

## POSTMODERN GEOPOLITICS AND THE POST-COLD WAR BALKAN POLICIES OF GLOBAL POWERS

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**Abstract.** *Theoretical and practical structure of the power system behind the implementation of the global powers' foreign and security policies should be analysed with the postmodern understanding. In this context, the global powers' interests – in their soft or hard forms of manifestation – are crucial elements of democratic development and crisis management within the network strategy in Balkan policies. The security culture is about the states' security perception and about the tools, which are used to combat specific threats. According to postmodern geopolitics, the Post-Cold War realities – with the axis of global powers – and Balkan policies of these powers are related to the political changes. United States (US) maintains its military superiority in the world order with state actors, and on the other hand, cooperates with the European Union (EU) as an international organisation. According to the post-modern understanding, there is neither a new world order nor a new world disorder in the world today. Instead, there is a security zone in Europe and a zone of danger and chaos outside. Balkan policies of global powers are essential because of the problematic issues in the region. Balkan geography constitutes a critical equation in this regard. This study emphasises that EU democratic development projects are different from the US in terms of strategy and institutional means. Some of the projects are considered within the EU enlargement strategy, while others are viewed as a foreign policy strategy, which is mainly assumed by leading countries like China. Compared to the US, the EU strategy focuses more on non-military operations, and the Balkan policies of these states represent a specific feature of the postmodern geopolitics.*

**Keywords:** *Postmodern Geopolitics, Balkan Policies, Post-Cold War, Global Power, US, EU, Turkey.*

**Rezumat:** *Geopolitica postmodernă și politicile balcanice post-Război Rece ale Puterilor Globale. Structura teoretică și practică a sistemului de putere din spatele implementării politicilor externe și de securitate ale puterilor globale ar trebui analizată în termenii înțelegerii postmoderne. În acest context, interesele puterilor globale – în formele lor blânde sau tari de manifestare – sunt elemente cruciale ale dezvoltării democratice și gestionării crizelor în cadrul strategiei de rețea din politicile balcanice. Cultura securității se*

referă la percepția de securitate a statelor și la instrumentele utilizate în vederea combaterii amenințărilor specifice. Conform geopoliticii postmoderne, realitățile post-Război Rece – cu axa puterilor globale – și politicile balcanice ale acestor puteri sunt orientate spre schimbările politice. Statele Unite ale Americii își mențin superioritatea militară în ordinea mondială față de actorii statali, iar pe de altă parte, cooperează cu Uniunea Europeană ca organizație internațională. Potrivit interpretărilor post-moderne, în lumea de azi nu există nici o nouă ordine mondială, nici o nouă tulburare mondială. În schimb, există o zonă de securitate în Europa și o zonă de pericol și haos în afara acesteia. Politicile balcanice ale puterilor globale sunt importante din cauza aspectelor problematice existente în regiune. Geografia balcanică constituie o chestiune critică în această privință. Studiul de față subliniază faptul că proiectele de dezvoltare democratică ale Uniunii Europene sunt diferite de cele ale Statelor Unite ale Americii din punctul de vedere al strategiei și mijloacelor instituționale. Unele dintre proiecte sunt luate în considerare în cadrul strategiei de extindere a UE, în timp ce altele sunt văzute ca o strategie de politică externă asumată, în principal, de țările-lider precum China. Strategia Uniunii Europene, în comparație cu cea a SUA, se concentrează mai mult pe operațiuni non-militare, iar politicile balcanice ale acestor state reprezintă o particularitate a geopoliticii postmoderne.

**Résumé: La géopolitique postmoderne et les politiques balkaniques post-Guerre Froide des Puissances Globales.** On devrait analyser la structure théorique et pratique du système de pouvoir derrière l'implémentation des politiques externes et de sécurité des puissances globales dans les termes de la compréhension postmoderne. En ce contexte-là, les intérêts des puissances globales - en leurs formes gentilles ou fortes de manifestation - représentent des éléments d'importance cruciale du développement démocratique et de la gestion des crises dans le cadre de la stratégie de réseau des politiques balkaniques. La culture de la sécurité fait référence à la perception de sécurité des États et des instruments utilisés en vue de combattre les menaces spécifiques. Conformément à la géopolitique postmoderne, les réalités post-Guerre Froide - avec l'axe des puissances globales - et les politiques balkaniques de ces puissances sont orientées vers les changements politiques. Les États Unis de l'Amérique maintiennent leur supériorité militaire dans l'ordre mondiale envers les acteurs étatiques, et de l'autre partie, coopèrent avec l'Union Européenne en tant qu'organisation internationale. Conformément aux interprétations post-modernes, le monde de nos jours, il n'y a aucun nouvel ordre mondial, aucun nouveau trouble mondial. En échange, il y a une zone de sécurité en Europe et une zone de danger et de chaos en dehors celle-ci. Les politiques balkaniques des puissances globales sont importantes à cause des aspects problématiques qui existent dans la région. La géographie balkanique en constitue une question critique. L'étude ci-jointe souligne le fait que les projets de développement démocratique de l'Union Européenne sont différents de ceux des États Unis de l'Amérique du point de vue de la stratégie et des moyens institutionnelles. On prend en considération certains de ces projets-là dans le cadre de la stratégie d'extension de l'UE, pendant qu'on aperçoit des autres en tant que stratégie de politique extérieure assumée, en

