

THE BALKANS IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD - PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

Predrag Obrenović¹

Independent University Banja Luka

Dragana Popović²

Institute for Scientific Research of Independent University Banja Luka

Abstract: The international relations of the 20th century were largely characterized by the balance of power, and it could be said, a balance of fear, of two opposing alliances. Precisely these two centers of power, the USA and the USSR led to division within the system of the entire international community. However, the breakup of the USSR, the emergence of new states, the end of the Cold War also led to the end of bipolarity and the emergence of unipolar world. The only remaining hegemon the USA, using all its available resources as well as the resources of their “followers” disrupted the system of power balance in their favor. That disruption of the power balance system was most bloodily manifested in the Balkans as part of the European continent and a kind of connection between worlds. Regardless of the large resources available, both the “hard” and the “soft” powers, the USA could not completely bring the Balkans under their control. Changes in the international relations we live in, question the current order based on globalization and one hegemon. However, this very hegemon, using all resources selflessly, is trying to preserve its order by enabling itself and its followers to play the role of “the master of the world” and assigning itself eternal world policeman role. Throughout the globe, questions are being raised about the value of global order and the USA’s power as the sole global power. By shifting the economic flows to the East, e.i. to the Asia-Pacific part of the world, Western hegemons are slowly becoming naked in their imperialistic interests. Re-questioning the power of the “world policeman” is reflected on those parts of the world that are at the junction of “different worlds”. One such part of the world is certainly the Balkans. Therefore, the theme and the aim of this paper is to point out the importance of the Balkans in terms of power projection of key global and regional factors of international relations at the beginning of the new millennium. By analyzing influences of global and regional factors of international relations, it can be stated that peoples on the Balkans already live in a multipolar world, which is characterized by great instability due to undefined zones of influence of global and regional players. Defining those areas of interest becomes an imperative for the human civilization survival.

Keywords: *Balkans, Russia, China, Turkey, the USA, NATO, European Union*

INTRODUCTION

Starting from the premise that any attempt to investigate phenomena and processes in international relations must and should begin with the question of world

1 email: predrag.obrenovic@nubl.org or predragobrenovic@yahoo.com.

2 dragana.popovic@nubl.org.

order as the state of the international system in a given historical period, looking at the current state of world order, it is possible to decisively influence the world order tomorrow. That is, based on what happened, we could see what will happen. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate in detail the world orders that have existed until now during the human civilization development. Based on that, we can have certain scientific and expert assessments and forecasts of what “tomorrow’s world order” will look like. Current world order, based on the postulates of the neoliberal theory of international relations is characterized by globalization, unipolarity, realignment of global actors of the world order, attempts of establishing a “world government” and global governance and universal conventions.

Mutual relations in the modern world order can be viewed on the basis of the role of the international relations key factors, and one of the most significant among them is the re-emergence of nation- state which, in the time of intensive globalization processes, under the influence of new global players of international relations, were excluded from the flow of global processes. Relations in the modern world order can be observed through the return of the nation-states. Such order has been known since the time when the world order was based on the foundations of the realistic theory of international relations, where states were the most important factors of international order based on their mutual relationship.

However, the world order based on the neoliberal theory of international relations is slowly coming to an end, and as the winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Joseph Stieglitz, states, it is already dead and we live in some postmodern society where nation-states are re-profiled as one of the key factors of the future world order. Large nation-states (economically, politically and militarily) will be the future bearers of a world order based on multipolarity.

The separation of parts of the world into individual power centers and regions does not mean that in the future world order, there will be no connection into a single whole, which will simply be called multipolar global geopolitical system with its subsystems. In the coming period, when the scientists and professionals speak of multipolar global order, it is highly likely to imply a sharp contrast between centres of world power and peripheries. However, analyzing the social orders that have developed and built up over the course of human civilization, it can be said that whenever there were many centers of power ,there was a very turbulent situation on the peripheries of those centers , and throughout history, one such periphery has been the Balkans, i.e. the Balkan Peninsula.

BALKAN PENINSULA

Observing the history of the Balkan Peninsula (hereinafter the Balkans), it can be concluded that the Balkan Peninsula had changed its name several times, but for some reason the Balkans has survived and is still used.

