

The International Community and the European Union in the Western Balkans: from ‘Disinterest’ to ‘Active Participation’

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ABSTRACT

This article's intention is to frame the debate on the role of the international community and the European Union in the Western Balkans. The article deals mostly with the historical facts in concepts that were developed in the Balkans; starting with the role of the Ottoman empire, which traces can be found in the Balkans still today and going through the bloody 20th century wars – from WWI and WWII to the Balkan wars, which deeply penetrated the modern structure and thinking in, on and about the Western Balkans. The article finishes with a short analysis of the international community's activities in the Western Balkans that presents the pillars for the following debate in the following articles.

KEY WORDS: Balkans, Western Balkan, Yugoslav wars, European Union, International Community

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POVZETEK

Cilj članka je uokviriti razpravo o vlogi mednarodne skupnosti in Evropske unije na Zahodnem Balkanu skozi obravnavo zgodovinskih dejstev v različnih konceptih, ki so bili oblikovani na tem geografskem področju. Začenši z vlogo Otomanskega imperija, katerega sledi lahko najdemo na Balkanu še danes, skozi krvave vojne 20. stoletja – od I. svetovne vojne, II. svetovne vojne, do balkanskih vojn, ki so globoko prodrle v sodobno strukturo in razmišljanje v, na in o Zahodnem Balkanu. Članek se zaključi s kratko analizo aktivnosti mednarodne skupnosti na Zahodnem Balkanu in predstavlja temelj za nadaljnje razprave v člankih, ki mu sledijo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Balkan, Zahodni Balkan, jugoslovanske vojne, Evropska unija, mednarodna skupnost

INTRODUCTION

Defining the Balkans³ is very difficult, considering the fact that there is a multiplicity of meanings, which combine geographical, historical, cultural, anthropological and socio-political elements, which are often ambiguous (Strle and Josipovič 2014, pp. 13). Those elements together with a very diverse population in the Balkans significantly influenced by the subsequent bloody conflicts, which resulted in the wish for a sovereign nation state, which was born with the decay of the Ottoman power (Strle and Josipovič 2014, pp. 17). Nevertheless wishes sometimes convert to the reality; nations in the Western Balkans started to *westphalise*⁴ only in the late 19th century. However, the push and pull factors did not support the clear path of the state-building processes, especially because several great powers were interested to leverage their powers within the Balkans. The Balkans as an area was also so complicated because – as pointed out by Horvat (1971, pp. 71) – these people have been using two alphabets, three major religious denominations have been present and at least four

³ The word Balkans is in Turkish explained as a mountain range and was spread by the Ottoman Turks (Mazower 2000; Todorova 2001, pp. 58)

⁴ *Westphalisation* is a process of conversion of ethnic groups to nations, which later on gain their own state.

languages have been used by the five nations. Thus after the decrease in power on the side of the great powers and after the disappearance of the balance of powers in the European continent, it was clear that the nations from the Balkans would opt for their own nationhood and would start to form their own political milieu. Whether World War I (WWI) was the dawn of the Balkan political emancipation, World War II (WWII) promoted the idea of the intra-Balkan's political cooperation. States that were formed after the end of WWI after 1945 became stronger and more important. However, the political emancipation of the Balkan nations did not solve the problems of their diversity. Because of the external factors this diversity was after WWII linked to a common denominator – the communist system – but as soon the bipolar world order fell apart, the 'old' (inter-nation) divisions gained impetus. When it was clear that the world order would change from bipolar to multipolar, some ideas on the Balkans state-to-state diversity started to reappear. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, being the most important actor in the Balkans, was just a question of time. However, the occurrences that happened later reaffirmed the common (western) perception about the Balkan nations, being understood as "primitive, cruel and blood-thirsty savages" (Zupančič and Arbeiter 2016). The wars in the territory of former Yugoslavia not only confirmed such statements about the Balkans, but reinforced them.

