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EDITORIAL OFFICE:

CIRR, Institute for Development and International Relations - IRMO  
Ljudevita Farkaša Vukotinovića 2, HR-10000  
Zagreb, Croatia  
Phone: +385 1 48 77 460  
Fax: +385 1 48 28 361  
E-mail: [cirr@irmo.hr](mailto:cirr@irmo.hr)  
<http://cirr.irmo.hr>

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# Rethinking Realism and Constructivism Through the Lenses of *Themes* and *Ontological Primacy*

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Joseph Jon Kaminski

*International University of Sarajevo*

*jkaminski@ius.edu.ba*

*ORCID: 0000-0001-5551-1383*

## Abstract

**Key words:**  
*realism;*  
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*relations theorising;*  
*ontology; themes*

*If integrative pluralism in international relations theorising is the way forward, how can we still maintain some type of demarcation between pre-existing paradigms in order to not throw the baby out with the bath water? The notions of themes and ontological primacy provide a useful intervention in this regard. They both link realism and constructivism yet at the same time differentiate between the two enough to allow for the original free-standing paradigm to maintain its veracity and usefulness as an explanatory tool to explain the international order. This article promotes the idea that realism and constructivism engage with many similar themes; it is their ontologies and methodologies that are the key points of departure and are worth being further explored. The article concludes that taking the notion of ontological primacy seriously allows for much needed theoretical pluralism, while effectively maintaining the foundational moorings of longstanding international relations theories.*

## Introduction— Integrative Pluralism and 21st Century International Relations Theorising

*The European Journal of International Relations* (EJIR) released a special issue in September 2013 (Vol. 19, Issue 3) titled, “The End of International Relations Theory?” The individual articles that appeared in this highly touted volume generally argued that it was time for scholars to move beyond the old paradigm wars and instead embrace some type of integrative pluralism between competing paradigms. On the detrimental effect of the paradigm wars that dominated international relations (IR) theorising during the 1990’s and early part of the 2000’s, David Lake commented that these intellectual squabbles “perverted the discipline and turned inquiry into contests of a quasi-religious belief in the power of one or more ‘ism’” (2013: 568). Dunne, et al.’s opening article set the tone for the volume arguing for integrative pluralism, an approach to IR theorising which “accepts and preserves the validity of a wide range of theoretical perspectives and embraces theoretical diversity as a means of providing more comprehensive and multi-dimensional accounts of complex phenomena” (2013: 416). Integrative pluralism allows for scholars to incorporate concepts from multiple paradigms, ultimately creating new theories that can compensate for weaknesses in older theories. Meaningful IR theorising in the future will require a more complex understanding of reality which necessitates greater research on ontology, and most importantly— an idea that will be later explained in greater detail— the notion of *ontological primacy*.

Thomas Kuhn (1962) argued that paradigms in the hard sciences are incommensurable; when one scientific theory comes into fashion, the old theory is promptly relegated into the annals of history. However, Kuhn’s theory about paradigm shifts was specifically aimed at the hard sciences and not necessarily the social sciences. Unlike physical scientists who completely abandon previous theories deemed inadequate, social scientists build on previous work. Andrew Bennett’s reading of Kuhn suggests that paradigmatic exclusivity should not be the way social science research operates. Instead, Bennett calls for his own version of pluralism within IR theorising, *structural pluralism*, arguing that “it conveys the sense that IR scholars can borrow the best ideas from different theoretical traditions and

social science disciplines in ways that allow both intelligible discourse and cumulative progress” (2013: 461). Structural pluralism’s strongest point is that it allows for cumulative research findings within a discourse whose structure remains intact.

Theoretical eclecticism has long been a staple in some of the other sub-fields in political science. For example, some of the leading Marxist scholars in comparative politics often incorporate elements of liberalism and even conservatism in their understanding of politics. Sheri Berman’s, *Social Democracy and the Making of Europe’s Twentieth Century* (2006), is an excellent contemporary example of a work that utilises elements of liberalism and Marxism to explain the development of social democracy in Europe during following WWII. Similar efforts at transcending hard paradigmatic boundaries have occurred more recently in foreign policy analysis as well. Hans Mouritzen argues that ‘compatibilism’ is the road forward in foreign policy analysis which he argues

*...holds that perspectives should — for explanatory purposes — be made compatible by the conscious effort of the analyst ‘Compatible’ means that they should be mutually competitive, possibly offering contradictory real-world predictions, but (in some cases) ultimately supplementing one another in a specific explanation. Even if forces are contradictory, they may both be at work in a given situation and thus ‘push’ actors and developments in opposite directions — the net result thus being a compromise. Therefore, the perspectives or theories should be allowed to supplement one another for explanatory purposes. (2017: 3)*

Asle Toje’s work on strategic culture in relation to EU actorness also embodies the integrative pluralist spirit. His work nicely weaves together realist concerns with hard power and constructivist interests in soft power and non-coercive persuasion noting that

*...instruments of foreign policy are usually grouped under the broad headings of diplomatic bargaining, persuasion, economic rewards and coercion, armed coercion and military intervention. Friendly states tend to interact at the lower end of this scale and adversaries tend towards the upper end” (2008: 12).*

The key point is that one cannot understand EU strategic culture without accounting for the interaction between power and identity.

Even prior to the 2013 EJIR special edition, IR theorists had already begun to move away from strict paradigm demarcations. Solomon Barkin for example argued that the strict paradigm approach towards constructing theories of international relations should be avoided; rather *concepts* should be the key focus—“Paradigms stand in opposition to each other; to believe in one is to reject others. Concepts interact in more complicated ways” (2010: 6). Theories like constructivism, realism, and neorealism should not be viewed in all or nothing terms; they should instead be viewed as theories that place primacy on certain concepts or themes. While at times they truly are diametrically opposed, often there are points of convergence.

This paper focuses on constructivism and realism and argues that both approaches often deal with the many of the same themes. Ted Hopf argued that “neorealism and constructivism share fundamental concerns with the role of structure in world politics, the effects of anarchy on state behavior, the definition of state interests, the nature of power, and the prospects for change” (1998: 181). However, these themes are engaged with from very different ontological perspectives. It is important to recognise that while neorealism and constructivism may share similar ‘fundamental concerns’ with these aforementioned themes, they do not necessarily share the same understanding of how to actually approach them, nor do they give the same level of explanatory power given to each of them. Similar to Hopf, Barkin has also advocated for the compatibility between constructivist and realist approaches to international relations—

*An examination of constructivist epistemology and classical realist theory suggests that they are, in fact, compatible. Not, of course, that good constructivism is necessarily realist, or that good realism is necessarily constructivist. But rather that constructivist research is as compatible with a realist worldview as with any other as (and more compatible with realism than some), and that the realist worldview in turn can benefit from constructivist research methods. (2010: 3)*

One ought not to force explanations that incorporate realism

and constructivism into their work. Barkin's main point throughout his work is that future IR research should occupy a middle ground between rigid paradigms and overly loose concepts.

This resonates with the pioneering work of Giovanni Sartori (1970) who contended that good concepts find a balance between precision and extensibility. Sartori famously argued that future concept formation and theorisation ought “to maneuver, both up-wards and downwards, along a ladder of abstraction in such a way as to bring together assimilation and differentiation, a relatively high explanatory power and a relatively precise descriptive content, macro-theory and empirical testing” (1970: 1053). In essence, Sartori sought to define concepts in ways that would maximise Pareto optimality between precision and extensibility. Barkin applies this general basic logic to an IR context, arguing that “somewhere between a rigidly paradigmatic approach and an unordered conceptual free-for-all is a level of categorisation that is amenable to productive communication among approaches” (2010: 6). To engage in productive communication, one must begin by looking at where the different methods share a similar discourse.

As integrative pluralism gains further traction in IR theorising, the next question that must be addressed is: how can we move forward in theorising in a manner than allows for some flexibility between previously believed to be incommensurable paradigms (such as realism and constructivism), while at the same time, maintaining at least some boundaries to avoid annihilating the earlier paradigms altogether? This article will contend that themes and ontological primacy help to address this question. Future IR theorising ought to: 1) articulate the different themes they engage with, and; 2) articulate which matters are ontologically primary in their analyses. If this can be done, meaningful integrative pluralism that does not denigrate into a type of ‘theoryless theorising’ can transpire thus moving the discourse on IR theory forward. The next few sections of this article contend that the disagreement between realists and constructivists is primarily related to the *degree* in which one theory prioritises a particular concept or idea over another more than anything else.

## Defining Ontological Primacy

Jackson and Nexon argue that disagreements between the various approaches to international relations theory ought to be understood in terms of 'gradations of disagreement' rather than 'absolute, categorical distinctions'—

*...we believe that the state of theorizing might be improved if we focused more on the agreements and disagreements among choice-theoretic, experience-near, and social-relational approaches. Such an understanding of the field reconstructs existing terms of debate, deals with broad concerns in scientific ontology, and involves gradations of disagreement rather than absolute, categorical distinctions. (2013: 560)*

This article supports this general position. Before looking at similar themes covered by constructivism and realism in greater detail, the notions of *themes* and *ontological primacy* need to first be more clearly defined.

The word 'theme' has its origins in Greek, *théma* ( θέμα ) and originally meant: "a proposition" or "subject." Its Latin equivalent, *thema*, similarly means: "a subject" or "thesis." A 'theme' in contemporary IR theory scholarship can be understood as a specific subject or topic studied within IR's broader various competing discursive theoretical frameworks. There are many themes readily discussed in IR theory such as the anarchic international order, self-help behaviour, balance of power and balance of threat, the role of international norms, the role of language, and the role of domestic politics. Realism and constructivism both regularly engage with these themes. Exploring a particular theme in international relations however does not necessarily imply that the aforementioned theme is rudimentary, or has *ontological primacy*, in the broader discursive framework of any particular theoretical approach.

Ontological primacy within IR theorising can be conceived of as a foundational understanding of what is considered indispensable or constitutive of a particular international relations theoretical discursive framework. The root of the word 'ontology' derives from the Greek word *on* ( ὄν ) which means: "being; that which is", and the word 'primacy' derives from the

Latin word *primatus* which means: 'of the first rank.' Therefore, ontological primacy can be understood as *a study of that which is of the first rank*. One salient example of how constructivism and realism are ontologically different is in regard to their more general methodological approaches to international relations theorising. Realist/positivist approaches are often primarily interested in *how power is exercised*, whereas constructivist/post-positivist theories usually tend to focus on *how power is experienced*.

While there are always exceptions to the rule, realist theories tend to focus on the impact of material forces in a scientifically objective, value free way; they are generally positivist theories. John Mearsheimer's, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) is an example of a work that is situated within a positivist-realist methodology. Such works do not make normative claims as to what ought to be done; they seek to simply explain the world as it is. Positivist theories often are critical of normative theories because these theories often blur the lines between facts and morality (Nicholson 1996). Positive theories are primarily interested in facts, not ethics.

Constructivist theories on the other hand often tend to engage in post-positivist methodological frameworks that focus on ideational forces and socially constructed realities. Often such theories are normative and reject efforts to provide meta-narratives that claim to explain the entire international system. Works like Kathryn Sikkink's, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics* (2011), embody this normative constructivist spirit. The methodological and epistemological divide between the two approaches is real. Post-positivist constructivist theories are not studied in the same way as positivist realist theories.

*In many ways, the positivist—post-positivist divide overlaps with the epistemological and ontological differences of the second and final debates, respectively. Indeed, it reflects two different paradigms — not in the usual, loose International Relations sense that I have been using so far, but in the Kuhnian (Kuhn, 1970) definition of a single, hegemonic theoretical approach — in which 'facts' in one paradigm are sometimes simply unintelligible in the other. (Lake 2013: 578)*

Part of the earlier difficulties in creating a genuine dialogue between realism and constructivism could be traced back to the methodology and epistemology of each approach. Despite these genuine differences, each approach does not have to be so rigid that it cannot account for certain overlapping thematic concerns in its analysis such as power politics, anarchy, and ideas.

There are major differences in the specific themes each approach posits as ontologically primary. For example, the role of anarchy and self-help is constructed as an independent reality in neorealist discourses. Regardless of social realities, anarchy and self-help behaviour have their own independent mode of action and impact on the international order. Anarchy and self-help behaviour are *always* ontologically primary themes in realism. This does not mean realism cannot also account for social and ideational factors in its analysis. It does mean that such themes will ultimately be secondary in explanatory power to anarchy and self-help behaviour. An anarchic world order is the cause of the various ideational forces that shape international relations. On the other hand, within constructivism, ideational forces and norms are the most ontologically primary variable to consider. Ideational forces account for why the international order is anarchic. The causal chain between anarchy and ideational forces within realism is turned around within constructivism; ideational forces are the *cause* and one of the *effects* is the anarchic international order. As such, anarchy cannot simply be studied as a given with no conditions attached to it. The next sections will look in greater detail at some of the *themes* that are shared by realism and constructivism and how both approach these same themes.

### *Theme 1: The Role of Identities and Power Politics*

Realist and constructivist research have both addressed the role of identities and pure power politics. While each school's approach to power politics and intersubjectivity at an ontological level are vastly different, this does not mean there is an irreconcilable gap between these two concepts at a thematic level. Terms such as 'rules', 'norms', and 'discourses' often immediately raise the constructivist flag. Barkin (2010) argues that while constructivism looks specifically at rules,

norms, and discourses, none of these are *only* applicable to constructivism; any effective realist critique must at some level take these particular things into consideration as well. Identities are shared and constructed amongst actors. There are multiple 'ideational factors' that constantly shape and reshape these identities. According to Ruggie, "In contrast to neo-utilitarianism, constructivists contend that not only are identities and interests of actors socially constructed, but they also must share the stage with a whole host of ideational factors that emanate from the human capacity and will which Weber wrote about" (1998: 856). Ideational factors include, but are not limited to identities, threats, fears, general aspirations, and other rudiments of perceived reality (Lakitsch 2019). The interactions of these elements influence both state and non-state actors within the broader international system.

Questions about human nature, which are ultimately connected to identities, have always been relevant in realist thought going all the way back to Thucydides. For Thucydides, "with the ordinary conventions of civilized life thrown into confusion, human nature, always ready to offend even where law exists, showed itself in its true colours, as something incapable of controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice, the enemy to anything superior to itself..." (Thucydides—cited in Sekine 1999: 136). The idea that specific identities shape international relations have been incorporated into realist approaches as well. Bennett for example comments that

*...scientific realism is open to theories on the kinds of mechanisms that constructivists emphasize, including theories of persuasion, intersubjective meanings, discursive communication, learning, naming and shaming, framing, legitimacy, and norms of appropriateness. (2013: 468)*

While issues of intersubjectivity might not be ontologically primary in realism, this does not mean intersubjectivity is an 'out-of-bounds' theme to consider within a realist theoretical framework. Critical constructivism understands social relations much like Foucault who saw hierarchy, subordination and domination as inextricable from all social interactions. This is quite similar to important assumptions held by realists and neorealists in regard to global politics (Hopf 1998). Realism and critical theory are intimately connected in many fundamental ways. The differentiating issue is degree, or ontological primacy,

rather than actual content of the ideas being debated.

In the 1940's, E.H. Carr noted the interaction between power politics and intersubjectivity. He argued that the basis of international morality being founded on some type of 'harmony of interests' was wrong and that in the years following WWI, "every country struggled to maintain its expanded production; and an enhanced and inflamed national consciousness was invoked to justify the struggle" (1949: 61). He goes on to explicitly claim that the vindictiveness of the Treaty of Versailles directly facilitated in Hitler's rise to power. This argument lacks any explanatory power without actually understanding the unique subjective conditions that lead to the rise of fascism. By Carr's own admission, the draconian conditions set forth by the Treaty of Versailles set the table for Hitler's rise. Its stipulations bankrupted Germany, thus putting Hitler in a position to spread his nationalist ideology to an already disenfranchised German public in the 1920's. The treaty itself formalised the power structure between state actors in Europe following the *Great War*. A different treaty would have most likely meant a completely different international world order. Carr's analysis is a great concrete example of thematic overlap between realism and constructivism. Carr's assessment is dependent upon understanding how constructed identities were impacted by this treaty. Despite the overlap, Carr's ontological assessment of international relations is still driven by power politics. While power politics is the ontologically primary concept in his overall analysis, nonetheless, intersubjectivity cannot be completely divorced from his analysis.

When trying to actually understand what 'power politics' means, Barkin argues that it is meaningless unless placed into the context of other states and the behaviours and actions of states at some level contending that "it makes no sense to speak of the power of a state without the context of the object with respect to which of whom that power may be used" (2010: 18). When states grapple for power in the anarchic sea of international relations the ways the actual grappling occurs varies from state to state. Treaties, economic relationships, and cultural connections all impact and affect the way states actually struggle with each other for power. The response of the United States to a perceived violation of international law by a state like Iran or North Korea would obviously be substantially different than if a similar violation was carried out by a close

ally like Canada or Israel. Understanding power is meaningless without having some idea of who the players in the actual game are and what their agendas are.

Other realists have also discussed the importance of ideas and actors. Robert Gilpin recognised the dangers of ignoring individuals and individual interests when trying to understand the international order— “There is certainly the danger in this practice of coming to think of the state as an actor in its own right, which has interests separate from those of its constituent members” (1984: 318). Each state is at some level going to act differently in accord to prevailing historical circumstances. The specific people who are actually in power impact state behaviour at both the domestic and international level. Contemporary realists recognise that multiple factors influence state behaviour. The structure itself does have an impact on state behaviour. Realists differ from constructivists in the belief that state behaviour’s *most* important factor is security: this is an ontological distinction between realism and constructivism, not just a thematic one. However, both realists and constructivists posit that attitudes and personalities impact the international order. “Identities are necessary in international politics and domestic society alike, in order to ensure at least some minimal level of predictability and order” (Hopf 1998: 174). Gilpin and Hopf both recognise that without considering the importance of identities, making reasonable predictions on behaviour is impossible.

### *Theme 2: Anarchy and Self-Help Behaviour*

Another thematic similarity and ontological difference between realism and constructivism is the role of the anarchic world order, largely driven by self-help behaviour. Both theories address the question of anarchy in the international order. They both also have something to say about the nature of individual states self-help behaviour. As mentioned in my earlier discussion on realism, anarchy is an ontologically primary classical realist proposition (Carr 1949; Waltz 1979; Waltz 1986; Waltz 1986a). According to Morgenthau, “The state has become indeed a “mortal God,” and for an age that believes no longer in an immortal God, the state becomes the only God there is” (1965: 197). Even the United Nations’ (UN) power is limited. According to Article 1, section 2 of the June 1945 Charter

of the United Nations, the purpose of the UN is only “To develop friendly relations amongst nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples and to take appropriate measures to promote universal peace” (cited in Weston, et al. 1997: 11). Its mission is to promote world peace, but its original charter by no means gives this loosely configured body of member states *carte blanche* to impose its will on other states even if this is not exactly the case today in practice.

Carr also believed that the system of international relations was and always will be anarchic: “Countries which are struggling to force their way into the dominant group naturally tend to invoke nationalism against the internationalism of the controlling powers” (1949: 86). Here one can see the beginnings of what later realists would discuss as balance of power theory. To understand international politics is not to understand harmonious relations between actors, rather it is to understand the driving forces of what account for the clashes of interests between actors.

Since the international order is anarchic, neorealists have argued that the primary motivating factor of states in the international order is their own existential security. This is the ontological break between the role of an anarchic world order and constructivism. “Each unit’s incentive is to put itself in a position to take care of itself since nobody else can be counted on to do so” (Waltz 1979: 107). For neorealists, regardless of social circumstances, existential security will always be the primary motivating factor of states. This means that it is unlikely that the future will see any real paradigm shift in terms of the functioning of international life. This means that the prognosis for any major shift in the way the international order operates is rather unlikely.