The name change was more frequent than in other European geographical entities. These names were borrowed either from the civilizations that developed on it, or from the names of the great empires that alternated on it. Some of those names are related to the way the relief of the Peninsula was understood in the Classical and Renaissance periods.

From a geographical point of view, the peninsula is defined as a continental surface surrounded by water from three sides. Since the Balkan Peninsula is bounded

by the sea from the East, South and West, the northern border remains to be defined, which is already the subject of dispute among certain experts in the field and science. The Sava and Danube rivers, whose valleys are cut along the southern rim of the Pannonian basin, represent a natural border in a geographical terms. However, from the mouth of the Kupa to the Sava and further to the West, it is more difficult to determine the northern border. Generally speaking, it is often stated in the literature that that border continues along the Kupa river and then extends linearly across the Dinaric hills to Rijeka on the Adriatic Sea. The border drawn in this way is an administrative creation, and as such, does not fit either with the relief, ethnographic or political facts.

The exact natural-geographical borders of the Balkans have not yet been established. Cvijić's attitude towards the Balkan Peninsula was "...that first impression one gets after a general survey, is one of the reality. The Balkan Peninsula is a geographical and geological intermediary between Europe and Asia, with several special features of its own" (Cvijić, 1922, p. 9), but also the Balkan Peninsula is not the only land link between Europe and Asia. On the contrary, Europe is widely connected to Asia with the Russian platform. However, the Russian surface continues towards Siberia and the desert of Central Asia, which makes it difficult to access even outside the centers of ancient civilizations. Whereas the Balkan Peninsula is closely connected by the Aegean Sea, a very accessible link with Asia, and through Asia Minor further towards China and India, or across the Mediterranean towards Egypt and further to Africa.

The Balkans were not written about only by professionals and scientists from the Balkans, but many others as well. Defarges, describes the Balkans as a place located on the border, the edge of the empire. As such, this area is related to the constant activity of foreigners, e.i. the others. The peoples of this area are unique, but also very different. These differences lead to large and difficult conflicts in this area. They live in a community, mixed, but still separated. In addition, Defarges notes that the Balkans "are torn between Rome and the Hellenistic world, Rome and Carthage, Rome and Byzantium, and in between Christianity and Islam" (Defarges, 2006, p. 24).

If we were to proceed with further elaboration of the professionals and scientists views, both domestical and those from other areas, this paper could become one huge study on the Balkans, which is not the aim of it, therefore the view of Dafarges will be stated at the end which says "..., Balkan Peninsula- the Balkans, that peninsular land mass between the Adriatic, Mediterranean and Aegean seas, is just one in a series of numerous worldwide zones - joints, i.e. regions that are located between many civilizations and systems of political organization. Located on empires border or more or less divided among those empires, this and similar regions do not cease to be disputed. The population is both local and has arrived due to successive migrations; which causes eternal conflicts over the division of territories between peoples who mix, but still remain separate".(Defarges, 2006, p. 24).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE KEY FACTORS OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS TOWARDS THE BALKANS

The Balkans are, speaking freely, in one of the key geopolitical and geostrategic places we have all over the planet, and as such represents an area where almost all

key religions of the modern world meet. These differences, in aspect of contemporary theory and practices of international relations as well as other humanities can be viewed from at least two standpoints . The first one is usually highlighted when one wants to state how such diversity in ethnicity, religion, culture and every other social field is visible. That is, it is good from the aspect of mutual respect and further cohesion, because according to the supporters of such standpoint “differences attract”. The second one has a more realistic view which states that different customs, beliefs, peoples and culture bring many conflicts and violence. Reinforced nationalism and awareness of the other and different, can cause anxiety and fear. Such feeling further escalates into animosity, which can eventually lead to open hostility and armed conflict.

