
Security Dimension of Open Balkans: Contemporary Security Challenges as a Chance for Regional Security Platform

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Abstract

The Open Balkans initiative primarily is focused on the cooperation within the economic framework between participating actors. But, bearing in mind reached declarations between Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia related to the cooperation in the fields of security, there are no doubts that this initiative also could provide a contribution in the regional security infrastructure, at this moment between participating states, but later also within the whole Western Balkans region. Leading research question of this paper is whether Open Balkans, as an initiative with pre-dominant economic sign, could also contribute in the process of creation regional security sustainability from the contemporary security threats angle. From the theoretical point of view, contribution of this paper is foreseen in the context of analysis how much regional cooperation in the field of security could contribute in wider security infrastructure. Primarily the research would be focused on the so-called soft-threats, which do not include "traditional" security threats such as territorial integrity, possibilities of foreign aggression, as well as traditional ways of war.

Key words: Open Balkans, security cooperation, contemporary security threats

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Introduction

Before we focus on the security framework of the Western Balkans, it is important to point out that the theory of the regional security complex starts from the fact that the regional level is the best for understanding security (Luka Glušac, 2021, p. 42). According to understanding of Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, Western Balkans represents regional security sub complex (Glušac, p. 57) which also has huge influence on the European security mosaic. In that context, sub complexes that are locked into a complex, *id est* surrounded by the units that make up the complex, cannot affect the change of the external boundaries of the complex through their disintegration (Glušac, p. 51). However, the example of the Western Balkans testifies to a different tendency, because even though it is outside the European Union complex, composed of actors that are not members of the EU, as a region that is geographically located in the "womb of the EU" it has a significant influence on security trends both in the Union and on the continent. Security cooperation in the Western Balkans in the last 30 years, after the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has been marginalized in such a way that there has always been a more pronounced interest in cooperation in this domain with partners outside the region, as opposed to a pragmatic approach and the creation of a regional security infrastructure. There are three key causes of such a situation: civil wars in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, which have contributed to a pronounced negative peace in regional frameworks, mistrust between political elites, as well as political abuse of nationalism, which has contributed to an increasingly pronounced distancing of some actors from other actors in the Western Balkans. With pronounced political hostilities, open questions from the recent war past and the pervasive phenomenon of mistrust, cooperation in the field of security has become almost impossible in

the Western Balkans. Later, that invisible line of separation in terms of security was additionally strengthened, bearing in mind that certain countries in the region became NATO member states, that NATO established its mission of unlimited time scope in Kosovo, while at the same time Serbia tried to preserve its military neutral position. bearing in mind the intervention of NATO forces in 1999, as well as the marked mistrust of Serbian society and the public when it comes to this military and defense alliance. But the goal of this work is not to determine the causes of insufficient cooperation in the area of security in the Western Balkans, but to try to recognize the possibilities of cooperation in this domain from the point of view of contemporary security challenges. In fact, the essence of the work is to answer the question of whether modern security challenges, such as organized crime and corruption (Bjelajac, 2008 & Bjelajac, 2015), migration, human trafficking, natural disasters, cyber security and terrorism can represent a common denominator for the creation of a platform for cooperation in the field of security in the Western Balkans, specifically in this work, through the analysis of capacities for security cooperation within the framework of the Open Balkans. The fact is that not all actors in the Western Balkans are included in the Open Balkans initiative, so Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro are not participating, but this makes this paper even more relevant because it opens up the possibility to analyze the potential of security cooperation within the framework of the Open Balkans as an initiative in which currently participate two NATO member states and one state that pursues a policy of military neutrality. With this we will encourage a double debate in security science from the contemporary security challenges point of view: first, the debate will be focused on the question do the contemporary security challenges automatically generate security cooperation between political entities, regardless of their national security policy and strategy; secondly, how regional integration in the field of security contributes to the strengthening of the regional security environment, and thus the national security of the political entities in the certain region, in this case the Western Balkans. Through the analysis of the level of cooperation in the field of security within

the framework of the Open Balkans, we will try to explain why comprehensive regional integration and cooperation in the field of dealing with contemporary security challenges in the Western Balkans is desirable and how much it actually contributes to the creation of a sustainable regional security environment, bearing in mind the basis for building trust at three levels: between political elites, then between political entities and finally, comprehensively at the level of societies.

