

# Western Balkans Region and the Geopolitical Context

Russian Influence

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The Western Balkans region has again became the hotspot that separates Russia and the west: Russia which intents to project power in the region, in one side, and the west which intents to expend futher the good-governance principles through the integration process, on the other.

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## Introduction

The rejection that was made by the former pro-Russian regime of President Yanukovych's, to the Brussels agreement on fostering closer ties with Ukraine's political and economic shpere, was due to the great Russian pressure. Russia insisted on signing, instead, the Treaty on Ukrainian membership in Euro-Asian bloc. This bloc was newly created by Russia in the composition of which are some former USSR countries: Byelorussia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

The refusal to signing the agreement with the West prompted President Yanukovych to face major series of demonstrations by the so-called Euro-Meidan protestors. Demonstrations aimed the opposite of what Russia insisted – that Ukraine take the direction to the West, instead. As a result, the regime of Yanukovich collapsed. This classic revolution then led to a situation which produced geo-political effects. It followed with the invasion and annexation of Crimea. Later, in the name of preserving the rights of ethnic Russian citizens, Russia's initiative helped armed pro-Russian rebels' resistance against Ukrainian authorities. Ukraine, as a geostrategic hotspot within the border separating the two great geo-political poles has become, again, a battlefield between these poles.

This conflict, which many international relations analysts refere to as the Cold War II, has tensed the situation in the international political system. Now the battle is focused on each area where geo-political poles see an interest to gain ground and exert their influence. One of these areas is the region where we live - the Balkans. In an analysis that was developed by the Russian Council on International Affairs, it stresses the necessity of increasing Russian influence through the so-called "soft power". The report emphasizes the importance that major Russian companies, always in coordination with the Russian Federation, should give attention to strengthening their economic impact in order to factorize Russia politically and diplomatically.<sup>1</sup>

Countries with which it aims to achieve these objectives are Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and

Herzegovina, Macedonia and Kosovo, through its tensed northern territory. I.e. in Montenegro, 1/3 of direct foreign investments come from Russian companies. At the same time, Serbia, as a result of the economic crisis that has gripped her in the beginning of the global economic crisis, the Russian Federation has provided soft loans multiplying the cooperation for infrastructure and energy projects. Bosnia & Herzegovina as well, namely the Republika Srpska, which is under the pro-Russian leadership and which constantly threatens with sucesion, is another hotspot in the diplomatic battle between Russia and the West. Meanwhile, by considering that most of the Western Balkan countries are dependent on Russian gas, (recalling the period between 2006 and 2009, when Russia stopped supplying Ukraine with gas), those faced with this challenge also had problems about compensation for the lack of gas.<sup>2</sup>

This diplomatic maneuver is done so that the Russian Federation has a card to achieve its strategic goals - disorientation and complicating the path of the Balkans states towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Florian Beiber from the Center of Studies on Eastern Europe at the University of Graz, on an interview to the portal in Serbian language, stated: "We know that the EU's relations with Russia have deteriorated and that Russia can play a negative role in the region and it is necessary to send a clear signal that by taking reform measures as well as improving regional cooperation, these countries can advance their path towards the EU because there are no other alternatives." He further stated that "Germany does not view with concern the interest of Russian investors in the region, but the Russian authoritarian model that can be implemented in the region, which we have seen in Macedonia, where Russia is supporting the current government...Not that they are pro Russians, but tend to look closer to that kind of authoritarianism in Russia. Therefore, in this respect the role of Russia in the region is seen as negative."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[Http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id\\_4=3744#top-content](http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=3744#top-content)

<sup>2</sup>Progress and Challenges in the Western Balkans, Testimony by Ivan Vejvoda before House of Representatives, US Congress, April 2015. <Http://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/IV%2-%20Hearing%20United%20States%20Congress%20House%20Subcommittee%20Europe%2029%20April%202015.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=277646>

## The stagnation of enlargement process

The financial crisis caused an enormous distrust of European citizens towards the entity's institutions. European citizens started to increasingly return their attention to political alternatives of the extreme right or left, as a result.<sup>4</sup>

