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## THE “OPEN BALKAN” INITIATIVE: AN OUTWARD-DIRECTED POPULISM

Marko B. TMUŠIĆ<sup>1</sup>  
Stevan RAPAIC<sup>2</sup>

*Abstract.* This paper analyses the “Open Balkan” initiative, using some of the theoretical assumptions of economic and, consequently, political populism in order to show that the economic benefits of this initiative do not differ too much from the existing economic benefits of the CEFTA (2006) agreement, of which all three countries (signatories of the “Open Balkan” initiative) are members. However, unlike the economic ones, the political benefits of this initiative can be seen much more clearly. Specifically, the “Open Balkan” initiative can be seen as a mechanism for “bridging” the waiting period for these countries to join the EU, overcoming some of the obstacles of the existing bilateral trade agreements that the countries from this region have with the EU. We will show, using quantitative content analysis, that the “Open Balkan” initiative is a political populist concept directed outward, i.e., toward EU leaders, and not an initiative that can bring something completely new and different compared to all previous bilateral and multilateral initiatives of this type.

*Keywords.* “Open Balkan” initiative; Serbia; North Macedonia; Albania; CEFTA; populism; international trade.

### An Introduction – Evolution of the “Open Balkan” Initiative

This part of the paper will offer a brief comparative analysis of the CEFTA 2006 agreement and the “Open Balkan” initiative. Why is it important? The public can often hear assessments that the main intention of the “Open Balkan” initiative

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is the development of free trade – more precisely, the unhindered movement of people, goods, capital, and services among the countries signatories to this agreement. This rightly raises the question, what is the significance of the “Open Balkan” initiative? What is its comparative advantage over the CEFTA 2006 agreement? To answer this, we must, briefly, look at the basics of both agreements.

The Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) is an agreement on a free trade zone between Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, UNMIK Kosovo, Moldova, and Montenegro. It was founded in 1992 in Krakow. Former CEFTA members were Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, and Croatia, which have since become EU members. All countries that joined the EU have left the CEFTA. Later, the CEFTA agreement was expanded by allowing other Balkan countries to become members of the CEFTA, which had already developed bilateral free trade agreements under the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. A new declaration on CEFTA enlargement was adopted with new members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Serbia, Montenegro, and, on behalf of Kosovo and Metohija, UNMIK. The new agreement was signed on December 19, 2006, at the Southeast European Summit in Bucharest. The agreement was ratified on March 31, 2007. Its implementation started on May 1, 2007. So, we notice that most of the mentioned CEFTA member countries were part of the former single market, i.e., until 1991, most of these countries, except Albania and Moldova, were members of the former Yugoslavia. The problems that led to the rapid disintegration of this country, which can be divided into several categories: political, economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, etc., are more or less present today and largely represent a burden from the past that burdens the CEFTA agreement and affects its effectiveness (Begović 2011).

The current purpose of the CEFTA, as a free trade agreement, is to prepare the countries of the Western Balkans for EU accession but also to develop and improve regional cooperation. The CEFTA strengthens and renews economic cooperation between partners in the Western Balkans and, as such, is an effective basis for these countries to join the EU (Rajin et al. 2018). As a framework of economic cooperation, the CEFTA enables the creation of a positive business environment in the following manner: 1) offers the possibility to apply diagonal cumulation of the origin of goods; 2) introduces steady liberalisation of trade in services - fulfilled; 3) requires balancing of investment conditions through the application of the WTO rules and offers identical status to domestic and foreign investors from the region; 4) guarantees protection of intellectual property rights in line with international standards; 5) advances mechanisms for resolving disputes arising from the implementation of the CEFTA; 6) commits to obliging its member countries to implement the WTO rules regardless of their membership in the organisation (Rajin et al. 2018, 357).

However, despite the basic intention and its essential provisions, the free trade agreement does not in itself guarantee that the expected results will be achieved. Economic benefits for one member state do not have to translate into economic benefits for another member state of the agreement. Moreover, certain conflicts can be observed. Bartlett (2009) claimed that the Balkan states are engaged in a complex and contradictory process of simultaneous regional integration and disintegration. A network of 32 bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) were introduced under the guidance of the Stability Pact for South East Europe and later the CEFTA free trade area, to improve political and economic cooperation, liberalization, and integration. However, the way it was implemented came in for some criticism (“spaghetti bowl” of differentiated trade relations). Bartlett (2009, 28) argued that the interaction of the EU’s preferential trade on a bilateral basis, through Autonomous Trade Preferences and the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs), with the system of bilateral FTAs between the countries of the region could create a perverse “hub-and-spoke” syndrome. He explains it in a way that those firms located in the EU hub would achieve lower costs than those located in the Balkans spokes due to greater economies of scale achievable in the hub, so that spoke firms would become less competitive. On the other hand, firms located in the spokes would also be discouraged from importing intermediate goods from neighbouring countries in the region for processing into exports for the EU market. This could lead to a well-explained risk by Christie (2002, 26–27) that the Western Balkan countries redirect massively to the EU and end up being a set of small peripheral economies that are next to each other rather than integrated.

Here it must be added that the SAA Trade Agreements introduce trade reciprocity after the stipulated transitory period, which means that the markets of the Balkan states would also be open for EU products, but slowly since the transitory period of usually 6 years is envisaged. The EU adopted unilateral trade measures, the Autonomous Trade Measures (ATMs), granting Serbia and other Western Balkan economies tariff-free trade and quota-free access to the EU single market for almost all export products from this region (except sugar, some meat products, fish, and wine). The ATMs are nonreciprocal and asymmetrical in favour of the Western Balkans not being obligated to reciprocate by granting trade preferences to the EU. These agreements are different from the European Agreement in that the EU insists more on the fulfilment of certain political conditions. However, those networks of bilateral trade agreements were too complicated to administer, and the Balkan states decided to conclude a single trade agreement under the auspices of the CEFTA (Bjelić and Dragutinović Mitrović 2012, 268–269).

The aforementioned political, economic, and legal (for example, the current ATMs) reasons can be singled out as the cause of the insufficiently good effects of the CEFTA agreement so far. In that regard, certain analyses (Kikerkova et al. 2018)



point out that within the 10 years of its creation, the CEFTA gave an unsatisfactory performance in the region regarding trade liberalisation.

The shortcomings of this agreement are reflected primarily in the ineffective system for resolving disputes and the existence of numerous non-tariff barriers that the countries of the Western Balkans have introduced to prevent the import of certain products. These non-customs barriers, which are of an administrative and technical nature, include complex procedures at border crossings, inconsistency in the work of customs and inspection services (sanitary, veterinary, radiological), inconsistency of domestic standards and technical regulations with international ones, lack of accredited bodies and laboratories, mutual non-recognition certificates on the quality and origin of goods, various types of corruption and crime, etc. (Rapać 2020, 567).

In July 2017, under the Berlin Process, the CEFTA member states decided to enhance cooperation by taking the free trade area to a higher level – the regional economic area, which should provide full trade liberalization. One of the steps taken in that direction was the Amended CEFTA Agreement, more precisely Protocol 5, which deals with issues of trade in goods, and Protocol 6, which deals with issues of services. This newly established framework of the CEFTA should become fully operational by 2023. During that period, all CEFTA Parties are due to implement concrete measures that will eliminate non-trade barriers to trade by cutting down the number of physical controls at the borders and introducing joint customs controls. However, this has not happened so far. Moreover, the consequences of Kosovo's<sup>3</sup> decision to ban the import of Serbian products in 2017/2018 are still being felt – 37% fewer goods are imported from Serbia to Kosovo\* today than five years ago when the disputed customs duties on the import of products from Serbia were introduced. Furthermore, all CEFTA Parties are expected to reduce the number of documents required for customs clearance, as well as to implement paperless trade in goods and provide the option for electronic payment of customs duties, fees, and so on. Having in mind that all Parties of this regional economic area face severe budget constraints, the speed and success of the full implementation of this Amended Agreement can be slowed down, or even disabled, and might depend on the accessibility of additional funds or multilateral donations (Kikerkova et al. 2018, 300–301). These are just some of the reasons for the establishment of the “Open Balkan” initiative, within which these activities will

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<sup>3</sup> In UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the term “Kosovo” is used. In the following text, we will use the name Kosovo\*, as provided for in the Agreement on Regional Representation. This name is accompanied by a footnote to this content. The designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

be successfully implemented because it is a matter of a significantly smaller group of countries, among which there is a political will to implement these decisions.

Some of the European officials went a step further by proposing a common market for the Western Balkans, which would function on the same principles as the internal market of the European Union, emphasizing that such a market would be more attractive for investors from other countries and that it would remove obstacles in intra-regional trade. Then, for the first time, the idea of something that would practically be a customs union, and perhaps even a common market for the countries of the Western Balkans, was presented to the public, which represents a significantly higher level of economic integration than the free trade zone such as the CEFTA 2006, i.e., what we call “mini-Schengen”. However, it is unknown so far how it is possible to implement the liberalisation of factors of production in the region without a previously established customs union, i.e., a common market. In other words, it is not possible to realise a certain aspect of a higher level of integration without previously established lower levels, because the previous levels represent the basis for each subsequent level (Rapać 2020, 568–571).

Understanding this idea becomes even more complex if we look at its goals, among which we pay special attention to the first point of this agreement, which represents a significant novelty in the political relations of the three countries (Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania) – the establishment of a common visa policy. The second and most significant innovation is the creation of common work permits, i.e., the recognition of qualifications and diplomas, which will lead to the creation of a somewhat unique labour market. The other listed points do not realistically represent a significant improvement in the political and economic relations of the three countries, but primarily come down to the abolition of administrative and technical barriers in trade, which is why the “mini-Schengen” concept, as agreed in Novi Sad and Ohrid in 2019, cannot be classified as a higher form of regional economic integration, and that it does not include the freedom of movement of goods, people, services, and capital, as its advocates claim. It can represent only a regional economic space (zone), which is a level lower than the customs union but slightly higher than the CEFTA 2006. The basic idea of the creators of “mini-Schengen” as a regional economic zone is to be only the first step in establishing a higher level of integration (Rapać 2020, 574–575).

Considering that it cannot be said that any significant progress has been noticed after the improved version of the CEFTA agreement and that Serbia and other countries in the region (mostly as a result of insufficiently implemented reforms in many segments) have not received positive signals about the recent accession to the EU, the conditions are created for political leaders in these countries to take over the situation, so to speak, in their own hands. One such attempt is the “Open Balkan” initiative.

What is the “Open Balkan” initiative? The leaders of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia decided to improve regional cooperation by forming the so-called “mini-Schengen”, aiming to improve the economic performance of the region and quality of life in general, until the EU opens the door to them. Their idea of bringing Western Balkan countries closer together was a few years old; at a regional summit in Trieste in 2017, they agreed on a regional economic action plan. They met on October 11, 2019, in Novi Sad (northern Serbia) and signed a declaration of intent to establish the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital between the three countries. This “mini-Schengen” agreement became operational in 2021, starting with the citizens who were able to cross the borders only with an ID card. Also, they have invited Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo to join them (Simić 2019). Several steps were undertaken in that direction: first, the *Joint Declaration adopted at the Western Balkan Summit held in Ohrid* on November 10, 2019; second, the *Joint Declaration adopted at the Western Balkan Summit in Tirana* on December 21, 2019; and third, the *Memorandum of understanding on cooperation related to free access to the labour market in the Western Balkans*, signed in Skopje on July 29, 2021, with the new name – the “Open Balkan” initiative (previously known as the “mini-Schengen” area), as an idea of forming a common market for countries waiting for EU membership.<sup>4</sup> According to the World Bank estimations (Brezar 2021), because this initiative is trade-heavy, promising free movement of goods and citizens as well as equal access to the labour market, those countries which will take part in this initiative will save up to \$3.2 billion (€2.71 bn) each year.

In that regard, the most important step happened on December 21, 2021, in Tirana, where an *Agreement on conditions for free access to the labour market in the Western Balkans* was signed. This agreement was confirmed in the form of the Law, passed by urgent procedure, in the Assembly of Serbia on December 29, 2021 (Open Parliament of the Republic of Serbia 2022). The main intention of this agreement is to further strengthen regional cooperation and mutual understanding, aiming to contribute to economic development and increase economic growth, investment, and employment in the Western Balkans. According to this agreement, citizens from all three countries will be able to be employed under the same conditions as the domestic population, i.e., they will be subject to domestic legal regulations. The provisions of this agreement are, in fact, a precursor to removing the borders, as

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<sup>4</sup> So far, within the “Open Balkan” initiative, there are signed agreements on free access to the labour market (Tirana December 2021), on interconnection of electronic schemes (Tirana December 2021), on cooperation between the Ministries of Agriculture in relation to phytosanitary and veterinary inspections (Tirana December 2021), and bilateral agreements on recognition of the AEO between Serbia and Albania and between North Macedonia and Albania (Tirana December 2021). Prior to Tirana, an MoU on trade facilitation, an MoU on the creation of a single labour market (both signed in Skopje 2021), and a Travel Agreement with ID card were signed.

was stated<sup>5</sup> during the Economic Forum for Regional Cooperation (July 29, 2021) in Skopje.

To enable the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital, the “Open Balkan” initiative also aims to reduce or eliminate the stopping of trucks at border crossings, which as a model already exists in the EU, through an ICT system that pre-defines all necessary documentation, etc. Also, to introduce concrete benefits not only for citizens of the “Open Balkan”, but as well as for companies, in the form of certain discounts on goods and services (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia 2022).

Therefore, according to its basic content, the “Open Balkan” initiative represents a kind of concretization of previous regional initiatives. It is fully compatible with the Common Regional Market set goals (as part of the Berlin Process or with the CEFTA), as well as with the EU principles and EU regulations, meaning that this initiative does not contradict the obligations of each state under the accession process. However, there is one key difference (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia 2022), one feature of this initiative compared to the previous ones. This initiative is not an alternative to the previous agreements *but is an additional instrument to bypass the current obstacles to enable the benefits of regional integration to be felt on the ground in the day-to-day operations of companies and the daily lives of citizens* (in the first phase for three and the second for all six countries in the Western Balkans).

The analysis of the stated goals of the “Open Balkan” initiative, in addition to the obvious economic goals, highlights one, we would say, political, or more precisely, foreign policy goal, and that is the creation of a union that will be regulated by all existing and valid EU rules and regulations before the accession of the signatory countries of this initiative to the EU. The economic logic of this initiative is clear, and that is the unification of otherwise small and poorly developed economies, which individually cannot match the developed economies in the international market. Their chances increase significantly in the form of the single free market, as one of the forms of economic integration that eliminates the shortcomings of the previously analysed CEFTA agreement. However, we must not overlook the fact that, in the political sense, this initiative will be confronted with numerous political, cultural, historical, etc., challenges, so it is crucial how the political leaders, not only of the signatory countries to this initiative but also of the other countries, will treat each other.

Based on the above, it could be stated that the basic idea of the “Open Balkan” initiative is the creation of a single labour market because its essence is exclusively in the free movement of workers. But the fundamental question here is why the

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<sup>5</sup> President of the Republic of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic stated: “...we will no longer have borders by January 1, 2023. Border crossings will remain, but not for our citizens” (*Euronews Albania* 2021).

free movement of people and the single labour market suddenly became so important to the initiative's initiators. An interesting analysis is offered, claiming that despite relatively high unemployment and subsidies per newly hired worker, foreign investors will still have a lot of difficulties finding qualified workers for wages that are only slightly above the minimum wage, especially if we keep in mind that 40,000 to 50,000 people leave Serbia every year. Precisely because of this, the need arose in the Serbian market to maintain a low minimum wage and ensure stability in the inflow of organisation as well as retain existing foreign investors and attract new ones. This can only be achieved by ensuring a single labour market, that is, freedom of movement and employment within the "Open Balkan" Initiative. Given that it is hard to imagine that this single labour market will cause significant migration of Serbian workers to North Macedonia and Albania, it is assumed that workers from Albania and North Macedonia will fill the jobs that are created by the departure of Serbian workers to the highly developed countries of the world. Foreign investors will also get easier access to the markets of other members of "Open Balkan", which will further reduce costs and improve business. The European Union and the international community will support the idea of "Open Balkan", because it contributes to the stabilisation of the Western Balkans, especially if Kosovo\* is included in this integration, and the countries of the region will be offered a "common European perspective" (Rapać 2020, 590–591).

### **Economies of the "Open Balkan" Initiative**

As we stated in the previous part of the text, the members of the "Open Balkan" initiative are Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. In order to gain insight into the economic potential of this initiative, it is necessary to present the basic macroeconomic indicators of each of the member states. Also, here we will present their foreign trade relations, which will shed light on the basic economic flows within the initiative.

#### *Albania*

Albania is the country that is still economically the least developed of the members of the Open Balkan initiative. With a population of 2.8 million inhabitants and a gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021 of 18.2 billion dollars, or 6,494 dollars *per capita*, it can be considered to lag behind the other Balkan countries (World Bank 2022b).

Table 1: Basic macroeconomic indicators of Albania (2016–2021)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Real GDP growth (percent)	3.3	3.8	4.1	2.2	-3.5	8.5
Consumer price inflation (percent, period average)	1.3	2.0	2.1	1.4	1.6	2.6
Public revenues (percent of GDP)	27.4	27.7	27.6	27.2	25.9	27.0
Public expenditures (percent of GDP)	29.6	29.8	29.3	29.2	32.6	31.5
Public debt (percent of GDP)	68.7	67.8	64.6	63.7	74.0	72.1
Goods exports (percent of GDP)	6.7	6.9	7.7	6.6	6.0	8.2
Goods imports (percent of GDP)	30.9	31.3	30.2	29.7	28.4	33.0
Net services exports (percent of GDP)	7.4	9.4	8.6	9.3	8.1	11.5
Net foreign direct investment inflows (percent of GDP)	8.7	8.6	8.0	7.6	6.7	6.4
External debt (percent of GDP)	73.5	68.7	62.9	60.0	65.6	58.1
Unemployment rate (percent, period average)	15.2	13.7	12.3	11.5	11.7	11.5
Youth unemployment rate (percent, period average)	28.9	25.9	23.1	21.5	20.9	20.9

Source: World Bank 2019, 38; World Bank 2022a, 71.

Although we cannot speak about significant economic development, Albania has had a couple of years of moderate growth in real GDP, which reached 4.1% in 2018. However, this process begins to slow down the following year, when it recorded a growth rate of only 2.2%, just before the crisis year 2020. In the year in which the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, Albania recorded negative economic growth of -3.5%. This negative value of economic growth in the year of the crisis is not surprising, but its rapid recovery in 2021 certainly is. Real GDP growth in 2021 was 8.5%. This is the highest recorded value in the post-crisis year in the countries of the “Open Balkan” initiative. Until the end of 2021, inflation was relatively moderate and stable. In the observed period, public revenues as a percentage of GDP stayed around 27%, and public expenditures also did not vary significantly.

Albania had a high share of goods imports in GDP, which has even increased in the last five years and amounts to 33%. On the other hand, the share of exports in the total GDP was decreasing, and it even decreased by approximately 50% in



2019 compared to 2014, when it was 9.3% (Rapaić 2020, 576). However, goods exports as a percentage of GDP recovered and reached 8.2% in 2021. This indicates the importance of goods trade that advanced in the observed period, which coincides with the development of the Open Balkan initiative.

Aside from the previously mentioned negative trends, there is a high share of public debt in GDP, which has ranged between 63 and 74 percent over the last five years. External debt as a percentage of GDP, on the other hand, fell significantly from 73.5 percent in 2016 to 58.1 percent in 2021. Another positive indicator for the Albanian economy is the share of service exports in GDP. The export of tourism services, in particular, jumped, which contributed to this share of 11.5% in 2021. Tourists from Serbia, whose number has increased significantly in previous years, have certainly contributed to this, since they do not need a passport to visit Albania. Nevertheless, unemployment is still a big problem in Albania, especially youth unemployment, which amounted to 20.9% in 2021. Although this is a historical minimum for this country, general unemployment of 11.5%, as well as high youth unemployment in 2021, indicates numerous shortcomings in the Albanian economy.

Table 2: The most important trade partners of Albania  
(share in total merchandise exports and imports, 2020)

	Export	%	Import	%
1	EU	74.7	EU	58.0
2	Serbia	12.0	Turkey	9.6
3	North Macedonia	3.3	China	8.9
4	Montenegro	1.9	Serbia	5.2
5	China	1.8	Russia	2.2

Source: World Trade Organization 2022a.

The European Union is the most important foreign trade partner of Albania. More than 74% of the total Albanian exports end up in the European market, while 58% of the total imports into Albania originate from the EU. Perhaps the most interesting piece of information is the fact that Serbia is the second most important export market for Albanian products. Of the total exports in 2020, the share of goods exported to Serbia was 12%. Serbia is also an important country of origin when it comes to imports into Albania. Of the total imports in 2020, 5.2% accounted for goods from Serbia. So, it is clear that Serbia represents an important foreign trade partner for Albania, especially when it comes to exports.

We notice that, apart from the EU, Albania imports the most goods from Turkey (9.6%) and China (8.9%), while Russia is in fifth place with a share of only 2%. Russia's

share refers to the import of energy products, while Albania imports various types of finished goods, machines, and semi-finished products from Turkey and China. Turkey recognises Albania as a country of special political, economic, and cultural interests. However, we note that Serbia is also on the list of the countries from which Albania imports goods, and it is in fourth place with a total share of 5.2%.

### North Macedonia

North Macedonia was considered the least developed republic in the former Yugoslavia. In 2021, North Macedonia's GDP was \$13.8 billion, or \$6,720 *per capita*. At the beginning of the transition period in 2001, the GDP of North Macedonia was 3.7 billion dollars, which is four times lower than in 2021 (World Bank 2022c). In the last six observed years, we can note that the average growth rate of the Macedonian economy was only 1.2%.

Table 3: Basic macroeconomic indicators of North Macedonia (2016–2021)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Real GDP growth (percent)	2.8	0.2	2.7	3.9	-6.1	4.0
Consumer price inflation (percent, period average)	-0.32	1.4	1.5	0.8	1.2	3.2
Public revenues (percent of GDP)	30.6	31.0	30.4	31.4	30.5	32.3
Public expenditures (percent of GDP)	33.2	33.09	31.5	33.5	38.9	37.7
Public debt (percent of GDP)	39.9	39.5	40.5	40.4	51.9	51.8
Goods exports (percent of GDP)	35.1	38.1	43.2	47.5	45.3	51.1
Goods imports (percent of GDP)	53.1	54.9	58.6	64.8	62.3	71.3
Net services exports (percent of GDP)	3.5	3.8	3.3	3.0	4.0	4.3
Net foreign direct investment inflows (percent of GDP)	3.3	1.8	5.8	3.2	1.5	3.7
External debt (percent of GDP)	74.7	73.6	73.7	72.4	88.3	81.4
Unemployment rate (percent, period average)	23.8	22.4	20.7	17.3	16.4	15.7
Youth unemployment rate (percent, period average)	48.2	46.7	45.4	35.6	35.7	36.3

Source: World Bank 2019, 58; World Bank 2022a, 96.



The public debt of North Macedonia is constantly growing, and in 2021 it was more than half of GDP. External debt also increased, especially in 2020, when it amounted to 88.3% of GDP. Although unemployment in 2021 reached a record low level of 15.7%, North Macedonia is still a country with a high unemployment rate and a particularly high youth unemployment rate, which in 2020 amounted to 36.3%. A relatively low rate of economic growth, a high unemployment rate, and high foreign debt point to structural problems in the Macedonian economy.

Table 4: The most important trade partners of North Macedonia  
(share in total merchandise exports and imports, 2020)

	Export	%	Import	%
1	EU	77.6	EU	46.2
2	Serbia	7.9	UK	15.6
3	China	2.5	Serbia	7.8
4	UK	2.4	China	6.9
5	Turkey	1.5	Turkey	5.1

Source: World Trade Organization 2022b.

Looking at the main foreign trade partners of North Macedonia, we notice that in this case, as well as with the previously presented countries, the European Union dominates. North Macedonia sells 77.6% of its total exports to the market of EU members. Also, most of the goods imported into the Macedonian market come from the EU. In the total Macedonian imports in 2020, the share of the EU as the country of origin was 46.2%. Apart from the EU, Serbia is the main export market for Macedonian products. Approximately 8% of the total value of exports ends up in the Serbian market, while the share of Serbian goods in total imports to North Macedonia is also around 8%. When it comes to the main import partners, it is interesting that the United Kingdom appears as one of the key players with a 15.6% share of total imports.

### *Serbia*

Serbia has the largest economy in terms of territory and economic capacity in the Open Balkan initiative and the region we are looking at. With a GDP of 63.07 billion dollars in 2021, it could be concluded that it is the most developed country in the region. However, its macroeconomic indicators indicate not-so-enviable results. The achieved GDP *per capita* of Serbia in 2021 was 9,215 dollars (World Bank 2022d).

Table 5: Basic macroeconomic indicators of Serbia (2016–2021)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Real GDP growth (percent)	3.3	2.0	4.2	4.3	-0.9	7.4
Consumer price inflation (percent, period average)	1.1	3.2	2.0	1.9	1.6	4.0
Public revenues (percent of GDP)	40.8	41.5	41.1	42.0	41.0	43.3
Public expenditures (percent of GDP)	41.9	40.4	40.6	42.2	49.0	47.4
Public debt (percent of GDP)	62.8	55.6	50.1	48.8	53.9	53.9
Goods exports (percent of GDP)	34.9	35.9	35.5	35.7	34.4	38.9
Goods imports (percent of GDP)	43.4	46.1	47.7	47.9	45.5	50.1
Net services exports (percent of GDP)	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.7
Net foreign direct investment inflows (percent of GDP)	5.2	6.2	7.4	7.7	6.3	6.8
External debt (percent of GDP)	72.1	68.9	61.3	61.8	65.8	68.6
Unemployment rate (percent, period average)	15.3	13.5	12.7	11.2	9.7	11.0
Youth unemployment rate (percent, period average)	34.9	31.9	29.8	28.6	27.3	26.5

Source: World Bank 2019, 63; World Bank 2022a, 102.

The Serbian economy had its biggest growth in 2004, when real GDP growth was 9%. After 2008, the growth of Serbia's economy stopped, so in the period 2009-2019, the average growth rate was only 1.5% (Rapać 2020, 581). Among the countries of the "Open Balkan" initiative, in the crisis year of 2020, Serbia had the smallest drop in economic growth, which was below one percent. In the coming year of 2021, Serbia has even recorded a significant economic recovery and real GDP growth of as much as 7.4%.

Serbia reduced public debt in the observed period. In 2016, it amounted to 62.8% of GDP, and in 2021 it would be reduced to 53.9%. The share of merchandise exports in GDP increased in the observed period, but it was

accompanied by an even greater increase in the share of merchandise imports, which implies that Serbia, just like Albania and North Macedonia, is highly dependent on merchandise imports.

Table 6: The most important trade partners of Serbia  
(share in total merchandise exports and imports, 2020)

	Export	%	Import	%
1	EU	64.9	EU	58.8
2	Bosnia and Herzegovina	7.1	China	12.2
3	Russia	4.7	Russia	6.0
4	Montenegro	4.0	Turkey	4.4
5	North Macedonia	3.8	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2.3

Source: World Trade Organization 2022c.

In 2020, Serbia exported goods worth 19.4 billion dollars and imported goods worth 26.2 billion dollars. In terms of the value of exported and imported goods, Serbia is the leader in the region, which is understandable given the size of its market and population. The share of the EU in total exports of Serbia is 65%, while the share of imports is 59%. The second most important market for Serbian products is Bosnia and Herzegovina, which accounts for 7% of total exports. Serbia's third export market is Russia, and to this country, Serbia mostly exports agricultural products, socks, medicines, and vehicle tires. Russia is also the third most important foreign trade partner of Serbia when it comes to imports. Approximately 6% of total imports into Serbia originate from Russia. Just like other countries in the region, Serbia is dependent on the import of gas and oil from Russia. In the fourth and fifth place as the main Serbian export markets are Montenegro and North Macedonia, with a share of 4% and 3.8%, respectively. Apart from the EU and Russia, when it comes to imports, the most important partners are China, with a share of more than 12%; Turkey, with a share of 4.4%; and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 2.3% of total imports to Serbia.

Common to all three countries of the “Open Balkan” initiative are high public and foreign debt, import dependence, a foreign trade deficit, the EU as the main foreign trade partner, high unemployment, and especially high youth unemployment. All this is accompanied by a low growth rate in average wages. The average salary in Albania in 2021 was 363 EUR, while in North Macedonia it was 458 EUR. Real wages in Serbia from 2012 to 2021 increased by 26%, which means that the average annual growth is only 2.6% (*Nova ekonomija* 2022). The average

salary in Serbia in 2021 was 544 EUR, which is significantly more compared to Albania and North Macedonia. Nevertheless, Serbia ranks high among the countries of the “Open Balkans” in terms of industrial production and market size, so within this group it represents an economic leader. This thesis is supported by the data that Serbia is one of the main foreign trade partners of Albania and North Macedonia. Serbia is Albania’s second most important market for the export of its goods, and it is not negligible either as a country of origin, accounting for about 5% of the total value of imports into Albania. The situation is similar in North Macedonia. It can rightly be said that, after the EU, Serbia is the most important foreign trade partner of North Macedonia. Serbia is second on the Macedonian list of import countries and third on the list of export countries.

Trade that develops between these countries requires further liberalisation but not in terms of customs barriers but primarily non-tariff barriers. Tariff barriers were removed under the CEFTA 2006 agreement, but numerous non-tariff barriers still remain in place and are implemented by all countries. The “Open Balkan” initiative is precisely aimed at removing these barriers and represents a union of the political wills of three states to improve economic relations and increase the flow of goods, people, and services. Bearing in mind the high unemployment rate in all three countries, and especially the high unemployment rate of young people, who do not have legal opportunities to get a job in the EU countries, the “Open Balkan” initiative affirmed the idea of the movement of labour between these three countries and the mutual recognition of diplomas.

### **The Open Balkan Initiative as an Outward-Directed Political Populism**

Uncertainty and dissatisfaction, accompanied by various economic problems caused by globalisation – economic and financial crisis, trade wars, deindustrialization, and migrant crisis, have enabled the growth of populism, both on the side of globalisation advocates and those of its intentional and unintentional victims (right-wing and left-wing populism). Populism is often associated with left-wing parties, which criticise the current economic situation – dissatisfaction with the country’s growth performance, initial conditions, etc (Dornbusch and Edvards, 1990). But economic globalisation cannot be completely blamed for the flourishing of economic and political populism in Europe and the rest of the world. Rodrik (2018, 13) points out that changes in technology, the rise of the market where the winner takes everything, the erosion of labour market protection, etc., in addition to globalisation, played a role, especially as processes that fostered and strengthened globalisation.

A somewhat more detailed analysis of the economic incentives of populism is offered by Dorn et al. (2020, 3139–3183), particularly emphasising the impact of

negative economic shocks that are linked to sharp ideological divisions that deepen along racial and ethnic lines and cause discrete changes in political preferences and economic policy.

In addition to the above explanations of the economic roots of populism, we must not omit another very useful interpretation (Guiso et al. 2017, 3), which, in addition to the anti-elitist dimension, emphasises that populists share the fear of people's enthusiasm and promote policies regardless of their long-term consequences for the country. The three important components of populism, according to this interpretation, are 1.) the populists' claim to be on the side of the people against the elite (so-called supply rhetoric), 2.) the fears of people's enthusiasm (so-called demand conditions that populists give in), and 3.) the neglecting of future consequences (short-term oriented policy). This attempt to decompose populism in economic terms, on the side of supply and demand, is important for understanding the short-term nature of populist politics. The demand side, which refers to the so-called fears of people's enthusiasm, meets with the offer side. That is, the populists claim that they are against the elite and, as such, on the side of the people. In this context, short-term protection represents the moment in which supply and demand meet. This is especially pronounced in situations of economic insecurity when people try to overcome new problems as soon as possible. More precisely, they require short-term protection. On the other hand, short-term supply-side politics, i.e., populist politics, is based on the dichotomy of people against the elite, because the long-term is considered the interest of the elite (Guiso et al. 2017, 8–9).

The aforementioned views on the economic causes of populism indicate to a certain extent that the "Open Balkan" initiative does not fit into the offered matrix of so-called economic populism. However, the fact that it is a populist concept can be concluded first by comparing this initiative with the CEFTA, where we showed that there are no significant differences, but rather, we believe that the concept of "Open Balkan" is directed toward the EU leaders, to provide their support for reducing existing tensions due to the delay in the admission of these countries to the EU.

In this context, interesting research is offered by Colantone and Stanig (2018, 1–18), who examined how globalisation affected electoral outcomes in 15 Western European countries between 1988 and 2007. Specifically, how the measure of exposure to Chinese imports, specific to each region based on its industrial specialization, affected the election cycle and the movement of the electorate. They concluded that a stronger import shock leads to increased support for nationalist and isolationist parties, then to increased support for the parties of the radical right and a general shift of the electorate to the right. They proved that the Chinese import shock, by imposing uneven adjustment costs across the region, caused an increase in support for nationalist and radical right-wing political parties in Europe.

The existence of this type of reaction implies that globalisation may not be sustainable in the long run if the benefits of trade are not shared equally within society. They conclude with some concern that the success of nationalist parties could jeopardise the very survival of the open world that we have known for the last 30 years. If parties and candidates proposing economic nationalist platforms become more influential in advanced democracies, they are likely to launch a coordinated protectionist agenda. Therefore, according to the authors, the world needs a better, more inclusive model of globalisation.

Having in mind that populism could be seen as a discourse between “the people” and the “elite” constructed through a down/up antagonism between “the people” as a large powerless group and “the elite” as a small and powerful group (De Cleen 2017), our idea is to present that the “Open Balkan” Initiative is a concept of political populism directed at the EU leaders, the so-called “elite”, because populism is not necessarily opposed to the existence of an elite *per se*, but is a claim to represent “the people” against a (some) illegitimate “elite” and constructs its political demands as representing the will of “the people”. Populists mobilise and simultaneously stimulate or reinforce dissatisfaction with “the elite” for its (real and/or perceived) frustrating or endangering of several demands, interests, or identities. Although “the elite” often refers to certain powerful groups within the nation – national politicians, intellectuals, artists, etc., it can be much more common for populists to construct an antagonism between the (nationally defined) people-as-underdogs and non-national elites. In some cases, the nation in its entirety even comes to be identified as the underdog in opposition to an international or foreign elite (De Cleen 2017).

