

SECURITY COMMUNITY BUILDING IN THE WESTERN BALKANS – WISHFUL THINKING OR AN INEVITABLE FUTURE?

Abstract. *Relying on a combination of security community theories, this article aims to explain whether it is possible to form and develop such a community in the Western Balkans or if some version of a security community already exists in the region. Features of the theoretical concept of security community developed by Karl Deutsch and the revised security community theory of Adler and Barnett, along with Buzan's regional security complex theory are used to assess the current relations among actors in the Western Balkans.*

Besides explaining the European Union's influence on the development of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, the paper analyses domestic factors contributing to or inhibiting the creation of a security community, as well as the bilateral/multilateral favourable/unfavourable conditions for its development.

Therefore, the paper traces the development and institutionalisation of relations between Western Balkan countries and the factors influencing them, including the current state of their interactions and their perceptions of security cooperation. Key national strategic security documents are also analysed to detect how each country (including Croatia) perceives its neighbours, its regional belonging, the biggest regional challenges and the potential for resolving domestic and open bilateral issues.

Keywords: *security community theory, regional security complex theory, national security policies, Western Balkans, regional security*

Introduction

The institutionalisation of international security in the history of modern states has led to the creation of global and regional (security) organisations and regimes, many of which declare 'international peace and security' as

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their main or at least one of their main purposes. In the course of these developments, the creators of their constitutive acts gradually developed norms and acceptable rules of conduct for inter-state relations at the global level, which primarily concerned the right to use force only in specific conditions and, finally, a ban on the threat or use of force in international relations (UN Charter, Article 2). However, given that the theory and practice of international life often take dissimilar courses, and military (and other forms of) force remain an instrument for achieving certain goals and national interests, this has given incentives for groupings of like-minded states to establish alliances, formal and informal forms of cooperation, which have also provided grounds for reconciling their shared enmities and rivalries in given circumstances.

The 20th century saw the emergence of many of such more or less institutionalised cooperative entities in different parts of the world. Yet, the European continent (more specifically, its Western core) was often characterised as a rare example of a region whose constitutive elements (states) were able to bridge their differences, diverse interests or even rivalries in a peaceful manner – without resorting to violence. Hence, in the second half of the 20th century, as the European project as a peacebuilding project itself evolved, it provided practical grounds for the theoretical ‘security community’ concept proposed and developed by Karl Deutsch.

As it gradually reached the phase of a ‘mature security community’, whose main pillars are the transformed EU and NATO, coupled with a dense network of various forms of cooperation in several functional areas, the European security architecture has had to find appropriate ways to tackle the emerging problems in the non-integrated or peripheral parts of the continent – where the region of the Western Balkans (WB) is a focal point due to its recent violent history and current status *vis-à-vis* the European core.

Hence, this paper aims to analyse domestic factors contributing to or inhibiting the creation of a security community, as well as the bilateral/multilateral favourable/unfavourable conditions for its development in order to establish whether there any grounds exist to claim that the violent patterns of inter/intrastate relations in the region are a matter of the past and that their inconsistent interests can be resolved peacefully. In other words, the main research question is whether at least a nascent (Adler and Barnett, 1998) form of security community exists in the Western Balkans and which conditions are needed to develop one such a community in the future? To this end, the paper analyses the roots and evolution of diplomatic, political and security relations while assessing mutual (mis)perceptions, unresolved bilateral issues, opposing interests and foreign-policy objectives in order to detect any gap between declaration and action, more precisely between formally recognising regional cooperation is essential for regional security and

development and the actions taken primarily by political elites to actually establishing a sound basis for sustainable peace and security in the region.

The core argument is that the EU has been promoting a 'regional security community' in the WB as a phase of enlarging the current 'European security community', which stems from its interest in spreading the sphere of security around the European core. Although not aimed to create an institutional structure, the project of developing regional cooperation in the WB may be viewed as an effort to build and strengthen the regional sub-system of the wider European security complex. However, its normative and transformative power encounters numerous obstacles in the WB, whose sources lay in the complex combination of inter- and intra-state relations. In addition, when examining the prospects of building a regional security community from the perspective of WB actors, at first glance a basic 'ingredient' in any security community seems to be missing – the "feeling of belonging to a certain community" (Grizold et al., 2015: 205) or the '*we*' feeling – normally arising from geopolitical realities, historical heritage, a shared view of the nature of security threats and security interests but, most vitally, mutual trust.

Apart from the theoretical concept of security communities (Deutsch, Adler and Barnett), the paper relies on Buzan's regional security complex theory (RSCT). The region of the Western Balkans provides an interesting case study in the context of these theoretical concepts for two reasons: the first is the region's importance for Europe's overall security, as stated in EU strategic documents¹ and confirmed by the extensive reform agenda designed exclusively for this region, while the second is the region's recent history, still experiencing the transition from a conflict/post-conflict phase to stable peace within and between regional actors.