Populism in Europe is growing more and more. In addition, the European project is increasingly being undermined by strict management budget cuts, which is manifested with popular discontent. Dissatisfaction is also reflected with the growth of xenophobia due to the arrival of illegal immigrants from the Balkans region, including the refugee's coming from war zones in the Middle East. Occasional incidents against immigrants, i.e. cases of killings committed by the extreme right party "Golden Dawn", unveils the tension that is reflected.<sup>5</sup>

Increasing populism patterns has damaged and continues to hurt the fiscal measures taken by traditional right or left political parties. Facing with more and more popularity of extreme right-wing parties, which insist that the national states require the return of sovereignty from Brussels; limit the arrival of illegal immigrants from North Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East, mainly, are those elements that have led to an increase of euroscepticism. Many European leaders, seeing the non-growing popularity of enlargement policy, began to raise the alarm about the necessity of pausing this process, noting that after the accession of Croatia on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013, the other candidate and potential candidate countries should bear in mind that the European Union is unable to continue absorbing other states for at least another 5 years period.<sup>6</sup>

## The Western Balkans' crossroad

Taking into account the European leaders' statements including those of officials in Brussels; taking into account the great attention that is devoted to solving the financial problems that have affected the euro area; taking into account the conflict in Ukraine, and considering the refugee crisis, the crossroad in which the

Western Balkans finds itself, is getting more and more complex.

The non-readiness of the political leaders of **Bosnia & Herzegovina** to meet the European leaders requests about the need to reform the institutional system, in order to be able to overcome the obstacles which are related to meeting the Copenhagen criteria, constitute an important element of complexity of the process.<sup>7</sup>

Institutional configuration that was implemented as a product of the Dayton agreement, although managed to stop the bloody conflict, continues to pose a problem for the functionality of the state - partly as a result of the lack of confidence from three ethnic groups. Thus has become a real issue - seriously hampering the European perspective of the state.<sup>8</sup>

To help accelerate the process, UK and Germany took the initiative – *the new strategic approach*, in November 2014, to foster institutional reforms at all levels of government, pushing authorities to undertake broad reforms to implement economic and political Copenhagen criteria.<sup>9</sup>

However, this proper initiative is encountering political obstacles. One of them is - the President Milorad Dodik call about the necessity of holding a referendum regarding the reconfiguration of the institutional powers of prosecutors and judges at the federal level. This call was met with fierce opposition from EU diplomats, noting that this process will not be able to avoid the negative consequences towards the path to EU. Their statements were justified under the pretext that the holding of this referendum contradicts the Dayton accords.<sup>10</sup>

The non-functioning state problem is now added by the growing tendency of the Russian Federation to consolidate its influence in the region after losing ground during the 90's following the collapse of the Berlin Wall.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup><http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2009/07/what-caused-the-housing-bubble.html>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/9330223/Rise-of-neo-Nazi-Golden-Dawn-party-leads-to-scare-of-immigrant-attacks-in-Greece.html>

<sup>6</sup><http://juncker.epp.eu/my-priorities>

<sup>7</sup>Nicholas Hill, Deputy Head of Mission, American Embassy in Bosnia & Herzegovina, interview for the daily *Oslobodjenje*.

[Http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/daily-news/hill-dodik-can-block-reform-processes-whether-hes-in-government-or-opposition](http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/daily-news/hill-dodik-can-block-reform-processes-whether-hes-in-government-or-opposition)

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/bosnia-herzegovina-a-new-strategic-approach>

<sup>10</sup><https://euobserver.com/opinion/129860>

## The significance and destabilizing potential of Serbia

Cultural, religious and historical links and heritage of Serbia and Russia have been used increasingly in favor of the promotion and strengthening of mutual interest. The former has retained influence in our region based on diplomatic and military strength of Russian Federation, while the latter has used Serbia as a tool to expand its influence on preventing the integration of the Balkans under the sphere of the West as well as to have easier access to the Mediterranean and Adriatic Sea.

The strengthening of this influence is largely linked to the Russian strategic investments in energy, in gas pipelines, in particular, followed by the signing of a multi-million contract to extend the gas network in the Balkans. I.e. Serbia's State Oil Company has been already privatized by the Russian state-owned company, Gazprom.

