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THE FUTURE OF THE EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS - A VIEW FROM SERBIA

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European Movement
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Forum for International Relations

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Jelica Minić¹

The future of the EU and the Western Balkans – a view from Serbia

In the third issue on foreign policy, which is dedicated to the analysis of the possible ways in which the European Union might transform after Brexit and the many crises and challenges of the last decade, remarks are given concerning internal relations within the European Union (EU), the EU's position on the global stage and the power/embeddedness/vulnerability of the European system of values. Regarding all three aspects, the authors try to understand how the identified changes and revisions are reflected in the EU's enlargement policy and in its relations with the Western Balkans (WB). It tries to answer the question of how the changes that occur on the European scene affect the position and prospects of the region, which for the first time in history is united by its joint aspiration to integrate with the EU environment. As the migrant crisis has shown, although the region is not on the external borders of the EU or in its back or front yard, it is still a largely disorganized inner yard.

The authors' papers represent a view from Serbia where different strategic options and different views on these issues intersect, which affect the character, depth and pace of the reform process and its true commitment to European integration.

All will agree that the region has lost a lot of time and enthusiasm in the process of EU accession, and that after solemn promises of a certain European perspective made at the Thessaloniki EU Summit - WB, 2003, the expectations of most countries in the region (except for Croatia) concerning membership of the EU in the near future have not been met. The joint stabilisation and accession process, which was designed as a mechanism to integrate the region into the EU, did not have the adequate strength and pace to sufficiently accelerate the consolidation of the post-conflict regions and assist in their essential long-term stabilization, as recent tensions in the region show. However, it is about a policy which when all is weighed up it must be assessed as successful, because no matter how distant, the prospect of EU membership was the anchor of all the positive changes in the region.

In a number of areas the region has already integrated or is rapidly integrating into the EU - trade, investment, energy, transport, telecommunications, research and development, as well as police cooperation, the protection of European borders, etc. In some areas the process is underway and in others, in the early stages. The high degree of economic integration is just one of the causes of the economic crisis spill over from the EU to the Western Balkans. Following an initial recovery in the past decade, the region has entered a phase of recession and stagnation, which has resulted in the region continuing to lag behind, high unemployment, corruption and organized crime, as well as deterioration in the political climate in the region. In addition, in the absence of stronger involvement of the EU and its Member States, the door has been opened for many new actors (Russia, China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, etc.), who in the last decade have taken up considerable economic and political space in the region.

And then there was Brexit, another blow that triggered essential revision of the very foundations of European integration. Some believe that the departure of the United Kingdom will lead to the consolidation of the EU through new and inevitable reforms. If the forecasts prove to be true that the EU will reconstitute in several concentric circles and that in the last circle, which will represent a common/single market, this time Great Britain will remain with Turkey and possibly the Western Balkans, and we will get a kind of "asymmetric federation" (a comparison with the possible options during the breakup of Yugoslavia), an asymmetry which Great Britain has always campaigned for. And it would not have to be the end

¹ President of the Forum for International Relations of the European Movement in Serbia.

of the EU. If we look at the current structure of participation in the Eurozone, the Euro-plus pact, the Agreement on Stability, coordination and governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, and the Schengen visa regime, it can be seen that an “a la carte” system already functions within the EU, which in some areas includes European countries that are not EU members.

Others believe that Brexit is the beginning of the end of the EU and an indication of a flood of nationalist and populist political forces which will put pressure on other countries to leave the Union (The Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Slovakia, and even France and Italy which are founder states). There are no mechanisms within the EU which can prevent this. The only obstacle to this would be an open debate about the serious economic and social issues within the EU which so far have been ignored, and this has invoked dissatisfaction on the left, as well as on the right which is far more powerful.

Finally, on a global scale, the EU is weaker with the exit of the UK. In the US, Democrats expressed sorrow, while conservatives satisfaction with the outcome. At first, Russia expected sanctions to be softened and better relations with the EU. Turkey immediately after Brexit restored relations with both Russia and Israel on the same day, while China and India reviewed planned investment in the UK and the fate of existing ones.

The process of “withdrawal” will last at least two years according to the procedure set out in the Treaty of Lisbon. So far, this is the first case of withdrawal from the EU. Britons are in no hurry and EU officials want a speedy process, however, there are those who are calling for sobriety and reflection. The first fear a “domino effect”, while the second seek the best solution for both sides, which needs time and a cool head.

In the Western Balkans the consequences of Brexit are unclear, although it has caused satisfaction among Eurosceptics who are on the increase. New EU members are concerned and they remind us that the EU is the most important peace project in Europe, that Britain is a major financier of the net EU budget, and that for some of these countries it was an important factor in the establishment of security and stability and economic support in the post-war period. However, the United Kingdom is not an important trade, investment and technological partner of the Western Balkans. This is to some extent a mitigating factor. But so far it has been an important advocate of the enlargement policy and a counterbalance to the dominant role of Germany, not only in the Balkans.

EU officials argue that expansion will continue, but it has certainly fallen even lower on their list of priorities. The changes that will occur in the EU should be carefully monitored and every opportunity should be used for faster partial/functional/sectoral integration - so the regulation of the EU's relations with the United Kingdom could pave the way for countries that are not yet members. The Berlin process in a way anticipated this path. It would be good if the countries of the region succeeded in their fight for it to continue in coming years, as its discontinuance was announced. It was precisely Great Britain who was supposed to host the WB 6 summit in 2018, after Italy in 2017. However, this is not expected to happen as it will no longer be a member of the EU then. And even though regular summit meetings between the EU and the countries of the region, as envisaged in the Thessaloniki agenda, were not realised, the Berlin process has taken on an important communication role at the highest level, although with a limited number of EU Member States. That is why it is of practical and symbolic importance to political leaders and the general public in the region.

Tanja Mišćević²

Seven decades of the idea of the EU – how to proceed or how to return?

Exactly seventy years ago, just after the horrors of the Second World War, Winston Churchill in his famous speech in Zurich, announced a vision for Europe. In September 1946, addressing students at a local university, he called for the re-creation of the European family through a regional structure which he called the United States of Europe. The aim of this structure was to “... rescue ordinary people of every race and every land from war and servitude ... established on solid foundations.”³ If some countries of Europe in the beginning do not want or cannot join the EU, those who wish have to gather together and continue in that direction. In this, France and Germany must lead, and “... Great Britain, the British commonwealth, mighty America and I trust Soviet Russia, must be friends and sponsors of the new Europe”.

One other important European was Altiero Spinelli, who during the war contemplated a Europe after it was over and in the Ventotene Manifesto he very clearly stated that the future of Europe must be without borders, based on the unity of its people and on European values. This was the same Spinelli who was the first president directly elected to the European Parliament in 1979 and one of the authors of the draft EU Treaty in the 1980s.

Today’s EU is based on these ideas and is in essence a political project. It is not just about 28 countries cooperating with each other, but about the countries which over the decades have created supranational institutions that have executive and legislative jurisdiction over Member States, and who can make laws that apply to natural and juridical persons in Member States. The Union has its own court, the European Court of Justice, which has primacy over national courts, and the European Parliament together with the Council of Ministers adopt laws which are superior to national laws. The European Commission also has supranational/executive functions, which regarding certain policies, such as competition, state aid and foreign trade, has the first and the final word.