Looking through history, it can be seen that the Balkans had very turbulent periods of war and conflict, e.i. periods of disintegration and fragmentation, but also integration. Disintegration and fragmentation periods alternated cyclically with periods of peaceful coexistence, which were marked by key periods of integration processes. Cyclical periods of solution and desolution of the Balkans have already begun in the period of Ancient Greece, through Rome and Byzantium, the Ottoman period, the Balkans wars, the World War I, the World War II, and the war that occurred with the breakup of Yugoslavia. Those periods have left visible consequences on the territory of the Balkans even today, the ones that will torment the Balkans peoples for decades to come. As it has been the case throughout history, it can be said it is the same today. Currently, the Balkans with its peoples are in a period of dissolution, which is still not complete ,but the outlines of the coming period of solution and construction, can already be seen .The current state of dissolution is not only the fault of the West or the East, or the “international community” that has its own legitimate goals in this area, but primarily the Balkans peoples themselves are to blame, who have not experienced the renaissance of their ethnic and national being unlike other peoples of Europe, and therefore tend to be the subject of interest of major players in international relations, both global and regional. Therefore, the following part of this paper is precisely dedicated to the relations of key global and regional players towards the Balkans. The classification of global and regional players was carried out as follows, the western ones: the USA, the European Union, NATO and the eastern ones : Russia, China and Turkey.

THE BALKANS IN THE SPHERES OF INTERESTS OF THE EAST

Of the three key states from the east that project their interests on the Balkan Peninsula, two of them have a history of their relations with the Balkan peoples, while the third one (PR China) has yet to create its history of relations with the Balkans. The first review will be on China's relations with the Balkans.

Looking at China's historical relationship with the Balkans, one realizes that this relationship has been negligible. However, the success of Chinese communism, which has built a modern economic giant from one average country with numerous economic, political, religious and ethnic problems, which, according to already determined estimates, became number one in the world. In other words, it has enabled great economic power to flow naturally into other fields of power such as political and military, leading to the possibility of PR China changing its foreign policy. These changes made it possible for the People's Republic of China to become one

of the leading powers in the world order. China's influence on the Balkan countries in the past, could be characterized as economic one, until 1999 and the bombing of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Belgrade by NATO. This was the point that allowed the People's Republic of China to express more specific views on events in the Balkans during the last decade of the 20th century.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the People's Republic of China thanks to its economic power, began to expand primarily its economic, then political and military power to other parts of Asia, Africa, Europe and Balkans as an integral part of the European continent. One of the most significant models of projections of China's influence on the European continent, and thus the Balkans, is an initiative that was created in 2012 under the name "17+1 initiative". In addition to the Republic of China, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are included in this bilateral cooperation program.

It is interesting to point out that "Platform 17+1" succeeded to bring together the countries that historically belonged to different geopolitical spheres, around one common interest, trade and investments. During historical period the Chinese presence in the members of the previously mentioned initiative was negligible, but now it has changed drastically. This proactive action of China becomes one of its own characteristic of the recent era "China that is not afraid to take a more proactive role in the international community and global development." (Ivanić & Savović, 2020, p. 14).

The next project but not less important is from 2013. Namely, 2013 represents the year when China adopts "One Belt, One Road", more precisely the document called the New Silk Road. The strategy based on many projects and ways of cheaper and faster production of goods which is primarily directed towards the West and the Western market. However, by adopting this document, China is gradually entering the Balkans. This highlights the importance of the position of this area, as well as the possibilities it has as a transit region. China's entry into the Balkans, additionally strengthens the thesis about the Balkans as a bridge between the East and the West. "The Belt and Road is aimed at six economic corridors that pass through very complex geographical areas, but simultaneously resource-rich areas: New Eurasian land bridge – which includes railway to Europe through Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus and Poland; Economic corridor of China, Mongolia and Russia; including railway connections and a steppe road - will connect with the land bridge; Economical corridor China, Central Asia, West Asia: connects with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey; China economic corridor, Indochina Peninsula - including Vietnam, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Myanmar and Malaysia; and China-Pakistan economic corridor, which will face the challenges of strained relations between India and China." (Ivanić & Savović, 2020, p. 15).