Conceptual framework

What does it take to ensure peaceful *interstate* relations? This question concerns many social scientists across different disciplines, but most notably those working within international relations and security studies given that interstate war is traditionally viewed as the chief source of insecurity. The development of these two disciplines in the 20th century produced several theories giving different explanations of war and peace, the nature, meaning and role of the state, force, interests, values, prospects of cooperation,

¹ *European Security Strategy – A Secure Europe in a Better World (2003)*. Accessible at <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world>, 13. 3. 2018. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. The Global Strategy of the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (2016)*. Accessible at <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union>, 13. 3. 2018.

international organisations and the nature of the international system. As the nature and definition of security have changed over time, so has the meaning of peace, threats and ways of conceptualising the conditions required for peace within and between states, societies and other actors.

What does the theoretical 'security community' concept mean? According to Karl Deutsch, the famous political scientist who introduced this concept into IR and security studies, although it is also relevant to peace studies (Vesa, 1999: 19), 'security community' is "one in which there is real assurance that the members of community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes in some other way" (Deutsch et al., 1957: 5).

Professor Deutsch notes in the Introduction to his ground-breaking book *Political Community and North American Area*, the main reason for him and his associates to embark on their research was to contribute "to the study of possible ways in which men some day might abolish war" (Deutsch, 1957: 3). This centuries-old question resulted in a new concept which has inspired generations of political scientists to complement, adapt and apply it while analysing peace, security and conflict dynamics in different parts of the world at intra-and inter-state levels. Although generally accepted that Deutsch and associates were mainly concentrating on the inter-state level, the above definition does not refer to this level specifically, leaving open the possibility of its application also at the intra-state level, which has been especially practical and useful in the post-Cold War context. After all, in this very work, there a distinction is made between *amalgamated*² and *pluralistic*³ security communities, both of which require "some sort of organisation". The original keywords within this concept are 'integration', the expectation of 'peaceful change' and 'sense of community'. Since the Cold War, the concept has gained significance as shown by the fact the institutionalised forms of cooperation, upholding the existence of the European and Trans-Atlantic security community, have not only managed to survive and eliminate the use of force among its constituent parts over a longer period, but have also become reference point for those outside the integration.

Which preconditions are needed for a security community? According to Vesa, Deutsch and his associates recognised integration, more precisely 'integration capability', as a prerequisite to manage the growing transnational relations that are a consequence of integration (political, cultural, economic). Moreover, in order for a security community to be successful, it has to encompass a "mutual responsiveness" or a "we-feeling" that enables sympathising with the needs of others in the community and responding

² Where 'amalgamation' means "merger of two or more previously independent units into a single larger unit, with some type of common government" (Deutsch, 1957: 6).

³ In pluralistic security communities there is no common government between the units within community, and each retain their independence and sovereignty.

positively to them (among political elites and populations); “the compatibility of major values” and the “lack of preparation for hostilities” (Vesa, 1999: 20).

The biggest revision and further popularisation of Deutsch’s concept came with Adler and Barnett who concentrated on pluralistic security communities as “theoretically and empirically closest to developments that are currently unfolding in international politics and international relations theory” (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 5). Acknowledging that Deutsch’s concept already presented a serious alternative to the dominant realists’ vision of state behaviour in the international system, Adler and Barnett’s attempt concentrated on conditions likely to lead to the emergence of a security community, with special emphasis on the societal dimension and constructivism since they assumed that security communities are socially constructed cognitive regions characterised by mutual understanding and common identities (Barić, 2012). Thus, Deutsch’s preconditions were complemented with shared practices and values, trust as well as the identification of common self-images. Consequently, security community was redefined as a:

community of sovereign states agreeing on the unbearable destructiveness of modern war and on political, economic, social and moral values consistent with democracy, the rule of law and economic reform, to provide their collective security through a process in which member states come together on the basis of shared values and identities. (Adler, 1997: 258)

34

The concept was also broadened by introduction of the idea that one can distinguish different evolutionary phases of security communities, namely, between “nascent”, “ascending” and (loosely and tightly coupled) “mature” security communities (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 48–49) – depending on the strength and type of interactions, the level of coordination and trust, consistency of values and other factors.

Distinguishing between materialist (realist) and subjective (constructivist) elements of security, Väyrynen (2000: 166) defines a security community as “as a collective arrangement in which its members have reasons to trust that the use of military and economic coercion in their mutual relations is unlikely”. Väyrynen also combines structural⁴ and cognitive/societal⁵ prerequisites for the creation of stable peace within regions. He contends that:

⁴ *Balance of power, economic ties and collective security.*

⁵ *Knowledge, trust and predictability.*

the material and societal elements of security meet in the concept of trust that has inter-subjective and institutional foundations, but which at the same time can be linked with essential factors, such as economic interdependence and military confidence. In fact, the existence of a durable security community requires both objective and subjective elements of security that together, then, constitute a necessary precondition for such a community. (Väyrynen, 2000: 161)

Focusing strictly on the absence of physical violence (which can take the form of military and economic coercion), he pays extra attention to the intra-state level, claiming we cannot speak of a security community in regional (inter-state) terms if there is a civil war within one of the constituent units:

the existence of a pluralistic security community should require that the probability of violence is low both in the external and internal relations of its member states. Thus, peace and security have both an extra- and intra-state dimension that are conceptually distinct but must empirically co-exist if a region is to be regarded as a security community. (ibid.: 172)

Similarly, challenging the traditionalist approach to security that is concentrated on external threats, Mohammed Ayoob offers an alternative definition of security by turning to the intra-state level, asserting that the biggest security concerns of most states are “internal in character and are a function of the early stages of state making at which they find themselves” (Ayoob, 1997: 121). These early stages of state making characterise a vast number of countries worldwide, but also Western Balkan countries which are the focus of this analysis. The intra-state level, according to Ayoob, is essential for inter-state relations. In other words, the absence of inter-state violence requires three components at the intra-state level: “territorial satiation, societal cohesion, and political stability”, which characterise peaceful relations among industrialised democracies (ibid.: 136). Hence, these factors will also be incorporated within the analysis.

