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# WESTERN BALKANS IN THE LIGHT OF REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY

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This article analyzes an acute international security issues of Western Balkans sub-complex using Regional Security Complex Theory (hereinafter RSCT) as an advanced theoretical approach.

The study allows not only to identify the key elements and main features of RSCT, but also to form an idea of the Western Balkans as an extremely heterogeneous and conflict region.

With the aim to confirm RSCT on the example of Western Balkans sub-complex, the author raised number of tasks, among which are: application of four levels of RSCT in order to analyze such Western Balkans security dynamics as relations between the countries in the region, relations of the region with neighboring regions and the role of global powers in the region; another task of the paper is analysis of Western Balkans as a sub-complex within the European Regional security complex. This issue is one of the reasons why Balkan itself deserves special attention of RSCT, as during the 90s there was a possibility for it to form a special RSC, due to all specifics that were taking place at that time. As a result of research, the author gives three possible scenarios for Western Balkans sub-complex to become part of European Regional Complex in the future.

The main conclusions of the article stress that Western Balkans retain their specificity, which requires a separate study and a special approach, and also confirm that RSCT is an effective methodological tool, which allows researchers to analyze regional international political processes in the field of Western Balkans security.

**Key words:** The Balkans; Regional Security Sub-Complex; RSCT; Analysis; Dynamics; Global Powers, EU; Integration.

For many years and especially during the Cold War, security studies were dominated by theories which were explaining security relying mainly on political and military aspects. These theories frequently overemphasized undoubted importance and influence of super powers on the security dynamics of different regions and almost they completely neglected local actors and the way how they shape the same region.

Just a cursory glance at the situation and relations in the Western Balkans is sufficient to conclude that this is a very complex region. In this regard, the author of the paper believes that the analytical part of the research needs a modern approach in order to analyse problems of regional security and uses the Regional Security Complex Theory (hereinafter: RSCT) as the main instrument for the research. This theory represents a significant step forward in international security studies, because it considers regional security sub-systems (complexes) as objects of its analysis. Taking this into account, the author used the methodology of regional security complex theory in order to analyze Western Balkans subsystem (complex) as an object and main focus of security analysis. The methodology also includes the principles of objectivity, scenarios, as well as analysis and synthesis.

The change of global security constellation was caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it significantly contributed to review of the former theoretical framework

for the analysis of international security. The perceived disadvantages, shortcomings and inadequacy of the former theoretical conceptual apparatus, represented the epistemological precondition for the development of new approaches in the study of international security, which take into account changes that occurred after the Cold War. One of such approaches is the Regional Security Complex Theory, developed by Ule Waever and Barry Buzan, the founders of the Copenhagen School of International Relations. In their book “Regions and Powers: International security structure”, Buzan and Waever observed that there are global and great powers on systematic level, that there is one global (United States) and four great powers (EU, Russia, China, Japan) and 6 regional security complexes [Buzan, Waever 2003: 50]. To date, Regional Security Complex Theory is the most effective and most developed methodology of regional policy measurements of international policy [Lukin 2011: 2]. The main idea of this theoretical approach is that, in spite of globalization, the majority of security threats in international relations still have a territorial character and the level of these threats depend on the geographical distance [Todorova 2006: 42].

Emphasizing the relative autonomy of the studied complex and its regional security dynamics (compared to units that are not part of that complex), the authors of RSCT advocate the idea that single units by themselves build complex, and they are part of it. This is diametrically opposite approach of the Cold War security paradigm in which two superpowers, sometimes with less, sometimes with more confrontation, were determining their spheres of interest and were making regions from, top-down'. One of the first attempts to define the regional security complex was originated from Buzan, who was explaining RSC as “a group of states whose primary security concern so closely connected that their national security can't be reasonably considered separately” [Buzan 1983: 106].

After recognizing the possibility of the presence of other actors, as well as highlighting different security sectors, a few years later, Buzan and Waever transformed the existing definition of a regional security complex. They defined RSC as “a set of units whose main processes of securitization and/or desecuritization so much connected that their security problems cannot be analyzed or solved separately” [Buzan 1998:201].

In an attempt to respond to the question why regions appear as a special type of territorial subsystem, Volc reminds that the fact that units (states) are more fixed rather than mobile, should also be noted [Volc 2008:68].

Analysing regional problems I.M. Busygina uses the term “region” as an integrated system with its structure, function, its history, culture, living conditions, relationship with other regions [Busygina 2001: 7—15].

Serbian theoreticians define region as a natural entity, which appears spontaneously and naturally [Wilingten 2013: 429—451].

