipal officials. The latest example of American control over the Kosovo state is the police. In 1999, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) was created, in which many ex-KLA fighters were retrained as "law enforcement officers". Although financed by the European Union, the KPC was trained and organised from the outset by the American company Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI). The Americans trained the KPC's recruits in such a way as to turn it into a fully-fledged military formation, whereas the organisation was intended to remain a civil protection force. The United States even controls the Kosovar police force, sometimes without consulting UNMIK. On February 17, 2001, near the village of Livadice, Albanian terrorists blew up the "Niš Ekspress" bus, killing 11 Serbs, including two children, and injuring 40 others. Although some Albanian suspects were arrested after the investigation, all were released except Florim Ejuoi, who was proven to have direct links with Albanian organised crime and former KLA circles. Ejuoi was transferred to the American base at Bondsteel for "security reasons", from which he managed to escape a few days later. However, this escape was organised by the American army without asking UNMIK for authorization. On July 29, 2001, London's "Sunday Times" reported that UN informers suspected Florim Ejuoi was working for the CIA and that his trial would have been highly embarrassing for his employers.

But the system set up by the American government in Kosovo is now a model for future territorial detachments around the world, planned by the American government. This is evidenced by the fact that the most senior American leaders in Kosovo are then sent elsewhere to destabilize other countries, far from the Balkans. The best example is Philip S. Goldberg, US ambassador to the Philippines, Bolivia, and Colombia. In the 1990s, Goldberg was a key player in the breakup of Yugoslavia. From 1994 to 1996, he was in charge of the State Department's Bosnia Office. He worked closely with Washington's special envoy, Richard Holbrooke, and played a key role as Secretary General of the US negotiating committee in Dayton, which led to the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995. These agreements led to the breakup of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1996, Goldberg worked as a Special Assistant to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott (1994-2000), who, together with then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, was instrumental in bringing about the war against Yugoslavia in 1999. In Kosovo, Philip S. Goldberg served as US Chief of Mission in Pristina (2004-2006) and maintained ongoing relations with the leaders of the paramilitary UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army), whose leaders are now at the head of the Kosovar government and who were known for their close ties with the US government.

From 1993 onwards, the American government provided the Croatian army with arms through the port of Split. But above all, in 1995, the action of its veterans, who for two years had been training and financing the Croats, enabled them to drive out the militias and Serbian civilians from Krajina in two phases: Operation Hurricane in May and Operation Storm in August. However, these two operations, carried out by private firms linked to the American military-industrial complex, caused what the official media were already inappropriately calling "collateral damage". The success of "Storm" resulted in several hundred deaths on the roads of exodus and the irremediable expulsion of 230,000 Serbs from Croatia in the summer of 1995. In 1994, Bill Clinton's administration armed the Bosnian Muslims by circumventing the international embargo it had called for two years earlier; this was Bosniagate. In a new concept that marked the apogee of American unilateralism in the mid-1990s, the three national leaders of the Bosnian conflict were summoned by the US administration to sign a separate peace treaty at a base in Dayton, Ohio, in an authoritarian conception of diplomacy, to say the least. But that was not all. Through Military Professional Resources Inc. (MPRI), the US supported the arrival of jihadists on Bosnian soil in their fight against the Bosnian Serb Army. The aim was not to combat Serbian "barbarism", but to establish a lasting foothold in the heart of the Balkans.

Western firms' appetite whetted by Balkan resources

Twenty-five years after the NATO bombardment of Serbia and Kosovo, the strategic importance of the Kosovo highlands, wedged between the mountains of Albania, Montenegro, and Macedonia, is becoming clearer. To the east, in the lower Morava region, Corridor X already drains vital trade flows between Budapest and Salonika for Macedonia and Serbia. To the west, Corridor IV, Trieste-Constantza, is whetting Russian appetites. It is easy to see why Moscow-backed gas and oil pipeline projects ("SouthStream") in Kosovo are thwarting the American AMBO project to bring hydrocarbon supplies from Central Asia through the Balkans. Since 1997, the European Union has invested eight billion euros in Corridor VIII (pipeline, rail, and road). On this east-west axis, the EU is in competition with the Americans. Since 1997, the Trans-Balkans AMBO oil pipeline has been developing between the Black Sea and the Adriatic, while the Nabucco gas pipeline is due to link Istanbul to Vienna via Romania. The Russians' return to the energy race is striking. Since 2007, the Burgas (Bulgaria)/Alexandroupoli (Greece) pipeline has made it possible to avoid Turkey by passing through two Orthodox countries. But above all, the American "Nabucco" gas pipeline project is competing with the Russian/Turkish "Turkish Stream" gas pipeline project.

As a gateway to Hungary and Romania, Vojvodina is at the end of the Balkan energy tubes; European corridors IV and X pass through it, as do the routes of the future Russian "Stream" and American "Nabucco" pipelines. This is why major Austrian, Hungarian, and Russian industrialists are trying to establish themselves in Vojvodina. In 2006, Austria's O.M.V. was already interested in acquiring a refinery in Novi Sad, and in early 2008, an Austro-Hungarian energy alliance was about to be concluded. But the Russians moved faster, acquiring 51% of Naftna Industrija Srbije (NIS), the Serbian oil company, in December 2008. Vojvodina has thus become the site of a strategic confrontation between Russia, which is banking on Vojvodina as an energy corridor to Europe and a means of bypassing the Ukrainian "enemy", and Hungarians, who are increasingly present on their southern bangs. It is no coincidence that Gazprom has decided to locate Russia's main gas storage centre for the Balkans in Vojvodina. The Western Balkans, engaged in a process of Euro-Atlantic integration, are brimming with unsuspected energy resources. Coveted by multinational firms and regional and international powers, these resources are a major reason for past wars and future conflicts. Serbia is both in the heart of the Balkan hydrocarbon distribution networks and a supplier of electricity to neighbouring countries.

With 8 hydroelectric and 9 thermal power stations, Serbia's energy dependence is moderate (40%). The NATO bombing in 1999 damaged this potential, as Serbia went from being self-sufficient before the war to importing 25% of its electricity needs. This has led the EU to provide substantial loans, and Serbia joined the ECSEE in 2005, with credits ranging from 1 to 6 billion euros. In addition to increasing the capacity of the Djerdap hydroelectric power station on the Danube, there is considerable potential on the Ibar, Lim, and Drina rivers. Croatia is a transit country on the various gas routes between Asia and Europe and, at the same time, the Western Balkan country with the most diversified energy offer. With no fewer than 30 hydroelectric power stations, hydroelectric capacity is a major contributor to electricity generation (54%). Bosnia-Herzegovina's network was severely damaged by four years of war, which explains the substantial aid provided by the EBRD and the EIB, which have granted more than \$230 million to the country's three electricity companies. With no hydrocarbons, Bosnia's main energy resources are hydroelectricity and lignite. Montenegro, which has no hydrocarbons, is also a long way from the big energy tubes; Elektroprivreda Crne Gore (EPCG) publicly manages 76% hydroelectric power. Kosovo, on the other hand, is one of Europe's most mineral-rich regions. The Kopiliq site has the world's fifth-largest lignite reserves, and the Trepča mine is brimming with lead, zinc, and copper of exceptional grades. Kosovo is also home to silver, gold, nickel, bauxite, and manganese. According to the November 2007 World Bank report, the value of Kosovo's subsoil wealth is estimated at \$13 billion. This concentration of wealth in such a small area is bound to attract covetousness. Trepča, until now operated by the "Privatisation Agency", is to come under the control of the Kosovo government.

On this east-west axis, the EU is in competition with the Americans. The Trans-Balkans AMBO pipeline was the subject of a feasibility study in the late 1990s by the Houston, Texas-based company Brown and Root. Brown and Root is a subsidiary of Halliburton, of which Dick Cheney was director before being elected Vice President of the United States. The project is also the work of the Trade and Development Agency (TDA), created in 1981 by President Reagan to promote US exports. The TDA has been heavily involved in the design of Corridor VIII from the outset; in 1998, it decided to specifically finance feasibility studies for the modernization of the ports of Burgas in Bulgaria and Constantza in Romania. It was no coincidence that Bulgaria announced in 2003 that it was making the port of Burgas, the end point of Corridor VIII, available to Anglo-American troops. The Russians' return to the energy race is striking. Since 2007, the Burgas

(Bulgaria)/Alexandroupoli (Greece) oil pipeline has made it possible to avoid Turkey by passing through two Orthodox countries. But above all, the American “Nabucco” gas pipeline project, from Istanbul to Vienna via Romania, is in competition with the Russian “South Stream” gas pipeline project. The latter would follow a much safer, and therefore less costly, route, passing through Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia, with which agreements have already been signed. In February 2007, Putin signed a comprehensive gas transit agreement with Croatia, a country not known for its Russophile tradition, and in 2008, Gazprom merged with the gas company Srbijagaz and took over the oil company NIS in Serbia.

On January 15, 2015, Vladimir Putin announced that Turkey would change the route of the South Stream pipeline, thus putting an end to the procrastination of his supposed “allies” Serbia and Bulgaria and, like a chess player, responding with an “oukaze” (proclamation) to the sanctions policy implemented against Russia in 2014. The 2015 revival of the East-West conflict is blatantly obvious here. The South Stream is dead because of the pressure exerted by the EU on one of the countries that recently joined, Bulgaria. In November 2014, Bulgaria declared that it no longer wanted Russian gas pipes. Putin then changed his tune and proposed the “Turkish Stream” from January 2015, which would pass through Turkey, Greece, then Macedonia, and Serbia. However, the EU is exerting constant pressure on these southeastern European countries to prevent the Turkish Stream from becoming a reality. Proposals for a hypothetical “Eastern Ring”, credit blackmail on Greece, and other revisions of EU-US projects from the 1990s (TAP or TANAP) seem for the moment to be dissuading Gazprom and the Russian government from starting any major work. Is this the end of the South Stream project? Putin is testing the Europeans here, given that over 40% of their gas supplies come from Asia, but he is also showing that Europe is no longer the bright future so much hoped for. Russia is turning more and more towards Asia, while China is moving into the Balkans. The latter has decided to turn Serbia into an energy hub.

China will build two thermal power stations and a high-speed rail network between Greece and Hungary via Belgrade. In this new Eastern Question, the Balkans have become the European centre of the world’s great energy game. At the end of 2019, the strategic alliance between Russia and Turkey seems, despite the EU’s resistance, to have definitively occupied the terrain of Southeast Europe for decades to come. The Turkish Stream project is making great strides on European soil. On September 18, 2019, Bulgarian energy operator Bulgartranz and Saudi Arabian Arkad signed an investment

agreement to extend the Turkish Stream into Europe. By early 2020, the new “Balkan Stream” will be able to transport Russian gas from the Bulgarian port of Burgas to the Hungarian spot connected to the West European network. Through Serbia, a 403-kilometre pipeline will link Zaječar (on the Bulgarian border) and Horgoš (on the Hungarian border). Despite the cancellation of the South Stream project, the Russians were able to overcome the European blockage by reaching an agreement with Turkey. From 2021, the Turkish stream will not only supply all of Eastern and Central Europe with gas, all the way to Italy, but will also bypass the EU’s main ally in the region, Ukraine. The Americans, eager to find an outlet for their formidable LNG deposits, had initially delivered part of their LNG reserves to the EU, but Biden, wanting to defend US national interests first and foremost, decided to cut off these deliveries in January 2024, putting the EU once again under indirect dependence on Russian LNG (Bohineust, 2024).

“International Disorder”: The EU as a factor of instability in Southeastern Europe

Two of the former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Croatia, joined the EU in 2013. Accession processes have been launched with Serbia and Montenegro, and soon after with Macedonia and Albania. But there is still no question of Bosnia-Herzegovina, an administrative mille-feuille that is very difficult to manage, and Kosovo, plagued by political instability and security chaos. The question is whether the EU still has the will to enlarge its eastern borders and in what political configuration. For Serbia and Montenegro, the EU’s procrastination has already left room for Russian, Turkish, Emirati, and Chinese geopolitics, particularly in energy and transport. At a time when the European Union is beset by internal problems, it is time to reconsider its enlargement, particularly in Southeast Europe.

But is it not already too late for the EU in the face of Russian and Chinese geopolitics? In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the High Representative appointed by the EU, which finances him from funds normally earmarked for Bosnia’s economic development, has special powers known as “Bonn powers”. These include the discretionary power to overturn laws, dismiss senior civil servants and political leaders, and dissolve institutions. The first High Representatives took advantage of this to impose “binding decisions” on everyday life: a unified flag and anthem, common vehicle registration, and a common currency (the “konvertibilna marka”, indexed to the mark and then the euro). The international protectorate is also based on a denial of

sovereignty that is unique in the world. The governor of the Central Bank, appointed by the IMF, cannot be a Bosnian citizen.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) decides on privatisations and other acquisitions of investment funds. The protectorate has also been Europeanized in recent years, with the EU Police Mission replacing the UN Police Mission in 2003 and the European Force (EUFOR) replacing SFOR in 2004 and 2010, with 2,000 soldiers in the field. In addition, the offices of the EU representative and the UN High Representative were merged in 2007, with Austrian Valentin Inzko of Slovenian descent at the head of this super-protectorate (Gros-Verheyde, 2009). This has led to the absurdity that Bosnia's European integration is likely to be negotiated by itself! In this situation, the Serbian authorities in the Republic of Srpska can hardly seek to safeguard what was guaranteed to them by the Dayton Accords.

The Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina find themselves, in a kind of irony of history, the best defenders of these agreements imposed in 1995 by the international community, while Bosniaks and Croats are seeking to revise the international agreements. In early 2000, Bosniak Haris Silajdžić, former Prime Minister of the federal government, advocated a strengthening of unitarianism around the powers of the central government. In March 2001, the Croatian Dražen Budiša proposed doing away with the two entities and replacing them with ten to twelve cantons. He believed that in this way, each of the three peoples would be able to live in security in territories that were easier to administer. Since then, Croatian political leaders in Herzegovina have been making thunderous announcements in favour of the forthcoming incorporation of the two Croat-majority cantons of Bosnia-Herzegovina into neighbouring Croatia. On February 17, 2008, the Priština Parliament unilaterally proclaimed secession from Serbia. Twelve years after this self-proclaimed independence, this secession is a real tragedy for the region and a danger for Europe. In 2020, Kosovo is in fact a failed state, i.e., a state in economic and political bankruptcy, where the most elementary rights, such as freedom of movement and personal safety, are still not applied throughout its territory. It is run by corrupt authorities involved in various forms of trafficking, some of whom are accused of war crimes. Finally, Kosovar secession poses a growing risk of destabilisation for the entire Balkans, in a region where each country groups together several nationalities, which themselves often occupy cross-border areas (Albanians, Serbs, Hungarians).

The unilateral declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, endorses a state of lawlessness. Agim Çeku, a former Yugoslav army commander who became Prime Minister of Kosovo in 2004, committed war crimes while fighting in Croatia in the 1990s. He is also being prosecuted by Serbian courts for war crimes committed during the 1998 conflict between Serbian police and the UCK in Kosovo. The second Prime Minister, Ramush Haradinaj (2006-2007), had a trial at the ICTY in which the prosecutor demanded 25 years' imprisonment for the massacre of dozens of Serbian villagers (civilians, women, and children) during the Kosovo war in 1998. Haradinaj was acquitted in April 2008 for lack of evidence; indeed, nine witnesses died accidentally during his trial. Considering that there had been insufficient witness protection, on July 21, 2010, the ICTY ordered Ramush Haradinaj's re-imprisonment in order to open a new trial. He is to be retried on six counts of war crimes, including several for murder, cruel treatment, and torture, and will remain in prison until the start of the trial this time. Finally, the current Prime Minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, who led the KLA forces in 1998, is accused by Belgrade of having directly massacred 60 Kosovo Serb villagers in the summer of 1998. In addition, a recent report by the German secret service (BND) demonstrates Thaçi's involvement in the racketeering and cigarette-trafficking activities of the Albanian mafia. Finally, Hashim Thaçi has been accused by Carla Del Ponte, former ICTY Prosecutor, and Dick Marty, Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of having been involved in a terrible affair of trafficking in organs taken from Serbian prisoners during the Kosovo war of 1998.

Since Kosovo was placed under international supervision in 1999, neither the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) nor the Kosovo Force (KFOR) have been able to prevent a process of ethnic cleansing driven by Albanian extremists. Between 1999 and 2008, of the 235,000 Serbs, Gypsies, Gorani, and Turks expelled from Kosovo after the Kumanovo agreements, only 18,000 were able to return to their homes. Worse still, between 1999 and 2004, 1,197 non-Albanians were murdered and 2,300 kidnapped. There is not a single Serb left in Gnjilane, where there were 8,000 in 1999; there are barely 40 or so in Pristina, down from 40,000 in 1999. Of the Roma population estimated at 140,000 in 1999, two-thirds have had to flee. More than 150 Orthodox churches and monasteries have been destroyed, and 40,000 houses have been burned down or blown up by extremists. Finally, with regard to the anti-Serb riots of March 2004, in which no fewer than 19 people were killed, a recent report to the French National Assembly highlights *"the damning record of the judicial handling of the spring 2004 riots. Although 50,000 people are said to have taken part in the violence, only*

454 charges were brought and 211 guilty parties convicted". But the height of ignominy is the trafficking in organs, of which the Kosovar mafia, linked to certain gangs of power in Pristina, has been suspected for several years. In April 2008, Carla del Ponte published in Italian *"La chasse, les criminels de guerre et moi"* (The Hunt, the War Criminals, and Me), a book in which she described organ trafficking in Kosovo in the late 1990s, involving some of today's leading politicians in Pristina. In the summer of 1999, some 300 Serbian prisoners were allegedly transported from Kosovo to Albania, to the small town of Burrel, 91 km north of Tirana, where they were locked up in a sort of prison. A room in a "yellow house" outside the town was allegedly used as a theater of operations. During a Council of Europe mission in 2004, investigators discovered traces of blood in the house, which had been repainted white in the meantime, as well as remnants of used medical equipment (gauze, syringes, empty bottles, and drugs used for muscle relaxation). The harvested organs were then *"sent to clinics abroad to be implanted in paying patients"*, while the victims remained *"locked up until they were killed for other organs"*.

Regional recompositions to the rescue of the European order

In this rather difficult context, marked both by the appetites of the powers that be and internal problems, the leaders of the small Balkan nations attempted, not without difficulty, to federate their economies by bringing them together in regional organisations. The Open Balkan is an economic and political zone of three member states in the Balkans, those being Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The zone has a total area of 131,935 km² (50,940 sq mi) and an estimated total population of almost 12 million, located in Central and Southern Europe. The official languages are Albanian, Macedonian, and Serbian. Its administrative centres are the cities of Belgrade, Skopje, and Tirana. With the establishment of the zone, all three member states aim to increase trade and cooperation, as well as improve bilateral relations.

The idea of the Open Balkan (formerly known as the mini-Schengen Area) came in the early 1990s. It was first mentioned as an economic area between these countries on the Balkan Peninsula. The plans were eventually abandoned due to the Yugoslav Wars. The first signs of the Open Balkan emerged in 2018 as a way to improve political relations. The idea of the area was brought to life by Edi Rama in Berlin when he discussed it with the interested nations. Rama took on the idea of the former Prime Minister of

Albania, Fatos Nano. The Open Balkan's intentions are to provide greater opportunities for trade and student exchanges and encourage EU integration, *inter alia*. Citizens of member states will need only an ID card to visit other member states, saving time at border crossings. This economic zone prepares the countries to become members of the European Union. In this union, goods and capital between these countries would flow quicker, and more than 30 million hours would be saved crossing the borders of these three countries every year. The estimate by the World Bank projects savings of \$3.2 billion, of which, according to President Vučić, Serbia would save at least \$1.5 billion. On July 29, 2021, Vučić, Rama, and Zaev participated in the forum for regional economic cooperation in Skopje, where they signed agreements on the movement of goods, access to the labour market, and cooperation in protection against disasters. It has been agreed upon mutual acceptance of diplomas and job qualifications, making work forces more flexible and available and so attracting more investment. As part of the initiative, a regional economic forum attended by some 350 companies, mostly coming from these three countries but also from the wider region, was also held. An Open Balkan Leaders Summit was held on September 2, 2022, in Belgrade. Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania signed several agreements on the exchange of food products, energy, and cinematography, as well as cooperation in emergency situations. The countries also agreed to further cooperation and the easing of tensions in the Balkan region. Montenegrin Prime Minister Dritan Abazović and the chairman of the council of ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Zoran Tegeltija, also attended the summit, expressing their wishes for these countries to join the initiative.

The Visegrád Group was established in 1991 when the Polish, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian leaders met in the Hungarian city of Visegrád to foster cooperation between the three Warsaw Pact states. In 1993, Slovakia separated from the Czech Republic, and the Group became the "V4". The initial objectives, which were to promote the integration of these states into NATO and the European Union, were fulfilled in 1999 and 2004, respectively. The V4 subsequently continued its existence mainly as an instrument for consultation, cooperation, and the definition of the common positions of the countries ahead of the European deadlines. Today, the pace of meetings at all levels is slowing due to the divergences between Hungary and its three partners on the issue of the war in Ukraine. With around 65 million inhabitants, the Visegrád group enjoys a similar weight within the European Union to that of France, which gives it 12.46% of the votes in the Council of the European Union. The V4 operates in an informal

intergovernmental mode and makes its decisions by consensus. The agenda of the meetings is set by the Presidency and generally evolves according to the main deadlines of the European calendar (European Councils, Informal Summits, etc.). The current presidency is held by the Czech Republic until July 2024. In 2023, the leaders of the Visegrad Group set several priorities: cross-border interconnection (modernisation and expansion of transport networks between V4 countries); increased coordination in the energy transition through the development of nuclear energy and low-carbon technologies; economic development; strengthening digital skills; fostering “green innovations” through cooperation with third countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Israel; sustainable development: protection of nature and biodiversity, particularly forests; promotion of technological neutrality; harmonization of legislation in line with European climate objectives. While the members of the Visegrád Group all defend a strong attachment to the Euro-Atlantic area, they differ both in terms of varying accessions to European programmes (euro or Schengen) and also in terms of their respective foreign policies. While Poland has placed itself under the US military umbrella, Hungary is gradually getting closer to Russia. Aleksandar Vučić, President of Serbia, took advantage of these reconfigurations to approach Hungary in recent years with Viktor Orbán. This Serbo-Magyar axis represents the backbone of a reconfiguration of the Western Balkans towards a space more oriented towards Central Europe.

Following the Summit of June 25, 1992, in Istanbul (Turkey), the Heads of State or Government of 11 Black Sea Basin countries (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine) signed the Declaration on the Establishment of the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC).

Serbia joined the Organisation in 2004. Aiming to promote cooperation and harmony between member countries by encouraging friendly and good neighbourly relations in the Black Sea region, BSEC now serves as a platform for cooperation in a wide range of areas for its twelve member states. The Committee of Senior Officials of BSEC reports to the Council of Foreign Ministers and acts on behalf of the Council. The Committee shall be responsible for implementing the activities of the Organisation. On March 10, 1994, the Permanent International Secretariat of BSEC was established in Istanbul by the decision of the Council of Foreign Ministers. The current Secretary General of the Permanent International Secretariat of the BSEC is Lazăr Comănescu, of Romanian nationality. Since 1995, a “Troika” consultative mechanism has been set up, which includes the previous,

current, and subsequent presidencies. BSEC priorities, as set out in the BSEC Charter, include cooperation in the following areas: trade, economic development, banking and finance, communications, energy, transport, agriculture, health and pharmacy, environmental protection, tourism, science and technology, exchange of statistical data and economic information, cooperation between customs and border authorities, fight against organised crime, drugs, illegal importation of weapons and radioactive materials, terrorism and illegal emigration, extermination of emergency consequences, small and medium enterprises, education, institutional renewal, and good governance. Albania and Serbia benefit economically and politically from their integration into the BSEC, which has a population of 333 million and an average GDP per capita of more than 10,460 euros. Both a continental free trade market and a growing political-military group, the BSEC offers important prospects for the Western Balkans, which wish to escape the US or Eurasian prisms.

Conclusion

Emmanuel Todd, in his last book, explains the vacuity of a West that arrived, especially in the Protestant world, at the end of a process of dechristianization and loss of values (Todd, 2024). This explains the decline of this West on the international scene and therefore the weaknesses of the American empire on its eastern steps. The US military-industrial apparatus has been able to carry out, as in other parts of the world, an exercise of predatory resources for decades. Carried out almost to completion, it has enabled, among other things, the grabbing of Kosovo's subsurface resources by the children of the US deep-state.

The US soft power agencies have also succeeded in placing many of their followers at the head of micro-governments in Balkan states. But the dream of a democratic, liberal, and human rights-promoting space, supported by bodies like the UN, has hit the wall of reality. Kosovo is a failed state in the grip of all types of criminal trafficking; Bosnia-Herzegovina, despite the proclamation of the high representative of the EU, is still in danger of splitting in two.

Faced with a process of continuous fragmentation, the leaders of some of these countries have understood the need to regroup around already very active regional organisations. The Open Balkans, the Visegrad Group, and the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation offer a path of regional reorganisation that allows the Balkan countries to regain control of

their destiny. But will these initiatives be enough to get out of Western or Eurasian influence?

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THE BALKANS AS A TRANSITIONAL REGION BETWEEN INTERNAL CIRCLES AND GLOBAL SQUARINGS IN THE PARADIGM OF HYBRID POWER

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Abstract: The Balkan geopolitical conundrum lends itself well to being represented by the vain effort of squaring a circle. The article responds to this challenge by proposing a theory of the Balkans as a *transitional region*. Conflict dynamics within its western flank are analysed, highlighting their substantial circularity. It also considers attempts by global geopolitical actors to square the Balkan circle. In order to get out of the so-called *sovereignty labyrinth*, which shackles both internal and external actors to the absoluteness of a legal principle, the peculiarities of the transitional region point the way to the *governance function*. The amphibious image with which this form of power can be represented reveals its essentially hybrid nature, which is an alternative to both the terrestrial character of the *Juridical* and the maritime character of the *Economic*. This makes governance a paradigm of the *Political* that proves to be more suited than ever to the precisely hybrid modes of conflict in contemporary geopolitics.

Keywords: Geopolitics; Balkans; Squaring Circles; Transitional Region; Hybrid Power.

Introduction

The Balkan political space constitutes a veritable geopolitical conundrum, which lends itself well to being represented by the vain effort, worthy of a Sisyphus, of *squaring a circle*. In this paper, we intend to take up this intellectual challenge by proposing a theory of the Balkans as a *transitional region*.

The transition we are talking about is profoundly politico-geographical and is essentially that between two juxtaposed *great spaces*, the Western or European space and the Eurasian or Russian space. However, in such a context, windows of opportunity open up for the geopolitical action of even

distant actors, such as China. Moreover, the spatial transition finds itself fuelled by the temporal one, since the current phase of *geopolitical disorder*¹ finds in the Western Balkans a potential place for the reconfiguration of global geopolitical balances, as it is already happening for Ukraine and Palestine and could happen for the South China Sea.

For these reasons, the current research has focused precisely on the western flank of the Balkans, an area that, despite its modest demographic and economic size, derives its geopolitical significance exactly from its intermediate position.

Resuming the evocative image of squaring the circle, our contribution will start with an analysis of the dynamics of conflict within this area, grasping its substantial *circularity*. Indeed, the various actors that oppose each other end up going around in circles in the so-called *labyrinth of sovereignty* (Barbaro, 2023), since each one wants to impose on the other an ultimate power over the territory, each one resorting to the same, aforementioned, legal principle.

The fragmentation of the Balkan political space, on the other hand, cannot but attract the competition of global geopolitical actors for control over it; this, in turn, acts back upon this very fragmentation, further exacerbating it in the short term. In this sense, it is clear how the complexity of such dynamics can be reduced by recognising the mutual interdependencies between scales that constitute *transcascality*. It is within this framework that the attempts by these actors to square the Balkan circle are analysed.

However, paradoxically, if it is true that in the short run such geopolitical *squarings* fuel Balkan disintegration, in the long term they necessarily imply, for functional reasons, the prospect of a recomposition of the regional political and economic space. The consequent problem of whether to conceive such a space as fragmented or cohesive, while on the one hand it resides in the realm of spatial ontologies, on the other hand suggests obvious and pressing strategic implications. In both dimensions of the discourse, we believe that it is inescapable to understand the nature of the Balkans in terms, precisely, of a transitional region.

The *amphibious* characteristics of such a geopolitical context cannot help but make it fertile ground for forms of competition and conflict based on the paradigm of hybrid warfare, among which those related to information strongly emerge. Therefore, in a global geopolitical context marked by strong *pleiocricality* (Barbaro, 2020), and all the more so for a transitional region, it is appropriate to ask whether it is necessary to break out of the

labyrinth of sovereignty and imagine equally hybrid and amphibious forms of power in space.

The internal circles of the Balkan political space

To test the arduous task of squaring the circle of the Western Balkans, one must first try to understand what this circle is and what its peculiarities are. The current geopolitical dynamics of the region have their roots in the disintegration process of the Yugoslav State, which erupted in the 1990s in the aftermath of the implosion of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolarity that had governed the international order during the Cold War.

“Between 1991 and 2001, several independent states emerged from the ashes of Yugoslavia, whose territorial delimitations were the result of a series of wars fought between their respective national components. All this took place under the eye of the United Nations and in an area contiguous to that of the newly formed European Union” (Barbaro, 2023). This dramatic course of events, as we have argued, should be viewed through the lens of separatist phenomena.

Several factors had made it possible for almost half a century to maintain State unity: Josip Broz Tito’s strong leadership; the break with the USSR starting in 1948 and the consequent development of a socialist model *with Yugoslav characteristics*, specifically a *self-management type*, i.e., based on workers’ involvement in the management of enterprises, but with a moderate openness towards the Western bloc and the free market; a non-aligned foreign policy, a model for which the country assumed a leading role internationally; and a federal system that allowed internal particularist pressures to be dampened for a long time.

After Tito’s death in 1980, the decline of the national economy and the change in the international order facilitated the emergence of nationalist leaderships and the explosion of ethnic tensions that had long remained latent. The separatist-driven conflict dynamic that led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia was not, as in the more typical scheme, vertical: the Federal State had already collapsed and had no margins to oppose the independentist actors. On the contrary, it was horizontal: nationalists from different ethnic groups opposed each other. On the other hand, what was typical of the separatist problem and what gave a *circularity* to those conflicts was the fact that each of the actors involved conducted their battle by referring to the same legal principle. The result was that they all found themselves in what we call the *labyrinth of sovereignty*. In the absence of a *restraining* power on

the superordinate scale of the Federal State, which can be effectively depicted with the Pauline image of the *katechon*, the fire could only have spread. After all, if the source of legitimacy is the same, every action can only be countered by an equally legitimate reaction (Barbaro, 2023).

However, one should not fall into the determinist temptation to believe that such internal conflicts constitute an unavoidable necessity for the Balkan space. Indeed, in the course of history, this region has also known long phases of cohesion guaranteed by the domination of external powers, from the Roman to the Ottoman and the Byzantine empires. This gives rise to a whole debate on whether the Balkans should be regarded as a region endowed with unity and coherence or, on the contrary, as little more than a representation of a fragmented and incoherent space (Todorova, 1997; Dragovi-Soso, 2002; Lampe, 2006; Glenny, 2012).

What we wish to emphasise here, however, is that the action of external powers within an intermediate space such as the Balkans contributes in its own right to the circularity of its political dynamics. Indeed, in a context of competition for the acquisition of influence, the region's fragmentation constitutes a vulnerability that makes it easier and more attractive to access it. In turn, the actors involved will not hesitate to further exacerbate the latter in order to gain competitive advantages. In the long run, however, in a scenario of achieved hegemony, any power would rather need to reverse the trend and give again some homogeneity to the controlled space. And this for functional and security-related reasons, not dissimilar to those that had induced Captain Francesco Bertoni (1930) first and then the Institute of Maritime Warfare in Livorno (Ramoino, 1999) later to identify the unity of the Enlarged Mediterranean in the problem of guaranteeing the continuity of communication flows. Exerting influence to take advantage of fragmentation and exacerbating fragmentation to achieve further influence, making use of hegemony to strengthen homogeneity, and bolstering homogeneity to consolidate hegemony – in short, it is evident how external powers are also an active part of the circular dynamics within the Balkan region.

The geopolitical squarings of global actors

Come to think of it, it is possible to say that in the Balkans, the function of *katechon*, not fulfilled by an already dissolved superordinate state power, has in a certain sense been taken over by the actors of global stature that have intervened in the region. As we have said, on the one hand, they have tactically played and are still playing with the dynamics of fragmentation

to gain competitive advantages in terms of penetration and influence; on the other hand, however, strategically, they are the bearers of long-term plans that functionally imply a recomposition of the Balkan space in the name of cohesion and coherence. This clearly defines the ultimate meaning of the attempts by the various actors to square the Balkan circle.

The United Nations may perhaps not be considered an accomplished geopolitical actor since it has neither the will nor the means to control political spaces and impose its order there. However, it can certainly be understood as an agency of meaning that promotes discourses of power functional to others' geopolitical projects. This is the case with the *responsibility to protect* (R2P), a doctrine that lays the conceptual foundations to support so-called humanitarian interventions, which are framed around a perspective of relief in defence of fundamental rights.

Even before their formalisation, the principles at the origin of R2P provided a discursive platform for the US intervention strategy in the Balkans, which was materialised through the mediation of NATO. The latter enabled the US to act directly on the ground with strong international legitimacy, as it did in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (later leading the Dayton Accords process in 1995) and in Kosovo in 1999. To avert the threat of the area's sliding into the Russian orbit, Washington's strategy has been attempting to imprint the Balkan space with a turn in the direction of Western sovereignty paradigms to foster the process of its *Euro-Atlantic* integration.

This entailed, after NATO's diplomatic-military mediation, entrusting the political initiative to the European Union as the most ideal space to incorporate the region for reasons of geopolitical coherence and geoeconomic functionality. In interpreting this role, Brussels has pursued its enlargement strategy to the Western Balkans by equipping itself with a general legal framework for the accession processes, with schemes of agreement with the individual countries concerned and concrete instruments to support development and structural reforms. Counting on the attractiveness of becoming a Member State, the EU binds this possibility through forms of marked conditionality, mainly concerning compliance with its regulatory standards. The risk arising from this is that of wrongly calculating the balance of costs and benefits as perceived by the countries concerned, ending up not being able to cope with the competition of those who, as we will see, propose unconditional investments.

The European Union's potential strength lies in offering the prospect of an adaptive politico-economic integration based on multi-level governance

and a diffuse and asymmetric distribution of powers—in a word, a *hybrid* integration. The realisation of that potential and the implementation of this prospect, however, are subordinated by Brussels to a paradoxical condition: the fossilisation of a territorial configuration based on sovereignty, considered definitive despite the vitality of factors that could lead to future reconfigurations. Thus, for example, in the context of the conflict between Serbia and Kosovo, the EU would demand the crystallisation of the status quo enshrined in the declaration of Kosovo's independence and UN protectorate in 2008.

The mentioned case study is particularly significant. Serbia continues to exercise the pivotal role it has historically played in the region, due to its central position within the Balkan Peninsula and as a place of transition between the West and East. This gives it the two-faced aspect of a possible bridge or wall within the area as well as between the European and Russian space. Moscow is today closer to Belgrade than it was during the Cold War, after the break-up between Yugoslavia and the USSR. Its decision not to recognise the statehood of Kosovo, where, along with the historical core of the Serbian nation, its most important religious sites are located, is part of a broader strategy of revitalising the cultural ties that have their heart in the common Christian-Orthodox identity. In this regard, energy and infrastructure initiatives are more of a functional lever to strengthen it, but the ultimate goal of the Russian space remains to counter the European one in the region. What is more indicative, however, in the case of Serbia is that any external attempt at geopolitical *squaring* can only revolve around the circularities of the internal dynamics of the Balkan region, and this is perhaps the clearest example of how the different scales condition each other, *merging* into the coils of *transcality*.

China is a global actor that differs significantly from the others in this respect. For it, the Balkans is not an end but a means. Consistent with its *centripetal imperialism* (Marconi, Barbaro, 2021), Beijing has no interest in encroaching on the Balkan space to impose its order there; rather, it aims to make use of the region's transitional properties to bring together the maritime and land components of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as exemplified by the railway that should connect Piraeus to Budapest via Belgrade. Along this route, the opportunity is propitious to make further investments and to bolster its global geopolitical legitimacy by resorting to the weapons of *soft power*.

In conclusion, we will only mention Turkey. It is not a global player, and, at the time of writing, it does not have the specific weight to dictate the

region's order on its own; however, still mindful of the Ottoman past when it was able to do so, it maximises its presence there through diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations. Similarly to what Russia did with the Orthodox peoples, Ankara proposes itself as a point of reference for all Muslims in the area.

Transitionality and hybrid power

Efforts to square the circle of the Balkans by global actors, who are also locked in the conceptual labyrinth of sovereignty, seem destined to remain the vain exercise of a jurist, Sisyphus.

Indeed, Carl Schmitt, while proclaiming his distance from geographers, did not contemplate a *Nomos* in which the *Ordnung* (order determination) would not reflect the *Ortung* (place determination), thereby revealing a profound geographical sensitivity (Schmitt, 1950). In other words, paraphrasing the German scholar's thought, a politico-juridical superstructure makes sense and is effective if it reflects the spatial configuration of a political structure. The juridical principle of sovereignty, by its very intrinsic absoluteness, thus proves to be concretely unrealisable and ineffective for the appropriation and stabilisation of such a complex and problematic political space.

In the name of this principle, the internal actors make that space fragmented, while the external actors make it the object of a desire too dangerous to be pushed to its extreme consequences because it would entail a head-on clash between two large spaces. This is exactly what is happening in Ukraine: proof of the consequences brought by the declaration, from both sides, of *Ordnungen* not corresponding to any mature and factual *Ortung*.

The myth of Sisyphus himself, as reinterpreted by Albert Camus, comes in handy in suggesting perhaps the best attitude to get out of this painful condition. The Greek hero, condemned by the gods to push a rock to the top of a mountain only to see it roll down into the valley and repeat the torture *ad infinitum*, symbolises the struggle of human beings – both as individuals and as a collective body – against a destiny from which they can only redeem themselves by recognising and accepting the absurdity of this very struggle. It is then necessary, in the words of the French writer, to find a way to “imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus, 1942).

This adaptive effort, in our case, translates into the renunciation of the pretence of playing the sovereignty card as the instrument resolving every territorial problem, all the more so in a politico-geographical context in

which it has already proven to have counterproductive and paradoxical effects. If the puzzle is geopolitical, the solution must not be merely legal but geopolitical as well.

For our part, the first step is to make a theoretical contribution to a deeper understanding of the peculiarities of the Balkan political space, overcoming the trivialising unitary/fragmented dichotomy. If the circular dynamics of internal conflicts tell us a story of disintegration, the squarings attempted by the external geopolitical actors need functional homogeneity from a future perspective. How do we defuse this short circuit?

Our proposal is to grasp, along with all its implications, the transitional nature of the Balkan region. In order to do so, however, one must first understand what transitional nature consists of. In this regard, a traditional theoretical tool in the history of classical geopolitical thought, and especially German geopolitical thought, namely the concept of *large spaces*, is particularly useful. Friedrich Ratzel had already formulated the idea that political communities, as well as those of living species in general, have their own *living space* (*Lebensraum*), which is dynamic, in which to realise their existence (Ratzel, 1897; 1901). Karl Haushofer took up this vision and made it his own, envisaging its explication in *pan-regions* (*Panregionen*) of continental dimensions constructed from *pan-ideas* (*Panideen*), i.e., general ideologies of spatial organisation (Haushofer, 1931). In a similar vein, Carl Schmitt repeatedly prefigured an overcoming of the international order based on nation-states in favour of a new order based on *large spaces* (*Großräume*) led by hegemonic centres (Schmitt, 1940; 1941; 1950).

Between hegemonic political spaces such as the *Großräume*, there can certainly be a variety of *intermediate spaces* – a concept that is quite generic in itself, so much so that it has known various interpretations within geopolitical thought. Among these, the first is defined by the expression *cordon sanitaire*, a biopolitical metaphor adopted by the geopolitical lexicon to indicate a zone established to isolate and contain a rival power. An emblematic historical example is represented by Eastern Europe: the little states that arose from the disintegration of the continental imperial powers following the Great War were considered and employed by Western forces to circumscribe Germany and the Soviet Union, just as the USSR itself, after the Second World War and during the Cold War, made them its satellites to defend and distance its borders from the West (Parker, 1985). Similar phenomena have been analysed, with greater specificity, in relation to the scale and function of the area under consideration. Thus, a single country established or sustained in order to oppose an adversary space is called a

buffer state (*État-tampon*). Similarly, a protected border area, often by demilitarising it, is called a *band-tampon*. Both were instruments used by France between the two world wars to defend its eastern borders and contain German pressure (Korinman, 1990). Finally, although the literature has sometimes focused on their intermediate position (Spykman, 1944; Fazal, 2007) and other times on their conflict-mitigating effect (Chay, Ross, 1986; Buzan, Wæver, 2003), a peculiar trait of neutrality (Mathisen, 1971; Partem, 1983; Menon, Snyder, 2017) has often been attributed to the broader concept of *buffer zones*.

Clearly, such conceptualisations prove unsatisfactory when put to the test in a geopolitical context such as the Balkans: some are fossilised on the state form or a local scale; many of them on the subordination of the area to one of the hegemonic political spaces between which it is placed; others, on the other hand, postulate their neutrality, functional to the mitigation of the conflict.

The concept of *transitional region*, which we propose here, is intended to shift the focus from the self-referential strategies of external actors to the relational and transcalar peculiarities of the political space under consideration, first and foremost accounting for its complexity. Indeed, the Balkans, as we have observed, is the object of the attempted squarings of global politics; however, these are grafted into a context that, as we have argued, exhibits a complex political and cultural identity. The countries of the Balkan area, moreover, give rise to a spatiality made coherent by common dynamics; ultimately, paradoxically, we could say that they are united by their fragmentation circle. Such a geopolitical landscape seems to make linear evolutions such as the assumption of a status of perfect neutrality or a territorial reconfiguration marked by a rigid application of the sovereignty principle — from the recomposition into a unitary state to the exclusive subjection of the region within a hegemonic space — unlikely. As follows from our arguments, an outcome of stabilisation of the area can only pass through an exit from the labyrinth of sovereignty. This does not mean, as should be clarified, the denial of this principle, which remains the foundation of the international law doctrine, but rather to recognise that it is illusory to believe it to be a panacea for the territorial problems of such complex contexts.