Do contemporary security threats recognize national borders or military/defense blocks/alliances?

In modern security strategies, especially in powerful and developed countries, apart from "traditional" security issues, such as ensuring political independence and territorial integrity, modern security threats and challenges that go beyond the domain of national borders are also analyzed. In this sense, developed countries deal with security issues, threats and challenges that may arise as a result of inefficiency and ineffectiveness of internal institutional infrastructure, as a result of internal political instability, as a result of economic crises, as a result of health crises and pandemics, as a result of natural disasters. From the other side, contemporary study of the possibilities of small states to resistance to security threats is far from being understood that it boils down to the classic policy of balancing and developing own military potential (Gajić, 2020, p. 63) In fact, we are talking about security threats and risks that do not recognize national borders and whose consequences, due to the all-pervading process of globalization, also have an all-pervading effect in one region, but also in wider geographical frameworks. The financial crisis of 2008, which arose within the framework of the banking sector in the USA, represents one of the most modern examples of the global spread of the crisis, respectively, its all-pervading impact on the banking sector in countries that are thousands of kilometers away from the USA in a geographical and territorial context. In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic is also a good example for understanding the impact of modern crises and their all-pervasive nature of threat in terms of security. But we have to note that even "traditional" security threats

in the modern globalized world have an all-pervasive impact, respectively, consequences on political entities that have no geographical connection to the security threatened area. This thesis is evidenced by the wars on the soil of the Middle East and North Africa during the second decade of the 21st century. As a result, these wars have produced huge, multi-million waves of refugees and migrants, which directly and indirectly threatened the security infrastructure in the countries that were on the so-called migrant and refugee routes. When we talk about direct and indirect ways of endangering the security mosaic in countries that were on migrant and refugee routes, we can use the example of the countries in the Western Balkans region. These countries were indirectly threatened because their economic and political systems were faced with unexpected challenges that caused large economic expenditures for developing countries, while, on the other hand, they simultaneously caused internal political tensions along the lines of political blocs that consider it is necessary to open state borders for migrants and refugees and the so-called conservative political blocs that explicitly demanded the "rejection" of migrants and refugees through various military and police measures, including the construction of multi-kilometer fences on state borders as an appropriate method to deal with the migrant and refugee crisis. And when it comes to direct threats that endanger the security mosaics of countries on migrant and refugee routes, it is important to point out that these political entities were simultaneously faced with an increase in crime rates through illegal crossings of refugees and migrants, through human trafficking, through the creation of cartels that deal with human trafficking and illegal routes for the transport of migrants and refugees, up to the abuse of migrants and refugees through their forced involvement in human trafficking and the sale of illegal substances, such as drugs. Perhaps in this context, on the example of the migrant crisis, we could find a best place for analyzing the questions posed by Марјан Гјуровски (Marjan Gjurovski) and Трајан Гоцевски (Trajan Gocevski), namely: For whom to provide security? What does security refer to? From whom to protect? From which sources of threats, threats and risks? And finally with what means and

resources to do it (Gocevski and Gjurovski, p. 50)? The above mentioned examples represent a clear indication of the pervasive character of the consequences of modern security risks and threats, and in this context this paper will serve as a good academic basis for providing an answer to the question of why regional security cooperation and integration contribute to regional security sustainability and how modern security risks actually exert pressure to rational and pragmatic political elites for cooperation in the domain of security at the regional level.