Even though "we all know all about the Balkans" (Udovič 2014), no one really wants to tackle the issue, regarding the role of the European states and international community in the Balkans. Starting from the Ottoman Empire, naming the role of the Habsburg monarchy, which tried to conquer the Balkans for several times in its existence, and finally stopping at the Stalin-Churchill division of the Balkans – half-in-half – which was managing to divide the Balkans according to its historical legacy. In more recent times, we should ask ourselves about the activities of the European states after the dissolution of the bipolar order and especially on the actions performed by the European Union (EU), which was in the Balkans, during the Yugoslav wars – not only inhibited but impotent. One can say that the EU (intentionally) overlooked the Balkans because of its internal inca-

pability to set an agreement on what was going on in the region, while others can discuss that the EU was cautious, because of the historical experiences with the Balkans. Nevertheless, the EU omitted the occurrences in the Balkans for almost a decade and started to become an (important?) actor only in the first years of the 21st century.

Why this happened so late, how the EU reacted during the Yugoslav wars, what were the scenarios of entering into the Balkans and what was the role of the EU in the Balkans after the end of the bloody conflicts, are the research questions that we would like to discuss in this and in the following articles. In order to answer all these enumerated questions, we have employed qualitative and quantitative approaches, using different methods: from an historical-critical assessment of facts, to in-depth semi-structured interviews and data-analysis. All these methods are not only employed in this article but in the whole section, which should be read as an in-depth analysis of what was happening in the Balkans after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and what are the challenges the EU should focus on.

The proposed article therefore serves as a platform for the debate on the role of the EU and international institutions in the Western Balkans, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. It is not therefore the intention of the article to go into detail, but more to establish a framework of the Western Balkan mosaic, in which other authors can fill their piece, which will altogether form a clear picture on what has been going on in the Western Balkans after the dissolution of ex-Yugoslavia. However, since we all know that *Historia magistra vitae est*, we decided to start the proposed article with a short excursion into the history of the Balkan peninsula where from ancient times ethnic groups and nations applied the *homo homini lupus* modus operandi. The historical part is followed by a sketch of the dramatic Balkan wars and major inter-ethnic issues that today still influence the activities and developments in the Western Balkans. The third part of the article presents an overview of the activities of the EU and the international community in the region, which in the first years after the dissolution of Yugoslavia (intentionally?) overlooked the

occurrences in the region, but in the late 1990s they started to accelerate their 'interests' about the inter-ethnic problems and issues. The article concludes with an open question on the future of the EU and the international community's engagement in the Western Balkans which from today's perspective does not seem too optimistic.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

EARLY HISTORY IN THE BALKANS

The Balkan Peninsula was firstly dominated by the Roman Empire and after that by the Goths and the Byzantine rulers (Javornik, Voglar and Dermastia 1987). But before the Balkan Peninsula was inhabited by the Slavs in the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries, the territory was inhabited by the Illyrians, who are assumed to be ancestors of the Albanians (Anderson 1995, pp. 2).⁵ After the Slavs began to colonise the area, they very quickly converted to Christianity. Furthermore, a shift from the Christian regime towards a Turkish Muslim one happened during the 14th century, which was the result of the Ottoman Empire occupation (Skendaj 2012, pp. 16). More specifically, the Ottoman Turks consolidated their rule in the Balkans in 1371, when Ottoman troops defeated the Serbian army in the battle of Maritsa and conquered the territory of present-day Macedonia. Even though, the joint forces of Serbs and Albanians managed to defeat them in 1386 in present-day Montenegro. The Ottoman invasion carried on and led to the battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389, where the Ottoman troops conquered the joint forces of the Serbs and Albanians (Voje 1994; Krstić 2006; Zupančič 2013). The battle at Kosovo Polje became a historical battle for Serbian mythology and their statements over Kosovo.

After the few centuries' long occupation of the Ottoman Empire over the Balkan Peninsula, the Empire started to fragment, which offered the possibility to the Balkan nations to politically emancipate themselves. The landmark could be the Treaty of

⁵ The tribe of Illyrians, who inhabited the territory of today's Kosovo in the 4th century BC, spoke a language similar to the Albanian (Zupančič 2013).