We must then shift our attention from the superstructural element of the *Juridical* to the structural element of the *Political*. In this sense, we take up our dialectical theorisation of the spatial forms of power (Barbaro, 2023). On the one hand, the terrestrial power localised by Halford John Mackinder

(1904) in the *Heartland* and brought back by Jean Gottman (1952) to the model of the *polis*, already praised by Plato (1907) in its Spartan realisation devoted to the value of security, and on the other hand, the maritime power extolled by Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) and hypostatised by Gottman in the *Alexandrian system*, were almost foreshadowed by Aristotle (1831) in contrasting the need for security with that of openness to opportunity. We can therefore affirm that on the one hand, *telluric* power is substantiated in the sedimentation of political culture until it crystallises into the *Juridical*, while on the other hand, *thalassic* power feeds on circulation and exchange, assuming the liquid form of the *Economic*.

The need therefore arises to find, between the two dialectical extremes, a synthesis that recovers a sense proper to the *Political*. Our proposal (Barbaro, 2023) is to identify this third way in the *function of governance*, a realisable manifestation of power that, if on the one hand does not passively resign itself to the incontinence of the *Economic*, on the other does not fall into the arrogance of the *Juridical*. Instead of letting events happen or claiming to determine them, governance assigns to itself the function of diverting their course and affecting them as far as possible to realise the ends of the political community. Neither terrestrial nor maritime, power will rather be *amphibious*; if we were to assign the image of a geopolitical environment to it as well, it would be Nicholas John Spykman's *Rimland* (1944).

The amphibious metaphor of governance reveals, by immediate consonance, its essentially *hybrid* nature, and it also corresponds to both the spatial characteristics of transitional regions and the dynamic traits of political actions that, although now spread globally, find a specific application. The contestability of these areas and, at the same time, the inappropriateness of military confrontation, apart from the dramatic exceptions we are witnessing, facilitate the new modalities of an undeclared but permanent and unlimited war. Conventional conflict, even if avoided, is not excluded, but it is accompanied by the most varied forms of competition, involving the entire political space. The contextually high levels of competition and interdependence generate the paradox of a "structural state of emergency", or *pleiocriticality* (Barbaro, 2020).

One of the most strategic elements is information, since the function of governance, "somewhere between art and technique as well as "wisdom" and work" (Barbaro, 2023), finds in information the essential resource to reduce the complexity of the context and act effectively on it (Barbaro, 2021). It is no coincidence that espionage and disinformation establish themselves

as the weapons par excellence to be turned against the entire body of political communities.

As a corollary to our theoretical discourse, we will limit ourselves to pointing out a comparative case with counterintuitive and seemingly contradictory findings, so much so as to take on a suggestive chiasmus form. According to what has been said, one might expect Russia to have difficulty exerting an effective influence on the Balkans since the spatial configuration of its power is profoundly terrestrial and sovereignty-related, marked by a strong domination of the centre over the peripheries. Instead, its ability to exploit its cultural influence on the region is decisively enhanced by a marked inclination towards hybrid conflict modes. On the other hand, in the prospect of co-opting the Balkan countries into its political space, the European Union is advantaged by its vocation for an exercise of governance in asymmetrical and diffuse forms, but at the same time it is hampered by its tendency towards rigid normativism. Far from constituting an aporia, this framework seems to confirm a recurring tension between the sedimentation of the respective spatial configurations and the drive, conscious or otherwise, to compensate for them if not to overcome them (Barbaro, 2021).

Conclusions

If the Balkan situation is a puzzle, it is at least as much so for the actors involved in it, in their play on the ground, as it is for geopolitical scholars bent on their papers. This is because, in geopolitics as well as in the most common *divertissements*, the solutions one is tempted to give in the immediate instance are often the crudest and almost always reflect the biases ingrained in the minds of those who engage in them.

The actors within the Balkan political space and the prime agents of its proverbial fragmentation have undertaken and still conduct their territorial reconfiguration strategies by opposing each other in the name of the same irreducible legal principle of sovereignty. An instrument that each wields from its side, like the end of a rope that is tugged fiercely on both sides, but without anyone moving an inch.

Balkan dynamics are circular because every sovereignty claim can only trigger other equal and opposite claims, but also because they simultaneously attract and are fuelled by competition between global geopolitical actors.

Everyone finds opportunities and conditions favourable to their strategic interests there. Even physically distant political actors, such as China, can seize a window of opportunity and carry out political and economic penetration. In this way, Beijing can insinuate itself like a wedge into Southeastern Europe and connect the BRI's maritime belt and land road. But the highest stakes are those generated by the confrontation between the two great spaces surrounding the Balkans: on the one hand, the European West, and on the other, Russian Eurasia. In projecting their spheres of influence, one and the other cannot help but conceive of their grip on space as exclusive and their game as zero-sum. The cone of shadow that is denied on the level of ideas but actually produced by their overlapping makes the area a place of potential disorder and possible reconfiguration of the global geopolitical order.

The Balkan circle may not be square, but the whys and wherefores of its peculiar geopolitical dynamics can only be understood if we grasp the nature of this space as a transitional region. As such, it will not be able to find its stability in its partitioning between the two great spaces, and even less so in its appropriation by one of the two with the illusion of enclosing it in the labyrinth of sovereignty. In this sense, while Russia nominally keeps a federal order and shows a strong inclination towards hybrid power, the fact remains that its territorial configuration, as also revealed by its geopolitical and military action, is radically geared towards the domination of the centre over the peripheries. On the contrary, the factually multilevel order of the European Union and the diffuse distribution of power in its political space, albeit with many contradictions, open up the possibility of a *light* and *flexible* entry of the Balkan region within it.

It is worth pointing out, however, that in this hypothesis, the rules of engagement are quite challenging for everyone since they imply, on the one hand, the adaptation of the Balkan region to European political paradigms and, on the other, the preservation of its cultural and economic proximity to *other* spaces. Similarly, the ability to manage internal conflicts with equal versatility is required as well. Why, for instance, not consider the possibility of an extraterritorial status for Serbian sacred sites on Kosovar soil? This further set of challenges is nothing but a corollary of the spatial and temporal transitionality we have discussed, calling into question the need for an *amphibious* governance function in the same way as the conflict dimension falls within the hybrid power paradigm.

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POLITICAL ANTAGONISMS, MISALIGNED SECURITY POLICIES, AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION EFFORTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: PRESENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: Incoherence is an expression that could be used to describe the political, economic and security developments in the Western Balkans. Armed conflicts during the 1990s, attempts at reconciliation during the 2000s and regional cooperation under “external” mentorship represent three focal points that characterize the contemporary history of the Western Balkans. Meanwhile, numerous regional models, frameworks and initiatives for economic integrations followed the formula – economic integration as a prerequisite for lasting peace. All of these have contributed to the fact that actors in the Western Balkans have only one common denominator – membership in the European Union, as a key and strategic foreign policy goal. However, the achievement of that common denominator was without a clear strategy on how to do it and whether such a foreign policy goal, in real international circumstances, is still achievable. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to establish how regional circumstances determine the realization of the foreign policy goals of the Western Balkan actors. How and whether potential economic integration, as a basis, has contributed to essential reconciliation and cooperation? From the academic perspective, in a theoretical sense, the goal is to establish how much economic integration is a realistic basis for reconciliation on the political level in ongoing international circumstances, which would probably be best described today by neoclassical realists.

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Keywords: Western Balkans, economic integration, European Union, foreign policy goals.

Introduction

Western Balkans actors are states and political entities listed in the group of developing nations from different domains, but with accent to their economic systems, democratic institutions, political framework, security and defense mechanisms. In fact, those are states and political entities which are facing contemporary and ongoing domestic and foreign challenges, risks and threats with very limited resources, which lead those nations to continuous emergency position, closely connected to the question of their long-term sustainability. Majority of internal and regional issues are in correlation with the period after the Yugoslav Federation break-up in which the entire region was introduced to civil clashes, economic collapse, the overthrow of the political system and creation hostility and animosity on national and religious level. In fact, post-Yugoslav area (including Albania, but without Slovenia and Croatia) represents a geographical connected unity which shares same and similar domestic, regional and foreign challenges, risks and threats, but refuses to establish common and integrated platform for resolving mentioned difficulties. Although European Union membership represents common denominator to all actors, promoted as a key or strategic foreign policy goal, concrete steps in that direction are missing, especially from the regional point of view in the context of resolving outstanding regional or bilateral issues, or in the context of creation common platform for overcoming other potential domestic, regional and so-called “imported” threats, which are also facing all the actors in the Western Balkans region, with a lower or higher intensity. The point is that Western Balkans region is composed of states and political entities which are integrated *by default* in different ways, but at the same time burdened with divisions, mistrusts and political factors which do not allow any initiative that could lead in the direction of solid and predictable stabilization of the region, as a whole, which also will bring all the Western Balkans actors to become reliable, prospective, stable and sustainable factors within the international relations.

Political positioning of “actors” in the Western Balkans

In order to form a clear picture of the political positioning of “actors” in the Western Balkans, it is necessary to analyze it starting from two different

angles: internal and foreign. Because above all, we are talking about small states whose positioning is largely determined by internal and external circumstances that interpenetrate each other. Any attempt to analyze and explain the political positioning of states and political entities in the Western Balkans, focusing only and strictly on internal (dis)opportunities or on external (geopolitical) circumstances, will lead us in the direction of achieving limited and not comprehensive results. Observing from the perspective of internal politics, we have to establish that these are states with a large “burden” of internal political difficulties.

Concretely, the principle of public policies has not been revived, democratic institutions are still very weak, borders are undefined and a clearly formulated foreign policy is also absent. (Varga, 2018) According to the opinion of some authors, we are talking about states that function almost in a permanent unstable political, economic and security situation. (Varga, 2018) In fact, we are talking about states and political entities within the so-called Western Balkans framework that, even in 2023, are included in the Freedom House list of „Nations in Transit“, and are positioned in the internal political context as systems led by transitional governments or hybrid regimes. (Smeltzer, 2023, p. 14)

Main challenges according to Freedom House 2023 Report „Nations in Transit“:

State or political entity	Key objections
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders • elections marred by irregularities
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders • institutions are challenged by clientelistic party politics • lagging judicial vetting process • special anticorruption courts made small strides in addressing graft

State or political entity	Key objections
North Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders • acute political dysfunction • strong political polarization • parliamentary blockades
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders
Montenegro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders • acute political dysfunction • political polarization • lawmakers pushed through legislation that undermined citizens' basic rights
Kosovo*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite-driven politics and diplomacy have excluded the voices of civil society and ordinary citizens • antidemocratic and authoritarian leaders • an uptick in violence in the Serb-majority north

Source: Nations in transit 2023 – Freedom House Report, In *War Deepens a Regional Divide*, pp. 7-8: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/NIT_2023_Digital.pdf.

In the context of the political positioning of states and political entities in the Western Balkans, we must not ignore Dušan Pavlović's explanation, which directs us towards a new "model" of a captured state. In fact within the Western Balkans we are facing the version of captured state, as Pavlović explains, in which "it is primarily about political parties as political machinery to collect votes", and, on that basis, "party patronage becomes the main element of state capture" (Pavlović, 2021, p. 1). Furthermore, according to Pavlović, "state capture is not anymore about changing policy regulations so that certain corporate agents can gain an advantage over other corporate agents" (Pavlović, 2021, p. 3), but "it is primarily about organizing political machinery to win elections, thus ensuring the incumbent remains in office" (Chipkin & Vidojević 2021, as cited in Pavlović, 2022).

In this context, if we merge internal political challenges, faced by Western Balkans states and political entities, mentioned in the Freedom House “Nations in Transit” report alongside with understanding of captured state provided by Dušan Pavlović we could assume twofold understanding of political positioning of “actors” which are subject of this analysis: first, internal obstacles lead these countries and political entities to self-produces challenges that become risks and threats which endanger internal stability and sustainability; second, potential self-produced risks and threats are eroding internal institutional framework of these subjects, including foreign policy service, thus creating unable “actors” for realization of foreign policy goals, including positioning within international relations.

If we “move” back to the subtitle of this chapter, based on a data we have provided so far, we could assume that political positioning of the Western Balkans states and political entities is not favorably from the point of different segments. There are maladjustments in leading internal and foreign policies which, in the context of small states, could potentially have multiple consequences. For example, Bulgaria or Greece, although those are also grouped in the small states from the points of geographical size and population, because of the EU membership, have comparative advantage to lead restrictive and in a huge manner discriminatory internal policy toward minority groups within their societies although it is against the Union’s principles. From the other side, these two states on the foreign policy level have the comfort to pledge for democracy, including respecting minority rights, although both are using opposite mechanisms internally. But the EU membership, *de facto*, provides to Bulgaria and Greece such “maneuvering” space. From the other side, when it comes to the Western Balkans states and political entities, such “maneuvering” space is, usually, impossible bearing in mind their foreign policy capacities, as well as limited domestic capacities which determine also their political positioning.

The Western Balkans and the European Union in the light of economic integration

The Western Balkans is geographically surrounded by EU member states. The most important determinant of the relationship between the EU and the Western Balkans is the EU accession process. As they often emphasize in their strategies, that convergence to EU standards is one of the main goals of the development strategy, the countries of the Western Balkans directed their resources to fulfill the criteria set before them by the EU.

EU accession process is a shared strategic objective for the whole region. On this path, some countries have advanced further, while some are still in the EU so-called “waiting room”. However, the common denominator for all countries is that they are not progressing fast enough. Accession talks are underway with Montenegro and Serbia, while the Council has opened accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo* are at the end of the “line”, as potential candidates for EU membership. Apart from political ties and the importance of relations with the countries of the European Union, the countries from the Western Balkans region are also economically closely connected with the EU, and to some extent, they are also dependent on the EU.

All Western Balkans partners have signed Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAA) with the EU, with which it is opening up trade and aligning the region with EU standards. The SAA provides the overall framework for the relations of the EU with the Western Balkans. The SAAs are adapted to the specific situation of each partner from the Western Balkan and it is establishing a free trade area between the EU and the certain country, but also identifies common political and economic objectives and encourages regional cooperation. The EU also provides political and financial support for the Western Balkans partners to foster good neighborly relations and build shared prosperity through regional integration. The EU also supports regional cooperation organizations, to boost economic development, improve connectivity, and enhance security and many other benefits across the region. The connection of this region with the EU can also be seen through trade, because the EU is the leading trade partner for all Western Balkans, with almost 70% of the region’s total trade. From 2011 to 2021, EU trade with the Western Balkans has grown by almost 130%, and in the same period, Western Balkans exports to the EU have increased by 207%. EU businesses are also leading investors in the region. In 2018, EU companies accounted for over 65% of foreign direct investment in the region (European Union External Action, 2022).

The SAA, an international treaty between Serbia and EU, entered into force on 1 September 2013, thus granting the Republic of Serbia the status of an associated country to the European Union. Serbia has taken over with the signing of the SAA the two most significant commitments: to establish a free trade zone and align domestic legislation with the EU. “SAA is a legal basis for the improvement of cooperation between Serbia and the EU in a number of areas: economic and commercial policy, statistics, banking, insurance and financial services, auditing and financial control, promotion and protection of investments, industrial cooperation, small and medium-sized enterprises,

tourism, agriculture and agro-industrial sector, fishery, customs, taxation, social cooperation, education and training, cultural cooperation, collaboration in the audiovisual field, information society, electronic communications networks and services, information and communications, transport, energy, nuclear safety, environment, research and technological development, regional and local development and public administration.” (Ministry of European Integration, 2024). From that moment on, this comprehensive treaty became the basis of economic cooperation and economic relations between Serbia and the EU countries. SAA and Interim Agreement with Albania is signed on 12 June 2006, and entered into force on 1 April 2009. The SAA between the EU and Kosovo* entered into force on 1 April 2016, with North Macedonia entered into force on 1 April 2004, with Bosnia and Herzegovina enters into force on 1 June 2015 and with Montenegro on 1 May 2010 (European Commission, 2024a).

The prospect of EU membership is an incentive to bring forward reforms in the Western Balkans to enable difficult decisions to be implemented and to change the institutional as well as the economic and legal structure. Reforms have always been a key for the European path, but more importantly, they are crucial to improve political, legal and economic governance, and more precisely the rule of law, media freedom and conditions for civil society. This is path in the shared interest of the citizens of the Western Balkans and of the EU.

Initiatives and plans for supporting the region

In the ongoing negotiations between the EU and partners from the Western Balkan region, there were a large number of initiatives, investments and cooperation, so we will mention only a few of the most recent ones. The European Commission on 6 October 2020, adopted a comprehensive Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. The aim of this plan is to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, supporting a green and digital transition, fostering regional integration and convergence with the EU. The Economic and Investment Plan sets out a substantial investment package mobilizing up to €9 billion of funding for the WB region. The Economic and Investment Plan identifies ten investment flagships to support major road and railway connections in the region, renewable energy and the transition from coal, renovation of public and private buildings to increase the energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, waste and waste water management infrastructure, the roll out of broadband infrastructure, as well as increased investments in the private sector to boost competitiveness and innovation, in particular of small and medium sized companies and a

Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2024b). On 08 November 2023, the European Commission also adopted a new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, with the aim of bringing some of the benefits of membership to the region in advance of accession, boost economic growth and accelerate much needed socio-economic convergence. The objective should be to enable partners to step up reforms and investments to significantly accelerate the speed of the enlargement process and the growth of their economies. For this, a new €6 billion Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans has been proposed for the period 2024-2027 (European Commission, 2024c).

Among the assistance for the region, we may mention the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) which provides financing and technical assistance to strategic investments in the energy, environment, social, transport, and digital infrastructure sectors. WBIF also supports private sector development initiatives. This is a coordinated blending platform financing the preparation and implementation of priority infrastructure projects through: 1) grants from the European Commission's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and 20 Bilateral Donors; with 2) loans from the participating financial institutions; and 3) national finance (WBIF, 2024). The priority investment programs for the region, according to the EU, are Economic and investment Plan, sustainable transport, clean energy, environment and climate, private sector, human capital, digital future. The Economic and investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, put forward by the European Commission in October 2020, is a clear sign of the EU's commitment to these goals in the region (WBIF, 2023).

Economic convergence is an essential element in getting the Western Balkan countries closer to the EU. But, currently, the level of convergence between the Western Balkan partners and the EU is not progressing fast enough, with average GDP *per capita* in purchasing power for our Western Balkan partners standing at between 30% and 50% of the EU average (European Commission, 2024d). It is painfully obvious that the Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe, but not the European union. The differences in these two regions are not small, but in order to bring them closer together the European Union, but also the WB region, must work together towards the long-term economic recovery, faster regional integration and convergence with the EU.

Existing regional economic initiatives in the Western Balkans

Regional initiatives in the Western Balkans after the end of Yugoslavia almost always had a goal of overcoming conflicts, reconciliation,

rapprochement, establishing cooperation and the like. In recent years, these initiatives have increased and shared cooperation on the path of European integration. Some of them are the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA), the Energy Community and the Western Balkans Transport Community, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). After the disappointment of the perspective of quick entry into the EU, the Berlin process stood out as the most important initiative. The main achievements of the Berlin Process are the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Agreement on the Development of a Common Regional Market, the signing of the Regional Roaming Agreement, and the creation of the so-called “green lanes” to speed up border procedures with key goods during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jelisavac Trošić, Arnaudov, 2023, p. 60). “The leaders of the Western Balkans, have agreed to enhance economic cooperation in the region by developing Common Regional Market (CRM), based on the EU rules and standards, to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of the region and to bring the region closer to the EU markets.” Building upon the commitments and results of the Regional Economic Area, the leaders of the Western Balkans at the at the Berlin Process Summit, held on 10 November 2020 in Sofia, adopted the CRM 2021-2024 Action Plan, based on the four freedoms and enriched with trade, digital, investment, innovation and industry areas (Declaration on Common Regional Market, 2022).

Four key areas of the CRM 2021-2024 Action Plan (CRM, 2024):

<i>Regional trade area</i>	Free movement of goods, services, capital and people, including crosscutting measures, such as the Green Lanes, to align with EU-compliant rules and standards and provide opportunities for companies and citizens	<i>Regional investment area</i>	To align investment policies with the EU standards and best international practices and promote the region to foreign investors
<i>Regional digital area</i>	To integrate the Western Balkans into the pan-European digital market	<i>Regional industrial and innovation area</i>	To transform the industrial sectors, shape value chains they belong to, and prepare them for the realities of today and challenges of tomorrow.

The RCC and CEFTA Secretariats are leading regional organizations to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan, but the main responsibility lies on public institutions in each of the Western Balkan's economy, in particular ministries and institutions leading the implementation effort at the economy level (CRM, 2024). As part of the Berlin Process, in July 2017, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) presented the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (MAP REA) during the Berlin Process Summit in Trieste, Italy (Regional Cooperation Council, 2017).

On the other hand, with the resulting saturation of even the Berlin process, three countries separated from the Western Balkans group and tried to find a slightly different type of cooperation, primarily without the direct influence of the EU. A new regional initiative was launched by Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia Initially called Mini Schengen, which grew into the Open Balkan, with an ambitious goal to form a single market with unhindered movement of people, goods, services, and capital (Proroković, Entina, 2023, p. 106). So far, agreements and documents signed under the Open Balkan initiative are: Memorandum of Understanding on Trade Facilitation, Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation Related to Free Access to the Labour Market in the Western Balkans, Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Protection Against Disasters in the Western Balkans – all signed in July 2021; Agreement on Conditions for Free Access to the Labour Market in the Western Balkans, Agreement on the Interconnection of Electronic Identification Schemes for Citizens of the Western Balkans, Agreement on Cooperation in the Areas of Veterinary, Food and Feed Security and Phytosanitary Areas in the Western Balkans, Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Authorized Economic Operators (AEOS) Between Albania and North Macedonia, Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Authorized Economic Operators (AEOS) Between Albania and Serbia, Trilateral Agreement on Cooperation Between General Directorate of Accreditation of the Republic of Albania (DPA), Institute of Accreditation of the Republic of North Macedonia (IARNM) and Accreditation Body of the Republic of Serbia (ATS) – all signed in December 2021; Agreement on mutual recognition of academic qualifications, MoU on cooperation in the field of tourism in the Western Balkans, MoU on cooperation in the field of culture, MoU on cooperation in the field of tax administrations in the Western Balkans – all signed in June 2022 (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, 2024).

The business community expects to benefit from boosting regional economic integrations within the framework of Open Balkan initiative. But, on the other hand, we cannot ignore potential negative aspect of the abolition of barriers on the border may be the impetus to intensification of cross-border crimes (Proroković, Entina, 2023, p. 107).

Current challenges in the framework of the Western Balkans

Actors in the Western Balkans “traditionally”, after the breakup of Yugoslavia, are faced with internal institutional challenges that cause all-pervading effects. We are talking about effects that are noticeable in the economic and political system, but also in the security sector. The instability of the political and economic system, as a result of institutional deficiencies, further endangers the national security systems of actors in the Western Balkans in dealing with internal and external challenges, risks and threats. However, there are not only internal challenges, but there are also regional issues that additionally have a negative impact on the security mosaic of the Western Balkans. According to Dragan Đukanović, “there are still essentially unresolved issues, such as the relations between Belgrade and Pristina (which are currently accelerating primarily due to the US), the internal reconfiguration of relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the gradual attempt to suppress the further growth of Russian influence in certain states of the region (it already has a strong influence in Serbia and the BiH entity, the Republic of Srpska)” (Đukanović, 2023, p. 135). When it comes to disagreements between Belgrade and Pristina, from the Arnaudov’s perspective, this regional issue largely determines the regional security mosaic, and thus the bilateral relations of actors in the Balkans (Jelisavac Trošić & Arnaudov, 2023, p. 151). “In the regional context, Belgrade is alone in its position on Kosovo*, which may not directly, but indirectly affects the relations with other regional actors”, explains Arnaudov (Jelisavac Trošić & Arnaudov, 2023, p. 151) and adds that unresolved regional issues of this type testify to the lack of political trust, as a basis for cooperation in different domains, which greatly negatively determines cooperation and integration within the framework of the region and, also, indirectly prevents the potential creation of a common regional platform for dealing with contemporary security challenges, internal and external. But, in the regional context, we have also not ignore the migrant challenges, in the format of the transit zone and the so-called Balkan route (The migrant crisis has caused great concern in the Western Balkans region. The Balkan migrant route was

the only sustainable passage for the massive influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa. According to the United Nations, 80% of the almost one million refugees who found refuge in Germany in 2015 went through this route, either registering at the Centre in Preševo, Serbia (600,000) or bypassing it and continuing (Cocco, 2017, as cited in Jelisavac Trošić & Arnaudov, 2023), then the all-pervasive phenomenon of emigration of the capable of working and qualified population from the Western Balkans to Western Europe, as well as challenges in the sector of health and within the labour market, as a consequence of ongoing emigration.

In the context of regionalism, “security problems that characterise the Western Balkans in the post-Yugoslav paradigm have not yet been adequately resolved” (Đukanović, 2023). Separatism as a tool in political action in the Western Balkans is still very much current. Many politicians call for “secession” as a method of increasing political popularity, which de facto contributes to the strengthening of animosity in the region, but also the phenomenon of negative peace, which in practice makes it impossible to deal with current internal challenges such as economic challenges, political disputes, problems in the health system framework, deficit in the labor market, etc. On the other hand, also from the regional perspective, missing the momentum for accelerated regional integration, primarily based on the needs of new geopolitical developments, will contribute to the deepening of animosity within the borders of the Western Balkans (Gjurovski & Arnaudov, 2023, p. 286).

In fact, it is about internal and regional challenges in the Western Balkans that permeate each other. Because the institutional and political problems that are evident in the framework of the actors in the Western Balkans, which we have mentioned in the previous chapter, to a large extent cause the deepening of the existing ones and the development of new challenges, risks and threats:

- political corruption makes institutions inefficient, and subsequently ineffective
- inefficient and ineffective institutions make the economic, political, health and social system unstable
- instability in the framework of politics, health, economy and social policy makes society dissatisfied, as well as unstable, regardless of national and religious affiliation
- social instability and unsustainability lead to emigration flows of the working and qualified part of the population

- emigration, as an internal, modern and massive phenomenon, leads to problems on the labor market
- problems on the labor market, in the opposite direction, weaken the health and social system, and thus the economic (in the economic context, as Gocevski and Gjurovski have stated, “the theories of security and peace unequivocally indicate that one of the key factors for the promotion and preservation of world peace is precisely raising the level of economic development of countries (Arnaudov, 2022, p. 28) and financial sustainability of the overall system all the problems together make the actors in the Western Balkans unsustainable, and therefore unprepared to face internal, and then regional and “imported” challenges, risks and threats.

The #SecuriMeter 2021 survey which had been conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo in the period from January 28 to February 19, 2021 has showed that, according the perception of citizens, economic crisis, poverty and social exclusion (63 percent), crime, organized crime and vandalism (58 percent), pandemic (53 percent), natural disasters, climate change and pollution (29 percent) major reasons that have a negative impact on their sense of security, while for 26 percent of respondents it is the migrant crisis. (Komarčević, 2021) In this context, the unresolved internal and regional challenges should be analyzed, as well as the impact of “imported” threats, challenges and risks on the security picture of the Western Balkans if we attempt to create clear and empirically verifiable analysis about the security aspects of the case study region.

The research data we have mentioned above also confirm the thesis that the national institutional framework is the main cause of internal challenges, risks and threats in the Western Balkans:

- 70% of the respondents believe that insufficient capacity of competent institutions is the biggest problem in the fight against organized crime;
- Slightly more than half (54%) believe that law enforcement agencies should do more to combat organized crime;
- Almost the same percentage of respondents is of the opinion that corruption is the main reason for the poor performance of institutions in the fight against organized crime (Komarčević, 2021).

Internally, the Western Balkans as a whole is facing internal (in terms of actors) and regional challenges, risks and threats that have largely arisen as a result of institutional and political instability. We are talking about

pervasive political and institutional challenges that continuously generate new internal and regional challenges, while deepening existing ones. In this context, it is almost impossible to analyse separately facing internal and regional challenges, without first analyzing how to solve the challenges at the institutional and political level. In fact those are about multiple, multidimensional and causal relations of causes and consequences that overlap each other and that, de facto, create a mosaic of all-pervading challenges, risks and threats in the Western Balkans, the overcoming of which presupposes a fundamental systemic reconstruction.

Economic challenges

Consequences that disintegration of former Yugoslavia has brought upon industry, production, trade and economic relations has brought a lot of changes and challenges (Jelisavac Trošić Sanja, 2018, p. 264). The partners from the Western Balkans belong to small open economies that are trying to strengthen the upward trajectory of export-led economic growth. Although exports have revived over the past years, their role needs to be strengthened even more (Table 1). Structural changes in the economy and strengthening of the institutional infrastructure are a condition for the growth of the role of exports as a factor in economic growth. For instance, Serbia's exports are mostly labour-intensive products with less added value (Jelisavac Trošić, Tošović-Stevanović, Ristanović, 2021, p. 47). The partners of the Western Balkans specialize in industries with low and medium technologies and have a relatively small number of high-tech products, mainly in the mechanical, automotive or chemical industries, with which they could enter the international market. For the sake of their own faster development, but also for the sake of strengthening competitiveness and exports, the partners of the Western Balkans should develop strategies for the development of high-tech products that will be competitive on the European Union market (Jelisavac Trošić, 2023, p. 99).

Table 1: Trade in goods (in million euro)

	2012	2015	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Exports					
EU	1770880	1876328	2131985	1932727	2181004	2572720
Albania	1531	1728	2426	2190	3012	4090
Bosnia and Herzegovina	4018	4595	5876	5379	7298	9190
Kosovo*	276	325	384	475	756	920
Montenegro	367	317	416	366	437	700
North Macedonia	3124	4088	6424	5781	6922	8300
Serbia	8251	11447	16859	16464	21053	26353
	Imports					
EU	1702498	1648068	1940879	1717439	2125964	3002095
Albania	3797	3882	5269	4860	6545	8002
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7799	8105	9969	8634	11042	14642
Kosovo*	2508	2635	3497	3297	4684	5639
Montenegro	1821	1842	2601	2105	2504	3540
North Macedonia	5071	5801	8463	7599	9638	12126
Serbia	13522	14425	22216	21482	27332	36736
	Balance					
EU	68382	228260	191106	215288	55040	-429375
Albania	-2267	-2154	-2843	-2670	-3533	-3912
Bosnia and Herzegovina	-3781	-3510	-4093	-3254	-3744	-5452
Kosovo*	-2232	-2309	-3114	-2822	-3929	-4719
Montenegro	-1454	-1524	-2185	-1739	-2067	-2840
North Macedonia	-1947	-1714	-2040	-1818	-2716	-3826
Serbia	-5271	-2978	-5356	-5019	-6279	-10383

Source: Eurostat.

From the Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, we can find out that in the context of weakening global demand, growth in the region decelerated over the course of 2022 and into 2023. On the one hand, the slowdown in global demand for goods contributed to weaker than expected

industrial production in the European Union and with a spillover effect also in the Western Balkans, especially weighing on Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia. On the other hand, global demand for services has proved to be more resilient, in particular for travel, which has benefited Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Against the all odds the Western Balkans labor market continued strengthening in 2023, and the average employment rate for the region reached a historical high of 47.8 percent in June 2023. Unfortunately, labor shortages continued to be among top concerns raised by businesses in the region. With inflation remaining high, poverty rates in the region are estimated to continue their downward trend, but at a slower pace. “Despite recent momentum in the post-pandemic years, labor force participation rates in the Western Balkans continue to lag other countries with similar levels of economic development, and the gender disparities persist in all countries, despite a gradual increase in female labor force participation” (Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, 2023).

All in all, for Western Balkans reforms are still essentially needed – to consolidate the recovery toward sustainable growth. Meanwhile, negotiations with the EU hold the potential to bolster prospects in those countries. Since the agriculture sector is undergoing a major structural transformation, efforts to green agriculture are important to ensure access to the EU market and for the competitiveness of agriculture, rural development, and food and nutrition security (Ibidem). Agricultural production and export of agricultural products are very important for the economic and sustainable development of the Western Balkans. However, the participation of agriculture in economic development (GDP), as well as the participation of agriculture in employment, have a statistically negative impact on the economic and sustainable development of the Western Balkans (Jelisavac Trošić, Tošović Stevanović, Benhida, 2023, p. 97).

“Imported” political and security challenges

In order to be more precise, in this chapter we will use the term “imported”, which in essence represent security and political challenges that do not recognize the physical borders of sovereign states, and as such are consequences of broader European and world events.

In the case of the Western Balkans, we must point out that these are challenges that can be divided into five subgroups:

„Imported“ political and security challenges				
Political		Security		
European	Economic	Military/ Ukrainian War	Health	Energy

When it comes to political challenges, we can divide them into: European, created as a consequence of the institutional and political crisis within the framework of the European Union, which indirectly caused consequences for the enlargement policy in relation to the Western Balkans; and economic, which arose as a consequence of the all-pervading European economic and global crisis caused by numerous new war hotspots that essentially threatened the existing global supply chains, and thus caused major shocks on the world stock markets, which had a direct negative effect on the stock markets within the Western Balkans as well.

European institutional crisis

From the perspective of EU institutional crisis and the enlargement policy towards Western Balkans, it is important to stress out that membership in EU, as a strategic foreign policy goal of all six Western Balkans actors, represents from a different aspects issue closely related to the security and stability of the region. First, because the EU membership perspective, as a chance for development and prosperity to the whole region, represents the least common denominator to all actors within Western Balkans, which determines reconciliation process, resolving open disputes after the break-up of Yugoslav Federation and provides political justification for inter-actors and inter-ethnic cooperation which is burdened of the civilian wars during nineties. The eventual marginalization of the European perspective of the Western Balkans can greatly harm the regional circumstances in two ways: first, slow down the process of overcoming existing disputes, which is a prerequisite in the process of European integration; secondly, it can slow down the initiated processes of institutional and civil democratization, which would be directly to the detriment of citizens. From the other perspective, at it explains Dragan Djukanovic, “as the influence of Russia, Turkey, China, the United Arab Emirates, etc., grew cyclically, the (Western Balkans) leaders of these countries gradually softened their previously emphasised pro-European and pro-Euro-Atlantic efforts and began to diffuse their foreign policy efforts and activities to identify other options for their countries’ positions”

(Đukanović, 2023, p. 136). On the road to EU membership, in an attempt to achieve faster economic growth, the WB found itself in a position of susceptibility to especially Chinese loans and investments (Stojanović-Višić, Jelisavac Trošić, Simić, 2023, p. 240).

However, the goal of this work is not to determine which external partners are more rational and pragmatic for the development and sustainability of actors in the Western Balkans, but rather to show, on the example of the interweaving of the interests of various external actors in a case study region, how much this can lead in the direction of potential regional destabilization due to potential occurrences of the following variables:

- division of the Western Balkans societies into “pro-Western” and “pro-Russian”
- division of the Western Balkans actors into “pro-EU” and “anti-EU”
- division of Western Balkans political subjects into “pro-EU” and anti-EU (which in practice makes the defined foreign policy goals unsustainable).

Such scenario could additionally destabilize the security mosaic of the region, bearing in mind already existing regional disputes, as well as strengthening of extreme political options which are promoting numerous radical political approaches, as an attractive way for their political positioning. According to some analysts, in recent years there has been growing concern about the potential for violent right-wing extremism in the Western Balkans: in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. With a history of violence stemming from right-wing political ideologies, experts express concern about the spread of right-wing extremism in the context of potential political conflicts (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2023).

Ukrainian War

The war on the territory of Ukraine represents a multiple “imported” security challenge for actors in the Western Balkans:

- the security destabilization of the European continent is closely related to the EU enlargement policy
- the security destabilization of the European continent threatens the defined economic supply chain, which threatens investment flows and financial stability

- the security destabilization of the European continent, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, threatens the energy sustainability of the entire continent, including the Western Balkans.

In this context Western Balkans actors have become even more vulnerable from security point of view, bearing in mind, in a huge manner, limited capacities in the economic and energetic sector. Economic development of Western Balkans depends of foreign companies investments, which, as a consequence of the Ukrainian War, have become slower in deciding on new investments or expansion of existing ones. In fact, unstable security circumstances within European continent have influenced directly to investment strategies of leading global companies. According to NALED conducted survey from April 2022, immediately after the beginning of the Ukrainian war, “impact of the crisis on the Serbian economy will be negative consequences for the macroeconomic performance of the Serbian economy, primarily through the rise in prices of energy, primary agricultural products and food, shortages, higher inflation, which will consequently lead to slowing down of economic activity” (Rančić & Stojanović, 2022). On the other hand, the Ukrainian conflict further increased the existing animosities between the actors in the Western Balkans to those who provide firm support to Ukraine and are fully adapted to the EU sanctions policy against the Russian Federation (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2023b) and to those who provide firm support to Ukraine but reject the EU sanctions policy, considering that this approach does not punish the Russian Federation, but ordinary citizens of that country (Tanjug/RTV, 2024).

Energy crisis

The energy crisis in the Western Balkans also represents an external security challenge in this region, as a consequence of the Ukrainian conflict. It is a security challenge that is affecting the economic and financial system of actors in the Western Balkans, due to the impossibility of functioning of the economy without the import of this energy source and due to the fact that it is largely a region that “relied” on the import of Russian gas. As Simonida Katarska explains, the war in Ukraine “has significant implications for the Western Balkans from several aspects. First, as in the entire European context, the invasion creates insecurities that will have long-term security and economic consequences. Almost exclusive reliance of the Western Balkans to the Russian gas makes it very vulnerable in such escalations” (Alibegović, 2022). In fact, the war in Ukraine has found the countries of the Western Balkans which are significantly dependent on

Russian gas, after which some resorted to searching for alternative sources (Manojlović, 2023). But the fact is that looking for alternative access to gas is a very expensive and long-term endeavor that requires large financial expenditures. In this context, the actors in the Western Balkans are still very vulnerable, bearing in mind the “limited” gas capacities they possess, but also the danger of possible shortages, bearing in mind the existing energy infrastructure, which foresees the delivery of the largest amount of Russian gas in the Western Balkans via the territory Ukraine, where the conflict is still taking place on a large scale.

Health challenges

When it comes to health “imported” challenges, we have not ignore the consequences that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused on a global level, and thus also in the Western Balkans region. Bearing in mind the fact that we are talking about actors who are still classified as “developing countries”, we have not ignore the potential dangers that can cause health crises, which can be established by the example of Covid-19. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic has severely affected the public finances of most countries in the world, (Kisin et al., 2021, p. 67) including the countries of the Western Balkans (Kisin et al., 2021, p. 67). With the onset of the pandemic, all countries in the region have increased their public debt, much more than was the case during the global economic crisis (Kisin et al., 2021, p. 69).

The Covid-19 pandemic had a threefold impact on actors in the Western Balkans:

- first, it “weakened” their economic and financial performance through new debts on the international financial markets (directly), higher public expenditures (directly) and “slowed down” investment policy (indirectly);
- secondly, it additionally “weakened” the health system (directly), which was already largely vulnerable due to the internal challenges (institutional and political) faced by actors in the Western Balkans
- thirdly, it showed how dependent the economies in the Western Balkans are on external partners, and how much their overall stability and sustainability, including health security, is dependent on external actors.

In fact, this concrete chapter, represents a textbook example of the fact how much small states, on the Western Balkans actors case study, are dependent of foreign political, security and economic flows and how much mentioned flows, interfered with internal/national challenges, risks and

threats, determine the scale of vulnerability, from one side, and sustainability, from the other side, of those subjects of international law.

Conclusions

The Western Balkans represents a connected region which is geographically so close to the European Union, but in the political, economic and security context yet so far away. A region which is, *de jure*, constantly searching for reconciliation and development, but at the same time continuing to feed animosities and disputes which contribute to “deepening the gap” of mistrust. Regional communication, as well as cooperation in a larger number of fields, political, economic, security, legal, diplomatic and other fields, has proved to be very difficult and slow progressing. All Western Balkans partners have Stabilization and Association Agreements with the EU. All of them are on the path of opening up trade and aligning the region with EU standards. The overall framework for the relations of the EU with the Western Balkans has been set for some time. The EU also provides political and financial support for the Western Balkans partners to foster good mutual relations and to build prosperity through regional integration. But the longer this process of settling down and raising the quality-of-life lasts, in this slow pace, the more and more people, companies and politicians are worn out along the way.

The Western Balkans is composed of countries and political entities which are integrated *by default* in different ways, but at the same time burdened with divisions, mistrusts and political factors. All mentioned, do not allow any initiative that could lead in the direction of solid stabilization of the region, as a whole. And it's not the result of a lack of trying. Projects and initiatives were driven by external factors, but also by the participating countries themselves. It remains an open question whether Western Balkans actors will ever become reliable, prospective, stable and sustainable factors within the international relations. And again, on the other hand, will the interference from outside be really and sincerely constructive and bring a stabilizing influence and a perspective of progress.

In fact, in the context of Western Balkans states and political entities there is double missed opportunity for reconciliation, cooperation and integration – within the region and European: from one side, sharing internal institutional, political, economic and security challenges, threats and risks represents excellent basis for common and synchronized approach in resolving mentioned obstacles; second, common foreign policy goals

represent additional and from EU perspective, strong and essential determinators which could enhance regional potentials for reconciliation, cooperation and integration. On that basis would be reached triple goal:

- Resolving internal challenges, threats and risks
- Regional approach as a mechanism for effective foreign policy activities
- Direct contribution to the reconciliation process on the lowest level, within the Western Balkans societies, which are still under strong political discourse of animosities from nineties.

In that direction, on the basis of this paper, we are proposing following measures:

- Creation a framework for political cooperation released from internal (state/political entity) pressure by certain political and social factors
- Creation an economic regional platform released from the obstacles of ongoing bilateral and regional disputes and issues
- Creation a strategic regional foreign policy platform which will cite ongoing and potential challenges, threats and risks in the process of realization of foreign policy goals and, on that basis, provide mechanisms and instruments for efficient and effective foreign policy for all Western Balkans actors.

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WESTERN BALKANS AND UKRAINIAN CRISIS 2014-2024

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Abstract: The paper explores the changes that have occurred in the foreign, security, and defense policies and capabilities of Croatia and Serbia, as the two most important states for the Western Balkans stability in the context of the ten-year Ukrainian crisis and changing international relations and order toward the more conflictual one. These changes were significantly expressed at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, with Crimea joining the Russian Federation, strengthened in 2022 with the Russian military intervention, and still ongoing with the greater polarization between the EU and NATO on the one side, Russia on the other, and with the significant role of rising powers like China and India on the third. The authors claim that the Ukrainian crisis reflected the global trends on the regional level thus bringing more polarization, prospect for conflictual relations, and militarisation instead of immersion of the whole region into the Western structures on the geopolitical grounds. The analysis of the policies and comparison of the cases of Croatia and Serbia are conducted according to three variables: 1. narratives on the Crimean crisis in 2014 and Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2022, 2. measures taken regarding Russia and Ukraine, 3. changes of their capabilities. The authors conclude that with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the potential for new crises in the Balkans rises. Countries' narratives, especially that of Croatia which constantly victimizes itself, create new mistrust and distance between the two countries and peoples, Croatian EU membership which is constantly highlighted against the Serbian lack of harmonization with the EU foreign and security policy further distances Serbia from the EU, and improvements in defense capabilities, conducted on the various grounds and with opposing actors triggers the arms race, thus complicating the mutual relations of the Western

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Balkan countries and slowing down the prospects for European integration instead of fostering them on geopolitical grounds.