To test our hypothesis that the “Open Balkan” initiative is a political populist concept directed toward the EU elite – hence, directed outward, we will use the concept of transnational populism defined by De Cleen (2017). According to his point of view, populism is certainly not necessarily national or nationalist. All that is needed to speak of transnational populism is a politics that discursively constructs and claims to represent a transnational people-as-underdog. However, whereas populism has frequently opposed a nationally defined people-as-underdog to supranational and international *elites*, the construction of a transnational people-as-underdog has been far less common and straightforward. One of the features of transnational populism is the international cooperation between nationally organised populist parties and movements, which is why truly transnational populism is more profoundly transnational in that it constructs a transnational people-as-underdog as a political subject that *supersedes* the boundaries of the nation-state rather than merely *linking up* national people-as-underdogs. De Cleen (2017) makes a distinction between international and transnational populism, where international populism does create a transnational people-as-underdog, while transnational populism brings together nationally organised political actors and nationally defined people-as-



underdogs. The key point of his research is that transnational populist resistance against a shared foreign or transnational elite has often gone hand in hand with the construction of a pan-national or regional identity. Such pan-nationalist identities show strong similarities with nationalism, as they too are based on shared territory and history and constructed through the opposition to out-groups. Here can be seen the articulation of pan-nationalism or regionalism and populism. Transnational populism is not necessarily incongruous with the thorough articulation between populism and nationalism. And it points to the articulation of populism with politics that revolves around a logic very similar to nationalism, only on a larger scale.

Having all this in mind, we will test our main hypothesis that the “Open Balkan” initiative is a political populist concept directed outward, i.e., toward EU leaders and not an initiative that can bring something completely new and different compared to all previous bilateral and multilateral initiatives of this type. We will use quantitative content analysis of communication patterns in this endeavour, with a focus on messages delivered to the Serbian public via domestic media (social media, internet portals, print, TV, and radio).<sup>6</sup> The units of analysis were the posts and comments with their descriptive data (publishing time and date, author, and type of post). The content analysis consisted of these categories: type of post; time of post; time of the comment; the number of likes; and the number of comments. Due to the analysis of the subject of the research, which is the verification of the assumption about the “Open Balkan” initiative as populism, which is mostly external, we will analyse two periods: *the first*, from March 1 to March 31, 2022, during the election campaign in the Republic of Serbia (for general elections – both the president and members of the National Assembly, as well as the local elections in 12 municipalities and 2 cities, including Belgrade), during which the most important political messages (such as the “Open Balkan” initiative) have been sent to the public; and *the second*, the first week of June 2022, as a period in which there were no significant internal political processes on the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

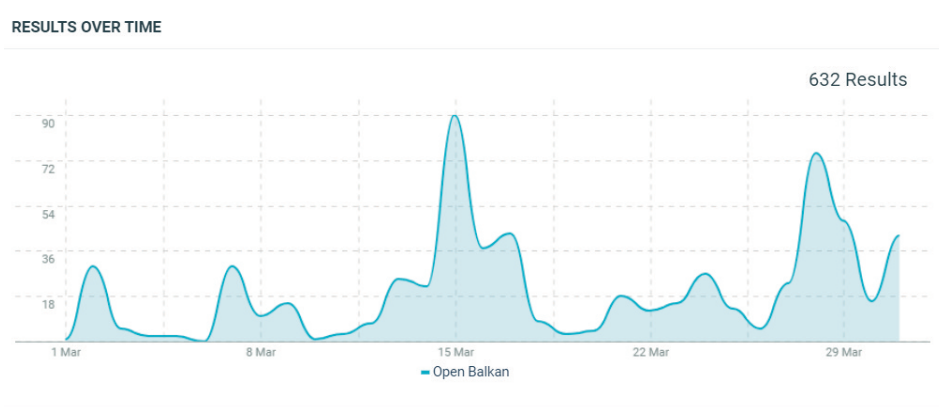
By analysing the content in the domestic media and the representation of the “Open Balkan” Initiative in them in the previous period (a month earlier, that is, during February 2022), we came across interesting data.

Namely, from March 1 to March 31, 2022, the “Open Balkan” initiative was mentioned **632 times** in the online media, and the most mentions were recorded in the middle and end of the month.

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<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this research, we used the Talkwalker software (it is a social media management tool that's laser-focused on tracking a brand's global online reputation and sentiment through online, social, print, TV, and radio; the tool generates actionable insights and competitive metrics). We would like to take this opportunity to thank the marketing agency *Digital Element* from Belgrade, which helped us to conduct this research.

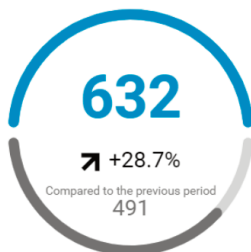
Graph 1: The number of the “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in domestic media – March 2022



Source: The authors calculations.

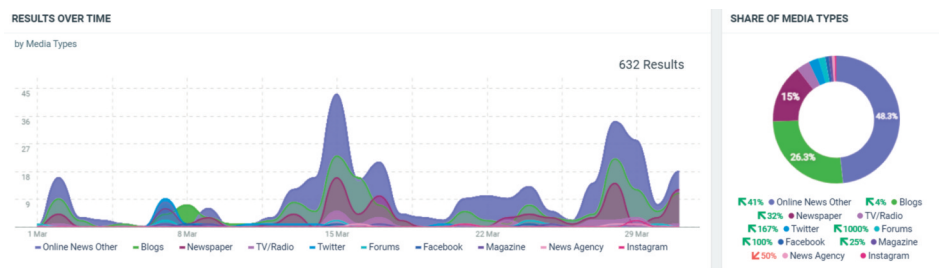
Graph 2: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions that compared to the previous period – February 2022

RESULTS



Source: The authors calculations.

Graph 3: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in March 2022 – the share of media types



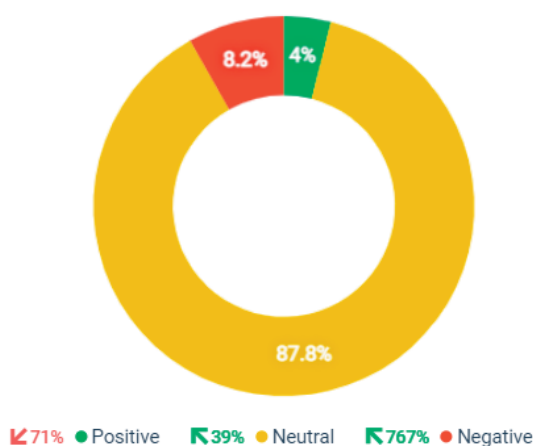
Source: The authors calculations.



The sentiment of the posts **was mostly neutral (88 percent)**, while positive (4 percent) and negative (8 percent) were less common. The most mentions (596) came from online portals.

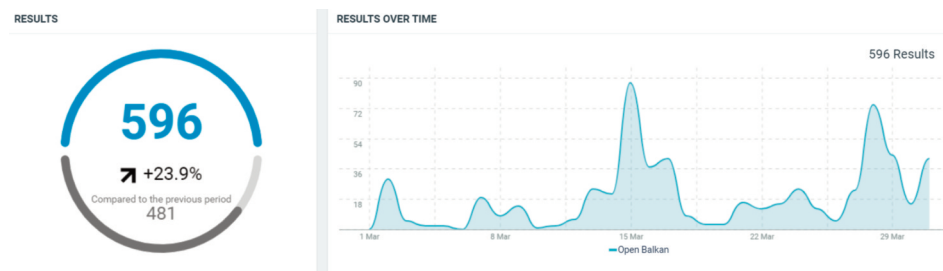
Graph 4: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in March 2022  
– the share of sentiment

#### SHARE OF SENTIMENT



Source: The authors calculations.

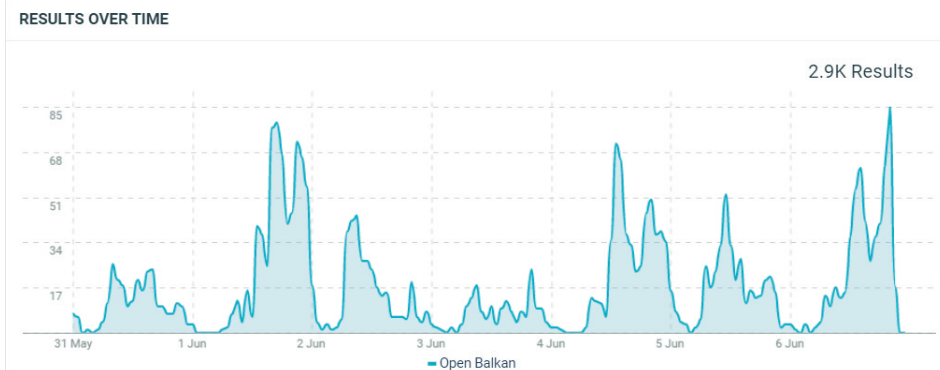
Graph 5: The “Open Balkan” initiative in March 2022 mentions  
– only portals



Source: The authors calculations.

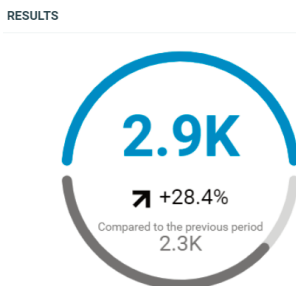
It is interesting that in the first week of June alone, the “Open Balkan” initiative was mentioned **2.9K times** on digital channels. In this period, most mentions were recorded on Twitter, but online portals also significantly participated in creating the entire media image with 972 mentions.

Graph 6: The number of the “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in domestic media – the first week of June 2022



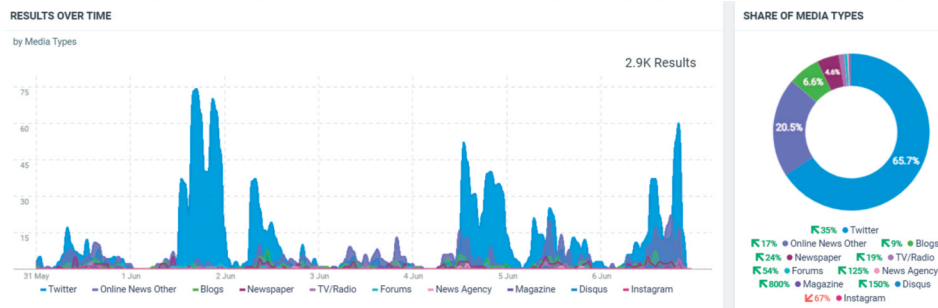
Source: The authors calculations.

Graph 7: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions compared to the previous period – the first week of May 2022



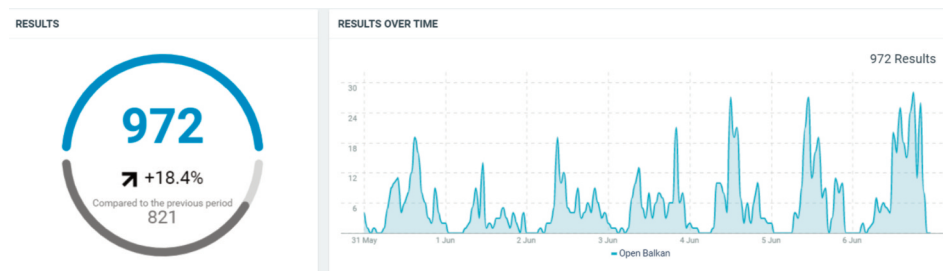
Source: The authors calculations.

Graph 8: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in the first week of June 2022 – the share of media types



Source: The authors calculations.

Graph 9: The “Open Balkan” initiative in the first week of June 2022 mentions – only portals

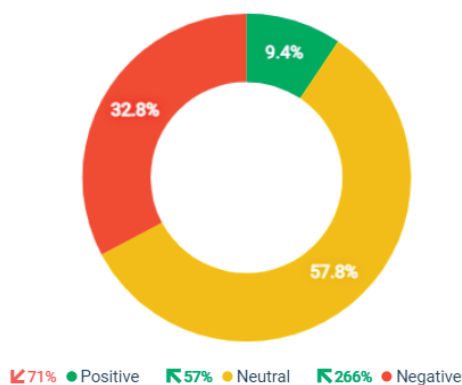


Source: The authors calculations.

In this period too, **neutral sentiment is dominant (58 percent)**, although at the beginning of June there **was a noticeable increase in positive sentiment (9 percent)**, but also **negative sentiment (33 percent)**.

Graph 10: The “Open Balkan” initiative mentions in the first week of June 2022 – the share of sentiment

**SHARE OF SENTIMENT**



Source: The authors calculations.

If we compare the period of the election campaign, i.e., the number of the “Open Balkan” initiative mentions that were collected from March 1 to March 31, 2022, when the campaign heated up, and only the first week of June 2022, we can conclude that this initiative was certainly not the focus of the election campaign, but gained relevance after the end of the elections in Serbia. This confirms that the “Open Balkan” initiative as a political or economic populist concept is by no means aimed at the domestic electorate.

We conclude this based on the data that the “Open Balkan” initiative was discussed in the online media as much as 359 percent more in the first week of June compared to the entire period of March, and if we compare only the web portals during the election campaign (March 1–31) and the first week of June, the presence of the “Open Balkan” initiative in domestic media during the first week of June was increased by 63 percent.

Therefore, the obtained data indicates that the “Open Balkan” initiative is not aimed at the domestic population. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not a question of political or economic populism, which political parties often resort to during the election campaign. However, if we look at the obtained data within the framework of the concept of transnational populism, mentioned earlier, we can conclude that it is a regional initiative aimed primarily at EU leaders, intending to gain their support for this project to reduce the existing political tensions due to the long-term delay in the admission of these countries to the EU. Therefore, on the one hand, this initiative tries to overcome the shortcomings of other similar initiatives — especially CEFTA — but also to offer a kind of alternative to the EU itself, which with this initiative gains time in deciding on the admission of these countries. Of course, in addition to the political leaders in these countries as well as the EU leaders, it seems that the biggest winners of this initiative are foreign direct investors who get one market, now integrated, of cheap labour and that in the lobby of the EU. Of course, we have already mentioned that the realisation and implementation of this initiative will face numerous challenges of a political, economic, and legal nature. What currently stands out as its advantage over previous similar initiatives is the strong political will of the signatory countries of this initiative, which is mostly reflected in the fact that the political problems of the past that burdened their mutual relations are now put on the backburner, and that the focus of those countries should be prosperity and economic progress as an economic goal, and as soon as possible, accession to the EU as a political goal.

### **Conclusion**

Created out of “mini-Schengen”, as a result of the political will of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania, the “Open Balkan” initiative had the goal of overcoming some basic shortcomings within the existing CEFTA 2006 agreement. When it became evident that there was no political will for improving economic cooperation within the CEFTA 2006 and that there was obstruction by certain members, on the initiative of Serbia as the largest economy in the region, the idea was created to unite those CEFTA 2006 members who have the political will for further liberalisation and the removal of non-tariff barriers. Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia were guided by the principle that, through an example of good practice, they would encourage other countries in the region, primarily Bosnia and

Herzegovina and Montenegro, to join this initiative. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially Kosovo\* and Montenegro, maintained a negative attitude towards the “Open Balkan” initiative, considering it to be a kind of demagoguery and populism with the aim of creating a regional organisation that would be economically and politically dominated by Serbia. Also, they consider the Open Balkan initiative to be distancing their countries from the process of accession to the European Union.

Is the “Open Balkan” all about populism and what kind of populism? This is a key question that we tried to answer in this paper, in which we defined the “Open Balkan” initiative, made its distinction in relation to the CEFTA 2006 agreement, and gave an overview of its economies, and therefore its economic potential.

All economies of the “Open Balkan” initiative have limited capacities, with relatively low average real GDP growth in the previous ten years, as well as low and relatively similar GDP *per capita*. These countries cannot be considered significant economic successes, and their average salaries are still at a significantly lower level than the least developed EU countries. High unemployment, especially high youth unemployment, stands out as the biggest drawback and common denominator for all observed countries. All these indicators, as well as numerous others, speak in favour of the thesis that by uniting the markets of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania, significant economic results cannot be achieved that would represent a momentum for economic development. The structural problems of the observed countries cannot be solved by the mere liberalisation of trade, the establishment of a common labour market, or even the total abolition of non-tariff barriers.

The average citizens of Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia are not familiar with the integration processes that follow and imply the “Open Balkan” initiative, nor are they able to distinguish between this idea and the existing CEFTA 2006 agreement. The decision-makers in these three countries did not even bother to familiarise their voters with the mentioned processes in more detail, while, on the other hand, they made significant efforts to present the idea of the “Open Balkan” initiative to EU leaders, that is, to get support for it. Therefore, our main hypothesis was that the “Open Balkan” initiative is a political populist concept directed outward – towards EU leaders and not an initiative that can bring something completely new and different compared to all previous bilateral and multilateral initiatives of this type.

By analysing the content in the domestic media and the representation of the “Open Balkan” initiative in 2022, we have seen that this initiative was not the focus of the election campaign in Serbia, from March 1 to March 31, 2022, which is why we came to the conclusion that the “Open Balkan” initiative is by no means aimed at the domestic electorate. Therefore, we used the concept of transnational populism in order to explain that the “Open Balkan” initiative is a regional initiative

aimed primarily at EU leaders to gain their support for this project. So, we concluded that this initiative represents a political populist effort, on the one hand, to overcome the shortcomings of other similar initiatives, such as the CEFTA, but also an attempt to bridge the period until these countries of the “Open Balkan” initiative join the EU. In addition, one must not lose sight of the fact that foreign direct investors are also the winners of this initiative, as they get one integrated market of cheap labour in the lobby of the EU.

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### **ИНИЦИЈАТИВА „ОТВОРЕН БАЛКАН”: ПОПУЛИЗАМ УСМЕРЕН КА СПОЉА**

*Анстракт:* У овом раду се анализира иницијатива „Отворени Балкан”, користећи неке од теоријских претпоставки економског, а самим тим и политичког популизма, како би се показало да се економске користи од ове иницијативе не разликују превише од постојећих економских користи ЦЕФТА (2006) споразума, чије су све три земље (потписнице иницијативе „Отворени Балкан”) чланице. Међутим, за разлику од економских, много јасније се виде политичке користи ове иницијативе. Конкретно, иницијатива „Отворени Балкан” може се посматрати као механизам за „премошћивање” периода чекања ових земаља на улазак у ЕУ, односно превазилажење неких препрека постојећих билатералних трговинских споразума које земље овог региона имају са ЕУ. Показаћемо, уз помоћ квантитативне анализе садржаја, да је иницијатива „Отворени Балкан” политички популистички концепт усмерен ка споља – ка лидерима ЕУ, а не иницијатива која може донети нешто сасвим ново и другачије у односу на све досадашње билатералне и мултилатералне иницијативе овог типа.

*Кључне речи:* иницијатива „Отворени Балкан”; Србија; Северна Македонија; Албанија; ЦЕФТА; популизам; међународна трговина.

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## ARE THE HAWKS WATCHING CLOSELY? REPORTS ON CHINA'S MILITARY POWER FOR THE US CONGRESS, 2001–2021

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*Abstract:* This article presents the findings of a study that examined the Pentagon's perception of China's security and military affairs. Its goals are to explain the major trends and projections of how the United States views China's security policy as part of the launch of its new Grand Strategy, as well as the patterns of US foreign policy response. The main unit of analysis is the report titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China", which has been issued annually since 2001 by the Pentagon. In total, twenty-one reports submitted until 2021 are involved in the sample. The analytical process is split into several levels, aiming to get insights and highlight elements of Chinese growth as a major security threat to US global hegemony. The author uses the congruency comparison method to see whether the Pentagon's perception of China's security policy has evolved over time. The reports' features were then qualitatively studied through a series of global security crises, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US military retreat from Afghanistan, military alignment in the Indo-Pacific, and regional security dynamics in the Arctic. The findings reveal that the Pentagon's perspective on how China formulates its security policy agenda has shifted from a strategic to a more specific military dimension, along with China's domestic potential concerns with Taiwan.

*Keywords:* US; China; security policy; Grand Strategy; content analysis; nVivo.

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The paper presents the findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2022", financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.

## Introduction

The international system is made up of many variables that are subject to change, although some of them evolve at a slower pace than others. The pursuit of global supremacy is defined by what is known in the field of international relations as a *hawkish* desire to attain such a position. The hawks are wary of the rest of the system's actors in order to maintain their own systemic hegemony. Such vigilance is extremely vital when another subject threatens to usurp the throne, and these patterns can be traced back to the United States' hegemony over the last two decades. During its short history, it has created arguably the most complex system of aggressive global monitoring of other countries' foreign and security policies. Some of the versions changed depending on what the hawks believed was the most dangerous security threat.

The rapid expansion of China over the last decade has slowed a half-century-long strategic confrontation between the United States and the Russian Federation and ushered in a new era of Sino-American rivalry. Despite popular belief that the United States began to treat China as an enemy of its interests during Barack Obama's presidency (Ooi and D'arcangelis 2017; Beeson and Watson 2019),<sup>2</sup> such a qualification could be justified only in its later strategic activity. For instance, Trump's 2017 US National Security Strategy identified China as a "revisionist power", further claiming that it constituted the greatest threat and challenge to the US economy and interests around the world (The White House 2017). However, the United States' strategic monitoring of other countries' hard power capabilities began far earlier and has evolved into a one-of-a-kind approach to tracking China's military and security advancements. This is reflected in the recurring Pentagon's systematic reports on this topic. The purpose of this article is to identify important directions in the Pentagon's institutional understanding of China's military defence dynamics and to examine how China's Grand Strategy (GS) segments have been perceived by the US during the first two decades of this century. It provides qualitative insights into the Pentagon's perspective of how China's security policy evolved on a yearly basis, as reported to the US Congress during a two-decade period. Thus, it compounds the analysis of twenty-one annual reports titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" that are pursuant to the United States S.1059 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 (US Congress 2000, Sec. XII).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, the National Security Strategy adopted in 2015 envisaged that the US "welcomed the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China" and "...was seeking to develop a constructive relationship with China that delivers benefits for two peoples and promotes security and prosperity in Asia and around the world" (The White House 2015, 24).

<sup>3</sup> The Act required from the Pentagon to submit an annual report "on the current and future military strategy of China" (US Congress 2000, Sec. 1202). It is worth noting that the National Defense

Kerry Dumbaugh (2008) integrates the concept of the Grand Strategy (hereinafter GS) into the analysis of the two sides' policies by situating it in Nixon's early 1970s *détente* strategy, which she believes signalled the end of China's first GS period as well as the first significant change in Chinese foreign policy. Kai He (2016) splits Sino-American relations into two categories: trends (competition or cooperation) and issues of concern (military or economic). Based on these interactions, this author argues that Sino-American relations experienced four major periods: military competition from 1949-1969; military collaboration from 1970-1989; economic cooperation from 1989-2009; and the final economic competition, which lasted from 2010 onwards (He 2016). This author claims that these four decades of military superiority in their bilateral interactions served as the "entrance time" to the unipolar era (2016, 136). The peak of unipolarity brought calm and promising relations between the two countries, which culminated in the early 2000s with George Bush's famous speech delivered at Tsinghua University, in which he stated that "America offered its respect and friendship" to China in the hopes that "it will become a '大国'—big/leading nation at peace with the world" (The White House 2002). This was a time of steady and positive bilateral ties, which, according to some theorists, resulted in China's tardy identification as a "credible" strategic opponent and threat to its throne (Clark 2011; Drezner 2019). As China's military spending increased in 2007, the rhetoric became more heated, prompting the US government to prioritise its foreign policy goals toward China. The substantial growth in military spending began in 2007, with a 17.8% increase that was regarded by then-US Vice President Dick Cheney as "not consistent with Beijing's avowed desire for a peaceful ascent" (Buckley 2007), and then nearly doubled between 2010 and 2015 (The World Bank 2022). The first significant surge occurred in 2008 when Beijing hosted the Olympic Games, which prompted a barrage of foreign criticism of official China over the Tibet situation, protests, human rights, and a slew of other issues.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that Sino-American relations have received a lot of academic attention throughout modern history, there are still some gaps in our understanding of one of the elements of the US foreign policy stance toward China – institutional perceptions of its military and security policy development. There are many classic postulates on which academics have based their papers in the literature,<sup>5</sup> but only a

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Authorization Act, which is still in effect (2022), restricts direct military-to-military interaction with China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) "where such engagement would pose a national security risk" (US Congress 2000).

<sup>4</sup> In separate studies, Kent Ono and Joy Jang Jiao (2008) and Susan Brownell (2012) provided a comprehensive sociological analysis of how human rights and related phenomena were (mis)used against China in the context of the 2008 Summer Olympics.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, relaxation of relations with China during the seventies (Goh 2005; Komine 2016) and certain issues connected to China's internal assumptions about its foreign policy behaviour,

few of them devote the stream of analysis to the study of the *perception of others* (Solomon 1981; Chen and Chen 1992; Broomfield 2003; Ono and Jiao 2008), and this study falls into such a category.

The analysis proceeds as follows: the results of the analysis will be presented after the theoretical premises and methodological apparatus that will be used as a research model in this study. This research design is aligned with the most similar studies in this field, with both manual and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis formats used to convey the findings. The discussion includes comparisons with the existing research work on Sino-American rivalry in terms of growth and global hegemony. Following the author's findings on the identification of China's Grand Strategy segments across time, he concentrates on likely neuralgic points that will serve as the cornerstone of future ties between the two superpowers. In this part, the author discusses the occurrences in Ukraine, Cold War-like attempts to contain the QUAD/AUKUS, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and China's Arctic policy. The goal of the study is to figure out how US institutions feel about China's level of assertiveness in the international system when it comes to security and military policy.

### **Refining the Sino-American Competition Analytical Toolkit**

Analysing how one superpower observes the progress of another power's defensive capabilities as it challenges its predominance in the international system is a difficult task. Because finding a single acceptable theoretical foundation is doubtful, this article borrows postulates from a variety of international relations theories. The hegemonic stability theory (HST) will be applied at the broadest level feasible because the purpose of the study is to find characteristics of the US institutional evaluation of China's military capability. A pledged hegemon must ensure its commitment to the system in order to keep its own position, according to the initial Charles P. Kindleberger's HST inquiry (Kindleberger 1973).<sup>6</sup> One way to do so is to keep track of how other system units behave on a systemic level, particularly those with the capacity to challenge the incumbent hegemon.

In 1989, Michael Webb and Stephen Krasner were the first to apply the HST to the field of international studies. They put the main premise of global dominance rivalry to the test. They identified the diversification of states' interests in relation to international economic liberalisation and stability (Webb and Krasner 1989).

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such as the potential for democratisation (Oksenberg 1998) or China's Communist Party activities (Bian et al. 2001; Brown 2017; Pieke 2017).

<sup>6</sup> The hegemonic status, according to the original HST position, is derived from three important features: primacy in military and technological affairs, economic expansion, and the system's perception of the hegemon (Kindleberger 1973).

Although such an organised system increases the absolute level of well-being of all participants, not all countries will feel the benefits. As these authors noted, if the pattern of so-called “relative gains” threatens the security of powerful states, international economic liberalisation becomes limited (Webb and Krasner 1989).

Another crucial segment for a superpower’s foreign/security policy analysis is the well-known idea of the Grand Strategy. This concept appears to have resurfaced in academic discourse in tandem with China’s massive growth, which has lasted more than a decade. Even though many academics focus their articles on the US GS, there is a large body of work devoted to “deconstructing” the components of China’s GS (Goldstein 2005; Kane 2016; Friedberg 2018; Doshi 2021). Rush Doshi (2021) contextualises his viewpoint on China’s GS throughout three distinct phases, which he calls a “displacement strategy”. According to his stance, China’s GS evolved from 1989 to 2008 (the first displacement strategy), with the financial crisis in 2009 causing the second displacement strategy to emerge, which lasted until 2016 (Doshi 2021, 276). The third displacement strategy is in effect in the current temporal domain, which spans 2017 and beyond. Its major components are targeted at a hegemonic throne change and exposing China’s global ambitions through an asymmetric Sino-American competition strategy. Doshi (2021, 277) says that China’s worldwide expansion can take numerous forms. According to others, the source of this can be seen in the contradiction between the terms “security policy” and “Grand Strategy” in academic discourse.<sup>7</sup>

The Grand Strategy of the challenger to the US hegemony will be segmented at the second, more detailed level of analysis. According to David Singer (1961), the degree of analysis, in this case, should be “lowered” to the national level. He argued that nations move toward outcomes about which they have less knowledge and less control, but that they nonetheless prefer, and thus pick, specific outcomes and strive to accomplish them through deliberate strategy development (1961, 85). His concept of “objective factors” in international politics as central analytical values on which the level of analysis should be based – the state – raised two dilemmas: whether it was necessary to analyse perceptions of these objective factors (in this case, China’s military growth as a threat to its own national security) or whether such an analysis should be carried out independently of both objects in relation to the researchers’ position (Singer 1961, 86)? Without providing a definitive answer to this conundrum, Singer pointed out that while it was correct to conclude that

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<sup>7</sup> Stekić (2021) notes that the distinction between these two concepts is based on two main regularities. First, “Grand Strategy” refers to a systematic set of norms and perceptions of *self* by the superpower, whereas a security policy is a tool that can aid in its implementation. While the Grand Strategy is primarily concerned with securing a superpower’s position within the international system, security policy is always directed to *the other*. Thus, unlike the Grand Strategy, a security policy is usually codified by strategies, doctrines, and other legislative acts (Stekić 2021).

there was no extremely clear causality between actors' actions and "objective factors", perceptions have had a significant impact on the formulation of policies and actions toward one another, and that it could have been a useful alternative to the phenomenological view of causation (1961, 87).<sup>8</sup>

Nicolas Kitchen (2010) offered a new analytic inquiry that provides a model of the Grand Strategy's creation based on systemic influences and domestic notions. He bases his conclusions on neoclassical realism postulates, which incorporate both systemic realist aspects and domestic-level factors that, as per his claim, "neoclassical realists have resurrected from classical insights" (Kitchen 2010, 130). These remarks are completely consistent with the concept of defining "national interests" and conducting foreign policy based on their judgment of relative power and other countries' intentions, but always subject to domestic limits (Lobell et al. 2009).

Advancing the neorealist account, Kai He explains Sino-American relations through the neoclassical realist nexus of threat-interest perceptions. She believes that leaders' perceptions of security challenges and economic interests between the two countries determine either cooperation or competition (He 2016). According to defensive realism, the rise of others could effectively capture these interests. If the US feels China is motivated by security concerns, it may be inclined to embrace cooperative actions that express its own benign intentions. However, if the US considers China to be a selfish country that values changing the status quo for non-security reasons, the US should adopt more competitive policies, putting a strain on US-China relations (He 2016, 53).

Discussions over what constitutes a GS and how it might be altered are relevant to today's Sino-US battle for global hegemony. Furthermore, there is an inconsistent assessment of its components and activities in relation to China's security and defence manoeuvres and actions as well as the hegemonic stability foundation. Some academics focus on the emerging power's centric aspect as well as the means and policies at its disposal (Doshi 2021). In this process, they overlook the current hegemon's position and posture in the system, whose perceptions and actions are more than deserving of systematic examination. The defence realism postulates are used in conjunction with the HST inquiry as the theoretical underpinning for an analysis of the objectives of this study.

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<sup>8</sup> However, the choice of these two levels of analysis and the theoretical investigations that go with them does not rule out the use of other analytical methods in similar analyses. Some scholars deploy an interdisciplinary approach to examine how Sino-American ties are perceived. Emanuele Castano and associates (2003) provided an intriguing analytical possibility for the perception of the *other* in international relations from the standpoint of political psychology. It helps us better understand how international actors are viewed by examining how the perceiver interprets the content of these actors' images. They used the notion of *entitativity* to highlight potential polarisation in international relations based on how the *other* is perceived (Castano et al. 2003).



### Method Remarks

This article mainly employs qualitative document analysis (QDA) as a method used to produce the most accurate findings, which are illustrated in documents that circulate and are issued by the same authority on a regular basis. Such a type of analysis allows for clear comparisons between the years and the topics covered in each report. To be fair, the QDA is not the most common method of integrating data in the international relations discipline, yet the considerations presented above show that annual reports with similar structures are a valuable source of data. Recognising that the QDA is not often used in political science research, Jared Wesley (2010) claimed that this cognitive method consists of three ontological orientations.

According to the first, because “quantitative positivists” (as this author refers to them) believe in the principles of “inherency and verifiability”, the QDA distinguishes between the qualitative and quantitative cognitive domains of this method (Wesley 2010, 2). In terms of social reality cognition, the second cognitive ontological dimension sees quantitative and qualitative research projects, and hence the QDA, as equal. As a result, the differences between these two research traditions are represented in the “style”, even though they are methodologically and substantively unimportant (Wesley 2010, 2). The third perspective promotes the notion of methodological dualism in using both methodologies in the examination of political phenomena. Dualists, thus, argue that the ramifications of research methodology should be considered as explicitly as possible (Wesley 2010, 2). This research goes beyond “quantitative positivism” and aligns with ontological viewpoints that are compatible with qualitative research design. Besides, some scholarly debates about the QDA’s methodological consistency have arisen. Overall, the four primary issues of qualitative research that are raised against the scientific accuracy of the analytical process are impartiality, the precision of analysis, portability of the findings, and authenticity (Mackieson et al. 2019). This is particularly evident when it comes to the QDA, which is, of course, interpretivism-based. According to Penny Mackieson and associates, there should be three stages of QDA analysis. The first stage should include the development of the full dataset, while the second level should include the refinement of the themes (Mackieson et al. 2019, 971). They do, however, point out that the final stage is the most essential, as it entails an analytical process based on a set of specified norms and processes (2019, 971). Given that the congruent elements of all reports indicated the existence of three dominant fields of analysis, content analysis will be performed to track the organisation of these acts.<sup>9</sup> The qualitative analysis of the documents in this

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<sup>9</sup> In political science, the congruency comparison approach is a particular application of the standard comparison methodology. It is founded on the presumption that repeating this procedure with



study starts with an examination of the strategic, security, and political dimensions, followed by an examination of the attitude toward Taiwan and, finally, other issues, which were all identified by the software. To reach this conclusion, a two-step analysis will be carried out – in addition to the computer-assisted qualitative data program, the analysis will combine personally observed qualitative insights derived from the author's own QDA. First, a computer-assisted analysis will be performed to identify the “themes” or significant areas of interest described in the reports. It will be used as the foundation for both automated and manual QDA processes, resulting in a matrix of US institutional perceptions on how China's GS changes over time.<sup>10</sup>

The author utilized the *nVivo* software, which employs a variety of text analysis techniques, but three were used in this study: theme identification, sentiment measurement, and cluster analysis.<sup>11</sup> The software uses the complete linkage (farthest neighbour) hierarchical clustering technique to arrange the items into a number of clusters based on the determined similarity index between each pair of items (nVivo 2022). It, for instance, labels each sentence as “neutral”, “positive”, or “negative”. To verify the software accuracy, a random test was performed manually throughout the sampling documentation:

*“To advance its broader strategic objectives and self-proclaimed “core interests”, China pursues a robust and systematic military modernisation program”* (Pentagon 2012) / coded as: **positive**

*“China seeks to enhance its profile in existing regional and global institutions while selectively pursuing the establishment of new multilateral mechanisms and institutions to further its interests”*  
(Pentagon 2019)/coded as: **neutral**

*“China's leadership sees U.S. policy towards the PRC as a critical factor affecting the PRC's national objectives and increasingly views the United States as more willing to confront Beijing where U.S. and PRC interests are inimical”* (Pentagon 2021) / coded as: **negative**

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categorization, creating relationships between the variables, and providing interpretations will produce the best analytical results. According to some academics, this comparison is most practical when done using “texts provided to each category intended to validate such categorization” (Bhattacharjee 2012, 115). Contrary to generic comparison, congruency comparison only compares related sections or chapters of the cited or examined texts, making it a more sophisticated approach.

