

# **BALKAN REGION – BATTLEGROUND FOR A CLASH OF THE CENTERS OF POWER IN A CREATION OF A NEW WORLD ORDER**

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## **Abstract**

After the cold war, the world entered into more complex and unpredictable set of interests and realignments. Threats such as organized crime and terrorism, economic crises and refugee crises have increased and improved interdependence between individuals, organizations and countries.

The positioning of the Balkan region, as a gateway to both the Europe and the European Union is the scene where the big centers of power will realize their interests in terms of has created a multipolar world order in the Balkan region. This process hassled by national interests through policies designed of large business centers and companies. Major centers of power have mostly interested in a stable Balkans region because stability means a way for furthering the interests of the major centers of power. The shocks that had occurred after the broke up of Yugoslavia were crucial in the infiltration of US-the main major power- influence in the Balkans. The promotions of democracy and EU and NATO membership have been the main priorities of US.

On the other hand, Russia and China has seen the EU as a major market in which they will pursue their interests, primarily

economic. Given the strategic geographical location of the Balkans, the region is an open gateway to the EU market and could be considered as a way of achieving the goals of China and Russia. However these goals have caused great dissatisfaction of the other center of power, USA. This means that any cooperation agreement that has concluded between rivals of the USA with the Balkans will mean an unforgivable transgression and betrayal. If we take into account, "South Stream" agreement that signed between Russia and the Balkan countries and the benefits of the New Silk Road through high speed train line between Athens-Skopje-Belgrade and Budapest under the auspices of China are the cases that the USA could be considered these moves for treason.

Taking into account all the events that occurred in the Balkans last two years (Political destabilization in Macedonia, coup attempt in Turkey, referendum in Republika Srpska, the tightening of relations between Serbia and Kosovo, election process in Montenegro, opening the Albanian question, etc.) are opening a new question - who needs more "stable" or "unstable" Balkans?

**Keywords:** *Balkan, centers of power, interests, new world order, and polarity.*

### **1. The end of *pax americana* – the rise of the rest**

The world has entered in a period of transition. Historically, unilateral position of the United States culminated with an imperialist foreign policy of George W. Bush and his doctrine of "export values" such as democracy, freedom and human rights enshrined in the so-called "The new US security strategy" from 1992, proposed by high-ranking administrator in the Bush administration, Paul Wolfowitz. (Judies, 2007) On the other hand fast growing economies that embodied in the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), as well as Turkey, Vietnam, Indonesia, have launched a process of reducing the unilateral capacity and power of USA. These developments of course do not mean that in an overnight US will lose its military - political influence on the global political scene, but there is a chance the US hegemonic dominance to be revitalized by the new emerging economies.

Today we live in the third shift of the dominance of the major powers throughout history. The first change is characterized by the growth of the power and influence of the Western world in the 15th century. Both agriculture and industrial revolutions and the developments of trade, science and technology had contributed to development of capitalism. End of the 19th century was characterized as the second change that embodied in the growth of the power and influence of the US on the global political stage as an imperialist superpower. The development of Pax Americana (American Peace) was based on the principles of the Roman Empire (The Romans believed that the territories under their control were privileged, enjoying peace and prosperity guaranteed by the power and influence of the Roman Empire) and was created by the global dominance of the United States, which is the most powerful economy in the world. On the other hand, the process of globalization has increased interdependence and cooperation between countries, especially in the field of the economy and security. This situation created powerful players on the global political scene. Through their influences, they have been tried to remodelling the world order, which would mean a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world order, or hybrid world order. (Zakaria,2008).