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*principal, par les États-leaders tels la Chine. La stratégie de l'Union Européenne, en comparaison avec celle des États Unis, est concentrée plutôt sur des opérations pas-militaires, pendant que les politiques balkaniques de ces États-là représentent une particularité de la géopolitique postmoderne.*

## INTRODUCTION

There is no consensus definition of postmodernism, which is widely discussed in the period from the mid-20th century to the present. However, postmodernism corresponds to situations such as globalisation, consumption, change of centralist understanding in-state levels, and commodification of the knowledge. According to postmodernism, geopolitics is a discipline that examines humanity in correlation with the spatial factor. At the political level, it examines the similarities between power and purpose, nowadays and in the future, based on physical and political geography. Geopolitics is also the activation and evaluation of the geography with all its species and data. It forms the scientific basis of the security and development policy of a state.

Postmodern geopolitics concept and the post-Cold War Balkan policies of global powers prove that many important variables concerning the Balkan geography emerged with the deterioration of the bipolar world order after the Cold War Period. At the beginning of these variables, the liberation of Western Europe from the threat of the Soviet Socialist state as well as the ability to control the energy resources vital for the European continent can be mentioned as nationalist conflicts of ethnic origin in the Balkans.

In this study, with a mix of hard and soft power, it is evaluated that global powers have some postmodern geopolitical features in this region. In the literature, there are many kinds of research explaining the region with hard power, but as in postmodern geopolitics, global powers need all variables.

One of the main discussion topics of this postmodern approach is energy. As a postmodern geopolitical aspect, an important reason for the worldwide wars of occupation is the struggle for the seizure of natural resources, the means of transportation, and the control of trade. Large consumers, particularly the US, which consume 25% of the world's primary energy sources and crude oil, have been fighting for years to take control over the limited natural resources and the transport routes. In the world economies, the socioeconomic dimension and the importance of access to energy were clearly understood due to the unilateral

increase in crude oil prices by the OPEC member countries in 1973-74, and their long-term negative economic and social effects.

On a global scale, it can easily be said that the Balkans are not very important in the matter of energy supply. The main reason is that the region is impoverished in terms of other derivative energy sources, especially oil. Therefore, the Balkans has not been one of the most remarkable regions regarding the energy security supply. However, for widening the scope of energy security, diversification of distribution and transmission channels, and the introduction of very different methods to meet the energy need, the Balkans should be included in the global energy security equation, even though it is insignificant in terms of supply.

The analysis of the global powers' view of the Balkan geography in the light of these data is the main reference point of this study. The postmodern geopolitical approach constitutes the fiction of this study, which will underline the role of global powers in the Balkans, in the future. The classic geopolitical frames focus only on a historical and strategical view of the Balkan region.

### **1. AS A THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION. POSTMODERN GEOPOLITICS AND STATES**

Geopolitics is defined as the research of the parameters of geographical factors in international relations. Geopolitical theorists have attempted to demonstrate the importance of concerns in reaching national boundaries, exploiting important maritime routes and controlling strategic land-based parts in determining national policies.

Geographical concerns have a significant role not only in the political calculations of strong states that are trying to play a critical role in international politics but also in determining the spheres of influence of small and medium-sized states that aim to reach appropriate geographical boundaries to protect their national interests. Undoubtedly, geopolitics is not the only determinant in foreign policy decisions.<sup>1</sup> However, when the values of a country are compared with those of other countries, combining them with the elements of power, it can affect the possible results positively or negatively.

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<sup>1</sup> Carlo J. Bonura Jr., *The Occulted Geopolitics of Nation and Culture: Situating Political Culture within the Construction of Geopolitical Ontologies*, in Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, New York, Routledge Publishing, 2002, p. 88.

The geopolitical approaches<sup>2</sup> gain importance in the correct reading of the effects of the post-Cold War period and the globalisation process. Geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-cultural assessments, prepare a scientific basis for the states' foreign policy strategies and provide political decision-makers with worldwide, regional and countrywide action options. It is only possible to understand the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR, to explain the current situation in which the greatest effects of globalisation are experiencing, and to produce policies appropriate to the changing conjuncture by using geopolitical depth and geopolitical approaches.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, geopolitical assessments are needed to ensure that thought is passed through discipline and handled with integrity in decisions on international relations, security, policy, and planning priorities. The political, economic, military, and socio-cultural power of the countries can change in time relative to other countries in the world and the region. These developments in the changing elements of geopolitics also affect geopolitical evaluations and foreign policy strategies.