Keywords: Western Balkans, EU, Serbia, Croatia, foreign and security policies, Ukrainian crisis.

Introduction

The Ukrainian crisis is considered to be one of the “watershed” moments in international politics, especially with the 2022 Russian military invasion in Eastern Ukraine it is perceived as a turning point in human history after which international relations will no longer be the same (Kostić Šulejić, 2023, p. 83). This “turn in history” brought many challenges and changes in Europe, affecting various fields of human life and state policies, and changing the established patterns of international relations. This paper focuses on the consequences that the ten-year crisis in Ukraine has had on the security situation in the Western Balkans and the prospects for the encirclement of the whole of this region into the European Union. This primarily refers to the attempts to involve Serbia and Serbian people, since the Ukrainian crisis primarily affected the relationship between the NATO member countries from the region and Serbia and the Republic of Srpska as military-neutral and more Russia-oriented republics. “Circling the square” instead of “squaring the circle” became the right description of the European Union and the West endeavors to incorporate Serbs into the Western line of thinking and acting but with less success.

Because of the security dynamics in the region primary relationship that affects its stability and prospects for EU integration is the relationship between Croatia, as a NATO and EU member, and Serbia, as a military-neutral and EU candidate country. Additionally, the relationship between Serbia and Croatia is crucial for the stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), since both Serbs and Croats have strong links with these two countries which are at the same time guarantors of Bosnian stability and integrity. All three countries, together with Montenegro, are also locked into the sub-regional arms control agreement, and their capabilities are measured in comparison to one another and having in mind the set limits. These are the reasons why are we in this paper concerned primarily with the effects that the Ukrainian crisis produced on the foreign and security policies of these two countries. Other countries of the Western Balkans region that are at the same time NATO members – Albania, North Macedonia, and Montenegro – as well as the Kosovo entity have the same stand regarding the Ukrainian crisis as Croatia, with the full alignment of their policies with the EU and NATO,

while Bosnia and Herzegovina is torn apart among the Croat and Serbian position. Thus, the analysis of the positions and changes in Serbia and Croatia gives an excellent explanation of the security situation in the region, its stability, and prospects for encirclement into the Western structures.

The analysis of the policies and comparison of the cases of Croatia and Serbia are conducted according to three variables: 1. narratives on the Crimean crisis in 2014 and Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2022, 2. measures taken regarding Russia and Ukraine, and 3. changes of their capabilities. The authors conclude that with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the potential for new crises in the Balkans rises. Countries' narratives, especially that of Croatia which constantly victimizes itself, create new mistrust and distance between the two countries and peoples, Croatian EU membership which is constantly highlighted against the Serbian lack of harmonization with the EU foreign and security policy further distances Serbia from the EU, and improvements in defense capabilities, conducted on the various grounds and with opposing actors triggers the arms race, thus complicating the mutual relations of the Western Balkan countries and slowing down the prospects for European integration instead of fostering them on geopolitical grounds.

**“Dropping the gloves, fighting with bare hands”
– true faces of West and Russia and consequences
for the Western Balkans**

The Warsaw Pact, due to the numerous contradictions on which it rested, existed on increasingly narrow bases of power during the last decades of the Cold War. Moscow permanently lost its economic, ideological, and moral appeal, with military power standing out as almost the only effective tool for projecting power (Гедис, 2003, п 406). The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact deprived Russia of the aforementioned instrument of power, making it vulnerable to the challenges that followed. The post-Cold War period is characterized by the Alliance's efforts to take advantage of a favorable geopolitical moment and fill the “security vacuum” in Central and Eastern Europe created for them by the sudden collapse of a strategic rival. They will be generated by geo-strategically motivated moves by the Alliance aimed at its expansion, following the ideas of offensive realism (Благојевић, 2021, pp. 329–344). NATO's “open door” policy, based on Article 10 of the Washington

Agreement, is considered one of the basic instruments of expanding Atlanticism and US influence (Благојевић, Стојковић, 2023, pp. 38-39).

Over time, reform efforts led to positive effects, which provided space for a more confident position of Moscow towards the West in protecting national interests, primarily those related to stopping NATO's eastward expansion. The key event was the Munich Security Conference in 2007 when Russian President Vladimir Putin requested equal status in all future negotiations and announced that his country would play an important role in structuring the future global multipolar order. He criticized, as an open provocation, NATO's entry into Russia's borders, despite previously given guarantees that it would not expand across and beyond the eastern borders of a united Germany. At the same time, he proposed the establishment of a new global security architecture, expressing Russia's readiness to, "in interaction with responsible and independent partners, join efforts in building a just and democratic world order that would ensure security and prosperity not only for a select few but for all" (Putin's Speech, 2007). However, the logic of exclusiveness is something inherent in the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which prohibited Russia from preserving its positions in Eastern Europe and the Post-Soviet States in economic, trade, and defense fields (Kostić, 2021, p. 504). Feeling excluded from the dominant flows of security integration in Europe, in 2009 Moscow launched an unsuccessful initiative for an agreement on a new European security architecture in which everyone would participate (Ејдус, 2012, p. 258). In almost the same context and manner, these propositions were repeated in the new Russian proposals in December 2021, but with the same negative outcome and reception by the Western allies (Костић Шулејић, 2022, стр. 63-73).

The NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008 was significant in many ways for Ukraine and the future of relations with Russia. The Alliance rejected Kyiv's request to, together with Georgia, obtain consent for the implementation of the Membership Action Plan (MAP). On that occasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin told his American colleague George W. Bush that Ukraine is a "non-existent state". Even though the USA was in favor of the Membership Action Plan, France and especially Germany were against provoking Moscow by bringing Ukraine closer to NATO, especially since Russia's military intervention in Georgia was a clear demonstration of force directed towards Ukraine and the West (Blagojević, 2016, pp. 247-248). The constant ignoring and marginalization of Russian strategic interests contributed to the strengthening of animosity between Russia and the West, which was also manifested in the continued expansion of NATO.

The geopolitical importance of Ukraine for Russia is enormous, but it is also significant for the geostrategic interests of the West. It is the largest country in Europe, with a significantly large Russian population, with access to the Black Sea. Ukraine was also one of the first countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States to form independent armed forces and applied for future NATO membership and the Partnership for Peace program in 1994. As Brzezinski points out, Ukraine was the focal point of Russia's imperialist ambitions in Europe, so the importance of that country is naturally recognized both in Moscow and Washington. Moreover, the loss of Ukraine for Russia would also mean the loss of access to Europe and important ports on the Black Sea, while also forcing the country to reorient its foreign policy to Central Asia or the Caucasus instead of Europe (Blagojevic, Pejic, 2019, pp. 305-328). At the end of the last century, he recognized the potential of French-German-Polish-Ukrainian political cooperation supported by the United States, assessing that it could contribute to increasing the geostrategic weight of Europe (Brzezinski, 2001, pp. 82-115). Ukraine is certainly paying a heavy and bloody price in this armed conflict for the policy of NATO expansion and Russia's determination to oppose such developments (Благојевић, Стојковић, 2023, pp. 36-38).

The outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, the so-called 'appearance of people', and the violent change of power in Kyiv started in 2014. The Russian population, with the tacit support of Russia to say the least, organized a referendum on independence from Ukraine and on joining Russia. Although the referendum results are still not internationally recognized, this did not prevent Moscow from declaring the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. It seems to be an indisputable fact that the European Union developed economically and politically to a large extent thanks to its smaller allocations for defense and security because it was the United States and NATO that constantly provided it with security guarantees. Furthermore, for more than half a century, the European Union was not in a position and did not have enough political will either, to independently consider its overall strategic position and actions on the international stage. The Minsk Agreements, it has turned out, were the maximum the European Union's "independent" engagement could produce about the crisis in Ukraine. Russian Federation launched a military intervention in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 that directly threatens peace in Europe (Blagojević, Karavidić, 2022, pp. 81-82).

It seems that the Russian side in the war in Ukraine is focused primarily on deterring NATO, and only secondarily on coercion towards Kiev. One

can hardly expect an effective victory in a war when it is a secondary strategic goal (Blagojevic, 2019, pp. 280-281). In such circumstances in the global strategic environment, it is difficult to expect that there will be no negative effects on the political and security situation in the Western Balkan region, which was already burdened by various problems arising from the “wars for the Yugoslav heritage”.

Croatian narratives, measures and capabilities

Croatia and Ukraine have a very strong relations since their independence in the 1990s. Ukraine, which proclaimed its independence from the Soviet Union on 24 August 1991, recognized Croatia on 11 December 1991, two months after the end of the moratorium on the Croatian declaration of independence from the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), and was the first UN member state to diplomatically do that. Croatia was also the first country to recognize the independence of Ukraine on 5 December 1991 (Demeshchuk, 2019, p. 33). The close ties between the two countries continued in the new era and in the last ten years Croatia first tried to reconcile the Russian and Ukrainian positions and kept the lines of communication open with Russia, but after 24 February 2024, it aligned itself fully with the EU restrictive measures and policy regarding Russia and tried to offer some good services and examples of its own war experience to Ukraine.

Narratives – Ukrainian crisis as an excuse for a constant further victimization of Croatia

After the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially the way it was done, the greatest Croatian fear was that something similar might happen in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Northern Kosovo. Wójtowicz (2020, p. 24) considered a visit of the Croatian President to Russia in October 2017 as one of the measures taken to reconcile the Croatian and Russian interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to discuss the prospects of cooperation in the field of energy.

This fear continued to grow for the previous ten years and was especially strengthened after 24 February 2022 and the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The fear of Serbian resurrection and assertiveness called for more Croatian attention on the situation in Bosnia, especially regarding the Republic of Srpska, but also the position of the Croats in the BH Federation. From the beginning, Croatia participated in the formulation and adopted

the EU decisions regarding Ukraine and Russian intervention. Croatia condemned “aggression on Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the military of the Russian Federation” as well as authorization that the Council of the Russian Federation gave to the Russian president for the use of armed forces in the territory of Ukraine (MVEP, 2014a). These Russian activities were considered to violate international law and treaties. Before 2014, the officially proclaimed policy of Croatia regarding Ukraine was that Ukraine should not be an area of conflict but the potential strengthening of cooperation between the EU and Russia and “overlapping” of their free-trade areas (MVEP, 2014b). Similarly, Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksey Y. Meshkov attended the 9. Croatia Forum in Dubrovnik and stated that nobody should ask or pressure countries from the region to choose between the EU and Russia or to adopt sanctions against Russia, that the membership in the EU should not create a new line of division in Europe, but that the Balkan area should be the one of cooperation between the EU and Russia (MVEP, 2014c). As noted before this concept of an “area of cooperation between the EU and Russia” failed in Ukraine and it will most probably fail in the Balkans as well, hopefully without war. In August 2014 Croatia opted to find new ways of communication with Russia since the existing ones, together with sanctions, did not lead to the de-escalation in Ukraine, but even worse confrontation (and later on even further military operation) (MVEP, 2014d). Croatia considered the elections in the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Republics in November 2014 illegal (MVEP, 2014e). At the end of 2014, Croatia qualified the situation in Ukraine as a “war of low intensity” and even as a conflict between the West and Russia, concluded that Minsk agreements were not functioning or being implemented, thus calling for engagement in their upgrading or finding some other solution for achieving truce in Ukraine (MVEP, 2014f).

In the period 2015-2020, the creation of the Islamic state and Russian inclusion in the Syrian civil war, together with the Minsk 1 and 2 agreements for Ukraine, the Iranian nuclear deal, the situation in Libya, and the great migration crisis from the MENA region in 2015 and 2016, Ebola and later on Coronavirus crisis caused a situation over Crimea to slide down from the top of the international, and particularly important, the EU agenda. Croatia was concerned with the energy issues, but the stability of BH as well and tried to keep the communications line with Russia open (MVEP, 2015). What was not immediately recognized, however, was that the existing model of cooperation under the constant enlargement of NATO was no longer acceptable for Russia, and was not perceived as being in mutual interest, but highly exclusive. In September 2016, Croatian Minister of

Foreign Affairs Miro Kovač and his Russian counterpart Lavrov agreed to strengthen economic relations between the two countries (MVEP, 2016). In November 2016, Croatian Prime Minister Plenković visited Kyiv where he said that the Croatian experience of reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranya, and Western Syrmia would be a very appropriate and useful experience for Ukraine. Russia immediately condemned this statement and blamed Croatia for the expulsion of the Serbian civilian population in Operation “Storm” (Demeshchuk, 2019, p. 35). These parallels might have triggered the Russian thinking of an actual military operation later on in Eastern Ukraine.

In that period, after the Minsk 2 agreement, Ukraine was interested in the a) Croatian experience regarding the reintegration of former Serbian entities into the Croatian state, b) sharing the experience in medical and psychological treatment of Ukrainian soldiers, c) humanitarian demining, d) prosecution of war crimes e) postwar reconstruction and f) experience in EU integration process. Coordination of activities between Croatia and Ukraine has been done through the Working group of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and Ukraine established in 2016. After the meeting with Sergey Lavrov in Moscow in May 2017, Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs Stier announced the beginning of a “new phase in dialogue between Croatia and Russia” (MVEP, 2017). During 2017 and 2018, both states perceived their relations as good with the prospects for their improvement.

Croatian National Security Strategy from 2017 does not contain any reference to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, but several times mentions possibilities that Croatia might be a subject of “hybrid activities” (SNS RH, 2017). Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović was considered to have a good relationship with Vladimir Putin, but, later on, she accused the Russian regime of meddling in the Croatian presidential elections when she lost to Zoran Milanović, who became the new president in 2020. She considered the issue of the LNG terminal in Croatia as a reason for “Russian hybrid actions during the election campaign, which contributed to the 2020 election results” (N1, 2023).

The action plan of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs for the period 2021-2024 recognizes that the world has changed, become multipolar, and less predictable (Provedbeni program MVEP, 2021, p. 10). This document, adopted before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, even stipulates the strengthening of partnership with Russia and China and the position inside the EU to better use the membership in this organization and the EU regulation for the achievement of Croatian national interests (Provedbeni

program MVEP, 2021, p. 11, 13). In December 2020, after sixteen years, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov visited Croatia and both states concluded that they should keep the communication channels open, while Croatian Minister for Foreign and European Affairs Grlić Radman visited Russia in January 2022, where he recognized the significant importance of Russia for Europe and especially BH, in preserving its Dayton agreement and equality of all three constitutive peoples. Russian intervention in Ukraine in February 2022 brought a more decisive Croatian posture toward Russia and the Croatian officials qualified the intervention as “non-justifiable aggression” calling Russia to withdraw from “occupied territories” (MVEP, 2024). Croatian Parliament also adopted a Declaration on Ukraine and called this intervention a violation of international law, an attack on the whole of Europe, exclusive fault of the Russian regime, and expressed the right of every state to its foreign policy choices (Declaration on Ukraine, 2022).

During the ten years of Ukrainian crisis, several points specifically marked Croatian policy. Firstly, Croatia played a significant role in the NATO policy toward Russia of keeping the door open for conversation with this important country, and especially the Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarović was successful in this role. Secondly, Croatia has constantly expressed recognition of Russia as a great power and that Croatia should not treat Russia as Serbia, since Russia is a “dangerous”, “dark” country and “a world nuclear superpower” and Serbs as „gunners“. He also talked about the Ukrainian war as the result of the constant NATO provocation of Russia (HRT, 2023). In the Croatian political spectrum, this position was only held by unparliamentarily Croatian Party of Rights 1861 (Petcinić, 2023, p. 82). Thirdly, the crisis over Crimea, and especially the 2022 invasion gave a framework and opportunity to Croatia to constantly put forward its wartime experience and experience as a “victim of a great Serbian aggression” which makes Croatia specifically sensible for the Ukrainian situation and can offer to Ukraine its experience of reintegration of separated territories to the existing state and other wartime experiences. Just to further support Kosovo’s independence, the new Croatian president Milanović stated that in the same manner as Kosovo was taken from Serbia, Crimea will never again be part of Ukraine, thus limiting the concept of reintegration (HRT, 2023). Fourth, the Ukrainian crisis gave to Croats more opportunities to express their identity as a Western nation and to ask Serbia to determine to which civilizational and identity group it belonged. Croatian membership in the EU and NATO is perceived as strengthening Croatian sovereignty and global influence (Program Vlade RH, 2020, p. 55). In the regional

framework cooperation with Visegrad Four Countries and the Three Seas Initiative provides an additional framework for the formulation and coordination of foreign policy goals and measures and contributes to the desired “restoration” of the Central European national identity of Croatia, due to the past historical and cultural bonds (Knezović and Klepo, 2017, p. 15). However, the 2017 NSS mentions national or Croatian identity much more than the previous one.

*Measures and capabilities:
Helping Ukraine, replacing Russia, being Western*

Croatia is aiding Ukraine with various kinds of political, humanitarian, technical, financial, and military means. Its position regarding capabilities may likely be influenced by the recent Russian re-armament of Serbia, but it is also “a policy of choice and compliance with the goals of NATO, and not of the utmost need for defense” (Kurecic 2017, p. 74). Croatia adopted all restrictive measures and resolutions that called for the Russian withdrawal and responsibility regarding the war crimes that were agreed upon in the framework of the EU and NATO. At the beginning of the crisis, in 2014, the EU prepared a three-phased approach to the new situation. The first phase involved a termination of the treaty on the new visa regime with Russia. The second phase consisted of the prohibition of travel to the EU and freezing of assets of those involved in the destabilization in Eastern Ukraine, and the third, which was later agreed and implemented, especially in 2022, involved various economic and financial restrictive measures. As Kostić’s model of exclusiveness suggested (2021), the enlargement of the EU and NATO to the East involved the gradual replacement of all Russian strongholds – the dependency on Russian energy sources and military assets and capabilities.

Regarding restrictive measures, Croatia immediately forbade entry into the country for persons from Crimea and the Russian Federation, froze their assets, took measures against disinformation, and adopted measures that limited cooperation and trade with Russia, access of Russian financial institutions to the EU capital market, arms trade with Russia and export of dual-use items for the military purposes.

Croatia is one of the NATO countries that provided medical treatment and rehabilitation to the wounded Ukrainian soldiers and already in November 2014 eight of them were in Croatia (MVEP, 2014g). Croatian volunteers also participated in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, especially the regiment “Azov” (Demeshchuk, 2019, p. 36). At first, in November 2014,

Croatia, together with other EU countries, abstained from voting for the Russia-sponsored resolution to the UN dubbed Combating Glorification of Nazism, Neo-Nazism and Other Practices that Contribute to Fueling Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, but later on the EU countries has voted against this resolution initiated by Russia and its partners countries every year.

After the Russian invasion in 2022, the Croatian government expressed its position in five points: 1. the strongest condemnation of unprovoked Russian aggression, 2. call on Russia to immediately stop the military attack, 3. full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, 4. supporting the EU package of sanctions, and 5. readiness to provide humanitarian and technical assistance to Ukraine and the possibility of accepting Ukrainian refugees (MVEP, 2022). Croatian harbors Rijeka and Split served for the transit of Ukrainian grain. Overall Croatian assistance to Ukraine by 2023 was 225.34 million of euros and 25.000 Ukrainians received a status of refuge in Croatia (MVEP, 2023a). Croatia also donated one million euros to UNICEF for the urgent restoration of Ukrainian energy infrastructure for schools and hospitals. In October 2023, Croatia organized an International Conference on Humanitarian Demining (MVEP, 2023b). Croatia also helped Ukraine with 500.000 euros through NATO's Comprehensive Aid Package for Ukraine (Vijesti 2023). In 2022, the Croatian Parliament also adopted a resolution on condemnation of Russian aggression and support for Ukraine. In June 2023, the Government of Croatia recognized *Holodomor*, a great hunger in Ukraine caused by the communist government in 1932 and 1933, as genocide over the MVEPUkrainian people and the Croatian Parliament adopted a declaration on the recognition (HRT, 2023). The Croatian Government wanted to join those EU member states that would provide on-site training for Ukrainian soldiers, but President Milanović vetoed such a proposal (Raos, 2023, p. 6).

In the field of energy, Croatia is diversifying sources and has built an LNG terminal on Krk that was officially opened in February 2021. Regarding military means, the difference between Croatian President Milanović and the Plenković Government also appeared. While Milanović objected to sending military aid to Ukraine, the Government still decided to send military help. However, Croatia is following suit in this matter of other Eastern European Countries by providing Ukraine with old Soviet-era weapons and equipment, such as 14 used Mi 8/17 transport helicopters and around 15 130 mm towed field gun M-46 (Balkanska bezbednosna mreža, 2024, p. 6).

These donations to Ukraine, are immediately followed by the purchase of new Western weapons and capabilities. However, even before the Ukrainian crisis Croatia, as part of NATO and EU, Croatia had to strengthen its interoperability with allies and reach 2% of GDP for defense, of which at least 20% for the new weapons and equipment, which are the conditions that Croatia has fulfilled (MVEP 2022). Donated helicopters Mi8/17, and those that remained in the Croatian Army will be replaced by the new US UH-60M Black Hawks. One of the biggest changes in capabilities came with the replacement of Croatian MiGs with 12 French Rafales in the period 2022-2025. The purchase of Rafales was a complicated decision since the discrepancy between the government and a president appeared again – while Milanović opted for the US fighters, Plenković supported the acquisition of Rafales. Before this, Croatia was unable to finish procurement of F-16 from Israel, since Israel did not get approval to sell them. Croatia also purchased Bradleys and additional Patria armored vehicles and set to receive new Howitzers and anti-armored systems (Ferenčić 2023). Croatia also acquired 89 infantry fighting vehicles Bradley from the US (Balkan Defence Monitor, 2024, p. 32).

Croatian aim is also to strengthen the Navy and construct multi-purpose offshore ships, and those that might go into the Mediterranean. Milanović insisted on the procurement of new anti-air and missile defense systems. Croatia also considered the idea of returning the compulsory military service, which is an idea again supported by Croatian Prime Minister Plenković, but not President Milanović (Predsjednik 2024). Regarding some emerging and disruptive technologies, the Croatian Ministry of Defence promoted the Israeli Orbiter 3B system in 2019 as a system that will significantly improve data-collecting and reconnaissance capacities while the Israeli Elbit Skylark 1 system has been used by the Croatian armed forces for several years by now (Jevtić and Kostić Šulejić, 2023, p. 225). Croatia also started its space program and is developing the first Croatian satellite Perun (Jevtić and Kostić Šulejić, 2023, p. 228).

Serbian narratives, measures and capabilities

Serbian foreign policy in the last decade is determined by the following issues: negotiations with the temporary authorities in Pristina regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija, with the mediation of the European Union, and the effort to preserve the southern Serbian province within the constitutional order of Serbia; efforts to maintain the continuation of the

process of European integration despite the contradictory provisions of chapter 35, i.e. the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the agreements reached within the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as an effort to increase the potential of national power, primarily economic and military, thereby creating more favorable conditions for the positive outcome of the primary national interests. The outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 only further complicated, and in many ways made more difficult, the realization of Serbia's vital national interests, and the beginning of the Russian military intervention in 2022 further compromised the position of Serbia in international relations, especially its defense policy of military neutrality.

*Narrative - Effort to Present Serbia as an Independent,
Principal and Predictable State*

While Croatia extensively used Russian aggression in Ukraine to highlight its war experience and the Serbian guilt, as Croatian officials perceived it, Serbia tried to use the situation to highlight the Serbian experience of Kosovo secession, NATO aggression, and a need for equal and universal respect of international law (Dačić, 2015). When the Ukrainian ambassador at that time Oleg Aleksandrovič called Serbia to condemn Russia, Vučić stated to the press asking Ukrainian president Volodimir Zelensky to condemn the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 (Danas, 2022). From the beginning of the invasion, Serbia called for a peaceful solution to the conflict based on the respect of international law and not recognizing referendums on Crimea or in Donbas, thus recognizing the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Besides considering both states and nations of Ukraine and Russia as "brotherly", Serbian policy toward the war in Ukraine is more shaped by its policy of military neutrality than the EU integration. This neutrality allowed Serbia to express more freedom in its foreign policy, and the opportunity to continue cooperation with all "four pillars" of its foreign policy – Beijing, Brussels, Washington and Moscow. However, the pressures exist from all sides. As in the case of Croatia, the Serbian position is not only shaped by the issue of Kosovo but the position of Serbian people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska.

In 2015, Serbia presided over the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Its presidency was preceded by Switzerland and handed over to Germany. Therefore, at the crucial time of the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine, Serbia, together with these undisputed diplomatically powerful states with significant international influence, contributed to the

efforts to ensure the conditions for the implementation of crisis management and initiate diplomatic procedures to reach an agreement on the size fire (OEBS, 2024).

At the same time, Serbia did not join the sanctions that were introduced to Russia at the time and came under the attack of Western media and diplomacy. As a rule, the international public and diplomatic representatives of the West considered that decision to confirm the thesis that Serbs are “little Russians in the Balkans”. This was especially used by the Croats, as already described, but also by the representatives of the Albanians from Kosovo and Metohija, who based their entire foreign policy on this premise, as well as their attitude towards Serbia in the negotiation process.

At the beginning of 2015, Prime Minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić emphasized at the Munich Security Conference, regarding the crisis in Ukraine, that people’s lives are the most important. “Now the most important thing is that the conflicts stop and that our Russian and Ukrainian friends don’t die anymore and he repeated that Serbia is on the way to the EU, that it doesn’t balance between Russia and the European Union, but that it has its own way” (Vučić, 2015b). These theses contain Serbia’s essential approach to the crisis in Ukraine, on which Serbia’s narrative regarding this issue is based. Without intending to deal in more detail with the value parameters of such positions, it is necessary to emphasize that from 2015 until today, Serbia stands in the same position regarding the problems in Ukraine. Furthermore, the same can be said about the challenges of Serbia’s imposing sanctions on Russia, although there is a lot of pressure from Brussels and other power centers. These characteristics, by themselves, do not have to mean anything in the value sense of strategic gains or losses, but they certainly indicate the existence of long-term decisions and independent Serbia’s foreign policy.

The Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2022 only increased Serbia’s challenges in terms of foreign policy positioning. Since the entire European Union decided on military intervention and the expansion of economic sanctions against Russia, Serbia had to wait a few days to take a position on this issue. After the session of the National Security Council of Serbia held on February 27, 2022, it was decided to once again repeat the full and principled support for respecting the principles of the territorial integrity of Ukraine and to consider the violation of the territorial integrity of any country, including Ukraine, as wrong. At the same time, referring to recent national experiences with international economic sanctions, the decision was repeated not to impose sanctions on any country, not even its

representatives or economic entities (Закључак СНБ, 2022; Благојевић, 2019, pp. 171-176).

Several political parties in Serbia did call for the immediate introduction of sanctions against Russia, and in that aspect, greater division appeared in the Serbian political spectrum than in Croatian, but without the potential to significantly disrupt the leadership of the ruling SNS party (Spasojević 2023, pp. 272, 275).

*Measures and Capabilities: No-Sanctions Policy,
Military Neutrality, Deterrence*

At the Ukraine-Southeast Europe Summit in Tirana, held on 28 February 2024, President Aleksandar Vučić reiterated that he will stick to the principles and principles adopted by the National Security Council of Serbia two years ago. At the same time, Serbia advocated that sanctions against Russia and its malignant influence should not be mentioned in the agreed Declaration (Вучић, 2024). Although the negative consequences of the policy of not imposing sanctions on Russia in terms of the negotiation process for joining the European Union, as well as the position of Serbia in the negotiation process with Pristina, seem to be clear, it looks as if it's still too early to assess the final consequences of such a decision.

Although Serbia is the only WB country that did not support all the EU declarations regarding Ukraine, Serbia did support UN General Assembly resolutions regarding the support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, withdrawal of Russian troops from the Ukrainian territory and recognition of the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas and Crimea, illegality of referendums in four areas and withdrawal of recognition, suspension of Russia from the UN Council for Human Rights and principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine. Serbia, however, did not support the resolution about the reparations to Ukraine in November 2022. Overall, because of the Ukrainian crisis Serbian alignment with the EU foreign and security policy dropped from 64% in 2021 to 45% in 2022, but because of the lesser amount of the new restrictive measures packages against Russia Serbia increased the score of its alignment to 54 percent in 2023 (Novaković and Plavšić, 2024, p. 2). Other WB countries, and especially important BH, aligned with the EU CFSP in full. In the Council of Europe, Serbia was absent from voting on resolutions regarding Ukraine and the expulsion of Russia from this organization (Council of Europe, 2024).

Since the beginning of the military intervention, Serbia has “provided all kinds of humanitarian aid to the vulnerable population of Ukraine, remaining committed to peace and consistent respect for international law,” said Ambassador of Serbia to the United Nations, Nemanja Stevanović. Serbia accepted as many people from Ukraine as needed and for two years of war provided direct financial aid of three million euros for the children of Ukraine and another 1.5 million euros for the internally displaced. At the same time, Serbia sent 14 humanitarian aid trucks for the Ukrainian people and donated two medical vehicles, as well as electrical and energy equipment (Brnabić, 2024). This, especially for a militarily neutral country, is a more than sufficient indicator of support for Ukraine, which, often carried away by the unambiguous diplomatic, economic, military, and media support of the administration in Washington, considered that this attitude of Serbia is more hostile than friendly (Blagojević, 2019, p. 1152). The statement of Ukrainian officials after the Summit in Tirana that Serbia is difficult for her to understand, but that she is not her enemy, but her partner, can be taken as proof of this claim.

In late February 2022, the Serbian Government decided to abort all activities related to planning, preparing, and conducting the exercises with foreign partners. However, in 2023, Serbia held a military exercise that was co-organized by the US European Command and Serbian Armed Forces called “the Platinum Wolf 2023” (Balkan Defence Monitor, 2023, p. 38).

The main point of view of the theoreticians is to classify neutral European states as “small states” which are often treated in the literature as “weak” or “vulnerable” in material and geo-political terms (Agius, Devine, 2019, pp. 266-267; Beyer, Hofmann, 2019, pp. 287-288). However, neutrality is contrary to the usual policy implemented by small states, as they are expected to increase security by entering into military alliances with other countries (Blagojevic, 2016, p. 241). Conversely, neutrality represents a policy in which a relatively small country chooses to rely more or less exclusively on internal/national resources and strengths rather than strong allies (Edström, Gyllensporre and Westberg, 2019, pp. 180-198; Blagojevic, 2019, pp. 280-281).

In these positions, one can find answers to questions related to the position of Serbia regarding the conflict in Ukraine, but also to the measures it takes to deter potential aggressors. We live in a time of increasing security challenges in Europe, and Serbia has decided to be militarily neutral. This inevitably leads to a strategic commitment to organize national defense independently, using the concept of total (comprehensive) defense.

Furthermore, military neutrality necessarily leads to the necessity of relying on national resources in terms of providing modern weapons and military equipment to the greatest extent possible. This in no way means that one should give up the acquisition of modern foreign weapons and equipment if there are opportunities for that or there is a lack of potential to produce it within the national framework (Благојевић, 2022, pp. 140-142).

This is especially the case with the armament of the Air Force and Air Defense. In the past decade, Serbia has bought a lot of weapons and equipment for this type of military force, while taking into account the equal representation of Western and Eastern technology, following the policy of military neutrality, which implies a certain type of balance in relations with other subjects of international relations. The fleet of the Air Force was updated and modernized with airplanes, MIG-29, and modernized Eagles, while the helicopter fleet was strengthened with Russian Mi-8, Mi-17, and Mi-35, as well as Airbus H-145. Anti-aircraft defense has been significantly strengthened by the acquisition of the Pancir S-1 system and the domestic Pasars, as well as the acquisition of the FK-3 air defense system, which is the Chinese improved version of the Russian S-300 system.

Experiences from the wars in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine indicate the increased importance of unmanned aerial vehicles in modern warfare. Three years ago, Serbia acquired armed and reconnaissance drones (CH-95, CH-92, and others) from China, Israel (Orbiter), and Germany (Orbiter) and in the meantime developed a range of domestic weapons of this type. The unmanned aerial vehicle "Pegaz" has already been included in the armament of the Serbian Armed Forces, and the introduction of the reconnaissance aircraft "Vrabac" is planned. It is announced that the Serbian defense industry will produce 5,000 "suicide drones" of the "Komarac" type by the end of 2024 (Vučić, 2024).

With the armaments and military equipment of the Army, the relationship between domestic and foreign production is much different, in favor of the domestic defense industry. Here we must emphasize that Serbia is traditionally a significant producer of personal infantry weapons and ammunition, as well as artillery tools and ammunition. These are the reasons why Ukrainian President Zelenskiy was interested in attending the Ukraine – Southeast Europe Summit in Tirana, of course, in addition to political support, because his army is in dire need of artillery ammunition. In this regard, too, Serbia adhered to the principles of neutrality and refraining from any involvement in armed conflicts. Although it was occasionally accused of selling artillery ammunition to Ukraine, Serbia responded to each

accusation by inspecting the end-user certificate, which eliminated the negative political consequences. In terms of infantry fighting vehicles and the transport of military personnel, Serbia received from Russia infantry fighting vehicles for arming one battalion, while most of the armored personnel carriers inherited from the Yugoslav People's Army were modernized in Serbian factories, with the production of new ones, such as Miloš and Lazar.

In addition to modern weapons and equipment, for successful deterrence, it is necessary to have trained and motivated personnel. Since Serbia suspended mandatory military service in 2010, a serious problem of filling the reserve force appeared. That is why, on the initiative of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, a procedure was initiated for the return of mandatory military service (Vučić, 2024). The Ukrainian crisis and the armed conflict contributed to the renewal of discussion about the return of mandatory military service in Serbia, as well as in Croatia.

Conclusion

This paper explored the changes that have occurred in the foreign, security, and defense policies and capabilities of Croatia and Serbia, as the two most important states for the Western Balkans stability in the context of the ten-year Ukrainian crisis and changing international relations and order toward the more conflictual one. These changes were significantly expressed at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, with Crimea joining the Russian Federation, strengthened in 2022 with the Russian military intervention, and still ongoing with the greater polarization between the EU and NATO on the one side, Russia on the other, and with the significant role of rising powers like China and India on the third.

The Ukrainian crisis reflected the same trends in the Western Balkans as well. It showed a great discrepancy between the NATO members on the one and military-neutral countries and entities on the other side. Analyses of the Croatian narratives showed that the Ukrainian crisis was considered to be contrary to international law and Croatia constantly called for the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Ukrainian territory. It also used the parallels with its own war experience which further deepened the gap of understanding with Serbia. It might even trigger the Russian thinking of military intervention by constantly calling for the implementation of Croatian experience in the reintegration of the former Serbian-populated regions. The Ukrainian crisis has also strengthened the development of

Croatian national identity as part of wider Central European and Mediterranean identity. Regarding measures, Croatia adopted all restrictive measures brought by the EU and NATO, as well as its internal documents that condemned Russian intervention and created a greater solidarity with Ukraine. Croatian military capabilities were also strengthened, which proved the existing trend of the replacement of Soviet-era weapons and equipment with new Western ones, primarily from the US and France.

In Serbia, the Ukrainian crisis was a new opportunity to highlight the importance of principled foreign policy, the need for respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states and condemnation of military interventions such as the NATO intervention in 1999. It caused a further lack of harmonization with the EU Foreign and Security Policy and distanced Serbia even more from its neighbors. It also contributed to the strengthening of the position of military neutrality in contrast to NATO membership of all other countries in the region. Serbia did not impose sanctions on Russia, nor did it recognize the referendums held in the Donbas region and their incorporation into the Russian Federation. Serbia also adopted all the UN resolutions that called for the Russian withdrawal from this region and is sending humanitarian help to Ukraine. In the “vicious circle” of the arms race with Croatia, Serbia is strengthening its defense capabilities by procuring new weapons and systems from both China and the West, primarily the US and France. It is also strengthening its military industry and capabilities.

In the end, the continuation of the conflict in Ukraine brings more potential for new crises in the Balkans. Countries’ narratives, measures, and capabilities in the region further distance Serbia from Croatia and the EU, and improvements in defense capabilities, conducted on various grounds and with opposing actors trigger the arms race, thus complicating the mutual relations of the Western Balkan countries and slowing down the prospects for European integration instead of fostering them on geopolitical grounds.

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THE PRESPA AGREEMENT: MACEDONIAN DIPLOMATIC GAMBIT OR GEOPOLITICAL GAME CHANGER

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Abstract: The analysis, conducted over five years following the signing of the Prespa Agreement, aims to comprehensively evaluate its impact on the resolution of the longstanding name dispute between Macedonia and Greece and to forecast its implications amidst evolving geopolitical trends. By using a critical geopolitical lens and discourse analysis, the study will examine whether Macedonia made a wise diplomatic move by signing the agreement or whether it was a strategic tool to help the government achieve its aims of joining NATO and the EU. Concurrently, it will scrutinize the agreement's transformative role in reshaping the Western Balkans' geopolitical landscape and its consequential influence on wider regional dynamics. This perspective will illuminate potential cascading effects, encompassing the sway of other regional influences and power shifts. It is discernible that, despite being a significant milestone towards Euro-Atlantic integration, the Prespa Agreement's success remains partial. Despite Macedonia's accession to NATO in 2020, the agreement did not facilitate, let alone ensure, a seamless path towards EU membership. Moreover, as an example of an asymmetric agreement, Bulgaria has exploited the Prespa Agreement, using the situation to impose conditions and introduce new "unresolved" issues that challenge the Macedonian people's identity, language, and historical narrative. With this development, the Prespa Agreement has temporarily or finally lost its potential for Macedonia to move towards the EU. Macedonia's prolonged integration process may encounter fresh and formidable challenges in a turbulent and uncertain multipolar geopolitical world.

Keywords: Prespa Agreement, critical geopolitics, Macedonia, NATO, EU.

Introduction

The signing and validation of the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018, and February 12, 2019, respectively, marked a watershed moment in the historical relationship between the Republic of Macedonia (now the Republic of North Macedonia) and Greece. This internationally recognised agreement effectively ended decades of discord surrounding the use of the name “Macedonia,” which had strained diplomatic ties between the two countries. By entering into force, the Prespa Agreement rendered the Interim Accord of 1995 obsolete. This Interim Accord served as a temporary measure to manage relations between the two countries amidst the unresolved naming dispute. However, the Prespa Agreement’s implementation signified a definitive resolution to the longstanding issue, clearing the path for a new era of cooperation and mutual understanding between North Macedonia and Greece.

The formal title of the agreement, “Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as described in the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the Termination of the Interim Accord of 1995, and the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between the Parties”, underscores its comprehensive scope and ambition (Janev, 2021). This designation highlights the agreement’s aim to address the issues outlined in United Nations Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), which had significant implications for the relationship between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece. By referencing UNSC Resolution 817 (1993), the agreement acknowledges and builds upon the legal framework established by the United Nations, emphasising its commitment to international law and diplomatic norms. This recognition underscores the agreement’s legitimacy and adherence to established principles of conflict resolution within the global community. In addition, the Interim Accord of 1995’s termination marks a significant advancement in settling the parties’ long-standing disagreements and a step towards a more stable and cooperative relationship. Furthermore, the formation of a strategic partnership highlights the agreement’s more general goals of promoting confidence, collaboration, and interests between Greece and North Macedonia.

The paper aims to hint at the multifaceted nature of the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece. It suggests that the agreement could be seen through two different lenses. Using chess terminology, it will be analysed whether the Macedonian diplomatic gambit of sacrificing the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia represents a strategic and diplomatic manoeuvre that should provide the country with

a secure and prosperous future. From the perspective of the Macedonian diplomatic gambit, the resolution of the long-standing name dispute with Greece should have enabled smooth membership in NATO and the EU. This point of view ought to highlight and defend Macedonian diplomacy's commitment and involvement in achieving the deal. Even though the Republic of Macedonia declared its independence on September 8, 1991, and the Prespa Agreement was signed on June 17, 2018, about 27 years had elapsed. However, thanks to diplomatic ploys, about 140 UN members were able to recognise the country's constitutional name in bilateral relations.

Furthermore, the paper will try to analyse the period after the signing of the Prespa Agreement over five years. In doing so, the agreement will be viewed as a geopolitical game changer. That means that the Prespa Agreement has significant implications that go beyond the immediate resolution of the name dispute. That is, the agreement definitely changed the geopolitical landscape of the Balkans and potentially affected the wider regional geopolitical dynamics. This perspective may emphasise that the solution to this dispute may have ripple effects and affect other regional conflicts and power dynamics, but it also continues to represent an obstacle for Macedonia in its efforts to achieve its national strategic goals. In essence, the analysis in the paper covers the duality of the impact of the Prespa Agreement: one that acknowledges and verifies the (un)success of North Macedonia's diplomatic strategy in achieving the agreement, and another that emphasises the wider geopolitical implications that influenced the signing of the agreement. The paper presents the agreement as a key event that can be interpreted in different ways based on its immediate diplomatic implications and its potential to reshape the geopolitical dynamics of the Balkans.

Adding qualitative methods to the critical geopolitics approach, which is based on structural geopolitical analytical tools, will be the main way to figure out how the Prespa Agreement affected things as a diplomatic move by Macedonia or a major geopolitical game changer. By employing qualitative methods such as content analysis and discourse analysis, we will be able to delve into the intricate nuances of diplomatic manoeuvring and its broader geopolitical implications. Through the examination of speeches, official papers, and media coverage, we are able to discern the narratives, symbols, and rhetorical devices that are employed to portray the agreement as a diplomatic triumph or setback on a national and international level. This requires a comprehensive examination of the historical backdrop surrounding the name issue, the unsuccessful endeavors to reconcile it, and the geopolitical environment before the Prespa Agreement's execution.

