

The European Union and the creation of the new security periphery: the case of the Western Balkans

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) enlargement went through strong processes of Europeanisation that, apart from revealing the regulatory power of the EU, reflect its ability to transform the identity of those countries candidates to membership. Considered as one of the most important and successful instruments of foreign and security action, the succeeding enlargement policies to the East, particularly those of 2004 and 2007, represented a significant contribution for the establishment of an extended security community. An assessment on the countries of the West Balkans is presented, since their processes of accession to the EU now extend for more than a decade. The undeniable geopolitical and geostrategic significance, shown throughout history by the risks of spreading the internal conflicts across the European borders, make this region one of the most vital of the EU's periphery, to its security. In spite of this significance, the current "enlargement fatigue", motivated largely by the lack of consensus amongst member-states, drives away the countries of the Balkans from veering towards the EU, thereby rendering them more susceptible to the influence of foreign players, particularly that of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. In that context, it is argued that the EU, by setting aside the enlargement politic to the countries of the West Balkans, gives a deeply negative sign to the region, moving them away from the criteria established for the europeanization processes reached so far, and as a consequence, placing themselves under de influence of foreign players, circumstances which jeopardise the stability in the EU periphery.

Keywords: European Union, West Balkans, European Security, Europeanization.

Resumo

O alargamento da União Europeia (EU) tem sido acompanhado por intensos processos de europeização que, além de relevarem o poder normativo da União

Europeia, são o reflexo da sua capacidade em transformar a identidade dos países candidatos à integração. Sendo considerada como dos mais importantes e bem-sucedidos instrumentos da ação externa e de segurança da União Europeia, as sucessivas políticas de alargamentos a leste, em particular as de 2004 e 2007, contribuíram para a criação de uma extensa comunidade de segurança. Nesse âmbito, são analisados os países dos Balcãs Ocidentais, cujos processos de adesão à UE se estendem há mais de uma década. A inegável importância geopolítica e geoestratégica, demonstradas ao longo da história pelos riscos de contágio da conflitualidade interna atravessarem as fronteiras europeias, fazem da região uma das mais vitais da periferia da UE. Apesar desta importância, a atual fadiga de alargamento, motivada em grande parte pela falta de consenso político entre os Estados-membros, afasta os países dos Balcãs do rumo de aproximação à UE, tornando-se mais permeáveis às influências de atores externos, em particular da China, da Rússia, da Arábia Saudita, do Irão e da Turquia.

Neste contexto, o abandono da política de alargamento da UE aos países dos Balcãs Ocidentais constitui um sinal profundamente negativo para a região, levando-os a afastarem-se dos critérios definidos nos processos de europeização alcançados até ao momento e, por consequência, a entrarem na esfera de influência de atores externos, circunstâncias que são desfavoráveis à estabilidade na periferia da União Europeia.

Palavras-Chave: União Europeia, Balcãs Ocidentais, Segurança da Europa, Europeização

Introduction

The European Union (EU) evolution is closely associated with the integration and development among its members reached in several areas, namely political, economic and social. Regardless of the discussions involving the autonomy of each member state towards the European institutions and vice-versa, explained by the different theories of European integration, the advances accomplished in several areas are obvious and they've been integrated on the several revisions of the original Treaty. Besides the integration, EU's development can be seen through the growth of member-states, presently with 27 member-states, translating into broader geographic and cultural influence.

Sharing rules and values regarding democracy, the rule of law, good governance and observing human rights and the rights of ethnic minorities, is a fundamental pillar of the European identity¹ projected both internally and internationally representing a major part of the EU's normative power², in the relation with other players, particularly with States that are in the process of joining the EU.

1 MOLE, Richard C. M. - *Discursive Constructions of Identity in European Politics*, p.160.

2 MANNERS, Ian - "Normative power Europe reconsidered"; DIEZ, "Normative Power as Hegemony".

When it comes to the relation with these States, Hooghe, Marks and Lavenex³ emphasize that the EU's political guidelines for the accession process, are meant to export its governance model, by conveying a set of values, regulations and specific decisions of the European institutions, to the decision making processes and national policies of the candidate States, at different levels. The ability of the EU to transform those entities, through the so-called "europeanization processes", has been therefore, central when dealing with matters related with the EU's enlargement and the making of a new periphery.

The enlargement to the eastern European countries, in 2004 and 2007, which included countries that were once part of the Soviet bloc, namely Poland, one of the largest member states, in terms of area, has opened a profound arguing about the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing an enlargement policy to new states, since a sort of "enlargement fatigue" has been identified related to the enlargement process to new member states⁴. A poll conducted by the Eurobarometer in 2018, points that a considerable portion of European citizens (46%) does not endorse the enlargement to other states, against 44% who do. However, the number of citizens having an opposite opinion regarding the enlargement policy is increasing, since the value in 2017 was 44% (an increase of 2% in just one year). This trend is more obvious in 11 of the member states, particularly in Austria (69% "against"), Germany (63%) and Finland (62%). In opposite direction, Spain (67%), Lithuania (66%), Poland and Romania (both with 65%) are those countries which stand by the integration of new states into the EU⁵.

Recently in Strasbourg, the French President Emmanuel Macron made public his reluctance towards the pursuit of the enlargement policy, by asserting that the EU needed to improve its own governance before admitting new member states. Macron yet justified his statement with concerns regarding migration, specially the one that comes from Albania, since the Albanian community is the second largest applying for asylum in France, emphasizing that it would be impossible for him to justify opening negotiations with that country to his fellow citizens, given those circumstances⁶. On the other hand, Hungary⁷, Italy⁸, Austria⁹ and particularly, Germany¹⁰, uphold the

3 HOOGHE, Liesbet; MARKS, Gary - *Multi-level governance and European integration*; LAVENEX, Sandra - "EU External Governance in Wider Europe".