<sup>10</sup> The researchers themselves deploy coding activity using the established grid while using the manual QDA. The manual QDA used in this investigation is based on looking at the phenomena that the software QDA has defined. In the following section of this study, this matrix and further data will be provided.

<sup>11</sup> See Abualigah et al. (2020) for more information on how clustering approaches work in the social sciences and in the QDA.

The sample includes twenty-one reports published between 2000 and 2021. Their congruent sections are studied for similarities and differences, as well as to recognise the patterns that lead to China's GS segmental stress in terms of implementing US foreign aims. A broad content analysis and a sentiment measure make up the analysis, along with their frequencies. To give as much accurate analysis as feasible, all extraneous elements of each report were deleted prior to analysis, including the introduction, technical details, contents, and preface paragraphs.

### **Us Perception of China's Security Policy**

Depending on the analysed material for US foreign policy commitments, various scholars convey the findings in different ways (Solomon 1981; Ono and Jiao 2008; Glaser 2015; Komine 2016; Ooi and D'arcangelis, 2017). Starting with the results produced using computer-assisted qualitative software, this section of the paper covers findings ranging from individual research questions to general ones. To identify significant themes, categories, and subcategories, all sampled reports were run through software.<sup>12</sup> The software identified and clustered 16 themes with a total of 5 key dimensions – strategy change, political leadership, military and security issues, Taiwan, and other matters.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the most essential subtopics that are included in the analytical plan are identified within each of the themes.<sup>14</sup> After the text was coded and all the references were classified, the sentiment of the text was measured, which is the first finding of this study, as shown in the figure below.

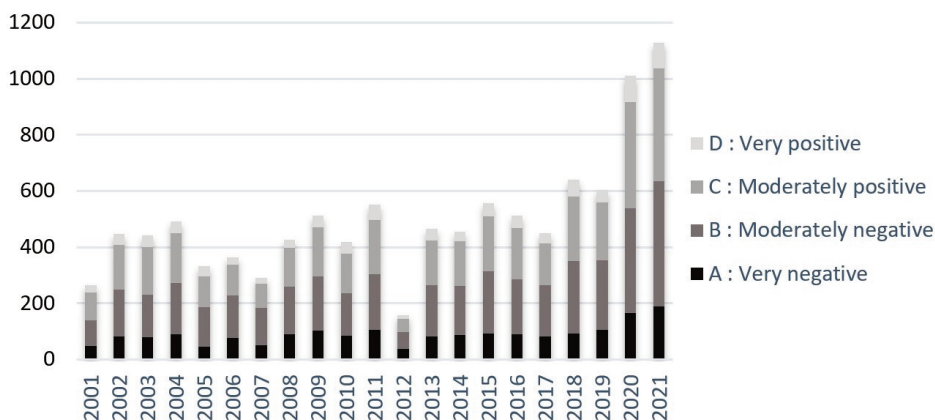
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<sup>12</sup> All essential references (with their sub-categories) for text clustering analysis are included in Appendix A of this article, whilst the findings for all dimensions are listed in Table 1.

<sup>13</sup> Even though the simple word frequency data may already speak volumes without further study, it is worth noting that military development, defence, the PLA modernisation, operation, capabilities, security, and missile technology consistently rank first in all selected reports. Synonyms are used to sample these words.

<sup>14</sup> The software, for example, clustered aircraft, military forces, information, modernisation, technology, and other topics as the principal themes of all reports. It identified considerable usage of phrases like aircraft carrier, commercial aircraft industry, stealth aircraft, or, in the case of technology, dual-use technology, advanced information technology, and communications technology, within these themes. Appendix A of this paper contains a full summary of themes and subtopics, whose frequencies are shown in Figure 4.

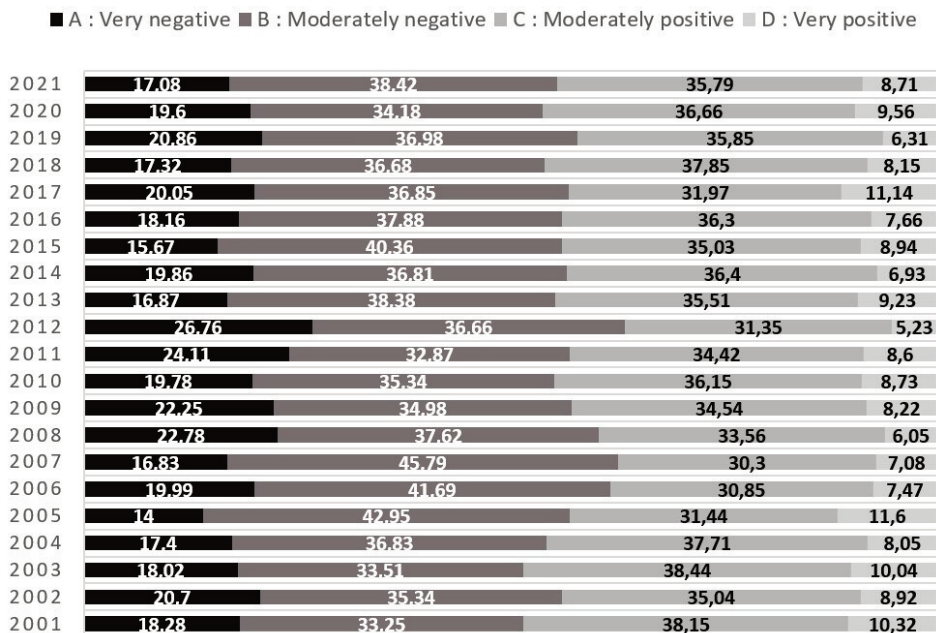
Figure 1: Pentagon's perception of China's security policy  
– sentiment frequencies (all reports)



Source: Author.

The software categorised a vast number of references into four categories: very negative, moderately negative, moderately positive, and very positive. The total quantity of indexed and categorised references increased year after year, with some periodic oscillations. The years 2001, 2007, and 2012 had the fewest references, while 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 had the most (Figure 1). As of 2018, negative tone frequencies were prevalent, peaking in 2020 and 2021. Some notable examples can be found in the 2018 Pentagon Report, which stated that “while China advocates for peaceful reunification with Taiwan, it has never refuted the use of military force, and continues to develop and deploy increasingly advanced capabilities needed for a potential aggression” (Pentagon 2018), or that potential military activities in the case of China’s policy towards Taiwan could “range from an air and maritime blockade to a full-scale amphibious invasion” (Pentagon 2018). For instance, a report from 2019 claims that the PLA deploys one of the warfare that “uses propaganda, deception, threats, and coercion to affect the adversary’s decision-making capability” (Pentagon 2019, 112) or the reported “harnesses” of official Beijing to “academia and educational institutions, think tanks, and state-run media to advance its soft power campaign in support of China’s security interests, was in stage (2019, 112). The report from 2014 envisages that “Communist Party leaders and military officials continue to exploit nationalism to bolster the legitimacy of the Party, deflect domestic criticism, and justify their own inflexibility in dialogues with foreign interlocutors” (Pentagon 2014, 17). However, across the twenty-one-year period studied, there were no significant differences in the percentage share of indexed references, as Figure 2 presents below.

Figure 2: Percentage of sentiments expressed in all reports, 2001–2021.



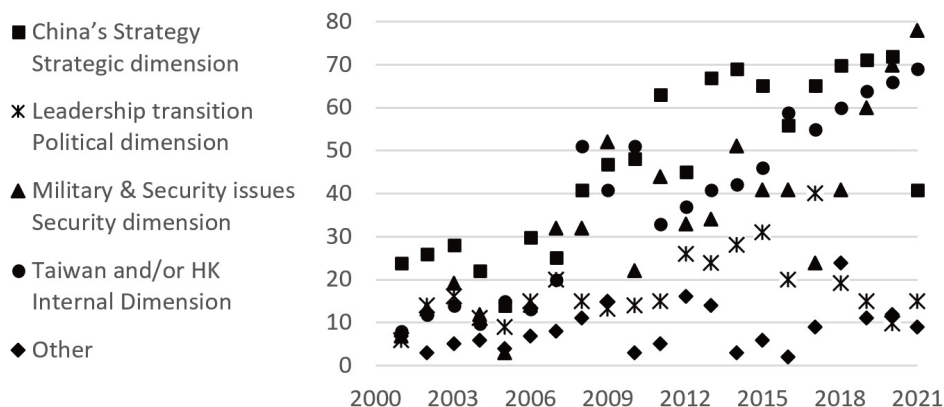
Source: Author.

The most negative sentiments were expressed in the reports from 2006, 2007, and 2012 (all over 60%). The 2001 report was the only one that saw an equal percentage of “very positive” and “moderately positive”, while negative sentiment prevailed in all other reports. The greatest “very negative” sentiment was seen in the reports from 2011, 2012, 2019, and 2020, while the least was found in the reports from 2004, 2005, and 2013. In 2005, 2007, 2015, 2021, and, at the very least, 2008, 2011, and 2012, the most “moderately negative” sentiment was observed. The years 2001, 2003, 2004, 2012, and 2018 received the greatest “moderately positive” scores, while 2006, 2007, and 2012 received the lowest (Figure 2).<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, computer analysis identified five primary dimensions on which the contents of the reports have been focusing: China’s Grand Strategy, Political Leadership, Military and Security Issues, Taiwan and HK, and Other Issues (Figure 3).

<sup>15</sup> The breadth of the reports was expanded throughout time, not just in length but also in scope. Reports of up to fifty pages in length were registered for the first few years of reporting. The reports have gotten a little lengthier since 2008, but they were still up to 100 pages long, but the 2016 report had a far broader scope and length – around 200 pages. This pattern persisted, with reports totaling 200 pages in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 3: Share of total references within identified dimensions across the reporting period



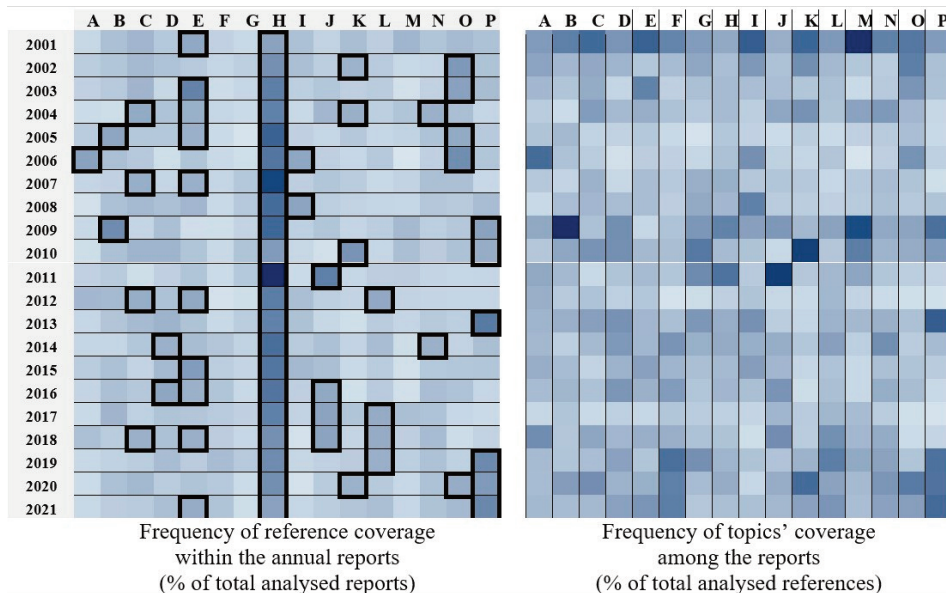
Source: Author.

Figure 3 demonstrates that the Chinese Grand Strategy dimension takes up the majority of the space in all reports, which was especially visible in the early reporting periods. This first dimension accounts for about half of the total representation between 2001 and 2005, but it also accounts for a considerable portion of the reports in 2011 and 2013–2015. It is worth noting that since 2017, this dimension has taken up less space in reports, with only 19% of references in 2021 (Figure 3). Except for 2002 and 2017, when such percentages are lower, political elements and leadership turnover occupy a stable 10% in all reports with notable consistency across a large number of reporting years. It claimed China and Russia “maintain a robust defence and security relationship, including bilateral policy consultations and professional military exchanges” (Pentagon 2002).<sup>16</sup> According to the report, “Beijing has created a spectrum of non-lethal coercive alternatives, including political/diplomatic, economic, and military measures”, while its “coercive techniques would aim to sway Taiwanese authorities whose decisions are influenced by public opinion, at least in part” (Pentagon 2002, 47). The political dimension of China’s “aggressive efforts to advance its sovereignty and territorial claims, its loud rhetoric, and lack of transparency regarding its rising military capabilities and strategic decision-making” is given a lot of attention in the 2017 Report (Pentagon 2017, 42). These moves “have pushed some countries in the region to strengthen their connections with the United States”, according to the report (Pentagon 2017, 42).

<sup>16</sup> This stance is also accepted by some scholars. See Lađevac (2021) for a comprehensive overview of present Sino-Russian relations.

Military and security issues as the third dimension have taken around 15-20% of each report, with the exception of the last three years culminating with the 2021 Report. It is largely focused on military topics, particularly the mission and tasks that China's PLA has in the "new age", as well as the strength estimates of Taiwanese troops (Pentagon 2021). It also provides information on the PLA's near-periphery forces, capabilities, and actions, as well as the PLA's global footprint. The treatment of resources and technologies for force modernisation, as well as the list of interactions that US Army leaders have had with China's PLA, adds to its comprehensiveness. According to Pentagon estimates, China would likely keep expanding the PLA's worldwide military presence through "humanitarian assistance, naval escorts and port calls, UN peacekeeping operations (PKO), arms sales, influence operations, and bilateral and multilateral military exercises" (Pentagon 2021, 125). The Taiwan issues have intensified the greatest across all aspects. Between 2001 and 2009, it accounted for roughly 10% of all reports, but these figures have been steadily climbing until 2017 when it accounted for more than 20% of all reports, and in the 2021 Report, it accounted for nearly 30% of all examined references (Figure 3).

Figure 4: Frequencies of reference and topics coverage, 2001–2021.



Legend: A: aircraft B: capabilities C: defence D: development E: force F: foreign G: information H: military I: missile J: modernisation K: national L: operations M: power N: security O: systems P: technology.

Source: Author.



Figure 4 shows the frequency of references and topics covered in all reports. The results for each year are presented in the left segment, based on the current topic. Military capabilities, modernisation, military power, military modernisation program, and military budget are all heavily weighted in all of these cases. Extreme clusters of references, such as those in the 2018 and 2021 reports, refer to force deployment, particularly naval forces, in relation to Taiwan. Furthermore, technology deserves special attention, particularly in recent reports that include clusters of dual-use technology and technology that China imports from other countries. Figure 4 on the right shows that the most common themes in reports were national modernisation and technology clusters. However, the last three reports included the capabilities and advanced technology of the PLA's operating technique. Furthermore, the cluster involving international and overseas foes was well-represented in reports from 2018 onwards, while the Pentagon believes that the national and system clusters were also essential in China's tactical advance during the same period (Figure 4).

Another qualitative output of this study is a manually completed content analysis, which is in line with some academic discussions (Wesley 2010) on the QDA research traditions. It will cover the essential points of how the United States views China's military strength during the last two decades. The structure of the first three reports in the reporting period (2001–2003) was very similar. China's Grand Strategy is monitored by the Pentagon through an examination of its goals and sources, as well as its military and security strategies. As seen by the Pentagon in the early 2000s, the components of China's GS were positioned inside its comprehensive national power – CNP measure, as well as how the PRC's conventional armed forces were updated and trained.

The Strategic Force Modernisation Program, as well as its intercontinental and medium-range ballistic missiles, as well as submarine-launched ballistic missiles, received a lot of emphasis in the 2003 Report (Pentagon 2003). For the first time in the 2005 Report, the security situation in Taiwan was linked to the PLA upgrading. According to the Pentagon Report, China's strategy for Taiwan “combined the credible threat of using military force with economic and cultural tools” (2005, 39), and China could “threaten or deploy a naval blockade either as a ‘non-war’ pressure tactic in the pre-hostility phase or as a transition to active conflict” (Pentagon 2005, 41). Since 2008, the Pentagon has identified “special topics” in each annual report. To be fair, these efforts were fairly modest in 2008 and 2009, with only one such issue in each report – *Human Capital in the PLA Force Modernisation* in 2008 and *China's Global Military Engagement* in 2009.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The special topics of the 2008 Report are conscription modes, educational standards, officer admission and career growth, and civilian personnel (Pentagon 2008, 47).

Based on all subsequent reports, no clear pattern can be discerned when it comes to special topic coverage; nonetheless, in most cases, they tend to follow the previous year's most tumultuous events and official Beijing's policy moves (i.e., adoption of Arctic policy in 2018 treated in the Report of 2019).

Table 1. Pentagon's appraisal of China's military and defence capabilities in the spotlight<sup>18</sup>

	Dimension									
Period	Strategic/Grand Strategy		Political& Leadership		Security & Defence		Taiwan / HK		Other	
	CAA*	MPA**	CAA	MPA	CAA	MPA	CAA	MPA	CAA	MPA
2001-2008	↔	↑↓	↑	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
2009-2013	↔	↔	↑	↔	↓	↓	↔	↓	↔	↔
2014-2018	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↓	↑	↑	↓	↓
2019-2021	↓	↓	↔	↔	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↔

\* Computer Assisted Analysis / *nVivo*

\*\* Manually Performed Analysis

Source: Author.

Table 1 clearly shows how the focus of dimensions has shifted over time, demonstrating that US policy has been passivated and can now be researched and examined as such through case studies. China's strategic dimension of its desire for supremacy is no longer considered by the Pentagon. Rather, it focuses on a number of high-profile defence concerns, as well as internal Chinese political upheaval around Taiwan and Hong Kong. When comparing computer-automated and manually completed analyses, the analysis demonstrates that institutional views have shifted from strategic and political to security and military realms, as well as to internal political issues. It is not surprising, then, that the United States' foreign policy agenda toward China has recently centred on thwarting China's global military dominance<sup>19</sup> as well as its domestic weakening through the securitization of the

<sup>18</sup> Where ↔ indicates stagnation of the issue in US perception, ↑ stands for some changes, while ↑ and ↓ indicate rise or downgrade focus to a topic within the specific dimension.

<sup>19</sup> A fundamental assumption of the Hegemonic Stability Theory is that the hegemon in the system possesses military strength. It is no surprise that the US is stepping up its efforts to confront China's PLA growth, military budget increase, and prospective force deployment outside of China throughout the world.



Taiwan issue, which will be discussed in the next part, through several neuralgic challenges that are occurring in the international system.

### **Are the Hawks Monitoring Closely: Dovish *Status Quo* or Hawkish Assertiveness?**

This study offers an analysis that is in line with the contemporary academic community's attempts to deconstruct US foreign policy goals (Drezner 2019; Löfflmann 2019; Biden 2020; Kaufman 2021; Lawniczak 2022). While the purpose is to explain the Pentagon's briefings to the US Congress and their potential impact on US foreign policy formulation, it appears that such a task would be difficult to perform academically within the limits of an academic essay. As a result, the findings' statements should be viewed as one of several possible explanations for the United States' change in foreign policy objectives toward China. Besides, the paper does not include specifics of China's foreign policy instruments such as the Belt and Road Initiative,<sup>20</sup> relations with many countries within this initiative, or Chinese investments due to the specifics of the topics covered by the reports, even though they have explained how the US policy toward China was perceived. Second, this essay focuses primarily on the People's Republic of China's security and military expansion, which, besides many other domains, has only a partial impact on US foreign policy formulation. Given that China's global strategy is built primarily on military and economic influence rather than deploying political power, the findings could be useful in assessing components of the US agenda.

The Pentagon's evolving view of Chinese military and policy development points to a broader trend of shifting perceptions of the US's place in the modern international system. For a long time after World War II, US officials labelled China an "international outlaw", citing the Taiwan Strait problem and the Sino-Indian border war as examples (Solomon 1981). The normalisation dialogue between the two sides in 1971, however, was little more than a Washington's response to probable Sino-Soviet allyship, as Richard Solomon (1981) asserted in his classic article on US perceptions of China. Fears of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan prompted the Congress to pass a bill on provisional measures.

Unlike decades ago, when the main points of uncertainty were more acute than ever before, the focus of US foreign policy toward China appears to be turning

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<sup>20</sup> Even though the BRI does not yet have a military component, it may serve as a tool for Chinese policymakers to encourage greater aggressiveness in security-related matters. According to Abdur Shah (2021), the securitization of the BRI has altered how the US's priorities for foreign policy have evolved. He contends that a securitized approach exaggerates the threat that the BRI poses to the American international order while disregarding its ability to help meet Asia's urgent infrastructure needs (Shah 2021, 14).

passive, possibly for the first time in recent history. Kenneth Schultz (2005) proposes an explanation in which a state's hawkish behaviour is significantly reliant on the average voter in a consolidated democracy. When governments consider whether to cooperate, they must consider not only how the foreign opponent will react but also how voters will react to their decisions, as is the case with the US political system (Schultz 2005). Washington is now obligated to respond to the problems that are arising in Eurasia in order to build a coherent strategy to fight China's growing security and defence capabilities both at home and abroad. The number of bills introduced in the US Congress against China is enormous. Between 2001 and 2021, the US Congress passed a total of 27 resolutions and acts targeting China's domestic political difficulties and CPC operations (US Congress 2022).

Some of the resolutions, such as the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, the Hong Kong Autonomy Act, the Prohibition of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Trade to the US Market, the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018, and the Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019, were aimed at internationalising internal political problems within China. It should be noted that these initiatives run concurrently with US foreign policy actions against China and serve as a supplement to them. It is also worth noting that the total number of proposed anti-China laws that were never passed for a variety of reasons dwarfs the number of measures passed by both houses of Congress. The US Congress passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018 as a direct step to govern the US military and diplomatic strategy in the Indo-Pacific area as a result of the US view of the current Chinese military growth power in the region. This Act states that the Indo-Pacific region plays a theatre of a "geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order" (US Congress 2018, Sec. 2-7) and calls for the increased importance of US allyships with Japan, both Korea, Australia, and Thailand, its strategic partnership with India, commitment to Taiwan, all to deter and contain China (US Congress 2018). The Act also directs the president of the United States to make efforts to change Taiwan's *status quo* and to transfer defence articles to Taiwan that are "tailored to meet the existing and likely future threats from China, including supporting Taiwan's efforts to develop and integrate asymmetric capabilities, as appropriate, including mobile, survivable, and cost-effective capabilities, into its military forces" (US Congress 2018, Sec 209-3b).

Due to the peculiarities and intensity of influencing the reformulation of US foreign policy towards China, further brief discussion moves to four neuralgic points – the crisis in Ukraine, the security vacuum created by the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the dilemma of "containment" of China through QUAD, and then AUKUS, as well as the rising security and economic dynamics of the Arctic region. Such analysis is consistent with neoclassical realism's theoretical

notion that “intervening variables – ideas within states” impact foreign policy preferences (Kitchen 2010).

#### *Four focal points of US-China policy reformulation*

New global complexity has prompted the US to become more active in its efforts to contain China militarily. Since its founding in 2007, when then-Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described it as an “Asian arc of democracy”, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has evolved into a distinct but insufficiently formal alliance. It was revived by Trump’s presidency, and while most people had forgotten about it, it was restored in September 2021 under Biden’s administration, bringing Australia and the United Kingdom under the US security umbrella. However, with an 18-month time constraint and a lack of real defence cooperation (it only envisions collaboration in technology and submarine development, as well as information sharing), the AUKUS is unlikely to meet its goal of being a serious tool of “China’s containment”.

It is for these reasons that this pact is way too far from the rationalist foreign policy approach. Rather, if the QUAD was considered a project to legitimise an attempt to “defeat the communist menace” (The White House 2017) in the eyes of the public and political leaders of Western countries, then the AUKUS is nothing more than the pure legitimization of such efforts and the result of a post-truth period. The academic community (Chen and Chen 1992; Broomfield 2003; Clark 2011; Drezner 2019) generally agrees that, in modern circumstances, great powers’ (and superpowers’) foreign policy cannot be conducted on rational grounds but rather on deceptions, creating false threats, securitizing issues that do not deserve it, and permanently creating a “security theatre” atmosphere in (south) Eastern Asia, labelling it as “the US’ Indo-Pacific policy”.<sup>21</sup> This attempt to restrict China in the manner of the Cold War will almost certainly fail, as the ways in which the international system functions have substantially altered since the Cold War. Without success in degrading the PLA capabilities, as Pentagon perceptions (see Table 1) show, the US willingness to station military personnel near its direct adversary’s home would be a disastrous policy. Supplying weapons to Taiwan by the Western coalition would also be a mistake, as Beijing would use this to justify military action against the island. However, AUKUS still exists (April 2022) but

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<sup>21</sup> As a part of the US effort to pay more attention to this area, the Indo-Pacific theatre has been heavily securitized recently. Its Pacific Military Command renamed itself the “Indo-Pacific Military Command” and expanded its geographical sphere of operations. This militarized response to the BRI is emblematic of the broader “China Threat” attitude that is currently dominating policy debate in Washington. See Abdur Rehman Shah (2021) for a more extensive discussion on the means and outputs of the Indo-Pacific region’s securitization.

with limited scope as it remains in the shadow of the armed conflict that erupted in February 2022 in Ukraine.

The beauty of the Winter Olympic Games opening sharply contrasted with the Russian Federation's leadership decision to attack Ukraine only two days after the Games ended. Even though the Russian invasion is far from over (April 2022), the several-week-long crisis has generated a major question about the future of Sino-American strategic competition – whether the island is endangered? A few official Beijing measures might currently (April 2022) provide an accurate assessment of China's role in Ukraine's conflict. Official Washington accuses China of exploiting the fate of Ukraine to justify potential aggression against Taiwan daily, while it sent its top defence officials to the island just a few days after Ukraine's conflict emerged (Martina and Brunnstorm 2022). This was especially intensified by top Chinese officials' statements that China remains “on the right side of history” when it comes to this conflict (*Reuters* 2022). Taiwan is an important hub of US foreign policy, especially given the findings of this article, which show that the Pentagon has shifted its focus from China to military capabilities and placed its relationship with Taiwan in an international context. The hawks' focus appears to be dispersed across a wide variety of concerns that must be resolved simultaneously (Doshi 2021; Shah 2021).

Unlike the Ukrainian crisis, the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan put China's official security policy to the test to a large extent. This long-planned but widely perceived as “sudden” and “chaotic” retreat generated a real scholarly concern: how closely do the hawks monitor China's future prospective involvement in Afghanistan? Until President Obama's 2011 announcement of a complete military withdrawal from this Central Asian country, China paid little attention to the Afghan situation. This precisely aligns with the Belt and Road Initiative, a ten-year-old effort aimed at bringing Central Asian and European countries under a single roof of multilaterally enhanced economic and political cooperation. Wang (2016) argues that unlike the pure energy trade cooperation that China maintained with Afghanistan during the first decade of the XXI century, with the introduction of the BRI, this course has changed. China keeps great bilateral ties with the official Afghan and Pakistani governments, whilst was willing to participate in the “intra-Afghan” dialogue between the Taliban and the official government in 2015 (Wang 2016, 76). He also established a number of arguments that a power vacuum that would emerge as a result of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan for China's involvement would be nothing but “a significant flaw” (Wang 2016). In terms of military presence, China has yet to fill this power vacuum (April 2022), but in terms of soft power, such as humanitarian and financial aid, China has made significant progress in Afghanistan (Soherwordi and Sulaiman 2021). Under the Taliban, no substantial Chinese investment announcements have been made to date, although this Central Asian country is critical for China's terrestrial New Silk Road, both for transit and supply security. As a result, the Afghan issue is projected to remain one

of the cornerstones of both sides' efforts to maintain regional control as part of their larger strategic rivalry. The Arctic is one such place that deserves a lot of attention in this battle.

Not only is the Arctic a novel variable, but it also symbolises all similar cases that might emerge as “non-competed” areas of this rivalry. In 2018, China announced its Arctic Policy with a tendency to establish itself as a “Near Arctic” state.<sup>22</sup> However, in the international arena, this campaign has not garnered the support of its key “rivals”. In January 2021, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo slammed China’s “Near Arctic” claims, alleging that its borders are up to 1450 kilometres from the Arctic Circle and calling it “communist fiction” (Langley 2021). China’s tendency to develop a safe passage for its trade ships to avoid repeating the Malacca dilemma may result in the establishment of a new sovereign over the Arctic. How closely the hawks will monitor China’s ambitions for the Northern maritime route will be determined by the regional security dynamics in the High North. Should China be willing to send military forces to defend the northern route, this might draw the attention of the US and create a classic security dilemma, promoting the Arctic as a new chessboard for global domination.

All four cases show that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and China’s security and defence policies are deeply anchored in what the US hawks are supposed to monitor, which is why attempts to create a coherent “theory of perception of China” (Broomfield 2003) are not entirely futile. Based on the neuralgic areas, it is feasible to infer the existence of numerous possibilities that will be reflected in US foreign policy. The first scenario might entail a new international power balance marked by prolonged tripolarity. It would include the United States as the system’s major superpower and hegemon, but with two clear poles – the Russian Federation and China – in political, economic, and military matters. The balance between the US and China, a kind of soft bipolarity that aligns with Spykman’s geopolitical stance in practice – China would eventually control Eurasian space, while the US/West would control the so-called “rim” of Rimland – is the second scenario that will influence US foreign policy goals in the near future. Russia would rule the Rimland in this situation. However, the issue here is that it is unclear whether the parties “agreed” in a gentlemanly manner, whether the balance of power was achieved by all parties’ conscious effort or by pure chance.

The third possibility would be a new US strategy to solidify and sustain its traditional unipolarity. It will be motivated by a desire to assert hegemony and a desire to “come closer” to China’s geographical reach and the South China Sea. If

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<sup>22</sup> In terms of Kindlberger’s precondition for “hegemonic commitment” to the *whole* system, this completely corresponds to the basic theoretical postulates of hegemonic stability (Kindlberger 1973).

this occurs, China's growing military assertiveness and readiness to forcefully defend its declared objectives in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as other sites such as the Malacca Strait, will become more realistic. What happened in Afghanistan may have been a precursor to the last scenario, but the situation in Ukraine in April 2022 still speaks against China's military involvement outside of its borders.

### **The Endangered Hawk's Nest: Toward a More Pragmatic Approach of US Foreign Policy**

This study examined how the United States saw China's security agenda during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and applied the findings to the current neuralgic areas where strategic competition may continue to emerge in the future. At the end of 2021, Henry Kissinger remarked that in today's environment "there could be no national victors in national contests" for both China and the United States (*XinhuaNet* 2021). This was not far from his first plea for strategic rivals to achieve mutual coexistence in the system. Charles P. Kindleberger (1973) exposed that a hegemon's commitment to the system is of vital importance for its "nest". Whether such a hawk's nest is going to be shaken or not depends on the perception of China's overall growth. According to Ian Clark (2011), due to relative material imbalances within the system, China's succession to hegemony over the US could occur by 2025. He argued that hegemony should be connected "not only with the exercise of dominant power, but with the construction of a distinctive, and acceptable, pattern of order" (2011, 22), which China is unlikely to achieve anytime soon. Whatever occurs, China and the US will almost certainly opt for coexistence over direct armed conflict, which is why US foreign policy aims are likely to become pragmatic. It will fight to maintain its control wherever it can at the moment, with a particular focus on the regions of the world where China is consolidating its power.

In summary, this study found that US foreign policy has evolved away from focusing on *others'* Grand Strategies and toward more pragmatic and specific reasons that promote China's global ambition. The absence of structured and systematic monitoring of China's security policies does not imply that the US has given up on the battle. The findings showed that over the past few years, the US began to concentrate on practical areas of China's security policy, which may be a component of a new, well-coordinated "Western" strategy for containing China. Such perceptions, as shown in Table 1, are in conformity with the thesis that this may be the enhanced US objective to partially handle each component of China's security strategy, both inside and outside of its borders, rather than challenging China's integral policy.

Even though content analysis of strategic acts can be a useful analytical tool, as explained earlier in the text, this study has one epistemic fault. The Pentagon's annual reports to the US Congress are an example of this article's release. Although the



scientific validity of the conclusions has been enhanced by the inclusion of as many as 21 reports, this does not imply that the US President or the Congressional Foreign Affairs Committee would take action against China in practice. Depending on the performance of other superpowers in the system, the US foreign policy approach could be (come) dovish or hawkish. Hence, the scope of this piece is confined only to an institutional comprehension of *others'* foreign policy strategies in international relations. Further research efforts should focus on improving the analytical toolset for Sino-American strategic competition, as this is a topic that will dominate the attention of IR academics in the near future. As a result, a nuanced strategy is required that fits both conceptually and contextually with what the two superpowers want to accomplish and how a genuine scientific analysis could investigate and explain this interplay.