The projection of China's influence in the Balkans is primarily reflected in the millions of infrastructural projects in Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia. It is a fact that infrastructural projects, whose construction is extremely demanding and difficult, are mostly implemented by companies from China. Its goal is clear, it is the Western market. The region of the Western Balkans is one of routes towards that goal. However, it should be emphasized that the Western Balkans are therefore of a great value for China. "China's interest in the Western

Balkans should be viewed mainly through economic prism, as some Balkan countries will eventually become part of the EU –for this reason China uses its firms to fill infrastructure gaps, which will enable China to ship goods from Greece via the Western Balkans to the huge market of the European Union.” (Ivanić & Savović, 2020, p. 18).

Investing in the infrastructure construction projects in the Balkans is not the only possibility of investment from foreign investors from the People’s Republic of China. On the contrary, Chinese investments in technologies and technological development in the Balkans, begins to be observed with great concern from the West. A growing concern can be seen in the West, where Western actors consider Chinese investments inadequate, which they consider contrary to European rules and norms, so the western part of the international community advocates the termination of close cooperation between some Balkan countries and China. However, the rise of Chinese influence in the Balkans indicates the impossibility of West itself to stabilize this region, so by all possible prospects in the Balkans in the future period, the influence of China will be felt increasingly.

When it comes to Turkey’s influence on the Balkans, it is necessary to mention a couple of facts, among which ,the focus would be on the following:

- 3% percent of Turkey’s territory belongs to the Balkan Peninsula
- Turkey has a long history of ruling the Balkans
- Demise of Kemal Atatürk’s achievements and the return of the neo-Islamic perception of society building

Observing Turkey today, it can be said that it has grown into a significant regional power which wants to expand its influence. Projection of state power in international relations is additionally reinforced by its membership in the NATO alliance, its actions in accordance with principles and norms of NATO. In addition to membership in the NATO alliance, which officially began in 1952, Turkey has made significant efforts to become a member of the European Union, which indicates its desire to become a European state, the state that is part of a civilized, unique identity ,European identity. “Turkey applied for associate membership in 1959 in the European Economic Community (EEC), and in 1963 an agreement ,a.k.a “Ankara agreement”, about association formation between Turkey and the European Economic Community ,was signed. (Blagojević, 2014, p. 9).The engagement of modern Turkey in the Balkans is justified by the deep connection with the Ottoman Empire, through political, economic, military and cultural sphere of life of these two regions. One fact in favor of Turkey wanting better cooperation towards the development and prosperity of the Western Balkans, is a large number of Turkish officials visiting the politicians of this region. “At the end of 2009, the Turkish president Abdullah Gul visited Serbia. That visit initiated interstate cooperation on political, economic and cultural level. The practice of one-month meetings of foreign affairs ministers of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkey, was agreed “ (Blagojević, 2014, p.7).

However, Turkey’s actions towards the Balkans can be divided into two parts: foreign policy engagement of Turkey during the conflicts in the Balkans until 2000 and engagement of Turkey in the Balkans after the 2000s. In the first part, until 2000, Turkey followed the well-known mantra of the West, in its foreign policy activities, which was primarily reflected in logistical support to the Islamic population during

the conflict on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. No matter how much Turkey was involved in the logistical support of the Islamic population during the war in former Yugoslavia, after 2000, Turkey begins the process of changing its policy towards the Balkan countries. During this change, special attention was paid to Serbia and Serbian people, because Turkey used its historical heritage which showed that without the support of Serbia and its people as a key nation in the Balkans, its policy towards the Balkans is of no great success. Along with this change, there was also a change in Turkey's own policy, both externally and internally, where the achievements of Atatürk's reform of Turkey were suppressed and a new model of internal governance is introduced, which implied the merging of a new democratic one with the legacies of the Ottoman Empire. However, regardless of the degree of Islamization that has taken place in Turkish society, where this movement, along with other factors, highlights the "fraternal Islamic connection" in the Balkans, it is not so radical as to exclude the possibility of coexistence with other non-Islamic religions. This attitude of the new Islamic movement in Turkey was created on the basis of vast historical experience of coexistence with other denomination in Europe and especially on the Balkans.

