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Araştırma Makalesi

THE PEACE-BUILDING EFFORTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: THE CASES OF MACEDONIA AND KOSOVO¹

*Bülent Sarper AĞIR**
*Murat Necip ARMAN***
*Ekrem Yaşar AKÇAY****

Abstract

This paper is written in the belief that the European Union uses different instruments in order to maintain a permanent peace environment in the post-conflict regions. To answer the question of what those instruments are, we begin by taking a closer look at Macedonia and Kosovo cases which clarify the peace-building conception of the Union. In accordance with the aims of this study, the concept of human security will be regarded to mean a circumstance that the European Union has officially recognized as a basic policy to evaluate the peace-building instruments. The major instrument that the European Union uses at the nation and state building processes of post-conflict regions is the Stabilization and Association Process. Under that process, the European Union signed several agreements with the Western Balkans countries known as Stabilization and Association Agreements. We found a significant correlation between Stabilization and Association Agreements and the reconstruction of the Western Balkan countries' economic and political conditions, which have gained their independency after the disunification of Yugoslavia but experienced serious state-building problems. These consequences of the Stabilization and Association Agreements with Macedonia and Kosovo complement each other and help to illuminate the phenomenon of the success of Stabilization and Association Process of the European Union.

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* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Adnan Menderes University, Aydin Faculty of Economics, Department of International Relations, ORCID: 0000-0003-4774-7438, bsagir@adu.edu.tr

** Assoc. Prof. Dr., Adnan Menderes University, Aydin Faculty of Economics, Department of International Relations, ORCID: 0000-0002-6873-206X, mnarman@adu.edu.tr

*** Assoc. Prof. Dr., Hakkari University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Science, Department of Political Science and International Relations, ORCID: 0000-0001-9157-6133, ekremeyasarakcay@hakkari.edu.tr

Keywords: Peace-building, Macedonia, Kosovo, the European Union, Stabilization and Association Process, Stabilization and Association Agreements.

BATI BALKANLAR'DA AVRUPA BİRLİĞİ'NİN BARIŞ-İNŞA ÇABALARI: MAKEDONYA VE KOSOVA ÖRNEKLERİ²

Öz

Bu makale, Avrupa Birliği'nin çatışma sonrası bölgelerde kalıcı bir barış ortamı sağlamak için farklı araçlar kullandığı inancıyla yazılmıştır. Bu araçların ne olduğu sorusuna cevap vermek için, Makedonya ve Kosova örneklerine daha yakından bakarak başlıyoruz. Bu iki örnek, Birliğin barış inşası anlayışına açıklık getirebilecektir. Bu makalenin amaçları doğrultusunda, insan güvenliği kavramı, Avrupa Birliği'nin barış inşası için kullandığı araçları değerlendirmek için resmi bir politika olarak resmen tanıdığı bir durum anlamına gelecektir. Avrupa Birliği'nin çatışma sonrası bölgelerin ulus ve devlet inşası süreçlerinde kullandığı başlıca araç İstikrar ve Ortaklık Süreci'dir. Bu süreçte Avrupa Birliği, Batı Balkanlar'daki türkeler ile İstikrar ve Ortaklık Anlaşması olarak adlandırılan çeşitli anlaşmalar imzalamıştır. Biz İstikrar ve Ortaklık Anlaşmaları ile Yugoslavya'nın dağılmasından sonra bağımsızlıklarını kazanmış, ancak ciddi devlet-inşa problemleri yaşayan Balkan Devletleri'nin ekonomik ve politik koşulların yeniden yapılandırılması arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulduk. Makedonya ve Kosova ile İstikrar ve Ortaklık Anlaşmaları'nın bu sonuçları birbirini tamamlar ve Avrupa Birliği'nin İstikrar ve Ortaklık Süreci'nin başarısını aydınlatmaya yardımcı olacak niteliktedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Barış İnşası, Makedonya, Kosova, Avrupa Birliği, İstikrar ve Ortaklık Süreci, İstikrar ve Ortaklık Anlaşmaları.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will investigate the bright spot of peace-building efforts of the European Union (EU) in regions which experienced war and conflict, especially Kosovo and Macedonia. After the Cold War, the international society has intensively focused on to deplete the intra-state conflicts and to restore the main problems of post-conflict societies. In 1992, Boutros Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace report warned the international society about the peace-building concept after the conflicts; “*comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people*” (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Therefore, involvement of the EU in peace-building efforts in the Western Balkans provides a good opportunity to examine the role of the international actors in establishing a peaceful environment in post-conflict societies.

The Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) was announced by the EU in 1999 in order to provide an integration strategy for the five countries ([ex] Serbia

² Bu çalışma, Kodolanyi Janos Üniversitesi Kültürel İlişkiler Enstitüsü tarafından 4-6 Kasım 2016 tarihlerinde Budapeşte'de düzenlenen 21. Yüzyılda Güvenlik ve Egemenlik Konferansı'nda “Batı Balkanlar'da İnsan Güvenliği Sağlayıcı Bir Aktör Olarak Avrupa Birliği'nin Çabaları: FYROM ve Kosova Örnekleri” olarak sunulan çalışmanın gözden geçirilmiş ve genişletilmiş halidir.

and Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) of the conflict-ridden Western Balkans region. Through SAP, the EU expresses its responsibility to maintain the stability of the region (European Commission, 2012a). In Thessaloniki Summit 2003, the Council of Europe decided to strengthen the SAP by introducing new instruments to support reform processes in the countries of the region and their European integration efforts. Thus, the EU makes clear that to support the Western Balkans countries' European integration is a priority for her (European Commission, 2012b).

What we usually have in mind when we talk about the basic challenges of the Western Balkans countries in the European integration process are the lack of rule of law, corruption, organized crime, the negative socio-economic and socio-political conditions. To add, populist policies are always a risk for economic issues and democratization. The risk of instability in the region attracts the attention of the EU, given the war that shook this region and the heritage of the division. Because the reasons of insecurity and instability in the region are perceived solidly in Europe as organized crime, migration, terrorism, refugee movements and human trafficking. The enlargement process of the EU by including the Western Balkan states would support the structural transformation of the region according to European values.

In this paper, it is aimed to examine the involvement of the EU in peace-building processes of Macedonia and Kosovo. Macedonia and Kosovo are the last samples of conflictual developments of the region. Since NATO intervention to Kosovo in 1999 and short-lived civil war in Macedonia between February-July 2001, there has not been any case for military confrontation in the region. By being a civil power in the region since 2000s, the EU has an important responsibility to transform these two countries in particular and whole region in general into peaceful conditions. The research question of the article is if, how and to what extent the EU as an actor and European integration as a process contribute to the peace-building processes in Macedonia and Kosovo. The paper will be structured into three parts. Firstly, the contribution of the EU and her involvement in the Western Balkans region will be examined by focusing particularly on 2000s. In the second and third parts, the relationships between the EU and Macedonia and Kosovo will be respectively analyzed in terms of the two countries' integration efforts with Europe and involvement of the EU. The EU organized two meetings on the Western Balkans enlargement in February 2018 at Strasburg and May 2018 at Sofia. Those meetings illustrate that the importance of the rapid integration of the region has gained a greater importance for the EU.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PEACE-BUILDING EFFORTS in the WESTERN BALKANS

We need to express the opinion that the EU is one of the global actors who has officially stipulated the human security as a security policy priority. Human security as a concept caused to develop new security policies for the EU, and it has

contributed to the creation of different strategies and implementation tools (Georgieva, 2008). In this respect, five basic threats to Europe are listed in the European Security Strategy (ESS): terrorist attacks, regional conflicts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime and failed states. ESS mentioned that those issues may be military or not (European Security Strategy, 2003). In this document, security is regarded as the first condition for development. On the other hand, in the Barcelona Report, insecurity and lack of development are seen as the main targets. Therefore, development assistance is seen as one of the instruments that can be implemented by the EU. In the Barcelona Report, Kaldor and Glasius conclude that security agenda should be reorganized in the direction of human security which is related with the sense of safety of Europeans. The EU needs a more complicated civil-military capability that will be appropriate to exert human security operations. Accordingly, the Barcelona Report aimed to compose a Human Security Intervention Force, having military and also civil elements (The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, 2004).