4 ANASTASAKIS, Othon - "The EU's political conditionality in the Western Balkans", p. 365; STEFANOVA, Boyka M. - *The European Union and Europe's new regionalism*, p. 80; KHAZE, Nina Markovic - "European Union's enlargement fatigue: Russia's and China's rise in Southeast Europe?"

5 EUROPEAN COMMISSION - "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", p.25.

6 FOUÉRE, Erwan - "Macron's "Non" to EU Enlargement".

7 HUSZKA, Andrew - "Hungary".

8 FRONTINI, Andrea - "Italy".

9 ALGIERI, Franco - "Austria".

10 ADEBAHR, Cornelius; TÖGLHOFER, Theresia - "Germany".

enhancement of political efforts towards the enlargement to the West Balkans region, a process that is currently ongoing¹¹, expressing the importance of that region to the EU, namely in what relates to security matters. Recently, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, claiming a geopolitical urgency, underlined the importance of speeding up the process of enlargement to the countries of the West Balkans, specially to the Republic of Northern Macedonia and to Albania¹².

History and the constant threat of ethnic conflicts in the West Balkans are traditionally related with the influence that these problems have in Europe's security¹³. Some member states have also showed their concern with the high levels of corruption and transnational organized crime, as well as migrant fluxes from the region¹⁴. These concerns with the security environment are referred in several strategic documents. In 2003, the EU Security Strategy identified a number of threats coming from the West Balkans, namely heroin traffic and women's sexual exploitation, crimes perpetrated by organized crime networks. In this document, the risk for the European security related to "collapsing states" in the region, is also pointed out¹⁵. Within the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, references are made, once more, to the challenges for the EU, regarding safety in the West Balkans, emphasizing migration, energetic security, terrorism and organized crime. In face of these challenges, the Global strategy refers, the EU "will continue to develop anti-terrorism cooperation, in the matter of respect for human rights"¹⁶.

Apart from the challenges posed by security related issues, the geostrategic and geopolitical characteristics of the Balkans, have also to be addressed. The region "is pivotal between three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa (...) as a crossroad of cultures and, historically, of disputes between empires"¹⁷. Given that position, the West Balkans experience the influence, apart from that of the EU, of other foreign players. Russia stands out, with a foreign policy for the region that is very dynamic¹⁸, but also China with economic interests, through the "belt and

11 MACDONALD, Alastair - "Western Balkans Need EU Path to Prevent New Wars".

12 BURCHARD, Hans von der - "Merkel: Albania, North Macedonia should get green light for EU talks".

13 GOMES, Teresa - "A democratização dos Balcãs: O caso da Macedónia", p. 69.

14 ZENELI, Valbona - "A European Future for the Balkans?"

15 COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN UNION - "Secure Europe in a better world. European Security Strategy", p.6.

16 EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION - "Share Vision, common action. A stronger Europe: a Global Strategy for European Union's foreign and security policy", p.16.

17 PEZARAT CORREIA, Pedro - *Manual de Geopolítica e Geoestratégia - Análise Geoestratégica do Mundo em Conflito II*, p.245.

18 MULAL, Muhidin; KARI, Mirsad - "The Western Balkans Geopolitics and Russian Energy Politics".

road initiative”¹⁹, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, all of them, with political and religious (ideological) interests in the West Balkans²⁰.

Bearing all this, the present article shows that there is an intimate relationship between the enlargement policies and changes operated by the EU on candidate states, having in the so-called “Copenhagen Criteria” their regulatory framework, and secondly, to point that the withdrawal of the West Balkans countries from the perspective of joining the EU, may have deep negative consequences for the EU security, making the region more prone to the intervention of other foreign players, namely Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The paper is organized in three chapters, apart from the introduction and the conclusion. So, in the first chapter the relation between the enlargement process and the establishment of the so-called security communities. On the second chapter, the importance of the West Balkans for the EU is assessed, both in terms of security and geopolitics. Thirdly, the most meaningful relations between the EU and the countries of the West Balkans, with an emphasis in the changes at political and security level, that were implemented, under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) are addressed. Finally, an insight on the motivations of foreign players is given; when feasible, the main challenges posed by their presence, are also addressed. As an outlook, the main challenges for the EU in the West Balkans are presented, as an outcome of the purposes, intentions and influence that the foreign players have in order to achieve those same purposes.

Europeanization and the creation of the security communities

The concept of Europeanization, being a rather recent theory, is intimately associated with the enlargement processes²¹. Initially, the word was applied referring to the governance concurrence models within the member states²² and to the processes of transformation of domestic policies of those states by the EU²³. Bélanger²⁴ defines Europeanization as “part of the greatest project of creating a new political and legal European order”, hence it is essential to consider the political motivation of

19 TONCHEV, Plamen - “China’s Road: into the Western Balkans”.

20 VRAČIĆ, Alida - “Turkey’s Role in the Western Balkans”.

21 RISSE, Thomas - “A European identity? Europeanization and the evolution of nation-state identities”, p.3; LARSEN, Henrik - *Analysing the Foreign Policy of Small States in the EU*, p. 22.

22 RISSE, Thomas - “A European identity? Europeanization and the evolution of nation-state identities”, p.3.

23 LADRECH, Robert - “Europeanization and political parties: Towards a framework for analysis”, p. 387.

24 BÉLANGER, Marie-Eve - “Europeanization as a Foundation of the European Construction”, p.29.

the Europeanization, via the intersubjective creation of an European political space. For the quoted author, the European order is established by means of the Europeanization, being the essence of it, the enlargement of the political community, in a geographic sense.