According to Blagojević, "the new Turkish foreign policy towards the Balkans and its surroundings is presented on five general principles, which allow a wide maneuvering space for peacekeeping actions:

1. If security and democracy are not balanced, Turkey stands no chance of establishing influence in its surroundings
2. Zero political problems with neighbors enable Turkey to successfully act towards the surroundings. It is an "active setting in relations with neighboring countries, in order to eliminate all the problems that exist in them which burden bilateral relations and limit the room for maneuver of Turkish politics on the regional and global level.
3. Developing relations with neighboring regions and going beyond that
4. Commitment to a multidimensional foreign policy;
5. Framework action as a principle of "Rhythmic diplomacy" (fast adaptation diplomacy to given conditions and circumstances)" (Blagojević, 2014, p. 12).

In addition to the economic and military rise of Turkey, and its influence in the Balkans, it also contributes significantly in the field of culture and education. Its influence in the field of education is noticeable in the increased number of students who attend Turkish language faculties, but also the culture of its people. With the support of the Turkish government, the "International Burch University" was founded in 2008 in Sarajevo. In Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey offers scholarships for undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as those for language learning." (Blagojević, 2014, p. 17) Also, a significant influence is achieved in tourism, which makes destinations throughout Turkey, attractive for the Balkans people. Although Turkey's influence is most pronounced in the economy and military, the one through culture, education and tourism is increasing. It indicates serious intentions of this country and its ambitions to expand on European soil.

When it comes to Russia's influence on the Balkans, an overview can be made through three epochs:

- The epoch of the relations of Imperial Russia towards the Balkans and its peoples
- The epoch of the relations of the Soviet Union towards the Balkans
- The epoch of the relations of modern Russia towards the Balkans.

The epoch of the relations of Imperial Russia towards the Balkans and its peoples, can be viewed from the aspect of help that Imperial Russia provided primarily to Serbs and Bulgarians to free themselves from slavery of the Ottoman Empire.

In the next part of the paper, there will be more details about the influence of the Soviet Union towards the Balkans and later on the influence of Russia as an independent state. After the Second World War, international relations were characterized by bipolarity, i.e. by clearly defined spheres of influence from the East (Warsaw military alliance) and Western (NATO). The bipolar division of the Balkans was completed at the conference which was held in Yalta from 04.-11. February 1945.

At the conference, in which the “big three” Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt participated, the division of the sphere of influence in the Balkans according to the 2+2+2 model, was agreed, i.e. two countries to be part of the aforementioned two bloc alliances and two states to be outside the blocs. Such sphere of influence with minor oscillations lasted until 1989, e.i. until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

With the end of the Cold War, the power that the Soviet Union once had, was lost, and thus Russia becomes a weakened state whose future, at that time, was uncertain and difficult to forecast. Many analysts of international relations at that time, saw the possibility of complete subjugation of Russian Federation to the West, given the hegemonic US diplomacy. However, with the arrival of Vladimir Putin in 2000, Russia began its recovery. In that period, Russia has an increasing influence on certain countries of the Balkans.

Western leaders, driven by power and profit, could not see the colossal importance of offered discourse in the foreign policy of post-Soviet Russia. Namely, the colossal feature of Russian post-Soviet debate on foreign policy was an almost simultaneous appearance of two interwoven and empowering discourses: the discourse on geopolitics and the one on the Eurasian security concept.”Despite plenty of competing ideas, plans and ideologies, only the discourse of geopolitics/Eurasianism represented Russia’s most comprehensive attempt to come to terms with the Soviet collapse and the international order it created” (Morazova, 2009, p. 681). The same author states that it is important to mention that the process of Eurasian integration practically begins after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and thus a unified security, political and economical system. It turned out that the emerging states were not able to independently reach the new e.i., higher standards. “In such circumstances, on December 21, 1991, the Community of Independent States was formed, within the framework of which several agreements have been signed that mostly concern security and economy. The main initiator for the signing of the aforementioned security agreements was precisely Russia.” (Morazova, 2009, p. 683).

During Vladimir Putin’s mandate from 2000-2004, which was characterized by a very bad situation in economy, politics, army, security, the gradual revival of the Russian state began. Putin implemented major changes in the government structure, and had to reach out for difficult measures in order to improve the situation,

in which he succeeded as much as it was possible. The foreign policy of Russia at that time was based on the enormous wealth in natural resources, primarily in oil and gas, which almost half of the world's population depends on. Thanks to natural resources, primarily natural gas, the overall economic picture of Russia, which suffered enormous damage during the crisis, was improving.