Finally, regional security complex theory (RSCT), extensively described in *Regions and Powers – The Structure of International Security* presents, “a model of regional security that enables one to analyse, and up to a point anticipate and explain, developments within any region” (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 40). In their application of the regional perspective to explain global security dynamics, where they distinguish between global powers and lesser powers, Buzan and Wæver assume that:

since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes. (ibid.: 4)

They also describe regional security complexes (RSC) as spaces of amity and enmity among actors, “which makes regional systems dependent on the actions and interpretations of actors, not just a mechanical reflection of the distribution of power” (ibid.: 40). The Balkans, the authors add, may be considered a sub-complex of the wider European regional security complex (ibid.: 62), although during the 1990s there was a possibility the region might form a separate RSC (ibid.: 377) due to its internal dynamics quite dissimilar from developments in the rest of Europe.

The Western Balkans – intra- and inter-state dynamics

Compared to other European regions, the Western Balkans remains a challenge since reform processes encounter several obstacles stemming from the complex domestic and interstate environments. It is a politically-defined region in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood, currently encompassing six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia),⁶ characterised by unresolved domestic issues as well as bilateral and multilateral disputes. The term is used for those countries of South-east Europe not included in the EU, but wishing to join. All countries in the region, except Kosovo, are members of the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, CEFTA also includes Kosovo (through UNMIK),⁷ while Albania and Montenegro have achieved NATO membership as well. Consequently, parts of this region are found in the institutional structures (namely NATO) considered important pillars of the European security community.

While different studies suggest that the prospect of conflict in the region is low, some still tend to describe it in terms of insecurities stemming from challenges such as dealing with the aftermath of the 1990s’ conflicts (on the local and regional levels), political instability, corruption,⁸ low levels of economic development, as well as social and ethnic tensions. For example, the 2018 Global Peace Index (GPI), which assesses the ‘quality’ of peace relying

⁶ Until 2013, Croatia was also included in the definition of the region.

⁷ United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo was established by the UNSC Resolution 1244 in 1999. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General as the head of the mission enjoys the executive powers under the Resolution. Accessible at <https://unmik.unmissions.org/mandate>, 4. 4. 2018.

⁸ For the corruption assessment in the region and the comparison with EU-28, see: *Anti-corruption efforts in Western Balkans (2017) Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. Accessible at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599417/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)599417_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/599417/EPRS_BRI(2017)599417_EN.pdf), 15. 4. 2018.*

on a set of indicators such as ongoing domestic and international conflict, societal safety and security and militarisation, states that Western Balkan countries scored relatively lowly among the 163 countries analysed, especially compared to the rest of Europe.

If we include Croatia and Slovenia in the analysis, one may observe a slight difference in the assessment of peace between those countries of the region that have achieved either EU or NATO membership or both, and those that have not (except Serbia). While EU and NATO members Slovenia and Croatia, and NATO members Albania and Montenegro rank either very highly (Slovenia 11th) or highly (Croatia 27th; Albania 54th, Montenegro 58th; Serbia 54th), the state of peace in the rest of the Western Balkans is described as “medium” (North Macedonia 87th, Bosnia and Herzegovina 89th and Kosovo 92nd). Europe has been designated the most peaceful region in the world for the tenth year in a row (36 countries analysed), whereas 5 WB countries are among the 10 European countries with the lowest GPI rankings, despite some improvements (Global Peace Index, 2018).

Currently, five out of the six Western Balkan countries, according to the Freedom House Index, are labelled “partly free”, with the exception of Serbia as a “free” country. Describing the downward trends in the quality of democracy in Europe, Freedom House claims the presence of international actors remains important in terms of promoting the strengthening of the rule of law, democracy and democratic institutions in the region: “Events in the Western Balkans demonstrated a need for continued engagement in the region by major democracies” (Freedom House, 2018: 16).

In terms of economic development, the Development Policy and Analysis Division (DPAD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (UN/DESA) classifies Western Balkan countries as “economies in transition” with “upper middle income”. Similarly, World Bank data for 2019 suggest the same categorisation, except for Kosovo which is in the “lower middle income” category (DPAD, 2015; World Bank, 2019).