In particular, its market is integrated: there are no customs duties, but there is a single/ common set of rules and standards that are implemented under the control of the European Commission with primacy given to the common rules of competition, control of state aid and a balanced contribution to the common good, even through the budget. The main characteristic of this specific/common/internal market is the four freedoms: movement of goods, capital, services and people (the workforce).

However, there are not only successes in the Union; there are also different challenges that it has had to deal with. Today’s EU is also facing a number of pending (unsolved) issues - unemployment, especially among the youth, the increasing public debt, the huge challenge of the integration of refugees, the serious threat to human security, and in particular, the prospect of one of their members leaving the EU. It is surrounded by geopolitical situations which it is not able to cope with and nor can its members jointly take action, migrants who they cannot integrate, the growing threat of terrorism, as well as the undiminished need for growth, development and competitiveness. Today’s Union functions under conditions whereby every day it spends dealing with itself, it falls behind with innovations and investments, which other economic (and military) forces successfully use.

² Head of the Serbian negotiating team for negotiations on the accession of Serbia to the European Union

³ Winston Churchill, United States of Europe, Speech, Zurich, Council on Foreign Relations. <http://www.cfr.org/europe/churchills-united-states-europe-speech-zurich/p32536>

The state of the Union – no union within the Union

The president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, in his speech on the state of the Union in September 2016, was very clear when he said that “We are not the United States of Europe. Our European Union is much more complex. And ignoring this complexity would be a mistake that would lead us to the wrong solutions.”⁴ In particular, he pointed out that there was not enough of Europe in the Union, nor sufficient union within the Union. He even spoke of an existential crisis, because there is not enough common ground on which Member States can work, that state leaders speak mainly about their internal problems, and if Europe is mentioned, it is in passing. Never before was it possible to see representatives of EU institutions establish priorities that are so different, and sometimes in direct conflict with national governments and their parliaments, and among these priorities, there is almost no overlap. He concluded that there was “... so much fragmentation and so little unity within the Union.”

It is essential, Juncker believes, to find the answers to the five key issues that he sees as priorities: a Europe which has to protect, maintain the European way of life, empower its citizens, defend at home and abroad, and take responsibility. At the summit of the heads of state or government to be held in March in Rome, where the signing of the Treaties of Rome will be celebrated, the European Commission is preparing a white paper with a vision of how to strengthen and reform the economic and monetary union. Summing up his views on the state of the Union, he stated that only European countries can defend a reason for unity and no one else can do it but them.⁵

Of course this raises the question of all the options the European Commission has to propose to save the European project. Thus began the race which in the past few months in academic circles resulted in every single article mentioning possible scenarios regarding the future of the EU.⁶ It seems that everyone agrees that this is the right moment to re-think the future of the Union, not in terms of its final appearance, but rather the transition which will help it to survive the critical challenges that it faces. As for a strategic debate on *finalite Europeen*, there is neither the energy nor those to start it.

It is possible to systematise these proposals concerning the EU’s future path – it is not a waste of time for us who are outside of the EU, on the contrary. This means understanding our position in each of the options that may be on the table of European leaders in the coming years. As a country negotiating membership of the EU, Serbia must be ready not only to understand what the potential courses are, but also to find its place on them during accession negotiations, as well as after them. We have always known that the EU is a moving target because it changes every day, but we could never have anticipated that essential changes to the further internal integration of EU Member States could occur at the same time as the process of our integration into the EU.

The first, easiest option or scenario is the one that Britain had advocated many years before the referendum, which is to return to the initial plan with a single market as the key element. According to those of this opinion, the euro is actually the main problem, and a discussion concerning a closer Union should be finished. The way to solve the problem is first of all to get rid of the euro, which would not destroy the EU, however, it would mean the beginning of a pragmatic and efficient process of integration. In addition, it would also mean questioning whether the activities of the EU itself are of additional value to important policies and whether most of them could be renationalised. It certainly means limiting the role of the European Parliament and the Commission, while strengthening the role of national governments and parliaments in decision-making at EU level. This, of course, weakens supranationality, and one of

4 Jean Claude Juncker, *State of Union Address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends*, Strasbourg, September 14, 2016, SPEECH/16/3043

5 *Ibid*, p. 4.

6 See, for example: Stephen M. Walt, *Does Europe Have a Future?*, Foreign Policy, July 16, 2016; Strategic Options for Europe’s Future, New Pact for Europe, www.newpactforeurope.eu, Tim Oliver, *Brexit: What Happens Next*, LSE Ideas, Jun <https://medium.com>

the basic principles of supremacy ceases to be the hallmark of European integration. In fact, instead of multiple unions, this would mean a more national one.

The second option is the one advocated by authors who believe that the Lisbon Treaty (which came into force in 2009), secondary law, as well as decisions of the Court of Justice, which together make up the *acquis*, actually contain all the instruments to overcome the existing problems. Their main objection is that all the instruments which were agreed upon were never used properly and completely because there was no political consensus among the members, and this was actually the basic fault. Their full implementation would not mean further transfer of the sovereignty from states to the EU in certain areas for which they are not yet ready, such as taxation, social and employment policies. They believe that it is necessary to restore the public's faith in Union, and this can be done only if it is consistent in the application of existing agreements.

The third option is an ambitious further development, but gradual, (modelled on proposals at the very root of the European project, i.e. developmentalism), which means that it is not enough just to consolidate the achieved level of integration. Further integration is necessary, which would mean more power for the EU so that it could be more efficient regarding activities concerning key challenges, with measures to strengthen democratic legitimacy. This necessitates public debate on the amendment of treaties on which the EU is based, which must include the general public, but would require caution so that differences among members would not widen. Proponents of this option have differing opinions regarding whether this would mean the introduction of a permanent principle "a Europe at different speeds", or whether it would be used only in the short-term as an element of enhanced cooperation between those who want deeper integration. It would certainly mean the empowerment of EU institutions and the strengthening of supranationality, even within the domain of budgets and structural policies, in order to support integration with financial assets.

And of course, it is possible that today's EU, as argued by a significant number of authors, actually has no instruments that could cope with the problems. Therefore, they propose a full economic, fiscal, financial, social and political union with a strong European government and a legislative authority which would be able to make autonomous decisions in the real interest of Europe. Those Member States that oppose this should be ignored and those who want such integration should be given the opportunity.

What is absolutely certain with regard to all of these options and scenarios is that no one is thinking about giving up the concept of European values – and frankly, nobody mentions them. Let us start from the assumption that they are not mentioned because they are implied. This for us means that in whatever direction the Union goes, and from whatever perspective its further development is observed, the process of our achieving European values and standards is neither hindered nor can it be regarded as inadequate. Yes, of course it will certainly be slower because the attention of Member States will be much more focused on other issues. However, if we look at our process of integration into the Union more like an issue of internal reforms and not involving institutions, it should not slow down. After the opening of chapters dealing with the rule of law (Chapters 23 and 24), it will be necessary to adopt measures that will introduce legal certainty, which realistically will be a huge job. Certainly it would not be good if the *momentum* was to discontinue with the opening of new chapters for negotiation, because it involves us more, not only regarding internal reforms, but also it forces us to think about the future Europe.

And because of our European road, as well as the risk of security threats in the area of European, Asian and Middle Eastern geopolitical regions, the EU is required to consolidate management, which requires a strong and not a weak Europe - one that can find the answer to security, freedom and the well-being of its citizens.