Historically, the format of world orders was often in the process of transitions and changes. In the early twentieth century, the world order was multipolar which characterized by the formation of alliances, accompanied by many conflicts, wars and domination of the European powers on the global stage through their powers and influences. After World War II, the world order was remodelled from the multipolar to bipolar, dominated by two opposing powers, US and USSR. This new world order created alliances, as on one side the Atlantic Pact, on the other side, the Warsaw Pact. Both opposing blocks piled arms and filled arsenals. With the agreement at the seventies the both sides began to gradually reduce their armaments but They had been still retained their overkill capacity (another beautiful coinage of the Cold War, which means a capacity, in this case a country to be "killed" several times. As much as it may sound illogical, it is so frightening). It was a period of threats caused by both sides. There was fear on both sides. The fall of socialism was accepted as the disintegration of the bipolar system and started remodelling a unipolar world order again. What does it mean? - It means that both Eastern military alliance (Warsaw Pact etc.) and the Soviet Union was been dissolving. Countries that were occupied by Soviet domination, aided by the growth of Western influence, have started to adopt the capitalist system. These countries that survived the collapse of the block division were rewarded for that changes and accepted as new members in the Atlantic Pact. This means that they became a powerful weapon in the hands of

the only military and economic superpower - the United States. Russia after the breakup began to sink economically, becoming a second-class country in which corruption and poverty reigned. The capitals were transferred to other countries, and military arsenal rotting in the depots. At that time, Russia was without a vision and adequate and clear foreign policy without ambition and willingness to be guided. This situation was used by the US to increase its economic and military power.

However as we have explained above, the development of the economic power of the United States was caused a domino effect and growth of other economies. On the other hand, the process of globalization has created interdependence of countries especially in the areas economy, politics, security etc. and aroused new players (who were just objects or observers in the past) that through its effects caused erosion of the stable unipolar position of the US in world order. This process requires new remodelling the world order, that has to depend solely on the behaviour of the United States. If unipolar order found ways to circumvent international organizations not respecting the international law, acting from a position of power in the function of US national interests, multipolar order requires respect and support of international organizations, and resolving global challenges through multilateral engagement before the large forces of power (Zendelovski, 2010).

According to Aristotle, man is a political being - *zoon politikon*. According to him, "one who can not live in the community or to whom nothing is necessary, because it is sufficient to itself, is not part of the state, he is a beast or a god". This absence of the need to be with and like others is a form of unipolar order. But this form of independent action is not political, because politics, economics and trade exist only in the community, which by the nature of things is multipolar world order (Mulgan, 2000).

Beside USA, we must not forget China. The country is the most secret and controversial actor in the international arena, which until now has always been neutral. It is arguable question of how dominance of China can affect to the process of creating a new order. Globalization and interdependence primarily in political, scientific and business links with the outside world, referring here to Europe, America and Africa as new unconquered market and these were key factors that changed the rigid position of China. Fast-growing military and economic power of China were the guarantors for its internal security and stability, but also to strengthen its influence in Southeast Asia. But the projections of its power in the region were not sufficient to ensure primacy of the superpower. China is oriented towards economic conquest of Europe and the United States and Africa? In the upcoming period, besides the

Europe, Africa will be the place where the three major centers of power, the US, Russia and China will cross their influences. In other words, the next multilateral cold war. For China, Africa is a market for placing their products. Africa also represents industrial potential, with many natural resources, mineral wealth as well as alternative fuel, Therefore; large companies see Africa for a good opportunity for investment. Thinking long term for these values, China began to impose its influence through its mega project "Silk Road" by land and sea, as well as investments in Africa (Until now invested about \$ 400 billion). To ensure security and stability for their investments, China has started construction of a military base in Djibouti, a place that according to the location is strategic. Because through this base, China will provide safety of the movement of goods from its own territory to Africa and has a greater control and influence in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal as a gateway to Europe. Silk Road will continue through the Balkans (Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary through the construction of high-speed rail line through these states). Because of this interest, by the construction of a military base in Djibouti China has been to respond to threats from terrorist organizations al-Shabab in Somalia and Yemen branch of Al Qaeda. The danger of the Islamic State is a threat for China. The decision of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to join the alliance with Moscow and Damascus to release Syria and fight against the terrorist organization Islamic State was an initial burst for terrorist attack realized in Kyrgyzstan signed with the initials of the Islamic state. This decision has set a precedent and also a milestone in the positioning of China and its abandonment of the position of neutrality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The fact that in the terrorist organization Islamic State members thousands of Uighur fighters originating from western China which have separatist aspirations and secession from China are cited as the second important reason why China enters the fight against terrorism, primarily against the Islamic State. On the other hand coup attempt in the Turkey, and its chill out of relations with the United States, the termination of cooperation US-Russia regarding the Syrian conflict, has created the possibility of creating a joint alliance of the line Ankara-Moscow-Tehran-Beijing as response to the final settlement of the Syrian issue.