While the notion of the international order as being anarchic is an obvious staple to realism, it also has applicability in constructivist thought. As discussed, constructivism’s ontological basis is steeped in the notion of identities being constructed in international relations. Barkin’s argument that constructivism centres on intersubjectivity instead of pure power politics is important when further exploring this point. In the words of Alexander Wendt, “Despite important differences, cognitivists, poststructuralists, standpoint and

postmodern feminists, rule theorists, and structurationists share a concern with the basic 'sociological' issue bracketed by rationalists—namely, the issue of identity- and interest-formation" (1992: 393). Wendt's constructivism which is deeply rooted in Waltz's structural realism does not deny that international relations are anarchic nor that power is important. What he does deny is that the 'self-help world' of international politics derives tautologically from anarchy and power like classical or neorealists; "self-help and power politics do not follow either logically or causally from anarchy and that if today we find ourselves in a self-help world, this is due to process, not structure" and that, "[a]narchy is what states make of it" (Wendt 1992: 394–95). Other constructivist scholars echo a similar sentiment. Cameron Thies claims that "Anarchy, while appearing as a constant structure determining the environment of world politics, is actually always in process" (2004: 164). This differs fundamentally from the view of realists on the relationship between self-help behaviour and anarchy.

While constructivists and realists may have a different view on the *ontological primacy* of 'self-help' behaviour as being a necessary condition of an international order that is anarchic, this does not mean both realism and constructivism disagree in any fundamental way about the notion of anarchy as an important *theme* to consider. As argued above, Wendt makes it clear that constructivism is amenable to the idea of a largely anarchic world order; rather it is the *inevitability* of self-help behaviour that is the point of real departure between realist and constructivist theories (Bennett 2013). They also disagree with whether or not states are always driven by fear and existential threats. For example, would it be appropriate to assume the expansion of the British Empire was driven by fear of foreign conquest at a time when they were far and away the global hegemonic power, and not living in the age of global terrorism?

Constructivists would argue that one cannot automatically assume each state will always be driven by fears of existential threats to their security when crafting their foreign policy; structures within states themselves play a major role in whether or not a state behaves primarily out of fear or for some other reason. The extent to which the structures impact these behaviours is what really differentiates realists from constructivists in this particular sense. Anarchy is caused by

state interactions (Thies 2004). If state interactions are properly understood in their proper social and psychological contexts, and the way states actually interact, enter into alliances, and engage in foreign trade were different, the situation of anarchy may differ. This does not mean anarchy will disappear, but it could mean a different type of anarchy could exist.

### *Theme 3: Balance of Power and Balance of Threat*

In the late 1970's Kenneth Waltz offered a theory of international behaviour that suggested states will either seek to balance the power of a stronger actor or bandwagon with that actor. Stephen Walt defined *balancing* as siding with others against a prevailing threat, while he defines *bandwagoning* as siding "with the source of danger" (1987: 17). Walt held that balancing is more common than bandwagoning in international politics noting that "joining the weaker side increases the new members influence within the alliance because the weaker side has a greater need for assistance" (1987: 18). When balancing, the aligning state may not have any other prior engagements with a particular state, but nonetheless joins forces with that state in order to stand firm against a larger threat. Stronger states generally prefer to engage in balancing behaviours and that when available, these states will seek other states to balance with against the threatening state or entity. However, when there is no real other option, bandwagoning is more common. Bandwagoning implies the old saying, *if you can't beat them, join them*. A state facing a direct threat with no other feasible alternative is more likely to bandwagon with that potential threat. Walt believes that most states do not wish to act this way because it mitigates their own capacities as autonomous actors. A state that bandwagons with a stronger power is likely to lose a great deal of autonomy.

Balance of threat theory is an upgrade from the implausible balance of power theory which has been criticised by a litany of scholars for its empirical shortcomings (Nexon 2009; Ikenberry 2002; Wolforth 1999; Cederman 1994; Schroeder 1994). Following the end of the Cold War, states did not immediately rush to balance the hegemonic power of the United States as balance of power theory would suggest. Walt questioned Waltz's balance of power claim "and argued instead [that] states balance against the greatest threats to their interests, defining threats as a

product of perceived intentions, ideology, and distance as well as capabilities" (Levy 2003: 129). According to balance of threat theory, states seek to balance in terms of the level of *threat* a particular state presents to itself, rather than based solely on power. If an actor is not considered a threat to a particular state, then that state will not necessarily balance against it. Balance of threat theorists argue that states are more concerned with perceived threats to their existence, rather than simply being driven by fears of raw power alone. State identities obviously become important when sizing up another state's intentions.

Balance of threat approaches to international relations can also be explored using constructivist methods. Petr Kratochvil notes that; "One of the oft-cited exceptions on one side of the cleft is Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, which shows how close the starting point of realist thinking is to constructivist theories. Indeed, the questions Walt asks are virtually identical to those posed by constructivist scholars" (2004: 3). The issues Kratochvil are alluding to are those of constructed identities and identity formation.

Levy (2003) points out that there is not one particular universal balance of power theory. Instead, there are numerous balance of power approaches that share similar realist theoretical assumptions. An entire calculus of variables goes into a state's assessment of whether another particular state is a threat or not. Threats to the state or national security are generally discovered via social interactions with other individuals or state actors (Kratochvil 2004). Understanding a state's 'perceived intentions' is not an exact science by any means. A state's geographic proximity also factors into whether a state is viewed as a potential threat. Despite the tensions between Iran and the United States, it is obvious that these tensions would be much higher if these two nations were not literally on the opposite side of the world. The problem in properly assessing a threat lies in the difficulties of quantifying the 'level of threat' based on any one particular variable, such as relative proximity or ideology. This type of approach to international relations easily falls within the epistemological approach offered by constructivists.

## The Case of Thucydides— An Empirical Example Articulating Differences in Ontological Primacy between Realists and Constructivists

The best way to illustrate the point this article is making is to look at the ontological differences between realists and constructivists on a specific historical and literary topic that each school of thought has in the past explored in detail; the case of Thucydides. Both realists and constructivists have traced the origins of international relations and their respective approaches all the way back to Thucydides' classic work, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thucydides method for gathering his information was uniquely modern; he used strict standards for evidence gathering and based his explanations on cause and effect rather than metaphysical explanations related to supernatural phenomena or 'gods' (Cochrane 1929). While realists and constructivists both trace their roots back to Thucydides, they both offer different interpretations of meaning and what was ontologically primary in his work.

Traditionally, realists have claimed Thucydides as one of their own. Jonathan Monten argues that the *Athenian Thesis* embodies what would later become the basis of political realism in international relations.

*The Athenian thesis is the clearest representation of realist thought in The Peloponnesian War, and in portraying the history of a system of independent city-states interacting in the absence of an overarching political authority; Thucydides through actors such as the Corcyrans, the Mytelineans, and most consistently the Athenians introduces elements of what would become known as the realpolitik tradition. (2006: 5)*

The Athenian thesis in many ways parallels the notion of anarchy that is posited as given in both realism and often unavoidable in constructivism. The Athenian city-state was not organised in the same manner as modern independent sovereign nations. The varying competing city-states in the ancient Greek world were much smaller in population and land possession than modern nation-states. Nonetheless, these city-states behaved much like modern nation states; both modern nation states and ancient city states emphasised security in an anarchic world of international relations. Like modern nation states, international justice and altruism are

largely rhetorical devices used by the Athenians. In the words of Clifford Orwin, "The Athenians...can live neither with piety nor without it. Without caring to observe its restrictions except where convenient, neither have they purged their souls of the hopes and fears that piety nurtures" (1989: 237). This is very similar to the way modern realists would argue that states follow the rules of piety or fairness; when and *only* when it suits their needs.

Another critical element of the work of Thucydides that realists argue corresponds with realism is the idea of the primacy of state actors in the international order. Keohane argues that, "1) states (or city-states) are the key units of action; 2) they seek power either as an end in itself or as a means to other ends; and 3) they behave in ways that are, by and large, rational, therefore comprehensible to outsiders in rational terms" (1986: 7). Thucydides' work embodies all three of these elements that are essential to realism. It assumes the primacy of state actors in "as a simplifying device, referring, for example, to Athenians, Melians, or Spartans as coherent, unitary actors in the international system" (Monten 2006: 8). For Thucydides, the key to understanding conflicts lies within understanding the motivations behind each independent state's behaviour. In the end, states are constructed by social actors who make decisions based on their own needs and interests. Despite the fact that states are constructed by individual social actors, the state remains the primary unit of analysis in Thucydides account of the international order.

While it is obvious that realism can trace many parts of its roots back to Ancient Greece (Frankel 1996; Keohane 1986; Walt 2002; Waltz 1979), constructivists also have compelling arguments that show their respective paradigm's roots can be traced back to the same source. Peter Ahrensdorf (1997) went as far as to contest whether the Hellenic international system was even anarchic since many Ancients believed that there exists a divinely enforced moral order, in which there was an agent that governed the international order. Altheide and Johnson (1994) argued that writers like Thucydides highlighted the prominence of individuals in their narratives and actually challenged realist assumptions of state centrality. Ahrensdorf's argument is quite speculative, as it is impossible to adequately quantify how seriously the Ancient Greeks took their own myths. However, the prominence of individuals and the role of

the narrative are quite relevant and reasonable ways in which constructivists have read Thucydides.

Altheide and Johnson (1994) claim that the social world is actually an interpreted world. It is through writing and discourse that history is constructed. Writers are always at some level shaped by factors such as gender, social class, and ideology when constructing any narrative. Understanding this fact makes understanding Ned Lebow's interpretation of Thucydides much easier to understand.

While Lebow recognises that realism and Thucydides have undeniable connections, he nonetheless argues that "Thucydides is a founding father of constructivism" and that his history was meant "to explore the relationship between *nomos* (convention, custom, [and] law) and *phusis* (nature) and its implications for the development and preservation of civilization" (2001: 547). Similar to other constructivist arguments, Lebow's discourse is steeped heavily in recognising the importance of language and literary style. Understanding the role gender, class, and ideology played in Thucydides' writing is essential to understanding the actual intent of his narrative. The work of Thucydides "shows not only how language and convention establish identities and enable power to be translated into influence but also how the exercise of power can undermine language and convention" (Lebow 2001: 547). One of Lebow's broader claims is that once the Athenians were no longer able to use the *language of justification* to promote their foreign policy, their power is all but vanquished. Regardless of their military might and rich history, they no longer were capable of winning the war of ideas. "By the time of the Sicilian debate, the Athenians can no longer speak and act coherently, and this failure is the underlying reason for their empire's decline" (Lebow 2001: 548). This emphasis on the importance of language and rhetoric is largely ignored by realists who argue that the structure of the international order shapes behaviours and outcomes. Language and rhetoric are internal to the individual state and are not related to the 'given' anarchic order that realists posit as inherent in all international relations.

Lebow's argument is powerful; it suggests actors with greater military capabilities are not immune from losing their power. Public opinion and internal policy cohesion cannot be ignored. Short sightedness and internal incompetence and corruption

played a critical role in the failure of the Athenian's. Internal discord and a loss of civic virtue all facilitated in the fall of the Roman Empire a few centuries later as well (Gibbon 2001). If Lebow is correct about the extent that language and winning the 'war of ideas' is important, powerful state actors should be aware that simply having the strongest army does not safeguard a regime from collapse. While recognising the role of military capabilities and state power, Lebow nonetheless gives ontological primacy to language in his interpretation of Thucydides; this is why Lebow's account of Thucydides is fundamentally a constructivist one.

The different appropriations of Thucydides serve as an excellent example of a difference in the operationalisation of ontological primacy between constructivist and realist interpretations of international relations. When evaluating where constructivists and realists differ on the interpretation of Thucydides, it becomes clear that the difference between them is in what Thucydides was *really* trying to convey to his readers. Barkin argues that what each approach centres on (i.e. gives ontological primacy to) is what ultimately differentiates the two theories commenting that constructivism "centers on intersubjectivity, whereas that of realism centers on power politics" (2010: 9). The key word in the above quote is on the word "centers." The operational definition offered by Barkin of realism and constructivism is an example of an ontological difference rather than a thematic one that can be applied to the Thucydides example. Realists view Thucydides primarily via a power politics lens; whereas constructivists view Thucydides via intersubjectivity and language.

### **Conclusion: Themes and Ontological Primacy the way Forward**

Trine Flockhart argues that we are entering a "a new global order characterized by diversity in power, principles and institutions" (2016: 4) The old approaches to the international order simply will not suffice in an ever-changing world in which multipolarity, the decline of US power, and the rise of China along with ascendant mid-level powers seems almost undeniable. This article called for a re-thinking of rigid paradigmatic fealty and showed that constructivists and realists both engage with many of the same themes; it is what each approach gives ontological primacy to that truly differentiates them.

Integrating the notion of ontological primacy into the broader IR theoretical discussion allows for IR theories to better retain their distinctive character while at the same time allowing for necessary thematic overlap which is essential for the further development of both paradigms. Integrative and structural pluralism therefore should not be understood simply as the melding of constructivism and realism (or any other IR theories for that matter) into a cumbersome and watered-down metatheory, nor should they be understood as an effort to dissolve the lines between paradigms altogether. Rather, pluralistic approaches should be understood as those that allow for, and even encourage, active engagement with an eclectic variety of themes, while at the same time, allowing each paradigm to retain their core ontological assumptions.

Eclecticism within reason is a good way to develop theories and better understand the world (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). One can be a realist and accept the tangible role of domestic norms and structure, so long as they accept the primary ontological position of realism, that the anarchic international order, dominated by self-help behaviour is still the driving force behind the international order. The same goes for constructivists who address similar themes as realists; one can still be a constructivist who acknowledges the real impact of the anarchic/self-help international order, so long as they do not adhere to the ontological realist position that it is always the most essential and primary factor behind global political discourse between state actors.

The main representatives of the most prominent 'isms' in IR Theory waded into the waters of opposing discourses long ago. The people writing about these representatives of the most prominent 'isms' have made the mistake of compartmentalising these nodal IR theorists into rigid camps or paradigms.

*Yet scholars have often presented their findings as if one 'paradigm,' focusing on just one of these sets of mechanisms, should displace another. This not only misapplies the notion of paradigms, it misreads the work of Kenneth Waltz, Robert Keohane, and Alex Wendt, the three iconic representatives of the main 'isms' in IR. In fact, none of these scholars has been wedded to using only one 'paradigm' to explain international politics. (Bennett 2013: 463)*

Legro and Moravcsik also echo this point about the fluidity between paradigms pointing out that many realists have shifted their explanations into arenas more commonly seen as constructivist commenting that “while contemporary realists continue to speak of international ‘power,’ their midrange explanations of state behavior have subtly shifted the core emphasis from variation in objective power to variation in beliefs and perceptions of power” (1999: 34-35). Despite the thematic lines being blurred between realism and constructivism, it is safe to assume that at a deep ontological level, they are still quite different, and this will not be changing anytime soon. Too often the primary distinction between realism and constructivism is inappropriately reduced to a difference in thematic concerns; this is an oversimplification.

The longstanding criticisms of realism and constructivism still remain. Critics of realism contest that modern realism does not really explain anything and is too pessimistic about the possibility of meaningful change in state behaviour, whereas critics of constructivism argue that language games that overemphasise social identity leaves one overly optimistic, trapped within the musings a naïve liberal idealism. Efforts to synthesise both approaches also have weaknesses.

*It is very much not the stuff of a new paradigm—being a hybrid, it suffers the limitations of both constructivism and realism, and as such is only applicable to a subset of questions in international relations, those that look at the social construction of public policy, particularly foreign policy, in international politics. (Barkin 2010: 8)*

Theories that seek to explain structure should never be ignored. Randall Schweller aptly comments that, “The cure for weak systemic theories is not to ignore the effects of structure on behavior and outcomes but rather to create better systemic theories” (1998: 184). Better systematic theories should make efforts to incorporate behaviour and the realities of power politics into their discourse. Brown, who borrows from Stephen White, comments that “the aspiration to produce Grand Theory should not be abandoned, but such theory must be action-guiding as well as world-revealing” (Brown 2013: 494). This seems to be the most reasonable way to move international relations theorising to a new level.

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# Why does cooperation work or fail? The case of EU-US sanction policy against Iran

Paulina Matera

University of Lodz, Faculty of International and Political Studies

paulinamatera@uni.lodz.pl

ORCID: 0000-0001-5453-1622

Rafał Matera

University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology

rafal.matera@uni.lodz.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-3683-0439

## Key words:

Cooperation of the allies; relative gains; co-leadership; sanctions against Iran; the JCPOA.

## Abstract

*In the article, we explore the factors which brought about the transatlantic coordination of the policy of imposing sanctions on Iran. We will mainly focus on the events in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the new incentives for cooperation appeared due to the growing concern over the development of Iran's nuclear programme. Considering the capabilities of using the tools of economic statecraft and diplomacy, we claim that the EU-US cooperation can be termed a co-leadership. The assessment and the reasons for the transatlantic break-up on this matter during the presidency of Donald Trump was examined using the concept of relative gains. We evaluate to what extent the initial goals were achieved in practice, and we also try to predict the possible consequences of the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).*

*As to whether the effectiveness of the sanctions through the cooperation has been enhanced, the answer is ambivalent. On the one hand, the cooperating transatlantic partners managed to coerce Iran through isolating the country from international economic contacts and negotiated the JCPOA. On the other hand, Trump's renouncement of this agreement brought many negative consequences and undermined the earlier joint effort.*

## Introduction

The US government imposed sanctions against Iran in 1979 after Iran's Islamic Revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis (Mason 2015: 19-20). It should be noted that the purposes of US sanctions have changed over time. Initially, they were aimed at forcing Iran to stop supporting acts of terrorism and at reducing its influence in the Middle East. Since the mid-1990s, the focus has been on ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme was used only for peaceful purposes, i.e., increasing its energy capabilities.

European countries have conducted their policy, distinct from that of the United States, maintaining diplomatic and economic relations with Tehran. This policy was based on a so-called "critical-dialogue." As Jacques Chirac put it in 1996: "Critical dialogue is not open and friendly as it would be with countries with which we have normal trade, cultural and political relations. It is a limited organised dialogue through which the Europeans convey to Iran a certain number of ideas (...)" (Litwak 2000: 83). This policy was introduced to use economic incentives (trade credits and debt rescheduling) to change the behaviour of the Iranian regime, which was also eager to obtain European investments and technology. The EU countries opposed expanding the scope of the American sanctions.

In 1996, the US Congress passed the Iran and Libya Sanction Act to discourage economic relations between Iran and third parties by imposing, *inter alia*, secondary (extraterritorial) sanctions on European companies investing in Iran's oil and gas production infrastructure. The European Commission lodged a complaint against the United States to the WTO against this legislation. Finally, an agreement between the transatlantic allies was reached, and the threat of US sanctions against EU businesses was waived, but the issue illustrates the divergences between the transatlantic partners over Iran (Dupont 2010). In this article, we explore the factors which brought about the transatlantic coordination of the policy of sanctions towards Iran and those, which caused the divergences after the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015.

## Theoretical and conceptual framework

Cooperation among actors on the international stage is commonly perceived as desirable, which is why scholars try to work out the conditions in which it is possible. According to Robert Keohane, cooperation occurs “when actors adjust their behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination.” (Keohane 1984: 51). Sascha Lohmann observes that in international relations, “the ground between harmony and discord is occupied by cooperation,” which is chosen by the parties when they perceive it as gainful, or they are somehow forced to undertake it (Lohmann 2016: 934). Usually, the profits from it are not equal. Even though the goal of one state is not equally important to its partners, those partners are, in most cases, eager to support it, as they count on benefits in other fields, or they are anxious that the activities of companies or financial institutions may be constricted by the predominant power (Gowa 1986: 173-4).