Security dimensions of Open Balkans

According to Ivana Jovanović, management and security of borders in Europe, migration and free movement of persons, especially in neighboring regions that are in the process of post-conflict stabilization or preventive international monitoring, represents a significant challenge for European states and European regional arrangements and organizations dedicated to peacekeeping (Jovanović, 2015, p. 11). In that context, apart from the political-military dimension, border management and control are also connected to two other dimensions - economic and human. The economic dimension refers to border management and unified and complementary control systems through the cooperation of participating states, which aim to prevent illegal economic activities and illegal trade (narcotics and other illegal means, cross-border crime, human trafficking). Finally, the management and control of borders today is inextricably linked to the human dimension of security, in terms of respecting and realizing basic human rights (Jovanović, p. 13). In addition to the historically ubiquitous military threats, small states today are facing numerous non-traditional types security threats such as terrorist activities, hybrid threats, as well as a whole range of economic, societal and environmental threats (Gajić, 2020, p. 69). Small states today are faced with security challenges, risks and threats that a society does not interpret as a danger to the survival of the state, both such threats, risks and challenges in the long term period contribute to the erosion of an institutional system and the state

system. The threats faced by small states in the modern international system go beyond the classic military threats, interconnected economies, online infrastructure, and diasporas all present new challenges to state security that require nuanced solutions (Crandall, 2014, p. 30). Among the contemporary threats faced by small and micro states are political corruption, political clientelism and abuse of public institutions for party purposes, which in the long run makes the public system unprofessional, ineffective, and therefore ineffective for the needs of its citizens. It is actually directly related to internal security, which refers to the smooth functioning of the constitutional order, respectively the social, economic and legal system, and the protection of other goods, values and objects (Gajić, 2020, p. 65). In fact, we are talking about numerous modern security challenges that require huge resources for preventive action, which small and micro states, which are most often, in the economic sense, developing countries, do not have enough, and require huge budget expenditures to deal with them. When it comes again for the security of borders in Europe, the stability of former conflict areas, including the Western Balkans, is particularly important. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic, on behalf of the Republic of Serbia, which presided over the OSCE in 2015, stated during 2014 in the priorities of the future presidency, that the region of the Western Balkans, which for many years faced wars, hostilities, sanctions, foreign interventions, and serious violations of human rights, will be given special attention.¹ It is important to emphasize that European and Balkan security are closely and inextricably linked, especially in the context of modern security threats. This was confirmed by the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Majlinda Bregu, who stated in Paris in 2021 that the security challenges of the European Union and the Western Balkans are increasingly connected due to a series of new global threats (Beta/Danas, 2021). In this context, the security

¹ Priorities of Serbia's OSCE chairmanship presented by Minister Dacic at a special OSCE meeting.
<http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php/o-ministarstvu/ministar/govori/13932-2014-07-15-11-0327?lang=lat> op. cit.

dimension of the Open Balkans can contribute to the process of creating a regional security platform in the Balkans that will make the security mosaic in the region more sustainable in the long term, in the economic sense it will contribute to reducing the costs of the participating actors, and in the political sense it will contribute to increasing trust between the political elites in the region. Actual US Ambassador to Serbia Christopher Hill at the conference "Regional security challenges and events in the countries of the Western Balkans", has pointed out that the meaning of the "Open Balkans" is to create a sense of community and a way of functioning with the neighbors, and that the initiative contributes to good neighborliness and facilitates the flow of movement across borders (RT Balkan, 2023).

From the point of view of the signed agreements and declarations by the leaders of the participants of the Open Balkans, we will find that it is not only an economic regional initiative, but also an initiative that deals with certain issues of contemporary security threats. This is evidenced by the Agreement on Cooperation in Civil Emergency Situations signed in July 2021 (CCS Open Balkan, 2019). Serbia, North Macedonia and Albania also signed the Operational Plan in the field of civil protection, which is actually a continuation of the previously signed agreement. The operational plan envisages the establishment of permanent communication channels through national operational centers. This plan also envisages the organization of joint seminars, conferences, exercises, round tables, trainings, including the exchange of good practices and experiences (CCS Open Balkan, 2019). This agreement specifically provides mechanisms and procedures for planning and implementing measures to protect against floods, earthquakes, fires, environmental pollution, vessel accidents, radiological hazards, various pandemics, industrial and other disasters. Also it is agreed mutual notification and exchange of information about the threats, occurrence and consequences of a possible disaster, including the provision of mutual assistance in rescuing and eliminating the consequences of disasters by the company and air forces and vehicles for intervention in cases of mass fires, earthquakes and other disasters, as well as education and training of personnel of protection