Russia's foreign policy was based on stable principles. Russia was moving towards creating its own identity and position as a regional and global actor e. i. a cooperative partner which can establish a relationship with countries with very different interests and prospects. "Essentially, Russia's foreign policy priorities are oriented towards security. Foreign policy itself is more focused on key bilateral relations. Aggressive confrontational foreign policy has not become the result and consequence of the growth of authoritarianism in Russia. It is important to emphasize that no matter much room there was for Western cooperation with Russia in many areas of common interest, the West could not convert Russia into its value system. It was believed that it would not come true in this mandate, nor for many years afterwards" (Lo, 2004, p. 7-8).

The economic strengthening of Russia enabled it to use both "soft" and "hard" power and diplomacy. That exact combination of soft and hard power with defined foreign policy goals, has clearly proved to be successful in the Balkans. Consequently, now the interests of Russia are represented in the Balkans, from political, economic, geostrategic to trade through investments in infrastructure to social ones such as tourism, which is most pronounced in the area of the Western Balkans. In addition to these interests, it is much more important to point out that Russia's ties with the Balkans peoples are historically deeply rooted. Sharing the same dominant religion, and very similar language with many Balkan countries, Russia represents a significant player in the region. Also, Russia had an important role in resolving the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, as it was part of most of the international initiative to end the conflict in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Serbian people in Serbia and Republic of Srpska, due to their common past, Orthodoxy, but also their bad experience with NATO alliance, cooperate bilaterally with Russia, thus expressing their desire for Eurasian integration and cooperation. Russian influence in this area is strong, intertwined with the past, with a tendency to continue in the future.

THE BALKANS IN THE SPHERES OF WESTERN INTERESTS

In aforementioned text on the Balkans in the interests of the East, the relations of three key factors that exert their influence on the Balkans had been mentioned. The realization of their influence has been primarily guided by the historical context that Russia and Turkey have with individual nations and states in the Balkans, to a purely Chinese influence which is primarily based on economic interests, as the construction of the "Chinese economic bridgehead" in the Balkans will enable further penetration into the European continent. It is much easier to talk about the Balkans in spheres of interests of the West, as opposed to the East because it is the same approach, only with two different aspects of military and economic, and both of them have the same method of leadership and performance, which is the "stick and carrot method".

Before any further explanation, it should first be stated that Western players in the Balkans are primarily considered as the realization of the influence of the United

States of America, which pursues its own interests directly through various bilateral or multilateral forms and initiatives of cooperation and through the North Atlantic Alliance - NATO and the European Union. In addition to the aforementioned, similar interests are also shown by other western players, such as Germany, France or Great Britain, but due to constant dominant role of the USA in the Western Hemisphere, they aligned their interests with the American and currently do not show different forms of behavior.

After the “tectonic” changes in international relations at the end of the 20th century e.i., the disappearance of the bipolar world and the emergence of a unipolar world under the leadership of the USA, western players took advantage of the vacuum space and disrupted the system that was based on the balance of power . During that period, Western actors, using already well-established method of “carrot and stick³³” in conducting their neoliberal diplomacy, extended their influence in the Balkans.

With the breakup of Yugoslavia, the European Union and the NATO alliance were making considerable efforts to the Balkans an area under their complete control. Although there is sometimes an impression of a lack of harmonious coordination of actions among these bodies. One of the visible influences is precisely in changing the name of this area, so the Balkans became the Western Balkans, and through a further process integration becomes Southeast Europe. These changes implied the renunciation of certain peoples identity and accepting something new they themselves did not know what they were accepting. That was done with the aim of becoming part of the alliance and the opportunity to make a profit for individual nation-states.

Serbian people, led by their leaders, decided to retain their autonomy, which resulted in imposing collective guilt on the entire nation for the war crimes committed in this area, although these wars were more focused on spatial fragmentation and the weakening of the former SFRY, which was becoming a fast-growing economic country in the middle of the Balkans.