In this context, the debate on relative and absolute gains is worth mentioning (Powell 1991). Neoliberal institutionalists believe that states are rational actors who care about their national interests. When they observe that the outcomes of cooperation are profitable for them (bring absolute gains), they do not pay too much attention to the benefits of the others (Grieco 1990; Keohane and Nye 1977; Krasner 1983; Axelrod 1984). Neorealists oppose this statement, claiming that cooperation is based on relative gains: the states compare their benefits with those of the partners, which should be more or less equal. Even when the partners are satisfied with the cooperation, namely the fulfilment of their assumptions, one side can withdraw its commitment once it realises it is achieving relatively less profit than its allies (Waltz 1959).

Robert Axelrod, who based his assumption on game theory, mentioned the circumstances of effective cooperation. According to him, “If the strategic setting allowed long enough interactions between individuals, much of the advice pointed to reasons why an egoist should be willing to cooperate even though there is a short-term incentive not to cooperate” (Axelrod 1984: 124). The underlying condition of a successful collaboration is repeatability – the stable interaction in many fields, which creates the interdependence. The partners know

they will be punished for backsliding, and they will benefit from taking collective actions. Thus, they should acknowledge that “the future is more important relative to the present” and should adopt common “values, facts, and skills that will promote cooperation” (Axelrod 1984: 126). Considering the case of US–EU cooperation, we can state that they are longstanding allies who share common aims, such as “promoting peace and stability, democracy and development around the world; responding to global challenges, and contributing to the expansion of world trade and closer economic relations” (The New Transatlantic Agenda 1995). They also declare an attachment to shared values: “freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights” (Shared Values). As they have undertaken many actions together on the international stage, they are quite experienced in this and trust each other. They have learned to cooperate and avoid conflict for as long as possible, share information, and consult with each other regularly.

The above-mentioned exemplary approaches to the reason for cooperation were based on the voluntary decisions of the individual actors. Hegemonic stability theory brings the concept of the influence of a dominant actor of the international system or an alliance (Webb and Krasner 1989). The effective pressure of the hegemon occurs when the other states are not able to counterbalance its dominant position, at least in the field in which the pressure is exerted. The hegemon can use either incentives or coercive measures to persuade the others to yield — e.g., the threat of the deterioration of the terms of cooperation in other areas. In the case of sanctions, the hegemonic leader, besides political gains, can change the terms of trade to its own advantage (Mansfield 1995: 582). It also shapes the rhetoric: in the case of Iran, US officials kept presenting this state as a major threat to world security, and its government as an oppressive theocracy (Pieper, p. 109).

Economic sanctions are defined in diverse ways (Barber 1979: 367; Askari et al. 2003, Baldwin 2003: 271-2). We will adopt the definition proposed by Francesco Giumelli, who said they are “politically motivated penalties imposed as a declared consequence of the target’s failure to observe international standards or international obligations by one or more international actors (the senders) against one or more others (the targets)” (Giumelli 2011: 16). There is no accord among scholars about the value of cooperation in the case

of economic sanctions. Some claim that it does not enhance the effectiveness of coercion, in terms of achieving stated goals, as it is too costly once the sender wants to engage the reluctant partners (Van Bergeijk 1994: 19). Daniel Drezner was convinced that multilateral sanctions are counterproductive unless they are imposed and coordinated in the framework of an international organisation (Drezner 2000). The other group (Martin 1992; Moravcsik 1997) claims that cooperation is essential for the effectiveness of sanctions, as it depends on large-scale economic pressure. According to Inken von Borzyskowski and Clara Portela, between 1980 and 2014, the cooperation in sanction policy increased significantly, which could be interpreted as proof that governments and international organisations are more convinced about the sense of common actions (Borzyskowski and Portela 2016). It is also crucial that the major trade or/and investment partners of the targeted state form the coalition. In another case, third states or companies (“the black knights”) will take advantage of the withdrawal of the key players and enhance the presence in the abandoned market (Mansfield 1995).

Pluralist theories contain the assumption that the clash of interests of different interest groups is the main factor in creating a foreign policy (Viotti and Kauppi 2012: 136-7). However, in elite theories, we can find the hypothesis that decision-makers have a critical impact on a state's foreign policy: once they accept the particular strategy, the postulates of the interest groups mean less (Haas 1990: 55). According to Helen Milner, “for security issues, the perceptions of elites play a sizable role” (Milner 1992: 490): the authorities expect that their decisions will be accepted in the name of the superior imperative of security.

### **The incentives of cooperation: common goals, different priorities**

The issue of the effectiveness of international sanctions is widely discussed in the literature (Barber 1979; Drezner 2000a; Giumelli 2003; Pape 1997). In this paper, the goal-driven criterion is adopted: it is assumed that the aim of the “sanctioners” or senders (the US, the EU) has been to achieve specific foreign policy goals. According to Francesco Giumelli, evaluating the effectiveness of sanctions should be placed in the broader

foreign policy context, and the aims of imposing them are multidimensional and complex (Giumelli 2003: 7). This paper identifies the different goals of the allies toward Tehran and tries to explain why these led to a severe dispute, which ended with a split that might cause a renewal of the Iranian military nuclear programme and an increase in tensions in the Greater Middle East region.

The Americans wanted to enhance the effectiveness of their long-lasting coercion against Tehran by discouraging European companies from operating on the Iranian market. Additionally, notably during the presidency of George W. Bush, EU leaders were anxious that Iran might be the target of US military intervention. Based on these facts, it could be assumed that the US, as the hegemon, had full control over imposing additional sanctions as well as the negotiation process. Nevertheless, in this analysis, we aimed at a more in-depth investigation of the leadership in this coalition. The focus will be placed on the potential of using the tools of economic statecraft: not only sanctions but also the economic incentives to convince Iran to compromise on the curtailment of its military nuclear programme. The diplomatic dimension will also be emphasised. The assessment and the future of the transatlantic cooperation on Iran's policy will be examined using the concept of relative gains.

In this framework, we formed four assumptions concerning the reasons for cooperating on a sanctions policy:

1. The US had compelling arguments to persuade the EU to introduce sanctions. It was possible because of America's supremacy in the financial system, thanks to the strong position of the US dollar in international transactions. The willingness to use this currency in the reckonings induced European financial institutions and firms to decrease their operations in Iran, and it facilitated the EU's decision to impose more restrictive sanctions on Iran.
2. The failures of the policy of offering economic incentives to Iran proved that the EU was not able to use its considerable potential of economic statecraft in this case without support from the US. Thanks to the cooperative approach of the administration of Barack Obama, the Europeans were more eager to adjust to the American strategy.

3. The EU, as the one of the major economic partners of Iran and with a wide range of economic statecraft tools, was able to conduct effective negotiation by imposing painful sanctions and, in contrast, offering economic incentives valuable to Iran (e.g., profitable trade agreements, investments, transfers of technology, or development aid).
4. The US has displayed serious constraints in dealing with Iran: namely, the strong opposition in Congress heightened during Donald Trump's presidency. The Obama administration had extremely limited possibilities to use its economic and diplomatic instruments in relation to Iran. Besides, the US hopes to maintain good relations with its major allies in the region — Israel and Saudi Arabia — which disapprove of the JCPOA.

The method proposed by Lee Jones and Clara Portela is applied to define the priorities of the US and EU's policies (Jones and Portela 2014). These priorities could be determined based on the analysis of specific events, standpoints, and decisions (before and after the introduction of the coordinated sanctions regime), and on the grounds of the available documents. Then, a framework for interpreting and categorising the aims of the economic statecraft could be made concerning the target, the sender, and the international system. It is based on the assumption that using the tools of economic statecraft has many other purposes besides those related to the behaviour of the target in a particular case, both regarding the domestic and foreign policy of the sender. On this basis, the assessment of its implementation will be presented: the priorities will be defined, and how many of them were achieved will be decided.

The EU's aims could be conceptualised as follows:

1. In relation to the target, as stated in the European Security Strategy issued in 2003, the proliferation of WMD was identified as "potentially the greatest threat to EU security." (European Security Strategy 2003). A separate strategy for dealing with this problem was also issued in 2003 (EU Strategy 2003). The coercive measure of sanctions was tailored to pave the way for diplomatic negotiations, leading to a comprehensive and long-lasting agreement on limiting the Iranian nuclear programme to peaceful purposes. The indirect aim was to restore trade and investment

relations, to eradicate corruption and change the regulation deterring foreign economic activities (Kogan 2015:93-8). The lifting of the sanctions could also be perceived as an incentive for the Iranian authorities, as the restrictions had been disastrous for the economy. Protecting the human rights of Iranian citizens was also an important goal for the EU (EU restrictive measures 2019).

2. In relation to the sender: the EU felt threatened by the development of the Iranian military nuclear programme and the consequences for the Middle East. The chance to prove the efficiency of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in such an important matter was significant to strengthen the integration (Adebahr 2017; Meier 2017). Another goal was to create better conditions for trade and investment for European companies. An essential condition of achieving this goal was signing a deal with Iran, which would be approved by the US. It could lead to the lifting of sanctions and opening broader perspectives for European firms and financial institutions. They would be able to operate in the Iranian market without the threat of American restrictions.
  3. In relation to the international system, both defence and the enhancement of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty (NPT) regime were at stake (Council Decision 2010). Moreover, the US military intervention against Iran could be avoided. The EU also wanted to act in the interests of security in the region, to reduce the danger of an arms race, and mollify the regional hostility between Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia (Halliday 2006). Although the United States had more adequate tools in this matter, the EU was able to augment its impact, promoting constraint on the expansion of Iranian influence in the region (Pierini 2016).
1. The US's primary objectives were similar to the European ones in many aspects, but there were different priorities:
    1. In relation to the target, the main aim was the curtailment of the Iranian military nuclear programme. Like the Europeans, the US planned to solve the problem through diplomatic negotiations, but in case of their failure, they were ready to "use all elements of American power to achieve that objective" (US Policy towards Iran 2013). The weakening of the Iranian economy was perceived not only in terms of

forcing it to yield to the senders' demands but also to deprive the regime of the resources for improving its military nuclear programme in the future (Calabresi 2015). The immediate restoration of US-Iranian diplomatic relations was somewhat inconceivable, but it would 'open the window of opportunity,' e.g., in coordinating some activities in fighting the common enemy, ISIS (Esfandiary and Tabatabai 2015: 10-11). The perception of the US as the main enemy consolidated the conservative and radical political powers in Iran. Easing the hostility could boost the more liberal forces. Another goal articulated in the official documents was to protect the rights of Iranian citizens.

2. In relation to the sender, the plan of engagement in Iran was articulated in the National Security Strategy in 2010, as the country was perceived as a major security threat (National Security Strategy 2010). Obama wanted to achieve significant success in foreign policy in his second term of office. However, he could not count on domestic support for this solution, especially in Congress. Also, the level of public distrust towards Iran was high, due to the long-standing hostile policy towards Iran, perceived as one of the major foes of the US (Iran — Historical Trends 2018). The reestablishment of economic relations was not a goal which the US planned to achieve in the foreseeable future. It was a significant difference between the transatlantic allies.
3. In relation to the international system, enhancing the NPT regime was one of the most critical factors for the US (National Security Strategy 2010). The sanctions were also tailored to serve as a game changer in the situation in the entire Middle East region. The Americans wanted to prevent an arms race and to protect their major allies, Israel, and Saudi Arabia (US Policy towards Iran 2013). They also aimed at constraining Tehran's ambitions to broaden its influence in the region. Iran's support for Bashar al-Assad in Syria and engagement in the civil conflict in Yemen were perceived as dangers. The most important aim was to deter Iran from actively supporting terrorist organisations, e.g., Hezbollah or Hamas.

## Creation of co-leadership

The credibility and strength of a leader determine the effectiveness of international cooperation. A leader must be ready to pay the economic and political costs of sanctions. The ability to organise international cooperation is also essential. A leader must convince partners with different national interests to adopt the plan and try to arrange some compensation for the losses that the sanctions usually cause for those engaged in trade with the sanctioned state—that is, the target. In the case of reluctance, the leader uses the available pressure tools to enforce the desired tactics. In the case of sanctions on Iran, we assume that the United States and the EU jointly provided leadership on the imposition of international sanctions, as they complemented each other's abilities and had the same main goal.

Nevertheless, it should be stated that the EU finally adopted the US strategy of dealing with Iran for several reasons. Beginning in 2002, when the international community learned about the fuel enrichment complex in Natanz, there was an observable change of attitude toward American sanctions on the part of the EU (Patterson 2013:137). After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, EU policymakers were concerned that Iranian nuclear facilities could be the next target as George W. Bush included Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, in the "axis of evil" (De Galbert 2015). To avoid that scenario, they discussed the option of imposing sanctions. However, when Iran declared its readiness to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the US administration rejected the proposal, which was proof of its reluctance to use only the diplomatic tools favoured by the Europeans (Kaussler 2014).

The Iranian authorities believed that maintaining a dialogue with the so-called EU3—France, Germany, and the UK—would prevent a potential American attack (Heradstveit and Bonham 2007: 425-33). The EU3 managed to work out a common standpoint, despite their different policy goals (Youngs 2006). In 2003, they proposed economic incentives for Iran in exchange for a cessation of the enrichment of uranium and the implementation of the Additional Protocol (with *additional* tools for verification) to its IAEA comprehensive safeguards agreement (Cronberg 2017: 249). The negotiations were

strengthened by putting them in the framework of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Not only did it enhance the political significance of the negotiations, but it also made the proposed package of economic incentives more robust, especially as far as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement was concerned (Adebahr 2017). On 15 November 2004, the EU-3 signed the Paris Agreement with Iran (Communication dated 26 November 2004). However, the parties could not reach an understanding on the issue of whether Iran had a right to conduct uranium enrichment. Despite the incentives package proposed by the European negotiators, it was evident that the diplomatic dialogue had not produced any noteworthy progress, even though Europe had intensified its economic relations with Iran (Roudsari 2007).

Another major issue that led to the EU comply with the US strategy towards Iran was the intense campaign of the delegates of the Treasury and State Departments. They talked with the authorities of European companies, notably the financial institutions, presenting the risk of maintaining business activities in Iran, in terms of becoming the target of US secondary sanctions. Many European economic entities yielded to this pressure, and the US Treasury fined those who resisted. By mid-2007, the significant withdrawal of European firms, banks, and insurance companies from Iran could be seen. The said was unavoidably transferred to the level of European governments — e.g., Chancellor Angela Merkel adopted a strategy to discourage German enterprises from opposing the American plan towards Iran (Lohmann 2016: 938-9). The situation was quite similar to the one in 1996, but this time the Europeans did not protest; on the contrary, the outcomes of the US campaign paved the way for the imposition of unilateral sanctions on Iran by the EU, coordinating them with the American coercive measures (Pieper 2017: 103). Because of that, some scholars claim that the US, as the hegemon, practically forced the EU to adopt the tough strategy (Lohmann 2016; Pieper 2017). However, the EU's motives should not be confused with its actions. While it is true that American pressure made the European countries impose sanctions on Iran, in fact, it was also a convenient tool for the E3, as they could continue their negotiations with Tehran from a position of strength.

In June 2005, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was reluctant to negotiate with the West, won the presidential elections. It was

clear that using incentives without the threat of sanctions would not be effective in this case. Imposing them was only possible in the framework of the broad cooperation of the major actors. That was why the Europeans referred to the full scope of measures of “effective multilateralism” indicated in the European Security Strategy (ESS) from 12 December 2003. In 2005, the E3 leaders assured President Bush that they would follow the primary goal to stop the nuclear threat from Iran. The US was also ready to mitigate its standpoint: the Americans gave up their postulate of Iran, completely stopping its uranium enrichment as a precondition to negotiations (Lohmann 2016: 940-1). Although in 2005, the incentive was not attractive enough for Tehran, it was a sign for the EU that the US was ready to use diplomatic tools together with economic sanctions.

The failure of the diplomatic measures convinced the EU that the case should be brought before the UN Security Council (UNSC), according to the US postulate. The Europeans managed to gain the support of Russia (Iran’s principal security partner) and China (a major importer of Iranian oil) for their version of the resolution (Sauer 2017: 12). The first UNSC resolution, no. 1737, was passed in December 2006. It banned the supply of nuclear technology to Iran. Furthermore, the assets of individuals and organisations involved in the enrichment programme were frozen.<sup>1</sup> The UNSC resolutions diminish the political costs to the countries participating in the sanctions regime (i.e., accusations of violating international law, and, or undermining the autonomy of the target) and constitute an incentive for other countries to support the leaders’ policy (Drezner 2000: 73-83; Bapat and Morgan 2009: 1092-93).

The said did not mean the end of negotiations — they were conducted with new actors involved, in the formula P5+1 (the five permanent UNSC members plus Germany, with the growing role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy - EU HR). It marked the beginning of greater US engagement — a period in which the close cooperation of the EU and the US was visible.

The US administration aimed at forming a coalition on sanctions with its European partners in the framework of the

1 The UNSC further strengthened the sanctions by Resolutions 1747 from March 2007, 1803 from March 2008, and 1835 from September 2008 (UN Documents for Iran 2007, 2008)

UN. Traditionally, Great Britain has had a “special relationship” with the United States, and successive governments had become increasingly convinced of the need to intensify the sanctions, notably through the financial isolation of Iran. France became more eager to coerce Iran after Nicolas Sarkozy won the presidential election in 2007. He endeavoured to build closer relations with the United States, and he claimed that the Iranian nuclear programme posed a severe danger to international security. In Germany, the political landscape changed in 2005 with new Chancellor Angela Merkel. The German position on Iran was not as severe as that of the French, as Germany was Tehran’s biggest trading partner in the EU. At first, the Germans supported a two-track approach—diplomatic dialogue together with the threat of sanctions—but in 2009, when Guido Westerwelle took charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German government began to support the imposition of economic restrictions (Patterson 2013). While the southern countries of the EU—namely, Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain, and Italy—were more dependent on Iranian oil and reluctant to adopt this solution, their opinion carried less weight, as they were suffering more severely from the financial crisis and needed assistance from the EU, notably from Germany. Also, informal pressure from the United States, with its considerable influence over the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the financial system, should be taken into consideration (Martin 2015).

After adopting core elements of the US strategy toward the Iranian nuclear programme – sanctions within the framework of the UN and individual ones – the EU’s position as an impartial negotiator was weakened. Diplomats had to go along with the firm standpoint of George W. Bush’s administration (Kaussler 2014).

### **Co-leadership in action**

The transatlantic cooperation got a new impetus after Barack Obama took the office of President in 2009. He was determined to reach an agreement with Iran: he went further than his predecessors and wanted to apply a new strategy containing both incentives and sanctions. This dual-track approach was a real breakthrough in the US policy. The EU felt the reduction of hegemonic pressure. The new American approach had an

inclusive character; it constituted an invitation for real co-leadership in the transatlantic sanction coalition. However, US officials, among them the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, underlined the necessity to keep the tight sanctions regime (Lohmann 2016: 942).

The Americans stated that the negotiations would concern only the military nuclear programme and that other problems, like terrorism, stabilisation in the Greater Middle East, and human rights violations, would be excluded from the talks. Unexpectedly, France and Great Britain were against such an approach. They claimed the strict standpoint should be maintained, especially in the face of the presidential election in Iran in June 2009, when Ahmadinejad was re-elected. The fairness of the elections was questioned by a considerable number of Iranian citizens, due to the persecution of opposition members. The EU and the US condemned those actions of the Iranian authorities. Nevertheless, the allies decided to restart negotiations in October 2009, and the European opponents finally accepted the US strategy but remained unconvinced of it. Indeed, after reaching a preliminary agreement, Iran withdrew from it. Additionally, Iran failed to report its new centrifuge facility at Qom to the IAEA; it was a blatant violation of the Subsidiary Arrangements signed in 2003. These events created the impetus for the imposition of UNSCR 1929 in June 2010. This resolution expanded the arms embargo and put restrictions on financial and shipping enterprises relating to “proliferation-sensitive activities” (Jessen 2017). After it was voted on, the boosted coordination of the sanction policy could be observed.