**Table 1. Modern versus Postmodern Geopolitics<sup>4</sup>**

Modern Geopolitics	Postmodern Geopolitics
Cartographic visualizations: maps Perspectivist theatre Inside/outside, Domestic/international East/West Territorial power	Telemetrical visualizations: GIS <sup>5</sup> Post-perspectivist simulations Global webs, glocalization Jihad/McWorld Telemetric power

<sup>2</sup> Traditional geopolitics examines current and future power and target relationships based on physical and political geography. In other words, it determines the direction that all elements of power give to politics in the geographical area and data. Political geography, physical geography, biological geography, social geography, anthropology, cultural and civilization history, social and political sciences, such as examining many disciplines according to their methods and trying to judge on the current events are considered as a geopolitical, empirical branch of science.

<sup>3</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War*, in Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, New York, Routledge Publishing, 2002, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Postmodern Geopolitics? The Modern Geopolitical Imagination and Beyond*, in Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Simon Dalby (eds.), *Rethinking Geopolitics*, New York, Routledge Publishing, 2002, pp. 28.

<sup>5</sup> GIS – Geographical Information Systems.

Hardware ascendant: GPR <sup>6</sup>	Software ascendant: C142
Territorial enemies	Deterritorialized dangers
Fixed, rigid posture	Flexible, rapid response
Geopolitical man	Cyborg collectives
States/Leaders	Network/Cyborgs

Statistical information is insufficient to explain the whole existence of a state. Statistical data is more about the past. However, geopolitics is oriented towards the future as it considers the state as an organism above individuals. In this view, it is not content with political geography but also benefits from other sciences.

Geopolitical science, which is defined as the foreign policy directed by geography in its most general definition, has been used in different meanings in the historical process and sometimes formed the moral basis of an ideology that claims that a country's expansion policy is logical and sometimes hegemonic. From the point of view of critical geopolitics and Marxist thinkers, classical geopolitical theories are considered as a rationalisation tool built for US imperialism.<sup>7</sup>

When we evaluate the US foreign policy in a historical process, we see an image of foreign policy strategies shaped in the axis of geopolitical theories. Another feature of geopolitics is that the problems that countries or states consider nationally, such as the Balkans, have rapidly aroused universal repercussions. As in the Balkans, universal events are reflected in the national problems of the respective states. For this reason, it is obligatory for international problems to be interpreted together with national problems and to make geopolitical evaluations. In fact, the lack of this could generate a grave mistake because the national values of a country are sensitive to the effects coming from many focal points.

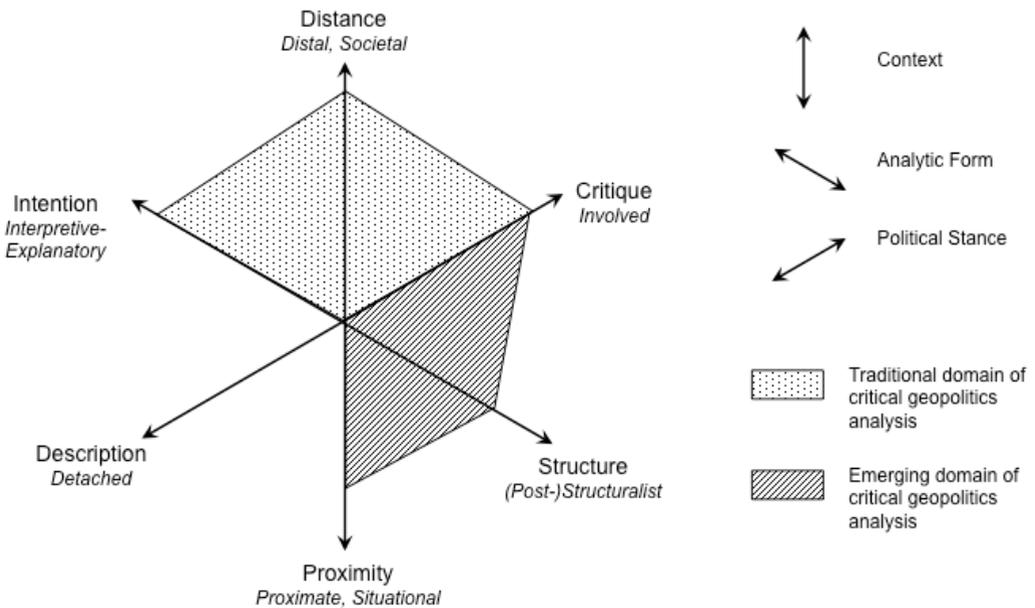
However, it is not possible to argue that geopolitical theories take into account all the balance of power in the world or respond to every situation. As such, it is necessary to make new assessments according to the position of global powers against each other. Especially in the geopolitical studies to be carried out in the Balkans, it brings the consideration of the real geography and the determination of distant goals.<sup>8</sup> Thus, short-term or close-purposed developments that seem to be contradictory in the Balkans will not be considered.