It remains to be seen how Sino-American strategic competition develops in the future, particularly in light of emerging international complexities. The armed conflict in Ukraine that erupted in February 2022 further “promoted” Russia as a conventional hard power pole in international relations, which will impact US foreign policy and its focus on both China and Russia. This could, subsequently, lead to a modern “imperial overstretch” in the United States’ foreign policy practise in the third decade of this century.

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**ДА ЛИ ЈАСТРЕБОВИ ПОСМАТРАЈУ ПОМНО?  
ИЗВЕШТАЈИ О ВОЈНОЈ МОЋИ КИНЕ  
ЗА АМЕРИЧКИ КОНГРЕС, 2001–2021**

*Апстракт:* Овај чланак представља налазе студије којом је испитана институционална перцепција Пентагона о безбедносној и војној политици Кине. Научни циљ чланка је да објасни главне трендове и пројекције о томе како Сједињене Државе виде кинеску безбедносну политику у светлу покретања њене нове Велике стратегије, као и обрасце спољнополитичког одговора САД. Главна јединица анализе су извештаји под називом *Војни и безбедносни догађаји који укључују Народну Републику Кину* које Пентагон издаје на годишњем нивоу од 2001. У узорак је укључен укупно двадесет и један извештај поднет закључно са 2021. годином. Аналитички процес је подељен на неколико нивоа са циљем да се стекну увиди у истакнуте елементе кинеског раста као главне безбедносне претње глобалној хегемонији САД. Аутор користи методу конгруентних подударности да утврди како се перцепција кинеске безбедносне политике временом мењала. Карактеристике извештаја су затим квалитативно проучене кроз призму глобалних безбедносних криза, укључујући руску инвазију на Украјину, војно повлачење САД из Авганистана, војно усклађивање у Индо-Пацифику и регионалну безбедносну динамику на Арктику. Налази откривају да се перспектива Пентагона о томе како Кина формулише своју безбедносну политику померила са стратешке на конкретнију – војну димензију, која укључује и унутрашње проблеме Кине са Тајваном.

*Кључне речи:* САД; Кина; безбедносна политика; Велика стратегија; анализа садржаја; nVivo.

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## Appendix A

aircraft	capabilities	defence	development	force	foreign	information	military
aircraft carrier	military capabilities	active defence	military-technological development	military forces	foreign technology	information blockade	military capabilities
military aircraft	joint operations capability	defence spending	probable development	nuclear forces	foreign militaries	information warfare	military forces
commercial aircraft industry	operational capability	defence industries	national development	special operations forces	foreign affairs	information operations	military modernisation
indigenous aircraft carrier program	key capabilities	ballistic missile defences	security development	naval forces	foreign firms	achieving information dominance	military power
aircraft bombs	limited capability	air defence brigade	force development	secessionist forces	foreign policy goals	advanced information technology	military modernisation program
fixed-wing aircraft	targeting capability	national defence	national development strategy	force structure	foreign governments	information superiority	military budget
stealth aircraft	joint capabilities	annual defence spending increase	national development program	force development	foreign industries	information technology	military organisations

missile	modernisation	national	operations	power	security	systems	technology
ballistic missile submarines	military modernisation	national power	joint operations	national power	security developments	control system	advanced technology
anti-ship cruise missiles	modern warfare	national interests	special operations forces	military power	security strategy	advanced weapons systems	foreign technology
ballistic missile defences	modernisation effort	national sovereignty	joint operations capability	state power	security environment	international system	military technologies
missile frigates	force modernisation	national development	information operations	great power	securing access	global governance system	dual-use technologies
missile closure areas	modern information technology	national goals	long-distance mobility operations	economic power	security matters	weapon system research	enabling technologies
missile destroyers	modernisation goals	national strategy	air operations	power projection	Chinese security strategy	vertical launch system	communications technology
conventional missile forces	ground force modernisation	national defence	amphibious operations	preeminent power	security issues	air defence systems	advanced information technology

## **AID IN WAR OR AID TO WAR? FOREIGN AID IN THE 2022 WAR IN UKRAINE**

Igor PELLICCIARI<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* Aid has confirmed itself as a key instrument of foreign policy in the first year of the Ukrainian war, as it had earlier in the pandemic, pursuing in the first instance the national interests of the state donors. However, when compared to other similar cases, such as the outbreak of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, exactly 30 years before Ukraine, state funded aid policies in the new scenario show a number of absolute novelties, such as: 1) the speed of reaction of Western state donors at the beginning of the war; 2) the primacy and leading role of state donors over the non-governmental sector; 3) the quantity and diversification of aid mobilised; 4) (Russian) food as a weapon vs. (Western) weapons as legitimate aid; 5) broad anticipation of post-war planning; and 6) sanctions (to the enemy) becoming an aid (to the friend). Each of these aspects has been linked to specific foreign policy issues and interests of state donors to such an extent as to confirm the relevance of using an institutional-realist approach to understand their political-utilitarian motivations in organising aid in the war scenario in question. Thus, providing elements to support the thesis of this article, namely that aid to Ukraine in 2022 has primarily been driven by state donors' realistic foreign policy objectives, aimed at implementing their geopolitical strategies.

*Keywords:* foreign aid; foreign policy; geopolitics; Ukraine; Bosnia and Herzegovina; war; military aid; Russia; European Union.

### **Pandemic, War, Aid**

The outbreak of COVID-19, in February/March 2020, and only two years later of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, in February/March 2022, created a double-crisis scenario of unprecedented global impact in recent history. In both cases, *aid* was

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among the most frequently occurring words, after *virus* and *war*, respectively (Pellicciari 2022; Antezza et al. 2022).

As in the case of the COVID-19 outbreak, the conflict came as a surprise, at least in its modalities, creating situations of need and laying the groundwork for initiatives to mitigate them (Dräger et al. 2022). In both crises, the pandemic and the war, aid has become an all-encompassing term that is used in different contexts and associated with multiple actions. It is heterogeneous both in terms of the assistance provided and the characteristics of the donors and beneficiaries involved.

The 24-hour infotainment of the media, more interested in the audience than in data, has not distinguished public from private types of interventions. As a result, non-governmental initiatives have been lumped together with others born in the public-state sector, perpetuating a common feeling of difficulty in recognising differences between initiatives that are often poles apart, to the detriment of the emergence of a shared understanding of the idea of aid.

The *mare magnum* of humanitarian and solidaristic initiatives from the private and non-governmental sectors (praiseworthy in intentions, much less so in effectiveness) was, as usual, difficult to evaluate accurately and thus also to comment on as a whole. It requires painstaking case-by-case reconstruction, often made almost impossible by the lack of certain, homogeneous, and accessible data. If non-governmental action was on the whole parcelled out and of a symbolic rather than practical nature, a different matter concerned state-funded aid: assistance interventions traceable to governmental decisions and financed with public funds.

As for the pandemic, the spontaneous orientation towards aid – given and requested – in the face of a health emergency looming over the whole of humanity without distinction was predictable. This was the ideal terrain for the spread of a wide and transversal sense of solidarity (Kobayashi et al. 2021).

It was less obvious that aid played a role in the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, as this was a context of open military opposition that was less predisposed to the idea of international cooperation. In this case, the powerful imposition of assistance narratives and initiatives took place, with peculiarities destined to affect the way aid between states was conceived politically and communicated institutionally. Interventions during the emergency phase of the pandemic and the following geopolitical clash of vaccine diplomacy have shown how aid has become central in defining the balance of power in the international system (Fidler 2020; Chohan 2021; Hyndman 2021; Pellicciari 2022).

The thesis proposed here is that in the first year of the war in Ukraine, *State-Funded Aid* was also driven by strategies on the part of donors determined to use their assistance interventions as a primary tool for the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. In support of this thesis, a direct comparison is proposed here between *State-Funded Aid* in 2022 in Ukraine and that which exactly three decades earlier in



1992 characterised the first year of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (Pellicciari 1998; Pickering 2014, 31–43; Gilbert 2016, 717–729). This comparison, as well as the thesis it proposes to support, takes its cue from, and in fact, stands as an ideal continuation of the approach that guided a recent reconstruction of the evolution of *Foreign Aid* from the collapse of the Berlin Wall to the COVID-19 outbreak (Pellicciari 2022).

This analysis was linked to an adaptation of the theoretical foundations for studying aid in the international system and their readjustment so as to make them suitable for a historiography of international relations focused more on the system of interests than the values underlying the policies of assistance between sovereign states. This resulted in an approach geared primarily towards reconstructing the dynamics of power and political obligation between donors and recipients, based on an idea of aid understood above all as a political-institutional category between the states involved. And on concept of *International Aid Public Policy* (IAPP) preferred to the traditional one of *Foreign Aid* because it is open to considering any form of transaction on favourable terms between a state donor and a state recipient on the basis of the basic relationship ( $D > R$ ) as aid (Pellicciari 2022).

The result is a historiographic analysis where aid is an instrument of foreign policy on a par with war and trade and responds to the power politics of state actors competing for primacy in providing assistance to selected scenarios of geopolitical importance. Where state donors have, on the whole, higher political interests than recipients. It is a historical (descriptive and not prescriptive) approach to the dynamics of inter-state aid that is set within the general framework of realist thinking in international relations, from its classical origins such as in Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, to its variants that matured primarily in the Cold War (Kennan 1947; Morgenthau 1962; 1978; Huntington 1971; Waltz 1978), to its contemporary evolutions (Kissinger 2014).

Comparing the *LAPPs* in Bosnia in 1992 and in Ukraine in 2022, one looks for elements that bring the actions of state donors back to motivations linked to the pragmatic pursuit of their own geopolitical interests rather than to the formally declared aim of sanctioning the non-observance of a basic principle of international law.

The comparison attempts to capture the features of three key elements of aid in the two historical cases, namely:

- (a) The intervention scenario,
- (b) The interacting actors (Donors and Recipients),
- (c) The aid provided.

A table (Table 1) of striking differences emerges, which helps to grasp in detail the specificities of the Ukrainian case and also gives substance to the thesis argued here.



Table 1: Comparing the IAPPs in Bosnia in 1992 and in Ukraine in 2022

	<i>Bosnia 1992</i>	<i>Ukraine 2022</i>
<b>Scenario</b>		
<i>Internal</i>	*) Provisional sovereignty *) Weak, divided statehood *) Internal conflict	*) Consolidated sovereignty *) Institutionalised Statehood *) Centre-periphery + East/West tension
<i>International</i>	*) Changing international context *) Bilateral diplomatic action *) Russia politically absent	*) Defined geopolitical dispute *) Cohesive Western Front *) Russia active militarily
<b>Actors</b>		
<i>Donors</i>	*) Non-governmental *) Specialised multilateral agencies	*) Bilateral State Actors *) Multilateral Institutions
<i>Recipients</i>	*) New, occasional, fragmented	*) Public sector related \ pre-existing \ institutionalised
<b>Aid</b>		
<i>Amount</i>	*) Limited \ Symbolic *) Humanitarian \ Emergency	*) Numerous \ Consistent *) Wide-ranging (financial, political, military)
<i>Type</i>	*) Neutrality \ Pacifism	*) Interventionism \ Declared political objectives
<i>Politics</i>	*) Sanctions strategies separated from aid policies	*) Sanctions strategies integrated with aid policies

Source: Author.

***Bosnia 1992***

Born out of the ruins of the broken and violent collapse of the former Yugoslavia, the conflict in BiH was set in the chaotic context following the end of the bipolar order that had governed international relations from the end of World War II until the collapse of the Berlin Wall (Fagan 2006, 406–419; Hill 2011; Gilbert 2016, 717–729). A decades-old system of international balances has broken down without a new one ready to replace it. Both the constitutional and geopolitical frameworks of BiH that emerged from the former Yugoslavia suffered as a result of present weakness and total uncertainty about future changes, which were seen as inevitable due to a widespread perception of instability and impermanence of the *status quo* (Fagan 2006; Belloni and Strazzari, 2014).

Having declared its independence at the outbreak of the war crisis, the new Bosnian statehood found itself very weak in its institutional and constitutional foundations. Its sovereignty, which was in fact non-existent in a country divided into three parts in open military conflict – each with its own weak but distinct state organisation – was but formal (Hansen 2006; Azarkan 2011).

From a geopolitical point of view, the picture was equally confusing. The Western Balkans were an important hub, but it was unclear – and in fact the subject of a heated international debate – what their future status should be. Traditional national interests were moving independently to improve their status and secure influence over new, geopolitically accessible areas (Hansen 2006). These initiatives acted at the politico-diplomatic level, with the effect of limiting the political legitimacy and room for manoeuvres of the international community of the time, which was dominated by Western bloc countries after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the slide into substantial irrelevance of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The year 1992 was characterised by the evident political impotence of both the United Nations and Brussels (at that time still the European Economic Community) in limiting the degeneration of the crisis into a chronic military confrontation, aggravated by the fact that it was both an ethnically-motivated civil war and a conflict between three former Yugoslav states – Croatia, BiH, and Serbia (Craven 1995; Radeljić 2012).

Initial aid interventions suffered from this framework of uncertainty over the country's future political-institutional position and diplomatic competition from the main international players of the time. Faced with the cautiousness and tactics of the Western states, the first donors to become active in the dramatic Bosnian conflict came from the galaxy of the non-governmental sector. It was they, together with specialised agencies of the main multilateral organisations, who were the only donors present in the field at the dawn of a war that had no precise start date, resulting in a progressive slide towards increasingly bloody clashes (Fagan 2006; Belloni and Strazzari 2014).

The common trait of these donors was the concentration of their efforts on emergency humanitarian aid, called upon to cover the very serious situations of basic needs brought about by a conflict responsible for casualties – mainly among the civilian population (Hill 2011; Gilbert 2016).

Non-governmental interventions were often disconnected, symbolic, and clearly insufficient to deal with the magnitude of the rifts and basic needs created by the war. Nevertheless, they played an important role in raising Western public awareness of a crisis that was otherwise neglected by the mainstream and unchallenged in the pre-social media era. They were also almost exclusive bearers of a pacifist message associated with a distinct political neutralism that, in the name of caring for the

victims of war, believed it was not necessary to take a stand on the ongoing crisis (Hill 2011; Pickering 2014; Gilbert 2016).

The multilateral aid of classic international organisations such as the United Nations, traditionally active in the field of emergency crises through their autonomous agencies (the initial presence of the UNHCR was followed by UNOPS, UNDP, WHO, etc.), was more structured in terms of hardware and better organised. However, even this aid suffered from high rates of dispersion and ineffectiveness, both because of the instability and complexity of the war scenario and because of the mechanical transposition of a *third-world* type of intervention in BiH, which had entered a purely political crisis with high levels of socio-economic development (Pickering 2014; Gilbert 2016).

Multilateral aid focused on an exclusively humanitarian dimension, so apolitical that it distanced itself from the active pacifism of the non-governmental sector. The international organisations suffered from the confused Balkan context and a clear political mandate from their headquarters, which were blocked by internal diplomatic competition between their member states. Under these conditions, they shifted from the active neutrality of the non-governmental sector, deliberately confusing it with a redundant “always-on” equidistance to the parties in the conflict; so much so that the multilateral donors at the time organised their own presence and action in all countries involved in the conflict, without distinction. That is to say, not only in BiH but also in Serbia, although it was already at loggerheads with the Western world, having been accused of triggering the (para) military escalation of the Balkan crisis. This resulted in a clear separation between sanctions and aid. The harsh sanctions that the international community imposed on Serbia had no intersection with aid policies in Sarajevo, nor did they stimulate initiatives of political and/or military support, dropping the hypothesis of military aid to the new-born Bosnian army in an anti-Serbian function. Similarly, proposals to immediately admit BiH together with Croatia into the European Economic Community were considered useful provocations to draw attention to the scenario, but with no prospect of coming true (Craven 1995; Radeljić 2012).

### *Ukraine 2022*

The Ukrainian war context was radically different, beginning with the domestic and international scenario in which the Russian invasion in February 2022 matured (Antezza et al. 2022; Hashimova 2022). Compared to BiH, the main difference was in the different levels of institutionalisation of the two countries’ statehood at the time the war began, as well as in the international balances against the backdrop of the two crises. Unlike BiH, Ukraine entered the conflict a full three decades after it had gained internationally recognised sovereignty and consolidated its own political-institutional system (Kubicek 2008; Subtelny 2009). In the turbulent early 1990s,

while the Federated Socialist Republic of BiH experienced a traumatic breakaway from the former Yugoslavia, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine achieved unhindered independence after the dissolution of the USSR (Craven 1995; Radeljić 2012). It retained its original internal borders from the Soviet period (Kubicek 2008; Subtelny 2009).

As unexpected as the Ukrainian war was in its modalities in February 2022, the institutional and political, as well as domestic and international, terms of the issues that precipitated it were long known; they were as clear as the underlying geopolitical dispute and opposing sides. Domestically, Ukraine arrived in 2022 after a long course of institution building, assisted by massive Western technical assistance financed primarily by the US and the EU (Milner 2006; Milner and Tingley 2012; Antezza et al. 2022; Hashimova 2022). Although it has been an intense and often poor track record, which is common for many countries in post-communist transition, it has contributed to strengthening an established perception of Ukrainian statehood fully integrated into the international community. In the face of established sovereignty, the main unresolved political-institutional problem over the years has concerned the difficult balancing act between the centre in Kiev and the peripheries in the west and east of the country, composed of Ukrainian and Russian ethnic majorities respectively (Kubicek 2008; Subtelny 2009).

Internationally, Ukraine has been the theatre of a constant and prolonged geopolitical contest between a pro-Western option (initially only pro-European, with time expanding to the Atlanticist side) and a pro-Russian one, tending to stay in Moscow's orbit (Kubicek 2008; Subtelny 2009).

These two international orientations have become intertwined with the internal center-periphery and regional East-West questions, alternating in Kiev between radically opposed governments and policies: one in tune with the western part of the country and thus closer to the EU and NATO, the other with the eastern part of the country and more interested in relations with Russia (Kubicek 2008; Subtelny 2009). The crystallisation over time of the opposition of these opposing options was behind two important structural features of the war scenario in 2022, which were completely absent from BiH in 1992:

- a) an initial political compactness of the Western front on the Ukrainian question with a community of vision and intent, which in the Bosnian case appeared only towards the end of the conflict, marked by the US intervention in the scenario;
- b) Russian determination to use force in foreign policy as opposed to the low political-military profile held by Moscow in the Balkan scenario of the 1990s.

Compared to the BiH, the main aspects of the Ukrainian scenario have been very clear since the dawn of the crisis, starting with the certain date of the outbreak of the conflict: February 24, 2022 – the beginning of the Russian military invasion.

Strengthened by unprecedented political cohesion and mutual coordination, bilateral (from the US to the UK, from France to Germany) and multilateral (from NATO to the EU) Western state actors have had a common political stance, clearly condemning Moscow's action. Faced with such a well-defined (geo) political framework, their timing was unusual and opposite to that recorded in BiH, when the same actors moved very late after the start of the clashes. They struggled to recognise the war from its onset and in fact contributed to its protracted nature – so much so that the Dayton Peace Accords fell more than three years after the iconic start of the tragic siege of Sarajevo (Dahlman and Tuathail 2005).

Reluctant to get formally militarily involved on the ground, they acted as donors in the new crisis scenario, intervening with their own aid initiatives. The experience gained during the massive aid given to Ukraine in the three post-Soviet decades after 1991 facilitated the rapid response of Western state donors, thus relying on institutional and logistical networks developed and consolidated over time, with local recipients already defined and known beforehand, often from the Ukrainian state sector (Gorodnichenko 2001; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013).

The speed of reaction of the state donors was the driving force behind the action of the remaining non-governmental donors, who found themselves in an unusual secondary role following narratives and values far removed from the neutralism and political pacifism of the Bosnian context. Consequently, in Ukraine, aid actions went far beyond simple emergency humanitarian interventions in support of war victims and declared themselves opponents of the Russian invasion, in open support of one of the parties involved, namely, the government in Kiev.

The leading role of state donors influenced the quantity, variety, and political impact of aid. Firstly, the increased financial resources available to the public sector led to a significant increase in the amount of assistance, mobilised or even just announced, which is unusual for a conflict in its early stages (Gorodnichenko 2001; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013; Antezza et al. 2022). At the same time, the strong politicisation of the scenario spilled over into the type of aid provided, resulting in its strong diversification (Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013). Faced with the common and decisive objective of countering the Russian invasion *whatever-it-takes*, assistance varied in sectors and used instruments far removed from the classic practices commonly associated with *foreign aid* in emergency situations. It was a consistent series of direct financial, military, and political aid, distinguished by its variety, consistency, and type of accompanying institutional communication (Gorodnichenko 2001; Dimitrova and Dragneva 2013; Antezza et al. 2022).

The novelty was not so much in the content of these interventions but in the manner and timing with which they were presented, as in the case of armaments, which were openly promoted as a legitimate form of aid. Although military assistance between states has existed for a long time, in the Ukrainian case, for the first time,

donors such as the European Union and its member states placed it in the formal category of *state-funded aid* and presented it as such to their own public, to such an extent that on the Western side, the question of which weapons to send as aid to Ukraine has surpassed the remaining traditional humanitarian initiatives in visibility, which have taken a back seat in politics and in the media. This is exactly the opposite of the timing seen in BiH in 1992, when the international community debated for a long time, undecided, on the advisability and forms of involvement in the Bosnian context, as well as on the advisability of sending armaments to the Sarajevo government to strengthen its army and better oppose Belgrade (Dahlman and Tuathail 2005; Hansen 2006; Azarkan 2011). When military supplies were finally given, it all took place in the shadows, with a discretion bordering on secrecy and without such an intervention being presented as an integral part of assistance policies.

With regard to the political-institutional aid to Ukraine, the peculiarity was in putting typical post-war issues, such as the issue of post-conflict reconstruction, which the European Union raised as early as May 5, 2022, at the Donors' Conference in Warsaw, at the centre of the Western agenda, with the fighting still raging and the outcome of the war largely uncertain (Service of the Republic of Poland 2022; Antezza et al. 2022).

Alongside emergency and humanitarian interventions, which in the Ukrainian crisis meant urgent support for refugees and internally displaced persons (7.7 million internally and 5.2 million abroad), the conference opened up the programming of an initial allocation of 6 billion for the reconstruction of Ukraine's infrastructure and economic system. The issue of Ukraine's accession to the EU, another form of political aid linked to the war, gave a similar feeling of an early theme (Kirsch 2022). With an incomplete path to many *EU acquis* standards despite dozens of Brussels-funded technical assistance projects over three decades, on June 23, 2022, the European Council granted Kiev the coveted status of candidate country along with statements from numerous Western leaders in favour of an imminent Ukrainian entry into the EU (Bosse 2022; Kirsch 2022).

It was an acceleration that was the result of a political decision taken in the midst of war, unrelated to the level of European harmonisation reforms achieved by Kiev, and that was conceived rather as compensation for the invasion suffered by Moscow.

A final peculiarity of Ukrainian aid in comparison with the Bosnian experience concerns sanctions and their use, with important quantitative and even more qualitative changes. On the first aspect, there was the speed with which the pre-existing sanctions framework from 2014 (since the annexation of Crimea) was strengthened at the outbreak of the war, filling it with content and giving it a much broader scope (Mamonov et al. 2022; Huang and Lu 2022).



New packages of measures have gradually been introduced, adding to rather than replacing those already in place, with a linear impact in areas not touched in the past. Among the most interesting aspects is the political purpose for which the restrictive measures were conceived, transforming them from a moment of condemnation for a country's non-compliance with international law into a direct instrument to help the opposing party. Sanctions designed to strike at Russian nerve centres were designed as instruments of tactical confrontation, putting the objectives to be achieved before respect for the founding principles of Western liberal democratic culture if necessary. Above all, they were solicited and coordinated directly with the Ukrainian government – questioned not only in deciding what aid to receive from the West but also what sanctions to introduce against Moscow.

The innovations in the described framework all relate to Western state donors. However, Russia has contributed to the evolution (or involution, depending on one's point of view) of the political use of aid in 2022, emerging here not from a comparison with Moscow's role in B&H 1992, where it was not a major player, but rather from its efforts in recent years to come back as a global player on the international scene, also thanks to its aid policies. In the two decades prior to the 2022 war (starting from the symbolic date of January 31, 2005, when it paid off its debts to the International Monetary Fund four years before its official expiration), Russia had in fact decided to progressively leave the role of recipient of Western aid in the post-Soviet period to become a re-emerging donor itself. The huge resources used by Moscow for this purpose had consolidated a geopolitical use of aid together with a “catch-all” approach inherited from the Soviet period that was not limited to cooperation and/or humanitarian interventions but extended to any sphere or resource of state competence.

On the one hand, the pandemic crisis fully confirmed this approach, with the geopolitical vaccine Sputnik V offered or distributed on favourable terms as aid to friendly and allied countries, following purely diplomatic rather than economic-commercial logic and channels (Pellicciari 2022). On the other hand, the Ukrainian crisis in 2022 has marked a breaking point with Moscow's aid policies in two respects. First, on a general level, because of Russia's choice to pursue its foreign policy goals with the primary use of direct military action rather than the well-established combination of “Aid+Diplomacy” frequently used in the re-emerging donor period on an international scale, thus opening the key political question of the reasons for Russia's choice of invading Ukraine to shift from the use of the “carrot” (aid) to the “cannon” (old-fashioned military action) in the pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. Second, an even greater breakthrough has been in the reversal of the logic of the use of goods to cover basic needs, which went from being a traditional instrument of aid to a tactical instrument of offence, by selectively controlling and limiting their distribution. The new approach has mainly concerned natural resources and raw materials, of which Russia is the world's leading



exporter. In the name of Soviet-derived “catch-all” aid, they have been granted on advantageous terms to friendly countries and allies, while since 2022, they have been progressively rationed against the Western side. The most emblematic case concerned wheat, which in the past was a commodity par excellence at the centre of humanitarian interventions against hunger and which in 2022 was made difficult to access, making it an object of negotiation and *de facto* transformed into a hybrid weapon for geopolitical confrontation.

### Conclusions

The comparison of the two historical cases makes it possible to better isolate the absolute novelty of certain elements of aid to Ukraine in 2022 and leads to the identification of 6 main related aspects. Each of them is linked to a specific foreign policy issue with direct effects on the geopolitical interests of Western state donors to such an extent as to confirm the relevance of using an institutional-realist approach to understand their political-utilitarian motivations in organising aid in the war scenario in question, thus providing enough elements to support the initial thesis of this article, namely confirming that aid in Ukraine in 2022 has primarily been driven by state donors’ realistic foreign policy strategies, aimed at defending their geopolitical interests.

Table 2: The comparison of the two historical cases

<i>Specificities of aid to Ukraine in 2022</i>	<i>Related Political issue</i>
Speed of reaction of Western State Donors	State Donors moved by foreign policy interest
Leading role of State Donors	Aid as instrument of active Interventionism
Quantity, diversification of Aid	Flows of financial, military, and political Aid
Food as a Weapon, Weapons as legitimate Aid	Self-defence as a primary humanitarian need
Early anticipation of post-war programming	Donor competition on re-construction
Sanctions as Aid	Sanctions designed as a tactical war tool

Source: Author.

### ***1) Speed of reaction of Western State Donors t the beginning of the war***

The responsiveness of Western state donors is the first of the peculiarities that characterise the Ukrainian scenario. Technically, they were able to leverage the experience and logistical networks gained in the uninterrupted and substantial Western aid programmes to Ukraine over the previous decades. Politically, the speed of presence on the ground benefited from an unusual commonality of positions and views of the Western front, united in opposing the Russian invasion. The central factor in spurring the donors was a declared foreign policy objective (keeping Kiev under its influence) in the face of a serious geopolitical risk (Moscow regaining control over Ukraine with military action). Had there been humanitarian motives behind Western aid in 2022, as claimed by state donors, it would not explain why, less than a year earlier, both Brussels and Washington (NATO was not even consulted) disregarded Kiev's requests for help to vaccinate its own population, in the midst of the second wave of the pandemic emergency and in the political impossibility of asking Moscow for vaccines. In other words, Western state donors' lack of response in 2021 to Kiev's request for help would not be attributable to a lack of sensitivity but rather to the fact that the pandemic health emergency in Ukraine did not have the same potential for a geopolitical crisis as the pre-war scenario of 2022.

### ***2) Primacy and leading role of state donors over the non-governmental sector***

State donors' speed of reaction granted them a primacy of action in the war crisis so that their aid interventions were the very first seen in Ukraine in 2022, well before the arrival of traditional assistance organised by the non-governmental sector. As a result, the values and narratives of aid were dictated by state donors, immediately charged with a strong political meaning and reinforcing the link between aid and foreign policy objectives, such as an active opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, a) an attitude to political interventionism prevailed to the detriment of the pacifist neutralism in scenarios where the primacy of action was of non-governmental donors, b) NGOs and their humanitarian and solidarity interventions have had a secondary role and reduced visibility compared to the interventions of state donors to which they have had to adapt politically and logistically.

### ***3) Quantity and diversification of aid mobilised***

The combination of political interventionism and, by definition, the considerable number of resources at the disposal of the public sector led to a very consistent flow of aid that was unusual for a war scenario, particularly in its initial phase. Aid was also introduced in areas of intervention not usual for a conflict, going far beyond the

traditional type of assistance designed for an emergency scenario. Classical humanitarian aid has been surpassed by a number of aid interventions in the economic-financial, military, and political-institutional fields. This has created the ideal conditions for the occurrence of the distorting phenomena associated with aid in war, such as a) a high rate of aid dispersion; b) corruption; c) the overload and overlapping of aid; d) ineffective donor coordination; and e) the impossibility of taking an exact census of ongoing aid interventions in the scenario.

#### *4) Food as a Weapon, Weapons as legitimate Aid (and self-defence as a primary need)*

One of the main aid-related entanglements in the Ukraine crisis concerned food and armaments, as used by Russia and the Western side, respectively. On the one hand, Moscow has turned access to food as a tactical tool of pressure to its advantage; on the other, the European Union has put armaments at the centre of its policies to help Kiev. These are two disruptive developments in the practical application of the concept of aid, which are likely to make history and leave a legacy for the future – in the case of Russia, because it clears the way for the use as an instrument of tactical confrontation, which has been the primary form of humanitarian aid for decades; in the case of the West, by openly providing arms as aid to Ukraine, state donors have formally set at least two new key political principles. In the first place, the full legitimacy of aid was given to the provision of armaments. In other words, it overcame the tendency to consider only good aid (humanitarian or development interventions) as “real aid” – to the advantage of the idea that inter-state aid can be any kind of transfer on favourable terms between a donor and a recipient. Most importantly, since weapons were given as assistance in a time of emergency (the start of a war), the right to self-defence was indirectly recognised as a primary need, and consequently, armaments were placed on the same level of need as humanitarian aid. The main issue lies in sanctioning food as a weapon and armaments as aid on the basis of political necessity of the moment and not as the result of a conceptual evolution of state aid policies. As was the case with the US “preventive intervention” in Iraq in 2003, the risk is that a rhetorical formula imposed politically in a given case may become a precedent that can later on backfire on the very same subjects who introduced it precisely because of its inherent contradictions and weakness of definition.

#### *5) Broad anticipation of post-war planning*

As soon as the conflict began, two initiatives ideally placed in the post-war phase were anticipated in the name of interventionist aid: a) post-war reconstruction; and b) Ukraine’s path to EU membership. In the first, the technical problem was in

planning framework aid in the face of the impossibility of quantifying resources and interventions on needs that were as yet unknown. The political issue was the beginning of positioning state donors aiming to manage the future reconstruction phase, starting a political competition that will only grow over time. Forgetting about repeated negative experiences in the past, they seemed not to care about the almost certain prospect of repeating errors in aid governance, with chronic problems of ineffectiveness and sustainability of results already seen in other scenarios, from Bosnia to Afghanistan via Kosovo. With regard to Ukraine being promoted as an EU candidate country, the technical issue was obtaining status regardless of the completion of a complex process of harmonisation with the EU acquis. The political issue again raised the matter of Brussels' homogeneity in assessing the compliance of candidate countries (as seen with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU) and member countries (as in the case of tensions with the Visegrad group countries) with EU standards, further raising the suspicion of an arbitrary application of procedures that by definition are technical-administrative but subject to contingent geopolitical logic and objectives.

#### *6) Sanctions (to the enemy) as aid (to the friend)*

The evolution of sanctions was one of the most unexpected novelties in the Ukrainian scenario, especially because it concerned a tool that had already undergone profound transformations. In recent decades, they had already gone from being the *“last-step-before-war”* to the *“first-choice-before-war”*, which represents a change of perspective that had made their use very frequent, thus giving rise to *“Sanction Wars”* and making them one of the favourite tools of diplomacy in the post-bipolar world that were easy to set up and conversely difficult to take away, destined to last beyond the contingency that justified their introduction. Their peculiarities include the positioning of sanctions as a complementary and opposite instrument to assistance policies, a true *“anti-help”* – while at the same time being capable of coexisting with them, leading to the frequent paradoxes of *“aid-to-enemies”* (such as in the case of the EU aid to Turkey for the Syrian refugees) and *“sanctions-to-friends”* (as in the Russia-Italian relations until the 2022 war) situations. In the Ukrainian war context, they underwent a further radical change, becoming a tactical-strategic resource in the war, aimed not only at striking one of the warring parties, but directly at benefiting the other (who acts like a recipient) as it helps to prompt, influence, and design them. After sanctions become a form of weapon and weapons are promoted to legitimate aid, it is inevitable that sanctions (to the enemy) are actually aid (to the friend).

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## ПОМОЋ У РАТУ ИЛИ ПОМОЋ РАТУ? СТРАНА ПОМОЋ У РАТУ У УКРАЈИНИ 2022.