In June 2010, the EU banned investments in the Iranian oil and gas sector, prohibited government support for trade, and restricted financial transactions. This decision was partly caused by American pressure on European firms to withdraw from the Iranian market (Adebahr 2014). On June 24, 2010, the US Congress passed The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, which enhanced restrictions on Iran. Obama issued executive orders relating to Iranian officials who had been responsible for serious human rights violations and imposed further sanctions against entities under the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 (Starr and Ighani 2016). However, the idea of simultaneous negotiations with Iran was not abandoned. In UNSC resolution 1929, the crucial role of the EU HR, Catherine Ashton, in terms of carrying on the P5+1

dialogue with Tehran, was underlined.<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, an increase in tensions between Iran and the West could be observed. In November 2011, an IAEA report was published emphasising the probable military dimension of Iran's nuclear programme. Then, on November 29, 2011, protesters attacked the British embassy in Tehran (Dehghan and Butt 2011). The US and EU authorities decided to devise a joint plan. Since military action was unthinkable, the discussion turned to choices for further sanctions. As Robert Keohane notes, reliable and durable cooperation assumes that each party obtains comparable gains, but that the losses should be shared equally (Keohane 1986: 5). In 2011, representatives of the US Treasury Department were sent to Europe to convince the governments to introduce an embargo on Iranian oil and more severe restrictions on the Iranian central bank (Lohmann 2016: 943). To minimise the costs of those sanctions, representatives of the US, the EU, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Japan, and South Korea held a meeting in Rome on December 11, 2011, to agree on the necessary measures to persuade Iran to restart negotiations. The US persuaded the Saudi diplomats to produce more oil to compensate for a possible EU oil embargo (Van de Graaf 2013: 155). However, it was still difficult for the EU to make a decision during the financial crisis, as European countries (especially from the South) were very much reliant on Iranian oil. Also, substantial Europe-based companies, like Royal Dutch Shell and Total, were linked with Iran through significant investments and contracts (Metelitsa and Asghedom 2015). Still, it was clear that the European governments would not defend corporate interests this time. The idea of Western cooperation proved to be crucial (Therme 2016: 148). Therefore, companies had to accept that the imposition of sanctions served vital national interests and, ultimately, it would be profitable for their business.

The constant threat of the US's secondary sanctions against companies operating in Iran was another significant factor of the EU policy, but it also influenced the other states' attitude to do business with Tehran. They had to consider the threat of

2 In the resolution, the leading role of EU HR in the negotiations is underlined in point 33.: "(UNSC) encourages the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to continue communication with Iran in support of political and diplomatic efforts to find a negotiated solution, including relevant proposals by China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States with a view to create necessary conditions for resuming talks, and encourages Iran to respond positively to such proposals" (Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions 2010).

penalties for not complying with specific US and EU prohibitions. Each country followed its fundamental national interests, but none could ignore the Western pressure. In 2012, Obama signed the National Defense Authorization Act to prevent transactions by foreign financial institutions with Iran's central bank, which severely affected the importers of Iranian oil. Soon after, the EU sanctions affected Iranian transportation and shipbuilding services, oil and gas technology, and investments in the petrochemical industry. The ban on insuring Iranian oil shipments (in this sector, the predominance of British companies was noticeable) was introduced. They also cut Iran off from the SWIFT banking network. The EU also decided to place an embargo on Iranian oil and natural gas, on petrochemical equipment and technology, and financial investments in this sector. Moreover, the European assets of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) were frozen, and trade in gold and other precious materials between Europe and the CBI was banned. Travel bans on 490 entities and 150 individuals connected with the Iranian nuclear programme were also introduced (Adebahr 2014). The European and American restrictions reinforced each other. The partners had a dominant position in the sanctioned spheres; hence, their cooperation strengthened the overall effectiveness of the sanctions (Van de Graaf 2013). They have severely affected the Iranian economy, and the demanding situation had been aggravated by the government's involvement in the conflict in Syria. Unemployment was rising among young people, and the internal opposition was strengthened. This made the authorities in Tehran more willing to compromise (Hurst 2016).

### **The JCPOA and the process of lifting sanctions**

Following the two-track approach, the P5+1 tried to work out a comprehensive deal with Tehran. It is worth underlining that this was a European idea, although it was the transatlantic cooperation that enabled this alternative. However, it was not ideal. Richard Nephew, who served as the main sanctions expert for the U.S. team negotiating with Iran from August 2013 to December, claimed the Europeans were anxious that the US wanted to reduce their share of the Iranian market by restoring trade relations with Tehran after the lifting of the sanctions. They considered it the main reason behind the pressure on European financial institutions. The Americans denied it, but distrust on this matter remained (Nephew 2018: 106).

Additionally, without consulting its European allies, from 2011, US diplomats conducted secret talks with Iranian representatives to establish the basic terms of a future agreement. They wanted to overcome the deadlock in the negotiations and to work out a deal in which “Iran would accept restrictions on its nuclear programme and transparency provisions that went beyond its existing legal obligations under the NPT, in exchange for a relaxation of the US and other international sanctions” (Nephew 2018: 121-2). They ensured the US acceptance of Iran’s enrichment of uranium for non-military purposes and worked out an outline for the future agreement. The agreement was ready in June 2013 (Jessen 2017).

Three factors can explain the secret character of the US-Iranian negotiations. First, during the P5+1 meetings, the divergences between France and the United States became apparent. The Americans applied pressure to conclude the negotiations by the end of March 2015, but French diplomats expressed the opinion that the provisions of the agreement were imprecise and not severe enough to prevent Iran from developing a military dimension to its nuclear programme.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bahout and Benjamin Haddad argue that this position was also because France felt marginalised when the separate US–Iranian meetings came to light (Bahout and Haddad 2015). Second, Obama’s administration wanted to conclude the agreement with Iran before the end of the President’s second term of office. The confrontational approach of the Republican majority in the US Congress, which wanted to jeopardise the agreement, was considered. The American diplomats have also been anxious about the need to compromise with the postulates of China and Russia. The election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who was recognised as a moderate reformer, in June 2013, created more opportunities to shape an agreement that could be accepted by all parties.<sup>4</sup> It led to the suspension of the first round of sanctions following the interim agreement negotiated in Geneva in November 2013 (Joint Plan of Action 2013). Subsequently, intensive negotiations took place in which the EU officials of the EEAS (*European External Action Service*) chaired and coordinated the central meetings of the politicians

- 3 One French diplomat concluded, “We spent more than 10 years talking, slowly setting the architecture of sanctions, of pressure, and defining principles of negotiations. Once we dismantle this, it won’t come back up. So we better get the best possible deal” (Bahout and Haddad 2015).
- 4 Hassan Rouhani was the chief Iranian negotiator with the EU-3 in 2003 and 2004 in talks, which led to concluding the Paris Agreement.

and experts, and were active in shaping the provisions of the final agreement (Jessen 2017).

On 14 July 2015, the P5+1, the EU HR, and Iran signed the JCPOA. Iran agreed to reduce by two-thirds its installed centrifuges, not to enrich uranium over a certain level during 15 years, and to reduce its existing stockpile. The IAEA must have regular access to all of Iran's nuclear facilities to monitor the country's compliance with the agreement. The JCPOA includes the assurance that the US and EU sanctions related to the nuclear programme will be lifted, as well as all UNSC resolutions concerning this issue. The condition was the fulfilment of the obligations by Iran. Before the implementation of the agreement, the UN, the EU, and the US coordinated the necessary work to lift sanctions. The Transatlantic Business Council, along with the American Chamber of Commerce for the EU, held a roundtable on the matter, and they discussed the procedures with EU and US officials. The guidelines were published jointly on Implementation Day, January 16, 2016 (Geranmayeh 2016). On that day, the IAEA stated that Iran had implemented all the required measures. Thus, the process of lifting the sanctions began. Obama signed an Executive Order revoking sanctions against Iran for pursuing a nuclear weapons programme. Moreover, the EU and the UNSC lifted most of their sanctions (Trans-Atlantic Business Council, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

However, US sanctions on Iran for terrorism, human rights abuses, and ballistic missiles remained in place. Because of this, it was not assured that the non-US citizens and companies who conduct business with still-sanctioned Iranian entities would avoid American penalties. It is particularly confusing for financial institutions, which could lose "their correspondent account with US banks" (The Iran nuclear deal 2015).

### **Trump's retreat from "effective multilateralism"**

Donald Trump, who won the presidential election in

5 The EU lifted its oil and gas embargo, sanctions on financial and banking transactions, and removed certain (but not all) individuals and entities from the list of those sanctioned. The arms embargo and restrictions on the transfer of ballistic missiles have remained in place for eight years. UNSC sanctions on conventional weapons that were linked to Iran's nuclear activities will remain in place for five years, while those on Iran's missile program related to nuclear activities expire in eight years (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action 2015).

November 2016, called the deal “disastrous” and stated that he would re-negotiate it (Tharoor 2016). On 13 October 2017, Trump refused to certify Iran’s compliance with the JCPOA; however, the IAEA and the other P5+1 countries expressed a different opinion. In a statement released the same day, the EU foreign ministers “encouraged the US to maintain its commitment to the JCPOA” (EU Statement 2017). EU officials undertook diplomatic actions to convince Congress not to break the deal, offering in return closer cooperation to hinder Iran’s activities in the Middle East and to stop its ballistic missile tests. The EU was ready to cooperate with the US to work out a supplemental agreement to the JCPOA about those issues (Rozen 2017). It seemed to be fruitful, as the deadline passed on December 12, 2017, and Congress had not taken any action. However, the EU’s diplomatic success was only temporary. On May 8, 2018, Trump declared the termination of the fulfilment of obligations of the JCPOA and re-imposed all sanctions against Iran. The EU declared a continuous commitment to the agreement (Katzman and Kerr and Heitshusen 2018). Iran had expected that the EU would bypass the EU’s financial system and pay for Iranian oil in euro to Iran’s central bank, and that the earlier investments would remain in place and new ones would flow in. However, after Trump’s announcement, some major European companies signalled that they might withdraw from Iran (Carbonnel 2018). Thus, the European Commission decided to implement the so-called Blocking Statute, which aims to protect firms that would not yield to the US’s sanction regime and continue their activities in Iran. It also pledged to enhance its cooperation with Iran (European Commission acts to protect 2018).<sup>6</sup> However, without the US’s support, it may not be enough to keep Iran in the JCPOA, and a common front on this issue with China and Russia may be harmful to transatlantic relations, already severely impaired. The EU engaged in all areas of implementing the JCPOA: lifting sanctions, verification, and civil nuclear cooperation. In 2015, The EU’s “Iran Task Force” launched programmes on cooperating on nuclear safety, energy, educational exchanges, enhancing trade, and investments (Windt 2017). In 2016, EU imports from Iran increased by 344.8 per cent, and EU exports increased by 27.8 per cent. The volume of FDI also grew, and big EU multinational

6 During her visit in Tehran in April 2016, Mogherini announced cooperation in numerous fields, including “economic relations, energy, environment, migration, drugs, humanitarian aid, transport, civil protection, science, and civil nuclear cooperation, as well as culture” (EU high-level delegation 2016).

corporations, including Total, Shell, Vodafone, Siemens, and many others, announced their will to enhance their presence on the Iranian market (Cimino-Isaacs and Katzman 2017). Nevertheless, under intense pressure from the US Department of the Treasury, many corporations have withdrawn their investments from Iran. Additionally, SWIFT (a Belgian company), decided to remove Iranian banks from its system again. Most of all, the Europeans were disappointed because of the contempt shown by Trump to their long-lasting diplomatic efforts (Adebahr 2017). The “effective multilateralism” promoted by the EU helped to bring major world powers to the negotiating table, and the active coordination facilitated the consensus and implementation of the deal. However, the development of events from the beginning of Trump’s presidency has shown how fragile this consensus can be. Both sides were ready to re-introduce sanctions in case Iran violated JCPOA, but the lack of transatlantic unity has led to the devaluation of economic sanctions — the alternative to military action — as a tool of foreign policy.

The European governments and the EU authorities did not have many means to ease the outcomes of the American financial sanctions. However, on January 31, 2019, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom announced the launch of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX). It opens a trade channel for European banks and for business with Iran, which was swamped by US sanctions. Thanks to INSTEX, Iranian exports to Europe can obtain credits that might be used to make purchases from European traders. It aims to supersede bank transfers, which might be subject to US sanctions (Rafati and Vaez 2019). This “special purpose vehicle” can be used mostly by small- and medium-sized firms that have no links to the US market. However, the project has not been brought into force yet (April 2019). It may be because of American pressure: although the US authorities stated it would not have a significant effect on their sanction policy, they condemned the European initiative, and the US sanctioned many European banks for maintaining transactions with Iran. Another factor that may undermine the European attachment to the JCPOA is the fact that the EU became more critical of the Iranian policy — notably connected with its ballistic missile programme and Tehran’s engagement in conflicts in Syria and Yemen (Peel 2019).

**Relative gains after the JCPOA — causes of the disruption of the**

## US—EU sanction cooperation

The US withdrawal from the agreement was caused by the perception that none of the goals of the policy connected with the deal had been met. Initially, the EU was satisfied with their accomplishment.

Leaving aside the economic losses, we can try to estimate the relative gains of the JCPOA for the US and the EU, considering each side's priorities. According to the EU leaders, the most important common goal—curtailment of the Iranian military nuclear programme—was fulfilled. In July 2016, one year after signing the JCPOA, the IAEA verified that Iran had implemented the deal (Verification and Monitoring 2016). However, the US Congress criticism and the announced withdrawal from the JCPOA refutes the statement on the achieved goal. It is the main explanation of the current transatlantic drift. As far as the enhancement of security in the region is concerned, according to the US allies in the Middle East, the Iranians can easily conduct their military programme in secret, despite the IAEA controls, and re-launch it after the JCPOA terminates. Trump fully agreed with the standpoint of Saudi Arabia and Israel (Guzansky and Shapir 2015; Gause 2016). These two countries, together with Egypt, are perceived as crucial allies in Trump's strategy for the Middle East. Since the JCPOA was agreed upon, Iran has performed several missile tests, and their frequency increased in 2017 (Iran Missile Milestones 2017). The US responded by imposing a new set of sanctions against the responsible entities and individuals. However, the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, underlined that these actions could not be considered violations of the JCPOA. Nonetheless, she censured Iran for them (Sharafedin and Fioretti 2016).

During the negotiations on the JCPOA, the issue of cooperation on fighting ISIS was not officially raised, but there was hope for common informal activities. In September 2014, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, stated that Iran would not join the American-led coalition. Anti-American rhetoric is still an essential factor in the legitimisation of the regime in Tehran (Esfandiary and Tabatabai 2015: 11). The EU did not conclude any agreement with Iran on this matter either (as Australia had done), but in the resolution of European Parliament, it was

indicated that “the EU and Iran face common enemies in the shape of ISIS/Da’esh (...); European Parliament welcomes Iran’s contribution to the fight against ISIS/Da’esh (...)” (Report on EU Strategy 2016).

As regards solving the problem of human rights violations in Iran, the efforts of both sides can be considered as a fiasco. The US and the EU continue to connect the sanctions with this issue, which means that they are not satisfied with the performance of the authorities in Tehran.

As far as restoring economic relations is concerned, we can state that the achievement of the US has been somewhat unthinkable. By contrast, the EU undertook the resilient efforts to restore them. However, most of the European companies that planned to open or re-open their business in Iran were also present in the American market, and they needed assurances that they would not be subjected to US sanctions. Furthermore, the Iranians were disappointed with the slow pace of regaining economic stabilisation, and they demanded the elimination of doubts about doing business in their country (Adebahr 2014). The discrepancies connected with the will and ability to obtain sound profits from economic cooperation with Iran significantly added to the fissure of the allies’ cooperation.

The EU countries were satisfied with the JCPOA as far as the priority issue in relation to Iran was concerned. Their main anxiety related to the US standpoint. The fact that the US did not substantially complete any of its goals caused dissatisfaction. However, we must acknowledge the fact that the primary condition of any positive outcome from the JCPOA is Iran’s compliance with the rules of the agreement. If this stipulation was not fulfilled, it would be difficult to observe any gains at all.

### **Concluding remarks**

The theoretical approaches help to understand the gains and difficulties, the opportunities, and the barriers to the collective relations of the partners in the policy toward Iran. That framework was useful for creating a full picture of the cooperation between the allies.

Referring to Keohane’s definition of cooperation, the EU was the

partner who adjusted its strategy to the preferences of the US. It occurred due to America's economic pressure on European enterprises. The curtailment of their activities in Iran facilitated the EU's decision to impose severe sanctions and coordinate them with the US plans. This change in the EU's policy was an example of the successful employment of the financial weapon, which was possible because of the US's hegemonic dominance in the global financial system. Additionally, the US shaped the rhetoric concerning Iran, portraying this state as a major threat to world peace. According to the elite theory, it deprived interest groups (i.e., Europe-based companies operating in Iran) of any lobbying power — the decision on sanctions was taken by particular governments and EU authorities. In this context, the determination of Barack Obama is also worth noting. Despite the reluctance of Congress and most of the public opinion, he continued negotiating and decided to sign the JCPOA. He imposed sanctions and then lifted them by executive orders to avoid a vote in Congress.

Nevertheless, the European countries also recognised the opportunities to accomplish their important goals: to eliminate the threat posed by the Iranian military nuclear programme and to ensure that economic relations could be conducted with Iran in the future, without the threat of US secondary sanctions. The Obama administration was able to continue the hard-line policy of George W. Bush, and thanks to the European engagement, the American diplomats had a considerable influence on the negotiations with Tehran.

As previously stated, just after concluding the JCPOA, it seemed that the EU countries had managed to obtain more benefits from the deal; however, it proved to be illusory because of the US's secondary sanctions policy, which constrained the engagement of European businesses in Iran. European hopes for any positive outcome of the cooperation with the US were summarily dashed after President Trump decided to withdraw from the JCPOA. Based on Axelrod's game theory, we can assume that confidence in the US's reliability as a trustworthy partner in foreign policy was shaken. It was harmful to the transatlantic alliance and its future common actions, notably in the case of coordinated sanctions.

As to whether the effectiveness of the sanctions through the cooperation has been enhanced, the answer is ambivalent. On

the one hand, the transatlantic partners managed to coerce Iran through isolating the country from international economic contacts. Together, they were successfully able to discourage the “black knights.” On the other hand, Trump’s renouncement of the JCPOA brought many negative consequences and undermined the previous common effort. What is more, the deteriorating economic situation in Iran has weakened the position of the political forces which were open to a dialogue with the West. The Iranian conclusion that the agreement was a mistake could be disastrous for regional security. It would also constrict attempts at Iranian-Western negotiations in the future, if not make both sides unwilling to take part at all.

Since the Iranian government has always perceived the US as its main adversary (and vice versa), and the US has maintained sanctions against Tehran for over 30 years, the US is widely recognised as the main initiator and manager of the economic restraints. Neither the Americans nor the Europeans were able to achieve any significant outcomes vis-à-vis sanctions against Iran alone. Cornelius Adebahr noted that during the whole course of negotiations, the EU HR was the “main contact point with regard to the nuclear file” for all other parties of the dialogue (Adebahr 2017). Negotiations were possible due to the cooperation of European countries (as well as the position of Russia and China in the framework of P5+1). “Effective multilateralism” based on UN rules, was also a vital component of the EU’s foreign policy, and it was also significant in the US strategy during the presidency of Obama (Léonard and Kaunert 2012: 473; Jentleson 2013: 99). However, it must be remembered that bilateral negotiations between the US and Iran also took place. As the divergences between these two states were the major obstacle to the agreement, their weight should not be underestimated. While it could be interpreted as a US success, it is doubtful it could have been achieved without comprehensive European support. Even though one may assume the US’s engagement of the EU was only instrumental, it was efficient as far as the JCPOA is concerned. The US wanted to achieve more, but for the European countries, the deal was the maximum gain.