<sup>6</sup> GPR – Ground Penetrating Radar.

<sup>7</sup> Anders Stephanson, *Fourteen Notes...*, pp. 63-66.

<sup>8</sup> Blagoy Klimov, *Geopolitics vs Globalization in The Balkans: The New Rivalries in The*

Theoretically, the scope of geopolitics and the meaning of geopolitical phenomena change. Geopolitical renewal and change are problematic and even impossible within the framework of the view that geopolitics is a static and geography-dependent determinism. The distinction between geopolitics and political geography reveals itself once again and is critical. In short, political geography explores the impact of geographical structures and features on political life. Since geography is immutable, geopolitical renewal and change are not possible in this view. However, it is clear that this view is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon, far from the one-dimensional understanding of geopolitics.



**Figure 1. Three core dimensions of approaches to discourse analysis in critical geopolitics<sup>9</sup>**

Today especially, it is clear that the national policies cannot be considered separate from global and regional policies. In addition, examining the two pillars of

*Energy and Transport Sectors*, MPRA (Munich Personal RePEc Archive) Paper No. 4112, 2007, p. 13, in [https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/4112/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_4112.pdf](https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/4112/1/MPRA_paper_4112.pdf) (Accessed on 02.09.2019)

<sup>9</sup> Martin Müller, *Doing Discourse Analysis in Critical Geopolitics*, in “L’Espace Politique” [En ligne], 2010, no. 3 (12), consulté le 06 octobre 2019, in <http://journals.open-edition.org/espacepolitique/1743>; DOI: 10.4000/espacepolitique.1743

power and goal, geopolitics expressed various theoretical approaches.<sup>10</sup> It is for this reason that all decisions regarding the Balkans will need to be subject to a broad and comprehensive geopolitical assessment. In fact, in a changing world, powers or countries, societies aiming to reach a better place must take into account all the elements and theories of geopolitics. Therefore, it is evident that many problems regarding the Balkans cannot be solved without a geopolitical view.

First, it is because the determinist ideas do not value the classical geopolitics. The second is that many things that geopolitics envisage do not happen. The third is that it appears to be ethnocentric from the very beginning. This view can be seen in the statements of the classical defenders of geopolitics, such as the German Ratzel and Haushofer, the American Mahan and Spykman, the British Mackinder and the Swedish Kjellen. However, in recent years, five main trends in geopolitics have emerged. These are the American geostrategy, the radical French "*geopolitique*", which gives importance to environmental geopolitics on an international scale, followed by geopolitics, geoeconomy, and the critical geopolitics. Therefore, it can be said that the geopolitical evaluation of the Balkans can be made by taking into account the geopolitical theories based on the developments in the 21st century.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. POST-COLD WAR BALKAN POLICIES OF GLOBAL POWERS**

Another issue to be discussed is whether the rules or laws are systematic with geopolitical theories. The reality is that Balkan geopolitics should not be based on hard power or independent geography. In fact, the geographic and geopolitical positions have different meanings because of the geographical location of the Balkans – according to their physical geography – and explains the situation.

The geopolitical position refers to the location of the Balkans along with the power centres, the political structure of the supply and political perceptions, along with the value of the Balkans. The geopolitical area of the Balkans is much broader and more comprehensive than its place on a map. Therefore, when its geographical position is evaluated together with the elements of power, its geopolitical position will have a value.

While today's world-wide power centre in the US, Europe, and the CIS, if they lose their power-centre characteristics and new powers form in hypothetical

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

South America or the east of Asia, it is inevitable that geopolitical position will change value even though the geographical position of the Balkans has not changed.<sup>12</sup> Postmodern geopolitics will directly affect the fundamental political, economic, and security parameters of the Balkans. Moreover, the future position of the Balkans is expected to be in the form of an alternative reorganisation of relations with power centres and a structure in which long-term cultural, economic, and political ties are strengthened.

### 2.1. Geopolitics and Balkan Concept

“Balkans” is the name given to the region located in the southern part of the geography constituting the European Continent. For this reason, the concept of South-East Europe for the Balkans can be used in some studies. The northern boundary of the Balkan geography is the Danube and Sava rivers, which divide the midline of Europe in the east-west direction. This region, also called the Balkan Peninsula, can be defined by the borders of countries such as Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Greece, Macedonia, and Bulgaria.