*Russia calculates also, in case of membership, that it can continue to keep its influence within the European bloc.*

However, the South Stream pipeline project, which was planned to surpass the Ukrainian territory to supply the Europe through the Balkan region, was stopped due to the EU's request to respect its laws on competition, the so-called *Third legislative package on the internal market on gas and electricity*.<sup>14</sup>

The strength of Russian influence is extended in security field as well. Russia has recently signed an agreement with Serbia's Armed Forces on technical cooperation – cooperation in education and healthcare, in particular. In addition to that, this agreement intends to modernize Serbia's army through equipment purchases.<sup>15</sup>

In 2007, the Parliament of Serbia adopted the text of the Resolution on the Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and the Constitutional Order, including an article<sup>16</sup> that

calls for military neutrality of the armed forces. In September this year, the Serbian military forces joined Russian and Belarusian military forces in the joint exercise, called *Slavic Brotherhood*, on the Russian territory. The European Commission reacted immediately stating that it "sends the wrong signal."<sup>17</sup> European Commission spokeswoman said that "We expect Serbia to act in conformity of obligations derived by EU integration process".

The crisis in Ukraine proved once again the existence of strategic cooperation between the two countries. The Western countries appeal to impose sanctions on Moscow was not followed by Serbia on the grounds that the Russian Federation and Serbia have signed a strategic agreement and intends not to exacerbate these reports. Meanwhile, the foreign policy announced by the Serbian leadership tends to follow national interests by keeping and cultivating fraternal relations with Russia, in parallel with advancing the agenda on fulfillment of conditions set by the European Union about the accession process. In the meantime, according to the EU treaty, a country, which enjoys a candidate status, should start to align its foreign policy with that of Brussels, as a sign of willingness and seriousness to become equal with other EU member states.

The pressure from Brussels and Washington on Serbia to reflect on its foreign policy was added recently by a visit that Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić paid to Washington. The invitation was made by the Vice President Joseph Biden. The meeting is expected to be characterized by the theme of the necessity of Serbia to commit to fulfillment of standards imposed by the EU and to clarify its foreign policy.

<sup>14</sup><http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/12/the-us-must-counter-russian-influence-in-the-balkans>

<sup>15</sup><http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33445772>

<sup>16</sup><http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/germany-worried-about-russian-influence-in-the-balkans-a-1003427.html>

<sup>17</sup>[http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-15-4829\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-4829_en.htm)

<sup>15</sup><http://inserbia.info/today/2014/10/agreement-on-technical-cooperation-between-armed-forces-of-serbia-and-russia/>

With undefined subjectivity and integrity by the international community (UN), Kosovo is obliged, despite the legal opinion of the International Court of Justice, dated 22 July 2010, to respond to the request of UN General Assembly to engage in a dialogue, mediated by the EU, about its internal rearrangement. The integration of northern Kosovo under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Kosovo; the successful integration of Serbs in political and institutional life; the recognition from five EU countries; the signing of the SAA Agreement (although slightly different from that signed by other countries of the region, precisely because of the refusal of recognition of Kosovo by 5 EU states), visa liberalization, the normalization of relations with Serbia, as key in meeting the EU standards on promoting good neighbourly relations, are obstacles and processes through which Kosovo finds itself. Handicapped by weaknesses in governance, followed by the problem of the lack of international subjectivity, geo-political sphere can be a concern for the future of Kosovo, without excluding the possibility of affecting the interests of the EU in relation to the process of integration of Western Balkan countries.

By signing the agreement for establishing the Community of Serb Municipalities, the aim is to achieve integration of parallel institutions under the institutional framework of the republic. However, taking into account the primary objective of Serbia's foreign policy: non-recognition of the independence and increasing attempt to sabotage the project of independence, the establishment of Community of Serb Municipalities will enable Serbia to extend its influence in state-building process in Kosovo.