In the context of Trump’s policy, the EU is worried about the extraterritoriality of US sanctions, and the Americans are concerned that the allies will be reluctant to impose them again if the deal is violated. They are afraid that the re-establishment

of economic relations would cause the Europeans to treat any Iranian misbehaviour as falling short of a breach of the agreement. It is worth noting that, paradoxically, American policy could strengthen Iranian conservatives and weaken the position of President Rouhani. If he is not able to fulfil his promise that the Iranian economy will recover after the lifting of sanctions, he will be confirming the predictions of the Iranian opponents of the JCPOA (Jentleson 2013). The Americans were not very willing to improve economic relations with Iran; for them, security matters are far more critical. In Washington, the possibility of Iranian hegemony in the region is perceived as a severe threat. These differences in perceiving the problem on both sides of the Atlantic after the US withdrawal from the deal led to a return to the situation in the 1990s when the EU used diplomatic negotiations, and the US preferred hard power tools, which proved to be an ineffective strategy. Trump's policy provoked a power struggle, which is harmful to the transatlantic alliance. Iran could take advantage of these divergences and choose not to obey the regulations of the JCPOA. In the current circumstances, the previous joint action that led to the JCPOA might turn out to have been a significant failure and a waste of time and money.

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# International Community's Approach to Western Balkans: In Search of Stability and Security

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**Janez Juvan**

*Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia.*

*janez@juvan.si*

*ORCID: 0000-0002-1366-0177*

**Key words:**  
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## **Abstract**

*The article presents research on the international community's engagement in the countries of the Western Balkans in the past and their possible approach in the future. The focus of our research is on the functioning of mechanisms through which the international community performs certain tasks in the region. These interventions are primarily political, in the form of conferences, political programmes, consultations, pressures and continuous persuasion. Economic initiatives follow afterwards. By using different reform approaches, international institutions try to improve cooperation with the European Union (EU) and countries such as the USA, Russia, Turkey and China. Our research attempts to identify possible methods and new solutions for individual cases of conflict in Western Balkans countries, especially where the international community is actively involved. On this basis, we created a more holistic approach. The application of these measures could make the necessary reforms of the future easier. Our approach emphasises all the elements of security that are essential to the stability of the region and for the prevention of conflicts in the future.*

## Introduction

At the end of the Cold War, socialist countries started implementing a more modern form of political system, that included multiple parties and an evolving civil society which sparked simultaneous processes of democratisation and the creation of democratic state institutions. For these reasons the political elites of the international community, the European Community (EC), US and Soviet Union, sought to restore new mutual political, economic and social relations with individual countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. Democratisation processes were also taking place in former Yugoslavia, however they varied from republic to republic. They were subverted by inter-republican tensions and inter-ethnic frictions (Hayden 2013). Political and civil institutions in Western Europe and other world centres did not respond adequately to the coming threats of armed conflicts in Yugoslavia (Power 2013). There were concrete warnings of a possible war, but they were ignored by the international community or were even openly underestimated. Later, many wondered how the international community could so easily have left the events in Yugoslavia to unfold onto a course of unrestrained war and violence. The answer is simple: this happened because at least in the beginning the events did not in any way jeopardise Europe and the wider international community (Mojzes 2011). Europe and international institutions also did not have security concepts prepared. In addition, during the same period, the international community was intensively engaged with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the unification of Germany and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, all of which implied a search for a new meaning of NATO. All of this led to a lack of interest toward events in Yugoslavia. They also did not have adequate qualified experts who could react to the violence triggered at those moments (Cohen and Lampe 2011). It was a period of relative peace in Europe as no regional armed conflicts existed in Europe since the intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary (1956) and in Czechoslovakia (1968). Those warnings from experts who knew how to read between the lines from the data obtained and who warned about the high probability of armed conflicts in Yugoslavia, were quickly removed from the daily agenda of political talks and media news. The military security concepts of that period were placed in the context of the Cold War, which were slowly becoming obsolete

(Hough 2004). Analyses with serious warnings of possible violent conflicts were being presented publicly, but no one was capable of forecasting inter-ethnic clashes, concentration camps, mass killing of civilians, burned down and destroyed towns, thousands of raped women and murdered children, let alone the Serbian genocide of Bosniaks (Donia and Fine Jr. 1995). None of this was foreseen in the security documents of the international community for wider Europe in the mid-1980s. The underestimation of previous warnings and the horrifying reality of massive massacre in Yugoslavia later led to the modernisation of security concepts within the wider European community (Juncos 2013; Booth 2007). These kinds of blockades when resolving major violent conflicts occur not only because of different interests within countries in conflict, but also because of the very diverse interests of the international community, which often does not have a common approach to resolving conflicts nor the means for a rapid action to prevent violence. This paper attempts to present a new approach to understanding the necessary measures and priorities that the international community should implement within the region in the future.

## **Methods**

A combination of different methods was used in our research. We studied and analysed the content of a variety of sources, from expert literature, research reports, documents of international organisations, international agreements, examples of good practice, books, films, videos and sound recordings, to memories of the event from its actors, etc. Practices in non-Western countries, where similar problems have been dealt with in the past, served as a starting point for our analysis. The analysis and synthesis of the existing material was supplemented by our own research findings, which in the empirical part are based primarily on interviews and the method of participating as an observer through cooperation with research and expert groups in peace projects for the Western Balkans region. In addition to secondary sources, we used interviews with individual participants in peace processes in countries of the Western Balkans. We conducted interviews with 24 respondents for our research. They were selected after preliminary discussions with them. The sample included members of the international community,

people from different nations in the region, members of civil society, representatives of official institutions, political representatives in the region and military and security experts. The questionnaire used in interviews consisted of topics such as: international community efforts in the region, finding solutions to eliminate the blockade of Kosovo in relation to its neighbours, the question of recognition of the Macedonian name and the procedure for its invitation to the European Union (EU), the possibility of Montenegro's entry into the EU as the next country from the region, necessary democratisation of Serbia as an important stakeholder for stability and security in the region, and what forms of assistance from the international community would be most appropriate for long-term reform processes in the region. We evaluated the work of the international community in ensuring security, political, economic, social and cultural stability in the region. We also used the method of analysing policies in terms of designing, implementing and evaluating the policies of peace processes. Policy analysis, combined with the analysis of the political networks operating in the region, is the basis for a successful strategy for planning relevant policies and the preparation of long-term stability and security in the region. The variables we have focused on include: inter-ethnic conflicts, the rule of law, the country's entry into the EU, the importance of long-term security in the region, peace processes and the goals of the international community, conflict resolution, political and economic stability, human rights protection and regional cooperation. The analysis was carried out by comparing existing successful examples and already established good practices in the wider international community. Of course, our active participation in individual events was also very important to us in the field of our research work. Interview responses are particularly critical of poorly implemented actions already taken under partial regional agreements. Defining cooperation in this heterogeneous international community, with the aim of finding consensus solutions and putting them into practice, was certainly one of the most important goals of our research. With experience and observations acquired through research, what might be the actual aspects of the possible contribution of different partners within the international community to achieve common goals in the region? In the past, it has often been shown that various international interest groups and foreign political parties have exercised their support for local political actors who favour them. Such practices become very

adverse to effective reforms in the region. After conducting 24 interviews, this proved to be the fact. Thus, we have been able to construct an approach for conflict resolution, from the point of view of stability and security, and to clarify whether the approach is sufficiently effective to be implemented with the goal of integrating the five Western Balkan countries into full EU membership.

### **Meeting the problem — or what went wrong in the Western Balkans**

The wars in former Yugoslavia have changed the security concepts of the European Community. In fact, EC was forced to change its foreign and security policy. Security was directly linked to a response to EC foreign policy activity and its active participation. Or as Stefano Bianchini (S. Bianchini, interview, 28 April 2017) put it: "If you do not do anything, it does not mean that nothing will happen to you. It rather means that you cannot expect anything good for yourself if you have done nothing good to somebody else. If you do not mediate peace in former Yugoslavia, you will not have peace at home." The security concepts in the EC were directed threats from abroad, especially military and in some cases terrorist and ecological threats. The concepts of a threat from an ethnic community within a state were not even debated within the European Community. Nobody in their right mind thought that members of one nation would decide to exterminate their neighbours from their homes using genocide (Rozman-Clark 2014; Hagan 2003). The international community was by no means prepared for it in its European Community backyard, even in its worst dreams. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of the international community is in some ways understandable (E. Petrič, interview, 8 September 2017). The events had simply surpassed the imagination of the military and security experts who had been dealing with these issues on a daily basis (Hitchcock 2003).

Today, after years of independence of all former Yugoslav countries, it has become obvious that small countries can not only survive but also can be equal interlocutors on a formal level in international relations and processes (Z. Živković, interview, 11 November 2017). The greatest danger in the region at the present is the further division of countries. The ambition of individual parts of states to secede is still present,

for example the secession of the Republic of Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which would surely be followed by the Croatian part. The Serbian part of Kosovo has similar ambitions and the Albanian majority communities/regions in North Macedonia do not see themselves as part of the home country when interethnic disputes rise to the boiling point. Due to these potential ongoing changes with borders, the inaction of the international community is all the more problematic, since secessions can lead to examples of “unwanted practices”, which many other ethnic groups in multinational European countries would happily like to exploit (N. Arbatova, interview, 24 December 2017). The security concept after the break-up of former Yugoslavia must become an integral plan for all of Europe and a part of the stability of the wider region. Excuses such as, “*it only concerns those Balkan people down there in the south*” should never be used again (Cohen in Lampe 2011).

It is not easy to prescribe pre-designed solutions. At the same time, the degree of willingness to find compromises among the people of former Yugoslavia proved to be extremely small. Peace agreements such as Dayton and Ohrid, the Stability Pact and the Ahtisaari’s Plan for Kosovo, Nimetz’s proposal for the name of North Macedonia, as well as subsequent reform proposals that made it possible for states to bid for EU membership, give us a realistic picture: positive changes even in such difficult situations are possible. In any case, the security elements in the region as desired by the international community do not only include the absence of armed conflicts but also the functioning of the rule of law, the provision of human rights, and the cultural dialogue between different communities in the region (L. D. Frčkoski, interview, 10 December 2016). Poverty, social exclusion, refugee migration, unemployment, organised crime and the unreliable globalisation of the economy all pose serious problems for the region. This causes great apathy and an inability for inhabitants of the region to deal with the situation on their own, which leads to mass emigration of young and qualified people from the region (Vesnić-Alujević 2012). The international community does not know how to change this course of events. Political elites in the region skilfully exploit this indifferent and dormant situation and as a result they can easily divert all financial sources, resources, and international assistance to their own benefit (S. Mesić, interview, 22 November 2016).

Certainly, developments towards Euro-Atlantic integration are important for the stability of the region. In the military field, NATO membership directly ensures the prevention of armed conflicts in the region and participation in common goals to guarantee the security of the wider alliance. Joining the EU, Euro-Atlantic integration and NATO provide motives, but these are often more conditioned by impulses from the outside than part of orderly processes from the inside. Looking at the situation as a summary of the effectiveness of the international community, North Macedonia has fulfilled all the formal requirements to become a candidate for NATO membership, and is still in the waiting room. The essence of the Ohrid Agreement was national consensus for common policy towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Mirko Pejanović draws attention to the slowness of EU enlargement and Euro-Atlantic processes in the region, which is particularly reflected in the deepening of interethnic conflicts in BiH and North Macedonia. He says these two countries should be admitted to NATO with no unnecessary preconditions. BiH highlights the importance of NATO membership and EU integration. The Western Balkans often pay the price for the ambiguity of the broader geopolitical situation, and in such a situation, a great deal of effort must be invested in development, security and the rule of law (M. Pejanović, interview, 13 February 2017). In the Western Balkans no one readily admits their guilt. There is no catharsis for the consequences of their actions. It is therefore important that the new generation does not fall into the traps and snares of new nationalism. Only in this way would they overcome the continuing conflicts, triggered primarily by individual nationalist movements, whose sole interest is to stay in power.

In order to secure the conditions of EU membership, Serbia will probably have to join the NATO military alliance before that. All neighbouring countries are already members, or like North Macedonia and BiH, are in the accession phase. Serbia has been a major generator and instigator of wars, violent conflicts and instability in the region in the past, so some EU member states, will not recognise its neutral status, and agree on its NATO membership. At the same time, Serbian membership for the EU will guarantee an adequate security situation in the region and be an assurance that Serbia does not bring with it unresolved security problems. Today, when EU membership is

a long way off for Serbia and its politicians manifestly claim that NATO membership is out of the question, these processes are still in their infancy. In the past, similar opposition was characteristic of Montenegro, but the country is now a member of NATO. A large part of EU member states will not want to risk unpredictable regional disagreements and will expect Serbia to join NATO as a condition for EU membership. It is therefore necessary to open up a constructive debate on this very sensitive topic. Consequently, technical assistance in this security area is also a very important part of the new model of international community action in the Western Balkans.

**Toward a new model — Creating a proposal for a new approach of the international community's action in the countries of Western Balkans to achieve long-term stability and security**

EU enlargement is unlikely to be realistic in the coming years. Therefore, constituting an appropriate security concept in the Western Balkans will be an important factor for the countries in the region. With consideration to the secessionist tendencies of some states, it clearly indicates that the EU is not joining glue, but a broader common interest in integration and cooperation and not just a mutual conflict management tool. The EU and its closure of borders is a policy that does not contribute to stability in the region. New security elements for the stability of the region and for the prevention of conflicts in the future will be presented in this paper.

Social, labour, pension, legal and health security for citizens are serious problems of the region. People often do not have basic health services provided and there is a lack of medical devices and medicines. Pension systems do not work and the treasuries and funds have been emptied. Not enough new jobs are being created to ensure resources for welfare state expenses. Education and school systems are often subject of political decisions and not of systemic long-term solutions which would lead to a more competitive society based on knowledge and skills (Perry 2015).

We defined the weaknesses and strengths of the measures taken by the international community. By comparing them, we have attempted to choose those methods of work that have a greater chance of success in the future. We analysed

the prevailing methods of work and the measures that the international community should take to bring its work closer to the inhabitants in the region, all those who are also directly affected by their engagement. We suggest a new model of conflict resolution for the Western Balkans.

### EU Membership as part of the Security Concept

On a map of Europe, a part of the Western Balkans is a grey area enclosed by EU member states. The long-term perspective is membership into this group, whereby the EU can advise and directly help with technical assistance, which is also the most effective. Countries of the region will have to earn membership on their own with work and diligence. For those countries in which membership will be very difficult to achieve, such as Kosovo (5 EU member states do not recognise Kosovo as a sovereign country), they will need a solid regional commitment to cooperation. There is a constant underestimation of the region by Western political elites. But the level of democratisation within society and individual countries has not increased greatly (Jović 2018).

We can describe the security, the social as well as the political situation in the Western Balkans, as a status quo. The international community is keeping the situation calm by implementing individual measures and promises, but is not proactive in current events. Representatives of certain countries such as Germany, Austria, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, Sweden and Turkey come to the region and try to resolve individual problems through direct negotiations with political players from the Western Balkan countries. No one, at least at the operational level is seriously concerned with the region as a whole, which was confirmed by US expert V. Perry as well as expert N. Arbatova from Russia. Regardless of their differences regarding the definition of conflict, both agree, along with many others, that there is no agreed upon approach to the functioning of the region by the international community. The international community has its key people deployed to other more important and more pressing conflicts at the moment.

## Peace Processes as a Real Possibility for the Future Development of the Region

Studies of peace processes and implementing security concepts through peace improvements requires complex planning methods, flexible ways of implementing development and skilful negotiators for executing the proposed solutions that are accepted (Galtung 1996). Wars take place on a daily basis, making people flee from the violence and consequently they emigrate. People are killed, they are exposed to pressure, torture, enslavement, rape, and imprisonment. Their basic human rights are encroached on and they are deprived of their right to education and personal development (Paris 2004; Webel and Galtung 2007). War is definitely one of the most burning and dangerous components of instability and has a direct impact on the integrity of individual states originating from the former Yugoslavia, which are not members of the EU yet. The countries are politically weak, their economic power is small, and they have an unstable legal order. Conflicts within one country are transferred to another country and spread over a large part of the region (P. Sokolova, interview, 28 November 2016). Political and cross-party dissensions in Serbia have a direct impact on the Republic of Srpska in BiH, which in turn causes an additional unstable power ratio at the federal level. Croatia, through its interference in the regulation of relations in BiH through Bosnian Croats, also directly influences the functioning of the executive power at the federal level (V. Perry, interview, 23 January 2017). In North Macedonia, stability is often directly dependent on the situation in Kosovo and the influence of extremist and nationalist groups, and on the readiness of the Albanians in North Macedonia to work with the Macedonians in the governance of the country (S. Ordanoski, interview, 16 February 2017). The autocratic political regime in Montenegro is the reason behind the lack of any functioning and orderly democratic institutions in the country. This makes them a very unlikely candidate for membership in the EU (F. L. Altmann, interview, 13 January 2017). The lack of social, cultural, scientific, and political elites affects the slow and often completely inadequate development of individual countries. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect comparable development to those European regions that did not experience wars (S. Šelo Šabić, interview, 26 January 2017).

The countries in the region have formally depoliticised the military. In reality, it is a frequent instrument of political leverage and is often used for intimidation. Due to low living and working conditions, there are systemic problems with personnel. In the field of defence, they face challenges for which they are often not prepared for or for which they are under-equipped and undertrained. The depoliticisation of the military in the Western Balkans is not something that would be self-evident and clear to all. On the contrary, a great amount of work is needed for civilian parliamentary scrutiny, a democratic role, and loyalty to the law and the constitution. This is a lengthy process and it is especially difficult because political leaders in the region see the army as a means of direct use for internal political problems. The involvement of the military and civil peacekeeping institutions is not only a one-time intervention, but a process that must be based on proven experience and a professional approach (Garb 2016).

#### Multilateral Cooperation by the Wider International Community in the Region

Some very large and often key conflicts still exist in the region, which the international community causes with its initiatives (Glenny 2012; Erin 2015). These conflicts manifest in the form of various unverified peace processes and developmental projects, involving “international experts” who do not have the slightest notion or previous experience on the matter, region and problems (V. Bojičić - Đelilović, interview, 21 April 2017). The international community often negotiated and agreed with individuals who do not by any chance meet democratic standards and do not give any assurance that they will fulfil the agreements made on behalf of the community they represent (Holbrooke 1999). As a result, a large amount of international funds was misused or simply used for the personal interests of cliques and individual political elites, which in reality is more reminiscent of organised crime. Thus, it is becoming more and more difficult for the international community to justify the funds earmarked for the region (J. Rupnik, interview, 22 April 2017).