More precisely, according to O' Tuathail (1999), for heuristic reasons, critical geopolitics is divided into formal, practical, popular, and structural. Structural geopolitics, or the method of analysis within critical geopolitics, involves the study of structural processes and tendencies that condition how states practice foreign policy. Hence, through the analytical framework of structural geopolitics as part of critical geopolitics, we will try to analyse the Prespa Agreement. Without intending to elaborate on it in detail, the main aim is to understand the geographical context. The analysis is based on the position of Macedonia in the Western Balkans and its geopolitical and geostrategic relations with other regional powers, as well as the impact of the geopolitical significance of the agreement. Furthermore, regional security will be reviewed with the resolution of the name dispute and the contribution of the Prespa Agreement to the stability of the Western Balkans. The structural geopolitical analysis takes into account the influence of the Prespa Agreement in balancing relations with neighbouring states. The integrations and integration processes that the agreement accelerated have had great geopolitical importance. Structural factors such as the geopolitical interests of other NATO and EU member states can have an impact on the process of negotiation and implementation of the Prespa Agreement. And as the last part, within the framework of the structural geopolitical analytical approach, the impact of the agreement on bilateral relations between Greece and Macedonia, as well as their relations with other countries in the region and beyond, should be considered.

Historical Context: The Origins of the Name Dispute and its Impact on Relations between Macedonia and Greece

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which ceased to exist in 1992, gained international recognition for its republics. The cause of its disintegration and the root causes of violence remain debated. The 1990s wars sparked heated scholarly debates, often linked to rival policies. Despite the disintegration, new histories and studies continue to emerge, highlighting the ongoing interest in the subject and the relevance of the debates it sparked (Dragovic-Soso, 2008).

As a prelude to what was written above, the collapse of the bipolar world order that was marked by the fall of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, symbolically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall, started the geopolitical transition period. Many authors, such as Krauthammer (1990), Freedman (1991), Carpenter (1991), Nye (1992), Tuathail (1994), and Luke (1994), argued

and defined that transition period as a transition from a bipolar to a unipolar world order with a single world power, the United States. However, this unipolar moment, according to Kenneth N. Waltz and Christopher Layne, paves the way for a faster transition to a multipolar order because it will stimulate the growth of new powerful states and regions (Layne, 2006). But what is interesting about this analysis is that the unipolar moment inevitably caused the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which was trying to create balance between the West and the East and stimulate a movement of non-aligned countries. The breakup was inevitable and, unfortunately, had a bloody ending.

The Republic of Macedonia was one of the ex-Yugoslavia federal republics that gained independence on September 8, 1991, without bloody conflict on its territory. With an overwhelming majority, more than 95 percent of the citizens who went to the referendum on September 8, 1991, answered positively to the referendum question: *“Are you in favour of an independent Macedonia with the right to enter a future union of sovereign states of Yugoslavia?”* The referendum was preceded by a Declaration of Independence that the first multi-party Macedonian Parliament adopted on January 25, 1991. Formally, the will of the people for an independent state was confirmed by the Declaration of Acceptance of the Referendum Results on September 18, 1991, in the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia. The next important step in strengthening the state was the adoption of the new Constitution on November 17, 1991. The international legal subjectivity of the state was definitively confirmed on April 8, 1993, when, by acclamation in the General Assembly of the United Nations, Macedonia was accepted as the 181st full member of the World Organisation (Veljanoski, 2017).

The Macedonian Constitution of November 17, 1991, is the embodiment of the historical cultural, spiritual, and state heritage of the Macedonian people and their centuries-old struggle for national and social freedom and the creation of their state. The foundations of the state derive from the state-legal traditions of the Republic of Krushevo, the historical decisions of ASNOM, and the constitutional-legal continuity of the Macedonian state as a sovereign republic in Federated Yugoslavia, as well as from the free will of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia in the referendum of September 8, 1991. The concept of the state is determined as a national state of the Macedonian people in which full civil equality and permanent coexistence of the Macedonian people with the Albanians, Turks, Vlachs, Roma, and other nationalities living in the Republic of Macedonia are ensured (Службен весник на РМ, 2011). On the other side, Greece reluctantly

accepted the independence of the Republic of Macedonia. Greece asserted that the term “Macedonia” alluded to the historical Kingdom of Macedon and that adopting it as part of the name of a neighbouring country would hijack a crucial aspect of culture and legacy unique to “Greek”. Additionally, it argued that the name Macedonia suggested territorial claims to a province of the same name in the northern part of Greece (Macedonia’s Dispute With Greece | ESI, n.d.). This region, referred to as Aegean Macedonia in Macedonian historiography, belonged to Greece due to the partition of ethno-geographic Macedonia that existed under the Ottoman Empire.

Due to the consequences of the Balkan Wars, ethno-geographical Macedonia was partitioned following the Ottomans’ withdrawal. With these starting positions, the Macedonian state began to seek wider international recognition. The European Community’s Council of Ministers determined on December 16, 1991, the terms under which the EC would acknowledge the former Yugoslav republics that had proclaimed their independence. The European Community (EC) required these republics to guarantee that they had no territorial claims against any neighbouring EC state and to commit to protecting the human rights of the ethnic minorities living in the frame of their state territory. Additionally, they would not engage in hostile acts against any such state, including the use of a name that implied territorial claims. This requirement, which was added at Greece’s request, obviously only pertained to Macedonia because it was the only former Yugoslav country that bordered an EU member state (EC: Declaration on Yugoslavia and on the Guidelines on the Recognition of the New States, 1992). An EC Arbitration Commission concluded that only Slovenia and Macedonia met the requirements for recognition after the Macedonian government offered additional constitutional guarantees that it would uphold the integrity of all international borders and refrain from meddling in the domestic affairs of other states. Furthermore, it made it clear that using the name “Macedonia” did not mean making territorial claims against a neighbouring state (Turk, D., 1993: 80). Nevertheless, the EC declared on January 15, 1992, that it would recognise Slovenia and Croatia but not Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia was granted recognition by the European Community in May 1992, but only after taking a name that satisfied all sides. It declared a month later that it was prepared to acknowledge the Republic “under a name that does not include the term Macedonia”. It was evident that the EC supported Greek claims to prevent the new state on their northern border from being recognised (Danforth, 1993).

However, various names were suggested to resolve the issue, including the names of ancient regions to the north of Macedonia, Dardania and Paeonia, South Slavia, the Vardar Republic, the Central Balkan Republic, and the Republic of Skopje, all of which were approved by Greece. Northern Macedonia, New Macedonia, and the Slavic Republic of Macedonia were other compromise proposals that Greece rejected. Greece even proposed at one time that the Republic take on two names: an unofficial name for internal consumption that could contain the word “Macedonia” and an official one for external use that could not. Despite this, the Republic of Macedonia itself rejected each of these options, insisting that it would only accept recognition as the Republic of Macedonia in accordance with its constitution.

When the Republic of Macedonia petitioned to join the UN in December 1992, the conflict moved from the capitals of the member nations of the European Community to New York City. When a plan was put forth that called for the Republic of Macedonia to be admitted to the UN under the temporary or provisional name “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,” with a permanent name to be determined later through a mediation process, the governments of both Greece and Macedonia were willing to make concessions. Ultimately, on April 7, 1993, the Security Council decided to accept “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” into the United Nations by a unanimous vote (Danforth, 1993).

Failed Attempts at Resolution before the Prespa Agreement

In a situation of strong geopolitical disturbance of the Western Balkans, after the dissolution of SFRY and attempts by the US and Western allies to strengthen NATO position and start with the EU enlargement process, strong national mobilization in Greece against the name of the new neighbouring country on the northern border occurred. Both governments have had a very difficult position in the further process of negotiation on the so-called name dispute. The position was diametrically opposite. Maybe, in that situation, President Gligorov from the Macedonian side and Prime Minister Mitsotakis from the Greek side were brighter points in guiding regional geopolitics in the Western Balkans. This argument stems from the previous rich political experience of both politicians. Apparently, those did not stop nationalism on both sides. It was more expressed from the Greek side and culminated with major protests in Thessaloniki in 1992. On February 12, 1992, a massive protest gathered one million people in Thessaloniki, declaring that “Macedonia is Greek” (Ioannou, 2018).

In 1994, Greece broke diplomatic ties with Macedonia and placed a trade embargo on the country. Greece's actions delayed international recognition of the newly established Macedonian state despite criticism from the UN and the majority of EC/EU member states. Greece and Macedonia eventually reached an interim accord in 1995, expressing respect for each other's territorial integrity as a result of diplomatic intervention by the United States. Macedonia pledged to alter its flag and remove any language from the constitution that would be construed as a breach of Greek territorial integrity in exchange for Greece's recognition of the Macedonian state. But because the dispute over the name "Macedonia" could not be settled, Macedonia adopted the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to gain international recognition (FYROM). As the mediator in the 1994 name dispute settlement, Matthew Nimitz's recommendations and directives focused on resolving the country's name in a way that would be acceptable for diplomatic reasons and would not infringe upon the identity of Macedonians. As a diplomat who began working for the Clinton administration in 1990, he spent 24 years concentrating on "one word": Macedonia (*The Man Who Has Focused on One Word for 23 Years*, 2017).

Among the permanent efforts to resolve the name dispute, we apostrophized the situation in 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest. A summit was held in April 2008 to consider the aspirations of three Balkan countries, Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia, to become NATO members. It was clear that there was strong support from the US administration and President George W. Bush. In the statements he gave in front of the Summit, Bush clearly stated that all US-Adriatic Charter participants have to be new NATO members. On May 2, 2003, the ministers of foreign affairs signed the US-Adriatic Charter in Tirana (Grdešić, 2004). As part of the first developments at the Summit, Bush stated, "NATO will decide whether to invite three Balkan nations—Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia—to join the Atlantic Alliance". The United States strongly supports inviting these nations to join NATO. These countries have walked the difficult path of reform and built thriving, free societies. "They are already making important contributions to NATO missions, and their citizens deserve the security NATO membership brings" (NATO Summit 2008, 2008).

As a result of the unresolved dispute, in 2008, Greece blocked Macedonia's NATO membership. It has also blocked the start of Macedonia's EU accession talks, despite several positive annual reports from the European Commission on the country's progress. Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis said on March 3, 2008, that progress has been slow on this issue.

“No solution, no invitation”, he said. The Macedonian position was that they should have the right to name their own country, that they had amended the Macedonian Constitution to renounce all territorial claims on Greece or any neighbouring country, and that they had changed the country’s flag (NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates, 2009). The Macedonian side used this turn of events to accuse Greece of breaking the Interim Accord from 1995, specifically Article 11, and to file complaints against the neighbour with the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Apart from the failed efforts to resolve the name dispute, from a geopolitical point of view, that period is quite dynamic, due to the progress of the independence of Kosovo¹ and the paving of the way to expand NATO to the east, that is, with Ukraine and Georgia. As Fridman (2008) argues, on August 8, 2008, the Russian invasion of Georgia did not change the balance of power in Eurasia but simply announced that the balance of power had already shifted. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a possible confrontation with Iran and a destabilising circumstance in Pakistan, have consumed the United States. It is unable to intervene on the Russian perimeter and does not have any strategic ground forces in reserve. These key developments have given the Russians a chance to reclaim their dominance in the former Soviet arena. The invasion did not tip the scales of power because Moscow was not concerned about how the United States or Europe might respond. It was up to the Russians to decide when to announce the shift in the balance of power.

The third phase of expansion began with the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, marking the geopolitical developments at the end of the Cold War. Poland and Hungary in 1999 and seven other nations (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania) in 2004 were the first two phases. Furthermore, it appears that in 2008, the NATO Alliance recognised the geopolitical interests of the United States with the entrance of Croatia and Albania. Specifically, in relation to the veto for Macedonia, the US administration demonstrated its continued alignment with the geopolitical redefinition of the former Yugoslav regions by proposing and inking a strategic alliance with the Republic of Macedonia. Hence, the Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation between the United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia was signed on May 8 in Washington, D.C. Based on shared values, aspirations, and interests, the United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia are committed to strengthening and broadening their close alliance. The two nations want to

strengthen their strategic partnership by working together more closely on security, people-to-people contacts, and trade (*Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia*, n.d.).

After such events, with a pronounced geopolitical connotation, the name dispute becomes a secondary issue. Following the mediator Matthew Nimitz's fruitless attempts to resolve the issue over the name, the Macedonian government (headed by VMRO-DPMNE) initiated the "Skopje 2014" project to renovate the country's capital and began the so-called "antiquization" process widely presented in 2010. The goals were to increase public awareness and potentially capitalise on the fact that more than 60% of UN members – including the US, China, and Russia – recognised the state's constitutional name before the NATO Summit in Bucharest. In light of the circumstances surrounding the Prespa Agreement's signing in 2018, Boyko Borisov, the prime minister of Bulgaria, made a comment that warrants consideration. Specifically, in 2012, he appeared to reveal the geopolitical dynamics in the region even after Macedonia and Greece's disagreement was resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Given that Macedonia is a northern region, any solution that included a geographic designation would be unacceptable to Bulgaria. The prime minister of Bulgaria argued that calling something "Northern Macedonia" is inappropriate since it encompasses Bulgarian territory as well, which will lead to opportunities and motivations for territorial claims (Bulgaria Says No to Macedonia Becoming "Northern Macedonia"; Novinite.com; Sofia News Agency, n.d.). This is a good indicator of today's negative development of bilateral relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria. It is especially noteworthy to highlight the current culmination of a radical swing in relations, given that Bulgaria, on January 15, 1992, was the first nation to officially recognise the independence of the Republic of Macedonia, as defined in its inaugural constitution (Bulgaria Was the First to Recognise Independent Macedonia 30 Years Ago, 2022).

Structural Geopolitical Analysis of the Prespa Agreement: Towards (un)predictive Geopolitical Development

Before starting the analysis of the Prespa Agreement from the angle of structural geopolitics, it is useful to determine the changing nature of the political approach as well as the global and regional geopolitical dynamics. These processes have been applied and are present both before and after the signing of the agreement. In that direction, the evolution of the political

approaches of both countries to resolve the dispute is obvious. Namely, the earlier stages of the issue surrounding the disagreement over the name Macedonia unmistakably point to and describe an extraordinarily challenging negotiation process between the two nations through UN mediation. Greece has backed down from its earlier tough stance that any mention of the word Macedonia in the name of its northern neighbour would be prohibited. Firstly, the so-called twofold formula can be applied, wherein the Republic of Macedonia in the Cyrillic alphabet can be used for internal purposes; nevertheless, an acceptable solution had to be found for external use. Before the Prespa Agreement was signed, the negotiations' dynamics produced a mutually agreeable solution wherein the name Macedonia could be used. Still, the solution would be *erga omnes* or for general use.

Globally speaking, the geopolitical environment is rapidly shifting. The stances taken at the beginning of the previous century have shaped Macedonian diplomacy, which works to achieve the strategic goals of joining the EU and NATO. However, it is not a matter of having to stray from predetermined strategic objectives; it rather has to do with a lack of preparation for the shift in the global geopolitical power environment. It is critical to keep an eye on geopolitical dynamics, particularly for entities with tiny geographical areas. This makes it possible to forecast changes in the geopolitical stratum as well as one's own state's situation. In particular, a multitude of scientific analyses suggest that the geopolitical processes at play on a worldwide scale are evolving. It is evident from a close examination of Nye, Brzezinski, and Kaplan's ideas that the geopolitical shift of power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asian and Asia-Pacific areas is a multi-decade process. The works of Brzezinski (2012), Nye (2011), Kissinger (2011), Kaplan (2010), Mearsheimer (2014), and others clearly demonstrate these conclusions. The multipolar world is determined by the process of geopolitical power transfer (Mileski et al., 2023). The global event that determined the geopolitical trends before the signing of the Prespa Agreement was the arrival of Donald Trump in the White House as the 45th US President (Smith, 2023). During that period, the American administration made strong efforts to resolve the Kosovo issue and the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue. The views on the issue of the dispute with the name are continuously in the direction of support and motivation for finding an acceptable solution (Juzová, 2021).

However, one must ask what precisely transpired on the international scene prior to the Prespa Agreement being inked. The realisation that the

geopolitical landscape in the region had changed while the EU was looking inward and concentrating on its serious domestic issues — such as the crises in Greece and the eurozone, Brexit, the refugee crisis, and the rise of Euroscepticism and populist extremism in Europe — has been a major catalyst (Panagiotou, 2021).

With a focus on the symbolism of the UK's exit from the EU, Teokarević (2021) analyses how Brexit has affected relations between the UK and Western Balkan countries. He uses the concepts of linkage, leverage, and soft power to analyse trade, security, and cultural relations between the UK and the region. According to the research, relations will deteriorate after Brexit, and the UK will mainly have little interest in the Western Balkans. Furthermore, the majority opinion within the EU regarding further enlargement and low preparation for EU membership means that Brexit has not significantly changed the low chances of EU accession for the Western Balkan countries. Also, prior to the Prespa Agreement's signature, the Western Balkans were the focal point of the 2015–2016 regional migration and refugee crisis. During that time, the EU made an effort to defend its external borders against both legal and illegal migration, as well as to maintain control over the so-called Balkan route. It was natural that the Macedonian and Greek authorities would cooperate in that situation. Although certain misunderstandings were evident along the Macedonian-Greek border, the cooperation has been deemed adequate (Mileski, 2018). The growth of Euroscepticism and populist extremism in Europe is a framework that determines the EU's approach and attitude towards enlargement. Numerous authors, including Styczyńska and Meijer (2023), Larsen, Cutts, and Goodwin (2020), Treib (2021), Ehin and Talving (2021), and others, analyse their growing influence and profile the geopolitical trend in the context of debates and real needs and wishes for expansion with the countries of the Western Balkans.

Regional connection is also a noticeable trend in the region, before and after the signing of the Prespa Agreement, and it refers to the Berlin Process and the Open Balkans. The goal of the Berlin Process, which started in 2014 in response to the enlargement-related Juncker Declaration and in light of significant geopolitical problems the EU faced, was to keep the Western Balkans region of Europe moving forward with European integration. Although it was first restricted in scope and time (2014–2018), it has since expanded and taken on other facets, with no clear end in sight. Thus far, it has only engaged a small number of candidate member states (the six Western Balkan states hoping to join the EU: the so-called WB6 group

consisting of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia) (Marciacq, F., 2017). It can be noted that Greece was not interested in participating in this process. The next project after the Prespa Agreement that shapes the geopolitics and regional cooperation of the Western Balkans is called the Open Balkans. The goal was to close the large gap between expectations and realities about the Western Balkans' European destiny. Three Western Balkan nations—Serbia, N. Macedonia, and Albania—started an initiative for indigenous regional cooperation in many domains in 2019. Kulo and Novikau (2023) evaluated the partnership as having nothing groundbreaking or essentially novel in terms of concepts, goals, and actors, with an emphasis on the economic side of things. Even if it is completely implemented, its effects are expected to be minimal because it is limited to only three Western Balkan countries.

The Prespa Agreement in Geographical Context and Internal Political Dynamics

In the presence of UN mediator Matthew Nimetz, the foreign ministers of Greece (Nikos Kozijas) and the Republic of Macedonia (Nikola Dimitrov) signed the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018, in the village of Nivitsi on the shores of Lake Prespa. In general, the agreement's goals were to forge a strategic partnership between the parties and open the door for the Republic of Macedonia to join NATO and the EU. The agreement called for Macedonia to rename itself North Macedonia and change the state's official name to "Republic of North Macedonia". On the other hand, Greece agreed to recognise the Macedonian ethnonym used in the citizenship name and designate Macedonian as the official language. Furthermore, Greece promised not to obstruct its neighbour's admission to international organisations (Конечен договор за решавање на македонско-грчкиот спор за името и за стратешко партнерство, 2021).

Final negotiations began in February 2018, with the first draft of the agreement prepared by Greek Foreign Minister Kozias. Interestingly, according to Nimitz's claims, these negotiations were bilateral, with no outside pressure input except for his discreet assistance. In his paper "The Macedonian "name" dispute: the Macedonian Question – resolved?" Nimitz (2020), among other things, explained what the starting point was in addressing Macedonia to resolve the dispute. Namely, his addressing the name dispute as a "geographical" problem and issue, and not an identity issue, was denied by later events after the suppression of the Prespa Agreement, explaining that all the resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council were not aimed at

changing the identity of the Macedonian people. The focus that was given only to the geography and the geographical region of Macedonia, according to Nimitz, required the addition of a certain modifier to the name of the Republic of Macedonia for a more accurate reflection of the geographical reality. This perspective, framed within the structural geopolitical analysis of critical geopolitics, underscored the pivotal geopolitical position of Macedonia. Its proximity and interconnectedness with neighbouring regional powers elevated the geopolitical significance of the Prespa Agreement. Historiographically speaking, the geopolitical significance of Macedonia as the crossroads of the Balkans during various periods significantly influenced the development of geopolitical dynamics. Macedonia, despite its exceptional geographical location, places little and a relatively moderate amount of value on its geopolitical standing (Mileski, 2017). From a contemporary analytical standpoint, it is indisputable that the effort to resolve the name dispute before the conflict in Ukraine held significant geopolitical implications for NATO. Vankovska (2020) concurs with this line of reasoning, emphasising that Macedonia's geographical predisposition and geopolitical position produce the same outcomes, i.e., its location on the front lines of the new "Cold War," where proxy warfare is conceivable.

However, on a domestic political level, following the Prespa Agreement's assignment, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia called a referendum on July 30, 2018, intending to approve the Prespa Agreement. The fact that only 37% of voters participated in the referendum shows that former Prime Minister Zaev was unable to inspire the populace and persuade them of the advantages the shift would provide. The state institutions were forced to decide in response to the referendum's unsuccessful validation, which required them to declare the referendum to be consultative. More precisely, on the referendum question, "Are you in favour of the EU and NATO membership by accepting the Agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?", 91.46 percent, or 609,813 citizens, voted "for" and 5.65 percent, or 37,700 citizens, voted "against". Invalid ballots were 19,221 or 2.89 percent. In an official statement, the President of the State Election Commission clarified, "The decision has not been adopted because more than half of the total number of citizens registered on the Voters' List did not vote" (Veljanoski, 2018). Despite the violation of the state Constitution, that is, Article 73, which indicates that referendums on certain issues announced by Parliament are mandatory, the process of implementing the Prespa Agreement continued (Nakeva, 2022).

Following the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, the Republic of North Macedonia will have a new constitutional name according to four modifications adopted by the parliament. Along with these modifications, the legislature also passed a constitutional bill amending Amendments 33, 34, 35, and 36 to take effect when the NATO membership treaty is ratified and the ultimate solution between Greece and Macedonia over the name issue is reached. Citizens protested in front of the Macedonian Parliament in order to deter the Assembly from voting on the subject of changing the country's constitution and name. Nonetheless, 81 percent of the parliamentarians supported the constitutional modifications, and on February 12, 2019, the Greek Parliament ratified the accord, bringing an end to the conflict between Macedonia and Greece and renaming the state the "Republic of North Macedonia". In return, Macedonia was permitted to begin admissions talks with the EU. Furthermore, it completed the final formal phase of the Prespa Agreement with Greece on March 27, 2020, making it the official 30th member of the North Atlantic Alliance. From a contemporary standpoint, the Prespa Agreement originally achieved a single strategic objective: NATO membership. However, it is valid to question if the name change was required to achieve that objective if the procedure continued until the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict. Moreover, EU expansion policies are starting to imitate the growth process of NATO.

The Prespa Agreement and Regional Stability

Practical geopolitical analysis shows the strong support of Western politicians regarding the referendum in Macedonia. For instance, President Macron, via video messages, expressed his support: "You should vote and decide whether you are in favour of amending the Constitution so that the agreement could come into force. I strongly support it and firmly believe this agreement is good for you, for the region, and for Europe", stated Macron (European Western Balkan, 2018). In that direction was also German Canceled Angela Merkel. She visited Macedonia and voiced strong support for Macedonia's efforts to ensure a successful referendum on the historic "name" agreement with Greece (Marusic, 2018). The former US president Donald Trump said on the referendum: "The historic Prespa Agreement resolves the long-standing name issue with Greece and paves the way for Macedonia's membership in both NATO and the European Union" (Kathimerini, 2018).

This strong support is interpreted via the lens of structural geopolitical analysis as a narrative meant to provide greater stability in the Balkans,

depicted historically as an area troubled by geopolitical competition and ethnic tensions. The powers and relationships among the surrounding states were not balanced by the Prespa Agreement. As Vankovska (2020) argued about the Prespa Agreement in a geopolitical frame, it is an imposed solution of great Western powers with one very unique term, represented in domestic political and scholar circles, called geopolitics in denial. In contrast, proponents of the treaty highlight its importance because of the security threats if a small country does not resolve the dispute. As previously mentioned, the question arises whether, after the tectonic geopolitical changes caused by the two crucial geopolitical game changers—the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine—the nature of the threats is still the same. Or, did the five-year experience after the agreement was signed, which opened new fronts of confrontation with neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, which is a NATO ally), stall the promised progress towards the EU? Macedonia increased its national security but hypothetically became a legitimate target of a possible confrontation with Russia as a member of NATO. These conditions in a multipolar geopolitical order require greater caution in attempts to maintain peace in these areas, but at the same time, they create great scepticism in the intentions of the allies from the west towards Macedonian EU progress.

In that direction, it is interesting to see that the support for the membership of North Macedonia in NATO has increased from 2021 to 2023. In a survey conducted by Spasenovski (2023), supported by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, support in 2021 was 59.8%, 64.2% in 2022, and 65.7% in 2023. But it is indicative that with NATO membership, a small trend of scepticism is observed in North Macedonia about whether the country is safer and more stable. The perception that it is a safer country was 40.6% in 2022, and in 2023 it dropped to 32.1%. It is noticeable that the population is beginning to doubt the increase in security, answering “somewhat yes” to the same question, which in 2022 was 15.6% and in 2023 was 24.0%.

The Prespa Agreement and Integration Processes

By settling the name controversy, the Prespa Agreement's primary goal was to allow the Republic of Macedonia to resume its Euro-Atlantic integration process. Even though people have been interested in that topic for a long time, especially when it comes to joining the EU, the stories about expansion have always been about finding specific reasons, inconsistencies, non-principled solutions, and necessary changes within the EU. In that regard, Wesley Scott (2005) notes that the EU's enlargement is a distinct

process of regional involvement aimed at resolving the conflicts involved in the development of a cogent geopolitical strategy for the EU. The lack of a single, broadly accepted geopolitical agenda that addresses the challenge appears to aim at expanding the spheres of influence for “stability”, “prosperity”, “sustainability”, and “security”. This controversial narrative related to EU enlargement has followed Macedonia from the moment of obtaining candidate status in 2005 to the conditional invitation to start membership negotiations in 2022 (Следната Цел: Членство Во ЕУ, 2022).

Jańczak (2015), Keil (2023), Petrovic and Tzifakis (2021) note that the EU’s enlargement policy in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership (*Eastern Partnership, n.d.*) are proceeding in two distinct directions based on their analysis of a significant number of scholarly articles. Enabling the Western Balkans to adapt to European norms, values, and legal frameworks through the EU *acquis communautaire* is of utmost importance. However, the Eastern Partnership strategy is a well-established geopolitical concept.

In the previously described context, in conditions of weak or incoherent will for EU expansion in the Western Balkans and the absence of unity, the Prespa Agreement failed to become a successful diplomatic story. This conclusion stems from two key moments in the last five years. The first moment is French President Macron’s veto in October 2019 for the start of EU membership negotiations for Albania and Macedonia. The excuse was the urgent need to change the methodology for EU enlargement with new candidate countries (Cvetanoska, 2019). Brussels’ inconsistency is best reflected in Juncker’s statement. Jean-Claude Juncker, former president of the European Commission, referred to the refusal of EU leaders to initiate membership negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania as “a grave historic mistake” (Gray, 2019).

The second key moment, which definitely reduces the effect of instant success and diplomatic victory of the Prespa Agreement and has the potential to increase Euroscepticism, is the decision of the European Council in December 2023. With that decision, negotiations for EU membership with Ukraine and Moldova began, while Georgia received the status of a candidate country. At a press conference on November 8, 2023, EC President Ursula von der Leyen recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (Kováčik, 2023).

It is worth noting that Ukraine and Moldova acquired the status of candidate countries for EU membership in 2022. It is just another inconsistency in EU enlargement policies. This is especially true if one knows the military and political situation in Ukraine (war) and Moldova

(separatism). In addition, the invitation to start EU membership negotiations addressed to Bosnia and Herzegovina (candidate status from 2022) in March 2024 further diminishes the importance of the Prespa Agreement in the context of European integration (The Guardian, 2024). However, it is notable that the war in Ukraine has altered the EU's enlargement policy, which, as we said previously, resembles NATO expansion.

The Prespa Agreement and Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations between Macedonia and Greece have been on the rise for the last five years. This especially applies to diplomatic and economic cooperation. However, the echo in the political and scientific spheres is negative in both countries. The Prespa Agreement may have improved relations with Greece, but as a result, relations with another EU member state, Bulgaria, have become problematic. Bulgaria managed through the so-called "French proposal" to obtain the conditional invitation for the start of membership negotiations with the EU, imposing a condition: the inclusion of the Bulgarian minority, which according to the last census of 2021 was 3,504 people, in the country's constitution. At the same time, Bulgaria is problematizing Macedonian history, language, and identity (Kitevski, 2023). Or even more, as Vankovska (2019) stated, the Prespa Agreement symbolically reconceives the old Macedonian question into a new form with an old essence. On the other hand, the supporters of the constitutional changes to include the Bulgarian minority, who are mostly from the ruling political elites, point out that this demystifies the Bulgarian position of "one people in two states" and that the Bulgarians are already in the constitution in the section of the preamble that has a clause about "other peoples, i.e., communities". Furthermore, there is the declaration for the protection of the Macedonian language in the German Parliament or the signing of the agreement on Frontex in the Macedonian language. Today, we have a situation in which North Macedonia, from the formal legal aspect, started the negotiations for EU membership on July 19, 2022, but in circumstances that are unknown in the history of the EU enlargement process (Tilev, 2022).

If we concentrate only on the reflection on the Prespa Agreement, then obviously it was negative on both sides. From a political aspect, the Greek and Macedonian governments faced strong opposition and dissatisfaction with the historic deal. The Macedonian Assembly approved the deal on June 20, 2018, but without opposition parliamentarians. Former Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov boycotted the session, and protests erupted in

Skopje. The Greek government faced opposition from New Democracy, accusing Tsipras and Kammenos of allowing Macedonian citizens to claim Macedonian language (Νοβας, 2022). The provisions of the Prespa Agreement, which were supposed to become valid after 5 years, brought to the surface the problems and the negative attitude of the population towards the agreement. Pursuant to Article 1, paragraph 10 of the first part of the agreement, within five years after its entry into force, Macedonia must change the official documents (passports, identity cards, and driver's licences) that are used outside the country. This situation made it impossible for a large part of the population, due to the weak institutional capacity to implement the provisions of the agreement, to leave their own country. According to some estimates, more than 400,000 citizens remained stuck in the labyrinth of processes for changing personal documents and driver's licences with the new constitutional name. Thus, they were denied the guaranteed right to freedom of movement. On the other hand, Greece does not comply with the provisions regarding the change of road signs to the Republic of North Macedonia. Also, three memoranda of cooperation arising from the Prespa Agreement await ratification in the Greek Parliament. They refer to obligations to accelerate the process of Macedonia's integration into the EU, to establish a coordinating committee for economic cooperation, and to a technical agreement for monitoring flights. In a word, the deadlines of the Prespa Agreement, to which both countries committed, have been breached (Спаковска, 2024).

Conclusion

Considering the Prespa Agreement as a resolution of a lasting dispute regarding the name "Macedonia" through an analogy of a chess game would preclude it from being deemed a compromise (draw) that would have satisfied both parties. Both sides express "loud" criticism of the Prespa Agreement in this specific case. Overall, it is an unfair agreement that does not count as a successful diplomatic gambit (material sacrifice) because of the concessions that were made during the negotiations, especially the controversial change to the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia. In essence, the "chess opening" that occurred at the onset of the name dispute and in the years preceding the signing of the Prespa Agreement resulted in about 140 recognitions of the constitutional name Republic of Macedonia and one positive judgement by the Hague-based international court against Greece for its side in the violation of the 1995 Interim Accord. As evidenced

by the sequence of events, Macedonia's efforts to preserve the name that has been accepted and embedded in the national identity for generations were not aided by this "chess" opening. The necessity for a compromise became abundantly apparent due to global geopolitical shifts and pressure from international factors. Macedonia accomplishes one strategic objective by becoming the 30th member of NATO; however, the commencement of negotiations and membership in the European Union appear to be highly problematic and relativized. Simultaneously, the four-year NATO membership contributes to an increase in security, but no discernible and practical economic impact has yet materialised.

When analysed through the lens of structural geopolitics, the Prespa Agreement can be identified as a geopolitical game changer at the regional level. Notwithstanding the amelioration of political relations with Greece, acrimonious relations emerged with Bulgaria. Despite being the first nation to acknowledge the Republic of Macedonia's independence, Bulgaria has thus far succeeded in integrating its interests into the framework of negotiations for Macedonia's EU membership. The Prespa Agreement, which was intended to serve as the "key" to initiating EU membership negotiations, fails to accomplish this objective without introducing other significant matters that are vital to the state's national interest. Since it entered into force five years ago, the Prespa Agreement has undergone multiple relativizations. In the first place, the blockade of Macron and the EU in 2019 was under the pretext that essential modifications to the EU accession process were required. Concurrently, a framework for negotiations is founded on a so-called "French proposal" that is distinct and has not been implemented in any other member-seeking nation. Furthermore, Hungary abstained from consensus decision-making (27-1) in November 2023, when an invitation to commence negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova was issued. The invitation extended to Bosnia and Herzegovina in March 2024 unequivocally implies that the European Union deviates from its established enlargement policy criteria in favour of responding to world geopolitical dynamics and trends. The most recent actions have resulted in the relativization of the initial stages of EU membership negotiations, as well as the postponement and unpredictability of the candidates' complete membership at this juncture of geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, the EU's conditioning relationship has the potential to heighten Euroskepticism among Macedonian citizens, thereby facilitating a restructuring of the prevailing European discourse in the country and amplification of foreign geopolitical influence.

Eventually, the question is not whether an alternative to European integration exists but how a nation safeguards its national interests along that trajectory. Due to these factors, small states must implement a prudent and calculated foreign policy that incorporates strategic hedging into their interactions with major and regional powers, among other components. Small states, which are vulnerable to asymmetric approaches, pressures, and concessions during negotiations with large states or alliances, must implement the concept of strategic hedging. It is necessary for determining the optimal formula for situating small sovereign states in the multipolar world of global competition, but it can also be beneficial in the regional geopolitical context and dynamics. For this reason, hedging must not be perceived as opportunistic but rather as a pragmatic decision and mode of operation. One may legitimately inquire about the potential consequences of the name dispute remaining unresolved before the commencement of hostilities in Ukraine on February 22, 2022. Under such circumstances, without an agreement with Greece, would Macedonia become a member of NATO? After Macedonia, Finland and Sweden expressly did, especially Sweden, which abandoned the concept of a neutral state. It represents another argument, despite the strategic partnership with the US, for failing or not having a strategic hedging concept.

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THE COLOUR OF CHANGE: TO THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BULGARIAN COLOUR REVOLUTION

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Abstract: The year 2024 marks the 35th anniversary of the landmark 1989–the year in which Todor Zhivkov was removed from the highest positions of power in the Communist Party and state and the Bulgarian Velvet Revolution began. There are political analysts who share the opinion that the Velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe in the 1990s should be classified as early manifestations of the later post-Socialist colour revolutions, taking into account the apparently common Maidan model for undermining the statutory state authority as well as the applied strategy of the managed chaos. In this article, it is my intention to provide academic arguments not only in support of this claim but also to prove that it was Bulgaria where the first *colour revolution* in modern Eastern European history actually took place.

Keywords: Bulgaria, 1990s, transition, velvet revolution, colour revolution

Rita Klímová, an English translator for numerous well-known dissidents from Czechoslovakia and a prominent dissident herself, coined the term *velvet revolution*. During the years, the term was used internationally to describe not only the events in Czechoslovakia but the overall process of non-violent transition of power in Eastern European countries in the late autumn of 1989. It is also accepted in Bulgarian scientific circles, although rather in its Slovak version–the *gentle revolution*. In an attempt to formulate an appropriate political definition of the events that followed the internal party coup of November 10, 1989, President Zhelyu Zhelev himself avoided the notion of a *gentle revolution*, calling rather for a *peaceful transition* to parliamentary democracy and a market economy (Желев, 2017). In his memoirs, as a direct participant in the events and a member of the Coordination Council of the United Democratic Forces (UDF) and a professional historian, Dimitar Ludzhev, on his part, uses at least three terms in parallel: *velvet/gentle revolution*, *revolution*, and *negotiated transition* to describe the period 1989–1991, supported by relevant documentary information (Люджев, 2012, 2019). Iskra Baeva also writes in a

comparative context about the Bulgarian version of the *gentle revolution*, explicitly specifying that it differs from the Czechoslovak one, for example, because it did not mark the beginning of the changes but came into action after the power had already been legitimised through *democratic elections* (Калинова, Баева, 2010, с. 268). Stepan Polyakov, on the other hand, goes a bit further by unequivocally talking about *Gentle Revolution LTD* (referring to the popular abbreviation for a Limited Liability Company) in the sense of something orderly organised, involving multiple *business* partners, and including foreign mentors and advisors (Поляков, 2005). The unanimous thesis imposed by them is that what was happening then in Bulgaria was identical to the revolutionary wave that overthrew the pro-Soviet-type party-political regimes in the context of Mikhail Gorbachev's Perestroika and the transformation of the system of state socialism and the Eastern Bloc initiated by him. Without attempting to refute this thesis in principle, I would venture to argue that what happened in 1989–1991 in Bulgaria is to some extent identical only to the events in Romania happening at the same time, as described by Eugeniy Krutikov (Крутиков, 2019) and Vladimir Bereanu (Береану, 2023). And if we accept as authoritative their definition of these events as a *colour revolution*, then it is twice as authoritative to apply it in relation to what was happening then in Bulgaria, where precisely for the first time in modern Eastern European history the protesting squares were painted in a common and clearly distinguishable colour symbol—the blue one.

It should be noted here that defining the political turmoil of the 1990s in Bulgaria as a *colour revolution* is not typical of Bulgarian analytical thought, both in the field of contemporary history and political science. However, the very logic and sequence of events reveal many of the elements of the well-known later *Maidan* model, leading to the conclusion that Bulgaria was used by certain Western centres of political influence as a testing ground for that political engineering, which has as its ultimate goal the permanent expulsion of Soviet/Russian influence from Eastern Europe, the occupation of the vacated geopolitical vacuum by the US, and the structures and institutions for economic and military-political integration of the transatlantic space in the face of NATO and the EEC/EU. The short answer to the question of way Bulgaria was used is that if the model proved to work successfully, it was then to be applied within a much broader geopolitical area, namely, for the overthrow of communism and the long-term undermining of Moscow's position in the entire Eurasian space from the Balkans to the Urals. In this context, Bulgaria was the ideal experimental testing ground, since until very recently it played the role of the most loyal Soviet ally and a kind of centre of the Eastern bloc. A key

point was also the fact that the Bulgarian colour revolution took place in two stages: first from 1989-1991, and a later continuation from 1996-1997, for the purpose of consolidating the externally imposed *civilisational choice* and stabilising the positions of the new pro-Western-oriented ruling elite. But let us look at the facts and the chronology of events.

The change in Bulgaria began at the initiative of the internal opposition within the Bulgarian Communist Party itself. The first political organisation that became the initial initiator of the idea that it was time to change something in the governance of the country, and precisely on the model of Perestroika in the USSR set by Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, was the Club for Support of Glasnost and Reconstruction in Bulgaria, founded on November 3, 1988. It was the political currents for the reconstruction of the system of state socialism, which started in the USSR and affected the entire Eastern bloc, that created the right atmosphere for a purge at the top of power in all European socialist countries, among which Bulgaria was no exception. Thus, on November 10, 1989, the removal of Todor Zhivkov from leadership positions in the party and the state was carried out, after the public accusations of the then foreign minister Petar Mladenov against him that he was responsible for the economic crisis in the country, and after the intervention of the Soviet ambassador Viktor Sharapov, who unequivocally called on Zhivkov to step down from power (Ненов, 2014, с. 20). It is also important to recall that the first protests and rallies in December 1989 were also organised by leftist activists in the immediate context of the preparation of the Extraordinary 14th Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (January 30–February 2, 1990), which had to be convened to adopt the social democratic concept and the line of political pluralism and democratic parliamentary elections (Проданов et al., 2009, с. 98). The centre of this still entirely left-wing movement of the discontented became Sofia University, where on December 7, 1989, representatives of all existing dissident associations and organisations, including the Club for Glasnost and Reconstruction in Bulgaria, the Independent Society for the Defence of Human Rights, the Ecoglasnost movement, the Independent Federation of Labour Podkrepa, the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party, and the Independent Students' Society, signed the political agreement for the establishment of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) with Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev as its first chairman (Спасов, 2001, pp. 84-85). It is noteworthy that most of the founders of the UDF were left-wing opposition formations in their ideological orientation, if one excludes some with openly anti-communist views, such as the Bulgarian Agricultural People's Union Nikola Petkov or the Club of the

Illegally Repressed after 1945. Their more radical, right-wing views would prevail, and the opposition alliance would begin to identify itself with them later towards the end of 1991, when its contacts with Western embassies and intelligence headquarters were beginning to grow, the first wave of street discontent had already passed, the Eastern Bloc was gone, and Washington had already announced the political directive for the future enlargement of NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC) to the East.

The UDF began to develop active socio-political activity immediately after its establishment. The first rally of the members and sympathisers of the opposition union was organised on December 10, 1989, in the ideal centre of Sofia on the square in front of the St. Alexander Nevski cathedral. Already at this rally, quite radical for the then-mass public attitudes, demands were sounded, which are indicative of the external influences in the formulation of the so-called 'blue idea' at this very early stage. In addition to the abolition of the leadership role of the Communist Party in the state government, the demands also included the drafting and adoption of an entirely new constitution, the introduction of the principle of separation of powers, the rehabilitation of all those convicted of political crimes during the period 1944-1989, accountability for those responsible for the country's economic crisis, as well as the organisation of a National Round Table following the Polish example (Здрожевски, 2012, с. 39-56). The rally of December 10, 1989, as well as the mass public meetings that followed, including the candlelight vigils in front of the former Tsar's palace, became the occasion for the convening of the extraordinary plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party on December 11-13, which publicly condemned Todor Zhikov's regime and expelled him from the party structures along with his closest associates. The new party leadership, in the person of Petar Mladenov, undertook to dismantle the Communist command-administrative system, introduce the principles of the free market, and create a socialist state governed by the rule of law. It was decided to proceed with the drafting of a new constitution and a new electoral law, and the parliamentary group of the BCP undertook the obligation to submit to the National Assembly for consideration a proposal to repeal Article 1 on the leadership role of the Communist Party from the constitution still in force. After the plenum, a second impressive rally was organised in the centre of Sofia, this time by BCP members and sympathisers who chanted in support of the new political course taken by the party (Луджев, 2012, с. 272-276).

