

The Process of Institutionalization of the EU's CFSP in the Western Balkan Countries during the Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract

This paper analyses the Western Balkan countries' relationship towards the instrument of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union in the context of the measures undertaken by Brussels against the Russian Federation due to its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. In this regard, the author first points out to what extent the countries of the Western Balkans over the past few years, that is, after the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, harmonized their foreign policies with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. Certainly, the most important foreign policy challenges for the Western Balkan countries in 2014 are imposing sanctions against the Russian Federation.

Some Western Balkan countries (above all, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia), according to the author's assessment, are stretched between their intentions to join the EU and thus harmonize their foreign policy with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union on one hand, and on the other, to avoid disruption of existing relations with the Russian Federation.

KEY WORDS:

European Union, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Western Balkans, Ukraine, Russian Federation, foreign policy.

Introduction

Contemporary global politics demonstrates that all attempts to incorporate certain global trends into existing “drawers” of different theoretical directions can hardly offer comprehensive explanations. The gap between different approaches can be seen in the example of the current Ukrainian crisis and the harmonization of foreign policy of the Western Balkan countries with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union (EU). *The institutional approach*, for example, has convincingly explained the formation of the European Union and its nearly seven decades long evolution showing that institutions and specific policy processes may be adequate frameworks for the positioning of this organization on a continental and global scale (Peters 2007: 223). The EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy has been built for more than two decades and it has become an articulate voice of the Member States towards third countries (Baker 2011: 343–358). However, if one examines its effectiveness in solving crises in the EU’s neighbourhood, in particular in the case of the recent Ukrainian crisis, one can conclude that it has not been too effective, and that sanctions against the Russian Federation have not yielded the desired results related to stabilization.

The Ukrainian crisis also shows that realism has not lost its historical battle with other theories of international relations (liberalism, constructivism, critical approach, etc.), as was often emphasized in the post-Cold War period (Waltz 1979 / Novičić 2007: 211–242). This theoretical approach points to the newly induced security threats and the drive for dominance among global powers (Donnelly 2013: 276). Thus, smaller countries are trying to position themselves through either ‘distancing’ or ‘inclining’ to the world’s centres of power (The Editors, *The Nation* 2014). Such attempt are observed through declarations of some Western Balkan countries regarding the Ukrainian crisis in the context of the adaptation and harmonization of their foreign policy with the CFSP, which represents an obligation in the course of European integration (Rynning 2011: 23–42).

The Ukrainian crisis, which began in early 2014, caused predominantly by the neighbouring Russian Federation to prevent closer bonding of Ukraine with the European Union, contains certain characteristics identical to the

Yugoslav crisis, i.e. primarily the Bosnian War (1991–1995). Ukraine's territory is prey to Russian ambitions (the annexation of the Crimea in early March 2014) and plans of the pro-Russian separatists in the eastern parts of the country (the self-proclaimed People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk). Although the Ukrainian Parliament passed a bill on the special status of these areas on 16 September 2014 (Minsk Protocol 2014), it became clear that this would not satisfy the interests of the Russian separatists in these areas. At the same time, the European Parliament and the Ukrainian Rada adopted the Agreement on Ukraine's accession to the European Union (Blic 2014a), which the Russian Federation clearly opposes and constantly demands its change (EU – Ukraine Association Agreement 2014).

The threat of further dissolution of Ukraine, which has been directly instigated by the neighbouring Russian Federation, remains. However, a certain disorientation of other actors is also evident — that of the United States and the European Union to first prevent this conflict, and then to influence the reduction of open defiance of the neighbouring Russian Federation. Everything that the European Union has undertaken in relation to the crisis in Ukraine, by introducing several “rounds of sanctions” (Europa. EU 2014a) against the Russian Federation, has been shown as insufficient for this country to completely abandon its hegemonic ambitions. Instead, Ukraine will remain a very unstable country that will not be able to realize its leading foreign policy goal — accession to the European Union. Other post-Soviet countries can face a situation similar to the Ukrainian one due to the growing ambitions of the Russian Federation (Blair 2014).

As a result of growing tensions between the West and the East — the USA and the EU on the one hand, and the Russian Federation on the other, some Western Balkan countries reconsidered their previously established foreign policy course. This primarily applies to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to a lesser extent to Macedonia. At the same time, in response to the Ukrainian crisis, Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo confirmed their pro-European foreign policy course. Supporting the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, they have shown that they would continue to be predictable and reliable partners. Both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia face problems of potential separatism, and therefore waver in relation to the direct support to the CFSP concerning the activities of the Russian Federation in Ukraine.