First and foremost, the international community could find more competent people to join its tasks. Over the years, many active international actors have not had sufficient

skills to work in the Western Balkans. At the same time, the international community and its institutions did not check whether people sent to the region actually had the necessary qualifications to work in the specific circumstances that were needed considering the specific situation in the region. Thus, research and interviews have shown that special training and testing of experts sent to the Western Balkans is needed. These preparations could be carried out effectively with the involvement of state institutions, civil society and individual NGOs from the region itself, and with the involvement of local experts assisting on specific problems that would be addressed. In fact, in the past, there has been a considerable shortage of qualified experts who would be able to draw up plans for the monitoring and involvement of the international community in these extreme circumstances. Interviewees from the Western Balkans all agree on the need for more engagement of qualified professionals and experts from the region. While foreign interviewees claim that what the international community has to offer to the region is actually a limit for professionally staffed, financial, political, and operational support. The lack of qualified international experts shows that there is no greater pressure from countries of the international community and also there are no demands of their civil and political society to take appropriate action in the Western Balkans. Today, Europeans are preoccupied with their own problems, such as environment, terrorism and migration issues, and above all with their own security and future. It could also include examples of good practice and their transfer to the level of enterprises and civil society. The effect of the Berlin Process is reflected as a positive and bright perspective for the future, whereby a part of the programme includes the exchange and socialising of young people. This process guides the possibility of future integration of the region into the EU through gradual stages of development and acceptance of membership conditions (Vogel 2018). This includes the physical gathering of young people that goes beyond digital social networks. Young people from the region get to know their peers from other parts of Europe and they jointly build networks of connections for the future. These changes and movements are created for overcoming ethnic differences, which have often been the cause of separation (Rupnik 2011; Mowle and Sacko 2007).

It is extremely difficult to obtain written commitments, official documents and constructive strategic plans on how

to implement reforms from regional politicians. It is almost illusory to expect them to explain how all these commitments will be upheld, implemented and respected. In the past, the international community expected the region to carry out the following commitments very quickly (E. Busek, interview, 13 October 2016): the adoption of key constitutional reforms to democratise society; a strict commitment to the rule of law; the construction of functioning state institutions; socio-economic reforms and care for a welfare state; cooperation with international financial institutions; and the elimination of ethnic nationalist interests as the primary leverage of local politicians.

It is therefore necessary to re-implement reforms in the direction of state institutions and to achieve the efficiency of management, governance and state control with all the constituent elements. The integration and direct involvement of the international community at this point is necessary because this is the only way objectives such as the rule of law and socio-economic reforms to ensure the functioning of the welfare state can be achieved in a normal time period (Sebastián 2014).

#### Introducing Key Reforms as Part of a New Model of Action by the International Community

Introducing reforms is difficult in an environment where, even after the last wars, a very strong resistance to change exists. Obstacles are also caused by many recommendations and lots of advice from different centres of political power. Often the recommendations and instructions on what is needed to be done are very abstract (Štiblar 2007). Nevertheless, our research has identified some of the levers that could allow the reforms to make key changes step by step. We have divided them into several work areas within the framework of a new model of action for the Western Balkans. The first step is undoubtedly regional integration, where some factors have priority. These include transport and energy, entrepreneurship and the economy, sport, culture, social assistance programs, institutional integration, cooperation in meeting EU requirements for legislative alignment, constructively addressing the issue of interstate borders and resolving wartime disputes.

Field	Activity	Who
<b>Regional Integration</b>	Infrastructure	<b>International Financial Institutions for Development. EU Regional Development Programmes.</b>
	Trade, economy, tourism and investments	
	Education, science, research and the environment	
	Institutional renovation	
	Culture and sports	
<b>Required reforms in the region</b>	The rule of law	<b>EU programmes for the region in the framework of technical assistance. Local offices of international institutions to assist countries.</b>
	Public administration reform	
	Business environment, fiscal policy, financial institutions	
	Competitiveness and the labour market	
	Social, health and pension systems	
	Promoting civil society	

## Regional Integration

Regional integration was singled out as one of the main principles for the future of the Western Balkans at the conference organised within the framework of the Berlin Process in the summer of 2017 in Trieste. Non-EU member states do not have a clear enough perspective on membership, which is why in the meantime, their engagement can be directed towards strengthening important areas in which the region can achieve common progress (M. Pejanović, interview, 13 February 2017). The possibilities of joint cooperation are as follows:

- a) Infrastructure (high-speed and regional roads, railways, telecommunications, water resources, agricultural areas, energy and environmental management etc.) Each country plans independently, which is understandable because of the conditions of financing. In any case, projects at the regional level could be placed in a common matrix, gradually obtaining system interoperability, thereby improving their performance, having more economical maintenance and operating at lower costs. The region is unattractive in terms of business investments, which are more likely to go to Central Europe or the Black Sea. The manufacturing of products, which will then be exported from the region, will surely return after the modernisation of the region and the appropriate infrastructure is implemented.
- b) Trade, the economy, tourism and investments have also been areas of separate regulation within the individual state for more than two decades. Mutual agreements exist but due to the poor economic situation in the entire region, individual states do not compete with one another and do not create a common environment, where initiatives would succeed on the basis of performance and innovation. They are instead controlled by local monopolies of the state, which often protect their unfair, uncompetitive economy and protect the privileges of the ruling elites. The Western Balkans can become a common economic environment during the interim period of entry into the EU, making it easier to set up international funds for entrepreneurial economic cooperation initiatives in the region, with which they could overcome local barriers.
- c) Culture and sport are linked to the region's tradition and exchange of events, professional and scientific foundations and a direct economy related to activities. These include competitions, festivals and events. Regional associations are members of international associations. Major cultural events often have a multinational and international context as well as content. By nature, these include the basic elements of regional integration. It is necessary to develop a strategy where the inhabitants of the region will see their participation in a multicultural environment

as a civic interest. The spiritual component is an important part of the formation in the wider region, where values and tolerance towards difference are shaped, within the cultural exchange.

- d) Education, science, research and the environment are social areas, which are always put to the side when planning. Because of such neglect one of the worst consequences for the region is the emigration of young people and older qualified people. It is not just about finding work, but also professional and intellectual challenges that make people move and look for new opportunities. Skilled people are leaving, because the region simply does not allow them to realise career ambitions and to develop personal potential. This is crucial for the future and functioning of the previous three elements for regional integration. The EU and the international community have developed models to promote all these activities. Such knowledge could be transferred to the region via the establishment of regional offices of already existing institutions operating in the international environment.
- e) Institutional renovation can be a continuous and gradual process for the democratisation of society, although reality shows completely different situations. Democracy without a demos is a condition of the system where all the institutions of the state exist, and the public administration is completed with all the necessary offices and yet the entire functioning of the state does not meet democratic standards one bit. The international community has a large number of offices, bureaus, envoys and semi-official representatives in the region and at the same time cooperates in concrete projects. Key objectives must exist for the renewal of state institutions such as justice, intelligence services, fiscal, health and pension systems, in which the international community must set up and at the same time prepare a thorough cooperation and assistance plan. When defining which institutions of the state do not function, help from a developed civil society is very important.
- f) A functioning security policy is of utmost importance and must be strategically planned together, both by the international community and Western Balkan countries. Although Yugoslavia literally disintegrated

in the war, the change in local geopolitics has led to the fact that the region should take up regional security issues together. Mass migrations, terrorism, environmental issues, and the continually recurring threats of local armed conflicts are a clear signal to the region that their political elites should establish regional cooperation with their experts. The problem lies in the fact that the states are burdened with national issues and within this context, neighbours are seen as part of their problem rather than a solution. This is reflected in the increased re-arming of Serbia and Croatia, where the rivalry of the United States and Russia is certainly taking place in the background. This must be overcome, otherwise regional cooperation on key security issues cannot be achieved.

### The Goals of the New Model for the International Community

There are serious problems for the future of the Western Balkans regarding blockades and failure to respect parliamentary systems, the lack of legal order, the defencelessness of individual social groups and inaccessibility to work, healthcare services, social benefits and pension insurance rights. Social protests are often misused for political interests<sup>1</sup>. Failure to implement socio-economic reforms, which have been the focus of the international community and its policies towards the region, have led to significant resistance to political elites, with mass protests in BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia. Most of the blame for failure in reform processes is on the side of local elites. Local elites have used the stagnant period for their own benefit, and they have paid no attention to any required reform. The international community, however, made extensive demands and at the same time was not systematically consistent in implementing its own reform principles and decisions (S. Bianchini, interview, 28 April 2017). The ways of introducing reforms were incomplete experiments that excluded entire segments of populations.

1 These civil society protests have also moved the international community forward, seeking to take a more active role. The concrete results of this multi-faceted cooperation were the elections in North Macedonia in December 2016. Everyone acknowledges that civil society has set new standards for combating and resisting abuse of power, and yet protests still give hope for future reforms (S. Ordanoski, interview, 16 February 2017).

In introducing reforms, the international community has bypassed the involvement of civil society and even parliaments. All this took place at the level of international officials and local politicians in the region. Excluding such a wide range of social control, parliaments and civil society, there was no policy pressure against the non-implementation of reforms (V. Teršelič, interview, 15 October 2016). But resistance by the citizens has exposed the following important problems: individual cases of state capture, an example of the very serious failure in the operation of fundamental institutions, is the biggest problem in the region; the passivity and inactivity of international institutions in the region established with the purpose of helping to set the region on its own feet; the radicalisation of religious oppositions and involvement of foreign countries regarding regional religious problems and conflicts; overturning the European migration flows solutions to individual countries in the region; and uncertainty about the status of membership in the EU and thus causing opposition from citizens towards EU integration.

Regional blockades at all levels of institutional decision-making and governance can be prevented with international initiatives. The EU should set up the following basic support with technical assistance for the operation of institutions of the countries in the region in cooperation with other international stakeholders:

- a) The functioning of the rule of law. Without this basic postulate for each state, it is not possible to implement any serious changes in the direction of the rule of law. This is why the establishment of professional teams that can advise, assist and make proposals by the EU is an important element in the systematic training of countries for democracy. However, there is a problem at the purely operational level when high-level representatives of the EU and institutions of the international community have good relations with autocratic politicians, who attack the constitutional order, laws, and judicial systems. International institutions give local authorities legitimate acknowledgment by tolerating these deviations.
- b) Public administration reform. This is something that needs time and democratic tradition. The abuses in this area are numerous in autocratic regimes. By employing loyal people for the elites, without

competitive services and with a complete lack of professional supervision over the functioning of public administration, abuse is a daily phenomenon. States budgets are being shaken by excessive and ineffective public administration, which directly threatens the country's economic and social security. Over decades and through the education of citizens, Western democracies have achieved efficiency in the public system by using very strict rules for the interaction between the state institutions and their operations in favour of the citizens. This is not an easy task, which is why it is necessary for the international community to address it with patience. Only then will international funds and aid not be used for public administration, except in cases where this is part of the agreed technical assistance, which must be directly checked by the effects of its performance. This form of technical assistance, which checks for efficaciousness, is actually the common thread of all measures within the framework of the new model.

- c) The business environment, tax policy, financial institutions, the competitiveness of the private sector and the labour market. Some proposed measures are being achieved in this area, whereby international institutions and agencies are taking most of the credit. These requirements are directly linked to the external inflow of money which is why local authorities respond to them quick. Recommendations by international institutions in the region should simply have to be directly binding and not conditioned by EU membership. There is still time to establish normal operations until the moment of EU membership. The region should achieve these standards much earlier than accession to the EU. International institutions that already have existing regional offices with project staff are an elegant solution to address these barriers, while at the same time, transferring good practices enables comparability and efficiency. These types of regional offices could become a concrete contribution as technical assistance, which is seen as part of the new model.
- d) Social, health and pension systems. These systems depend on the taxes that are collected and the distribution of money in their operation. This is

something that does not work and their fragility directly affects the quality of life of citizens. Since there is massive unemployment and a large proportion of the population receives some benefits in one way or another, this is an unsustainable burden for budgets on the other hand. Transparent public finances, an efficient tax system and regulated fiscal performance are a prerequisite for social, health and pension systems. Political elites are aware of this, but due to their short-sighted selfishness, they disregard it since they are only worried about their own interests. The international community invests quite a bit in promoting the competitiveness of the region's economy and certainly the emphasis on the importance of economic growth, an appropriate business environment, and the free movement of labour, capital, goods and services is of key importance in increasing the number of jobs. This is the only activity that will fill the sources of social, health and pension systems. No other sources exist — with the exception of borrowing, which still has limited possibilities. Reforms have been implemented in similar cases elsewhere in the world and are operating, which is why technical assistance at this point is crucial for a new model.

- e) Promoting civil society, expert opinion groups, and the establishment of NGO projects. Unfortunately, regional dialogue cannot function without financial, professional and logistical support of the majority of good and really successful civil society initiatives. A wider social environment is not sufficiently inclined towards these types of activities and often exasperates them with political affiliation, financial donations and their affection for individual national groups. There are concrete examples of good practice (renewable energy, environment, culture exchange) and evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of this type of support in the region. With the involvement of parliaments, expert opinion groups and civil society should be more engaged and simply put more time, work and resources into achieving goals. Shortcuts do not work and once again this has proven to be still true in the region. In many cases these shortcuts are "fait accompli", a decision made somewhere at

the top, and parliaments do not even have a say in it. Politicians adopt key agreements outside of agreed procedures without taking into account formal decision-making rules, which normally functioning parliamentary democracies are familiar with. In the last twenty years, elements of the new reform model described above have already been introduced into the region. Many of them failed. Some reforms have only been partially successful. Finding a new name for North Macedonia, for example, took experts a decade and a half to find an acceptable solution for both sides. The new model is not a magic wand that will work or fix problems overnight. Neither is the model presented as a pre-ordained rule of individual procedures. Many of the experts we interviewed and asked for their professional opinion on the new model have directly introduced several reforms in the region in the past. Our research and expert opinion from interviews have shown us that a new model needs to be presented as a purpose for integral regional reforms. Changes could be implemented step by step and will need a long time to reshape societies. However, in order to put in place the above-mentioned necessary reforms, it is necessary to have the coordinated action of the international community, taking into account the basic common denominator, that partial changes bring with them solutions that affect the whole region. It is certainly not possible to introduce a new model in one package of solutions. However, past reform solutions in the region were also set as a broader common goal, followed by successive individual operational steps. If we look at the region from the perspective of the post-war period, we see that progress was made. There are many debates within the international community regarding the reasons why similar efforts in rule of law, public administration reform, civil society/youth support, environmental and infrastructure reconstruction, etc. in last twenty years failed to effect change. What is very often overlooked by many experts and is at the same time very important for understanding the situation is that the war has caused great human, social, material and environmental damage. The consequences are still not being alleviated, much less

eliminated. Many people were killed during the war, and many more emigrated from the region. There is simply a lack of life potential in the form of a larger number of creative people. This is why many people think that nothing works and that changes in the region are impossible. Such comprehensive reforms as the new model in our research requires a longer period of time and can only be achieved by people who live in the region.

## Conclusions

At the level of the international community, a basic mechanism of reform for the Western Balkans region is needed. Without it, any good initiatives are condemned to long-term difficulties. This has already been demonstrated by the experience so far. It is not easy to draw up a feasible plan of how to get real structural reforms started with an international paternalistic attitude towards the region. Democracy is the basis and everything else is built on top of it. A legal and social state, open borders for people, the economy, culture, transport and knowledge can be those common denominators needed to start a new cycle of attempts for change. EU membership is certainly in the wider interest of the entire Western Balkans, but the attitude of all EU countries to the region itself is ambiguous. Accession conditions, negotiations and entry modes are a refined mechanism developed by the EU. The EU has already completed the accession of a larger number of countries at once in 2004 with 10 countries and at the administrative and operational level it has experience and knowledge as far as this is concerned. In particular, there is no political will and the crisis and conflicts especially at the EU's borders are causing discomfort to its citizens, which is why no EU policy wants to promise quick negotiations for membership and even less to determine the indicative entry dates. This is stressful for the candidate countries and without a clear future, people are leaving the region, especially those who are most capable and who should be the bearers of future progress. This is why reforms need to be implemented today and now. In any event, both the region and the international community can do a lot of different things up to the point when the will, the readiness and consensus for EU accession policy will be found.

Regional integration is a very important part of the content for the necessary reforms in our new approach for long-term stability. Areas of development are infrastructure; trade, economy, tourism and investments; education, science, research and environment; institutional renovation; culture and sports. International financial institutions for development and EU regional development programmes can provide direct support for improvement through technical assistance, expert's platforms and consulting. The essence of the new model is to achieve the functioning of the rule of law, the modernisation of the public administration, the unification of the business environment with fiscal policy and supervisory institutions, to open up and protect the competitiveness of the workforce, to establish functioning social, health and pension systems and create conditions for the functioning of civil society. All these reform processes can be reached with existing international and EU programmes for the region in the framework of technical assistance and local offices of international institutions to assist countries. A proactive and dynamic development of relations at the level of the international community needs to be created. The security concept for the Western Balkans must become a plan for the whole of Europe and the wider international community as part of the stability of the wider region.

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# North Macedonia and its Neighbours: Challenges and Perspectives

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## Dragan Đukanović

*Faculty of Political Science — University of Belgrade, Serbia*

*dragan.djukanovic@fpn.bg.ac.rs*

*ORCID: 0000-0003-0298-0164*

### **Key words:**

*Macedonia; foreign  
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### **Abstract**

*In this paper, the author has analysed the perspectives of Macedonia's new foreign policy concept regarding its neighbours since the second half of 2017. Therefore, he points to Macedonia's numerous bilateral issues, primarily about its name with neighbouring Greece. The paper also includes a review of other open issues with Bulgaria and Albania, which jeopardize its path towards the EU and NATO membership.*

*The signing of two crucial bilateral agreements with Bulgaria (2017) and Greece (2018) has significantly changed its foreign policy position and accelerated the realization of its Euro-Atlantic perspective. Additionally, Macedonia has improved relations with Albania and Kosovo. Although the relations with Serbia have oscillated, they cannot, in general, be labelled as bad.*

*The author concludes that the determination of the new Macedonian political elite to resolve the accumulated bilateral issues with its neighbours is very significant in the broader regional context. It also represents a stimulus for the rest of the Western Balkans.*

## Complex Historical Context of Macedonia's Relations with its Neighbours

The Macedonian national question, as one of the controversial problems in Southeast Europe in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, has caused constant tensions and problems between Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and since 1912 with Albania. (Gleni 1999: 205-209) Namely, in the Ottoman Empire, along with its apparent weakening in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, several national movements in the Balkan Peninsula strengthened. (Lila 2017: 31–35) From all of them, only the Macedonian movement has failed to realize through the formation of a separate national state. (Pavlović 2001: 36–67) Serbia and Bulgaria, which were defined as separate states in that period, certainly contributed to this. However, Greece has also succeeded in gaining a particular influence in today's Macedonia through the Orthodox clergy. (Gleni 1999: 205)

Attempts to impose their paternalistic position *vis-à-vis* the local population in Macedonia generated intensified internal tendencies in Serbia and Bulgaria to integrate this area into their composition. Despite the several uprisings of the Macedonian population on the territory of the Ottoman Empire, the most significant of which was organized in Kruševo on 2 August 1903 (*Ilinden Uprising*), Ottoman structures demonstrated extreme resistance to Macedonian ethnic identity and particularity. (ibid.: 210–215) At the beginning of the 20th century, there was significant opposition to the establishment of Macedonian identity from the neighbouring states, primarily Bulgaria and Serbia. Moreover, the Bulgarian historiography was mentioning the Ilinden Uprising as a part of the struggle of the Bulgarian population in the territory of today's Macedonia, or as frequently mentioned in the "Western Bulgaria." (ibid.: 209)

The most drastic conflicts between Serbia and Bulgaria regarding the issue of Macedonia were conducted in the Second Balkan War, i.e., during the end of June and July 1913. (Zundhausen 2008: 235–237) After that, the entire territory of today's Macedonia was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbia. However, in the historical context and primarily because of the Great War which broke out one year later (July 1914), this area

has never been integrated into its composition. Moreover, the concept of complete denial of Macedonian ethnicity continued within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia after 1918. (Jančeva, Litovski 2017: 149–153) Not only did this lead to internal conflicts within the Macedonian population, but also to the strengthening of certain forces that conducted the Bulgarisation of the population and trying to increase the influence of the neighbouring state. The said was confirmed by the relatively easy and quick realization of Bulgarian occupation and annexation of this area after 1941. (ibid, 153–158) Furthermore, a significant part of the western parts of Macedonia dominated by the Albanians was annexed to self-proclaimed Greater Albania. (ibid.: 155)

During the second half of the Second World War, on 2 August 1944 (the religious holiday Ilinden), the Anti-fascist Sobranie for the National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM) was formed in the monastery of Sveti Prohor Pčinjski, re-affirming the ethnic and linguistic specificity of Macedonia as well as the status of the constituent element within the framework of the future Federal Yugoslavia. (Pravna enciklopedija 1979: 39) During 1944 and 1945, the Democratic Federal Republic of Macedonia or later the People's Republic of Macedonia was constituted. (ibid.: 39)

However, during this period emerged significant antagonisms with the Yugoslav neighbours about the identity issues of the Macedonians. Namely, since the constitution of ASNOM, Greece has denied Macedonia's right to use the term of the Macedonia geographic region and attempts to link the history of Slovenian Macedonians with the legacy of ancient/Hellenic Macedonia. (Gavranov, Stojković 1972: 215–216) Also, neighbouring Bulgaria denied the existence of Macedonian ethnicity and the Macedonian language, considering that it was *de facto* Bulgarian ethnicity, as well as one Bulgarian dialect.