The Union without Britain - “reverse” Enlargement

Certainly the most interesting issue facing the Union next year (years) will be the consequences of the referendum which was held in June 2016 in Great Britain, when most of those who voted decided that this country should leave the EU. The United Kingdom is not one of the founders of the Union; it became a member in 1973 (along with Ireland and Denmark). Achieving membership was not easy because it had been stopped twice, mainly due to the attitude of the then French President, Charles de Gaulle, who claimed that Britain could not fit into a community that was being created at that time.⁷ Furthermore, membership itself was not easy both for Britain and the EEC, later EU, or its Member States. Negotiations were very difficult regarding agriculture, the creation of regional policy in response to a disbalance in access to the then development fund, there was the rejection of certain common policies (primarily social) as well as the famous debate on rebate and the return of funds from the EU budget to the UK budget. It would, however, be completely one-sided to say that Britain has only caused problems and that it did not have an important place in the European project, because shortly after membership it became a part of the axis (Berlin-Paris), which created and improved a variety of European policies. Today's Union is primarily an economic soft power superpower, which is the result of Britain's membership and the role it took.

Certainly the Union will no longer be the same Union without the UK, but we do not think that this is the end of the Union. The UK can leave the EU, but it cannot be “re-located” outside of Europe. Britain's exit will open up a large number of debates on the consequences of the first withdrawal of membership after the Treaty of Lisbon provided this possibility by introducing the now already famous Article 50 of the EU treaty, in the hope that it would never be implemented. Therefore, the intention was that the manner and procedure of withdrawal of membership remain undefined, clearly expressing the view that the withdrawal of any Member State would never actually occur.

However, there was a referendum, and its results are now already known. After several months of discussion, the new Prime Minister of Great Britain, Theresa May, announced that at the beginning of next year, March 2017, Britain would initiate the procedure under Article 50. The following concerns the provisions that are provided in such a case: when a Member State, in accordance with their constitutional procedures decides to leave the Union, it informs the European Council about their intention, negotiations commence for the conclusion of the agreement under the terms of withdrawal, which should create a framework for their future relations with the EU.⁸ The Council of Ministers shall, upon the recommendation of the European Commission, adopt a decision to open negotiations for an agreement on the withdrawal and nominate a negotiator or the head of the negotiating team.⁹ Based on a qualified majority, the Council concludes the agreement on behalf of the Union after receiving the consent of the European Parliament.

The founding treaties of the EU cease to apply to the state that withdraws from membership on the date the treaty of withdrawal comes into force, or two years from the notification of withdrawal, unless the European Council, in agreement with the state in question does not extend that period. During the negotiation period on withdrawal, the country that wants to leave the Union will not participate in discussions at the European Council nor the Council of the European Union, or in decisions relating to it. A new qualified majority will be determined on the basis of the provisions of this agreement, so that the Council's work is unhindered during withdrawal negotiations.¹⁰ Finally, the message to the country that wants to withdraw is - if it re-applies for membership, the same procedure will be followed as with any European country under Article 49 of the EU Treaty. In other words, in the case that Britain wishes

7 Dezmon Dinan, *Menjanje Evrope – Istorija Evropske unije*, [A Changing Europe – The History of the EU] Official Gazette, 2010, page 46.

8 Article 50, par 2, EU Treaty, *Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union*, Official Journal of the European Union, C 83/1, 30.03.2010.

9 Article 218, par 3, Treaty on the functioning of the European Union.

10 In fact, in the provisions of Article 238, paragraph 3, a qualified majority is defined as at least 55% of the members of the Council representing the participating Member States, as well as 65% of the population of these States.

to renew its membership, it will have to, like Serbia, conduct negotiations on accession and harmonization with European standards.

Following the referendum and the decision to leave the EU, no one really knew what would happen next. Obviously, neither of the two sides had prepared a plan for this situation, and therefore only now are they beginning to think about the course and content of the withdrawal negotiations. More and more often we hear that it will actually be “*reverse enlargement*” in order for the solutions to be put into a structured framework. This actually means that the subject of negotiations, contrary to the accession negotiations where the main issue is when the candidate country will be able to harmonize its laws, policies and standards to those existing in the EU, will be an open question concerning when and how Britain will disassociate its laws, policy and standards from the EU, and how it will affect the achieved level of integration of the other 27 member states.

In fact, nobody is thinking too much about the entire *acquis*, because the main focus is on access to the market. As Prime Minister May very clearly explained “... Brexit means the complete repatriation of political powers from Brussels. Anything else would be unacceptable ... It means the freedom to make our own decisions on a whole spectrum of different issues, from the way in which we label our food to how we choose to control immigration.”¹¹ This means that for Britain an agreement on free trade is acceptable, but not a compromise regarding a free market, in order for companies to have maximum freedom to trade and operate within the European market, but without allowing the free movement of workers of EU Member States, and certainly without the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.¹²

The reaction from Brussels has been more than interesting - in fact there was no real reaction. Only Juncker's cabinet announced that there would be no statements made to the media, but that there would be a reaction to the submitted notification of withdrawal, which is expected in the near future. However, more and more EU officials warn Britain that they will not allow informal discussions of any kind because they know that the views of Member States on what they would like to be achieved in the withdrawal agreement are not uniform.

Nevertheless, we can already see what will be difficult to achieve in these negotiations. It is certain that during negotiations the initial position of the Union will be not to allow Britain to be the one to choose what suits or does not suit from the *acquis*, and its participation in the single market means that it must contribute funds for its functioning, i.e. pay into the Union's budget. It is also certain that if an agreement is not reached, according to Article 50, it will automatically switch to the mode of trade that is in accordance with the rules of the WTO (World Trade Organization), which Great Britain as well as the EU are members of - which means that the rules of foreign trade will be the same, just like, for example, with the Russian Federation!

However, although there are other options, none of them can be used in their pure form. Thus, the model of relations which firstly occurred to everyone, and which the EU has primarily with Norway within the European Economic Area, involves the free movement of labour, which Britain excludes as a possibility. The model of the Union's relations with Switzerland, which is based on a number of bilateral agreements, was not, however, acceptable for the EU itself because (as in the case of the referendum concerning immigrants in this country) without its influence, things could change significantly. Through negotiations it is possible to foresee a lower level of integration, a customs union, as in the case of Turkey – and this would mean that Britain could negotiate independent free trade agreements with all the partners it had as a member of the EU, and this has put Britain in a very disadvantageous position compared with those who are more interested in closing an agreement.

11 Tom McTague, Charlie Cooper, *Theresa May sets Brexit course on hard*, POLITICO, October 2, 2016, <http://politico.eu/article/theresa-may-sets-brexit-course-on-hard>

12 *Ibid*, p. 5

The solution could be a free trade agreement between the EU and the UK, such as our Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the Partnership Agreement, or the Agreement on Trade which was recently concluded with Canada. This would provide a basis for Member States to demand from Britain that the agreement include the immediate harmonisation of their rules with the new rules of EU law, as well as the control and monitoring of their implementation.

This all suggests that the negotiations will be long and very interesting. The chief negotiator appointed by the EU, Michel Barnier, a former member of the European Commission responsible for trade, is very good at reaching an agreement and has excellent knowledge of European Union law, but his ideas have still not been aired in public. His plan is to provide support to Member States in the negotiations in order to ensure that all stand behind the reached agreement.