Given the Russian influence in the region, it is not surprising that Russia will use this institutional mechanism as a tool to exert geo-political influence in the region.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the transformation process of KSF in a regular army will be followed by opposition from Belgrade. In this scenario, there is a possibility that the future army of Kosovo will be

organized in two garrisons; one serving for the territory of the Republic of Kosovo and the other for the territory of Community of Serb Municipalities. Political effects of this formula will have an effect on the process of Kosovo's future towards NATO membership. Most probably, Kosovo will be forced to pass a resolution in Parliament to declare its armed forces neutral, with other words, to prohibit Kosovo's membership in any multilateral military organization, including that of the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO). Recalling the day after the accession of Croatia and Albania in NATO, the Serbian institutions reaffirmed its stance towards neutrality of its armed forces neutral, justifying its willingness not to join any supranational security mechanism.

That the Russian Federation will use all the means at its disposal to prevent further expansion of NATO borders, the last case stipulates that. In June this year, the Russian Ambassador to Sweden, Viktor Tatarintseva, threatened to take measures if Sweden and Finland continue their efforts to join the Western military alliance. He further warned, saying that "President Putin has signaled that there will be consequences and that Russia would consider military intervention and will make reorientation of troops and ballistic missiles." "A state which decides to join NATO should be cautious about the risks that may be exposed."<sup>20</sup>

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Let's also recall the European Council decision on the implementation of trade and economic sanctions against the Russian Federation as a result of the crisis in Ukraine, and the annexation of the Crimea in particular. The

<sup>19</sup><http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-opposes-to-serbia-s-military-drills-with-russia-08-18-2015-1>

<sup>20</sup><http://live.kalxo.com/sq/MTL/Anetaret-e-Kongresit-Amerikan-Ngrene-Shqetesime-per-Kryeministrin-Serb-8260>

<sup>19</sup> Intervistë me analistin e marrëdhënieve ndërkombëtare, Naim Rashiti.

European Union, in conformity of Copenhagen criteria, urged candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey) and potential candidates (Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina), to follow its decision to enforce sanctions against the Russian Federation. Kosovo responded to this call positively, despite the low level of trade relations.

Russian strategic aim, among other things, is sabotaging/complicating/blocking/preventing other countries which seek membership in NATO. So, establishing the Community of Serb Municipalities, most probably, except for Serbia, will also serve Russia in achieving its strategic objective.

## Macedonia and the Ohrid Agreement

**F**reedom House describes Macedonia as a state with transitional government or hybrid regime. The report further highlights the history of parliamentary and presidential elections, which were characterized by biased coverage of progovernment media and abuse of administrative resources, which led to a long boycott by opposition political forces.<sup>21</sup>

The affair with interceptions launched in public by the main opposition party LSDM, headed by its leader Zoran Zaev, further shook the democratic basement and institutions. Brussels and Washington diplomatic mechanisms were immediately put into action trying to mediate a dialogue in order to reach an agreement between the government and the opposition on stabilizing the democratic institutions. After a marathon negotiation process, they came up with a political agreement on the stabilization of the political situation.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the Russian diplomacy was not absent in this regard. It supported the government side, justifying its action under the pretext that the West is using the opposition parties, especially Albanian's, to overthrow the government in response to Gruevski's government lack of readiness to impose sanctions against Russian Federation.<sup>23</sup>

So the purpose of these Russian diplomatic interventions was to expand its geopolitical influence in the region by becoming a negotiating party. This position would enable the achievement of its goal in the disruption of the countries of the region towards the realization of their objectives for reform and social democratization of the state and institutional system.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, taking into the consideration of corruption phenomenon which the entire region suffers greatly from, not excluding the political parties, the efforts to achieve the objective to push forward the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement are slim. This has contributed in part, in raising tensions on the political scene by disabling Albanians and Macedonians, including other ethnic groups, to focus on the attention that should be given to equal economic development, social and institutional democratization and the rule of law.

This situation is contributing to tension which inevitable favors Russian interests.