San Stefan that ended the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and created an independent Bulgaria⁶ and an enlarged Serbia and Montenegro (*ibid*).⁷ But the other European states, especially some of the Great Powers⁸ were not very fond of this new arrangement. The idea about a powerful Slavic state was, for example, contrary to the economic interests of the Habsburg monarchy and the undisturbed path to the Aegean Sea, whereas Great Britain was afraid that Bulgaria was only a satellite country of Russia (Oakes, Mowat and Richards 1918, pp. 325–6). Dissatisfaction about this new arrangement led to the Berlin Congress in 1878, with which the size of Bulgaria was considerably reduced and split into two autonomous principalities under the sultan's supremacy (Hall 2000, pp. 3; Pirjevec 2003, pp. 19). Moreover, Serbia had gained its independence and was granted additional territory in the south, Montenegro had lost its autonomy, which it gained with the Treaty of San Stefan and BiH and the Sandjak of Novi Pazar came under Austro-Hungarian administration (Hall 2000, pp. 3; Pirjevec 2003, pp. 19–21; Sotirović 2016).

After the Berlin Congress an imaginary truce prevailed in the Balkans as the result of the new balance of power between the European superpowers. Despite the individual local conflicts there were no major wars until 1908, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire neglected the *de iure* sovereignty of the Ottomans over the Bosnia and Hercegovina (BiH) (Jelavich 1983, pp. 96; Seljak 2005, pp. 16). The annexation of BiH to the Habsburg monarchy changed the everyday aspects of life for its citizens also in terms of the balance of power, considering the fact that BiH was gradually de-Islamized and therefore the catholic community was improving its position on the power scale (Strle and Josipović 2014).

The Ottoman Empire occupied the Balkans for more than 500 years before its people started to really rebel and “initiated the exodus of Ottoman control of the territory” (Gewehr 1931, pp. 79 in Shahan 2012). The Balkan states with one main goal to divide the

⁶ New Bulgaria encompassed most of the territory in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula and it also included Macedonia (Hall 2000, pp. 2; Britannica 2016).

⁷ According to the Treaty of San Stefano, Serbia gained the right to statehood (Sotirović 2015).

⁸ Great Powers were known as Germany, Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy (Hall 2000, pp. 2).

retrieved territory among the Balkan states, without the occupier in the picture (Hall 2000, pp. 13; Shahan 2012), joined the Balkan League⁹ and the first Balkan war outbreak on 8 October 1912 with the Montenegrin attack on the Ottoman troops (Hall 2000, pp. 15). The rise of nationalism and the new aspiration fuelled by the ethnic identity initiated the aggressive ideas and desires for the territorial expansion (Hall 2000; Pirjevec 2003; Shahan 2012). The First Balkan War, which ended on the 30 May 1913 with the Treaty of London, resulted in a high number of casualties on both sides, the loss of the territory¹⁰ on the Ottoman side and Albanian independence (Mazower 2000).

The Second Balkan War began on 29 June 1913 because of the dispute between Serbia, Greece and Romania over the division of their newly conquered joint territory in Macedonia. The war ended only a month later with the defeat of the Bulgarians and peace treaties were signed in Bucharest in August 1913 and Constantinople in September 1913 (Hall 2000; Pirjevec 2003; Udovič 2011). The aftermath of the conflict was that Serbia gained the Kosovo region and extended its territory to the northern and central part of Macedonia, whereas the southern part of Macedonia belonged to Greece (Mazower 2000; Hall 2000). A year after the Habsburg Archduke Franc Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914, which resulted in riots that escalated into WWI (Hall 2000; Udovič 2011; Pirjevec 2003). After that everything changed.

WWI AND WWII

One of the results of the end of WWI was the emergence of several new states out the territory of the Habsburg monarchy. The Slavic nations, which were before fragmented between different states, became independent and in October 1918 established the State of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (Repe 1995,

⁹ The Balkan League was the alliance between Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro and was also formed because of the high Russian influence with one main goal to get rid of the Ottoman occupation (Allcock, Danforth and Crampton 2015). Moreover, the Balkan league was formed by the efforts made by King Ferdinand of Bulgaria and the Cretan politician Venizelos

¹⁰ The Ottoman Empire lost control over the Aegean Islands, Crete and its former provinces in Europe (Helmreich 1938).