Brzezinski explains that there are five basic verities that emerging redistribution of global political power. The first is that United States is still world powerful entity (politically, economically and militarily), but, rising of the other, launched the process of reducing of their power. The second is Russia and her foreign policy, third is China (she is not challenge for USA still), the forth is Europe and her constructive role in taking the lead in regard

to transnational threats, and the last one is violent awakening among post-colonial Muslims by European Countries (Brzezinski, 2016)

## **2. Crossing the impact of the major centres of power in the Balkan region**

When we mention the Balkan region, the first name that comes to our mind is Yugoslavia. From a European success story after World War II, the process of disintegration of Yugoslavia was suddenly turned into an experiment (pilot project) that will later be applied in other regions of the world. Balkan region for its geostrategic position, its mixed multi-ethnic structure, is one out of the three regions on the world that there have been disagreements continuously along ethnic and religious ground, the nationalism and conflicts have often developed into mass bloodshed. The other two regions with similar characteristics are the Middle East and Asian Balkans (countries of Central Asia) (Brzezinski, Z. 2006). To answer the question of who needs unstable Balkans, we will return to the story of Yugoslavia.

In order to slow down and block Germany, the major Western powers France and Britain with provisions of Corfu Declaration laid the pillars of Yugoslavia. Spreading the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empire, Yugoslavia had united all South Slavic nations in one state. Thus by the unification of the South Slavic nations it would not be easy prey for the imperialist intentions, which operate on the principle divide and then conquer. Based on its constitutional order, Yugoslavia was likeness of a Britain.

Through the creation of the Non-aligned Movement, Yugoslavia had become an important player on the international scene. This movement had aimed to be the guardian of national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of all member states from the imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and all other forms of aggression, occupation, domination, and hegemony as well as against great powers in the period of Cold war (Kacrpо, 1979). Also it favoured independent development of the states, rejecting any external influence and interference of foreign influences. This strategy of Non-aligned Movement, did not favour the strategy of big powers for ideological wars by absorbing weak states. For that purpose this movement should have been disintegrated. Federal Yugoslavia had consisted of six countries, had to be divided, so the newly independent states to have been exhausting and later absorbed into the ideology of the great powers. It was actually only one reason. On the other hand, the rate of economic growth

and development of Yugoslavia especially after the Second World War had placed her on high 24th place among world economies. If we compare this data with the report from 2015, Montenegro is on 149th place; Macedonia is on 130th place, Bosnia and Herzegovina on 112th place, Serbia on 87th place, Slovenia on 81th place and Croatia on 76 place (Statistic Times, 2015). At that time, the state had had a dominant share of the joint stock companies, something that could not be imagined for Western democracy. Thus, the state had controlled the entire operation of enterprises, and transferring capital abroad was been impossible. The entry of foreign companies with the purpose of exploitation of natural resources was also disabled. For that purpose, the dissolution of Yugoslavia into smaller states with weaker economies should allow

- Do not be able to develop independently (Need of interdependence, globalization and democracy);
- Wrecked economies and natural resources should be available at the disposal of large multinational companies and financial institutions;
- Depletion of the population;
- Working age and educated population will be forced to work for minimal salaries.
- Destruction of the strong manufacturing capacity in all spheres of economy and industry in order to be neutralized as competition to western corporations. (Butler, 2016).