All of these countries, except Albania, share a common history (but different historical memories) within Yugoslavia during the 20th century, but also in earlier historical periods. However, all post-Yugoslav countries held the status of constituent republics in SFRY, except Kosovo (an autonomous province in Serbia). On the other hand, Kosovo shares national identity with Albania and Albanians in North Macedonia. Another shared characteristic of these countries is their relatively recent experience with either civil unrest, civil or inter-state conflicts. Namely, Albania saw civil unrest⁹ in 1997 fuelled by economic crisis which resulted in the state’s collapse

⁹ Jusufi claims that at that phase this country “was on the brink of civil war with civil unrest spreading to all parts of the country” (Jusufi, 2017: 83).

and engagement of the international community through operation ALBA under UNSC Resolution 1101;¹⁰ Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced both civil and interstate conflict between 1992 and 1995, leading to the long-term engagement of international actors (EC/EU, NATO, UN, OSCE) in the pre- and post-Dayton period, which are still acting today as guarantors of these countries' existence; North Macedonia experienced civil war in 2001; while Serbia and Montenegro which formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003) and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006) experienced both civil war (in terms of Kosovo secession) and interstate wars (with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia). All these conflicts, except the one in Albania, had the characteristics of an ethnic conflict, while the characterisation of these conflicts as civil or interstate remains a source of contention.

All regional actors seem to share identical foreign policy objectives – membership in the EU and (to some extent) NATO – both of which have exerted a significant influence on regional developments ever since the early 1990s due to its proximity to the integrated part of Europe. In different phases over the last 25 years, these two external actors have been engaged in activities such as preventive diplomacy, peace-making, peace enforcement as well as peace-building aimed at providing the conditions needed for a peaceful transformation within and between Western Balkan societies.

The first phase of this transformation may be contextualised within the basic agreements which concluded or finalised violent episodes within and between the states. Namely: the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995);¹¹ the Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium or Erdut Agreement (1995); the Ohrid Framework Agreement (2001); and to some extent the Brussels Agreement (2013)¹² regulating the normalisation of Serbia–Kosovo relations.

What followed was a mutual recognition phase entailing former Yugoslav republics, which remains unfinished in terms of Serbia–Kosovo relations. Following the Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, Albania, Croatia, North Macedonia and Montenegro recognised it that same year, while Bosnia and Herzegovina has still not taken this step due to a lack of consensus between its two entities – the Federation of Bosnia and

¹⁰ Details of the operation can be found in (Marchiò, 2000).

¹¹ Dayton Peace Agreement. Accessible at <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173?download=true>, 10. 03. 2018.

¹² Brussels agreement is different in nature than the previous three listed here, since it did not follow immediately after the open violence has ended, but after a prolonged period following the NATO intervention of 1999, UNMIK transitional authority and declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008. Hence, it is not strictly a peace agreement.

Herzegovina and Republika Srpska – the latter being strongly opposed to such a move. Engaged in EU-facilitated dialogue with Prishtina since 2011, Serbia remains consistent in its position of not recognising the *de facto* independence of Kosovo and officially regards it as one of its autonomous regions.¹³ Its current government programme adheres to the established state policy for the territory as its “Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija” and the provisions agreed through the facilitated dialogue with the “Temporary institutions of self-government” in Prishtina (Government programme, 2017: 27–28). Besides Serbia, five EU member states also refuse to recognise the independence of this country, namely Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus.

In its National Security Strategy (2009: 5), Serbia states that Kosovo’s recognition by some countries in the region negatively affects the confidence- and cooperation-building measures and delays the stabilisation processes. Hence, the issue of Kosovo’s contested statehood remains one of the regional issues with the greatest conflict potential, especially considering the size of the Albanian population in neighbouring North Macedonia (roughly 25%) and the proximity of Albania. If we put Serbia–Kosovo relations in a ‘bilateral’ perspective, the biggest problems still include the status of the Serb population in Kosovo, border disputes, establishing the Association of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo and the recent transformation of the Kosovo Security Forces into the Kosovo Armed Forces in December 2018. Finally, what constitutes the ‘normalisation’ of mutual relations is perceived differently by the two sides: while for Serbia this means “everything but recognition”, for Kosovo “normalisation without recognition is unthinkable” (Gashi and Novaković, 2017: 3). State-building processes are still underway in the region, not only in Kosovo but also in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where ethnic divisions, institutionalised by having two separate entities, limit the basic consensus on the central government’s role and the overall distribution of powers, thereby creating a deeply divided society. The absence of any ‘we-feeling’ at the local level in Kosovo as well as in Bosnia and North Macedonia may be considered factors seriously inhibiting the creation of a security community. Also, in terms of Ayoob’s “territorial satiation”, as a precondition for peaceful relations, the region still faces challenges.

The normalisation phase between Serbia and Montenegro (at that time the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) and Croatia took the form of binding legal documents in 1996¹⁴ in which both states, among other things, agreed to mutually recognise their independence, establish diplomatic relations,

¹³ See the ‘Basic info’ section at the official web site of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Accessible at <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/tekst/en/130127/basic-info.php>, 3. 1. 2019.