and rescue services units, fire protection units as well as other members of rescue teams through briefings, courses, trainings, seminars and other forms of cooperation, as well as organizing and conducting joint rescue and assistance exercises, including the exchange of scientific and technical data, as well as other documents of importance for disaster protection, up to cooperation in the development and production of rescue and assistance equipment (Cooperation Agreements, 2021, p. 1). Actually it is about so-called ecological security threats, respectively, according to Jaap de Vilde, security threats that are not caused by human activities, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, typhoons, meteor strikes and the like (Ejdus, 2012, p. 201), respectively about contemporary security threats, regarding which the leaders of the Open Balkans have taken concrete and defined measures. Also, in the declaration from Ohrid, adopted on November 10, 2019, one of the key priorities regarding security within the framework of the Open Balkans is the strengthening of cross-border cooperation in the field of security, and the strengthening of cross-border cooperation of police authorities in the fight against transnational crime, as well as in areas of terrorism, including the strengthening of cross-border cooperation in the areas of migration and civil emergencies (CCS Declaration from Ohrid, p. 3).

The security dimension of the Open Balkans has been already proven in practice by providing mutual assistance in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. In the National Security Strategy of Serbia, it is emphasized that "epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases can threaten the population of the Republic of Serbia and carry the risk of severe economic and social consequences, and infectious disease epidemics, in addition to being unusual in terms of number, time, place and affected population, can also cause an increase in the number of patients with complications, the appearance of severe clinical forms of the disease, infectious diseases, and death" (National Security Strategy, 2019). In this context, the Open Balkans served as a kind of security platform, which enabled the participants of this initiative to provide assistance to each other in the fight against the covid 19 pandemic, specifically, Serbia, by providing medical assistance to North

Macedonia, enabled the Macedonian authorities to face timely and effective this modern security challenge thanks to this regional initiative, based primarily on economic postulates.

In addition, we have to emphasize the importance of coordination within the framework of the Open Balkans initiative in the field of contemporary migration flows through the so-called Balkan routes, which during 2014 and 2015 were relevant not only at the regional but also at the wider European level. Strengthening the cross-border cooperation of the participants of the Open Balkans in this area greatly contributes not only to the better coordination of migration flows throughout the region, where the safety of people is significantly threatened due to the existing migration flows, but also to prevention, with the aim of providing double protection, namely, on the one hand, the protection of citizens in the region, and on the other hand, the protection of migrants whose lives are most often threatened due to the pervasive phenomenon of human trafficking, but also due to illegal migration routes. It is actually about security challenges, risks and threats, which are also defined in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia from 2019, which states that "mass illegal migration represents a significant security risk, bearing in mind that the migrant crisis and illegal migration in combination with organized crime and the strengthening of religious radicalism can lead to the emergence of security threats, especially if the Republic of Serbia, as a transit country, is forced to take over, even temporarily, the care of migrants whose number exceeds its economic and organizational capacities" (National Security Strategy, 2019). In this context, cooperation within the framework of the Open Balkans, bearing in mind the fact that all current participants in the initiative are actually transit countries on migrant routes, greatly contributes to the improvement of security circumstances in each country individually, but also in the entire regional context. Cooperation in the framework of security was further encouraged by the new circumstances and the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The security crisis, which at the same time caused an energy crisis on a global level, required a response from actors in the Western Balkans, as well as actors within the framework of the Open Balkans.

Thus, in the past year, energy security has officially become a security domain through which participants of the Open Balkans promote mutual cooperation. In this context, we must point out that the energy deficit is often treated as a threat to national security, because without a sufficient amount of energy, the state can experience an economic, political and social collapse (Ejdus 2012, p. 172). Moreover, without a reliable supply, the state cannot organize its defense system, nor can it maintain internal stability and security (Ejdus 2012, p. 172). Energy security is mentioned not only in academic literature as one of the modern security sectors, but also in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, where it is said that "the energy security of the Republic of Serbia can be threatened by the disruption of stable and regular supply of energy from other countries." When it comes to the participants of the Open Balkans, in the newly emerging security circumstances on European soil, energy security is also one of the current topics within the framework of this initiative. It is about Serbia's initiative to form a joint working group for cooperation in the energy crisis and participation in strategic projects, which will in practice deal with solving problems during the winter, but also potential cooperation on large strategic projects (Euronews/Tanjug).