Leaders of the Republic Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina often point out the possibility of a referendum on the status of this entity, while recently in Macedonia, after more than two decades, the so-called Republic of Ilirida was “proclaimed” in the territories predominantly populated by Albanians.¹

At the same time, the Russian Federation, for the umpteenth time, noted that the expansion of NATO to the rest of the Western Balkans represents a provocation against this country.² In this context, it was pointed out to Montenegro that, keeping in mind its aspirations to become a member of NATO, Russia would not look favourably at that, but would consider it a “provocation” (Kajošević 2014). At the same time, the conflict in Ukraine continues, despite the Minsk peace agreement. “Misunderstanding” between the Russian Federation and the EU and the USA continues. The Western Balkan countries face a challenge whether they would remain consistent with earlier proclaimed pro-European foreign policy goals.

The Western Balkans between future EU membership and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis

a) The Current Situation Regarding European Integration in the Western Balkans

The six subjects — countries and entities in the Western Balkan region, after Croatia’s accession to the European Union at the beginning of July 2013, are still far from full membership, but their basic foreign policy goal is membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance,

1 The President of the Republic of Srpska Milorad Dodik, during the last five years, has repeatedly claimed he would call a referendum on the status of this Bosnian and Herzegovinian entity. This was particularly topical during 2014 in the context of the referendum in the Crimea, as well as an unsuccessful referendum in Scotland in September. At the same time, in Macedonia in mid-September 2014 the so-called Republic of Ilirida was again declared in the northwest part of the country inhabited by ethnic Albanians. Similar attempts were made in 1992, but this creation never lived.

2 See: The Interview with Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, given to the Sarajevo daily newspaper *Dnevni avaz* — Avdović, E., 2014. Šef ruske diplomatije Sergej Lavrov za ‘Avaz’: Moskva protiv NATO-a na Balkanu. *Dnevni avaz*, [online] 29 September. Available at: <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/138045/sef-ruske-diplomatije-sergej-lavrov-za-avaz-moskva-protiv-nato-a-na-balkanu> [accessed 14 October 2014]. Quote — “When asked how Moscow looks at the possibility of further rapprochement of the Western Balkan regions, or the prospect of accession of Montenegro, Macedonia and especially Bosnia and Herzegovina in full membership in NATO, (Sergey) Lavrov has openly said that Moscow sees it as wrong policy and provocations by the North Atlantic military alliance.”

with the exception of the Republic of Serbia (Đukanović 2010: 295–313). This pro-European and Euro-Atlantic shift in foreign policy of Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia began mostly at the beginning of the last decade and resulted in Albania becoming a member of NATO (2009), and Montenegro (Jovičević 2014) and Macedonia are approaching this status.³ When one looks at the effects of the fifteen year long process of stabilization and association, established in 2000, one can see that there are obvious improvements in almost all countries of the region (Ateljević 2005: 7–32). This approach towards the Western Balkan countries helped to open up the prospect of a European future and reduced viewing EU membership as a utopian goal. Croatia, as the most successful regional example, managed to start and complete the negotiation process (2005–2011), and become a member of the European Union (2013), thus becoming a “role model” for other countries of the Western Balkans south of the rivers Sava and Danube (Lopandić 2013: 7–20).

In the meantime, the progress of other countries in the region also followed. Currently, four Western Balkan countries, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, acquired the status of candidate for membership, and the negotiation process began with Montenegro and Serbia.⁴ Macedonia acquired candidate status in 2005, and was then significantly ahead of the rest of the region. However, after no agreement was reached between Macedonia and neighbouring Greece regarding the name of the country, both its approach to membership in the EU (2005) and NATO (2008) was stopped. Albania has waited for quite a long time (from 2009 until June 2014) to be granted candidate status, but as of recently it made evident progress due to internal reforms (Europa.EU 2014b). In this regard, the new government in Tirana with Edi Rama as Prime Minister, formed in mid-2013, failed to accelerate these reforms and gain the trust of the administration in Brussels.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has been spinning for more than two decades in the “vicious circle” of solving the so-called national issues of Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, and is suffering due to the deep dysfunction of state

3 Macedonia's membership in NATO was blocked by neighboring Greece at the Summit in Bucharest in 2008. On the other hand, Montenegro is expected to receive an invitation for membership in NATO in 2015, after the summit in Wales in September this year, where it was stated that it can become a member before the next summit in Warsaw.