Pirjevec 2003; Udovič 2011); a month later this newly established state merged with the Kingdom of Serbia into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes which later on renamed itself to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929 (Pirjevec 2003; Udovič 2011; Allcocke and Lampe 2012). The cultural and ethnic mosaic of the Balkans was made up of people of different traditions, cultures and religions, therefore tensions between them were inevitable. The Serbs for example saw the new arrangement as an old, but bigger state whereas the Slovenes and Croats saw the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a reality that was foreign to their own interests and mind-set (Pirjevec 2003; Nation 2003). Serbia saw itself as the centre of the newly established country and side-lined the role and the autonomy of the Slovenes, Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians (Seljak 2005; pp. 19). Irrespective of the differences in political tradition and their different interests, relations between the nations of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were peaceful until the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, which was followed by the series of political instabilities (Repe 1995; Seljak 2005).¹¹

After the putsch in March 1941, when Yugoslavia dismissed its adherence to the Berlin-Rome axis, Yugoslavia was attacked. In only 14 days the country was occupied by Germans, Italians and Hungarians and divided in occupational zones; only on the territory of Croatia a new state emerged – the ‘puppet state’ known as the Independent state of Croatia (Nezavisna država Hrvatska), which was ruled by Ante Pavelić (Pirjevec 2003; Udovič 2011). After four years of fighting against the occupation and after the bloody civil war, Yugoslavia was liberated in 1945. Josip Broz - Tito, being the ruler of the communist resistance, formed a new state that tried to reduce the notion of ethnic issues and forced the uniformity. This was also visible in the documents where there were two categories: nationality and citizenship. The idea of the communist government was that nationality would be abandoned and a new common identity would be established. However, this experiment failed and instead of converging na-

¹¹ After the assassination of King Alexander an agreement between Serbia and Croatia was reached, which established the Autonomous Banovina of Croatia as the only autonomous political-territorial unit in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with a series of powers which were transferred from the Yugoslav government to the newly established Banovina (Pirjevec 1995).

nationalities they started to diverge. This was brought so far that the main ideologist Edvard Kardelj prepared a new constitution in the 1970s, that was based on a national-principle. Even though this pace was just the absorption of reality into the political system, it was clear that nations within Yugoslavia had opted for fragmentation instead of unification. After Tito's death, who was the main authority linking together all nationalities in Yugoslavia, the national movements revived and led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia (Curtis 1992; Pirjevec 2003; Seljak 2005).

TOWARDS THE STATES' INDEPENDENCE AND THE YUGOSLAV WARS

Soon after Tito's death in 1980, a new era in Yugoslav politics started with many proposals for political reforms; a serious economic crisis happened between 1983 and 1985 and tensions between the constituent nations were very evident (Curtis 1992; Pirjevec 2003; Udovič 2011). The important step towards the breakup of Yugoslavia was the rise of Slobodan Milošević who tried to undermine the foundations on which Tito's Yugoslavia rested with the abolition of the Constitution of 1974 and the consolidation of his power in Serbia, in both autonomous regions; in Montenegro and among the Serbian population in BiH and Croatia (Pirjevec 2003, pp. 37–9). The notion that Yugoslavia should be reshaped into a new country with the biggest power given to the Serbs as the biggest ethnicity in the country, was very high and intensified the relations between the secessionist Slovenia and Croatia and unitarian Serbia (Udovič 2011).

In the last six months of the existence of Yugoslavia, a series of dramatic events occurred which were set out by the Slovenian plebiscite, organized on 23 December 1990, on which the Slovenes declared an independent and sovereign country with an absolute majority (Pirjevec 2003, pp. 39). "Each of the republics of the modern federation underwent its own historical and cultural development, very often in conflict with the territorial or political goals of its Slavic and non-Slavic neighbours" (Sudetic 1992, pp. 56). Religious beliefs and nationality threatened the idea about national unity and the newly established federal state

structure. Moreover, ethnic diversity and man-made borders, which did not encompass all the members of one ethnic group within the republics, emerged in political disharmony and disagreements. After Tito's death the period of peace and prosperity was over and the state of the united South Slavs was only a dream from the past, which had started to crumble. The identity and historical origin of each constituent nation within the SFRY was stronger than the artificial common culture and ethnicity (Sudet-ic 1992; Pirjevec 2003; Vladisavljević 2004; Udovič 2011).