Therefore, Europeanization is about the relation established between the European institutions and the states, through new sets of rules, regulations, procedures and structures that the member states have to embed in their own internal structures and regulations²⁵. The concept of Europeanization, related to foreign policy is implemented since the post-Cold War period, in order to establish the relationship between the EU and countries from Central and Eastern Europe, that initiated their accession processes, at the time. Since then, Europeanization was made mandatory to the candidates (and potential candidates), regarding the introduction of legislation, setting political priorities and reforms on the administration²⁶.

The so-called Copenhagen criteria, set in 1993 by the European Council, translate most of the Europeanization processes related to candidate countries, thus establishing that requirements laid down must be met, at a political level (human rights, rule of law, consolidated democratic institutions, respect and protection of ethnic minorities), economic (a market economy that really works and the ability to face competition and markets of the EU) and legal (ability to observe the duties arising from the accession, including the ability of an effective implementation of the rules and regulations which are part of the body of established Community law and adhering to objectives of a political, economic and monetary union).

Relating to candidate countries, the Europeanization is a process of structural transformation²⁷, having both the institutions and players a central part in these processes²⁸. This transformation represents, according with Borzel and Risse²⁹, an opportunity presented by the EU for the implementation of a “(re)socialization” and learning of the candidate countries. To support that transformation process, the EU uses incentive policies (comprising funding) that set the basis of a compliance policy, meaning, more funding requires more transformation (*more for more*)³⁰.

25 KALIBER, Alper - “Europeanization in Turkey”, p. 38.

26 CELATA, Filippo; COLETTI, Raffaella, p.19; OLSEN, Johan P. - “The Many Faces of Europeanization”.

27 OLSEN, Johan P. - “The Many Faces of Europeanization”, p.921; FEATHERSTONE, Kevin; KAZAMIAS, G. A. - *Europeanization and the southern periphery*, p.3.

28 COMAN, Ramona; CRESPIY, A. - “Still in Search of Europeanization: From Limited to Structural Change?”, p.56.

29 BORZEL, Tanja; RISSE, Thomas - “When Europe Hits Home”.

30 GRABBE, Heather - *The EU's transformative power*; ELBASANI, Arolda - “Europeanization travels to the Western Balkans: enlargement strategy, domestic obstacles and diverging reforms”, p.5.

A recent paper by Licínia Simão³¹, a Portuguese researcher, draws a framework for the EU enlargement to the Southern Caucasus region. The author connects this movement with the need to create the so-called “security communities”, correlating the existence of “rogue states” in the vicinity of the EU with security issues inherent to those circumstances, therefore motivating the EU to “Europeanize” those countries, by means of a “peaceful change”³².

Karl Deutsch and other authors³³ specifically addressed the concept of the “security communities”, stating that its establishments pose a “real assurance that its members won’t fight between themselves, seeking to solve their disputes by means other than conflict”³⁴, thus creating a sort of “non-war community”³⁵. Besides, they state that establishing those communities allows the members to develop and deepen common values and identities, and institutions and dialogues that will integrate, peacefully, the views of the several states.

Related to this subject, the works of Mole³⁶ must be highlighted; Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania’s accession to the EU was analysed, identifying the changes in those countries’ security identities, aiming to counter Russia’s influence in that region; also, Rieker³⁷ addressed the way the EU affects the national security identities of the four largest Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). The latter author shows how the different stages of the accession process, post-cold war, had had an influence on the way those countries addressed their national security, underlining that the speed and features of those changes varied among these states, due to a combination of different connections with the EU and different traditions of their security policy.

The creation and enlargement of the EU, as it happens with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), is thus seen as one of the most relevant examples of establishing security communities, while an enhanced instrument of cooperation, fostering interrelationships between the member states. By means of the enlargement, the EU produces a positive integration dynamics with other states, in order to develop common expectations and producing changes in security policies.

31 SIMÃO, Licínia - *The EU’s Neighbourhood Policy towards the South Caucasus Expanding the European Security Community*.

32 *Idem*, p.27.

33 DEUTSCH, Karl; et al. - *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area*, p. 6.

34 *Idem*, p. 5.

35 WAEVER, Ole - “Insecurity, Security and A security in the West European Non-War Community”.

36 MOLE, Richard C. M. - *Discursive Constructions of Identity in European Politics*, p. 164.

37 RIEKER, Pernille – “From Common Defence to Comprehensive Security”.

The geopolitical context of the West Balkans

Deriving from its geography, the West Balkans have been, throughout the history, one of the main stages in the feuds between major powers. Geopolitically, this sub-region has always been an important frontier between regions (Europe and Middle East, Europe and Asia), cultures and religions (Catholics, Christian Orthodox and Muslims). Huntington defined the region as one of the “fracture lines” of the “clash of civilizations”³⁸. This is also pointed by Bobic³⁹, arguing that the Balkan’s peninsula, due to its geopolitical configuration, establishes the connection between Western Christianity, Oriental Orthodoxy and the Islamic world.

Figura 1 – Países dos Balcãs Ocidentais



Fonte: www.GISreportonline.com

Brzezinski⁴⁰ has also emphasized the importance of the region, stating that it is a significant strongpoint for securing Eurasia’s control. Years later, the author underlines that the “Achilles heel” of the XXI century, geopolitically speaking, is the area that he designates as the “Global Balkans” – the strip of land of Eurasia, going from the Balkans to Central Asia, defining it as “unstable and a source of crisis”⁴¹. The geopolitical value of the West Balkans was also emphasized by Federica Mogherini, former responsible for the EU’s diplomacy; during a visit to Serbia, she highlighted the relevance of that sub-region to the EU’s stability, referring to it as a “geopolitical chessboard”, where

38 HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. - *O choque de civilizações*.

39 BOBIC, Marinko – “Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans”, p.88.

40 BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew - *The Grand Chessboard*.

41 BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew - *Strategic vision*, p.135.

several players, like Russia⁴², play an ever more active part, by means of their economic interests as well as their cultural bonds to the peoples of the West Balkans.