Some of the internal changes within the EU, as the first consequences of the fact that Britain opted to leave, primarily relate to changes in the weighting of votes within the qualified majority decision-making, re-allocation of seats in the European Parliament, the issue of British national officials in EU institutions, and changes in the budget and costs. With regard to the latter, the contribution of Great Britain or any other country to the budget is, and will be, one of the most important points of discussion and negotiation, and will directly depend on the model they wish to achieve. These are not just technical changes, this is not the harmonization of management for the release of a state - this is an important question regarding the institutional balance of power within the Union.

Also, it is possible that the position of the Eurozone will be strengthened because its biggest rival will no longer be able to affect this policy. There are indications that dealing with the exit of Britain could lead towards the strengthening of integration, primarily by Germany and France. This is very difficult, because in conditions of strong Euroscepticism, and the strengthening of populism and ultra-right forces in Member States as well as within the European Parliament, such a strong shift would cause great resistance in public opinion.

Let's return, in conclusion, to Churchill and Spinelli, as well as Monet, Schuman and Delors – not one of them claimed that the European Union project would be simple, cheap and easy. However, they claimed that its added value was so great that it was the answer to the greatest number of problems for Europeans (security and the economy), in fact, it suited the interests of Europe. What else can we conclude but that the EU needs to go in the direction of further integration in order to return to the starting position of strengthening unity and sharing responsibility for an improvement in European values.

One does not need much wisdom to say something like this, but a lot of skills, knowledge and tact are needed to achieve this.

The future of the EU from a geopolitical perspective: between controlled atrophy and controlled consolidation

I assume that the majority of readers will not agree with my conclusions. In any case, this is a significant improvement, because eight years ago, when I discussed a similar topic with colleagues from European countries, the percentage of those who disagreed was 100%. This reaction was in mid-2008 when I stated that it was the beginning of the end of the EU.¹⁴ Who could have believed such a thing? Although Kisoro Mahbubani convincingly demonstrates that the era of domination of Western powers in the global framework is over, the fate of the EU is not in question. In the final proposal regarding the reconstruction of the UN Security Council from 2013, he proposes that instead of two permanent European members - Great Britain and France, there should be one reserved for the EU.¹⁵ I still do not know what the new proposal after Brexit will be!

The formation of my views on the future of the EU, were affected by things I noticed during my many years of participation in talks concerning the status of Kosovo under the auspices of the UN. Up until then, I had observed the EU by analyzing numerous policy documents and political decisions of the institutions of this organization with the accompanying statistical indicators. Then I became familiar with the practices of the EU, and at first I was completely taken aback.

In fact, shortly after the opening of negotiations it was clear that the EU had no position on the long-term resolution concerning the issue of Kosovo. The decision was made in Washington, and Brussels served only to come up with the technical solutions and to bring the matter to an end with the least number of problems. But Kosovo is in Europe. Serbia is a Central European Danubian country. International relations must be viewed from the angle of geopolitics and international security. Let us leave the idealistic theories aside and remember the realist school of thought: international relations take place in an anarchic environment and the basic aim of the actor is to provide survival using the principle of self-help.¹⁶ Without clear geopolitical objectives and political decisions arising from them, it is not possible to maintain long-term stability on the complete territory of the observed entity.¹⁷ In this case, the observed entity is Europe. The geopolitical goal was supposed to be the creation of a long-term stable peripheral zone in the Balkan region. Political decisions had to move towards this goal. Did support for the political and legal escapades in Kosovo contribute to the stabilization of the Balkans? Do the Balkans today contribute to the regional stability of Europe or present a potential source of new problems?

The Kosovo problem is a first-class geopolitical issue. Until the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, Kosovo was the biggest geopolitical hotspot on the continent. How is it possible that something like that can be overlooked? In essence, the answer is simple: the EU did not deal with geopolitics. True, some countries, such as Germany and Great Britain had their own geopolitical objectives which concerned aspirations for the further geographical fragmentation of Balkan political units. This is a tactic as old as the hills in order for bigger powers to more easily control a certain geographical area. In this context, it is even possible that Kosovo is not the last case of secession in the Balkans. However, these are goals that are

13 The author is executive director of the Centre for Strategic Alternatives and a lecturer at the Faculty of Diplomacy and Security.

14 Proroković, Dušan, *Kosovo: medzietnické a politické vzťahy*, SSNS, Bratislava, 2013, pp. 189-192.

15 Mahbubani, Kišor, *Velika konvergencija: Azija, Zapad i logika jednog sveta*, CIRSD, Beograd, 2015, p. 262.

16 Waltz, Kenneth, *Theory of International Relations*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, 1979; Цыганков П.А., *Теория Международных отношений*, Гардарики, Москва, 2003; Mearsheimer, John J., "Structural Realism", In: Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milja, Smith, Steve (Eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 3rd Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 77-93.

17 What geopolitical objectives mean for the politics of a country and how to define them can be better understood by reading, for example: Brzezinski, Zbigniew, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 2007; Дергачев, Владимир А., *Геополитика*, ВИРА-Р, Киев, 2000; Дугин, Александр, *Основы геополитики*, 1-2, Екопрес, Зрењанин, 2004. Sprukman, Nicholas, *America's Strategy in World Politics. The United States and the Balance of Power*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1942.

determined by a nineteenth-century geopolitical model. The British approach, based on the Atlantic concept and the continuous attempts to push Russia from continental Europe, to a certain extent, is no surprise. In this regard, the United Kingdom has fully coordinated its approach with the US since the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁸ It is very surprising that other have the same attitude. It is not in the interest of continental Europe to participate in the creation of a global rimland. Firstly, this zone of relative destabilization (wherever there is geopolitical confrontation there is a certain amount of destabilization) covers a third of its territory. And secondly, the circumstances have changed. Continental Europe (excluding post-Soviet regions) has about 462 million inhabitants, which is less than 6% of the total world population. Before World War I, 15% of the world's population lived in our part of the world. In 1900, Sweden had 5.14 million inhabitants and Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) 4.1 million. Today Sweden has about 10 million, and Ethiopia more than 92 million. In 1923, the GDP of France was 15 times greater than that of Turkey, and in Italy and Japan it was on the same level with twice as small an economy as China. Today in France the GDP is 3.5 times higher than in Turkey, in Japan it is 2.5 times higher than in Italy, and in China it is even 6 times higher.¹⁹ The circumstances are new and new approaches are required. Europe must think about its own security in a new way. Nothing is the same as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is not clear how a fragmented Balkan with small dependent states and state-like creations can help European security and ultimately - how can it play the role of a stable EU periphery at a time when a multipolar world order is being created? China has already secured its place as the second most important force in the multipolar system, Russia, with the largest nuclear potential and a relatively consolidated economy, will also have an important role and Turkey and Saudi Arabia have similar ambitions. All of these countries, even then in 2008, openly expressed what their interests in the Balkans were. They did not even conceal the methods they would use to strengthen their presence. Did Brussels consider that a radical solution for Kosovo would push Serbia into the arms of Russia? Did they think about the domino effect and what the consequences of a radical solution would be in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as in Macedonia? Or in Abkhazia and South Ossetia? Perhaps in Transnistria, in the Crimea? Did they believe in the ability of the Kosovo Albanians to build a sustainable system when their compatriots in Albania had not achieved this in a hundred years!? And what will happen if the system is not established? The collapse of the system in Kosovo could result in this area becoming a base for the recruitment of radical Islamists. Osama bin-Laden lived in Albania in the nineties!²⁰ The terrain has long been prepared. The lack of vision and the lack of specific geopolitical goals have resulted in the Balkans remaining a security problem for the EU. While others clearly knew what they wanted, the EU to this day does not.