The practicality of any EU mission in its surrounding regions such as the Balkans has a priority over a mission in other parts of the world. Because, insecurity and instability in the Balkans affect Europe directly in issues such as human trafficking, organized crime and refugee flows (The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, 2004). For preventing this and truly implementation of the EU's human security strategy, the Barcelona Report proposes six principles that include "the primacy of human rights, clear political authority, multilateralism, a bottom-up approach, regional focus, the use of legal instruments, and the appropriate use of force" (The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, 2004). To add a bottom-up approach and to develop the instruments of communication is vital for human security. (The Barcelona Report of the Study Group on European Security Capabilities, 2004).

In the post-Cold War era, the Western Balkan countries became a crucial platform for the EU's crisis controlling instruments and transformative power. In this respect, the EU appeared as a crucial actor in preventing the conflicts, managing the crisis and peace-building after the Cold War. The first initiative regarding the region was the "Process for Stability and Good Neighborliness in South East Europe" called as the Royaumont Process which was started in December 1995 with the aim of focusing on the stabilization of the region. Thus, in the post-Dayton period the EU became the main actor behind the recovery of the region, and the Regional Approach was launched by Council in 1996 to achieve political and developmental dimensions of the EU integration processes of the referred countries.

To accelerate the efforts to stabilize the region, the EU launched the OBNOVA and PHARE programmes to assist the reconstruction efforts of the Western Balkans countries such as Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Anastasakis & Bechev, 2003). In 2000, the EU launched the CARDS programme for assisting domestic reforms and reconstruction in the countries in question and

replaced PHARE and OBNOVA (Council of the European Union, 2015). To add, as another initiative of the EU, the Stability Pact was signed in 1999 in Cologne in response to the EU's call for a comprehensive platform for the stability and development in the region. The Stability Pact aimed to help regional countries strive to increase respect for peace, democracy, human rights and economic development (Krastev, 1999). In June 2000, at the Feira Summit of the EU, those countries were given a perspective for future full membership. Later in November 2000, the EU emphasized the importance of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in Zagreb Summit for the Western Balkans. The SAP was composed of three basic elements: a) Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA), b) unilateral trade concession, and c) financial assistance. The SAAs are regarded as the instruments for the integration of the regional counties into the EU structures.

Simultaneously, the EU focused on introducing stability, due to the delicacy of the situation in the region about the security challenges and threats. Therefore, involvement of the EU in the Balkans has been the front line of its solid pursuits of CFSP (Kostovicova, 2008). Hence, first military and police operations of the EU were plotted in the region. The aim of the EU is to secure and stabilise the region by offering incentives that will politically and economically draw the Western Balkans countries ever closer to the EU.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S INVOLVEMENT in MACEDONIA

Macedonia established diplomatic relations with the EU in 1995, after the EU officially recognized the state. Besides, Macedonia had been a partner of the Union's PHARE programme in 1996, before IPA. From that point and until the inter-ethnic conflicts between Albanian rebels and Macedonian military forces in 2001, the EU primarily helped the country by providing humanitarian and diplomatic assistance to build a democratic and stable Macedonia. The EU assistance increased to some €452.3 million between 1992-2001, in order to help Macedonian government to provide shelter, health care, educational facilities for refugees following the 1999 Kosovo crisis. €259 million assistance dispersed through PHARE and OBNOVA programmes were used to assist the reformation of the economy and strengthening the infrastructure of the country. In the respect of CARDS programme, projects were funded in order to bring stability and reduce the ethnic tensions in the country. CARDS programme allocation for 2002-2006 to Macedonia focused on developing government institutions, supporting the return of displaced persons, improvement of socio-economic development, modernization the justice and internal institutions, struggling with organized crime, to establish legislation and harmonisation with the EU norms. The EU launched the SAP in 1999 in order to introduce an integration strategy for the five countries (Serbia and Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) of the conflict-ridden Western Balkans region (European Commission, 2007). In respect of the SAP, three aims were successfully pursued. These are a steady transformation to the market economy, encouraging regional

cooperation and anticipating EU accession. In April 2001, Macedonia was the first country which signed the SAA, and passed to a new stage with the EU in a new base before the escalation of the conflict. Thus, Macedonian accession of the EU became officially the target of both Macedonia and the EU. Indeed, Macedonia has entered into a new period with the signing of Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) which ended the shortly-lived intra-state conflict between Albanian guerrillas and Macedonian security forces in August 2001.