*Апстракт:* У првој години украјинског рата, као и раније у пандемији, *помоћ* се потврдила као кључни инструмент спољне политике, пратећи пре свега национални интерес државних донатора. Међутим, у поређењу са другим сличним случајевима – као што је избијање рата у Босни и Херцеговини 1992. године, тачно 30 година пре Украјине – политике државне помоћи у новом сценарију показују низ апсолутних новина као што су: 1) брзина реакције западних државних донатора на почетку рата; 2) примат и водећа улога државних донатора над невладиним сектором; 3) количина и диверсификација мобилисане помоћи; 4) (руска) храна као оружје против (западног) оружја као легитимна помоћ; 5) широка антиципација послератног планирања и 6) санкције (непријатељу) постају помоћ (пријатељу). Сваки од ових аспеката је повезан са специфичним спољнополитичким питањима и интересима државних донатора у толикој мери да потврђује релевантност коришћења институционално-реалистичког приступа за разумевање њихових политичко-утилитарних мотива у организовању помоћи у ратном сценарију о коме је реч. Дакле, ти елементи подржавају тезу овог чланка, да је помоћ Украјини 2022. године првенствено била вођена реалистичним спољнополитичким циљевима државних донатора, усмерених на спровођење њихових геополитичких стратегија.

*Кључне речи:* спољна помоћ; спољна политика; геополитика; Украјина; Босна и Херцеговина; рат; војна помоћ; Русија; Европска унија.

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## THE GREAT POWERS' GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION OVER THE BALKANS – THE INFLUENCE OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

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*Abstract:* The object of this paper is a geopolitical analysis of the great powers' competition in the Balkans. The main reason for the research is the unquestionable impact that the Ukrainian crisis, which is divided in the paper into two phases, has on the Balkans. The authors emphasised that competition between the US and Russia is dominant, while China is geopolitically suppressed. For the US, the main geopolitical framework is Euro-Atlanticism and the policy of NATO enlargement as its most important instrument. Also, it was argued that the EU's approach is completely complementary to NATO's. Regarding Russia, the phases of the neo-Eurasian geopolitical concept and their influence on practical policy were explored. Russia's primary goal is to prevent further NATO expansion, but that policy has experienced several failures in the Balkans. Four scenarios for ending military operations in Ukraine were analysed and their influence on the Balkans assessed. The main conclusion is that the Balkans will continue to be the object of competition between the great powers, and that the extent to which the balance of power between Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism will be possible will depend on the outcome of the current Ukrainian crisis.

*Keywords:* Great powers; US; NATO; EU; Russia; China; Ukraine; geopolitics; Balkans.

### The Balkans as a Geopolitical Knot

The Balkans has always been a precise seismograph of geopolitical processes at the global level, especially active over periods characterised by turbulent relations

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among great powers. Thus, towards the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the pronounced domination of a superpower in the unipolar period of the world order, the “Balkan geopolitical knot” (Stepić 2001) has once again become a confrontational arena for the regional actors with the prominent assistance and support of great powers. As the only remaining superpower, the United States maintained its military presence and influence in the Balkans after the conflict’s military phase ended and entered a period of frozen conflict across the major Balkan regions. However, the processes unravelling on a global level since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have led to, to put it bluntly, the temporary placing of the Balkans on the secondary track of US interests, which hitherto completely dominated both the region and global affairs. The American focus on the “Eurasian Balkans” (Bžezinski 2001), especially following the terrorist attacks in September 2001, and the rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region, left room for other great powers to attempt to establish a balance of power in the Balkans, increasing their presence and efforts in pursuit of their respective interests. In this regard, the Balkans have become a testing ground for the great powers of the modern world: 1) the United States, as the dominant global power and leader of the Western “block”, including the EU; 2) the Russian Federation, which has entered the phase of strengthening traditional influence in the region; and 3) the People’s Republic of China, a new global player, which previously had no significant influence or presence in the region.

The influence of the great powers in the region is multi-layered and implemented by a combination of various instruments. In the geopolitical sense, the Balkans has been and remains an arena where security instruments in the interests of the great powers have been applied. At the same time, however, in order to shape the regional outlook, there are other instruments at play, such as geoeconomic ones, including energy security. The security management of geopolitical interests became increasingly important with the escalation of the great powers’ conflicts in the crisis regions when, as a rule, the balance of power spilled over into the Balkans.

Rendering the perceived geopolitical aspects of the great powers’ competition in the Balkans, it is necessary to note that the key framework in which they take place is set by the conflict of Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism, while China remains in a subordinate position in geopolitical terms. That is why the focus of the paper will be on opposing Euro-Atlanticism and Neo-Eurasianism, keeping China’s presence in the region as secondary.

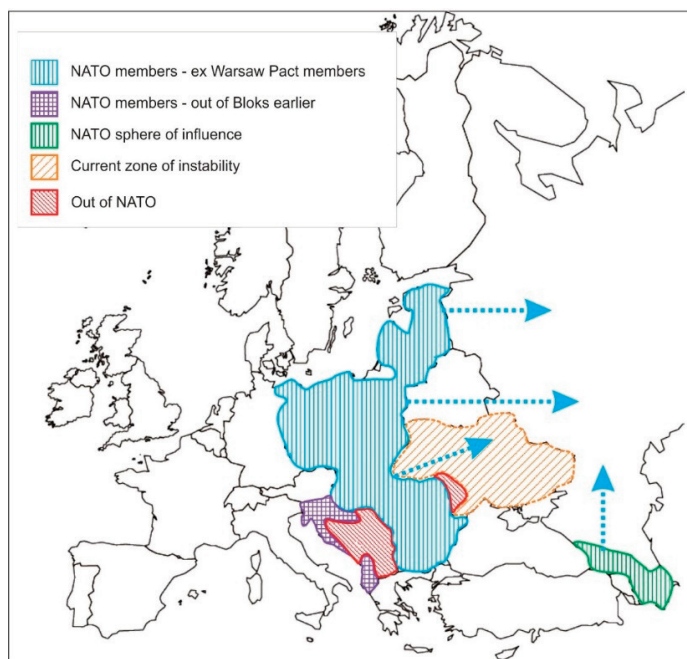
### **The Ukrainian Crisis and the Great Powers’ Geopolitical Competition**

Having in mind the great powers’ competition in the Balkans, the Ukrainian crisis can be divided into two general phases. The first phase can be assigned to the period from late 2013 and early 2014, or the period from Euromaidan events and, more

specifically, from Russian-led referenda in Crimea till mid-February 2015.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of military operations in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, led to the second or “hot phase” of the still ongoing crisis. Between the first and the second phases of the conflict, there was *de facto* a frozen conflict between the Russian-supported forces in Donbas and the Ukrainian forces, marked by numerous breaches of the ceasefire but without significant changes in terms of territorial control.

The basic geopolitical aspect of the Ukrainian crisis, especially since the beginning of the second phase of the crisis, is certainly the outstanding level of intensification of the conflict between Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism in the wider European context, with significant reflections in the Balkans. However, it is necessary to note that the basis for the current level of conflict between the West and Russia arose after the shift in the demarcation line between Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism following the victory of the United States in the Cold War (Zarić 2015, 31).

Map 1: Line of demarcation between Euro-Atlanticism and Neoeurasianism after the Cold War



Source: (Zarić 2015, 31).

<sup>3</sup> The key moments to describe the transition from the first phase to a *de facto* frozen conflict in Ukraine were the signing of the Minsk II Protocol on February 12, 2015, and Ukrainian forces' withdrawal on February 18, 2015, after the battle of Debaltseve.

The focus of the conflict between the thalassocratic West and tellurocratic Russia takes place in Eastern Europe and the “sanitary cordon”, i.e. the buffer zone, as key areas for control of Eastern Europe, the Heartland, and the World-Island, in accordance with Mackinder’s three-part slogan (Mackinder 1996, 106). It is in that area that the greatest emphasis was placed on the actions of the United States and its allies, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, immediately after the onset of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis, and especially with the transition to the second phase of the crisis. Mackinder’s buffer zone, as a central place for measuring the strength of Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism, represents a historical constant; despite different names assigned to it in the geopolitical projections of the great powers, in essence, the area referred to was always the same. Thus, the historical perceptions of the significance of Central and (South) Eastern Europe are important both in the theoretic-conceptual and practical geopolitical senses, although named differently, simultaneously remaining “litmus” used to geopolitically confirm the status of a great power with global ambitions. This area represents a zone of the Eurasians’ dilemma towards the west. Brzezinski recognised contact of three out of four grand spaces in it. The same area remained a buffer zone in the post-Cold War era, from Rumsfeld’s New Europe and Dugin’s Great Eastern Europe, to Koen’s Gateway region that could easily be turned into a Shatterbelt. China has also recognised its interest in this area, establishing the “16+China” format (Stepić and Zarić 2016, 456–457).

Thus, a region in which all the great powers seek to confirm such a status emanates an attractive magnetism for their further positioning. As the Balkans is a part of that area, it remains a zone of competition for great powers, especially bearing in mind that, from the Western point of view, the Balkans are an “area of instability” within the buffer zone, as it is not fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures like its other parts. Thus, an area that is not integrated into anyone’s sphere of interest opens the door of opportunity for the great powers to act actively in it, achieve their own and prevent the realisation of rival interests. In this sense, the United States, as the leader of the West, and Russia are geopolitically competing in the Balkans, with one of the key instruments being NATO enlargement or its prevention. When it comes to China, as another great power of the modern age, it demonstrates no direct geopolitical interest in the Balkans, which is no less than a region of the wider Chinese geopolitical global performance, predominantly within the Belt and Road Initiative.

Considering the position and importance of the Balkans in such a manner, the impact of the Ukrainian crisis, both direct and indirect, on the entire region is inevitable. Thus, after focusing on other regions, the beginning of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis has ushered in an intensification of the US and Russian interest in the Balkans. The best indicator of the direct impact of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis on the Balkans may be the assessment of the US Secretary of

State at the time, John Kerry, that Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro are in the “line of fire”, along with Georgia, Moldova, and Transnistria. Kerry made this assessment when talking about Russia’s growing influence in the Balkans in front of the US Senate Foreign Policy Committee members (B92 2015). Simultaneously, over the period of a frozen conflict between the two sides and preceding the intensification of the Ukrainian crisis, China has seized the moment in an attempt to position itself as well as possible in the same area.

However, the onset of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis placed the geopolitical interests in the focus of both the American and the Russian sides, which will be discussed in more detail later. As a consequence of the geopolitical aspect of a clash between the great powers across a wider European framework, including the Balkans, China became *de facto* suppressed. What followed was, to a certain degree, a case of the spatial shrinking of its core instrument from the “17+1” format to “16+1” when Lithuania left in 2021.

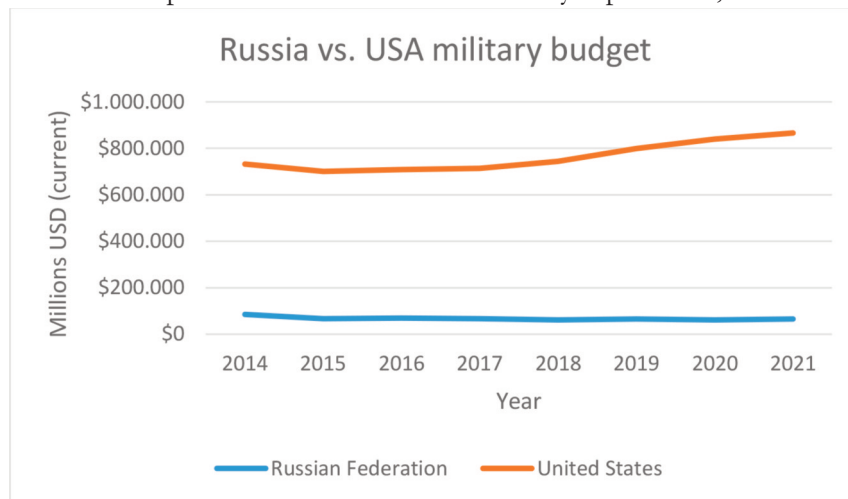
When the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis started, geopolitical instruments and interests were positioned at the forefront of Euro-Atlanticism and Eurasianism. The key feature following the onset of the second phase of the crisis, in the context of the Balkans, is that the intentions of both the United States and Russia to see the completion of their respective spheres of influence have become more intense, with less room to maintain a balanced relationship with the great powers. An additional characteristic is that, indirectly, there are indications that, regardless of the formal denial of the possibility of changing borders and violating territorial integrity and sovereignty, these options have been inherent in international politics. This is further reinforced by what the former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said at the World Economic Forum in Davos in May 2022. In addition to stating that the conflict in Ukraine could permanently reshape the global order, he also pointed out that Ukraine should cede part of its territories to Russia in order to reach an agreement and end the current military conflict (Kissinger 2022).

### **The Balkans’ Magnetism for Great Powers**

As already mentioned, there are three great powers involved in the competition over the Balkans: 1) the US, as the leader of the political West; 2) the Russian Federation, as a traditional player in the region; and 3) the People’s Republic of China, a new player both globally and regionally. Each of the above-mentioned great powers has its own interest in the Balkans and is trying to impose themselves in almost zero-sum game competition with the other(s), simultaneously putting the region in a wider global geopolitical context. However, from a geopolitical standpoint, they have a distinct level of involvement in the Balkans, with China’s presence in that context in the region already highlighted. This is why the US/NATO and Russian involvement in the region will be highlighted.

Although the US/NATO and Russia are involved in the region, there are several facts important to the Balkans that must be noted. Firstly, the level of possibilities for engaging in the Balkans for the two sides is asymmetrical. Asymmetry is visible when it comes to the military budgets of both the US and Russia, with the US military spending more than 12 times greater than Russia's (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Comparison of Russian and US military expenditure, 2014–2021.



Source: SIPRI 2022.

However, although asymmetry in military expenditure is undeniable in the US's favour, the distribution of US military funds across the Balkans on one hand, and Russian military cooperation on the other, shows precisely where the geopolitical focus is directed in the region, as we will analyse later on.

### *NATO Enlargement as the main US Security Instrument in the Region*

The United States pursues a geopolitical perspective in the Balkans primarily through regional security arrangements, in accordance with the postulates of power projection set by Nicholas Spykman during World War II (Vuković 2007) and by means of the victory achieved in the Cold War. Accordingly, the key factor for the realisation of the interests of the US, as the leader of the West, is NATO, and the secondary aspect of the same complex is implemented by engaging the EU. In that sense, it is necessary to point out several elements that mostly connect this framework of the complementary action between NATO and the EU, and we will start with the EU, which, as Brzezinski pointed out, is an element of the American Western Eurasian bridgehead.



Links between the EU and NATO are powerful, not solely due to the fact that there is strong coordination and cooperation between the two organisations, including joint declarations and now regular progress reports<sup>4</sup>, but mostly because the majority of the EU member states are also NATO member states.<sup>5</sup> Bearing in mind that Finland and Sweden submitted applications to join NATO, justifying their decisions by the emerging Russian-Ukrainian conflict, current trends show that the ratio between EU member states, which are not at the same time NATO member states, is about to change in favour of the Alliance (NATO 2022a).

In the most important document adopted by the current European Commission (2019–2024) in the area of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), named “Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security” in several places, including the Introduction of the document, it is clearly stated that “a stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members” (CEU 2022, 5). Clearly, the main point of such a position is that NATO is a leading organisation in the area of defence, which is also a product of the escalation (the second phase) of the Ukrainian crisis as of February 24, 2022.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the EU adopted the abovementioned document in March 2022,<sup>7</sup> after the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis began and caused severe reactions jointly from the US and the EU to Russian military actions, demonstrates a close connection between the Ukrainian crisis and the great powers’ competition in the wider European zone.

A part of the EU Strategic Compass directly linked with the Balkans is entitled “Our strategic environment”. It emphasises that the Balkans is labelled as the first layer of the EU’s strategic environment. However, it is still not stable and secure from the EU perspective, and it is exposed to foreign interference.<sup>8</sup> A focus in the

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<sup>4</sup> Between June 2017 and June 3, 2021, there were six progress reports on NATO-EU cooperation published in total: 1) the first progress report on June 19, 2017; 2) the second report on December 5, 2017; 3) the third report on June 8, 2018; 4) the fourth report on June 17, 2019; 5) the fifth report on June 16, 2020; and 6) the sixth on June 3, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Currently, 21 out of 27 EU member states are also NATO member states.

<sup>6</sup> Also, a statement by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, indicates that the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis led toward degrading the EU’s strategic autonomy, at least from the Russian perspective. Minister Lavrov emphasised that since it has come to power, the new German government has lost the last signs of independence and that France is the only one that advocates the EU’s strategic autonomy (Teslova 2022).

<sup>7</sup> The document was prepared before the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis, with an obvious influence from the first phase of the crisis. However, the emerging of the second phase led to several reviews and changes of the Compass, which, at the end, has its final content.

EU document was put on Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and the progress of the EU-led Pristina-Belgrade dialogue (CEU 2022).

When it comes to the key zone of its strategic environment in the Balkans affected by the Russian Armed Forces operation in Ukraine – Bosnia and Herzegovina – the EU not only issued a political statement after adopting the Strategic Compass, but it also takes tangible action. The present EU Commission's most key CSDP paper clearly targets Bosnia and Herzegovina as a probable and potential “spill over” location for “deterioration of the European security situation”. Just after the escalation in Ukraine, the EUFOR almost doubled its troops in Bosnia and Herzegovina by engaging almost 500 additional troops from Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia (Shanon 2022).

Besides Bosnia and Herzegovina, as mentioned in the Strategic Compass, the significance of the Kosovo and Metohija issue is also emphasised in the Western geopolitical approach to the Balkans. From a political perspective, also after the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis emerged in late February 2022, the EU has reinforced the EULEX mission with the additional 92 officers from its member states (EULEX 2022). This can be seen as the second pillar of the EU's attempts to achieve the proclaimed goal of stabilisation of its own strategic environment.

From the geopolitical perspective, it can be concluded that these EU decisions are being driven by two factors: 1) a perception of the other great power's (Russian) influence in the Balkans; and 2) the complementarity of the EU CSDP with NATO troops' deployment on the Eastern flank caused by the escalation in Ukraine. Those two factors combined demonstrate that the most important strategic vector of interest is pointed towards the East/Russia, with a perception that no instability can be allowed behind the “main front” (in the Balkans).

When it comes to NATO, it remains the main instrument for achieving Euro-Atlanticism goals in the region. A process of NATO enlargement in the Balkans is directly aimed towards what western perception is – weakening Russia's influence in the region. Analysing details of the prospect of NATO enlargement policy, two main flanks can be highlighted: 1) the Balkans and 2) the Nordic area. In line with that, it was observed when the Ukrainian crisis started that “in terms of implementation, pursuing a geopolitical enlargement policy means reprioritizing NATO's enlargement principles. Candidate countries would be evaluated on how their military, political, and economic assets add to or detract from alliance capabilities, as well as on the impact of their admission on the overall security of the alliance *vis-à-vis* Russia” (Wolff 2015, 1114).

As the sole unstable area of Mackinder's buffer zone, the primary US/NATO goal is to integrate the Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic framework. After a brief pause

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<sup>8</sup> Although not explicitly mentioned, it is obvious from numerous political statements and documents in the EU that this formulation is pointed mainly toward Russia and partly toward China.

in its enlargement, a new period of vigorous NATO active open-door policy began shortly after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. In the Balkans, it was evident that following a stalemate with the joining of Albania and Croatia in 2009, a new impulse for enlargement was marked by the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis.

Perceiving the Balkans as the black hole in NATO's southern theatre, Wolff argues that stalled NATO enlargement and previous EU and NATO investments in reforming the Balkans are elements that do not allow the West to let Russia pull the region away (Wolff 2015, 1114–1115). It can be concluded that, as a consequence of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis, Montenegro (2017) and the Republic of North Macedonia (2020) became full NATO members.

A proper indicator for this is the assessment of the significance of Montenegro's joining NATO. Although Montenegro is a relatively small country lacking comparatively (globally/regionally) significant military capabilities, its joining NATO has a clear geopolitical background. Comprised in a relatively simple assessment after that phase of Alliance enlargement, it was pointed out that the "Adriatic is [now] effectively a NATO lake" (Young 2019, 31). Such a geopolitical point of view also shows a direct Euro-Atlantism approach to the Balkans in a Heartland-Rimland concept versus Russian Eurasianism.

Following Montenegro's accession to NATO, the enlargement process in the Balkans continued with the Republic of North Macedonia in 2020. However, directly preceding NATO's membership, a major dispute over its name was resolved with Greece by means of the Prespa Agreement. The key prerequisite for joining NATO was adopting the Prespa Agreement using a referendum held on September 30, 2018. However, there were several problems as regards the referendum: it failed to reach the constitutional census of 50% +1 and it was never ratified in accordance with the law, while its entering into force upon publication in the Official Gazette was with only one signature out of the two required (Vankovska 2020, 356). Despite that, a higher geopolitical interest led the West to accept the results of the referendum and to start the formal procedure of the Republic of North Macedonia's joining NATO.

The second phase of the Ukrainian crisis gave an impetus to the enlargement of NATO towards the Nordic flank, including both Finland and Sweden initiating the process in May 2022 (NATO 2022a). Indirectly, the same elements have also made an impact on the Balkans, especially related to Bosnia and Herzegovina, bearing in mind several key statements of both NATO and B&H representatives.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The same remark can also be found on the official NATO website, which is dedicated to NATO-Bosnia and Herzegovina cooperation, where it is emphasized that "in light of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO is increasing its support for partners at risk from Russian threats and interference, including Bosnia and Herzegovina" (NATO 2022c).

However, the background of Bosnia and Herzegovina's path towards NATO has several keystones, marked by internal differences with respect to full-fledged NATO membership. The biggest one lasted almost 10 years (2009–2019), between the first showing interest in the Membership Action Plan (MAP) and further path towards Alliance, expressed by Bosniak politicians<sup>10</sup> in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and submitting "Reforms Program" to NATO in December 2019.<sup>11</sup> From the Alliance side, the most significant element is the fact that in December 2018, NATO member states' foreign ministers decided that NATO was ready to accept the submission of Bosnia and Herzegovina's first ANP under the MAP.<sup>12</sup> Also, as of early 2020, it was published on its official website that Bosnia and Herzegovina was participating in the MAP (NATO 2022b).

Additionally, statements made by highly appointed representatives of both Russia and NATO presented opposite opinions on the prospect of Bosnia and Herzegovina's NATO accession. In that context, the Russian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Igor Kalabuhov, reiterated on several occasions, following the beginning of the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis, that there was no consensus in B&H regarding NATO membership.<sup>13</sup> He added that this was an issue which would be difficult to overcome and that every decision in that direction was a B&H internal issue. However, Russia would keep the right to react in the case of the prospective accession of any country, including B&H to NATO (*Al Jazeera* 2022). On the other hand, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, after meeting with the Chairmen of B&H Presidency Šefik Dželeferović in May 2022, stressed that the Alliance strongly supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty and territorial integrity and "remains committed to its Euro-Atlantic aspirations..." (NATO 2022d).

When it comes to the NATO-B&H-Russia triangle, it can be stated that there are two major difficulties. First, the Ukrainian crisis was the catalyst for NATO's

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<sup>10</sup> The Minister of Defence, Selmo Cikotić, reiterated a desire to join NATO in January 2009, which was confirmed by the Bosniak member of the Presidency, Haris Silajdžić, in October 2009, including the announcement of the official MAP application.

<sup>11</sup> The Reforms Program has dual interpretation. On the one hand, the Republic of Srpska representatives and institutions are stating that the document is not the Annual National Plan (ANP), but rather a document promulgating improvement of cooperation with NATO and not implying NATO membership, as stated in the document itself. On the other hand, NATO representatives and Bosniak and Croat politicians are stressing that the Reforms Program is actually an ANP, a keystone in the activation of the MAP process.

<sup>12</sup> This step was taken despite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina did not fulfil any of the conditions set by NATO in 2010. Also, the broader perspective of the decision is that it was made in the aftermath of general elections held in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2018, with several serious obstacles in the formation of the Council of Ministers negotiation process.

<sup>13</sup> At this point, it is crucial to understand that the Russian position is rooted in the Republic of Srpska National Assembly resolution on military neutrality, adopted in 2017 (Rezolucija NS 2017).

increased involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to the dynamics of NATO-B&H ties. However, the integration of the “black hole in the southern theatre” was done gradually, starting from easier cases (Montenegro, North Macedonia) and moving towards more complex ones (B&H). Second, the procedures are not so relevant when geopolitical reasons are imperative. They are put aside when perceived in a wider geopolitical context.

Aside from that, the US approach to a region supports the overall processes of NATO enlargement and is focused on increasing interoperability and strengthening ties with regional Armed Forces. One of the main indicators of the US approach is how funds from Foreign Military Sales (FMS) are distributed (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of US FMS funds in the Balkans and Ukraine, 2016–2021.

Country	EY 1950-2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	total 2016-2021
Albania	\$87,867,033	\$994,908	\$5,589,703	\$5,330,857	\$2,918,259	\$42,284,081	\$8,760,201	\$65,878,009
B&H	\$88,522,335	\$400,182	\$3,536,189	\$6,004,842	\$429,880	\$40,831,644	\$255,489	\$51,458,226
Croatia	\$38,349,621	\$31,671,492	\$7,678,053	\$6,131,175	\$3,425,044	\$85,068,480	-\$419,212	\$133,555,032
Montenegro	\$108,741,684	\$1,279,992	\$674,415	\$2,365,794	\$1,328,646	\$38,501,006	\$13,623,451	\$57,773,304
North Macedonia	\$5,502,082	\$265,713	\$769,363	\$924,549	\$11,012,940	\$21,085,360	\$84,691,923	\$118,749,848
Serbia	\$11,037,998	\$0	\$0	\$15	\$1,591,510	\$4,116,118	-\$20,972	\$5,686,671
Kosovo and Metohija	\$12,557,346	\$9,132,845	\$148,420	\$0	\$2,707,541	\$11,115,838	\$22,425,205	\$45,529,849
Ukraine	\$179,208,737	\$226,587,316	\$207,721,548	\$250,781,852	\$272,465,442	\$510,598,973	\$333,050,125	\$1,801,205,256

Source: DSCA 2020; DSCA 2021.

Analysing the FMS funds data,<sup>14</sup> it is clear that the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis led to a significant increase of US military support to Kyiv, in addition to other funds used by the US to support Ukraine, especially since the beginning of the second phase of the crisis. However, a distribution of funds in the Balkans at the same time shows that the biggest beneficiaries of the US military support initiatives were new NATO members, North Macedonia and Montenegro. Overall support for B&H significantly increased as well in the same period, reflecting the US political approach to that country, which is in conjunction with B&H-NATO relations linked to the MAP/ANP issue. On the other hand, despite being the largest country in the region with the strongest Armed Forces, funds for Serbia were by far the lowest compared to others for FY 2016–2021.

<sup>14</sup> Available funds in FMS should be observed as total, having in mind that some projects can withdraw more funds in one year, but are planned for a longer period of time. However, in total, funds for the period FY 2016–2021 are showing present trends.

Prominent US theorists have also made direct links between the Ukrainian crisis, NATO enlargement, and Russian actions in Ukraine. Although not among the US mainstream authors, John Mearsheimer's position on this issue is important to note. During the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis, Mearsheimer stated that NATO enlargement was the root cause of the crisis, more specifically, Ukrainian extrication from the Russian sphere of influence and its turning into a "Western stronghold on Russia's border" (Mearsheimer 2014a, 78).<sup>15</sup>

Mearsheimer continued with the same position after the second phase of the crisis emerged in 2022, insisting that if there was no NATO eastward enlargement, there would not be a Ukrainian crisis, also reiterating that the beginning of the crisis was the Bucharest 2008 NATO Summit and the promotion of enlargement towards Ukraine and Georgia (Chotiner 2022), with prompt Russian leadership perception that this posed an existential threat to Russia itself, which gradually led to military actions in Ukraine, with territorial goals of operation pointed towards eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. And although not referring directly to the Balkans, Mearsheimer used historical facts to show that the former Yugoslavia, along with Albania, was not a part of the former USSR, which is now part of Russia's first tier of geopolitical interest (Mearsheimer 2022).

### *Neo-Eurasianism as a Russian Geopolitical Framework in the Balkans*

The core geopolitical framework of Russian action towards the Balkans is contained in a broader neo-Eurasian geopolitical conception. According to Stepic's conclusions, the concept of neo-Eurasianism implies that the ultimate goal is the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world divided into four essentially tellurocratically conceived pan-zones of the meridian direction, within which Big spaces exist. At the same time, such a structure envisages the possibility of connecting Big spaces from different pan-zones. The most significant segment of this geopolitical conception is that Europe would cease to exist as a branch of Euro-Atlanticism and an American bridgehead in western Eurasia, which would inevitably have a direct bearing on the Balkans (Stepic 2013).

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<sup>15</sup> This Mearsheimer article triggered a debate between Michael McFaul, professor and former US ambassador to Russia in Obama's administration (2012–2014), Stephen Sestanovich, professor and also ex-Ambassador-at-Large for the former USSR (1997–2001), and Mearsheimer in *Foreign Affairs*' next issue. McFaul and Sestanovich, as mainstream representatives, denounced Mearsheimer's thesis for the cause of the Ukrainian crisis, labelling Russia as responsible for the emerging crisis and advocating that Russia had a wrong perception of the West's actions. However, in his response, Mearsheimer reiterated his earlier thesis, additionally emphasising that good US-Russia relations were always present when Washington took Moscow's interests into account (McFaul 2014; Sestanovich 2014; Mearsheimer 2014b).



The neo-Eurasian perspective of the new multipolar order was forged in the period of the still present domination of the US in the global framework. Taking this into account, Stepić emphasises the four phases of the neo-Eurasian strategy aimed at the transition from a unipolar to a pan-zonal multipolar world:

1. Introductory phase or statement of global geopolitical reality,
2. Reactive phase or the onset of the Eurasian counter-strategies,
3. Multipolar phase and establishing zonal “pan-areas”, and
4. Large-scale phase or structuring of “zones” (Stepić 2013).

Analysing current processes set in this manner, the main conclusion is that the concept has currently reached a phase between the reactive (second) and multipolar (third) phases, and that the transition to the active phase of Russia’s performance was conditioned and accelerated. At present, there are two main factors that should be taken into account: 1) the situation with the connection of the Western Eurasian bridgehead with the Euro-Atlantic core (US), along with the situation regarding Russian intentions to create axes of friendship; and 2) an active process aimed at pushing the spheres of influence of the pan-Eurasian zone in the part of its Big space Russia-Eurasia, at the expense of the Euro-African pan-zone in the part of the European Big space.

Map 2: Sphere of influence contact zone between Neo-Eurasianism  
and Euro-Atlanticism in Neo-Eurasian geopolitical concept  
– from reactive to multipolar phase



Source: Authors.



When it comes to the weakening of the ties of the bridgehead with the core while strengthening the axes of friendship, perhaps the best indicator of this approach was the continuation of the energy interconnection between Europe, predominantly Germany, and Russia, with a direct bypass of the buffer zone (or Rumsfeld's "new Europe") by means of "Nord Stream 2". The first phase of the Ukrainian crisis generated the need to diversify gas supply routes between Moscow and Berlin. Although the Ukrainian crisis has led to the introduction, in several areas, of US and EU sanctions against Russia over the annexation of Crimea (Janković 2021, 14), the project of connecting Germany and Russia by means of the "Nord Stream 2" gas pipeline has continued at this stage, despite strong political pressure from Washington on Berlin. At the same time, during the Trump administration, relations along the Brussels/Berlin-Washington line were strained, which resulted in stronger votes for achieving strategic autonomy at the EU level, including in the field of defence. Significant improvements in relations between the EU and its member states and the United States since the establishment of the Biden administration have returned Russia's strategic focus to confronting the United States, including destroying the architecture of arms control agreements highly significant for Europe. Thus, in the first 100 days of the Biden administration, the commitment to renewing relations with allies was emphasised on several occasions, and the culmination of that approach was manifested at the Munich Security Conference, when Biden reiterated that NATO has a future, reaffirmed the US commitment to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and stopped the process of reducing the number of American soldiers in Germany (Simić and Živojinović 2021, 201–203). The main conclusion based on the circumstances in which the relations between the great powers are established is that the relatively more favourable process of weakening the core's ties with the European bridgehead has been reversed, contrary to Russia's interests with changes in the United States. Such a disturbance in conception caused a faster transition to an active approach and the third phase of the idea of a multipolar world according to the vision of neo-Eurasianism.

However, it is necessary to note that the immediate preparation for the transition towards achieving the goals defined for the third phase of the neo-Eurasian concept began even prior to the onset of the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis. The culmination of these processes was reflected in the Russian initiative conceived in the proposals for two agreements from December 2021 (Russia-NATO and Russia-US). From the geopolitical perspective, the most significant demand on the part of Russia in both documents was to suspend further NATO expansion, especially emphasising Ukraine among other countries in Article 6 of the draft agreement with the Alliance, and also to limit the deployment of NATO forces along the lines prior to May 27, 1997 (Agreement Russia-NATO 2021, Articles 4 and 6), as well as the application of indivisible security (Treaty US-Russia 2021). The United States and NATO rejected the main Russian proposals, with special emphasis on

maintaining an active “NATO open door policy”, which is certainly one of the most important segments of the Euro-Atlantic strategy after the Cold War (Aza and Gonzalez 2022).

The overall circumstances of the relationship between neo-Eurasianism and Euro-Atlanticism had significant projections in the Balkans. When it comes to Russia’s position, an important feature is that in the neo-Eurasian concept, Russia has not fully defined its aspirations towards the Balkans, except for the Black Sea states, which it still sees as a part of its sphere of interest, regardless of their NATO and EU membership. This can be seen in geopolitical projections of the phase development of the neo-Eurasian conception, where it is correctly noted that the line separating the spheres of interest of neo-Eurasianism and Euro-Atlanticism encompasses the entire country of Ukraine, breaks out almost on the eastern shores of the Black Sea, and includes Turkey. Therefore, Russia stated that the Balkans were in the depths of the opponent’s zone. It is crucial to see that such a situation has violated even the easternmost border between the two opposing sides in the concept of neo-Eurasianism (strategic narrowing on the Odessa-Narva line), which was considered the minimum protection of Russian interests and was not considered part of the contested zone in neo-Eurasian concepts.