Conflicts in the Balkans make the region more problematic. This environment of struggle can show us that the Balkans is a famous region. For this reason, the most prolonged battles since the beginning of the 20th century and the periods of severe heavy losses continued in these lands, and unfortunately, there was a constant occupation and oppression in this region. It is possible to see here the traces and evidence of the Western geopolitical understanding of Rimland developed by Spykman during the Cold War Era based on the Mackinder's theory of Black Dominance by the Soviet Socialist state.<sup>13</sup> The most violent of this polar power struggle was again on this geography, and it was seen that this struggle resulted in the victory of the Western society in a way that affected the Balkan societies the most.

After the end of the Cold War, power struggles and the control of the routes that can be used to circulate these resources in the world markets have been on

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<sup>12</sup> Licínia Simão, *European Energy Security: The Reconcilable EU and Russian Approaches?*, in Carlo Patricio Fernandes, Teresa Ferreira Rodrigues (Eds.), *Geopolitics of Energy and Energy Security*, Lisboa, Instituto da Defesa Nacional, 2017, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *The Geopolitics of The Balkans in The 19th and 20th Centuries-Between National Emancipation Movements and Geostrategic Games of The Great Powers*, in “Facta Universitatis”, Series: Law and Politics, Vol. 9, 2011, No. 2, p. 103.

the agenda.<sup>14</sup> With this agenda, the Balkan region is the most suitable route for energy resources in the Middle East and Caspian Basin within the scope of meeting the energy needs of Western Europe.

Post-Cold War researches brought new priorities and policy options for the US. The United States has to take into account the increasing interdependence of globalisation as well as the protection of these priorities and the implementation of policies. The US cannot remain indifferent to the problems, even if any developments in any part of the world in the new era do not directly concern US interests.<sup>15</sup> The reflections of crises and conflicts in the Balkans, on the other hand, directly and indirectly, affect the security of the US as seen in the past. With the effect of the power gap resulting from the Post-Cold War, the US began to approach regional security problems differently.

One of the main factors underlying US policy in the Balkans is the integration of the region's countries into the Euro-Atlantic alliance as a relevant military and political structure. The American administration has taken steps in this context since the Bosnian crisis, and firstly encouraged the EU to play a role in these confrontations.<sup>16</sup> The establishment of political stability in the region is also of great importance for European security. Historical experience shows that instability in the Balkans can threaten the stability and peace in Europe. Therefore, the next objective is to prevent crises that would require NATO's intervention.

A report by Congress, in May 2009, also showed a significant reduction in the financial dimension of US engagement in the region.<sup>17</sup> For example, while the aid to the Balkan countries was 621 million dollars in 2002, this amount decreased to half in 2010. The primary purpose of the aid already provided is to promote the integration of the region into the Euro-Atlantic perspective.

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<sup>14</sup> In terms of the Balkans, main features of the Cold War period; in addition to serving as a border between two blocs, the plans of the USSR regarding the Mediterranean and the Middle East were disrupted and separatist movements in Yugoslavia played a key role in dissolution of the USSR.

<sup>15</sup> Ljubiša R. Mitrović, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>16</sup> José Félix Ribeiro, *Russia Oil Energy and Arms*, in Carlo Patricio Fernandes, Teresa Ferreira Rodrigues (Eds.), *Geopolitics of Energy and Energy Security*, Lisboa, Instituto da Defesa Nacional, 2017, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> In this context, military engagement with Bosnia and Kosovo interventions and the former Eastern Bloc countries within the framework of NATO's enlargement strategy can be considered as an attempt to block a European-based defence and security policy.

In this context, the US aims to strengthen democracy, the market economy, civil society, and press freedom in the region’s countries, to prevent the weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and to promote the development of human rights. In this process, the US supports the EU’s more significant role in the region to achieve the above objectives.



**Figure 2. The Western Balkans’ Tortuous Road to Integration with The West<sup>18</sup>**

As an integration concept, *Europeanization* is defined as a *civilisation project*, which aims to transfer countries from a low to high culture, through the conditionality and socialisation processes determined by the EU. Within this framework, the former Soviet countries and the Balkan geography have been intensely confronted with the processes of Europeanization.<sup>19</sup>

In 2004 and 2007, EU enlargement encompassed many former Soviet countries and the Balkan countries.<sup>20</sup> Bulgaria and Slovenia were accepted as

<sup>18</sup> *GIS Dossier: The Western Balkans*, in <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/gis-dossier-the-western-balkans,politics,2527.html> (Accessed on 02.09.2019)

<sup>19</sup> Jelena Subotic, *Europe Is a State of Mind: Identity and Europeanization in the Balkans*, in “International Studies Quarterly”, Vol. 55, 2011, No. 2, pp. 309-330.

<sup>20</sup> Russia is the EU’s biggest threat in the Western Balkans. Russia tries to build an image that restores its military power and its foreign policy by centring its historical ties in the Balkans, its Orthodox and Slavic brotherhood, its role as the protector of tradition

members of the Union. Six Western Balkan countries, except Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, making some reforms with the projection of transforming their structure in line with the EU's acquis for nearly 20 years, but this process has not been completed yet.