To make it even worse, an almost identical mistake was repeated in Ukraine. The foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland reached an agreement with Viktor Yanukovich on 20th February 2014 regarding the announcement of early elections and a peaceful transition of power. A day later, armed demonstrators seized control of state institutions and Yanukovich had to flee the country. What followed after that is already part of history. The European troika proved to be an inadequate partner. They even failed to avail of the opportunity to come to a lasting peace through the Minsk process. The EU must not put pressure on Poroshenko and other US protagonists in Kiev. Therefore, maintaining tension in Ukraine continues to exhaust the EU, and the consequences of unstable relations with Russia are catastrophic in economic, but even more so in political terms.

On the other hand, the fact that the leading European countries have their own geopolitical goals did not mean that the EU as a whole, have them. It is true that with regard to Kosovo, and in general the question of Serbia, the geopolitical interests of Berlin and London to a large extent overlap, while those

18 Mackinder, H, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1904, pp. 421–437.

19 *Monitoring the World Economy 1820-1992*, OECD, Paris, 1995; *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, OECD Development Centre, Paris, 2001.

20 Jovanović, Živorad, *Kosovsko ogledalo* [A Mirror of Kosovo], BCSP, Beograd, 2006, p. 55.

of Paris to some extent, and Rome, the least. However, the big question is what will happen to the EU when they are diametrically opposed concerning other issues. How can the EU set up and put in place long-term policies concerning the Middle East, post-Soviet countries, or equatorial Africa where there is a population explosion happening right now?

As long as the EU functioned as a trade association and crossed over from being a customs union to a monetary union, European integration was successful and useful for all participants in this process. However, when it needed to transform itself into a political union, it tripped up. What actually happened to the EU was excellently described by Henry Kissinger: "Europe, which less than a century ago had a near monopoly in the design of the world order, is now in danger of being cut off from the contemporary quest for world order by the identification of its internal construction with its ultimate geopolitical purpose".²¹ The EU was turned inwards, weakly anticipating what was happening on the outside. Even the issue of Kosovo remained external in character. Some in Brussels should be reminded - believe it or not, that there is a world also outside of Europe. The refinement of internal rules and the development of bureaucratic procedures are important issues, but the fate of the EU in no way depends on them. The fate of the EU depends on whether there will be harmonized geopolitical objectives, i.e. common foreign and security policies. If they were to exist, it would be the first sign that we have equally understood the challenges and the threats. If not, then the perception of reality of the Greeks and the Finns would be quite different, but the two of them could trade if it was in their mutual interest, but nothing more than that. Successful trade on its own can be done with even Bangladesh. If the challenges and threats are understood differently, as an illustration tomorrow the Finns could turn to Turkey to help them to protect themselves from Russia and the Greeks could turn to Russia to help them prevent further illegal immigration from Turkey. In addition, although with the Maastricht structure a special pillar for the EU's foreign and security policies was envisioned, in practice it has not progressed far. Essentially, it could not have done so, since EU security remains dependent on NATO, i.e. the US. How can it manage its own security policy without adequate military power? Robert Cooper was aware of this problem and stated that "it is unacceptable that the defence of 450 million Europeans is so dependent on 250 million Americans. Free defence does not exist. No one yet knows exactly when, but at some point the Europeans will realize that they will have to pay for such an arrangement. There are no guarantees that American and European interests will always coincide."²² Since the mid-2000s, the dynamic development of international relations has overtaken the slow and anaemic activity of the EU, just as Cooper said.

As always in history, now we have to face the consequences because it was left to others to take care of our security. Paul Kennedy in the mid-nineties said that "the forces of economic expansion - Britain in the 1860s, the United States the 1890s, Japan today - could actually decide to become rich instead of spending a lot of money on arms. Half a century from later, the priorities can completely change. Previous economic expansion brought overseas obligations (dependence on foreign markets and raw materials, military alliances, and perhaps on bases and colonies). Secondly, opposing powers are now developing economically at a faster rate, and in return they want to expand their influence in the world. The world has become a place with more competitors, and the market share is undermined. Pessimistic observers speak of decline; patriotic statesmen call for renewal. In such unsettling circumstances, large powers are likely to find themselves spending more on defence than they did two generations ago, yet to discover that the world is a less secure environment simply because other powers are growing faster and becoming stronger".²³ By constantly looking inward and focusing almost exclusively on economic issues, European societies have benefitted, but their future position has also been undermined. Is the EU prepared to tackle more security and foreign policy issues? How much will it cost? In this article I will put forward two possible scenarios that represent two possible extremes. Of course between the two extremes, there are numerous variations and possible outcomes.

21 Kissinger, Henry, *Svetski poredak [World Order]*, Klub PLUS, Beograd, 2014, p 107.

22 Cooper, Robert, *Raspad nacija, [The Disintegration of a Nation]*, Filip Višnjić, Beograd, 2007, p. 159.

23 Kennedy, Paul, *Uspon i pad velikih sila, [The Rise and Fall of Great Powers]*, CID, Podgorica, 1999, p. 18.

Firstly, let us go back to the beginning of the article: if 2008 was the beginning of the end of the EU, then Brexit marked its end. Due to the way it was set up, without specific geopolitical goals, no common foreign and security policy, without its own armed forces, the EU could not survive as a political union. Essentially, the EU imagined by Jacques Delors, is no more. I doubt that its end will be dramatic as in the cases of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and that its collapse will be rapid. It is more likely that it will die out in stages, with the agony associated with any new big geopolitical crisis, while maintaining certain institutions, primarily trade, which is of use to all. Under the same name, integration will probably continue to exist, with fewer responsibilities and common goals.

It will be a process of “controlled atrophy”, and the following is the scenario that awaits us. The UK has already exited and it will continue with the “Atlantic Partnership” policy, whereby it can be a more active player in other world regions and its interests will be better protected than with the EU. It will be increasingly difficult for Germany and France to defend their interests and impose other solutions through weaker EU institutions, and it will therefore have to practise a more independent policy. France will then have to deal with the unpleasant surprise of losing its position and having less influence than it had twenty years ago, which influences the opening of unpleasant issues regarding internal affairs. Germany will realise how much it is feared by the majority of Eastern European countries. As a result, the two great continental powers will be once again turned more inward, rather than outward. And this is a losing option. The areas that remain empty because of the weakening of the EU will be occupied by other actors. With the exception of three countries, only Italy, Spain, and to some extent Poland, have sufficient military resources to ensure national security. To protect themselves, European countries will need to enter into various arrangements with other great powers. The US and Russia are already positioned as current or potential partners, along with a great number of countries, China, through the realization of the geoeconomic concept “One Belt One Road” will appear as an increasingly important factor in central and eastern Europe, while Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran will invest a lot of effort into connecting with Balkan Muslims as well as the diaspora in Western Europe. I expect that India will also reveal a “European agenda” relatively soon, as it is the second most populous country, the fourth military power (with the possibility of becoming the third nuclear force), and the seventh world economy (by 2020 it is likely to become the fifth). As a theme for reflection I would like to ask the following question: what would happen if India increasingly insisted on the protection of the Roma in Europe? In the last two decades I have attended numerous events organized by Indian government institutions and I have regularly encountered political representatives of the local Roma. Regardless of their promises, Europeans have allowed the Roma to continue to be second-class national minorities, and tensions on this issue are high in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, etc. Another extremely dangerous player is the globalisation of Islam; we are witnessing its ambitions and actions. In this scenario, Europe will become a testing ground for geopolitical competition and will receive the status, for example, that Southeast Asia has today. In this part of the world, regional economic integration (ASEAN) also operates, but members are politically distant from each other. At least two and a maximum of five large European countries will be able to protect their fundamental national interests, but will not get involved in creating a global order. In fact, the only European country that will be able to join the global debate will be the United Kingdom.