However, the functional third phase of the neo-Eurasian concept implies demarcation with Euro-Atlanticism along the lines that include the route from the Baltic to the Aegean Sea and classifies Belarus, Ukraine as a whole, Romania, and Bulgaria as a Russia-Eurasia Big space. By comparing the delineation of neo-Eurasianism and Euro-Atlanticism presented in this way, despite the fact that it was made approximately, it can be concluded that for Russia, when it comes to the Balkans, Romania and Bulgaria’s joining NATO was a case of crossing the “Rubicon”, and that these two countries belong to its primary zone of interest. However, it is important to note that, no matter how rough this spatial representation of the neo-Eurasian concept is, it places the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Srpska, and other Balkan states in the European Big space of the Euro-African pan-zone. Adhering to such a projection, for Russia, most of the Balkans is territory “behind the *Limes*”.

The beginning of the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis also marked Russia’s launch of a process that would lead to shifting the borders of spheres of influence within Euro-Atlanticism in accordance with the stated situation. The Russian intention to control Ukraine is inherent and a necessity to achieve the minimum goals determined by the proposals of the two agreements towards the US and NATO in December 2021. However, regardless of the outcome of the second phase of the Ukrainian crisis, the further intentions and visions of Moscow with respect to the Balkans remain a big open question.

The strategic sphere of Russian action towards the Balkans is outlined in the key document defining the foreign policy – the Concept of the Foreign Policy of

the Russian Federation, a document that is periodically published. Thus, the shifting of policy towards the Balkans is evident from the most recent concepts, those published in 2013 and 2016. Namely, despite the fact that the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation from 2013 in Article 66 presents a brief guideline related to the Balkans, this approach was not retained in the 2016 Concept. In 2013, immediately prior to the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis, while the country was *de facto* considered part of (neo) Euroasia, the Concept stated:

“Russia aims to develop comprehensive, pragmatic, and equitable cooperation with Southeast European countries. The Balkan region is of great strategic importance to Russia, including its role as a major transportation and infrastructure hub used for supplying gas and oil to European countries” (FPC 2013).

The Russian foreign policy concept from 2016 makes no explicit reference to the Balkans. However, Article 69 of the document may be interpreted as indirectly related to the Balkans, the Republic of Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are not NATO members.<sup>16</sup> It states:

“Russia respects the choice of European States that are not members of any military alliances. These States are making a genuine contribution to ensuring stability and security in Europe. Russia is ready to engage in constructive multi-faceted cooperation with them” (The Embassy 2016).

Two basic elements can be noticed when comparing the above-mentioned attitudes in Russian foreign policy conceptions in the context of their geopolitical approach to the Balkans and relations with other great powers. The first element is closely related to energetics, especially bearing in mind that the energetics factor is the basic instrument of Russia’s geopolitical approach to Europe as a whole, especially to Germany, which is perceived as the key country in the neo-Eurasian concept of future world division. Specifically, the “South Stream” gas pipeline was still a possibility with the concept from 2013, but it was clear as early as 2016, with the update of the document, that the project had been cancelled and that there was no tangible possibility that the situation could not be reversed in the short term. As a result, Russia’s approach not just to the Balkans but also to Europe is altered from geoeconomics to geopolitics.

Along these lines, the second element can be regarded. It is manifested by the fact that the beginning of the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 inevitably led to a changed definition of priorities in Russian foreign policy but also a geopolitical worldview, and Ukraine, once regarded as the “default”, became a priority for Moscow. Despite the initial apparent perception that the consequence

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<sup>16</sup> When the document was adopted in 2016, the process of Montenegro’s accession to the Alliance was underway, which inevitably led to further antagonism between Podgorica and Moscow in the period immediately before and after the act of gaining full membership of Montenegro in NATO.

of this change is that the Balkans has been hierarchically degraded in that direction, the Ukrainian crisis has led to an increase in Russian interest and action in the Balkans. The increase of Russian interest in the Balkans can also be seen in Article 69 of the 2016 Concept, when the focus is placed on European countries which are not members of any military alliance, in essence NATO, and Russia is ready to cooperate with them in multiple dimensions (The Embassy 2016, Article 69).

In practice, the focus has been placed on the military aspects of cooperation with countries that are not NATO members, primarily with the Republic of Serbia, where, as part of military-technical cooperation in 2021 alone, Russia delivered tanks and armoured vehicles worth almost 75 million euros (Janković 2021, 15), intensifying the number of military exercises at the same time. Ponomareva is on the same line, analysing the position of Serbia in the Sino-EU/NATO-Russia triangle and putting Russia-Serbia military-technical cooperation in the context of the two countries' Declaration on Strategic Partnership, stating:

“Military-technical cooperation is a special area of strategic partnership, which draws the EU's and NATO's heightened attention. Indeed, Russia is the largest military-technical donor of the Serbian army. The Armed Forces of Serbia have obtained free of charge six MiG-29s, 30 BRDM-2MS armoured reconnaissance and patrol vehicles, and 30 T-72MS tanks. Also, Serbia enjoys significant discounts on Russian weapons and military equipment, and other benefits” (Ponomareva 2020, 172).

It is clear that Russia focused its actions in the Balkans on non-NATO or aspirant countries, attempting to strengthen military ties as a means of preventing further NATO enlargement to the region. Simultaneously, Russia is emphasising that “it should be recognised that the strategic partnership *en Russe*, unlike agreements with the EU and NATO, does not place Belgrade in an institutionally subordinate position” (Ponomareva 2020, 172).

At the same time, this is the prism through which the Russian position is outlined in relation to the aspirants for membership in the Alliance. Russia has persisted in opposing the accession of Montenegro to NATO, including the assessment of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) that it is a process of artificially drawing Montenegro into the Alliance. However, although it has made numerous statements to oppose the Alliance's enlargement to Montenegro, Russia has not taken concrete and effective steps to stop the process.<sup>17</sup> The full NATO

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that in the Western discourse, Russia is accused of being the party that inspired, financed, and supported the alleged coup in Montenegro, with the aim of disrupting the election process and election results in that country in October 2016. Russia's alleged reason for such actions was that Montenegro was joining in the EU sanctions against Russia and its intention to join NATO (Kondratenko 2018, 94). Although such allegations regarding Russia organising the coup are widespread across western discourse, it is disputable, to say the least, that Russia remained opposed to Montenegro's joining the Alliance.

membership of Montenegro has additionally reduced the geopolitical manoeuvring space of Russia in the Balkans, and the politics of preventing the Alliance from expanding further has suffered yet another debacle.

The next step was the process of the Republic of North Macedonia joining the Alliance. On that occasion also, Russia's policy of preventing further NATO expansion has failed. Russia strongly opposed the interpretation of the results of the referendum held on September 30, 2018, in Macedonia regarding the Prespa Agreement. Thus, the Russian MFA emphasised the low turnout of only 36.8%, which was interpreted as a political position contrary to NATO membership, stating:

“Despite the fact that two thirds of Macedonia's population did not vote in favour of the Prespa Agreement, the results of the vote were instantly hailed by the EU and NATO leaders and in Washington as well. The desire to ensure and speed up Skopje's accession to NATO despite the will of the people of Macedonia is evident” (Russian MFA 2018).

As it can be seen, an important position for the realisation of Russia's geopolitical interests, primarily in the context of preventing NATO enlargement, is occupied by B&H and the Republic of Serbia as the only countries that are not members of the Alliance. While Serbia is firmly in the position of military neutrality in accordance with the 2007 decisions of the National Assembly (Rezolucija NS RS 2007, Article 6), the position of B&H towards NATO remains disputable for two reasons: 1) the absence of consensus among the constitutive nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards the accession to the Alliance; and 2) the position of NATO that handing in the “Reform program” of B&H in 2019 launched the MAP, as explained earlier. However, Russian reaction regarding B&H joining NATO is significantly more flexible than in the case of other countries in the region, primarily due to the fact that the Republic of Srpska adopted a resolution declaring military neutrality in 2017 (Rezolucija NS 2017), whereby the leadership of the Republic of Srpska is decidedly against joining NATO.

With all these in mind, Russia's policy of preventing NATO enlargement has failed, so that (only) Serbia and B&H remain outside the Alliance in the Balkans (Janković 2021, 15), while the entire remaining area, indirectly (Kosovo and Metohija) or directly, is brought under the full control of Euro-Atlanticism. When it comes to Kosovo and Metohija, it is necessary to note that with the withdrawal of the US/NATO from Afghanistan, the KFOR has become the largest single NATO mission at the moment, which further speaks in favour of the significance assigned to that area and the Balkans.

At the same time, Russia will continue to oppose EU and NATO enlargement in the Balkans in order to keep the region out of Western political and security structures for as long as possible, and will continue to destabilise the region by maintaining frozen conflicts and hybrid actions to oppose the pro-Western

Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the authorities of the Provisional Institutions in Pristina (Jagiello 2021).

### **The Ukrainian Crisis's Scenarios and Possible Influence on Balkans Geopolitics**

The geopolitical significance of the Ukrainian crisis, especially after its second phase started, has a global impact, with major implications for the whole of Europe, including the Balkans. However, military operations in Ukraine are ongoing and the outcome of those operations is still unknown. Nevertheless, we will consider four scenarios according to which the second phase of the conflict could end, which would have a direct impact on the Balkans and the geopolitical destiny of both contested countries (B&H and Serbia). Having in mind that Russia is the main great power involved directly in the Ukrainian crisis, scenarios will be considered with Russia as the key subject. Some possible scenarios are:

- 1) *Russian grand victory* – taking control over whole Ukraine, or as a sub-scenario, Russian control over the Ukrainian territory east from the river Dnipro and on the South majority of Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions, as well as the Odesa region, including territorial contact with Transnistria/Pridnestrovie on the west and with the Danube Delta on the south;
- 2) *Partial Russian victory* – this is a reduced first scenario option, not including the whole Eastern Ukraine, but including Russian control of coastal and eastern parts of Ukraine, area stretching from Kharkiv region (necessarily including Khrakiv city), southern towards Luhansk and Donetsk, the majority of Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia and Kherson regions, as well as the Odesa region, including territorial contact with Transnistria/Pridnestrovie on the west and with the Danube Delta on the South;
- 3) *Russian geopolitical stalemate* – this scenario includes Russian control of territories as assessed on July 1, 2022, which excludes Khrakiv city, but includes Luhansk and Donetsk, as well as the majority of Zaporizhia and Kherson regions,<sup>18</sup> without further Russian advance in Ukraine, and
- 4) *Russian military defeat – Ukrainian military victory*. This scenario includes Russian control over Luhansk and Donetsk, but withdrawal from others part of Ukraine.

In each scenario Crimea is considered as territory under a full Russian control. However, when it comes to scenarios, the probability of realisation of scenarios 2

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<sup>18</sup> The scenario with the mentioned territories is based on the Institute for the Study of War assessments and maps of the Ukrainian conflict updates (ISW 2022).



and 3 is significantly higher compared to scenarios 1 and 4. Nevertheless, any of them could have a significant impact on the Balkans.

In the case of the first and second scenarios, Russian influence over the Balkans will be boosted, as well as in the Black Sea region. With controlling the whole Ukrainian territory, although this scenario looks unlikely, Russia will get an opportunity to use the full-scale capacity of its main instruments in the Balkans, such as providing stable gas supplies, a more visible presence in B&H, and maintaining significant military-technical cooperation, according to Ponomareva's conclusions. The same option will be valid in the first sub-scenario and the second scenario cases, however, with fewer available instruments. Both the first and second scenarios would result in increased confrontation with the US/NATO over the Balkans, and due to available instruments, Russia would be able to prevent the US from rearranging the Balkans according to the main Euro-Atlanticism framework. The Balkans' current geopolitical structure will remain the same, despite the highly likely US/NATO attempt to change it, which includes B&H and Serbia out of Euro-Atlantic institutions and Kosovo and Metohija as frozen conflict. In all the mentioned scenarios, all other Balkan countries, already NATO members, will remain in the US sphere of influence.

The specific difference between the second scenario and the first one is that Russia's influence will be focused to the Black Sea region's countries (Bulgaria, Romania), which is its primary geopolitical goal not just according to the presented Eurasian geopolitical approach but also its practical foreign and security policy, presented in December 2021 agreement proposals to NATO and the US. The geopolitical situation in the Balkans will remain as described, having in mind that the B&H integration process into NATO will continue with an uncertain outcome.

The third scenario would result in a frozen conflict in Ukraine and, most likely, negotiations between Russia on one side and Ukraine on the other, with Western support. Such a situation would produce continuing competition over the Balkans, but in this case with initiative on the US/NATO side and less Russian influence and instruments compared to scenarios 1 and 2. A possible geopolitical result in the Balkans would be further and gradual B&H integration into NATO and increased pressure on Serbia to reduce its connections with Russia. When it comes to B&H, Russia's limited instruments will probably lead towards preventing the extension of the EUFOR mandate, thus imposing legal and technical obstacles for the West to continue with a military presence in that country. From the US perspective, the Russian geopolitical stalemate in Ukraine will provide enough momentum for the US to impose strong pressure in order to find, from the western perspective, positive solutions to the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. North Macedonia and Montenegro, two new NATO members from the Balkans, will also be fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic framework.



The fourth scenario case – Russian military defeat, although unlikely, would lead to Russia's losing, on a long-term basis, its influence in the region. Two key processes could occur if this scenario were to materialize. The first one is completing the US integration of the whole Balkans into a Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO primarily. As a continuation of an already ongoing process, Bosnia and Herzegovina will become NATO members, while the West will push Serbia away from its military neutrality. The second is the further fragmentation of Serbian territories, with the possibility of dissolution of the Republic of Srpska and unitarization of B&H as a single process and an almost certain solution of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue based on Western primary interest – full independence of Kosovo and Metohija.

### **Conclusion**

The Ukrainian crisis, especially its second phase, led to a global and regional intensification of great powers' geopolitical competition, particularly in the European part of Eurasia. The understanding of the cause of the crisis is rooted in completely different perceptions in the West and Russia, and is still provoking debates on this issue, like one in the US, which included Mearsheimer vs. McFoul and Sestanovich. No matter if the cause of the crisis is the US attempt to make Ukraine its bulwark on the Russian border or Russian internal politics, unilateral actions or impulsive decisions of the Russian leadership, the consequences and how the crisis will end will be of the greatest importance for the Balkan countries.

Although there is a narrative of support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine in a majority of political statements, several indicators show that border change in this case cannot be completely excluded. Among main indicators, one can stress the already mentioned Kissinger's opinion or a statement of important Russian representatives, such as the Security Council Secretary's, Nikolai Petrushev, who emphasised that other Ukrainian neighbours like Poland are actively working on the seizure of western parts of Ukraine (*Interfax* 2022). This means that, after the end of the Ukrainian crisis, another rearrangement of the Balkans' borders cannot be completely excluded.

Such a scenario imposed a significant need for smaller countries and other subjects of international relations to closely monitor and assess great powers' positions or their definitions of interests in order to be in a position to create the greatest gain or at least the smallest damage to their own interests.

The crisis itself has had and is still having a direct influence on the Balkans' geopolitics. The region represents the most unstable part of the whole Mackinder's buffer zone, not being fully integrated into any great power's sphere of influence. Also, the last two waves of NATO enlargement towards the Balkans with

Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020), and the ongoing procedure with Finland and Sweden after the June 2022 Madrid Summit decision, are direct effects of the Ukrainian crisis. Russia's policy to prevent NATO enlargement in the Balkans has failed several times. Along with that, it is not completely clear if Russia sees the Balkans as part of its sphere of influence (or Russia-Eurasia Big space). However, military operations in Ukraine are not over, and the outcome will shape Balkan geopolitics in the future.

If any of the scenarios with a positive outcome for Russia (grand or partial victory) come to fruition, Moscow will have enough tools to continue competing with the US over Balkan countries, particularly those outside of NATO. However, it will not lead to reshaping the Balkans' geopolitical landscape but rather to keeping the current geopolitical structures, not easily allowing further NATO enlargement. The breaking point will be B&H, and relations in the US-B&H-Russia triangle will be the main indicator for further developments.

If scenarios with a negative outcome for Russia (geopolitical stalemate or military defeat) prevail, the process of absorption of the whole Balkans into the Euro-Atlantic structure will be quite certain. Current geopolitical structures will highly likely change in that case, with a gradual reduction of Russia's interests and capacity to be an active player in the region.

Whatever the outcome of the Ukrainian crisis, the Balkans will remain primarily an object of geopolitical competition among great powers, and the positions of its countries will be determined by their ability to assess the interests and courses of action of the United States, Russia, and China. Those great powers will continue to compete over the Balkans, but in the foreseeable future, the US will still be the country with the greatest capacity to influence geopolitically in the region.

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## ГЕОПОЛИТИЧКА КОНКУРЕНЦИЈА ВЕЛИКИХ СИЛА НА БАЛКАНУ – УТИЦАЈ УКРАЈИНСКЕ КРИЗЕ

*Апстракт:* Предмет овог рада је геополитичка анализа надметања великих сила на Балкану. Основни разлог за истраживање био је неупитни утицај који је украјинска криза, у раду подељена на два дела, имала на Балкан. Аутори истичу надметање САД и Русије као доминантно, док указују да је Кина потиснута са другом фазом кризе. Сједињеним Државама основни геополитички оквир је евроатлантизам, а као најважнији инструмент деловања САД на Балкану нагашена је политика проширења НАТО. Такође, истакнуто је и да је деловање ЕУ у потпуности комплементарно са НАТО. Поводом Русије, истраживане су фазе неоевроазијског концепта и њихо утицај на практичну политику. Руски примарни циљ јесте спречавање ширења НАТО, али је та политика доживела на Балкану неколико неуспеха. Разматрана су четири сценарија окончања војних операција и њихов утицај на Балкан. Основни закључак рада је да ће Балкан наставити да буде објект надметања великих сила, а да ће од исхода актуелне украјинске кризе зависити у којој ће мери бити могуће успостављање равнотеже сага евроатлантизма и евроазијства.

*Кључне речи:* велике силе; САД; НАТО; ЕУ; Русија; Украјина; геополитика; Балкан.

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## THE GEOPOLITICS OF RENEWABLES AND THE PLACE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

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*Abstract:* The energy transition and moving forward towards renewable energy sources have become one of the top priorities of national agendas in the XXI century. Related to the energy scarcity challenge, combat against climate change and environmental protection, renewables are one of the most exploited themes when it comes to contemporary energy policies. This article should offer insight into the relationship between renewables and geopolitics, i.e., possible geopolitical consequences in the context of the new energy race to gain the status of a leader in the domain of energy transition. Besides, the place of the Western Balkans in this context is also highlighted due to its high renewable energy potential. In doing so, this article employs a literature review and the major issues analysed are: 1) possible geopolitical consequences of the energy transition towards renewables; 2) renewables and their geopolitical importance; and 3) the place and potential of the Western Balkans countries in geopolitical reconfiguration based on the transition towards renewables.

*Keywords:* geopolitics; renewables; energy transition; the Western Balkans.

### Introduction

Although the literature on the geopolitics of renewable energy can be tracked back to the 1970s and 1980s (Vakulchuk et al. 2020; Scholten et al. 2020), the body

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of knowledge on this topic is of a more recent date. This is not surprising when bearing in mind that hydrocarbons and their transportation routes have dominated international energy relations so far. However, with the paradigm and policy shifts towards energy transition, which should bring more sustainable energy options for the environment and people, renewable energy sources (RES) have seen an uprising on the global, regional, and national agendas. Commonly understood as “a game changer for interstate energy relations” (Scholten 2018, 1), renewables are thus seen as the XXI century fuel, i.e., the “Al-Dorado of the XXI century” (EC 2015).

Fossil fuels have traditionally had strong geostrategic and geopolitical determination; coal, oil, and natural gas have long been the subject of geopolitical competition among states and have helped establishing international geopolitical map(s) during history. While coal led to the Industrial Revolution and shaped relations during the XIX century, oil determined the XX century world’s politics and was gradually replaced by natural gas in defining relations among states. However, power politics and states’ interests have included renewables recently as the energy transition took off in the first decades of the XXI century. Therefore, some of the authors compare the technological conversion that will take off in the next decades with the industrial revolution at the end of the XIX century (Criekemans 2018, 40). Considering fossil fuels determined energy relations between countries so far, the main question that arises is how the energy transition towards renewables will shape those relations in the future.

The goal of this paper is to highlight some key renewables geopolitical trends and to position the place of the Western Balkans countries in this context. In doing so, the article is structured as follows: it starts by defining some basic concepts and highlighting the nexus between renewables and geopolitics in order to contextualise the main research inquiry. The further section is dedicated to the place of the Western Balkans in the previously identified context of the interplay between renewables and geopolitics and its energy map and potentials in the domain of energy transition towards renewables. It concludes with the notion that the Western Balkans could benefit from the energy transition and have a prominent place in the context of the new energy race.

### **The Geopolitics and Renewables Nexus: Defining Basic Concepts**

To avoid further terminological ambiguity with “green” and “clean” energy, it should be stated that renewables, according to the International Energy Agency, are “derived from natural processes” and “replenished at a faster rate than they are consumed”, including sources such as “electricity and heat derived from solar, wind, ocean, hydropower, biomass, geothermal resources, and biofuels and hydrogen derived from renewable resources” (UN 2013, 194). Renewable energy is also often called sustainable energy due to its constant and natural replenishment. On the

other hand, green energy often comes from renewables, but with the notion that it excludes any environmental pollution or harmful effects on the environment, such as releasing greenhouse gases (TWI n.d.). In other words, while most green energy sources are renewable, not all renewables are seen as completely green.<sup>2</sup> In addition, clean energy is energy that produces little or no pollution, thus including renewables, but also nuclear energy and the carbon-neutralising impact of technologies (such as carbon capture and storage – CCS) (Collins 2022). Finally, energy transition is considered as a “pathway toward transformation of the global energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon” with 2050 as a crucial deadline (IRENA n.d.). In this context, renewables and energy efficiency measures are seen as a key tool for achieving 90% of the required decarbonisation of the energy sector within the stipulated period (IRENA n.d.; ENEL n.d.). As the energy transition is progressing incessantly, renewables are starting to appear as an obvious critical resource over the upcoming energy trends, both globally and regionally, and as a new strategic factor in the states’ competition. Renewables and their role in the energy transition eventually became accompanying issues of the global energy and climate policies based on the Paris Agreement, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and many other initiatives, as well as part of the public narrative dedicated to combating climate change and decarbonising energy sectors worldwide.

Although a detailed definition of the conceptual development of geopolitics is beyond the scope of this article, some basic understandings of the concept should be underlined. Geopolitics, put simply, refers to the state’s power projection within a specific geographic space (Šekarić 2021). The political environment, determined by specific geographic criteria, thus becomes a defining factor when deliberating (contemporary) international relations.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it could be said that geopolitics refers to specific spatial criteria that generate strategic interests of stakeholders. This key element of classical geopolitics – how to use space in order to increase the power of a state – becomes evident in terms of the specific, uneven geographic distribution of crucial natural resources. Geopolitics and natural resources, undoubtedly, have always been intrinsically connected due to their expressed territoriality. Geopolitics has been considered as an “integral to the drive to secure access to vital global resources” (Sarpong 2021, 1132) – those who have had access to critical resources and/or were abundant with energy sources were those with strong strategic advantages. Starting from the assumption that the operational logic of geopolitical power projection is confrontation (Wigell and Vihma 2016, 605), interstate relations with a geopolitical dimension regarding

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, power generated from biomass or hydropower comes from renewable sources, but the process of its production “creates difficult trade-offs” when it comes to the environmental impact (Shinn 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Cohen (2014) saw geopolitics as the “geography of international relations“.

natural resources are primarily seen as competitive, rivalry, and even conflicting. These behavioural patterns have resulted in competitions over crucial hydrocarbons throughout history and even over space resources and rare earth elements in recent years. For the purpose of this article, geopolitics refers to the geography and state power nexus and deals with interstate relations regarding energy transition towards renewables. In the context of this research, i.e., in specific relation to (renewable) energy, geopolitics has the meaning of “great power competition over access to strategic locations and natural resources” (Overland 2015, 3517). This is certainly the case with the “new energy race” over the materials needed for the construction of renewable technology infrastructure, which is largely determined by competition among states and gaining the status of an “energy transition leader”. Geopolitics in relation to renewables, on the other hand, has the potential to relieve confronting behavioural patterns in favour of states disposing with some forms of RES.<sup>4</sup> In other words, while rare earths needed for renewable tech could be (and are) a subject of those strategic interests, energy from solar, wind, or hydropower, if utilised in an adequate way, could make a state more energy independent and thus improve the producer-transit-consumer ratio characterising international energy relations.<sup>5</sup> This leaves less room for possible “weaponizing” of energy resources that has characterised oil and gas energy relations so far.<sup>6</sup> The question whether RES leads to more or less geopolitical tensions (Scholten 2018, 14) is difficult to answer primarily because the nature of their production and distribution beyond national boundaries and overall functioning of renewable energy systems within international context is still unknown. This is why the body of knowledge on the geopolitics-renewables nexus is still underdeveloped and is gaining more attention lately. Therefore, the next subsection is dedicated to highlighting possible geopolitical implications in the domain of energy transition towards renewable energy sources.

### *Geopolitical Importance of Renewables*

As already mentioned, the literature on renewables is not novel but has come to the fore with the increased dynamics of the energy transition from fossil fuels to zero-carbon energy sectors. By virtue of their geographic, chemical, and technical characteristics and contrary to fossil fuels, renewables are more abundant, decentral-generated and mostly electric-distributed, including rare earth materials in clean tech

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<sup>4</sup> What makes this conclusion possible is the fact that every country disposes of some forms of RES, whether it be solar, wind, hydropower, ocean, or biomass.

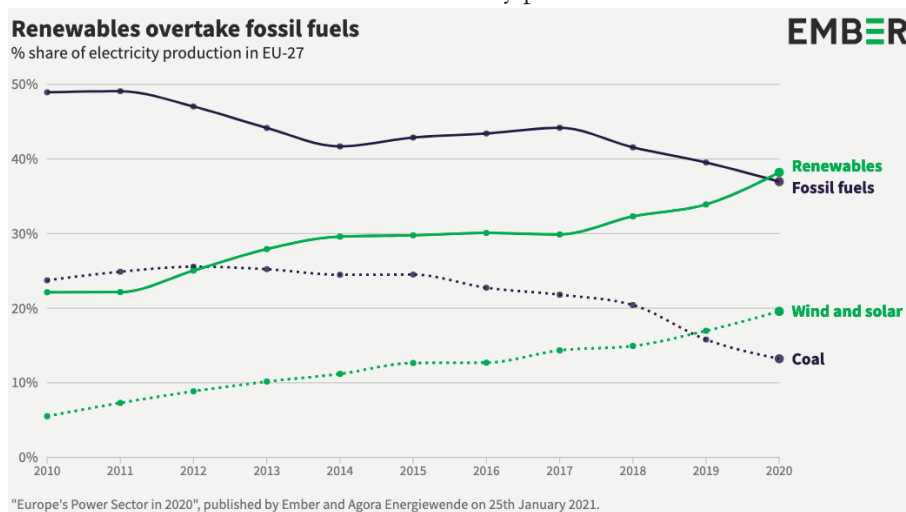
<sup>5</sup> However, this could be just one aspect of the geopolitics of renewables and is more rooted in local and regional levels of analysis when considering international relations.

<sup>6</sup> More on the “weaponizing” of different energy resources could be seen in: Lilliestam and Ellenbeck 2011; Obrenović 2020.

equipment (Scholten 2018, 1), and are more dispersed rather than concentrated in just a few locations like hydrocarbons (Hook and Sanderson 2021). Their characteristics thus could have some implications for states' energy relations when it comes to states' tendencies to use the potentials of RES and challenges posed by the currently undergoing energy transition.

Renewables' geopolitical importance has grown as their presence on the global energy map has grown, whether for reasons of diversification away from hydrocarbons, combating climate change, or stock depletion (Scholten 2018, 3). The share of renewables in global energy consumption is rising – for example, the growth rate per annum in the period 2009–2019 was 13.4% (BP 2021, 55). The EU, one of the greatest energy consumers, records a rising percentage of renewables in electricity production – while “clean” electricity replaced power from coal gradually from 2011 to 2019, the energy crisis and high gas prices resulted in replacing gas-generated electricity with the one gained from renewables (Jones 2021) (Illustration 1). In general, the EU more than doubled the share of its gross final energy consumption from renewable sources – from 9.6% in 2004 to 22.1% in 2020 (Eurostat 2022a). Moreover, energy investments across the globe have also favoured lower-carbon energy resources lately (IRENA 2020).<sup>7</sup> The electricity sector has seen the most recent growth in RES, accounting for roughly one-quarter of global electricity production (IRENA 2019, 16).

Illustration 1: % share of electricity production in the EU-27



Source: Jones 2021.

<sup>7</sup> However, the share of fossil fuels is still expected to cover the biggest part of world energy consumption due to the gap between rising global energy demand and energy transition dynamics.

So far, specific geographical and technical characteristics of fossil fuels (primarily oil and natural gas) have been reflected in trade patterns and energy markets, leading to the politicization and securitization of energy relations between states in a number of cases.<sup>8</sup> The geopolitical map traditionally linked with hydrocarbons that has prevailed so far has witnessed reconfiguration with the growing importance of RES nowadays. In this manner, IRENA's Report from 2019 stated that energy transformation driven by renewables will change international energy relations in years to come (IRENA 2019, 14). This especially comes to the fore when bearing in mind that more than 70% of proved hydrocarbons lie in countries in politically unstable regions such as the Middle East and Central Asia (Goldthau 2016, 13), which, in turn, has several destabilising effects on overall energy relations. The idea of using RES in order to become more energy independent thus enables a possible reduction of the prevailing geopolitical risks that have accompanied production, transportation, and consumption of fossil fuels so far. Due to their abundance, RES are present in every country in some form, which, if utilised in an adequate way, could result in decreased energy imports. Contrary to fossil fuel markets, where just a few well-endowed states dominate with significant amounts of hydrocarbons (Scholten 2018, 19), renewables could result in more competitive markets. A zero-sum energy relations perspective based on hydrocarbon trade patterns could be thus replaced with a room-for-everyone view based on renewable energy sources.<sup>9</sup>

IRENA's Report presented three types of countries which will have the potential to emerge as new renewable energy leaders – the first type refers to exporting electricity or green fuels; the second one is about controlling critical materials used in clean energy (lithium, copper, and cobalt mostly)<sup>10</sup>; and the last one refers to gaining a technological advantage (such as electric vehicle batteries) (IRENA 2019, 39–40). Those shifts impose considerations that a new energy race will result in “a new set of winners and losers” (Hook and Sanderson 2021). For instance, considering the “global South” is naturally richer in solar radiation, the question is whether the energy transition will bring some geopolitical reconfiguration in favour of the global South in this context. Those countries that import a huge percentage of their energy but are abundant with solar, wind, or hydropower will benefit most from the transition. In contrast, countries that rely heavily on fossil fuel exports and are characterised by lower GDP per capita are likely to struggle the most with new

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<sup>8</sup> Oil crises in 1973 and 1979, as well as few gas crises between Russia and the EU in the first two decades of the XXI century, are cited as examples.

<sup>9</sup> However, it should not be neglected that some countries are by nature “better endowed to become efficient renewable energy producers than others” due to better positioning of solar, wind, or biomass stocks (Scholten 2018, 19). This implies qualitatively different (though significantly reduced) differences between energy exporters and importers.

<sup>10</sup> While copper is crucial for electric cables and wind turbines, lithium and cobalt are used in electric vehicle batteries.

energy trends (Hook and Sanderson 2021). In a similar manner, Stegen (2018, 76, 79), relying on (neo)realism and (neo)liberal institutionalism as two predominant theoretical perspectives in International Relations, identified states with “raw renewable energy potential that are able to attain a high degree of energy self-sufficiency and export dominance” as winners in a renewables world. In addition, Sainteny saw three geographical zones<sup>11</sup> as key players in the geopolitics of renewable energy – the EU (with Germany as a core country), the US, and Asia (with China, India, South Korea, and Japan as core states) (Sainteny 2010 according to Crikemans 2018, 52), endeavouring to benefit from the energy transition. This set of possible winners of the energy transition clearly rests on renewable energy potential associated with adequate economic, personnel, technological, and know-how equipment.

Trying to catch the refined geopolitics-renewable nexus, Scholten et al. (2020) identified six clusters of possible geopolitical implications of RES. The first refers to the abundant and dispersed nature of renewables, which allows every country to produce its own energy to some extent and thus become less energy dependent on energy imports. This, in turn, qualitatively changes established energy patterns that have been dominant so far. The second one is in relation to more decentralised options in operating energy from renewables, opening the room for other, non-state and more local stakeholders, with possible impact on state energy policies. The third cluster of possible geopolitical implications highlights increased competition over critical materials used for renewable generation technologies. This is the case with rare earth materials, which are even now witnessing great powers’ competition over their extraction and constructing renewable generation technology. The fourth cluster brings increased electrification of energy systems since electricity from RES is currently leading, among others, thus having significant implications on the established energy transportation modes prevailing so far. Changes in the volume and nature of energy trade make up the fifth cluster of possible geopolitical implications, which, in turn, leads to the question of possible politization and even securitization of those trends. And finally, the sixth one refers to the intensified competition between renewable technologies coming from the West and China and ultimately getting the epithet of industrial leader in the energy transition. As can be seen, while some of those implications stem from the nature of RES, such as their physical, chemical, and technical characteristics, there is no doubt that those specifics could (and are) used by great powers to gain and maintain strategic advantages in the domain of energy transition. This could be primarily seen via competition on the West-China spectrum.

Great powers’ strategies and projects are already competing over renewable generation technologies and employing research of rare earth materials for the

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<sup>11</sup> These zones correspond with the biggest investors in the renewable energy sector as well as with the locations where are concentrated the world’s biggest solar power plants (Wolfe 2021) and wind farms (Renergy 2022).



construction of necessary infrastructure. More specifically, the question that arises is about possible dependency on rare earth materials necessary for renewable generation technologies. While those countries that dispose of rare earths are by nature “winners” of this competition, others interested in renewable technology could develop a new kind of dependency from prior ones. In this context, China could become a top leader in producing “clean technologies” due to the largest concentration of cobalt, lithium, and other rare earths needed for renewable generation tech (Pisilli 2022). The question posed justifiably is whether rare earths are new oil or gas that could possibly be used as a tool of political pressure. These dynamics, in addition, lead to questioning the position of petrostates and “traditional” energy powers during the period of energy transition and posing the question of whether they are going to be “losers” in the new energy race. As expected, those states that have adequate personnel and financial resources will benefit most from the energy transition. By taking the role of a leader in the energy transition, states are expected to impose themselves as energy powers with strong geopolitical advantages.