“Armed conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001 claimed over 200,000 lives, and gave rise to atrocities unseen in Europe since WWII and left behind a terrible legacy of physical ruin and psychological devastation” (Nation 2003, pp. vii). The main cause of the conflict in former Yugoslavia was the rise of “intolerant and exclusionary nationalism among its constituent nations”, which led to the destruction of the multinational country (Nation 2003, pp. ix).

SLOVENIA (JUNE 1991 – JULY 1991)

Slovenes expressed their will for an independent and sovereign state at the plebiscite on 23 December 1990, with the official announcement of the results on 26 December 1990, which stated that the absolute majority wanted an independent and sovereign state (Pirjevec 2003, pp. 39–40). The Slovenian government launched a diplomatic campaign with one main goal, to explain to the world their motive for independence. Furthermore, it defended the idea of disassociation and not secession in order to highlight the point that Yugoslavia had been “from its origins /.../ a voluntary union of peoples” (Nation 2003, pp. 105). Slovenia declared its independence on 25 June 1991 and the day after the Yugoslav People's Army (YPA) tried to suppress the Slovenian independence by force. Slovenians at the borders changed their uniforms and took over the control of the borders and were prepared for the YPA attacks. The Ten-Day War started on 27 June 1991 and was fought between the Slovenian Territorial Defence and the YPA. The war for Slovenia's independence ended on 7

July 1991 with the Brioni Agreement¹² and sustained very few casualties (Nation 2003; Pirjevec 2003; Pirjevec 2011). The European Community recognized Slovenia as an independent and sovereign state in January 1992, which was also followed by the recognition of the United Nations in May 1992 (Pirjevec 2003; BBC 2012).

CROATIA (1991–1995)

Croatia declared its independence together with Slovenia on 25 June 1991, but the introduction to the war in Croatia started even before that with intense propaganda, which was led by the Serbs in order to convince the population about the genocidal nature of the Croatian nation and its fascist regime (Pirjevec 2003, pp. 65). The conflict, fuelled with propaganda and hatred escalated in the areas which were mostly populated by Serbs and the war in Croatia started in March 1991 when the Serbs from Krajina¹³ attacked Croatian police units, followed by the Plitvice Lakes Incident (Pirjevec 2003;). The majority of Croats fully supported Croatia's sovereignty and independence, whereas ethnic Serbs in Croatia opposed the secession and wanted to reunite the territories which were mainly populated by ethnic Serbs, with Serbia (Nation 2003). After the plebiscite in May 1991, when the Croats voted for the independence of Croatia, the Serbs in Krajina decided to secede from Croatia and therefore created a political and organizational prerequisite for an open armed conflict (Tatalović 1997, pp. 110).

After the declaration of Croatian independence Serbian forces strengthened their attacks on Croatian villages and towns, but the balance swung towards the Croatian side after the four-month siege of the town of Vukovar, which fell in November 1991 (Tatalović 1997, pp. 110). Towards the end of 1991, Croatia freed a large part of the occupied territory and at the same time many member states of the European Community recognized it as an

¹² The Brioni Declaration (1991) was signed on 7 July 1991 between Slovenia and Yugoslavia under the auspices of the European Community and it halted the hostilities in the territory of Slovenia and froze the independence activities for a period of three months.

¹³ The territory was mostly populated by Serbs, who self-proclaimed Krajina as the Serb Autonomous Province of Krajina within the territory of Croatia (Nation 2003, pp. 98).

independent and sovereign state, which resulted in the loss of legitimacy for the military action of JNA which therefore had to sign a ceasefire in January 1992 and withdraw its troops into BiH (Tatalović 1997; Nation 2003; Pirjevec 2003). In February 1992, the Security Council through its resolution 743 approved the establishment of the United Nations Protection Force (UN-PROFOR) to supervise and maintain the agreement (UN 1996).¹⁴ Despite the UN intervention, the fronts were intact and in September 1993, Croatian forces launched an offensive in order to retake the Maslenica Bridge and the Peruca hydroelectric power plant. A ceasefire was once more renegotiated in March 1994, but in 1995 Croatia finally moved to free Krajina and was able to defeat the Serbian resistants and gain control over the whole territory (Nation 2003, pp. 125–6).