Apart from the influence that all the formerly mentioned players have in the region's stability, in the context of Europe's security, the West Balkans pose a potential threat, not in a military conventional sense, but regarding human (ins)security, since poor life conditions drives the natives from several of those regions to seek for a better life, elsewhere⁴³. In recent years, millions of refugees from Syria, Iraq and countries so far apart as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Libya, Southern Sudan and Yemen have reached the fringes of Europe, many of them passing through routes that cross the West Balkans, crossing the north of Greece, and passing through Albania, Serbia e Macedonia⁴⁴.

Regarding terrorism, the region has experienced a strong connection to fundamentalism and to the process of Islamic radicalization in particular. We have to bear in mind that during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (between 1992 and 1995), several hundreds of elements coming from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Paquistan, Algeria and other regions from the Muslim world, also including veterans of the Afghani *Jihad*, fought in what they regarded as a holy war against the Christian Serbs. Although most of those fighters had left the region after the end of the conflict, their ideological influence remained in some areas⁴⁵.

Cultural diversity in the region has been signalled as one of the reasons for the exacerbation of the region's instability. If by one hand, Albania can be considered comparatively homogeneous, with very few minorities, on the other hand, in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, 42% of the population is made of minorities. The same can be noticed regarding Montenegro, with 33,6% and Serbia, with 34,5%. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is even more complex, where there are almost 2M Muslims, 1.364.000 Serbs, 752.00 Croatians, amongst other cultures and ethnicities⁴⁶. As a result of this diversity, most minorities have constantly sought to break the link with their adoptive states⁴⁷.

At a political and social level, high rates of poverty and corruption are known to facilitate the arising of severe crisis in almost every countries. Referring to the corruption in the area, Koinova⁴⁸ stresses that it is a legacy of a confluence of factors,

42 Upon arrival at the Serbian Parliament, Mogherini was booed by members of the radical Serbian nationalist party, who chanted: "Serbia! Russia! We don't need the European Union! (cit in RIEGERT, 2017).

43 BOBIC, Marinko - "Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans.", p. 98.

44 LILYANOVA, Velina - "The Western Balkans Frontline of the migrant crisis".

45 PREZELJ, Iztok - *The fight against terrorism and crisis management in the Western Balkans*.

46 SMIRNOVA, Nina; YASKOVA, Alla - "The Balkans and the Mediterranean policy of Russia", p. 275.

47 LESS, Timothy - "Western Balkan six on their path to EU membership?".

48 KOINOVA, Maria - *Ethnonationalist Conflict in Post communist States: Varieties of Governance in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo*, p.183.

reaching from the antagonism inherited by the states, after the ruling of the Ottoman Empire, to corrupt social relations during the communist period and to the effects of the international economic embargo to the former Yugoslavia, during the wars that led to its obliteration. Besides, the author emphasizes, corruption has been used by governments has a “strategic weapon” to maintain power and influence the states policies, conditioning minorities in order to serve the purposes of different players (both foreign and domestic). Apart from identifying the historical background of corruption, Mankoff⁴⁹ also approaches the way some of the leaders from West Balkans’ countries have reintroduced ethnic nationalism, in order to divert their population’s attention from corruption schemes, taking advantage of the ethnic tensions legacy and the conflicts that marred the region, back in the XX century’s nineties.

The decade of 1990 was one of the bloodiest periods in the Balkans’ history, with hundreds of thousands of victims, dead, wounded, displaced and refugees⁵⁰, which led to the intervention of the international community, evolving the NATO, the United Nations (UN) and the EU, in order to restore stability. The priority given to other parts of the globe, by successive American Administrations, specially to the Middle East, since the terrorist attack on 9/11 (2001), has made the US influence in the region, almost negligible. For De Vivo⁵¹, this option of the USA was much influenced by the enhancement of the EU’s intervention in the region, together with the cooperative relation established with Turkey. In spite of this apparent neglect, the region is still of interest for American companies, highlighting the contribution given by Americans in the defence and security sectors, namely providing training for military and security forces of most of the countries on that area, activities that are combined with defence equipment sales⁵².

Regarding Russia, the connection that Moscow maintains with most of the West Balkans is motivated by historical and cultural affinities with Slav communities⁵³. This affinity with the Orthodox Slavs has developed a feeling of protection from Russia⁵⁴. Beyond the interferences in matters related with security, deriving from geographic vicinity, Russia is engaged in securing free passage through the Bosphorus Strait, into the Mediterranean⁵⁵, thus assuring its presence in the area, namely in the Adriatic, using

49 MANKOFF, Jeffrey - *Russian Foreign Policy*.

50 There is still no precise data on the number of victims of the former Yugoslavia conflict, with different organisations revealing significantly different figures. In a report presented on the conflict The International Center for Transitional Justice, account of at least 140,000 dead. In <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-FormerYugoslavia-Justice-Facts-2009-English.pdf> .

51 DE VIVO, Diana - “The Balkan chessboard: Russia’s ruble diplomacy and EU interests”.

52 SULKU, Mehmed - *Political Relations Between Turkey and Albania in the Post Cold War Period*, p.51.

53 DE VIVO, Diana - “The Balkan chessboard: Russia’s ruble diplomacy and EU interests”.

54 BECHEV, Dimitar – “The Influence of Russia and Turkey in the Western Balkans”.

55 SMIRNOVA; YASKOVA - “The Balkans and the Mediterranean policy of Russia”, p.268.

Montenegro as Host nation⁵⁶. In face of the geopolitical and geostrategic relevance of the West Balkans, the EU's enlargement to the countries in the region is seen by Russia as a potential threat to its interests and influence. Therefore, Moscow's diplomacy have been engaged in refraining countries from the West Balkans, from adhering the organization⁵⁷, fearing the enlargement's impact in the whole of the post-soviet area⁵⁸.