In the process of the signing of the SAA, the EU “urged the government to avoid further escalation through its large-scale counter-offensives and to start a dialogue on political reforms with the elected Albanian parties instead” (Schneckener, 2002). The SAA was a clear determination of the EU in the stability of the country and it came into effect in April 2004. In this process, negotiations between the EU and Macedonia have sustained continuity with SAA institutions. Accordingly, the EU has fully supported Macedonia in its efforts to ratify the amendments to Macedonia Constitution stipulated by the OFA. With the end of the conflicts, in October 2001 the Commission announced an intention to assist a Confidence Building Programme in Macedonia under the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) (European Commission, 2004). Specific targets of the program were to renovate the electricity poles for the villages affected by the conflicts in Tetovo, Aracinovo and the regions of northern Skopje; ensure the clearance of mines in homes and public buildings; implement the police and judicial sector reforms; and legislate a new law for municipalities. (European Commission, 2004).

As the security environment improved, in March 2003, the EU organized a military mission named Concordia, in Macedonia. The main purpose of the Operation Concordia was to create a suitable environment for the implementation of the OFA (Council of European Union, 2000). The EU described the Operation Concordia as one component of its larger and multi-faceted commitments to Macedonia, which included economic assistance and EU-association benefits. This operation was completed in December 2003 and replaced by the mission of EUPOL Proxima on 15 December 2003. On 15 December 2005, EU launched another mission in Macedonia: European Union Policy Advisory Team (EUPAT) mission (Skara, 2014).

Macedonia officially applied for EU membership on 22 March 2004. After the Commission’s recommendation, the Council granted candidate country status to her on 16 December 2005 mostly in recognition of the courageous implementation of the Ohrid reforms. The Commission accepted that the negotiations could be opened if the country meets the membership criteria. The main challenges stated by the Commission included the full implementation of the OFA; “*strengthening the rule of law, implementing the reforms in the judicial system and the police; upgrading the fight against corruption; pursuing the economic reforms; and improving the functioning of the public administration and its capacity to implement the community acquis*” (European Commission, 2012d).

In 2009, the Commission stated that Macedonia fulfilled the political criteria and suggested that negotiations can be launched. (European Commission, 2012d). The Commission stated that the next stage of the country would be to reinforce reforms, hence particularly mentioned to the rule of law and to strengthen inter-ethnic relations. (European Commission, 2012d). In this context, a High-Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) was started between Macedonian government and the Commission on 15 March 2012. The purpose of the HLAD is to expedite the EU accession reform process and strengthen Macedonia's European prospect (European Commission, 2012c). The priorities at the document were listed as "*freedom of expression, rule of law and ethnic relations, challenges for electoral reform, public administration reform, strengthening of the market economy and good neighbourly relations*" (European Commission, 2012c).

Concerning the political criteria, democracy, rule of law and the importance of the functional democratic institutions were strongly mentioned in 2016 Progress Report (European Commission, 2016). Indeed, in May 2015, protests were staged in Skopje due to the allegation of wiretapping of approximately 20.000 Macedonian officials and other figures by the government. In order to give an end to the political crisis, the Pržino Agreement was signed by main Macedonian and Albanian political parties with the mediation of the EU in June 2015. The "Pržino Agreement", which aims to support the functioning of democratic institutions, was signed (European Commission, 2015). The agreement covers the return of Social Democratic Union Macedonia (SDSM) -the opposition party, to the parliament, establishing political and legal accountability for the illegal wiretaps, establishment of a technical government to organize early parliamentary elections, implementing the OFA, good neighbourly relations, a commitment to implement EU recommendations on systemic rule of law issues and the holding of a HLAD meeting (European Commission, 2015).