¹⁴ The Agreement was confirmed as law by both parliaments in 1996.

resolve border disputes peacefully and declare a general amnesty for all acts committed in connection with the armed conflicts, except the most serious violations of humanitarian law (war crimes) (Article 7).¹⁵

The promotion of 'normalisation' in intra- and interstate relations is closely tied to stabilisation efforts as an integral part of the peacebuilding process in the Western Balkans. Since NATO and the EU represent the main institutional pillars in support of the European and trans-Atlantic security community, their normative and transformative power has encouraged a few initiatives aimed at strengthening the interconnectedness of regional actors and regional security – more precisely, at the elite level. Among these are the Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI, 1996), the South Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial Process (SEDM, 1996), the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (2006), the SEEBRIG, Southeast European Cooperation Process (1996, SEECP), the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe, the Regional Cooperation Council etc. – all of which have a broader membership, and where participating countries are often either EU or NATO member states themselves.¹⁶ However, due to the crucial role of external actors in their establishment, these programmes and other initiatives which include local actors have not been an expression of their inclinations for regional cooperation, but the result of a top-down approach of extra-regional actors. Although limited in their overall influence on domestic actors, they provide useful space for increasing mutual interactions, communications and, consequently, understanding and the level of mutual trust, as an essential ingredient of any security community. *The level of mutual trust* is by no means easy to determine and WB countries have experienced ups and downs amid a mixture of factors (for example, election campaigns, leaders' rhetoric, perception of historical events, including recent ones, rulings of the ICTY, etc.).

The strategic documents of WB countries state *regional cooperation* is essential to their national and overall regional security, recognising its importance in the context of their Euro-Atlantic aspirations.¹⁷ However,

¹⁵ Agreement on Normalization of Relations between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia. Accessible at https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/HR%20RS_960823_AgreementNormalizationRelationsYugoslaviaCroatia.pdf, 13. 3. 2018.

¹⁶ Such as Bulgaria, Romania, Austria, Denmark, Canada, etc.

¹⁷ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia don't have national security strategies. Their views of the region are derived from other documents. *The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Albania* (p. 7). Accessible at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155586/albania_english-2004.pdf, 17. 4. 2018.; *National Strategy for European Integration of the Republic of Macedonia* (p.6). Accessible at https://www.sobranie.mk/WBStorage/Files/National_strategy%2006.09.2004.PDF, 17. 4. 2018.; *White Paper on Defence of the Republic of Macedonia* (2012, p. 23). Accessible at https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/167326/Macedonia_ENG_2012.pdf, 17. 4. 2018.; *Strategic Security Sector Review of Kosovo*. Accessible at http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/The_Development_Context_of_Strategic_Security_Sector_Review_877377.

the formulations used in these documents also reflect the existing distrust among regional actors, tending to describe each other in terms of fragility, challenges, threats and sources of instability. The Croatian 2002 and 2017 National Security Strategies (NSS) reveal a reluctance to accept the idea of being included in the definition of the Western Balkan region in the first place (despite once being included in the definition of the WB used by the EU). In both documents, the emphasis is on its ‘multiregional’ character, carefully avoiding terms like the Balkans or Western Balkans completely. The first NSS states that “Croatia belongs to at least three European regions with recognizable identities: Central Europe, Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean”¹⁸, while the latest 2017 Strategy defines Croatia either as a Central European¹⁹ or a “sovereign Central European, Danube-Basin, Adriatic and Mediterranean country”.²⁰ Since it has achieved membership of NATO (2009) and the EU (2013), it refers to the Yugoslav successor states as its “southeastern neighbourhood”, which represents a “source of potential challenges” characterised by “political instability, insufficiently developed state institutions, corruption, high rate of unemployment, and social and interethnic tensions”, fragility as well as “trends of strengthening of intolerance, radicalism and extremism” (NSS of Croatia, 2017: 8). Hence, it states that:

Croatia will use its membership in NATO and the European Union to reinforce its international position and to increase its influence on regional and global security circumstances, especially when it comes to its southeastern neighbourhood. (ibid.: 23–24)

Other countries refer to their regional environment (to which they belong to) as Southeast Europe, the Balkans, the Western Balkans, while Montenegro also emphasises its Mediterranean component. One may conclude that there is only a *partial* ‘we-feeling’ in terms of belonging to the region itself, which then influences the type, extent and depth of regional cooperation.

pdf, 15. 4. 2018.; *Strategy of National Security of Montenegro* (p. 3). Accessible at <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/157123/montenegro2006.pdf>, 15. 4. 2018.; *National Security Strategy of Serbia* (p.8 and 21). Accessible at <http://www.voa.mod.gov.rs/documents/national-security-strategy-of-the-republic-of-serbia.pdf>, 15. 4. 2018.; *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Croatia* (2002, p. 14). Accessible at https://www.soa.hr/UserFiles/File/Strategy_Republic_of_Croatia.pdf, 15. 4. 2018.

¹⁸ *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Croatia* (2002). p. 3. Accessible at https://www.soa.hr/UserFiles/File/Strategy_Republic_of_Croatia.pdf, 15. 4. 2018.

¹⁹ In the foreword to the current NSS, the President of the Republic points out that Croatia is geographically, culturally and historically part of the Central Europe.

²⁰ *National Security Strategy of the Republic of Croatia* (2017). p. 5. Accessible at <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/National-Security-Strategy-2017.pdf>, 15. 4. 2018.