All the above, also were conditions that opened the gate for the entry of foreign capital takeover and exploitation of major manufacturing capacities by Western corporations. Normally it all happened, Yugoslavia should been disintegrated.

From a security perspective, the collapse of socialist oriented Yugoslavia was continuation of the strategy of the imperialist powers to absorb dilapidated states. Slovenia and Croatia are already been in NATO and the EU, Montenegro this year has become a member of NATO. At the same time negotiations with the EU for its inclusion will be begun. The goal is simple, the rejection of the Russia influence on these countries. Meanwhile, Montenegro held elections. At the same time a referendum was conducted in order to determine the future direction of this country, the EU, NATO or Russia.

On the other hand, the Balkans is the major crossroads of Europe and the Middle East in both directions. It has not been disputed the fact that the tendency of the imperialist forces to dominate and control these crossroads. The impact on "Diagonal Road" consisting Vienna-Belgrade-Skopje-Sofia-

Istanbul is of particular importance for the great powers. For Europe, Diagonal Road is a land route to the Orient while for the countries of the Middle East, which is a gateway to Europe. For that reason, which will be dominated, she will profit from it.

### **3. Towards union (EU) or a superpower (USA or Russia)**

In the past few years, the Western Balkans was in benign neglect by the European Union. However, the impact on relations Kosovo - Serbia was an exception. The former head of EU foreign policy, Catherine Ashton invested much energy in the process of reconciliation between Serbia and Kosovo after independence in 2008. German Chancellor Angela Merkel had a key part in the negotiation process between the two countries. Historically, the influence of Central Europe, primarily Germany in the nineties on the Balkan region had been hampered by the bloody wars between Serbs and Croats. Germany, on the other hand, has historic, religious and cultural ties with Croatia. In other words, Serbia was at war with an opponent who was part of Central Europe. (Anderson, 1995) These events have not been allowed Germany to achieve strategic contact with Russia (through Serbia, because she has a very good links with Russia). It will be a key condition for signing a Eurasian strategic partnership that will allow Germany to be the creator of EU policy and also to enable domination of the Balkan region. In translation, this means strengthening the position of Germany in development of EU policy, free entry to Russia in the European market, strengthening the European Union and so on. On the other hand, Anglo-American policy will be lost their influence both in the Balkans and the impact on EU policies and so on. From a geopolitical perspective, the concept of Eurasianism does not advocate for preservation of the status quo, but aims to select a future different from the cliché concept of Atlanticism. Eurasianism requires radical changes to the current world structure. This concept does not see the creation of a world government based on liberal - democratic values, but accession to the alternative of the globalization, which is a synonym for a multipolar world. However let's go back to the Balkans and its orientation again.

Much of the Balkan countries were absorbed into the European Union and NATO. The others, like Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not been yet members of the EU but they have taken in a strategic importance in the new strategic document of the European Union, "A Global Strategy for the EU in the area of common and foreign policy". If we take into account new security threats, the Balkan region is important for the migration, terrorism, energy security, organized



crime issues for both the EU and Europe and stable Balkans will also mean stable EU and Europe. Solving these issues requires joint access and joint action by all stakeholders. In that regard, the EU should be regardless, contribute to its impact on these countries, promoting political reforms, rule of law, good neighbourly relations and economic empowerment. All that requires a stable government that will implement these goals (A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, 2016)