After "Pržino Agreement", the parliamentary elections were held in December 2016. As a result of the elections new government took office in May 2017. The new government attached an importance to strengthen democracy, rule of law and good relations with civil society (European Commission, 2018). The citizens of Macedonia showed their support for the pro-EU policies of the government at the municipal elections in October 2017.

In terms of monetary issues, the IPA was initiated on 1 January 2007. Between the years of 2009-2011, € 294.7 million were sent to support the exertions of Macedonia to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria (European Commission, 2010a). The revised Multiannual Indicative Financial Framework for 2012-13 allocated a total EU contribution of € 215 million to the country (European Commission, 2012d). As a result of financial assistance provided by the EU to the country, it is stated that Macedonia has achieved some progress in developing a functioning market economy (European Commission, 2010b).

THE EUROPEAN UNION-KOSOVO RELATIONS and the MISSION of the EULEX

The EU has become the most important international actor in the efforts of the peace-building process in the Western Balkans since beginning of 2000s. The inclusion of the region into European integration process has required the playing of the above-mentioned role by the EU. In this context, the EU has taken a role in Kosovo's reconstruction efforts as a part of the existing international involvement in the country in the framework of the UN Security Council's resolution 1244. Currently, there are two main EU bodies operating in Kosovo: European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the European Union Office in Kosovo / European Union Special Representative in Kosovo. In February 2008, an EU Special Representative (EUSR) was coopted by the General Affairs and External Relations Council for Kosovo in order to contribute to the relations between Kosovo and the EU.

In the same time, the Council also agreed to a Joint Action to establish a European Security and Defense Policy rule of law mission, known as "EULEX" in Kosovo. However, Serbia recognized the existence of the UNMIK in Kosovo, since it operates at the command of the UN Security Council's 1244 resolution that emphasizes the sovereignty of Serbia on Kosovo. Therefore, Belgrade expressed her concerns about the "replacement" of the UNMIK by EULEX. Accordingly, Serb municipalities in northern Kosovo refused to cooperate with EULEX and announced to continue the cooperation with UNMIK (Savkovic, 2013). In the context of Serbia's concerns, Ban Ki Moon tried to get the support of Belgrade for deploying of EULEX in Kosovo through "Six Point Plan". In respect of this plan, it is envisaged the transfer of authorities in areas such as transportation, customs, justice, and infrastructure police, and preservation of Serbian community's cultural heritage to the Serb municipalities. Correspondingly, EULEX was decided to continue its mission under the UNMIK. Although Belgrade regime accepted the 'six-point plan', the Kosovar Albanians abnegated it due to the sovereignty issues. (Dursun-Özkanca 2010).

UN Security Council decided to deploy EULEX in Kosovo within the framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, in November 2008. Upon this, the EULEX replaced UNMIK by UNSC Resolution 1244 (Solana, 2008). And also, the EULEX declared its position as "status neutral" in order to meet the concerns of Serbia (Dzihic & Kramer, 2009). Consequently, deployment of the EULEX mission in December 2008 in Kosovo was accepted by both Belgrade and Pristina but approaches of two capitals have been contradictory. For Pristina, the EULEX was deployed in line with the Ahtisaari Plan, to apply the six-point plan (Dursun-Özkanca, 2010).

The main objective of EULEX is to boost Kosovar authoritative quarters to potentiate the principle of rule of law in areas of judiciary, police and custom. Moreover, EULEX aims to investigate the cases of war criminals and find missing

persons (Dzihic & Kramer, 2009). The mission was constituted in accordance with the decision taken by the EU Council on 16 February 2008. The mission reached its maximum capability on 6 April 2009. The success of EULEX mission about rule of law is crucial for integration of Kosovar Serbs into Kosovo's state institutions. In this respect, the EULEX opened a liaison office in northern Kosovo. Furthermore, while the Mitrovica courthouse closed in February 2008, the EULEX reopened and operationalized the court in December 2008.