BiH (1992–1995)

After the declaration of independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, BiH organized a referendum on independence on 29 February and 1 March 1992. The members of the Serb Assembly, which was formed in protest, invited the Bosnian Serbs to boycott the referendum on independence and strongly opposed the secession of BiH from Yugoslavia (Grant 2009; Bose 2009).¹⁵ BiH declared its independence on 3 March 1992 and was recognized by the European community on 6 April 1992, becoming a member state of the United Nations on 22 May 1992 (Grant 2009; Bose 2009). The declaration of independence triggered a very nationalistic war, with extreme violence and war crimes aiming at territorially dividing BiH alongside its ethnic lines,¹⁶ which lasted three years, starting on 6 April 1992 and ending on 14 December 1995 (Kivimäki, Kramer and Pasch 2012, pp. 16).

Even though the YPA left BiH in May 1992, most of the weaponry and military personnel remained in BiH in the so-called

¹⁴ Its mandate was a “classic peacekeeping mission, assuming a ceasefire-in-place, consent of the warring parties, neutrality between former belligerents, and limiting the rules of engagement confined to cases of self-defence” (Nation 2003, pp. 1259).

¹⁵ The Serb ethnic community in BiH strongly opposed any sort of separation that would leave them as a minority within an independent new state (Nation 2003, pp. 151).

¹⁶ “Serbs had Republika Srpska, the Croats had Herceg-Bosna and the Bosniaks the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia” (Kivimäki, Kramer and Pasch 2012, pp. 16).

Army of Republika Srpska (Nation 2003; Pirjevec 2003). In the summer of 1992, the humanitarian crisis in Bosnia led to the deployment of UN peace keepers to the area (Kalyvas and Sambanis 2005, pp. 193), but nevertheless, ethnic cleansing quickly spread from Republika Srpska to other areas which were controlled by Muslims and Croats (BBC 2016). Bosnian Serbs under Karadzic besieged Sarajevo, which lasted for 44 months (*ibid*). By the end of 1992 Bosnian Serbs already dominated nearly 70% of the territory of BiH (Notion 2003, pp. 164). In May 1993, the UN declared Sarajevo, together with Gorazde and Srebrenica, as a safe area, under the protection of the UN. Also, in 1993 the Vance-Owen peace plan was proposed, which included the division of BiH into ten semi-autonomous regions and was rejected by the Bosnian Serb National Assembly (Glaudić 2011)

Conflict continued through most of 1995 with its peak in July 1995, when Bosnian Serbs attacked the safe area of Srebrenica and killed around 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men (Kalyvas and Sambanis 2005, pp. 193). UNPROFOR troops did provide the civilians with humanitarian aid; however, they failed to protect the safe area of Srebrenica in July 1995. As Notion (2003, pp. 189) notes:

/t/he premeditated nature of the massacre, the extent of the killing, and the arrogant demeanour of the conquerors combined to make it a unique, and uniquely horrible, event, and an appropriate symbol for the degenerate nature of the Serb national agenda as it was pursued during the Bosnian war.

A ceasefire was reached by the end of September 1995, with the help of a ground offensive, NATO's air strikes and the US Special Representative's diplomacy and the war ended with the Dayton Peace Agreement, which was signed on 21 November 1995 (Silber and Little 1996/1997; Nation 2003; Pirjevec 2003). The estimated number of casualties in the BiH war range from 25,000 to 329,000, which is the result of the use of inconsistent definitions of who is to be considered as a victim of war (Notion 2003; BBC 2016). Nevertheless, new BiH, according to the Dayton Peace Agreement, became a unitary state, divided between the

Bosnian Federation (51% of the territory) and Republika Srpska (49% of the territory). After the war there still remains discrimination and violence against human rights, and the Dayton Agreement's arrangements also represent an obstacle to any serious political-administrative reform, with high potential for returning to a violent conflict (Nation 2003; Pirjevec 2003; Kivimäki, Kramer and Pasch 2012).