American politics has its own wild cards that could be used to destabilize the region if any power who has been tried to impose its influence pushing out Anglo-American. Kosovo and Albania in any moment could be used to destabilization. It could be caused a domino effect in the surrounding region, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Greece (where Albanian population lives, always playing on the national card). The statement of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Russian Duma that "Americans are strategically, who yearns to divide us." Having regard the case of Yugoslavia, in the future we can expect the implementation of the statement of the Russian Minister Lavrov, knowing that the United States is a strategic partner of Kosovo and Albania with dominant influence. In addition to this goes agreement between Tirana and Washington concluded in March 2013 according to which Albania has obliged to receive a settlement of two thousand Sunni Mujahedeen from Iran where dominated Shiite population (Kurani, 2016). The impact in Bosnia, which was controlled by Turkey, now has reduced after the events of July 15 and the attempted coup in Turkey. After this developments in Turkey the relationship Turkey and the United States have strained. Using that moment has strengthened the Russian - Turkish cooperation. Here we have to mention the agreement on joint construction of gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey through the Balkans, and from there to Europe.

Seen from a historical perspective through the narrow historical and cultural connections with Serbia and Greece, Russia has been trying to assert its influence in the Balkans. In Sochi, 2013, the presidents of Serbia and Russia signed a declaration on strategic partnership. Next in 2014, Serbia signed an agreement on military cooperation with Russia, and the same year Putin was awarded with the highest order of the President of the Republic of Serbia. In the economic sphere, the Russian state railway has begun to the reconstruction of the railway line in Serbia. Energy giants like Gazprom and Lukoil has been hold majority stakes in domestic energy companies of the same type. Serbia has not implemented the sanctions imposed by the EU towards Russia. The same situation happened in Macedonia and Greece. Also Russia's influence in Bosnia and Herzegovina is also important. Russia is a major supporter of Republika Srpska, an entity in which Serbs were the

dominant population. With the signing of the Declaration of cooperation with political parties in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria, Russia has clearly showed its position and influence in the region (Kathon). The declaration is highlighted the interest in developing cooperation in the Balkan states with countries of the Eurasian Economic Union in the field of economy, finance, energy and other spheres.

#### **4. Turkey and the Balkan countries: the effect of the Turkey's historical ties for becoming a regional power on Balkan countries?**

The political and cultural relations between Turkey and Balkan countries depend on the historical roots; going back to the Ottoman period. On the other hand, by the 1900s the ties between Balkan countries and newly developed Turkish Republic started to change due to the many reasons. To begin with, Turkey's foreign policy mostly depended on the both "zero problem" and respect to the territorial integrity of all countries. Furthermore, Turkey started the process of construction of the reformed nation and rather considered its interior policies. Hence the relations with Balkan countries consisted only about some migration agreements. Therefore, for the period of early 1900s, one can easily claim that Turkey did not have any aim for being a regional power towards the Balkans even though many Turk and Muslim population existed in the region. Throughout the years both the world conjuncture and the foreign policies of countries changed, and Turkey tried to play a new role in this new conjuncture. With the new world order regionalism increases and countries want to control or to be a "big brother" of some parts of the world with which they have common historical roots.

However being a "big brother" or a regional power is not only depends on the common historical roots in today's world order. There are many different definitions of being a regional power however there is some common elements from all definitions as;

*"being a part of a region which is geographically, economically and politically; being a leading position in the region; an ability of influence the construction of region both geographically and politically; displays the material, organizational and ideological resources for regional power projection; is economically, politically and culturally interconnected within the region; truly has great influence in regional affairs; exerts this influence by means of regional governance structures; defines the regional security agenda in a significant way; is recognized as a leading state or at least respected by other states inside and outside of the region; is integrated in inter-regional and global forums and institutions where it acts, at least in a*

*rudimentary way, as a representative of regional states* (Ustun, 2014).

According to these common elements it may be said that being a regional power mostly requires the lenient power elements both in international and regional relations.

Turkey is a unique country in terms of its geographical location since in many cases she acts as a bridge between East and West. She is consisted of values from both east and west as being a Muslim and secular state. This bridge position sometimes creates contradictions on her foreign policies and creates a kind of uncertainty. For the last few years Turkey had some problems with her neighbours and allies especially because of the instability in its close circle. The contradiction process started with Iraq intervention and continued with Arab Spring and Syria civil war. In Syria civil war Turkey support to Free Syrian Army (FSA) and this move has worsened its relations Syria, Iran, Russia and United States in some cases. The case of shooting down a Russian Su-24 aircraft by Turkish F-16 in the Turkey-Syria border area on 24 November 2015 lifted the tension between Russia and Turkey governments.