“The US has a permanent interest in peace in the Balkans, because the instability in this area poses a threat to peace throughout Europe and threatens American allies and the established balance of power that corresponds to American interests.” (Kostić, 2019, p. 353) Truthfully said, the involvement of the West, more specifically the USA, is based on military issues and the stabilization of the region through military cooperation. On the other hand, the European Union strives to create stabilization through good governance, democratization and the rule of law. The European Union’s activities concern the economic and political spheres of life in the Balkans. The interests of the European Union defined in this way are trying to eliminate the increased Chinese influence on the Balkan countries. Given the strong desire, as well as the will and hope of the Balkan countries to be part of Europe, to belong to a single union, “the USA has consistently emphasized that the path to the European

3 The head of the European Union delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Johan Satler, told BN TV on October 1st 2021, that the European Union has various mechanism, and financial aid can easily lead to sanctions. He pointed out that the EU is doing its part when it comes to BiH’s candidate status , but on the other hand, political blockades in BiH represent a big problem. When it came to EU financial support, Satler used the terms “carrot” and “stick”. Carrot would mean financial support and incentives, while the stick would represent sanctions. “Of course we have various instruments at our disposal. We perform with a “carrot”, with an incentive. We have shown this on the example of the vaccines donations during the pandemic. The citizens see that. I confirm that we also have a “stick” available. If it comes to that - we will use it,” he said (<https://www.rtvbn.com/4013678/satler-ako-dodje-do-toga-koristicemo-sankcije-u-bih>).

Union leads through NATO and that all countries became NATO members before becoming members of the European Union. The balance of power in this region, according to the American concept, means a balance in favor of those countries and peoples who support the US and thus increase its global power and breadth extent of their expansion.” (Kostić, 2019, p. 353). Generally speaking, current balance of power within the Balkans is de facto on the side of American and European interests. The desire for the USA dominance, as well as the pursuit of the title of the only world power, can be seen through engagement in this area. “The geopolitical practice of the modern world, clearly shows the USA aspirations to establish a new world order of a unipolar world, implying absolute control of the geographical space of the Western Balkans and the Balkans in general.” (Živković, 2020, p. 87)

The Balkans once again occupy a special place in the USA foreign policy. The reason for this may be the desire to regain its former glory as a world hegemon, or simply because this space is not under complete control, thus contributing to damaging the reputation of Western players on the global stage. The USA is investing significantly in this region, primarily through the NATO alliance, but also with the help of other foreign policy and diplomacy actors. In an attempt to re-establish control over the Balkans, one of the main tasks of both the USA, NATO and the EU is to keep Serbia, and areas where Orthodox people live, in their vicinity. If these efforts are to succeed, in addition to using various forms of “soft power”, it is necessary to influence the change in the attitude that Serbia and Serbian people in the Balkans are solely to blame for all the events of the past three decades.

Serbia as a country and Serbian people from the Balkans do not represent any destabilizing factor in this area. On the contrary, throughout history, it was Serbian nation that had played the greatest role in the integration processes of creating various forms of state communities with other peoples in the Balkans, that, throughout history, have never had a state-forming role.

The USA has the possibility of complete dominance in the Western Balkans, of course together with the European Union if they find mechanisms to influence the disruption of relations between Serbia and Russia. One of the ways to undermine Russia's influence in the Balkans is to establish good relations with Serbia and Serbian people. Therefore, “the USA will strengthen its role in two directions - firstly, it will encourage and elevate Serbia (for example, by recalling the Serbian-American friendships achieved during the two wars, thereby attempting to establish and revive “traditionally” good relations; support for “demarcation” as a way of solving the status of Kosovo), secondly, if such strategy fails, a harsher approach will follow, with possible increased military presence in the region and the isolation of Serbia.” (Kostić, 2019, 356). The approach, action and engagement of the USA in the Balkans are of vital importance for further development and progression of this area. This is evidenced by the Atlantic Alliance from 2017 report, which clearly states that the USA involvement in the Balkans is unquestionable and that development is possible with the USA leadership. The report is entitled “Balkans Forward: New US Strategy for the Region”. Through this new strategy, the US hopes to consolidate the cohesion of the Balkans in its interest zone.