The EU energy policies contain a strong renewable energy dimension. The European Green Deal puts clean energy transition and renewables at the top of the political agenda(s) with the goal of becoming the world’s first carbon neutral continent by 2050 (EC COM [2019] 640 final). These renewables transition goals are being accelerated in the context of the undergoing conflict in Ukraine, with the goal of reducing energy dependency on Russian hydrocarbons as quickly as possible. The US is also one of the expected “winners” of the new energy race due to the fact that it is strongly investing in the development of renewable technologies – in a seventeen-year period, its investments in clean energy have risen more than 10 times, from 10 billion dollars in 2004 to 105 billion dollars in 2021 (Statista 2022). As already mentioned, China’s dedication to green investments and energy transition puts it at the top of the battle for energy transition leader (Tables 1 and 2). The high concentration of critical materials and overall renewable energy activities makes China a “country in pole position”, with the help of producing more than 70% of solar photovoltaic panels on a global level, half of the world’s electric vehicles, and a third of all wind power (Hook and Sanderson 2021). Furthermore, China dominates critical materials supply chains, which results in economic benefits for this country regardless of which other states invest in the renewable energy sector. On the other hand, current energy powers such as petrostates and natural gas powers will face an urge to not reduce placement of their key energy exporting sources. If oil or gas demand starts to decline, this could result in lower incomes from hydrocarbons for net-exporters and, consequently, political instabilities in exporting regions (Scholten 2018, 19). Thus, it is anticipated that Russia and the OPEC nations won’t be passive spectators in the new energy race. These conflicting interests are also one of the potential implications of the undergoing energy transition.



Table 1: Top 10 countries by electricity generation from solar in 2018

No	Country	TWh
1.	China	178
2.	U.S.	85
3.	Japan	63
4.	Germany	46
5.	India	31
6.	Italy	23
7.	UK	13
8.	Spain	13
9.	France	11
10.	Australia	10

Source: Hook and Sanderson 2021.

Table 2: Top 10 countries by electricity generation from wind in 2018

No	Country	TWh
1.	China	366
2.	U.S.	276
3.	Germany	110
4.	UK	57
5.	India	55
6.	Spain	51
7.	Brazil	48
8.	Canada	32
9.	France	29
10.	Turkey	20

Source: Hook and Sanderson 2021.

However, it will be a one-sided story if we do not mention some of the key disadvantages when it comes to the faster transition towards renewables. Many questions remain unanswered in the energy transition, ranging from the producer-transit-consumer relationship in the context of renewables, to the impact of national-driven energy needs on foreign energy relations, to new potential stakeholders in the form of non-state and more local actors. While fossil fuel markets were dominated by (multi)national energy companies, renewables created space for more local businesses due to their decentralised energy production. Also, the question of renewable technology know-how and investments in the RES sector has become one of the most important. According to some estimations, renewable technology is not ready yet for complete usage – out of 46 technologies, only 6 of them are ready for commercial usage at this moment (Stanojević 2021). This puts the future of RES and the speed of technological innovations into a specific dependency relationship. In other words, not only renewable sources are important when it comes to the energy transition but also renewable energy systems comprising of adequate infrastructure capable for its usage, processing, and storage. Also, the high cost of those development projects makes RES technologies far from their full utilisation. Another implication of the new energy race is related to increased competition for rare earth materials used for renewable generation technology. This competition could result in new harmful environmental effects and controversial projects for an energy generation that should be safe for the environment in its basis.<sup>12</sup> Intermittency of RES is also

<sup>12</sup> For instance, the Republic of Serbia has witnessed several ecological protests during 2021 and 2022 against lithium exploitation and the Rio Tinto Corporation, as well as against the construction of small hydropower plants.

seen as one of the disadvantages of energy transition – unpredictability of weather conditions impacts expected and needed amounts of renewable energy. Finally, the world will not witness the complete end of fossil fuels in recent years – data on fossil fuels' share in global consumption and some expectations are clear about that. In other words, the pattern that will be prevailing in the near future will probably see the coexistence of fossil fuels and renewables or, as Scholten saw, “understanding of the geopolitics of renewables is in essence about how the energy transition affects fossil fuel dominated interstate energy relations” (2018, 11). Nevertheless, considering that RES and energy transition are “more than a mere change in the energy mix” resulting from changes in technologies and infrastructure, markets, and sector regulation (Scholten 2018, 5) and starting from the assumption that all endeavours are dedicated to overcoming the mentioned obstacles, it is highly likely that they will be overcome at some point in the future, which will open the room for a fast transition towards renewables. The truth is that energy transition could take decades (Stegen 2018, 76), but states' declared and operational commitment to renewable energy transition is what will make this energy shift worthwhile in the years ahead.

### **The Place of the Western Balkans in the Energy Transition**

The abovementioned section served to highlight the potential geopolitical implications of the energy transition towards renewable energy sources. While this, as expected, deals with great powers and possible global geopolitical reconfiguration in a new energy context, the question is how more locally oriented states will face those challenges, such as those from the Western Balkans (WB countries).<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this section is to contextualise the energy environment of the Western Balkans in order to understand its energy transition stage as well as to identify the potential for the Western Balkans to profit from the shift to renewable energy sources.

#### ***The Energy Context of the Western Balkans***

The Western Balkans countries' diverse energy needs have resulted in a diverse energy mix. However, some of the common denominators could be underlined. The primary Western Balkan energy sources are derived from coal, natural gas, oil, and renewable energy sources (mostly from wind, solar, and hydropower energy). In most of the Western Balkans countries, the biggest amount of electricity is still produced from coal-fired power plants, which, together with ageing energy

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<sup>13</sup> Although the author, in analytical terms, considers Croatia as part of the Western Balkans (together with Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Albania), it will be omitted from the analysis due to its EU membership and functioning in accordance with the European energy *acquis communautaire*.

infrastructure, makes those states some of the greatest pollutants in Europe (Todorović 2022), thus presenting a threat to fulfilling commitments from the European Green Deal (Morina 2022).<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding, investments in regional coal-fired power plants continue to be made, especially when it comes to the Chinese energy projects in this part of Europe within the BRI mechanism that are strongly opposed by the EU (Zakić and Šekarić 2021).<sup>15</sup>

Setting aside consumption of coal, the Western Balkans countries are largely dependent on Russian oil and gas. According to some data, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia import about 99% of their natural gas from Russia (Stanojević et al. 2020, 29; *Al Jazeera* 2022; Ichord 2022). Their high dependency on energy imports marked them as one of the regions with the most harmful effects of possible disruptions of all supplies from Russia (EC SWD [2014] 330 final/3). What further complicates this situation is the fact that the Western Balkans states lack diversifying options, whether when it comes to energy sources or supplying routes. As the war in Ukraine continues, the Western Balkans face an energy crisis where the need for diversification of energy production and supply routes thus becomes of crucial importance.

When it comes to the other great powers' presence in the Western Balkans in the domain of energy, it is worth considering the fact that the Western Balkans countries exist in an energy environment that is highly determined by their membership in the Energy Community, which obliges them to function in accordance with the European energy *acquis communautaire*. This essentially means that those countries need to transpose the entire EU energy and climate legislation into their own. Besides, the EU is also present in the energy sectors of those states via diverse financial tools in the form of grants and loans coming from EIB, EBRD, and other platforms and programmes (EC [SWD] 2020 223 final).<sup>16</sup> However, it is not unusual that the Western Balkans countries are thorned between European obligations and cheap and pragmatic energy solutions that meet their short-term energy needs. Good illustrations are cases raised against the Western Balkans countries in the domain of breaking such European energy rules.<sup>17</sup> Considering the

<sup>14</sup> For instance, while 22 EU countries emit 992 248 SO<sub>2</sub> t/year and 11 946 PM 2.5 t/year, 5 Western Balkan countries emit 750 893 SO<sub>2</sub> t/year and 20 188 PM 2.5 t/year (WBIF 2019, 5).

<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that China has been simultaneously investing in the renewable energy sectors in the BRI countries lately, contrary to coal-favoured projects, which, in turn, result in (almost) no EU resistance.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, the EU provided €1 billion in grants to energy and transport projects via the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) (WeBalkans 2022), while the new Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans opens room for potentially raising investments in the renewables sector by up to €20 billion (ECS 2021a, 4).

<sup>17</sup> Those cases could be tracked at the Energy Community's official webpage: <https://www.energy-community.org/legal/cases.html>.

strong EU's dedication to energy transition goals (especially in the context of undergoing conflict in Ukraine), it is expected that Western Balkans procrastination in the domain of energy transition will not be tolerated. This is further complicated by some of the common energy challenges in the Western Balkans in the domain of renewable energy, such as significant dependence on oil and gas imports; harmful environmental impact of fossil fuels; underdeveloped renewable energy sector; lack of integration of electricity and gas markets; etc. (Jovanović 2016, 196). Therefore, the abovementioned *state-of-the-art* created a challenging environment for fast energy transition in the region and tore apart the region between the reality of energy dependence and a potential energy hub (Turčalo 2020).

### *The Energy Transition in the Western Balkans*

A faster energy transition towards renewables in the Western Balkans is seen as a good way to achieve energy independence from energy imports (Kešmer 2022). This especially becomes important in the context of the Western Balkans' dependence on Russian oil and gas in terms of the current war in Ukraine and depleting coal reserves (not to mention its harmful environmental impact). Primary worries are connected to slow energy transition processes in the Western Balkans compared to European tendencies to end energy dependency from third parties, which also extends to the countries of the Western Balkans as EU candidate states and members of the Energy Community.

Some of the key advantages of using RES, as highlighted in the literature, are energy diversification, lower energy-import dependency, positive environmental impact, etc. Although RES require significant financial means, they reduce energy risks in a long-term (Jovanović 2016, 3) – if energy is used from domestic renewable sources, it reduces needs for energy imports which, in turn, ensures the sustainability of supply. Additionally, renewables are seen as a significant reducing-energy-poverty category; the social aspect of RES is primarily seen through the positive correlation of increased energy production and greater energy availability, on the one hand, and the improvement of quality of life (Jovanović 2016, 10). The Western Balkans has high renewable energy potential (Đurašković et al. 2021), disposing of significant hydropower, solar and wind resources, and biomass. This is what makes the WB region a zone of interest<sup>18</sup> of the EU in the domain of energy transition, especially in terms of its dedication towards European integration and firmer integration with the WB energy market (Jovanović 2016, 160). For example, the EU established a €339 million investment package to support 7 projects in the clean energy sector, environment, and the climate sector in the WB countries (Spasić 2022).

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<sup>18</sup> Or potential “energy hub” (Turčalo 2020, 6).

The Western Balkans countries are dedicated to developing renewable energy sectors. They adopted medium-term to long-term strategies in order to increase the share of renewables in their overall energy consumption (Energy Strategy RS 2015; Energy Strategy MNE 2014; Energy Strategy BiH 2019; Energy Strategy NMC 2019). However, data from the Energy Community on the Western Balkans' energy transition progress paints a slightly different picture. As for renewable implementation criteria, according to the Energy Community Progress Report, the WB countries are showing positive annual capacity change (Table 3). However, they mainly failed to achieve a certain percentage of energy generated from renewable sources and thus stayed below scheduled 2020 targets (except for Montenegro) (ECS 2021b, 24, 45, 124, 145, 165). For illustration, the share of renewable energy sources in electricity generation in 2010 and 2020 in the WB countries is presented in Table 4.

Table 3: Summary of renewable energy implementation criteria for 2020 for the WB countries

WB country	Implementation status	Description	Annual capacity change	Total capacities of renewable energy (MW)
Albania	55%	Moderately advanced	+ 221 MW	2398
B&H	48%	Moderately advanced	+ 22 MW	2373
Montenegro	69%	Well advanced	+ 21 MW	816
N. Macedonia	57%	Moderately advanced	+ 15 MW	782
Serbia	64%	Well advanced	+ 25 MW	3515

Source: ECS 2021b.

Table 4: Electricity generated from renewable energy sources in the Western Balkans, 2010 and 2020 (% of gross electricity consumption)

WB country	% in 2010	% in 2020
Albania	74.6%	100%
B&H	40.6%	45.5%
Montenegro	45.7%	61.5%
N. Macedonia	15.8%	23.5%
Serbia	28.2%	30.7%

Source: Eurostat 2022b.

On the other hand, the answer to what is slowing down the energy transition in the WB countries cannot be reduced to a single factor. According to some authors, outdated infrastructure, regulatory and market issues, low transparency levels, lack

of appropriate legislation, limited regional market integration, and poor institutional coordination are key obstacles to faster development of RES and increased investment in the renewable energy sector in the Western Balkans countries (Dunjic et al. 2016; Đurašković et al. 2021). In addition, some of the investments in energy sectors across WB countries “are mainly shaped by the preferences of a closed circle of domestic decision-makers and interest groups and, importantly, external signals and pressures” (Četković 2022). This leaves room for deeply rooted corruptive manoeuvres that characterise the Western Balkans’ governments, especially in energy sectors that are highly dominated by the states’ authorities.

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Given the geopolitical perspective that coloured this analysis, some remarks on the WB countries and energy transition should be made in the first place. The energy context of the region and some of the still unresolved political and security issues at the bilateral and multilateral level have shaped it as a challenging environment for energy transition. The mentioned presence of great powers with often conflicting energy interests in this part of the European continent could thus have a spillover effect when it comes to establishing international relations underpinned by renewable energy sources. This raises questions about the possible implications of importing RES technology originating from different suppliers, such as the US, the EU, or China. From a more local perspective, the already mentioned lack of regional electricity integration opens room for possible joint projects in the domain of RES, which, in turn, could ameliorate debased neighbouring relations and improve the export and import capabilities of those countries on a regional level. Undoubtedly, more investments in renewable energy sectors and an adequate legal framework to attract those investments are seen as key tools in a faster energy transition in the Western Balkans countries (Kešmer 2022). Despite identified barriers to faster development of renewable sectors in the WB countries, those countries could benefit from the energy transition in the long run if the process is managed properly. This is primarily seen through reducing import energy dependency, diversifying energy sources and supply routes, fully utilising raw renewable energy potential, improving regional integration in the electricity sector, generally improving renewable energy transportation infrastructure, and extenuating energy relations. Those benefits could enthrone the WB countries as potential “winners” of the new energy race. However, this must be done in accordance with global and regional energy transition goals, which necessitate political will to take necessary actions, among others.

### **Concluding remarks**

Though fossil fuels remain significant energy resources, the world’s dedication to the energy transition towards renewables and their rising share in world energy



consumption should not be neglected in years to come. This becomes especially important in the context of geopolitical competition among states over the label of leader in the new energy race. By virtue of their geographical and technical characteristics, RES and rare materials needed for renewable technology are becoming an object of new energy competition among states as the energy transition takes off in the XXI century, reconfiguring geopolitical maps established by fossil fuel trade patterns so far. Whether they serve as a diversification tool or the main source of dominating the energy mix of a country, renewable energy sources present a new instrument of states' strategic drive.

This article reviewed the geopolitical consequences of the energy transition towards renewables and questioned the position of the Western Balkans in this context. The Western Balkans, traditionally, saw great powers' presence even in the domain of energy in the form of dominantly the EU, Russia, and (more recently) China. This geopolitical picture could be qualitatively changed by the ongoing energy transition, especially when keeping in mind that the region abounds with some key renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower. Despite the good renewables environment, the Western Balkans countries are characterised by some of the obstacles when it comes to the faster energy transition related to weak institutions, ageing infrastructure, lack of appropriate legislation, and limited regional market integration. However, if the Western Balkans countries use their high renewable potential and effectively govern energy transition, they could benefit from many aspects of this process, including increased energy independence, full utilisation of renewable potential, lower energy risks, better positioning in the new energy race, and improved energy relations on both regional and global levels.

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## ГЕОПОЛИТИКА ОБНОВЉИВИХ ИЗВОРА ЕНЕРГИЈЕ И МЕСТО ЗАПАДНОГ БАЛКАНА

*Анстракт:* Енергетска транзиција и прелазак на обновљиве изворе енергије постали су један од главних приоритета националних агенди широм света у ХХИ веку. С обзиром на њихову повезаност са оскудицом енергетских ресурса, борбом против климатских промена и заштитом животне средине, обновљиви извори енергије једна су од најексплоатисанијих тема када је реч о савременим енергетским политикама. Овим чланком пружа се увид у везу између обновљивих извора енергије и геополитике, односно сагледавају се могуће геополитичке последице нове енергетске трке око стицања статуса лидера у домену енергетске транзиције. Осим тога, истакнуто је и место земаља Западног Балкана у овом контексту услед њихових великих потенцијала поводом обновљивих извора енергије. У анализи је коришћен преглед литературе, а главна анализирана питања су: 1) могуће геополитичке последице енергетске транзиције ка обновљивим изворима енергије, 2) геополитички значај обновљивих извора енергије и 3) место и потенцијал земаља Западног Балкана у геополитичкој реконфигурацији заснованој на транзицији ка обновљивим изворима енергије.

*Кључне речи:* геополитика; обновљиви извори енергије; енергетска транзиција; Западни Балкан.

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## THE UKRAINE CRISIS 2022 – AN ALARM FOR THE REFORM OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL?

Jelica GORDANIĆ<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* The 2022 Ukraine crisis pointed out many shortcomings and absurdities of the UN system. Russia's veto has paralyzed the Security Council and disabled the maintenance of international peace and security. Other mechanisms used by the United Nations were not adequate to stop the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The author analyses the Ukraine crisis as an indicator for the reform of the Security Council. Various aspects, possibilities, and initiatives of the Security Council's reform exist. The complex process of the UN Charter's revision and the right of veto of five permanent members are cited as major impediments to the Security Council's reform in this paper. The Ukraine crisis is a new San Francisco moment that will fail due to the lack of political will of the permanent members of the Security Council. The paper concludes that the Security Council should use more realistic solutions in order to empower its capacities and prevent future breaches of international peace and security.

*Keywords:* Russia; Ukraine; the Security Council; reform; veto; United Nations; permanent member; Ukraine crisis.

### Introduction

The third decade of the 2000s changed the world dramatically. The World Health Organisation announced the pandemic of COVID-19 on March 11, 2020.

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The paper presents the findings of a study developed as a part of the research project "Serbia and Challenges in International Relations in 2022", financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, and conducted by the Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrade.



The pandemic caused a serious health crisis as well as many social, political, legal, economic, political, and strategic implications. The whole world saw a light at the end of the tunnel in 2022 when it seemed that the pandemic was declining and everyday life was gradually returning. Dreams and hopes of returning to normal life changed on February 24, 2022, when the conflict between Russia and Ukraine started. The conflict in the heart of Europe hit the world (un)expectedly. The Ukraine crisis caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II, with more than 6.8 million Ukrainian refugees recorded across Europe (UNHCR 2022).

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is not just a conflict between two countries or some kind of regional conflict. It is a conflict that has the potential to affect the whole world. Russia and Ukraine provide 30% of the world's wheat and barley, one-fifth of its maize, and over half of its sunflower oil. The consequences of conflict might affect 1.7 billion people, which is over one-fifth of humanity (*UN News* 2022a). The conflict has the potential to cause multiple complex strategic implications. Ben-Gad (2022, 390) considers it a conflict of "Russia vs Ukraine vs Europe vs US vs China". In the West, the conflict in Ukraine has been characterised as an "aggression", "invasion", or "war". For Russia, the conflict is a "special military operation" with the aim of "protecting the people who have for eight years been exposed to humiliation and genocide by the regime in Kiev" (...), "demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine" as well as an operation to "bring to justice those who have committed numerous bloody crimes against peaceful civilians, including Russian citizens" (*TASS* 2022).

Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which gives a whole new dimension to this conflict. It has the right of veto. The veto can be considered a game-changer and makes Russia practically untouchable. The Ukraine crisis has pointed out the weaknesses of the United Nations, especially its inability to react and solve conflicts in which the permanent members of the Security Council take part. The paper examines: Is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine an opportunity for the reform of the Security Council, a "new San Francisco moment" (Gowan 2022)? Can the reform of the UN Security Council be the best cure for the efficiency of the United Nations, or perhaps some other solution might exist? Does the United Nations have the capacity to survive the Ukraine crisis? The world of today is not the same as the world after the establishment of the United Nations. The paper points out the multiple imperfections and absurdities of the UN system and the Security Council and offers potential solutions for its more efficient functioning.

### **Permanent Membership in the Security Council and the Right of Veto**

The Security Council is "the most dynamic organ in the organisation with the greatest powers and functions established in Chapters V to VIII of the UN Charter" (de la Serna Galván 2011, 150). The Security Council has "primary responsibility

for the maintenance of international peace and security”, which includes the right to take forcible action (whether military or in the form of sanctions) under Chapter VII of the Charter. Unlike the UN General Assembly, which is comprised of all member states, the Security Council has a very limited membership – only 15 members, out of which 5 are permanent members. Due to its very limited membership, the Security Council has been criticised for having a democratic deficit. As an undemocratic body, it is hard to expect it to operate democratically and reach democratic outcomes in its decision-making process. Farrall (2009, 918) considers that it is hard to expect that the Security Council will make decisions that serve the interests of democracy.

The Security Council makes decisions on procedural and substantive matters. Article 27(2) of the UN Charter states that decisions of the Security Council on procedural matters “shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members”. When it comes to substantive matters, decisions “shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members; provided that, in decisions under Chapter VI, and under paragraph 3 of Article 52, a party to the dispute shall abstain from voting” (UN 1945, Article 27(3)). This formulation of Article 27(3) of the UN Charter gives the permanent members the power of veto. Although the word “veto” is not explicitly used in Article 27(3), the fact that decisions on substantive matters require an affirmative vote of nine members, including the concurring votes of the permanent members, means that the absence of the concurring votes of any permanent member has the power to block the adoption of a draft resolution. Article 27(3) applies only to resolutions that invoke Chapter VI of the UN Charter “Pacific Settlement of Disputes” (UN 1945). It does not apply to resolutions that invoke Chapter VII, “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression”.

How did the veto become a part of the United Nations? The United Nations was established after the League of Nations, the world’s first universal organisation. Under the Covenant of the League, decisions could be made only by unanimous vote. This rule applies both to the League’s Council, which is the equivalent of the UN Security Council, and to all members of the Assembly. The League of Nations was not able to reach a consensus on a response to crises. The founders of the United Nations were learning from the failure of the League of Nations. That is why they decided that all the organs of the United Nations should make decisions by some type of majority vote. The rule of unanimity applies only to the five permanent members of the Security Council in the case of substantive matters. The veto has “in some ways saved the UN because it was created to take binding action and have teeth; the League of Nations failed because it did not have the power to implement its initiatives” (Dallas 2018, 7). The idea behind the veto was good, but the permanent members often use the veto power for their own national purposes.

Veto power can be considered the most important characteristic of the Security Council. It makes a difference between its permanent and non-permanent members. The veto of the permanent members is a result of the world after WWII, and it has been a privilege and reward for the winners of the war. Veto power and “the structure and voting pattern in the Security Council flagrantly render the principles of majority rule, popular sovereignty, and political equality impotent, therefore killing the zeal of other member states, who have long registered their resentment” (Christopher et al. 2021, 323). Article 2 of the UN Charter states that “the Organisation is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members” (UN 1945). The right of veto makes the permanent members of the Security Council more equal than the other members. The veto is considered “fundamentally unjust” by a majority of the UN members and “the main reason why the Council failed to respond adequately to humanitarian crises” (Wouters and Ruys 2005, 3). The injustice is even more drastic in situations where a permanent member is included in a conflict.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has attracted a lot of media attention and has cast a lot of shadows on the image of Russia, especially in the Western states. It has also heaped scorn on the United Nations and the Security Council’s roles and reputation. Problems started on February 25, 2022, when the Security Council rejected a draft resolution intended to end the Russian military offensive against Ukraine. The draft resolution was submitted by Albania and the United States. It gained support from 11 members of the Security Council, but Russia, as a permanent member, used a veto (UN PR 2022a). This was enough to make the solution to the conflict within the United Nations very difficult. China, as a permanent member, abstained, as did nonpermanent India and the United Arab Emirates. According to the draft, Russia’s military offensive against Ukraine is characterised as a violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 of the UN Charter, which states 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 any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations”.

The draft would also have the Security Council decide that Russia should immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and withdraw all its military forces immediately, completely, and unconditionally from that country’s territory (UN PR 2022a). The draft would have the Security Council deplore the decision of Russia related to the status of certain areas of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions on February 21, 2022, and decide that Moscow must immediately and unconditionally reverse that decision as it violates the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The voting has caused strong rhetoric from many sides. Ms Linda Thomas Greenfield, the US Ambassador to the UN, said that Russia “can veto the resolution, but not Member States’ voices, the truth, or principles, nor can it veto the Charter or the principle of accountability”. She emphasised that the “responsible Council

Member States will stand with Ukraine”, adding that the matter will be addressed in the General Assembly, where the Russian Federation’s veto does not apply (UN PR 2022a). The French Ambassador to the UN emphasised that “the Russian Federation is alone”, riding roughshod over its responsibilities to the Council and violating the United Nations Charter. China stressed that the issue of Ukraine is not one that emerged overnight. It represents the interplay of various factors over a long period of time. Mr Zhang Jun, the Ambassador of China to the UN, stressed that Ukraine should be a bridge between the East and the West, not an “outpost for major Powers” (UN PR 2022a).

Russia justified its veto for many reasons. The Russian Ambassador to the UN stated that Ukraine, with the West’s support, did not implement the Minsk agreements and that neo-Nazis and militias continue to kill civilians, adding to such blood-chilling crimes as sniper attacks on Maidan protestors. Russia considers that the West is making Ukraine a pawn in their game, adding that it is difficult to compete with the United States in terms of the number of its invasions. As a result, Washington is in no position to moralise (UN PR 2022a).

Despite criticism by Western states, Russia’s veto is not illegitimate. By Article 27 of the UN Charter, Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, just used its right. On the other hand, when it happens in practice, such a situation points out imperfections in the UN system. It raises questions and debates about the security mechanisms of the organisation and the necessity of change.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, raised a few questions in his speech at the meeting of the UN Security Council on April 5, 2022. He pointed out, “So where is the security that the Security Council must guarantee? There is no security. (...) So where is the peace that the United Nations was created to guarantee? (...) The UN system must be reformed immediately so that the right of veto is not a right to kill” (President of Ukraine 2022).

### **What are the options for a Permanent Member of the Security Council as a side in a conflict?**

The case of the Ukraine crisis has become a serious challenge for the United Nations. Photos and news of suffering people in Ukraine overwhelmed the media and social networks. People worldwide felt empathy for the Ukrainians. The use of the Russian veto made the Security Council powerless. At the same time, there was a question: Does the United Nations have some other mechanisms to condemn a permanent member of the Security Council?

The situation of the paralysis of the Security Council due to the veto of one of its members is not a new one. Situations like this have happened since the first years of the establishment of the United Nations. The solution to this serious

problem has been found through the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 377A (V) (Uniting for Peace) in 1950. In cases when the Security Council, due to a lack of unanimity among its permanent members, fails to maintain international peace and security, the General Assembly “shall consider the matter immediately with a view to making appropriate recommendations to Members for collective measures, including in the case of a breach of the peace or act of aggression, the use of armed force when necessary, to maintain or restore international peace and security. If not in session at the time, the General Assembly may meet in an emergency special session within twenty-four hours of the request therefor. Such an emergency special session shall be called if requested by the Security Council on the vote of any seven members, or by a majority of the Members of the United Nations” (UNGA Res. 1950, A/RES/377(V)). As seen by contemporaries, the United for Peace has been “a result of the organic imbecility of the Security Council” (Woolsey 1951, 129).

After the failure of the Security Council caused by the veto of Russia, the General Assembly held an emergency special session on March 02, 2022. As a product of the session, the General Assembly adopted Resolution ES-11/1, which “deplores in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the Charter” and “demands that the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine and to refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any Member State”. Also, the Resolution “deplores the February 21, 2022, decision by the Russian Federation related to the status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine as a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter” and “demands that the Russian Federation immediately and unconditionally reverse the decision related to the status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine” (UNGA Res. 2022, A/RES/ES-11/1).

The Resolution was sponsored by more than 90 countries and needed a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly to pass. Out of 193 UN members, 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution, which reaffirms Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. 35 abstained from voting, while only 5 members voted against it — Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Russia, and Syria (*UN News* 2022c).

Perhaps the only effect of the emergency special session and Resolution ES-11/1 has been the characterisation of the conflict as aggression, which has been avoided for a long time. That kind of action the General Assembly could take during its regular sessions. What were the practical effects of the emergency special session? The Security Council has powers to bind and coerce the membership, which includes the use of military force and the imposition of economic sanctions. The General Assembly has no coercive powers over the membership. Its decisions are



recommendatory. The emergency special session changed nothing regarding the actions of Russia. Ones more, this situation has shown the imperfections of the UN Charter and the deadlocks caused by it. When a permanent member of the Security Council is part of the conflict, emergency special sessions are not enough. In this context, the use of the Uniting for Peace mechanism “is a symptom of the UN’s institutional failure” and it “does not give the Assembly any more power than it possesses under the UN Charter” (Ramsden 2022). That power is moral and symbolic condemnation, which is not effective in complex cases like this.

### *Suspension from the Human Rights Council*

Another step towards dealing with the Ukraine crisis has been the suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council. Russia joined the Human Rights Council in January 2021 as one of 15 countries elected by the General Assembly to serve three-year terms. Resolution 60/251 on the establishment of the Human Rights Council states that “...electing members of the Council, Member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto; the General Assembly, by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting, may suspend the rights of membership in the Council of a member of the Council that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights” (UNGA Res. 2006, A/RES/60/251). The main reason for the suspension has been a massacre in the city of Bucha by the Russian Military Forces.

The Ambassador of Ukraine to the UN compared Bucha with the Genocide in Rwanda, emphasising that it happened “largely due to the indifference of the world’s community, when the UN did not respond to warnings in the UN Security Council and in the General Assembly, a year before the tragedy that we commemorate exactly on this day”. In the case of Ukraine, he added, “it is not even a year, because the tragedy is unfolding right now before our eyes” (*UN News* 2022b).

Voting for the suspension of Russia has shown interesting results. Out of 193 members of the General Assembly, 93 states voted in favour, while 24 voted against. The number of states that abstained from voting was 58. In remarks before the vote, Gennady Kuzmin, Russia’s Deputy Ambassador to the United Nations, urged countries to “vote against the attempt by Western countries and their allies to destroy the existing human rights architecture” (*UN News* 2022b). Many developed countries, such as India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar, Indonesia, etc., abstained from voting.

The results of the vote are not favourable for Russia. On the other hand, the results are not a triumph of the West. Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, had the total support of 24 states, which voted against it. That is quite a debacle. On the other hand, 93 out of 193 UN members voted in favour of



suspension. That is less than half of the membership. As such, it is not a reason for the satisfaction of the West.

### *Resolution 76/262 – “revolution” on the use of veto*

Perhaps the most revolutionary measure taken due to the Ukraine crisis has been Resolution 76/262 “Standing mandate for a General Assembly debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council”, adopted on the initiative of Liechtenstein on April 26, 2022. The idea of Liechtenstein for this Resolution is not a new one. It started in 2020, but its realisation has been stopped due to the pandemic. The situation in Ukraine has revived and made this idea possible.

The Resolution decides that the President of the General Assembly “shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council, to hold a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation” (UNGA Res. 2022, A/RES/76/262, Article 1). On an exceptional basis, it is decided to accord precedence in the list of speakers to the permanent member or permanent members of the Security Council, having cast a veto. Also, Resolution 76/262 invites the Security Council, in accordance with Article 24 (3) of the Charter of the United Nations, “to submit a special report on the use of the veto in question to the General Assembly at least 72 hours before the relevant discussion in the Assembly” (UNGA Res. 2022, A/RES/76/262, Article 3).

Gowan (2022) considers that Resolution 76/262 is “a tweak to the existing UN system rather than a major reform. It is still very unlikely – almost impossible – that the P5 will accept real limits on their vetoes”. On the other hand, many states had positive views of the Resolution. The Nordic and African Union states expressed unequivocal support. Mexico considers the resolution “an important step forward in strengthening United Nations accountability” (UN PR 2022b).

It is interesting to emphasise that not all permanent members of the Security Council welcomed Resolution 76/262. France stated that it is fully committed to the Security Council reforms, but the General Assembly cannot become a judge of the Security Council or its members – elected or permanent. Also, the representative of China pointed out that the Resolution gives the General Assembly a new mandate and is likely to cause procedural confusion and inconsistency in practice. China is not sure if such an arrangement would serve the Resolution’s intended purpose. The US was one of the rare permanent members of the Security Council to support the Resolution, claiming that veto authority comes with enormous responsibility (UN PR 2022b). Russia considers the veto an essential part of the Security Council. Without it, the “Council would simply rubber-stamp questionable decisions imposed by a nominal majority that would be hardly possible

to implement”. According to the representative of Russia, the veto is not the problem. The problem is certain Council members’ unwillingness to listen to others and achieve a compromise, thus compelling the use of the veto (UN PR 2022b).

The Security Council has been criticised due to a lack of transparency and making decisions behind closed doors. The Resolution has the potential to increase the transparency of the Security Council and to make this body less oligarchic and elitist. Of course, the permanent members are capable of using the veto. And for sure, they will use it. Resolution 76/262 has not made a fundamental change. It has just made the use of veto a little more complicated. The opinions of the permanent members — France, Russia, and China — on the Resolution are an indicator that any kind of reform of the Security Council is not an easy process. No matter how much some permanent members support the reform of the Security Council, none of them is ready for some modifications when it comes to the veto. Resolution 76/212 makes the most minor possible change, and the permanent members are not satisfied with it.

### *Removing Russia from the United Nations?*

Having in mind that all actions taken did not have much effect, there have been a lot of discussions regarding the possibility of removing Russia from the Security Council. Discussions were aroused after the speech of President Zelensky at the UN Security Council meeting on April 5, 2022. President Zelensky urged the UN to “remove Russia as an aggressor and a source of war from blocking decisions about its own aggression and its own war. And then do everything that can establish peace” (President of Ukraine 2022). Is this option possible?