Another possible scenario is to carry out “controlled consolidation”. How do I see this process? The aim will be for the EU to acquire the ability to take care of its own security. Divorcing from NATO will be complex and slow, but the EU will not be in a position in any way to upset the United States. Therefore, the objective can be reached by completely new geopolitical positioning. In these conditions, it is logical that the process must start around the German-French axis, i.e. the continental axis. It will be of crucial importance to define geopolitical goals. Geopolitical methodology is based on the dichotomy between maritime and continental powers, between thalassocracy and tellurocracy.²⁴ In a global thalassocratic

24 Schmitt, Karl, *Land and Sea*, Plutarch Press, Ann Arbor (Mi), 1997.

context, continental Europe has remained only a “cordon sanitaire” in relation to the centre of Eurasia (*Heartland*). European integration functioned to restrain the Soviet Union. That is why the EU was not able to define its own geopolitical goals. These were forgotten during the short period of great economic boom after the Cold War, and during the last few years these processes have been looked at less through cycles of long duration (*long durée*). Europe was drunk with success! The current crisis helps us to look at things objectively and to draw certain conclusions. Now it is time to sober up! The departure of the UK can actually help mainland Europe to again quickly adopt a tellurocratic approach. European geopolitics must be of a continental character.

On an external level, it would mean that its priority would be the adjustment of relations with the other continental poles, primarily with Russia, China, India, Turkey and Iran. There is a series of areas and initiatives that continental Europe can participate in. The existing economic power would have to be used for new initiatives, whether coordinating involvement in the Chinese project “One Belt One Road”, paving the way for the strengthening of European influence in Central Asia and Eastern Africa or the construction of a new strategic pipeline to Russia, which would ensure long-term energy security. This would strengthen today’s EU eastern periphery, since the countries between the Baltic and the Adriatic Sea would not be part of the Atlantic Rimland, but a transit zone through which Western European countries would be strategically linked with the most eastern Eurasian continental mass, which would be of great importance for the internal plan, because this plan, as seen from the examples of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, does not itself provide a solution. Inequalities remained extremely visible, and EU expansion led to a decrease in the population of these countries due to people fleeing, which brought new headaches. According to data for 2015, every thirtieth Romanian and fortieth Bulgarian emigrated.²⁵ And this trend will continue. In itself, the inclusion of other peripheral countries in the EU will not solve the problems they face today. A new vision for their development is necessary. Otherwise, the number of inhabitants will decrease in these areas, with an aging and less educated population. At the same time, the EU must insist on new political solutions in order to extinguish the existing geopolitical hotspots on European soil. US proposals must, of course, be taken into account to some extent because the relationship of power is such. However, they do not have to be fulfilled. Opening up to new “continental partners” would allow the creation of the balance of power, which would allow the EU new room for manoeuvre. Why not allow Russia to play a more active role in finding a solution for Kosovo? Why not include Iran and Turkey in talks on BiH? Why is there no place for China in talks about the future of Ukraine? When looking for solutions among a greater number of actors, they are then based on principles and not on the current political interests of those who are stronger. Principled solutions are sustainable in the long-term, and those imposed last until the balance of power changes. The EU cannot afford the luxury of becoming hostage to changes in the balance of power in the world order, but it must, through the creation of principles, find its place in the global political system and influence the shaping of the world order. Extinguishing geopolitical hotspots in this way stabilizes the periphery, ensures European security and creates conditions for the further strengthening of continental political integration on a completely new basis and in a different way than before. Does the EU have the power for something like this? Judging by everything we have witnessed so far, there are several reasons for pessimism. Between the two extreme scenarios, we could probably consider a solution in between. On the one hand, the EU will continue to function by inertia, and on the other, instead of action, we will witness the reaction to the decision of other actors. The EU’s path will be shaped from one judgment to another and from one crisis situation to another. Or it may be a dead end!? In social sciences it is impossible to predict with great reliability. The complex circumstances in which we find ourselves make the degree of reliability even smaller. The EU which we knew yesterday no longer exists. The outlook for the future depends on a whole series of circumstances and the outcome of many crises in various parts of the world which Brussels can no longer influence.

25 According to the indicator “*net migrations rate*” put forth in: *CIA Worldfact Book*, CIA, Washington D.C., 2016. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/>

Is the current European Union the future for the Western Balkans?

Previous years have been a special sort of test for the system on which the current European Union is based. In political and academic discourse, the tendency to characterise phenomena and processes, which the European Union had to fight with, as “challenges” imposed by the process of Europeanization as part of the globalization process, was evident. Such a broad approach leads to a review of political, economic, social and cultural events at an international level as products of international systems that are interdependent and deeply intertwined, and under which modern states and supraplates operate. However, each of these organizational units contains in its foundations basic values and principles that determine not only the framework of their activities, but also the limits to which they can be challenged. The Geographical frameworks of the European Union, together with the European values and principles on which it is based today, were brought into question due to several years of financial crisis, the monetary union and the recent crisis regarding the Schengen zone. In the shadows of this turbulence, there is an issue of existential character, i.e. whether the European Union as we know it today will survive in the future. The idea of holding a referendum on whether to “leave or stay” slowly gained in importance, occupying media space and thus burdening the daily lives of citizens. The domino effect of these crises could soon draw the attention of the public to other dimensions of European integration, such as the single market or the European Economic Area. In such circumstances, for candidate countries such as Serbia, the question is whether EU membership is really the only alternative.

European values

The evolution of the European project has shown that European values are quite a “fluid” category. The term “European values” itself contains numerous contradictions. Although the basic intention was for this term to include all the similarities that connect different European nations, including respect for all their differences, it is unclear to this day what it implies. The European legal and institutional heritage, known as the “*acquis communautaire*”, remained at a level whereby member states attempted to build a “European identity” that would harmonize all existing differences and elevate the sense of unity as a dominant value. The challenges which the European Union has faced in the last decade bear witness to their arbitrary interpretation, and the role and use of European values which completely undermine their legitimacy and more openly question their universality and reliability. The following text contains an overview of four such examples which reflect on: 1) the ongoing efforts to stabilize the Financial and Monetary Union, together with providing help to Greece, 2) the “Charlie Hebdo” case 3) the current (im)migrant crisis and 4) the “Brexit” case - the referendum in the UK on remaining in or leaving the EU.