Until the Second World War, Serbian civil circles were not inclined to recognize Macedonian ethnicity, using the term "Old/South Serbia" for this part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. (Jančeva, Litovski 2017: 151) However, due to the anti-fascist struggle and the victory of the anti-fascist forces in Serbia, which have advocated the federal organization of Yugoslavia and the equality of its peoples, the official Serbian communist party and republican structures accepted this principle. It also implied the recognition of the Macedonians as a nation,

as well as the Macedonian language. However, some Serbian nationalist dissident circles and part of the general public had reservations. Especially after the declaration of the autocephaly of the Archbishopric of Ohrid or the Macedonian Orthodox Church on 19 July 1967, which was part of the Serbian Orthodox Church. (Đorđević, 2005) Since then, this issue between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church has not only been broadly transposed to the relations of both Serbs and Macedonians, but also to the relations between Serbia and Macedonia. (ibid.)

### **Macedonian Independence since 1991 and newly expressed Problems with Neighbours**

On the eve of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Macedonia embarked on the realization of its independence in extremely challenging conditions. Despite particular initiatives coming from this southernmost Yugoslav republic to preserve and transform the federal state through the asymmetrical federation, it, however, declared its independence in a referendum on 8 September 1991. (Katz 2014: 191–210) Thus, Macedonia was again in a tough hard position, given the numerous oppositions from its neighbours, but without the former Yugoslav “protective umbrella”. (Jančeva, Litovski 2017: 166–167)

Bulgaria was the first country to recognize Macedonia's independence (15 January 1992); however, the recognition of Macedonian ethnicity and language did not follow. (MFA) Thus, it significantly reflected the relations between the two countries and different interpretations of specific periods of their history, which, when it comes to neighbouring Macedonia, Bulgaria considered for its own. The tensions mentioned above were frequent, but Bulgaria has managed to strengthen its influence during this and previous decade by granting scholarships to Macedonian students, but also citizenship to its citizens. (B92 2006) Nevertheless, in general, the Bulgarian-Macedonian bilateral relations were rather bad, which threatened that Bulgaria would exercise the right to block Macedonia's accession to NATO and the European Union.

Greece *de facto* did not recognize Macedonia following the Interim Accord until 13 September 1995. (Interim Accord

1995) However, these relations were at the level of the liaison offices, and since 2004 they were conducted through consular offices in Bitola and Thessaloniki. (ibid.: Article 1) On the other hand, Greece has consistently disputed the right to use the term Macedonia, but also the use of specific national and state symbols. Namely, the “Vergina Sun” displayed on the first flag of independent Macedonia had to be replaced in 1995 with a redesigned flag. (Kornfein 2013: 83) Also, under the United Nations system, the name “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” was used for this country. (ibid.: 80) Greece has been persisting with this for more than two and a half decades, conditioning with this issue Macedonia’s accession to the European Union (since the end of 2005), and later to NATO (since 2008). Despite significant US influence on the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, Greece did not allow Macedonia to join this alliance under its constitutional name.

In this respect, Macedonia has filed a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice concerning the alleged violations of the Interim Accord. (MFAa) At the end of 2011, this court ruled that Greece had violated the Interim Accord. (ibid.) The official Athena, therefore, has been highly successful in utilizing the potentials for conditioning Macedonia on the path towards full membership in NATO and the EU. Macedonia was thus left on the verge of Euro-Atlantic processes, but also led to the strengthening of conservative and nationalistic political options and forces. Also, Greece and its church did not recognize the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and it should be noted that after the Second World War, a significant part of Slovenian Macedonians was forced to leave today’s Aegean Macedonia. (Gavranov, Stojković 1972: 215)

Macedonia and Albania established diplomatic relations in April 1992, and these were mostly related to the status of the Albanians settled in the western parts of Macedonia. (MFAb) Namely, even during the first decade of Macedonian independence, ideas to federalize the state through the creation of two monoethnic entities (Albanian and Macedonian) emerged. Hence, in 1992, the self-proclaimed Republic of Ilirida was declared, and significant conflicts between the Albanian rebels and Macedonian authorities lasted throughout 2001. (Vukotić 2014) This conflict ended with the Ohrid Agreement (13 August 2001), which was later fully implemented after the change of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia.

(Andonovski 2018: 23—49) It ensured the participation of Albanian representatives at all levels of the government in Macedonia. However, neighbouring Albania was more concerned with the question of “consistent implementation of the Ohrid Agreement” in the context of Macedonia’s NATO membership. (Blic 2015) Bearing in mind that Albanian political parties play a significant role in the political life of Macedonia, they have succeeded in actual influencing the constitution of power, i.e., the election of dominant Macedonian political options and the formation of the government.

Macedonia recognized Kosovo in the second half of 2008 and succeeded in developing significant forms of bilateral cooperation, mainly economic. In this way, the relations between Macedonian authorities and the Albanian community have been further improved.

Serbia or the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia acknowledged Macedonia under its constitutional name as late as 1996, and the period of economic sanctions against the FRY (1992—1995) negatively affected the dynamics of mutual economic relations. (Đukanović 2016: 190) Apart from the non-recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church from the Serbian Orthodox Church, there were no major open issues in the relations between the two countries. Moreover, the first formal demarcation on the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia occurred between the FR Yugoslavia and Macedonia in 2001. (Ugovor 2001) However, relations were provisionally exacerbated by Macedonia’s recognition of Kosovo’s independence in October 2008. It should additionally be noted that long-standing Macedonian Prime Minister and leader of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski (2006—2016), has long maintained the most prominent political relations with the official Belgrade.

### **Deceleration of Macedonia’s Accession to the EU and NATO after 2005**

The persistent insistence of the European Union to overcome bilateral problems in the Western Balkans before it enters the finalization of the accession process has not yielded any meaningful results. This situation blocked Macedonia regarding its relations with the EU. Although Macedonia gained

candidate status for the EU membership in November 2005, due to neighbouring Greece and its blockade, it did not start the accession negotiations. (Đukanović 2016: 70) A similar situation was with NATO accession. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, Greece insisted on the change of Macedonian constitutional name, and with this slowed down the process. (ibid.: 94–95) That is why, in this period, Macedonia has gone into a certain self-isolation, lack of understanding of its own foreign and international position and has slipped to authoritarian tendencies and the growth of nationalism. The said situation has also been reflected upon by many international officials. Moreover, Macedonia has long been in the shadow of some other regional issues (such as the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina or the resolution of Kosovo's status). (Torov 2010) It also caused Macedonia to step down from the position of "leader" in the entire Western Balkans region in the accession to the European Union and NATO and remain almost on the very margin of these processes.

Due to its stubborn political views and at the same time, avoiding any relevant public debate, the government embodied in VMRO-DPMNE has been trying to block any possible agreement with Greece over the name of the country. The said virtually completely stalled the EU and NATO integration process, but also led to the more visible attachment to some other actors, such as Russia and Turkey. (Nezavisne novine 2017) Moreover, it seemed that Macedonia would only "slip up" deeper in its hard positions towards some neighbours, above all Greece and Bulgaria, which are both the EU and NATO members. All this was followed by the internal re-traditioning of the Macedonian society, the increasing influence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the strengthening of ethnonationalism. Apart from the above-mentioned, the linking of certain continuities of the contemporary Macedonian state and ethnicity with the ancient antique heritage was also historically very questionable. (Stanković 2012)

### **Formation of the new Government of Macedonia 2017**

The threatened Macedonia to become a self-isolated state and captured into a multitude of open questions with its neighbours. The intense dialogue between the authorities and the opposition concerning the internal political crisis, which

lasted between 2015 and 2016, resulted in an agreement to hold parliamentary elections in late 2016. (DW 2016) However, these elections also manifested a traditional split between the two dominant options – VMRO-DPMNE and the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), i.e., their electoral lists and coalitions. VMRO-DPMNE gained a minor advantage with 38.14% of the votes (51 mandates), while the opposition SDSM won near 37% (49 mandates). (N1 2016) The dominant Albanian political parties – the Democratic Union for Integration, the Besa Movement, the Alliance for Albanians, and the Democratic Party of Albanians, together, won 18 mandates.

After the Albanian political parties decided to enter the coalition with the oppositional SDSM, it was clear that the country would plunge into a political crisis. Namely, it lasted 171 days. Significant obstacles to the formation of government were also caused by President Gjorgje Ivanov, who gave his party colleague Grueski a mandate for the composition of the government even though he did not secure a parliamentary majority. (Politika 2018) When Zoran Zaev, leader of the oppositional SDSM, secured the parliamentary majority in the Sobranie on 27 April 2017, there was a particularly brutal physical attack on him and his party counterparts. (Novi Magazin 2017) Nevertheless, the crisis reached an epilogue when Brian Hoyt Yee, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe and Eurasia, visited Skopje on 1 May 2017, after which the entire crisis was channelled through the parliamentary procedure. (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2017 ) Consequently, on 31 May 2017, five months after the parliamentary elections, a new Macedonian government was elected, headed by Zoran Zaev. In his numerous speeches, as well as in his presentation, Prime Minister Zaev emphasized the need to improve Macedonia's relations with its neighbours. (Blic, 2017)

### **The basic principles of the new foreign policy of Macedonia after 2017: highlighted Euro-Atlantic integrations and good neighbourly relations in the Balkans**

It is imperative to note the essential characteristics of the new foreign policy of Macedonia after 2017. In the first place, it focused on the prompt resolution of numerous problems with neighbours accumulated over the past years, and above all, those most difficult with Greece and Bulgaria. However, this

was a very demanding goal, which proved to be realistic in the first year and half of the new government led by Zoran Zaev. The willingness to get immersed in solving these problems is a fundamental difference to the earlier right-wing governments led by Nikola Gruevski and VMRO-DPMNE. Although he occasionally sent signals, both to the EU and the USA, that he would solve these problems, former Prime Minister Gruevski did not do so primarily because of the resistance of the right-wing part of the Macedonian public.

Macedonia has shown its commitment to good neighbourly relations by taking part in numerous regional initiatives and forums in South East Europe and the Western Balkans. The secretariats of several regional initiatives are located in Skopje (Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative — MAARI, South East Europe Health Network — SEE HN, Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe — NALAS, etc. (Lopandić, Kronja 2011: 305–320)

The second complementary goal was related to the previous full implementation of the first one, which is the acceleration of Euro-Atlantic integration. In that sense, the country's entry into NATO has been unblocked, and soon it is also expected to get a date for the start of negotiations on EU membership<sup>1</sup>. Showing the example of good practice in resolving relations with neighbours has contributed to the alleviation of tensions in the Western Balkans and throughout the Balkan Peninsula. By addressing the name dispute, the new Macedonian authorities have shown how important is good political will and determination of political actors to solve a highly complex and decades-old issue, without adverse effect on the vital interests of the Macedonian people and the citizens of Macedonia.

The complete complementarity of both goals and their implementation has contributed to Macedonia's recognition as a constructive actor in the very turbulent Western Balkans and the equally unstable modern Europe. The significance of nearly three decades of Macedonia's long strategic partnership with the United States should not be underestimated, which contributed primarily to the country's emergence from a specific international (self) isolation, and then a successful

1 The full membership of the Republic of Northern Macedonia to NATO is expected at the end of 2019 or early 2020 and the date for the start of negotiations on EU membership in September or October of the current year.

re-affirmation after 2017. (Đukanović 2016: 122)

a) *Further improvement of Macedonia's relations with Albania*

At the beginning of January 2017, in Tirana, leaders of Albanian political parties from Macedonia defined a unique platform under the auspice of Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama. (RTS 2017) It preceded the total turnaround of these parties from VMRO-DPMNE to SDSM regarding the forming of a new government. In addition to emphasizing the necessity for the full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, on which Tirana insisted earlier, the document stressed the necessity of "ethnic equality of the Albanian population" in Macedonia. (ibid.) At the same time, the initiative for the Albanian language to become the second official language in Macedonia was also promoted. Thus, a special law was adopted at the beginning of 2018 in the Sobranie. (Balkan Insight 2018) This paper focused on a necessary discussion about the existing symbols of Macedonia, its steady economic development, as well as the cultural rights of the Albanians. (RTS 2017) Particularly emphasized was the need to resolve the name dispute with Greece, and, in that connection, the inclusion of the Albanians and their political leaders. (ibid.) Also, the document insisted on establishing closer cooperation with Albania and Kosovo and accelerating the integration of this country into the EU and NATO. (ibid.)

After the disclosure of this document, it was clear that a new coalition would be formed in Macedonia, which the ruling VMRO-DPMNE was opposing for more than a decade. Also, the re-affirmation of specific issues concerning the rights of the Albanians has only homogenized nationalistic circles in the ethnic Macedonian corps and provoked a multitude of controversial appearances by then-state officials, as well as numerous tensions.

After the government of Prime Minister Zaev achieved some progress in relations with Bulgaria (2017) and then with Greece (2018), and as the process of amending the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia started in line with the agreement reached with Greece, the Albanian political parties have requested that the Ohrid Peace Accord be further emphasized in the Preamble of the Constitution, (Vlada na Makedonija 2018: amandman XXXIV) although it has been fully incorporated in this constitutional act in the earlier 2001 constitutional

changes. (Andonovski 2018: 23—49) During the discussion on the changes to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, one of the delegates of the Alliance for Albanians proposed an amendment in which, next to Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, and Serbia, Kosovo would be listed as a neighbouring country of Macedonia. (RTK2 2018) In addition to Macedonia's formal recognition of Kosovo in 2008, this would further confirm the tendencies in relations with Pristina, which were significantly useful, especially in the economy. (Marlov, Ivanova 2013: 259—264) The new Macedonian Government has intensely supported the process of full normalization of relations between the authorities in Belgrade and Pristina, and it is frequently noted that without resolving this problem, it will not be easy to provide full regional stability. (Večernje novosti 2017)

In the following period, Albania will undoubtedly provide added support to Macedonia to join NATO after the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, which can be expected in 2020. However, initiating new issues such as the Macedonian symbols and the like, on the other hand, would not contribute to good relations between the Albanians and Macedonians in this country nor its relations with Albania. However, adoption of the law on the official use of the Albanian language at the state level of Macedonia at the beginning of 2018 confirmed the determination of the ruling SDSM and Prime Minister Zaev to improve relations with the Albanian population in the country.

b) *First Significant Progress in Relations with Neighbouring countries — The Treaty between Macedonia and Bulgaria (1 August 2017)*

The first noteworthy progress in relations with its neighbours, Macedonia achieved on 1 August 2017, with the signing of the Treaty on friendship, neighbourliness, and cooperation with Bulgaria. (Vlada na Makedonija, 2017) It was significant because of constant identity disputes with Bulgaria and the latent threats that it would use it as a blackmailing potential regarding Macedonia's entry into the EU and NATO. This Treaty indeed represented an increasingly significant improvement in relations between the two countries.

This Treaty remarkably relieved the relations in the southeast of Europe and pointed to the necessity of addressing problems that carry an overly complex historical heritage. (ibid.: preamble) Interestingly, this document did not mention the Bulgarian

and Macedonian language directly, but official languages in Bulgaria and Macedonia following their constitutional acts. (ibid.: člen 14) In the context of creating a secure environment in South East Europe, both states agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation, and Bulgaria would provide support when it comes to Macedonia's entry into NATO and the European Union. (ibid.: člen 2 i 3) Also, the two states agreed to closely cooperate when it comes to the work of international organizations and forums. (ibid., člen 3) Moreover, substantial attention in the Treaty was also dedicated to the strengthening of cooperation from local to central levels of government, as well as enhancing the cooperation in the field of tourism and infrastructure. (ibid.: člen 4 i 6) There was also the initiation of further cooperation through new bilateral agreements in the areas of "culture, education, health, social protection, and sport". (ibid.: člen 8)

A special Joint Interdisciplinary Committee of Experts on Historical and Educational Issues has been set up to overcome numerous conflicting interpretations of specific periods of Macedonian and Bulgarian history. (ibid.: člen 8) Its goal was to analyse individual historical personalities and events and prevent opposite interpretations. At the same time, with this Treaty, Macedonia committed itself not to encourage in any way the Macedonian minority in Bulgaria to separatism. (ibid.: člen 11,5) This issue primarily referred to Pirin Macedonia, which was extremely important for Bulgaria, and a similar solution appeared later in agreement with Greece about Aegean Macedonia.

During 2017 and 2018, there has been considerable progress in Macedonia's relations with Bulgaria, but the occasional misunderstandings regarding the Macedonian language reappeared in the public discourse of the authorities in Sofia. It seems that this issue, as well as the question of the interpretation of the history of the 20th century, will remain something that will be debated in the long run. (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2018) One cannot easily overlook these disagreements about history merely by the joint celebrations of Ilinden. Also, the Macedonian Orthodox Church is increasingly turning to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which does not want to confront the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church regarding this issue. (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2017b)

c) *The most significant breakthrough in Macedonia's relations with its neighbours: The Prespa Agreement with Greece (17*

June 2018)

In the broader historical sense, Macedonia was the most burdened with the dispute over its name with neighbouring Greece. Moreover, despite the numerous efforts to find a compromise after 1991 and thanks to Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General Matthew Nimetz, that did not happen. On the contrary, the parties have been very often far from the solution. Proportionally to that, there was a rise in the number of proposals for changing the name of Macedonia. During the year 1995, a provisional agreement was reached, which lasted for 24 years. (Interim Accord 1995) It stipulated that the Republic of Macedonia would be presented as “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” in the United Nations. (ibid.) This issue heavily burdened Macedonia’s foreign policy position and *de facto* slowed down its path to the EU and NATO membership, although it was the first of the Western Balkan states which embarked on this path in the middle of the 1990s. Macedonia was granted candidate status for membership in the European Union in November 2005 but has not opened the negotiation process since then. An analogous situation is with NATO because Greece did not allow Macedonia to be approved the membership invitation in 2008.