Before the declaration of independence, Kosovo was included in the EU's SAP in 2006, and an intensive political dialogue was started between the EU and Kosovo in order to meet European standards in Kosovo. Thus, it was made possible to adopt Kosovo's national laws and regulations with the EU's, by providing a European perspective to Kosovo. Accordingly, in 2008, the Parliament of Kosovo instituted a European Integration Committee and a diplomatic agency in Brussels (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). These institutional efforts displayed the importance of European integration for Kosovo. As a symbolic development for Kosovo's desire to be a part of European integration, the document of independence was declared under the melody of official anthem of the EU - Beethoven's Ode to Joy- in Pristina.

Although the EU member countries except Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Slovakia and Romania have recognized the independence of Kosovo, non-recognition of Kosovo by the above-mentioned EU member countries led to the development of uni-dimensional relationships between Brussels and Prishtina and prevent a clear perspective for Kosovo's EU membership (Recaj, 2017). Despite this situation, Catherine Ashton, the first female chancellor of the University of Warwick declared Kosovo as a component of the EU's Western Balkans strategy (European Commission, 2010b). Likewise, European Commission stated that not having consensus among the EU members about the status of Kosovo would not prevent the development of EU's concrete relationships with Kosovo. Indeed, Kosovo managed to participate in the SAP for the Western Balkans through an enhanced SAP Tracking Mechanism, which was established in 2002 (Ker-Lindsay & Economide, 2012). Since then, the issues of fight against corruption, respect and protection of human rights and minorities, organized crime, creation of a sustainable multi-ethnic society, rule of law, democratic governance and equitable access to public services for all citizens have been addressed during the meetings of SAP between Kosovo and the EU.

In a joint report issued by Catherine Ashton, and the European Commission on 22 April 2013, it was advised the launching SAA negotiations with Kosovo. Accordingly, the European Council agreed to launch the SAA negotiations with Kosovo on 27-28 June 2013. The agreement for reaching a normalization of relationships between Serbia and Kosovo during the dialogue meetings under the mediation of the EU played an important role for launching of negotiations. Consequently, a SAA between the EU and Kosovo was signed on 27 October 2015

in Strasbourg. The SAA, which is the first official link between the EU and Kosovo, is a critical development of Kosovo's road towards the future of Europe.

The SAA was only signed by the EU in order to avoid the veto of five EU member states which have refused to recognize Kosovo as an independent state (Şahin, 2013). Federica Mogherini explained the significance of the agreement in the following way: "*This agreement is opening a new phase in the EU-Kosovo relationship. It represents an important contribution to stability and prosperity in Kosovo and the region at large*" (Council of the European Union, 2003a). And also, Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for ENP and Enlargement Negotiations, stated that "*this agreement will help Kosovo make much-needed reforms and will create trade and investment opportunities. It will put Kosovo on the path of a sustainable economic growth and can lead to much-needed jobs for its citizens*" (Council of the European Union, 2003b).

With a glance to the EU's Kosovo Progress Reports, strengthening of public administration is continuously mentioned as one of the major cross-cutting issues, and public administration is evaluated as extremely weak, inefficient and overstaffed. For this reason, the establishment of a professional, accountable, accessible, representative public administration within the context of key EU partnership priorities and the provision of all public services in Kosovo should be considered as a high political urgency (European Commission, 2012c). Even though the Kosovo government approved the anti-corruption action plan and the Kosovo Anti-corruption Agency became operational in February 2007 with the help of encouragement of the EU, corruption in Kosovo is still widespread at all levels (European Commission, 2007). For example, inter-agency co-operation in corruption is insufficient and leads to inconsistent implementation of information, as well as legislation, strategy and action plans (European Commission, 2007). Therefore, the rule of law issues in Kosovo remain a major concern (European Commission, 2012d).

Disputes and status issues among ethnic groups in Kosovo duration to hamper the interoperability of institutions, hamper the reforms, and occasionally with wider regional implications (European Commission, 2012d). In this context, a dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo was announced at March 2011 to advance collaboration, advance on the road to the EU and development of people. In these dialogue meetings, it was focused on technical problems of the people without addressing the complex problems such as the status of Kosovo and northern Kosovo. However, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue was actually political in nature (Zornaczuk, 2013). For instance, immediate aftermath of launching a dialogue, while Serbian authorities brought forward the possibility of partition of Kosovo, Albanians put an emphasis on the territorial integrity of Kosovo. Despite the existence of the parties' opposite views on Kosovo's status, some agreements could be concluded on areas such as free movement of individuals, mutual recognition of diplomas, sharing of land

registry and cadaster records, regional cooperation and joint border management (Şahin, 2013).