KOSOVO (1998–1999)

According to Nation (2003, pp. 223) the disintegration process of the SFRY started by the abolishment of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, which resulted in a demeaning occupation of the Kosovar Albanian majority. Tensions over the control and sovereignty over the same territory, which was populated by Serbs and Albanians, has always been the essence of the Kosovo conflict (Anastasijević 2004).¹⁷ The instability and dissatisfaction with the Milošević regime and the rhetoric resulted in a referendum organized by the Kosovar Albanians on 22 September 1991, where 99% of Kosovars (mostly Albanians) voted for the independence of Kosovo (King and Mason 2006). Even though Serbia did not accept this move as legal or legitimate, the Albanians started establishing parallel structures in order to address their basic needs (Zupančič 2013, pp. 165). The inability of the Dayton peace process to address the whole region and to also include on the agenda the extreme fragility of the various regions which were aspiring to statehood, including Kosovo, culminated in another bloody conflict (Nation 2003, pp. 205–23).

When the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was formed in 1996, Kosovo Albanians started the rebellion against Belgrade and the armed conflict between both sides escalated in 1998, when the Yugoslav armed forces killed Adem Jashari and 58 other Kosovo Albanians (Zupančič 2013, pp. 163–9). Open aggression escalated and the UN Security council (UNSC) Resolution 1199 was adopted on 23 September 1998 with the request for the

¹⁷ According to the Serbs, Kosovo was freed by them in the battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 and represented the cradle of their culture, religion and their national identity, whereas according to the Albanians, the area was occupied by the Ottoman Turks, therefore without the special rights of the Serbs over the territory (Djilas 1998; Malcom 1998).

immediate termination of the armed conflict (Nation 2003; Zupančič 2013). Despite Milošević's preparedness to negotiate and the entrance of the observers from the OSCE to Kosovo, violence did not cease, leading to NATO's intervention at the beginning of 1999, when the Račak massacre was reported. When Serbia refused to accept the Rambouillet Agreement,¹⁸ NATO launched the military operation Allied Force which ended after 78 days with the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement and with the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1244 on 10 June 1999, Kosovo came under the auspices of the UN, headed by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) (Nation 2003; King and Mason 2006); Zupančič 2013).

Desires for a Great Serbia on one hand and a Great Albania on the other; the inability to resolve the Albanian national question in Kosovo and suppressing the aspirations of Kosovo Albanians for their own independent and sovereign country and the revival of historical myths led to the outbreak of a fully-fledged war in Kosovo. Despite NATO's intervention in Kosovo, dilemmas of national identity and the root causes for the conflict between the Serbs and Albanians were not addressed (Nation 2003, pp. 325–7).

MACEDONIA (FEBRUARY 2001–AUGUST 2001)

Macedonia in contrast to all the previously mentioned countries, declared its independence on 8 September 1991 and has avoided the bloody conflicts of the Yugoslav wars and maintained a peaceful environment up until the Kosovo War in 1999. Macedonia opened its borders for thousands of Kosovo Albanian refugees, who represented more than 11% of the whole Macedonian population at that time (Nation 2003, pp. 333). Albanian nationalists on both sides of the border wanted their autonomy and independence, also for the areas in Macedonia which were populated mostly by Albanians. The National Liberation Army (NLA) started with opening fire on the Macedonian police and

¹⁸ The Rambouillet Agreement was a proposed between the SFRY and the delegation representing the Albanian majority population in Kosovo. It contained several conditions such as "freedom of operation for NATO forces throughout the entire territory of Yugoslavia and the designation of a binding referendum on Kosovo's final status that would almost certainly result in a choice for independence" (Nation 2003, pp. 244).