On the other hand, Turkey has tried to develop its economic relations with countries which it has historical links. By lifting the visa requirements both near east and west countries opened new markets for Turkey, economic relations increased and Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency's (TIKA) started to play active roles in these countries. This new foreign policy, which includes the soft power instruments like business or constructing investments and development projects, called "neo-Ottoman" by some countries, however called "changing the past memories" by Turkish policy makers. Turkey has still not a regional power and it seems that she will not be in a short period of time because as we talked above for being a regional leader there is many parameters that a country have to realize however as Gurzel (2014) noted, Turkey could be accepted as a "rising power" in the region (p.99). In other words, this means that Turkey has a limited power for guiding Balkan countries, but the security and stability of this territory has indispensable especially for Turkey's economy.

When we look from the historical perspective, it could easily be said that the dominant form of Turkey-Russia relations generally have depended on the competitions. Indeed, it is known that this competition led to many armed conflicts in the last century. However there have been some closer periods between two countries relations beside these hot conflicts and cold peace, especially immediately after the serious changes on regional or global policies.

The geographical position of Turkey appeals Russia because it is the neighbour of the Balkans, which is a door to open the Europe. Also due to the soft power politics, Turkey started to construct good relationships with these countries. After the Ukraine crises Russia did not want to worsen the relationship with Turkey in spite of the aircraft crises and with the effect of the coup attempt in Turkey, Turkey and Russia have left behind the bad days, started new cooperation. On the date 10 October 2016, Turkey and Russia signed an inter-governmental agreement on realizing the construction of the planned Turkish Stream gas pipeline to pump Russian gas under Turkish waters in the Black Sea towards Europe. This pipeline totally passed over the Ukraine for gas transfer to Europe and Black sea and Balkans beside Turkey. Also mainly due to the Turkey's complex foreign policy has caused a tension between Turkey and USA relations, served Russia's foreign policy goals (Bilge Adamlar Kurulu Raporu, 2014). In this picture Turkey wants to be a secure energy center by using its geostrategic position between the production basins and consuming centers of energy. On the other hand Russia wants a stable Turkey for continuing and increasing bilateral cooperation especially for being next to Balkans. In other words Turkey's will of being a "Big brother" for Balkans, is an opportunity for realising Russia's economic goals. However both countries still have not become allies about the Syria crises.

### **Conclusion**

The process of globalization has created an interdependence of countries especially in economy, politics, and security; created new players (who were just objects or observers in the past) that through its effects caused erosion of the stable unipolar position of the US in world order. It requires new remodelling the world order, where new players (Russia and China) have more power than in the past. Transnational threats such as terrorism, poverty, climate change, civil wars and others have required a common interest and a common goal of all countries. In other words, countries have been needed to speak a common language. This means that countries need to jointly cooperate to restore and maintain security.

Based on the abovementioned text in the article, at this moment the Balkan region is a battleground on which the major centres of power (USA and Russia on first plan and China from background) will impose their influence. But our opinion is that the Balkan region should focus on Europe and the European Union. On the other hand, in the new strategic document of the European Union, the Global Strategy for the EU in the area of common

and foreign policy, the Balkan region took strategic importance. In this case, the EU should show more agility and determination in terms of strategic interests, primarily for its internal stability and security. For this purpose, a stable Balkans means a stable Europe. The European Union should directly involve its impact on the democratization processes and the provision of stable governments.

But, we must not forget Turkey. This country has tried to develop its economic relations with Balkan countries with which it has historical links. Also, a stable Balkan will help Turkey to increase its economy in this region, and on the same time to increasing its influence.

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