Greece and the European economic crisis – a single European market

Greece became the epicentre of the European debt crisis after the implosion of the stock exchange on Wall Street in 2008. In October 2009, Greece announced that for years it had provided incorrect statistics of the government’s deficit, which caused alarm among financial institutions with regard to the real situation in its overall economic, financial, monetary and fiscal system. The financial markets quickly prevented Greece from taking out new loans, and by spring 2010 Greece was on the brink of bankruptcy, which threatened to trigger a new financial crisis, not only in Europe but also in the international market. In order to avoid such an apocalyptic possibility, after long negotiations the so-called Troika was formed, consisting of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. After intensive meetings with representatives from Greece, the first two tranches of international financial

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assistance to the amount of €240 billion were agreed. However, such assistance is not approved without certain conditions. In order for Greece to be able to withdraw this amount, it had to make major socio-economic reforms which would encompass most of the public administration, followed by reforms to the social structure itself. Firstly, harsh fiscal measures were required that would involve huge budget cuts and the increase of taxes. At the same time, Greece was expected to tackle political corruption, improve the investment climate, as well as to accede to the introduction and enforcement of severe penalties for all citizens who broke the law. Although this agreement was intended to allow Greece to “buy time” in order to stabilize its finances and reassure the financial markets about the existence of the possible risk of the total collapse of the system, the internal economic and political problems did not disappear. At the same time as these developments, Greece was experiencing serious turmoil on the domestic political front which led to the fall of the government, a brief takeover of power by the ultra-right-wing forces “Golden Dawn”, a repetition of the elections as well as a referendum, which resulted in the re-composition of the initial governing structures, etc. According to analysts, the consequences of these events set back the Greek economy at least five years, while unemployment reached a record high of 25%.

Greek relations with individual EU Member States, such as Germany, as well as with EU institutions, such as the European Commission, are still very fragile. In addition to awakening many ghosts from the past (xenophobia, racism, etc.), these events have brought up the question of the arbitrary interpretation of the European *acquis* and how they are applied, but more importantly, how successful the internalisation of European values is in member countries. In this case, the value of the rule of law, solidarity, unity and equality are in first place.

Charlie Hebdo – freedom of expression

The “Charlie Hebdo” case essentially set off an avalanche of questions regarding the legitimacy and universality of the European values on which European society is built, as well as the entire EU system. It also can be considered a textbook example of a distortional observation of reality and the selective acceptance of facts. In the essence of this tragedy, lies the question as to how far the limits of the (European) right to freedom of opinion and expression go and when, as (European) values, they are usurped.²⁷ Numerous theoretical schools that deal with the value of systems agree that one cannot talk about absolute freedom because it functions on the principle of limitations; that is, the freedom of an individual/groups/ societies determines, i.e. restricts the freedom of other individuals/groups/ societies. Some media have given different answers to this question, but most of them agree that a satirical view of religious symbols can be interpreted in two different ways. The first one relies on the right to freedom of opinion and expression without negative connotations (i.e. hate speech), and the second one perceives the published drawing as a mockery of the religious beliefs of a particular community, with negative connotations (e.g. hate speech).²⁸ These subjective experiences have closed the circle of mutual recriminations regarding the ultimate intentions of a satirical sketch, which resulted in a tragic outcome. The reactions of Europeans within and beyond the borders of the European Union ranged from absolute solidarity with the victims and families of the victims, summarized in the banner “Je suis Charlie”, to a significant increase in Islamophobia and negative attitudes towards non-European immigrants. 29 So the question arises as to where the fine line is that separates the right to freedom of speech, i.e. the freedom of opinion and expression from the opinion, i.e. expression which is in the form of hate speech or has any other negative connotation. European values, which in this case were the subject of review, were primarily freedom of speech/opinion/ expression, freedom of the press, tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue.

27 “Is the Charlie Hebdo attack really a struggle over European values?”, taken from *New Statesman*: <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/01/charlie-hebdo-attack-really-struggle-over-european-values>.

28 Ibidem.

29 “Europeans all”, text from the Internet edition of *The Economist*, taken from: <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21638220-debate-over-freedom-expression-v-religious-sensitivity-seems-have-been-decided-attack>.

Illegal immigration – the right to the freedom of movement of people

Most politicians and academics agree that the wave of immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons pointed to the very essence of the failure to internalize European values within the European Union. Political discourse, behaviour and the activities of individual Member States of the European Union, to a large extent violated the rights and freedoms which generations of European citizens were proud of. Certain elements were too extreme and have brought up a number of issues, ranging from nonconformity to the arbitrary interpretation of the application of European laws and regulations. Thus, Hungary was the first to raise the “European wall” to defend itself against the onslaught of immigrants; the Czech Republic and Austria introduced temporary border controls; Slovakia expressed its readiness to accept only immigrants of the “Christian religion” because it believes that all “others” would have problems integrating into Slovakian society; Germany “invited” hundreds of thousands of migrants and later regretted such a hasty decision; Great Britain forcibly returned migrants who attempted to enter through the English Channel tunnel, etc.³⁰

Advocates of the enlargement of the European Union found themselves in the minority as the defenders of European basic freedoms, while Eurosceptics gloated over the downfall of the European Order. Most media reports during the first twelve months of the immigrant crisis recorded the unexpected and literal respect for the European code of conduct in candidate countries and potential candidates for EU membership, among which Serbia is at the forefront. Surprisingly, most of the media stated that these countries, whose readiness to comply with European norms and standards had been assessed, measured and criticized for years, behaved more like Europeans than the members of the European club to which they aspire. From a theoretical point of view, their actions are a textbook example which confirms a bidirectional approach to Europeanization, and from the “bottom-up”.

The European Union, which aspires to be an “open society”, as, for example, Soros perceives it, has largely failed to answer the challenges of a globalized world.³¹ The European values which public debate has focused on in this case, include democracy, the right to freedom of movement, the right to international protection and assistance, the right to integration, and ultimately the collapse of the Schengen system.

The “Brexit” case – the EU referendum in the UK

The result of the referendum about whether Britain should remain in or leave the EU did not come as any surprise. Although the reasons behind its commitment to leave the EU were issues such as the high influx of immigrants, job losses, rising unemployment and the deterioration of living standards, the real explanation was the primordial need of this island state to “isolate” itself so that the neighbouring problems would not affect them. Great Britain has always been more an observer than a participant in European integration. Thanks to the so-called “opt out” clauses, it has managed to carve out a comfortable position that allows it to participate in decision-making at a communitarian level, but not necessarily to implement the agreements reached. This position also represents one of the archaic principles of the British isolation policy which did not allow full commitment to the European idea, but the necessity to control and manipulate it. The question therefore is whether the British politicians, who had inspired the call for a referendum, had estimated that this supranational creation could no longer be managed in accordance with their interests. By exiting the EU, it would “shake” Europe to the core and possibly build a new base favourable for the implementation of British foreign policy, which is more inclined to observe, evaluate and control rather than to really dedicate and participate in the integration process of multilateral cooperation.

30 News from the Internet page: www.bbc.com, www.france24.com, www.irishtimes.com, www.wsj.com.

31 Gregor Peter Schmitz's interview with George Soros, taken from: <http://nybooks.com/articles/2016/02/11/europe-verge-collapse-interview/>

The referendum indicates another interesting fact, which is that in the last few years there has been a serious lack of citizen support for state policy. This is primarily reflected in the immigration policy, but also in other issues, such as budget allocations and the like. Many are of the opinion that the result of the referendum is actually the voice of the layers of society that were “lost” in some stages of the Europeanisation/globalization process. Other analysts believe this is unlikely, because if this is indeed the case, the referendum would have occurred a lot earlier.