4 Montenegro started membership talks with the European Union on 29 June 2012, and Serbia on 21 January 2014. So far, Montenegro has opened chapters 5, 6, 7, 10, 20, 23 and 24, and closed chapters 25 and 26.

structures and institutions (Đukanović and Jovanović 2014: 59–80). Since 2001, all attempts to change this state have not yielded any results. Yet, such constitutionally established Bosnia and Herzegovina is not credible in terms of taking over potential obligations from the EU or NATO, because there are no adequate institutional frameworks and capacities to adopt and implement the obligations which stem from the accession processes (Miljuš and Đukanović 2011: 187–232). In 2008 Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, but this document did not enter into force.

At the same time, Kosovo⁵, after the declaration of independence in 2008, was first and foremost focused on accelerating the process of its recognition, whereas European integration was a part of another foreign policy plan (Zejneli 2014). However, it should be noted that since 2012, a feasibility study was obtained, and completion of negotiations regarding the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is soon expected (Europa.EU 2014c). It should also be emphasized that Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Slovakia and Romania, as member states of the European Union, have not recognized Kosovo's independence, which will certainly complicate its joining this organization in the future. At the same time, the strengthening of right-wing political parties in Kosovo in the general elections of June 2014, especially the movement "Self-Determination" and potential forming of ruling coalitions by euro-sceptic subjects, may jeopardize its path towards membership in the EU, as well as block the resumption of negotiations on political issues with the authorities in Belgrade (Đukanović 2013: 365–385 / Radio Slobodna Evropa — Balkanski servis 2014a).

b) The Harmonization of Foreign Policy with the EU's CFSP: General Framework and Past Experience

Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia, as candidate countries for membership in the European Union, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, are obliged to harmonize their foreign policies with the Common Foreign and Security

5 "Kosovo", under the agreement achieved during the dialogue between Priština and Belgrade (2012), indicates the use of a separate footnote with the following text - "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence".

Policy of the European Union after and during the process of negotiations (Simić 2013: 17–41). The European Commission overlooks the harmonization of foreign policies of candidate countries with the CFSP (Istraživački tim Centra za spoljnu politiku 2014: 1–10). Therefore, how candidate countries follow EU policy towards third countries and international organizations is very important, as well as how much they internalize the *acquis* relating to this area (Ibid: 9–10). The CFSP determines the general criteria of foreign policy of the European Union, as well as the possibility to introduce restrictive measures against third countries. The CFSP developed into one of the leading and most recognizable instruments of the European Union. It deals with enlargement policy, relations with the Eastern Partnership, the Mediterranean, the influential countries of the world, as well as the participation of countries in international organizations (Ibid: 1–10). The CFSP implies certain legal acts such as communications, decisions of the Council and the European Council, the political declarations, the harmonization of common actions, etc. (Ibid: 9–10). It also includes the introduction of sanctions and restrictive measures, measures to prevent conflicts, non-proliferation (of small arms and light weapons as well as weapons of mass destruction), cooperation with international organizations and participation in peacekeeping missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy (Ibid: 9–10).

Almost identical conditions related to the harmonization of foreign policy of candidate countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, as well as other countries of Eastern and Central Europe, have shown that these chapters — today under number 31, and earlier under 27 - were quickly opened and closed, and that they did not represent a significant obstacle in the negotiations (Ibid: 7–9). It is interesting that none of the 12 countries asked for transitional arrangements related to this chapter, or for delays of internalization of regulations in the area of CFSP (Ibid: 8). These negotiations were opened with Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Cyprus in the first half of 1999, and with Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia and Malta in the first half of 2000 (Ibid: 8). With the exception of Romania and Bulgaria, all negotiations were temporarily closed in the first half of 2000, until they were finally closed in December 2002 (Ibid: 8). Negotiations on this chapter (CFSP) with Romania and Bulgaria were temporarily closed in the first half of 2000, and definitely in December 2004 (Ibid: 7–9).

