

## **MY NAME IS BALKAN, HER NAME IS EUROPE: POLITICAL KALEIDOSCOPE OF THE BALKANS AND THE ROLE(S) OF SERBIA**

Jović-Lazić, Ana and Alexis Troude (eds.). 2020. *Security challenges and the place of the Balkans and Serbia in a changing world*, 1–345. Belgrade: Institute of International Politics and Faculty of Security Studies at the University of Belgrade.

Today, the contemporary world is rapidly changing in front of our eyes, radically challenging its roots, depicted in its political, economic and security systems. Hence, drawing any conclusion or predicting future scenarios based on the current political and security kaleidoscope, not to mention the notorious pandemic crisis, may seem like a dubious task. However, despite the uncertainty that the realm of international relations carries, there are numerous academic attempts to provide more or less reliable guidelines. The above-mentioned facts may lead us to think that the uncertainty in the age of the crisis could be a positive catalyst for innovative solutions. This collection of papers, edited by Ana Jović-Lazić (the Institute of International Economics and Politics, Serbia) and Alexis Troude (University of Versailles, France), represents a brave scientific endeavor that offered prolific results. Divided into three different thematic areas, renowned experts from France, the United Kingdom, Serbia, Turkey, etc., contribute to this collection by dealing with the ongoing challenges of the multipolar world order. The fact that some papers are focused on Serbia and the Balkans, together with the intertwined interests of global and regional powers therein, represents an added value to this collection.

In the first unit, “Remodeling and Transformation of the World Order”, Richard Sakwa emphasizes the importance of distinguishing specific models of the world order, or the so-called “software” from the broader international system, which he refers to as “the hardware” in order to find a balanced *modus vivendi* in the plethora of international relations. While analyzing four different models of globalism that have appeared throughout contemporary history, Sakwa finally invites the reader to contemplate how the European Union can combine societal and human solidarity in a newly composed post-Atlantic West. Following Sakwa’s political-historical approach, the following author, Andrey Fursov, is looking for the missing pieces of the ‘mosaic of disorderly chaos’ depicted in contemporary world politics (Fursov 2020, 31). Exploring the flexible concept of the commonwealth as a possible “ante-chamber for an alliance”, Ramachandra Byrappa suggests a reassessment of this institutional framework of cooperation (Byrappa 2020, 43). Emphasizing its advantages in times of turmoil, Byrappa offers several quite interesting solutions for rebuilding Serbia’s foreign policy, especially in the light of its proclaimed military neutrality. In that regard, the creation of the Lower Danube Commonwealth, which would bring Austria,

Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria together towards a greater regional economic network, seems to be food for thought. The first unit concludes with contributions by Kōpanja and Stekić, which shed light on the different patterns of the geopolitical system's restructuring process, precisely distinguishing compression zones, such as Central Asia and Central Africa, from the only "true" shatterbelt, depicted in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Vladimir Trapara introduces the second unit titled "Balkan regional security: challenges and perspectives". Basing its research on a theoretical framework Miller-Kagan's patterns of great powers' and Halford Mackinder's concept of Eastern Europe (Mackinder 1919), while using a sharp historical comparison, Trapara looks for possible causes of the "balkanization" of the political space (Trapara 2020, 83). The following author, Ruth Ferrero-Turrión, contributes to the open discussion regarding the Balkan area, particularly about the relationship between the Western Balkans and the externalization process of the EU borders. Within the framework of the Western Balkans, Ćeranić and Lalić mainly focus on the regional security dynamics, while at the same time warning of a possible conflict in this important but complex geopolitical position. Šekarić and Lazić analyze the Western Balkans' energy security in an interesting triangle of powers, such as the EU, Russia, and Turkey, emphasizing the rising role of Turkey through particular case studies of the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turk Stream. In the search for possible reconciliation scenarios that could successfully apply to the Western Balkans, Olga Barbasievicz analyzes the patterns of European (primarily Polish-German) and Asian experiences of reconciliation. Finally, closing the second unit, Birgül Demirtaş compares the different attitudes of the five biggest Turkish political parties towards Syrian refugees after the Syrian civil war while touching upon the questions of Turkish identity, as well as the (re)formulated identity of the refugees.

The third unit, titled "The position of Serbia in Contemporary International Relations", completes the previous two units in a coherent manner, providing a detailed insight into the Serbian position on the international stage. The unit begins with Elena Ponomareva's research on multivectorness as a possible way out of the strategic vulnerability impasse, which could be extremely useful for Serbia, which is "the middle and most important country in the Western Balkans" (Ponomareva 2020, 170). In addition, Ponomareva analyzes the competition between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation in the race for the position of the dominant non-European actor. Alexis Troude explores the specific geopolitical position of Serbia, which finds itself between the East and the West. Troude pays special attention to the emerging Eurasian and Middle Eastern geopolitics, predicting their significant rise 'on the Balkan chessboard' in the years to come (Troude 2020, 194). Dušan Proroković points out the gap between Serbia's proclaimed path of European integrations and its actual foreign

policy, which is characterized by increasingly intensive cooperation with Russia. In that light, Proroković examines the “character of the Russian vector” in Serbian politics (Proroković 2020, 196). Analyzing the geopolitical demands of the EU, to some extent hidden beneath the Copenhagen criteria, Miša Đurković concludes that the relations between the Serbian people and the European Union represent a sad story with an unknown end, pointing out the geopolitical and identity price that Serbia, according to the author, has to pay for its EU membership.

Siniša Atlagić made an interesting mark with his research on communication procedures and psychological mechanisms, often used as an instrument of controlled chaos strategy in hybrid wars and colour revolutions. When it comes to China and its relations with Serbia, Duško Dimitrijević gives a comprehensive historical review, emphasizing the importance of economic factors that may deepen this cooperation, in line with the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In continuation of these units’ focus on China, Ivona Lađevac examines the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the role of Serbia within the said initiative. Lađevac urges Serbian stakeholders to take a more active role in relations with Chinese partners in order to create “an open, inclusive, balanced and benefits-sharing framework of regional economic cooperation” (Lađevac 2020, 281). When it comes to the important question of defense, Glišić, Đorđević, and Stojković treat the EU Global Strategy as a possible framework for deepening cooperation with the Republic of Serbia, emphasizing its long-term positive impact regarding the EU membership capacities. Speaking of EU membership, Ana Jović-Lazić examines the state of affairs, as well as the existing challenges in the process of alignment of Serbia with the common foreign, security and defense policy of the EU. The third unit is finalized with a comparative economic analysis, written by Marjanović and Zubović, dealing with the dominant macroeconomic indicators of Serbia and the selected SEE countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia).

Could a never-ending story between the Western Balkans (with a focus on Serbia as Europe’s strategically most important country) and Europe be seen through the lens of Serbian writer Milorad Pavić and his famous story „The Wedgewood Tea Set“? The story is depicted as a complex relationship between a woman and a man, and is told by a first-person narrator and finishes in the following way: “Could it be that I actually hated her? If the reader has not figured it out himself, here is the answer to the riddle. My name is Balkan. Her name – Europe” (Ponomareva 2020, 171).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pavić as cited in Ponomareva 2020, 171.

Be it as it may, in these curious and tumultuous times, it seems impossible to provide a precise and reliable prediction concerning the future of world politics. The international academic community can only do its best in an attempt to ask the right questions in order to provide the reader with credible information in his or her search for the truth. That being said, this collection of papers has accomplished its task of helping the reader to better understand the curious case of Serbia and the Balkans in today's world.

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