Military threats are treated differently in the strategic documents of the WB countries. The threat of a direct military conflict is assessed as “low” in Croatia, while North Macedonia states that it is “currently not facing direct conventional threats” (White Paper on Defence, 2008: 17). On the other hand, Albania does not define the ‘level’ of military threats, instead stating that the use of military force is a danger for its national security. Due to its specific position regarding Kosovo, the Serbian NSS states the country is exposed to the threat of “armed rebellion, as a specific form of armed conflict motivated by unconstitutional and violent aspiration to change the borders” (NSS of Serbia, 2009: 8). It also stresses Serbia “is still faced with significant challenges, risks and threats that endanger its security” while the “main threat to security is attempted secession of the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija” (ibid.). The Montenegrin NSS (p. 6), referring to conventional military threats, concludes that, although they have decreased, they can never be ruled out and potential military risks in the region cannot be eliminated.

All WB countries are multi-ethnic in character, as reflected in their constitutions and legal frameworks for the protection of either national, ethnic, language or religious minorities, as well as bilateral agreements on the mutual protection of minorities. Yet, what complicates the regional situation is the fact that a substantial number of people belonging to one ethnic community which represent the majority²¹ and constitutive nation in one country live in the neighbouring countries as minorities – for example, Albanians make up some 25% of the population in North Macedonia²² and 91% in Kosovo,²³ but only 0.08% in Serbia, since the 2011 Census did not include Kosovo and Albanian-majority municipalities in southern Serbia (Bujanovac and Preševo) boycotted the process.²⁴ According to the 2011 Census, Serbs constitute 29% of the population in Montenegro (MONSTAT,

²¹ It is interesting to note that according to 2011 Census in Montenegro, there are only 45% of citizens who declare themselves as Montenegrins, as the largest ethnic group. *Crna Gora u brojkama 2015*. Zavod za statistiku – MONSTAT (2015) p. 8. Accessible at <https://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/publikacije/CG%20U%20BROJKAMA/Monstat%20-%20CG%20u%20Brojkama%202015.pdf>, 20. 4. 2018.

²² Accessible at https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-48_bg, 20. 4. 2018. In recent years, North Macedonian authorities were unable to organize a new Census and the last official data on ethnic composition are those from 2002 Census. *Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Macedonia (2002)*. Accessible at <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacij/knigaXIII.pdf>, 20. 4. 2018.

²³ *Kosovo's population by ethnicity and censuses 1948-2011*. Accessible at http://askdata.rks.gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/en/askdata/askdata__14%20Census%20population__Census%202011__3%20By%20Municipalities/census33.px/?rxid=6c75a9aa-627c-48c6-ae74-9e1b95a9c47d, 20. 4. 2018. According to the same source, Albanians accounted for 70.6% of the Kosovo population in 1948.

²⁴ *2011 Census of population, households and dwellings in the Republic of Serbia*. Accessible at <http://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Nacionalna%20pripadnost-Ethnicity.pdf>, 20. 4. 2018.

2015: 8), 4.36% in Croatia²⁵; both Serbs and Croats together with Bosniaks are constitutive peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Bosniaks hold minority status in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Without going into further detail, one may assume that in such an ‘ethnic mosaic’ local issues quickly escalate to become bilateral or multilateral tensions, and that censuses (as seen in the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia or Serbia) are a highly politicised issue and a source of dispute since in WB societies numbers matter in terms of the distribution of political power, resources, privileges, etc. (Vrgova, 2015: 111). Affiliations and loyalty are, thus, frequently expressed towards the ethnic kin in the neighbouring state more strongly than towards other people living in the same polity – allowing the conclusion that in some WB countries the ‘we-feeling’ on the domestic level is being substituted by the ‘we-feeling’ found within transnational ethnic groups.²⁶ Together with other factors (especially the experience of mutual recent conflict), this translates into a lack of mutual trust.

The European security architecture and the Western Balkans

Describing the EU’s role in achieving peace and prosperity in Europe, the first European Security Strategy indirectly states some characteristic features of the security community, or necessary conditions for claiming that a certain region may be seen as such a community:

[The EU] has transformed the relations between our states, and the lives of our citizens. European countries are committed to dealing peacefully with disputes and to co-operating through common institutions. Over this period, the progressive spread of the rule of law and democracy has seen authoritarian regimes change into secure, stable and dynamic democracies. Successive enlargements are making a reality of the vision of a united and peaceful continent. (European Security Strategy, 2003: 1)

In addition, it confirms that the Balkans’ inclusion in a united Europe “offers both a strategic objective and an incentive for reform” (ibid.: 8). In the post-Cold-War period, the EU has expanded geographically, but also in terms of its functions, policies and instruments. Its normative power was particularly prominent in promoting and requiring reforms in those states wishing to join it, as well as in those considered important for the European

²⁵ In 1991 Serbs constituted 12.16% of the population in Croatia. Hence, the ethnic composition of Croatia changed substantially throughout 1990s. Census of population, households and dwellings 2011 – population by citizenship, ethnicity, religion and mother tongue. Accessible at https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2012/SI-1469.pdf, 20. 4. 2018.

²⁶ See, for example (Cruise and Grillot, 2013).

security community. Hence, it developed tools such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Stabilisation and Association Process, both aimed at stabilising the broader European environment and bringing several countries into the European security community.