Another of the players that has a keen interest in the area, is Turkey. As Russia, the Turkish connection, and that of the Gulf States, particularly Iran and Saudi Arabia, is due to the cultural relations with the near nine million Muslims of the West Balkans, which make them the majority of the Albanian population, in Kosovo and in Bosnia. During the war on Bosnia, Turkey secretly delivered weapons to the Bosnians, in spite of the UN's embargo⁵⁹ ⁶⁰.

Sustained by the connections (permanent) of geography, history and culture, Turkey uses *soft power* instruments in order to assert itself in the West Balkans⁶¹. The establishment of the *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency* (TİKA) has given a major contribution for the development of Turkey's strategy. Related to this, the construction and restoring Mosques in several countries in the area, including the building of the greatest Mosque in the region, in Tirana (Albania), deserves to be considered. The establishment, in 1996, of the *South-East European Cooperation Process* (SEECP)⁶², which aims to promote stability, security and cooperation among member states (Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Croatia, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldavia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia) by promoting mutual dialog and multi-level cooperation in all areas of interest, is another of the opportunities for Ankara to establish its influence. Bobic and Lami⁶³ argue that the Turkish influence in the West Balkans has aroused great concern in Europe and America, regarding Ankara's ambition to re-establish the sphere of influence of the late Ottoman Empire.

For the EU, Turkey could be a countervailing power to Iran and Saudi Arabia's influence in the region, that promotes a broader islamisation in the area. However, the ever more distancing of Turkey from the West and from the possibility of joining the EU, has risen fear in Brussels towards Erdogan's, *Justice and Development Party* (AKP) pro-Islamic and undemocratic policies⁶⁴.

56 BOBIC, Marinko – “Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans”, p.102–3.

57 VAN DEN BERG, Hans Bastiaan – “Russia, Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina”, p.43.

58 SAMORUKOV, Maxim – “Russia's Tactics in the Western Balkans. Carnegie Europe Report”.

59 BOBIC, Marinko – “Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans”, p.100.

60 LAMI, Blendi – “Geo-culture as a Turkish foreign policy tool for influence in Albania”, p.35.

61 *Idem*, p.29.

62 In: <https://www.rcc.int/pages/111/south-east-european-cooperation-process--seecp>

63 BOBIC, Marinko – “Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans”, p.99; LAMI, Blendi – “Geo-culture as a Turkish foreign policy tool for influence in Albania”, p.31.

64 BOBIC, Marinko – “Congruous or Conflicting? Great Power Configurations in the Balkans”, p.101.

Unlike other players, whose geographic vicinity emphasizes the security dimension, China's presence in West Balkans countries, besides being relatively recent, has in its essence, economic motivations. During the wars that followed the collapse of former Yugoslavia, China took a neutral stand and endorsed the decisions of the UN's Security Council. Beijing's diplomacy was, however, rather displeased when the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was bombed during NATO's operation in 1999, against Serbia⁶⁵. Economically, Chinese investment on countries from the West Balkans has been rising, particularly in Serbia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding Serbia, from 2012 to 2014, the increase in the investment rate, has reached two digits, funding major projects in infrastructure and energy⁶⁶.

Geopolitically, China's economic and commercial links with the West Balkans are a major contribution to the "New Silk Road", providing maritime and land access of Chinese products to the European market. *Clingendael, the Netherlands Institute of International Relations* has recently conducted an assessment on the "New Silk Road", highlighting the strong investment made by Beijing in infrastructure on the West Balkans and on the Black Sea. The authors point out that the Chinese power to transform specific sectors such as energy and transportation, is tremendous⁶⁷.

Figura 2 – Transport infrastructure and Chinese investment in western Balkans



Fonte: www.GISreportonline.com

65 TONCHEV, Plamen – “China’s Road: into the Western Balkans”, p.2.

66 ANASTASAKIS, Othon; DREZOY, Kyril; KONESKA, Cvete – “Written evidence - Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska”; TONCHEV, Plamen – “China’s Road: into the Western Balkans”, p.2.

67 BASTIAN, Jens – “The potential for growth through Chinese infrastructure investments in Central and South-Eastern Europe along the “Balkan Silk Road””, p.39; VOJVODIC-MEDIC, Filip – “How to Live with China in the Balkans”.

These economic relations have been accompanied by a number of diplomatic initiatives by China, being the liberalization of the visa program, a sound example. Serbia and Macedonia's Foreign Offices (and also those of Greece and Hungary), have accelerated the visa procedure in the respective diplomatic delegations in Beijing⁶⁸.

In 2012, China developed an initiative known as "16 + 1"⁶⁹, meant to promote Chinese cooperation with 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including West Balkans countries, namely Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina⁷⁰. This initiative, apart from strengthening the political and economic relation with the countries of the West Balkans, is also a facilitator for the establishment of Chinese language learning centres, in that region⁷¹. In spite of this engagement, and unlike Russia, China appears to have no interest in moving away the countries of the West Balkans from joining the EU, since that very same process, favours their commercial and cooperation interests, due to the easy access to the European markets, if the enlargement occurs⁷².

Chinese increasing influence is the motto that German diplomacy uses to try to accelerate the countries of the West Balkans' integration into the EU, by establishing, on an early stage, the so-called "Berlin process" and, in 2017, through its enhancement (Berlin Plus), which is meant to increase funding to countries interested in infrastructure and other development projects⁷³. Therefore, the German Chancellor is very sensitive to the geopolitical issues of the region, having shown mistrustful towards Chinese influence, and has even alerted not only for the economic, but also political interference of Beijing in the region⁷⁴.

West Balkans geopolitical context is extremely complex, resulting from several players that have an influence on the region, their multiple interests (usually conflicting) and sensitive, due to the permanent exploitation of cultural issues, especially those related to religion.