After successfully testing the mechanism of street pressure, the UDF started expanding its toolkit. When, a few days later, on December 14, 1989,

the parliament considered the issue of repealing Article 1 of the Constitution, the opposition surrounded the National Assembly building with a *human chain*. This was the first time in modern Bulgarian history that a *chain* of protesters, mostly young people and students, representing presumably the young elite of the nation, held each other's hands and walked around the building to express disagreement with the decisions of the political government and try to hinder the normal work of a public institution. The cold weather and the lack of objective information about what exactly was going on in the plenary hall contributed to the desired effect of exacerbating tension. In fact, the information was conveyed by the opposition speakers, Zhelyu Zhelev, Konstantin Trenchev, and Hristofor Sabev, and they did their best to present the complicated legal procedure for the requested constitutional change as a purposeful sabotage by the ruling *Communists*. Logically, this blew up the already hyped-up crowd; shouts like "Resign" and "Down with the Communist Party" echoed throughout the square. The protesters made an attempt to break into the parliament building, which caused the National Assembly Chairman Stanko Todorov, President Petar Mladenov, and Defence Minister Dobri Djurov to come to the entrance and try to speak to the crowd. Expectedly, they were met with new demands for resignation and booing. It was in the specific context of this complicated situation that President Mladenov pronounced his infamous remark, "It would be better if the tanks came" (Луджев, 2012, с. 280; Желев, 2010, с. 302-303; Симеонов, 2005, с. 661-667).

Perhaps the most striking evidence that this was precisely a pre-developed political scenario is the fact that the situation was repeated in almost identical details (and almost at the same time of year) in the early winter months of 1997, as will be discussed later in this article. However, neither in 1989-1990 nor in 1997 was it possible to regard these events from such a perspective, as these were years of mass euphoria and a completely different attitude towards the politics of Bulgarian society in general. The first one who tried to formulate some explanation for what happened in December 1989 was Zhelev himself. Commenting on the situation at another rally in front of the parliament building on August 1, 1990, as already mentioned before, he did not even dare to use the term *velvet revolution* but conveniently shifted the emphasis to accusing his own supporters of failing to ensure a massive enough presence on the square (Желев, 2017). The truth was that by the winter of 1989, the UDF was still a very young political opposition with no particularly formulated long-term goals and no experience in harnessing street pressure. Therefore, its leaders preferred the form of a *negotiated transition* following the example of the Round Tables in

Poland and Hungary, and at that historical moment, they were far from the idea of challenging the governing legitimacy of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The Bulgarian version of the Round Table was convened on January 3, 1990; its meetings continued until May 15, and the National Assembly was obliged to vote only on those decisions and laws that were adopted within its framework. The agreements reached included the complete abolition of the political system of state socialism, a transition to parliamentary democracy, the abolition of the political police, the depoliticization of the army, the courts, the prosecutor's office, and the diplomatic service; the dissolution of the BCP's organisational structures; as well as the holding of elections for a Grand National Assembly under a mixed majority-proportional two-round system. It had to draft a new constitution and adopt the necessary laws to change the political and economic system (Кръглата мада, 1990, с. 692-695).

It was in the context of the election campaign in the summer of 1990 that the popular logo of the UDF with the smiling lion with two raised fingers, depicting the sign of victory, was born. Its author was the artist Georgi Lipovanski, and the idea to choose this particular symbol was proposed by the world-famous French advertising agent Jacques Segela, hired specifically by the electoral headquarters of the opposition coalition to advise on the preparation of the election campaign. The association with the traditional Bulgarian national symbolism was consciously sought, including with the national liberation struggle of Bulgarians against the Ottoman enslavers; the ideological suggestion in 1990 was that Bulgaria should never again fall under communist rule. Once more on the advice of Segela, the main slogan of the election campaign was also chosen: "It's ours time!" with a direct reference to Bulgarian 19th-century national hero Vasil Levski's remark, "Time is within us and we are within time". It was then that the *colour of change* was specified, too. It was the blue one, which was broadly used in all opposition propaganda materials as well as in the background of the new logo of the UDF itself. As a natural visual counterpoint to red, the blue colour corresponded perfectly with certain visual archetypes of Bulgarian social psychology, one of which was the opposition *blue-red*, formed on the basis of the sports rivalry between the supporters of the two biggest Bulgarian football teams, CSKA and Levski. In this case, the reference to the opposition *Communism-anti-Communism* was quite obvious because the supporters of CSKA are traditionally people with leftist political views, while those of Levski have, to put it mildly, a reserved attitude towards the political regime in the country. For the first time, however, the blue colour was used as an element of the visual symbolism for political purposes

during the big rally around the National Assembly building on December 14, 1989, when opposition activists tore off a blue shirt and each tied a ribbon on his right arm, which was presented as the symbol of peace, the symbol of the United Nations, and Europe, but in fact represented a direct anti-association with the red bands tied on the left elbows of Communist Party supporters in the days immediately following the September 9, 1944 coup d'état. A few months later, however, in the context of the election campaign for the Grand National Assembly in the summer of 1990, more serious attention was paid, particularly to colour symbolism, and it turned out that the blue colour was the perfect tool for the achievement of a mass emotional impact. The propaganda concept developed under the leadership of Jacques Segela relied entirely on the blue colouring of all public events organised by the UDF, from the blue flags, inflatable balloons, advertising hats, T-shirts, notebooks, and pens to the blue ribbons tied to the collars of pets. This was the point at which one could speculate that the Bulgarian *velvet revolution* began to evolve into a *colour revolution*, as the introduction of the *colour* tool for psychological modification of public opinion went hand in hand with the adoption of a more aggressive approach in protest actions against political opponents. While the ruling Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) stresses its aspiration for non-violence, social justice, and a smooth transition, the sympathisers of the opposition UDF were trying (and to a large extent successfully) to shift public attention to the negative legacy of the Communist regime, the bloody repressions after September 9, 1944, the labour camps, the failures in the economy, environmental policy, and other denigrating topics (Kalinova, Baeva, 2010, pp. 260-261). This was the moment when, according to Dimitar Ludzhev, who was then a member of the Coordination Council of the UDF, foreign radio stations such as Deutsche Welle, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and the BBC started to intervene in the Bulgarian election campaign with special broadcasts and commentaries, while a host of Western journalists, diplomats, and experts engaged themselves in very open support for the opposition through consultancy and the provision of material assistance in the form of supplying paper, sound, and other equipment, printing propaganda materials, renting their official vehicles to the UDF's leadership, etc. (Луджев, 2012, с. 182-186). According to official data of the National Endowment for Democracy, during the spring and summer months of 1990, the UDF as a political organisation, the student associations gravitating to it, the Demokracy Newspaper (Вестник „Демокрация“), as well as the Independent Trade Union Podkrepa, received grants under the US programmes for public diplomacy and countering 'Russian influence'

totaling \$1,657,622 (Table 1). This ranks Bulgaria second after Poland among the top ten beneficiaries of U.S. transition assistance grants in Central and Eastern Europe. The young Bulgarian opposition was quite purposefully looking for and making such contacts because it still did not have the material resources to run an election campaign, and this was its way to legitimise itself in the political arena – within the country and before the wider world. Thus, from the very beginning of the Bulgarian transition, the newly emerging right-wing political elite voluntarily placed itself in immediate dependence on the favour of foreign (this time Western) centres of influence and interests, which would remain an invariable feature of the Bulgarian state government for at least three decades to come.

Table 1: Funds allocated to Bulgaria in 1990

Donated by	Beneficiary	Grant Funding (в долари)
Freedom House	Democracy Newspaper	232 695
Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI)	Podkrepa Trade Union	276 190
Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI)	Podkrepa Trade Union	51 024
Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE)	Federation of the Independent Students' Assosiations	100 000
National Democratic Institute (NDI)	Civic Education Programme	299 126
National Democratic Institute (NDI)	Bulgarian Association for Free Electiobs (BAFE)	182 024
(International Republican Institute) IRI	Ubnited Democratic Forces (UDF)	75 000
(International Republican Institute) IRI	Ubnited Democratic Forces (\ UDF)	441 563
	Total:	1 657 622

Source: NED, Annual Report 1990, 23.

The culmination of the election campaign came on June 7, 1990, when two parallel, crowded demonstrations of *the Blues* and *the Reds* were organised in Sofia. For this purpose, the BSP engaged all the larger squares in the central part of the city. The UDF remained with the only option to block traffic through the Eagles Bridge and Russki Boulevard (at present, Tsarigradsko Shosse Boulevard). With its impressive organisation and foreign support, the rally of UDF supporters far overshadowed that of the BSP, remaining in the historical records of the Bulgarian transition after 1989 as the largest political event, in which (according to the opposition) about 1 million people took part. In this connection, some sufficiently striking details that give a vivid idea of the scale of this protest cannot be overlooked. The central grandstand was located at the Eagles Bridge crossroad, while along the boulevard there were four more stages, each offering its own musical program. This provided a huge area that none of the capital's squares could offer. The technical facilities were donated and installed free of charge by the Greek conservative party New Democracy (Νέα Δημοκρατία). On the next day, to maintain the euphoria, a special microbubble circulated around the city, from which blue and white helium balloons were released. Gradually, a column of cars carrying blue flags formed behind it. They continued to move around even after midnight, already on the pre-election day, when political propaganda was officially banned. The headquarters of the Blues had no doubt about their imminent victory (Симеонов, 2005, с. 701, 703, 715).

The election results showed otherwise, however. The opposition union appeared to have won in the big cities, but not in the countryside. The UDF headquarters declared their intention to contest the results. *Blue* supporters gathered around the National Palace of Culture, where the ballots were being processed, and a *human chain* was formed in an attempt to repeat the scenario of the first mass *blue* demonstration in December 1989. The specially summoned foreign observers, however, expressed the unanimous opinion that the elections had been conducted normally, in full compliance with all the legal rules, and stated that the reported cases of violations were due rather to poor organization and lack of experience than to intentional fraud (The June 1990 Elections in Bulgaria, p. 103). The Blues' leadership was warned that even a single broken glass at that point would compromise them as democrats (Луджев, 2012, с. 260-265). Finally, the Coordination Council of the UDF announced its decision, stating that the elections were "free" but not "fair". As would become clear later, this was a tactical retreat that pursued longer-term goals, while for the moment the justification to the Blues' supporters was that the UDF had nevertheless achieved an electoral

victory by securing a third of the seats in the Grand National Assembly and, accordingly, a decisive say in the future vote on the new constitution (Луджев, 2012, с. 266-267). Apart from that, the success for the right-wing opposition was huge for another essential reason: the model of contesting election results through street pressure had already been tested and validated for subsequent political application.

Having formally acknowledged the election results, the technologists of the protest, the local leaders of the UDF, and their foreign consultants proceeded to the next level: the *colour revolution* passed into the phase of positional defence. At this stage, a key role was once again assigned to the “young”, the “smart”, and the “progressively minded” – the students. Between the two rounds of the elections for the Grand National Assembly, a small group of students declared an “occupation strike” in the building of Sofia University as a sign of disagreement with the recognition of the election results and demanding clarification of the situation. And then something interesting happened: several days after it became clear that the results of the vote could no longer be challenged, the protest tactics seemed to have changed, and in the general tense socio-political situation, the “tank remark” of President Petar Mladenov was launched too conveniently. The timing was more than appropriate and carefully chosen. By some strange coincidence, the students’ strike in Bulgaria corresponded perfectly with the exacerbation of political tensions in neighbouring Romania, where the processes of transformation of the system had already reached the stage of a direct armed clash between ruling and opposition parties. During exactly the same days when in Bulgaria the *forces of the protest* were beginning to prevail, seeking political responsibility even from the acting President, in Romania, on the contrary, the *forces of the status quo* led by the leftist President Ion Iliescu managed to neutralise, at least for a certain period of time, the opposition with the support of the miners and not without a serious dose of street violence. The Mineriade, which analysts would later refer to as a direct prototype of the *colour revolutions* (Крутиков, 2019), was in fact a distorted mirror image of what was happening at the same time in Bulgaria, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the events in Bulgaria reflected in a distorted way what was happening in our northern neighbour. In any case, one can conclude that these were variations of the same political scenario, but with two alternative outcomes, probably because it was necessary to check what the consequences would be, respectively, in the event of a victory by the opposition, as ultimately happened in our country, or in the event of maintaining the political status quo, as was the final outcome in Romania.

After the video recording of the “tank remark” was broadcast in the UDF’s TV pre-election studio, the students demanded a technical examination of the tape, and once it was confirmed to be authentic, they directly demanded the resignation of Petar Mladenov as head of state. The demand was spelled out in a declaration published on July 5, 1990, which, among other things, contained a call for support for the parallelly ongoing sit-in organised by UDF supporters in front of the Presidency building (НЕНОВ, 2014, с. 217). Tents were hastily set up there, and thus a new and hitherto unknown form of protest emerged, called the “City of Truth”. Among its 175 permanent residents were famous artists and writers, university professors, academic researchers, parents of protesting students, and many others. The protest wave grew; students from all universities in the country joined the demand for the resignation of President Mladenov, and even representatives of the more radical wing of the BSP itself expressed their solidarity. With such a strictly organised and massive attack, Petar Mladenov had no choice but to succumb to the pressure. On July 6, 1990, he resigned as head of state. Together with the small *tactical* successes of the managed civil discontent achieved in the previous months, which secured stable positions for the Blues within the Grand National Assembly, the removal of Petar Mladenov, who had been the main face of the internal party coup of November 10, 1989, presented an opportunity for the UDF to achieve its first *strategic* success, as it thus symbolically distanced itself from its leftist connection, which allowed it to claim control of the presidential institution. Henceforth, the establishment of right-wing control over the executive power as well — the Prime Minister’s position — was only a matter of time.

An indication that the revolution was developing according to a strictly guided behind-the-scenes model was the fact that the civil discontent did not subside but, on the contrary, grew once more after the resignation of President Petar Mladenov, encompassing other major Bulgarian cities and expanding and complicating its demands. “Cities of Truth” formed also in Burgas, Varna, Ruse, Veliko Tarnovo, and Stara Zagora, with protesters already demanding the removal of Georgi Dimitrov’s body from his mausoleum in Sofia; the removal of all Communist symbols from buildings and elsewhere; the holding of a “People’s Court” against Todor Zhivkov and his entourage; and the expulsion from the Grand National Assembly of all leftist deputies associated in one way or another with the “crimes of the communist regime” (НЕНОВ, 2014, с. 218-219). An emblematic example of the use of one of the techniques of the colour revolutions in Bulgaria at that time was the organisation of a concert of the popular singer Lili Ivanova in the “City of Truth” on July 27, 1990, through which a huge crowd was

attracted to the ideal centre of Sofia. As expected, after the concert, the crowd headed towards the National Assembly building, where, in the meantime, a heated debate was taking place about whether Todor Zhivkov should be summoned to speak in the plenary hall. The crowd surrounded the parliament and once again attempted to break in. It was crucial for the prestige of the Blues to provoke a public lynching of the former first party and state leader, who was destined to become the scapegoat of the revolutionary wave that had been first initiated by his fellow party members but quickly spiralled out of their control and turned in a radically different political direction.

In this tense setting, rose the management star of the then chairman of the UDF, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev. With his nomination and election to the presidential post on August 1, 1990, the forces of the revolution secured their control over the highest-level representative institution in the state for at least five years to come. This necessitated another change of tactics and the regrouping of these forces into a separate parliamentary wing, which retreated from the street and adopted the means of legally regulated inter-party struggle and a civil movement, which had to maintain public discontent outside parliament. The actions of this civil wing of the Blues turned out to be crucial for the further development of events, with its two most popular activists, Plamen Stanchev and Konstantin Trenchev, the leader of the Podkrepa Trade Union, being the instigators of the initiative for the removal of Soviet symbols from the buildings of the Largo in Sofia, as well as of the pogrom and the burning of the former Party House (Семерджиев, 2004, с. 443-445). It should be noted here that the actions of the civilian wing of the UDF, and especially the excesses they provoked in the centre of Sofia, played their part in successfully maintaining the impression that the country was on the brink of civil war and military dictatorship, as President Zhelyu Zhelev did not fail to note in his radio address on the night of August 26-27, 1990 (Желев, 2010, с. 387-388). It should also be noted here that the increased self-confidence of the *blue opposition* in the summer months of 1990 corresponded directly with the assertion of the *forces of change* in the remaining countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the “outstretched hand” of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) after the adoption of the Turnberry Message (Message From Turnberry, 1990) and the London Declaration (London Declaration on a Transformed North Atlantic Alliance, 1990), and with the beginning of the integration of these countries into the Western European political-economic space, consolidated under the supranational guidance of the EEC. Against this dynamic international background, the development

of the political situation in Bulgaria simply followed the general trend of the withdrawal of the pro-Soviet Left from power and the gradual occupation of the positions vacated by the newly formed pro-Western political parties. This is what predetermined the next stage of the *Bulgarian Colour Revolution* – the seizure of the supreme executive power through the removal of the leftist Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov.

This goal was achieved in the autumn of 1990 in the atmosphere of new mass trade union protests, a shortage of basic foodstuffs, and a coupon system that knocked public confidence out of Lukanov's cabinet. The power opportunity that opened up for the UDF led the Blue's headquarters to make their first major political compromise – to agree to participate in the newly formed coalition government of the non-partisan lawyer Dimitar Popov (December 1990–December 1991). The subsequent drop in tensions, however, was only temporary and represented the visible and more publicly acceptable side of the complex transformations of the country's economic foundations, which were beginning to place it in long-term dependence on the political favour of powerful international financial control structures such as the World Bank and the International **Monetary Fund (IMF)**. **Bulgaria became a member of both in 1990, thus unconditionally accepting to comply with the new US policy for economic expansion in Eastern Europe, including** through such sustainable development programmes as the "Rahn-Utt Plan". This was just another element of the model of *the colour revolution*, together with the parallelly applied techniques of manipulation of public consciousness, the emanation of which became the trial organisex against Todor Zhivkov, as well as the protest of the 39 blue deputies who left the parliamentary hall and took to the streets under the pretext that they did not accept the legitimacy of the Grand National Assembly because of the predominance of former Communists among its members. In fact, their protest was part of the newly launched election campaign for the 36th Ordinary National Assembly, the numbering of which, albeit half a century late, aimed to show the continuity between the post-war and pre-war parliamentary traditions.

The preparation of the elections for the 36th National Assembly was taking place in the context of extremely dynamic international events, which cannot but affect the struggle for political power in Bulgaria. It is a repeatedly proven fact that in the country, the direction of *the winds of change* has always been determined by the influence of *an external factor*, which in different historical epochs has different dimensions. In the summer of 1991, this principle affected Bulgarian foreign policy on at least two levels: Eastern

and Western, with the main events setting the parameters of the Eastern one: the collapse of the Eastern bloc after the self-dissolution of the Warsaw Pact Organisation (WPO) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), and the publicly announced intention of the North Atlantic allies to intervene in the political processes in Eastern Europe. After the beginning of the actual expansion of the Western politico-economic space to the East by binding all Eastern European former Soviet satellites to the treaty system of trade and economic cooperation with the EEC, came the next logical step: attaching these countries to the West in a military-political sense as well. Thus, in an environment of growing global Western influence, the process of the voluntary withdrawal of the socialist left from power and its handover to the right-wing opposition was accelerating in Bulgaria, parallel to the replacement of pro-Eastern (pro-Soviet) with pro-Western political attitudes among the ruling elite, already quite openly supported by Washington, especially after the two successive visits to Sofia of US Vice President Dan Quayle (June 6-7, 1991) and NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner (June 12-13, 1991).

I am mentioning these two unprecedented visits here, as they played a key role in the final decision of the National Assembly to unilaterally denounce the Bulgarian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (as of August 1, 1991). The termination of the military-political bilateral cooperation, announced in this unequivocal manner, the rightness of which seemed to be deliberately confirmed by the attempted Moscow coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, was a signal to the new partners in the West and a catalyst for the ideological regrouping and consolidation of the Blue Forces. From that moment on, the UDF, representing until then a centre-left coalition, started adopting more extreme right-wing political principles, attracting mainly anti-communist-biassed members. By the time of the elections, scheduled for October 13, 1991, the UDF had already split into three new formations: the "UDF-Movement", uniting the most radical Blues, including the 39 members of Parliament protesting against the BSP's participation in the drafting of the new constitution; the "UDF-Centre", uniting the more moderate social democrats and the Ecoglasnost movement; and the "UDF-Liberals", which included the Green Party, the former Glasnost and Reconstruction Clubs, as well as some politicians who had declared themselves in defence of Western liberal democracy values (Калинова, Баева, 2010, с. 281-282). Not without the assistance of President Zhelyu Zhelev and the majority in the Grand National Assembly, the abbreviation "UDF" and the blue colour of the ballot paper were given to "UDF-Movement". With them, it would win the elections and subsequently

appropriate the laurels of the Bulgarian revolution, permanently imposing the manner of anti-speaking as the main method of political struggle. The age of the open “witch hunt” on an anti-Communist basis was beginning. Particularly seriously affected by this process was the sphere of foreign policy, from which, after a massive purge in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, experienced experts and career diplomats were removed on charges of being “communists” and agents of the former State Security Services. Thus, the new UDF’s government, which took power after the elections, was clearing the ideological ground for the new “transatlantic” values, which occupied a key place in its political programme (Програмна реч на Филип Димитров, 1991). The nuances in the terminology used are very important in this case. For the Prime Minister himself, the former blue leader Philip Dimitrov focused precisely on the *transatlantic* component of cooperation with the Collective West, ignoring its *European* component. Thus, the US became the most important and now fully official foreign policy counterpart of the new Bulgarian right-wing ruling elite, which even dared to claim that the USSR/Russia should be sewed for damages inflicted on Bulgaria during the previous decades, as Foreign Minister Stoyan Ganev put it (Баева, 2004, с. 67). After 1991, there was a relative lull in the organised manifestations of civil discontent for several years, while the power structures and the course of the post-socialist transformation remained under the control of the Blues. This period, covering the terms of office of two Prime Ministers, Philip Dimitrov (November 1991–October 1992) and Lyuben Berov (December 1992–October 1994), could be defined as an intermediate stage of *the Colour Revolution*, or rather a pause between its two main stages. That was a time in which, according to indirect indicators, American financial support for *the forces of change* continued. It is known that for the entire period 1990–1999, the grants awarded to Bulgaria amounted to a total of 5,356,105 USD (Hale, 2003, p. 221), but unfortunately, there are still no declassified documents showing a breakdown by donor institutions and their respective beneficiaries.

The revolutionary tensions burst out again with full force in the winter of 1996–1997. Then, as already mentioned, the scenario from the dawn of the transition was repeated, but now with many more of the characteristic visual elements of the Maidan model, this time directed against the leftist government of Zhan Videnov (January 25, 1995–February 12, 1997). The particular external factor that unleashed these tensions was the open raising of the issue of NATO enlargement to the East. By 1990, the issue of the eastward expansion of the organisation was considered frozen for a long time to come, after the inclusion of the reunified Germany as a full member of the Western military-political space. In 1997, however, it re-entered the

agenda of the transatlantic allies after the last Soviet/Russian soldier had already left Eastern Europe. It was this circumstance that predetermined the second stage of the Bulgarian *colour revolution*, which began with a food supply crisis and continued with galloping hyperinflation and bank collapses in 1996. This exacerbated the anti-government attitudes in the society to the extreme and very conveniently concealed what was happening in the geopolitical background, where Bulgaria had already demonstrated serious signs of indecisiveness in both levels of its post-socialist pro-Western reorientation — the political-economic and the military-political one (ЯКИМОВА, 2019). The country was lagging behind both in its integration into the EEC and in the transatlantic financial system of the International Monetary Fund. That is why the external scriptwriters of the Bulgarian transition and the mentors of the right-wing-oriented Blues obviously decided that the processes started in 1989-1991 needed to be given a new and more powerful impetus. And Zhan Videnov proved to be an extremely predictable and easy-to-neutralise opponent, due to his naivety in foreign policy and inability to generate sufficient internal party and public support. Thus, the government of the Lefts found itself in the complicated situation of being an unwanted partner both in the West and in the East. In the West, because of its attempt to make a U-turn towards restoring cooperation with the Russian Federation, and in the East, because of the official Russian warning about the inevitable deterioration of bilateral relations should Bulgaria abandon its position of neutrality and decide to join NATO⁸. Solving the case required political will, stability, and strength, which the Lefts did not have at that historical moment, and so Zhan Videnov was forced to resign, and consultations began on the formation of a new cabinet within the same government mandate. It was then that the Rights, which had been in opposition until then, decided to resort once again to *coup technology* in order to temporarily regain their lost control over state power.

And so came January 10, 1997, another turning point in the history of the Bulgarian post-socialist transition. On that frosty afternoon, just as in December 1989, a crowd of discontented citizens gathered in and around National Assembly Square in Sofia. This time, they were joined by protesting taxi drivers. The demonstration was organised by the so-called “United Democratic Trade Unions”, including the leadership and members of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (КНСБ, which was its popular abbreviation in Bulgarian) and the Podkrepa Trade Union. The faces of the protest were the same as in the early 1990s, with TV cameras capturing Konstantin Trenchev, Philip Dimitrov, and several other newer but eminent blue leaders; among them were Ivan Kostov (yet to become

Prime Minister), Stefan Sofiyanski (future caretaker Prime Minister and Mayor of Sofia), Evgeniy Bakardzhiev (future Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development), Nadezhda Mihaylova (future Minister of Foreign Affairs), as well as the newly elected but not yet officially inaugurated President Petar Stoyanov. The parliamentary building was once again occupied and surrounded by a ‘human chain’ of angry students. The resemblance to the familiar pictures of December 1989 and beyond is too striking to be overlooked as pure coincidence.

However, if at the beginning of the 1990s the success of the revolution relied on the euphoric happiness of the already-achieved *freedom*, in 1997 the protest rhetoric and visual and musical propaganda were chosen in such a way as to support gloomy statements like: there is no freedom; it is a dream in the distant future; the communists are to blame for the crisis and the lack of economic progress; the struggle against them will be long and hard; and the prospects for the country remain unclear. This time, the propaganda toolkit included much more radical elements, with the immediate aim of provoking aggression and the bleeding of civil discontent. On January 10, broken paving stones, snowballs, smoke bombs, and firecrackers were thrown at the parliamentary building; supposedly, random protesters broke the windows and almost broke through the doors. Leaders of the ‘‘Communists’’ who were in the meantime sitting inside and discussing the options for a ministerial cabinet were brought out under the cover of police shields and were also pelted with paving stones, while the opposition leader Filip Dimitrov appeared before the TV cameras from a hospital corridor with a bloodied and bandaged head, claiming to be the victim of police violence. The trade unions were also strictly following the scenario of escalating tensions. Their structures helped to set up an orderly organisation to block the normal functioning of the state at all levels. All the capital’s public transport stopped running, and an ‘‘indefinite occupation strike’’ was declared with the participation of all the capital’s universities and schools. Students and pupils took to the streets and actively participated in the building of barricades at the capital’s central intersections, where campfires were lit under the sounds of revolutionary songs. In addition to Sofia, barricades were also built at key road junctions across the country with hand tools, rubbish bins, and farm machinery. The public was directly engaged to follow and participate in the dynamic events through aggressive media propaganda. The then-two channels of Bulgarian National Television (BNT) and the newly established opposition Radio Darik were involved with extraordinary, all-day broadcasts, reporting directly ‘‘from the scene’’ on the current situation. Tensions were running high, and when the date of February 4, 1997 came, instead of

announcing the composition of the new left-wing government, the BSP's leaders, Nikolai Dobrev and Georgi Parvanov, decided to return the mandate unfulfilled. On that day, the centre of Sofia was literally flooded by a huge crowd of people who gathered from all directions around the perimeter of the so-called "Triangle of Power", from the Presidency and the Council of Ministers to the Parliament building on the National Assembly Square. According to unofficial data, more than 1 million people protested against the formation of the left-wing government in the capital alone on that day. Later, two of the main participants in those events, former President Petar Stoyanov and his successor Georgi Parvanov, both argued unanimously that the return of the mandate on February 4, 1997, had prevented the outbreak of civil war. The association here with the events of the summer of 1990 and the burning of the Party House is more than obvious.

After the turbulent revolutionary beginning of 1997 and the three-month rule of the caretaker government of Stefan Sofianski (February 13, 1997–May 21, 1997), state power permanently passed into the hands of the Blues – for the first time since the turn of 1989 – for a full four-year term. This is the government that would complete the process of preparing the country for full accession to NATO and the EU at the cost of many compromises with the country's national interests and controversial foreign policy decisions, such as the granting of Bulgarian airspace for the purpose of NATO's air campaign against the former Yugoslavia. From the perspective of the present day, it can be noted that Bulgaria's integration into the political-economic and military-political structures of the transatlantic space was a kind of finale of the transition in a broad geopolitical sense. In this way, the Bulgarian post-socialist revolution achieved its ultimate goal: the permanent detachment of the country from Moscow's sphere of influence for at least three decades to come. That is why today we can classify it as a 'colour revolution', because the final results and the long-term consequences of the foreign policy reorientation suggest exactly such assessments and conclusions. What still prevents the official acceptance of this very term in Bulgarian historiography and political science is the fact that to attach this definition to the processes that took place in Bulgaria in the 1990s would mean to deny both the "blue idea" and the entire political and, above all, emotional significance of the system change that resulted from the November 10, 1989 coup. However, if we look at the few currently declassified archival documents, a picture emerges of a used ideal and a flawed civil protest, which could be assessed as originally justified. And the reason for such a development lies in the combination of the lack of sufficiently prepared politicians after the generation of Zhivkov's nomenclature in the dynamic international

environment as well as in the lack of sufficient own resources, which could allow the country to follow an adequate line of political behaviour before the world after the withdrawal of the longstanding geopolitical shield of the USSR. The undoubted merit of the local ideologues of the Bulgarian post-socialist revolution, however, certainly lies in the fact that they did not allow it to be “stained with blood” as suggested by its external scriptwriters and as happened in neighbouring Romania or during the later political revolutions of the early 21st century. That is why the organised civil discontent in Bulgaria of the 1990s might indeed be regarded as more akin to the model of the central European *velvet revolutions* of the same historical period, despite its intrusively *colourful (blue)* component.

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MONTENEGRO, SERBIAN IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract: The work shows the resistance and stabilization of the Serbian identity in Montenegro, in the context of international relations: from Trump's coming to power in the United States of America (2017) through the Orthodox Christian Litiya movement in Montenegro (2020) and the census in Montenegro (2023). In this regard, it can be seen that key foreign factors did not pose visible obstacles to this process in previous years.

Keywords. Montenegro, Serbs, Serbia, identity, West, Russia.

Introduction

From 1997 to 2019, the regime of Milo Djukanović attacked and destroyed elements of Serbian statehood in Montenegro one by one, and in that process broke up the joint state of Serbia and Montenegro in 2006. At the same time, Djukanović attacked the Serbian national identity of Montenegrins, as the only historical identity of Montenegro's statehood. Djukanović, until Trump came to power in the United States of America, had the support of the West for his anti-Serbian intentions. Since 2017, he has faced the first American blockades (Raković, 2019). Some other Western structures also got involved in exposing Djukanović's destructive activities.

Unfortunately, the Russian Federation also supported the secession of Montenegro from the joint state with Serbia. This was the naive policy of Russia, which believed that the time for the common state of Serbia and Montenegro had run out and that Russia would have an independent Montenegro as an ally. However, it turned out that this Russian policy was completely wrong because the Djukanović regime turned against the interests of Russia in the following years (Raković, 2019, pp. 272-275). Therefore, in 2020, Russia did not provide any support to Djukanović during the process of overthrowing his regime.

The Serbian people of Montenegro resisted these attacks through political parties, and when the Law on Freedom of Religion was adopted in December 2019, the Serbian Orthodox Church finally resisted the

Djukanović regime. The Litiyá movement was started. On that wave of all-Serbian gathering in Montenegro – in which Serbs from the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska were included with their support – in the parliamentary elections on 30 August 2020 the segregationist regime of Milo Djukanović and the Democratic Party of Socialists was overthrown.

This time there were international circumstances that went hand in hand. The peaceful Serbian revolution in Montenegro might not have been successful if it were not for the affection of some foreign structures towards the Litiyá movement or the intolerance of some other foreign structures towards the smuggling economy of the Đukanović regime.

Law on Freedom of Religion (2019) and the Litiyá movement in Montenegro (2020)

Since 1997, the Democratic Party of Socialists has been preparing for a showdown with the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro. After the secession of Montenegro (2006), Djukanović and his elite built a structure that would create a framework for the expulsion of the Serbian Orthodox Church from Montenegro and the confiscation of its property through institutional and administrative means, under the abduction law (Raković, 2015, pp. 72–109). They believed that that moment had come in 2019.

After Serbian political leaders of the Democratic Front Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević received a blessing from Serbian Patriarch Irinej on 25 December 2019 to “fight in every place and at every opportunity and not give up the defense” of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro (*Sputnik Serbia*, 25 December 2019), on 26 December 2019 the Democratic Front attempted to prevent by physical resistance the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Legal Status of Religious Communities in the Parliament of Montenegro. However, since all the MPs of the Democratic Front were taken out of the Parliament of Montenegro and arrested, the regime parties of Montenegrin separatists and national minorities adopted this law on 27 December 2019. (*Radio-television of Serbia*, 27 December 2019).

Andrija Mandić has been proposing for some time that peaceful protests should be organized, similar to the “Immortal Regiment” (*Besmrtni puk*) in Russia, but instead of images of ancestors, participants would carry Orthodox icons: “We should not carry photos of our ancestors, but we should carry icons of our saints, to pray to God and for all those who believe in God and who belong to the Orthodox Church to take to the streets. Our

Serbian Orthodox Church is primarily responsible for the organization of going out on the streets, and we certainly want that law to be changed in the parliament, with the aim of returning it to the parliament and removing the shortcomings so that everything proposed by the Church can be incorporated into it" (*Vijesti.me*, 28 December 2019).

On the evening of 26 December 2019, Bishops Joanikije of Budimlja and Nikšić and Metodije of Diocletia went out into the street with Orthodox Christian believers, to put pressure through prayer gatherings on the regime to withdraw this robber law. On the streets of Montenegro, there were blockades and clashes between the faithful citizens and the Montenegrin police (*Vijesti.me*, 26 December 2019; *Sputnik Serbia*, 27 December 2019; *CdM.me*, 29 December 2019). In order to prevent major incidents, the Metropolitan of the Montenegro and the Littoral Amfilohije became the head of the protest, and at the turn of 2019 and 2020, the gatherings grew into countless processions that gathered up to 200,000 people. These were the largest movements of the people in the history of Montenegro.

At the same time, the rebellion of the youth against the Montenegrin regime broke out, especially with the waving of the flags of the Kingdom of Montenegro and the Serbian Orthodox Church and the painting of murals throughout Montenegro in the colors of the Serbian tricolor red-blue-white flag of the Kingdom of Montenegro (*IN4S*, 22 January 2020). The Litiya movement and youth rebellion painted these events as a Serbian revolution in Montenegro. As never before in recent history, all-Serbian solidarity took place in all cities of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, where citizens in support of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbs in Montenegro also organized processions and painted murals in the colors of the Serbian red-blue-white flag.

Litiya processions were held during the winter for the last time on 12 March 2020 and then they were temporarily stopped by the decision of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro due to the corona virus outbreak. Since there was no political progress regarding the changes to the robber law, the Litiya movement continued on 14 June 2020 (*Vijesti.me*, 13 June 2020; *Sputnik Serbia*, 14 June 2020) until the parliamentary elections on 30 August 2020.

The arrival of Donald Trump in power and Montenegro

On 28 June 2016, US President Barack Obama submitted a proposal to the Senate to ratify the Protocol on Montenegro's accession to NATO. He did that on Serbian holiday St Vitus Day, exactly ten years since Montenegro

was accepted into the United Nations (on St Vitus Day 2006). However, that Obama proposal did not reach the agenda until the presidential election in the United States of America, which was held on 8 November 2016. The election was won by Donald Trump, who took the position that “NATO is obsolete” (*Independent*, 7 April 2016).

Breitbart, a portal owned by Trump’s chief strategist Stephen Bannon, published an article on 7 December 2016, titled “Montenegro’s Push to Join NATO May Set Up Trump-GOP Congress Showdown”. The text states that all the democrat senators are in favor of Montenegro joining NATO, and that on that issue “disagreements remain” among the republican senators. Therefore, writes the author of the text, Neil W. McCabe, there may be an “awkward situation” between the Trump administration and a section of Republican senators who support Montenegro’s admission to NATO (*Breitbart.com*, 7 December 2016).

Senator Rand Paul, with the support of Senator Mike Lee, blocked the ratification of the Protocol on the accession of Montenegro to the NATO alliance from December 2016 to March 2017 (*Shaheen.senate.gov*, 10 December 2016; *Washington Post*, 16. March 2017). Notorious supporters of Montenegro’s accession to NATO – such as Michael Haltzel – expressed fear that Trump could veto a positive decision by the Senate (*Huffington Post*, 30 January 2017).

But the “deep state” opened a series of scandals about the connections of members of Trump’s cabinet and environment with Russian structures. Trump’s national security adviser, General Michael Flynn, had to resign in mid-February 2017 (*Guardian*, 14 February 2017), and the head of Trump’s presidential campaign, Paul Manafort, was exposed to a media lynching because of his ties to the Russians (*Politico.com*, 8 March 2017). Among other things, and for this reason, on 7 March 2017, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson wrote to the Senate to adopt the Protocol on Montenegro’s Accession to the NATO (*Reuters*, 21 March 2017). On 28 March 2017, American senators voted by a convincing majority of 97:2 to ratify the Protocol on Montenegro’s Accession to NATO (*Reuters*, 27 March 2017). On 11 April 2017, Trump signed the ratification of that protocol (*WhiteHouse.gov*, 11 April 2017).

Despite this, Trump could not “swallow” the fact that he was forced to ratify Montenegro’s entry into NATO. In this regard, at the NATO Summit in Brussels on 25 May 2017, Trump rudely pushed Montenegrin Prime Minister Duško Marković away. Trump’s associate Omarosa Manigault Newman writes that Trump told her he pushed Marković away because “he’s just a whiny punk bitch”. (Manigault Newman, 2018, p. 211).

In an interview with *Fox television* on 18 July 2018, Trump even questioned whether the United States of America would defend Montenegro militarily, despite its NATO obligation. He thought that because of Montenegro – about which he spoke only with irony – one should not risk the third world war.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that the American ambassador to Montenegro did not support the intention of the Djukanović regime to adopt the segregationist law on freedom of religion. Namely, on 5 November 2019 the American ambassador Judy Rising Reinke visited the Metropolitan Amfilohije and at the meeting “it was concluded that such important social issues as the right to freedom of religion or belief must be conducted in the broadest public, permanent and institutional dialogue with full mutual respect, cooperation and tolerance of the state and all subjects of religious freedom” (*Pobjeda.me*, 5 November 2019).

British Ambassador Alison Kemp was on the same path. On 18 June 2020 she provided support to the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The statement of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral stated: “The ambassador reiterated the position that the United Kingdom is committed to the rule of law and full respect for human rights, which include the right to freedom of religion or belief, expression and assembly. Ambassador Kemp supported the expressed willingness of the Metropolitan and the clergy of our Church to resolve all open issues in the spirit of dialogue, peace, tolerance and mutual respect. Ambassador Kemp particularly emphasized the importance of avoiding violence and the use of force in this and all other situations” (*Vijesti.me*, 18 June 2020).

As far as Russia is concerned, it left the alliance with Milo Djukanović a long time ago, because the Montenegrin president deceived them by promising that Montenegro would not join NATO. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that he was friend with Milo Djukanović until Djukanović became a weapon of Russophobia (*Pečat*, 13 October 2023).

Here is a personal experience. Since I was a part of the inner circle – up to a dozen people – who planned and designed the way to the overthrow of Djukanović’s regime in the parliamentary elections. During 2020, I met twice in Belgrade with British structures, once with American structures and several times with Brussels structures. For them, the most important thing was that Montenegro does not withdraw from NATO and remains on the “European path”. When they received assurances that only the overthrow of Djukanović’s regime was in order, and not the revision of international

agreements, it was a guarantee that the West in Montenegro would not be an obstacle to defense of the Serbian Orthodox Church and even not be an obstacle to the restoration of the Serbian identity of Montenegro.

Cutting Montenegrin criminal channels across the oceans and seas

David Phillips from Columbia University writes in a book about the interventionism of the United States of America in Kosovo and Metohija, that American officials willingly overlooked Djukanović's connections with the mafia because they saw him as an effective counterweight to Milošević (Phillips, 2012, p. 80). The foreword for that book was written by American diplomat Nicholas Burns, who was actively involved in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav disintegration.

The former American ambassador to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, William Montgomery, confirms that the Americans turned a blind eye to cigarette smuggling and human trafficking in Montenegro only to overthrow Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević through Djukanović. On the other hand, says Montgomery, after Vojislav Koštunica's victory over Milošević on the Yugoslav federal elections (2000), the British insisted that "Montenegro under Djukanović is corrupt, and any alternative is preferable." Montgomery writes that such and similar objections from the "international community" were "hypocrisy" because everyone knew that "the transfer of cigarettes through Montenegro was one of the ways in which the Montenegrin government financed itself" in order to oppose Milošević (Montgomery, 2010, pp. 122, 124, 130).

Italian Finance Minister Ottaviano Del Turco gave an interview to Rome's *Il Tempo* on 1 February 2001 in which he made harsh accusations against Djukanović for cigarette smuggling. Del Turco pointed to connections between people close to Djukanović and the Neapolitan Camorra mafia. In addition, Del Turco said that with the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia, bigger problems appeared: human trafficking, arms trafficking and drug trafficking to Italy (*Glas Crnogoraca*, 25 March 2001).

On 30 June 2003 the news broke in Italy that the prosecutor's office in Naples requested Djukanović's arrest. According to the prosecution's report, Djukanović was at the head of a criminal organization that was involved in cigarette smuggling to Montenegro and other countries freed from the monopoly regime. According to the report, the Montenegrin leader and his associates collaborated with the Italian mafia. However, judge Anna Di

Mauro said that she refuses to consider this case because Djukanović is protected by diplomatic immunity (*NIN*, 10 July 2003).

Therefore, the anti-state as a parallel economic creation in Montenegro essentially influenced the secession from the joint state with Serbia. In this regard, in an interview with Podgorica's A1 television, Montenegrin banker Duško Knežević said that he could not talk about the malfeasances that were carried out in the referendum process in 2006 because it would "threaten the statehood of Montenegro" (*A1TV*, 25 January 2019).