However, the latest EU strategic document, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (2016), reflects many negative trends seen in the wider European security environment in the past decade, but also within the EU itself, by stating the "purpose, even existence, of [our] Union is being questioned".²⁷ Thus, this strategy is regarded as a vision for strengthening the Union as both a 'soft power' and global security provider through a wide variety of policies and instruments, emphasising the importance of the EU's strategic autonomy. It includes references to the Western Balkans as a region with EU membership prospects, where the Union must invest efforts to build state and society resilience as part of one of the Union's five priorities. The EU sees itself as a key transformative power *vis-à-vis* WB countries, and this document confirms the Union remains devoted to "promoting political reform, rule of law, economic convergence and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans and Turkey, while coherently pursuing cooperation across different sectors" (ibid.: 24).

From the EU perspective, the Western Balkans is currently the only region on its borders with any clear accession perspective, although there is no plan for an immediate enlargement on the horizon at the moment, at least not in the next 10 years or so (in 2014 the EC declared no further enlargement). Ever since the decade-long, open-conflict phase in the WB ended with the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001, the EU has been engaged throughout the region with its enlargement agenda on one hand, and its CSDP political and military missions on the other. Namely, the first formal confirmation that the WB countries are welcome in the EU once they meet the conditionality criteria came in 2003 at the Thessaloniki meeting of the European Council (European Council, 2003: 12),²⁸ while its CSDP engagement in the region was announced at the previous Copenhagen meeting in 2002. Accordingly, these new CSDP instruments were put into practice when the EU established the missions EUPM (2003) and ALTHEA (2004) in Bosnia and Herzegovina and CONCORDIA (2003) in Macedonia/FYROM.²⁹

²⁷ It also states that "We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned." (EU Global Strategy, 2016: 7).

²⁸ Accessible at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11638-2003-INIT/en/pdf>, 2. 4. 2018.

²⁹ Completed EU missions and operations. Accessible at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en, 2. 4. 2018.

A regional approach lies at the heart of the EU's Western Balkans policy, positing regional cooperation and the pacification of intra- and interstate relations as prerequisites for making progress towards EU membership (Emmert and Petrović, 2014: 1404). These goals were reinforced and reconfirmed in the EU's Western Balkans strategy published in February 2018.³⁰ On the other hand, a regional approach is less visible in NATO's policies on the region, although some forms of regional cooperation in defence reform, such as the Adriatic Charter,³¹ have appeared under US sponsorship. The Partnership for Peace programme (established in 1994) is based on an individual or bilateral approach (NATO and the participating country), and currently Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia are participating countries from the region.³² In terms of membership in both organisations, numerous obstacles remain in the WB, some being the consequence of the interplay of different domestic developments within countries and interstate disputes resulting in the whole region's slow progress.

The latest EC report on the Western Balkan partners and Turkey³³ published on 17 April 2018 reflects these obstacles quite vividly. On that day, President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker attended a debate on the Future of Europe at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, where he warned about the region's importance for the EU as the chief driving force behind the reforms, in the absence of which it would slide into fresh conflicts. His assessment of the current situation and stability in the region is summed up in the following statement:

If we do not open up to countries in that highly complicated and tragic region, and if we do not open up a European perspective to them, we will see war returning to that area as we saw in the 1990s.³⁴

³⁰ A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans. Accessible at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/39711/credible-enlargement-perspective-and-enhanced-eu-engagement-western-balkans_en, 10. 3. 2018.

³¹ Adriatic charter first gathered Albania, Croatia and North Macedonia (together with the United States) in 2003 and served as platform for their coordinated preparations for NATO membership. Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina joined in 2005, while Serbia (which pursues the policy of military non-alignment) and Kosovo hold an observer status.

³² Albania and Croatia joined the Alliance in 2009, and Montenegro in 2017. Kosovo is not participating in the program, and Serbia has so far been successful in blocking Kosovo's approach towards various organizations and programs.

³³ Enlargement package: Commission publishes reports on the Western Balkans partners and Turkey. Accessible at http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3342_en.htm. 4. 1. 2019.

³⁴ Western Balkans need EU path to prevent new wars: Juncker. Accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-france-juncker-balkans/western-balkans-need-eu-path-to-prevent-new-wars-juncker-idUSKBN1HO15C>, 18. 4. 2018.

Currently, each WB country is at a different stage of its EU accession preparation. Albania has been a candidate country since 2014 and not yet started the negotiating process. Montenegro and Serbia became candidates in 2010 and 2012 and opened their negotiations in 2012 and 2013. North Macedonia obtained candidate status in 2005 and, mostly due to the bilateral dispute over its name with Greece, has not started negotiations. Yet, in its April 2018 report on the region's progress, the European Commission recommended the Council open negotiations with both North Macedonia and Albania. The rest of the region, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, remain only potential candidates, with no strong institutional relations with the EU so far.