The power of the EU in the West Balkans

The date that the EU opened negotiations with most of the countries of the West Balkans, is already distant. In 1999, the EU launched the Stabilization and

68 BASTIAN, Jens – "The potential for growth through Chinese infrastructure investments in Central and South-Eastern Europe along the "Balkan Silk Road"", p.39.

69 Informação disponível em: <http://ceec-china-latvia.org/>. [Acedido 07 de fevereiro de 2020]

70 VUKSANOVIC, Vuk – "The Unexpected Regional Player in the Balkans: China".

71 BASTIAN, Jens – "The potential for growth through Chinese infrastructure investments in Central and South-Eastern Europe along the "Balkan Silk Road"", p.39.

72 VUKSANOVIC, Vuk – "The Unexpected Regional Player in the Balkans: China".

73 METUSHAJ, Mirela – "Geopolitics of Albania in the Balkans after NATO Membership", p.401.

74 SEKULARAC, Ivana; BACZYNSKA, Gabriela – "EU woos Western Balkans but is coy on membership. Reuters world news".

Association Process (SAP)⁷⁵, which is the mainframe for the relations between the EU and the countries of the West Balkans (European Parliament, 2018). The EU's initial approach regarding the integration to the West Balkans was made public for the first time, in June 2000, at the European Council held at Feira (Portugal), defining that integration, to be as broad as possible for the West Balkans, adding that those countries "are potential candidates to join the EU" (Council of European Union 2000: point 74).

In 2003, at the European Council in Salonica (Greece), the EU has reiterated its "determination to endorse totally and effectively the European approach of the West Balkans' countries, who will become an integrant part of the EU, once the Copenhagen criteria are met" (Council of European Union 2000: point 40). In this council, EU Ministers adopted a new agenda for the West Balkans, which included five key elements: enhancement of measures to consolidate peace and promote stability and democratic development; greater integration with the EU through the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP); greater cooperation in the fight on organized crime pertaining Justice and Internal Affairs (JAI); economic development; increase of support to reconciliation and strengthening cooperation.

From that date onwards, the political dialogue between the EU and West Balkans' countries has included issues regarding foreign policy and common security⁷⁶. In June 2008, the European Council explicitly made a reference to the adhesion, by conveying its "full support to the European approach of the West Balkans' countries", taking into account "the robust progress on economic and political reforms and by meeting the mandatory conditions and requirements (...) all of the potential candidates in the West Balkans should reach the status of candidate" (Council of European Union 2008: point 52). In February 2018, the European Commission released a new strategy for the West Balkans, announcing that two countries (Montenegro and Serbia) were able to join the EU until 2025.

The possibility of joining the EU has been beneficial for the security in the West Balkans, especially by solving conflicts amongst states of that region, having the EU taken a significant role as intermediate. As examples of this, the establishment of an agreement between Montenegro and Serbia regarding borders, and the restrain-

75 The Stabilisation and Association Process is the strategic framework for supporting the progressive approximation of the Western Balkan countries to the EU. It is based on bilateral contractual relations, financial assistance, political dialogue, trade relations and regional cooperation. Contractual relations take the form of Stabilization and Association Agreements (EEA), which provide for political and economic cooperation, as well as the creation of free trade areas with the countries concerned. On the basis of common democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law, each EEA establishes permanent cooperation structures. The Stabilization and Association Council, which meets at ministerial level every year, oversees the implementation and implementation of the agreement.

76 PHINNEMORE, David – "The Stabilization and Association Process: a framework for European Union enlargement", p.25.

ing of relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The EU has also been fundamental to alleviate the differences about the border, between Kosovo and Serbia, Greece and Albania; also on the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church, that brought tension in the relations of Montenegro and Kosovo with Serbia⁷⁷.

The prospect of integrate the EU was also significant for the resolution of the conflict between the Albanian Liberation Army and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in 2001. The signature, on August the 13th of that year of the Ohrid Framework Agreement⁷⁸ put an end to violence in Macedonia, in the same year the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU was signed. Recently, the EU gave a major contribution to solve the dispute that for decades, opposed Greece to the Republic of Northern Macedonia, because of the previous designation of the Republic (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). The political agreement achieved between both parts was motivated, largely to the possibility of the Republic of Northern Macedonia to join the EU⁷⁹.

Apart from the improvement in the relations between the countries of the region, the EU has sought to alter the policies followed by those countries, in order to promote a political dialogue regarding foreign policy, security and defence of the EU, in line with the EU statements, and taking part of whatever actions, sanctions e restrictive measures to be agreed upon. As an example, it is important to highlight the active part of Albanian contingents in Crisis Management Missions in the scope of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), namely EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EUTM in the Mali. The country has also volunteered to contribute with military personnel for the EU Battle Groups, in 2024. The involvement in police and military actions of the EU, equally extends to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the Republic of Northern Macedonia. Since 2017, two Bosnian military take part in the EU's training mission in the Central African Republic. Contingents from Bosnia and Herzegovina also take part in UN and NATO missions in Congo, Mali and Afghanistan⁸⁰.

Over the years, internally, West Balkans' countries have, been "seduced" by the EU to implement changes to their legal system and institutions, in compliance with European norms, particularly relating to matters regarding security and defence. It is important to stress the changes enforced by Albania that, in February 2019, adopted a new national strategy for small arms calibre control and light weaponry, for

77 HUSZKA, Beáta - *The Power of Perspective*.

78 Framework Agreement. Macedonia, 2001. Disponível em: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia/framework_agreement_ohrid_130801_en.pdf.

79 Sobre este assunto ver CRUZ, A "nova" República da Macedónia do Norte: significado Geopolítico e Geoestratégico. Disponível em: <https://cidium.ium.pt/docs/artigos/56amjln6fxssgwgwg.pdf>.