Taking into account these and many other different definition of the region, we agree with the notion that in modern educational and scientific literature the interpretation of region is not clear and often contradicting [Volkova 2002: 27].

In contemporary international relations theory, it is taken for granted that main political units are not mobile, but it should be taken under consideration that countries

are always fixed for a concrete territory, and they are forced to have certain relations with their neighbors. These relations can be very different. Buzan and Waever grouped them into models of friendship and enmity. This shows that the regions are socially constructed by their members. This brings constructive element in RSCT, which makes it different from any other theories.

“Scientific regional geography generally do not divide the Balkan peninsula on the east, west, north and south. Balkan peninsula is composed of three major natural areas: Aegean region, Pindos-Dinaric area and the continental block, and not one of them is marked as “western” or “western Balkans” [Cvijic 1991: 14—15]. Without entering in endless debates of what Western Balkans is, the author would like to note that the term “Western Balkans” has got rather political than geographical significance, and has been used for the first time in European Union official documents in the beginning of 1990s [Tiri, Donila 2009: 1107]. Nowadays, the term is used to address the Balkan states that still are not part of the European Union, but declared their aspiration towards the membership, and it includes Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

One of the main historical characteristics of the Balkans is that the region has been often divided and ruled by different empires, kingdoms, and various types of regimes [Pop 2013: 107]. Before and after the Cold War, the basic structure of the Balkans sub-complex did not change significantly. In modern conditions, the Balkan region is one of the most important cross-border regions in the global political arena, which has, on the one hand, favorable geo-strategic position, and on the other hand, high conflict potential. Western Balkan region plays an important role in the global system of international relations, even though currently a common Western Balkans identity is almost unimaginable.

#### **RSCT ANALYSIS ON THE EXAMPLE OF WESTERN BALKANS SECURITY DYNAMICS**

When analyzing RSC in the Western Balkans, the author of the article starts from the assumption that for understanding of the security dynamics in the regional security sub-complex Western Balkans, it's necessary to take into account all four levels of RSCT analysis: internal security, relations between the countries in the region, relations of the region with neighboring regions and the role of global powers in the region.

Although, geographically speaking, the territory of Western Balkans is not large, internal dynamics which happen there, are mainly caused by the heterogeneity of the peoples who inhabit it. The consequence of it is that this territory has become the source of many conflicts whose consequences are still visible, but at the same time it is labeled as a region with great potential for the escalation of new conflicts. In this sense, the area of the Western Balkans has a few potential focal points, because different ethnic groups intertwine on the territories of most countries in the region, and each of them has its own identity designed and built through the prism of the potential threats from other ethnic groups.

Security dynamics between the countries of the Western Balkans are strong and contradictory, especially at the most common “triangular”: Croatia — Serbia — Bosnia;

three entities within Bosnia; Slovenia — Serbia — Croatia. As a result of such interlocking triangles, each conflict is being easily reflected in the large number of countries. According to Buzan and Waever, even if some permanent alliances would form, they would have been ensued on a religious basis (“Islamic arc” — Turkey, Albania, Kosovo and one part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), on one side, and Greece, Bulgaria, Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina — Republic of Srpska, and Serbia. They added that the model of potential conflict on Western Balkans is too complicated and the number of participants is too big [Buzan, Waever 2003: 386]. When it comes to international impact, the question of the future of quite various protectorates in Bosnia and Kosovo, remains open. The way in which a particular nation or nations build their identity and the way we perceive their identity and their position in relation to the neighboring nation to the fullest extent influences the security dynamics between two peoples and wider area, too.

When looking at the overall security constellation, it can be said that the internal security level is especially important in the countries of the Western Balkans, because internal security in other Balkan countries is more stable. Of course, this is due to their membership in the EU and NATO. Full membership in these organizations provides a completely new quality to the countries and presents a new institutional mechanism for the realization of their national interests.

Serbia has traditionally been seen as the central country of the Western Balkans region. The complex nature of the Serbian issue in Western Balkans and security dynamics inside and outside Serbia, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have the potential for both positive and negative development in the future [Pop 2011: 81].