## Albania – Greece's obstacle

**I**n June last year, Albania officially received the candidate status for EU membership. To make the opening of accession negotiations possible, the European Commission has called on Albania to focus on meeting five criteria: the creation of a professional and depoliticized administration; strengthening the independence of judicial institutions; the fight against corruption; the fight against organized crime, and; protection and promotion of human rights.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to these criteria, the neighboring country - Greece has warned that the road of Albania towards Brussels depends on Albania's success in overcoming the obstacles such as: demarcation of the maritime boundary - a process which is still pending as a result of a negative decision of Constitutional Court; the issue of topography and the abolishing of the Law of War, which is still in force, despite Albania's accession to NATO.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup>[https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/01/swedes-lean-toward-nato-await-moscow/?utm\\_content=bufferb63b7&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/01/swedes-lean-toward-nato-await-moscow/?utm_content=bufferb63b7&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

<sup>21</sup>[https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit-2015/democracy-defensive-europe-and-eurasia#\\_Veb08SWqqko](https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit-2015/democracy-defensive-europe-and-eurasia#_Veb08SWqqko)

<sup>22</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/agreement-skopje-overcome-political-crisis\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/agreement-skopje-overcome-political-crisis_en)

<sup>23</sup><http://www.novinite.com/articles/168689/Russia+Claims+Macedonia+Crisis+Managed+from+Abroad>

<sup>24</sup><http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategic-europe/?fa=57301>

In a recent visit he made to Albania, Greek Foreign Minister made it clear that Albania's path towards EU will not be easy if the former does not solve the remaining problems with its southern neighbor.<sup>27</sup>

Russian influence can be noted here as well. During negotiations on the debt restructuring, right after Syriza came to power, the new government declared that the agreements reached by the previous governments should be renegotiated because they are harmful to the country's economic future. Reluctance to consider the demands of Greece from Brussels caused tension which set in motion the Greek diplomacy to seek help to other countries, like Russia. During the meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the latter stated that Russia is ready to help Greece with soft loans in order to help stabilize the country's financial situation.<sup>28</sup>

So, the intention of increasing Russian influence in the region appeared in Greece, despite the lack of understanding with Greece, after reaching agreement with creditors to restructure the loan agreement. Meanwhile, the Russian Federation is trying through Greece to disrupt the integration process of the Western Balkan countries towards euro-atlantic alliance.

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation published the list of countries that must be banned to export food to Russia. Albania is among those in the list.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, Russian influence has been observed recently in the socio-cultural sphere as well. Russian Embassy in Tirana announced the public in September of this year, about its initiative to offer Russian language courses whose target may be interested students. Recalling measures that have already been taken from the Russian Federation in terms of its presentation of literature in other Western countries in order to increase its reputation. I.e at the end of June this year, a festival of Russian books was organized at which at least 100 volumes of Russian literature into English were presented.<sup>30</sup>

**D**espite notable progress towards meeting membership criteria and despite Montenegrin diplomacy agreeing to impose sanctions against the Russian Federation, the role of the latter can not be easily ignored. Expanding markets reflect the possibility of the intervention of a certain state to protect or advance the rights of investors they originate from. This applies especially to countries with extractive political and economic institutions, as Russia is. Russian economy suffers from an oligarchic system shaped after the fall of the Berlin Wall, namely after democratic change there. This system enables the creation of an oligarchic clientele between political leadership and various businessmen. Such countries tend to use the business to achieve diplomatic objectives through foreign investments.

However, although foreign direct investment by Russian companies make up the opportunity to increase Russian influence in the region, the EU is still ranked more attractive as the economic entity retains its great influence in the political and economic life of Montenegro. Montenegro's affirmative response to EU's request to impose sanctions on the Russian Federation, shows that EU retains substantial influence on political and economic developments of the country.

However, the decision of North Atlantic Council about the possibility of granting Montenegro acceding invitation must be noted. NATO Secretary, Stoltenberg, at the last meeting that he had with the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Gjukanović, said that the foreign ministers of NATO member states will assess, at the end of this year, the Montenegrin state progress towards meeting the criteria for membership.<sup>32</sup> So there is a possibility that next year, NATO will have a new member.