Conclusion

Reform agendas in different areas in the WB countries are tightly coupled with their foreign policy objectives – primarily accession to the EU. Analysing the development of relations among states in the region, one may conclude they are not inclined to regional cooperation as such, due to the turbulent past and recent conflicts (resulting in high levels of distrust), and are instead seeking integration into larger European structures. They see it as a way of enhancing their interests and gaining a better position in the 'power games' with their neighbours in dealing with bilateral issues. It seems reasonable to claim that individual Western Balkan actors tend to perceive regional cooperation as quite instrumental for achieving their foreign policy objectives, frequently creating and nominally accepting different functional platforms for cooperation, which lack any real substance. This resonates well with the argument that among the Western Balkan countries "regional security cooperation was perceived as a means to an end, as a transitional tool to facilitate Euro-Atlantic integrations of each state in the region" (Grizold and Mitrevska, 2017: 54).

There was no genuine regional security approach as the idea of regional political elites – while the regional approach and regional cooperation were 'dictated' from above (European institutions). What we have seen in the region is a top-down instead of a bottom-up approach to regional cooperation, which has characterised this region ever since the 1990s and the state-formation phase. The importance of external actors in boosting regional dynamics and regional cooperation remains vital. According to Buzan and Wæver:

due to the asymmetry of power between the actors in and around the Balkans, it is in the hands of the external powers to 'force' the Balkans into the European complex. However, it was also possible for them to try

to fence the Balkans off, and decouple and contain it in order to keep its traditional security problems outside Europe. (Buzan and Wæver, 2003: 377)

Since all regional actors recognise the nature of threats has changed considerably over the last three decades, there are many examples of cooperation between parts of national security systems in dealing with transnational non-military threats and challenges. In contrast, the lack of cooperation and political will in dealing with the aftermath of the recent past on the domestic level, but also the inter-state level (for example, different interpretations of the causes, course and consequences of wars), is hindering the building of security cooperation and a security community and the region's overall progress that would bring it ever closer to the European security community.

Building on the analysis in the previous sections and all of the above-mentioned challenges as certain indicators, the key question remains whether it is really inconceivable that regional actors will resort to the use of force to resolve their domestic and bilateral issues? In other words, is the current level of cooperation sufficient to prevent future conflicts and does a security community currently exist and, if so, of what kind and quality, in the Western Balkans? The most recent open conflict in the region was nearly 20 years ago (the Albanian– North Macedonian conflict in Macedonia/FYROM in 2001), which is good enough reason to analyse whether the regional security complex can be described as stable and capable of resolving the existing disputes and differences peacefully without any repeat of those violent episodes?

In 2011, some authors claimed it is reasonable to expect peaceful change among the region's actors and that the region as such represents an "embryonic security community" (Ejdus, 2011), as the earliest stage in building a security community. Similarly, in their study on the public's role in security community building, Cruise and Grillot concluded that the role of external actors was crucial for the increased elite-level interaction triggering the early security-community phases. On the other hand, their research showed that "development of public-level security community is much less apparent than the observed growth of security community among governing elites" (Cruise and Grillot, 2013: 12). More precisely, they found that "regional identity is not clearly apparent at the public-level", that "citizens see the actions of their governments as a means to an end" (regional cooperation as a means of achieving foreign policy goals) and that they did not believe "their governments feel a true connection with other countries in the region" (ibid.: 17).

Another study by Knezović, Cvrtila and Vučinović (2017), which analysed the extent and type of police cooperation in the WB and its influence

on building a security community, shows that, despite the efforts of external actors and domestic elites, “limited progress has been made in the field of establishment of security community” (Knezović, Cvrtila and Vučinović, 2017: 168). They also claim that:

while evidence can be found about mutual relevance and basic responsiveness of units, as well as for compatibility of values, there is hardly any of it supporting generalised common identity and loyalty, which represents the most important indicator of tested theoretical framework. (ibid.: 169)

A recent study on the Western Balkans security complex seems the least optimistic. Conducted by the Slovenian authors Grizold and Skočajić Juvan, it points out that stabilisation processes in the region are far from complete, and that a set of domestic, regional and broader global challenges “have negatively impacted not only the relations among the WB countries, but also aggravated the complexity of security in the region, which is not stable” (Grizold and Skočajić Juvan, 2017: 261). Stating that the “political situation and relations between the countries of WB remain sensitive” (ibid.), these two authors conclude it is not unimaginable, in fact it is very likely, that the region will become more unstable due to the very fragile situation of the deteriorating neighbourly relations, but also migration issues, the terrorist threat and “growing presence and interference by powerful (global) actors and their agendas in the region, which are not necessarily in line with the WB’s Euro-Atlantic agenda” (ibid.).

Borrowing elements of different security community building theories in order to explain the current state of affairs in the Western Balkans, this analysis shows that, in spite of visible positive changes, many obstacles remain if stable peace is to be achieved at the intra- and interstate levels. It reveals that the key features of security communities, such as Ayoob’s *territorial satiation*, *societal cohesion*, and *political stability* or Deutsch’s *integration*, *expectation of peaceful change* and *sense of community*, are missing at both the level of the whole region and within states, especially in Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Conflicting perceptions, mutual distrust, open bilateral issues and complex internal dynamics, among other factors, contribute to the absence of the ‘we-feeling’ that is needed to establish substantial regional cooperation as a step towards the early forms of a security community.

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