Consortium of research centers dealing with the study of organized crime and corruption (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) awarded Milo Djukanović in 2015 with *Organized Crime and Corruption 'Person of the Year'* award. Therefore, it should not be surprising that since Trump came to power, actions to cut Montenegrin drug smuggling channels across the oceans and seas, from the United States of America to Australia, have intensified worldwide. In this regard, from 2017 to the end of 2023, in the actions of the DEA and other services and the police, 41.7 tons of cocaine were seized worldwide, smuggled in eleven shipments by Montenegrin citizens (*Politika*, 30 September 2023).

Namely, in September 2018, near the Azores, the Portuguese police seized 840 kilograms of cocaine on the ship "Florida", and two Montenegrin citizens were arrested on that occasion. In 2019, the Portuguese police seized six tons of cocaine on the ship "Yemaya", also near the Azores, and arrested a Montenegrin citizen. In addition, in 2019, the Portuguese police seized another 800 kilograms of cocaine on the ship "Seascope" that was sailing to Porto, and this shipment was also related to the drug smuggling of the Montenegrin underground (*Politika*, 30 September 2023).

Furthermore, in February 2019, 1.4 tons of cocaine were seized on the ship "MSC Carlotta" in New York, and then in March 2019, 540 kilograms of cocaine were seized on the ship "MSC Desiree" in Philadelphia, both of which were charged to the Montenegrin underground. The biggest action took place in June 2019, when about 20 tons of cocaine were seized on the ship "MSC Gayane" and five Montenegrin citizens were arrested (*Politika*, 30 September 2023).

Then, in February 2020, more than five tons of cocaine were seized on the ship "Aressa" off the coast of Venezuela, and the police arrested 11 Montenegrin citizens. Then in May 2020, the German police in the port of Hamburg seized half a ton of cocaine on the ship "Budva" sailing under the state flag of Montenegro (*Politika*, 30 September 2023).

All this, before the parliamentary elections on August 30, 2020, cast a great stain on the Djukanović regime, and also showed the intention of the Western services to deal with Montenegrin crime, which in previous years was linked to the powers of the regime in Montenegro.

The corona virus pandemic and circumstances in Montenegro

Despite Trump's negative attitude towards NATO, and even Montenegro's entry into NATO, the structures of the deep state continued their anti-Serbian policy. American General Curtis Scaparrotti, the commander of NATO in Europe, said at a hearing in the Armed Forces Committee of the US Senate on 8 March 2018 that the reason for concern is not only the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, but also the Serbian population in the Balkans (*US Senate*, 8 March 2018).

In this regard, the minister of a friendly country told me immediately before the outbreak of the corona virus pandemic, that he had information from the ambassador of a NATO country, that there would be no military intervention by the Euro-Atlantic alliance against the Serbs, that is, the Orthodox Christian believers in Montenegro, as were the NATO aggressions against the Republic Serbian Krajina and Republika Srpska (1994–1995) and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro (1999). The situation in Montenegro was considered an internal dispute.

However, the ambassador of that NATO country told him that there is a possibility that Italy will intervene at the invitation of Montenegro, as was done in 1997 in "Operation Alba" in Albania. Namely, in 1997, the Italian army intervened in Albania to restore order, suppress rebellion, stop civil unrest, and prevent mass looting after the banking collapse. Although that operation was "successfully completed", the riots were used to loot military barracks and police stations, and the smuggling of these weapons could lead to radical Albanian structures in Kosovo and Metohija (Greco, 1997, pp. 4–5).

If such an intervention had occurred in Montenegro, it would have been obviously on the basis of the bilateral agreement between official Montenegro and Italy. At the same time, it stands out that the Alpine Brigade "Julia" of the special forces of the Italian army, from 20 to 27 January 2020, on the eastern border towards the former Yugoslavia, held a military exercise for fighting in mountainous and urban conditions, which is very reminiscent of a possible conflict in Montenegro (*Esercito.difesa.it*, 27 January 2020). The entry of the Italian army under the guise of a "peacekeeping operation" would be nothing more than the occupation of Montenegro.

After the severe suffering of Italy in the corona virus pandemic, it was no longer possible, even if there was such an intention or thinking.

However, this is not the only indicator of why the corona virus pandemic contributed to the fall of the Djukanovic regime.

Namely, in February 2020, the “Factor plus” agency from Belgrade conducted an internal survey, according to which Serbian parties and parties voted for by the Serbian people could already have an absolute majority of voters in Montenegro: New Serbian Democracy (20.1%), Democratic Montenegro (18.3%), Socialist People’s Party (4.7%), True Montenegro (4.4%), Democratic People’s Party (4.2%) (*Faktor plus*, February 2020). However, the voters of Djukanović’s party did not live only in Montenegro, but came to vote from Western countries where they worked as guest workers (*gastarbeiter*). When it comes to small differences in votes, it could always turn the result in Djukanović’s favor. Of course, with all the other electoral malpractices that could be carried out by his structures. However, the corona virus pandemic thwarted some of the intentions of the Đukanović regime.

In accordance with the general epidemiological trends in the world, on 15 March 2020 Montenegro closed the borders for the entry of foreign citizens, in order to stop the spread of the corona virus (*Slobodna Evropa*, 17 March 2020). In order to prevent the collapse of the tourist season, the Government of Montenegro decided on 30 June 2020 to open the borders for citizens of the European Union (*Gov.me*, 30 June 2020). In anticipation of the parliamentary elections, on 15 August 2020, Montenegro opened its borders for citizens of the Republic of Serbia, the countries of the region and the United States of America (*Slobodna Evropa*, 14 August 2020). However, Montenegrin citizens who work as guest workers, for example, in Switzerland and Luxembourg, could not easily come to vote on 30 August 2020, because upon their return to the countries of Western Europe, they would be subject to quarantine, which could significantly complicate their lives and economy.

Nothing, therefore, benefited Djukanović’s regime. He was faced with a large Orthodox Christian movement of the Serbian people in Montenegro (and around it), he lost the support of the United States of America and the United Kingdom, due to epidemiological measures in Europe and limited movement he lost the external resource of voters. In the same time, arrests of Montenegrin drug smugglers were made on all meridians.

The absence of diaspora voters was crucial at the moment when the new parliamentary majority had only one more MP than Djukanović’s party and

its satellites – 41 MPs against 40 MPs. The bearer of this victory was the Serbian people of Montenegro.

Parliamentary elections (2020) and post-election events

On 31 January 2020, the President of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, held a meeting with Metropolitan Amfilohije and Bishop Joanikije in Belgrade. At that meeting, Vučić told the Serbian bishops from Montenegro that they would have all possible support from Serbia in the defense of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In this regard, the Republic of Serbia has engaged diplomatically to represent the interests of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro at international forums. The media network in the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska has been fully made available to protection of Serbian holy places in Montenegro.

At the same time, there was no objection in the Republic of Serbia that Zdravko Krivokapić, a university professor of mechanical engineering who was recommended by the Montenegrin priest Gojko Perović, became the head of the Serbian coalition “Za budućnost Crne Gore” (“For the Future of Montenegro”). But when the Democratic Party of Socialists was defeated in the parliamentary elections on 30 August 2020, Krivokapić showed a completely different face.

The leaders of the electoral lists of the new parliamentary majority Zdravko Krivokapić (“For the future of Montenegro”), Aleksa Bečić (“Peace is our nation”) and Dritan Abazović (“Black on white”) signed a coalition agreement on 9 September 2020 according to which the new majority committed that, after the formation of the government, it would continue to recognize the independence of the so-called of Kosovo, strengthens the position of Montenegro in NATO, and that the historical Serbian symbols of Montenegro will not be returned to use (*Slobodna Evropa*, 9 September 2020).

At the same time, Krivokapić, as a prime minister-designate, did not want the Democratic Front politicians who were the backbone of the “For the Future of Montenegro” coalition to enter the new government. When a high-ranking Serbian official called me to discuss what is happening in Montenegro after the elections, I told him that we were deceived, that we in Serbia should take the burden off the backs of Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević in the expectations of our public that they would be on ministerial positions and thus make their situation easier because Krivokapić, obviously with foreigners, excluded from power the members of the coalition he led in the elections.

It is obvious that Krivokapić's foreign mentors, possibly from Germany, believed that the new American President Joe Biden, who defeated Trump in the presidential elections on 3 November 2020, will return the old anti-Serbian policy towards Montenegro. However, it turned out that even Biden was not interested in supporting the defeated Djukanović structures.

On 24 September 2020, when Vučić again hosted Metropolitan Amfilohije and Bishop Joanikije in Belgrade, Amfilohije told him that "now he understands him much better" because Zdravko Krivokapić – behind whom the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral stood – signed a new recognition of the so-called Kosovo, which the Republic of Serbia has never done, nor would it do. At that meeting, Metropolitan Amfilohije and President Vučić improved their relations even more. The fruits of that improvement could not be seen because the corona virus killed Metropolitan Amfilohije on 30 October 2020. Only twenty days later, on 20 November 2020 the corona virus killed Serbian Partarch Irinej.

The so-called expert government of Zdravko Krivokapić was formed on 4 December 2020, and most of the ministers were of Serbian ethnicity. On 29 December 2020, the Parliament of Montenegro adopted amendments to the Law on Freedom of Religion, which removed the articles of the law that were a threat to the Serbian Orthodox Church (*Radio-television of Serbia*, 29 December 2020). Since the President of Montenegro Milo Djukanović refused to sign these changes, the Parliament of Montenegro again adopted the same changes on 20 January 2021, which according to the Constitution of Montenegro, Djukanović was no longer allowed not to sign (*Politika.rs*, 20 January 2021). This was an important, but not the final step in the protection of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro.

Basic Agreement between the Serbian Orthodox Church and Montenegro (2022)

On 18 February 2021 the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb and Ljubljana as the Serbian Patriarch. At the next session of the Holy Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Zdravko Krivokapić was invited to sign the Basic Agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church on 27 May 2021. Krivokapić arrived in Belgrade, but refused to sign the Basic Agreement (*Radio-television of Serbia*, 27 May 2021). On 29 May 2021, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected Bishop Joanikije as the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral.

Furthermore, at that May session of the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 2021, a decision was made to abolish the episcopal councils in those former Yugoslav republics where they were established, and the most important thing was that the Episcopal Council in Montenegro was abolished (*Serbian Orthodox Church*, 29 May 2021). Thus, the honorary title of the Archbishop of Cetinje and the informal name “Orthodox Church in Montenegro” for dioceses in Montenegro were excluded from use. Therefore, dioceses in Montenegro could bear only the name – Serbian Orthodox Church. On 5 September 2021 Patriarch Porfirije enthroned Metropolitan Joanikije in the Cetinje monastery.

Before the fall of Krivokapić’s government, Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazović visited Patriarch Porfirije in Belgrade on 26 January 2022 and gave him his word that he would sign the Basic Agreement because, Abazović emphasized, the Serbian Orthodox Church must have the same rights as other traditional churches and religious communities in Montenegro. Abazović’s government was formed on 28 April 2022.

Serbian Patriarch Porfirije and Prime Minister of Montenegro Dritan Abazović signed on 3 August 2022 in Podgorica the Basic Agreement between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government of Montenegro. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro was thereby granted historical continuity and legal legitimacy in the length of 800 years on the soil of Montenegro. At the foundation of the Serbian statehood of Montenegro is the identity of the Patriarchate of Peć. That was the final step in the protection of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro.

Despite the fact that the church autonomist Zdravko Krivokapić refused to sign the Basic Agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the general climate in Montenegro became significantly better for the Serbian people during his and Abazović’s government. Representatives of Serbian political parties were given positions “by depth”, they became directors of companies and institutions, and they employed Serbs who were not allowed to be employed during the time of the Democratic Party of Socialists. Therefore, the Serbian people began to win their freedom.

Western factors did not stop this process, not even the Biden administration. The US Deputy Secretary of State and Special Envoy of the President of the United States of America for the Western Balkans, Gabriel Escobar, said on 15 October 2021 that he could not see that being pro-Serbian and pro-Russian in Montenegro is the same thing, and that the Serbian issue is different issue (*Glas Amerike*, 15 October 2021). The Americans obviously wanted to show that there are pro-NATO Serbs in Montenegro, who would

be different from the anti-NATO Serbs in the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Srpska. This is a departure from Scaparotti's view that the entire Serbian population in the Balkans is hostile.

Presidential and parliamentary elections and census (2023)

Two of Krivokapić's "expert ministers", Milojko Spajić and Jakov Milatović, founded the populist movement "Europe Now" in June 2022. They acted from dualistic Montenegrin-Serbian positions, which – when it comes to identity issues – put Montenegro above and Serbdom below. In that sense, "Europe now" is quite similar to Democratic Montenegro. The "For the Future of Montenegro" coalition, led by Mandić and Knežević, had a completely different view, which always considered Serbdom equal to Montenegro.

In the second round of presidential elections on 2 April 2023, Jakov Milatović defeated Milo Djukanović and became the President of Montenegro. In the parliamentary elections in Montenegro, which were held on 11 June 2023, the "Europe Now" movement won (25.53%). They were followed by the Democratic Party of Socialists (23.22%), the coalition "For the Future of Montenegro" (14.74%), Democratic Montenegro (12.48%), the Bosniak Party (7.09%), the Socialist People's Party (3.13%). A new parliamentary majority was formed, which on 31 October 2023 elected Milojko Spajić as Prime Minister and Andrija Mandić as President of the Parliament of Montenegro.

Andrija Mandić placed a Serbian tricolor flag – the same dimensions as the red and yellow state flag of Montenegro – in his presidential cabinet. Before him, Serbian tricolors were placed in cabinets and on municipal buildings by the mayors of municipalities throughout Montenegro where the Serbian people form the local government (*Vijesti.me*, 16 January 2024). Mandić did not congratulate the so-called statehood day of Kosovo. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, headed by Filip Ivanović, the spiritual child of the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral and staff member of "Europe Now", congratulated on 17 February 2024 the so-called Kosovo: "We congratulate you on the Independence Day of the Republic of Kosovo. We look forward to the further improvement of our good neighborly relations" (*Vijesti.me*, 18 February 2024).

And this is an example that shows the visible role of pro-NATO Serbian structures in Montenegro, who act and will act against the interests of the

Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, the Serbian Orthodox Church and the united and indivisible Serbdom.

After a two-year delay, the census in Montenegro began on 3 December 2023 and ended on 28 December 2023. However, the census results on identity issues were not officially published until April 2024. There is reliable knowledge that 36–37% of Montenegro population declared they are of Serbian ethnicity, and 40–41% said they are of so-called Montenegrin ethnicity, while about 52% of population speak Serbian and about 33% speak so-called Montenegrin language.

It is noticeable, therefore, that Serbian identity through language has an absolute majority in Montenegro. Based on this, it can be seen that among the Orthodox Christians in Montenegro, and expressed as a percentage in relation to the entire population of Montenegro, a unique and indivisible Serbian identity is cherished by more than a third of citizens (over 36%), while a third of citizens have an exclusive so-called Montenegrin identity (about 33%), and the dual Montenegrin-Serbian identity has about 15% of the population. In accordance with the growth trends of Serbian identity, it can be expected that in the next census in 2031, the majority of dualists will break in favor of a single Serbian identity. Thus, the Serbian ethnic identity could reach an absolute majority in the total population of Montenegro.

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THE GREEN TRANSITION AND ENERGY SECURITY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRIES

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Abstract: The global energy markets are destabilized as the result of the crisis in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. Such adversely developments has additionally undermined the energy security of the Western Balkans countries that are faced with consequences of the global surge in energy prices. Due to the range of the current economic and security challenges in the context of the ongoing energy crisis, the burning question that arises is how to coordinate the goals of environmental protection with energy security.

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans as a regional strategy for the sustainable energy transition was launched in October 2020 by signing the Sofia Declaration, which relies on five crucial pillars: decarbonisation and climate resilience, depollution, circular economy, sustainable food system and rural areas, biodiversity. This Declaration foresees the commitment of these countries to the target of making the continent carbon-neutral by 2050 by phasing out coal subsidies, introducing carbon pricing instrument and renewables support schemes. The problem for Western Balkan countries relies in the fact that their energy mix is dominated by coal, while only Albania mainly relies on hydropower to meet its energy needs. The coal-fired power plants are denoted as the main cause of environmental degradation in this region, hence these countries committed themselves to decarbonize the energy sector. However, due to the possible deterioration of energy crisis, the plans to phase out coal-fired power plants has been postponed over the next few years.

Using a comparative analysis method, we will explore the structural developments of electricity generation and the possible capacities for use of renewables. We will also highlight the challenges for given countries to meet energy security goals.

Keywords: Western Balkan countries, energy security, energy dependence, green transition, renewables

Introduction

The climate change is one of the main global threat to humanity due to long-term ecologically irresponsible behaviour marked by the excessive consumption of non-renewable energy sources (such as oil, coal and gas). The cause of this problem, but at the same time its solution is energetics which has crucial role in the foundation of economic development. Decarbonization of the electricity sector, namely the reduction and eventual cessation of using fossil fuels for electricity generation, represents a strategic commitment to energy development. An effective energy transition should provide energy security, i.e. sufficient and affordable supplies and prevent economic shocks, along with the potential political consequences (Yergin, 2022). A fundamental barrier for sustainable energy transition represents the balancing the provision of reliable and cost-effective electricity for consumers with the imperative to reduce pollution. The energy transition is in the light of new challenges, as policymakers must address pollution reduction amidst energy crises and energy shortage while taking into account energy security.

In response to the current global context (the COVID-19 pandemic, rising energy costs, conflict between Russia and Ukraine), the costs associated with decarbonization highly increased, triggering an energy crisis, which directly reflected on the energy security. The sudden surge in energy prices, since the summer of 2021, has caused a big dilemma for policy-makers worldwide how to protect energy security and accomplish goals related to sustainable environment. Taking into account the current situation, governments need to find way how to resolve issues related to energy trilemma: energy security, sustainability and affordability (Hussain et al., 2023). Since energy crisis has several facets such as fossil fuels, energy prices, climate change, food security, inflation and COVID-19 pandemic aftermath, it underscores the need for a more comprehensive and holistic approach. Moreover, besides influencing the shift in their energy priorities and visions, the conflict in Ukraine has brought policymakers from EU members states in a situation that involves a struggle to preserve current energy security due to the cessation of cooperation with Russia and addressing issues related to the process energy transition without reinforcing additional high-carbon dependencies (Höysniemi, 2022).

The energy security, as an equivalent of national security, represents one of the main priorities of all countries around the world, which is closely interconnected with economic development, geopolitical tensions and environmental protection. In order to preserve the priorities of energy

policy, and above all energy security, the emphasis is on diversification of sources and routes of supply and integration of energy markets to ensure a stable and long-term sustainable supply of energy. While Western European countries intend to enhance their energy security through phasing out fossil fuels from their energy portfolio and foster the usage of renewable energy sources (RES), oil and gas exporting countries strive to preserve their energy self-sufficiency by applying a 'wait and watch' approach (Crowley-Vigneau et al., 2023).

Western Balkan (WB) region is facing a range of challenges due to its fragile energy security. These countries are traditionally highly dependent on imports of Russian oil and natural gas, which is directly reflected on the decline in their energy security. By introduction of the the hard-hitting sanctions imposed on Russia, their energy security is further destabilized. According to the OECD (2022), the main cause of the region's fragility stems from fluctuations in prices within the regional wholesale electricity markets.

Despite abundant potential for renewable energy, the region lag behind the EU in the transition from coal to clean energy sources. The green transition in the WB region, which implies the provision of a sufficient amount of energy in an economical, energetic and ecologically acceptable way, has been called into question due to the high dependence on coal for electricity generation and obsolete energy systems. By signing Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, the governments of these countries have gain a difficult task to protect energy security and reduce environmental pollution in the condition of rising prices. The transition to ecologically sustainable energy sources is a complex and inevitable process that will enable them to preserve energy security and yield numerous positive effects, particularly in the long run.

The aim of this paper is to address the current state of energy security and structure of the electricity generation in the WB countries. In section 1, we present the definitions of energy security and its strategies in the context of global turbulences and highlight the importance of renewable energy sources for protecting energy independence. In section 2, we show the association between energy security and rising energy poverty, while, in sector 3, we point out the significance of nuclear energy as a robust solution for addressing issues related to energy poverty and environmental degradation. Section 4 focuses on the issues related to navigating green transition in WB region. In section 5, we show the specificity of the energy sector and their potential for electricity production from renewables.

Energy security and renewable energy sources

According to the International Energy Agency (2024), the energy security can be defined 'as the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price'. The UNDP (2000) also defines energy security as 'the continuous availability of energy in varied forms, in sufficient quantities and at reasonable prices'. The basic components of energy security are availability of resources, reliability of supply, environmental sustainability and affordability of energy sources. Energy security includes not only supply of power and fuels, but also optimization of energy usage for greater efficiency. The renewable energy, as effective strategy for broadening the energy mix, contribute positively to energy security, while the energy security positively affect the renewable energy amidst geopolitical risk (Khan et al, 2023). By increasing energy efficiency, along with the use of RES, there is a significant impact on enhancing the competitiveness of the domestic economy, reducing business costs and cost of living, preventing the spread of energy poverty and increasing energy sovereignty.

The energy security can be achieved through three fundamental strategies like supply diversification, enhancing energy efficiency and accelerating the transition to renewable energy as a substitute for fossil fuels (European Commission, 2023a). Its objectives vary depending on a country's role within the energy market. The importance of energy security is also evidenced by the fact that it can and must be considered within the context of geopolitics (Proroković, 2020). From the perspective of energy security, countries that belong to the group of fossil fuel producers/exporters strive to provide consistent demand for their goods. Considering that their economies depend on the export of hydrocarbons (crude oil and natural gas), the energy transition could cause the loss of the usual sale markets and part of income, and create new risks associated with energy security (Borovsky, 2021). They are burden with high financial and technological costs of decarbonizing their energy sector, among other things, because of the risk of sanctions against exporting countries. For some exporters, especially those with a high share of fuel rents in GDP and insufficient financial reserves, the energy transition can also result in serious socio-economic and political turbulences. Fuentes et al. (2020) argue that countries typically formulate strategies with the intention to maximize the exploitation of their own energy resources. For instance, the countries owning conventional fossil fuels are ready to exploit them for improving their energy security by applying the all-of-the-above strategy, suggesting the use of nonrenewable

and renewable sources of energy, as well as the expansion of the renewable energy installations (for example, China and the United States).

On the other hand, the consumer nations, including those within the EU, seek to broaden their energy sources to reduce reliance on imports and enhance security (Rabi et al. 2022). The widespread adoption of renewable and other low-carbon energy sources will alleviate key risks for oil, gas, and coal-importing countries, potentially enabling them to achieve energy independence. These countries try to decrease energy consumption and increase the share of renewables in their energy demand, while reducing their addiction to the fossil fuels. However, the emergence of new risks stemming from the post-carbon era cannot be ruled out (Borovsky, 2021). That is why it is of crucial importance for this group of countries to “move towards a ‘security-centred’ energy transition, premised on ‘security first, compliance second’ (Marhold, 2023).

Bearing in mind the divergent energy security perceptions and priorities related to green transition, Pérez et al. (2019) distinguish two clusters of countries among EU Member States. The first one is green cluster consisting of countries located in the western region of Europe, which perceive renewable energy as a win-win, business opportunity and strategy for reducing the import dependency on fossil fuels. The second blue cluster encompasses countries situated on the periphery of Europe, which are deeply concerned about their energy security (energy supply and diversifications of energy sources). The use of renewable source of energy is seen as win-lose. This group of countries are characterized by high import dependency and strong market concentration, which make them very sensitive to external shocks. Such different energy strategies between EU member states could jeopardize the energy strategy and call into question the green transition.

The renewable energy stock are important for enhancing energy independence whose role is especially pronounced at times of heightened geopolitical turbulence. Igeland et al. (2024) point out that the economic policy uncertainty has positive effect on the returns of renewable stocks, while the renewable energy is seen as stable investment in conditions of macroeconomic fluctuations and crisis. The authors warn against negative impact of the prices of green metals such as nickel, copper, cobalt and zinc on the renewable stock, indicating that energy security can be jeopardized by the consequences associated with the renewable energy transition without effective management. Ivanovski and Marinucci (2021) who find negative long-run relationship between economic policy uncertainty and

renewable energy consumption have revealed the similar findings. In the condition of high and strong political and macroeconomic imbalances, in order to maintain their energy security, the countries will be forced to give up the use of RES, at least in the short and medium run. The need to ensure a stable and safe supply of electricity due to the stochastic nature of renewable sources has prompted the emphasis on energy security as a leading factor in energy policy.

Aslam et al. (2024) stress out that the shift from traditional fossil fuel-based energy sources to renewables significantly reduce energy security risk with the usage of renewable energy sources in the countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to their findings, the energy security risk is embodied by the energy production using fossil fuels, expenditure on fuel imports, the fluctuation of oil prices, the intensity of energy use in transportation, as well as the creation of a sustainable environment with reduced CO₂ to GDP intensity. Kim et al. (2024) demonstrate that the shift towards economically sustainable growth and an economy is expected to yield a favourable impact on energy security, contingent upon investments being directed towards mitigating the emerging risks associated with heightened dependence on renewable sources. The authors point out that two essential determinants of energy security are diversification and political risks, so policymakers should consider how they are intertwined with the green transition. Boosting domestic fossil fuel production at the cost of increased pollution could enhance energy independence but endanger the progress of the green transition, as well as long-term energy security. Chu et al. (2023) highlight that geopolitical tensions have a beneficial impact on the adoption of renewable energy for high-income countries, while they have a detrimental effect on the utilization of renewables in middle-income countries. Due to growing energy insecurity and geostrategic uncertainties, finding a balance between energy independence, economic development, and sustainability objectives will be a hard challenge. The energy crisis has brought to the forefront the aspiration to establish a balance between immediate energy requirements and ensuring long-term energy stability.

It should be highlighted that the transition to clean, sustainable energy and renewables can cause additional dependencies. The usage and inclusion of renewable energy sources in the energy matrix can cause the rise of conflicts and weaken energy resilience. Amidst the ongoing energy crisis, it is evident the geographical clustering of manufacturing facilities for modern clean energy generation equipment, which directly affects on the establishment of a new reliance for inputs and commercial partners (Gaspar

Filho & Santos, 2022). Therefore, consistent provision of essential non-fuel minerals at a reasonable cost is vital for ensuring energy security and facilitating the ongoing transition in energy systems. The transition to 'green' energy is influenced by a combination of political and environmental motives. Crowley-Vigneau et al. (2023) point out that the political objective of achieving energy independence through renewable sources may be within reach for certain countries within a few decades, whereas global climate change mitigation would likely require a significantly more time. The mass development and construction of renewable energy projects occur due to the need for energy stability, high electricity prices, and a general fear of shortages of all energy sources. Unfortunately, the ecological, social, and health components of the importance of renewable energy sources have taken a back seat.

The prevailing belief is that sustainable energy security could be achieved with the help of the massive investment in a mix of clean energy technologies, from solar and wind energy to nuclear power, 'green' hydrogen, electric vehicles, and carbon capture technologies (Bhatt, 2023). However, there is a dilemma whether these 'clean' sources are environmentally acceptable, i.e. whether their use can reduce pollution and at the same time increase economic growth. For instance, Ahn et al. (2021) argue that enhancing the share of renewable energy sources within the energy portfolio reduces social welfare as the adverse impact of reduced cost-efficiency offset the benefits of reduced climate damage on social welfare. Moreover, some authors argue that the impact of renewable energy on economic performance largely depends on the extent of renewable energy deployment. For example, Chen et al. (2020) demonstrate that developing countries experience negative impact if the usage of renewable energy is below a certain threshold. However, these countries could offset the adverse impact of renewable energy utilization over time due to higher levels of renewable energy adoption. Dogan et al. (2020) find evidence that renewable energy consumption has detrimental impact on economic growth in high-income OECD countries. On the other hand, there seems to be a positive relationship between renewable energy consumption and economic performance in lower to low-middle income countries.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the benefits of renewable energy sources are often exaggerated while potential negative effects are overlooked (Zvezdanović Lobanova et al. 2019). In addition, it should be highlighted that all renewable energy sources have an impact on the environment, with some of them leaving stronger consequences. The impact they will have depends

primarily on the characteristics of the technology used, geographical location, and numerous other factors. If each of these clean energy sources is adequately assessed, it becomes more than evident that ‘sustainable’ does not simultaneously mean ‘harmless’. Namely, some renewable energy sources lead to a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions during their period of use, but the overall effects that occur throughout their entire lifespan are often underestimated. What can be emphasized with certainty is that fossil fuels – coal, oil, and natural gas – contribute more to environmental damage compared to renewable sources. Therefore, the effects of renewable energy, as a key component of climate change mitigation strategy, must be appropriately considered in the broader context of biodiversity, ecosystem protection, energy security and sustainable economic development.

Energy security and energy poverty

The interdependence between energy security and energy poverty are very complex due to the fact that renewable energy sources may produce cost savings and improve energy efficiency in the long-term, while there can be short term obstacles and risks associated with affordability and alleviation of social inequalities. Although there is no clearly established definition of energy poverty, this term most often refers to ‘the inability of keeping the home sufficiently warm’ (European Commission, 2023b). Namely, it considers a condition in which the household lacks sufficient means to obtain the necessary amount of energy required for a healthy and dignified life, in a manner that does not jeopardize other basic household needs or the wider community. Limited income, disproportionate energy expenses and low energy performance of buildings cause the energy poverty. Energy-poor residents are not able to provide themselves with sufficient heat in the households or afford essential energy sources. Energy poverty causes economic, social and health problems which manifest consistently throughout the year, spanning both the summer and winter seasons. Its consequences are numerous, ranging from an increased number of deaths during winter and health issues such as colds, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, to mental health problems like anxiety, stress, and depression (Petovar, 2022).

Unfortunately, the energy poverty has been exacerbated even further due to inflationary rise in energy prices, geopolitical tensions and economic and financial repercussion of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lobanov et al., 2022; Carfora and Scandurra, 2024). Due to the drastic decision to completely

abandon the purchase of Russian gas, consumers were exposed to price fluctuations. Concerned about their energy security, the majority of households was obliged to provide locally available heating fuels such as firewood and pellet, which caused the increase in their price, exacerbating issues related to energy poverty (RES, 2023). Energy poverty is most prevalent in countries in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, primarily affecting marginalized groups (European Parliament, 2023). In order to prevent the poorest citizens from becoming victims of energy transition, numerous EU member states are striving to assist through various means such as issuing energy vouchers (as seen in France), reducing energy taxes, lowering value-added taxes, providing direct subsidies to the most vulnerable residents, offering payments to energy producers to reduce consumer prices, as well as implementing a range of other measures (as observed in Spain, Greece, Italy, Poland, etc.). EU has adopted a set of recommendations outlining measures and policies for addressing energy poverty in its member states. Protecting vulnerable citizens and reducing of energy poverty, as a cornerstone of European Green Deal (EGD), involves granting subsidies for energy vulnerable households, improving insulation and energy properties of buildings, as well as using efficient and health-safe local heating sources.

Green transition and nuclear power

The social pressures exerted by deepening energy poverty have a major impact on the reconsideration of the energy transition. On the other hand, green transition was designed with the aim of being fair, which means that no one whose income depends on fossil fuels should be left in poverty by abandoning them and switching to renewable energy sources. According to the majority of the expert and scientific community, the remedy for this difficult state of affairs is still seen in the increasing use of renewable energy sources, while some even emphasize the use of nuclear energy, which could strengthen the resilience and stability of the energy environment. Moreover, nuclear energy is stress out as a robust solution for addressing issues related to energy poverty and environmental degradation.

Bagus and Peña-Ramos (2023) argue that the adverse effects resulting from the implementation of the energy transition, such as high energy prices and uncertainty related to supply opportunities, could be avoided, while energy security could be ensured through nuclear power plants. According to the IEA (2022), nuclear power, as the second largest low-emission energy

source after hydropower, could allow countries to safely switch to energy systems dominated by renewable energy sources. Thanks to its potential, nuclear energy-producing countries could reduce their dependence on fossil fuel imports, harmful gas emissions, ensure the integration of a higher share of solar, and wind energy in electricity systems. Kocak et al. (2023) found that electricity from nuclear power prove to have reducing effect on energy poverty in middle and low-income countries, but insignificant in high-income countries. In addition, the authors stress out that renewable and hydroelectric power play a crucial role in both mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and alleviating energy poverty.

Many countries are considering the role of nuclear power plants in the electricity generation, while most scientific and professional public are concerned about the safety of atom energy production and the storage of nuclear waste. Despite the tendency to be denoted as a green source, nuclear energy cannot be classified as such. According to the IEA's plan to reach net zero by 2050, nuclear power could double between 2020 and 2050, if new facilities are constructed (IEA, 2022). It should be noted that nearly two-thirds of nuclear power generation capacity comes from more than 30-year-old facilities, many built after oil shocks in the 1970s. The nuclear energy and coal are crucial parts of European energy security in short and medium run, so any attempt associated with their replacement or reconfiguration of energy mix in the European energy mix is accompanies with great risks and obstacles (Joița et al., 2023).

Navigating green transition in Western Balkans

The integration of the WB countries into the European energy market was accomplished by creation of the Energy Community for South-Eastern Europe in October 2005 in Athens. The Treaty establishing the Energy Community came into power on July 2006. The contracting parties are the European Community on one side, and all the WB countries, as well as Romania, on the other. Besides further strengthening of foreign trade relations, among the primary goals of the Energy Community are: creation of an integrated and coherent market for natural gas and electric energy, establishment of integrated markets for other energy sources, attraction of investments in gas networks, energy production, and energy transmission networks; improvement of the environmental conditions in the region in the context of energy supply and resources, as well as promotion of the energy efficiency enhancement and the utilization of renewable energy sources, etc. (Ministarstvo za evropske

integracije, 2024). In 2016, all WB countries signed the Paris Agreement and committed themselves to combat climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

In December 2019, EU launched the EGD with the intention to overcome problems associated with climate change and environmental degradation. Its primary goal is to make EU as the first climate neutral continent with zero net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and provide sustainable economic expansion independent of resource consumption (European Commission, 2024). Considering the obstacles and disturbances observed in the global energy sector, the European Commission adopted the REPowerEU plan in May 2020 with the aim of saving energy, generating power through renewable energy sources, diversifying energy supply and increasing energy efficiency. The energy transition is projected to reach 45% of energy from renewable sources by 2030.

By signing the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB), at the WB Summit in the Berlin Process framework, in 2020, and endorsing the Action Plan of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkan at the Brno Summit in October 2021, the countries of the region acknowledged the EGD as the European Union's new growth strategy towards a modern, climate-neutral, and competitive economy that efficiently utilizes resources (European Commission, 2020). The GAWB is based on the EGD and the associated Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. This Agenda relies on five pillars – decarbonisation and climate resilience, depollution, circular economy, sustainable food system and rural areas, biodiversity – that are in accordance with the objectives of the EGD. In order to become climate-neutral by 2050, WB countries have agreed to align with the established guidelines concerning the reduction of carbon emissions within the energy sector under the Energy Community framework; create national energy and climate plans; address energy poverty, conduct an evaluation of the socio-economic effects of decarbonization in the region; renovate both private and public buildings and secure financing for these renovation schemes and integrate with the Initiative for coal regions in transition (OECD, 2022). In accordance with the Action Plan, the WB countries adopted the 2030 climate and energy targets under the Energy Community Treaty in December 2022. These targets involves carbon pricing, cessation of coal usage, pollution mitigation measures, conservation of natural environments and biodiversity, fostering regional cooperation, and a provisional schedule for alignment with the EU Emissions Trading System in 2024 (RCC, 2024).

In November 2022, the WB leaders signed the Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition which recognizes the need to transform economies and energy sectors to meet international obligations envisaged by the Energy Community Treaty, the Paris Agreement and the EGD. By creating Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, the EU has further encouraged the governments of these countries to focus on the implementation of projects that are significantly delayed. Their previous efforts have been focused on the electricity sector, although the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans covers wide range of areas, from circular economy to agriculture (Gallop, 2022).

In addition, by signing the Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, countries have, among other things, committed to apply the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) created by the EU with the aim of imposing carbon taxes on imports from countries that do not have a similar carbon price system, introduce market models for encouraging RES and fully eliminate coal subsidies. According to the Energy Community (2023), over the past five years (2018-2022), WB countries allocated EUR 405.52 million in subsidies for coal-based electricity production. The CBAM will further increase the pressure on them to align their energy policy with the EU's climate goals. The start of the transition period of the carbon tax (CO₂ tax) was on October 1, 2023 and is scheduled to last until the end of 2025. The Energy Community Contracting Parties are entitled to an exemption for import of electricity until 2030. This will create serious changes in business conditions for companies from the WB that export cement, electricity, fertilizers, steel, iron, aluminum and hydrogen to the EU, but also certain products obtained from them, for example, screws and various structures (European Commission, 2023c). Companies will be obliged to measure the amount of CO₂ emissions emitted in the production of goods they export to the EU and inform the company to whom they have sold the goods. Besides enabling their business partner in the EU to comply with CBAM regulations by reporting their emissions, exporters will also help themselves, as they will be able to assess how the cross-border CO₂ tax could influence the price of their products in the EU market and their competitiveness. The extent to which the WB region will be affected by these measures is also indicated by the fact that over two-thirds of the region's goods exports are destined for the EU, while an additional 20% are directed to regional trading partners, who are also closely interconnected with the EU economy (RES, 2023). Furthermore, these countries are expected to continue aligning with the greenhouse gas emission trading system. This system entails allocating a certain number of permits to polluters (primarily

companies in the industry, energy, and transportation sectors) for greenhouse gas emissions. If they wish to exceed their allocated quota, they must purchase permits from others who offer parts of their unused quotas.

The specificity of energy sector in Western Balkans

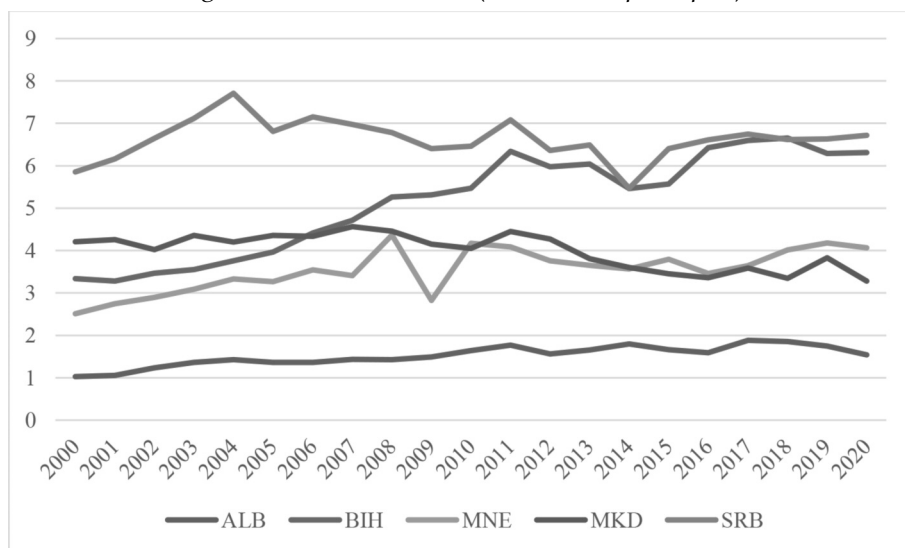
The 2021 energy crisis has influenced the dynamics of the energy transition of the WB countries and changed their plans for the transition from fossil to RES. Since it has left significant consequences on their economies, population and energy sector, the crisis has influenced the rethinking of the need to implement the energy transition, which these countries have not yet recognized as a development opportunity, but rather as a threat. The transition is seen as something that is imposed externally, and in order to preserve energy security, the process of abandoning the use of coal for electricity production is trying to postpone as long as possible. Due to concerns about their energy security, North Macedonia, Serbia and BiH decide to boost coal production in order to meet the demand of existing and newly established thermal power plants (TPP). Namely, although they initiated the development of integrated national energy and climate plans, no official decisions on decarbonization have been made, nor has a social consensus been reached on it.

Many cities and towns in WB are among the most polluted settlements in Europe due to power plants and heating which are denoted as crucial factors of environmental degradation in these countries. The majority of them use coal-fired power plants for electricity generation, which directly calls into question their ability to meet the requirements stated in the EGD. They possess outdated coal-fired TPPs, which cause significant electricity losses, as there has been no investment in building new electricity generation capacities for decades. In addition to the aforementioned shortcomings, a delayed adoption of renewable sources (with the exception of hydropower and bioenergy), high energy consumption per unit of output, limited private sector involvement, and inadequate market mechanisms for addressing energy poverty mark the WB energy sector.

Due to the effects of climate change driven by industrial operations, the utilization of coal in energy and heating sectors, along with insufficient energy efficiency, the average annual temperature in WB countries increased by 1.2 °C compared to 1970 (Knez et al. 2022). As it can be seen from figure 1, Serbia and BiH are with the highest air pollution in WB region as they rely heavily on electricity generation from coal usage. According to the

World Bank (2024), Serbia annually releases a greater amount of CO₂ than all other WB countries together. Serbia and BiH had the highest per capita CO₂ emissions among WB countries in 2020, at 6,71 and 6,31 metric tons per capita, respectively (see Figure 1). Albania's level (1,54) is half those of the Montenegro (4,06) and less than a fifth of those of Serbia.

Figure 1. CO₂ emissions (metric tons *per capita*)



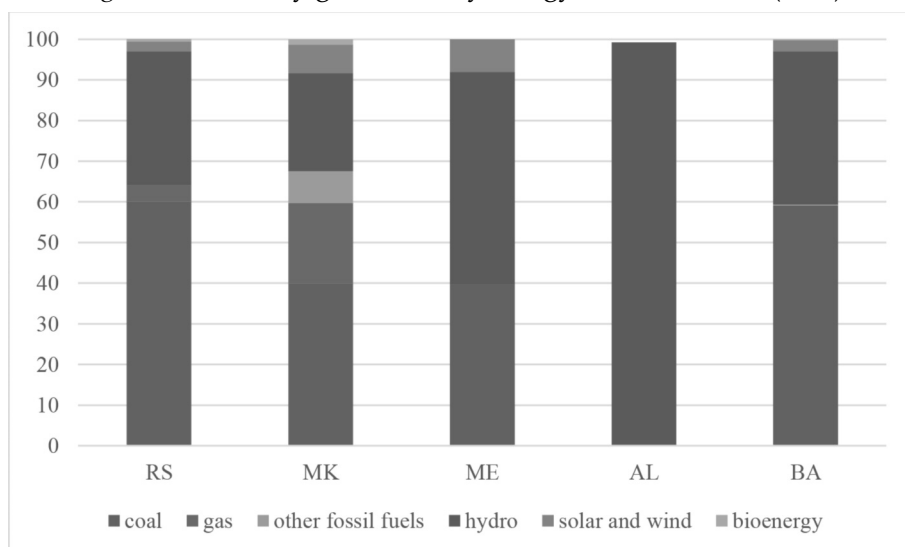
Note: AL – Albania; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; MK – North Macedonia; ME – Montenegro; RS – Serbia.