It can be seen that many important variables concerning the Balkan geography emerged with the deterioration of the bipolar world order after the Cold War period.<sup>21</sup> When all of these variables are considered, it shows the fact that Balkan geography is in a strategic position. The new era that started after the war brought the Balkans to a new geopolitical structure<sup>22</sup> that combines traditional security with a more modern concept: energy security.<sup>23</sup> Ensuring energy security is directly related to regional security. In the Balkans, especially if the prevention of hot conflicts arising from ethnic differences and the friendly settlement of various disputes will become a pragmatic choice, the energy security agenda will have a significant contribution.

## 2.2. Balkans' Energy Dilemma, Global Powers, and Geopolitics

The Balkan countries focused on economic development after the 1990s in search of political stability. However, energy resources have great importance to achieve this economic development. The most important advantage of the Balkan countries that do not have abundant fossil reserves is that they are located very close to the countries with abundant reserves. Unique to the Balkans, Russia is the largest gas supplier in Europe and the country with the largest natural gas reserves in the world. It has a strategic position in the transfer of the Caspian Region resources to Europe.<sup>24</sup>

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and family values. The Ukrainian civil war and the annexation of the Crimea, the Syrian civil war, the abduction of Estonian security forces, the intervention of the Baltic countries, the support of the coup attempt in Montenegro, make Russia an opportunistic and destabilizing state and all these events did not find an adequate response from the EU.

<sup>21</sup> When we try to define and make sense in the geography, culture, and civilization of the Balkans, it is seen that cultural structures are belonging to opposite poles.

<sup>22</sup> Jelena Subotic, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-330.

<sup>23</sup> Economic elements in geopolitics include crucial elements such as raw materials, minerals, energy resources, and transport at the strategic level that affect foreign policy and directly contribute to political power.

<sup>24</sup> Franco Tomassoni, *Some Features of The Russian Foreign Policy Approach to Europe*, in Carlo Patricio Fernandes, Teresa Ferreira Rodrigues (Eds.), *Geopolitics of Energy and*

The Balkans, with its strategic position, is the focal point of energy diplomacy of energy supply and demand countries. Balkan countries, whose energy requirements are very low, can quickly meet their needs thanks to this position and can achieve political gains according to their role in energy transfer.

The European countries' dependence on Russia was the determining factor in the Balkans' prominence regarding energy geopolitics. In the EU's search for resource diversification, the Balkan geography was seen as the gateway to the opening of new transfer routes. In terms of oil and gas, many projects have been developed across the Balkans.<sup>25</sup> While the EU has fully supported some of them, others have been hampered by serious opposition.

When the energy situation in the Balkans is examined, the first thing that stands out is the fact that the oil and natural gas reserves of fossil energy sources are deficient and that the region meets a large part of its need through imports. According to the Energy Information Administration, the proven oil reserves of the Western Balkans are about 335 million barrels. Total proven oil reserves of the European continent are 18.7 billion barrels. Of the 335 million barrels in the Western Balkans, 165 million are in Albania, 92 million in Croatia, and 77 million in Serbia and Montenegro. Oil production is at deficient levels.<sup>26</sup>

Russia is the biggest actor in the field of natural gas. Except for Albania, all the Balkan countries have natural gas connections with Russia. The Russian natural gas reaches the Balkans via two routes: the first is the Trans-Siberian Natural Gas Pipeline, which connects Russia with Hungary and extends from there to the countries of the former Yugoslavia; the second is from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria, while Turkey through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece are extending the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline line. This line is a branch of the Brotherhood from Ukraine. In terms of increasing Russian natural gas exports, Bulgaria is also one of the geographical transit countries.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the recovery in natural gas demand of European countries in the

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*Energy Security*, Lisboa, Instituto da Defesa Nacional, 2017, pp. 117-133.

<sup>25</sup> Licínia Simão, *European Energy...*, pp. 90-95.

<sup>26</sup> Güney Ferhat Batı, *Küresel Enerji Politikasında Balkan Jeopolitiği ve Enerji Güvenliği Paradigması* [Balkan Geopolitics and Energy Security Paradigm in Global Energy Policy], in "International Journal Entrepreneurship and Management Inquiries", Vol. 1, 2017, No. 1, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Zoran Nechev, Svilans Aleksandrs, *Western Balkans: More Resilience for the Energy Sector*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2017, in [www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06916](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06916) (Accessed on 13.09.2019)

last three years, the gas consumption was below the rate in 2010. In this case, the Balkan countries come to the forefront in the search for a market for the increasing natural gas supply in the short term. In addition to the increase in energy efficiency, renewable energy investments and the increasing dependence of LNG technology on pipeline gas, the EU is gradually decreasing, which has led supply countries, especially Russia, to seek a new market for increasing natural gas supply.