The case of the Republic of Croatia is similar. After leaving the Yugoslav Federation in 1991 it was faced with a search for its place in international relations and it began the process of European integration only at the end of the 1990s (Đukanović 2010: 295–313). It should be stressed that in this process Croatia managed to establish a good basis for a “strategic partnership” with the United States, which ultimately resulted in its membership in the EU (2013), and four years earlier in the North Atlantic Alliance (Ibid: 295–313). Croatia opened negotiations on the Common Foreign and Security Policy in October 2010, which were then temporarily closed only two months later — on 22 December 2010 (Istraživački tim Centra za spoljnu politiku 2014: 9).

b) The Western Balkans between the West and the East — Harmonization with the EU's CFSP and/or Strengthening of Russian Influence?

After the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine, the Western Balkan countries find themselves between obligation to harmonize their foreign policy with the CFSP and the (re)emergence of the Russian influence in the region, especially with respect to energy dependency. The majority of these countries had no negative experiences with the Soviet Union, with the exception of Albania, because due to the Yugoslav leadership break with Stalin in 1948 and later in the framework of the non-aligned movement, the influence of the Soviet Union was restricted. This “justifies” both the attempt to approach the Russian Federation (Serbia), and restraint towards its current foreign policy activities (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia).

Before the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis, the level of harmonization of foreign policy of countries in the region with the CFSP was high and indicated that in future negotiations with the European Union this chapter would not be problematic. Moreover, they all gradually made progress which the EU noticed and clearly indicated in their annual progress reports. When analyzing the progress reports for the last four years (2011–2014), one can see that the level of harmonization was high, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina. One also observes that during 2014, due to the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis and Europe's introduction of restrictive measures against Russia, this percentage decreased noticeably when it comes to Serbia and Macedonia.

After gaining independence in 2006, Montenegro managed to position itself in the Western Balkans as a sort of “meeting place”, thanks to its well-preserved multi-ethnic structure and complexity of its own Mediterranean and Western Balkan identity (Ministarstvo inostranih poslova Republike Crne Gore 2006). Montenegro defined Euro-Atlantic integrations as its goal and top priority even in its Constitution (Preamble, Para. 5). Montenegro will perhaps become a member of NATO in 2015 despite the aforementioned objections from the Russian Federation, that is, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.⁶ Russia has repeatedly tried to prevent the entry of the Western Balkan countries into NATO, and this especially applies to Montenegro where Russian capital has become very important for the local economy.

Montenegro's progress reports from 2011 to 2014 show that the level of harmonization of its foreign policy with the CFSP annually ranged between 99% and 100% (European Commission 2011c: 72–73 / European Commission 2012c: 61–62 / European Commission 2013c: 53–54 / European Commission 2014c: 56–57). Therefore, when it comes to the harmonization of foreign policy with the CFSP, there should be no major problems. Montenegro has started screening in Chapter 31 (CFSP) on 17 May 2013, and bilateral screening was closed on 27 June of the same year. In late June 2014, this negotiation chapter was opened.

Montenegro followed the restrictive measures of the European Union against the Russian Federation, despite the evident danger of reciprocal measures that would jeopardize the considerable export of food products and wines from this country (Blic 2014b). In this regard, it is important to point out that Montenegro was among the first countries in the region that publicly opposed the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in mid-March 2014. However, in the progress report for 2014, it is stated that Montenegro is late to adopt the law on the introduction of restrictive measures (European Commission 2014c: 57). At the same time, the positive role of Montenegro in the work of international organizations was pointed out, as well as its measures to adopt the amendments to

6 See the reply of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro to the statement by Sergey Lavrov about the membership of this country as a “threat” to Russia — Pobjeda 2014. MVPEI: Crna Gora ima jasno spoljnopolitičko opredjeljenje, to Rusija zna. [online] 1 October. Available at: <http://www.pobjeda.me/2014/10/01/mvpei-crna-gora-ima-jasno-spoljnopoliticko-opredjeljenje-rusijazna/#.VCw8LVf-67o> [accessed 14 October 2014]. Quote - “Montenegro has a clear foreign policy orientation, which is in line with national interests and was repeatedly stated in talks with Russian officials and officials of other countries. Russia's position in relation to the expansion of the Alliance is also very well known. Montenegro will continue to build relationships and develop cooperation with Russia in the spirit of traditional friendship, trust and mutual interest, with the sovereign right of both states to opt for courses of internal development and foreign policy orientation.”

legal solutions relating to the classification of confidential information. The same applies to this country's participation in UN peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Afghanistan and Cyprus, as well as in the EU military missions in Mali and the Central African Republic (Ibid: 57).