The aim of international administrations in Kosovo (since 1999) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (since 1995) was to build independent political institutions, which are able to resolve political conflicts peacefully. The functioning of these institutions which were created heavily depended on the international administrations authority. The absence of conflict resolution obstructed domestic institutions to become independent. It means that they didn't have a power to act. Because the international administrations have got broad powers to make peace and to build political institutions, domestic actors expected the international administrations to make some major political decisions. This led to a situation when the functioning of the domestic institutions seriously depended on the international administrations' authority [Sokolova 2007: 199]. In turn, this institutional dependence proved one of the characteristics of the RSC, and that is the influence of the external powers. Leading regional geopolitical players in the region that are present in the region are US, EU and Russia, so the main characteristic of the Balkans is that it is more an object than a subject of world politics. The Balkans might be considered as the case of overlay during the Yugoslav wars (1991—1999), the period when the region was greatly influenced by external forces, including the EU, USA and Russia. However, since each of the countries involved in the conflict had powerful friends abroad, they continued to hope for their support, and it made them less willing for compromise” [Buzan, Waever 2003: 383]. From the beginning, the Croats expected support from Germany, Serbians hoped for Russian support, and Muslims counted on

the support from the US. Therefore, none of the countries did not show any signs of willingness to compromise, and relevant external forces had a major impact [Pop 2013: 109].

Western Balkans became “a powder keg” of Europe every time when the Europe and America would start to interfere, but much of it depended and still depends on the purposes of Russian policy in this part of the Old World<sup>1</sup>. The existing relations between Serbia and Russia present an obstacle to inclusion of complete Balkan region in, especially because Russia is a Serbian strategic partner, which has important role in regional and international relations of Serbian policy [Mouritzen 1997: 66—68].

At the present time, unclear boundary of Western Balkans sub-complex has got two cores: the first group are the core of conflicts between Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks; and the second core is around Macedonia, where Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece are also involved. Security dynamics often have the triangle form of conflicts: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia; Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia; three ethnic groups in Bosnia, etc. In general, the Balkans have always been example of formal and informal alliances in which religion played a very strong role for ethnic or national identity. These alliances include, for example, “Islamic arc” linking Turkey, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Albania and Kosovo; and the alliance formed by the Orthodox Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and the Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) [Buzan, Waever 2003: 384—386].

After the wars that led to the breakup of Yugoslavia, the question is which of security problems prevail in the Western Balkans at the beginning of XXI century. On the internal level, of course, the problem is the nature of the Western Balkan countries, which are still facing many problems that prevent democratization. At the head of the list is the lack of consensus about the basic principles, values and priorities of the political and economic system, as well as their future place in Euro-Atlantic integration. As a matter of fact, societies are still essentially divided in various ways, which presents an obstacle of the overwhelming consolidation of democracy, and also the normal functioning of institutions. Freedom of media is endangered by governments and by strong economic and political groups.

Practically, each of the Western Balkans countries which are outside of the EU still faces difficulties of institutional or structural nature, such as the weakness of the functioning of democratic institutions in Albania, dysfunctional political structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the problem of Serbia's borders in the context of the unilaterally proclaimed independence of Kosovo, Macedonia difficulties in dealing with its neighbors, internal ethnic divisions and so on.

According to the Serbia's National Strategy document, such problems in the region as post-conflict legacy, organized crime, national, religious and political extremism are very common in the countries of the Western Balkans<sup>2</sup>. The religion comes on the

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<sup>1</sup> Guskova, E., 2009. Balkany kak osnova novogo miroporádka [Balkans as a basis for a new world order], *Russkii Dom*. URL: <http://rusdom.ru/node/1364> (accessed: 18.01.2016).

<sup>2</sup> *Strategija Nacionalne Bezopasnosti Srbije*, 2009.

surface, as it represents and sets a line of separation and the most important element in defining the national identity (Croat / Serb, three entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo Albanian / Kosovo Serb Orthodox Macedonians / Albanians). Religious and ethnic heterogeneity affect the economic development of these countries, especially those which have a complex religious structure, primarily Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro. [Halilovic 2012: 195—197]

There are number of issues in the Western Balkans of societal and political sectors, such as: Will Bosnia and Herzegovina remain as it is or it will divide into two or three countries; Will Kosovo be independent in the future, a part of Serbia or possibly part of a Greater Albania; The position of Albanians in southern Serbia; The relationship between the large Albanian minority and the Slovenian majority in Macedonia, which caused open violence in early 2001; and many others. In the Western Balkans, political and ethnic ground has not ceased to tremble, because it is believed that the processes of nation states construction which started at the time of disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, have not finished yet. Kosovo and Metohiya and Bosnia and Herzegovina present two focal points of this region that give character to this regional security sub-complex, so it is not difficult to conclude that the sustainability of the current status of Kosovo and Metohiya and Bosnia and Hercegovina is questionable. Each unit of this sub-complex wants a different status for these entities in accordance with its national interests.