The growing importance of the Balkans in natural gas trade has come up with the creation of a natural gas hub that will appeal to this region, and this has become a competitive element among the Balkan countries. With its growing economies and developing energy infrastructure, the Balkans have a more critical role in the global and regional economy. For a case, there are three strategic points for Bulgaria in Russia's energy policies.<sup>28</sup> The first is the Burgas-Alexandroupolis Oil Pipeline, and the Belene Nuclear Power Plant is the second one. The third is the South Stream Natural Gas Pipeline Project. Especially in the process until the mid-2000s, Bulgaria has tried to increase its capacity to transit Russian gas instead of developing different alternatives from Russia due to natural gas dependence. However, Bulgaria has not done this by laying out new pipelines, but rather by improving the capacity of existing pipelines. As a matter of fact, following an agreement signed with Gazprom in 1998, Bulgargas agreed to increase its transit capacity.<sup>29</sup>

As a grander view, great importance was attached to the membership of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU. The EU countries' inability to develop a solution to the growing energy needs in the first place with the existing policies and the solutions to prevent the use of Caspian energy resources for printing to the EU under the control of the Russian Federation has been a priority for the EU. For this reason, by joining these two countries to the EU, the European Union could reach the Black Sea via the Eastern Balkans. Thus, by handing the Caspian route from the Caucasus direction through the Black Sea to the energy supply, to the EU

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<sup>28</sup> The focus was on joint efforts to increase the capacity of Russian natural gas to be exported to other Balkan countries via Bulgaria. It can be said that Russia attaches great importance to Bulgaria in the export of natural gas to the Balkans. Russia attaches great importance to Bulgaria geographically and calls Bulgaria an energy corridor.

<sup>29</sup> Margarita Assenova, *Bulgaria's Ambitions for a Balkan Gas Hub. Challenges, Opportunities and the Role of a New Offshore Gas Storage Project*, Washington DC, The Jamestown Foundation, 2018, pp. 5-11.

territory without interruptions and restrictions, this has emerged as a vital Balkan-EU energy geopolitics.<sup>30</sup>

The Nabucco Natural Gas Pipeline Project, which will reach Europe, has been put into practice. After the enlargement of the EU to the countries in Eastern Europe, it is expected to move towards the Balkans and to include Romania and Bulgaria. The enlargement policy should be considered as a part of the Balkan energy geopolitics developed by the EU to meet the growing energy need without restriction. Thus, as a natural result of this geopolitical approach, the EU has acquired a significant part of Balkans geography, and the first genius in its history has allowed the Black Sea to exit from the Balkan region without any restrictions.

Recently, Germany and Poland have stated that the EU should not delay accession negotiations with the Western Balkan countries.<sup>31</sup> These countries are the gaps that may frequently occur in the region, Turkey, Russia, and China are warning for the filling. China sees the region as a corridor for Europe under the “*One Road, One Belt*” project. In this context, the plans include a bridge over the sea in southern Croatia, the modernisation of Huawei Technologies’ Serbian telephone administration and the construction of a motorway in Montenegro to connect Belgrade and the Adriatic Sea.<sup>32</sup>

China stands out with its intensive transportation, energy, and industrial investments in the region.<sup>33</sup> In addition, it is the third trade partner of Bosnia and Montenegro and the fourth trade partner of Macedonia and Serbia. Reducing

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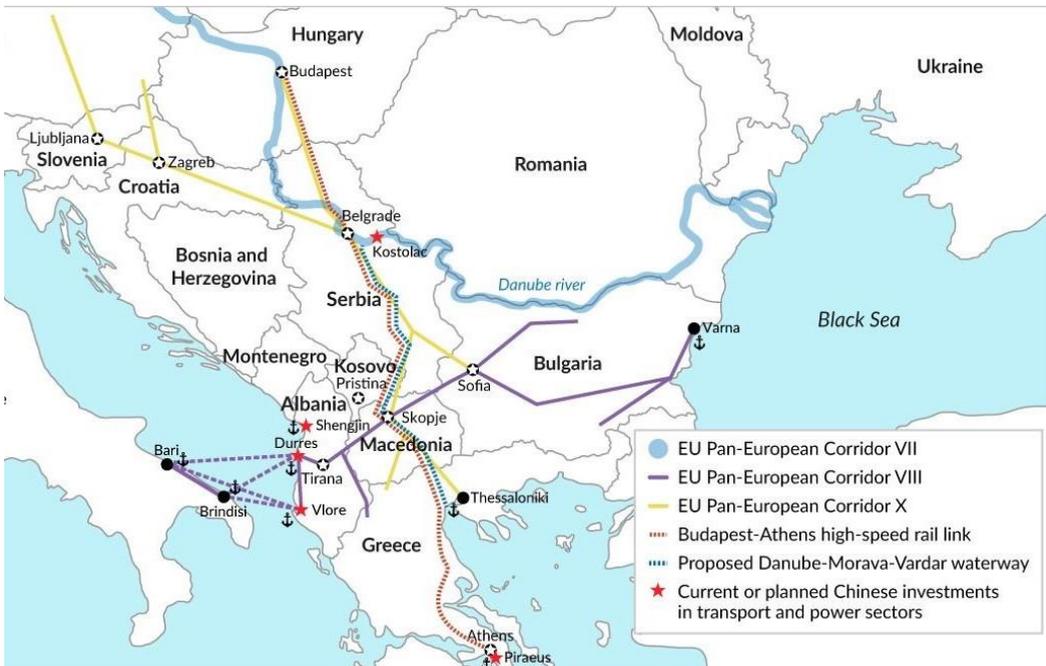
<sup>30</sup> Milan Simurdić, *The Energy Community – EU Energy Enlargement?*, in “International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs”, Vol. 18, 2009, No. 3, pp. 49-68.