In a theoretical sense, perhaps Barry Buzan has most clearly explained the necessity of cooperation in the field of security, pointing out that patterns of security relations at the regional level often have their own dynamics, which do not have to be decisively determined by the structure of the international system. Actually, we are talking about the regional security complexes of a group of states, whose primary security concerns, according to Buzan, are sufficiently interconnected that their national security cannot realistically be viewed separately (Buzan, 1983, p. 253). If we analyze the security and defense performances of small states, according the definition given by Rothsteinm, who says that a small Power is a state which recognizes that it cannot obtain security primarily by using its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so; the Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognized

by the other states involved in international politics and such thesis bring into relation with the possibilities within Open Balkans initiative, then we could make sustainable the opinion of the real capabilities of mentioned initiative in the security context, without analyzing it from the political point of view (Keohane, 1969, p. 293).

Conclusion

The Open Balkans as an initiative with an economic sign represents an excellent platform for establishing regional cooperation within the framework of the Western Balkans in the field of security. The countries in the Western Balkans are not facing so-called traditional security threats and risks in the last twenty years. But they are increasingly faced with modern security risks and threats that do not recognize national borders, including borders in the Western Balkans, which also affect and have a direct impact on endangering political independence, economic sustainability, and thus stability in society. In fact it is a context that show outlines of the Open Balkans that could be recognized as a platform that, through economic cooperation, can contribute to increasing trust between the political elites in the region, and thus to establish of acceptable political momentum for deepening cooperation in various domains and security sectors that will make sustainable not only security mosaic in the regional context, but also will improve it, and thus modernize it in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Modern security challenges, risks and threats do not recognize national borders, nor do they recognize the borders of military alliances or the borders of military-neutral countries. In this context, and on the example of contemporary global crises, such as health pandemics, economic and financial crises on a global level, it is very realistic to establish and deepen cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans region, within the Open Balkans initiative, in preventive action, but also in dealing with the aforementioned crises, without regardless of the national choice of the actors in the region in the context of security and defense policy.

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Bezbednosna dimenzija otvorenog Balkana: Savremeni bezbednosni izazovi kao šansa za regionalnu bezbednosnu platformu

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Sažetak

Inicijativa Otvoreni Balkan prvenstveno je fokusirana na saradnju u ekonomskom okviru između aktera koji učestvuju. Ali, imajući u vidu postignute deklaracije između Albanije, Severne Makedonije i Srbije koje se odnose na saradnju u oblasti bezbednosti, nema sumnje da bi i ova inicijativa mogla dati doprinos regionalnoj bezbednosnoj infrastrukturi, u ovom trenutku između država učesnica, ali kasnije i u celom regionu Zapadnog Balkana. Vodeće istraživačko pitanje ovog rada je da li bi Otvoreni Balkan, kao inicijativa sa dominantnim ekonomskim predznakom, takođe mogao da doprinese procesu kreiranja održivosti regionalne bezbednosti iz ugla savremenih bezbednosnih pretnji. Sa teorijske tačke gledišta, doprinos ovog rada je predviđen u kontekstu analize koliko bi regionalna saradnja u oblasti bezbednosti mogla da doprinese široj bezbednosnoj infrastrukturi. Istraživanje bi se prvenstveno fokusiralo na takozvane meke pretnje, koje ne uključuju „tradicionalne“ bezbednosne pretnje kao što su teritorijalni integritet, mogućnosti spoljne agresije, kao i tradicionalni načini ratovanja.

Ključne reči: Otvoreni Balkan, bezbednosna saradnja, savremene bezbednosne pretnje