Beside historical, political, juridical, cultural and linguistic closeness of units regional security sub-complex of Western Balkans (RSSCWB), the thing which clearly outlines the boundary of this sub-complex is the involvement of all actors and different interests in terms of “final solution” for Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska). This situation brings new challenges and can lead to new cycles of destabilization in the region. In the respect of this, the possibility that the Western Balkans becomes separated RSC, with clear boundaries, is still not completely excluded. The international community and local actors securitize increasingly transnational nature of criminal phenomena, such as illegal drug trafficking, human trafficking (prostitution — often in the form of slave-like and organized illegal migration to the West), weapons trafficking, and organized crime in general. These challenges are supported and reinforced by the above mentioned conflicts, by weak state structures and numerous fissures and conflicts within societies. Looking at the overall constellation of the Balkans, based on this, it can be said that the internal level is especially important in the countries of the Western Balkans.

### **WESTERN BALKANS SUB-COMPLEX AS THE PART OF EUROPEAN REGIONAL COMPLEX**

When it comes to the Western Balkans, the concept of the sub-complex becomes the central category in the RSCT. At the beginning of early 1990s the Balkans had a possibility to become a separate RSC. During this period, the Balkan region has been relatively separated from the European Regional Security Complex (ERSC), because the security dynamics were more intensive inside the borders within the former Yugoslavia.

Differences in power, combined with geographic closeness allow external actors to shape this territory. This is exactly what determines the Western Balkans as a potential part of a European RSC.

The most concrete incentive for entering Western Balkans entire region into the EU was given on the EU-Western Balkans summit in June 2003, when the Heads of State and Government of the EU stated that “the future of the Western Balkans is in the European Union”, and confirmed that all countries of former Yugoslavia countries and Albania are “potential candidates” for EU membership [Kronja, Lopandic 2012: 8].

Regardless of the apparent decrease in enthusiasm in the EU countries in relation of the process of its further expansion (which is reflected in the fact that summit EU-Western Balkans was never held again after 2003), the integration policy still continued. Croatia signed an agreement on joining the European Union (which was implemented on July 1, 2013) after six years of negotiations in December 2011.

Montenegro was officially accepted as a candidate for EU membership in December 2011 and Serbia in March 2012. There is a possibility that the European Council might consider the possibility to grant candidate status to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in near future, while open membership negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia are already open.

Negotiations with other countries of the Western Balkans can last from half of the decade (very optimistic variant) to an entire decade, and possibly even longer. The absence of a “European perspective” would probably cause new turmoil in the region where national-ethnic divisions haven’t stopped yet, where nationalist ambitions are still strong and where the socio-economic problems are more difficult than elsewhere in Europe.

The EU is currently in a crisis that can be developed in different ways. This affects the enlargement and integration policy, and thus the process of regional cooperation in Western Balkans sub-complex [Kronja, Lopandic 2012].

As the RSCT theory can be used to assess the empirical situations and for regional security forecasting [Mikhailenko 2014: 73], one can imagine various scenarios in the further evolution of the relationship between enlargement EU on the one hand, and regional cooperation on the Balkans, on the other.

One of the options is that EU finds a way out of the crisis soon. It would result in the strengthening of the Union, and would have a positive impact on policy of expansion at the same time just like as in previous crises. This scenario would make countries in the Western Balkans region more interested and active in regional cooperation, and it would strengthen the Regional Cooperation Council and the Cooperation Process in Southeastern Europe which would represent the true voice of the region. Bilateral relations would improve and many open issues on Western Balkans region would be solved. This scenario is the most difficult to achieve, but it would make everybody win, as the positive effects would multiply both in the European Union and in Western Balkans countries.

The most negative scenario would be further deterioration of the situation in the EU because it hasn’t found the right solutions for the crisis yet. In such conditions, the in-

terest of Western Balkans countries for EU integrations would temporarily disappear. This could decrease the interest in regional cooperation and it would worsen the internal situation in the countries of the region. Unresolved bilateral issues would lead to a deterioration of bilateral relations between the Western Balkans countries. Bilateral issues as well as problems in some areas of potential crisis (Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo) would be strengthening.

Third scenario would be “medium” scenario in which the negative and positive effects of the situation in the EU would be changing turns in relation to the enlargement process and regional cooperation, so that the general picture would not be as negative as in a previous option. EU would manage to calm the current crisis, but yet not to solve it in a sustainable and lasting way.