Former governments dominated by VMRO-DPMNE did not want to accept any change of the name, although the problem was only the “external” use of the state’s name, not the change of the constitution and the name for the internal use. With the arrival of the new SDSM-led government, dialogue with the official Athens intensified, which was followed by a specially strengthened role and engagement of the United States. The USA has encouraged both parties to finalise the dialogue, as well as to find the solution as soon as possible. Although there were presented various proposals to be added in front of the name Macedonia such as New/Upper/Vardar/Ilinden, the compromise which was achieved envisaged the name “Republic of North Macedonia”. (Danas 2018)

The agreement was signed on 17 June 2018 in Prespa, near the Macedonian-Greek border, by the premiers of the two countries and in the presence of many officials. It was based on earlier arrangements, intensification of bilateral cooperation, and the establishment of a strategic partnership between Greece and Macedonia. (Prespa Agreement 2018) The key foundations

of the Macedonian national identity were preserved, such as the language for which it was specified that it belonged to the South Slavic group of languages. (ibid.: Article 1, 3b; Article 7,4) The determinant Macedonian and Macedonian citizenship were also preserved. (ibid.: Article 1, 3b) The first part of this agreement focused precisely on these identity issues, but it also referred to the principles of international law, membership in the United Nations, and good neighbourly relations. (ibid.: Part One) It has also been indicated the following: both sides would respect the state borders; both sides were against irredentism and secessionism; that they would not mingle in each other's internal affairs; that they were against the use of the heritage of ancient Greek culture from the Macedonian side. (ibid.: Article 4—8) In this regard, a special Commission would be formed, composed of experts in the field of history and education, to address the problems related to conflicting interpretations of history. (ibid.: Article 8, 5)

The second part of the agreement determined a whole spectrum of areas in which the strategic partnership of the two countries would be established. (ibid.: Part Two) Particularly significant was the rise of diplomatic relations between Greece and Macedonia at the level of ambassadors, which was a substitute for the existing liaison offices. (ibid.: Article 10) The agreement has also envisaged the strategic cooperation in international organizations and forums and political cooperation with the formation of a special high-level council to oversee and foster the partnership. (ibid.: Article 11) Boosting economic cooperation as well as "cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture, research, technology, health and sport" were highlighted as priorities of the future strategic partnership between Macedonia and Greece. (ibid.: Article 15) Also, there was the strengthening of interstate defence cooperation as well as cooperation in the field of civil protection. (ibid.: Article 16) Taking everything into account, it was an extensive list of areas for the strategic cooperation and the commitment of Skopje and Athens to enhance previously weak bilateral relations through such intense cooperation.

Based on this agreement, the Government of Macedonia organized a referendum on 30 September 2018, which was not legally binding, but it indeed revealed remarkably interesting mood indicators of the citizens. The majority voted to accept the Treaty (about 95%), but more than half of the total voters

did not attend the referendum (about 37%). (Dnevnik 2018) This, somehow, decreased the initial optimism regarding the implementation of the Prespa Agreement. However, it was quickly recovered. On 19 October, the Macedonian Government succeeded in gaining the consent of two-thirds of the deputy in the Sobranie and commencing the process of constitutional reforms under the Prespa Agreement. 80 of the 120 deputies voted in the state parliament to initiate the change of the Constitution of Macedonia. At the beginning of November, amendments were introduced to the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, which were aligned with the Prespa Agreement. Namely, the word “North” was added in front of the word Macedonia in the Constitution’s text while the second amendment highlighted the preamble reference to the inheritance of ASNOM, where the Ohrid Peace Agreement was also mentioned. (Vlada na Makedonija 2018)

The third amendment regulated the role of Macedonia towards its nationals residing abroad, but with the indication that it would not interfere with the internal affairs of other states regarding this issue. (ibid.: amandman XXXVI) Moreover, Macedonia was obliged to protect the historical and cultural heritage of the Macedonian people. (ibid.: amandman XXXVI)

It should also be noted the significant escalation of Greek nationalism, which manifested itself through mass protests and opposition to the agreement between Macedonia and Greece. (Garda 2018) Even so, there was still much pressure regarding the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, primarily from the EU and the United States. On 25 January 2019, the Greek Parliament adopted the Prespa Agreement, followed by changes in the Constitution and full implementation of the Prespa Agreement in Macedonia. There was a narrow majority in the Greek Parliament with only 153 votes in favour and 146 against. (Blic, 2019)

On the other hand, we need to assess the real capacities and the extent of the announced strategic partnership between Greece and Macedonia. There is a possibility that this partnership might be more symbolic to relax the public of both countries to accept compromises. However, Macedonia received an invitation to join NATO on 12 July 2018, and there is a prospect of opening negotiations with the European Union in the coming year. (Invitation 2018) Thus, this country will escape its earlier

(self) isolation and the ultimate peripheral role in the Western Balkan region.

d) *Relations between Macedonia and Serbia during 2017 and 2018: good and bad oscillations*

Relations between Macedonia and Serbia since 2012, i.e., the arrival of the Serbian Progressive Party to power in Belgrade, have been good. Moreover, it seemed that Serbia's relations with this country were the most productive. (Simić, Đukanović, Živojinović 2013: 104—118) The said was confirmed by the visit of Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić to Macedonia in 2012 when he and Macedonian President Gjorgje Ivanov agreed to support the resolution of the inter-church dispute. (ibid.: 114) However, it was evident that the authorities in Belgrade still preferred VMRO-DPMNE and the misunderstandings with the new SDSM were deepened by the presence of one of the members of the Serbian intelligence service during the violent events in the Sобрание on 27 April 2017. (B92 2017)

Two and a half months after the inauguration of the new Government of Macedonia, in the second half of August 2017, a rather unusual situation happened when the entire Embassy of the Republic of Serbia had been withdrawn from Skopje due to not entirely clear circumstances. (Glas Amerike 2017) Despite the many media speculations, the real reason for this unusual act in the diplomatic practice remained unknown.

However, after a telephone conversation between President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, and Prime Minister of Macedonia, Zoran Zaev, on 23 August 2017, five points on inter-state relations were published in the official announcement. (RTS 2017a) They emphasized the necessity of mutual dialogue, which, despite specific differences, should contribute to the friendly relations of nations and states. (ibid.) In this joint statement, the intensification of economic and trade exchanges was also underlined, as well as the need to deepen regional cooperation and securing stability. (ibid.) Both sides have undertaken to further protect diplomatic and consular missions in their territory. (ibid.)

Another minor problem appeared in 2018 regarding the import of flour from Serbia to Macedonia, due to excise stamps on larger packaging, but it was temporarily solved. (N1 2018) In addition to this, on 21 November 2017, there was another

meeting of Vučić and Zaev in Belgrade, where good bilateral relations were confirmed. (RTS 2017b) On 2 September 2018, at their reunion at the Tabanovce/Preševo border crossing, there was an additional dissolution of relations. (Telegraf 2018) Both countries were ready to continue cooperating intensively in the field of European integration, and it was of immense importance that the Serbian president unambiguously supported the full implementation of the agreement between Greece and Macedonia. (ibid.)

However, there was still an open question of the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which would continue to remain predominantly in the sphere of relations between the two states due to the unwillingness of the SPC to achieve a compromise. (Helsinkiški bilten 2018) At the same time, at the beginning of the last decade, the Serbian Orthodox Church removed the memorial plaque of ASNOM in Prohor Pčinjski monastery in the south of Serbia. (Radio Slobodna Evropa 2017) Since 2003, Macedonian officials have not come to honour Ilinden, i.e., the day of ASNOM establishment. (ibid.) Another issue that can initiate further disagreement between Serbia and Macedonia is related to Macedonia's entry into NATO, which is not entirely complementary to the foreign policy agenda of Serbia.

### **Conclusion**

The new Macedonian government, constituted in 2017, succeeded in overcoming the numerous key bilateral issues with its neighbours just one year after its formation. Moreover, significant efforts have been made primarily for the consolidation of intra-ethnic circumstances between the Macedonians and Albanians, which was also transposed on Macedonia's relations with neighbouring Albania. These relations are now promoted further, and there is no potential for blocking Macedonia's entry into NATO, which has been debated in the official Tirana in previous years. A comparable situation is with Kosovo, with which the previous government had also well-regulated bilateral relations.

Of course, the most significant breakthrough of the new Macedonian Government has been achieved in its relation to Greece, where it has demonstrated a significant degree

of compromise even in terms of empathetic identity determinants, to which the name of the country for internal and external use belongs. Also, resetting the relations between Macedonia and Greece after a twenty-seven years-long dispute will undoubtedly contribute to the accelerated dynamics of the Euro-Atlantic integration of this country. It is confirmed by the strategic partnership between the two countries envisaged by the Prespa Agreement in several areas. This case has proven useful for overcoming some other similar issues in the Western Balkans region, especially when it comes to relations between Serbia and Kosovo. (Blic 2018) Furthermore, the determination and courage of the Macedonian political leadership to face the unpopularity of solving the significant problem of the name of the state, and to compromise it with neighbouring Greece should also be emphasized.

Credible public opinion polls showed primarily that the Prespa Agreement did not receive significant support from the Macedonian citizens. (Križalovski 2018) This was proved by a non-binding referendum on the Prespa Agreement, which was held on 30 September 2018, but also numerous researches over the past years. (Klekovski, Mihailovska, Jovanov 2018: 26–42) Bearing in mind that the pre-referendum campaign in Macedonia lasted only three and a half months, one should not be surprised by the inadequate response from the citizens.

Also, considering that the state's name issue represents an essential part of the foundations of the Macedonian national identity, one should not be surprised by a rather unconvincing majority that "copied" to the presidential elections in Macedonia on 5 May 2019. As a result, Stevo Pendarovski, as the candidate of the SDSM and the Albanian Democratic Union for Integration, won 51.6 percent in the second round, and the opposition candidate from VMRO-DPMNE, Gordana Siljanovska Dakova won 44.7 percent. (New Magazine 2019) However, this confirmed that the majority of the citizens after their initial negative attitude towards the Prespa Agreement gradually changed their views by identifying the only realistic option for the country in the policy of a clear Euro-Atlantic commitment, as well as good neighbourly relations in the Balkans.

Noteworthy progress has been made in the second half of 2017 and during 2018 in the relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria. The relations with this country are particularly

sensitive, bearing in mind the historical context of relations and often the negative attitude towards Macedonian ethnic identity. However, the Agreement from August 2017 has further relaxed these relations and placed them in the context of Macedonia's faster European and Euro-Atlantic perspective. Of course, specific issues such as different interpretations of history or the Macedonian language are to remain particular lines of separation between the official Sofia and Skopje.

Macedonia's relations with Serbia were also very satisfactory in the past, even though Macedonia recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008. (Đukanović 2016: 190) However, although it is not a predominantly global issue, it is clear that the relations between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian Orthodox Church remain the most significant problem. It mainly refers to the fact that the MPC demanded a mediating and "maternal" role from Bulgaria Orthodox Church during 2018 to gain recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. (Al Jazeera Balkans 2018)

In general, as a particular country of the former Yugoslavia, which had problems with the new (Serbia) and old neighbours (Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania), Macedonia has managed to achieve a significant turnaround and progress improving these relations in a remarkably brief period since mid-2017. It also represents important encouragement regarding its accession to NATO and the EU, bearing in mind the EU Enlargement Strategy until 2025, where bilateral relations with neighbours are a priority. (European Commission 2018: 6–7) The full integration of the countries of the region into the Union, as anticipated by the strategy, will not be possible without resolving open issues with their neighbours. (ibid.: 7) The "case" of Macedonia can, therefore, represent a favourable model for the rest of the Western Balkans, given the whole multitude of unresolved bilateral problems of these countries. It should be noted that, apart from Macedonia, Serbia is also in an immensely complex situation regarding the regional context, and to a certain extent Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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# Book Reviews

# The EU's Policy on the Integration of Migrants: A Case of Soft-Europeanisation?

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By Pierre Georges Van Wolleghem

2018. *Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*. Pages: 236. ISBN 978-3-319-97681-5

As part of the series '*Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*', this book represents a comprehensive examination of a number of issues in the field of migration, especially in the light of the current political scene in the European Union (EU). The book offers a compelling in-depth critical analysis of the EU's policy on the integration of migrants. Only a few books have examined the development of the integration policy at the EU level so far. The main contribution of this book is its attempt to fill the gap in this field and help policy makers and specialists understand potential consequences of the current refugee integration process in a timely manner. The question at the core of the present research is: *Can there be Europeanisation without an EU competence?* Van Wolleghem, the author of the book, uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in explaining the development of the EU integration policy (p. 20). Although the author states that the key limitation of this book is the emphasis on the EU policy only from an EU perspective (p. 194), rather than including other member states' perspectives for the sake of comparative purposes, this still does not minimise the valuable contribution of this book. Especially considering that the issues it discusses have a great potential to continue to be ignored by majority of the EU policy makers.

As the author explains, migration is currently among the crucial issues for the EU, one that is likely to become even more dominant on the global political agenda. Immigration to European countries has increased dramatically during the last decade. The economic impact of migration is studied intensively, and it has been confirmed that migration has positive economic effects. But immigration also poses social and budgetary challenges to the societies that accept migrants because "migrants' contribution to the EU labor market and its economy in general is by no means immediate" (p. 1). Failure

of the EU member states to participate successfully in the development and implementation of an integration policy produces negative consequences for European economies and their labour markets. The immigration philosophy based on the *Gasterbeiter* policy (guest worker policy) is outdated. The workforce does not stay in a country of employment only for a limited period of time any more, and a new way of managing immigration should be in the interest of all member states. Furthermore, the author draws readers' attention by addressing integration-related matters, such as: Why integration? Who is integrating? How to integrate? Who has the competence to integrate? And integrating into what? His answers to these questions can help those with limited knowledge in migration studies and the current European standpoint on immigration policy. All of these answers can be found in the introductory part of this book.

This book is divided into five main chapters. *Chapter 2* deals with the development of immigration policy and the failed competence of the EU regarding the integration of nationals of third countries. Van Wolleggem describes the gradual development of immigration policy at the EU level since the adoption of the Schengen Convention in the 1980s, including all the challenges that followed its adoption. The transfer of competences from the state to EU level was a particularly difficult issue and as the author explains "there were many bumps on that road, one of them being sovereignty" (p. 32). Clearly, the member states were in a bargaining situation in which they tried to pursue their interests. For this reason, the author applies the actor-centred institutionalist (ACI) theoretical framework by Frits Scharpf as the most suitable approach to explore immigration-related policies. The ACI standpoint is that social phenomena should be explained as the outcome of interactions among intentional actors. Van Wolleggem considers that actors make choices in accordance with their diverging preferences, and with different resources, strategies, as well as different chances of success.

*Chapter 3* describes the features of a specific context favourable to creating a European policy for the integration of third-country nationals. In addition, this chapter is concerned with the process of Europeanisation. The author formulates and formalises the causal mechanism that explains the passage of the policy from national agenda to the EU agenda (p. 61). The

European policy for the integration of third-country nationals was adopted with a significant delay. The Europeanised common immigration policy was developed in a climate of security concerns. The first step of adopting the common integration policy “took place at a time when there were 15 member states” (p. 64). The author argues that the emergence of an integration policy at the EU level is a result of three combined conditions: one that is referred to as a ‘necessary’ condition, a second ‘sufficient’ condition, and an ‘intervening’ factor. Firstly, a necessary condition proceeds through soft laws that derive from the institutional context and increase the acceptability of EU instruments for joint action. In this context, soft law can be understood as a set of non-binding provisions meant to guide the behaviour of member states. Upon this necessary condition, the sufficient condition is based upon the member states’ preferences and the role of the Presidency of the EU, and their readiness to place these preferences on the EU agenda. In the case of migrant integration, member states are key actors to place their concerns onto the EU agenda. Finally, an intervening factor is built upon the Commission’s ability to play policy entrepreneur, without ever infringing on member states’ exclusive competence. The Commission has managed to retain its proposals and policies within the boundaries of acceptability established by the member states (pp. 69-73).

*Chapter 4* analyses EU initiatives that facilitated the adoption of the European Fund for the Integration (EIF) of third country nationals (covering the period of 2007-2013) by the Council. This chapter discusses the key characteristics and principles of the EIF – which is considered a soft law. The EIF is a delicate matter as it operates on the principle of co-financing and programming. All EU member states except Denmark participate in the EIF. Since the responsibility for integration policies lies with member states and as the EU had no formal competence in the domain, the Council “did not provide for a clear European approach to integration, but proposed to support national policies leaning onto European-defined principles” (p. 102). This is mostly due to the principle of subsidiarity claimed by member states. The fund must be agreed by unanimity which may prove to be difficult (p. 111), but the author shows that the EIF enables member states to use it with considerable discretion. Also, this chapter identifies some of the main disputes over the EIF and policy-making processes by focusing on questions such as “Who gets what, when and how”. Van Wolleghem makes a compelling

case that the EIF has little effect on member states' integration policy.

*Chapter 5* discusses the mechanisms that govern the implementation of the EIF's soft law provisions across EU member states, while also focusing on the top-down Europeanisation process. This chapter aims to identify the factors determining the implementation of soft law provisions across member states. The chapter seeks to answer the question: Why do member states implement (the soft law provisions) without a legal obligation to do so? Van Wolleghem considers "actors likely to affect implementation in order to explain why member states implement or 'resist' soft law instruments" (p. 137). The author argues in this chapter that when it comes to the implementation of the EU integration policy, the policy instruments matter. Two instruments form the core of the EU integration policy are its Common Basic Principles (CBPs) and the European Integration Fund (EIF). Van Wolleghem argues that instruments determine "the influential actors that in turn may affect the implementation of outcomes" (p. 154). Additionally, in the context of migration policies, Van Wolleghem investigates the role of public opinion and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the decision-making process. He argues that when governments' preferences are not challenged by the Commission, they may be constrained by public opinion and/or CSOs. If policy-makers are interested in remaining in office, they must pay attention to the issues that the public cares about and the issues on which CSOs may exert pressure.

Finally, *Chapter 6* focuses not only on the implementation of the EIF, but also on the actual use of the fund. Understanding its actual implementation is important because the EU has taken further steps by introducing a new fund on Asylum, Migration, and Integration for 2014-2020. The question at the core of this chapter is: Once programmes are drafted and adopted, what determines the actual use of the fund at the national level? (p. 163). At the end of the implementation period, about 18% of the fund remained unused. In addition, Van Wolleghem points out disparities of usage between member states, ranging on average from 42% for Malta to 100% for Finland. Why do some member states not use the money they have available for their integration policies? (p. 164). EU funds might be too demanding as they require administrative and organisational structures, as well as budgetary capacity. The EIF's characteristics are very

similar to the structural fund regarding the co-financing principle. As a rule, the EU is co-financing 50% (or up to 75%) of integration projects. Member states are required to finance 25-50% of the integration projects. On the other hand, the EIF was not based on economic solidarity, and therefore does not consider financial imbalances among member states. Additionally, member states were receiving funds that were proportional to the number of migrants they granted residence to.

Van Wolleghem concludes the book by saying that “there is no EU integration policy. There is a consistent set of policy instruments that together form a policy relating to integration, but talking of an EU integration policy as of yet is hardly valid” (p. 190). Despite the commitment by member states to reach a more vigorous integration policy, disagreements emerged when it came to implementation. Without a strong foothold in integration matters and with a voting rule that requires unanimous decision-making, the adoption of an effective integration policy is unlikely. Importantly, the EU has no formal competence on integration, at the EU level the matter is vested with the member states, thus it exhibits intergovernmental features. Member states should realise that the movement of people is not an issue in itself and as such it should not be the subject of dispute. They should instead realise that the integration of refugees and migrants is a highly contentious topic, which in itself should be a trigger in reaching more effective integration policies.

Lastly, *The EU's Policy on the Integration of Migrants* is an excellent resource for students and educators interested in the EU and migration studies. Immersing yourself in this book gives you insight on the present EU migration crisis. It offers a significant contribution to the literature on migration by providing an in-depth analysis and overview of EU policy making, integration policy, the EU's capacity to absorb funds, the implementation of EU outputs, as well as Europeanisation.

**Hamza Preljević**<sup>1</sup>

1 International University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, hpreljevic@ius.edu.ba

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**Contact** Croatian International Relations Review  
Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO)  
Ljudevita Farkaša Vukotinovića 2, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
T +385 1 48 77 460  
F +385 1 48 28 361  
E [cirr@irmo.hr](mailto:cirr@irmo.hr)  
W [cirr.irmo.hr](http://cirr.irmo.hr)

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