80 EUROPEAN COMMISSION – "Bosnia 2019 Report", p.170.

2019-2024. The country as also signed the regional roadmap for a solution regarding illegal weapons possession, unauthorized use and small arms and ammunition trafficking in the West Balkans. As also enforced, a wide set of measures related to arms control by Police Forces, in line with the EU compulsory requirements. We can also notice the enforcement of these measures by the rest of the countries in the region, pertaining arms control⁸¹. The progresses made in other areas are also noticeable: justice and fundamental rights; freedom and security; press and education, amongst other examples, which reflect the EU's ability to transform.

Therefore, accession processes have been one of the main drivers of progress in the West Balkans. The outlook of joining the EU, encourages the states to implement reforms in several sectors, from politics, to economy, but specially related to security and defence⁸².

The enlargement fatigue and security consequences

The EU played a significant role in solving ethnic conflicts and bilateral challenges in the region. However, the limits of its influence were also made clear⁸³, largely motivated by the lack of political consensus between the member states regarding the entrance of new members, as if caused by a sort of “fatigue” towards the enlargement, and that has been delaying the negotiation and accession processes. During these last few years, the EU has been engaged in handling domestic problems, caused by the 2007 financial crisis, by the abandon of the Union by one of the more important member-states, the United Kingdom, by the management of the relations with the USA and with the Russian Federation, especially after Crimea's annexation (2014), e above all, in trying to deepen the political integration, as a way to overcome severe constraints to its decision making process.

As a result of this “internal crisis”, the identity transformation process of the West Balkans' countries has been rather slackened. From the West Balkans side, the stifling to the EU intervention has increased, being patent the progressive lack of commitment of the several states in implementing reforms in the security sector demanded by the EU⁸⁴. Apart from the elites, who increasingly resist the demand for liberal reforms in their respective countries, also the population have shown opposition to any reforms whatsoever that impair the basic social contract, given the

81 EUROPEAN COMMISSION – “Albania 2019 Report”, p.96.

82 HOUSE OF COMMONS – “Global Britain and the Western Balkans”, p.5.

83 HUSZKA, Beáta - *The Power of Perspective*.

84 BALKANS POLICY RESEARCH GROUP – “A decade after EULEX: a new approach to improve the rule of law in Kosovo”.

recent experience of Croatia and Greece, where joining the EU has coincided with economic recession, social unrest and massive migration⁸⁵, having as a consequence the increase in the overall suspicion regarding the EU process⁸⁶.

In face of this context, lately, there very few developments regarding the accession criteria to the EU. Difficulties have been reported in the transposition of European proposals regarding interagency coordination and cooperation, of the legal and police structures, which has jeopardized the ability to fight terrorism, organized crime (in particular, the one connected with arms and drug trafficking) and the borders control.

The relation between the countries of the region has also not improved, in spite of the progresses already achieved. The tensions between Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo have been made clear, with this latter state imposing 100% tariffs on all imports from the former⁸⁷. These relations are still based in political and cultural affinities amongst the different players, with the EU unable to achieve the expected impact in the improvement of those relations. Besides, and regarding foreign and security policies, the alignments are still motivated at large by the traditional geopolitical alliances. The Commission highlights this issue on the several reports on the progress of the accession process, pointing Serbia as maintaining that alignment with Russia and Venezuela, instead of complying with the EU recommendations⁸⁸.

The impairment of the progress in the accession and the consequential retirement of the West Balkans from the prospect of joining the EU, increasingly nurture the idea that the region may become one of the biggest security problems for the EU, notably terrorism and organized criminality, and also the possibility of the states fall under authoritarian regimes⁸⁹, resistant to European ruling power e very opened to outside players influence, and look with apprehension the outlook of integration into the EU as posing restrictions to their geopolitical aspirations.

Related with security matters, apart from the illegal migration, terrorism and drug trafficking, and of a trajectory leading to the arising of new forms of nationalisms and unstable governments, instability in the region will have a profound impact on European borders, as History showing that the consequences can be very serious. From 2012, resulting from several incidents, hundreds of convicts escaped imprisonment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, most of them still with its

85 LESS, Timothy – “Western Balkan six on their path to EU membership?”.

86 ANASTASAKIS, Othon; DREZOY, Kyril; KONESKA, Cvete – “Written evidence - Othon Anastasakis, Kyril Drezov and Cvete Koneska”.

87 EUROPEAN COMMISSION - “Kosovo Report”. Brussels: European Commission, 2019, p. 54.

88 EUROPEAN COMMISSION - “Serbia Report”, Brussels: European Commission, 2019, p. 92.

89 KHAZE, Nina Markovic – “European Union’s Enlargement Fatigue: Russia and China Rise in Southeast Europe”, p.49.

whereabouts unknown. Some sources state that over 1.000 foreign fighters from the region have left for the battlefields of Syria and Iraq. Although some progress has been made by the states of the region, regarding antiterrorism laws, radicalization is still a major concern⁹⁰.

An escalation of the instability would jeopardise the EU role in the region, impairing even more the possibility for the West Balkans countries to comply with the requirements necessary to achieve the status of member-state. Only the possibility of joining the EU will keep the West Balkans on the track, and able to resist pressure from the outside. Therefore, it is mandatory that accession deadlines be established, with achievable objectives, for each one of those countries. As an example, Montenegro has moved forward more significantly than its peers, but after 54 months has only been able to conclude 3 of the 33 chapters of the negotiation process with the EU. Likewise, Serbia has only concluded 2 chapters, and another 21 still have to be initiated. Meanwhile, Bosnia and Kosovo, are not even candidates to the accession, 15 years after EU leaders agreed upon the enlargement to the West Balkans⁹¹.