Source: World Bank (2024).

Regarding the electricity generation by energy source, each of the WB countries possesses a unique energy profile (see Figure 2). Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have significant reserves and local production of low-grade lignite coal, which satisfies approximately two-thirds of their total domestic gross energy consumption. In 2023, in Serbia and North Macedonia 70% of electricity was generated by combustion of fossil fuels. Based on the European Commission, approximately 138,000 jobs are associated with coal across the WB nations, with 90,000 in mining and 49,000 in coal-based TPPs (BiEPAG, 2023). By relying on the estimates from the same source, phasing out coal in accordance with the EU policies could potentially result in a

reduction of 0.4% of total employment in Montenegro, 0.5% in North Macedonia, 0.6% in Serbia and 1.3% in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 2. Electricity generation by energy sources in 2023 (in %)



Note: AL – Albania; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; MK – North Macedonia; ME – Montenegro; RS – Serbia.

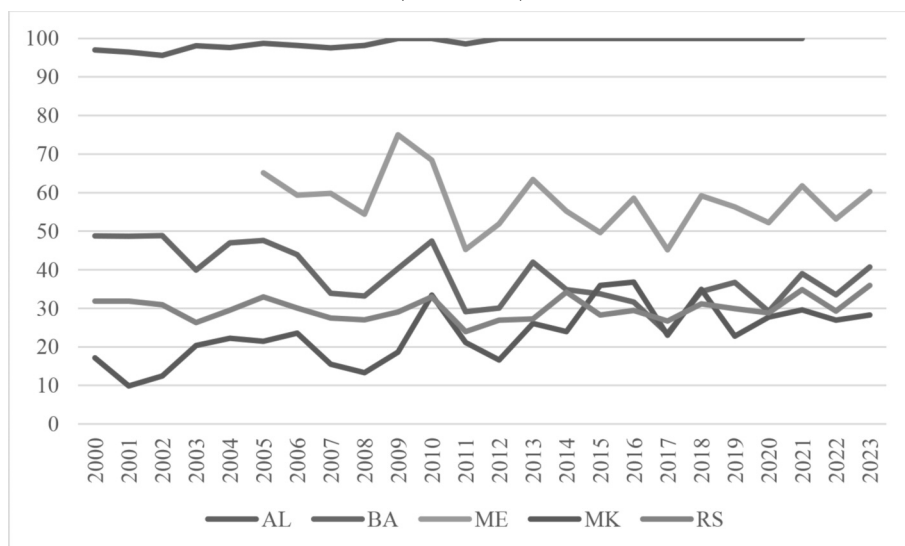
Source: Authors' elaboration based on Ember (2024).

After coal exploitation, hydroenergy represents the second most utilized source for electricity production in WB countries (see Figure 4). Albania relies heavily on hydropower, with nearly 100% of its electricity being generated from its three primary hydropower plants (HPP) - 'Vau i Dejes' (260MW), 'Fierza' (500MW) and 'Koman' (600MW). Such high dependence on this energy source exposes these countries to the risks posed by unforeseeable weather conditions such as droughts. Montenegro relies only on thermal and hydro power plants. It is noteworthy that North Macedonia has the highest level of diversity in its electricity supply as it generates electricity from coal, hydropower, natural gas, solar and wind, including other fossil fuels.

When it comes to the utilization of RES, it is noticeable that they hold an undesirable share in electricity production, despite the significant potential they possess (with the exception of Albania) (see Figure 3). In the early 2010s,

the wave of mass construction of mini HPPs mainly derivative type affected all WB countries. Mini HPPs on rivers have been promoted as one of the main ways to increase the share of energy from renewable sources, while neglecting the efficiency of wind and solar. Insisting on utilization of mini hydroelectric power plants as “sustainable” alternatives to traditional sources for electricity production did not yield the expected results, as the damage caused by their construction outweighed the benefits of utilizing the hydroenergy potential of watercourses. The majority of WB countries are energy-poor and heavily dependent on importing energy resources from Russia. North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina rely entirely on natural gas imports from Russia, while the Serbia’s share amounts to 89% (Cretti et al., 2022). However, upon examining their energy portfolios in 2023, it becomes evident that natural gas only played a role in the energy mix of North Macedonia and Serbia. In North Macedonia, its share in total electricity production was 19.8%, while in Serbia, it accounted for 4.1%, making these countries more sensitive to trade shocks and political pressures.

Figure 3. Electricity generation by clean energy sources in 2000-2023
(% of total)



Note: AL – Albania; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; MK – North Macedonia; ME – Montenegro; RS – Serbia.

Source: Authors’ elaboration based on Ember (2024).

Besides great potential for renewable energy in WB region, lignite and other types of brown coal are essential to the energy landscape of the WB, constituting approximately 70% of the region's electricity generation (with the exception of Albania, which is characterized by developed hydropower) (see Figure 4). Unfortunately, this energy source is one of the main air polluters, which abundant availability significantly affects its pricing. This lower quality coal is extensively utilized to operate TPPs, leading to pollution through the release of toxic elements into the air, such as sulfur dioxide or particles of arsenic, nickel, potassium, lead, etc. In condition of the extensive use of coal for electricity generation, there is a trade-off between economic performance and environmental sustainability (Mehred, 2021).

Figure 4. Electricity generation by fossil fuels in 2000-2023 (% of total)



Note: AL – Albania; BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; MK – North Macedonia; ME – Montenegro; RS – Serbia.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Ember (2024).

The energy sector of the WB countries remains largely under the control of state-owned utility corporations. The legacy of former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (with the exception of Albania) had crucial impact on the current state of WB' energy systems (Ralchev, 2012). Each country of

the region has its own specifics, as in terms of the current energy mix, consumption tendencies, economic conditions, development aspirations and socio-economic parameters. The region has key geographical positioning since it is located at the crossroads of the primary hydrocarbon transport pathways from regions abundant in energy resources to industrialised and energy consuming regions. Unfortunately, none of these countries has been able to take advantage of the benefits they have as energy resources transit countries in their favour.

The energy security of the WB countries will be notably enhanced in the upcoming years. A new coal-fired power station, Kostolac B3 (350 megawatts (MW)), has been constructed by Chinese companies, and its inclusion in the energy grid is expected by the April of 2024. Construction works on the Buk-Bijela HPP on the Drina River (a joint project with BiH) (115 MW) started in May 2021, but they have been slowed down due to the dispute between the Constitutional Court of BiH and the Consession Commission. The strategic projects that will also notably boost the share of RES in the total electricity generation are the construction of the reversible HPP Đerdap 3 (2400 MW) and Bitrica 2 (656MW) (Zvezdanović Lobanova and Lobanov, 2023). In order to ensure diversification of gas supply choices, a project for the construction of the Nis-Dimitrovgrad-Bulgaria gas pipeline was launched and released in December 2023. The construction of the Trans-Balkan Electricity Transmission Corridor, which is underway will significantly improve the safety and quality of the electricity supply. This is one of the leading projects within the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, which will contribute to establishing a regional electricity grid connecting the transmission systems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia with Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Italy through a 400 kV transmission line. Through the Western Balkans Investment Framework, the project of rehabilitation of the electro-mechanical components and supporting network of the Fierza HPP in Albania is also foreseen.

All countries of the region that are dependent on coal are facing a difficult and complex period of transformation of municipalities and regions, as coal was the basis of the development of their economic structure. WB countries are reluctant to participate in the implementation of the green transition due to fears that the immediate closure of the mines, countries would pay a price for such activities in the form of imports of electricity whose high price would be transferred to the final consumer, reducing the share of domestic electricity producers in the market. Such developments

would reduce countries' competitiveness, security, production, and supply, while external influences would further shake energy security and independence. Regardless of their preferences, all countries in the region will be forced to carry out the transformation of state power generation utilities (building new capacities and modernization of existing ones) to force environmental projects. This type of project should ensure a balance between energy and ecology, with a reliable supply of electricity.

By providing support in defining and coordinating energy policies of the WB countries, the EU is placing significant emphasis on enhancing their energy security. The EU has adopted a €1 billion energy support package to assist the WB in addressing immediate short-term and medium-term energy needs, accelerate decarbonization, and bolster energy independence. The intention is to provide support for small and medium-sized enterprises and the vulnerable households, alongside with the speeding up the diversification of energy sources and enhancing their efficiency and boosting renewable energy generation (EIB, 2022). EU will also provide the opportunity for the WB countries to join the EU Energy platform for voluntary joint purchasing of natural gas, liquefied natural gas and hydrogen. In accordance with REPowerEU, this EU energy platform was launched not only with the aim of demand aggregation, but also to optimize the utilization of current infrastructure and establish global engagement.

*Table 1. Imports of natural gas from Russia,
in thousand million cubic metres*

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
BA	186	218	227	245	244	230	210	253	-
MK	134	135	211	271	251	292	334	432	287
RS	1395	1740	1795	2182	2198	2262	1989	2365	2965

Note: BA – Bosnia and Herzegovina; MK – North Macedonia; RS – Serbia.

Source: Eurostat (2024).

The recent BiEPAG study (2023) related to the exploration of external influence in the energy sector shows that there is a public support for environmentally friendly transition, whereas it exists a lack of recognition regarding the adverse consequences associated with external actors such as Russia, Turkey and China (as their projects give rise to discussions regarding governance issues and their environmental impact). The energy sector is a

crucial target for Russian investments, with notable investment activity in Serbia and BiH (Vulović, 2023). In line with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has fostered investment in a range of areas, including infrastructure development, agriculture, mining and energy (Stekić, 2023). Chinese FDI was directed in highly pollutive sectors, marked by poor environmental governance (for instance, in Serbia) (Krstinovska, 2023). Their projects are not aligned with the EU acquis or the Paris Agreement and represent a big concern.

Conclusion

The energy security has become urgent concern firstly due the sudden upsurge in energy demand after the COVID-19 pandemic, the strong increases in natural gas and coal prices, electricity price jump and hostilities in Ukraine. WB region is facing a range of challenges due to its fragile energy security. Moreover, the green transition has also been called into question due to the high dependence on coal for electricity generation and obsolete energy systems. Concerns related to energy poverty and high electricity bills also represent the major reasons behind the resistance to energy transition. There is a justified fear that the energy prices in the region would rise and reduce energy security in case of becoming an EU member state as power generation would become subject to CO₂ pricing within the framework of the EU's emissions trading system.

The WB countries have not made significant progress in the field of renewable energy sources. The majority of electricity in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia is still generated from fossil fuels, primarily coal, while the remainder mostly comes from hydroelectric power plants. Inefficiency, technological obsolescence, and low-quality coal contribute to high emissions of pollutants that endanger health. It is essential to significantly improve energy efficiency and create an energy mix that will guarantee both energy security and environmental protection. In the next few years, the allocation of energy resources, diversification of energy sources, and reduction in import dependence will represent the most significant challenges for the energy sector in the WB countries.

Energy transition should bring significant changes to these countries in terms of environmental protection, whereas it should be sustainable and relatively equitable, meaning that the burden and benefits of the transition should be evenly distributed. Of crucial importance will be the full participation and agreement of all stakeholders (citizens, local communities, and industry), taking into account the specificities of sectors and regions

that rely heavily on fossil fuel use. Successful energy policy is possible in such challenging times only with a strategic approach to green transition, emphasizing sustainability and energy independence. Energy independence of these countries would significantly contribute to strengthening their international position and provide them with flexibility in foreign policy. In order to provide resilience against unprecedented energy shocks, government should invest efforts and resources into modernization of the outdated electricity grid, diversification of energy sources and security supply and increasing energy efficiency. The green energy sector is expected to provide stability in supply and availability of energy and energy sources, while taking into account the environment protection.

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PROFILING SERBIAN POPULATION: EXPLORING THE RISE OF PRO-RUSSIAN LEANINGS

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Abstract: Since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022, there has been an undeniable upsurge in Russian influence across various regions and developing nations. Among the Serbian population Russia enjoys an unprecedented level of support. Pro-Russian sentiments have never been so widespread in post-war history, as evidenced by numerous polls. The objective of this research is to understand spreading of these public sentiments. The data is collected through a survey involving 1,200 respondents from the territory of Serbia, but the statistical description of the obtained data is only the first scientific goal. A deeper analysis requires assessment of the impact of each independent variable on the formation of the Serbian population's stance towards Russia, which demands to employ an empirical model. Given the categorical nature of all variables, Logistic Regression was applied. Within this model, the survey questions treated as independent variables, while the focal point of analysis is the dependent variable, namely, respondents' commitment to establishing closer ties with Russia. Independent variables (and survey questions) divided into four categories: 1. the perception of the Kosovo and Metohija issue; 2. attitudes and opinions held by the Serbian population regarding the EU; 3. the value system of the respondents (embodied in LGBT movement and traditional family); and 4. socio-demographic characteristics of the population, such as the age and gender of respondents. The findings have unveiled that the most influential factor, characterized by the highest coefficient and utmost statistical significance, is the commitment of Serbs to maintain south province Kosovo and Metohija within Serbia. Subsequently, the variables representing disappointed expectations from the EU, negative attitude towards non-

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traditional values, as well as the age of the respondent, exhibit statistically significant albeit less pronounced impacts on pro-Russian attitudes.

Key words: Pro-Russian attitudes, Serbia, Kosovo, Euroscepticism, survey, Logistic regression, multiple regression.

Introduction

Throughout history, Russia has consistently wielded significant influence over the Orthodox Balkan communities, owing to its status as the largest and most politically and militarily powerful Orthodox and Slavic nation. Imperial Russia played a pivotal role in addressing the enduring Eastern Question, where it was regarded by Orthodox and, particularly, Orthodox Slavic populations as a patron of liberation and unification.

Over the course of the lengthy struggle associated with the Eastern Question, Russia expanded its territorial reach in parallel with the incremental liberation of regions inhabited by Balkan peoples. The zenith of its influence in the Balkans was reached during the 19th and early 20th centuries, marking the conclusive phase in addressing the Eastern Question. Even with the transformation of Imperial Russia into the USSR, there were only partial alterations in the fundamental tenets of Russian policy toward the Balkans. The strong influence endured, propelled by a shared commitment to the pursuit of new socialist societal models.

The objective of this research is to quantitatively assess the direction and intensity of the influence of relevant factors on the formation of the Serbian population's stance toward Russia. It's worth noting that, apart from presenting essential facts from recent political history in Serbia, this study refrains from delving deeper into the historical ties between Serbia and Russia, their shared origins, and religious connections. Additionally, it abstains from providing a subjective evaluation of the importance of European integration, refrains from offering a political analysis of the Kosovo issue, and does not include the author's personal opinions on these topics, even though this body of subjects is acknowledged as pivotal in shaping public opinion in Serbia regarding closer relations with Russia.

The data is collected through a survey involving 1,200 respondents from the territory of Serbia. The relevant factors in this study are organized as a series of survey questions, divided into four distinct categories, each considered critical in shaping the attitudes of the Serbian population towards Russia. These categories serve as comprehensive units to analyze and quantify the dynamics at play. First independent variable includes the

perception of the Kosovo issue. Second contains attitudes and opinions held by the Serbian population regarding the EU. Third independent variable illustrates the value system of the respondents embodied in perceptions toward LGBT movement and traditional family. Fourth variable consists of socio-demographic characteristics of the population, such as the age and gender of respondents.

By structuring our research in this manner, we aim to comprehensively examine the multifaceted factors contributing to the shaping of the Serbian population's attitudes towards Russia, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of this complex issue.

In order to evaluate the direction and magnitude of influence exerted by these factors, it becomes imperative to employ an empirical model. Within this model, the survey questions are construed as independent variables, while the focal point of analysis is the dependent variable, namely, individuals' attitudes towards political rapprochement with Russia. Given the categorical nature of all variables under examination in this study, it is evident that the utilization of linear statistical models is ill-suited for this task. Instead, we will employ Logistic Regression, a robust statistical method well-suited to modelling and interpreting the non-linear relationships inherent in this complex interplay of categorical variables.

The initial section of the article encompasses the theoretical framework, employing the historical method to scrutinize the geopolitical dynamics that have shaped the relationship between the Serbian population and Russia, the European Union, and the Kosovo problem. Within this section, assumptions and hypotheses are formulated, providing the foundational guidelines for the design of the survey research.

The subsequent section offers a comprehensive description of the methodology, delineating the definition of the statistical sample of respondents and the survey questions that align with the assumed factors influencing the Serbian population's attitudes towards Russia. To measure the impact of these factors, a Logistic regression is employed.

The third segment of the article presents the research findings, consisting of two components. The first part outlines the results derived from the survey, while the second part provides the outcomes of applying the GLM, specifically the determined coefficients for each evaluated variable.

The final section of the article is dedicated to the concluding considerations and discussion of the influence exerted by each of the aforementioned factors on the formation of relations with Russia. This

discussion is accompanied by a scientific explanation of confirmed or unconfirmed assumptions, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay of factors influencing the Serbian population's attitudes towards Russia.

In terms of research methods, in addition to the usual statistical description of the survey results, i.e. the distribution of answers and their combinations, the answers of the respondents will be subjected to additional statistical examination, in-depth analysis of the influence, intensity and direction of action of each of the factors that form the attitudes of the population of Serbia towards Russia. With this aim, we apply Multiple regression, which measures the influence of factors within a single model, and Logistic regression, which measures the chances and probability that each individual value attitude and characteristic of the respondents are found in pro- or anti-Russia groups.

The contemporary context of the growing pro-Russian attitudes of the Serbian population

The relationship between Serbia and Russia is primarily defined by their historical proximity, shared religious and cultural heritage (as outlined in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia in 2009), and the perception of Russia as a protector capable of addressing some of Serbia's most pressing geopolitical challenges.

Serbia and Russia have a centuries-old relationship full of ups and downs, but it can be said that since the creation of the modern Serbian state until today, friendship and alliance are abundant. The Russian army took part on the side of the Serbs in the Serbian-Turkish wars of 1876 and 1877-78, and then entered the First World War on the same side (Petrović, 2020, 103). The Second World War gave rise to communist rule in Yugoslavia while Russia was already under the communist grip, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the official relations of FR Yugoslavia and Russia, although close in principle, are colored by Russia's weakness to more strongly support its decades-long ally in the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and later during the NATO aggression against FR Yugoslavia in 1999.

The deepening of relations between Serbia and Russia has been happening since the Putin era in Russia, which marked the return of economic strength and Russian influence at the global level. Russia under the dominant political administration of Vladimir Putin provides strong

support to Serbia in international organizations, especially regarding the issue of Kosovo and Metohija and Serbia's responsibility for the wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The feeling of closeness between the Serbian and Russian people has remained unshaken for centuries, but in times of crisis like the one that exists today (mainly due to the secession problem in Kosovo and Metohija), it gains new momentum and intensity. The long-standing and urgent problem of Kosovo and Metohija entails the potential loss of the historical "cradle" of Serbian statehood and religion. We posit that one's stance on Kosovo significantly impacts their approach to Russia, which steadfastly represents Serbian interests, both through public pronouncements and its veto power in the UN Security Council concerning the recognition of statehood for this secessionist Serbian province.

The affinity for Russia has arguably never reached the proportions witnessed during the conflict in Ukraine in the post-war history of the region. In this period, the USA, NATO, and the EU have escalated their efforts to exert pressure on the Serbian sphere, aimed at diminishing Russian influence (Stanojević, 2021). In response, the Serbian government has consistently issued statements emphasizing its unwavering commitment to European integration while concurrently maintaining comprehensive cooperation with Russia. Given the ongoing strategic conflict between Russia and the entire Western political realm, Serbia's foreign policy orientation assumes profound and enduring significance for the country's future. Since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022, there has been an undeniable upsurge in Russian influence across various regions and developing nations. This phenomenon can be attributed not so much to inherent qualities of Russia itself but rather to the aspiration of resisting Western dominance. However, in the Balkan countries, which find themselves under significant Western European influence, there has not been a widespread political shift towards Russia. An exception to this trend is evident among the Serbian population, both in Serbia and the Republika Srpska, where Russia and Russian politics definitely enjoy an unprecedented level of support. Serbian support for Russia is now more important than ever, given that the war in Ukraine has been raging since 2022, which has turned the entire "collective West" onto the path of irrational Russophobia without the information when the war will end (Stojanović, Terzić, 2023). Serbia is one of the few European countries that has not imposed sanctions on Russia. The global conflict is teetering on the brink of direct participation of NATO troops in the war against Russia, which, along with existing nuclear arsenals, could bring the entire world to the brink of a nuclear abyss (Стојановић, 2021).

The European Union's policy of conditioning towards Serbia, as well as Russia's unambiguously support for the problem of the secession of Kosovo and Metohija, introduces a huge amount of rationality into the strong pro-Russian sentiment (Пророковић, Стојановић, 2023). Sharp divisions at the global level probably further strengthen the pro-Russian sentiment in Serbia, as our public opinion research shows. The problematic nature of the official pro-EU course of Serbia's foreign policy, while at the same time ignores compliance with anti-Russian political decisions, not only leads to geopolitical confusion, but in the prospective future may place Serbia in the choice of "Russia or the EU". It is necessary to investigate the correlation between the simultaneous rise of Euroscepticism and pro-Russian sentiments in Serbia. It's important to clarify that this paper does not aim to determine the level of Euroscepticism in Serbia, as sample data on this subject already exists, including more recent studies (Stanojević et. al., 2022). Instead, the objective of this group of questions is to gauge the extent to which Euroscepticism influences the stance towards closer ties with Russia.

Economic relations with Russia are also of great importance for the Serbian economy. Serbia stands out as one of the few countries worldwide to have entered into a free trade agreement with Russia, a move initiated in 2001 that has since unlocked significant economic potential (Stanojević, 2016). Regarding imports, Russia ranks as the third most crucial partner for Serbia, with imports totaling USD 3 billion in 2022, while also holding the sixth position as an export destination, with Serbian goods valued at USD 1.2 billion (ITC, 2024). In terms of energy, Serbia and Russia have had strong ties since 2008, when the Russian Gazprom became the majority owner of NIS. Serbia's dependence on Russian oil and gas is huge, with the potential to expand to other energy fields of cooperation, such as nuclear power plants (Stojanović, 2023).

Regardless of the fact that Serbia declared military neutrality in 2007, solid military cooperation with Russia has continuity. Serbia is an observer in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and conducts military exercises with Russia. In 2017, Russia equipped Serbia with six MiG-29 aircraft, thirty T-72 tanks and thirty combat reconnaissance armored vehicles BRDM (RTV, 2016). In 2021, Serbia bought modern "Kornet" anti-tank missiles from Russia (Politika, 2021).

Beyond geopolitical, security, and economic considerations, a deeper examination of the factors driving Serbian citizens' inclination towards closer ties with Russia reveals a complex set of values. This includes attitudes towards the LGBT movement and traditional family structures. Russia is a country that upholds traditional family values and prohibits the promotion

of LGBT narratives. Russia's Supreme Court has moved to classify the „international LGBT social movement“ as an extremist organization (Time, 2023). As an addition to an already-existing child protection legislature, Russia passed a federal law in June 2013 that made illegal for children to receive materials endorsing non-traditional sexual relationships (Guardian, 2013). This led to the several arrests of Russian LGBT persons who openly oppose the law. It has been seen as a *de facto* way of criminalizing LGBT culture and has drawn criticism from European medias, human rights experts, and LGBT campaigners worldwide. The law was expanded to cover all people in 2022, regardless of age, making it unlawful to promote non-traditional sexual relationships through any form of expression (Reuters, 2022).

Different areas of cooperation between Serbia and Russia are not the cause, but the consequence of centuries-old friendly relations between the two countries, and especially the feeling of brotherhood between the two Slavic peoples. All of the above affects the positive perception of Russia among the Serbian people, regardless of occasional political conflicts in Russian-Serbian political relations in the past.

Surveys of domestic and foreign, pro-Russian and anti-Russian researchers and institutions conducted during 2022 and 2023 showed that around 80% of Serbs oppose sanctions against Russia. According to a poll published by the Carnegie Foundation (Samorukov & Vuksanovic, 2023) (Carnegie Europe, 2023) in March 2023, more than 80% of Serbian residents are against introducing sanctions against Russia. The Belgrade Demostat survey showed that it is slightly less than 80% (Demostat, 2022), and the Western Balkans Security Barometer shows slightly more than 80% (Vuksanović et al., 2022). According to a survey by the pro-Russian New Serbian Political Thought (NSPM), about 84% are against sanctions against Russia, while according to a survey by the pro-EU organisation CRTA, „every tenth respondent believes Serbia should align its foreign policy with the EU and impose sanctions against Russia“ (CRTA, 2022). Also, according to survey by the well-known Belgrade agency House of Win from May 2022, only 20.6% of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia support the introduction of sanctions against Russia (House of Win, 2022). Interestingly, according to the same survey, if the EU offered Serbia immediate admission to the EU with the condition of imposing sanctions on Russia, that percentage jumps slightly to 30.5% of citizens who would support sanctions (House of Win, 2022). Therefore, there is a firm attitude of the citizens of Serbia in terms of a positive attitude towards Russia, which cannot be shaken even by a hypothetical „carrot“ from the West.

Understanding that public sentiments on a particular issue are intrinsically intertwined with the agendas of key political stakeholders in the long term, it becomes imperative to investigate the factors that shape Serbia's public opinion concerning the necessity of political alignment with Russia during this pivotal period.

Methodology

Variables

Dependent and independent variables are discussed in details in the first section.

Dependent variables (RUS), which are at the centre of this research, are the attitudes of the Serbian public opinion towards Russia in conditions of major international changes and regrouping.

Independent variables are factors which we assume have a significant impact on the attitude towards Russia, which were discussed in the first section (KM, EU, LGBT, AGE). These are the value orientations of the population of Serbia, as well as the age of the respondents, which is basically a demographic characteristic, but in this case, it is also viewed in the context of value orientations, bearing in mind significant changes in the political environment in various generations.

Methods

Survey

As a basic source of data, a survey of 1,200 respondents was conducted, a questionnaire with 5 questions, the first of which refers to Russia, and the rest of the questions were designed to give a more accurate representation of the views of the respondents on the factors that we consider as independent variables. The questionnaire with general distribution of answers by groups is given in the table . The results will be presented with a statistical description.

Multiple Regression

Multiple regression analysis is the one of the most common used methods of delving into factors influencing public attitudes. This statistical model allows to assess the impact of multiple variables on the dependent

variable. By incorporating described factors (variables), it would be identified which variables significantly contribute to shaping public opinion. Multiple regression analysis evaluates the independent effect of each variable on the outcome, adjusting for the effect of the other variables included in the same regression model.

The multiple regression equation takes the form:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where Y is the dependent variable, X_1, X_2, \dots, X_k are the independent variables, $b_0, b_1, b_2, \dots, b_k$ are the regression coefficients representing the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, and ε is the error term.

Logistic regression

The logistic regression equation is a statistical model used to predict the probability of a binary outcome (0 or 1) based on one or more predictor variables. Although there is also a multinomial logistic regression that includes multiple instead of binary outcomes, it is not so precise, but more generalized method. In our survey, attitude towards Russia had three possible outcomes: pro-Russian, anti-Russian and the third option of all varieties between the previous two answers. So, for the more precise measurement of intensity of impact of each independent variable, we will exclude from the sample all answers of respondents who do not have a strong pro- or anti-Russian attitude.

The Logistic regression assumed that the probability of an event is related to the predictors through a logistic function. The procedure fits a model using maximum likelihood. Likelihood ratio tests are performed to test the significance of the model coefficients.

It takes the form:

$$\text{logit}(p) = \log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_k X_k \quad (2)$$

Logistic regression can also include all factors simultaneously as a multiple regression. Since in the previous analysis the influence of each of the variables on the attitude towards Russia was assessed within the multiple regression system, the logistic regression was performed here separately for each variable. In this way, the chance and probability that each special characteristic or attitude of the respondents is found in the

group of the pro-Russian population was investigated. In this way, the chance (odds) is estimated for each answer in each variable to be found in the group of pro-Russian-oriented residents of Serbia. Odds and probability are two different measures, both addressing the same aim of measuring the likelihood of an event to occur. Conversion from odds (o) to probabilities (p) is simple by:

$$p = o / (o + 1) \quad (3)$$

The research will evaluate both, odds ratio and probability.

Hypotheses and tests

The null hypothesis (H0) is that there is no relationship between the growing pro-Russian mood in Serbia and their political-value attitudes about the EU, KM, LGBT and demographic characteristics such as gender and age. Hypothesis 1 (H1) is opposite and assume that there is statistically significant relationship between dependent and independent variables.

The tests will show with what reliability the null hypothesis can be rejected, that is, whether the obtained results of measuring the influence of the variables can be accepted as statistically relevant.

The T-test to find is the relation between variables are statistically significant or merely coincidental. For p-value, as a result of t-test, a threshold of 0.05 was set, that is 99.5% of confidences.

ANOVA procedure performs a multifactor analysis of variance for dependent variable. It constructs various tests to determine which factors have a statistically significant effect on population attitude to Russia. It also tests for significant interactions amongst the factors, given sufficient data. The F-tests in the ANOVA table allow identification the significant factors.

Results

Statistical description of survey results

The results clearly show the dominating pro-Russian sentiment of the people in Serbia. As many as 71% of respondents see themselves in the pro-Russian corps, while only 12% are anti-Russian. The hard core of the joining EU advocates at any cost stands at a modest 28%, while there are 32% of irreconcilable opponents of Serbia's entry into the EU. The connection between the problems of Kosovo and Metohija and Serbia's entry into the

EU can be seen in the policy of conditionality, and even 26% of citizens are not in favor of joining the EU if it would mean giving up the territorial integrity of the Serbian state. The percentage of Europhiles coincides with the percentage of those who are in favor of solving the problem of Kosovo and Metohija at any cost, but as many as 65% of respondents are against signing the normalization agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. The high anti-LGBT mood in Serbia is reflected by the percentage of 77% of those who oppose same-sex unions. It is interesting that the number of strongly pro-Russian respondents is slightly higher than those who hold the strongest position regarding the preservation of national interest and integrity, as evidenced by their stance on the Kosovo issue.

Table 1. Distribution of responses to survey questions

Question	Answers	Number	Share
How would you describe your attitude towards Russia?	Pro-Russian	852	71%
	Anti-Russian	144	12%
	Something between	204	17%
Which statement is closest to your position on Serbia joining the EU?	I do not support Serbia's entry into the EU at all.	384	32%
	I do not support if the condition is the giving up of KM.	312	26%
	I support Serbia joining the EU in any case.	336	28%
	I don't have an opinion on that issue	168	14%
Would you support the normalization of relations with Pristina according to Agreement on Normalization?	No, because it is against the national interests of Serbia.	780	65%
	Yes, because it is necessary to solve the issue of KM at any cost.	288	24%
	I have no position on that issue.	132	11%
What is your attitude towards the introduction of same-sex unions in Serbia?	I oppose	924	77%
	I support	132	11%
	I don't care	144	12%

Question	Answers	Number	Share
Your age?	18-29	264	22%
	30-44	312	26%
	45-59	300	25%
	60+	336	28%
Your gender?	Male	564	47%
	Female	636	53%

The distribution of different attitudes towards Russia by groups formed around other issues is too extensive to be presented in its entirety. We will only carry out the distribution of clear determinations, leaving out neutral answers, except when they are specific or unexpected in some way.

EU determinations and attitude towards Russia

- Among the opponents of Euro-integration, 88% lean towards a pro-Russian stance. In the EUKM group, respondents who support European integration if Kosovo is not a condition share the same pro-Russian stance, at 88%.
- About 77% of all respondents who are anti-Russian are in the pro-EU group.
- Conversely, among strong EU supporters, 75% hold an anti-Russian stance.
- There are twice as many respondents with anti-Russian attitudes among EU neutrals (19 respondents) compared to the group EUKM (only 10 respondents).

Attitude towards Russia and the issue of Kosovo

- Among the decisive opponents of giving up Kosovo and Metohija, who consider this a key national interest, as many as 90% have a pro-Russian leaning (702 out of 780 respondents). This relationship is also the most convincing among any survey response and attitudes about Russia.
- Approximately 9% of these respondents have a more neutral attitude towards Russia, falling somewhere between pro and anti-Russian, while anti-Russian attitudes in this group are represented by only 0.5%.

- Even within the group of respondents who believe that resolving the issue of Kosovo and Metohija is imperative at any cost, 28% lean towards a pro-Russian stance.

Non-traditional value system and attitude towards Russia

- In the relationship between traditional social values and pro-Russian attitudes, a strong correlation exists.
- Among opponents of same-sex unions, as many as 87% hold pro-Russian views simultaneously.
- Conversely, 60% of respondents who support same-sex unions exhibit anti-Russian attitudes.

However, it should be noted that although both correlations between these attitudes are very high, this does not imply that traditional values cause a preference for Russia. This principle also applies to other variables, as statistical description does not establish a causal relationship between phenomena; it merely highlights processes that can be stochastic (random).

Attitude towards Russia by age of respondents

- Pro-Russian leaning is significantly more prevalent in all age groups compared to negative or neutral attitudes towards Russia. However, the differences between generations on this matter are notable.
- The oldest group of respondents is proportionally the most represented in terms of pro-Russian leaning, at 81%. This group also has the fewest undecided respondents (11%) and the lowest percentage of negative attitudes towards Russia (8%).
- The 45-59 age group comprises 73% pro-Russian respondents.
- The youngest generation expressed the lowest level of positivity (64%) and the highest level of negativity (19%) towards Russia. In the 30-44 age group, the majority of undecided respondents answered “something in between” (23%).

Distribution of attitudes towards Russia by gender

- Male respondents exhibit a pro-Russian leaning significantly more often than females, at 82% versus 61%.
- Among female respondents, the moderate response “something in between” is approximately four times more common than among men (26% versus 6%).
- Negative attitudes towards Russia are equally represented in both sexes.

Results of multiple regression

The P-values are less than 0,01 in the four variables, EU, KM, LGBT, AGE, and these factors have a statistically significant effect at the 99% confidence level (table 2). Since the GENDER variable did not show statistical significance, it will be excluded from further analysis.

Table 2. Results of multiple regression

<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>T Statistic</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
CONSTANT	-0,9976	0,1349	-7,3913	0,0000
EU	0,2355	0,0412	5,7105	0,0000
KM	0,5748	0,0667	8,6079	0,0000
LGBT	0,2060	0,0503	4,0983	0,0000
GENDER	0,2160	0,4221	4.2124	0.1411
AGE	0,3209	0,0281	11,4436	0,0000
Number of observations	1200			
R ²	0.7246	R ² (adjusted for d.f.)		0.7218
Standard Error of Est.	0,5576	Mean absolute error		0,3866

Table 3. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F-Ratio</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
MAIN EFFECTS – Model	334,406	4	83,6015	268,79	0,0000
EU	39,8212	3	13,2737	51,91	0,0000
KM	47,6882	2	23,8441	93,25	0,0000
LGBT	2,3431	2	1,1715	4,58	0,0104
GENDER	1.4755	2	0,8664	5.45	0,1822
AGE	35,8088	3	11,9363	46,68	0,0000
RESIDUAL	304,02	1189	0,2556		
TOTAL	706,08	1200			

All F-ratios are based on the residual mean square error.

The ANOVA table decomposes the variability of RUS into contributions due to various factors. Since Type III sums of squares have been chosen, the contribution of each factor is measured having removed the effects of all other factors.

The output shows the results of fitting a multiple linear regression model to describe the relationship between attitudes towards Russia in the population of Serbia and four independent variables. The equation of the fitted model is

$$\text{RUS} = -0,997573 + 0,235497 \cdot \text{EU} + 0,574856 \cdot \text{KM} + 0,206025 \cdot \text{LGBT} + 0,320965 \cdot \text{AGE} \quad (4)$$

Estimated coefficient, T-statistics and F-Ration indicate by far the strongest influence of the KM variable, i.e. the greatest influence of the respondents' attitude towards the problem of Kosovo on the formation of their attitude towards Russia. This does not provide details on pro-Russian or anti-Russian leanings; it is the result of the preceding statistical description and subsequent logistic regression. The results of the multiple regression solely indicate the predominant influence of the attitudes of the Serbian population towards this significant national issue on the formation of attitudes towards Russia in general.

According to the estimated coefficients, the variable AGE follows, which refers to the age group of the respondents, but considering the F-ratio, the attitude of the respondents towards the EU has a slightly greater influence.

The value system, depicted by the LGBT variable, in the statistical description showed Estimated coefficient is at the lower and similar level for all other variables (0.2), but F-ratio (force) makes difference, with modest impact of LGBT (table 3). It is also highly significant but not strong variable.

The R^2 statistic indicates that the model as fitted explains 72% of the variability in population attitude toward Russia. The rest unexplained 18% are factor that are not included in this model and most often refer to a numerous individual factors that form the attitudes of individuals (personal experiences, family, friendship or business ties with Russian or anti-Russian individuals, institutions and the like).

Logistic regression

When neutral attitudes towards Russia were excluded from the analysis, a sample of 996 respondents remained for logistic regression. The results of Logistic regression illustrate the impact of each variable on the odds ratio of the

observed event of interest. These results are presented in Table 4. To reiterate, these are four separate models of simple logistic regression, where the Pro-Russian stance is set as the dependent variable, and the independent variables represent the determination of respondents within the respective groups.

Table 4. Results of Logistic regression: Coefficients and Odds

Parameter	Estimate	Standard Error	Estimated Odds Ratio
Pro-EU (constant)	-0,0645	0,1358	
Anti EU	4,7830	0,5956	119,467
EUKM	3,3895	0,3493	29,6533
Neutral	2,0179	0,2802	7,52281
KM (constant)	4,6634	0,3797	
Neut KM	-3,7627	0,5024	0,0232
NoKM	-5,1270	0,4063	0,0059
Pro-LGBT (constant)	-1,9095	0,3093	
Anti LGBT	5,3889	0,3700	218,9700
Neut LGBT	1,6393	0,3956	5,1513
AGE 60+ (constant)	2,4849	0,2170	
AGE=18-29	-1,3680	0,2677	0,2546
AGE=30-44	-0,8804	0,2764	0,4146
AGE=45-59	-0,4103	0,3007	0,6635

The results indicate a slightly negative relationship between pro-EU attitudes and pro-Russian sentiments. Conversely, the remaining three response categories demonstrate positive relationships of varying degrees. Anti-EU sentiment exerts the strongest influence. The odds ratio for this variable indicates that residents holding anti-EU stances are 119 times more likely to exhibit pro-Russian attitudes compared to those who view the EU membership as an imperative. For EU-neutral attitudes, the chance for pro-Russian stance is 7.5 times higher and for EUKM is 30 time higher than for pro-EU peoples (table 4).

A significant portion of the pro-Russian Serbian population does not harbour negative attitudes towards EU integration, encompassing those with EUKM and EU-neutral perspectives. Their proportion within the total

pro-Russian population is nearly equivalent to that of anti-EU respondents. This indicates that while there is a strong correlation between pro-Russian stances and anti-EU sentiments, the former is not solely rooted in the latter. Additionally, this distribution underscores the significance of another factor: attitudes towards Kosovo.

The logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between pro-Russian attitudes and attitudes towards Kosovo yields clear results consistent with those of multiple regression. Specifically, a neutral stance towards Kosovo and advocating for Kosovo's renunciation for the purpose of 'normalizing relations' both demonstrate negative estimated coefficients. Conversely, among the majority of the population, only an unequivocal stance on preserving territorial sovereignty exhibits a positive correlation with pro-Russian positions. Additionally, the odds ratio of encountering a neutral attitude towards Kosovo or advocating for its renunciation among pro-Russian respondents is minimal (0.023 and 0.005 respectively) compared to those firmly committed to preserving territorial sovereignty unconditionally.

Table 5. Logistic regressions: Likelihood Ratio Tests

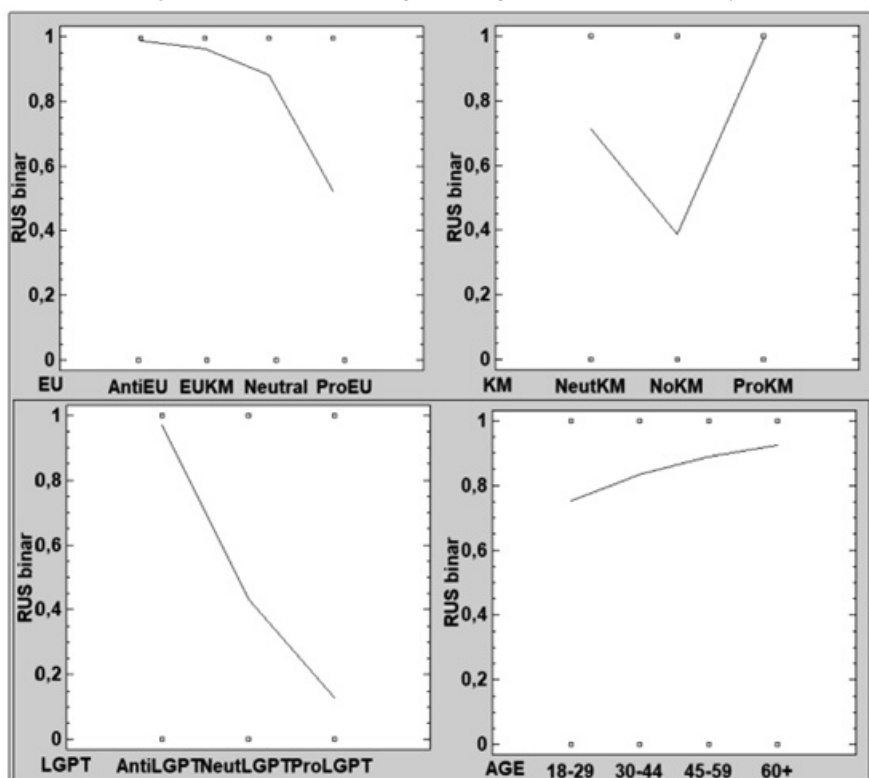
Factors	Percentage of deviance explained by models	Chi-Square	P-Value
EU	37,259	306,673	0,000
KM	51,047	420,149	0,000
LGPT	38,868	435,144	0,000
AGE	33,879	301,305	0,000

In separate logistic regressions, pro-Russian attitudes are predominantly explained by the attitude towards KM, with over 50% of the variation in the attitude towards Russia being defined by the attitude towards Kosovo. In the other models, this percentage ranges from 33% to 38% (see Table 5). The statistical significance of the Likelihood Ratio is confirmed by the p-value, with statistical significance exceeding 99%.