<sup>31</sup> The analysis of political power should focus on the system’s mechanism by focusing mainly on the internal and external political functioning of a country. At this point, the institutionalization level of the political structure and the ability to act holistically with all elements of the administrative structure should be focused on. Accordingly, it should be considered whether the political structure of the state examined is a symphonic harmony.

<sup>32</sup> Plamen Tonchev, *China’s Road: into the Western Balkans*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2017, in [www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06772](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06772) (Accessed on 02.09.2019).

<sup>33</sup> According to Stumvoll-Flessenkemper, who examined China’s influence on the Balkans, China’s policies have a paradoxical structure; while ensuring political stability, it has the effect of detaching from EU values and norms. The analysis reveals that China has undermined democratization by consolidating public credit and existing regimes, not holding tenders for transparency in investments, sometimes cooperating with local corruption networks, and making investments by ignoring environmental and social conditions.

transportation costs, securing energy routes and linking Europe and China, which are among the main objectives of Chinese foreign policy, will also affect the Western Balkans policy.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, China has increased its effects in the region to the institutional level by conducting summit meetings every year since 2012 with its 16+1 mechanism, which includes Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan countries. Entering the region with the investment of Piraeus Harbour in Greece, China has identified it as the main port of the Mediterranean and also has an essential role in transfer its products to Germany through transportation projects such as railway and highways (Skopje-Belgrade-Budapest Corridor) in the Balkan countries.



**Figure 3, Bridgehead to Europe: Transport Infrastructure and Chinese Investment in the Balkans<sup>35</sup>**

<sup>34</sup> Loïc Poulain, *China's New Balkan Strategy*, Center for Strategic&International Studies (CSIS), "Central Europe Watch", 2011, Vol. 1, No. 2, in [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/110829\\_CEW\\_China\\_in\\_Balkans.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110829_CEW_China_in_Balkans.pdf) (Accessed on 22.09.2019).

<sup>35</sup> GIS Dossier: *The Western Balkans*, in <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/gis-dossier-the-western-balkans,politics,2527.html> (Accessed on 12.09.2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

Conceptual shifts in the meaning, function, and perception of geopolitics can be mentioned. The emergence and importance of a region according to cyclical changes can be explained by postmodern geopolitics. Although some fixed and objective elements of geopolitics can be mentioned, the geopolitical definition takes different forms at certain times. This is because the security phenomenon gains meaning through various references. The concept of geopolitical shift expresses the fact that some regions become a zone of contention in line with the international conjuncture.

The increasing importance of energy security in the EU, in particular, has led the Balkans to witness the geopolitical struggle again. The Balkans, which are among the developed economies of the world and between the European countries that demand a high amount of energy resources and the countries that own 2/3 of the world's fossil fuel reserves, are critical for the transfer of energy reserves. With the change in the political map, the control of the geography in question also meant the control of energy resources going to Europe.

Although the Western Balkans account for 3.6% of the EU's total population, it is clear that there are regional and global reasons for Europe that the EU is struggling to transform the area and consequently reading the region through security. The European Parliament elections in 2019, the election of the new German Chancellor in 2021, the possible global economic crisis, the discussions of the European army, and the Balkans became a chessboard of the global conflict of interest show that it is not easy for Europeanization to move forward powerfully in the Balkans.

On a global scale, it can easily be said that the Balkans are not very important in terms of energy supply. The main reason for this is that the region is impoverished in terms of other derivative energy sources, especially oil. Therefore, the Balkans has not been one of the most remarkable regions of energy security supply. However, due to the widening of the scope of energy security, diversification of distribution and transmission channels, and the introduction of very different methods to meet the energy need, the Balkans should be included in the global energy security equation, even though it is insignificant in terms of supply.

The future role of the Balkans will determine the priority and importance of the region as regards energy security. In other words, the importance of the Balkans in terms of energy security is closely related to its ability and role to be part of the distribution route. The framework and nature of such a role will be determined by the complex dynamics of global and regional relations.