For these deadlines and objectives to be reached, the EU must also find a political consensus so that the current internal difference regarding the enlargement to the West Balkans might be overcome. In spite of each of the 27 member states might have divergent interests, with the countries closer to the eastern border being more favourable, given the fear that they may be the first ones to be harmed by an increase in insecurity, unlike those which are further apart, for whom the entry of more states can make the decision making processes more complex, besides altering the quota system of the Community's budget, it is mandatory to define a European vision. Beside these issues, the political and social fears regarding the integration of culturally distinct cultures, especially in religious practices, seem obvious. This may have been the main reason for the successive postponement of Turkey's accession to the EU, situation that led to the degradation of the relations and the distancing between Ankara and Brussels.

Serbia's President, Aleksander Vučić, is being focused in his country's accession to the EU, since he believes this is the best way to the political and economic revival of the country. This is significant because Vučić has dampening Serbian nationalism in order to assure European good will. The risk is that, if the enlargement is kept on hold, Vucic can be politically influenced to uphold the Serbian nationalism, or himself promote a change on his policy – something which is plausible taking into account his hard-line attitude, back in the nineties⁹². So, the region

90 BRITISH COUNCIL – “Written evidence British Council”.

91 LESS, Timothy – “Western Balkan six on their path to EU membership?”.

92 LESS, Timothy – “Western Balkan six on their path to EU membership?”.

is affected by a new phase of instability, with democratic regimes immersed in a profound crisis of values, with states all over the region being captured by internal and foreign interests, together with the repeated tensions between states and the rising of nationalism. All the countries in the region experience high levels of corruption and increasing levels of poverty. Unemployment amongst youths is at one of the highest rates in the world⁹³.

Bearing these vulnerabilities, the region's permeability to the intervention of foreign players, particularly that of Russia, whose relation is composed of many features: political and diplomatic, historical and cultural, energy and economic interests, soft power (including cultural, educational and religious cooperation), information operations and infiltration of the local media, connections with politicians, military and Intelligence cooperation⁹⁴. Moscow's regime thus seems to be willing to do whatever it can to upset the West Balkans path towards stability and democracy, this being verified by the support given to the attempt of *coup d'état* in Montenegro, in 2016, and the reports on Russian attempts of supplying weapons to militia groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina⁹⁵.

In Macedonia, since the beginning of the political crisis in 2015, Russia has significantly increased its influence, causing inter-ethnic tensions. In Serbia, concerns about freedom of the Press are worsened by the influence of Sputnik Magazine⁹⁶ (*Sputnik Srbija*), the source of news which is more often quoted in the country, and that has been spreading to other countries in the West Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia and Montenegro)⁹⁷. Anti-westerns and pro-Russian remarks have significantly increased, and along with it, the strengthening of the "pan-slav/orthodox solidarity". In Bosnia, Russia has supported destabilising activities and anti-Dayton agreements, of political leaders from the *Republika Srpska* (RS). That included the illegal referendum, in 2015, about the celebration of a RS national day. In February 2018, stories in the Bosnian press about weapons acquisition to the country's Police Force, nurtured the fear of an increased Russian influence, as well as the visit to the RS, of a Russian motorbike gang called "Night Wolves", in March⁹⁸.

This interference of foreign players has influenced, in several ways and intensities, the stability of the countries of the West Balkans, questioning the present role of the EU in the region especially, endangering the developments achieved.

93 BRITISH COUNCIL – "Written evidence British Council".

94 FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE – "Written evidence Foreign and Commonwealth Office".

95 HOUSE OF COMMONS – "Global Britain and the Western Balkans", p.7.

96 <https://sputniknews.com/>.

97 ASSENOVA, Margatita – "Russia's International Broadcasters".

98 FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE – "Written evidence Foreign and Commonwealth Office".

Conclusion

Issues related with security, are abreast with those related with economy and made the solid foundations for the establishment and strengthening of the EU, as a relevant political entity. The achievements accomplished in the scope of security and defence, which can be seen in actions taken under the Common Security and Defence Policy make unlikely a violent conflict between member states.

The EU enlargement policy has made a clear contribution to the reinforcement of its international status, and to the establishment of a real security community. Through this, the EU has sought to “Europeanise” structures both in member states and also in candidate states, in line with the regulations and values that make for the European identity. The success of the implemented measures was particularly clear in the post-Cold War period, by transforming authoritarian political systems into liberal democracies.

The political, economic and security crises that have been affecting the EU and its member states have profoundly changed the European view on the enlargement of the security community, integrating new states, in particular those of the West Balkans, to whom was promised a possibility of accession. The commitment made, and the positive economic outlook of the integration, has made possible significant changes in the relationship between the states of the region, which is historically very tense, and in each country internal structures (political, economic, legal, military and constabulary).

In addition, the possibility of integration, allowed realigning the geopolitical orientation of the region, by making these states less prone to suffer influence by foreign players.

These last years, have been characterised by setbacks in the Europeanisation processes, as a result of the “enlargement fatigue”. The lack of consensus between member states, backed by domestic public opinion, which tend to see the integration of the West Balkans’ countries as a threat to their security, especially coming from organized crime, mass migration and profound cultural clash, has restrained the developments once achieved.

The void of power brought by European indecision and created by the absence of a clear political commitment with the region, thus leading to the reforms “fatigue” and setbacks in the region, opened space for the interference of foreign players, preventing the possibility of enlargement of the European security community, considered to be one of the most successful foreign and security policies of the EU, making it harder to implement in the West Balkans. Security challenges identified by the most sceptical ones, regarding the enlargement, may be severely increased, if the EU ceases to have any influence in the area. In addition to the escalation of

quarrels between the states of that region, the surge of transnational organized crime organization's influence, radicalisms and extremisms, besides nationalisms rooted in ethnic matrixes, can pose a serious security challenge for the Europeans, one that only the enlargement of the periphery in general, and of the security communities in particular can assist in mitigate.

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