In relation to the situation in Ukraine, Albania almost entirely followed the European Union. In the period from 2011 to 2014 the level of harmonization of its foreign policy with the EU ranged from 95% to 100% (European Commission 2011a: 65–66 / European Commission 2012a: 65–66 / European Commission 2013: 55–56 / European Commission 2014a: 59–60). Thus, on 20 March 2014, Albania imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation, and it now completely follows the United States and the European Union on this issue. As in the case of Montenegro, after the commencement of negotiations on membership in the European Union, it is not realistic to expect that Albania will have significant problems in relation to Chapter 31, that is, CFSP.

Kosovo still has not signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement and did not have a formal obligation to fully follow the guidelines of the CFSP. However, it has condemned the actions of the Russian Federation in the Crimea in early March 2014. The announcement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo of 2 March 2014 stated that it condemns the "*occupation of Ukrainian territory, and the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pristina, 2014b). However, this statement was published exclusively on the English page of the official site and not on the Serbian and Albanian ones. Numerous later statements of the President and Prime Minister of Kosovo had a similar tone. On 17 September 2013, the Kosovo Government introduced sanctions against the Russian Federation, thus joining the European Union's position. All these activities leave an optimistic impression that the harmonization of Kosovo's foreign policy with the EU in future negotiations will not constitute a significant challenge to its "European path". A significant problem might be the eventual resumption of dialogue with the authorities in Belgrade, in the context of the announcements that the leader of the right-wing movement "Self-Determination", Albin Kurti, will be the main negotiator of Kosovo in this process. Therefore, in the following period the EU will insist on the revival and effectiveness of dialogue with the authorities in Belgrade.

When it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and in particular Serbia, it can be noted that 2014 brought additional concerns in their foreign policy orientation, because they, in spite of an earlier generally favourable evaluation by the European Union in relation to the harmonization of their foreign policy with the EU's CFSP, have not joined the restrictive measures undertaken by the Union successively since March 2014 against the Russian Federation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a country that is *de facto* constitutionally blocked and deeply ethnically divided, has failed to speed up the process of European integration (Đukanović 2008: 37–44). It did not harmonize its foreign policy legally or practically with the EU's CFSP. In this context, reports on the progress of BiH towards membership in the EU state that during 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, the compliance of foreign policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the CFSP was 68%, 58%, 66% and 52% (European Commission 2011b: 5 / European Commission 2012b: 7 / European Commission 2013b: 6 / European Commission 2014b: 6). One should add the permanent foreign policy disagreements between the members of the tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina on certain international issues (independence of Kosovo — 2008, the status of Palestine in the United Nations — 2012, etc.), as well as the fact that the strategic foreign policy document of this country is largely out-dated since it was adopted in 2003 (Predsjedništvo Bosne i Hercegovine 2003).

The Presidency of BiH adopted the “Declaration on the political situation in Ukraine” on 6 March 2014 (Predsjedništvo BiH 2014) which contains only general calls for peace and the peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian crisis, but lacks any sort of condemnation of the role of the Russian Federation in these events. However, the statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zlatko Lagumdžija, mitigated this by underlining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (SRNA 2014). However, when voting in the United Nations on the resolution on maintaining the so-called referendum on the island of Crimea in late March 2014, BiH Ambassador Mirsada Čolaković walked out of the voting room (N.N. 2014). When one considers the future internal relations after the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were held on 12 October 2014, it is clear that the depth of its (tri-)ethnic division will remain unchanged or will even deepen, and that there will be no acceleration of

European integration in the period to come.⁷

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina contributes to the fact that the official Russian Federation is developing very close relations with the current President of the Republic of Srpska Milorad Dodik, who uses all potentials of the Dayton Agreement to stop the formulation of a truly pro-European and Euro-Atlantic policy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, Dodik certainly expects the support of the Russian Federation in case of a referendum on the status of the BiH entity the Republic of Srpska (BETA 2014).

Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, Macedonia has not taken any official stance that would actually condemn the behaviour of the Russian Federation and there was no serious discussion on the introduction of possible sanctions (Kuzmanovski 2014). It is clear that this country is trying to keep withholding its position towards the crisis in Ukraine and is not ready to support the European sanctions.