In the eyes of the USA and its allies, the establishment of institutions and centers on the territory of the Balkans is aimed at the complete destabilization of the region, as well as the freezing of conflicts. More precisely, the expansion of Russia

and Russian influence in the Western Balkans leads to a shift in the balance of power in this area. It has also been shaken by the constant "cultivation of hatred" towards the NATO alliance and the USA, due to the bombing of Serbia that took place on March 24, 1999. It is necessary to point out that on the territory of the bombed country, there is a large amount of depleted uranium, the presence of which makes a huge number of the population sick. The topic of bombing, but also other topics related to the position of the Serbs in the Western Balkans, increasingly turn Serbia towards union with Russian Federation. In order to turn the matter to their advantage, in 2001, the West founded the Committee of Depleted Uranium, as its "ad hoc" institution.

In addition to the USA/NATO alliance, the European Union exerts a significant influence in the area of the Western Balkans. As we have seen the expansion of US influence in the Balkans, it is more strongly motivated by hard methods of power, the European Union has a different approach to stabilizing this region. Of course, the security of a certain area is a matter of military forces, but stabilization is achieved by other means and principles. The European Union is turning to stability through the principles of good governance. It actually advocates democratization, the existence of civil society, as well as the rule of law. It is necessary to extend the rule of law and democracy to a region that has lived for years in a closed society and regime that did not have freedom of the press, sometimes even freedom of speech. Such closed society, after the breakup of a federation, needs to be led towards a better, fairer and freer arrangement. According to the European Union, such an arrangement is democratic one. The European Union has been working for years to stabilize the Balkans through the building of institutions, the rule of law, a freer and stronger civil society. The European Commission strategy that dates back to February 2018, "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans", is precisely about the importance for "candidate countries for membership to have priorities, and they must reflect rule of law, justice and fundamental rights. A possible membership in the European Union is political, security and economic interests of the Union, whose fundamental objective is a stronger, more stable and united Europe, based on the common values." (A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, 2018).

CONCLUSION

An analytical review of the events in the Balkans reveals that it represents a diplomatic, military and ideological battlefield as a region at the crossroads of worlds and whose control enables further power and influence expansion. It may be said that the Balkans peoples are already living the New World Order, multipolarity, which aims to create a balance of power within international relations. That would balance the world's leading powers. The age of hegemony and bipolarity should be a thing of a past. New actors are coming onto the international scene. Players whose actions diminish the dominance of former rivals, the USA and Russia. Creating new actors, strengthening their power in international relations, is also reflected in the Balkans countries. Excluding the influence of historical actors from the Balkans will lead to renewed tensions and conflicts.

As previously pointed out, history abounds in frequent conflicts between the Balkans people. In more recent history, conflicts have moved to a higher level. Namely,

even though there is no fire or war, conflicts of interests of the great powers are flooding the Balkans. The points of interest of major international actors are intertwined within the region. Political elites, considering that their countries are worth more than others, try to get the best for themselves. Thus, military troops and bases, embassies, institutions and offices of international actors, great powers, are visible on the territory of some countries. Their actions, work and stationing in this area sometimes lead to worse, i.e. negative consequences for the prosperity of the Balkans. The reason for this is that the interests of the great powers differ, thus causing even more friction within the region.

In today's multipolar world order, the Balkans occupy an important place. However, in addition to various peoples living in this area, the Balkans are a meeting point for different world powers and their actions. The Balkans are the host to many international organizations, major world and regional powers. The influences of external actors in this area are very visible. However, divergent interests and goals of the great powers, international organizations, and the Balkans countries themselves, lead to even greater complexity and division in this region.

The Balkans remain one of the main foreign policy issues of many great powers of today's multipolar world order. First of all, in the Balkans, two of the world's strongest powers, the USA and Russian Federation, have existed with their interests since the Cold War. After the Berlin Congress, there was no wider constitutional-legal conference on the Balkans. Perhaps it is time to finally settle this issue in a conference format, it is necessary to have an agreement to constitutionally and legally resolve the issue of all peoples in the Balkans with clear guarantees of three European countries (e.g. Germany, France and Italy), Russia and Turkey. It is also very important that the USA is not involved in this because this is an exclusively European issue.

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