The way how the events and relationships in this field will develop further, depends on the determination of the European Union to make a strategic steps towards the Western Balkans. Steps that have been made so far, show that the European Union seeks to involve the region in its further integration. On the other hand, there was the possibility that these same forces which are now pushing the Western Balkans towards the European complex, detach and leave the Balkans, so that traditional security issues of Western Balkans are kept away outside of Europe.

There was even an ideological basis for this in terms of availability of discourse “Balkanization”, that in general indicates not only the fragmentation of large and powerful political units, but has already become synonymous for the return of tribal, backward, primitive and barbarian [Trapkovic, Pusic, Shyhyukovich 2007: 62].

However, Western Balkans will not be left on its own, as the external actors have always been crucial for the development of the Western Balkans, and they still are, especially West and Russia who have taken over management of the further development of the Balkans.

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This article starts from the assumption that RSCT gives us a convenient theoretical instrument for analysing the security dynamics in Western Balkans. For understanding of the security dynamics in this sub-complex, it was necessary to take into account all four levels of analysis: internal security, relations between the countries in the region, relations of the region with neighboring regions and the role of global powers in the region.

The extent to which the dynamics that are characteristic for ERSC (integration, expansion) will be extended to the Western Balkans, depend on the internal policy in the Western countries, internal dynamics of the region and the external context. All that requires a constant monitoring of the situation in this region, as well as the definition of global powers’ interests and approaches to their realization.

Presently, the Western Balkans can be considered as a sub-complex, but at the end of the day, it might become the part of the European super-complex [Pop 2013: 109]. On the other hand, it is necessary to note that Western Balkans is often mentioned in EU in the context of concern for the security and stability of the region, however not



only for its internal security but also for the overall security of Europe, as the further insecurity in the Balkans would have implications on the broader European security. It is also not excluded that in future, Western Balkans will become separated RSC with clear boundaries, due to its security dynamics.

According to Natasa Zambeli, European perception of the Western Balkans is based upon idea that the Balkans is totally different and opposite part of the world from Europe, and being a part of the Western Balkans is considered as an obstacle toward European integrations [Zambeli 2010: 55—76].

So, the Western Balkans has not yet become separated RSC, but the question is what permanent form it will get: whether it will still be sub-region or it will be fully merged into Europe? There are also many other questions left like: What if the Western powers are already tired of Albanian mafia, Montenegrin corruption, continuous local violence in Kosovo, ethnic tensions in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Macedonia; etc. Buzan and Waever predict that Western Balkans is on the way to become eventually transformed into an integral part of Europe and not as a part without problems, but as a part with east-central European issues [Buzan, Waever 2003: 383—386].

Based on our research, we can finally confirm that RSCT is an effective methodological tool, which allows researchers to focus on international relations, to analyze regional international political processes in the field of security and their relationship in global context [Zhuravlev 2015: 4].

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## ЗАПАДНЫЕ БАЛКАНЫ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ТЕОРИИ КОМПЛЕКСОВ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

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В данной статье анализируются актуальные вопросы международной безопасности подкомплеса Западных Балкан при использовании теории комплексов региональной безопасности (ТКРБ) в качестве современного теоретического подхода.

Исследование позволяет не только идентифицировать ключевые элементы и основные черты ТКРБ, но и сформировать представление о том, насколько Западные Балканы являются гетерогенным и конфликтным регионом.

С целью подтверждения ТКРБ на примере подкомплеса Западных Балкан перед автором был поставлен ряд задач, среди которых: применение четырех уровней ТКРБ для анализа таких

вопросов безопасности на Западных Балканах как внутренняя безопасность, отношения между странами в регионе, отношения региона с соседними регионами и роль глобальных сил в регионе; другой задачей работы является анализ Западных Балкан как подкомплекса в рамках Европейского регионального комплекса безопасности. Этот вопрос является одной из причин, поясняющих, почему Балканы заслуживают особого внимания со стороны ТКРБ, так как в 90-е годы появилась возможность для того, чтобы в регионе сформировался отдельный комплекс региональный безопасности. В результате проведенного исследования автор дает три возможных сценария для развития подкомплекса Западных Балкан, чтобы стать частью Европейского регионального комплекса в будущем.

Основные выводы статьи заключаются в том, что Западные Балканы сохраняют свою специфику, которая требует отдельного исследования и особого подхода, и что ТКРБ является эффективным методологическим инструментом, который позволяет исследователям проанализировать региональные международные политические процессы в области безопасности на Западных Балканах и их связи в глобальном контексте.

**Ключевые слова:** Западные Балканы, региональный подкомплекс безопасности, ТКРБ, динамика безопасности, мировые державы, ЕС, интеграция.

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