On the other hand, Macedonia has succeeded in adopting the Law on Classification of Information and the Law on Implementation of International Restrictive Measures (sanctions) in 2011, and the level of harmonization of its foreign policy with the EU in this area was 99% (2011), 100% (2012), 94% (2013) and 73% (2014) (European Commission 2011d: 77–78 / European Commission 2012d: 66–67 / European Commission 2013d: 57–58 / European Commission 2014d: 59). Not joining the EU sanctions against the Russian Federation has certainly diminished the earlier positive trend of the harmonization process. However, it is important to note that Macedonia supported the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 68/262 in late March 2014, condemning the referendum of pro-Russian separatists in Crimea (United Nations 2014). Also, Macedonia participates in peacekeeping missions in Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Since 2011, and after gaining candidate status, Serbia tried to do as much as possible to harmonize its foreign policy with the EU's CFSP. Thus, for example, in 2012 this percentage was 99%, in 2013 — 89% and in 2014 — 62% (European Commission 2012e: 62–63 / European Commission 2013e: 59 / European Commission 2014e: 61). The reports on Serbia's progress in 2012 and 2013 emphasize that Serbia intends to harmonize its own

7
See the web site of the Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina — www.izbori.ba.

foreign policy with the CFSP. Moreover, the positive role of this country in international organizations was pointed out, as well as the country's participation in peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the EU (Ibid). After the formal beginning of negotiations with the EU on 21 January 2014, the explanatory screening related to Chapter 31 was held on 15 July 2014, while bilateral screening was scheduled for 16 October 2014 (Kancelarija za evropske integracije Vlade Republike Srbije 2014). However, the report on Serbia's progress in 2014 noted that the earlier trend of harmonization of foreign policy with the CFSP was reduced and should be increased (European Commission 2014e: 61). It was also noted that it was necessary to adopt a law on the introduction of restrictive measures.

Since the beginning of 2014 there has been an evident lower level of acceptance of the normative acts of the EU in the field of CFSP due to the Ukrainian crisis and a sort of "artificial concordance" with the Russian Federation, which has not been explicitly clarified to the EU nor the Russian Federation.⁸ This percentage for 2014 is 62%, which does not correspond to the level of progress of Serbia in the process of accession to the European Union. In addition, Serbia is in a very difficult social and economic situation that does not allow, taking into account the dependence of the Serbian economy on the EU, the search for alternative partners and the development of additional close relations with the Russian Federation (Petrović, Đukanović 2012: 183–227). However, the Serbian political elite is still trying to maintain the illusion of extremely intense relationships with both Brussels and Moscow.⁹ The room for manoeuvring is narrowing down, keeping in mind the intention of Serbia to accelerate European integration (Večernje novosti 2014). However, Serbia insists on "brotherly" relations with the Russian Federation, although its modern political history does not confirm such a situation, especially after the First Serbian Uprising (1804), as well as during most of the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, by the decision of its own political elite Serbia "tied itself" to the Russian Federation due to a number of unfavourable energy arrangements

8 The abovementioned was confirmed by a quote by Sergey Lavrov from an interview given to *Dnevni avazu* – Erol Avdović, E., 2014. Šef ruske diplomatije Sergey Lavrov za - Avaz: Moskva protiv NATO-a na Balkanu, op. cit. Quote - "When asked how he sees the fact that Serbia ... is moving toward membership in the European Union, Lavrov told us that "politicians in power in Belgrade regularly assure the official Moscow that it will not have a negative impact on Serbia's relations with Russia" and "And when we think about cooperation between Serbia and the EU, then we believe that Serbia should find such an arrangement with Brussels that will not harm our cooperation nor the level of trade exchange and investment."

9 Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Negotiations on Enlargement also believes that such a foreign policy course of Serbia is neither sustainable nor acceptable for the Union.

concluded under worse conditions compared to other countries in the region (sales of the Petroleum Industry of Serbia in 2008, the arrangement regarding the South Stream pipeline, etc.) (RTV B92 2014).

Such, to some extent, mythical understanding of relations between Serbia and Russia is supported by circles around the current president of Serbia, Tomislav Nikolić, while Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić is more oriented towards cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany as the leading country of the European Union (Radio Slobodna Evropa — Regionalni servis, 2014b). It is particularly important that the Serbian Prime Minister, Aleksandar Vučić, publicly stated that Serbia supports the integrity of Ukraine, including annexed Crimea (this was also stated in the progress report for 2014 — European Commission 2014e: 61) while Nikolić's reference to Tito in light of a "post-modern policy of non-alignment", that is, keeping equidistance both towards the Russian Federation and the EU, will not bring a desirable foreign policy position to the country, nor an acceleration of European integration (L.G. 2014 / TANJUG, RTS 2014).