security forces in late 2000, which escalated into the armed conflict between the NLA and Macedonian government in 2001 (Nation 2003, pp. 335). After the Ohrid Agreement with which Macedonia pledged to improve the rights of the Albanian minority in Macedonia, the NLA agreed to a ceasefire (Nation 2003, pp. 337–8).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The discussion on why the EU entered the Balkans only after a decade of bloody conflicts never gives a clear and straightforward answer. Some researchers explain the reluctance of the EU to deal with the Balkans with the ‘cultural superiority’ (those barbarian savages), others say that the EU was at the time more focusing on establishing its internal stability (single market, introduction of a political union etc.) and was unprepared to act abroad, even though the Balkans are at its backyard. The third possibility sometimes quoted is that the EU did not act in the Balkans, because the decision-makers had not really accepted the new geopolitical situation, including the collapse in the wreckage of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Our statement is that it is impossible to find one clear answer on why the EU was so reluctant and defensive, but the fact is that the EU, for the first time, faced a bloody conflict in its neighbourhood. Being inexperienced and being unprepared to act in such a situation, the EU instead of adopting a proactive role opted for a reactive role, leaving the decision-making process on how the Balkans should be stabilized to external/international actors, such as the United Nations or NATO. Such a statement can also be partially confirmed by the fact that the EU established the Delegation of the European Commission in BiH ‘only’ in 1996, and only six years later the EU created the post of EU Special Representative for BiH. Even though someone may say that these two are political figures and are only important because of their symbolic value, the EU was also leveraging in its commitment at the level of preventive diplomacy. The deployment of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operation EUFOR Althea in December 2004 was not an independent decision, but it was forced by external variables, one of them being the fact that NATO decided to quit its

SFOR operation in BiH. The changed situation therefore externally forced the EU to take some action and the result of this was the establishment of Althea. What was noted by different interviewees in BiH¹⁹ was that the citizens of BiH are less interested in the power and authorities of Althea than they are in NATO or even before – IFOR (Implementation force) and SFOR (Stabilization force).

A similar situation happened in Kosovo, when the EU presented itself only after the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1244 that established the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), which administered Kosovo from June 1999 to February 2008. The UNMIK mission based on four pillars: the civil administration of a country (UNMIK), the humanitarian assistance (UNHCR), the democratization and institutions-building (OSCE) and the reconstruction and economic development (EU). What should be emphasized here is that NATO remained outside the four pillars and was entitled to address the military aspect of the peace-building process. The 2008 was a crucial year for building the state of Kosovo. With the strong tacit support of almost all EU28 members in February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence. In the same year the EU deployed its European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), which was intended to substitute the UNMIK's rule-of-law functions, and appointed the European Union Special Representative (who was at that time Pieter Feith), who presented a clear linkage between the Commission and the country. From that point forward the EU was strongly presented in Kosovo, but limited to its civilian sphere.

The above brief description presents two individual approaches by the EU in the Western Balkans region, focusing mostly on state-building. But parallel with the individual approaches, the EU also started to develop some regional approaches aiming at establishing and reinforcing peace and security within the Western Balkans. The first step in that direction was the establishment of the *Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe*, formed by the Cologne conclusions in 1999, which as pointed out by Vesnić-Aluje-

¹⁹ See more in the report on BiH (Udovič et. al. 2016).

vić (2012, pp. 31) “introduced as a long-term conflict prevention strategy on the territory of SE Europe”. The next step towards a higher involvement of the EU in the Western Balkans was the Thessaloniki European Summit (2003) that developed the conditions and activities in the Stabilization and Association Process, being the waiting room for the European integration. At that point it was for the first time clear that the EU changed its role from a reactive to a proactive one. The Thessaloniki conclusions also set a milestone for the EU CSDP missions that were later (in BiH in 2004 and in Kosovo in 2008) deployed in the region. Another step in a proactive policy towards the Western Balkans was done in 2008 with the establishment of the RCC and in 2015 with the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA).

The analysed facts show that the EU importance in the Western Balkans has been progressively changing. From the starting point, when the EU needed more than 5 years to act in its own backyard, it is now, two decades later an important agent in the region. Its politics within the CSDP missions mostly utilize the carrot and stick approach, named the possible future membership of the Western Balkan countries in the integration. However, its engagement is predominantly in civilian affairs, while the EU omits the importance of military presence in the region. Maybe the role of the EU in the region can be summarized best by the words of one interviewee who said that “we count on the EU, but we count more on NATO”. Taking this in consideration we can conclude that there is still room for improvement regarding the normative power and the real power of the EU in the region of the Western Balkans. The next decade can present a turning point of the positioning of the EU in the Western Balkans – but only if the EU missions will also adopt some ‘military’ character.

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