Article 6 of the UN Charter states: “A Member of the United Nations which has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organisation by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council” (UN 1945). Expulsion from the United Nations requires a decision of two main bodies — the General Assembly and the Security Council. The recommendation of the Security Council is the first step in this process, *conditio sine qua non*. Russia, as a permanent member, is not going to vote for its own expulsion from the UN. By the Charter, Russia is an integral part of the United Nations. Without Russia, the Security Council would not be the Security Council. None of this is the fault of Russia. This is just how the UN Charter works. Theorists consider that “suggestions to remove Russia from the Security Council are not only legally unfounded and unhelpful, but will distract from solutions in international law” (van de Riet 2022).

So far, the most realistic mechanism by which the permanent members could be “punished” is their credentials and representation in the General Assembly. Rule 27 of the General Assembly’s Rules of Procedure states that “the credentials of

representatives and the names of members of a delegation shall be submitted to the Secretary-General if possible, not less than one week before the opening of the session. The credentials shall be issued either by the Head of the State or Government or by the Minister for Foreign Affairs”. This process is usually just a formality, but there is precedent for the General Assembly to factor in a regime’s fidelity to the UN Charter in assessing whether to accept or reject credentials. The credentials of the South African apartheid regime were rejected by the Assembly due to its violation of the UN Charter. Theorists wonder “whether isolating Russia in this way is politically wise” (Ramsden 2022). This kind of action might cause more complications than benefits regarding the solution to the Ukraine crisis. In light of the conflict solution, the best option is the presence of Russia in the United Nations.

### **A Necessity of the Security Council’s Reform**

The Ukraine crisis has highlighted the difficulties regarding the veto of the permanent members of the Security Council. It points out the absurdities of the UN system and the power of one country over the whole membership of the United Nations. The Security Council is not able to perform its functions and maintain international peace and security. An emergency special session of the General Assembly was not an effective mechanism, only moral condemnation. Suspension from the Human Rights Council has the character of public shaming. Even Resolution 76/262 will not cause many benefits because the permanent members will use their veto in the future.

The Ukraine crisis raised a serious question about the necessity of the United Nations. Does the world need a universal organisation that is not able to perform its main function – to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war? Is it time for the reform of the United Nations and the new Security Council? Is it time for the modification of the veto?

Having in mind the situation in Ukraine and all previous crises where the Security Council has failed, reform is a necessity. What might be the most important aspects of the Security Council reform?

The literature shows no consensus on the issue of the reform of the Security Council. The current debate has been focused on certain reform areas:

- increment of the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council and the regional representation,
- reform of the veto right,
- reform of the working methods.

One of the questions which requires the most attention is the veto. Reform of the veto has been a topic since the early years of the United Nations. Over the years, there have been many suggestions for its reform. One frequently recurring proposal

consists of waiving the veto power in all proceedings arising under Chapter VI of the UN Charter on the peaceful settlement of disputes. This proposal was launched by Australia during the negotiations in San Francisco. China made a similar proposal that provides for a further restriction to the exercise of the veto and limits it to Security Council actions taken under Chapter VII of the Charter. The Chinese proposal was launched in 1948, which proves the difficulties of the veto since the establishment of the UN. This idea received support from many UN members, including the Non-Aligned Movement and many Latin American countries. A very reasonable suggestion was made by the African Union and several individual UN members. It suggests that the veto power should only prevent the Security Council from adopting a resolution if it were cast by two or more permanent members simultaneously. This suggestion is perhaps the most reasonable one because it restricts the power of a single permanent member (Wouters and Ruys, 2005, 21–22). Other suggestions have proposed the elimination of the veto with regard to specific issues such as requests for an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice, admission, suspension, and expulsion of the member states, the appointment of a Secretary-General and the amendment of the UN Charter (Wouters and Ruys 2005, 22).

Another serious question is related to the enlargement of the Security Council. Originally, the Council had 11 members. Due to the 1966 amendments, the number of members was extended to 15. Having in mind that the number of UN members has almost multiplied by four since the establishment of the UN and the 1966 amendment, the current 15 members of the Council are not enough. The representation in the UN Security Council is not proportional, neither geographically nor in terms of population or number of UN members per region. No country from Africa or Latin America has a permanent membership. Although more than half of the world's population lives in Asia, only China is a permanent member. The global ambitions of the EU are growing and this organisation hopes for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (Janssen 2021).

It is very questionable if some current permanent members of the Security Council have the capacity to be permanent members, having in mind that their power today is much more modest than it was in 1945. On the other hand, Germany, Japan, Brazil, India, and some other states have increased their power and become important global and regional players. Their contribution to the UN budget is not negligible either. Their growing influence, alongside their contribution to the UN budget, makes them perfect candidates for the potential new permanent members of the Security Council.

### *The Complexity of the UN Charter revision*

There is a lot of space and options for reform of the Security Council. Why did nothing happen in the meantime? The main reason is the complexity of the

UN Charter revision. Article 109 states that a “General Conference of the Members of the United Nations for the purpose of reviewing the present Charter may be held at a date and place to be fixed by a two-thirds vote of the members of the General Assembly and by a vote of any nine members of the Security Council”. Paragraph 2 of Article 109 states that “any alteration of the present Charter recommended by a two-thirds vote of the conference shall take effect when ratified in accordance with their respective constitutional processes by two-thirds of the Members of the United Nations including all the permanent members of the Security Council”.

The veto right of the permanent members is a fact that creates practical problems regarding potential UN reform. Any amendment to the UN Charter will take effect when ratified by the member states, including the permanent members. In this case, even if the whole UN membership has an agreement on some reform issue, the veto of one permanent member is worth more than the agreement of the rest of the organisation.

Before any serious actions regarding the reform of the United Nations, the agreement of all five permanent members should exist. Currently, among the permanent members, there is no consensus on potential new permanent members of the Security Council and much less consensus exists regarding the right of veto. If the formulation of Article 109 paragraph 2 was “any alteration of the present Charter recommended by a two-thirds vote of the conference shall take effect when ratified in accordance with their respective constitutional processes by two-thirds of the Members of the United Nations”, the process of reform would be much easier. Consent from two-thirds of the member states could be achieved on many reform topics. Having in mind that the rest of Article 109 paragraph 2 states “including all the permanent members of the Security Council”, many reform topics are impossible to achieve.

Some permanent members of the Security Council, like France, the US, and the UK, are more open to the reform topic. It is necessary to add that they are open to some extent. In the debate on the Security Council reform, held in November 2021, the US representative emphasised that “the United States remains open to an expansion of the Council for both permanent and non-permanent members” but “noting that expansion should neither diminish the Council’s effectiveness nor alter or expand the veto” (UN PR 2022c). France supported the enlargement of the Security Council but considered the veto of potential new permanent members an “extremely sensitive” topic (UN PR 2022c). Resolution 76/262 made a minor change regarding the use of the veto and some permanent members have not been satisfied with it. This shows that permanent members are not ready or willing to lose the veto power.

The UN General Assembly established the Open-ended Working Group in 1993 with the aim of “considering all aspects of the question of an increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council” (UNGA Res. 1993, A/RES/48/26). The Working group had some initial success, which was a good starting point for commencing intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) based on proposals by the member states on the question of equitable representation and an increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. The result of ING should be a solution that can garner the widest possible political acceptance by the member states. The IGN consists of several international organisations – the African Union, the Arab League, the G4 nations, the Caribbean Community, the Uniting for Consensus Group, and the L69 Group of Developing Countries. Each of these groups and organisations has different positions and priorities regarding the reform of the Security Council. The IGN shared a similar fate as numerous other bodies and groups established with the aim of reform within the UN. Its work has become “slow-moving and repetitive” and many member states “have become fatigued by the process” (Center for UN Reform Education 2022). It has been focused mostly on the Security Council expansion. In the meantime, the focus of the members had switched towards reform of working methods and the use of the veto. Many member states are turning to other forums and groups to address the ideas and possibilities of the Security Council reform.

With the revitalisation of the General Assembly, agreement and understanding on the most important aspects of the reform of the Security Council do not exist. Even if it exists, there is one issue that makes the whole process much more complicated – the right of veto. A veto is not just a “key obstacle” to the Security Council’s fulfilment of its mission (Dervis and Ocampo 2022). It is also a key obstacle to its reform and a better and more effective United Nations.

Having in mind the right of veto and the procedure for the revision of the UN Charter, it seems that every significant attempt at reform ended at the San Francisco conference. Reform of the Security Council requires good political timing and a compromise that all permanent members will agree on. The Ukraine crisis is a political moment that creates serious tension and divisions between the East and the West. As such, it is the worst possible moment for reform of the Security Council. Perhaps some limited reforms regarding global governance might be possible in the near future. Despite failing Ukraine, the UN security architecture “is still functioning in a way that the League of Nations Council did not in the later 1930s” (Gowan 2022).

It seems that the Ukraine crisis will share the same destiny as the war in Iraq. It will cause a lot of theories and debates on the necessity of the reform of the United Nations and the Security Council. While Western permanent members might be more progressive in public in favour of reform, their narratives will have



the aim of embarrassing and public shaming Russia. Narratives about Security Council reform have been used as a political and diplomatic tool for the past seven decades. Without the real and strong political will and consent of all permanent members of the Security Council, any aspect of the reform of the United Nations is not possible.

### **More Realistic Scenarios Regarding the Empowerment of the Security Council**

Due to the complexity of the UN Charter and the lack of political will of the member states, reform of the Security Council is not a task that is going to happen any time soon. The Ukraine conflict has caused even more animosity between the East and the West. The compromise solutions regarding the reform now look like a dream. Having in mind the economic, security, strategic, and food-related consequences of the Ukraine crisis, reform of the Security Council is currently not a top priority. In the future, it will be necessary for the Security Council to play its role much more efficiently. It should not be an organ that is paralysed by differences among the permanent members. It has to be an organ that performs its role in the interest of humankind. Perhaps two possible ways for the future empowerment of the Security Council might be to focus on its working methods and the possible establishment of the Emergency Platform.

#### ***The Emergency Platform***

The Secretary-General presented “Our Common Agenda”, a response to the request for recommendations made by the UN member states, leaders, civil society, and many partners of the United Nations on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations. Originally, the Agenda was created as a strategy for fighting COVID-19. Its initial aim is “to re-embrace global solidarity and find new ways to work together for the common good” (UN 2021, 3). Also, the Agenda is focused on the triple crisis of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, and pollution on a global level. Some theorists consider the Emergency Platform “an important proposal given the failures of international coordination during the pandemic across the health, economic, social, and peace and security domains” (Tørres and de Langen 2021, 3).

An interesting part of the Agenda is related to the possible establishment of an Emergency Platform to respond to complex global crises. The platform would be “triggered automatically in crises of sufficient scale and magnitude, regardless of the type or nature of the crisis involved” (UN 2021, 65). Once activated, the Platform would bring together leaders from the member states, key country groupings, international financial institutions, regional bodies, civil society, the private

sector, subject-specific industries or research bodies, and other experts. The activation of the Platform would depend on the seriousness of the crisis, including the scope of the crisis, identification of actors who can be a part of it, funding and financing, and mechanisms that might help solve the crisis, as well as criteria for deactivation of the crisis.

The proposed Emergency Platform has the aim of fitting into the prevention idea. The United Nations should be focused more on prevention. It is necessary to reduce strategic risks (nuclear weapons, cyber warfare, autonomous weapons), strengthen international foresight, reshape responses to all forms of violence, invest in prevention and peacebuilding (including the Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission), support regional prevention and put women and girls at the centre of security policy (UN 2021, 6). The Security Council should be the backbone of conflict prevention.

The idea of the Emergency Platform bringing together numerous subjects, from leaders of the member states to financial institutions, civil society, the private sector, and researchers, might be useful as a part of prevention efforts. The establishment of the Emergency Platform may perhaps contribute to preventive diplomacy as some sort of negotiation, mediation, or conciliation. Civil society and researchers can provide some new facts or point out new aspects of problems unknown or not well known to heads of state or heads of international and regional organisations. Lately, non-state actors are finding mechanisms, directly or indirectly, to influence the decisions of states and international organisations. Also, their influence on the development of international law and international politics is significant. They are gaining “more and more elements of international subjectivity as their scope expands, as well as the rights they enjoy and the obligations they fulfil” (Vučić 2020, 27). The United Nations should use a wide range of non-state actors, as it is proposed in the Emergency Platform, in order to improve its goals and functioning.

If done well, the establishment of the Emergency Platform can produce good results. Adopting “a comprehensive and holistic approach to wider crisis prevention and response – drawing on the capabilities of all governmental actors (at national, regional, and sub-regional levels) and non-state actors (from across civil society and the private sector) – could potentially revolutionize how the international system copes with a range of future political, economic, social, and environmental crises could potentially revolutionize how the international system copes with a range of future political, economic, social, and environmental crises” (Group of authors 2022, 34). Its role and relations with the Security Council must be clearly defined. In order to be successful, it has to be a relationship of coordination instead of competition. The involvement of numerous actors in some issues may result in more confusion than resolution. Also, it can create competition with the Security Council.

### *Working methods of the Security Council*

Another realistic mechanism to empower the Security Council could be the improvement of its working methods. The Security Council has been criticised for making decisions behind closed doors, its exclusivity and a lack of transparency (Gordanić 2021, 48). The member states consider that “a more accountable and transparent Council would be better placed to meet its core tasks of preventing and resolving conflicts” (UN PR 2022d). Regarding the working methods of the Security Council, some changes could be made regarding its transparency and improvement of relations with the General Assembly and other UN bodies.

Lately, there have been some small improvements when it comes to the transparency of the Security Council. Since the mid-90s, NGOs have slowly established a regular process of consultations with the Security Council members and have broadened the Arria formula. These consultations are strictly informal, but some time ago, this kind of communication was unimaginable. NGOs work in the fields and have contacts and information that might be precious to the Security Council. Also, NGOs have influenced some decisions of the Council in soft policy areas, especially when it comes to the rights of women and children in armed conflicts (Gordanić 2021, 61). In Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General considers that the United Nations should work “with a wider community of governmental, academic, civil society, private sector, philanthropic, and other actors to strengthen strategic foresight, preparedness for catastrophic risks, and anticipatory decision-making that values instead of discounts the future” (UN 2021, 45).

### *Relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council*

Due to their powers, the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council has been turbulent. Lately, the encroachment of the Security Council on the competence and jurisdiction of the General Assembly and the other UN bodies has been noticed. The encroachment indicates the tendency of the Security Council to “broaden, arbitrarily, the definition of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security, particularly with respect to thematic debates touching on social, humanitarian, or economic and development issues” (Sievers and Daws 2014, 582). The Security Council started to discuss issues of AIDS, climate change, and human rights. According to the UN Charter, these issues belong to the General Assembly. Considering them as a threat to peace has caused dissatisfaction among the member states. This kind of practice is a violation of the principles of the UN Charter and a reduction of the authority of the other UN bodies. It is “imperative to prevent the Security Council from encroaching on the Assembly’s mandate, a trend that had led to inconsistencies and a lack of harmony between the two bodies, which sometimes left the Assembly paralysed” (UN PR 2006). The General

Assembly has been marginalised since the end of the Cold War. The encroachment of the Security Council makes it even more marginalised. This causes a negative reputation for the Organisation of the United Nations. States are gradually losing confidence in the UN and turning to different forms of regional cooperation (Gordanić 2018, 338). Also, by taking responsibility from the General Assembly and other UN bodies, the Security Council is unnecessarily burdening its agenda. By doing the jobs of other bodies, the Security Council is not capable of focusing on its own responsibility – the maintenance of international peace and security.

The General Assembly receives and considers annual and special reports from the Security Council (UN Charter, Article 15). Over the years, there have been critics and improvements regarding the length and quality of the Council's annual report. So far, the Council has never submitted a special report to the Assembly. In cases such as the Ukraine crisis, submitting a special report might be an opportunity to increase transparency and take at least moral responsibility for failing international peace and security.

The General Assembly and the Security Council share many responsibilities and election processes within the UN. In many of these cases, the General Assembly depends on the previous recommendations of the Security Council. One of many examples is the already mentioned expulsion from the UN. Ideally, the functions of the General Assembly should be expanded and less dependent on the Security Council. This is also one important aspect of the reform of the United Nations. Until the reform process happens, the Security Council needs to learn to cooperate with the General Assembly and the other UN bodies. The General Assembly should be the organ of discussion, and the Security Council needs to be the organ of action. The relationship between the two most important bodies in the UN system needs to be more balanced in order to restore the reputation of the UN and achieve the objectives envisaged by the Charter.

## **Conclusion**

The Ukraine crisis is an important test for the United Nations. It pointed out all the shortcomings of the UN Charter. It has proved that the veto of one permanent member is capable of making the Security Council, the world's most powerful body, completely powerless and pointless. It emphasised the division between Eastern and Western members of the United Nations. It has proved that there is no effective mechanism when the permanent member is a party to the conflict. By using its veto right, Russia did not do anything wrong or unreasonable. Within the United Nations, all actions by Russia regarding the use of the veto have been legitimate. Any other permanent member would do the same if they were in the place of Russia. Simply put, all actions by Russia within the United Nations have been consistent with the UN Charter. The Ukraine crisis, unfortunately,

pointed out the absurdities of the UN Charter and proved that it is time for change – within the UN as well as within the Security Council.

A moment for a new San Francisco has arrived. The reform of the United Nations and the Security Council has become a necessity. Of course, an important task, such as a reform of the Security Council, requires an agreement between permanent members of the Security Council. It requires excellent political timing as well as political will. Unfortunately, the Ukraine crisis is not a good moment for reform. Divisions between Russia and Western states are sharp, and such a climate could easily send the world into a new Cold War. For the welfare of all members of the United Nations, the Security Council has to focus on more realistic options in order to improve its functioning. It has to work on its transparency, working methods, and more harmonic relationship with the General Assembly. In the future, the Security Council should be focused on conflict prevention and cooperation with other actors, including non-state actors. The establishment of the Emergency Platform might be a good mechanism for improving conflict prevention. It might be a good option for facilitating the work of the Council.

The UN Charter is, without a doubt, a precious legal document. Its interpretations over time have proved their quality. The world has changed drastically since the establishment of the United Nations. Some UN Charter principles, particularly the existence of permanent membership in the Security Council, have been overturned. The new age requires a new UN Charter and a new Security Council. When the right time arrives, all member states should require reform of the Security Council, which needs to include the elimination of the veto and more balanced relations with the General Assembly and other UN bodies.

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## УКРАЈИНСКА КРИЗА 2022 – АЛАРМ ЗА РЕФОРМУ САВЕТА БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ УЈЕДИЊЕНИХ НАЦИЈА?

*Апстракт.* Украјинска криза 2022. године истакла је многе недостатке и апсурде система Уједињених нација. Вето Русије паралисао је Савет безбедности и онемогућио вршење његове улоге. Други механизми предузети у оквиру Уједињених нација нису били довољни да утичу на активности Русије. Аутор анализира ситуацију у Украјини као индикатор за реформу Савета безбедности УН. Рад испитује различите аспекте и могућности реформе Савета безбедности и као највеће препреке сматра процес ревизије Повеље и право вета пет сталних чланица. Украјинска криза нови је Сан Франциско моменат који ће пропасти због недостатка политичке воље сталних чланица Савета безбедности. Рад закључује да би Савет безбедности требао користити реалистичнија решења како би побољшао своје капацитете и спречио будућа кршења међународног мира и безбедности.

*Кључне речи:* Русија; Украјина; Савет безбедности; реформа; вето; Уједињене нације; стални члан Савета безбедности; Украјинска криза.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT LAW

Casey-Maslen, Stuart. 2021. *Arms Control and Disarmament Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

“Arms Control and Disarmament Law” is part of a book series entitled “Elements of International Law” by the Oxford University Press, which aims to provide, in an objective and even-handed manner, comprehensive insight into narrow sub-sections of international law. Arms control and disarmament were thus chosen among the branches of international law to be examined despite the earlier neglect in international law scholarship, as they were most often subsumed into and regarded as parts of international humanitarian law, or even *ius ad bellum*. Ostensibly, it was recognised that greater attention ought to be given to this field of thought, given that, as the author points out, arms control and disarmament represent key contributions to international peace and security (Casey-Maslen 2021, 1).

The book consists of an introductory section and seven chapters that cover the most pertinent issues in this branch of law. In addition to providing a glossary of key terms, in the introductory part, the author seeks to contextualise the state of play in arms control and disarmament by sketching out a brief history of how this field developed from the XIX century onwards, as well as outlining the framework of relevant contemporary international institutions operating in arms control and disarmament affairs. Here he particularly notes that the roots of arms control can be traced to the earliest documents of modern international humanitarian law, such as the 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration and the Regulations adopted at the 1899 and 1907 Hague Peace Conferences. Disarmament efforts, on the other hand, gained traction after the Second World War and were initially associated with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) given their perceived significance during the Cold War, but were given new life in the last decade of the XX century when they started to encompass conventional weapons as well, particularly those that were deemed inhumane and indiscriminate.

The first chapter of the book deals with key concepts of arms control and disarmament treaties, namely prohibitions of use, production, development, testing, stockpiling, transfer, and assisting or encouraging prohibited activities. The prohibition of stockpiling and the destruction of existing stockpiles are identified by the author as the central obligations of disarmament treaties. This chapter is also

devoted to exploring the relationship between arms control and disarmament law, on the one hand, and other branches of international law, such as *ius ad bellum*, international humanitarian law, and international criminal law. Although arms control and disarmament find their origins in international humanitarian law, the author clearly explains that there is an apparent distinction between them since the latter is confined to situations of armed conflict, while arms control and disarmament law apply at all times.

The second chapter explores the two legal instruments that regulate chemical and biological weapons (the Chemical Weapons Convention – CWC, and the Biological Weapons Convention – BWC). Even though these two types of weapons were taken together in the discussions on their potential regulation and prohibition during the 1960s, the breakthrough was only made with the decision to take them apart and deal with one at a time, which allowed for the adoption of the BWC in 1971. This instrument was the first one to contain a prohibition on stockpiling and an obligation to destroy them. However, it was rudimentary in other regards, particularly with respect to verification of compliance. On the other hand, the CWC, adopted in the early 1990s, is a lot more cutting-edge, as it established its own organisational structure (the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons). In addition to legally-binding instruments, the author offers the readers to get acquainted with other mechanisms in this field, such as the Australia Group, a politically-binding regime that has the aim of harmonising the export control policies of materials that have the potential to be used for biological and chemical weapons.

Nuclear weapons, “the most powerful and destructive weapons mankind has ever devised” (Casey-Maslen 2021, 63), are the subject matter of Chapter 3. The author first plunges into the history of imagining the use of nuclear energy as a weapon after the discovery of the chain reaction; the development of a tangible nuclear weapon system within the Manhattan Project; its use for the first and only time in warfare in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and finally, the end of the American nuclear monopoly with the subsequent expansion of the nuclear arms club from 1 to 9 members. Against this backdrop, the author describes the interlocking web of treaties and forums that seek to regulate (and prohibit) the use, possession, stockpiling, and testing of nuclear weapons. The pinnacle of this regime is the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which combines the obligations not to develop and possess nuclear weapons for most states, to engage in disarmament efforts for the nuclear-weapon states, and to allow and encourage the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Testing of nuclear weapons, on the other hand, was prohibited in the atmosphere, underground, and underwater by the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, and the international community sought to expand this norm in the 1990s through the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which has yet to enter into force. Moreover, the author explains that a significant portion of the world is covered by nuclear-weapons-free zones that completely prohibit the possession of nuclear

weapons. Apart from multilateral and regional arrangements, attention is also given to bilateral nuclear arms control talks and agreements between the US and the Soviet Union/Russian Federation, which contributed to a significant decline in deployed nuclear weapons and total stockpiles and the abolition of certain weapon systems.

After the WMD, the book continues with a chapter on conventional weapons. The author explains that, unlike the Cold War period when the focus of arms control was on the relative strength of conventional forces of the two opposing military blocks on the European continent, the post-Cold War period was however marked by efforts to prohibit certain types of conventional weapons that were deemed to be particularly inhumane or indiscriminate. Unlike international humanitarian law, which is confined only to the use of weapons in armed conflict, disarmament treaties that came into being in the late 1990s and early 2000s contained provisions on stockpile destruction, prohibition of transfer, development, and obligations on environmental remediation and victim assistance. This new age saw the adoption of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and the Cluster Munitions Convention (CCM), the “two most notable global disarmament treaties with respect to conventional weapons” (Casey-Maslen 2021, 103). Nonetheless, these new tendencies also led to the blurring of the line between international humanitarian and disarmament law, something which can be seen in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Even though it is a legacy of the Cold War mentality and a *par excellence* international humanitarian law instrument, the CCW was from 1996 onward supplemented with protocols that contain clear-cut disarmament provisions, such as prohibitions on transfer in Amended Protocol II and clearance obligations in Protocol V. The author remarks that the APMBC and the CCM were actually products of failures within the CCW to go further with disarmament obligations and to completely prohibit the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. As disarmament treaties, the APMBC and the CCM have a broader range of employment than the protocols attached to the CCW, not only because of the obligation to destroy stockpiles but also in the way that the prohibition on use is applicable in all situations and not only in times of armed conflict.

Chapter 5 pays attention to the arms transfer regimes, with the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) being identified by the author as the most important instrument. Before its adoption in 2013, the international regulation of arms trade was limited to specific disarmament treaties that banned the transfer of particular weapons, arms embargoes imposed by the UN Security Council, as well as other formats of a more voluntary nature, such as the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNROCA), and the Wassenaar Arrangement, or of regional application, such as the EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP and the ECOWAS Convention on SALW. In this regard, the author introduces the readers more closely to the ATT by outlining its content and highlighting that it is enforced only with regard to



conventional arms transfer. A particularity of the Treaty is the number of references to other international instruments, which determine not only its application *ratione materiae* but also the situations when its core provisions of Articles 6 and 7 (on prohibiting transfer and assessing export) are activated.

Verification, as an integral and indispensable part of the success of disarmament and arms control treaties, is the subject matter of Chapter 6. The examination of verification measures is categorised depending on the particular disarmament and arms control theme, i.e., whether it is associated with the ban on development and production, where the focus is on the Chemical Weapons Convention inspections and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards; of testing, the most developed instrument being the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty's (CTBT) International Monitoring System; on deployment and stockpiling, where the New START made the most headway; stockpile destruction, where the focus is on the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty; and the use.

The last Chapter is dedicated to assessing the future of arms control. Apart from summarising and offering takeaways from the past 75 years of disarmament and arms control history, the author argues that despite the renewed hope after the Cold War, old problems, such as the lack of progress in nuclear disarmament (in accordance with Article 6 of the NPT), persisted, and also new challenges came to fruition. He particularly draws attention to the challenges of new technologies, such as lethal autonomous weapons systems and cyberspace.

It is without a doubt that this book provides an excellent overview and insight into the most salient elements and components of international disarmament and arms control law, particularly in illuminating its *differentia specifica*, i.e., the way in which it differs from other bodies of international law, most notably international humanitarian law. It also offers a novel manner of examining arms control and disarmament law, as the issues are categorised depending on the subject matter of legal regulation – in other words, whether it is nuclear, chemical, biological, conventional weapons, or arms trade. This is unlike earlier works in this field, in which the content is laid out chronologically (for example John Goldblat's "Arms Control: The New Guide to Negotiations and Agreements"), or according to the perceived critical elements of this branch of law (which is the case with Stuart Casey-Maslen's and Tobias Vestner's "Guide to International Disarmament Law").

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## EDITORIAL POLICY

*The Review of International Affairs* is scientific journal dedicated to international legal, economic, political and security relations. Established in 1950 as the first Yugoslav scholarly journal in its field, *The Review of International Affairs* is one of the oldest and best-known periodicals in the Balkans that cover research in International Relations.

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We strongly encourage papers on politics, economics, security and international law issues in the Balkan regional context. Aside from the Balkan-related issues, we are welcoming papers on other regional studies as well. However, this focus thus not presuppose limitation for articles, studies and comments on other relevant international topics.

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## **Book**

Reference list entry:

Jabri, Vivienne. 2007. *War and the Transformation of Global Politics*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, and Anuradha Chenoy. 2007. *Human Security: Concepts and Implications*, 2nd ed. Oxon: Routledge.

Vasquez, John A., Sanford Jaffe, James Turner Johnson, and Linda Stamato, eds. 1995. *Beyond Confrontation: Learning Conflict Resolution in the Post-Cold War Era*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Bentham, Jeremy (1907) 2018. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. Reprint, London: Clarendon Press. [www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html](http://www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html).

Dal Lago, Alessandro, and Salvatore Palidda, eds. 2010. *Conflict, Security and the Reshaping of Society: The Civilization of War*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.

Hayek, Friedrich A. 2011. *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*. Edited by Ronald Hamowy. Vol. 17 of *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, edited by Bruce Caldwell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988–.

In-text citation:

(Jabri 2007, 59)

(Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007)

(Vasquez et al. 1995)

(Bentham [1907] 2018)

(Dal Lago and Palidda 2010)

(Hayek 2011, 258)

### **Journal article**

Reference list entry:

Nordin, Astrid H.M. and Dan Öberg. 2015. “Targeting the Ontology of War: From Clausewitz to Baudrillard”. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43 (2): 395–423.

Adams, Tracy, and Zohar Kampf. 2020. “‘Solemn and just demands’: Seeking apologies in the international arena”. *Review of International Studies*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000261>.

In-text citation:

(Nordin and Öberg 2015, 401)

(Tracy and Kampf 2020)

### **Article in edited volume**

Reference list entry:

Herman, Michael. 2004. “Ethics and Intelligence After September 2001”. In: *Understanding Intelligence in the Twenty-First Century: Journeys in Shadows*, edited by Len V. Scott and Peter D. Jackson, 567–581. London and New York: Routledge.

Reference list entry:

(Herman 2004)



**Conference paper (if not published in conference proceedings)**

Reference list entry:

Korać, Srđan. 2016. “Human Security and Global Ethics: Can International Organizations be Moral Agents?”. Paper presented at the Third International Academic Conference on Human Security, Human Security Research Center (HSRC), Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, November 4–5.

Reference list entry:

(Korać 2016)

**Book review**

Reference list entry:

Firchow, Pamina. 2020. “Measuring Peace: Principles, Practices and Politics”, Review of *Measuring Peace*, by Richard Caplan. *International Peacekeeping* 27 (2): 337–338.

Reference list entry:

(Firchow 2020, 337)

**Legal and official documents*****International treaties***

Reference list entry:

[PTBT] Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water. 1963. Signed by US, UK, and USSR, August 5. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20480/volume-480-I-6964-English.pdf>.

[TFEU] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. 2012. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 326, October 26. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>.

[UN Charter] Charter of the United Nations, October 24, 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/introductory-note/index.html>.

In-text citation:

(PTBT 1963, Article III, para. 3)

(TFEU 2012, Article 87)

(UN Charter, Chapter X)

### ***UN documents***

Reference list entry:

[UNSC] UN Security Council. Resolution 2222, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, S/RES/2222. May 27, 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2015.shtml>.

[UNGA] UN General Assembly. Resolution 67/18, Education for Democracy, A/RES/67/18. November 28, 2012. <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/67/18>.

In-text citation:

(UNSC Res. 2222)

(UNGA Res. 67/18)

### ***National legislation***

Reference list entry:

[Constitution RS] Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. 2006. *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 98/2006.

Homeland Security Act. 2002. United States of America, 107th Congress, 2nd Session (November 25). [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hr\\_5005\\_enr.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/hr_5005_enr.pdf).

In-text citation:

(Constitution RS 2006, Article 111)

(Homeland Security Act 2002)

### ***Official reports***

Reference list entry:

[YILC] Yearbook of the International Law Commission. 2014. Vol. 2, Part Two. [https://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/publications/yearbooks/english/ilc\\_2014\\_v2\\_p2.pdf&lang=ES](https://legal.un.org/docs/?path=../ilc/publications/yearbooks/english/ilc_2014_v2_p2.pdf&lang=ES).

[The 9-11 Commission] U.S. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. 2004. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Government Publication Office.

US Congress. 1993. Nomination of R. James Woolsey to be Director of Central Intelligence: Hearing Before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate. 104th Congress, 1st session, February 2–3, 1993. <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/hearings/103296.pdf>.

[USAFH] United States Air Force Headquarters. 2014. United States Air Force RPA Vector: Vision and Enabling Concepts: 2013–2038. [www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/news/USAFRPVectorVisionandEnablingConcepts 2013-2038.pdf](http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/news/USAFRPVectorVisionandEnablingConcepts%202013-2038.pdf).

In-text citation:

(YILC 2014, 321)

(The 9-11 Commission 2004, 437)

(US Congress 1993, 125)

(USAFH 2014)

### ***EU legislation***

Reference list entry:

Regulation (EU) No. 1052/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 establishing the European Border Surveillance System (Eurosur). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 295, 6 November 2013. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1052&from=EN>.

[EC] European Commission. 2010. The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe, COM(2010) 673 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the

Council, November 22. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52010DC0673&from=GA>.

Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC (Text with EEA relevance), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 141, 5 June 2015. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32015L0849&from=EN>.

In-text citation:

(Regulation [EU] No. 1052/2013, Article 11, para. 4)

(EC COM[2010] 673 final)

(Directive [EU] 2015/849)

### *Decisions of international courts and tribunals*

Reference list entry:

[ICJ] International Court of Justice. Accordance with the International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion, 22 July 2010, ICJ Reports. <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>.

[ICJ Order 1999] *Legality of Use of Force (Yugoslavia v. United Kingdom)*. International Court of Justice, Order ICJ Rep. 1999 (June 2). <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/113/113-19990602-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>.

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Kruszelnicki, Karl (@DoctorKarl). 2017. “Dr Karl Twitter post.” Twitter, February 19, 2017, 9:34 a.m. <https://twitter.com/DoctorKarl>.

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Reference list entry:

Rohrbach, Livia. 2020. *Beyond intractability? Territorial solutions to self-determination conflicts*. Doctoral dissertation. Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen.

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Oxford Library. 2012. "Library Strategy". Oxford Library. Accessed 3 June 2012. <http://www.ol.org/library/strategy.html>.

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(Oxford Library 2012)

(Google Maps 2015)

(IIPE n.d.)

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Guzzini, Stefano. 2013. *Power, realism, and constructivism*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

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Gregory, Derek. 2014b. "The Everywhere War". *The Geographical Journal* 177 (3): 238–250.

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