In addition, on 16 October 2014, the president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin visited Belgrade, as officially stated, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the city. However, on the same occasion seven bilateral agreements were concluded yet, although expected, the agreement on the staff of the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Emergency Center in Niš was not concluded. Putin's visit to the capital of Serbia abounded in recognizable iconography on the military parade particularly organized for this occasion, and he was awarded the highest civil decoration. Such a visit of the Russian president, however, did not cause significant adverse assessments by the Brussels administration.

Serbia will be chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Ministarstvo spoljnih poslova Srbije 2014). In the context of developments in Eastern Europe, primarily in Ukraine, this fact may further hamper an otherwise quite complicated foreign position of the country. This is particularly evident taking into account the different levels of aspiration of both Western countries, and the Russian Federation in relation to Serbia, regarding the above mentioned chairing.

Conclusion

It is obvious that all the dynamism, complexity and unpredictability of contemporary international relations and global politics is not possible to encompass in only one theoretical direction or its numerous internal varieties. When it comes to the Ukrainian crisis, and the relationship between the Western Balkan countries towards the CFSP, it is obvious that the analysis requires taking into account the domination of both (neo)institutionalism and (neo)realism, as well as their internal synergy to the extent possible. Thus, research based on these two theoretical directions suggests the following conclusion/s.

The process of European integration of the Western Balkan countries has accelerated since 1999 and fifteen years after the introduction of the stabilization and association process. Today, all countries in the region, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, are candidates for EU membership, while Montenegro and Serbia started negotiations. In this regard, one of the chapters refers to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union. If one looks at the facts that from 2011 to 2014 most countries in the region significantly harmonized with the EU's CFSP, the current year denies this and to some extent disputes it, at least when it comes to Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro have extensively harmonized their foreign policy with the EU's CFSP, which they specifically confirmed by supporting and introducing restrictive measures against the Russian Federation.

Still, it must be emphasized that the countries in the region, primarily in terms of energy and the supply of gas, are very much connected to the Russian Federation, and that the political influence of this country is being re-established in the region (Weber, Basseuner 2014). This is especially evident in Serbia, as well as in the BiH entity — Republic of Srpska. The European Union, however, is trying to win over all the countries of the Western Balkans regarding support of sanctions already imposed in several rounds against the Russian Federation, due to the Ukrainian crisis.

In the next period, there will be many problems related to how the Western Balkan countries will accept any liability arising from the harmonization with the

EU's CFSP. The policy of so-called equidistance towards Brussels and Moscow, as well as other non-European centers of world politics, will not be sustainable in the long term for countries in the region, especially Serbia, which according to some announcements plans to fully harmonize its legislation with the European Union by 2019, as well as to fulfil the larger part of the obligations relating to the pre-accession period. Thus, the policy of the new "non-alignment" will not bring to its promoters the desired results on the foreign policy front. On the contrary, it can only further complicate the process of European integration and possibly tighten relations with Brussels.

It is clear that further harmonization of foreign policy with the EU's CFSP will not pose a problem for Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo, unless some drastic changes in the political relations and power occur, and/or right-wing political parties strengthen. On the contrary, it seems that Chapter 31 will be one of the easiest compared to e.g. Chapters 23 and 24 (Justice and Home Affairs), with which the negotiation process starts.

Certain reserves about the very dynamics of the negotiation process in Montenegro, Serbia, and in perspective – Albania, should be preserved considering the announcements saying that in the next short-term period (5 years) there will be no new expansion, as well as that the negotiation process for most member states that joined after 2004 lasted several years (Maksimović 2014). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the countries in the region should not continue to work on fundamental reforms and the harmonization of their political and economic system with the European Union.

It is important to add, in conclusion, that the countries of the Western Balkans need to solve a number of bilateral problems. This will be one of the obligations in the process of joining the European Union and the one closely monitored. The dialogue started four years ago between the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina must continue and lead to a better mutual relationship. Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to lag in European integration and in the next period will continue to be burdened with solving domestic issues related to its own organization and economic consolidation. Thus, the sending of confusing and contradictory foreign policy signals from Sarajevo will continue in the future. When it comes to Macedonia, there will also be no substantial progress in Euro-Atlantic integration of the country, taking into account a nearly two and a half

decade-long dispute with Greece which, despite mediation of the EU and the US, will not be solved soon.

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