<sup>27</sup><http://www.integrimi.gov.al/al/newsroom/deklarata-per-shtyp/pese-prioritetet-per-statusin-ja-masat-konkrete-te-qeverise&page=1>

<sup>28</sup><http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=286345>

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup><http://russia-insider.com/en/putin-offers-cooperation-greece-no-financial-aid/5434>

<sup>29</sup><http://www.euronews.com/2015/08/13/russia-expands-its-food-ban-to-another-four-countries-and-gives-ukraine-extra/>

<sup>30</sup><http://klankosova.tv/putini-rrit-ndikimin-ne-shqiperi-hap-kurse-te-rusishtes/>

<sup>31</sup>[http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/31/the-rise-of-bulgakov-diplomacy-russian-literature-vladimir-putin-read-russia/?utm\\_content=bufferdd9d4&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/31/the-rise-of-bulgakov-diplomacy-russian-literature-vladimir-putin-read-russia/?utm_content=bufferdd9d4&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

## Conclusions and Reccomandations

Russian Federation, as a regional power, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, has experienced a drastic decline of its diplomatic, economic and political reputation. As President Vladimir Putin claimed, "The destruction of the Soviet Union was the greatest geo-political tragedy of the twentieth century."<sup>33</sup>

This claim is seen by many International Relations analysts as a wake-up call for Russian citizens to rebuild pedestal state it once enjoyed in the past century. Examples such as the creation of the Euro-Asia Union which consists of former Soviet Union countries, the annexation of Crimea as a reaction of western plans to integrate Ukraine into its bosom, the resistance of Russian diplomacy to the West calls to get rid off President Assad, the diversification of natural gas export (a bilateral deal with China), and attempt to intervene diplomatically in the Balkans – in part through the relatively large presence of FDI originating in Russia and partly of the historical narrative of traditional ties with the Orthodox peoples, has to raised the alarm for Brussels and Washington. Increasing diplomatic efforts in terms of investments in infrastructure and energy as was the case recently with Vienna Summit, the successor to the Summit of Berlin - is one of the ways to accelerate the entry of the Western Balkan countries in EU.<sup>34</sup> The next Summit is expected to be held in Paris in August next year. This is the most serious initiative since the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, where officially EU countries gave the membership perspective to the Western Balkan countries.

In a speech in Croatia, the Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland, said that the Balkan leaders and its citizens must focus their efforts on three things:

“First, complete the democratic map of this region by finally turning the page on old hatreds and rivalries;”

“Second, kick-start prosperity and growth by connecting the countries of the region with new roads, railslinks, ports and energy infrastructure”

“Third, join forces to make the Balkans a no-go zone for today’s most pernicious threats to strong statehood and individual liberty: violent extremism, corruption and criminality, and the sleazy autocrats and oligarchs who come bearing gifts that promote their own interests, not yours”.<sup>35</sup>”

<sup>33</sup><http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/mar/06/john-bolton/did-vladimir-putin-call-breakup-ussr-greatest-geopolitical-tragedy/>

<sup>34</sup><http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/foreign-policy/western-balkans-summit-vienna-2015/>

<sup>35</sup><http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2015/jul/244800.htm>

## Reccomandations

- The EU's financial institutions must find ways of financing energy and infrastructure projects in order to have a more significant boost to economic progress of Western Balkans states making their interests further converged. This might effect to better coordinate the process of implementation of standards for EU membership;
- Considering the natural resource - gas as one of the most efficient resources Russian Federation has at its disposal to extend its influence in the region, the financial assistance must increase to enable the realization of the TAP project that crosses from Azerbaijan towards Italy, in particular, extending gas system to Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Increase projects funding for Western Balkans NGOs that aim to advance the principles of good governance, increase transparency and accountability, strengthen institutional mechanisms of the justice system, consolidate further the institutional and social democracy, increase effort for protection and promotion of the rights of marginalized groups and ethnic minorities;
- Increase diplomatic pressure through the use of stick and carrot policy regarding non-intervention in the internal affairs of Serbia towards Kosovo through the Association signed recently; Bosnia & Herzegovina shall delegate more competencies to the federal level by making possible the change of the constitution which would be acceptable to the member countries of the EU; and Macedonia, which should increase efforts to fully implement the Ohrid Agreement in order to contribute to easing ethnic tensions that can cost politically and in terms of future security of Macedonia on its path towards the EU;
- Besides efforts to implement new financial package agreed between the EU and Greece – the former should also focus on pushing the two countries to reach a compromise on the



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