The exit of Great Britain from the EU is an indicator of the collapse of one of the main founding principles, as well as EU values, which is reflected in the respect and coexistence of all forms of diversity. In addition, the decision-making process was guided by the principle of the equality of all Member States. This example shows that some countries felt that their voice carried more weight than others, and that in the most critical moments smaller states had to comply with their interests. This illustrates the attempt of supporters of the “stay” campaign to call a new referendum to confirm the results, which the EU unanimously refused, stating that after this decision, there was “no going back” for the British people.

Europeanisation vs. regionalization

Europeanisation is like a two-way street and its success depends solely on the reciprocal actions of the actors. There are several different “uses” to the concept of Europeanisation of which, for the purpose of this discussion, three have been singled out: a) Europeanization in the context of the EU enlargement policy b) Europeanization as a reconstruction of identity and c) Europeanization as transnational and cultural integration.

Studies on Europeanization present the view that this process initiates parallel, interconnected and interdependent processes of change both at national and supranational levels. Candidate countries strive to align their domestic policies with the EU acquis and reach the expected level which would ease the implementation of their future obligations arising from EU membership. This primarily relates to the institutional coordination and harmonization of legislation in order to allow countries already aspiring for membership to closely link to and integrate into the existing political, economic and security structures of the Union with candidate status. However, this does not work on the same principle when it comes to the study of the reconstruction of national identity and cultural integration. These areas of Europeanization have not been researched enough and have often been disputed due to the lack of a thoroughly built (“anchored”) theoretical base. Unlike the process of European integration which leads to the establishment of a “European core” or “European entity”, Europeanization is recognized as a second dimension, i.e. a process that runs parallel to integration and leads to disintegration, which runs counter to the efforts that lead to homogenisation at all levels. On which European or “communitarian” level is the identity and cultural integration of the people of Europe represented?

The interpretation of Europeanisation is that on national and sub-national levels of integration, significant changes appear that may complement, but equally deny the changes on a the supranational level. Europeanisation is therefore recognized through what is created by integration and what it continues to do, which is to help the diversification of European societies which are on different levels. In this regard, it cannot be categorically said that in the case of the Western Balkans, European integration depends on or necessarily affects the development of integration at lower or sub-regional (intra-regional) levels. Practical examples are in favour of the claim that on the basis of monitoring recent relations of European and intra-regional integration, four different scenarios can be identified: 1) the progress of integration at European

and regional levels,³² 2) progress at a European level and stagnation at a regional level,³³ 3) progress at a regional level and stagnation at a European level,³⁴ 4) stagnation at European and regional levels.³⁵ So, it cannot be said that regionalization is the opposite of Europeanization, but it is an integral part of it. Consequently, regionalization may contribute to as well as hinder the integration processes on a European level. For candidate countries and potential candidates for membership of the European Union, it is important to recognise and appreciate this element of Europeanization, which points to the fact that EU membership is not necessarily the final outcome of the integration process. Membership of the European Union may be one, but not the only alternative to countries that are committed to improving relations with the Union. There are many examples of international regimes, such as the EEA (The European Economic Area), EFTA (The European Free Trade Area), etc., which show that other forms of collective cooperation can also be equally successful and in no way will lessen the benefits that come out of such a form of cooperation with the European Union. With the formation of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the countries of the Western Balkans have already made a step in that direction.

The above examples show the options that should be kept in mind while monitoring the future development of the European Union, which will not only significantly affect its relationship with the countries of the Western Balkans, but also the region's relationship with the EU. The Western Balkan countries, as part of a regional framework that represent structures such as the RCC, can have a close relationship with the European Union as associate members, or continue to put pressure on the national governments of EU Member States to accept them as new members. The first option is quite controversial, as it is reminiscent of the regional framework that already existed in the region in the form of former Yugoslavia, which causes discomfort in certain countries in the region. The second option does not differ greatly from the first, except that the main power centre is recognized and accepted by Brussels.

The future of the EU – the future of the Western Balkans and Serbia

The current course of the enlargement process, and above all, the relationship of a growing number of Member States and the opinion of their citizens to the idea of further enlargement, does not inspire too much optimism. This fact urges consideration of possible scenarios for the future development of the European Union as a supranational creation. One approach to enlargement which is becoming more likely, is the organization of the institutional structure of the Union in the form of a so-called concentric circle system.

The first circle would consist of the founding Member States, who have decided to continue with political integration by means of further promoting cooperation on the basis of the European Political Union Treaty.³⁶ The second circle would consist of all the states of the first round and other current EU Member States that wish to continue with economic integration, but not political integration within the framework of the European Union Treaty.³⁷ The third circle would include Member States of the previous two circles and other European countries who would not like to be part of either closer political integration or economic integration, but are only interested in maintaining intergovernmental cooperation with EU

32 Example: The flourishing of regional organizations, initiatives, networks of cooperation in the Western Balkans, with EU support, the full cooperation of the region with the ICTY in The Hague, candidate status for Albania, BiH's application for membership.

33 Progress in the negotiations on the membership of Montenegro and Serbia candidate status for Albania, BiH's application for membership, political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, at the same time a constitutional crisis in BiH, a political status quo in Albania, corruption and organized crime in Montenegro, a dispute over the name of the Macedonian state and the constant postponement of the date for the opening of negotiations for Macedonia.

34 The Berlin process as a new impetus to regional cooperation, but at the same time, five EU member states that continue to categorically refuse to accept the unilateral recognition of the independence of Kosovo and Metohija.

35 The current crisis in the EU and the intensification of bilateral relations in the region point to the possibility of such a scenario.

36 Treaty on European Political Union, http://europa.eu/eu-law/decision-making/treaties/index_en.htm.

37 An example of cooperation between Member States and EFTA and the EU.

Member States and the single market. In this way, the functioning of the European Union through various “circles” of cooperation, which would include not only a different composition of participants, but also different levels, speed, interests and goals of cooperation, would impact on the complete re-design of “forces” within the EU. This would substantially affect the course of the European integration process which would be divided into several different “axes” of European integration. These axes would not be new in themselves, but would further institutionally strengthen and give freedom to the existing structures, such as the single market, the Eurozone, the Schengen area, etc. and eventually enable the creation of new ones. Structuring the European core into multiple axes at different levels of European integration would in fact be the consequence of the grouping of members of the European Union in accordance with their interests, needs and possibilities, which would greatly reflect on the candidate countries and potential candidates for membership.

Thus, countries aspiring for membership could be put in a position to vote on which of these circles they want to join. This option is not fundamentally new, since it is contained in certain treaties on accession, such as in the cases of the UK and Denmark, where these exemptions/specificities recognize and accept the introduction of the so-called “opt - out” clause. Consequently the Western Balkan countries themselves could contribute to this process by forming one or more separate entities of European integration through the existing regime of regional cooperation within the RCC and other regional integration mechanisms (CEFTA 2006, the Energy Board, South East Europe Transport Observatory, etc.).

Conclusion

For now, the future appearance of the European Union is uncertain and it is quite certain that with each subsequent step, it will be subject to deeper and further examination. This also presents great uncertainty for Western Balkan countries given that pro-European public opinion is decreasing the longer the process and positive outcome for their countries aspiring for membership are delayed. Also, enlargement is less present on the European agenda as more important and enduring problems which the EU successively faces have pushed it into the shadows. The grouping of current and future members around different axes and levels of EU integration does not necessarily mean failure of the current Union. On the contrary, such a solution could be beneficial both for the Union and for its members because it would, without unrealistic pretensions, focus on courses of action that would be aligned with its real interests and abilities.

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