Generally, odds are preferred over probability when discussing ratios, as probability is constrained between 0 and 1 (see Figure 1), whereas odds range from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$ (refer to Table 4).

The probability of pro-Russian attitudes for each commitment in each group was obtained through the transformation of the estimated Odds Ratio as specified in the description of the logistic regression procedure, and is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 1. Results of Logistic regression: Probability



The responses with the strongest pro-Russian leaning in each of the four question groups are designated with a maximum probability of 1. Similar to the preceding logistic regression table, where odds were assessed in relation to the dominant group, this section of the logistic regression estimates probability in the same manner. This aspect of logistic regression reveals the following:

- The likelihood of a pro-Russian attitude is highest among Anti-EU respondents, decreasing to 90% in the EUKM group, 83% in the EU neutral group, and dropping to the lowest probability of 50% among Pro-EU supporters.
- The probability of pro-Russian leaning in the group of respondents who believe that the Kosovo issue should be ended regardless of the outcome

is only 40%, while it is approximately 70% in the group with no clear attitude toward Kosovo.

- The probability of pro-Russian leaning within the same-sex union group is the lowest in the survey, at 17%.

The most significant contribution to probability estimation in logistic regression is evident in age groups. Here, it becomes clearer that the probability of pro-Russian attitudes is similar among generational groups, a pattern not discernible using multiple regression.

Drawing conclusions about the influence of each of the four key factors on the formation of attitudes toward Russia among the Serbian population requires consideration of all analyses: statistical descriptions, multiple regression, and logistic regression. Each of these methods offers a slightly different perspective on the relationship between various attitudes and characteristics regarding Russia.

Conclusion

Profiling, which entails the statistical description of survey results, revealed that the most typical pro-Russian-oriented resident of Serbia is reluctant for Serbia to join the EU. Territorial sovereignty and national identity are of vital importance and priority for them, and they oppose same-sex unions. Typically, they are older than 60 years.

In general terms, the statistical description of the survey data is sufficient to form a picture of the current attitude of the Serbian population towards Russia. However, additional in-depth research has proven necessary to understand the mechanisms that influence these attitudes, their intensity, and the probability of different combinations of attitudes.

The result of the multiple regression, which illustrates the measure and strength of each of the examined factors, is particularly significant. This allows for a distinction between stochastic and causal relationships. For instance, concerning the variable related to the traditional-non-traditional value system, statistical description and logistic regression indicate that almost all pro-Russian respondents are simultaneously opponents of same-sex unions. However, multiple regression suggests that while this relationship is evident, its strength is relatively weak. This suggests that a potential change in attitude towards non-traditional communities has a negligible impact on the subsequent change in attitude towards Russia.

Both multiple and logistic regression align closely with the statistical description of the correlation between attitudes towards Kosovo and Russia. In this instance, additional measurements have confirmed the strength, depth, and causality of the connection between these two attitudes. All methods have demonstrated that a decisive commitment to the preservation of Kosovo is the strongest determinant of pro-Russian attitudes in Serbia. Due to public support, as well as in the UN Security Council, Russia is perceived as the protector of the sovereignty of the territory of Serbia. But, this strong interdependency between two values of population leads to the conclusion that the resolution of the national issue of Kosovo, regardless of the outcome, would likely result in the decline of strong pro-Russian sentiment among the Serbian population in favor of a more moderate option within a relatively short period of time. The disappearance of the problem of Kosovo or the reduction of tensions over the urgency of its solution would also diminish the need for a major protector, as Russia perceives in the current volatile situation.

The rise of Euroscepticism and anti-EU sentiment in Serbia also demonstrates a clear correlation with increasing pro-Russian leanings across all statistical methods. However, it is evident that this connection is not as pronounced as in the case of the national issue of Kosovo. Specifically, the vast majority (88%) of Eurosceptics in Serbia lean towards pro-Russian sentiments (statistical description); however, the reverse relationship is less convincing, as the majority of pro-Russian respondents are not opposed to European integration (logistic regression).

These findings align with estimates from all available public opinion surveys, which suggest that approximately 80% of the Serbian population leans towards pro-Russian sentiments, while about 50% are against EU membership. Therefore, our statistical analysis indicates an asymmetry in the strength of this relationship

In terms of the influence of respondents' age, more relevant conclusions are drawn from statistical description and, particularly, logistic regression, than from multiple regression. This is expected, given that it concerns naturally variable characteristics (aging) rather than relatively permanent value attitudes. Although multiple regression demonstrated the significant strength of this factor, simpler methods provided significant indicators that pro-Russian leaning does not increase notably with age. Multiple regression, which measures the influence of specific variables while holding all others constant, indicated this variable to be significantly stronger than in reality. However, in direct correlation (logistic regression), it was revealed that there is little difference in the probability of finding any age group among the pro-Russian population.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERBIA AND BRICS WITHIN THE CREATION OF A MULTIPOLAR WORLD AND REFORMS OF INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: From 2024, in addition to Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the expanded BRICS will include five more countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Argentina has withdrawn after the elections). Hence, this group will cover 32% of the world's GDP per purchasing power parity, surpassing G7, 46% of the world population, 31.5% of the world's surface, 40% of the world oil production, 25% of trade, 15% of global services and 45% of the world's foreign exchange reserves. Furthermore, 16 countries have applied for membership, and more than 20 countries have expressed readiness for full BRICS membership.

Seeing how this is currently the most dynamic economic integration in the world, announcing the creation of a multipolar economic and political order and a gradual dedollarisation of the world economy, we have set three tasks for this paper: 1) research the economic and resource potential of BRICS and compare it to their competitors (G7, EU); 2) analyze possible reform directions of international economic institutions with the aim to strengthen and expand BRICS, including the efforts to create a new world reserve currency and the abandonment of the dollar as a key geopolitical and geoeconomic weapon of the USA and countries of the West; 3) point out the importance and possible paths of cooperation between the expanding BRICS and Serbia, from the BRICS+ form to a possible full membership.

The object of this paper is to show that BRICS will inevitably lead to a reform in the international economic and political relationships, with the idea of greater equity, equality and an accelerated development of countries of the Global South. Serbia, as a developing country, (in addition to its cooperation with EU), must pursue its chance to connect

with BRICS, for this will greatly impact Serbia's accelerated economic growth and development in the near future.

Keywords: BRICS, multipolar world, international economic relationships, economic integration, dedollarsation of the world economy.

Introduction

The first steps in the BRICS development are connected to several analyses of the Goldman Sachs bank, which has, in early 2000, announced the appearance of a large alliance of the world's emerging economies and provided the future name for this international integration. In the first Jim O'Neil text "Building Better Economic BRICs" (O'Neil, 2001), he declared that by the year 2039, these countries will surpass the G7 group in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). The text from 2007, "BRICs and Beyond" (Goldman Sachs Global Economics Groups, 2007), hinted at this potential alliance surpassing G7 by 2032, and even after 2008, the growth of China, India and Brazil was very dynamic.

In a review of the shorter history of the creation of BRICS it should be pointed out that the integration formally started in 2009, without South Africa, which joined in 2010 when BRICS had already formed its name (Crnić & Stefanović, 2018; Wilson & Stupnytska, 2007). Since 2013, an agreement on establishing a New Development Bank – NDB, has been reached (*VII BRICS Summit: 2015 Ufa Declaration*; Stojković, 2016), and in 2014, the Bank and Reserve Arrangement, with the amount of 100 billion dollars, have been established (Lissovolik, 2018). The bank's aim mainly consisted of loans for infrastructure investments.

That is how BRICS became a form of strategic partnership without a formal organisation or institutions (unless we include NDB and the Reserve Arrangement). Within the scope of the five levels of economic integration: 1) Preferential Trade Area, 2) Free Trade Area, 3) Customs Union, 4) Common Market, 5) Economic union, BRICS is a platform, an assembly without a Founding Act, and maybe even an "integration of integrations" in the future. As a regional platform, BRICS rounded up some of the strongest countries of the Global South which, formally, are not part of the Collective West and the most developed economies of the world alliance. Since 2024, the member countries of BRICS include Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia and Iran. Thus, BRICS may be considered an organisation/integration encompassing countries

of the South, developing countries, new emerging economies, OPEC leaders and “giant” countries, which include Brazil, the biggest country in Latin America, South Africa, the leading African economy, China and India as the most dynamic world economies and Russia as one of the most important military, geopolitic and economic powers of the world.

Even though BRICS lacks distinctly formed institutions, unlike most other classic integrations, we can still say that three structures, where its activities are performed, have been defined: a) political and government meetings, including the summit held once a year; b) financial instruments; c) working groups, especially in the domain of trade, economy and finances (Dugalić, 2020).

The most important reasons for the establishment and activity of BRICS, or rather, its main goals are:

- Reform of international economic institutions – IMF (International Monetary Fund), WB (World Bank), WTO (World Trade Organization), with the aim of greater equity and equality in work and with respect to the growing economic position of the countries of the Global South (Haibin, 2012);
- Reform and reorganisation of global political institutions, starting with the UN’s system and organisation;
- Creation of a more equal multipolar world, where the position of the dollar and sanctions will not be used as a dominance medium for western countries.

BRICS has been coceived within a group of countries distinguished by a large domestic market, a wealth of natural and energy resources, a large share in the world population, higher rates of economic growth, control over capital flows and a strong public sector (Dugalić, 2020, 2019). BRICS found its fertile soil in the discontent in inequality of economic relationships (where IMF is controlled by the USA and countries of the West), in using the dollar as a medium for restriction and discipline of countries striving for economic sovereignty, in the fact that after the Great Recession of 2008, protectionism started to grow in the international economic relationships, in the decision blockade conditions of the World Trade Organisation and the Security Council (when the decision does not suit the countries of the Collective West), in the lack of important financial means and funds for the development of countries of the Global South, (which was particularly evident during the COVID crisis) (Lissovolik, 2020; Bali & Demir, 2015), and in the air of pronounced weaknesses of the

global management system and the growing multipolarism within international relationships.

The Ukrainian crisis (which started in 2022), gave a big push to the growth and development of BRICS, since in 2024, the expansion with five new members ensued and more than 22 submitted a formal membership application, and 40 new countries aim for a full membership in BRICS, while, for the first time, Serbia acts as an observer in the workings of this organisation. The Ukrainian conflict particularly encouraged the search for an alternative to the dollar and gave a new incentive for expanding BRICS, since the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Collective West, as well as freezing over 300 billion dollars worth of Russian assets and their exclusion from the SWIFT paying system, additionally encouraged the members of BRICS and developing countries to search for an alternative to the dollar and to develop integrations which would help them combat rich countries of the world in alleviating sanctions and other economic pressures. This is why the strength and importance of BRICS keeps growing.

The economic and resource potentials of BRICS

This part of the paper is based on the tables at its end, in the Appendix. It should be noted that the data changes year in year out, with the BRICS share growing in the world's GDP, world trade, services, foreign-exchange reserves and energy potential. The same goes for BRICS before the expansion, but particularly since 2024, when five new countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Emirates, which are vastly important in the energy sector and financial services, joined the organization.

For the sake of illustration, the data for 2024, (based on the calculations of the State Bank of India), shows that the expanded BRICS will cover 45.5% of the world population, 31.5% of the world surface, the share in the world oil reserve will go from 18% to 40%, the share in the world trade from 20% to 25%, in world services from 12% to 15%, and that it will take part in the world foreign-exchange reserves with as much as 45%.

Table 1 shows that the share of BRICS countries in the world GDP went up from 18% in 2009, to 26% in 2022, and that the share of the expanded BRICS went up from 21% in 2009, to 28% at the end of 2022. The share in world foreign trade amounted to 6 trillion 259 billion dollars in 2022, or 25% (as stated at the beginning). Table 2 suggests that Russia is the world leader in values of gas, oil, coal, gold and wood reserves, with an estimated worth of 75 trillion dollars compared to 45 trillion dollars'

worth of gas, oil, gold and copper reserves the USA has. In addition to this, Iran and Saudi Arabia are among world leaders in natural gas and oil reserves, China in wood and coal reserves, Brazil in gold and uranium reserves. Based on Table 3, we can conclude that the expanded BRICS as a whole has a 41% share in the world oil reserves and almost 50% in natural gas reserves, while its share in the world gold reserves is 30% and 22% in the world uranium reserves. In the framework of the world daily oil production, as per The Energy Institute's data in 2022, the share of BRICS countries was 43.1%, or, in absolute numbers, 40 million and 454 thousand barrels of oil per day (EI, 2023).

BRICS countries have different growth models when compared to the West (China), as well as the public sector's share in economy (China and Russia have a bigger share), and India, respectively, leads a more liberal economic policy, while China and Russia have a stronger state-interventionist policy. Unlike the policy of the West, which leads to deindustrialization, these countries strive to encourage industrial production growth, to obtain larger internal equality in the distribution of wealth and income and to reduce the poverty level per capita. China and India have very high growth rates. China is becoming the world leader in economic size, while India is becoming the leading world economy within the service scope (Dimitrijević & Dželetović, 2023). Until 2025, China predicts complete technological independence from the West (*Made in China*), and becoming the leading world economy, between 2030 and 2050, within the GDP framework in dollars per current purchasing power parity.

As a whole, BRICS dominates in the field of energy (oil, natural gas, coal, atomic energy, electric energy), and owns the dominant share in other resources – unprocessed materials, minerals, and precious and rare metals. Strong economic development created a rapidly growing middle class, significantly reducing poverty in China, Brazil, India, Russia, and the growing financial power of China enabled loans for developing countries, investment in their infrastructure and incentives for economic growth without political conditioning.

We will list a string of economic features of BRICS countries (before the expenditure in 2012, although, even today, the main features and trends have not significantly changed) (Dugalić, 2020; Al-Jafari, 2018; Stamatović, 2021):

- BRICS countries have attained significant structural changes in economy by increasing the service share and the tertiary sector in GDP;
- In export, however, resources (Russia, Brazil, South Africa), industry (China) and services (India) are still dominant;
- An increase in manufacture (China, India), renewal of industrial and agricultural manufacturing (Russia) and the increase in factor productivity (China, India, Russia) all contributed to accelerate economic growth (IMF, 2011);
- As for resources, the data suggests that BRICS countries contribute with 69% of the world iron production, 41% of the bauxite production and 70% of the world coal production;
- Natural resource sectors are under tight government control and are used for economic growth and the development of these countries;
- In view of demographic features, with the increase in the standard of living and an extended life span, the share of the population aged over 65 has surged, which simultaneously leads to an increase in social security costs and pension insurance;
- The Chinese growth model has been led by export, while Russia built its growth on its dominant position in oil and gas export; in the last couple of years; China has been encouraging the domestic market and successfully avoiding the 'middle-income trap', which is mainly characterized by stagnating wages and aggregate demand; in the last 10 years, in addition to the military industry, Russia has been thoroughly developing its agriculture, its industry as a whole, nuclear energy and technology;
- Underdeveloped infrastructure has been one of key issues for BRICS countries, however, in the last 20 years, China has achieved impressive results, with Russia and India following right behind, additionally, the significance of infrastructure development in Brazil and South Africa is increasing; and thus, the New Development Bank is growing in importance;
- The significance of foreign direct investments in BRICS countries is increasing, and they are directing their attention to developing countries, countries of the West and offshore areas;
- One prediction shows that the G7 countries' share (without Canada) will significantly decrease in comparison to BRICS – from 89% in 1990, to 72% in 2020, to 50% in 2040, to 40% in 2050 (Wilson &

Purushothaman, 2003); the USA, Japan and EU share will decrease, and the BRICS share, especially China, will increase by 2050;

- BRICS countries have attained immense results in reducing poverty rates – China for over 800 million citizens, India reduced its poverty rate from 0.69 in 1969, to 0.20 in 2006, Russia and Brazil also achieved significant results in reducing poverty rates;
- However, the inequality is still quite high, measured with the Gini index it was above 0.4 in the second decade of the 21st century (except for India, where it measured 0.37), and it was very high in South Africa (above 0.6) (Dugalić, 2020)
- Table 1 in the Appendix shows the *Global Competitiveness Index* which suits the foreign capital interest and, according to its data, China, the Emirates and Saudi Arabia are well-placed, while other BRICS countries are not placed high on the list.

All BRICS countries have abandoned the *Washington Consensus* policies: liberalize – stabilize – privatize, (those policies provided disastrous results in Russia and Brazil) and they are implementing clear sovereign economic policies and external policies (Đorđević, 2007). According to the GDP measured per purchasing power parity, China is already the leading economy in the world, with India taking up third place, and Russia competing with Germany for fourth place. It should be mentioned that these countries did not suffer great loss during the Great Recession of 2008, and have also dealt well with the COVID crisis (China and Russia 2020/2021). The war in Ukraine did not weaken the Russian economy, and, in 2023, it has a higher growth rate compared to the USA, EU and Japan. BRICS is the most powerful integration of countries of the Global South, and its importance and economic power increases, even when compared to G7 group, making BRICS the most powerful economic alliance within G20 group of the most powerful economic countries of the world (Kim, 2018).

Strengthening and expanding BRICS and reform of international economic institutions

BRICS is becoming the new pattern, the new paradigm of international economic integrations, partly because it has no formal institutions, it does not have a Founding Act and cannot be filed under any of the five main forms of integration. In spite of this, it is a global

economic and multipolar platform of the Global South, offering a framework for a more balanced regionalism, sustainable development for less developed countries, more equal international economic relationships in global economic institutions and more resources for development (Wolverson, 2010). What makes it appealing is the fact that the leading countries and economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America hold the reins (and not USA and Europe), it opposes the *center – periphery* model (Lissovlik, 2017), and the EU's value system, which resides on political conditioning, precise and all-encompassing reforms (not just in economy), as well as political discrimination (e.g. Turkey and the countries of the so-called West Balkans).

An entire list of facts related to the Global South contribute to the development of BRICS: the importance of China's and India's economy increases, Russia is again taking the front row seat as one of the most powerful country of the world, there is a crisis in the global management of economic processes and an international economic institution's crisis (IMF, WB, WTO) (Farhi & Gourinchas, 2011), the conflicts between the Collective West and developing countries grow, as well as the importance of developing countries in international trade, capital flows and technological development, new growing economies emerge demanding different frameworks for a more equal economy cooperation, sovereignty and economic sovereignty grow in power, many developing countries have higher growth rates than developed countries and, as such, they are decreasing the difference in economic development, and increasing the share in the world's GDP.

BRICS is not for the suspension, but for the reform of the international economic institutions (and for the reform of the UN). BRICS may be a powerful opposition to developed countries, which have the tendency for growing protectionism, especially in the field of agriculture, technology and the increase of anti-dumping measures within WTO. BRICS has a vast potential within the concepts of *BRICS+* and *BRICS + BEAMS* (Lissovlik, 2018; Arapova & Lissovlik, 2021) which China and Russia advocate, as well as in the expenditure of regional cooperation, specifically in the area of foreign direct investment, capital inflow, improvement of international trade and financial cooperation, as well as creating an alternative to the dollar and alternative paying systems to reduce economic control and conditioning by the Collective West.

A number of key challenges have been set for the BRICS countries (Gowan, 2012; Lissovlik 2017):

- Can BRICS promote the interests of the Global South?
- Can it implement reforms within IMF, UN, WTO?
- Can it change the voting system within IMF and remove the blockades preventing work within UN and the Security Council?
- Can it commence the negotiations within *Doha Round* in WTO which have stopped due to blockades from developed countries?
- Should it strengthen the institutional cooperation structures and develop instruments and mechanisms to influence global economic flows?

What are the possible and existent structures of cooperation within BRICS and platforms of developing countries – the Global South:

- 1) Cooperation with international organizations,
- 2) Cooperation at the developed bank level,
- 3) Cooperation on regional economic integrations,
- 4) Integration within the areas of trade, finance and investments (Conclaves, 2011),
- 5) Strengthening of the global reserves currency fund,
- 6) Development of a' new reserve currency, or the improvement of payments in national currencies,
- 7) Development of an alternative system of payments,
- 8) Encouragement and development of new manufacturing and distribution chains.

Economic crisis are becoming more frequent within international financial relationships (Great Recession, COVID, energy transition, the war in Ukraine), bigger financial resources are necessary, and not just for an accelerated economic growth (IMF does not have access to enough funds and is therefore implementing politically reforming conditions), but also for creating global reserve funds and for the stabilization of financial systems within growing instability and independence. A multilateral financial system is necessary for crisis protection (Arapova & Lissovolik, 2021). With this in mind, the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) should hold the most importance, as well as a number of regional banks (Lissovolik, 2018, Lissovolik & Vinokurov, 2019) such as: African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), IDB group, DBSA (Development Bank of South Africa), SAARC, FOCEM, SDF, CDB, CAF, etc.

These facts become even more important when we take into account that many developing countries have chronic budgetary deficit problems, disparity in balance of payments and balance of current transactions, insufficient foreign exchange reserves, vulnerability to FDI inflow crisis (Foreign Direct Investments) and stability of exchange rates, difficulty accessing international capital markets, a high rate of unemployment, recessionary and inflationary pressures, high rates of informal employment, low wages. Developing countries often underestimate problems in their economy, they spin in the inflation, indebtedness and devaluation circle (Argentina), they reduce investments, in education, health and development, and they do not possess risk-management and respond inadequately to crisis. On the other hand, issues within BRICS exist as well: political conflict (China – India), mutual disputes within WTO (which are relatively small in number), not being prepared for further integrations, the collective position and negotiation power is not strong enough when compared to the West, differences in the level of economics development, economic structure, period of growth, absence of a general strategy within international relationships and international institutions, insufficient capital and investment level within NDB.

BRICS+ offers a specific concept of cooperation, promoted initially by China, which stands for BRICS becoming the ‘integration of integrations’ offering the framework and cooperation platforms for BRICS and leading regional economic integrations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. That framework would imply not only the expenditure of BRICS within memberships, but the creation of regional frameworks and platforms for integration and connection. Having in mind that the key BRICS countries are the founders as well as the leaders of regional continental integrations, BRICS can institutionalize cooperation with:

- 1) Eurasian Economic Union – EAEU (where Russia holds the reins)
- 2) ASEAN + China (Free Trade Agreement)
- 3) MERCOSUR (an economic integration of Latin America lead by Brazil)
- 4) SAARC + SAFTA

In addition, BEAMS is developing as a concept and an idea with added symbolic and metaphorical meaning. Namely, just like *BRICS* stands for bricks – the building blocks creating this new multipolar world, *BEAMS* is short for the *BRICS+ integration* which would add to the platform the existing integrations: *BIMESTIC* – **B**, *EAEU* – **E**, *AU* – **A**, *MERCOSUR* – **M**, *SCO* – **S**. The word *beams* stands for another type of

building material, so this connection would stand for beams and bricks building the framework for the new international economic order. This kind of global connection on the basis of regions – continents – transcontinental cooperation counteracts the big western integrations such as TPP and TTIP, which were abandoned at some point. As Lisovlik (2017) notices, the world is in need of connected regional economic integrations, especially within the Global South, as well as connected regional development banks, which would synergistically have a greater impact on IMF and other international organizations.

The possibility of further connection could be developed in a number of steps:

Step One – connecting the African Union and SCO via the New Development Bank and by financing large infrastructural projects;

Step Two – the BRICS – SCO – Latin America link;

Step Three – BRICS – SCO – BIMSTEC – AEAU – MERCOSUR link by creating a vast free trade area;

Step Four – a potential step, it might be a link between *ASEAN + China* and *China – India – ASEAN* along with BRICS, creating, again, a free trade area.

This represents the 10 potential bilateral agreements, with the existence of 15 trade arrangements on a bilateral basis. In this sense, the super-connection BRICS – BEAMS is potentially the biggest regional integration with enormous economic perspectives.

What is the direction which the financial system reform should take?

First – there is the possibility of gradually making yuan the new reserve currency to the extent of China liberalizing capital flows and growing into the leading world economic power; the alternative is introducing the golden yuan (Dimitrijević & Dželetović, 2022);

Second – creating some sort of accounting unit between the BRICS countries, which would adhere to the same principles as SDR (Special Drawing Rights within IMF), but based on Keynes' idea of a larger sum of the available accounting currency, aiding the countries which are having balance of payments problems without political conditioning or structural reforms as with the Washington Consensus model (Komazec, Bukvić, Dimitrijević & Petrović, 2022);

Third – implementing the gold standard which has its positive and negative aspects, and where the amount of gold could present a limitation to the availability of the reserve currency;

Fourth – encouraging trade with mutual currencies within BRICS, which is currently done; namely, this type of trade is conducted between Russia and China, Russia and India, Russia and Iran, and, as a practice, it is expanding on other countries in the world.

The possible paths for IMF reforms could be (Bhasin, & Gupta, 2018): increasing the BRICS countries' voting percentage within IMF decision-making at the expense of the most influential countries of the West, (mainly the USA which now has 15.45% of votes and can block any and all decisions and changes, while BRICS currently has 13.35% of votes); expanding the circle of reserve currencies, higher availability of SDR, more currencies within the SDR currency basket, which leads to the change of formula for the IMF member states quota. Greater availability of resources for crises and the stabilization of balance of payments, as well as a reduced impact of political factors is key. If BRICS countries could increase their percentage above 15% of votes, they could block adverse decisions of the IMF's Board of Directors, which are currently under the decisive American impact. The World Bank could have a greater connection to the NDB and AIIB within the coordination and financing of large infrastructural projects for developing countries and countries of the South. When we talk about the reform of the World Trading Organisation, all BRICS countries share the same principles of WTO reform, and within the potential BRICS+ group, which comprises 46 countries, 42 of them are member states of WTO. The World Trade Organization would have to become a multipolar organization and to greatly secure the interests of developing countries.

BRICS holds great opportunities in the expenditure of financial aid to Asian, African and Latin American countries, where China significantly stands out. Loans are directed to the needs for accelerated development, infrastructure construction, improvement of industrial and agricultural manufacture. The global Chinese projects "Silk Road" – "Belt and Road" have great perspective, especially in the development of transport, ports, trade, railways and infrastructure as a whole. There is also the possibility of an incentive from the BRICS Free Trade Agreement (FAT), Preferential Trade Area (PTA), investment cooperation and investment in developing countries and developed countries, creating offshore areas, etc. Although BRICS does not have important established institutions, there is some sort of statistical center, business, trade and financial facilities at the ministry level, NDR experts, experts for certain questions in the trade, finance and investment area.

There is much BRICS can do for the promotion of traditional and new factors for accelerated economic growth and development, which are: human capital, technology and capital transfer, institutional factors, natural and cultural factors. The new fundamental development factors are: foreign direct investments (China), international trade (China, Russia, India, Iran), energy (Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE), the financial market development (China), service sector (India). The most recent data, from 2023, shows that out of the five most dynamic world economies, three are BRICS members (India, China, Russia), and two are candidates (Indonesia and Turkey). The entire European Union is stagnating, the USA and Japan are reporting relatively modest growth rates. According to the GDP indicator per purchasing power parity (it better reflects the genuine economy and the true economic potential), China, India and Russia are among the first five countries of the world (with USA and Germany). All this strongly indicates at great development and economic perspective of BRICS and expanded BRICS at the expense of the Collective West.

BRICS and Serbia – perspective and cooperation

Serbia is a developing country – a moderately developed country, which has completed the transition process and is currently undergoing the European Union accession process. However, that process is quite slow and burdened by numerous political conditioning, most prominently the recognition of the false country Kosovo by UN. In a geopolitical sense, Serbia is neutral – it is not a member of NATO, and within its foreign policy, it has declared four pillars of cooperation: EU – USA – China – Russia. Honestly, Serbia is the only state in the proximity of NATO and not a member of it (except for Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is understandable, bearing in mind the history of NATO aggression directed at SRY in 1999, and the great number of people Serbia lost during that time, including the amputation/abduction of Kosovo and Metohija (K&M). Serbia maintains an excellent political and economic relationship with Russia, and it is one of few European countries which did not sanction the Russian Federation after the 2022 Special Military Operation in Ukraine. An excellent political and economic collaboration is also maintained with China – currently one of the most important economic partners and investors in Serbia. The relationship with the USA is burdened by opposing opinions on K&M and constant political pressures, including pressures on Republika Srpska.

Since the Non-Aligned Movement, when Serbia was part of the SFRY, the main principles of its foreign policy were founded on the ideas of independence, sovereignty and not getting involved in internal relations, including political neutrality. Under such circumstances, Serbia would benefit from the development of a multipolar world, greater equality and equity within international political and economic relationships, the reform of multinational economic organizations with multilateral features, greater inflow of foreign direct investments and capital without strict conditioning and structural reforms. With its political principles and as a leading integration platform of the Global South, BRICS offers Serbia perspective and significant cooperation with economic and geopolitical advantages.

- 1) From an economic perspective, Serbia, as a developing country, in an external position is very vulnerable, which was proven by the 2008-2012 crisis (Dimitrijević, Dželetović & Katić, 2023). Serbia is in a balance of payment, trade and current balance deficit, which leads to a growing debt and affects a whole set of economic indicators: foreign direct investments, Serbian net investment positions, foreign-exchange reserves, capital balance, the exchange rate stability and the financial system as a whole, as well as inflationary pressures. The balance between the current balance and balance of payments is maintained by a vast FDI inflow, but if it were to decline (as in the 2008 scenario) it could lead to an increased foreign debt, threaten the stability of the foreign-exchange rate and abruptly decrease foreign-exchange reserves. In this scenario, a series of devaluations and inflations, with a lost foreign capital, could quickly tear down the financial system of the country, as was the case with Argentina, Mexico, Russia and countries of the Far East which had a liberalized capital market at the end of the 90s. In the case of devaluation, not only would the inflation spiral activate, but the GDP share would abruptly increase, the loan ratings would decrease, debt conditions would grow worse in the sense of interest levels and repayment costs, and the average salary would drop. The current balance deficit, in accordance with the *twin deficit hypothesis*, would lead to a budgetary deficit, which would endanger pension delivery, social programs, education, health and high level infrastructure investments. Hence, Serbia needs an alternative in loans and FDI, which can aid its development, and is not part of the geopolitical sphere of the countries of the West. Thus, BRICS is an important alternative in western integration (EU) and Serbia would have to intensify its cooperation with this multipolar organisation, as

well as trade cooperation and energy perspective, import-export possibilities and agricultural cooperation.

- 2) In a geopolitical sense, BRICS offers cooperation without any political prerequisite for Serbia to meet, and bearing in mind that China and Russia, as permanent members of the Security Council who have not recognized Kosovo, are BRICS members, it makes the cooperation expenditure even more sensible and meaningful. Serbia needs to have interest in expanding cooperation on the Global South platform, diminishing its dependence on countries of the West and increasing its resilience in case of economic crisis or abrupt sanctions implementation around Kosovo. Bearing in mind the former possibilities Serbia had within the Non-Aligned Movement, reviving these cooperations could benefit Serbia with export incentives, industrial manufacture, and agriculture and employment growth. BRICS exhibits interest in expanding membership, it is the most promising economic integration in the world, with the possibility to increase its GDP, trade and investment. In the event of the global world changing and BRICS "stock growing", Serbia needs to expand its cooperation with this organization and strengthen its political and economic perspectives. This is further confirmed by the reciprocal cooperation and, recognizing this, BRICS invited Serbia to participate in this year's summit in Russia as an observer. However, we should keep in mind that this could have political consequences on the European integration process, but it is up to Serbia's leadership and diplomacy to balance between these actions towards the national interest.

Table 4 in the Appendix has the statistical data regarding the foreign trade exchange between BRICS countries within two years, before and after the expenditure: 2009 and 2022, depicting the share of BRICS countries in the entire import and export of Serbia. In 2009, import from BRICS countries was around 4%, and export 21%, while in 2022, the import share doubled at 8%, and export remained at 21%. This undoubtedly shows that Serbia has import potential with BRICS countries. In a statistical sense, the biggest potential lies in cooperation with the Russian Federation and China, whereby import from China increased, and import from Russia diminished in a relative sense.

BRICS holds enormous perspective significance for Serbian economy as an economic integration with a dynamic growth and development and increase in world GDP and trade. In these growing conditions of multipolarism and increase in economic power, primarily Eurasia on the

account of Euro-Atlantic integration, Serbia should gradually realize new positions in the international economic and political relationships. Not only do BRICS countries have dynamic economic growth, but they are also a great potential market for Serbia's export, as well as the basis for increased future foreign direct investments and capital inflow, especially for infrastructure investment. The cooperation with Russia and China has a special significance for Serbia, not only in an economic sense, but also because they are permanent members of the UN Security Council, which holds immense importance in maintaining territorial integrity of K&M in the Serbian structure.

Arguments pro cooperation with Russia (Dugalić, 2020):

- Serbia has significant cooperation with Russia in the area of energy, petrochemistry, military industry, agriculture, tourism;
- The Free Trade Agreement has been in power for more than 20 years, and, in 2015, it was ratified by the Eurasian Economic Union;
- There are great possibilities in the field of traffic, construction and scientific and technological cooperation;
- Food, agriculture and groceries export to the Russian Federation used to have great importance;
- Russia is the fifth partner in importance for Serbian export (after Germany, Italy, Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina);
- Russian import with Serbia is 65% oil and gas.

Economic cooperation with China has the following features:

- China has important direct and brownfield investments in Serbian economy, as well as activities in construction, infrastructure, bridge building, railways and highways;
- The Strategic Partnership Agreement has been signed since 2009, which led to an increase in capital inflow and investments from China;
- Within the "Belt and Road" project, which covers 4.4 billion people and 21 trillion dollars, there is a platform for cooperation with European countries "16+1", which includes Serbia, leading to an even more significant cooperation with China;
- A more significant cooperation with China has been established with the purchase of the Iron Factory *Smederevo* by Hesteel and *RTB Bor* by Zhuyin; China also participates in the construction of the fast track

Belgrade – Budapest and in the construction of the thermal power plant *Kostolac B*;

- Foreign trade exchange with China amounts to more than 2.5 billion dollars, however, it has an extremely imbalanced nature, due to the export being covered by only 5% of the import;
- Chinese development models may hold an important lesson for Serbia, especially when taking into account that for an accelerated economic growth and decrease in differences between development levels Serbia needs growth rates from 5% to 7% on average per year.

Lastly, we note that the potential membership in the European Union (which is currently not certain, at least until 2030), definitely leads to the termination of the Free Trade Agreement with Russia, Belarus and EAEU (Dimitrijević & Dželetović, 2016), and will also bring about pressure to significantly reduce Chinese investments and economic cooperation with China. Full EU membership certainly excludes BRICS membership, as well as any important institutional cooperation and connection with BRICS.

Conclusion

BRICS is the most dynamic and the most promising economic integration in the world, as well as the most influential economic platform of the Global South. It controls almost 50% of the world population, more than 40% of the world oil reserves and almost one third of the world's GDP. The extended BRICS covers 10 countries even now, bearing in mind that 22 countries officially applied for full membership, and almost 40 countries desire to be BRICS members.

As the largest economic integration of the Global South and developing countries, from the beginning, BRICS has aimed for a multipolar economic order, greater equity and equality in international economy, as well as reforms of the international political and economic institutions, thus obtaining greater influence of developing countries and powerful growing economies (China, India, Russia, Brazil, as well as many other countries). Among BRICS priorities falls the dedollarisation, creation of the new world reserve currency in the middle term and an alternative payment system – with the aim to prevent the dollar and economic sanctions to be used as a dominance medium by the Collective West, political conditioning and supremacy compared to the growing process of decolonisation, multipolarism and the increase in economic and political sovereignty. IMF reform would have to move in the direction of greater availability of

resources for solving balance of payments and budget imbalances of developing countries, greater voting influence for BRICS members and greater SDR availability. The World Trade Organisation would have to direct its actions and decision-making towards multipolarism and Third World Countries, thus reducing the richest world economies' protectionism. Within UN, reform of the Security Council is necessary, as well as reform of a number of collective organisations and institutions within the structure and system of this cooperation.

BRICS possesses specific potential to develop as the 'integration of integrations' within the following three formats: 1) New Development Bank, which together with the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and a network of other development banks in Asia, Africa and Latin America can achieve plenty for the infrastructure development plan and the accelerated economic development of the Third World and Global South; 2) BRICS+, which could purchase a row of regional organisations and institutions, such as MERCOSUR, EAEU; 3) BRICS + BEAMS, which would be joined by the Shanghai cooperation organisation, BIMSTEC and the African Union. Thus, a transcontinental super-alliance would form with the idea to expand the free area and preferential trade, as well as financial and investment cooperation.

Serbia, as a military neutral country, leaning on the USA, European Union, Russia and China in its foreign policy and international economic relationships, needs to advance its institutional cooperation and connection with the expanded BRICS. This should be done not only for the similar principles they both advocate (multipolarism, reform of international institutions with the aim of greater equity), but because BRICS is taking the global lead, it is the most powerful energy group in the world, offering investments, export chances for Serbia, a new economic development model and corresponding economic structures. This is why, in a world where power balance constantly changes and new security, economic and political developments in Europe and the rest of the world emerge, the invitation to this year's BRICS summit in Russia is the first large step towards further development and deepening the cooperation with this increasingly significant and powerful international integration.

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Annexes:

Table 1. Selected indicators for the expanded BRICS: Population; GDP and ranking of countries according to the Global Competitiveness Index

Member	Status	2009				2022			2019
		Population in thousands	GDP in millions (constant \$ 2015)	Share in global export in %	Rank by Global competitiveness index (result) **	Population in thousands	GDP in millions (constant \$ 2015)	Share in global export in %	Rank by Global competitiveness index (result) **
Brazil	Founder	194 517	1 583 910	1,03	64 (4,13)	215 313	1 901 461	1,3	71 (60,9)
Russian Federation	Founder	142 785	1 196 808	1,31	51 (4,33)	144 237	1 471 545	2,1	43 (66,7)
India	Founder	1 223 640	1 415 606	1,76	50 (4,33)	1 417 173	2 961 515	1,8	68 (61,4)
China	Founder	1 331 260	6 827 905	7,04	30 (4,7)	1 412 175	16 325 085	14,4	28 (73,9)
South Africa	Founder	51 171	302 460	0,52	45 (4,41)	59 894	360 707	0,5	60 (62,4)
Total founders	...	2 943 374	11 326 689	...	...	3 248 792	23 020 313	...	...
% of the global	...	42,75	18,22	11,66	...	40,86	25,58	20,1	...
Saudi Arabia	Added member	28 484	486 268	0,67	27 (4,72)	36 409	769 633	1,6	36 (70)
Iran, Islamic Rep.	Added member	74 323	405 415	0,44	Not ranked	88 551	487 695	0,3	99 (53)
Ethiopia	Added member	86 756	35 297	0,03	121 (3,41)	123 380	105 775	0,02	126 (44,4)
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Added member	85 501	274 326	0,40	81 (3,98)	110 990	453 827	0,2	93 (54,5)
United Arab Emirates	Added member	7 993	288 347	1,21	31 (4,68)	9 441	431 441	2,4	25 (75)
Total BRICS	...	3 226 430	12 816 342	...	...	3 617 563	25 268 684	...	...
World	...	6 885 663	62 157 298	...	...	7 950 947	89 994 663	...	...
% of the global	...	46,86	20,62	14,41...	...	45,50	28,08	24,62	...

Source: Data from database: World Development Indicators: <https://databank.worldbank.org/> 21. IV 2024.

* The World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) (2009). *Export by country and region*. Retrieved from <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/WLD/Year/2009/TradeFlow/Export#>

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Table 2. List of top ten world's resource rich nations

No.	Country Name	Main Natural Resources	Total cost of natural resources
1.	Russian Federation	Coal, oil, gold, gas and timber	\$75.7 trillions
2.	United States	Natural gas, gold, copper and oil	\$45 trillion
3.	Saudi Arabia	Gas, timber and oil	\$34.4 trillions
4.	Canada	Uranium, timber, oil, phosphate and gas	\$33.2 trillion
5.	Iran, Islamic Republic	Natural gas and oil	\$27.3 trillions
6.	China	Coal & timber	\$23 trillion
7.	Brazil	Gold and uranium	\$21.8 trillions
8.	Australia	Coal, iron ore, timber and copper	\$19.9 trillion
9.	Iraq	Oil & natural gas	\$15.9 trillions
10.	Venezuela	Iron, oil and natural gas	\$14.3 trillion

Source: Basic Planet (2023). *TOP 10 Countries with Most Natural Resources in the World*. Retrieved from <https://www.basicplanet.com/top-10-countries-natural-resources-world/>

Table 3. World reserves of selected natural raw materials
by BRICS countries in %.

Member	Status	Oil *	Natural gas **	Gold ***	Uranium****
Brazil	Founder	0,7	0,2	4,44	5
Russian Federation	Founder	6,2	19,9	12,59	8
India	Founder	0,3	0,7	No data	No data
China	Founder	1,5	4,5	3,7	4
South Africa	Founder	No data	No data	9,26	5
Saudi Arabia	Added member	17,2	3,2	No data	No data
Iran, Islamic Rep.	Added member	9,1	17,1	No data	No data
Ethiopia	Added member	No data	No data	No data	No data
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Added member	0,2	1,1	No data	No data
United Arab Emirates	Added member	5,6	3,2	No data	No data
Share in global reserves	...	40,8	49,9	29,99	22

Source:

* BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2021: *Oil*. Retrieved from <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2021-oil.pdf>. p. 16.

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Table 4. Percentage participation of BRICS countries in foreign trade exchange of Serbia

Member	Status	2009		2022	
		Export	Import	Export	Import
Brazil	Founder	0,01	0,72	0,21	0,27
Russian Federation	Founder	4,18	12,27	4,11	7,49
India	Founder	0,06	0,68	No data	0,75
China	Founder	0,11	7,07	4,01	12,11
South Africa	Founder	0,02	0,08	0,04	0,26
Total founders	...	4,38	20,82	8,37	20,88
Saudi Arabia	Added member	No data	No data	0,21	No data
Iran, Islamic Rep.	Added member	0,35	No data	No data	No data
Ethiopia	Added member	0,05	No data	No data	No data
Egypt, Arab Rep.	Added member	0,34	0,05	0,17	0,16
United Arab Emirates	Added member	0,18	No data	0,3	No data
Total BRICS	...	5,3	20,87	9,05	21,04

Source:

- Data for 2009: Republic Statistical Office of Serbia (2011) Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia. Belgrade. pp. 283-284.
- Data for 2022: Republic Statistical Office of Serbia (2023) Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia. Belgrade. pp. 313-314.

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