This confusion had continued until the fall of 2012 and in that time, the EU Commission stated that it is required to address the northern Kosovo problem in the context of bilateral relationships between Belgrade and Pristina. Moreover, the EU Commission emphasized that there is a need to address the northern Kosovo issue, about the territorial integrity (European Commission, 2012d). As a result, position and future of northern Kosovo will be an important geopolitical trump card for Serbia's EU membership process. Moreover, one argument against this cannot be ignored that the situation is a natural result of northern Kosovo's importance for newly independent Kosovo's sovereignty and other contested political borders in the Western Balkans.

Traditionally, the Serbs in northern Kosovo have objected no link with Pristina and see the region as a monad of Serbia. They explained their attitude to make a referendum in February 2012, at the time they refused Kosovo Republican institutions with the vast majority of votes (Zornaczuk, 2013). However, in June 2014, for the first time general elections took place throughout Kosovo, including in the four northern mostly Serb populated municipalities (European Commission, 2015). With the help of EU facilitated dialogue, the situation in the north of Kosovo improved in 2015 (European Commission, 2015).

CONCLUSION

We started this paper by noting that state and nation-building efforts of international community have a crucial place in the peace-building processes of post-conflict societies. Conceptually, state-building includes the efforts of international actors in order to stream up the capacity and legitimacy of the state (Ağır, 2017). In this context, rather than focusing primarily on post-conflict restructuring efforts and only on state institutions, social exigencies of humanity should be prioritized in the post-conflict restructuring process (Ağır, 2017).

The arguments given above prove that the peace-building processes of the societies which experienced war and conflict in the Western Balkans are related to the accession of these countries to the EU. In this respect, the SAP and SAA are the EU's policies that have been established with the aim of eventual EU membership of the countries of the region. Indeed, it is obvious that the Western Balkans countries are sufficiently successful in the path of EU integration (Ağır & Akçay, 2017).

This paper aimed to peruse the peace-building efforts of the EU in Kosovo and Macedonia. All these efforts of the EU can be considered as the examples of the EU's contribution as a security and stability provider for Kosovo and Macedonia. As a consequence of all these efforts of the EU, both countries' human development levels and integration with European values and the EU have gradually increased in the 2000s.

Despite the ongoing efforts of Kosovo and Macedonia to reform institutional structures of state in the direction of European values and standards, it can be argued that these reforms are only partly efficient in terms of socio-political cohesion. A number of restrictions of our study and areas for future research should be mentioned as the social tension between ethnic groups and lack of democracy in these two countries of the region. Therefore, efforts of the EU should be focused on strengthening of pluralist and civil political life by ignoring ethnopolitics. In this context, it is crucial to regard the consolidation of inter-group relations and trust for assuring absolute peace conditions in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Finally, at the final declaration of Sofia Summit in February 2018, the EU strongly stressed those priorities for the Western Balkans integration process; supporting the good governance and rule of law, reinforcing engagement on security and migration, supporting socio-economic development and putting a special focus on youth, increasing connectivity, a digital agenda for the Western Balkans, and supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans. The most important issue that highlighted on the agenda was “*countering terrorism and extremism, including financing, radicalization and the return of foreign terrorist fighters require our increased cooperation.*” (European Union, 2018b) During the two meetings, one in Strasbourg and other one in Sofia, organized by the EU in 2018, the Union explain to plan a rapid process for memberships of the countries of the region. In this context, the accession process of the Western Balkans with the EU is expected to be complemented until 2025. Indeed, for instance, on 26 June 2018, the General Affairs Council of the EU concluded a decision for opening accession negotiations with Macedonia in June 2019. This decision not only confirmed the determination of Macedonia for becoming a member of the EU and also displayed the positive contribution of the Union to social, economic and political development of Macedonia.

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